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# MY AEROPLANE ADVENTURES

By J. ARMSTRONG DREXEL

## VI.—When a Man Takes to Flying

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WHEN a man takes to flying he enters upon a career which is the most troublesome and yet the most fascinating that has ever been opened up for human beings. He invades a realm for which nature never intended him. All of his instincts teach him that to ascend high above the earth is to court death and that to trust himself to so flimsy and so breakable a thing as an aeroplane is to go to the utter extreme of recklessness and daring.

My admiration is unbounded for those first men who actually rose off of the ground in their crude heavier than air machines and defied nature with their new found toy. Each of us who has followed has had to prove his nerve and his skill, but we know when we start to learn that the machines we trust ourselves to are right, that they will fly if properly handled and that there is no very great secret about it at all because it has been done before

a circle to the left, and almost before I knew it I was back at my starting place and had stopped the engine.

Then Grahame-White explained to me that a Bieriot always has a tendency to steer to the left when it is running along the ground. This is due to the downward thrust of the propeller and the greater effect of the air pressure on one side than another. After being instructed to steer with my foot lever until I got going at full speed I started off again. This time at the first sign of a pull toward the left I thrust out my right foot and headed her the other way. Once more I had to do this, and then I attained full speed and was able to keep on in a straight line down the course.

Feeling with the utmost confidence that the tying of the wheel would make it impossible for me to rise from the ground, I had not the slightest nervousness as to the outcome of my journey, and I thoroughly enjoyed my dash down that mile of level earth at a rate of about thirty or thirty-five miles an hour. But again I was destined to a great surprise—a surprise



"I FELT THAT THE HEAVENS WERE TUMBLING ABOUT MY EARS."

and we need merely do as our predecessors did. But those first men dashed absolutely into the unknown.

Not long ago Captain Thomas S. Baldwin, the veteran balloonist and aviator, investigated the subject and as a result he declared that every beginner in aviation smashes up \$2,000 worth of property before he can get a certificate of competence, and one can easily imagine the risk to life and limb that is constantly run while these fledgling flights are being made. In my own case, when the mechanics let go of my machine for my first flight, it looked as though I were going to disprove this statement, but it was not many seconds thereafter before I showed that, if anything, Captain Baldwin's estimate of cost was altogether too low.

### My First Lesson in Flying.

My first lesson was taken from Grahame-White at Pau. His Bieriot was equipped with an Anzani motor, for it was before the Gnome had been placed upon the market, and it was probably fortunate for me that my machine did not have the greater horsepower developed by the later type of engine.

I learned as did most of the men who have made a success of the work. The controls were explained to me, and I made a thorough study of the theory on which the machine operates. I knew what to do to make the monoplane go up or down or steer to right or left, and I knew how to warp the wings to preserve my balance—that is, I knew them in theory, though I had, of course, never tried them in practice. "Now," said Grahame-White, "you are to take a run along the ground and see if you can steer the machine. The wheel is tied so that you cannot go up into the air, and all you are to do is to keep going straight and shut off your engine when you come to the end of the field."

So my engine was started, and when the propeller got going at a fair speed I gave the signal to the mechanics who were holding the machine to let go, and I felt myself dash forward smoothly over the ground. I believed that all I had to do was to leave the machine pretty well alone and it would go in a straight line until I stopped the engine, but in this I was destined to meet with a great surprise, for instead of going straight ahead I found myself going around in

that taught me to fly much as one teaches a boy to swim by throwing him in the water and letting him strike out for himself.

### I Find Myself in the Air.

At the end of the mile straight away on the course was a road crossing the field at right angles and at an elevation of several feet above the rest of the ground. Without thinking much about this road and feeling perhaps that so slight and so gradual an embankment was not a serious obstacle, I went dashing merrily on and up the slope toward the highway.

A few minutes later my utter astonishment may be imagined when I suddenly realized that I was not upon the ground at all, but was sailing gracefully through the air at a height of about eighty feet above the earth.

The explanation is simple enough to me now. When the front of my machine took the slope of the embankment it rose until the slant of my planes was exactly what was necessary for the impact of the air to get under them and give the required lifting power for the machine to fly. In other words, the embankment did for me what I might have done for myself had my wheel not been tied, and it sent my machine upward into the air as gracefully and as easily as though it had been purposely operated for that result by the most skilled aviator.

For the first few minutes my astonishment was so great that I did absolutely nothing but sit motionless and let the Bieriot take its course. Then I pulled myself together and tried to remember everything that Grahame-White had told me about how to manage the machine.

