

# The Pacemaker for Death QUIT!



Lincoln Beachey, Death's Pacemaker.

BY LINCOLN BEACHEY.

I HAVE just been asked by a syndicate to fly in Europe. I could easily make at least \$100,000 on one contract, but I have refused. I will never fly again. Fear has driven me out of the skies for all time. Not fear of my own death or the dread of bodily injury for myself has made me give up an art which I dearly love, but the blame and remorse for the death of brother aviators who went crashing into eternity trying to "out-Beachey Beachey." I have quit as pacemaker for Death.

I invented the "Vertical Drop," or, as the newspapers call it, the "Dip of Death," the "Dutch Roll," the "Ocean Roll," the "Turkey Trot," the "Figure Eight," which is also known as the "Spiral and Reverse." Death taught me each one of them. Nine of my friends were spurred on to try these things, and every one of them is dead. Phil Parmelee, John Frisbie, Rutherford Page, Horace Kearney, Billy Badger, Eugene Ely, Charlie Walsh, Cal Rodgers and Cronwell Dixon, fine boys all of them. And one by one they have hurtled down, clutching at the robes of God, to smash on earth!

Death has left me alone, has allowed me to do impossible things, because I was a good servant to him. I am tormented with a desire to "Loop the Loop" in the air. I know that I can do it, but I know that no one else can do it. I know that if I ever go up into the air again I will pull off this "Loop the Loop." And then many men will be taken in by Death in trying to do the same thing because I have done it.

They say I have shown wisdom rare in a gambler, for I quit the game when I was a winner. I knew I was a desperate gambler. Death was always my opponent, and I gave tremendous odds. My life was always my own stake—my life against a few dollars. It isn't wisdom that makes me quit. It's deadly fear for others.

In Chicago last September the mother of Horace Kearney came to me over while Horace was thrilling the crowds in Grant park because of his daring. She begged me, weeping, not to teach Horace any more of my tricks. Horace spoke up: "Mother, I must be a top-liner or nothing in this game. I must be as good as Lincoln Beachey or take a back seat, mother. So long as Lincoln is flying I must do the tricks he does."

Three months later he was dead. Charlie Walsh's wife begged me have Walsh cut out my death inviting spirals. I tried to, and he thought I was jealous. "Beachey does them, and I must if I am to get any of the big money," Walsh told her. Two weeks later Charlie went into the deadly reverse spiral. A little wire snapped and he was dead when they picked him up.

I was flying at Albuquerque, N. M., when a wire from Glen Curtiss told me that Mrs. Walsh and her two fatherless babes would pass through there the next day. In the baggage car of the limited was the body of my former team mate. In her compartment of the Pullman Mrs. Walsh made me feel like a wanton murderer as she told me how Charlie died, determined to master my spiral.

I sent some tickets to the window of Eugene Ely in San Francisco when I flew there last winter. She sent them back.

"I cannot bear to see you fly again," she wrote. "I can't forget that Eugene would be with me now if he had never seen you fly."

After Horace Kearney died Mrs. Kearney wrote me a pitiful letter reminding me of her request of a few months previous in Chicago.

"If only he had never seen you and tried to emulate your flying," she wrote.

At Tanforan, last November, I heard several of the boys about the hangars talking about doing the "straight glide." I wanted to leave the field then, because when I warned them they only laughed, and I was in the grip of fear—not for myself, but because I was certain they would follow my lead and go to their deaths.

Why did I enlist as Death's pacemaker? Well, listen. The people demanded thrills in the first place. I was never egotistical enough to think that the crowds came to witness my skill in putting a biplane through all the trick dog stunts. There was only one thing that drew them to my exhibitions—the desire to see "something happen"—meaning, of course, my death. They all predicted that I would be killed while flying, and none near wanted to miss being in at the death if they could help it. They paid to see me die. They bet that I would, and the odds were always against my life, and I got big money for it.

I made up my mind that if I did tumble from the air I did not want my final bump to stamp me as a piker. If it came my time to bow to the scythe wielder I wanted to drop from thousands of feet. I wanted the grand stands and the grounds to be packed with a huge, cheering mob, and the band must be crashing out the latest rag. And when the ambulance, or worse, hauled me away, I wanted them all to say as they filed out the gates, "Well, Beachey was certainly flying some!"

My "Death Dip"—the vertical glide—started through an accident that happened to me when I was thousands of feet in the air. I was up after the altitude record at the Los Angeles meet. I was high above the clouds. It was very wonderful, for below me, as far as the eye could follow, was a perfect sea of cloudy fleeces that reflected the golden sun in a dazzling way. I felt like an angel—so much so that in the ecstasy of the moment I began to sing aloud. And in a twinkling Death seemed to creep upon me and reach out and touch me with a bony finger tip. My motor had stopped dead!

It is beyond my powers to describe my feelings in that dread moment. I had been an airman since I

The "Vertical Drop," Better Known as the "Dip of Death." The Diagram Shows Also the Deadly "Come in"—Both Beachey's Inventions. Badger, Rogers and Dixon Killed Trying It.

## Nine Men Killed by Imitating His Desperate Feats, Lincoln Beachey, the World's Most Daring Aviator, Tells Why He is Afraid to Fly Again



The Finish of Cal Rogers. He tried the "Dip of Death." Shown Opposite, Failed to Make the "Come In" and Was Dashed to Death. The Photograph Shows How the Aeroplane Fell Head On.

at an angle of about 45 degrees. When I steeped down from the machine I didn't dare ask—I just waited for someone to say: "Why, Beachey, old man, your hair has turned snow white!"

