

My AEROPLANE ADVENTURES

By J. ARMSTRONG DREXEL

II.—My Closest Calls In the Air

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TO every man who flies there comes the moment when fate hangs by a filmy thread, when a hair's breadth one way or the other means life or death. I know of nothing in human experience which can leave so indelible an impression in so short a space of time. With the aeroplane as it is built today these critical moments are really only the infinitesimal fraction of a moment. The danger is reached and in a flash it is passed—safety or otherwise. There is no time for thinking. Everything must be done by instinct.

True, we do make voluntary and logical movements when we get into these scrapes, but I believe that these movements are always made too late to do any real good and that the first instinctive motion, without reason and without thought, is what decided the outcome of the moment.

Sometimes we have a warning of what is coming, and in such instances we can prepare ourselves and meet the danger with a plan of action logically thought out and calculated to meet the

vere a strain on the planes that it is extremely dangerous.

I think, on this day I speak of, that I was turning the machine in her own length or even shorter. I was paying not the slightest attention to the angle at which I was flying; all my thoughts were on the little circles I was cutting through the air, when suddenly I felt myself slipping on my seat, and I realized in a flash that my planes were dangerously near the perpendicular.

There was no time to think. One instant more and she would have lost her balance and come crashing down sideways to the ground 150 feet below.

Instinctively I threw my weight to the high side. My hand at once touched the bottom of the framework—a circumstance that will give some idea of my great angle. I took my feet from the steering lever, braced the left one against the side of the framework, shoved the steering post over with my knees to warp the left wing and help to right her and then—closed my eyes and waited for things to happen.

But, fortunately for me, I had done the right things just in the nick of time. An infinitesimal fraction of a

was debating whether to try for any more altitude with the darkness of evening gathering when my engine began to sputter and miss in a way that sounded as though there were no more gasoline in the tank.

This, however, I knew could not be the cause of the trouble. The tank had been well filled before I started, and what the trouble was I have never ascertained, but I felt the power beginning to give out, and I shoved my steering post forward just about in time to get the machine's nose pointed down when the engine stopped entirely. There was nothing for it but to plane down and get as near back home as possible.

With the machine pointed right for a long spiral glide, I looked below to get my bearings, and that is where I got my first fright. The mists had gathered so thickly that I could not see a single glimpse of the earth. There was nothing below me but a billowy sea of clouds, impenetrable to the eye.

I blamed myself in forcible language for my folly in not taking more careful note of my position on the upward climb. Now it was too late. I had not the slightest idea what part of the country I was over nor in what direction I was headed, but I had all I could do to take care of the machine, rushing downward through space as I was at the rate of seventy miles an hour or more. I thought of nothing except the steering and instinctively tried to keep her going in a general way in about the same wide circles that I had followed on my journey up.

Saved by a Fluke.

Soon I entered the clouds and began to catch glimpses of the earth. I thought I saw something that looked like one of the buildings on our grounds, and I steered accordingly, aiming to plane down so as to have plenty of room in the open land that stretched for miles away from the hangars.

Suddenly I plunged through the mists into the ordinary atmosphere of the earth's surface, and below me there was nothing but trees, trees, trees, as far as the eye could reach. I seemed to be directly over the heart of a limitless wood. To land in the branches meant certain wreck. I had no power in the engine to give me a chance to look about me for an opening. There was nothing to do apparently but to plunge down among the forest giants and trust to luck that the wreck of the machine would not cut me up badly and that my fall from the top of whatever tree I landed in would leave my features in good enough shape for identification at the inquest.

I took a deep swoop downward and then desperately turned the aeroplane's nose upward to coast as high as the momentum would take me and search for a clearing in this momentary respite.

I plunged downward for a hundred feet at a terrible rate; then at the moment of turning up my heart nearly stopped beating as I heard a choking cough from the engine, then another, then another, and suddenly the br-r-r of the cylinders as the explosions came with full force, and the propeller, getting its grip on the air, put on all its power, and I climbed safely away from the tree-tops, everything working perfectly and once more in control of a safe and efficient piece of machinery. I sailed close to the ground until I recognized some houses over the edge of the wood. I was more than twenty miles from home; but, with the engine working smoothly, the trip back was mere child's play, and I was soon on the ground again, being alternately cursed and hugged by Mac, while the mechanics trundled the Bleriot to the hangar.

The Eternal Question.

They are never pleasant to talk about—these narrow escapes. It is best to forget about them as soon after they have occurred as possible, for they get on the nerves, and things that get on the nerves are not good in aviation. It has always struck me as odd that almost the first question the average man will ask after he has met me is:

"What was the narrowest escape from death you have ever had?"

