



GRINDIN' HIGH

by FREDERICK C. DAVIS

A blazing steamer—a roaring furnace amid a vast expanse of desolate sea—and Nick Royce, fledgling, zoomed for the greatest scoop of all to prove himself a birdman!

IF YOU CAN'T DELIVER THE GOODS you're not worth a hoot to the Reel. And the next man that flubs his assignment goes packing off this field to stay!"

Gord Dugan was talking. He spat out his words with the same high pressure that drove him through the welter of duties as chief editor of the weekly World News Reel. It's a long way from Times Square to our T on Long Island, but he'd driven all the way from headquarters especially to read us his own personal riot act.

"It's a fast game, boys, and you've got to have guts to stay in it. From now on it's going to be faster still. If there's any man here who can't stand the pace, I'll take his resignation right now!"

We were in the little cubicle of an office that squatted beside the hangars. Rex Dillon and Tom Thurber were pilots; Jim White and I—my name's Art Buckley—were cameramen, and all four of us were

used to getting a classy yellow check, signed by Dugan, every Saturday morning. We felt that we justly earned the money; and since I was super to the boys at the field, I answered Dugan's gibe.

"We're still with you, Chief. We're all eager to make the World News the best on the screen. I know that the Compass people are pressing us close with a bigger line of men than ever before, and new equipment, but even so, we can stand 'em off with a fair break. We've simply been having a run of tough luck."

"What do you mean?" Dugan demanded.

"Take the Lindbergh reception at Washington, for instance. I'll admit that Compass got better shots of it than we did from the air; but it got 'em by taking a lot of crazy chances that I wouldn't let my pilot take. They crowded us so close that once we almost crashed. The sky was full of planes that day, and we had to keep our heads."

"And you kept your heads and lost the shots," Dugan snapped. "The angles we got showed principally another plane closer in, getting the good stuff, with 'Compass Weekly' lettered all over it! Why, it made us look like just so many funny jokes."

"Take the flood," I went on, disregarding this poke. "The big levee break we had to miss—had to. Luck played against us again. If I hadn't discovered the oil leaking out of the motor when I did, Rex and I would be sleeping somewhere in the Gulf of Mexico now. We had to turn back, and after we'd fixed the leak it was too late."

"Well, enough of these post-mortems," Gord Dugan cut in coldly. "I've heard 'em before. You didn't get the shots—that's what counts. If you were on your toes, as you should be, the Compass people wouldn't outplay you. Boys, if you can't bring in the pictures, I'll find somebody who can. We didn't buy this field and those planes for fun, and we're not hiring you out of charity. I intend to have the stuff, and if you want to keep your jobs, you'll have to get it!"

We said nothing while the Chief put a match to a fresh perfecto.

"Now, boys, so far as the Compass people go, we've put one over on 'em. We'll be having the best theatres in the world paying top prices for our stuff from now on—if we get the shots. I've just signed a contract with Rolf Flynn," he explained.

"Flynn!"

"Exactly. He's due in these parts soon. I had our Chicago man get him. Flynn—sure. The greatest stunt flyer in the world. He's going to pilot for us, and we're going to exploit him to the limit. He'll get stuff for us that no other flyin' man could ever get. It's the biggest stroke I've ever done for the Reel—and it's some stroke!"

I perked up at once. Rolf Flynn with the World News Reel! Why, Flynn's name was known as well as those of the trans-oceanic flyers, and in his field nobody could touch him. The daringest dare-devil flyer that ever flew—I'd seen him in the air once, and I knew he could make a plane do tricks, singly or in combination, that no other flyer could equal. No danger would ever phase Flynn.

"Chief, you mean it? Flynn is going out to get stuff for us?"

"He is. 'Excursions with Rolf Flynn.' That sort of thing, and a good deal more of it. They'll eat it up. As soon as he comes, Buckley, we'll get him in the air for a few action shots in the cockpit, and then we'll hold him ready for anything that comes along. Hello!"

"H'lo."

Dugan looked toward the door, and the answer to his greeting came softly and reservedly from a young chap who stood there. He was a handsome young fellow, with clear brown eyes and tousled hair and long arms, and as thin as a strut. For a moment he just looked at us, smiling, and almost shy.

"Sure you're in the right place?" Dugan asked.

