



Drawing: Bill Lambie

A U-2's eye view of the area traversed by the flight described in this article with the track over the ground shown.

came on the dial I decided that was good enough. The cloud above looked very menacing and dark, and my spare thermos had popped its cover and soaked my right side. It was freezing cold! Now for a nice fast dash along the mountains. It seemed that the smoggy air came straight up the side of the south face of the mountains and I buzzed along this shearline in zero sink to Lake Arrowhead. Here I fell out of the lift and spent more long times in weak lift trying to stay high.

About here I noticed a big DC-4 or DC-6 Air Force cargo plane come over the mountains near Yucca Pass and head towards George or Edwards AFB. I thought how very much different this flight over the mountains is for him than for me. The people on the lakes below probably didn't notice me far above them either.

I crept into a large valley between San Geronio Peak and Big Bear Lake and had to accept more slow climb to get back out again. Nice pine-covered mountains below—some snow still on the north side of San Geronio—fine for everything but landing gliders. Very impressive, if I weren't so cold and it wasn't 4 P.M.

I squeezed out 16,500 before I left the clouds and pushed out into the 30 miles of clear air to 29 Palms. I figured if I flew carefully to the turn and back to the foothills, I would have about 1,000 feet over the ground from which to work up to the clouds. The desert ahead looked completely dead. No dust blowing. Not a thermal in sight.

Down, down, past Pioneertown, past Yucca Valley. The best cruise seems to be about 65 or 70 mph indicated. Suddenly we hit very

rough turbulence. More turbulence, but no lift. It is very quiet in a one piece wooden glider if you're accustomed to a metal glider, as I am. Past some more turbulence and down to 11,000 ft. asl. I think I'll try a turn in this stuff to see what is going on. How stupid I have been! This is the best thermal since Lake Gregory. Back up to 16,000 and on to 29 Palms. The nicest, most powerful thermals I have ever had the pleasure to fly through occurred every few miles as we dashed onward, determined to make the turnpoint by 5 P.M. That last mile or two, to make sure you are past the turnpoint, seems to take forever. I set the wing in its favorite hands-off left turn and proceeded to shoot the rest of my roll of film. I tried several speed and aperture settings to make sure at least one picture came out. When the film was all used I prepared to leave and noticed that we were climbing at 700 feet per minute, so I stayed until 15,000! I thought of pushing on for a straight distance Gold C, the thermals were so good out here—but poor Mary waiting by the pool for me to be back in another hour—the thought of the long hot retrieve, and I had school to teach the next day.

The clouds over the mountains were now very flat and spreading out, but thermals in the desert were still good. It was past 5 P.M. A decision was made to fly a straight course up the Lucerne Valley and take my chances on the dry thermals. I decided I must be at least to Big Bear Lake, 50 miles, by 6 P.M. if I had any chance of getting back to El Mirage. Thermals were exactly where I predicted for the next 30 miles. I would swish along at 70 to

75 mph and slow up to 60 as I came up on each little range of rock piles and climb swiftly back to 15,000. Most of the desert in the Antelope Valley is dotted with subdivisions, roads and powerlines, but the desert to the north of 29 Palms is the most barren and beautiful I have seen. I was coming up even with Big Bear at 6 P.M. and the shadows covered the mountains on the northeast "back" side, where I was gliding, so I started angling across the Lucerne Valley heading north. Under the clouds again and very very slow climbs. I was determined to stay high this late in the day and managed to work each little streak of cloud belt that was lying across my track. The last scrap of cloud was dissipating over Rabbit Dry Lake as I drifted and turned and circled trying to get every last foot of altitude before the final glide. El Mirage Lake was now visible far off in the west, 35 miles away. The cement plant at Victorville, with its plume of white smoke, indicated a very light headwind but farther out toward El Mirage the area was suspiciously dusty. 14,200 asl was about the end of the lift and the cloud I was under had disappeared a good 10 minutes ago so I headed west. At 60 mph we were only sinking 100 fpm. Great! The sink slowly increased but Victorville came below with 11,000 asl showing on the dial. Only about 20 miles to go and still 8,000 feet above El Mirage Field!

The smoke over the cement plant swung around to the west. Just as I was congratulating myself for this further good fortune my sink slowly increased to about 500 fpm. The smoke then snapped around 180 into the east and blew straight off the top of the chimney. I could now see a large cloud of silvery dust coming off the dry lake at El Mirage directly toward us. By the time I passed George Air Force Base we had sunk to 7,300 feet asl and seemed to be standing still in the wind. A loss of 4,000 feet in 7 miles, and 12 miles to go on 4,000 feet. The field elevation is 2,865 ft. asl. I couldn't see the runways in the dust and glare of the setting sun but it was obvious that the goal was moving up in the canopy and it was doubtful that I could even make the end of the dry lake. I determined to fly along the road until the skid hit the ground in the possibility straight Gold C distance might be made.

The anticlimax of suddenly hit-