



MILE-HIGH EXPLOSIVES

by FREDERICK G. DAVIS

Dynamite on the sky track! It's tough and fast, the newsreel game, and Nick Royce is the toughest and fastest pilot that ever flew cloud-high camera shots from the danger spot marked X.

THE DeHAVILANDS WERE WARMED and waiting to sing into action—the brand of action that has made the Tip-Top World News Reel the greatest gelatine newspaper that ever flashed on a silver screen. Today we had special work ahead of us—very special!

It was eleven o'clock of a crystal-clear spring morning, and we were waiting for Bartlett to appear on the field—Bert Bartlett, News Chief. An hour ago he had phoned from headquarters in Times Square and rasped a hasty order into my ear:

“Art, I’m coming right over! Don’t leave on the *American Flyer* job until I get there! I’ve got something important to say to you news hounds—something blamed important!”

Now, when things start popping in this newsreel game they go off like a machine-gun. For weeks we may sit on our tails around the field with nothing to

do but wait for something to break; and then fires, floods and shipwrecks all start happening at once, and we have to fly our fool heads off to get the shots onto the screen before our competitors scoop us out. Brothers, it’s a tough and fast game!

And this morning we were already overdue to hop. We were all set to whirl over to another field on Long Island for the purpose of shooting the take-off of a new cruiser of the air. For weeks the newspapers had been running stories about the great new sky-liner christened the *American Flyer*. The big plane was announced to be startlingly new in design, and absolutely safe, with a cruising range greater than any similar heavier-than-air machine ever built. It was going to be used in a gigantic new system of transcontinental passenger transportation, and it was due to take off on its first flight to the Pacific Coast at exactly high noon.

“What a life!” I gasped, marching up and down in front of the hangars like a monkey in a cage. “If we don’t get out of here quick, and get those shots, Bartlett’ll skin us alive. And if we leave before he gets here, he’ll fire us! What’s keeping him, anyhow? What a life!”

I addressed this remark to “Suicide” Sandy Sinclair, that wild man of the sky at present officiating as pilot for the *Reel*, as cool-headed a dare-devil as ever cracked a cloud. He was sitting on the step of the office shack and gnawing at his fingernails. Precious minutes were ticking away.

“What’s he got to say to us that’s so blamed important, anyway?” I wanted to know.

Just then Nick Royce came running onto the field with an armload of hamburger sandwiches and coffee that he’d got from the cart across the road. In case there’s anybody here who doesn’t know Nick, just let me introduce him quickly as one peerless pilot, courage incarnate, the *Reel’s* greatest asset, and my best friend. Nick hurriedly unloaded our share of food, and then pulled a newspaper from under his arm.

“Gosh, Art—look at this!” he said breathlessly. “We’re apt to get a blame sight more ’n our money’s worth on this job today, if what this paper says is true!”

On the front page of this tabloid—the latest edition—was a screaming headline that attracted my eyes like a magnet:

*GREAT AIRPLANE THREATENED!
DANGER TO TRANSCONTINENTAL PLANE
DISCOVERED BY MOON REPORTER!
MAY BE DESTROYED AT NOON!*

AND below that, in blaring black type, was a story fit to curl your hair:

Grave danger is menacing the great new airplane, the *American Flyer*! It may never take off on its transcontinental trip, scheduled to begin at noon today. Before its epoch-making flight begins it may become a mangled wreck on the field!

Threats to this effect have been received by A.J. Walter, president of the Transcontinental Corporation, builders of the big plane, it was learned by a *Moon* reporter today. An anonymous letter received by Mr. Walter declares that the *American Flyer* will never even take off on its great flight, but will be destroyed!

Officials in charge of the cross-country flying project are seriously worried by the threats, and are taking every effort to prevent harm coming to the great ship.

No one will be allowed on the field without a pass. Several Army patrol planes have been detailed to the

sky above the American field as the time of the take-off approaches, as a precaution against the dropping of a bomb on the *American Flyer*. The only aircraft which will be permitted to land on the field before the big air traveler takes off will be the camera planes of various news-reels which have obtained permission to film the event.

Rumors of strife and conflict among the makers and backers of the great new airplane have been circulating ever since the project began, but it remained for the *Moon* to discover the amazing state of affairs described here.

Will the *American Flyer* soar on its way successfully, majestic monarch of the air—or will it be wrecked by the unknown terror which menaces it?

