Motorglider adventure crossing the Andes!

In Search of the Condor

***Jack Lambie** doesn't have to seek adventure. It comes to him as naturally as iron filings are drawn to a magnet. Thus, when a U.S. distributor of the RF-5B* Sperber *(a 56-ft. span, 25:1, two-place, VW-powered motorglider) asked Jack if he would be interested in delivering the ship from southern California to Asuncion, Paraguay, he accepted before you could say "condor" or "Andes." He still remembered circling in a thermal with one of the last few California condors. The huge creature didn't seem frightened by the glider, but out of concern for the species' survival, Jack never returned to their mountain range, though he felt a strong affinity for the bird.*

In South America the condors were supposed to still be plentiful, and the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC *offered Jack financial help in return for a "first look" at any condor pictures that he could make. In addition, the Big One — the first 1000-mile straight-out soaring distance flight — has still to be made; the Andes stretch from equatorial to antarctic climes. His delivery flight would require he cross them at their widest point. What were they like?*

Jack set out early last winter to learn for himself. He strapped a 27-gallon tank in the SPERBER'S *rear seat, along with an automobile electric pump to transfer fuel, and started south. What an adventure it was! An accident in Mexico, storms in Guatemala and Colombia, a harrowing cloud flight over the Ecuadorian Andes, and new friendships and camaraderie with SSA'ers he met en route.*

In the following article Jack recounts his experiences on one segment from Lima to La Paz. After interrogation and harassment from secret police (who evidently thought the SPERBER'S *enclosed wing and tail-mounted cameras to be James Bond chicanery), he is rolling down the runway at Peru's Chavez Airport. . . .*

Text and photos by JACK LAMBIE

SPOILERS CLOSED AND LOCKED, mixture rich, throttle open . . . . Lift-off! I retract the single gear and glance at the airspeed. *It reads zero . . . Damn!* The search by the secret police must have pulled the rear cockpit static lines loose. But with a sea level, two-mile long runway, and the turbo-Volkswagen engine hauling the *Sperber*, me, and 240 pounds of fuel up at 500 fpm, I'll keep going. . . .

Off the runway's end scattered bits of foggy clouds hover in the hazy sun. I float easily through the first patches then into a thick bank. It can't be very big. I'll just keep my heading. In a few seconds the *Sperber* is back in the sun, but another fog bank is looming. . . . No time to turn before going in. It would be foolish to turn in fog with no gyro. I keep the glow of the morning sun on the left edge of the cockpit and climb out again after another 30 seconds only to face yet another wall of gray vapor. . . . Now my heart is pumping. I know the ground rises around Lima's Chavez Airport. Not enough to reach where I am, but fog will extend down to the ground. No way to go except up. If I'd known it were this thick, I would have asked to circle over the airport to climb. . . . The sun begins playing tricks. Its glow leaps to the right then ahead. It must be reflecting from the clouds around and above. Confusing, but it means I'm almost out!

Revolutions 3200, power 35 inches, prop in low pitch. I watch the instruments, listening to the sound of the engine, gauging my speed, resisting the urge to chase the sun. With a disabled airspeed indicator it's too easy to stall trying to pull up

The condor lives! Despite an almost complete lack of condor sightings by South American pilots, Jack was able to make these pictures of the huge (12-ft. span) creatures. Unlike vanishing U.S. condors which seemed to accept him in their last mountain redoubt in California, Jack reports the close encounters with the elusive Andean counterparts required aerial dogfight flying technique.

toward the area of sunshine, too easy to go into a spiral dive chasing the shifting bright spot as it bounces around inside the clouds.

Blue sky above, another flash of white, then into a clear canyon between walls of puffy fog. I snake back and forth climbing out of the misty gloom, blinking at last in the brilliance of the low morning sun in the east. I am clear at last! This has to be the day of days. It's 8:15 a.m., I have to find condors and I have to make it to La Paz, Bolivia, in the high Andes. My permit to fly in Peru (which cost 100,000 soles — $400) has run out. If I land at my alternate, Arequipa, Peru, I will have a problem getting permission to take off the next day and might have to wait for an extension from the Office of Transportation in Lima.

I HAD INSTALLED ELECTRICALLY-DRIVEN CAMERAS on the wingtip and the tail. They were loaded and ready to photograph the giant South American condors supposed to infest Peru. Unfortunately, of the many people I had asked, no one had ever seen a condor except two old pilots who had seen some of the birds twenty years ago while flying up the coast from Tacna in a Piper Cub. Bolivian glider pilots who had soared in the Andes for thirty years reported *never* having seen a condor. I was hopeful, but my confidence was weak.

At 7000 feet the ADF began swinging around and I reported my position at Kalar, 50 miles south of Lima. The fog thinned. To the east I could see the bare, brown-and-golden desert coastline with an occasional fishing village on the shore. The 25:1 glide angle of my *Sperber* would make it easy to glide to the land if the engine quit, but, nevertheless, I was uncomfortable being so far out to sea. Nothing down there except blue water.

