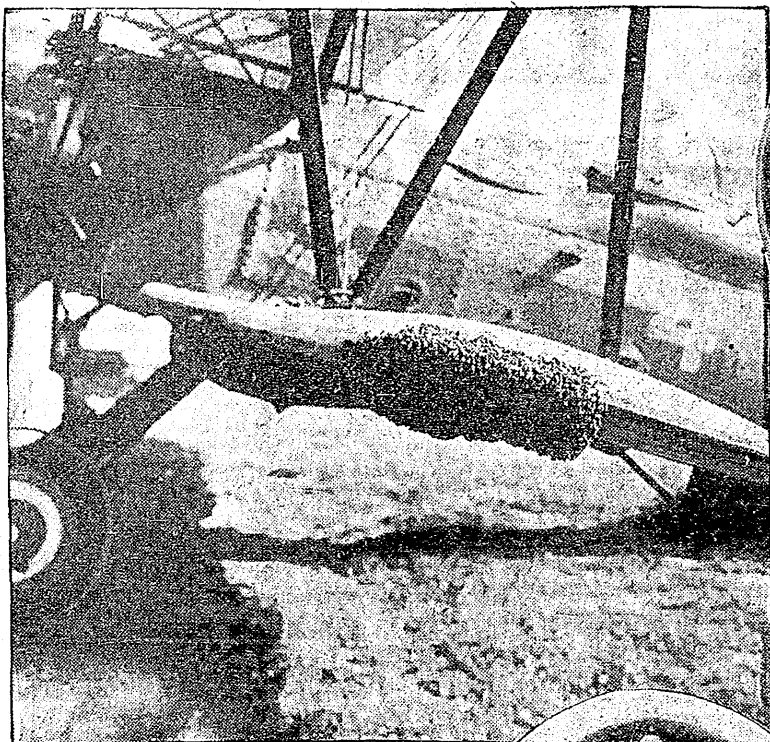


Freak Thrills of Uncle Sam's "Sky Birds"

Attacked by Angry Honeybees, Overcome by Carbon Monoxide, Upside Down and Unable to Right Your Plane—Just a Few of the Dilemmas That Would Test the Nerve of an Iron Man—Until Lady Luck Intervenes



During the Air Corps exercises at Mather Field, Sacramento, Calif., a swarm of thousands of honeybees settled on the wing of one of the planes

By James Nevin Miller

DARING duels with death are commonplace in the lives of American army and navy fliers. Almost daily freak adventures occur high up in the skies where lives can be saved only through remarkable skill, unusual courage, quick thinking, and the fickle favor of Lady Luck. And yet fatal accidents are exceedingly rare!

Most of these almost unbelievable adventures are deadly serious, but occasionally one happens that is strikingly funny. Take the case of a United States Army birdman who, not long ago, was mysteriously attacked by thousands of angry honeybees. The events of this queer near-tragedy occurred during recent Air Corps exercises at Mather Field, Sacramento, Calif., when Uncle Sam's "Red" and "Blue" armies of the air were fighting for mythical supremacy.

When Lieutenant S. J. Simonton went out to his plane he found that thousands of bees had, for some strange reason, settled on one of the lower wings. The wingtip was literally black with the weevil stingers and a veritable curtain of them hung down almost to the ground.

What to do was the question. But a solution was not long in forthcoming. Captain L. A. Smith, commanding the Eighth Attack Squadron, taxied his ship directly in front of the beleaguered plane and, setting the brakes, gave the bees the benefit of a 150-mile-an-hour gale. The breeze from the whirling propeller scattered the bees all over Mather Field.

HOWEVER, the excitement was not over just yet. When Lieutenant Simonton returned from his flight with the squadron some three hours later and taxied back to his parking place, the entire swarm of bees was on hand to greet him. A few seconds after the plane was in place all the insects had taken up their quarters again under the stabilizer on the tail of the ship.

Now, Lieutenant Simonton thought, this was carrying a joke too far. So he consulted straightway with authorities and after a weighty caucus it was decided to send to Sacramento for a bee expert. One Alf Erickson, reputed to know all the bees in Sacramento by their first names, volunteered his services.

According to an official army writer who reported this important matter, the bees followed him back to Sacramento in a quite docile manner, and the queen bee herself blushed with embarrassment at the proper scolding Alf delivered to her.

