



# TWIN FLYERS

by FREDERICK C. DAVIS

*They broke him—made him an outcast in the game he loved best. But he wasn't through—and in the mile-high contest for a scoop, Nick Royce came back!*

**H**ELLO, hello! That you, Buckley? Thought so. Dugan talking!" The telephone had zinged and I'd grabbed for it. In that little office shack of ours, on the flying field, I'd been chinning away time with Rolf Flynn, the same Flynn that's the greatest stunt pilot in the world; and Nick Royce, the newest man on the force, was snoozing on the cot—all of us, you see, taking it easy. But when Dugan started talking at us it was time to get going!

Gordon Dugan spat out his words as a Lewis gun spits out bullets. He kept at such a tension that he seemed ready to explode at any minute. Dugan was editor-in-chief of the weekly World News Reel, and his consuming passion was to make the Reel the greatest in the world. Lately the Compass outfit, our keenest and deadliest competitors, had scooped us so often that Dugan was driven to desperation.

Dugan believed that upon us, the flying division,

the salvation of the Reel depended.

"Get on your toes, Art!" he buzzed into my ear. "I've got a hot tip, and it's exclusive. This is our chance to shut out the Compass people completely. You've heard of the new Sikorsky plane, the very latest, that will probably fly over the South Pole. Well, it's going to be given its first try-out inside an hour. One of the hangar crew tipped me off. You've got to move!"

Flynn, knowing that a break had come, was already hurrying outside to put one of our DeHavilands in the warming.

"Sikorsky try-out, eh?" I came back. "Chief, we'll be in the air inside five minutes!"

"If that plane flies, it's a good picture; if it smashes, it's a wow. Whatever happens, Art, get it! Let Flynn pilot. Remember, this is our chance to scoop Compass all hollow!"

When Dugan demanded action, he always got it. To get the first shots of the first trip of a history-

making airplane was mission enough to speed us up to top notch. I rustled my camera from the locker and mounted it in the rear pit of the D.H. while Flynn called "Contact!" and a grease-monkey tugged at the prop. I threaded in a film cartridge and set my stop as Flynn settled to the controls; and then we trundled away and sliced into the air.

The field from which the Sikorsky would take off was very close. We flew directly over. The new plane was already on the field, surrounded by a crowd. Beautiful ship! Would it fly? Other World News cameramen, sent by Dugan, were on the ground, grinding away. Flynn weaved back and forth across the field while I kept my lens on the plane.

Then its motors blasted; soon it began to taxi off; and then, after a long run, it began to climb. Flynn crept as close to it as he could, and I kept turning my crank. Flashing in the sunlight, swooping, zooming, that big bird made me some marvelous pictures! We kept after it steadily, until it settled for the field again; and as it taxied up to the hangars, my camera ground free, with the film used up.

"Great stuff!" I yelled at Flynn. "Let's go home!"

Flynn nosed around toward the home field, and as we levelled off, *Z-zoo-oom!* another plane cut across our bow and circled back instantly. The man in its rear pit blithely thumbed his nose at me. Big letters on the side of that plane said: Compass News!

That hated name!

Flynn and I, intent on getting our own shots of the new ship, had not seen this one before. Evidently it had been capturing plenty of the scenery! Already it was zipping back toward its field. Now, with its superior equipment, Compass was able to get its stuff through the laboratory and on Broadway ahead of us. The first film out usually got the booking. Was this going to be another time when the World News took a beating?

"Let 'er out, Rolf!" I shouted.

I didn't understand this business. Dugan was fondly expecting us to romp back with a pretty set of pictures that no one else would have. Something was wrong somewhere!

Our field came in sight. As the DeHaviland nosed under the thousand foot mark, gliding for the T, a blue roadster came around the end of the hangars and stopped in a corner of the field. Flynn looked back at me smiling the sourest kind of a smile. That roadster was Gord Dugan's; and right below us, there he was!

