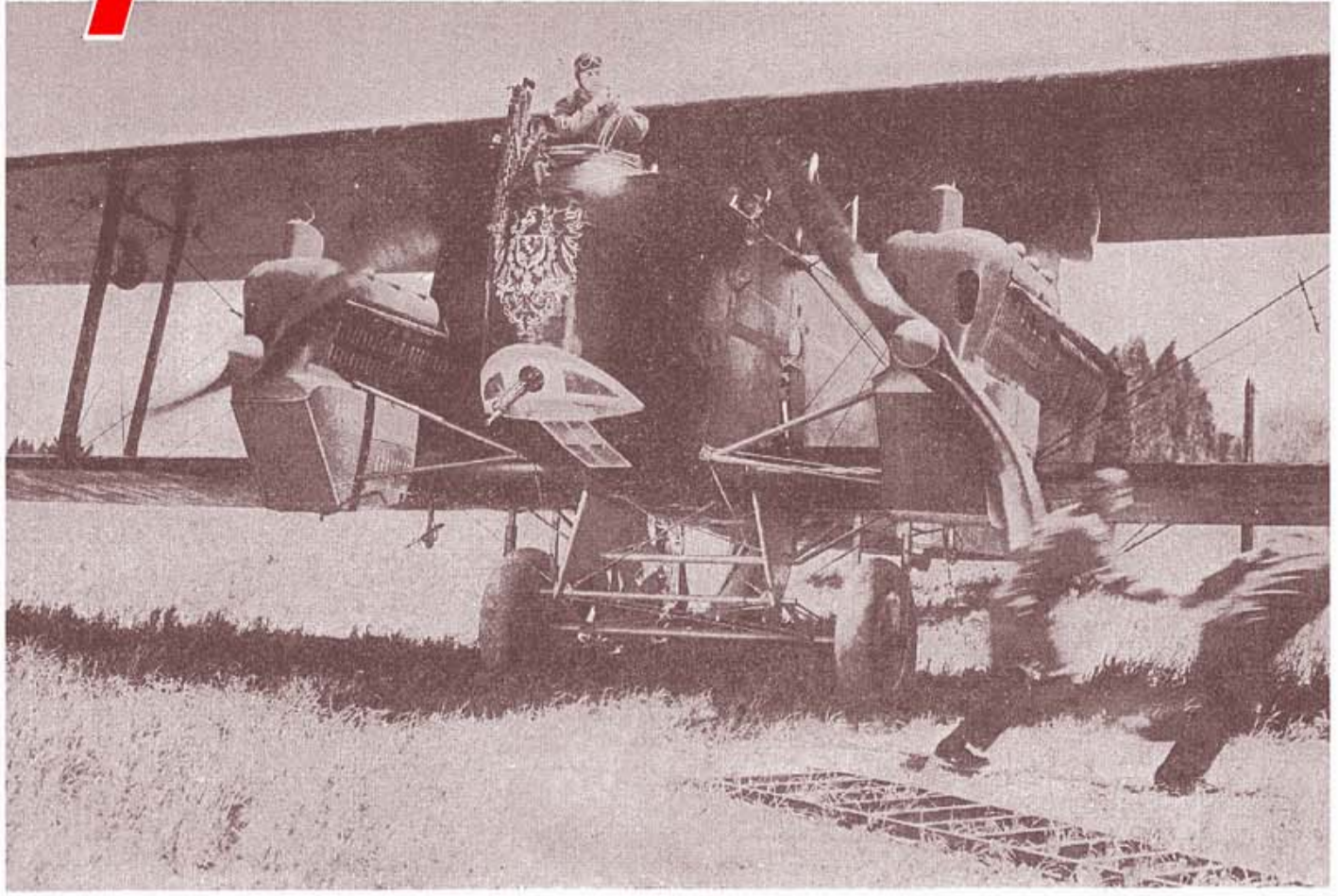


PHOTOPLAY

April, 1930: p. 30

4 Million Dollars



The great German Gotha, mightiest of bombing planes, about to take off for a scene in "Hell's Angels." This is one of the big fleet of mechanical eagles that Howard Hughes bought and reconditioned for his picture. You can see Ben Lyon in the nose of the ship, adjusting his helmet for the flight. On the opposite page, see what can happen to a Gotha!

The thrilling, romantic story of how Howard Hughes, the millionaire kid, tossed fortunes and human lives into the making of 'Hell's Angels'

By BOGART ROGERS

THERE is, according to science, an end to all things. Which, apparently, is the only reason why Hollywood's perennial picture production, "Hell's Angels," approaches completion. It couldn't go on forever and the immutable laws of nature have seemingly accomplished what man was unable to do.

