



KILAUEA OR CRASH

by C. M. MILLER

Crashed in the crater! Barton was trapped. But the volcano had spouted its challenge, and there was a girl to rescue . . .

BUT MAN-ALIVE, even if she is Old Whippersnapper's daughter, we can't leave her up there to die!"

The pleading in Jimmy Barton's voice would have melted a guaranteed pure meteor, but his partner was a cold-headed calculating sort of fellow.

"Yeah? I know we can't, but how are you going to get her off the volcano? The damn thing is spitting lava like a cut artery spurting blood, and she's right on the edge of the crater. Why, man, it's as good as your life to even try to land there. You can't. There ain't any place to set down."

Jimmy sniffed the sulphur-laden air of Hilo, Hawaii, then looked at the dark clouds of volcano ash that were drifting overhead. He took in at a glance the shuffling, dunnage-laden Chinese, the running Hawaiians that had shed their laziness, the quick-moving Japanese that were hurrying their goods to waiting boats, and a few sweaty-shirted Americans

who were shouting orders for the saving of their effects.

Hilo was a shambles, Jimmy had to admit. And Old Whippersnapper's daughter was marooned at the Volcano House on the very edge of Kilauea's boiling crater!

"I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to take the crate up, and circle the place. Might be able to get down without a crack-up."

Then, setting his teeth, he gritted: "And, damn you, you can't stop me—even if you do own half the ship."

Jimmy, whirling, headed toward the edge of town.

Now it was his pardner's turn to plead: "But, man, it's impossible. You can't do it."

"The hell I can't!" Jimmy snapped.

"No, you can't," Chuck stated deliberately. "A Jap just came in from Mountain View, and he said that lava had already started to run into the sea off Keauhou Point. Man, if it's that far away already, the Volcano House has

gone up in smoke, and the girl with it. Why, the lava is this side of Mountain View right now. Hilo will be gone in four or five hours at the most.”

By the time Chuck had finished talking, Jimmy had reached the plane, pushed a hand into the cockpit, cut in the motor and was getting ready to spin the prop. The air was beginning to be stifling. It almost choked him as he took a deep breath before spinning the engine.

“I tell you, Chuck, you might just as well go, and get on the boat. She’s leaving with everybody in three hours. I’m taking off.”

Chuck’s eyes were pleading. The bond between the two men was stronger than words. As Jimmy grabbed the tail of the plane to turn its nose into the wind, Chuck shouted above the roar of the motor: “Boy, I’m goin’ with you!”

Jimmy held out his hand.

“Just like you, Chuck, but you can’t. If I can land, I’ll need that other place for the girl.”

He swung himself into the cockpit and shot her the juice.

Taxiing down the ash-covered field, he took off. Then he looked back at Chuck. His partner was standing in the shower of falling volcanic ash, holding one hand high. Jimmy’s breath caught as he realized that Chuck was saying a mute good-bye.

JIMMY’S eyes were beginning to water behind the glass of his goggles, and his throat was rasping as he climbed above the doomed city of Hilo into the dense layers of floating ashes and acrid sulphur fumes. Sudden gusty blasts of wind were tearing at the fabric of the plane. Despite his expert handling, the ship lurched like a wounded bird.

Choking, sputtering, gasping for fresh sweet-tasting air, Jimmy fought grimly on. He was battling the forces of nature at their worst. Fighting for a slim chance to land at the edge of that fiery crater. Fighting to make a landing from which he never expected to take off from.

Snatching his tear-streaked goggles from his eyes, he flung them from the ship, and peered at the hazy smoke-ridden ground below.

“Gosh, wish I could get my bearings. If I climb too high, I am pretty sure to overshoot; and if I don’t, I’m going to strangle in these fumes. Holy mackerel, who’d ever think I’d take a chance to get Old Whippersnapper’s daughter out of a bad fix! The old buzzard!”

Jimmy chuckled as he recalled his last—and first—meeting with Old Whippersnapper—the Terrible Terry of Honolulu. He and Chuck had made a splattering forced landing in the Old Man’s pet bed of highly cultivated new-strain pineapples. The bed and pineapples were in excellent shape for hash when the plane had been salvaged. Old Whippersnapper, by the judicious use of bribes, had forced them to look for a new landing field.

And now Jimmy was trying to rescue the daughter! Great stuff!

His grin broadened a bit as he dropped below the black clouds. Suddenly, the tumbling buildings of Kurtistown shot out of the gloom.

