

Figure 1—1900 PDST May 18, 1957

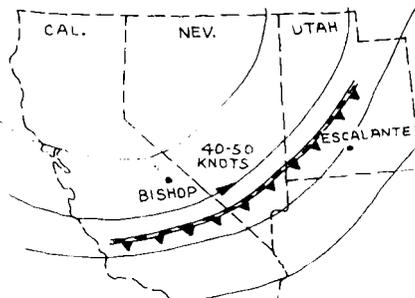


Figure 2—0700 PDST May 19, 1957

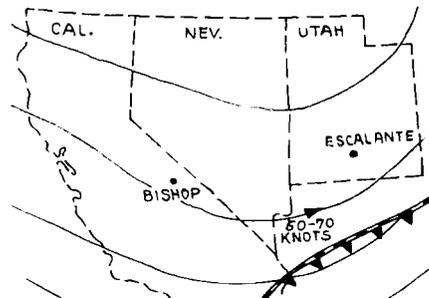


Figure 3—1900 PDST May 19, 1957

Meteorology during period of Sterling Starr's flight showing location of surface front and 500 mb winds.

dows, and I spent a few minutes adjusting the vent for optimum combination of comfort and vision.

It might be mentioned here, that the air mass aloft was warm and dry, hence no lenticulars; while below 20,000, it was cold, moist and unstable. It is surmised that perhaps the difficulty in climbing to 25,000 was due to the weak characteristics of the wave at the lower levels, with a stronger wave aloft. The L-26 did not get above 25,000 until two hours later, when the winds aloft were shifting to the north and the upper wave was weakening.

I still had about 600 fpm climb at 34,000 feet, the weather to the east was clear, so I decided to fly down the Sierras in the wave to near Owens Lake, climbing all the while. However, lift diminished almost immediately upon moving south, and a downwind turn as before netted 1,500 fpm down air. Penetration back into the wave was made, 31,000 was re-established, (35,900 ft. true altitude) radio check was made with Roger and Bob on the ground, and at 11:15 a.m. a compass heading of 60° was taken toward Indian Springs AFB, Nevada.

Penetration through 1000-1500 fpm down was made into the secondary wave over the White Mountains. It was weak, and I gained only about 3000 feet in it. Turning southeast again at 31,000 feet, a dense roll cloud was observed forming at about 15,000 feet some 20 miles east of Death Valley. Dust blowing from the valley floor was visible rising to about 10,000 feet. I flew toward the leading edge of the roll cloud, and encountered 1000 fpm lift at 23,000 feet. I was very unsuccessful in staying in the lift, and after gaining some 6,000 feet, I lost half of it before leaving the vicinity.

A course was then established toward Las Vegas. Cumulus clouds could be seen forming at about 15,000 feet over the city. Zero sink was encountered during a consider-

able part of the long glide toward that city, and Mt. Charleston was reached with 20,000 feet of altitude. The line of cumulus stretching to the east, which had enticed me as far south as Las Vegas, moved further south; and I turned east hoping for clear air lift. Cumulus began forming to the north, over the route I should have taken for the shortest straight line to my goal. (However, the country between Death Valley and Mesquite is too desolate for safety, and I did not regret the circuitous route.)

I encountered my first thermal 10 miles east of Dry Lake, Nevada, at 10,000 feet, 1:20 P.M., under a forming cumulus. Keeping to the high country underneath cumulus forming at 15,000 feet, I maintained 10,000 to 12,000 feet, and arrived over Hurricane, Utah, about 280 miles from Bishop, at 3:00 P.M.; an average ground speed of 75 mph since turning east at Bishop.

At Hurricane, difficulty was encountered. The terrain ahead consisted of Zion National Park, 20 miles of the most rugged country I have ever flown over. The clouds ahead of me over the park had dissipated, and behind me, both to the northwest and southwest, and then to the southeast, the cloud cover had grown solid and was developing into rain showers. Thermal activity had disappeared. I sank low into the valley, and soon was struggling to stay up on rough, vicious ridge lift and small thermals just to the east of Hurricane. Never before had I flown such violent turbulence. The temptation to give up and land at Hurricane was great, but I fought it out, being flung hither and yon with gay abandon by nature.

By 4:30 P.M. the situation had improved considerably. In a succession of ridge lift, small thermals, and an air mass action caused by a local storm pushing in from the south, I had clawed back to 10,000 feet asl. and ventured down the canyon lead-

ing through Zion National Park. Tops of the ridges were 7000 feet. I soon found myself ridge soaring the "Mountain of the Sun". After about ten minutes, I caught a thermal which took me 1000 feet above the ridges. From there, I could see a green field at the other end of the park, and I set sail for it, down Clear Creek Canyon. Large downs were encountered, and twice more I turned aside to the ridges to regain a few hundred feet. At the east end of the Park, a thermal took me back to 10,000 feet at 5:00 p.m., with approximately 70 miles between me and my goal.

The less said about the flight from this point, the better.

To the stranger in the air over Southern Utah, one place can look like another. To me, it did, and I was guilty of looking for my goal at the headwaters of the Paria River, instead of Escalante River canyon forty miles to the east, where I thought I was. Forty miles is very noticeable on a check of time and distance, but I didn't realize I was confused until a landing was fast becoming necessary.

The flight was terminated at 5:35 P.M., seven miles east of Glendale, Utah, near a shepherd's camp, for a total flight distance of 331 miles, and an altitude gained mark of 22,400 feet. This flight completed my Diamond C requirements, U.S. No. 11.

Much credit must go to Roger Ruch, who conceived the flight, Bob Schnelker, who retrieved me the following day, and Duke Mancuso, who loaned me his L-23. To have such friends, is to be rich.

The real story here, is the flight that was reasonably possible on this day. Dr. Paul B. MacCready, Jr. has recently suggested such possibilities in SOARING (March-April, 1957), and it has been dreamed of by many.

If takeoff had been at daybreak, 35,000 feet over Bishop could have been attained by 6:30 A.M., and bet-

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