As we glided over the field and trundled to a stop, Dugan got out of the roadster and came hurrying

toward us. Even before I was out of the pit he barked:

"Art, did you get the shots?"

"I got the shots, Chief, but what was the idea of telling me this was exclusive stuff?"

"It *was* exclusive. Compass didn't know a thing about it! What do you mean—?"

"Exclusive, me eye! This stuff is as exclusive, as beans in Childs!"

Dugan understood, and glared. "Do you mean to say that—why, the guy that tipped me off guaranteed—"

"No matter what he guaranteed, Chief, Compass was on hand as usual, gathering in everything it could, which was plenty! They're scooping us as regularly as clockwork."

"Compass was there, was it?" Dugan growled.

"With bells on. Here are my shots, Chief, but Compass has got stuff just as good or I'm the best crank-turner in this wicked world."

"Hang Compass!"

Dugan snatched the film cartridge that I offered him and pushed it into Flynn's hands.

"Rolf, get in my car and drive like fury for the lab. Tell 'em they've got to process this stuff faster 'n they ever handled anything before. Get Smythe to work splicing the shots into the reel that gets release tomorrow. Go it, man!"

Rolf ran toward the roadster. As he purred away, Dugan grabbed my arm and began striding toward the office shack, chewing on his perfecto like mad.

"Art, Compass has been up to more dirty work."

"Well, maybe not, Chief. Maybe one of the other boys of the Sikorsky crew gave out the hot dope to Compass."

"Maybe, and maybe not!" said Dugan. "Compass isn't stopping at anything to beat us out of this game, Art. They may have tapped our telephone wires. They may even have got the tip from one of our own men!"

"No, no, Chief. You know that the only man who ever sold out on us was Rex Dillon, and since you hired Rex back, he's been straight as a ruler. None of the boys would do such a thing, Chief!"

"Who was on the field when I phoned you?" Dugan persisted.

"Rolf and me. Rex Dillon and Jim White are somewhere down the coast, and have been since dawn, getting some battleship formation stuff. Tom Thurber left for Chicago yesterday to take up his new job on the passenger field out there. And that's all of us, except—"

"Except Nick Royce," Dugan caught me up. "Trying to shield him, Art? Where was he when I phoned?"

"Why, he was in the office," I admitted, "but he was lying on the cot, asleep."

"*Maybe* he was asleep. He probably heard the whole conversation. After you went out, it would be an easy matter for him to phone the dope over to Compass!"

Wow! And I thought Dugan was Nick Royce's friend! I took a minute to soak that in. Nick Royce, I thought, was absolutely square. He wasn't capable of doing the thing Dugan suspected him of. Royce was a boy that was thoroughly trustworthy, who had done his damndest for the World News every chance he'd got. The most surprising thing about this was that Dugan should go so far as to suspect him.

"Chief, you're running wild when you begin to think that Royce has sold out—"

"Art, I'm ready to suspect anybody!" Dugan rasped. "Compass is out to ride us off the screen, to annihilate us, and they won't stop at anything, crooked or straight, to do it. I've got my back to the wall; I'm fighting for my life."

It was true. Tip-Top, the biggest photoplay production corporation in the world, had been planning for some time to add a news-reel to its releases, and it intended to buy up one of the existing independents. They were almost ready to buy, and their choice had narrowed down to either the Compass outfit or ours, the World News. They were keeping a close watch on us. The reel they bought and gave their name would become the biggest in the world; the others would simply pass out. Compass was hell-bent on landing that deal. We were working night and day to land it ourselves. Dugan couldn't let anything like sentiment stand between him and success.

"Nick Royce has done a lot for us, and I'm grateful for that; but he's human. He wants a good steady job, because he's just married. If he honestly thinks that Compass is going to win out, he may be going over to them. Oh, I know you think he wouldn't do a thing like that, but damn it, I'm doing some thinking of my own. And I know that every man has his price!"

Dugan was certainly on the war-path this time. Compass was ragging him beyond human endurance. The only word to fit him was "desperate."

