

1929

The First Million Miles

DENSE fog raced down the wintry North Atlantic coast, like clouds of gray venom spat from the teeth of the northeast gale it was trailing from Halifax to Hatteras. The sea, the land and the sky were blended, and surface craft came to a standstill—or crept at best. For the young mail pilot caught two thousand feet aloft, however, there was vouchsafed neither the comfort of anchors nor the guidance of shining rails past green semaphores.

For him a world of form and order had suddenly ceased to exist; he was lost in a blanched chaos. More than two hours ago he had left Washington and bucked his way northward in a frail airplane which even the army had branded and tossed aside as obsolete after the then recent Armistice. He had deserted the railroad tracks west of the Amboys and sliced across the Raritan and lower Staten Island toward the makeshift terminal of the early air mail which was at Belmont Park race track on Long Island. He had seen the menacing wall of mist swirling toward him, and he had tried to race it. The fog won. The last familiar thing he had glimpsed before he was blanketed was the Narrows, far below.

Oh, well, he wasn't particularly alarmed. He was young, but the wisdom of hundreds of flying hours was in his brain, and the experience of years—even in 1918 he was a veteran—rode in his cockpit. He would stay high enough for the present to cheat the clawing smokestacks of Brooklyn; then, when he figured he had reached the clear in the vicinity of the track he would feel for the ground and, no doubt, see enough to enable him to squeeze down, somehow. Meanwhile, he'd fly by compass.

Compasses Are Like That

With a bit of a smile for the zest of the adventure he turned his eyes from their purposeless joust with the fog and fixed them upon his compass. They nearly jumped in horror from his head, for the compass was spinning . . . spinning . . . spinning . . .

Compasses are like that; very rough air may jolt the needle from its patient regard of the north; its swings will be-

come wider and wider, until at last it is circling the dial, slowly, like an uncertain old horse caught underneath a goblet. Fighting to steady his nerves, the young pilot decided to nose down for a cautious look at the ground to enable him to reorient himself. He broke from the fog, almost to collide with a ghostly ship. The last ship he had seen before the fog smothered him had been broadside to his flight path. He was going in the same direction as this one!

That pilot knew for the first time

It would take you four lifetimes of ordinary motoring to cover a million miles. Hamilton Lee had gone that far when he was barely over thirty. Now he's half through his second million. He's a man of the new epoch, a product of aerial transportation. Here's his story

By W. B. Courtney



Hamilton Lee, who has flown over a million and a half miles without a serious crash

Boeing Air Transport, Inc.

what a cold sweat was like as he pulled back up into the murk. He had none of the cockpit marvels of today to help him; no turn- and bank-indicator, whose bubble would run out to show him a low wing and a turn when he thought he was level and true. No artificial horizon to make up for the lost real one. Only a tachometer, whose indication of the gain or loss of engine revolutions would hint when he was diving or climbing. Only that and nothing more except flying instinct—which is a paltry and unreliable substitute for science.

The boy wet his lips and steeled himself to an eternity of minutes through which he flew what his senses said was

a bee line for the home field, until his calculation of time told him he should have reached there. Then he throttled the motor and sneaked down through the fog, trying to surprise the ground. It surprised him instead when it turned out to be an oily swell of sea-water leaping for his wheels. He was far off the coast.

He climbed again, and now his mind was reeling like the compass needle. He blundered on.

Thus he seesawed through the fog, up and down, now over water, now over land, for thirty-five minutes.

His gas supply, already heavily taxed by a long fight with the head wind, was

running out and left but a few minutes of grace when he finally spied a crowded shore line. He went up again for safety and flew briefly inland. This time, when he came down, there was an open field below his wheels, but when he tried to turn into the wind he lost the field and was as badly off as ever. Next he found a cemetery; the visibility, somehow, was a little better here and he circled, trying to get up courage enough to pancake among the tombstones. But he hadn't the heart for it, and poked away into the fog once more.

A Veteran Is Scared

His engine started to sputter. He came down and sped along not fifty feet above the blurred earth until he saw a mite of a clearing between houses. There was no turning into the wind; he settled to the ground just as his motor died away. His prop stopped turning and his ship stopped rolling simultaneously, and not more than six feet from a tree.

