

# DISTANCE OVER *the* PLAINS

How The New American Record  
Was Made by L. B. Barringer

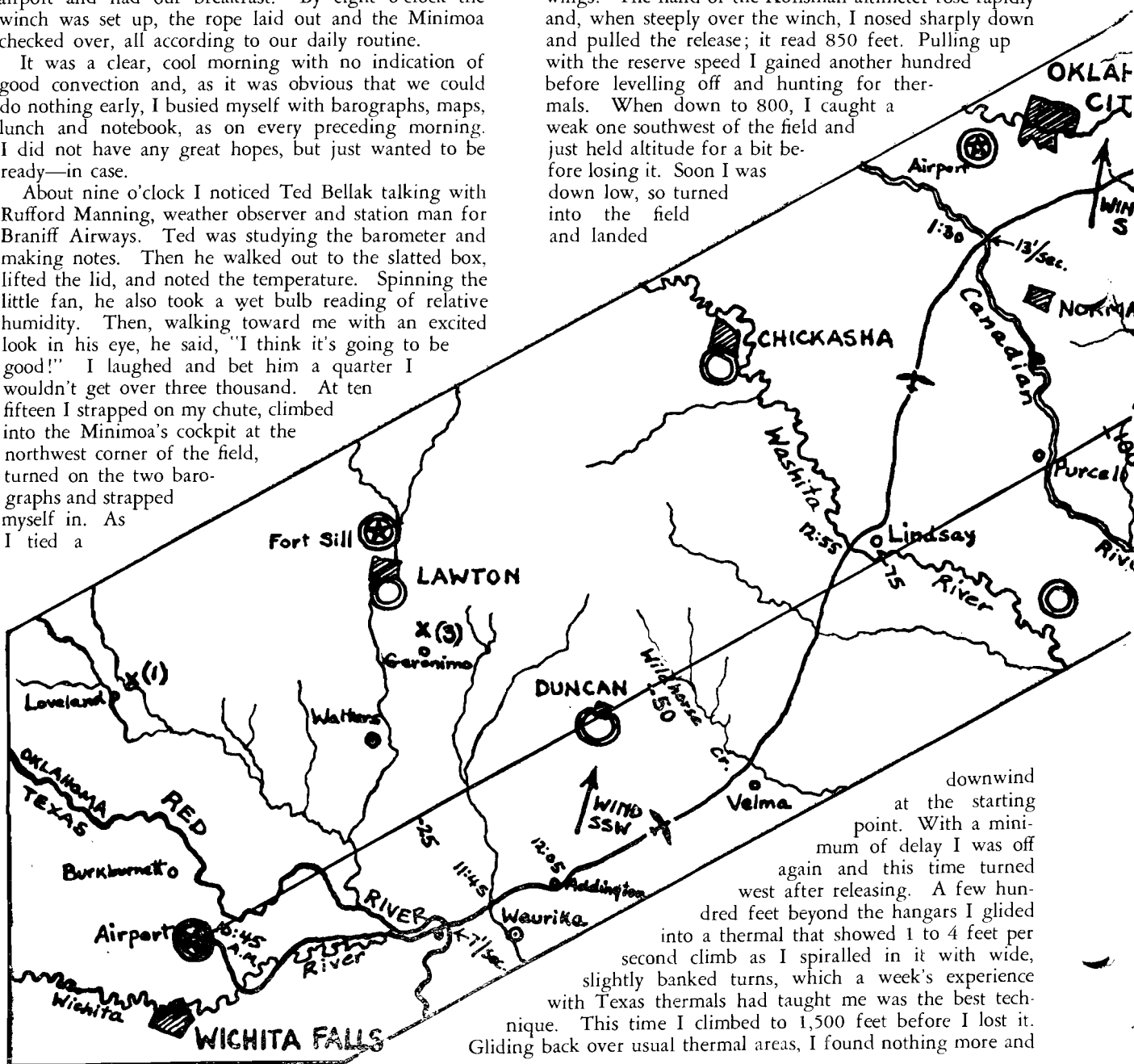
On the morning of Tuesday, April nineteenth, I picked up the boys at the National Guard Armory in Wichita Falls, Texas, at quarter of seven as usual. We drove the six miles north to the airport and had our breakfast. By eight o'clock the winch was set up, the rope laid out and the Minimoa checked over, all according to our daily routine.

It was a clear, cool morning with no indication of good convection and, as it was obvious that we could do nothing early, I busied myself with barographs, maps, lunch and notebook, as on every preceding morning. I did not have any great hopes, but just wanted to be ready—in case.

About nine o'clock I noticed Ted Bellak talking with Rufford Manning, weather observer and station man for Braniff Airways. Ted was studying the barometer and making notes. Then he walked out to the slatted box, lifted the lid, and noted the temperature. Spinning the little fan, he also took a wet bulb reading of relative humidity. Then, walking toward me with an excited look in his eye, he said, "I think it's going to be good!" I laughed and bet him a quarter I wouldn't get over three thousand. At ten fifteen I strapped on my chute, climbed into the Minimoa's cockpit at the northwest corner of the field, turned on the two barographs and strapped myself in. As I tied a

handkerchief over my head to ward off the sun's rays, intensified through the new plexiglas cockpit cover, and put on dark glasses, I noticed small cumuli beginning to form to the southwest. Snapping the cover shut I shouted "All set" to Pete Bonotaux at my left wingtip. Picking up his large flag, Pete waved it from side to side. The field had a slight crown to it so I could not see the winch four thousand feet distant, but I could see Ken Findiesen waving another flag about half way to it. Almost immediately the slack was taken out of the rope. As the ship began to move, Pete dropped his flag, Ken lowered his, and Ted gave the winch full power. There was only a slight breeze blowing but the Minimoa soon had flying speed and I lifted her off through the oat tops.

Climbing gradually at first and then very steeply, I could feel the pull on the rope slow up the winch. With an indicated airspeed of 45, I climbed very rapidly. The manila rope absorbed shock and strain so well that there was no feeling of roughness or overstraining the wings. The hand of the Kollsman altimeter rose rapidly and, when steeply over the winch, I nosed sharply down and pulled the release; it read 850 feet. Pulling up with the reserve speed I gained another hundred before levelling off and hunting for thermals. When down to 800, I caught a weak one southwest of the field and just held altitude for a bit before losing it. Soon I was down low, so turned into the field and landed



downwind at the starting point. With a minimum of delay I was off again and this time turned west after releasing. A few hundred feet beyond the hangars I glided into a thermal that showed 1 to 4 feet per second climb as I spiralled in it with wide, slightly banked turns, which a week's experience with Texas thermals had taught me was the best technique. This time I climbed to 1,500 feet before I lost it. Gliding back over usual thermal areas, I found nothing more and