



# TWINS AND TROUBLE

by WILLIAM E. BARRETT

*Another "sky talk" yarn, proving that trouble never comes in small doses—particularly in the air.*

**B**RAD," THE CHIEF'S VOICE WAS LOW and serious and I could smell trouble, "we have a pair of important students coming in and I'm going to turn them over to you."

"Good," says I. "What's the matter with them?"

The chief looks pained, but he shouldn't. He knows and I know that when important students are turned over to the good old assistant, it means that there's a nigger in the woodpile or something. Just the same, he looks hurt.

"Don't be like that, Brad," he says real soothingly. "I know you've had some terrible things to instruct, but I

want to make it right. That's why I am giving you these two guests of ours."

"Guests!" That was the tip-off. Any time a stude is referred to as a "guest," you can bet your new Eaglerock against a cracked strut that some senator's eccentric aunt or his feeble-minded son has a hanker to fly.

I sits there grimly expectant and the chief's voice flows on. "These two gentlemen come from South America and they—"

"Don't speak English," says I, "and are very hot tempered and carry long knives and—"

"Please don't interrupt. They speak perfect English

and they come from a splendid family. We are honored that they selected our school. I want you to give them special attention and be very careful not to offend them in any way. They may be a bit strange and find it hard to adapt themselves."

"Oh, yeah!" I says, getting up with an air of dignity. "I'll be polite and see that they don't get grease on their clothes, and if they give her too much rudder. I'll stop the ship and request 'em to kindly be more careful and——"

The chief frowns. "This is no laughing matter, Brad, and I want you to take it seriously. They'll be here tomorrow and nothing we have is too good for them. Remember that."

I make my exit gracefully. There's as much sense in arguing with the chief as there is in taking a Jenny to the North Pole. He's one of these serious dodos who can fly like an eagle'd like to, but an awful stuffed boot to talk to. The public knows the chief by his first name and he's held more records than he can remember, but he's hell on an assistant. His job is good-will and gravy flying—mine is flying the freaks and taking the raps. But, never mind.

I am already outside the door when he booms after me and I turn. "Forgot to tell you, Brad. They're twins. And their father is Señor Enrique Gopez who has been in the papers so much for successfully quelling the revolution in his country."

Twins! I don't make any comeback. What's the use? The thought is too appalling. Through the long dark hours of the night I dream about it. Suppose one is good and one isn't, and suppose I solo the wrong one? Suppose they bring up a lot of bloodthirsty revolutionary ideas and get a hate on me? The idea of fighting twins, or instructing them or flying with them is a new one to me and it disturbs my sweet slumbers plenty. Finally, however, I punch the pillow a dirty whack and roll over.

"Anyways," I grunt savagely, "the prop on the old Travelair goes through more revolutions in a minute than their blanked country will ever have."

'N' that was the most consoling goodnight thought I could dig up.

THEY came. Modocs, you should have seen them; short, sad, silly-looking young yaps in pretty clothes. They were standing side by side like a pair of tin soldiers when I first saw them and they looked like Buster Keaton would look if there were two of him and he was going to a funeral.

The chief does the introducing and both of these jobs nod their heads.

"Pleased," chirps the first one in a flat voice.

"Very," cracks the other. Then they lapse back into unconsciousness. I shuffle my feet.

"You would like to look around the place a bit first?" I asks politely. They nod again and we start. The chief leaves the party and they are mine; all mine, Modocs, all mine.

Fourteen times, by actual count, brethren, the No. 1 twin said "Pleased" and exactly the same number of times did No. 2 say "Very." It was as annoying as the dragging of a tail-skid over the concrete, but it was up to me to be Uncle Sam and show the boys lots of hospitality, so I carried on. The worst of it was, though, that I was sure they couldn't be pleased. No one with the flat-spin look that they had could possibly be pleased—much less "very."