Another hour would pass before I reached my required reporting point at Pisco. I would drop down to the Islas de Chincha and Las Balestas. I slowed the engine to start the long glide.

It was perfect to be in the clean quiet air away from bureaucracy. Four days earlier, at the entry port for Peru, all my cameras and film had been taken by Peruvian Air Force security officers. They must have thought I was the James Bond of motorgliders because of the streamlined cases over the wing and tail cameras and two more in the cockpit. They flew the cameras to Lima the next day in a Russian-built turbo-prop and insisted I follow. I made it into Jorge Chavez (Lima International) at sunset as fog from the ocean closed down the field.

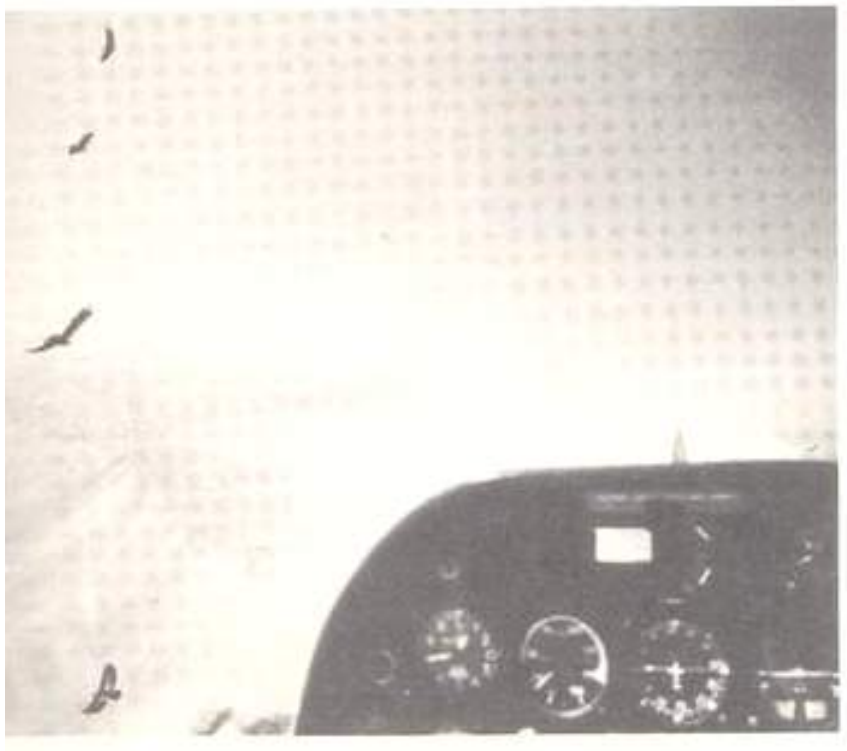
The Peruvian Air Force interrogators questioned me first. Then I was their guest — in a private room surrounded by machine gunners — until the next day when an even more thorough probing at the National Security Headquarters in Lima followed. I got my cameras back after convincing them (with an hour lecture on bird aerodynamics!) that I was a bird expert interested only in the condor.

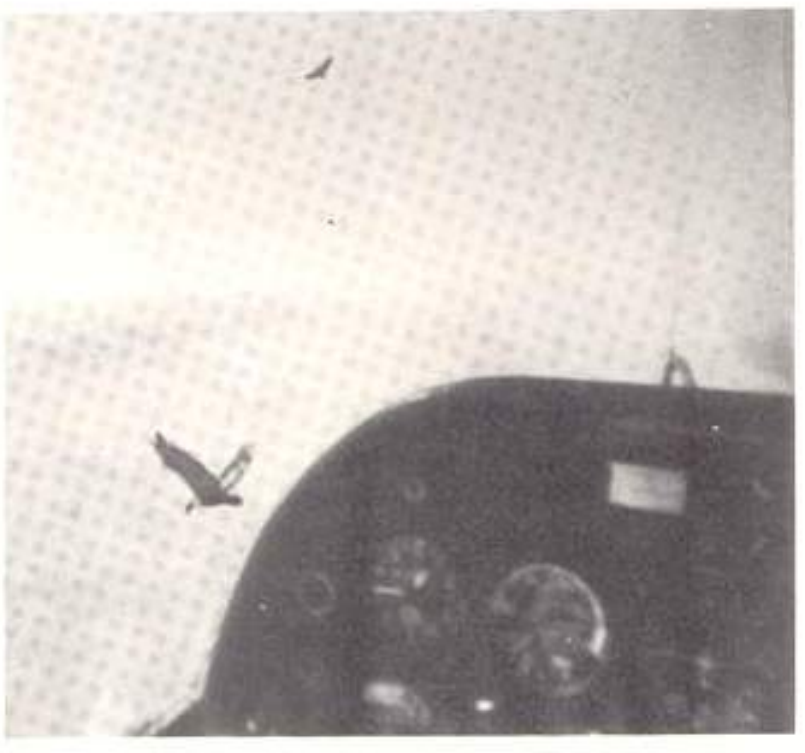
Then I spent one day waiting for the fog to clear and another day of delay caused by Peruvian secret police. It was a familiar story. They, too, noticed my cameras, confiscated my film, and took me in for questioning. At my insistence they eventually called the National Security Office. I overheard the conversation.