And even now, with "Hell's Angels" practically in the can, Hollywood's mad wags won't let it alone. The latest—and I hope the last—of the gags at its expense has been going the rounds.

"Well," say the wise-crackers, "now that the talkie version of 'Hell's Angels' is finished, they're waiting for television!"

For over two years, "Hell's Angels" has had the cinema industry gossiping, scoffing, laughing up its sleeve and right out in public, admiring, doubting, amazed, astonished, goggle-eyed and simply flabbergasted. Nothing like it has ever happened before, and probably nothing like it will ever happen again. It is the last word in opulence, extravagance and lavish expenditure of time and money.

It cost, according to figures issued by its producer, over \$4,000,000, which is more, by hundreds of thousands of dollars, than any single picture has ever cost before.

To the intense joy of the laboratories and the Eastman Kodak Co., 2,254,750 feet of film were exposed—another record.

Thirty months were required to produce it—surely a record.

It was written, produced and directed by one young man who, when he started it, had practically no previous experience in the business. This may or may not account for its tremendous cost.

Every dime of the \$4,000,000 was right out of this same young man's trousers pocket.

It is surely the most amazing thing that has ever happened in a business where odd and peculiar hocus-pocus is no novelty.

All that was left of the big Gotha after stunt flier Al Wilson crashed it for "Hell's Angels." Mechanic Phil Jones lost his life in this smash. Wilson saved himself by leaping out with a parachute



Howard Hughes, the 25-year-old Texas millionaire who wrote, produced and directed the stupendous air picture, "Hell's Angels," that is costing about \$4,000,000. Will he get it back? He doesn't care!

OldMagazineArticles.com

4 Million Dollars

How It Was Spent

TOTAL NEGATIVE COST AND DEVELOPING (2,254,750 feet).....\$225,475

TOTAL COST FLYING SEQUENCES
(Exclusive of film cost).....\$2,113,000

Planes bought and reconditioned.....\$562,000
Players' and flyers' salaries..... 754,000
Plane and location rentals..... 389,000
Salaries, cameramen, technicians..... 408,000

TOTAL COST DRAMATIC OR INTERIOR SEQUENCES.....\$1,068,000

Sets, costumes, etc..... 520,000
Players' salaries..... 328,000
Salaries, cameramen, directors..... 220,000

TOTAL COST ZEPPELIN SEQUENCE..... 460,000

Cost to Date.....\$3,866,475

When cutting costs, "dubbing," exploitation, etc., is added to above, cost of "Hell's Angels" will be over \$4,000,000.

To even begin to understand "Hell's Angels" you must first know about Mr. Howard R. Hughes, Jr., the young gentleman who financed, wrote, produced and directed it.

Howard Hughes, Jr., or "our hero," was born in Houston, Texas, on Christmas Eve, 1904. He lost his mother when he was eighteen, and when he was twenty his wealthy father died.

