



FORTUNE FLYERS

by ROBERT CARTER

Treasure waits under tropic seas. High in the skies above the Spanish Main, Webb Foster peers down upon coral reefs. And buccaneers of the air fly to do murder for hidden gold. . . .

ALARGE windjammer was being towed slowly down the harbor, its sails furled. A trim ocean liner, riding through the Narrows on her outbound course, steamed at half speed. Tugs panted along, off Coney Island, rounding Norton's Point.

The air seemed lazy. There was that atmosphere of unhurried commerce about the lower bay. Except for one thing. A monoplane roared high in the sky, close to the Staten Island shore. At ninety and more miles an hour it tore through the sky. At the stick was Webb Foster, sky-pilot extraordinary.

Far out over the bay, with the offshore wind on his tail, he whizzed along at better than a hundred miles an hour. He circled over the ocean liner, sped on toward Rockaway Inlet, then back to the ocean liner again. Webb Foster was having some fun.

Ahead of him a few miles, he could make out a

seaplane, flying on his own level, straight toward him. Resembling his own monoplane, it differed only in that it had pontoons.

The seaplane circled to the south, and Webb Foster promptly forgot it. His little Wright-Morehouse, twin-cylinder engine was revving up high, and the single-seater monoplane trembled to the feel of horsepower pulling it through the skies.

For months Webb Foster had sacrificed; toiling to make his dream come true. And here he was; flying high over the bay at ninety and more miles an hour; with the little *Petrel* feeling joyously eager to climb away and up to where the clouds beckoned.

The even firing of the cylinders sounded a song of power to him as he sat there, thinking back on those days of toil on the ground. The wind stung his face as it whipped back from the whirling prop and tore at his helmet. But Webb Foster loved it.

He looked down at the liner again. Her passengers had left off gazing up at him and his stunting ship. They were crowded over at the starboard rail, gazing overside. Foster swung his *Petrel* lower, glanced in the direction in which they were staring. A few hundred yards from the liner, a tiny sailboat was scudding along over the whitecaps. Its sail was slatting viciously. The lone boatman was trying frantically to brail up his canvas in order to reef.

It happened then; just as Webb Foster decided that the sailor must be an amateur at the game. The tiny boat capsized. The amateur had been thrown clear over and into the water.

IN AN instant Webb came close over the bobbing figure of the sailor. The liner seemed farther away now. And the boatman was apparently an inexpert swimmer. He was floundering about in the water.

Suddenly he straightened out, and struck out for the liner in his own floundering way. Webb saw the move, throttled his engine and swung down closer to the swimming man.

It was evident that the man should swim for his own sailboat, which was floating a short distance away, and to which he could cling until help came. Webb brought the *Petrel* closer.

"Go back!" he yelled. "Your own boat's closer! Go back!"

Then the momentum of the plane had carried him past. He looked back, but the swimmer had obviously not heard him. Some one on the deck of the steamer had tossed a life preserver—but the man could never reach it.

Webb remembered the seaplane he had seen a few moments back. He looked about, then to the rear. There it was! It was coming from the Staten Island shore—and would probably arrive in time to help. He turned back to the swimmer.

The man's head had gone under!

No time now to wait for the arrival of that seaplane. The steamer was still too far off to be of any help. The swimmer had kicked to the surface again—was waving one hand in a gesture of hopelessness.

Webb bit his lip in helplessness. He could bring this *Petrel* down into the water, leave it, and swim to the man. Yet it would mean destroying this thing for which he'd struggled for years—this dream of his that had come true, and would be an empty thing of the past.

The steamer was still too far away. The seaplane was turning back. Its pilot had evidently not seen

the tragedy which was being enacted in those waters. Webb argued with himself.

To save that fool who hadn't known how to handle a sailboat, he was going to give up his trim little ship. But to the pilot of the *Petrel* there was no alternative. He was going to set the little monoplane down in that water and save the man.

He nosed down, found himself wondering how long the ship could float on the water. He looked at his gas guage. It registered almost full. Without gasoline he might be lucky enough to enable the ship to float until some passing trawler picked it up. But the tanks were almost full, and he had no dumping equipment.

The man was making no progress at all now. The *Petrel* dived, and as the water reached hungrily for it, Webb Foster unfastened his safety belt. He tore off his goggles and there came a resounding smack that jarred the monoplane as though it had struck a wall of cement.

THE icy water bit into Webb Foster's body. It jarred him, brought him up clear-headed and strong. He could hear the man's shouting and sputtering somewhere close by. With a strong overhand stroke, he reached the man's side.

The drowning man grasped Webb's arms, held them tight to his body. There was a moment of anguish as the flyer realized that this man was going to drown them both. Then he lifted one hand, wrenched it free, and landed flush upon the man's chin with an unmerciful wallop.

Even as the man lapsed into unconsciousness, Foster's eyes glimpsed the trim little plane, sinking into the water as the waves lapped into the cockpit through the unresisting wings. Bitter thoughts raced through his mind. This lifeless body he held pinioned in his arms was the cause of that—this man's thoughtlessness had brought that liny little wasp down into the water. . . .

He looked up as he heard a grinding-noise and felt a disturbance in the water. The liner he had seen from above had stopped just a few yards from them. Its propellers were churning the water as they went into reverse. He could read the name on the stern—*Coamo*.

A life preserver splashed a yard or so away from him. A second one followed from the upper deck. A Jacobs' ladder was being lowered as the ship swung around broadside to the swimming flyer.

They were pulled aboard by strong, willing hands. The ship's officer was staring at the two sullenly, apparently impatient with both of them. The passengers

crowded about, whispering words of praise for the hero of the daring rescue. The man had fainted; and Webb Foster was glad to get the load from his arms away into the outstretched hands of the medical officer.

Two seamen carried the dripping figure below as the ship's doctor gave them the order. Webb Foster stumbled to the starboard rail for a last sight of the *Petrel*. It had been pulled almost entirely underneath the water and was floating; tail high in the air, a few yards to one side of the liner.

He stared for a long minute at the sinking ship. A second later, there was nothing left to remind the pilot of his trim little craft. Gone—his ship! The tiny wasp that had just done ninety-five and more for him! That speedy, slim little monoplane that he had seen in his dreams for so long. Gone! Gone because a man didn't know how to handle a sailboat in the fairly smooth waters of the Narrows. . . .

"Great work, my friend!" A booming voice close at hand interrupted his thoughts. "Come back into my stateroom—you need some dry clothes. Perhaps a drink will fix you up, too!"

WEBB stared at the speaker. He was very well dressed, though conservatively. He seemed to be in his early fifties and suggested a well-to-do hanker. Webb nodded, and followed the man silently to B deck. He was ushered into a stateroom with a double bed and two cots.

"I'll lay out a suit and some underclothes for you first, young man. A good hot bath will fix you up, right. Just make believe the place belongs to you. My name's Charlton. I'll take a turn about the deck, visit the other chap perhaps, then drop in and see how you're coming along."

The churning of the ship's engines interrupted Webb's thoughts.

"Thanks. Foster's my name. But where will they let me off? At the Lightship, or—"

"Listen, young man!" was Charlton's reply. "You did a mighty, mighty fine thing today. I saw it all. I was watching you for a quarter of an hour before that happened. And I could see that you're a damned fine flyer. You saved a life—and you lost a plane.