"That," says E. Hamilton Lee, senior air-mail pilot not only of the United States but of the world, and the man who has flown more than any other human being, "is just about the closest I

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ever came to a serious crash, and it plumb scared me. I sat in that old Jenny and shook for five minutes before I could wish enough strength into my arms and legs to pull me out of the cockpit. I almost collapsed when I stood on the ground; and when I got to the nearest house and called the field at Belmont on the phone I was so nervous I could scarcely talk. They sent a truck from the field for the mail and me, and first thing next morning they pulled the old army custom of checkmating air-shyness by sending me right back into the air with the southbound mail. I give you my word, I shook all the way to Washington, and all the way back again; and I shook for half a dozen round trips after that."

You might be surprised to hear a confession of fear from the man who holds a record of "firsts" which no one will ever be able to take away from him. In years to come many people will each fly more than a million and a half miles; more than 14,000 hours. But Hamilton Lee will live in aviation history as the first man to have spent 10,000 hours of his life in the air; to have traveled a million miles off the ground. Now he is far ahead of even that record, and none of his contemporaries in active flying today are anywhere near him. You are due for more than one surprise, however, when you meet Lee.

(Continued on page 58)

"AS I WUZ SAYIN'"

MY IDEA
OF A DESIRABLE
MALE MATE



"Lon Moon has jest returned from Europe where his wife wuz gatherin' material for her club paper entitled, 'Can French women teach us anything?'"

"Things look purty bad, says Lon. You can't git a good cigar in London fer less'n a quarter."

"An' in Paris they ain't fit ter smoke at any price."

"The result is that the nations git irritable an' suspicious."

"What Europe needs today is a good rickel cigar, same as we did before we had rocky fords."

"If our government would ship 'em enuff rocky fords, it 'ud be a whole lot better'n joining the World Court."

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WHEN IT'S GOT THE STUFF
Lorillard Co., Inc., . . . A NICKEL'S ENOUGH

The First Million Miles

Continued from page 13

You expect frosted blue eyes or steely gray ones; but his are dark, warm and lively. You are prepared to shake hands with another of those lean, long, spare Nordics whose somber faces and cold reserve suggest contemplation of heroic horizons which are beyond your normal ken. You meet, instead, a vivacious fellow with a country twang to his soft voice, who can easily become what your Aunt Mathilda used to call a chatterbox. The only striking and distinctive physical characteristic about him is the involuntary swiftness of his movements, his deftness with his hands and feet. You get the impression that there is no weight to his body, and you begin to understand his cockpit "touch"—it's the same thing that in a horseman is called "sweet hands."

The Dizzy Chair

Fourteen thousand hours in the air! One million, five hundred thousand miles! When only a handful of the earth's total population have ever permitted their feet to be lifted from its surface at all! You can better appreciate the magnitude of Lee's achievements if you think of them in terms of your own daily life. I have read somewhere that the average pleasure automobile owner drives only about 10,000 miles each year. Well, at that rate, after you've been driving one hundred years you'll still have fifty years of plugging ahead of you before you can catch up to Lee's present mileage record.

He has flown three round trips to the moon, and is now thousands of miles away from the earth on the going half of his fourth trip!

Theoretically, of course. Actually, he is very busy shuttling trimotor passenger ships and single-motored mail planes, fair weather and foul, over the 486 prosaic miles of his lap of the Boeing Line, from Omaha, Nebraska, to Chicago, at the rate of sixty-five hours, or thirteen trips, a month.

Although he is only about thirty-six, his career, of course, is rooted in aviation antiquity; he learned to fly in one of the earliest types of pusher planes.

His wings had the sturdiness of two years' growth when, in 1917, the United States Army found itself with a war on its hands and sent out a hasty call for civilian veteran flyers to instruct its fledglings. Lee, a grizzled veteran of twenty-one, responded. He had seen America from the air, and wanted to see Europe; but suffered, instead, the common fate of our best native flyers of 1917 in being kept on the instruction stages of the nation's flying fields. He taught aerobatics at Ashburn Field in Chicago; at Chanute Field, in Rantoul, Illinois; at Selfridge Field, in Mt. Clemens, Michigan, and at Ellington Field, in Houston, Texas.

