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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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"VISIBILITY"

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman
Authority on Meteorology

What does the aviator mean when he talks, as he does every day, about the "visibility"? Certainly not what anybody would have meant by that term twenty years or more ago. Normally and originally the word means merely the state of being visible, and such a state hardly admits of degrees. A thing is either visible or invisible. An extension of meaning permits us to compare visibilities: i.e., the clearness with which objects can be seen. In the new sense current among aviators and meteorologists, "visibility" is not a state but a distance. The visibility is said, for example, to be a thousand meters, or twelve thousand meters, or it may be expressed in yards or miles, etc.

In his recent book "Visibility in Meteorology," W. E. Knowles Middleton, the Canadian meteorologist, prefers throughout to speak of "visual range" when he is referring to the distances at which things are visible. He talks of "visibility" only when he means the relative clearness with which different objects stand out from their surroundings under conditions of good seeing, when all are visible.

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