

probably clogged with Columbia Basin dust). Unfortunately my road and railroad led only to a mine! I had resolved to turn back to Kellogg if we got below 7000 feet. By the time I realized my embarrassing mistake in navigation, I was down to this altitude. I scratched around for some minutes over a bare mountain side and lost more altitude, then turned back - and ran into 1000 fpm sink. We were soon below 5000, Kellogg (elevation 2300) was out of sight - and reach - over fifteen miles down the valley, and there was *no place* to land. I felt very foolish and fervently wished I hadn't followed Fisher into this venture! However, there was nothing to do but scratch around and hope for the best. Finally we got up again (or I wouldn't be writing this story), and the last thermal was so friendly that it seemed unsporting not to go on up and have a look at the pass.

At 3 o'clock we were over Mullan Pass, having covered only twenty miles in the preceding hour. Here the course turned SE and followed highway 10 and the valley of the St. Regis and Clark Fork rivers to Missoula. Before take-off I had talked with Paul Loudon, an old time Spokane soaring pilot, who now flies fire patrol in this area for the Forest Service. He reported that there was no place to land until one reached some meadows near St. Regis, 30 miles beyond the pass and 50 miles beyond Kellogg. He may well be right, but from where I sat I could see what appeared to be a clearing or large meadow only about 15 miles away near the tiny town of Haugen. While it is difficult to size up a field from 15 miles distance, the reassuring sight and a good thermal right over the pass which took us to 9500 feet (the best altitude yet) inspired confidence, and we pressed on. By now thoughts of achieving optimum speed were forgotten and the strategy, as since first entering the mountains, was to stay high and glide as far as possible. The meadow at Haugen, which was crossed by a road and looked very landable indeed, was passed with good altitude. Just beyond St. Regis, whose fields looked very small, the last cloud lift of the day was encountered for a slow climb to 10,000 feet (high spot of the trip) under a little wispy patch of cloud of the type one would normally ignore. The emergency field at Superior was now in range and we continued on along the crest of the heavily forested 7000-foot moun-

tain ridge on the north side of the valley, gradually sinking lower, and stopping occasionally to circle where valleys funneled the wind up the mountain side or where a buttress protruded into the valley. It was growing late and all thought of Diamond distance had been abandoned. Now it was just a matter of working for contest points and trying to overtake Fisher. As I continued along the ridge, getting intimately acquainted with the trees and rocks along the crest, I enjoyed a fine view down into the valleys on both sides. The lift was almost purely of the slope variety, and was found only along the crest - if one stopped to circle, one promptly drifted out of the lift. In this way I passed just below a Forest Service fire lookout and wondered what he thought. We were too busy dodging rocks and trees to wave. About this time Missoula airport became visible over the ridge far down the valley and I began to hope that I just might be able to reach it - although not quite 500 km from Wenatchee, it looked so much more inviting than anything where I was. The lift continued and, staying over the mountains, I approached Missoula. At this point I received a rude shock as I looked at the country ahead and unfolded the Butte sectional. The land didn't flatten out to the east of Missoula as I had thought. Instead, the highway vanished into another and narrower canyon, and the next landing strip, in the canyon at Drummond, was over 40 miles beyond Missoula. The Missoula airport looked ever more inviting, but hopes of Diamond distance had begun to cautiously re-emerge. We were too close to give up.

East of Missoula the mountains

were surmounted by a thick layer of cloud the west edge of which hinted of a lenticular build up (Missoula radio called them cirrus, they probably were). We gained all the altitude possible and glided out over the city, hoping for wave lift. None was found so a session of slope soaring followed on the side of a TV antenna-topped hill by the entrance to the canyon on the east side of town. The object was to climb high enough to look over the top and see if there was any place to land further on since only another 10 miles was needed. We finally topped the hill at 7000 and saw some narrow fields of alfalfa by the highway ahead which looked like possible landing places, so we pressed cautiously on. By now we were under the cloud deck, it was growing dark (particularly when viewed through prescription-ground sun glasses), and the effect was much like flying up a gloomy tunnel. However the lift continued and there were even a few thermals. Twenty miles after entering the canyon we rounded a bend at 6500 feet - and found a mile long airport besides the highway and river below! Not only that, but at one end was a brightly lighted road house which promised all the necessities of life. This seemed too good to be true, and I could scarcely believe my incredibly good luck. A bolder pilot might have converted the remaining altitude into another ten or fifteen miles of distance and have chanced a landing in some tiny field. Bob Fisher might be ten or forty miles ahead, but for me this was the place. I checked twice to make sure my eyes were not deceiving me, then opened all six spoilers and dropped down. I made a high speed pass over

The Schweizer 1-21 and Bob Moore on the end of the runway at Elliot Field, Montana.

Photo: Elisabeth Moore