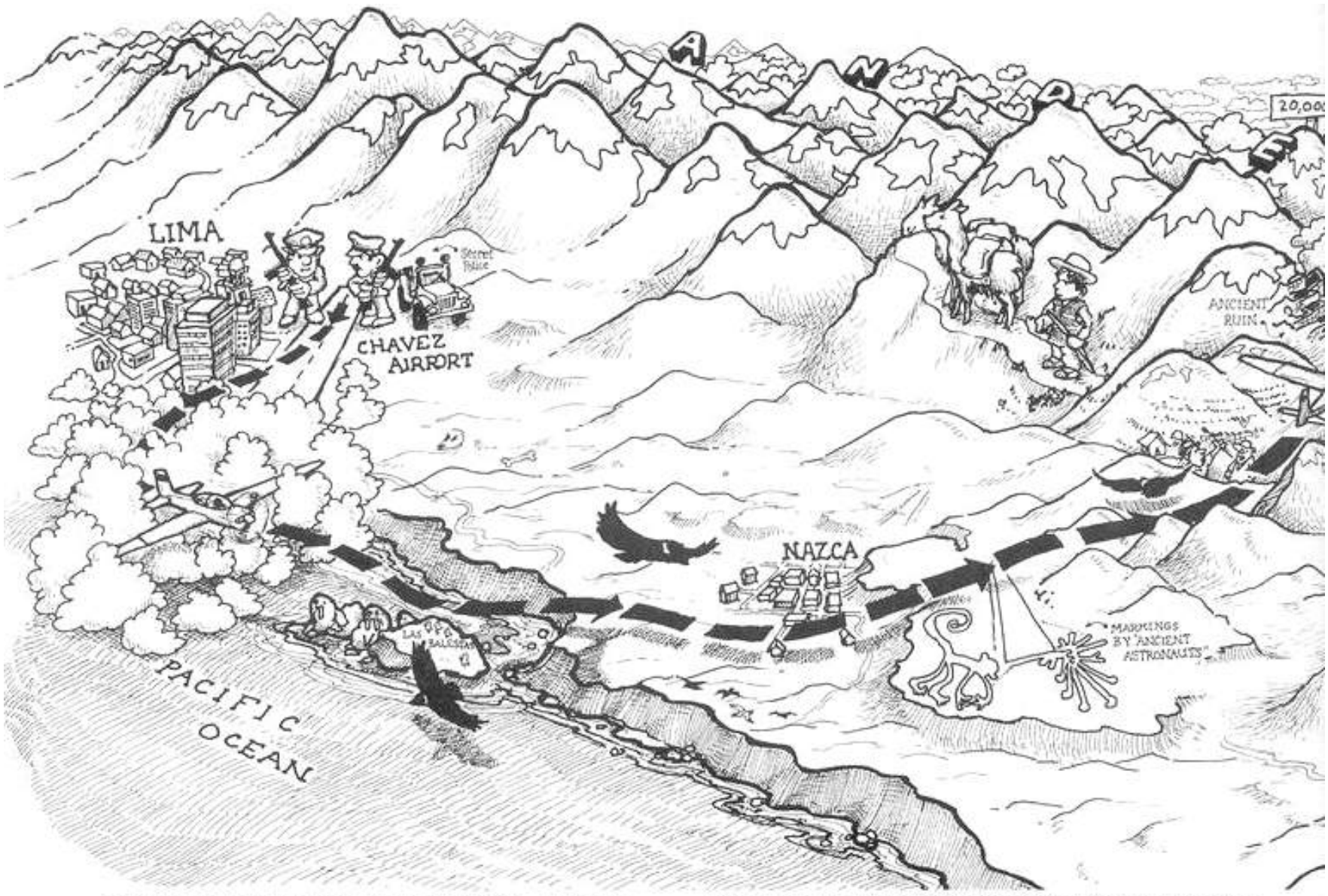
"No problema? Salida?"

Very disappointed, almost hurt, they returned my film and said I could go. But after clearing customs, immigration, police, flight plan, declaration, and paying parking fees, it was too late; I could not fly to Arequipa in the remaining daylight, and no visual night flight is permitted in any country except U.S.A.

I FELT A WONDERFUL SENSE OF FREEDOM and aloneness, gliding down quietly over the blue sea







with the tan specks of islands far ahead. I hoped the condors might be found roosting on the islands, because various books and papers I had studied mentioned their feeding on dead sea lions and bird eggs along the coast. These islands were a special refuge for birds and sea mammals and in past times many tons of guano from the bird droppings were mined and shipped to be used for fertilizer.

