

Filming a Huge Air Picture—



Robert Taylor gets a lesson in blind-flying in the Link Orientator at Randolph Field—a safe and sane method. Director Richard Rosson, in leather jacket near camera, directs the action.

A CREAM-COLORED Bellanca cabin plane skimmed over the West Point of the Air and settled down on Randolph Field, Texas. Hundreds of civilian and army spectators rushed out to greet the pilot. The cabin door opened and the crowd cheered.

It was Wallace Beery!

The 200-pound movie actor, who is a lieutenant-commander in the Reserve Naval Air Service, stepped lightly to the ground.

"Where's your Navy uniform, Mr. Beery?" someone asked.

"I'm too smart to land at an Army airport in a Navy uniform," he laughs.

And that incident marked the event when the harbinger of the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer company swooped down on Randolph Field to film the mighty aerial spectacle, "The West Point of the Air."

* * *

WITHIN two days after Beery alighted at the \$12,000,000 Army flying field, fifty Hollywoodites with ten tons of equipment were on location, working like mad. (That being an old Hollywood custom.) Among the personnel were Maureen O'Sullivan, Lewis Stone, Robert Young and Director Dick Rosson.

Included in the tons of equipment was a giant generator for the lighting system to provide sufficient electricity to illuminate the entire 2,300-acre field. Another unit of the technical production equipment was a portable sound-recording system. With this system, Jim Brock and Ted Raymond, sound engineers, recorded 40,000 feet of air-

plane noises to be "dubbed" to air footage at the California studio.

In air shots, sound and image must be recorded separately inasmuch as sound apparatus on the ground is not sufficiently sensitive to pick up the sounds of ships in the sky. Accordingly, Brock and Raymond obtained sounds of all types of airplane-motor noises in every kind of performance, including taxiing, taking off, zooming, looping, banking, and power diving. These sounds were fitted to appropriate scenes in the studio's film-editing room.

The motion picture industry's two



Wallace Beery, alias "Big Mike" gives a little hangar flying instruction to a group of cadets—Robert Young, Henry Wadsworth and Russell Hardie. Camera at left and microphone over Beery's head.

by

EDWARD B. COPE

most famous aerial photographers, Charles Marshall and Harold Perry, shot the majority of the formation-flight scenes in "The West Point of the Air." Joseph Valentine, who is considered tops when it comes to photographing women, also was among the eight camera units shooting pictures of cadet officers and airplanes.

"That," commented Jeff Davis, San Antonio newspaper columnist, "is just another example of the customary movie practicality!"

In California, studio equipment has the right of way. Sets are thrown together. Then noisily torn down. Then thrown together again. Tons of equipment are slammed around in the hurly-burly of Hollywood. But this condition did not prevail at Randolph Field.

You see, M.-G.-M.'s contract with the government provided that no Federal property was to be damaged in any way. Then, there was to be no interruption of the Army personnel by undue noise or disturbance. (So the yes-men just nodded their heads.) On top

in the Field and Studios

IN THIS article, the author exposes all of the mechanical and photographic tricks-of-the-trade employed in the production of a big film play. In particular, the story tells how the picture, "The West Point of the Air" was produced at Randolph Field, the primary training school of the U. S. Army Air Corps.

And in this story, the admirers of Wallace Beery, a transport pilot and officer in the navy, will get some new dope on their film hero.

of all this there was the little item of a \$100,000 cash bond.

So Director Rosson impressed upon his "grips" not to leave a scratch on any of Uncle Sam's highly polished floors. Literal and figurative kid gloves were much in evidence. In the School of Aviation Medicine, the technicians wore tennis shoes and all equipment, even the 400-pound sound cameras, were moved on straining, indignant shoulders.

* * *

IT WAS in this same School of Aviation Medicine that five "student officers"—Robert Young, Russell Hardie, Henry Wadsworth, Robert Livingston and Robert Taylor—were put through the mill, where all recruits are examined by the use of a number of instruments, devices, and gadgets.

As the cameras whirled, the five young actors were put through their paces. They were spun in an electrical whirling chair and then put under their own power. None was able to walk the designated chalkline. In fact, several



Principals in the cast lined up before starting out on the day's work. LEFT TO RIGHT: Major Harms, Randolph Field Officer; Maureen O'Sullivan, Director Richard Rosson (sitting on wing), Wallace Beery, Lewis Stone, Captain Aubrey Strickland, Lieutenant Luke Smith, Robert Young and Russell Hardie.

fell flat on the floor when they tried to stand up.

On the insistence of an Army medical officer, Beery was placed in the chair to determine whether the Navy aviator "could take it." He could and did.

But the real martyr of the day was Bob Livingston. The director had great difficulty in getting a satisfactory picture of Livingston in the whirling chair. As a result, he was twirled intermittently for more than an hour. When the cameramen finally got a satisfactory shot, Livingston was a wreck. He flopped on an Army cot and didn't move for an hour.

* * *

CLOUD formations played an extremely important part in the filming of the flying sequences of the picture that Hollywood will probably call "colossal."