"I'm going to take it on myself to give you a reward. How does a trip to the tropics sound to you? This ship's hound for San Juan, Porto Rico."

"Sounds good, Mr. Charlton." Webb grinned. "I'm not sure, though, whether it's a dollar and a half, or two dollars that I have in my pocket."

"Never mind about that," was the rejoinder. "I have plenty of money with me. I'll fix your passage with the pursuer. Of course—don't think for a minute this is charity. I have a real interest in doing this. I like your style. You throw in on a business proposition with me. I'll give you a good salary. Buy you a new plane besides. Perhaps—" he shrugged—"Providence had something to do with your rescuing the little man today."

"You mean you're offering me a job—flying?"

"That's it exactly."

"Well—"

A knock had sounded on the door. A ship's officer appeared in the doorway as Charlton opened.

"As to transferring this young man to another vessel, Mr. Charlton," he said smiling broadly, "I think perhaps that—"

"I think perhaps that will be unnecessary," cut in Charlton. "This chap's going to San Juan with me."

"But I'm not so sure, sir, that there is any additional stateroom accommodation on board—" the other offered.

"I'll attend to that." Charlton snapped. "I've two empty beds here. I took this suite to be alone—but I'll share it under the circumstances." As the ship's officer turned to go, satisfied, he called: "Wait a minute. I'll go to the captain or the pursuer or whoever it is and get him to O.K. this. Be back in a few minutes, Foster." He slid through the door.

In a few seconds he was back in the room. "By the way, Foster—married or single?"

"Single, sir! Why?"

"Good. It would never do if you were married. This jaunt may be the most pleasant experience of your life. But I ought to tell you now that under certain conditions, it might prove most dangerous. Now's the time to back out, if you care to."

Instantly Webb had made his decision, and replied: "I think I'll stick with it, sir."

Charlton burst through the door again to settle Webb's passage. As the young flyer stripped off his clothes and prepared for the bath, he looked out through the porthole. Snowflakes were falling out there.

"Good night! The *Petrel* gone. And I'm on my way to the tropics. Looks like I'm getting the adventure I started out into the air for—and right out of the air, too!"

CHAPTER II IN TROPIC SKIES

THE COAMO WAS PLOWING along through a snowstorm when Webb Foster, dressed in a suit of Charlton's clothes, which fortunately, fitted rather well, came out of the suite and walked aft along B deck.

It seemed a dream to him as he pulled up the collar of his great coat and looked overside. Four days more, and he would be in the land of perpetual summer. It was hard to realize. He was going south, and he had hired out as a pilot!

He wondered, as he leaned over the rail, who Charlton could be. Giving the appearance of a banker—yet he could be any one of a million things. Why was he going to the tropics? Why did he want a pilot? Could Charlton be a smuggler—or perhaps one of the Central American revolutionists he had read about?

Webb decided it might be a good idea to go back and talk to Charlton a bit. He could not associate the general appearance of this elderly gentleman with any war-like tendencies; yet it might be best to find out what it was all about, anyway.

On the forward deck, Foster met the man he sought. Charlton had his back turned to him as he came up; was chatting with a man in sailor's uniform who looked vaguely familiar. For a moment Webb was disturbed. Then recognition came to him. This was the man he had rescued from the bay!

Instantly Webb sought escape from the meeting. The man would probably be quite profuse in his expressions of gratitude, and Foster did not want to stand through that sort of a barrage just then. He heard music, and sought the social hall from which it came. Unnoticed, he eased away from the forward deck and the two earnestly conversing men.

As he entered, Webb removed his overcoat and placed it, with his cap, on a chair beside him. He felt vaguely conscious of some one's steady gaze in his direction. He looked up—to catch the girl in the act of smiling at him. She averted her head quickly, but not quickly enough to hide the smile.

Webb smiled to himself. He knew what she was

smiling at! The oddly dignified suit he was wearing, probably contrasted sharply with his general features. Her laugh had been kindly enough, he decided. There could be no other cause for it.

The ship's orchestra struck up a tune, and Webb was surprised to find that the girl was walking straight toward him. Once more he looked down at the sober suit which made him resemble a deacon, somewhat. The girl was now in front of him; he bowed, and smiled a puzzled sort of smile. In another moment, he was guiding her over the smooth floor of the social hall to the strains of the music.

Surprised, the girl asked, "Is this the sort of thing that one does these days? Do men kidnap girls into dancing with them without asking?" she smiled. "But then, I suppose a hero always can be relied upon to do the unexpected!"

Webb grinned. "But I had an idea that you expected me to dance with you," he apologized. "I saw you get up and walk right to me."

The girl laughed. Her voice sounded like music to the flyer. "The reason I did that," she explained, "was that I recognized one of my Dad's suits and I was going to tell you that there was another in his trunk which would be far more suitable for a young man of your type!"

FOSTER made the most of the newly-formed acquaintance. He danced with Betty Charlton until the luncheon gong sounded, and then Joshua Charlton took possession of him, and invited him to lunch in the stateroom, where they might talk things over privately.

Webb expected that in that talk Joshua Charlton would expose all of the details of the trip on which they were going, and in which he had so suddenly been plunged. But Charlton's conversation only whetted his appetite, without doing anything to satisfy his curiosity in the matter.

As the room steward retired, Charlton exclaimed: "Well! Today's quite a day, Foster. You know that chap you rescued from the bay? His name's Eli Hammond. He came up to me on the forward deck, recognized me. He's the son of an old friend of mine. He speaks Spanish fluently, and I realized how valuable he might become. I invited him along on my expedition. I had planned to man it in Porto Rico, you see. But I'd rather have a couple of Americans in it anyway."

Webb listened, hoping that the details concerning this expedition would soon be made clear. However,

he learned nothing beyond the fact that Charlton was a retired banker and had engaged a pilot for his expedition in New York. The pilot had proven dishonest, however, and Charlton had dismissed him. Evidently the banker had been to the West Indies a number of times, and owned an estate somewhere in the interior of Porto Rico.

Webb could not help but trust the banker. The more he talked to him the more he trusted him. And yet he could not understand the need for mystery in this expedition. Why should a man of Charlton's age, a retired banker, be going on an expedition that was evidently so fraught with mystery? What lay ahead of them?

He discovered just one thing. Charlton had ordered an amphibian for use on the trip. It was to be flown from the Sikorsky plant at New York to San Juan, Porto Rico, probably arriving there before the *Coamo*.

In his enthusiasm over the ship, Webb soon forgot all fears and doubts. Somehow, anything this man would do must be legal and aboveboard. Perhaps the few moments spent in the social hall with his daughter had something to do with that decision too. . . .

ELI HAMMOND joined the two in their stateroom for the remainder of the trip. Webb found it hard to be friendly with him, somehow. He could not find any basis for his suspicions of the young man, yet there seemed to be some deep underlying motive for his being on board which Webb could not fathom.

Yet through the short, fast-moving days that followed Hammond's coming to the stateroom, Foster found nothing to confirm any of his suspicions. Hammond was suave, gentlemanly, and evidently a prince of a chap.