Tempus fugited and I lived through it. I got used to seeing them wander in like a song-and-dance team and I got over expecting them to swing into " 'Twas the merry month of May," or something. In fact I got used to the whole lay-out. I took them through the preliminaries on the ground and never heard any of their perfect English except the same two words. 'N' then the time came to take 'em aloft. That's when they burst forth into speech.

I was so surprised that I didn't get them at first; then it registered. All that this pair of weak ailerons wanted was to go up together and be instructed at the same time—two men to the stick and yo heave ho for heaven!

"No. No," I says politely. "Flying is a one-man job—one at a time. There is no way known to man for two men to fly the same ship in the air at the same time."

"But, señor, we have never been separate. We can take the turn—wan weeth the hands and wan weeth the feet."

"Yeah! 'N' how would I know whether to ball out the hand man or the feet man? A lovely arrangement." I smiles through my tears, though, and chirps politely. "It is impossible, boys. Just suppose one of you got an idea to hank left and the other wanted to go right?"

They break out into violent Spanish and then shift gears back to what might laughingly he called English. Just like they had rehearsed it, they chant together.

"Señor, that is the impossible. We do everything the same at the same time always."

"Interesting, if embarrassing," says I, "but the works is off. You will fly separately or you won't fly with me."

A HALF hour of Spanish and English followed that ended with me in a heavy perspiration and the “Guests” in tears. They embrace each other as though Europe was the next stop and “Pleased” gets into the cockpit, waving back to “Very,” who is trying to bear up bravely under the separation.

I was looking for trouble. It was with less than no confidence that I let him hold the stick and guide it himself. He fooled me. Not only that, but his brother fooled me later. ‘N’ they kept on fooling me.

Those boys handled a plane like Paderewski handles a piano. They were born with the touch. Just the right shade of rudder and just the right angle of bank. Oh, they were prime. After I had them in the air a few times I forgave them freely for being twins, for being nerve-wreckers and for being freaks. A steady diet of kaydets like that and my little pay check would seem like too much. Boy!

The day that I turned the plane over to Pleased for the first time was a day of exceeding doom for me. Maybe it wasn’t.

I’d had both boys on banks, glides, take-offs and landings until they were good enough to solo. ‘N’ I wanted to let them take a few complete trips with me before turning them loose. Not that I was a bit uncertain about them, but just that I wanted them to have confidence before going it alone. They didn’t need anything else. At least, I didn’t think so.

The parting that day was particularly touching. Pleased is kinda white around the gills like he was going solo instead of just piloting me around on stuff that he’d done a flock of times previous. Very just stands and looks. His brown eyes are full of woe and he reminds me of a widder lady who has just lost her cat. Downright unholy for two guys to love each other like that. It just ain’t right.

*Lam!* We’re off and the kid brings the stick forward and then back with the light touch he’s famous for and I relax. Nothing to it! We go up in wide graceful spirals and I let him take the altitude. It’s his party, and as long as he doesn’t endanger my neck, I’ll let him give her the works.

Suddenly we start to wobble and I turn around in the cockpit for a look-see. My revolutionist friend is looking down on the ground over the side like he never saw the old planet before. His lips are trembling like a girl who wants something bad enough to cry for it and his face is as white as my best shirt.

“Snap out of it and forget the ground!”

My gentle baritone flows into the Gossport and

vibrates the ear-phones in his helmet. He jumps like a chicken on hot pavement and lets go of everything. We are falling off on one wing and I make a grab for the controls. Not fast enough—

Pleased is ahead of me and he pulls, the stick back against his belt and holds it there like it was built to hold kaydets in the cockpit.

“Leggo o’ that!” I bark and—brethren, we are in a fourteen-carat, absolutely genuine spin.

The hangar is chasing the clouds around and every split tick of the clock is the signal for the sky to change places with the earth again and for the horizon to swing over us like a skipping rope. Nothing alarming, you understand, but one of those things you don’t stay in just for the sensation.

I gets another load of the guest’s face and there is death in it. He’s voting the Pessimist ticket right then and betting himself that his brother is no longer a twin. Not me, Modocs, not me. I’ve got a bungalow that ain’t paid for yet and I need a few months’ salary.