Someone had come along with the revolving-chair test. This did not simulate flight conditions, but it served to make its victims dizzy. The doctors, handicapped by a lack of knowledge and precedent and by insufficient time for prolonged experimentation, did the best they could under the press of circumstances and fabricated an elaborate theory of what a normal man's reactions should be to the chair-spinning. Many of the applicants got sick, and this was considered right and proper. The students selected under this theory got through the primary instructions all right, in most instances, but were killed off in alarming numbers when they reached the acrobatic stage. The flight doctors, puzzled and worried, summoned

Lee from his instruction work and asked him to submit to the chair-spinning test.

He did so, and his reactions were exactly opposite to those which the doctors' theories had reckoned normal. The upshot was a new card of theories, and fatalities fell off in the acrobatic stages on the country's flying fields.

The Armistice found Lieutenant Lee still at Ellington patiently telling cadets to "dive her a little to gain speed, then pull her up and over fast, and don't forget to shut your motor off when you're at the top or you'll dive like hell and maybe suddenly find yourself flying better wings in a better world!" Lee remembered the great new novelty with which the Post Office Department had just begun to experiment between Washington and New York—air mail. He applied for a job, and was hired by telegraph.

Hamilton Lee stayed on that experimental air-mail line for two years and he can keep you fascinated for hours with tales of its trials and tribulations and of the characters who flew it. "They were the Daniel Boones, the Kit Carsons and the Davy Crocketts of aviation," he says, "the men who recklessly carried out to all the frontiers of daily life the work of fathers of aviation like the Wrights. They hated discipline; they knew that the average life of a pilot was only a few months and they lived accordingly. They were as temperamental as opera singers. Some wouldn't fly when they passed a load of hay on the way to the airport; others wouldn't fly unless the chief mechanic owned a black cat. There was no system of licensing in those days, and you were never asked whether you could fly. The fact that you applied for the job was recommendation enough. I never had this experience, but I know reliable fellows who swear it happened to them: a man would come up and whisper, 'Say, I've got a job to work on the air mail. Show me how to fly this thing, will you!'"

"It's very different nowadays. It's a cold business proposition and temperament doesn't get you any place except to an employment agency. The pilot is still the most important human equation in aviation, but he's a dignified professional man and not a harum-scarum."

Although it's difficult to get him to commit himself about it beyond a fond smile nowadays, Hamilton Lee's early flying career was as colorful as the next man's, spotted with narrow escapes and high romance—and very useful, withal. He blazed many virgin air trails. He inaugurated the St. Louis to Chicago service, the line which later was to become famous as Lindbergh's run. He also opened the Twin Cities to Chicago service, closed up the longest link in the transcontinental line, Omaha to Chicago, and was one of the pioneers who braved the run over the Alleghenies, from New York to Cleveland.

Pilots on Strike

Before the Washington-New York line flowered into a country-wide network Hamilton Lee was involved in one of the most spectacular events of the early air mail—the first and only strike of pilots.

There flourished in those days, of course, the usual abuses of bureaucratic management. Stupid and autocratic underlings at local points habitually ordered pilots to fly against their own judgment. Office men in Washington, ignorant both of flying and of weather, often issued flight demands upon pilots in New York. Added to this, the flying

equipment was bad and the ground organization worse. Pilots, in consequence, were being sent up to their deaths. Resentment and fear mounted among the survivors. No man knew who would be the next to crash; but it was a case of fly if you were told to, or forfeit your job.

Pilots, faced with a beggar's choice, would sometimes side-step the issue with tricks that were difficult to detect, in order to keep down out of weather that would not have given them a fighting chance for life. It's no trick at all for a flyer to lame a ship without nicking his own skin. But there came a serious impasse one day at Belmont Park, when the weather was so atrocious that Pilot Leon Smith, whose turn it was to take off, scorned a ruse and just flatly refused to go.

The field manager notified Washington, and orders were telegraphed to Smith to take off at once. He still refused. Hamilton Lee, next in turn, was summoned; but when the circumstances were explained, he said: "If the weather's too bad for Smith, it's too bad for me. His judgment is as good as mine."

