

13 HOURS BY AIR

BY WALLACE WEST

Novelized From The Paramount Picture of The Same Name

SYNOPSIS

Jack Gordan, crack air pilot, comes to New York on vacation from his western division duties only to be called back to Salt Lake City to fly a ship to San Francisco. He balks but changes his mind when he sees pretty Felice Rollins, society heiress, board the westbound plane. Complications set in when a guntoting foreigner named Stephani attempts to stop Felice from continuing her trip. Jack saves Felice and finds out why she is so anxious to get to the coast. On his leg of the flight, a howling storm forces Jack to make a landing in a snow-filled pass. While Jack and the co-pilot explore the situation, a government agent posing as a Dr. Evarts attempts to arrest another passenger, Palmer, who is a notorious bank-robber. The latter pulls a gun and wounds Evarts and the co-pilot. Jack gets ready to defend the plane.

CHAPTER IX

"Where's your gun?" Jack demanded as he lifted Evarts through the cabin door.

"Palmer took it and Freddy's too," gasped the wounded man.

"Freddy's?" screamed Ann. "What happened to him?"

"Palmer shot him," groaned Jack, too dazed by the catastrophe to realize the effect his words would have on the girl.

"Freddy—shot! Freddy — Freddy . . ." Before he could stop her the girl had torn the door open and was dashing out through the snow.

"Here—take care of him," Gordon commanded Felice as he placed the wounded man in the aisle. Then he ran back into the storm.

"Ann! Ann! Come back here, you idiot," he shouted. "Palmer will get you too." Catching up with her, he gripped her arm. "You're going back to the plane. We've got trouble enough."

"Trouble! You've got trouble!" she laughed hysterically. "That's a good one. What about Freddy lying out there all alone—bleeding to death—while you stand there and keep me from . . ."

Realizing that she was rapidly going into hysterics, Jack slapped her hard across the face, then spun her toward the plane.

"Sorry," he said quietly. "Now go on back. I'll find Freddy."

Tracing Evarts' footsteps through the snow, he finally came to a dark mass lying across the path. He hurried forward and picked Freddy up in his arms. The boy was unconscious. Jack's face hardened as he staggered back to the plane.

"Is he dead?" Waldemar inquired hopefully as Ann helped the pilot lift her sweetheart into the cabin.

"No. But we've got to work fast. Ann, get the emergency kit. Felice, I need some hot water."

For half an hour the three worked rapidly bandaging the wounded. Neither was badly hurt as it had seemed at first. Evarts had a clean wound completely through the right shoulder. Freddy's skull had been creased by a bullet but the bone had not been broken.

"Any one people got a gun in your bag?" inquired Jack at last.

"I have," answered Waldemar, proudly displaying his water pistol.

"He'll come back and shoot us," wailed Miss Harkins. "I know it. I know it! I'm so nervous I could jump right out of my skin."

"Go ahead, lady—and we'll make a rug out of it," Jack was savage.

"Look!" cried Ann. "Freddy's coming out of it."

"Fine!" he exclaimed as his co-pilot's eyes flickered open for a second. "Better dish out some hot coffee to the others."

Completely exhausted, he climbed into the cockpit and started the cold motors again. Felice found him there.

"I want you to know I feel terribly sorry—and entirely responsible for all of this," she began contritely.

"Aw, forget it. These things just happen." He was too tired to care.

"No—I kept egging you on—urging you to take chances . . ."

"You must be kinda crazy about that guy in San Francisco . . ."

"What guy are you talking about? What did Stephani tell you?"

"Oh, he made a couple of cracks."

"All right. Now I'm going to make a couple of cracks. My sister, Kay, and I met this Stephani and his brother Alie—last summer in New York. When they found out who we were, Alie gave Kay the old Continental rush, and swept her off her feet—she's just a kid—eighteen. I pleaded—did everything I could—but she's in her way to San Francisco with him now. They plan to be married in Honolulu. I've got to stop them. It's all my fault for letting her know such people. I can't let her suffer from my stupidity."

"Humph!" A great load seemed to lift from Jack's shoulders. "The outlook isn't particularly bright at the moment, but if there's any chance of getting you to the Coast before noon tomorrow I'll grab it."

"Did you see it?" Ann burst in upon them, closely followed by Waldemar. Then, realizing that she had disturbed an important conversation, she stammered. "I mean the light. It came and went—like a match. Do you suppose it was Palmer?"

"Probably," shrugged Jack. "I think he'll wait for daylight before coming back, though. That would help his aim. Our only chance is to get off in the morning before he shows up."

"And if he gets here first?" inquired Felice.

"I'd give my left ear for a gun," was the glum reply. Suddenly he looked at the girl appraisingly and demanded: "How's your nerve?"

"I think it'll get by." Her blue eyes met his brown ones steadily.

"That's swell—because we're going to give it a workout. See that? He reached through the cockpit door and unhooked the fire extinguisher which hung on the cabin wall. "I got some of that stuff in my eyes once—couldn't see or breathe for five minutes. And it squirts yards—like a gun."

"He'll never give you the chance to use it," said Felice.

"Not me, maybe. But he won't be watching you. Now if the party gets rough you hide it under your coat and

"Hello, everybody," beamed the gunman. "Wintny isn't it." He kept them covered with his two guns. "If any of you want trouble—start it and I'll finish it. As for you, Rollo." He glared at Waldemar, who was innocently returning to his seat. "I've got some plans for you. In the meantime, keep that trap of yours shut."

Palmer started walking forward toward Jack, waving the latter into the cockpit. He apparently had no fear of the cowering passengers.