“Let go of everything!” I yell. He grabs a tighter hold and that’s all the results I get, while the tail keeps whipping around and frankfurters for lunch seem more foolish every second.

THERE’S only one thing to do. ‘N’ know, Modocs, that there are times when a little brutality goes a long way. I slipped up over the back of that front cockpit and—*Swishhhhhhhh!*

The old loaded hose that has traded many a boy a headache for a pine box landed on the guest’s noble brow.

Maybe he moaned, Modocs, and he might have cursed. I don’t know. All I know is that he was knocked loose from everything and that I had the stick.

*Zipppppp!*

We haven’t got much altitude left, but I get everything into neutral and then dive the old bus at the ground. The field comes up to me fast and when I think that I have the old flying speed,

I ease gently back on the stick.

We come out of it as nonchalantly as though we were raised on Murads and I straighten her out. As soon as we have a little air under us again, I take a look at my victim. He is coming to with a blank, scared look on his pan and I give him a ride to get his head clear. After a while I look back to see him shuddering there in the cockpit as miserable as a wet dog in a cold wind.

“Take the controls!” I bark. ‘N’ that’s the right treatment. A guy who’s had a good scare in the air

ought to grab the stick and go right back. It saves him from going canary and washing out.

There is no movement in the rear cockpit, so I take another look and signal to him with my hands. He just shrinks back there and his eyes look at me with the queerest expression that I have ever run up against—one of those looks that make you think of dark alleys and ten-inch blades and coroner's juries. It is no go, though. He craves no more flying and that is that.

I kick her around into the wind and we come down. Pleased is out of the cockpit like a shot and into the arms of Very who is spitting Spanish like a marine spits cut plug. In a couple of seconds it is a duet, and as Pleased spills the lurid details about that sock on the conk, their voices raise until it sounds like the sextette from Luscious.

I square my manly shoulders and amble into the whirling words. I fix my eyes on Very and beckon with one dirty finger.

"You're next," I remark sweetly. "Jump in."

Three yards of Spanish greet that remark and then Very shrugs.

"Señor, we go up no more."

I'm surprised at the firmness in his tone, but I know what's the matter. I insulted practically all South America with that one little piece of loaded hose.

"Don't be like that," I growl. "Your brother was frozen to the controls and we'd both be out there all mixed up with the motor and the fuselage if I hadn't—*er*, removed him from the stick."

Pleased steps forward then and he almost looks like a man. he's so darn mad and dignified and hurt.

"Señor, I am a Gopez!" he says real chilly. Then the act pivots like one man and parades off across the field. Just like that.

FOR several minutes I stand there scratching my head and trying to figure it out. "Señor, I am a Gopez," he says—not only admitting it, but practically bragging about it. It's sure rich.

I've got a job to do, though, that's not so comical. I have to go in to the chief and tell him that I bashed a guest on the coco and that the guest is sore and that he, in fact both of him, will not play with me any more.

I start for the office with all the confidence and enthusiasm of a rook spinning his first prop. I may be able to duck in time and I may not. You know how it is!

Well, I confess! For a stunned moment the chief

sits there like he'd felt the wings fall off and had just remembered where he last saw his 'chute; then he goes right up like a Curtiss Hawk at full gun.

"My gosh. Brad!" he moans. "This is terrible. We'll hear from this through the embassy at Washington. Striking a Gopez!"

He moans and runs his fingers through his hair like that is much worse than socking a Magee or a Callahan. "What should I have done, crawled back there and kissed him?" I says.

"Brad, your levity is unforgivable. You've got the school in serious trouble and you don't seem to realize how serious."

I confess that I don't, and I'm thinking along the same lines a half hour later when he all but kicks me out of the office. It'd take an awful lot to convince me that a live Gopez with a headache ain't a darn sight better diplomatic proposition than a stiff Gopez with a connecting rod in his kidney.