I had to read that column twice before I realized fully what it said. Then I pushed the paper away with a snort of disgust.

“Holy smoke, Nick, that’s only a cooked-up sensation sprung on the public to sell a few papers, that’s all. The *Moon’s* the yellowest sheet in Manhattan—you know that.”

“Sure,” said Nick, “but what if it all happens to be true? Gosh, if something like that happens to the *American Flyer*, it’ll be up to us to get some shots of it. And if we get the shots, it’ll be the biggest thing yet—”

“It won’t happen,” I answered gloomily. “If it happened, it would certainly make great pictures—if we got ’em,” I admitted, “but nothing’ll happen to that plane, you can bet—”

A TAXI came snarling onto the field, with one door open and Bert Bartlett hanging out of it. When it screeched to a stop, he slapped a bill at the driver, and came dog-trotting at us with face red as a beet. He was certainly burning up with something!

“Boys!” he roared at us. “Are you ready to go?”

“We are—and if we don’t get away from here mighty blamed quick we’ll miss the take-off!” I answered him.

“Listen!” he came right back. “Listen hard! We’re going to get those shots today, sure—but we’re going to have to do more than that. Every reel in the game is going to have a camera on that field and every one of ’em is going to beat the cars to get their shots onto Broadway before us.

“We’ve got to maintain our reputation, boys—we’ve got to maintain our lead. I’ve doped out a way of getting onto Broadway at least a full hour before any of the others. Say, we’ll make ’em look like a slow freight through Arkansas!”

“But wait—there’s something else. Today, boys,

we're co-operating with the studios—we're going to get sound pictures of the whole business. The recording apparatus is already over there on the field. They've got permission to shoot Walter, the head of the whole works, inside the cabin of the airplane. He's going to make a short talk for us, and we're going to get it exclusive! This is going to be the biggest thing that ever happened in the news-reel game!"

Bartlett's eyes were afire with that rabid look that comes into the face of a news-hound scenting a big break. He talked like the exhaust of a Liberty under full throttle!

"This is the way we're going to do it!" he rushed on. "Sinclair, you're going to pilot Buckley over there with his camera. You'll be on the field when the *American Flyer* takes off, and once it's up, you'll follow it and get some good shots of it. I've got permission for you to do that. It's the chance of a lifetime! Why, those pictures you get will go down in history! The first passenger transcontinental flight across the United States!

"As soon as you've got the shots, you'll follow the same plan I'm going to give Nick right now. Naturally, your pictures won't be sound stuff. Nick's going to handle the talkie reels from another camera. Now, Nick, get every word I say!

"You'll stick with the boys who run the sound apparatus in the cabin of the big plane, understand? As soon as those shots are made, they'll unload and give you the cans of film. Now, if we tried to get those films to the lab in town by motor car, we couldn't get on Broadway with the stuff any sooner than anybody else. Here's where our real speedy work comes in.

"You'll grab those cans and jump into your ship and head for Manhattan. You know where the Golden Building is located—the new skyscraper—on Fortieth street. On the top of that building several of the men from the lab will be waiting. You're to fly over that building and drop the films down to 'em. By *flying* the stuff over, we'll gain a full hour—and scoop the world!"

"Gosh—we'll get pinched for trying a stunt like that!" Nick protested.

"No you won't—I've got permission to do it."

BARTLETT fished several officious papers from his pockets and pushed them at Nick and me. He pulled out of his pocket also two little cloth bags, and tossed them over.

"Get a rope somewhere right now. Put the cans of

film in the bag, and pad 'em with wiping waste. Tie it to one end of the rope, and when you pass low over the top of the Golden Building, drop 'em to the men that'll be waiting. You heard that, Art. As soon as you finish getting your shots, you're to do the same thing. Now, go at it!"

"Gosh!" Nick ejaculated again. "We can do that, Boss. Sure—depend on us! But wait a minute—look at this!"

Nick pushed the copy of the *Moon* under Bartlett's nose. As his eyes flashed over it they widened with a fiery eagerness.

"Great Lord, we can't afford to miss such a chance as this! Be on your toes! When the time comes for that ship to take off, be ready to shoot anything that may happen. If that big plane is destroyed somehow, we've got to get some shots of it—absolutely got to!"

"Depend on me, Boss!" I piped up.