"This is the World News field, isn't it? I guess I'm in the right place, then. I've come to do some flying for you."

"Oh!" Dugan rose politely. "I beg your pardon!" He extended one of his horny hands. "I wasn't expecting you so soon!" He was all affability. "Come right in, Mr. Flynn!"

The young fellow, smiling a bit more, came in. So this was Flynn! I admit I blinked at him. I realized, that moment, that I hadn't known what Flynn looked like. I didn't expect him to look like a bashful, down-chinned lad. I had known he was young, but I was surprised to find him so boyish. But, after all, why not? Youth rules the world. There's Lindy, for instance. This chap was of Lindbergh's general build, and I liked him at once.

"I'm certainly glad to see you!" Dugan went on, pumping the young chap's hand. "Did they tell you at the office that you'd find me out here?"

"Ye-es," he said quietly.

"Couldn't keep away from the field, hey?"

He laughed softly and said not. Dugan ceremoniously introduced him to us all. He graciously shook hands, slowly, and smiling all the while. He was a model of quietness and reserve. Dugan's manner said that now, out of self-respect, the rest of us would have to test our mettle.

"Sit down, Mr. Flynn. Well, you've just met the flying division of the reel. Our little celluloid newspaper is all tuned up to get some sensations hot out of the air, and you're the man to do it for us, Mr. Flynn. We need your daring and your aggressiveness and your speed. Personally, I'm ready to begin at once. 'Never wait,' that's my motto. Did you come in your plane, Mr. Flynn?"

"No-o."

"Well, we've got three, and they're all at your service. We'll spare no expense to make your flights bring in the best possible results. Our planes are DeHavilands—big and steady. Do you like DeHavilands, Mr. Flynn?"

"Ye-es."

He didn't say much, while Dugan rattled on. Personally, I was more than glad to see Flynn with

us. His prestige was considerable. The Compass people had been beating us out, because of superior equipment, but now Flynn would be able to equal them, I felt sure.

Flynn's presence would perk us up, too. Not only are our planes used for taking shots from the air, but they are used frequently in transferring European stuff from liners to the laboratories, and from inland points as well. Speed in transporting the undeveloped films by airplane is very valuable when every moment counts, and the first film out gets the booking on Broadway. The game is getting faster every day; and Flynn would make it faster still. Besides, Flynn was an interesting sort. Reputed as a dare-devil, he was as quiet as a mouse. His occupation and his nature were strangely in contrast. I expected to see him go through some interesting metamorphoses when he climbed into his plane for his first flight with the reel.

"Dillon," Dugan asked suddenly, "how's the air today?"

"Smooth."

"Buckley, the light is good, isn't it?"

"Good, and not a suggestion of haze," I answered.

Dugan was evidently anxious to see Flynn take off and, frankly, I was too.

"Listen, Mr. Flynn. I hate to put you into action at once, but conditions are ideal right now. 'Do it now'—that's my motto. We can't pass up any opportunities in this game. Now, I want to have Buckley and White take some stock shots of you, on the ground and flying, to use at the beginning and end of every news strip you go out to get. There's no telling when a call may come in, and when the time comes conditions may be worse, and we might not have time to get them then. Better take some of them now, to have them on hand. Bits introducing you to the fans as a World News getter. Willing?"

"Su-ure."

"Good! You didn't bring your duds along this trip? No matter. Buckley looks about your size. Got any extras, Buckley? Fine! Mr. Flynn, you can change right in here, while the boys are making ready."

We left the young chap peeling off his clothes, calmly and wordlessly, while we left the office.

"You, Dillon and Thurber, warm a plane," Dugan prattled on. "Buckley, get your machine into it. White will take the ground shots, and you'll get the altitude stuff."

The hangar doors rumbled open, and Dillon and Thurber rolled out the D. H.

I hustled out my camera and mounted it in the rear pit while Thurber spun the propeller at Dillon's "Contact!" White was spreading his tripod off to one side. The plane was warmed, I had set my stop and fed in a cartridge, when that quiet young man came walking out, looking neat and trim in my spare outfit.

White shot him while he was adjusting his helmet and goggles and climbing into the pit. I got a good view of him climbing in, too. Thurber and Dillon were leaning on the D.H.'s tail, with the blocks chocked, and then the motor began to roar up. I watched the helmeted head bob around in the front pit.