The memory of it all is now but a mad, dizzy whirl through space. I know I came down out of the heavens with the swish of a great condor. I could hear the hysterical applause as I turned up the nose of my plane to ease the force of my drop from the blue. I had come down in a straight glide

And that was the beginning of the "Dip of Death." It was the forerunner of all that people have been pleased to call my "air devilry." My defense of the "Dip of Death" is that I was forced to take it, as birdmen have since, and when I kept it up I was furthering the interests of science in that I was showing airmen that it was possible to cheat death when your motor stalled above. It was all at the peril of my own life and at the cost of all the lives snuffed out in an attempt to follow in my wake. Consequently, I held little fear of an engine gone wrong thereafter, and one-half of the martyrs of this great science would be alive today had they studied the possibilities of the glide as I did, patiently and scientifically.

As soon as I found that I could make the tremen-

dous glides to earth, I began to reinforce my machine. I doubled every wire, and gradually I was able to come down at sharper and sharper angles. I went slow. The others didn't.

As the days and weeks and months went by and I was sharpening the angle of that glide, I knew the time would come when I could make a sheer dive from a great altitude.

At first I had great difficulty in breathing. It was hard to control my senses and to get used to the increased air pressure. Gradually I mastered it. One day, letting only a few friends know of my intentions, I determined to make a dead drop from an altitude of 5,000 feet. Well, if I had failed I wouldn't be here to tell about it now. I came

Just an unexpected puff of wind, and it was the end. He wouldn't listen, and he paid the price with his life. He was doing what they call my "Dutch roll."

Phil Parmelee was killed doing my "figure eight." I used to complete the entire evolution with my hands off the levers, guiding my machine with my knees and the motion of my body only. Phil was determined to master that. He died trying to do it.

Horace Kearney wanted to be the star at our Los Angeles meet. "Do something to outshine Beachey!" seemed to be the cry. So he attempted a flight over the ocean from Los Angeles to San Francisco, where a meet was to follow shortly after. He took with him as a passenger Chester Lawrence, automobile editor of the Los Angeles Examiner. A single pontoon from that machine is all that they ever found of it. Kearney and Lawrence were never seen alive nor were their bodies found.

Billy Badger, a college graduate and rich, died in the "pit" at Chicago during the big meet. Billy was doing my vertical dip with the "come in." Billy was all courage and the jolliest fellow I ever knew. He was happy-go-lucky and simply trusted to luck. He didn't take the trouble to reinforce his machine, and the result was that when he made the drop the force of the air crumpled the wings of his plane up about him. He forfeited his life with a smile.

Eugene Ely was showing a Georgia crowd the "Dutch roll." When they dug Gene out his last words were: "I lost control."

Cronwell Dixon, a mere lad, wanted to "be better than Beachey." His machine crumpled when he was trying the dip.

Cal Rodgers, the man who flew from coast to coast, died in the surf near Los Angeles doing the dip. Rodgers was dipping down and clinging sea gulls for the amusement of the crowd. He plunged into shallow water and died under his machine.

John Frisbie went down to his death doing the "ocean roll." I was engaged especially to do stunts at the Chicago meet. I appeared on the last two days only, but my antics in the air saved the meet, they said. When they saw me perform the first day they were betting in the auditorium bar that I would not live the meet out. When I flew over Niagara Falls and down the gorge they were betting two to one that I would never get out of the gorge alive. I did, though, and landed in Canada in six minutes, getting \$5,000 for the feat. So perhaps I've been forced to do these stunts.

The aero-scientists said a man couldn't go up in the air and come straight down, because the pressure on the top of the biplane would crush it and turn the thing over. With my hat off to science, I will only say that I dropped straight down safely for two years. There was pressure on the top. Lots of times I thought the canvas MIGHT burst, but it didn't.

The chief of police of San Juan, Porto Rico, whom I know very well in a social way—not through professional attentions—coined the saying: "To fly better than Beachey means death." Those words seemed to be always before my eyes.

I love the game and believe in it. We can't even dream of the results yet to be attained. I know I've got plenty of courage. I always felt sure of myself—so sure that the thought of death never

straight down like a stone. As I neared the ground I turned up the plane's nose and landed in a distant part of the field as gently as a bird.

And I've done it hundreds of times since. No living thing has ever gone through the air at the rate I went. One day we figured the speed of the drop. From an altitude of 5,000 feet until the time I brought up the plane's nose near the ground I traveled at the rate of 156 miles an hour. Just twenty-three seconds it took to cover the distance!

The boys who tried to follow me in that drop, in most cases, went at it blindly. Before taking up the planes I had been a dirigible balloon operator for five years. Study of the air was a fad with me. When I took up the planes I knew a little more about the elements than my brother birdmen. Most of those killed had never been off the ground in anything. Some of them didn't even take the trouble to look their machines over before going up. Generally they left it to a mechanic. I never failed to examine everything before trusting myself to chance.

I watched Rutherford Page trying out some of my stunts in a brand new Curtiss machine. He was foolishly brave and I tried to warn him. He laughed at me. He insisted that he could do anything I did. I helped to untangle his dead and broken body from that very machine a few minutes later. As we worked to clear him of the maze of wires and canvas, his mechanic turned to me and said:

"Mr. Beachey, Rutherford said just now, before he went up, he was going to outdo your stunts or break his neck."

Beachey's "Spiral Glide" with the Deadly Reverse That Killed Walsh.

even bothered me. But my conscience won't let me go on with my work. Only one thing will ever tempt me to take my place in an aeroplane. If ever the United States is forced into a war, and Uncle Sam wants me to fly for "Old Glory," I'll fly—but until then I'm through.