Then Webb Foster received his first hint concerning the nature of the expedition. On Monday morning, the *Coamo* sailed proudly into San Juan harbor. From the upper deck, Joshua Charlton was pointing out the beauties of the scene which lay below their eyes.

"One could find adventure down this way on some uninhabited island, Foster," he said. "Suppose I were to tell you that this expedition of mine is a treasure hunt. Would that interest you?"

"Sounds good, Mr. Charlton. But I don't suppose there's any such thing as an uninhabited island in the West Indies these days."

"Oh, don't you, though?" There was a twinkle in the elderly man's eyes as he spoke. "See that island over there?" He pointed off their bow. "That's uninhabited.

It was formerly used as a leper colony. And Mora Island is practically uninhabited. So why not a few more?"

Charlton's Porto Rican agent came up to them then, and motored them to the Hotel Condado. Ramon Lado showed them the spots of interest, for Webb's own benefit, he guessed, as they passed through the streets of San Juan. Webb was thrilled to the novelty of it all. But the biggest thrill was to come.

After luncheon they strolled toward Santurce Bay. There, resting on the water, was a huge amphibian plane. A Sikorsky.

Instantly the young pilot forgot everything about him. His eyes took in eagerly every line of the beautiful ship. The graceful hull and pontoons, the two powerful Wasp engines that hung below the upper wing—nothing missed his practiced flying eye.

Lado's son, Vincent, was in the pilot's seat. The party boarded the plane at once, and he taxied the amphibian along the smooth waters of the bay, bringing it into the air with a smooth lift from the water.

The plane was a beauty, and flew like nothing Webb Foster had ever sat in before. They flew low over the city, heading out for Barranquitas, where the Charlton estate was located. There they landed, in a setting so beautiful that Webb Foster's eyes could not believe the things they saw.

ALL that afternoon Webb spent with young Lado going over the giant ship. A special cargo space had been added by taking out some of the seats in the cabin. It had a ceiling of twenty thousand feet; and Lado had brought it to a high speed of a hundred and twenty-five miles an hour. Webb could not be satisfied, however, until he'd taken the ship up himself, with his own hands at the wheel.

Lado took the ship off again, flew it for a few minutes. At three thousand feet he turned the wheel over to Foster. For an hour Webb flew the ship over the thick jungle that surrounded the Charlton estate on all sides. Banking, turning, diving, everything Foster did with that huge ship. He thrilled to its graceful flying, to the hum of power he could feel as he held the wheel in his steady arms.

He landed back at the Charlton estate, and brought the ship up to the hangar which had been built on it to accommodate this vessel of the skies. For long hours he stood there, eyes taking in every line of this beautiful thing that he was to pilot through the skies on the Charlton expedition.

“Mind coming up to my room a moment, Foster?” Charlton stood beside him, asking the question.

Jerked out of his reverie, Webb followed the banker into the screened house and up the stairway to his study.

“Just wanted to see you for a little conference,” he explained as he led the way through the matted corridor. “We can talk more privately up here, and—”

Charlton did not finish. As he swung open the door of his room, a thud sounded outside on the ground, and a swish of wind carried the noise of rustling papers blowing in the air and on the floor. Charlton snapped on the lights.

On a desk lay his black portfolio—open. Large sheets of paper, evidently spread across the desk a few moments before, were now scurrying about the floor in a draft created by an open window and door, which Webb now banged shut.

From Charlton’s gasp of astonishment, Webb sensed something of what had happened. In two leaps he was at the window. In a flash his eyes caught the form of a man disappearing into the gloom, while on the ground below the window lay the ladder that had fallen, causing the noise. Webb snatched the automatic he had glimpsed on Charlton’s dresser and dashed out of the room, down the stairway and through the rear door.

He could hear the thief racing through the garden, could see that he was making for the thick jungle of trees to the north of the garden. A shot failed to stop the man. In a moment he was swallowed up in the darkness. But Webb Foster followed along, grimly resolved to get the man. Long minutes he wandered through the jungle, seeking the fugitive. Then, from far off, he heard the roar of an airplane engine—wide open. . . .

CHAPTER III AT BIPLANE ISLAND

THE SNEAK THIEF, whoever he was, must have had a plane waiting a discreet distance from the Charlton house. But Webb could hardly see his hand before his face. He could tell that the plane was getting into the air, but he could not see it.

But now he was racing back toward the Charlton house, and in five minutes was in the air at the wheel of the big amphibian. The noise of the fugitive plane had disappeared to the north—its pilot evidently nosing toward San Juan.

Another five minutes, at better than a hundred-mile-an-hour clip, and in the moonlit spaces of the upper air, Webb could make out a hazy outline some distance ahead. It was a low-wing monoplane. He’d follow that plane.

Suddenly, however, the amphibian’s engines sputtered, roared, spluttered again, and then died. Out of gas! And yet the fuel gauge showed the tanks half full.

With his mind full of wonder, and feeling more concern for the safety of the expensive plane than for himself, Webb picked out a sheen of water about half a mile ahead. It was a small lagoon, but it would serve the purpose.

He glided the big plane down to the surface of the water. The landing wheels at each side of the boatlike hull served as a brake, and brought him to a stop before the plane’s nose reached the marshy stretch of mangrove roots at the other end of the small lagoon. And Webb was reminded of another occasion, just a few days before, when he had brought a land plane down on the waters of New York’s lower bay. That seemed years ago, for plenty had happened since then.

WHEN finally gasoline had been carried to the ship from the Charlton estate and the amphibian was once more in its hangar, Webb Foster felt glum and dismal, but Charlton was loud in his praise of him.

“Foster,” he said, when the two were back in Charlton’s room, “your presence of mind wasn’t wasted, anyhow. You say it was a low-wing monoplane. Well, that tells me something.

“I guess it’s up to me to give you a few particulars that I didn’t let you know about on board the *Coamo*. I told you then that there might be danger in the job, and now you can see that trickery is already in the air.

“The man you were chasing was more than a thief—he was a spy. He was after a map that I had locked in my portfolio, in my desk. He almost got away with the map, but not quite, thanks to our unexpected arrival. I have several important maps and charts in my possession—for, as you may have already guessed, our expedition is to be a treasure hunt.”

He smiled at Webb’s evident approval, and added: “But it’s one of the strangest treasure hunts you’ve

ever heard about, I guess. When we get to the island—for it's on an island—I'll tell you all about how I learned of the treasure.

"The greatest secrecy is necessary, of course. This morning I learned that the pilot I had dismissed at New York beat me to San Juan by two days—and has a plane here! It's a low-wing monoplane! That's why your discovery of tonight is important. It centers suspicion."

"But the gas tanks. How about that?"

"An accomplice—that's all. We'll get away from here as soon as possible. The steam yacht will be ready to sail the day we hop off. You see, I am prepared for most anything. We have prepared for many months for just such emergencies."

Webb marveled at the efficiency of the man. This was going to prove genuine adventure—with all the glory and atmosphere of olden-day searches for treasure! There was only one regret in Webb's mind as he turned in that night. Betty Charlton was staying at Porto Rico.

They were ready. Eli Hammond was the first of the party to enter the plane. Charlton sat opposite him, while young Lado, as the relief pilot, sat in the flying compartment beside Webb. A diver was aboard, a chap named Avery.