Flying with Flynn! I got a big kick out of that. Now I'd see some real piloting, for sure.

At a signal from the pilot, the plane was loosened, and it began to trundle down the stalk of the T. I ground away steadily, aiming at Flynn's head, while the ship gained speed. We were off!

The plane stayed on the ground longer than usual. I put it down to Flynn's method, let out the film, and ground on. Then the D.H. bounced up suddenly. I kept the crank turning automatically while I wondered if that, too, was Flynn's method; but of course, this was his first try in a strange plane. Far below, now, the ground teetered, and I shot some of the sky-line blurring past.

Swinging the box around, I ground in a few feet of the hangars in the distance, with Dugan waving both arms.

I turned back to the pilot and managed to get a good shot of his helmet silhouetted against the glare of the sun on the whirling propeller. Then I took a rest. I had plenty of footage left, for whatever Flynn wanted to do in the air and for the landing.

The plane jerked around into a bank so suddenly and so sharply that my safety-belt creaked. I grabbed the crank and ground. The plane righted itself with a jerk. After I'd caught my breath I shouted:

"Anything wrong?"

No answer. We were climbing. I slipped on a filter and got some fine cloud effects beyond the wings. Then the plane mushed out into a glide, and then into a dive. Whatever this Flynn did, I decided right there, he did suddenly! The ground came swooping up until my heart stopped beating for fear we'd plow right through it. When it was almost close enough to spit at, the plane went into a terrific zoom; and then it seemed that we were climbing vertically toward Kingdom Come! This was too much for me; I just hung on, and managed to grind a few feet each way.

Flynn must know what he was doing, I felt, but it was sure hard on my heart!

With the struts shrieking and the wires whistling with the strain the plane banked vertically. We headed back toward the hangars. I ground out a few more feet, of the approach. My 200 feet of film were about gone. Straight at those hangars we drove. He waited to ease up much later than Rex Dillon usually did.

Then with a bound we hit the ground. Two long explosions broke out over the diminishing roar of the engine. Both truck tires had blown out; and this time I began to wonder, and wonder seriously, about this Flynn's flying!

We were rushing at the hangars madly. I saw Thurber and Dillon scooting out of the way, preceded by Dugan. White, at the last moment, abandoned the crank, snatched up the tripod, and beat it. On came the hangars. And then—

Cra-ash!

What happened next I can only guess. The plane must have swerved aside, and that swerve was all that saved two lives. One wing went into splinters, the propeller completely disappeared, and the other wing broke as the body flopped over. He had side-swiped one of the hangars.

I climbed out, dizzy and wobbly, realizing only vaguely but gratefully that by some miracle I wasn't hurt. But how about Flynn?

Thurber and Dillon came rushing back. They hoisted a limp pilot out of the broken pit, swung him between them, and carried him toward the office.

White, in the meanwhile, with the presence of mind of the born cameraman he is, had reset his tripod a little distance back and was grinding in the whole episode.

Flynn was unconscious. Stretched out on the bunk in the office he was dead to the world, though Dugan's swift examination disclosed no injuries. The telephone buzzed with a call for a doctor, and after what seemed an eternity, the medic came.

Dugan was fidgeting like an old woman. Having counted so heavily on Flynn's flying to bring the World News wide publicity and favor, this incident had unnerved him. If Flynn had to give up flying for a time it meant that once more the World News was having a stroke of its characteristic rotten luck.

The doc, however, told us good news. "He's just in a faint. The stuff I've given him will bring him around soon. No internal injuries. He'll be as well as he ever was in an hour."

Dugan drew a chair close. Thurber and Dillon had fortified me with some sustaining alcoholics, and the effect of the shock was fast leaving me. While the two pilots went out and confined themselves with sweeping up the mess by the hangar, Dugan and I waited for Flynn to come around.

At last he did.

"Feeling better?" Dugan asked.

"Some."

"You're all right. Nobody hurt. The D.H. is a pile of junk, but it was an old one anyway. It's the first time you ever made such a landing, I suppose. A minus-three point, eh?"

No answer.

"Something must 'a' been wrong with that ship," Dugan suggested.

"No-o," said the man on the bunk. "It was my fault."

This was some admission for a pilot like Flynn to make! Yet, it seemed he spoke the truth. I was in a position to know!

