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Sky Patrol 1938: Universal Newsreel Aviation Stories

by Phillip W. Stewart

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UNIVERSAL NEWSREEL

Release No. 731

SKY PATROL 1938

UNIVERSAL NEWSREEL AVIATION STORIES

Phillip W. Stewart

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with GRAHAM McNAMEE — by courtesy N. B. C.

**Books by
Phillip W. Stewart**

AERIAL ACES OF THE UNIVERSAL NEWSREEL

*A Reference Guide to the Aviation Related Stories Released Nationally
by Universal Pictures, 1929-1931*

AMERICA'S FILM VAULT

*A Reference Guide to the Motion Pictures Held by the
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An Investigator's Guide to the Films Produced by the Ford Motor Co.

PROJECTED HISTORY

*A Catalog of the U.S. National Stories Released by
Universal Newsreel*

Volume One: 1929-1930

Volume Two: 1931-1932

Volume Three: 1933-1935

SKY PATROL 1938

Universal Newsreel Aviation Stories

WAR WINGS

Films of the First Air War

WARFILMS

*An Overview of Motion Pictures within Military Record Groups
Held in the U.S. National Archives*

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Contained within these pages is verbiage that was used by American society during the late 1930's. While the inclusion of these words or phrases does not represent the author's view of today's society, this book is being presented with the style and wording as it was originally fashioned.

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Introduction

A BRIEF HISTORY

The Universal Newsreel dates all the way back to 1913, when Universal Pictures introduced *The Universal Animated Weekly*, a silent, one-reel, news film. In 1918, William Randolph Hearst, the noted newspaper baron, started “*The International Newsreel*” and released it through Universal. This business relationship continued until 1929, when Universal Pictures started to produce an independent sound newsreel called the “*Universal Newspaper Newsreel*” in July of that year. After decades of superb achievement, the Universal Newsreel went dark 38 years later, in December of 1967.

Three years later, 6350 reels of edited stories and 8501 reels of outtakes, along with approximately 550,000 subject catalog cards, 3400 single-page rundown sheets, and 445 large boxes of associated production files were donated to the National Archives. Its official NARA name is “MCA/Universal Newsreel Library Collection.” In March, 1974, MCA/Universal removed all restrictions and abandoned all copyright claims to the collection. As a result, this newsreel, consisting of almost 15 million feet of film, is in the public domain.

As great as it is, this collection is not a complete historical record. My research indicates four principal reasons for this. First, due to constraints such as: staff, equipment, budget, and the competitive nature of the newsreel business, the management of Universal Newsreel exercised their editorial rights to pick and choose what stories they thought were important or entertaining enough to pass along to their audience. Second, it was a common practice at Universal, as well at other newsreel companies, to disassemble the 35-mm film negatives of the individual stories soon after the bi-weekly issue was produced and sent out to the theaters. This allowed the narration and music tracks to be recycled for silver recovery. Universal

kept a couple of complete release prints with the sound track intact for reference purposes, but few survive today. As a result, the Universal Newsreel stories held in NARA prior to the mid-1950's are usually silent and missing the golden toned narration of Graham McNamee, and later, Ed Herlihy. Unfortunately, the only noise you may hear in the newsreels of the 1930's and 1940's is the "sound-on-film" of speeches, statements made directly to the camera, and the occasional story that had "wild" or "natural" sounds. Third, after they took custody of the collection, NARA made the difficult decision to discard a sizable portion of the outtake reels they deemed not historically significant. These outtakes included nearly all reels relating to sports, fashion, human interest, animals, oddities, gags and contests. Lastly, there was the disastrous NARA nitrate motion picture film fire in December, 1978, that destroyed about 73% of the remaining outtakes (1930-1950) and almost three years' worth of releases (1941-1943).

Despite these shortcomings, the surviving titles of the MCA/Universal Newsreel Library Collection consists of almost 400 hours of edited stories and 800 hours of outtakes that cover most of the key national and world events from 1929 to 1967.

SKY PATROL 1938

As noted earlier, the material presented here is based on the motion picture films contained within the MCA/Universal Newsreel Library Collection. Catalog cards, paper documents, microfilm records, and the moving images were all methodically investigated. The resulting relevant information: titles, story line, narration, word picture, and notations provide a comprehensive rundown for each title. Featured stories were selected because of their dominate aviation content and/or historical significance, and are presented in release order.

Each story has two titles. The top one is the actual title as seen in the film. The other title (in parentheses) is the one used in Universal Newsreel synopsis sheets and ultimately by NARA

catalogers for all their databases, including the online National Archives Catalog. These synopsis sheets were informational single-page handbills that provided theater managers advance notice of the action-packed stories coming in the next Universal release. These titles rarely matched each other because the reel producers and editors were tweaking stories until the very last moment. Below the titles is the **STORY LINE**. Taken from the synopsis sheets, this narrative uses much of the verbiage indicative of the dramatic hyperbole of the times. Next is the **SCRIPT** section. Because these stories don't have sound tracks, a lightly edited copy of the original narration script is presented here. **ACTION** describes, in a succinct fashion, the film scenes that visually support the script. The **NOTES** segment consists of cameraman comments and historical information. Lastly, the **DATA** line contains the story's catalog number (N), time in seconds (T), event location (L), and the release date (D).