"Where's Royce?" he demanded. "I want to see Royce."

When we pushed into the office we saw not only Royce, but another chap, wearing flying clothes. This flyer was strange to me. He nodded politely to us, but Dugan ignored him.

"Nick, about an hour ago I phoned Art from Manhattan, and Art took my message in this office. I was giving him confidential information. You were here at the time. Did you hear the talk that passed between us?"

Nick Royce caught the drift at once. He never misses a thing. Bright-eyed, long and thin as a strut,

made of hard muscle, he was always sparking, alert. He grew a little pale as Dugan stared at him, and answered: "I must've been asleep, Boss. I didn't wake up until the Liberty began to turn over outside."

"I was giving Art a tip, Nick—telling him where to get some pictures that were to be exclusive with us. Somehow or other, Compass managed to get on the scene. Art thinks that it was just natural that they should be there—that they'd got tipped off, too—but I've got my own ideas about it. I've got a hunch that somebody on this field tipped off Compass. It could have been done—couldn't it, Royce?"

Nick grew still paler. Dugan's insinuation was unmistakable. For a minute Dugan chewed on his perfecto and glared; and Nick gazed back.

"If you think I tipped off Compass, you're mistaken, Boss," he said.

Dugan had got nowhere. His failure didn't put him in any better mood. As he strode across the office and back, he looked up into the stranger's face.

"D' you want to see me?"

"I do, sir."

"What about?"

"I'm a flyer. I've got over eight hundred hours in the air. I've heard that one of your pilots recently left, and I came to see if I could get his job. I've had quite a good deal of experience in the news-reel game, and—"

"Where?" Dugan shot out.

"I've been with Compass, and—"

"*Compass!*" Dugan thundered. "You say you've been working for Compass?"

"Yes."

"And you have the nerve to come over and try to get a job from *me*?"

"I don't see why I shouldn't."

Dugan squinted with suspicion. "D' you mind telling me *why* you left Compass?"

"Not? at all. I knew that some of the tactics they were in the habit of using weren't strictly square. I couldn't go on working for an outfit like that. I got out."

Dugan sneered. "Sounds like a fairy tale! You'd better go back to Compass and tell them that their latest trick is a flat failure."

The stranger's face grew cloudy white. "What do you mean by that?" This chap's fists were clenched now, and the knuckles were hard. "I've come here in perfectly good faith. There's no trick—"

"You say not!" Dugan barked. "Well, I think different. Compass is just the kind of outfit to try a trick like this. It has got enough brass to try to get one of its men on

my payroll, so he can throw monkey-wrenches into the machinery at close range! Good Lord! And you try to make yourself seem honest by admitting that you come from Compass! Well, I don't bite. You—you belong off this field!"

This young fellow was holding himself back with some trouble. "Mr. Dugan. I'm not trying to trick you. I've told you the truth. Compass is a crooked outfit. I quit it because I want to work for an honest concern. I came over here, hoping that you might give me a chance to show what I can do. If you don't want me, that's your business, but—don't insinuate again that I'm a crook!"

Dugan sneered again. "Give you a chance? I'll give you a chance to get off this field quick. And you'll do well to take it!"

"Just a minute, Boss."

This was Nick Royce speaking up. He was looking Dugan square in the eye; and he was still pale.

"What're you mixing in this for, kid?"

"I want to vouch for this man, Boss. I know that he's told the truth. He's a good flyer. I'm the one that suggested he might try to get Thurber's job, and I give you my word, he's square—"

"How do you know that?" Dugan demanded.

"Because," said Nick Royce calmly, "he's my brother."

"WHA-AT?" Dugan blatted, and flopped into a chair, staring. "Do you mean to tell me that, while you've been working for me, you've had a *brother* working for Compass?"

"Gosh, Boss!" answered Nick Royce. "What difference does that make?"

To Dugan it made plenty of difference. It meant that Nick was bound to Compass by the bonds of blood. And as Dugan soaked up the damning idea, all his suspicions began to center around Nick Royce with a vengeance.