“Good gosh, look at that,” he groaned.

He dropped lower to watch a great wall of lava, at least thirty feet high, as it swallowed buildings, smearing itself over the landscape. Black crusts, with the baleful red glow of heated lava showing under their cracked tops, were streaming down the mountain side. Swallowing everything in their path.

Jerking the stick into his stomach, he zoomed and shot high above the wind-ripped clouds. Jimmy had quit grinning. The sight of the hell-born wall of lava had forced home the size of the job he had undertaken.

Sighting the towering top of Mauna Loa, he jerked the ship around so that it was bearing a bit off the right-hand side of the motor, and shot her the gun.

Eruption-born blasts of wind were ripping at the wings. Shooting her nose up. Trying to pancake it on the mountain side, then with sudden twisting force, throwing one whig high and dropping the other.

“I can’t do it—but damn it, I can’t leave her there to sizzle in that red-hot stuff.”

Clipping his teeth together, grinding his fingers into the stick, he sat with muscles tensed and quivering. Grimly going, and willingly, to a searing, lava-borne death.

JIMMY was watching the great clouds of steam rising from Keauhou Point. He noted the bloated, white bellies of lava-killed fish floating in the blue water.

By careful sighting of the familiar points of Mauna Loa and the coast, he judged himself to be about over the smoke-covered hotel. A sudden blast of rising air whipped the smoke from the very edge of the fiery crater, and Jimmy sighted the Volcano House through a rift.

The rising air made the ship creak and jump like a newly-saddled horse. Yet he fought the controls so skilfully that soon he was circling low over the hazy outlines of the hotel.

Jimmy kept one hand constancy wiping tears and ashes from his eyes while he dipped, circled, and zoomed, looking for a possible landing.

Cutting low over the hotel, he spied the cleared road that led to its door.

Bringing the ship's nose into the air, and cutting the gun, he pancaked on the narrow ribbon. A wheel struck a pile of old lava. A wing dropped, scraping the bank along the road. Then the wheel snapped off, and the wing dropped lower. The ship skidded around in its length, almost bumping its nose against a dilapidated Ford that sat by the roadside.

Jimmy scrambled out of the cock-pit, wiping tear-filled eyes and bloody nose.

Cracked up! On the edge of the live, boiling crater—and no way to get out!

He was groaning as he turned away from the smash-up, and ran toward the hotel.

"Gotta find the girl, then maybe I can get away on foot."

Just past the doorway, he stumbled over the unconscious body of Old Whippersnapper's daughter. Grabbing a fire bucket, Jimmy clashed the water over the girl. Dashing into the dining-room, Jimmy ripped a cloth from one of the tables.

Tearing the cloth into quarters, then soaking it in another bucket, he contrived smoke-straining masks for both of them.

Another bucket of water, and the girl's eyes opened. Tearfully, she started to speak, but Jimmy didn't wait. Throwing her over his shoulder, he ran out into the shower of falling ashes.

As he reached the plane, the wind suddenly shifted. Clouds ran one way, the falling hot ashes the other. Soon the air was cleared.

Jimmy ran a knowing eye over the ship. The wing was weakened, the fabric torn, but not beyond repairs. The main worry was the broken wheel.

"Can't take off with that," he grunted. Then turning, he looked for a way out on foot.

There was none.

His worried eyes saw nothing but an advancing twenty-foot wall of live, steaming lava that completely surrounded the hotel.

"Not a chance," he gritted through his clenched teeth.

THE girl, shaken, threw her mask-like piece of cloth aside, and climbed to her feet beside Jimmy.

"Is there any chance of getting out?"

"Sure, easy," Jimmy lied.

He stopped to examine the torn wing. His face suddenly brightened. Leaping up, without a word for the girl, he sprinted back toward the hotel.

Dashing through the doorway, he made his way to the basement. Then, grabbing a pair of pliers and a coil of wire, Jimmy scudded back to the ship.

Grunting, straining until it seemed his muscles might tear through his sweating skin, Jimmy managed to shift the plane to level ground. The girl did her best to be of help. Her early fright had passed; now there was a determined glint in her large blue eyes. This Julia Terry was a good soldier.

Jimmy, searching the ground nearby, found a pole that would suit his purpose. Using it as a lever, he was able to raise the broken wheel from the ground. It was ruined beyond hope of repair. But there was the old Ford!