"I'm sorry I took the plane up," the young fellow said. "I shouldn't 'a' done it. I should 'a' told you before."

"Told me what?" Dugan demanded.

"I'm not Flynn."

Dugan looked around a moment, finally found me, and we stared at each other for a good, long stare. Then we looked back at the chap who had said he was not the man we believed him to be, and Dugan said, as calmly as he ever said anything:

"What did you say?"

"I'm not Flynn."

We had heard aright. This time we merely blinked. Dugan blurted:

"Whattaya mean—you're not Flynn?"

"Why, I'm not Flynn. I'm Nick Royce."

"Who the hell is Nick Royce?"

"Nobody."

"Then what in the name of almighty damn did you say you were Flynn for?"

"I didn't say so," Dugan was answered. "*You* did!"

Dugan gulped speechlessly.

"I never said I was Flynn. You mistook me for him. I just came to ask for a job. At first I thought it was a joke you were making—pretending I was Flynn. I was just being agreeable. Then when I realized you meant it—why, I just let you."

The air was clearing rapidly. Dugan absorbed the situation while he glowered. Then he burst out:

"Well, I'll be double gol-damned! You've certainly

got a full cargo of nerve, young fellow. Had you even been in a plane before, may I ask?"

"Certainly!" Royce straightened up, unsteadily. "Certainly! I can fly. I've graduated from a good flying school. The trouble is I haven't got a plane of my own, and I haven't touched a stick in months. I've got a good record. I've flown solo—two hours."

"My God!" Dugan sputtered. "Two hours of solo flying to his credit, Buckley! Did you hear that? Why, you lunatic, you! You dared to take one of my planes up! You dared do it! Kid, do you realize you've wrecked a plane and only by the grace of Heaven missed killing yourself and the best cameraman I've got?" /

"I don't care!" said Royce.

"Don't care!" Dugan found words again beyond him.

"I don't care!" Royce repeated, his gentleness all gone from him now. "If you'll only give me time to get back into form, I'll show you what I can do. I never flew such a heavy ship before—that was the trouble. I can do it. I've been all over this country, from coast to coast and from border to border, hunting for a job, and when you mistook me for Flynn I couldn't help myself—I grabbed the chance to show you what I can do!"

"And you did!" Dugan snarled. "You showed us, all right. You're an expert crate-smasher!"

"You made the mistake, didn't you?" Royce went on heatedly. "You told me to go up. What're you going to do about it now? Sue me for damages, I suppose. Well, go ahead. Sue and be damned! See what you get. I haven't got a penny in my pocket. I—I haven't had a bite to eat for two days."

At this Dugan calmed.

"Ease up on him a bit, Dugan," I suggested, though my head was still whirling. "The kid's no Lindbergh, but if I'd been in his shoes I'd have done the same thing."

"Are you hungry, kid?" Dugan asked.

"Some day I'm going to be a damn' good flyer!" the young fellow sped on. "Wait till I get my chance—!"

"Kid, listen. If you ask me, I say you'll never be a flyer—never in this wide world. You haven't got the stuff. You've just let yourself run away with a romantic idea. Now, shut up! I asked you, are you hungry?"

Royce was. Dugan pulled a bill out of his pocket and pushed it into his.

"Now get out of here!" he ordered. "Be thankful you're getting off so easy. Buy yourself a square meal and go back home to mother. Did you hear me? Get

out—and never show your face on this field again—you would-be aviator!" Royce's face flushed angrily. He tried to give the bill back, but Dugan forced it on him. Then Royce turned and stalked angrily away, past the hangars.

"Wait a minute, Dugan!" I objected. "Wait a minute! Call him back!"

"If you call that kid back, Buckley, you're fired!"

Royce just then disappeared around the farthest tin house.

"Well, all right—if you'll o.k. an expense slip for it, Dugan," I said meekly, not wanting any more disturbances. "That kid's gone off in my best flyin' clothes!"

WE NEVER KNOW when something's going to "break." News respects no hour. Like a bunch of old-time reporters, when reporting was reporting—and we're like a newspaper with a very small staff and an enormous circulation—we've got to be ready to abandon sleep, beefsteaks, shows, weddings, anything, and go out and "shoot it." Not even night stops us, for then we use magnesium candles, or flares, and owl-eye lenses, and get the shots anyway—or try to. We get scores of things that don't go onto any screen; they're filed away in the archives, maybe to be used some day, maybe not. Whenever there has been a long period when things are dead, we know that Father Chance is working up something big. And it had been quiet long enough when Dugan had come to stir us up!