Royce was a reticent chap; he never talked much, and it was only natural for him to have kept quiet on the subject of his family. Once or twice he had mentioned that an older brother of his was an aviator, but that was all. At last he had spoken up with the intention of defending his brother; but he had succeeded only in giving himself a whacking black eye.

"Nick, if I'd know that before, I'd never have hired you!" Dugan snapped.

"Why not?" Nick Royce asked. "Bill's being over on Compass hasn't kept me from beating them out whenever I had the chance. I've worked my hardest for this outfit. If you'll give Bill the chance you gave me, he'll show you that he's certainly worth hiring."

"Nick—you think a lot of this brother of yours—do you?"

"I sure do!" said Nick Royce—thereby strengthening all the suspicions in Dugan's mind. "He gave me my first lessons in flying."

"I thought so! If matters came to a showdown between your boss and your brother, you'd side with your brother, wouldn't you?"

"If Bill needed my help bad, he wouldn't find me turning him down!" Nick asserted.

"Even if he was playing crooked, you'd stick—"

"Boss, Bill's straight!"

Nick snapped out the words, and Dugan's eyes flashed. Bill Royce himself came between them.

"Let it go, Nick. If Mr. Dugan thinks I'm a crook, we can't change his mind. I'll hunt for a job somewhere else."

"You're passing up a good chance to get an all-around man, Boss!" Nick flared at Dugan. "He's a better flier than I am, and he can handle a camera too. He'll prove that himself, if you'll give him half a chance. That's all he wants—a chance—"

"A chance to earn big money from Compass by wrecking us!" Dugan answered harshly. "And you want a chance to get a slice of that money, Nick! By God! Every man has his price—blood will tell!"

*Rr-r-r-r-r-r!*

Overhead sounded the drone of a motor. Dugan cocked an ear to it. In another minute there would have been fists flying in that office, if it hadn't been for that interruption. Dugan rose, popped out the door, stared at the sky, and called at me:

"Art, it's Dillon and White coming back!"

At dawn Rex Dillon and Jim White, having been directed to shoot some battleship formations due to take place off the Jersey coast, had roared away in our other DeHaviland. They were a pair that could be depended on to bring back the best possible shots; and Dugan had been counting on their work to highlight the freshest reel he had being assembled.

The plane swooped down to the sand, and trundled up toward the hangars. Dugan ran toward it, and I kept at his heels. As Jim White rose from the rear pit, Dugan asked his pet question:

"Did you get the shots?"

"Chief, look at this wreck!"

Jim indicated his camera. Mounted in the rear pit, it sat cockeyed on its tripod head. He swung it around showing us one side of it bashed in. A ragged hole was torn into the very heart of the mechanism. One glance



was enough to tell me that there was a camera fit only for the junk-heap.

"What happened?" Dugan demanded. "Did the films get hurt?"

"There's a cartridge in there that's ruined!" Jim White answered with a moan. "It had my best shots on it. It's the second. I've got the first one I ran through, but it's only long-shot stuff. Hang it, Chief! The bullet that wrecked that camera—"

"Bullet!" Dugan said.

"Sure—bullet. The Bullet that wrecked that camera came from the Compass plane as we were—"

"Compass!"

Dugan was almost apoplectic. He could only stare and listen as Jim White went on.

"The Compass plane was on hand, as usual, and it didn't try to bother us until I'd ground through my first cartridge. Then, when we began working close, getting the real stuff, they began to edge in on us. We were flying straight ahead when *pop!* my camera went smash right under my nose. I jumped back, looked up, and saw the cameraman in the other plane with a gun in his hand. He must have been a crack shot—one bullet did the trick. And then the Compass plane flew like hell for their field. Chief, we're beat again!"

Leaving his controls, Rex Dillon spoke up. "That's just the way it happened, Chief. Not having any guns, I kept away from their plane after that. They're crooked to the core, damn 'em!"