Webb reached forward, clasped the satiny hand that Betty reached out to him in farewell. She threw them a kiss as the plane skirted along the water, eager for the take-off. It might have been for her father, Webb reflected as he sent the ship off to the southwest. Then again—a part of it might have been for him. He grinned and shrugged.

He had gone over the various charts thoroughly with his employer the night before. The island they sought, which he had named "Biplane Island" because of its shape, was surrounded by knifelike reefs which made the region a graveyard for ships. That had been one reason for the plane. Charlton's yacht was to anchor a mile offshore. Supplies would go in to the island by air.

Somehow, as they flew through the soft-lighted skies, Webb thrilled to the feel of impending danger. The attempted theft of the map might mean that Charlton's enemies knew more than the banker imagined. That meant danger! He repeated the word to himself, thrilling to the prospects that awaited beyond the far horizon.

They flew on quietly for some time. Then Webb began to recognize the worried expression on

Charlton's face. The banker was making figures on scraps of paper—looking anxiously at the maps. He kept glancing at his watch—checking it with the plane's chronometer. Soon after twelve, noon, the banker signaled Webb to take the ship below to the water.

"We may be a bit off our course," he commented as they alighted on the water. "The fog seems to be clearing a bit. We may as well wait and check on our maps.

"We shouldn't be more than fifty miles northeast of Alhaja Island. We'll use that island as a checking point when we go aloft again."

QUIET settled as Webb cut the switches on the two Wasp engines. They began a careful checking on their maps and charts. Suddenly Webb raised his head sharply. Strained forward. A familiar sound pierced his ears.

"Anybody hear anything?" He asked.

Webb answered. "Sounds like the drone of an airplane engine, far off!"

Charlton rose in his seat. Lado and Avery, too, concentrated on picking up the sound. Webb tried to pierce through the mist with his eyes, but could see nothing.

"I thought I heard something," murmured Lado. "Probably imagination, though."

"How about you, Hammond?" queried Webb.

"Must be imagination," declared Hammond. "I didn't hear anything."

In a moment they had dismissed the subject. A few minutes more of checking, and Webb strode back to the pilot's compartment to lift the Sikorsky into the air again. He had decided that Hammond would bear watching. His statement that he hadn't heard a thing had sounded a shade too deliberate. The sound had been faint enough, but Webb was sure that his keen ears had not deceived him.

Shortly after one o'clock, Alhaja Island, the checking point they'd decided on, hove into sight. With the island astern, Webb ruddered eastward. The fog had cleared. The visibility was excellent. There was no sign of other ships in the air or in the skies.

Then the reefs of Biplane Island came into sight!

As the Sikorsky roared nearer, the likeness to a biplane became less pronounced. On one side of the island, a row of palms lent a tropical touch, and circling the island, Webb could make out a tangle of wilderness toward the center. It surrounded a small lagoon. He nosed low, then circled a bit.

He lowered his landing wheels as he struck the water, and taxied the amphibian to the shingle beach which sloped down to meet the waters of the lagoon. A treasure island! Webb was the first to leap out of the plane. Seven short days before, he'd thrilled to the flights of a tiny monoplane back in New York. Now he was setting foot on a genuine treasure island!

He strolled about alone, for a reconnaissance of the island. By the time he had returned to the beach, darkness had set in. He started to walk south toward the camp. He made out the figure of a man, walking northward along the beach. He dimly made out the figure as Eli Hammond.

Suspicious, he watched from behind a large ceiba tree as the man stalked along, giving occasional furtive glances back toward the camp. Eli Hammond might be out only for a stroll of exploration, like himself. But Webb somehow could not trust the man—and he watched closely, crouching low behind his tree.

Webb continued to crouch low as Hammond walked along. Hammond was whistling, but now and then he ceased his melody to tune his whistle into the sound of a bird's call. The bird's call was repeated and repeated. It seemed too deliberate to be anything but a signal.

Was he signaling for him, Webb Foster? Webb doubted it, somehow. He decided to remain in concealment. A moment later he was mentally patting himself on the back for his caution.

For there was an answering whistle. It came from the deep wilderness to the right. Could Eli Hammond have arranged some secret rendezvous for himself and one of the men of the party? Could young Lado, or Avery, the diver, be in league with him in some trickery? But the next moment the answering whistle sounded nearer, and Webb Foster threw himself prone on the ground.

"Hammond?"

It was a voice pitched low in caution. It was the voice of neither young Lado nor Avery, the diver. Some one else, and naturally some one who was an enemy of the Charlton party, was on Biplane Island!

CHAPTER IV SUNKEN TREASURE

THIS, THEN WAS THE ANSWER to the mysterious noise heard through the fog earlier in the day, when the distant sound of a droning propeller had come faintly down to the Sikorsky resting on the quiet waters! Now Webb was certain it was a plane that he had heard. And no wonder that Eli Hammond had affected to believe the noise was "imagination."

What was more, that plane had already landed on Biplane Island, discharged one or more passengers, and was probably on a return trip for more men or more supplies, or both.

All of Webb's suspicions were now verified. Eli Hammond was a crook, ungrateful to the man who had saved his life and the man who befriended him—a low-down traitor, willing to betray his benefactors.

Webb began noiselessly tracking Hammond into the depth of the jungle. Hammond must have known that the plane had landed some one to watch for the Sikorsky and spy upon the Charlton party. Evidently Hammond had been ordered to wander out casually at nightfall, whistle, according to some pre-arranged signal, and confer with Charlton's enemy.

The foliage overhead broke up the moonlight into small strips, but shadowy patches of ground were plentiful. Hammond, once in the jungle, walked along with a sense of self-assurance. Webb trailed him over the carpet of the forest, through masses of purple convolvulus and fragrant frangipani and along toward a spring which trickled musically over ferns.

The answer to Hammond's whistle had been coming nearer, and now two mysterious forms came out of the jungle gloom to a patch of moonlight. Webb saw Hammond join the two figures, then all three sat down beside the spring. But the sound of the trickling water and the rustle of noisy acacia leaves overhead drowned out the gist of their talk. And that talk was most important to overhear.

Webb circled widely and quietly, skirting the trees southward, then snaked along on his stomach directly to the rear of the unsuspecting conspirators. Just how much of importance he had failed to hear he did not

know; but the first thing he did hear threw much light on the strange experiences of the past several days.

"So you tell Wilke not to be getting too careless," Hammond was saying. Webb recalled that Wilke was the name of the pilot whom Charlton had discharged in New York.

"I might have drowned there in New York Bay. He kept too far away with that seaplane."

"But that was for caution," put in a strange voice. "He wasn't supposed to come to the rescue except as a last resort. When he saw that monoplane near you, he took it as a bit of luck. Well, things turned out all the better, as it happened. Old Charlton don't suspect a thing, does he?"

A WAVE of anger surged through Webb Foster. That overturning of the sailboat in New York Bay had been a trick, then! Instead of taking passage in the normal way and running the risk of Charlton's suspicion of sociable strangers, Wilke and Hammond and their gang had doped out a better way to get their spy in the banker's party.

Webb strained his ears to catch every word of the low-pitched conversation.

