

# Lowell Smith's Boyhood Pranks and Early Life Fitted Him for Courageous Nerve-Racking Task of Piloting Flagship on Historic Air Voyage

Commander of World Flight Shocked Rangers in Sierras When, as Fire Patrol Pilot, He Climbed Out on His Speeding Ship's Wing to Adjust Radio and Re-Establish Communication.

(Continued From Page One.)  
 Angeles and landed a job as a mechanic in an automobile repair shop, but soon gave it up to join Villa's army in Mexico.

He found the bandit general a fascinating character, a genuine idealist fighting for the people. Villa's army, according to Lowell Smith, had the best morale, the best esprit de corps, that he has ever seen before or since.

Villa had an air service consisting of three planes piloted by three American soldiers of fortune. Lowell Smith was the engineering officer attached to the squadron. But when one plane collided with an adobe hut and the second was riddled with bullets and the third took a nose dive into the ground, Villa's air service vanished into thin air and Smith came north and went to work on the "Betty O'Neal," a silver mine at Battle Mountain, Nevada.

In 1917, when America entered the war, he went to San Francisco and angled his way into the air service, took a special course in aeronautics at the University of California, and then was assigned first to Rockwell field, near San Diego, and then to Kelly field in Texas.

He showed such a natural aptitude for flying that for a long time they wouldn't let him go to France, but kept him as an instructor. When he eventually did arrange to get overseas he arrived too late and merely stayed in England for a short course in handling Handley-Page bombing planes.

### Led Forest Fire Patrol.

Returning to America he was put in charge of the airplane forest fire patrol work in California, Washington and Oregon. In the dry season in these states when fierce fires constantly menace the timber lands Lowell Smith and the men of his squadron day after day cruised up and down the backbone of the Sierras and Cascades. It was only once in a blue moon that they ever saw a spot even half large enough to come down on in case of a forced landing.

Below them were jagged peaks and cliffs. On either side of the mountains were the forests of giant trees that they were guarding.

But only once in his four years of forest fire patrolling did any member of his squadron have a forced landing. There were no fatalities. In the course of a single year he and his fellow pilots spotted 600 fires and flashed the news by radio to the forest rangers.

It was while in command of this fire patrol that "Silent" Smith gave one of his most famous exhibitions of nonchalance and daring. Up to that time he had had a perfect record for radio communication between his plane and the ground. This day he happened to have a forest ranger along as passenger. Suddenly the

smashed up, it was not entirely demolished and did not burst into flames.  
 Bystanders ran over, expecting to find Smith either dead or seriously injured. But they were nonplussed under the debris assuring them that he wasn't even scratched, but would be deeply indebted to them if they would lift the plane off his neck.

In 1919 he took part in the transcontinental reliability and endurance contest from San Francisco to New York and return. On this flight he broke one record when he reached Chicago as the first person ever to arrive in the Windy City from San Francisco by air. But an unfortunate accident happened to him in Buffalo, where his much beloved Bluebird was destroyed by fire while he was absent from the flying field.

### Refueled Planes in Midair.

However, his first real claim to fame came when he conceived the seemingly mad idea of refueling from one plane to another in midair with both planes in full flight.

As everybody knows, it is an exceedingly dangerous thing for two airplanes to fly close to each other. Both are usually hurtling through the air at a speed of anywhere from 70 to 150 miles an hour. And if so



Father of Lieutenant Smith Addresses Fliers at San Diego.

much as the tip of the wing of one happens to touch the other a tragedy is almost certain to result.  
 Secondly, it seemed absurd to most people to think of two planes flying

## Smith Greets Parents on Return



ROUND-THE-WORLD FLIERS REACH SAN DIEGO. The round-the-world fliers reach Rockwell field, San Diego, where their machines were put through mechanical tests prior to the hopoff six months ago, on September 22. This picture shows Lieut. Lowell Smith, commander of the flight, greeted by his father and mother, Mr. and Mrs. Jasper Smith, just after their arrival at Rockwell field.

at high speed and attempting to keep together long enough for any appreciable quantity of gas and oil to be transferred. Airmen had discovered that it was a mighty risky and difficult thing for two planes even to keep one above the other long enough to enable one barebrained birdman to catch a rope ladder and change planes.

But, as usual, Smith had thought the matter out before he said anything about it, and knew whereof he spoke. He and his fellow pilot, Lieut. John Paul Richter, remained aloft in their De Havilland all through the day from dawn to dark, all through that night and even through the second day.

Never once during all this time did either of them have a moment's chance to sleep. They were fed, watered, oiled, and gasolined by means of a little hose dangling from another plane. The first time they attempted to make contact with the hose sheer luck saved them from going up in flames.

Richter caught the nozzle in his hand and accidentally turned it too quickly, with the result that he was drenched by a stream of gasoline. But Dame Fortune smiled upon them that day and not a drop landed on the engine. Sixteen different times contact was established between Smith

and Richter and a refueling plane. From 50 to 100 gallons of gas were transferred nearly every time.  
 The aviators indicated when they were hungry by rubbing their stomachs and opening their mouths so that a pilot of another plane flying near by saw them and descended "to get feed for the birds."  
 All during the night they had fog

to add to their difficulties, and twice before dawn they narrowly escaped disaster. The first time the motor began to sputter Smith's trained ear told him there was dirt in the feed pipe. Picking up his spotlight, he smashed it against the pipe in an attempt to jar the dirt loose, and then he kept tapping the pipe with a wrench until the sputter was eliminated.