I circled the two small islands while pushing the buttons on the stick to operate the electric cameras. Thousands of sea birds surged over the mesa top. Small beaches among the scalloped cliffs were crowded by fat, smooth sea lions looking like giant sea slugs come on land. Another swing around the islands. No condors. Las Balestas was bare and sparsely birded, so I skimmed over the sea to Isla de Sangayan. No condors. Next the Peninsula Paracas, its 300-foot wall facing the sea with a narrow beach, moved by my left wing in the morning sea haze. *Déjà vu!* I was suddenly back at a Torrey Pines soaring contest near San Diego, California.

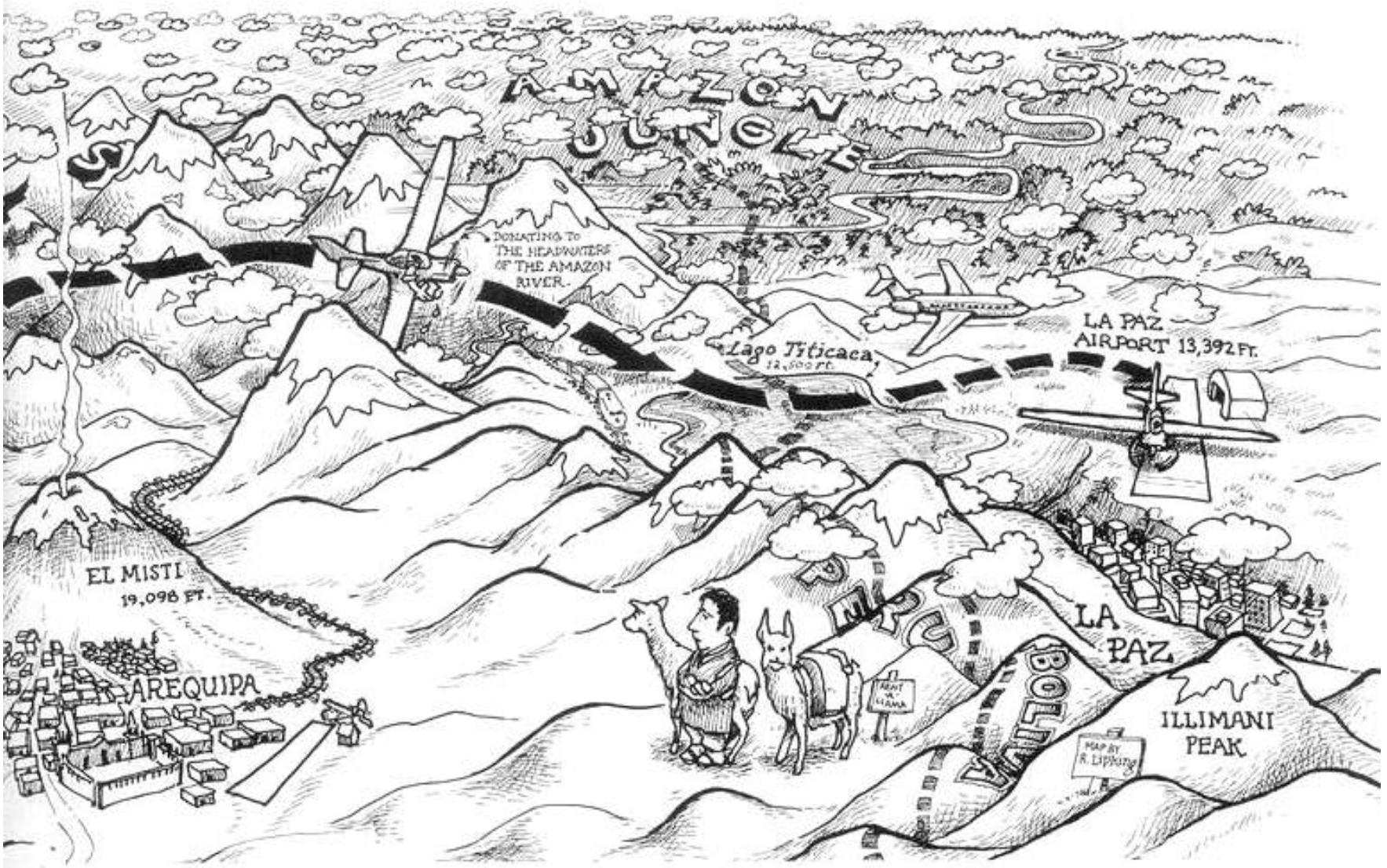
A glint of feathers!

A creature that seemed as big as a hang glider dove from the cliff and glided past between me and the rocks. I turned the 17-meter span motorglider as quickly as possible — just in time to see the flash of white ruff around its neck as the bird slipped over the edge of the escarpment and down into a sandy bowl. It was like meeting a celebrity in real life after seeing him on television or movies for many years, completely familiar yet somehow new and exciting. I took pictures with the hand-held camera as I swept past the ponderously flapping bird.