VIEWING

As you read through all the titles, I suspect that you'll find several that you'd like to view. Regrettably, your options are currently somewhat limited. Your first choice should probably be to check out the web. With the explosive growth of all things internet coupled with the fact that the Universal Newsreel is not under copyright, some titles are now available as downloads, streaming video, or on DVD's. Therefore, a web search may be in order, just type in the story's title (the one in parentheses) in the search block of your favorite search engine. You just might be surprised at what's out there in cyberspace.

Second, check out the growing number of digital copies that are available from NARA's computer database, the National Archives Catalog (<https://catalog.archives.gov>). Again, just make sure you use the story titles listed in parentheses in your search.

If that doesn't work, I'd suggest a visit to NARA. All the films mentioned in the following pages are available on reference videos and/or DVDs for your viewing and research pleasure at

the Motion Picture, Sound, and Video Research Room. If you choose to visit, it would be best to email the research staff (mopix@nara.gov) in advance to ensure that your film of interest and its playback equipment are available.

Lastly, you may want to hire a private film researcher to make video reference copies of your selected titles. If you live outside a reasonable driving distance of College Park, this may be a viable cost option. A list of researchers is available on-line at <https://www.archives.gov/research/hire-help/media.html?format=motion-pictures>.

Chapter 1

January

**1. SAMOAN CLIPPER LOST IN PACIFIC
WITH CREW OF 7
(CLIPPER LOST IN SOUTH SEAS)**

STORY LINE: The gigantic *Samoan Clipper* explodes and sinks at sea, killing all seven members of the crew during a test flight on the new Hawaii to New Zealand route. The fated ship carried no passengers on her way to disaster.

SCRIPT: With deep regret, we bring you last pictures of Edwin Musick, gallant commander of the *Samoan Clipper*, who, with six companions, has been lost in a frightful tragedy in the South Seas. An oil leak developed as the gigantic flying boat was making a test trip from Samoa to New Zealand. The ship exploded, killing all on board.

ACTION: Engines running; Musick stands outside building with others; aerial view of a clipper turning into the wind; cockpit interior; start of take-off run; views of Musick at the controls; aerial scenes of a clipper in flight.

NOTES: *Samoan Clipper* was a Pan American Airways' Sikorsky S-42B (NC16734). The clipper scenes in this story are of a Pan Am Martin M-130 which apparently Musick flew in an earlier newsreel.

DATA: N: 10-632-1; T: 30; L: Pacific Ocean; D: 01/12/38



**2. CLIPPER FORCED BACK 700 MILES
BY GAS TROUBLE
(CHINA CLIPPER FORCED BACK)**

STORY LINE: The giant *China Clipper* is forced back from half-way across the Pacific toward Hawaii by a clog in the oil line. Few of the eight passengers even realize that the ship has turned as its skilled crew of seven bring it safely into port.

SCRIPT: Seven-hundred miles at sea when a fuel line defect developed, the *China Clipper* returns to Los Angeles as the safest move. The huge ship was Honolulu bound when the captain found he was unable to pump gasoline from the wing tanks. Most of the passengers were asleep and unaware of any trouble until the plane landed in California instead of Hawaii. The great plane, larger than the *Samoan Clipper* lost two weeks ago, was at no time in peril.

ACTION: *China Clipper* is towed into port by a large tugboat; exterior cockpit area of plane; Captain J.H. Tilton; more towing; passengers; more views of the flying boat under tow.

NOTES: Registered as NC14716, the *China Clipper* was the first of three Martin M-130 four-engine flying boats built for Pan American Airways. Passengers seen in this story include R.S. Springer and Mrs. H.B. McCoy of Manila, PI and M.H. Lockett of Los Angeles, CA. Footage was shot on 1/22/38 by Norman Alley.

DATA: N: 10-635-1; T: 35; L: San Pedro, CA (in Summary sheet) or Los Angeles, CA (in film title); D: 01/24/38



3. QUICK-OPENING PARACHUTE IS DEMONSTRATED (NEW 'CHUTE OPENS IN HURRY)

STORY LINE: Intrepid aeronauts test a new type parachute which opens almost immediately and which can be maneuvered

to avoid trees or other danger spots while landing. A tremendous increase in the safety of 'chute-jumping is expected.

SCRIPT: Mark Willing of Mount Holly, VA, once saw a parachute jumper killed, so he determined to build a fool-proof 'chute. With Kimball Scribner and Raymond Morders, two college boys helping, they have developed 'chutes that open almost instantly, and which can be deflated and inflated at will in the air. Did you notice how quickly the 'chutes opened? Little danger of a crash landing there! By special cords, the 'chute can be almost completely deflated in mid-air without danger to speed its descent to the ground should it drift toward trees or power lines. It's expected to be a great life-saver for aviators!

