

# DIAMOND "C" NUMBER 8

by ROBERT E. BROWN

I sat at my work bench in the instrument shop at North American's flight test hanger in Los Angeles. It was about 1:00 a.m. when I heard the company plane returning from a flight to Muroc. The telephone rang in the operations office and I heard footsteps on the stairs. Fran Muller, the company pilot, an old time glider guider, burst into the room and said, "Hey kid, the weather bureau just called and said that there would be a strong wave by dawn at Bishop. Get your gear and let's go."

Just at this moment my cousin (a non-gliding type) came into the shop. He was returning home from a date and had just stopped in to say hello. "Sorry but I haven't time to talk now. Harold. We are off for Bishop again," I said. He decided to go along for the ride, so we loaded up my flight gear and took off for Bishop. As we climbed out over the city Fran said, "Normally I wouldn't fly up the Owens Valley on a night like this for all of the tea in China."

By the time we got over the desert it was about 2:00 a.m. and all of the lights on the ground disappeared. A very new moon cast just enough light to outline the mountains on either side of the valley. As we entered the valley we noticed that the ground was covered by dust picked up by the wind blowing down off the mountains into the valley. We were flying along over the center of the valley at 9,000 feet when the ship suddenly dropped to 7,000 without giving any prior notice. Then all hell broke loose. The wind had picked up sooner than the weather people had expected, and we were trapped in the dark of night in the Owens Valley while a strong wave system was in progress. The airplane began to buck like a wild bronco with a burr under the saddle. We headed for the Sierra Nevada Mountains knowing that the safest direction was "UP." Over all of the noise I heard the snapping of chute buckles and I looked back at my cousin who had just finished putting on the chute that I was going to use in the sailplane. With a weak smile he said, "Just let me know when its time to jump."

We entered the wave and got a short breather while it carried us up to 16,000 feet with the engine throttled back. Not having any oxygen on board we had to cut over into the downdraft area to keep from being carried up any higher. Finally we arrived over Bishop, and after the roughest ride ever, got down to about 5,000 feet where the air smoothed out and enabled us to make a more or less normal landing. When the airplane rolled to a stop in front of the

*Hans Jacobs adds another feather to his cap! His product, the Weihe, although much modified in this instance, helped Bob Brown become Diamond "C" Number 8.*



hanger, no one said a word. In the glow of the instrument panel I could see that Fran actually had drops of perspiration on his forehead.

After we quieted our nerves and got Harold to take off the chute, we unloaded the ship and sacked out in one of the cabins on the field for what was left of the night.

When dawn came it revealed the Sierra Wave system in all of its glory—three stacks of lenticular clouds and a big fat roll cloud well out over the valley indicating a strong wave. We rolled out the TG-3 which George Dibert so kindly lent to me to make the wave flights. We checked out the radio gear and charged the oxygen system which was really two separate systems, one regular system and an emergency or reserve system.

Al Langenhime and Bob Symons helped to get the ship on the line, and at last I was finally ready to go. The wings were leveled and the tow plane started down the runway at 9:15 a.m.

I was off on my fifth and highest wave flight. We headed over to the mountains and up Bishop Creek Canyon where there was a break in the line of roll cloud. I can tell anything that you want to know about the rocks in that canyon, because I was towed close enough to see them in great detail.

After climbing to about 8,000 feet we passed under part of the roll cloud. The B T tow plane reared up on its tail, and stalled. The TG-3 and I went along for the ride. It was impossible to keep the slack out of the tow line. It was a big enough job just keeping the glider behind the tow-plane.

We finally entered the wave and I released at 12,000 feet. As the smooth lift carried me aloft at a steady rate of climb of 1,800 to 2,000 feet per minute, I took back all of those mean

things I had said to myself about the tow pilot. At 22,500 feet the lift dropped off to about 800 feet per minute. Working my way south towards Lone Pine I encountered O sink, then moving up wind a bit to find more lift I found normal sink instead, so drifted back into the main part of the wave and struck out to the North toward Bishop.

Note: The following paragraphs are copies of the notes I made during the actual flight.

Over Bishop at 30,000 feet, strong drift to East, necessary to crab as though ridge soaring to hold position in wave.

Oxygen check, supply okay, pressure breathing not as difficult as on earlier flights.

10:45—Break in wave 15 miles north of Bishop, no lift, altitude 25,000 feet.

10:50—No lift, 21,000 feet smooth air.

11:00—ROUGH AIR, down to 18,000 feet.