His eyes anxiously scanned the narrowing wall of lava. Then off he dashed back to the hotel again, and down the basement stairs. He couldn't help noticing, as he ran, that the lava-wall was closing in. Despite the more favorable wind, the sulphur fumes were growing stifflingly stronger, and the heat unbearably intense.

"Gotta work fast. Can't stand this much longer. That wall is hopping fast now." His throat seemed afire.

Two monkey wrenches were clutched in his hands after his foray to the hotel basement. A few words from Jimmy, and Julia smiled behind the cloth mask which she had retrieved. Clumsily, she strained at a front wheel of the old Ford with her free hand.

Meanwhile, Jimmy tackled the damaged wheel of the plane. His hands bleeding and torn, the skin of his ripped shirt gleaming with perspiration, he finally flung the wrenched, broken wheel from him. He leaped to help Julia.

A few jerking motions of the jack handle raised the wheel from the ground. Adjusting a monkey wrench to the hub cap, he spun it around. Yanking the wheel from the axle, Jimmy dashed toward the plane. If it would only fit! It was their only chance.

AGAIN he glanced anxiously at the advancing lava. It had reached one of the outbuildings. Pushing at it with terrific force, the lava flattened the building into a heap of blazing boards, then, advancing across the pile, covered it from view

The heat was increasing. Jimmy was praying for the gas tank—praying that it would not explode.

A roar behind the hotel told him of the explosion of a stored drum of gasoline.

The girl was gasping for air in the shower of falling ashes. Jimmy felt the heat tearing at his dry throat, rasping his lungs.

Suddenly the wheel fell from his hands. It was an old wheel, and two of the spokes fell out. He couldn't use it! It wouldn't stand the strain.

Whirling, he dashed toward the old car. Yanking the jack from under the axle, he raised the other front wheel from the ground. Groaning with the effort, laboring for every breath of baked air, he struggled on. The torn skin and bleeding of his hands went unnoticed now.

Steadily that searing wall of lava moved onward to swallow them up.

The hub cap came off. Jimmy leaping to his feet, went dashing for the plane with the second wheel in his hands.

Kneeling down, he attempted to slide it on the axle.

It wouldn't fit! The axle was too large!

The girl's face went pale with helplessness. Bravely she held back the threatening tears.

With an angry curse of impatience, Jimmy jumped to his feet and headed toward the hotel once more.

The narrowing wall of lava had almost reached the back of the hotel. The garage was already a mass of flames and crumbling walls. With a whoosh! that threw blazing boards right and left, another gasoline barrel soared skyward.

"Boy, it's getting nasty! Gotta get off in ten minutes, or not at all," Jimmy groaned as he grasped a file and a rasp from the basement work-bench.

Reaching the plane, he dropped to his knees, and began rasping down the too-large axle. The filings were mixed with blood and skin from his hands. Streams of perspiration dropped from his face to keep the mask over his mouth clamp.

Stopping for a precious moment, he raised the cloth and shouted: "Julia! get some of those fire buckets and keep the plane wet. She's liable to catch fire."

In a moment, splashes of cool water told him Julia was doing her share. Cautioning her to keep the motor dry, he kept the rasp biting grittily into the axle.

At last! It ought to fit. Picking up the wheel, he slid it on the axle.

It did fit!

A moment's work and the hub cap was in place. Now to turn the plane so he could head it down the road, and take off.

Shouting to the girl to get into the ship, Jimmy grabbed the tail and lifted it around. Cutting in the motor, he swung the prop. The exhaust roared above the howl of the wind. Jumping into the cockpit, he opened the throttle to go scudding down the road.

But his wide grin was suddenly wiped from his face. The crippled wing began wobbling and shaking. Little streamers of fabric were fluttering in the wind and beginning to tear off.

With a shout of dismay Jimmy shut off the motor. The girl began crying.

"It's no use, it's no use, we can't get away," she wailed.

"We won't give up the ship yet," said Jimmy. "Get those fire buckets and keep pouring water on the ship. I'll have it fixed in a few minutes." His sharp words stopped the girl's threatened attack of hysteria. Jimmy grinned to himself as he watched her running toward the hotel for water.

"Doggone, things certainly are breaking bad," he muttered as he ran after the girl toward the hotel.

Gathering several table cloths from the hotel dining room took Jimmy only a moment. On the run back, he scooped up the coil of wire that lay where he had stumbled over it.