After 30 seconds it landed in a spray of sand on the side of the hill. The condor is too heavy to fly without upcurrents. It needs to take off from a higher place like a hang glider. I flew over the sea to circle back so the wingtip camera would be in position for a picture of the giant feathered creature sitting on the slope, but in the 45 seconds it took to come around, the bird skimmed down the hill, over the edge of the cliff, and disappeared. *Damn!* But I was encouraged.

Fifteen miles farther south, the scene was repeated almost exactly. However, this bird didn't land but pulled up over the edge and was lost from sight immediately. I continued along the cliff edge, peering down to see if I could catch one on a ledge before it took off. Then, the blink of a shadow on my canopy. I looked up.

Straight above was a wonderful sight. Four immense condors circling in a thermal! I pushed quickly on the rudder pedal and eased the stick left to start a turn designed for the tip and tail cameras' fields of view and moved into the thermal under the birds. Three were immature with dark brown plumage. I selected the adult with its striking black and white feathers. Each time I flew close, it would fold its wings, roll away, and dive. I had soared with the California condors several years ago and



found them unafraid of my smaller RF-4D single-seat motorglider. These Andean condors actively tried to get away. Operating the cockpit camera and flying was very difficult. With no airspeed to check, I had only the control feel and tail buffet to warn of an imminent stall. The bird led me through steep maneuvers. Turning as tightly as the big *Sperber* could follow, I took pictures of the condor. Like a World War I dog fight, the action brought us lower. Over the sand dunes behind the cliffs, the bird dove into a gulley. It was too narrow to follow close enough to get pictures, so I stayed above and watched the clever flyer skim out to the beach and magically disappear.

I WAS SWEATING IN THE BAKING SUN AND HOT AIR. The condor was gone, so I headed down the coast. Many smaller vultures and sea birds soared over the beaches, but no more condors were to be seen. I turned inland to photograph the famous "ancient astronaut" markings in the desert near Nazca. According to one imaginative writer, these strange lines and drawings were done by ancient spacemen because they can best be seen only from above and some look like runways of a modern airport. I aimed the nose of the quietly flying motorglider at 110 degrees and headed inland. In many years of flying over the California deserts, never have I passed over such eerie wastes of exotic sand, rock, and snaking canyons as I saw there in the Peruvian desert. Not a plant anywhere. A shimmering sea haze made it seem as if I were over a strange lost world.

From my studies and questioning local fliers, I had a pretty good idea that the markings were about 25 kilometers north of Nazca on a flat plateau. Ahead was a riverbed and some irrigated fields; beyond, a raised area with a bluish cast. That must be it. I could see faint lines traced over this stony desert. What luck!

I pulled up from my ground skimming to 400 feet, circled the markings, and took pictures. It did look as if someone had planned an airport. The boundary lines were not parallel, accentuating the impression of long runways stretching into the distance. I saw a huge monkey and condor diagram among the faint markings.

Made by ancient astronauts? Possibly. Can be seen only from above? Probably. But as I worked a strong, gusty thermal in my climb out, I noticed there was no need for an aircraft. All the patterns can be seen clearly from atop hills just southeast of the site. Anyone could climb the hill and make sense of the patterns. Now came hard-decision time.

IT WAS NOON. I had taken off at 8:00 a.m., but 4 hours later I was only a third of the way. At this rate it would be 12 hours to La Paz. Not enough fuel. As I passed over the town of Nazca, I thought fleetingly of landing for another ten gallons of costly Peruvian gasoline, but realized on April 23rd

it is fall in South America with days becoming shorter. La Paz is far to the east — far enough that another 40 minutes would be cut from the daylight. I was running out of time, which can't be purchased at any price. My permit didn't have Nazca listed and I might run into difficulty. I reluctantly decided to go to Arequipa and see if I could get by on my outdated permit and fly into Bolivia the next day.

I circled in a thermal to 9000 feet. Twenty thousand feet would be needed to safely cross the Andes, so for practice I decided to see how high I could get on the way to Arequipa. I moved into the foothills of the brown, dry, steeply-rumpled mountains. The lift was strong, narrow, and rough like the White Mountains in California. The turbulence shook the glider with powerful surges of up and down currents. The simple Posa carburetor used on the Revmaster VW engine does not have a float bowl and relies on the weight of the fuel in the tank to flow down into the carburetor jet. The surges became so pronounced that the engine cut out for seconds at a time as the fuel pressure changed suddenly.

No amount of adjustment with the fuel mixture control seemed to help. Perhaps I should go back to Nazca, after all. I edged out of one canyon, barely slipped over the ridge, and descended into the next. An Indian village was built against the bottom of the mountain with hardly enough flat area to farm. How to land, if I must? Come up the slope and stall. On next to the village. No roads here — only trails. What problems, what adventures, if the motorglider slid in on this stony ground? I had been told the Indians are not friendly. They don't attack a downed pilot, but if he were hurt, he might be helped to die more quickly, so the airplane and cargo could be stripped.