When orders came to fire Smith and Lee all the pilots quit their ships. For three days no mail was flown; then Assistant Postmaster-General Otto Praeger, the man in charge of the air mail, told the pilots to send a spokesman, together with Pilot Lee, to Washington.

One Little Word

Out of that conference came a correction of the existing system and a better mutual understanding when Praeger said:

"I've got to fight Congress, which won't appropriate for air mail and thinks it's all nonsense. I've got to fight the public, who won't use air mail. And now if I've got to fight the pilots too, there won't be any air mail!"

"When we carried that message back to the pilots," said Lee, "we all began to see beyond our jobs, beyond our troubles and our likes and dislikes. I think this was the first time we began to take a serious view of our share of the responsibility for building up public confidence in aviation."

After four years filled with thrilling adventure in Eastern skies, Hamilton Lee was assigned to the run from Chicago to Omaha, which he has flown regularly during the past nine years, with brief interludes of excitement in special jobs. One such, in the winter of 1923, brought him into the headlines of every newspaper in the country; that was his rescue of a band of lumberjacks who were marooned and starving to death on remote South Fox Island, twenty-three miles from the mainland in northern Lake Michigan.

Most often, nowadays, since he has become a byword for safe flying, Hamilton Lee is asked whether flying can be as safe for you and for me as it seems to be for him.

"Yes—emphatically yes," he insists. "If the Department of Commerce examiners pass you as physically fit to fly, then I'd say that you can learn to fly as well as I do, or better, and that you'll live to fly as long as I have flown and to enjoy flying as much as I enjoy it, provided you are willing to tack up in your cockpit, or hang inside your head where it is never out of your mind's eye, one little word—caution."

"Indeed, your chances for a safe and pleasant use of aviation are far better than mine were when I took it up. You don't have to take the chances we took,



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or that the mail pilots may even take today. You don't have to fly experimental equipment, as we did. The government has marked off for you the safe ships to use. It has surrounded you with organized and lighted airways, weather service, radio, beacons to guide your ship to port and a dozen and one safeguards. Fewer and fewer pilots are being killed each year—even those of us who have to fly when you, as an air traveler or pleasure flyer, ought to remain on the ground.

"I haven't got any secret or magical method, any instinct, that you haven't got or can't develop, provided your health is as good as mine, and your intelligence is at least average.

A Few Tips

"Some people who write to me seem to think I have coddled my record, but that isn't so. I've done my share of acrobatics, and taught others how to do them, which is more hazardous. I've won cups in national air races, and I've worked as a stunt flyer and test pilot. I'm out there taking the run of the weather now as I have always taken it with the other air-mail pilots. We often fly the mail through when passenger ships remain on the ground.

"I don't think my personal way of flying differs from that used by my mates on the air mail. A lot of people say that I must be lucky; but flyers don't believe in luck. They can't afford to; any more than they can afford to be superstitious. Even if I were lucky, gambler's odds would be stacked against me now. You never hear a professional pilot telling me I'm lucky!

"I have never had a major accident, and I have never been injured in flying, although I have had my share of forced landings in which I have had to accept collisions with fences and other ground obstructions and work minor damage upon my ships. The answer, if there is any, is this—I have always known what I was doing.

"In the early years of my flying I always made a careful study of every accident in which one of my mates was killed. I didn't examine only the conditions in which he had found himself, and then do a bit of second guessing as to what he should have done to save himself. I studied even more closely the circumstances which led up to his predicament, and thus I taught myself not only to avoid his error but the beginning and the growth of his error.

"Therefore, for those of you who intend to take up flying for pleasure or as a profession, I give you this as my Rule Number One, if you want to fly long and to live long: Avoid the occasion of error.

"Next, I do what every other careful professional flyer does: I study the ground closely as I fly over it, cataloging the suitable landing places I see. If unforeseen circumstances should suddenly arise, despite my radio weather reports, or if motor trouble should develop, I have available in my mind at any given instant, ready for my trained reflexes, the nearest and best landing place; and I can turn to it without the loss of an instant's time.