"Now *move!*"

Well, we moved. We moved with all the celerity we were capable of. The big news airliner was due to take off at high noon, and it was too far past eleven now to risk a single minute. Fired by the daring of Bartlett's plans, we began to follow orders.

Alone in one of the D.H.'s, Nick Royce drove across the field and into the wind. I settled behind my mounted camera in the rear pit of the other as Sandy Sinclair, at the controls, threw the plane into the air behind Nick. We gathered ourselves a hatful of altitude, and then leveled off toward the field from which the *American Flyer* was scheduled to take off in a few minutes.

Off our left wings lay the narrow band of water that was Long Island Sound. As we droned through the air I began looking around, suspecting that there was a third plane in the sky somewhere. And there was. Flying behind us, over the Sound, was a monoplane blasting through the sky at full throttle, in our direction. It was slamming through the air like mad.

Though I expected to see the camera ships of the competing news-reels in the sky, this was not one of them. It was a privately owned crate, evidently—a swift scout. It came thundering along at a crazy speed, drew alongside us, and then inched ahead. The pilot never looked around. He was burning the wind with all the power his radial could give him.

Suddenly something went wrong with that crate. The thunder of the motor broke off short, then barked several times. The plane lurched through the air, losing speed rapidly, and began to nose down. All at once,

with motor dead, it began to flutter toward the ground below like a bird stricken in mid-air!

WE HAD no time to waste, but the spectacle of a fellow pilot making a forced landing was enough to make us hang back a moment. The scout fought its way through the air, while the pilot hunched in the pit and strove to keep it under control.

The scout fluttered down to a field on an estate below. It was loggy, and it struck drunkenly on one wing. Even from our altitude we could see the undercarriage was probably crushed, and that one wing was cracked. The pilot limped out, stared up at us, jerked off his coat, and began to wave it at us frantically.

We had precious few minutes to spare, but Nick Royce is a human being first and a news-reel flyer afterward—which is probably the reason why he’s such a crack flyer! He banked his D.H. into a loose spiral, to answer that summons for help. Sandy Sinclair, being of the same breed, promptly kicked our crate downstairs after Nick.

We rolled onto the field a short distance from the scout. It was disabled—through flying for a time. The other pilot came limping toward us, and we ran to meet him.

“You hurt?” Nick demanded. “Anybody else in that plane?”

“No—I’m alone!” the pilot answered in a gasp. He was a narrow-faced guy with washy blue eyes, and a queer way of looking out of them. Under his one arm he was clasping tightly a little black bag like a doctor’s medicine case. “Thanks for coming down. There must’ve been a leak in my fuel line or something, but—but I’ve got to go on!”

He hitched that black bag a little closer.

“Give me a lift, will you? I’ll pay you—”

“Can’t do it!” Nick said briefly.

“We’re on our way to the American Flying Field, and we haven’t got a minute to spare.”

“The American—why, say, that’s where I was heading!” this narrow-faced guy came back at us. He looked over at our plane, saw the name of the *Reel* painted on the sides, and grinned a funny crooked grin. “Say that’s luck! I’m a newspaper reporter. I’ve come from St. Louis to cover the flight for the *Globe!*”

“Reporter?” Nick echoed. “Well, that’s different! Sure, we can give you a lift. Hop in behind me, and we’ll be on the American field in a shake!” The thin-faced guy started walking behind Nick toward the one

D.H. “Tip-Top, hey?” he said. “Best reel in the game! Say, I’ll hand you a little free publicity for this!”

“Get goin’!” I yelled at Sandy as Nick climbed in to the controls. “It’s past eleven thirty!”

Sandy Sinclair started jogging over toward our plane, and I kept beside him.

“Wonder what that bird’s got in that little black bag?” he puffed out. “He’s holdin’ onto it pretty tight.”

JUST then Nick opened the throttle, and pushed the D.H. into the wind. With the other guy in the pit behind him he lifted and swung around toward the north. Sandy kicked along after him while I settled again behind my good old camera, and once more we hit the air-trail.

A few minutes fast flying brought us in sight of the American field. The roads for miles were choked with cars. Around the fence of the field thousands of persons seemed to be crowding. Down there, in almost the center of the tarmac, sat the great new air-liner, the *American Flyer*, its wings flashing in the sun.