It was another day, clear as crystal, but it was a day almost gone when the telephone in the office shack jangled.

"Hello, hello!" the voice of Dugan's secretary, Smythe, came in impatiently. "Dugan there?"

"No. Is he coming?" I asked.

"Left here long ago, with Flynn, the flyer."

"Well, well! So we're going to get a look at the real one this time!"

"Better get ready for some action," Smythe rasped on. "Something's breaking. There's a coast-wise steamer on fire about sixty miles south of New York, and well out. Wilson, over at the Moon, tipped me off. No verification yet. I'll do my best to verify it. Expect another call within fifteen minutes. And if you see Dugan coming, tell him. He'll want to use Flynn on it!"

The wire hummed voiceless again. Fire at sea! This was indeed good stuff, if it was true. I could picture it in a flash—big white boat, flames reaching high. Flames ordinarily don't picture well, but against the

dark background of the water, and with the light fading, they would look great. Commotion on deck! Speedboats putting out to give succor. Lifeboats bobbing all around. Passengers leaping off, trying to swim away. All good stuff. Doubtless many New Yorkers were on the boat, and if so, we could—if we worked fast enough—get the pictures on Broadway in time for the first evening performances!

“Lord!” I prayed as I pushed out of the office door. “If only our streak of bad luck lets up now!”

I caught Dillon and Thurber working in the hangar.

“Warm ’er up!” They knew at once that something was coming loose. “Here’s a chance to show Dugan we can get the stuff for him. Right this minute the Compass flyers are probably getting their own planes out of the hangars. Get going, you glue-boots! Dugan’s on his way out here now, with Flynn—due any minute!”

They rolled our ablest D.H. out, without ado. Dillon emptied tank after tank of gas into the crate while Thurber rushed around, making sure she was in tune. Then they blocked her, and the engine roared and began to heat.

I’d hustled my trusty old film machine-gun out of the locker, and was mounting it in the rear pit, meanwhile. I’d just finished threading in, and storing some extra cartridges inside my jacket, when I saw a neat blue roadster ease to a stop at the edge of the field. It was Dugan and Flynn.

I beat it to them and told them the break. The trio of us trotted into the office, and as we banged in the telephone shivered again. While Dugan snatched it up and barked into it, I had a chance to look at Flynn.

He wasn’t very imposing after all: average build, a bit stooped, eyes a washed blue. One side of his face was covered with a square of gauze, fastened down with bits of adhesive tape, so that I couldn’t tell much about his good looks. I learned later that the gauze was there to cover a bad scratch he’d got when chuting down into a patch of saplings, some days previous. I shook hands with him—nice chap!—just before Dugan whirled around.

“The dope’s true. It’s the *White Rose*, and it hasn’t got a chance of staying afloat. We’ve got to get that, boys—it’s rich! Flynn, here’s your chance, the minute you hit the field. I knew you’d change our luck. How’s the machine, Buckley? How’s the plane?”

We pattered out of the office again. Dillon was again emptying cans of gas into the D.H., and the propeller was still during the operation. Dugan

ramped around the plane, cussing us out for being so slow. Minutes were precious right then. At last Dillon finished, jumped in the front pit, yelled “Contact!” and let the motor roar up while we sat on the plane’s tail. With the motor idling, I climbed into my camera pit, and we all looked around for Flynn.

“Flynn!” yelled Dugan hoarsely. “Where’s Flynn?”

Right then the guy with the patch of gauze on his face came running out of the office, adjusting his goggles and his helmet, and without waiting a minute, legged into the front pit. And before I had time to take a deep breath we were trundling down the field. The plane lifted nicely, banked east, levelled off, climbed, and deadheaded on. We were out to get the stuff, and we had a fine start.

I was making sure of the stop of my camera when something white suddenly flapped across my face, and instinctively I grabbed at it. It was the piece of gauze that belonged to Flynn. The rush of the wind had obviously tugged it away from its place. I leaned forward, to hand it back, and in doing so caught sight of the cheek which it had bared. I gulped and stared.

Not the slightest scratch marred that cheek!