Early the next morning the drain on the feed pipe again clogged and the plane dropped 300 feet and came within a few yards of plunging into the Tijuana river, when a hard blow from Smith's wrench again cleared the dirt and with the throttle wide open they ascended to safety and continued their gruelling flight.

It was one of the most sensational and dramatic flights in the history of aviation. They established eight world records for distance, speed, and duration. They remained in midair, traveling at an average speed of 88.50 miles an hour, for thirty-six hours. They actually covered twice the distance of the non-stop transatlantic flight of Alcock and Brown.

### First "Dawn to Dusk" Flight

Shortly after this Smith and Richter gained more fame on their "dawn to dusk" flight, from Canada to the Mexican border. This also was a non-stop refueling affair. For 12 hours they sat in their cockpits as they flew 1,500 miles over Washington, Oregon, and California at an average speed of better than 100 miles an hour.

Supply planes met them at Eugene and Sacramento. Through an inch and a half refueling hose they refilled their gas tanks at the rate of 50 gallons a minute. The full moon was just going down behind the mountains of British Columbia when they started the flight, and as they approached the desert of northern Mexico that same old full moon was there to greet them and cast a brill-

iant light over the flying field at San Diego.

This historic flight conclusively proved that fleets of airplanes can cross any part of the United States at high speed to meet a possible invasion, and without the delay of descending for supplies.

Perhaps the most illuminating episode in Smith's meteoric flying career prior to the world flight was in 1922, when he set out with a squadron of planes from San Diego in search of Colonel Marshall and Lieutenant Webber, who had mysteriously disappeared while flying above the desert en route to Huhuaehua, Ariz., and whose charred remains eventually were found in the Cuyamaca mountains.

Smith's objective on this desert flight was the hut of an old Indian guide. Nothing much was known about the Indian except that he lived "somewhere about 110 miles southwest of Nogales." With the vaguest possible description of the country to guide him, "Silent" Smith led the way from San Diego across barren mountains and desert valleys off to the uninhabited southwest.

Indian Hut Sighted.  
 There was neither railroad, river, town, nor other landmark to guide him, yet at the end of an hour and a half Smith's plane made a sudden dive and when the airman followed and looked over the metal edges of their cockpits far below they saw the shack of the Indian guide.

Rarely in the history of cross-country flying has there been a feat to equal this, except on the recent world flight, when "Silent" Smith led his squadron of world cruisers through

fog and uncharted seas to the islands off the Siberian coast.

"Silent" Smith is a tall, dark complexioned, agreeable looking young man with jaw and mouth that suggest determination. His grey eyes suggest reserve power and have a disconcerting way of looking through you. About his lips there lurks a whimsical



Arrival at Labrador—First Stop on American Soil.

cal smile. He is sensitive and quiet, quick to think, but slow to speak.  
 In many ways this young California-bred descendant of Daniel Boone made the ideal leader for the world flight. On all matters pertaining to aerial navigation his fellow airmen knew that they could rely absolutely upon his judgment. And to men engaged in such hazardous enterprise there is nothing that makes all the hardships and dangers so easy to face as implicit faith in one's leader.

History tells us that Daniel Boone

In addition to being a great hunter, a famous Indian scout and an intrepid explorer, was "mild mannered, quiet and unassuming." And like his celebrated Kentucky ancestor, "Silent" Smith, leader of the first expedition to circumnavigate the world by air, is likewise all of these.  
 Fascinating and thrilling though the career of "Silent" Smith has been, the adventures of Erik Nelson, the American Viking, have been even more picturesque and romantic.

Read the next installment of this story of the thrilling round-the-world flight in The Omaha Bee tomorrow.

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Lieut. Lowell Smith. Photo taken October 24, 1924.

pilot of another plane in the squadron saw Smith's ship go through a series of erratic maneuvers. Something had gone wrong with the radio apparatus and Smith, turning the control of the plane over to the ranger, who had never flown before in his life, climbed far out on the wing, kicked the guard from the generator propeller, and clambered back into the cockpit again just in time to keep the ship from going into a tailspin in the trembling hands of the terrified ranger.

### Saved Government Millions.

"Had to keep up communication," was "Silent" Smith's laconic exclamation when they got down.  
 Under Smith's leadership this aerial forest fire patrol saved the government many millions of dollars' worth of the most valuable timber in America and gave Smith his first important training in cross-country flying and navigation, a training that later enabled him to accomplish the seemingly impossible when he led a squadron of world cruisers across strange continents, for thousands of miles over billowy cloud-seas where no plane had passed before, and all the way round the globe without once getting off the course.

On another occasion a wing, probably due to some hidden fault in construction, crumpled up on him while in the air over the city of Portland. He was not flying very high, so when one plane hit the ground, although it

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