"In his next trip," came a new voice, "he'll bring three more men. He brought only us two this time, 'cause he carried along a small boat. We got the boat bunked away here in the woods. He'll fly right up to his ceiling when he comes close to the island, and make a dead-stick landin' outside the reef. It'll be after midnight, and them birds up in the camp won't hear him. But we'll know, and we'll row out the boat and bring in our three pals.

"A small boat can make it through them rocks and reefs. Oh, don't worry, boy! Wilke's got a head on him, all right! He's got the right idea—he'll just let these boobs go through with the thing an' find the gold He won't pull any rough stuff till then! But, then! Oh, baby!"

And at Hammond's next words, Webb Foster had fairly to hold himself with great effort to keep from dashing out then and there and throttling the smooth spy.

"Well, it can't come any too soon for me!" was Hammond's comment. "When the split-up comes, I hope Wilke sees all that I've done. I kept these boobs busy to give Gomez a free field to get in and trace the map. All I want is my rightful share.

"And then, with old Charlton out of the way, I'm going to make a play for that daughter of his. She's

some baby!" Webb could hear his heart pounding violently against his ribs. The map traced through Hammond's treachery!

"*With old Charlton out of the way, I'm going to make a play for that daughter of his!*" It was stark, brutal murder they were planning!

He had heard enough. He began easing himself back through a thicket of vines and bushes. At a discreet distance he rose to his feet, broke through to the beach, and ran every inch of the way back to camp.

CHARLTON'S face was pale in the firelight as he listened to the tale of arch treachery. Avery, the diver, had retired for the night, and young Lado, Webb and the banker talked in low tones.

"I'll never regret meeting you, Foster," said Charlton warmly. "And now, what do you suggest?"

"Hang this man Hammond to a tree!" cut in young Lado, his Latin eyes blazing.

"No," said Webb quietly. "He can still be a valuable man to us. From what I overheard, those would-be murderers won't attempt anything until the gold is located. We must put up an innocent front to Hammond, and I'll see if I can't overhear more of their plans. For all we know, they might have spies among the yacht's crew. We might as well know just what we're up against." This plan was finally approved by Charlton. "And now," said the banker, "I'll tell you two fellows what I didn't want to disclose before. You see, if this were an ordinary treasure hunt, I suppose those other fellows would have as much right trying to get the gold as we have. But this is something else again. You will recall when the *Deutschland*, the merchant submarine, came to America with a cargo from Germany. But what you don't know is that Germany sent over another merchant submarine—the *Potsdam*—shortly before the United States entered the war.

"The mission was attended with all secrecy. My bank in New York handled the details of a heavy gold shipment to Germany. The submarine took a circuitous route back to Bremen, for obvious reasons. It struck one of the many reefs about this island, and foundered. Only two of the entire ship's company escaped—and one of these promptly murdered the other. Men will murder for gold.

"The most efficient methods failed to capture the slayer. But after many years, he made a voluntary surrender when he believed the trap was closing about him and he couldn't realize his dream of salvaging the sunken gold for himself.

“By a method too lengthy to explain now, he got in touch with me at my bank. He surrendered, and was willing to give the approximate location of the wreck on condition that his family in Germany received a life annuity. Under the circumstances, this was promised. He paid for his crime, and then I started to organize this expedition.”

“But weren’t you taking unnecessary chances doing it this way?” cut in Webb.

“Couldn’t you have made the expedition public and thoroughly protected?”

Charlton smiled. “That is a logical question,” he replied. “But you see, there is a diplomatic measure involved. Our bank arranged the loan as the institution of a then neutral country, but when the United States entered the World War, we were rather regretful of that loan. And right now any publicity would do harm to our bank, for now we are on the edge of some mammoth deals with governments still antagonistic to Germany. That’s why our treasure hunt is a free-lance venture and highly secret, and why I wouldn’t call in the law and court publicity except as a very last resort.”

Several definite plans had been formed by the trio before Hammond came in sight along the beach, whistling loudly and unsuspectingly.

“Quite an island here, Mr. Charlton,” he observed casually. “I’ve been exploring it.”

A cheerful sort of murderer was this Hammond, thought Webb Foster.

FLYING over the reefs and shoals adjacent to Biplane Island next day, Webb Foster determined upon one thing—to keep Eli Hammond in the cabin with him when he went aloft. When Hammond was in the air, he could execute no treachery on the ground.

Webb circled the odd-shaped island several times. Sometimes he flew high, and sometimes just skimmed the treacherous and reef-studded waters. Lado and Hammond, and Charlton, when he flew with the party, and Avery, the diver, made notes as Webb soared above the coast or swooped low whenever any large, dark object loomed below the sunlit surface.

The plane was proving as useful as Charlton had hoped. Somewhere about Biplane Island was a reef with a fortune in gold shouldering against it.

But how far it was from the coast, none could tell. It might be a hundred yards out, in one of the shallow basins, or it might be ten miles out, in reasonably deep water. It might lie off on one end of the island, or it might lie off the opposite end, or off neither.

Webb combed every foot of the water for the submerged hulk as a fish hawk might comb it for finny food. Ten years and more before, other American pilots had scouted for German submarines filled with torpedoes; now Webb Foster was doing the same thing for a submarine filled with gold.

The second day brought no definite results, but the third day’s aerial scouting proved promising. The search had narrowed to the waters off the southwest tip of the island, where the rocky, wing-like formation sloped down into the sea.

Four miles west of this point, surrounded by restless, creaming water, was a visible reef. It was Charlton’s theory that this reef submerged as it continued shoreward, but connected in some way with the rocky southwestern coast of the island.

This submerged reef, he believed, might have wrecked the U-boat. Additional proof of the treachery of the waters of this section was found in considerable wreckage which had been washed ashore. It was the rotting hulk of a schooner, its timbers battered and splintered by the sea’s fury. A keel of oak that once had been so strongly built into the schooner’s planking was now little more than driftwood.

That the schooner had struck some reef off this point was apparent; that the reef was submerged was likely. But the submarine, down no one knew how many fathoms, would rest where it sank. Only keen eyes from a low-flying airplane on a sunny day might find it. And Webb flew ceaselessly and untiringly over this territory, ranging a wide circle, which he gradually narrowed.

Close to three in the afternoon, lying in shoal water a quarter mile west of the coast, could be discerned a long, narrow shape that might be only a submerged reef, or might, on the other hand, be the foundered submarine. The airplane had located the possibility. Now it was up to Avery, the diver, to investigate it.

From the wreckage on the coast a strong raft was fashioned, Hammond, the traitor, working as busily as the others. The raft was floated, and then towed by the plane to a point near the long object showing darkly in the shoal water.

“You can get your diving togs on, Avery,” suggested Charlton. “Webb, you go up again, and circle right over the spot. It will save us a lot of bother in trailing weights and grapnels below the water.”

AVERY’S first descent was made during the final hour of daylight. He had donned his suit of manganese bronze,

which had the tensile strength of steel. The following day the yacht would arrive with more practical suits for longer work beneath the surface, and considerable above-surface equipment.

But Avery's suit required no equipment of the latter sort, no surface tank or air feeding. The helmet and breastplate were in one piece, attached to the body part of the apparatus with a bayonet lock, and the arms and legs were of hard, rolled, interlocked flexible tubing, in order to allow below-surface freedom for the diver. A caustic-soda apparatus was arranged inside of the armor. By means of this, the carbonic acid formed by the diver's breathing was purified and could be breathed over again. Several tests had shown the suit effective for a minimum of fifteen minutes below the surface.