What now! Pushing at the pilot’s shoulder, I caused him to look back. For a full minute we stared at each other, while the plane wobbled and bumped.

“Save my soul!” I declared.

The ignition went off, and in the following silence the pilot spoke.

“It’s all right. I’ll do it this time. Dugan called me a would-be—said I’d never make a flyer—said I didn’t have the stuff—and I intend to show him he’s wrong!”

The man at the controls of that plane was not, you see, Flynn at all. It was that young fellow named Royce!

Completely flabbergasted as I was right then, I could only listen while the plane munched out and Royce talked. I had no idea then how he’d managed to do it. I learned later, however. And that piece of information belongs right here!

The real Flynn, at that moment, was on the ground, probably unconscious. At any rate, this Royce had been hanging around the field for two days, thinking of nothing else but that he was going to show Dugan up for calling him a would-be. He’d determined that he’d prove otherwise, and that nothing would stop him. He’d seen and heard most of our preparations for getting under way, and he was ready to grab his chance if it came. It did!

In the excitement of getting into the air, we hadn’t paid much attention to Flynn. He’d stayed in the

background, letting us do our stuff. It was right then that Royce had popped out and called Flynn back, out of sight. Not knowing what it was all about, Flynn followed Royce into the office, and for his pains got a tap on the head with the desk telephone! All Royce had to do was grab up the goggles and helmet, and stick that patch of gauze on the side of his face. During the one moment when he was getting into the plane, nobody suspected that Flynn wasn't Flynn at all!

And there I was again, several thousand feet above ground, with Royce at the stick, and still feeling shaky from the smash-up of a couple days before! And it was just my luck I hadn't a chute.

"Get out of the air!" I yelled at him when I could talk again. "Take this plane down again, or you'll kill us both!"

"No, sir!" Royce came back. "I'm going to take you out to get those pictures, and nothing's going to stop me!" Then the motor roared up again, and we bored on. The earth danced below us. The plane jerked and swerved. But still Royce deadheaded it on—and I could do nothing but go along!

"Oh, Lord!" I moaned. "Talk about bad luck. This is the worst yet!" Think of it! A supremely good piece of news work to be done—and almost sure of being missed! That crazy kid was gumming all the works I could think of.

"They probably know it on the field by now," I comforted myself. "They ought to send Flynn up in another plane, with White at the camera."

That would get the pictures, all right—but it wouldn't save yours truly from becoming so much mash before long!

Now we were skimming high over the seaboard; and we nosed out over the water. The plane tilted back and forth like a sea-saw. I could see Royce's head tense and set. For a long time we went ahead, as though we were going over a rutted road in a flivver—and I began to wonder how it would seem to be dead. "Too bad!" the fellows would be saying tomorrow. "Poor old Buckley! He had a tough break!"

Then I forgot about myself when the stuff began to come into view. The pungency of smoke was in the air. Bad for the shots, but it couldn't be helped. Faintly I saw what seemed to be a bonfire in the center of the sea. Royce wobbled straight toward it, then swerved aside as though he realized I wanted a clear way, and began circling widely—and roughly—while I ground it in with a dead man's hand!

We came closer. The boat was smoking like a

burning oil well. It was doomed. Like chips in the black water, life-boats were bobbing all around. Far in the distance I could see the fast motor-boats from the shore beating it out that way. In the opposite direction the big form of an Atlantic liner was heading straight toward the blazing ship. Great stuff! Big passenger liner leaves its course to come to the rescue!

I gestured frantically in that direction, and Royce took me to a point where I got a shot of the fire, far in the background, with the Atlantic liner nosing toward it. I knew when I ground it in that it was good!

Back we zipped. It was a pippin! It deserved all the footage I could give it. The long distance shots were good. Seeming to know what I wanted, Royce drove in closer. I ground away like a machine.

"What'm I shootin' this for?" I asked myself. "I'll never live to take 'em back!"

Royce literally dived at the fire. Closer and closer we swooped, while the flames licked high. I got it all. The heat of the fire beat into our faces. Sparks as thick as raindrops flowed past us—and all the while I knew that if a flaming fragment should settle on our wings, we were bound for Davey Jones' locker! Not stopping at all, Royce dived straight on. We bobbed around like a hollow ball in a fountain jet, for the uprush of air over the fire was terrific. Straight over that fire we buzzed—and lived to tell the tale! When I came out I was minus eyebrows and eyelashes, and had hair like a blond African!