Several other planes were buzzing around the sky—Army planes. Sure enough! They made me think of the sensational story the *Moon* had printed, about the threats to damage the *American Flyer*. Still, the Army planes might be patrolling just as a natural precaution. Seeing we were news-reel ships on the favored list, they let us go down.

Nick stuck in first to the field, and Sandy stepped down after him. As soon as we rolled to a stop fully half a dozen cops rushed at us and demanded to see our passes. We produced the documents, and they went hurrying away to attend to other official business. The field was in a hubbub, with thousands peering over the fencing and perhaps a hundred cops, stockholders, mechanics and newspaper photographers buzzing around.

“Say, thanks!” said the bird we’d taxied to the field, looking at us with his washy, narrow-set eyes, and hitching that black bag under his arm tightly. “If there’s anything I can ever do for you, just let me know!”

Then he went hopping away. Now it was about a quarter of twelve. There was a group around the big plane, which sat at the beginning of a runway smooth as a ball-room floor. Nick and Sandy and I went trotting toward that group, and shouldered our way to the steps. Flashing our passes, we pushed up the steps and through the doorway, into the cabin of the big plane.

It was full of flowers and people and noise. In one corner a camera was set up. It was covered with a sound shield, a device about twice as big as the camera inside, with a little door in one side, clamped shut. This was to prevent the grinding of the gears reaching the microphone when the pictures were being made.

The cameraman was trying to keep the machine on its legs, and the sound operator was trying to push everybody out of the cabin. In one corner was a smallish, worried looking little man whom I knew to be A.J. Walter, head of the whole works. He was imploring the crowd to leave. We buckled to and, by dint of a few football tactics, gently applied, succeeded in clearing the cabin of everybody except Mr. Walter and ourselves.

"Now, gentlemen!" Mr. Walter exclaimed, frowning at us. "Can we proceed? We must not be late in this take-off!"

THE cameraman dodged behind his machine and the sound man came up with the microphone in his hands. He put it—a disk suspended in a metal ring by four delicate coiled springs—on a little table beside Walter. Walter sat down nervously, close to the window, and waited for the signal.

Outside the plane, on a truck backed up behind one wing, was the electrical recording apparatus. Crouching at what looked like a little black desk, peppered with knobs and indicator-lights, was the sound monitor, with head-phones clamped to his ears. He looked up, caught a signal from the cameraman inside, and snapped a switch on the control panel.

The cameraman simply reached forward, pushed a small button on the side of the sound shield of the camera. No click resulted, no whirring followed but inside, we knew, delicate and accurate spring mechanism was turning the film through the sprockets—and the scene was being shot.

Mr. Walter took out his watch, glanced at it, looked into the camera, and smiled.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, speaking in a clear, modulated voice, "it is now eleven fifty. In ten minutes, at noon, this great airplane will take off on its first flight across the continent. Though we will fly thousands of feet above the earth, at a speed of one hundred miles per hour or more, the passengers in this plane will be as safe as you are, seated in the theater. The flight of this plane marks a revolution in the science of flying, for it is equipped with devices which make of it for safety, speed and convenience, a marvel of the age. . ."

Down the narrow corridor, which joined the cabin at the rear, a lock clicked, and a door came open an inch. The cameraman jerked at the alarm, but Walters went on talking smoothly.

"Should the motors of this airplane fail while it is in flight," he said, "there will be no danger to the occupants. We are able to fly even without human hands on the controls. It is impossible for this ship to fall. At the worst, it will begin a slow glide to earth, descending at a rate only half that at which a parachute descends with a load of one man under it. . ."

The door in the corridor opened wider, and a man stepped out. The cameraman frantically waved him back, but he paid no attention. This was ruinous! There was no time to retake this scene! It had to go as it was! And this man, coming down the corridor, was walking right into the picture.

He came right on. He couldn't fail to understand that a talking movie sequence was being made, but he came right on! There was a grim, hard smile on his lips. Under his left arm he was clasping a small black bag like a doctor's kit. In his right hand he was leveling a big automatic.

It was the narrow-faced flyer we had brought to the field in our plane!

FOR a moment we stared, dum-founded, at the cold, grim assurance of this man. Just opposite Walter he paused, and turned the gun full on him! The cameraman made a rapid motion toward his camera, to snap off the mechanism; but, as he did so, the man with the gun whirled around. With blazing eyes he clicked out a command.

