

DIANA and DAEDALUS

by WILLIAM T. ROYCE

III

Bob had already made two very long flights and the crew had had to drive almost all night long each time in order to get back to the gliderport for the next day's flying. During these retrieves Bob slept in the back of the station wagon in a bed rigged specially for this purpose. So his crew welcomed a chance to rest up and Anne looked forward to a change from taking care of the children.

Bob had decided that he would make a goal flight to 29 Palms which would earn him enough points to remain among the leaders in the scoring and which would not be too difficult and tiring a retrieve for Anne.

Bob Howard rose and helped his wife out of the beach chair. "Let's telephone the kids and say 'hello.' We're scheduled to meet Peter at the field in front of the hangar at 12:15, so we have plenty of time." Arm in arm they headed back to the hotel to telephone.

The temperature at Murietta was 91°. A half mile from the highway a short, stocky man stripped to the waist stopped his digging and sat down on the mound of fresh dirt. As he wiped his forehead with his handkerchief he wondered to himself why people had to die in hot weather like this. Suddenly a glint in the sky caught his eye and leaning back on his hands he watched the silver glider circling high overhead.

In the cockpit, Bill Coverley was commenting to himself, "This is the first time I can remember finding a thermal over a cemetery." Circling steadily until the variometer showed the thermal strength to be abating, Bill headed off once again on course. He knew that at this stage of his flight he was racing an invisible enemy. Resolutely moving in each day from the coast some 25 miles away was a mass of cool marine air. This enemy would soon reach the tops of the ridges and pour down into the valley. In doing so it would wash away all thermal activity, so Bill had to be beyond the end of the valley before this happened. His altimeter registered 4000' as he cut across the highway and headed for the junction at Radec. Holding a steady course Bill sensed that what-

ever wind was blowing at this altitude was slightly from the right and behind him. It would probably be helping his airspeed a mile or two per hour. He was glad it was not a head wind.

For the next nine miles Bill glided along through mostly smooth air. The occasional turbulence he encountered was never sufficient to be considered a thermal. All the time the altimeter continued to unwind 3750', 3500', 3300', 3000', 2850', 2500'. Bill was scarcely 1500' above the terrain. Highway 71 was on his right. No signs of a thermal—2400'. About a half mile ahead a dust devil moved slowly over the ground. It was sucking up wisps of alfalfa, newspapers, pieces of grass, and lots of dust. Bill saw the devil and headed for it immediately. He concentrated on figuring out where the thermal might be at his level. Thermals developing from their dust-devil tails bend in strange fashions sometimes and Bill did not want to waste time trying to locate this one. As his altimeter read 2100' the dust devil was directly beneath him. Suddenly the right wing flipped up. This was it. Circling to come back into the thermal Bill quickly centered it and glanced at his variometer. It showed that he and glider were rising a bit as he continued to gain altitude. The thermal grew stronger. The glider was rising at the rate of almost 500' per minute. Bill grinned. His body relaxed a bit as he continued to gain altitude. The thermal grew stronger. The glider was rising almost 600' per minute now. At 7200' the thermal weakened and Bill left hurriedly. A straight glide carried him across Vail Dam and over Radec where he could see the junction of highways 71 and 79.

From the sloping fields east of Radec Bill picked up the best thermal so far. As he circled higher and higher he noticed the bright observatory on Mt. Palomar. Against the dark background of the forested mountain the observatory stood out in striking fashion. After each completed turn Bill could see that the observatory was a little further beneath him than on the previous turn. Up and up the glider continued. At 10,000' Bill straightened out on his compass heading and the glider's nose

pointed toward a spot halfway between Hot Springs Mt. and Henshaw Lake. There was still fair lift remaining in the thermal, but every minute that Bill spent gaining altitude allowed the invisible mass of marine air to creep closer and closer to the valley.

Bill still had 35 miles to travel before he would have escaped completely from the deadening clasp of this unpredictable enemy. Some mornings the wind pushing this soaring enemy in from the coast was strong enough so that by 10:30 to 11 its cool arms were squeezing through the gullies and beginning to spread across the valley floor. Bill knew that even now he might be too late. With this nagging fear haunting the back of his mind, Bill could not fully appreciate the splendor of the scene below him. However, the sun shone so brilliantly on the Mt. Palomar Observatory dome that Bill's attention was continually attracted to it. He marveled as he remembered the years of labor spent grinding the lens for the giant telescope housed within. He wondered how anyone could have managed to get the giant lens to the top of that steep mountain.

Soon the observatory passed behind his right wing. About 11 or 12 miles from Radec, another thermal was worked briefly. As Bill reached the Henshaw Lake area, he noted his position at 12:20. On his left was Hot Springs Mt. and on his right the settlement of Warner Hot Springs and the lake itself. Checking the chart revealed that during the first hour of flight, a distance of 43 to 45 miles had been covered. This was quite satisfactory. The first barrier had been hurdled, the valley was behind. Ahead lay a range of mountains whose peaks rose just above 6000'. Beyond them lay a shear drop to the desert floor. The terrain fell more than a mile in altitude in less than a mile in distance. If Bill had enough altitude he planned to fly directly to Barrego Valley. If not, he could skirt the mountains and work his way gradually to the ledges bordering the desert.

His luck continued. Another good thermal made is possible for him to soar past San Ysidro Mt. at 8000'. Bill's relief was genuine, for the terrain below was most forbidding. Before him stretched the foreboding desert crowned in the distance by a blinding glimmer from the Salton Sea. Whatever lay ahead of him, Bill knew that at least he had greater chances of safe landing spots. He re-

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