My one thought was to get back to my starting point, for by this time I had gone beyond the smooth fields and was flying over rough and dangerous ground that would have meant instant disaster had I landed upon it. So, in order to turn, I thrust my left foot gently forward, and I shall never forget my thrill of triumph as I found the Bieriot gradually sweeping about in a wide and easy circle to the left that soon brought me again back to the smooth fields and facing toward the direction from which I had come.

### An Unexpected Disaster.

As I approached my starting place I shoved my wheel gently forward, as I

had been instructed to do to come down, and a few moments thereafter I landed as lightly as a bird, feeling that my first flight had indeed been a triumph unmarred in any way and entirely disproving the discouraging things I had heard about the difficulties of learning to fly.

I landed with the wind and going at a speed well up between fifty and sixty miles an hour, and not twenty feet from where I touched the ground was a high fence. Into this I crashed at full speed. I felt a sudden jar and heard the loud noises of splintering wood all about me—so loud indeed that I felt that the heavens were tumbling about my ears. Then I felt another jar as I fell to the earth, and when I had recovered my senses sufficiently to examine the wreck I found that there was not much left except the seat and me. For the seat I had no very high regard, but I was mighty glad and grateful to find that I was able to get up and walk about with only a score or so of sore spots distributed over my body.

I must have been an awful sight to behold. From the very beginning of my flight, unaccustomed as I was to hurtling at such a rate through the air, the wind had lashed my eyes as though with whiplashes, and my eyeballs had become sore and inflamed. The oil from the engine had been dashed back on to my face, and there it had mingled in grimy brotherhood with the water that streamed from my eyes under the lashing of the wind.

It took me a long while to get used to this pain caused in the eyes by the rushing air, and during the next few weeks when I began flying with the Gnome engine I got a double dose of lubricating oil in my hair, all over my face and down my neck.

I flew with the first Gnome engine ever put upon the market. It was a short time after I had taken my initial lessons from Grahame-White and when I was in the school run by Bieriot himself at Pau.

It was a vastly different matter to start a flight with this new motor. Instead of having an easy run along the ground and lifting at a speed of about thirty miles an hour, as I had done with Grahame-White's Anzani, I now found myself rushing along at nearly fifty miles an hour almost as soon as the mechanics let go of the machine. Here my poor eyes got a lashing which I shall never forget and which daily nearly blinded me until I became accustomed to flying at this tremendous speed.

### I Go In For High Flying.

From the very first the one phase of aviation that held a really powerful fascination for me was altitude climbing. No sooner had I tried my fledgling wings than I looked longingly into the upper air and wanted to climb as far as my engine would carry me.

On the third day of my practice at the Bieriot school with the Gnome motor I decided to take affairs into my own hands, and, disregarding all the advice that had been given me, I headed the machine upward and climbed close to a thousand feet, when suddenly, one after the other, three of my cylinders went bad, and I was forced to coast down to the ground again. It was the result of some minor defect in the new engine, and when it was repaired I took my equipment with me to my place at Beaulieu, in England, there to practice a bit and then try for my certificate, or aviator's license.

I became proficient in a remarkably short time. When I felt that I could pass inspection I had the officials of the English Aero club appoint a day when I should try for my certificate. An official came up to wish me good luck just before my mechanics started the propeller, and I asked:

"What is the English height record?" "Paulhan has it," he replied. "It is 977 feet."

"Well," I said as I turned away, "I am going to try to beat that."

I started off in wide circles, and the first two times I passed over the heads of the officials I saw one of them wave a red flag, the signal for a naval officer with a sextant to take my height. Higher and higher I went, but I was surprised not to see the flag wave after that, and I came to earth again.

"How much did I do?" I asked the navy officer.

"Ten hundred and forty feet," he replied. "You have broken the English altitude record, and I believe you went twice as high as that, but unfortunately the man who was to signal me with the flag got mixed up somehow, and I only took your height on your first and second circles."

This love of altitude work has been my constant passion ever since. Merely to get into an aeroplane and fly no longer has any fascination for me. I want to climb. I want to keep going up until I am sure that I am higher than any man has ever been before in a heavier than air machine, and, though not long ago I almost determined to give up aeroplane work, I now feel the desire growing stronger upon me, and it would not surprise me if I tried for another record soon.