"Don't move—any of you! I'll shoot the man that moves!"

For another moment he glared at us. The camera was silently grinding on, recording his every expression, his every syllable!

Glancing through the window at the recording apparatus on the truck outside, I saw the monitor looking up curiously—but the recording went on. The chilling voice of the man with the gun froze us where we were.

Walter had stopped talking. He stared up at the man with the gun and grew very pale.

"Hutton!" he gasped. "How did you get in here! I gave orders you weren't to be admitted to the field if you—"

The man called Hutton sneered. Quickly he slipped his automatic into the pocket of his tunic—but he still

thrust it at Walters. He was keeping the weapon out of sight of those outside the windows. His eyes burned on Walter.

"I said I'd get you, Walter! I said you'd never fly this plane if somebody else built it! It's never going to take off. I'm going to wreck it as you wrecked me!"

"Get out of here, Hutton!" Walter snapped, standing up, rigidly. "I threw out your designs of this plane because they were defective! They were no good—and you know it. You were drunk when you drew the plans, and drunk when you delivered them!"

"I owed it to the public, and to aviation, and to the reputation of our factory to get rid of you—and you deserved to be kicked out, you drink-rotted fool!"

Hutton sneered in Walter's face. "You kicked me out because you wanted all the glory for yourself! Well, you're getting it! You're getting your glory! You're going to die in a blaze of it!"

"You drunken lunatic, get out of here!" Walter raged. "I'll call—"

"Wait!" Hutton's warning clicked out! "You'll hear what I've got to say, Walter!"

"I'll kill any man who touches me before I'm through talking! Listen! I swore when you kicked me out that you'd never fly a plane built from any other designs than mine. I'm going to live up to that promise. At twelve o'clock noon, this plane—and you with it—is going to be blown to atoms!"

"You're crazy!" Walters gasped.

Hutton slowly drew his right hand out of his pocket. Gently he took the little black bag from under his arm, and put it on the floor. Then he straightened again, staring around with eyes that blazed with an insane light.

"Listen!" he whispered. "Listen—listen to it tick!"

A hush came into the cabin of the plane. Chilled, nerves taut, we listened in spite of ourselves. Did we hear it? It was a faint, elusive sound—but it was there. *Ti-tick, ti-tick, ti-lick, ti-tick!* From inside the black bag!

A LOW, crazy chuckle came from Hutton's lips. "You hear it! You hear it! Listen, Walter—listen to it. Keep listening! I've set that mechanism for twelve o'clock sharp—the time when this plane of yours is supposed to take off. Well, it'll take off, all right. When those six sticks of dynamite let go at twelve o'clock, it will take off—in a million pieces!" And he laughed again, shrilly.

Walter stared at the man in dumfoundedness. A hush again. *Ti-tick, ti-tick, ti-tick!* Walter took an impulsive

step forward, toward that black bag, and reached down for it. Hutton laughed again, more shrilly than before, with such a demoniacal note that Walter's hands stopped before they touched the black bag.

"If you open it," Hutton said, suddenly grimly cool, "it will explode at once. When you open the catch—Walter, listen! While I worked for you, I may have got drunk—but did you ever know me to tell a lie? Did you ever know me to—"

"No!" Walter blurted.

"I'm telling you now that there are six sticks of dynamite in that bag," Hutton went on leeringly. "There is a clock mechanism adjusted to set them off at twelve o'clock to the second. Also, the stuff will explode if you open that bag. I've planned it carefully, Walter—very carefully. I've tested it time and again! Nothing in the world can prevent that bomb exploding at twelve o'clock—or sooner! . . . And I've never lied to you in my life!"

Hutton backed away, cackling crazily. He pushed open the door and started to go down the steps, still laughing insanely.

We stared at the little black bag on the floor as if hypnotized. My watch read exactly six minutes of twelve—and for all I knew it might be a few minutes slow!

Walter jerked out of the spell of horror first. He strode to the door, jabbed a finger at Hutton, and barked at the policemen clustering around outside, keeping the crowd back.

"Get that man! Arrest him! Take him away from here—quick!"

The cops closed in on Hutton—and he was still laughing his crazy laugh.

Walter swung back, staring at us, at the bag on the floor. The cameraman—forgetting that his own machine was still grinding film through the sprockets—stepped forward and in a choky voice tried to speak nonchalantly.