Dillon chewed on his perfecto savagely. "It's plain as day that Compass and our outfit are coming to death grips, boys. We've got to be prepared for anything. And we've got to play absolutely safe. I'm going to use every means I know of to get them for the tricks they've pulled—and to keep them from pulling any more. All right, we're licked again. God, how I hate that — Compass out—"

Dugan turned, stopped in his tracks and growled. Right in front of him were Nick Royce and Bill Royce. They had followed us from the office. Dugan levelled an accusing finger at Nick's brother, and ordered:

"Get off this field!"

And Nick Royce came back in an instant: "Boss, for Lord's sake, be fair! Bill's true as gold. If you'll only give him a chance to prove it—he needs the job, and—if you'll only give him a chance—"

"Get off this field, you, or I'll knock you off!"

Dugan thundered again. "Go back and tell your pretty outfit that I'm going to fight 'em with their own guns."

"Cut it out, Boss!" Nick Royce put in, his voice cold

and sharp. "I'm the one that brought Bill down here. You can't treat him this way without treating me the same—"

"You're right!" Dugan came back. "Nick, after what I've learned, I'm through with you. Get off this field yourself. Get off, both of you!"

Nick smiled a crooked smile. "Just as you say, Boss. You're acting like a damn' fool. You've got to either think we're both honest or both crooks—and if you think we're crooks—so long!"

Together Nick and Bill Royce turned and trudged away. Seeing him going, I almost had a panic. Grabbing Dugan's sleeve, I told him:

"Lord, Chief, that's no way to treat Nick, after all he's done for us. He's just married, and he needs his job bad. Why not call him back and—"

"Royce is off the payroll, and he stays off." Dugan answered, now stony calm. "My eyes've been opened, Art. I believe that brother of his is still in Compass pay, using Nick as a tool, to harm us some more. After all, blood is thicker than water!"

Just then Nick disappeared around the hangars. I couldn't believe that that was the end of Nick Royce. And I was right. It wasn't!

LATE morning of the next day, Dugan came bursting into the office shack with eyes popping. Flynn and I, chinning again, instantly got ready for some speedy action. Dugan looked like he meant serious business.

"Listen, boys; we've got to move now! I drove all the way over here because I didn't want to trust the telephone. I've got another tip, and this time I'm absolutely positive that it is exclusive. I got the dope from a pal of mine that I went overseas with, and he's given me his word of honor that nobody'll know of it but World News. Now, get this:"

Dugan looked around to make sure no one was listening, and sped on.

"The Department of War is going to carry on some bombing practice this afternoon. There's a fleet of planes already on the proving ground, up-state. There's a concrete bridge on the grounds, and the bombing planes are going to let loose some powerful bombs on it. I've already got a couple of boys on their way up there to get telephoto shots of the hits from the ground; but that's not all. Art, I've got a permit for you to fly with the bombing planes, alongside 'em. You can shoot the bombs as they drop, and get everything from the air. Big stuff! Big thrill. And remember, it's all exclusive. Compass doesn't even dream it's to happen!"

"When do we go, Chief?" I asked.

"Right now!"

Dugan talked faster and faster, telling us how to get to the proving grounds, how we should fly with the bombing planes, what they were going to do.

"The thing is all fixed, I tell you. All you have to do is keep in the air with the bombers. Fly right beside 'em. Get the bombs as they drop, and the splash they kick up. Stay with 'em until your film is gone. We'll feature this as an exclusive picture, see, one of Rolf Flynn's excursions, and it'll go over big!"

"O.K., Chief!" I answered, getting up. "Are you sure this is exclusive?"

"Sure? Sure I'm sure—unless these walls have got ears!"

"Then—"

I'd stepped over to the door, Flynn behind me, and jerked it open. And there I stopped in my tracks, gulping, staring at the young chap that was standing on the step outside. It was Nick Royce!

Nick Royce, back on the field! How long had he been standing outside? Nobody knew. How much of Dugan's talk had he heard? Nobody knew that. Why was he there? Dugan stormed up and shot that question at him.