When the sky was the desired shade of blue and had the requisite number of feather-like clouds, the movie company would take to the air. And not one min-

ute before! On days when conditions were just so, hundreds of Army craft would drone over the largest flying center in the world.

Perhaps the most outstanding formation was thirty-six planes, flying in the letters "U. S. A." That sequence will most likely be used in the last few minutes of "The West Point of the Air," when an aerial review is supposed to be in progress.

One day, during the three weeks M.-G.-M. was on location, the director had everything arranged for a plane to make a bad landing and go over on its back. The cameras were set up—"Monkied" with—Taken down—Moved—Set up again. The director signaled the stunt flyer that everything was okay.

The crate came bounding all over the field making "porpoise" landings but could not wham over. Such flop-overs, according to William F. Salathe, Army aviation editor of a San Antonio newspaper, "happen quite frequently in flight training" without even the student pilot's half trying.

Another scene in the picture was the depicting of a student's overturning a training plane after striking a hay stack in an emergency landing field near the Air Corps Primary Flying School. To be sure of the desired after-effect, Rosson had the plane placed on its back with a crane. Several of the spectacular mishaps, which will be flashed on screens all over the world were made in miniature. The risk,



A spectacular formation flight over the Administration Building, Randolph Field. A formation of 36 planes spells out the letters: "U. S. A."

studio officials sighed, was too great for the flyer.

But one stunt that was not a fake was a land-plane dipping its wing tips alternately in the Guadalupe River, as the flyer skimmed over the surface.

While on this river location, the company shot scenes of ground troops and Air Corps pilots in peace-time war maneuvers. The sequence called for the construction of a pontoon bridge with anti-aircraft guns, tanks, scattered ground activities, and marching troops taking part. In all, 32,000 feet of film was shot here; less than a thousand feet of it will be used.

* * *

IN ONE part of the \$600,000 air epic, Beery, as a hard-boiled instructor, gave a hangar lesson in flying to a group of cadets. In this sequence Beery climbed into the rear cockpit of a plane and ordered one of the cadets into the front seat. Beery then began explaining what makes the ship fly and how it is operated.

Being an experienced flyer himself, Beery was perfectly at home in this shot. As the scene was repeated seven or eight times, the hefty movie star seldom repeated the same lines; he "ad-libbed" with the natural ease of a real flying instructor.

When the scene was completed and the day's work ended, hundreds of Beery's admirers surged around him demanding autographs. He obliged until he was blue in the face. A friend of his spirited him away from the clamoring mob to the peace and quiet of the Officer's Club.

But even that move didn't give the actor any relief. For the small daughter of an officer was waiting for him, with her pen and signature book in hand. She approached Beery for an autograph.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, young lady," the Californian said, not wanting to hurt the child's feelings; "I'll sign your autograph book if you'll show me who else has signed it for you."

Beery presumed the book contained the signatures of a few of the child's girl chums. She quickly thumbed through her book; the first names Beery's eyes fell on were those of Secretary of War Dern, General Danforth, Wiley Post and General Pershing!

* * *

WALLACE BEERY, who holds a transport pilot's license in addition to his Navy reserve commission, is "sold" on private flying. He explained that he had recently ordered a new Bellanca, equipped with flaps for landing in short fields. His new plane will have a cruising range sufficiently great so that he will only have to make two stops on a flight from California to New York.

When the location shots for "The West Point of the Air" were completed, Beery dipped his wings in a reluctant good-bye to San Antonio, then flew straight to the United Airport in Los Angeles, where he keeps his plane.



Taking an actual flight picture of a training plane flying over a line-up of 80 U.S. planes at Randolph Field. The cameras are on the elevated platform at the right, only slightly below the plane.

THE complete screen story told in "The West Point of the Air" was written by Lieutenant Commander Wead, retired, who has worked on many movie stories, A. J. Beckhard and Harold Buckley. After several rewritings, in order that it would meet the approval of the United States War Department, the air epic tells the following tale:

Sergeant "Big Mike" Stone (Beery) is one of the best flying instructors at Randolph Field, while his son, "Little Mike" (Young), is a football hero during his attendance at West Point. Little Mike and Skip Carter (Miss O'Sullivan), childhood sweethearts, are practically engaged, much to the joy of Brother Phil Carter and General Carter (Lewis Stone).

Because of his football prowess and his popularity, Little Mike is very conceited. Then vampish Dare Marshall, a discontented society matron, becomes interested in him.

After being graduated at West Point,



A close-up of Wallace Beery who is a transport pilot and a Lieutenant Commander in the Reserve National Air Service. A real aviation fan.

Phil, Little Mike, and their three best friends are sent to Randolph Field for their training. Little Mike shows great ability and promises to be one of the best flyers in the Army. One of the boys has to leave because of his lack of nerve.

The crucial day is when the boys must solo for sixty hours in order to earn their wings. On the day before Little Mike is to take his test, he asks Skip to go out with him. She refuses, saying that he needs his rest. He is still too cocky to take advice, and he becomes angry. It is just at this juncture that Dare arrives. She has taken a house near the flying field, and Mike goes with her and spends the night at her house.