"It's a hoax, Mr. Walter. There's nothing in that bag. He's trying to throw a scare into you. Why, I'm not afraid to open that thing!"

Before we could stop him he dropped to one knee in front of the bag, and put out his hands to open the clasp. His fingers came within an inch of it—and paused stiff . . .

Ti-tick, ti-tick, ti-tick!

"Get away!" Walter gasped hoarsely.

The cameraman tore himself back, deathly pale, shaking, staring.

“Good God—what’ll we do!”

“Get that thing out of here!” Walters rasped. “Get it out of here before it goes off!”

Nobody moved.

Ti-tick, ti-tick, ti-tick!

“Get it out of this plane!”

Ti-tick, ti-tick!

A COLD, numbing terror gripped us as a full realization came to us of what this meant. Every second was bringing that great new plane nearer to destruction—but that was the least of it!

Outside the cabin, within a few feet, were fully fifty persons—men in frock coats, officials of the service—women in stunning gowns, socially prominent, who were to make the trip—several small children, waiting eagerly to come forward. Beyond that were scores of policemen, newspaper photographers; and at the fence, hundreds of persons, watching.

The explosion of that infernal machine would mean the deaths of scores, serious injury to hundreds of others. And the seconds were ticking away!

Ti-tick, ti-tick!

Four minutes of twelve!

Walter took several steps forward, timorously, his eyes fixed on the bag. He reached down—and we stopped breathing. His fingers curled around the handle of the bag, and, slowly, he lifted it. Holding it away from him, in one hand, he stared at us in horrified appeal.

Outside the crowd was eagerly awaiting the take-off of the great plane, as the seconds passed. None of them dreamed of the horror that might burst unseen upon them if that black bag should explode. The plane would fly to bits, the field would become a smoking crater in the earth, strewn with dead and mangled.

At that moment, as we stood there frozen with terror, it seemed that nothing could avert that disaster.

Then Nick Royce moved. He’d been standing behind me, beside Sandy Sinclair. Quietly, confidently, he stepped toward Walter. Gently he reached out, curled his fingers through the handle of the black bag. Walter let him have it.

“I’ll take care of this, sir,” he said.

“Put that down, Nick!” I gasped at him. “Good gosh, put it down—and clear out of here!”

Nick never glanced up. He stepped to the doorway of the cabin, carrying the black bag, and began to pick a way through the crowd with his eyes.

“Be careful!” Walter gasped. “If those people out

there learned what’s in that bag, there’d be a panic. For heaven’s sake—!”

Nick went down the steps carefully. Even as he moved we could hear the *ti-tick* from inside the bag, clocking us toward our doom. Nick started for the line of policemen, and Walter, stepping to the door, shouted huskily:

“Make way for that man, officers! Let him through! Don’t stop him! Don’t let anybody stop him!”

Sandy Sinclair and I tore loose from the spell, and went stumbling down the steps after Nick. He was carrying that black bag as though it contained nothing at all. There he went, through the line of police, past frock-coated men and dazzling women—carrying within inches of them that madman’s instrument of destruction.

He began to run toward his plane. He dodged around those persons in his path. Hurried, he ducked past the wing of his D.H. and pulled himself up on the step. He reached into the pit and clicked on the ignition—*put that bag on the seat*—and ducked around in front again to pump over the prop!

SANDY SINCLAIR and I loped toward him. Neither of us knew what we were doing, or why. We only knew that Nick Royce was very close to death, and we were full of some wild impulse to get him away from it. A glance at my watch told me that it was—three minutes of twelve!

Nick’s Liberty roared into action. He ran around to his pit and jumped in. He jammed on the throttle, kicked the plane around on the ground as it began to gather speed, and drove it into the wind with engine blasting. He went roaring up into the sky like mad. And in the pit beside him was that black bag of doom!

Why Sandy and I clambered into our own D.H. I don’t know. That wild impulse to stick close to Nick may explain it. We knew we could do nothing to help him, but we couldn’t let him plunge away alone. With Sandy crouching at the stick, and our Liberty growling, we trundled into the air and whirled through the sky after Nick.

He had the throttle of his D.H. wide open, and it was thundering in a steep climb, out toward the Sound. Sandy drove behind him, several hundred yards away. We realized now what Nick was trying to do. If that black bag had remained on the field, it would have taken its toll of lives. There was only one chance to save the plane and the people on the field—and Nick was taking that chance.