The spare, dry area of a few hundred acres was lonely with mountains all around. I had the eerie feeling of not belonging. I wanted to head back to the coast, but a thermal shoved firmly upward as if to say, *"Yes, go on. A creature of the air belongs anywhere it can fly."* My friend, the thermal, pushed at 1500 feet per minute as the *Sperber* circled tightly. Altitude is insurance. At 13,000 feet lift weakened so I continued deeper into the rising mountains. Despite the extra altitude, the ship was still only a few hundred feet over the sparse brush and tan, stony ground.

Another condor! I had turned in a thrust of lift along a narrow ridge curving up to a 15,000-foot peak when I saw its huge wings and white markings float by below me. It turned and circled in a thermal. What an unexpected thrill to see a seventh condor. Now feeling like an ace, I would be smart this time and let the bird get above me so it couldn't dive away into the canyons. I was determined to use all my concentration to keep the plane in close and make sure the bird was within camera view. But as I swooped up from below, I found it impossible to fly the plane in the turbulent

Who says you can't take it with you? Just before departure Jack photographed his payload. Note the sleeping bag and foam rubber pad for sleep under the bird's wing when necessary.

air, move close to the condor, and change the cockpit camera lenses from wide angle to the telephoto in the few seconds available. The huge bird looked over at me, calm and aware. It was a male with red wattles on his head and neck. As he half rolled and dropped past the leading edge of the wing, my thumb flicked the stick buttons (see photo). I hoped the tail and wing cameras caught the quickly maneuvering bird. He pulled out just above the stony slope and sped down the canyon. No chance of diving after him. How I wished for my little RF-4 — the single-seat version of this plane. It can make 14-second circles effortlessly and would have been perfect for staying with these wary birds.

TIME AND POSITION: Lake Parinococha at 1:00 p.m. Still hundreds of miles to La Paz. We passed the white peak of Nevada Sara Sara, then over the steep dramatic valley of the Rio Ocana. Looking down 10,000 feet to the river made shivers tingle in my arms. (Yes, with over 5500 hours of flying, I am scared of heights. Peering over the edge of the Grand Canyon in Arizona, or even watching someone else lean from the railing of a tall building's observation deck is terrifying. I'm comfortable in aircraft because the sensation of height doesn't exist, as there is no visual connection with the ground.) I seem suspended above a miniature landscape, unless, and this was one of those times, there is a great difference between the bottom of a canyon or mountain and one part is close to the plane I'm flying. This startling realization of height was unsettling. Luckily it was quiet and smooth over the deep canyon. The Revmaster-VW ran evenly.

I passed alongside Nevada Solimano and Coropuna, cloud-haloed snowy 20,000-foot peaks. Searching for lift, I pulled the motorglider in close to a canyon's edge. A good thermal lifted us to the rim where a strange pattern in the rocks appeared. Walls, foundations, and streets clung to the mountain. An abandoned city? No people, roads, or even trails were near its boundaries. It must be one of the many unexplored remains of prehistoric societies in South America. It was a perfect place to put an ancient city high in these mysterious and remote highlands.

I love to fly low. The motion, snapshot scenes, and the instant shift of position as the ground unrolls below gives a sense of godlike freedom. But up there the thin air was so violent it was frightening to be close to the ground. At 14,000 feet the currents thrust and tugged me up and down hundreds of feet in seconds. If I smacked into a rocky slope, there would be no way to salvage this beautiful airplane that had flown so far.

Something made my eyes flick to the left. Unconsciously, they had picked up a movement to the north. I intensely studied the ridge. A moving dot was briefly silhouetted between the far peaks. With its big, flat, airplane-like wing, it could only be a condor! I concentrated on the bird, now disappearing, now made visible only by its shadow leaping along the rocks. The motorglider closed in on Number Eight.

The South American condor, like those California condors with which I had flown, don't use lift as would a glider pilot. We humans soar as high as possible in the strongest lift, then glide on course. Condors soar only high enough to search for carrion or glide across valleys and gaps. The young bird was too close to the rocks in the narrow canyon to position my cameras for good pictures. I had a chance for only a few shots before being forced to circle up and out of the dead-end canyon into which the bird had flown.

THE BACH PRELUDE ON MY STEREO TAPE, SO perfectly suited to this high mountain flying, had drifted into the background. I turned up the sound on the headset. It dawned on me that flying at 14 to 16,000 feet the last few hours might have been affecting my perception due to lack of oxygen. Perhaps I was listening but not hearing. I pulled on my oxygen mask and turned the valve. In two deep breaths the stereo sound of Bach again boomed in the headphones!