"If I am over bad country, where the available landing fields are few and far between, I fly high enough so that one is within gliding distance. If necessary I'll shift my course to keep fields within reach. What if this does add ten minutes to the flight? Now as to country so bad and so remote that there are no safe landing fields—well, you haven't any business flying over that kind of country, yet.

"If the weather changes suddenly for the worse, if your motor doesn't sound just right, land in the last best place you saw. So here's a second rule for

your safety in flying: Never be afraid to turn back.

"As an example of how this method has helped me, let me tell you about one wicked night in January, 1929, before we had radio communication on our ships. Over Des Moines, a blizzard which had been suddenly born there on the prairies, and was one of the worst I have ever seen, hit me from all sides. It came almost like a flash of lightning; one instant I was watching the lights of the city, the next instant all were blotted out and the ship was rocking like a snip of paper in an air shaft. To make matters worse, my instrument panel light burned out.

"I banked, instinctively, in the direction in which I knew Des Moines airport lay. But I couldn't find the field, and I had to get down. I released a parachute flare. It fell behind a hill, yet burned long enough to silhouette a haystack and a few other minor things which identified that field instantly in the mental catalogue I have of my scheduled run. I landed.

"Let's look at it this way. Flying is thoroughly dependable and safe, I believe, for you and every normal person, man or woman, if you will approach it in this frame of mind: it's a brand-new medium, opposed to every lesson and experience of mankind's history and life on earth. You can't make so fundamental a change as lightly as you would change from driving your car on the right to the left side of the road, and Lord knows there'd be enough accidents if you tried even that.

"You've got to approach flying with an elastic mind. You've got to change your habits of thought, of making decisions, of imagination. You've got to be somewhat afraid of flying, because it's only in proportion to your respect for it that you will keep yourself tight-ened up. If people were properly afraid of driving, everyone would enjoy it more and there'd be no accidents—or scarcely any. Heaven help us if the human race ever gets to where it isn't afraid of flying."

Hamilton Lee is proud, of course, of his enormous mileage, and of the fact that nearly two of his thirty-six years of life have been spent in the air. He is prouder of his record of no serious accidents and no injuries. But he is proudest of the fact that he has never lost a single letter of those entrusted to him in the air mail.

Free to Fly

He is unmarried, and lives alone in an apartment the contract for the furnishing of which must have enabled some oriental dealer to go back to the old country to live in peace and plenty. He is an American by birth and parentage, sprung from the sturdy stock of the Illinois prairies. Paris is the name of the spring-off place, if you are a stickler for exactness. You suspect that there is plenty of Scotch blood somewhere in his background because of the beautiful economy of his wit and of his philosophy: "I was too lazy to be a farmer," he explains as his excuse for deserting the home furrows for the free lanes of the sky: "I wanted a job on which I could sit."

Lee took a vacation last year and spent it flying on other sections of the line with his friends among the pilots.

It is his ambition to save up enough money to retire—not to a chicken farm or anything like it—but to a small plane and the freedom to fly at will over all the oceans and the lands of the earth. He'll do it, too. He is very much interested in the new light planes which are being brought out this year for private pleasure-flying. He'll be able to have a little plane of his own some day, he hopes!



and a Handy Closet

cabinet, unless the placed that one for some two main arrangement, and evening work only ed at any one time.

ould Be Consulted

per who can plan the building of her needed fortunate, for with the same thorough workshop that the business world are working unit can the individual work can be made ju efficient in cater rements of the pa sing it. Best of al built-in kitchen cup no pantry is thru abhors the openin cupboard door arrange every to open hook or she open sun may shi windows or st view of the str be hers, as oses.

here is no doubt t ell arranged kitch attractively decorat d arouse less an m to kitchen w would tend to k ants longer. If o is limited to a bedroom and a ed trinity of st e and sink, sub inevitably br bounds, and ight of the joys rained at the Ar icemen's Ball p kitchen into su abutant state tha schold from g her down is o mind its every Plan your kitch pleasant place, ch the belligi ome as passiv bs. Little th ich add to the t of a maid w atly appreciate h stool with k makes dish easier. In as this, there sho ys be a scrap the cook's co e for the wast ends.