"Gosh! I can get some things of mine out of my locker, can't I?"

"You can!" Dugan snarled. "But you can't sneak around the field and listen in on the conversation that goes on! Royce, did you hear what I told Art?"

"What if I did?" countered Royce.

"I thought so!" Dugan blurted. "You're not going to get away with that stuff!" He turned to us. "Boys, get out there and warm a plane. You haven't got any time to lose. The bombing will probably start at about the time you get there. Get going!"

He turned back to Royce. "You, Royce—you're working for Compass now, eh? Sticking to your brother! You think you're going to tip him off, so Compass can scoop us again with these bombings? Not much! You're not going to leave this field until Art comes back with the shots!"

"I'm going to get my stuff and leave when I please," Royce answered.

Dugan rushed. He flung his arms around Royce. Plain as day, he was intending to keep Royce on the field and away from mischief by sheer physical force. Dugan was desperately, fighting mad. But when he began to tackle Royce he made a grave mistake!

Royce wriggled and lurched, and broke free of Dugan's arms. Dugan, snarling, rushed at him again;

and this time Royce simply sidestepped him. Royce didn't want to fight. Dugan shot out a right; and then Royce, nagged to it, reached out one long arm and connected a fist with Dugan's chin. Dugan went sprawling in the sand.

Royce began hurrying away; and Dugan scrambled up, shouting at us: "Stop him, Art! Stop him, Rolf! Get him!"

Nick Royce went right past us, but neither Flynn nor I made a move toward him. Neither of us believed that he was in Compass pay, or even in sympathy with the outfit. Dugan was a wild man on the subject of Compass; and we couldn't bring ourselves to the point of collaring Royce just to make him wilder. Seeing Royce speeding out of sight around the hangars, Dugan began rushing after him!

"Hold on, Chief!" I stepped in his way, and slowed him down. "Let Royce go. We're going to get that bombing stuff for you—never fear. We're on our way right now!"

"Then get going!" Dugan screeched. We got set quicker than we ever did before. With my camera mounted, threaded and set for stop, Flynn with his engine warmed, we were ready to speed off in very few seconds. We zipped down the field, lifted, circled several times for altitude, and then Rolf started deadheading up the Sound and toward higher New York State.

"Dugan's lost his head," I told myself. "Nick Royce is too good a man to make any underhanded plays, and if his brother is like him, Dugan's done himself out of two fine flyers. That's a heck of a note."

Below us territory was unreeling fast, for Flynn was letting the plane stretch out. The twelve cylinders of the Liberty motor thundered on. The black-blast tore at our heads; the brace-wires sang; the struts felt the strain. The ceiling was high today, and a clear sun was shining. The air was clear, promising me some fine shots. My camera was all set. All we had to do was get to the proving grounds, stick by some of the bombers, and bring home some knockout pictures. This was running through my head when the engine missed, choked, sputtered, and died.

"What's up, Rolf?" I asked, fast.

"Hanged if I know!" Flynn answered. Then seeing the gas gauge, he blurted out: "Lord! The gas level has gone low. Something's wrong there—maybe a leak!"

Just then the engine roared on again; and it kept going as Rolf jazzed it as though nothing in the world were wrong with it. We picked up speed again, and as we were zipping past the hundred and fifty mile mark, the engine choked off again, and this time it stayed dead.

"Blast it!" Flynn snarled. "There's nothing to do but go down and see what's wrong!"

He craned over the cowling, looking for a landing field. Forward, where we were drifting, was a golf course that looked mighty good. Flynn scooped down to it, losing speed steadily; the fairways tilted close; and then we were rolling over the grass. We both jumped out, and Flynn put his head into the motor.

"Speed it up, Rolf!" I nudged him. "We've got no time to waste!"

"Feed line snapped?" Flynn moaned. The smell of high-test gas was strong on the air. "Hold your finger over this, Art; we can't waste any gas!" As he turned the cock, and fished for some tools in the cockpit, I helped as I could, which was not much. "We've been trailing gas all over the state of New York!" Flynn said. "One minute and we're fixed." He was tapping the break. "Hop in!"