ACTION: New parachute is demonstrated by Scribner on ground using a parked plane as wind source; Scribner and Morders stand next to airplane in flying garb and parachutes; a Bourdon Kitty Hawk B-4 (NC30V) aircraft takes off with the parachutists in front cockpit; aerial view of Scribner jumping; two deployed 'chutes; spectators; Scribner collapses his parachute and returns it to normal; Scribner releases another parachute and lands.

NOTES: Scenes shot 1/23/38 by James Lyons.

DATA: N: 10-635-8; T: 59; L: Washington, D.C.; R: 01/24/38



4. IL DUCE'S SON ON ITALIAN PIONEERING FLIGHT TO BRAZIL (YOUNG DUCE FLIES ATLANTIC)

STORY LINE: Bruno Mussolini, son of the Italian dictator, and several companions take-off for a flight across the south Atlantic

to Brazil and Argentina. The three planes, flying in formation, reach Rio de Janeiro 14 hours after leaving West Africa.

SCRIPT: Lieutenant Bruno Mussolini, son of Il Duce, joins the pioneering Green Rats squadron for a ten-thousand mile flight from Rome to South America and back, in the interests of commercial Italian aviation. From here they go down the coast of Africa, across to Brazil, and then on to Buenos Aires. Later, a regular airline may be established over the route. An historic take-off that already has been crowned with success, for they spanned the Atlantic in record time.

ACTION: Pilots look at map standing in front of a Marchetti SM.79 tri-motor plane; pilots; map; crews man their planes; tri-motor in front of hangar starts to taxi; take-off.

NOTES: Story was filmed at Guidonia Airfield on 01/18/38 by Grimaldi Domenico. His caption sheet noted that this was the first flight in which Lieutenant Mussolini acted as a pilot-in-command. The other pilots were Colonel Biseo, the squadron commander, and Captain Mosectelli. They flew the same Alfa-Romeo powered Savoia-Marchetti SM.79 tri-motored planes that gained first, second, and third places in the Paris-Damascus-Istres air race of 1937.

DATA: N: 10-636-5; T: 39; L: Rome, Italy; D: 01/26/38



5. NEW AVIATION DEVELOPMENTS AT INDOOR SHOW (AIR PROGRESS SEEN IN SHOW)

STORY LINE: International Air Show opens in the Amphitheatre at the Stock Yards with its display of the latest developments in

aviation speed and safety. Unusual designs stand ready to prove their worth.

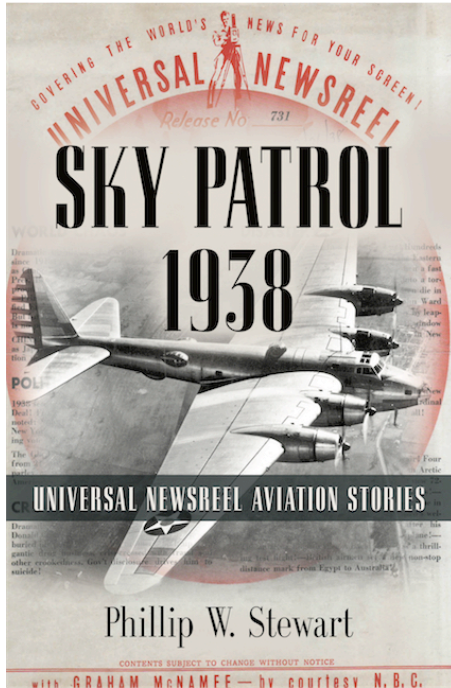
SCRIPT: The Chicago Stock Yards is a new rendezvous for planes, but there's a reason. A great indoor airshow is being held in the vast International Amphitheatre, with a wide assortment of exhibits, from this early French flying machine, on up—and UP is right. Might be called the picture of a Frenchman trying to raise the price of the franc. Quite a contrast, this new model speed plane! Many of the latest refinements in aviation are here on display. There's a tricky three-bladed, variable pitch propeller, for instance. And the insides of a big, modern counter-balanced plane motor. Engines have come a long way since this old chain-drive Wright job. The public, of course, is interested in the new modern transport planes, now that wives are taking to the air. How's that for a rumble seat? But it's not for mother-in-law. It's for map-making!

ACTION: Plane lands at the stock yards; scenes of a floor show depicting the first French flying machine; views of an Army Northrop A-17 attack plane, a cutaway of a WASP radial engine, and of a 1910 Wright Brothers motor; Beechcraft 18B (NC1284) mounted on wing jacks demonstrating its retracting landing gear; view of a Ryan Aircraft instrument panel; women climb aboard a Stinson airplane; the Air-Mapper Explorer.

NOTES: The lady sitting at the controls in the Ryan instrument panel scene is Dorothy Ring, who was the youngest woman transport pilot in the U.S. at the time. Shot by Floyd Traynham and S. Savitt on 01/28/38.

DATA: N: 10-637-8; T: 79; L: Chicago, IL; D: 01/31/38





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