This is simply another manifestation of that morbid desire for thrills at another man's expense by demanding feats the aeroplane was never intended to perform. The aeroplane has its limitations, and they are, so far, very narrow ones. It will do certain simple things very well and if not pushed too hard is not a great deal more dangerous than manufacturing dynamite or being picked out by the Black Hand.

The late Ralph Johnstone recognized this clearly, and he once said, "It will get us all some day." "It" got him just as it has got many another good man who is trying to advance the new science, but these are the things that it is best for us not to think about.

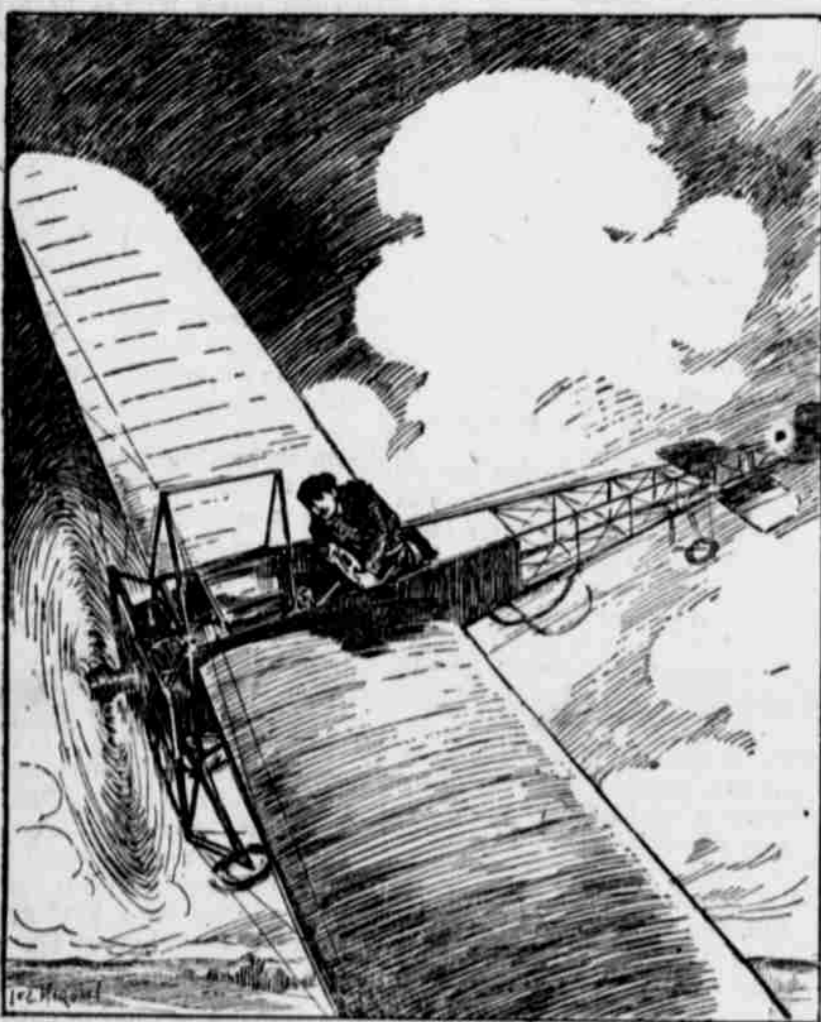
I remember when the first news of Johnstone's death reached me. I was dining with Grahame-White in Philadelphia. White had had a hard afternoon flying in the teeth of a fluky wind that would have kept any other man safely housed in the hangar.

Reporters wanted to know if it would keep White from flying next day.

"No," said White. "These things cannot stop us. We must do our work just the same. But such accidents bring home to us the awful danger that we are constantly running, and we have to keep constantly pushing such thoughts out of our minds."

Yet, as I say, the average man, after he has talked to an aviator five minutes, will ask:

"What was the narrowest escape from death you have ever had?"



"I KEPT DRAWING CLOSER AND CLOSER ABOUT THE CENTER FLYING AT A GREAT ANGLE ALL THE TIME."

emergency in the best way. At other times the danger comes and is past before we really realize what is happening, and in these instances it is only the instinct that comes with long training in flying that pulls us through in safety.

I have personally had many thrilling experiences in the air, but there are two instances that have left upon my memory stronger impressions than all the others. I regard them as my two closest calls.

Both of these thrilling moments came to me while I was flying for practice at my school at Beaulieu, near Southampton, England. My partner, MacArdie, and I have an ideal flying grounds there. It is seven miles from the railroad station, with perfectly flat country, smooth and clear except for one line of telegraph wires.

