

# DIAMOND PROSPECTING IN THE MOJAVE DESERT — Part 2

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In Part I of this article, published in the November-December 1957 issue of SOARING, some of the problems encountered in making diamond flights in the Mojave Desert were discussed. In this part, a diamond goal flight is described illustrating how these factors affected an actual flight.

Never having flown the gold distance of 300 km (187 miles), it seemed the best strategy to always declare a diamond goal before every take-off. If after take-off it should turn out that conditions would be better in a somewhat different direction, it would always be possible to abandon the goal and go for the distance. As pointed out in Part I, there are not many choices of

angular course was chosen. My mistake was starting too soon, and I never got much above my release point 2,000 feet above the ground. I rapidly sank down to between 300 and 500 feet where I spent 45 minutes gaining and losing one hundred feet at a time before I finally had to land after a flight of only 15 miles. After landing I had the frustrating experience of having to hold the ship down for several hours while dust devils played all around, and numerous other sailplanes were observed 8,000 or 10,000 feet above me.

On my second try I started for Yucca, Arizona, due east of El Mirage. This time I had 3500 feet above the field when I left, but again I had started too soon. About one hour out I encountered the stable air flow-

no matter what I was flying I would probably have had to land.

The 4th of July holiday weekend was soon coming up, and I decided to devote July 4, 5, 6 and 7 to an all-out attempt to make the diamond goal. On the 4th the weather bureau promised a good day with thermals to 10,000 feet and a southwest wind. I declared Dry Lake, Nevada, as my goal and took off shortly after noon but was unable to find enough lift to stay up and returned to the field. A little later I tried again and proceeded to spend three hours over the El Mirage Airport with five or six other ships. None of us was able to get above 6,500 msl until very late in the afternoon—in spite of a temperature of 110 degrees on the ground—and no one left the field. I had learned my lesson, I thought, on the previous attempts and was firmly determined not to leave El Mirage unless I had ample altitude to get past the relatively stable air usually encountered to the east.

Tired and disgusted, I returned home and had a long, heart-to-heart talk with the forecaster at the weather bureau. He could not understand why conditions had not been better and said that we should have the same situation the following day. This certainly didn't sound encouraging, but I drove the 90 miles to El Mirage again the next day, July 5, to try again. With the forecast of light west to southwest winds, I again picked Dry Lake, Nevada, as my goal. Promptly at noon, Pacific Daylight Time, I was towed off, and 15 minutes later was back at the field unable to even stay up. I moped around the field for 45 minutes until Gus Briegleb wagged the tow plane wings violently while making his approach after towing off another ship indicating good lift had been encountered. At 1:05 PM he towed me off, and I cut loose in good lift over the field at 5,000 msl (2,135 feet above the field). This thermal (1)\* took me over the field to 9,000 msl where it seemed to peter out. This looked very encouraging in view

\* Numbers in parentheses identify points on the barogram reproduced on page 4.



Photo: Ann Witheridge

No landing problems here! Bearing on its nose the emblem of the Vultures soaring group of Detroit, the Selvidge 1-26 rests in the center of Dry Lake, Nevada, five hours and twenty minutes and 198 miles from its take-off at El Mirage.

routes out of El Mirage, and this was not a serious restriction. You will be pretty certain to continue in the direction you started under most circumstances. On several days during the summer, I declared a diamond goal from El Mirage but didn't find conditions to my liking and did not leave the vicinity of the field. The first day I actually left the field was something of a fiasco. The weather forecast indicated good thermals to 10,000 or 12,000 feet and practically no wind, so a tri-

ing up from Cajon Pass east of the field and finally landed on a side road about 27 miles out. I was pleased to note that my 1-26 wing tips cleared the embankment and sage brush on each side of the road by about two feet and was very thankful that I was not flying a wide span ship. To those who might suggest that with a longer span, higher performance sailplane I would not have been forced to land, I can only answer that the pilotage is vastly more important than the equipment, and