Breathing the fresh, mind-clearing oxygen, I examined the map as the big *Sperber* circled in a thermal to 17,000 feet. We were near Choquecorao Peak. Here the Amazon River has its headwaters, and drainage begins at a small glacial lake, according to both the Peruvian Geologic Survey and *National Geographic* explorer, Loren McIntyre. A few minutes flying brought the motorglider around to the northeast side of the peak. There it was, the beginning of the greatest river in the world. I opened the small panel on the side of the canopy and, in an egotistical (but relished) moment, poured out a bottle of my "water," thinking of how long it would take the drops to reach the Atlantic Ocean 4000 miles away. . . .

I KNEW I HAD BETTER GET TO AREQUIPA, but the detail map south of this point seemed to be missing. (It turned up later in my car at Chino Airport.) Twisting around, I managed to pull a planning chart of South America from the map box behind me. It ran from the equator to Tierra Del Fuego, so the one-to-five-million scale meant an hour's flight was only an inch on the map. After 45 minutes of heading generally south but flying around the 20,000-foot peaks, there was still no sign of the road or valley that ran up to Arequipa's 9000-foot airport.

The wire on the ten-gallon tank in front was halfway down. I plugged in the electric fuel pump and transferred gas from the rear seat supply for 18 minutes before vent spray on the canopy indicated a full 10 gallons in front. I had very carefully determined the little auto pump moved a liter per minute, so it was possible to calculate fuel remaining by the transfer time. This was the fifth 18-minute transfer of the day's flight. There should be 12 liters remaining in back, enough to go to Arequipa. I kept heading south. The *Sperber* was now floating over a more gently hilly area — 14,000 feet above sea level. Thermals swirled dust to thin cumulus clouds. The ground was only a few thousand feet below, although we were at 16,000 feet.

Where was Arequipa? I could see only bare brown grassy slopes and rocks. Then ahead I spotted a railroad. It even showed on my map! My eyes followed the line to the west to a surprising sight — the distinctive cone of El Misti Volcano which I knew to be near Arequipa. I had studied every account I could find of flying across the Andes and recognized that peak from pictures in old *National Geographic* articles. We were far to the north and well east of Arequipa. I looked at the big map. La Paz was very close on this scale, but was there really enough fuel? The plane had about two and a half hours at cruise power in the front tank, but exactly how much was left in the reserve wasn't definite because I had taxied several miles and at least thirty minutes running at the giant Jorge Chavez International Airport.

I plugged in the pump and checked the time . . . . 3:30 p.m. If it were possible to make La Paz, I would soon know. After fifteen minutes, the tiny bubbles in the clear plastic line grew larger until they became convulsive squirts. The rear tank was empty. We were past the Laguna Salina at 19,000 feet. Arequipa was 75 miles behind. The front tank had nine gallons. The engine uses 3.5 gallons per hour so with 200 miles to go, landing at La Paz would be after sunset with 2 gallons remaining. Go all the way back to Arequipa? In Peru? To hell with it. I'm going to go for La Paz.

SLOWING UNDER THE THIN CLOUDS TO EXPLOIT LIFT brought me to 20,000 feet, which was 5000 feet over the valleys and enough to clear the 17,000-ft. peaks. I floated over a sea of mountains, chasms, and rolling, stony, brown fields, even remembering some of it from studying Skylab photographs. The ponds and small lakes of meltwater were calm, and cloud shadows showed no drift. I began smiling as I realized one of my dreams: "Jack Lambie is crossing the Andes at their widest point." I was infused with wonderful feelings of accomplishment which were heightened by the enthralling and magical view. Over 10,000 feet a change in the atmosphere occurs. The ground here is so high there is no gradual fade of visibility in the haze of the lower air as occurs when looking from an airliner window or even when soaring along the Sierra Nevada range and looking into the Owens Valley or Death Valley areas.

Seeing so sharply from horizon to horizon was like looking at pictures from the Viking orbiting Mars. Never have I flown where I seemed so suspended in space. The sparkling transparency was everywhere and no line of haze anywhere.

Still 130 miles from La Paz, Bolivia, I saw a strip of blue on the horizon. It marked the world's highest navigable body of water — Lake Titicaca at 12,500 feet. Soon the great lake was spread before me like an enameled jewel — flat and solid. The calm, smooth lake was surrounded by the Altiplanoe — a 13,500-ft. highly populated plain. Below I saw only a few dirt roads, some Indian huts, but no people or movement.

As the VW quietly drew the glider through the bright, invisible air carrying its ecstatic pilot toward the lake, signals from the La Paz VORTAC impinged on the Omni pickup and the needle came to life. I called on South America radio frequency, 129.2, to report crossing the Peru-Bolivia border. No answer. I called the La Paz approach control frequency listed on my Jepp Chart, 119.5. No answer.