The next day is Saturday and the word has got around so that my friends get to looking at me sadly and wandering over soberly to shake hands. The whole darn crowd is walking around like they were up in somebody's homemade job and not sure when the bottom was due to drop away from everything.

NOTHING much happens despite the gloom except that one of the twins disappears and the other applies for another instructor. I gets a look at the survivor and there's three hairs sticking out of a mole on his chin, so I know that the one who is missing is Very.

That is a jolt. I wouldn't have been so surprised if it was Pleased, 'cause I'd figure he was taking a course of aspirin or something and I kind o' figured he was through with the air anyway after the pleasant experience he had in watching the earth play tag with the sky.

Nothing of the kind! Silence and mystery cloak the activities of Very during the week, but Pleased works Joe Hamstreet to death and gets along fine. He solos in great shape and goes after the advanced stuff like he'd never washed out.

It is irritating of course to have the chief looking sour every time I heave into sight and I'm some puzzled about the breaking up of the inseparables, but I have work to do, so I manage to more or less forget 'em.

Fate has handed me another lemon to add gray hairs to my classic dome—a railroad engineer named



Monahan who should have been good and wasn't. Just to show you what having twins around the place will do to one, my luck twins up to trouble. This big baboon freezes on me just like my spic friend; freezes tight at two thousand—and him a railroad engineer who'd stick to the throttle through hell and high water.

That, brethren, was a problem. This guy ain't likely to act hurt; he'd look too foolish doing it. 'N' I don't think he's related to anybody particular, but orders is orders. 'N' I simply mustn't massage any more conks with stuffed hose if I want to hang around and collect pay. A fine thing to be up against with the tail waving in the air and not any too much of the well-known ether under the nose.

Well, there's something in this theory that it takes brains to instruct, Modocs—there sure is. When nothing else wakes this egg up I take a big chance and jerk the stick out of the front cockpit and wave it in front of him.

I'm betting, brothers, on the fact that this guy is used to emergencies in his work and that he will snap out of it when he savvies that he's the only one with any controls. 'N' I ain't crazy either. I've got an eye over the side and I'm blessing the rule I cussed—that 'chutes must be worn on all stude flights.

Well, Psychology won in a walk. That big ape gasped like a fish when he found that he had to fly or else crack up. 'N' then he came out of it. He landed the ship hard and the mechs had a little work to do, but Monahan was a flyer front then on. The treatment was a success and the patient recovered, in other words, and I was feeling right with the world again. Then back came Very. Yes, sir. 'N' instead of getting another instructor like his brother did, he comes to me like nothing ever happened.

I ALMOST have to grin in spite of my hunch that the good luck is gone for keeps. Somebody else seems to have shown a lot of disrespect for a Gopez and done a good job. There's a chunk of court plaster across the egg's chin that's about two and a half inches long—just like somebody tapped him with a lot of emphasis and good technique. He doesn't spill any of the details, though, and I don't feel chummy enough with him to ask for the low-down, so we get right down to business.

I left off instructing him, you remember, just when he was about ready to solo and needing only a trip or two with his own paws on tire controls and me for passenger. I check him up on landings and take-

offs and then I let him take the ship. Once more, it is skyward ho and a full-blooded Gopez on the stick.

Do you believe in that gag about lightning never hitting the same guy twice? Well, I did and I wasn't much worried. I'll be a son of a gun, though, if the same darn thing didn't happen that happened with his brother—the same squint at the far earth, the same shaking of the ship and then the blank look and the spin!

This freezing to the stick business is getting epidemic and it isn't one of those things you get to like by taking lots of it. Not a bit. There's space under us, but the hitting of another Gopez just ain't to be thought of. I try everything I know to kick him loose or wake him up or get control of that ship myself. 'N' then a horrible thing happens—the stick breaks right off in my hands.

A hasty glance, brethren, is enough to show me, even if we are in a spin, that that stick's been sawed three-quarters through. Dirty work!