Eternal practice and unflinching patience are necessary when the average man takes to flying. Day after day he must go out "grass cutting," as they say at Mineola when the novices roll along the ground or take only short, low jumps into the air. This is not exciting and it will seem to the would-be pilot that he is making slow progress, but, as a matter of fact, he is training his mind and his muscles to work in unison and by instinct, and this faculty alone is worth all the trouble it takes to acquire it once it is called into play in a bad spot high above the earth. It may not be needed very often, but, like a gun in Texas, when it is needed it is needed badly.

# LUCKY LAST LOOK

It Preserved the Declaration of Independence in 1814.

SAVED IT FROM THE BRITISH.

The Precious Document Would Have Been in the State Department When It Was Burned but For Pleasanton's Final Glance Around the Room.

Comparatively few of the present generation know how near to being lost was once the most precious of our national documents, the Declaration of Independence. It was during the war of 1812. The Declaration of Independence hung for many years in a frame in the state department in the room then occupied by Stephen Pleasanton. Mr. Benseley, commissary of prisoners of war in London, forwarded to the state department some London newspapers, stating that the English fleets and transports were receiving troops at Bordeaux, France, with the intention of operating against Washington and Baltimore. Soon after it was learned that the British fleet was in Chesapeake bay and that it was ascending the Patuxent. The officials and citizens of the little capital city were hourly expecting an attack.

Upon receipt of this information, which was a few days before the enemy entered Washington, Mr. Monroe, then secretary of state, James Madison being president, mounted his horse, rode to Benedict, a small village on the Patuxent, where the British forces were being landed, and climbed an eminence within a quarter of a mile of the village, in order to ascertain the strength of the enemy. Being convinced, after his inspection, that we had no force available that could successfully resist them, he sent a note to Mr. Pleasanton by a vidette, advising him to see that the best care was taken of the books and papers of the state department.

Acting at once upon this authority, Mr. Pleasanton purchased some coarse linen and had it made into bags of suitable size, in which he, assisted by others in the office, placed the books and other papers.

While engaged in this work General Armstrong, then secretary of war, passing the state department on his way to his own office, remarked that he thought they were unnecessarily alarming themselves, as he did not think the British were serious in their intentions of coming to Washington. Fortunately Mr. Pleasanton was of a different opinion, and observed that it was the part of prudence to take measures to preserve these valuable papers of the revolutionary government. Had Mr. Pleasanton delayed but a few days, had he followed the advice of the secretary of war, an irreparable loss would have been sustained. For the papers which Mr. Pleasanton had placed in the coarse linen bags comprised the secret journals of congress, then not published; the correspondence of General Washington, his commission, resigned at the close of the war; the correspondence of General Greene and other officers of the Revolution, as well as laws, treaties and correspondence of the department of state from the adoption of the constitution down to that time.

Mr. Pleasanton had the bags carted to a grist mill, which he selected as a suitable depository. The mill, which was unoccupied, belonged to Edgar Patterson and was situated on the Virginia side of the Potomac, beyond the Chain bridge, two miles above Georgetown.

The last load had left, and Mr. Pleasanton was just quitting the vacant rooms when, glancing back suddenly to see whether anything had been left behind, to his consternation he saw the Declaration of Independence, which had been overlooked, hanging upon the wall. He hastily cut it out of the frame and carried it away with the other papers.

He then began to be uneasy about the place he had chosen, for if the British took Washington, which he firmly believed they would do, and very soon at that, they would in all probability detach a force for the purpose of destroying a foundry for the making of cannon and shot in the neighborhood and, of course, would consider a grist mill too valuable a thing to be left standing in a country they meant to subdue. Mr. Pleasanton therefore visited some of the Virginia farmhouses, whose owners were only too willing to loan him wagons in which to convey the documents to Leesburg, a distance of thirty-five miles. There they were deposited in an empty house, the keys of which were given to Rev. Mr. Littlejohn, who was one of the collectors of internal revenue.

Worn out with his labors, Mr. Pleasanton states in a letter, he retired early to bed that night and slept soundly. Next morning he was informed by the people of the little tavern where he had stayed that evening that they had seen during the night, the same being the 24th of August, a large fire in the direction of Washington, which proved to be the light from the public buildings, which the enemy had set on fire and burned to the ground.

When he returned to Washington on the 26th he found the public buildings still burning and learned that the British army had evacuated the city the preceding evening in the belief that the Americans were again assembling in the rear for the purpose of cutting off their retreat.—Kansas City Times.

'Tis well said that man has no greater enemy than himself.—Firenze.

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