"No harm was done except that Lieutenant Simonton's name was immediately changed to 'Honeyboy,' by which pseudonym the United States Air Corps will henceforth know him. Why the bees singled out this particular plane for their concerted attack no one seems to know, but the chances are that some was, or a 'spy' in the employ of the 'Red' army, conceived the idea of putting one of the planes out of the running by smearing honey or molasses on the wing."

Lieutenant F. L. Baker, United States Navy, recently had two freak thrills during one never-to-be-forgotten flight while engaged in bombing tests from a fighting plane. At 5000 feet he went into a vertical dive, when suddenly a large mass of red-hot gasoline struck him full in the face.

Whereupon the battle for life began in deadly earnest. Seconds later a terrific explosion rocked the cockpit, followed by a sizable blaze. There was only one thing for Lieutenant Baker to do and he did it. He explains: "I went over the side head first, then found the ripcord and pulled it. The chute functioned perfectly."

Noting that he now was over water, the flier, when he got within a couple of hundred feet of the surface, unstrapped his chute harness and inflated his rubber life jacket. But soon he found, to his alarm, that his shoulders were caught in the chute harness.

It was while attempting to disengage himself that the officer had his second, and probably his biggest, thrill of the day. Unwittingly he tipped over his parachute seat, with the result that from a height of at least 100 feet he found himself diving head first at tremendous speed toward the water. During this unscheduled stunt he turned over twice



Captain R. C. Blessley, of the United States Army Air Corps, was catapulted from his acrobatic plane like a stone from a small boy's slingshot

but nevertheless hit the water in a perfect dive! Fortunately, immediate rescue was at hand in the form of a destroyer towing the target at which Lieutenant Baker had been aiming a few moments earlier during bombing practice.

AN EXCEEDINGLY strange instance of an airplane pilot being overcome by carbon monoxide poisoning during flight culminated in some thrilling experiences for his companion in his efforts to take over the controls of the plane to avert death for both men.

Two student officers of the aerial photography class of the Air Corps Technical School, Chanute Field, Rantoul, Ill., were taking photos at an altitude of 12,000 feet over Chicago when the photographer sensed that the plane suddenly went into a steep dive. Upon going forward to confer with the pilot regarding the unusual behavior of the plane, the photographer, Lieutenant James S. Olive, Jr., found his companion, Lieutenant Philip D. Coates, in an unconscious condition. He had fallen forward in his seat, his shoulders pressing the control stick forward, with the result that the plane was diving crazily at a speed of about 170 miles an hour!

Vigorously shaking the pilot in an endeavor to arouse him from his stupor and finding this vain, Lieutenant Olive grasped Lieutenant Coates and held his unconscious form back into the seat, reaching forward with his right hand while standing behind the seat. Straining on the control stick, the photographer brought the plane back to a fairly reasonable speed, but in so doing lost about 3000 feet of altitude over Chicago and

was heading toward Lake Michigan.

Unfortunately, it was impossible for Lieutenant Olive to reach the rudder bar so as to effect a change in the plane's direction. He tried to remove Lieutenant Coates from the seat, but the latter's feet were extended and hooked over the rudder bar, which prevented Lieutenant Olive from reaching it. Every time Lieutenant Olive released his hold on the pilot, Lieutenant Coates would slump against the control stick. And each time the photographer hauled the pilot back and released his own hold on the stick, the plane would go into a sharp zoom.

Finally, through almost superhuman effort, Lieutenant Olive managed to pull back the rear section of the pilot's seat and place Lieutenant Coates in a prone position. Even then, being unable to reach the rudder, he was forced to straddle his companion's prostrate form, turning and flying the plane toward Chanute Field at 6000 feet altitude with the aid of the stick only, standing in this awkward position and, in addition, holding Lieutenant Coates' head in his other hand near an open air vent. This lasted about forty-five minutes, when Lieutenant Coates began to revive.

After Lieutenant Coates became fairly rational, he tried to fly the ship, but failed to regain sufficient consciousness or sense of co-ordination. Lieutenant Olive removed him from the pilot's seat as soon as enough strength had returned to accomplish this and placed him in the rear compartment of the plane, where he suffered acute nausea.

With the controls at his command, Lieutenant Olive flew the ship to Chanute Field and landed. At this time Lieutenant Coates had regained most of his normal faculties, and while suffering tremors and nausea, was able to talk and walk to the hospital, where he was cared for by the flight surgeon.

UPON investigation, it was found that Lieutenant Coates had suffered a serious attack of carbon monoxide poisoning, due to an unusual break in the exhaust line leading through a heater jacket, allowing exhaust gases to fill the interior of the plane immediately around the pilot. The photographer was not affected by the fumes, since he had been taking photos through an opening in the floor of the plane and had been breathing only fresh air.