"All ready, Avery," called Webb as the diver made the final adjustments. Avery was lowered with a loop in the helmet of the armor fastened to a cable, held by the three men on the raft.

Charlton's face was beaming as Avery remained down for several minutes and indication by his tugs on the cable that he was all right and evidently making a thorough examination of what was below. His delay below the surface augured well for the success of the expedition. It looked as if the treasure had been found.

But as Avery finally came to the surface and crawled out on the raft and had his helmet removed, he shook his head determinedly.

"We're on the wrong track," he announced. "It's just a coral reef. Look, these are pieces of the crumbling coral that I broke off."

He handed two or three fragments of the coral to Charlton. Then Avery turned casually toward Hammond.

"Yes, just coral, Hammond," he said. "Here's a piece of it."

Webb saw him hand a piece of coral to Eli Hammond. The latter held the fragment ostentatiously, but Webb could see that he was palming something else in his right hand. Webb affected to turn away. Out of the tail of his eye he saw Hammond's right hand go into his pocket. It came out with a packet of cigarettes and a match.

But had Hammond palmed a piece of gold? And was Avery, too, a traitor?

CHAPTER V THE SPY'S TRAIL

FOSTER CREPT SOFTLY through the inky jungle. He looked at his watch. It was close to one o'clock in the morning. He was supposed to be sleeping soundly, but shortly after midnight a peep into Hammond's tent had shown the traitor missing.

It was the work of only a few moments to dress quickly and trail Hammond toward the rendezvous near the spring.

Halfway through the wildernesses, Webb stopped to listen. Yes, that was the sound of a throttled airplane motor. Wilke must be landing off the other end of the island with his three additional men. There was an interval of silence, and then the sound of the motor again. It grew fainter and fainter. Wilke, the spying pilot, was winging away from the island.

Webb took a chance on being seen by Hammond. Hammond's two accomplices, he assumed, would be out in the small boat to welcome their three new fellow conspirators. Hammond might even be with them. Webb broke through to the beach, ran as fast as he could to within a quarter mile of the spring, then doubled back into the jungle again, and made the rest of the distance slowly and quietly.

He could hear voices, and catch the scent of tobacco. The conspirators were back near their spring rendezvous. Five minutes of careful wriggling along the ground brought Webb within earshot, and, peeping through a cluster of vines, he could see six smudgy forms. If he were caught this time, there would be six enemies to fight.

"Here! Light a match!" came Hammond's voice. "I can prove what I say. It's real gold. Avery said it was a cinch to find. The whole side of the U-boat was ripped wide open by the reef, as clean as a can opener could do it. Charlton hasn't the slightest suspicion, but there's no use of our waiting any longer. We know where the gold is now. And say! Look how it shines!"

In the flare of a match, Webb could see all six men huddled about, looking at the piece of gold. Avery, then, had been brought over to their side.

"But Wilke said to take no chances!" came another booming voice. "Of course, there ain't one chance in a

thousand that the yacht'll escape. But the yacht might get the chance to send out an S.O.S. If that happens, we don't want to be caught here with a murder on our hands. No, when Wilke gets back, and we know we ain't got nothin' to fear from the yacht, that's time enough to give these boobs the works."

"He's sure about the yacht?" asked Hammond anxiously.

"Aw, leave it to Wilke. He had the yacht picked off 'fore he started here from Alhaja Island. It was sixty miles north of Alhaja then. Wilke'll be back there in two hours, easy. The other plane'll have the dynamite aboard. All Wilke's got to do is load his up. By that time the yacht'll be off Alhaja Island, or might near it.

"And say! You're takin' a chance right now, Hammond, by not bein' at the camp. How do you know this Foster guy mightn't take it into his head to fly out to meet the yacht? He could make it in les'n two hours. Say! The best thing you can do is beat it back and fix up that crate of theirs so it can't fly no more than a rabbit!"

A moment later Webb saw Hammond leave the party and cut through the jungle toward the beach.

NOW began the most peculiar kind of a race that Webb Foster had ever engaged in. Behind him were five men who could—and would—murder him if, in hurrying, he made one suspicious sound. Ahead of him was Hammond, who, should he turn and see him, would shout at the top of his lungs and bring the five men to his aid.

Webb must beat the traitor back to the amphibian plane. But he must not be discovered too near the spring—if the Sikorsky was going to be of any use in assisting the threatened yacht. Wholesale murder! That was what the Hammond-Wilke party was willing to do, for gold.

A half hour of nervous trailing through the jungle, and then Webb bore to the right and ran with all speed along the beach toward the camp. A few paces ahead of him he could see Hammond's hastening form.

Webb cut into the jungle again, circled stumblingly through vines and underbrush, once more emerged on the beach, and now could see Hammond a hundred yards or so to his rear. The pilot panted along the final uphill mile, and burst into the tent of Charlton. Between gasps he poured out his story.

"So get the guns ready!" he concluded.

"Wilke's base is at Alhaja Island. He's got nearly an hour's start on us. If he beats us to the yacht by so much as a minute, that yacht is doomed!"

The amphibian was packed with three rifles and a sawed-off shotgun, and each of the three men pocketed an automatic. The engines were not started, however, until Hammond, walking leisurely up the hill, found himself a captive.

"Bind him up!" yelled Webb to the blazing-eyed Lado. "He's coming along! If we go to our death, he's going with us!"

The cowering Hammond was bound tightly and thrown into one of the cabin seats. Then the calm night air was split by the roar of the two powerful Wasp engines, and three minutes later the huge amphibian was in the air, nosing north.

Still panting and perspiring from his exertions of the past hour, Webb kept the plane on her course, flying at five thousand feet. But as the amphibian roared through the black night, low cloud formations began interfering with his vision ahead.

He dropped a thousand feet, leveled out, and then snapped off all lights. The luminous dial of the tachometer told him that he was coaxing every last inch of speed from the ship. On the flight down he had held the craft to a little more than a hundred miles an hour. That had been a pleasure jaunt to an island of treasure. This was a race against time—and, for all he knew, a race to his own funeral. For that strange voice back by the spring had said that there would be two ships in Wilke's bombing party.

Blackness below, flecked with occasional white where shoal water snarled over a reef. Blackness above, and once in a while a dim star winking down through a hole in the clouds. Blackness, the color of death in the cabin, broken only by the luminous tachometer and the radium tinted dial of Webb's wrist watch.

It was one-thirty. In the air a half hour, and sixty-odd miles on his way. A few minutes later and the plane was out of the cloud-shrouded territory and beneath a patch of tropic blue sky powdered with stars. The ocean below had changed from a funeral black to a mass of star-lighted blue, and, just to port, a black hulk loomed.

For one instant Webb turned on his powerful searchlight and swung the beam downward. He was well on his course—the beam disclosed the coral islet that had been the graveyard of a schooner. He had flown over this islet on the way down. And he was now less than an hour from Alhaja Island.

Would he be in time to save the yacht? Had Wilke already reached Alhaja Island, organized his party, and made off toward the yacht?