My Closest Call of All.

My closest call came to me in a most undramatic way. There were no spectators save only MacArdie and our mechanics, and I think that Mac was the only one of them who really saw my danger and knew that he was near to losing a partner.

I was flying low with the Bleriot XI, with the antiquated type of wings. I started to circle the place in wide, easy curves, without any definite object in view. I found the machine was banking well at the turns, and I became curious to see just how small a loop I could make with her, so I gradually narrowed the circle in which I was flying. There seemed no limit to her possibilities; I felt as though I could turn her on her beam ends if I wanted to, and so, without the slightest thought of danger, I kept drawing closer and closer about the center, flying at a great angle all the time because the circle had become so small that there was no straightaway flight. It was a case of jam the rudder over hard and see how close she would come about.

It may be well to explain that the Bleriot banks automatically when going about a turn—that is, the far side rises and the near side falls until the machine is frequently tilted at an angle of forty-five degrees. This can, of course, be prevented by warping the wings and keeping her on a more even keel, but to do this puts so se-

cond later would have been useless, for I am convinced that I caught the machine just as she was passing the critical angle, after which there would have been nothing to support her in the air, and I should have gone crashing downward. As swiftly as it had come the danger had passed; the machine had righted herself, and I opened my eyes to find myself sailing away on an even keel—safe, alive, and thanking God for it.

I looked beneath me and saw that the mechanics were gazing up at me with no idea of what I had just passed through. Mac, however, looked as white as a ghost. He knew.

Naturally my nerves were about gone. My heart was thumping like a triphammer, and I could scarcely get my breath from the excitement. But I made up my mind that Mac was not going to see me quit, so, as though I had intended just what happened, I went sailing away to the far side of the grounds and came back again in wide, easy, sweeping curves that landed me at the feet of my excited partner in perfect style.

I did not fly again that day.

Lost In Cloudland.

My other narrow escape was the result of a fluke, and I was saved by a fluke. To this day I have not been able to figure out why either of the flukes happened. I was practicing at Beaulieu for height; altitude work had attracted me from the beginning, and I practiced constantly. In fact, I had several times exceeded the world's record for height as it stood then, but could not claim it officially, as I used my own barograph and aneroid and the flights were made with Mac and the mechanics as the only watchers.

On this day I went up toward evening. It was one of those gray days with a thin mist over everything and a damp feeling in the air that suggested an impending fog. I should have known better than to attempt to climb under such conditions, but I was keyed up to it and I did not want to put it off.

The mechanics turned the propeller over and I was off. The engine was running with that smooth purring that is music to the ears of an aviator, and without any incident whatever I climbed to something like 6,000 feet, which was then above the record, and

Who Wants This Grand JERSEY BULL?

Norris Humphrey, the well-known Dairy and cattleman of Eugene, writes a letter to The Times, asking the editor to prepare an advertisement offering for sale his fine Jersey bull "FLYING FOX." He encloses a pedigree and an adv. which says:

"I am offering for sale one of the finest imported bulls to be found in the world. A. P. Walker pronounces him a wonderful bull. He is easy worth \$1,000. For a quick cash sale, the first check for \$500 gets him. He is a most beautiful solid fawn color with black points; very gentle and fine disposition. Look at the pedigree. Correspondence solicited."

But I think the best advertisement is part of Mr. Humphrey's letter in which he says:

"I am offering for sale to the dairymen around Marshfield and Coos Bay, one of the grandest bred Jersey bulls that the 'Island of Jersey' ever produced. I bought him for myself, but circumstances are such that I desire to sell him at a great sacrifice, this bull, 14 months old, imported from the island last year, will make great money for the dairymen of Coos county. I have never offered him less than \$500, but I am now going to offer to take \$350 spot cash for him f. o. b. Eugene if taken at once. I consider him well worth \$1,000 today. A. P. Walker, the greatest importer of Jerseys from the island, says that he is a wonderful bull. It is an opportunity that some of your dairymen cannot afford to let pass. Whoever gets him finds the best bargain in Oregon that I know of. I enclose also his pedigree.

"I forgot to say that dam of the bull is a very large milker and tested 7 2-10 April 14, 1911. You will see from this ad. that I have reduced my price to \$350.00 in order to make a quick sale for cash. The bull is very kind and easy handled, and all right in every way. I am now leaving the whole matter to you."

Dairymen interested may see Pedigree and photographs of the bull at The Times' office. Address all correspondence to

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