Probably acrobatic fliers have more thrills than those in any other branch of the service. Captain R. C. Blessley,



While diving crazily at the rate of 170 miles an hour, Lieutenant James S. Olive, Jr. (right) rescued his pilot, Lieutenant Philip D. Coates, after the latter had been overcome by monoxide gas poisoning

Air Corps, while practicing acrobatic maneuvers eighteen miles west of Selfridge Field, Michigan, several weeks ago, found himself unable to bring his plane out of an inverted, or upside down, spin. He was leading his squadron in formation practice, preparing for Air Corps maneuvers on the East coast, and was performing what is known as the Immelmann, or 180-degree, turn. During this death-defying maneuver the ship is pulled upward and over on its back as in the start of a loop. Instead of completing the loop, however, the plane, from the upside down position, is then rolled over right side up.

Captain Blessley got his ship over on its back all right. But from then on things went "haywire," the plane going into an outside spin, which in aeronautical terms means that the pilot is on the outside of the turn, centrifugal force tending to throw him away from the plane and against his safety belt. This fact is borne out by the manner whereby Captain Blessley got away from the plane, for immediately upon unbuckling his safety belt, which by the way proved no easy thing to do, he was literally catapulted out of the craft. Indeed, he was thrown out of the ship like a pellet from a small boy's slingshot. Counting three, Captain Blessley released his safety belt, causing the silken folds of his chute to billow out from behind him and let him gently down upon the roof of a barn, from which perch he promptly fell off, causing no more damage than a slightly sprained ankle. Not more than 100 yards distant he could see the once graceful single-seater pursuit plane, now reduced to a piece of junk.

BUT if it's sheer drama you like, then imagine yourself in the place of Miss Rosalie Gordon, former mascot of the Air Corps flying field at Brooks Field, Texas, who jumped from a plane at a height of 4000 feet to find her chute held fast by shrunken ropes which caused her body to dangle helplessly in the air held only by a small rope the size of an electric light cord.

For more than half an hour Miss Gordon dangled in this perilous position, during which time no fewer than thirteen planes tried to come to her aid. But let Miss Gordon, now Mrs. Fred Lund, tell her own thrilling story.

"I was mascot of the Thirty-sixth Division, Air Service, and in an exhibition to be given I offered to do a parachute jump. I had been wing-walking several years, but this was to be my first jump. Just before I went up it rained heavily, causing the ropes holding the ring of

the parachute to shrink so that the ring could not release the bag.

"Clyde Pangborn was piloting the plane when I went up and Captain Milton Gorton sat in the cockpit with me when I made the jump. When the plane had ascended to a height of a little more than 4000 feet the signal was given and I jumped. It was pouring rain.

"After one terrible moment I realized that my chute hadn't opened. I was possessed of panic for a few minutes. This was replaced by the realization that I must do all possible to save my life. Meantime, Captain Gorton leaned over and began hauling up the rope. But his strength proved inadequate and he was forced to release the rope, and I dropped down again.

"WHEN Pilot Pangborn dived for the ground and took me across the field about eighteen feet from the ground to appeal for help. Soon thirteen planes in all, one carrying Freddie Lund, my teacher (and now my husband), took to the air in the attempt to rescue me. All these ships circled about me, but it seemed there was nothing they could do. Lieutenant Strickland, one of the newcomers in a relief plane, evolved a plan whereby he would fly his ship into the Houston Channel, land in the water and then have my pilot cut me loose, allowing me to drop into the water, when Lieutenant Strickland would pick me up. But I refused this plan, for I am deathly afraid of the water.

"However, not everybody understood the cause of my predicament. Freddie Lund, flying by in another plane, held a knife in his hand with which he planned to sever the small rope that supported my body in its helpless dangle. Very quickly I signaled with my hands the position of my parachute and he then tossed the knife to me. I missed it by about two inches. Had I caught it, I would have attempted to cut the small rope around the top of the spreader bar. With one foot dangling while Captain Gorton sat in the same manner on the other side with a foot dangling, I caught hold of the toes of both shoes.

"After I was lifted to the spreader bar I was asked if I was able to crawl up into the cockpit. I found my strength unequal to this additional tax upon it. So Captain Gorton and I hung onto the landing gear, while Clyde Pangborn returned to the cockpit and took over the controls from Freddie Lund, while Freddie crawled into the front. We landed after forty-three minutes of the most trying ordeal any of us had ever experienced."

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