It was hard to believe what he knew to be true—that this night men should be planning to drop quick death on a harmless party of seamen. But facts were facts. It was no harder to believe, after all, than the thousands of other cases where men had killed ruthlessly—for gold.

Gold! A fortune in gold lay far astern, off Biplane Island. But gold would be of little value to him forevermore if he failed to bring down the enemy planes. Here in the air tonight it was steel, not gold, which would govern his destiny.

In the clouds again; clouds which dropping two thousand feet could not shake off. Then a ceiling of stars again, and Webb's keen vision, unobstructed by the haze of the prop's rotation, picked out the circling beam of the lonely lighthouse on Alhaja Island. Webb went to twelve thousand feet and swung wide of the island. He went into more clouds, and then put the wheel forward and swooped down into clear air.

His heart pounded violently. Off of his port wing, a few hundred feet below his own level, he could make out the wing lights of a pair of airplanes. A few miles north of the island there was a glow through the thin mist—the lights of the yacht! He could beat the two enemy planes to the yacht. But then what?

He knew that the enemy planes had no knowledge of his nearness. His every light was doused. The two enemy planes flew in close formation, their lights on, doubtless, to avoid any chance of collision, at this, their moment of triumph.

After all, they had no reason to hide their lights—the only one to see them in these uncharted waters would be a lonely lighthouse keeper, who could never guess the reason for their presence. And the men on the yacht would hardly take them for potential murderers. When they found out differently, it would be too late. Dead men told no tales.

Now Webb felt a tap on his shoulder, and heard Charlton's voice:

"Fly as low as possible over the yacht. I've written them a note, telling them briefly what's what and ordering them to douse their lights. Lado, Senior, is aboard, and he knows my handwriting. I've wrapped a hammer in the note, and I've got a second note ready in case I miss the deck with the first."

NOW the lighted outline of the yacht could be plainly seen. Webb flew toward the vessel, circled it, and dropped low. He saw the note-wrapped hammer drop from the cabin, and a moment later the doused

lights of the yacht told him that Charlton had made a direct hit.

And now Webb had banked and turned back toward the two lighted planes. He pulled back the wheel and climbed. Lado and Charlton had their rifles at their shoulders. And then, as if one hand had snapped the button, the lights on both enemy planes went out!

What did it mean? Did it mean that the two enemy pilots were simply taking a precautionary measure in flying over the yacht? Or did it mean that they had seen the amphibian outlined in the mast lights of the yacht as Webb circled over the vessel?

The answer came in half a minute—emphatically. It came in a burst of bullets from the leading enemy plane, which, Webb could see, was a low-wing monoplane. Probably Wilke himself was in that plane.

The monoplane went into a steep zoom as there was a burst from the rifles of Lado and Charlton—evidently a harmless burst, for the monoplane looped all the way around and was now farthest from the yacht. It was one of the best shots at the monoplane that could be hoped for. What was the matter? Were Charlton and young Lado poor shots? Webb knew that Charlton had been a big-game hunter. Probably Lado was the poor shot, and could be used to better advantage at the wheel.

A second later Webb had swung the wheel over to Lado, and had taken the young Porto Rican's rifle. The enemy monoplane was shrouded in the darkness for a moment or so, but then Webb could make out its shadowy form ranging toward his right wing. Racing toward the yacht was the ghostly outline of a seaplane. The seaplane was running away from the air fight. For what purpose?

Webb Foster was only too certain that he knew! One charge of dynamite, dropped by the seaplane on the yacht's deck, and then both enemy planes could turn upon the amphibian and blast it from the skies. He saw the seaplane circle about the vessel and swing low.

Lado also must have guessed the seaplane's intention, for he had already ruddered toward the yacht, and was streaking after the seaplane.

A crimson stream of rifle, fire from the shadowy monoplane to the right rattled into the amphibian, and Webb's rifle was knocked out of his hands. It had been a close call, but in an instant he had snatched up the shotgun, and, knowing that seconds counted, was aiming it at the seaplane, now directly over the yacht.

As he pulled the trigger, he saw a dark missile drop from the seaplane's cabin. Dynamite! And if it hit the yacht—

There was a deafening roar, a pall of smoke, and the amphibian fairly quivered and rocked with the currents, like a small boat on a stormy sea.

CHAPTER VI SKY KILL

FOR ONE TERRIBLE INSTANT, as his head buzzed and his ears rang and the amphibian continued to rock with the thunder of the explosion, Webb Foster believed that he had failed in his mission. He believed that the yacht had been destroyed—and the men murdered *en masse*. But only for an instant.

He saw Charlton on his feet, gesticulating wildly—and joyously. What had happened suddenly became clear enough to him now. Peering below in the darkness, Webb could still see the black hulk of the unlighted yacht, its funnels belching smoke. The yacht was still there! And though he could scarcely believe his eyes, he knew that the seaplane was gone. Had vanished entirely.

Bits of wood and fabric were floating in the air. Webb's shotgun charge had made a direct hit. One or more of the bullets in that charge had detonated the bomb carried by the seaplane and had blown the seaplane and its crew to bits. Webb felt a sudden surge of optimism. It was one against one now.

Yet somehow his optimism faded. His chances were hardly even yet. The remaining ship, the low-wing monoplane, had the advantages of maneuverability over his own heavy amphibian. If it could get its cargo of dynamite above the amphibian—and drop it—then Webb Foster and his two companions would nevermore be concerned with treasure quests or other earthly projects.

Now Webb could see the monoplane ruddering speedily away from the yacht. Possibly its pilot thought that the bullet that had done for the seaplane had come from that quarter. Thank Heaven for that, anyhow, thought Webb.

He dropped his shotgun, crawled back into the pilot's compartment, and motioned Lado to swing the wheel over to him.

Once more in charge of the controls, he gunned the amphibian directly between the yacht and the monoplane. The latter, he could see, had banked and turned, and now was streaking toward him again, twisting and zooming and diving like a snipe over a marshland.

From its cockpit came another burst of lead that shattered the amphibian's instrument board. A scream sounded back of Webb. He could not as much as look back, however, at the moment. The little monoplane was outmaneuvering him; it had rolled clean over him, sending down a charge of death as it went, and now was all but over the yacht.

Webb saw a dark missile fall from its cockpit, and land, it seemed squarely on the vessel's deck.

Webb waited for the explosion, and then his heart leaped hopefully. For there was no explosion, except a burst of rifle fire from the yacht's deck, which caused the monoplane's pilot to zoom his ship, and then wing over to avoid a second burst.

But why hadn't that bomb exploded? Webb could have sworn that it had hit the yacht's deck. For just a fraction of a second, as he sailed the amphibian over the yacht, he snapped on his searchlight and shot a bright finger of light down on the vessel.

GOOD men on that yacht! In the bow there were several seamen with rifles to their shoulders; in the waist of the ship were four other men, holding the corners of an outspread tarpaulin in the air. No fools, and no cowards, those seamen! The searchlight's flash had shown how once more they had staved off disaster—they had caught the monoplane's deadly missile in the tarpaulin and kept it from exploding. Then, just before Webb snapped off the searchlight, he saw one of the seamen gingerly pick something from the center of the tarpaulin, and heave it overside into the black water.

The monoplane, then, had failed in its purpose of bombing the yacht, but it was still very much in the fight. It banked and turned, maneuvered back toward the vessel, and let fall another weight of dynamite.