He was heading toward the Sound, roaring toward it under all the power his Liberty could give him. Beyond the shoreline he might drop the bag into the water—there its explosion could do no harm. But he had to reach the water before the tick of twelve if—

Below us lay a scattering of towns. Cars were gliding over the roads. In the houses hundreds of families were perhaps hearing the thunder of our planes above them, without suspecting that death might drop instantly out of the sky to claim them. Nick had to get rid of that bomb before the tick of twelve in order to save his own life—and the shore line lay beyond.

My watch—the time—a minute and a half to twelve!

Nick went thundering on. He not only had to reach the water to drop that bag; he had to have plenty of altitude when he dropped it, or the upheaval of the explosion would toss him like a leaf, throw him dead into the Sound, in a broken plane! As he climbed the line of water came closer.

It was a wild, unthinking impulse that made me swing my camera toward Nick Royce's roaring ship. It was the irrational impulse of a mind trained for years in capturing thrills for the great movie public. There went my best friend, thundering through the sky with death riding in his wings; and I turned the lens of my camera on him to record his doom for the Reel we'd served together!

MY RIGHT arm turned over the crank of my machine automatically as I stared, horrified, across space. Below us the shore line glided past. Nick drove on, and his left arm came up out of the pit, carrying the bag. He lowered it overside as he plunged through the sky—and held it!

Thirty seconds of twelve by my watch!

Nick dropped that bag. It began turning end over end through the air—and we swooped directly above it. Desperately Sandy Sinclair kicked the big D.H. around in a bank so terrific that the wings almost ripped off. Below us the black speck was hurtling toward the lapping water below; and fiend that I am, I followed it with my lens.

Whooorn!

Before it struck the water a terrific thunderclap broke through the clear sky. Our two D.H.'s were tossed like chips on an invisible wave. A cloud of dirty gas appeared above the water, and an unbreathable stench rolled up at us. From the far horizon the explosion echoed back.

Whoom-oom!

Nick Royce circled slowly, looking across at us. He waved and I could see him grinning. What a guy! What a guy! Me? Brothers, I don't mind telling you. I just settled back in that pit and cried like a kid.

"God bless 'im!" I choked into the backwash. "God bless 'im!"

ALL of which was not in the day's work. We'd left the home field with orders to get some shots of the take-off of the great new air-liner—and the hour of the launching was at hand while we were miles from the news! It took us just a minute to swing our crates around in a steep bank and go thundering back toward the American field.

As we sailed close to it, I saw the great form of the *American Flyer* moving slowly over the ground, into the take-off. Sandy Sinclair banked around loosely, and I swung my lens down at the great winged ship, and started grinding.

When the *American Flyer* went winging into the West, carrying with it its distinguished passengers, safely started on its epoch-making flight, we swung away—our job half done. To put it in a few words: we got the shots!

We followed out Bartlett's orders, after that. We flew over Manhattan, dropped low over the Golden Building, and tossed the cans of film to the men waiting below. A few minutes previous Nick Royce had done the same thing with the reels of talking film which he had carried from the field. He was hovering in the sky above, waiting to fly back to the field with us.

Before any of the other reels got their ordinary shots onto the Broadway screens that afternoon, Tip-Top was presenting the most astounding piece of news photography in the history of the game. A talking sequence which showed an armed man threatening the president of the corporation—a scene depicting every action and syllable that had occurred inside the cabin of that plane before the take-off.

Added to that were my shots of Nick Royce carrying the bag, and dropping it—the explosion—and then the *American Flyer* winging majestically on its way.

That day, ladies and gentlemen, Tip-Top owned the world, and we owned Tip-Top!

FROM San Francisco, when the great air liner landed and finished its cruise, Walter wired us his

thanks and assurances that we would be suitably rewarded. Bert Bartlett puffed out his chest and patted us on the back and offered us perfectos, one after the other, and chortled with glee.

Yeah!

But Nick Royce? You wouldn't have known he'd done anything worth mentioning. He was as quiet, as bashful, as retiring as ever—if not more so. He simply said, and was quoted as saying:

“Aw, gosh, it wasn't anything.”

But, brothers, I freely admit that for days afterward I couldn't hear the tick of a clock without growing very blond around the gills, and I still jump out of my chair when the noon whistles go off!