They return to the field in her car on the following morning. Phil is taking his test, and he fails to see the car until it is too late. To avoid hitting it, he cracks up his ship. As a result of the accident, he loses a leg. Then another of Mike's fiends has a crack-up, and this young man is burned to death in his plane.

Little Mike loses his nerve, and is afraid to go up. His father practically forces him to go, and when Little Mike is taking off, he flies too low over the hangar and loses his landing gear. Big Mike sees this and has a pilot take him up and drop him into his son's ship. There he tells Little Mike to glide to the ground.

Little Mike hasn't enough nerve to do this, so his father successfully brings the ship down. Little Mike tells his father that he is through with the Army and flying. In order to shut the boy up so that the officers won't hear him, Big Mike knocks him out. For striking a superior officer, the sergeant is court-martialed, and dishonorably dismissed from the Army.

Big Mike takes a job with a cheap commercial flying company, and it is there that Little Mike comes to see him and make his peace. He tells his father that he knows that he (Little Mike) is yellow and can't fly, so he is leaving the Army and going East with Dare, who is getting a divorce. Big Mike

(Concluded on page 60)

Laird Plane*(Continued from page 18)*

the upper wing only. This alloy is also used for the trailing edge of the lower plane, starting behind the strut connection. Gasoline tanks are enclosed within both the upper and lower wing panels. It is notable that the inter-plane bracing is entirely of the strut type without the use of wires so that these struts handle both the flying and landing loads.

The tail surfaces are of the cantilever type, covered with a skin of 24ST alloy, the elevator and rudder hinges being fitted with ball bearings. The tail group is supported by a full swiveling tail wheel mounted on an oleo strut shock-absorber. All the tail surfaces as well as the roots of the wings are filleted into the fuselage at the point of attachment.

The Wasp "C" engine is rated at 450 h.p. at an elevation of 6,000 feet. It is covered with a full N.A.C.A. housing.

SPECIFICATIONS

Length	27'-6"
Upper wing span.....	38'-0"
Lower wing span.....	17'-6"
Wing-loading	21.3 lbs./sq. ft.
Power-loading	11.9 lbs./hp
Gross weight	5,350 lbs.
Empty weight	3,205 lbs.
Payload	1,170 lbs.

END.

Movies*(Continued from page 10)*

feels terribly about this; but his son claims he can't fly in the Army maneuvers—he hasn't the nerve to go up to drop flares.

On the night of the maneuvers, Little Mike is with Dare. Suddenly Skip comes in and tells Mike that he owes it to Phil and to his father not to quit. They walk outside and Mike sees Big Mike flying in a flimsy crate, dropping flares.

The son dashes to the airport and gets into his ship. He tries to get his father to land before the old plane falls apart. One of the wings gives and the ship hurtles into a lake, a burning mass. Risking his life, Little Mike drags his father to safety. He knows now that he isn't yellow, after all, and that he can fly.

This is demonstrated to the satisfaction of everyone who can view the stunting and flying that is shown.

Big Mike is reinstated through the efforts of General Carter and he is the one to pin the wings on Little Mike. Then, like all Hollywood epics, the juveniles are happily reunited. As they hold the final embrace, hundreds of airplanes fly past in a stupendous, monstrous, gigantic, colossal, and mediocre aerial review.

END.

Lake-Front*(Continued from page 14)*

for commercial purposes. I remember having had the pleasure of flying for the Government back in the year of 1919, at which time Grant Park was used for a landing field; and although we had no serious accidents, the location of the field was not practical.

"Except on days when we had winds from the East, flying conditions were very bad; visibility was very poor because of smoke and mist. Take-off's toward the loop were almost always considered dangerous; of course, planes are much higher powered these days, which would make it a lot safer.

"As I understand the proposed island airport construction, the West boundary of the field will be just one mile from Michigan Avenue. This means that the modern commercial transport plane taking off at 100 M.P.H. would be over the loop area within 45 seconds after the wheels lifted from the runway. Should any trouble develop in that first minute, it would be almost impossible to make a safe landing; of course, we must admit the same conditions prevail at the present Municipal Airport when planes take off toward an Easterly direction."

* * *

No. 5 (Official and Pilot, a man without a doubt who knows more than any other official or pilot in this area



The AUGUST Issue

NEW READERS and old readers alike, will find much of interest in the August issue of POPULAR AVIATION, on the front cover, rear cover and between covers. We have some articles treating on some brand-new subjects that will hold their interest and attention.

Our Photo Phans will find a lot of dope on the Sopwith Camel, that wartime celebrity, starting with a full colored picture on the front cover and then following through to an interesting description of this noble little ship on the inside pages. There will be some rare photos accompanying the article which will be of interest.

Then, there will be a highly instructive article on the merits and demerits of the two-cycle engine, an engine type that is now being seriously considered by the aviation industry. There will be a lot of instructive matter on lightplane construction and design, an instructive flight story and much new data in the old departments which have proved so popular in the past. You must get your copy of the August issue and the surest way is to subscribe.

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