The prop kicked over from compression, and Flynn settled to the controls with the motor blasting again. As he trundled the ship away, he shouted back to me:

"Gas is down to the bottom, Art. I'm switching on the emergency tank right now. If we make the field, we're lucky; if not—"

I prayed for luck. Flynn kept the plane at its most economical speed. Territory began sliding past us again. And then came a discordant note in the music of the motor—the sound of another plane drawing close!

Behind us was a gray plane. On the side of it, as it drew closer and closer, were painted the words: Compass News!

"Oh, Lord!" I moaned. "They're on our tails again. And they're traveling like blazes!"

The plane began drawing up beside us. Then it weaved closer. From the pit two helmeted heads turned to us. I stared at them; kept on staring; and then I saw who they were.

"Nick Royce!"

I shouted the name into the thunder of the motor. Nick Royce—it was Nick Royce who was driving that plane ahead of us! And behind him, at the camera in the rear pit, was his brother Bill. I couldn't disbelieve my eyes, but my senses were shaky. Nick Royce, driving a Compass plane, and flying like fury to beat us out!

Flynn opened the throttle, and our D.H. buzzed on. With a low gas supply this was unwise, but we couldn't help it. Even so, Royce gradually drew ahead of us. Little by little he eased forward. I could see Flynn bending over the dials, jerking from one to the other.

And right then the motor coughed. After a moment of sputtering, it droned on, but we were losing speed.

On the horizon, now, I could see the flat expanse of ground that was the flying field; could even see the bridge on it that was soon to be demolished. Toward it the Compass plane was flying at full throttle, leading us by hundreds of yards now. And once more the motor of our D.H. wheezed and died.

"My gosh, Rolf!" I gasped. "We're so close—we've got to get there!"

"Gas tank dry," Flynn answered me back. "We can't glide to it. Nothing to do but go down and service."

"And by then the show'll be over!"

As we mushed out into a glide, hunting for the smoothest field to land on, the Compass plane kept streaming straight for the proving grounds—and the big shots!

Our D.H. lumbered across a rough field, and jolted to a rocking stop just this side of a barbed wire fence. I hopped out. Not even a house was in sight!

"Lord, Rolf!" I said. "Losing the time is bad enough—but seeing Nick Royce driving in with a Compass plane is the worst blow I've had in years. I've been trustin' that kid all along; and there he is, flying for Compass with that brother of his! Lord, there ain't no good in human nature when things like this happen."

"I know it!" Flynn answered. "It gets my goat. I never expected it of Nick. But if we get some gas into this crate in a hurry, we might get some of the bombings even—"

*Boo-oom!*

The sound of the explosion rolled over the field; and afterward the buzzing of a number of planes.

"It's no use, Art! They're already begun. We're licked. And Nick Royce is right there, getting the stuff for Compass. What's the world comin' to?"

*Boo-oom!*

"Flynn, where's a can?" I demanded, suddenly mad. "We can't let Royce run away with us like this. We've got to get up there and gather a few pictures ourselves!"

Flynn grabbed four five-gallon cans out of the tail of the ship, and turned two over to me. We ran to the top of the hill, and seeing a house below, hoofed it for all we were worth. When we reached the house, nobody answered our call; we raced out to the stable, shouting, rattling those cans.

"Hello!" we yelled.

*Boo-oom!* came over the hills.

At last a farmer came down from the hay-mow. We yelled at him again.

"Gas? Gas? Ain't got none here; You can git some up to the store at the crossroads. Oh, it's jest about four mile from here."