AS HE ran toward the plane, he glanced back at the steadily nearing wall of lava. It was piling high around the rear of the hotel—had already reached the back of the big building. Licking flames began to climb the wooden walls. As he saw the blaze grow, he became doubly anxious about the plane. Also, about the shifting wind.

He had to take off directly toward the hotel. There was barely room under favorable circumstances, and with the heavy gusts of wind and steadily climbing flames, it looked hopeless.

He would have to fly through that raging red blaze—unless the lava flattened the hotel before he had the broken wing fixed.

Dropping the wire, he threw the table cloths over the wing, taking care that they hung well over the forward edge, and began whipping them down with wire. Wrapping the wire tight held the cloths in place, and protected the wing fabric from the tearing blasts of wind.

Finishing the wing, he glanced again at the wall

of lava. It was steadily marching toward the plane. It seemed to Jimmy as if it were some live beast intent on swallowing both he and the girl.

“Damn you; you won’t get her. You won’t—you can’t.” But even as he shouted, the lava crawled steadily forward.

His eyes searched for Julia. Her clothes smoking, her hands blistered, with singed hair in her eyes, he saw her smiling bravely at him, beating out a blaze that had started on the fuselage.

A burning shingle from the hotel landed on Jimmy’s shoulder. He knocked it away. Frantically he kept stringing wire to brace the weakened wing.

He passed a wire under the fuselage and shouted to Julia! “Quick, grab it, and pull!”

She flung a bucket of water over a wing, dropped the bucket, then grabbing the wire, pulled with all her strength.

Jimmy jumped the tail. Taking the wire, he made it fast to a strut on the left wing. A second wire he ran over the body, and another he fastened to the tail skid braced the wing. Then he shouted to Julia.

“Get in quick! We’ll try it again.”

Lifting the tail of the ship, Jimmy swung its nose toward the blazing hotel. As he cut in the motor, he glanced toward the fire with worried eyes.

Flames were climbing high above the roof, lava completely surrounded the building; was already coming down the road toward the plane.

And he had to fly straight through the raging hell of flames that sat directly in his path! Already the road was narrowing as lava climbed to its surface and threatened to completely blank out his runway.

Grabbing the hot prop, he gave it a few turns, then yanked down hard. The motor roared. Dodging under the wing, Jimmy leaped into his seat in the rear cockpit.

Snapping open the throttle, he started to taxi toward the hotel. Then he shot every ounce of juice the laboring engine could take.

The bouncing plane shot between the high walls of lava. Advancing waves of melted stone almost scraped the wing tips as he went scudding toward the burning hotel.

The tail came up. The Ford wheel struck a stone. Jimmy groaned, but it held under the strain.

Blazing shingles, sulphur smoke, and ashes were swirling about the ship. Blasts of wind threatened to fling it into the red maw of advancing death. Still it shot forward.

Now they bumped the road. A skip. Another bump. The hotel was tearing at them at a terrific rate. Jimmy felt the lurching of the ship and narrowly watched the high-shooting flames.

Back came the stick!

His jaw-muscles were quivering. White-knuckled hands were gripping the stick, His toes were grinding into hot shoes. Arm and shoulder muscles were quivering under his skin. Holding his breath, eyes glinting, Jimmy held the stick back.

A searing red blaze shot up ahead of the ship. Another to the right. He watched the wall of flame cut off the way. A blast of skin-searing heat—throat-clutching smoke. Nauseating fumes—blinding, burning clouds of smoke and fire. Then—clear air!

They had won through!

CIRCLING Mauna Loa’s towering peak, Jimmy anxiously watched the braced wing, praying that it would hold. It had begun to flutter and shake. The whole ship was vibrating. But, at least they were clear of the lava.

Suddenly the wing began to loosen. Jimmy knew it couldn’t hold five minutes more.

Cutting the gun, he glided easily toward a group of waving cocoanut trees. He was looking for a landing. But all the ground he could see was rough, rocky, brush-smearred and tree-dotted mountainside.

“She’s a good kid—shame to crack up. Worked hard—she’s got nerve—”

Crash!

Ripping wings, tearing fabric, snapping struts. . . Jimmy opened his eyes. An angel was bending over him. An angel with blistered hands tenderly brushing his forehead. An angel with wind-whipped, singed hair.

“I’m going to make dad buy you a three-motored ship, and a landing field” every two miles on the island of Oahu. And besides, I want you to teach me to fly.”

But Jimmy was more interested in the angel herself than in three-motored ships and landing fields.