The scheme I worked on Monahan comes back to me, then, only now I have to do it. I hold the stick up and toss it away, twisting around in the cockpit when I do it. The spic looks at me and then I turn cold all over. He reaches down and throws his stick over after it!

Nothing to it after that, Modocs! With no controls, that is one Travelair that is going to be dug up out of the earth in scattered chunks. Kicking out of the safety belt, I give the kid a wild signal and bait out.

One—two—three——

At seven I pull the rip cord and wait for that always anxious second before the 'chute opens. Then with a crack she balloons out wide and flips me head over heels.

I bob along under the spreading silk like a cork on the ocean. 'N', Modocs, I'm the only 'chute in the sky. My spic student has forgotten to jump or was too scared to.

"Holy Moses!" I groan. "This is going to get the United States into a war with South America as sure as fate. Bailing out and leaving a Gopez in a stickless plane is one of those things that's going to make me an international figure."

I squint around and try to find the plane. It should be digging in about now—but no! I can't see it, either.

Then, away over to the right I pick it up. It is out of the spin and spiraling away up into the heavens again—a plane without a stick and with a scared green rook in the cockpit!

There is nothing in the whole book that will explain that one and I'm beginning to think that maybe I've been scared delirious and that, after all these years, I've finally broken down from the strain of teaching the world and his aunt to fly.

Around comes the crate in a snappy bank and right for me. Yes, sir! It comes straight down the skyway with the prop pointing at my 'chute and the motor roaring full gun.

JUST about the time that I am kissing the world good-by, the boy eases the throttle a bit and banks around me. We haven't got a helluva lot of altitude, but he flies around me close enough for me to see his pan. 'N' he's grinning. Yes, sir, Modocs, that gloomy monkey who was never known to wear a cheerful look before was actually grinning; a damned insulting South American grin that brought several things forcibly to my mind at once.

First was the big groan. A million people were crowding around down there on the field waiting for me to come down. 'N' those people, brethren, were going to be entertained by my explanation, if any, of why I got scared and bailed out while a stude had guts enough to pull the ship out of a spin and take care of it; a stude that never soloed.

The old perspiration just stands out on me as I think of it! That story about the sticks won't go down and I know it. The Gopez family is avenged—and how! Not only avenged but rubbing it in with a grin. I'll never be the same man again.

It takes forever to come down. I'm in a hurry to get to earth and get it over with and I dread it like poison. How in thunder did that spic put it over on me?

The thought of that cut stick runs through my bean. That's the answer of course. Somebody who

heard of the trick I played on Monahan wanted to make sure that I'd repeat and that I'd fall for my own gag. Who would do that except the Gopez boys, sweet little fellers that they are? 'N' the stick that my friend Very tossed over the side must have been a dummy—but where did he learn to fly like that and where did he get the guts to pull her out of a spin?

The ground puts a close to the bean exercise I'm getting, and instead of landing gracefully like a vet should, I land like a cup o' cold coffee. I'm so busy wondering that I never spill any air out of the chute till too late, and when I light I shake everything and skid along on my ear to the loud laughs of an amused audience. Beautiful!

I am being eased out of the silk canopy and trying to laugh off the unlaughable when the Travelair comes down like a feather and my friend, the spic, hops out and comes over to me. A piece of court plaster is dangling loose on his chin and I gape my face wide open.

Brethren, that lad has no more wound on that chin than I have. All he has is a mole with three hairs in it. The egg I've been instructing is my old friend. Pleased, who got a sock on the conk last time and who has been getting some very ultra-ultra stuff from Joe Hamstreet for the last ten days. I am still gaping and shaking off the hoarse guffaws around me when this poisonous half of a pair of twins bows.

"Señor," he says, "a Gopez never forgets."

Modocs, the Gopez family ain't alone. Nobody else has ever forgotten, either, and it don't look like they're ever going to let me forget; the only instructor that ever bailed out and let a green rook fly circles around him and his 'chute.

Laugh that off!