"Hello, beautiful," he grinned at Felice. Then, as she ignored him he added: "Don't get on your high horse sister. Plenty of swell dames have gone for me."

"Can you take off?" he demanded of Jack.

"I'm not sure." The latter was playing for time.

"Come on—can the funny stuff. It's hard and smooth and downhill, if you can't take off, maybe I can . . ."

"You'll break your fool neck and everybody else's."

"Listen—if you think you've got me over a barrel because you're the only one that can fly this plane, you're crazy—I will if I have to."

"Where'd you learn?" Jack demanded after a second's hesitation.

"Mexico."

"All right—I'll fly you on one condition. These people go along."

"Okay—I'll be a sucker but get this—you'll fly and I'll ride the co-pilot's seat and if you try any funny business—I'll fly the rest of the way myself. Now start 'em up and let's get going."

As Jack started into the cockpit, Palmer's eyes suddenly lit upon the empty fire extinguisher rack.

"Wait a minute!" he snarled. "Stand still! Who's got that extinguisher?"

"It's in the washroom, mister," piped up Waldemar innocently.

"So you were preparing to squirt me out like a bonfire," Palmer sneered at Jack. "If I didn't need you . . ." He whirled on the other passengers. "The rest of you get out of this plane and get out quickly."

"You'll be arrested for this!" cried Miss Harkins dramatically as she gathered her skirts about her.

"All right, sister, go call a cop—call a couple of cops."

"You can't," protested Stephani. Stephani. "We'll all freeze to death."

"I'd as soon kill you as look at you," snarled the gunman.

"What about me?" inquired Waldemar. "You said . . ."

Palmer turned and stared at him indecisively as if he couldn't quite make up his mind what to do. Deliberately Waldemar raised his hand to his nose and wiggled the fingers slowly. Then, as his enemy tensed for a spring he fired his old standby, the water-pistol, from the hip.

The jet hit Palmer squarely in the face. The effect was astounding. He yelled, gasped and clawed at his eyes, then fired his guns wildly.

Jack got the idea at once. Waldemar had charged his pistol with extinguisher fluid. He leaped forward and crashed into his foe. Palmer went



Palmer went down, one of the guns flying from his hand. "Grab that gun quick!" shouted Jack.

down, one of the automatics flying from his hand. Felice dived for it but the gangster, recovering somewhat, plunged forward and was on the verge of grabbing it when Waldemar tripped him neatly.

"Grab that gun, quick!" shouted Jack.

Stephani complied, but instead of using it, tossed the weapon through the window and sat back to enjoy the fight.

By this time pandemonium reigned in the cabin. Palmer and Gordon were in a tight clinch and the former was gleefully gouging the pilot's eye and trying to tear his other gun free.

"How do you like it, huh?" He gouged again and Jack groaned. Then the latter twisted loose and walloped his foe beside the jaw. The other gun crashed against the side of the cabin floor while the two men engaged in a slugging contest. A mule-kick wallop to the chin knocked Palmer to the floor but as he fell his hand grasped the lost gun. He took quick aim just as Waldemar crept out from under a seat and

let him have another jet from the water pistol. The stuff would have choked an elephant, but Palmer merely staggered back, dropping the gun once more.

And once more Stephani reached for the weapon. This time, however, Ann's high-heeled slipper pinioned his fingers o the floor while she picked up the automatic and crept forward to inflict the deciding blow.

Palmer, again recovering from the fluid, was fighting like a madman. He had Jack jammed against the cockpit wall and was pounding him into a pulp. But his attention kept being diverted by Waldemar, who was dodging in and out, trying for another shot. The pilot managed to pinion his opponent's arms for a second. Yelling with delight Waldemar leaped in, jammed his pistol under Palmer's very nose and pulled the trigger.

The gangster couldn't take it this time. Choking, sobbing and gasping for breath, he clawed at his eyes while Jack deliberately measured him and swung a hay-maker from the floor. His

enemy's head snapped back and he went down for the count.

"Waldemar," wailed Miss Harkins. "I knew you'd hurt someone with . . ."

"He's moving," screamed the boy as his fallen foe stirred dazedly. "Somebody kick him quick."

"He's out, Waldo," Jack laughed shakily. "Thanks to you."

"Boy, did we fix him 'n boy, did you sock him," chortled the child.

"This trip is more darn fun," groaned the pilot. "Tie him up, somebody." Then he turned to Felice. "Come on. We've got to hurry."

"Just a minute," interrupted Stephani, making his last bid. "I . . ."

"Listen, you. One more move and you'll be going places with him." Jack jerked one swollen hand toward Palmer, "for attempting to delay the U. S. mail, assaulting a carrier of the mail, attempted bribery of a post office employee, carrying firearms without a permit and . . . is that enough?"

"Yes," answered Stephani, subsiding meekly.

"All right now," he continued to Felice when they were both in the cockpit. "My hands are both shot. You might as well learn to fly now, as later. Do just what I tell you."

"But . . ."

"Shut up," he barked. Felice started to flare up at his tone, then grinned happily. She adored it.

An hour later they were soaring out of the mountains.

"Nice flying," chuckled Jack. "You're getting the hang of it fine."

"Thanks—I love it." She manipulated the stick gingerly.

"It's going to be wonderful . . . you having dinner with me tonight. And now." He reached painfully into his pocket and brought out Felice's ring.

"Could I interest you in a large and handsome ring and a large and battered pilot—because I'd like to return both of them to their owner?"

"But I only own one of them," she answered, banking the ship like a veteran.

"That's what you think," he grinned as he steadied her hand on the wheel.

THE END.

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