Four miles! We moaned, but hopped to it. Reaching

the road, we paced away at our fastest. When a flivver truck came rattling along, we hailed him, and got a ride. That ride was the sweetest we ever had. Clattering along at what seemed a snailish speed, after our plane's, we heard, again and again:

*Boo-oom! Boo-oom-oom!*

Each one of those booms made us sadder. After an eternity we reached the store. We tore the store clerk away from a customer and made him pump gas. It went in drop by drop until we took the handle out of his hands. Then with the four cans full, we scraped up enough money to pay him, and enough to hire a truck to take us back.

*Boo-oom!*

"Sounds like somethin' blowin' up!" remarked the clerk, and to our credit that clerk is still alive.

Rolf Flynn took the controls of that truck as we went back, and no truck ever traveled so fast as it did. Its owner held on for dear life. We streaked down the highway so fast that the motor didn't let us hear any more booms. Then into the farm, across the field, and to a crashing stop beside the plane.

"Work fast, Art!"

*Boo-oom!*

We filled that plane as fast as gas would pour into the tank. With the fourth can empty, we turned the D.H. tail for prop. I tugged it around, and roar she did! Then I leaped into the pit, and Flynn eased on the gas. We jerked and bobbed over the rocky ground; and at last we found enough speed to take off. Then circling, Flynn bored on for the proving grounds.

*Boo-oom!*

The field swam closer. The bridge now was a wreck; a heap of concrete. The ground and river bed around it were cratered and dug up by the bombs. I swung my lens at it, hoping to get a few of the explosions; but as I did so, the bombers circled down, and made for the ground. Back and forth Flynn and I weaved, hoping, waiting, praying that we could get a picture of just one bomb dropping. But no.

The bombing was over!

As I settled back in my seat, sick and tired and disgusted, the Compass plane, driven by Nick Royce, nosed toward home. And there was nothing for us to do but go home likewise. We went—empty-handed.

WHEN the D.H. taxied to a stop on our T, Gord Dugan rushed up to us and asked his inevitable question: "Did you get the shots?"

"No!" I yowled at him. Then, very gently, I explained why we hadn't got the shots. In the first place, a broken

feed line had stopped us. In the second, our lost gas had forced us down. In the third place, we got there too late. And in the fourth, Compass was on hand anyway—with Nick Royce piloting.

"Nick—Royce—flying for—Compass!" Dugan repeated like a ghost.

"Exactly!"

Dugan was a beaten man. He sagged. His face grew haggard. He was almost ready to burst into tears when the droning of a plane came through the air, and he looked up; and his face grew hard again in an instant.

"Hang 'em! Insulting me by flying over my field—the dogs!"

Right over the field was the Compass plane! That was carrying it a bit too far. I cursed Nick Royce forwards and backwards. And then that Compass plane began to drop.

It did more than that—it swooped down, touched, and trundled to a stop right on our T.

Dugan watched hypnotized, as Nick Royce got out of the cubby. His brother passed him several film cartridges; and then Nick Royce walked straight toward Gord Dugan, and offered them to Dugan. Walked straight up, he did, and offered them to Dugan!

"Here y' are, Boss," he said. "Here're some shots of the bombing that Bill and I got. I think they're pretty good. Can you use 'em?"

Dugan gulped. "Wh-what? You're giving those shots to me? To me?"

"Sure. That was our idea in going and getting 'em—to give 'em to you. We thought at first that we'd simply add 'em to what Art got; but since Art didn't get any, I guess these are the only ones anybody'll get. They're yours, Boss."

As in a dream. Dugan reached out and took them. "Wh-what's the idea? How come—"

"Bill wanted a chance to show you what he can do," Nick said. "Also, I wanted to show you that we're both giving all we've got for World News. You wouldn't listen to me; all I could do was prove it to you this way. Do you believe now that we're square?"

"Believe—!" Dugan repeated. "My Lord! Nick, where did you get that plane?"

"We needed one bad, so we beat it over to the Compass outfit and stole one of theirs," Nick Royce answered as simply as you please. "We'll take it back tonight. Meanwhile, Dugan—are we hired?"

"If anybody says you're not," declared Dugan, "he's a liar!"

And the Royce brothers grinned a broad Royce grin.