The ground was now in shadow; the cockpit becoming cold. I pulled a towel around my shoulders as I floated over the lake, now gray like a giant slate blackboard. Still no answer to my calls. Almost all ground control in the world is at a frequency of "121. something." I tried 121.1 to

Self-portrait: Lambie mounted remote cameras on the Sperber (note tail housing) and tripped shutters with a stick-mounted release. They resulted in many striking pictures like this one approaching the Andes (background) over a relatively populated area. However, the enclosures also resulted in his forceable detention by secret police who ruined irreplaceable exposed film and detached airspeed lines while ransacking the glider.

121.9 . . . . no answer. My chart did not have the tower frequency. Most control towers south of the border are "118. something," so I started in on 118.0.

"Motorglider, November, niner, niner, eight, eight, seven, 30 minutes west of La Paz for landing." No answer. 118.1. . . . nothing. 118.2 . . . . quiet. I clicked in 118.3 and heard a loud voice from La Paz Tower instruct a Lloyd Aero-Boliviano Boeing 727 to hold for a motorglider. I called on 118.3 and got an immediate reply.

"La Paz Tower to Motorglider 887, what is your position?"

"Motorglider 887, 16,700 feet over the lake heading 110 degrees." I heard them release the jet and saw it curving to the north.

"Hey 887, that's quite a flight you made from Lima. I used to fly for Continental Airlines up in the states."

"Thanks for the comments, I agree. It was an exciting 10½ hours from Lima."

I COULD HEAR SOMEONE ASKING THE TOWER about assisting me after landing. The Ayar Uchu Glider Club was expecting me, since I had written them many weeks before. In the cold and darkening cockpit I was warmed with the realization that friends were here. La Paz tower had called the group at the gliderport that afternoon so they could put away their winch and gliders.

In any flier's experience one of the happiest times is the completion of a journey packed with experiences.

The city of La Paz was nowhere in sight, I found later it is in a chasm behind the airport. Clouds towered 30,000 feet over Iillimani Peak still a bright golden pink in the sun, long since below the horizon. Then the 4km runway stretched ahead. I pushed the lever over with cold stiff fingers to lower the wheel and turned on the landing light. One last breath of oxygen and I turned off the tank and put the mask behind me.

I flicked on the landing light but stayed to one side of the runway, a technique to avoid being run over by another plane. Because there was no airspeed indication, I flew at what seemed to be extra speed for safety, but at this 13,392-ft. altitude, the groundspeed at landing was 75 miles per hour. Although the runway was rushing by at what I thought was sufficient speed, the wings didn't think so and we touched down about 9000 feet short of the terminal.

Now was a fine time to try high-altitude takeoff. At open throttle the engine would do only 19 inches manifold pressure and 2500 rpm instead of 3400 rpm and 40 inches at sea level. The plane did nothing more than a fast taxi. It was ominous. I put it out of my mind as a truck with a flashing light raced out to the taxiway to lead me in. We taxied past a big Braniff DC-8 and the stares of curious deplaning passengers at the El Alto Terminal.

A LINE OF MEN STOOD AT ATTENTION as I swung around, turned off the fuel, radio, and master switch. When I opened the canopy and stood, they broke ranks and rushed to the plane.

"The Club de Planeadores Ayar Uchu welcomes you, Jack Lambie. We are glad you are here at last."

I sat down on the edge of the cockpit in the freezing cold thin air.

"I am so very happy to be here. You have no idea how wonderful it is to have my friends greet me."

The Club members were mostly Germans and Austrians who settled in Bolivia and transplanted their love of gliding. Rudolph Ortner, Juergen Klint, and Stephen Javornik walked me to the terminal for an instant passport stamp and customs okay. The airport manager, tower chief, and customs all congratulated me on the flight and welcomed me to Bolivia. What a difference from Peru! What a difference being met by friends!

The club members removed all cameras and baggage and carefully tied the ship down in the cold wind. We drove off into the dark toward La Paz. I was getting really curious about where the city could be when it appeared suddenly in a great canyon a few miles beyond the airport. At night the sparkling city was like none I'd ever seen. The air at 12,000 feet is so clear I think one could see a candle miles away. The glittering city, unfolding as we descended on the fine freeway, gave me the romantic feeling of landing a spaceship in some far-away planet and being taken to its wondrous alien capital.

Dinner, however, was not in a crystal palace and served by robots, but at the German Club's authentic Old World Restaurant. Over good drink and food, I again sensed the bond that fliers everywhere understand in one another.

They had brought their gliders and airplanes from the U.S.A., Germany, and Switzerland to fly over the plains and mountains of this high country; the cost, difficulty, and time are nothing compared to being able to fly. We agreed now was a wonderful time to be living when such beautiful creations as gliders and motorplanes exist for us to experience the thrill of matching ourselves with the air . . . being creatures of flight.

A storm was reported over the jungles so I would have several days to enjoy my new friends. Time enough to worry about a loaded takeoff from 13,392 feet that already was beginning to form a tiny knot of apprehension. For now, after 10½ hours of pure flying adventure, I was in La Paz.