A white splash, a scant yard from the ship's rail, told Webb that the charge of death had missed—probably because of a burst of shotgun fire from Charlton, who had fired as the monoplane winged within range. The burst had caused the monoplane's pilot to careen out of range and doubtless had affected the bomber's aim.

AS WEBB maneuvered away from the yacht, he almost crashed the swift monoplane which had once

more turned back into the fight. Another crimson stream of rifle fire poured from its cockpit straight into the amphibian, and Webb felt a burning pain in his right arm. He gunned his plane in a wide circle, and gritted his teeth on account of the pain. But in his heart was a feeling of impending triumph.

He felt certain now that the monoplane had unloaded its entire supply of bombs—for now the monoplane was centering its attack upon the Sikorsky, and was paying no more attention to the yacht.

Lado, seeing that he had been wounded, motioned Webb to swing the wheel over to him, and Webb did so. Now, for the first time since the scream in the amphibian's cabin, he had a chance to look back, and what he saw was little or no surprise.

Hammond was silently crumpled on the cabin floor. Webb's face was grim. The traitor had been caught in his own trap. A bullet from the monoplane had killed him.

But this was no time for Webb to ponder over a traitor's reward. The monoplane was crowding in now, showing a definite tendency to crash deliberately. And that monoplane pilot—Webb had to admit it—was an expert. And the swift monoplane was much easier to maneuver than the heavy amphibian.

Webb was thinking quickly. His wounded arm was throbbing painfully, and the monoplane was darting about him like an angry hornet. It was no use trying to outstunt this darting sky demon.

But the amphibian, he believed, could outspeed it. Once more he motioned for the wheel, and as it was swung over to him, gunned his ship toward the south. The yacht was safe from the bombs now, and its crew could fight rifle fire with rifle fire. The chances were that the monoplane would give chase to the amphibian—which was just what the monoplane did. It looked as though the amphibian, built for passenger flights and not for battle, was discreetly running away from the fiery little monoplane, with its steel-shell fuselage and superior maneuverability. And that was how Webb Foster wanted it to look. But Webb Foster had not flown nearly two hundred miles that night to find a battle—and then lose it.

THE monoplane's pilot was making a desperate effort to cut off the amphibian's apparent retreat. It flew down slantingly at full gun, and bullets from its rear cockpit whistled over the amphibian—a few hailing against struts and wires.

But now the big plane was putting space between

itself and its deadly pursuer. Webb's gaze was concentrated on a patch of filmy cloud, seemingly a couple of miles away and about five thousand feet above him. If he could make the shelter of this cloud—well, he had a real plan in his mind.

The monoplane was roaring along in his wake, but the amphibian was already pulling well away from it. Webb yelled instructions to Lado. The young Porto Rican and Charlton were to reload the rifles and the shotgun, and to have them ready for a surprise coup.

Webb saw his companions working feverishly at the firearms. A moment later he shot directly into the cloud, and found it as dark as the inside of a coal mine.

Once within the cloud's protecting blackness, Webb flew full gun through it, but when he emerged at the south end of the cloud, he did not continue straight on. That was what the monoplane's pilot would expect him to do; therefore, that was the one thing not to do.

The cloud still veiled Webb, although he was out of it. It continued to veil him as he banked and turned, and then zoomed his ship to a point almost parallel with the top rim of the cloud. His keen eyes were boring into the darkness below. When his pursuer raced through the cloud he would believe that the amphibian had winged straight on. That would be his pursuer's mistake, thought Webb, as his lips tightened.

He continued to circle about the south end of the cloud till he saw the monoplane's propeller boring through into the clear air. Then Webb dived his ship. The whirling prop of the unsuspecting monoplane was so close that Webb had to jerk back into a sharp zoom to avoid being crashed. As he pulled back the wheel, he heard the reports of his companion's firearms.

Charlton, with the sawed off shotgun, had taken careful aim at the monoplane's propeller. And as the monoplane lurched, Webb knew that his employer had made a perfect hit. For the monoplane was careening over and falling with a shattered prop. The pursued had turned into the pursuer and had made use of the element of surprise.

WEBB shot his wheel forward, and nosed into the wake of the falling monoplane. He could see the pilot in the front cockpit desperately lighting at the controls to level out his ship; then, this attempt evidently proving futile, he could see the pilot stepping out: on the cowl.

He saw a body hurl itself out into space—then the silken arch of a parachute mushroomed out as the monoplane fell like a plummet. The pilot was taking

a last chance with his chute-pack and letting his rifleman in the rear cockpit make the best of it.

Webb turned on his searchlight. The figure in the parachute was floating down—down to the white water that foamed and lashed about the rocky coast of Alhaja Island. It was the end of a persistent enemy—a vicious, but not uncourageous man. That the monoplane's pilot had been the villainous Wilke himself, Webb felt certain.

Webb snapped on the lights of the amphibian. Charlton was dancing on the cabin floor and patting him on the back, but once more Webb took the wheel and looked at the altimeter. The amphibian was up two thousand feet. He turned its nose north and trained its searchlight in that direction. The long white shaft of light picked out the yacht, still steaming south, and a couple of moments later Webb was over the vessel, had circled it, and was bringing the amphibian down to the water about a hundred yards away from it.

As he taxied toward the boat, there was a hail from the deck. It was the voice of the senior Lado.

"Is it all right? Did you get them all?" came the voice.

"You bet we got 'em all!" was Charlton's reply.

"I'll have the skipper heave to," came Lado's voice again, and they could hear the Porto Rican agent yelling instructions to the skipper to halt the vessel.

And when they had taxied to the side of the now lighted yacht, the elder Lado came down a rope ladder and into the plane.

"I don't believe I ever want to go through anything like that again!" said the Porto Rican fervently. "And, under the circumstances, Mr. Charlton, I hope you'll forgive me. We had a stowaway on the yacht. We didn't discover her till this noon—when it was too late to turn back."

"Her?" repeated Charlton.

"Me, dad!" came a voice from the deck. "I just had to come—but I never thought it would be as exciting as this." Joshua Charlton sank back weakly to the seat of his wicker chair.

"Betty!" he yelled. "My heavens! Betty! Of all the—"

He broke off abruptly. He seemed totally incapable of further speech for the moment.

BUT Webb Foster was climbing out of the plane's cabin through the hatchway in the top and was making for the rope ladder. He had just been the victor in a thrilling air fight against heavy odds. The evening had been a decided success. And the one remaining element to make it a perfect success, in his opinion, was the presence of Betty Charlton.

The gold, he knew, would be easy to get now. With Hammond dead, and Wilke, the leader also gone, it would be a simple job to overpower the other conspirators left on the island. Yes, the hundreds of bars of gold in the sunken submarine would soon be stowed away in the hold of the yacht; but there was something else that Webb was far more interested in.

It was this golden-haired girl whose life he had saved in those thrilling but terrible moments of air conflict. Webb Foster felt in his heart that he and Betty Charlton had been destined to meet ever since that moment, days before, when he had plunged his little monoplane into the chill waters of New York harbor.

And later, under soft tropic skies, he learned that she felt the same way about it. He was a flyer of fortune, indeed, for the air lanes of adventure had brought him treasure of two different kinds.