Royce banked so suddenly that my stomach turned. I was getting sea-sick in that plane! He roared down until, when he banked, one wing of the plane swept not more than five feet above the lashing waves. And all the while, like an optimistic fool, I ground on.

"It won't be long now!" I thought.

Let Royce slip, let the plane hit the water, and we'd sink like a shot. I couldn't dare loosen my safety belt, or I would have been thrown out—yet if I didn't, I'd go down with the ship like so much lead. Royce circled back, barely missing the foremast of the ship, barely missing the crash that would have resulted from our trying to fly through the wireless antennae! Then he swooped around again, and I shot life-boats by the dozen. Let Royce push too much on the stick, and there would be some survivors who didn't survive! But at last we climbed up again—and once more I began breathing.

The boat was sinking. The water hissed high against the hot timbers, and suffocating bellows of smoke rolled up, mixed with steam. I stopped every minute to

wipe off my lens, as Royce continued to whirl around in the air like a dragonfly gone loco. I got the ship sinking from more angles than I ever thought possible!

Then I became aware that another plane was buzzing around us. Only one glance was enough. It was a Compass plane! It had been there minutes before I realized it—but not Royce. When I looked up and saw the plane, it was side-slipping as fast as it could away from the wreck, to avoid crashing into Royce—while the Compass cameraman ground away and got some perfectly flat views of a clear sky!

Again the Compass plane tried to ease in for a closer shot of the ship, just as it was settling; and Royce dodged before it at a mad speed. That Compass view would show our World News plane cutting across it! Death in forty forms was waiting for me right then, but to save my soul, I couldn't help grinning at the irony of it. It was the same medicine that Compass had given us—and Royce didn't even know he was the doctor!

I grabbed Royce's shoulder.

"Go back!" I yelled.

I hadn't the slightest faith that we'd ever get back.

Royce banked around violently enough to tear off both wings—but we kept the wings. Just as the plane levelled off in gosh knows what direction, I saw a third ship buzzing around. Again one stare was enough.

That plane was a World News crate. It was piloted by Flynn—the real, guaranteed Flynn. And it was arriving after the whole show was over!

The next I knew we had, somehow, reached the ground. We reached it whole, and it was our T at that. When I came tottering out of that plane, Dugan rushed forward, like a bull seeing red, at Royce.

"You crook! You—you—you!"

Then he sputtered into silence.

I pushed my cartridges into his trembling hands.

"Thanks!" he said, in his surprise. "Did you get 'em?"

"I guess we did!" I told him. "If I know my stuff, they're the best stuff I ever got. If they don't pack a thrill, nothing ever will. I almost died of it myself!"

"I'll take 'em over to the laboratory myself!" he burst out.

"You—you!" he roared, levelling his finger at Royce. "Get off this field. Get off! If you show your face again, I'll have you thrown in jail. You would-be-bird, I'll put you in a cage! Buckley, run him off—run him off!"

Dugan was yelling this into the air as he sped toward his car. As it grated away he shouted again, "Run him off!" Then I turned to Royce, who, right out, was grinning.

"You heard my orders," I told him. "You're to get off this field."

"Get off, hell!" Royce said. "I'm hired!"

Several hours later things were quieter. There wasn't much to be said. The other boys were outside, but I thought I'd better hang around the phone. When it rang I grabbed it.

"H'lo, Buckley." It was Dugan's voice, low and comparatively calm. "Where's that crazy kid?"

"He's still here, but he's apt to be leaving soon," I said. "Were the shots good?"

"Corking! We'll rake clean with 'em. A real scoop. That kid may be crazy, but I guess we need a little insanity in this business. Could we train him up a bit?"

"Flynn says he's a born flyer!" I answered. "But, Chief, you'll have to talk fast. There's a Compass man over here trying to get Royce to go over to their offices and talk terms—and Royce is weakening!"

"*What?*" Dugan barked. "Keep that kid! Double the Compass offer, but keep him!"

I went outside grinning, to where there wasn't any Compass man at all! Royce was sitting on the steps, getting pointers from Flynn.

"You're right," I told him. "You're hired."

"Oh, sure," said Royce. "When do we go up again?"