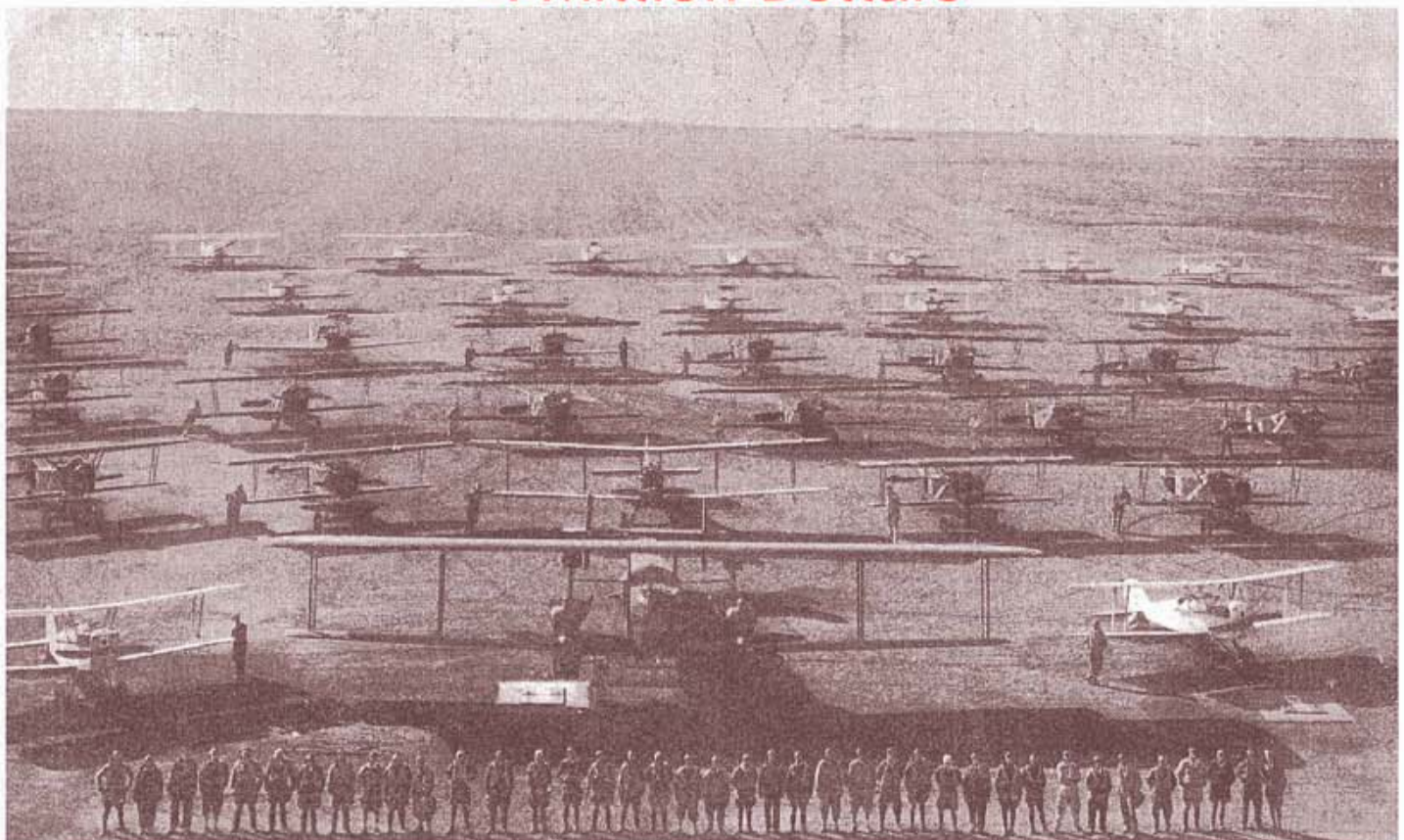
The industrial pride of Houston is the Hughes Tool Co., a colossal establishment in which several hundred workmen unceasingly fabricate Hughes Patent Rotary Drill Bits, Hughes Simplex Rock Bits, Hughes Disc Bits, Hughes Acme Tool Joints and divers other gadgets consumed in enormous quantities by oil drillers. It is a very profitable enterprise—about two million dollars a year worth of profitability—and now it all belongs to Howard R. Hughes, Jr., including the annual profits.

At the tender age of twenty-one, young Mr. Hughes went West to seek his fortune, having first turned over the tool business to his associates with instructions to forward his dividend checks to Hollywood. His uncle, it so happens, is Rupert Hughes, the novelist, which has nothing to do with this story. Howard Hughes became immediately interested in the picture business and entered it through the expedient of financing Marshall Neilan's production, "Everybody's Acting."

This feature, so it is said, returned fifty per cent profit, and the young Croesus figured that if he could make fifty per cent on an ordinary picture he should be able to realize proportionately greater returns on better pictures, which demonstrates he had a great deal to learn about motion picture finance. Anyway, with the enticing fragrance of new gold tickling his nostrils he organized the Caddo Company (Caddo is an oil field from which, I believe, some of his income is derived), untied his ponderous bankroll and prepared to take the picture business apart and find out what made it tick.

He unlimbered his talents, so to speak, by making a picture called "Two Arabian Knights," and very good, too. It materially enhanced the reputations of Louis Wolheim and William Boyd, its stars, and Lewis Milestone, its director. It also made money and strengthened

4 Million Dollars



Howard Hughes' own war fleet! Forty planes of all types, with their pilots, assembled at the airport at Oakland, Calif. Shortly after this picture was taken, the ships took off for the most spectacular air battle of "Hell's Angels," a picture that abounds with thrills.

Mr. Hughes' belief in the theory that the more you spend the more you make.

We come now to "Hell's Angels," which started its historic voyage across the cinematographic seas some time in 1927.

The legend is that Howard Hughes bought an idea from Marshall Neilan—for cash. I don't know what the idea was, but it was a virile little rascal that developed into four million dollars' worth of movie. The archives reveal that Harry Behn and Howard Hughes wrote the original script, which was subsequently pencilled out of all resemblance to its original self.

IN October, 1927, the thing started to jell. From Paramount, Mr. Hughes borrowed Luther Reed, a director. In case Mr. Reed needs further identification I refer you to "Rio Rita" and "Hit the Deck," his latest directorial specimens. He was also an aviation nut and had been the first aviation editor of the *New York Herald*.

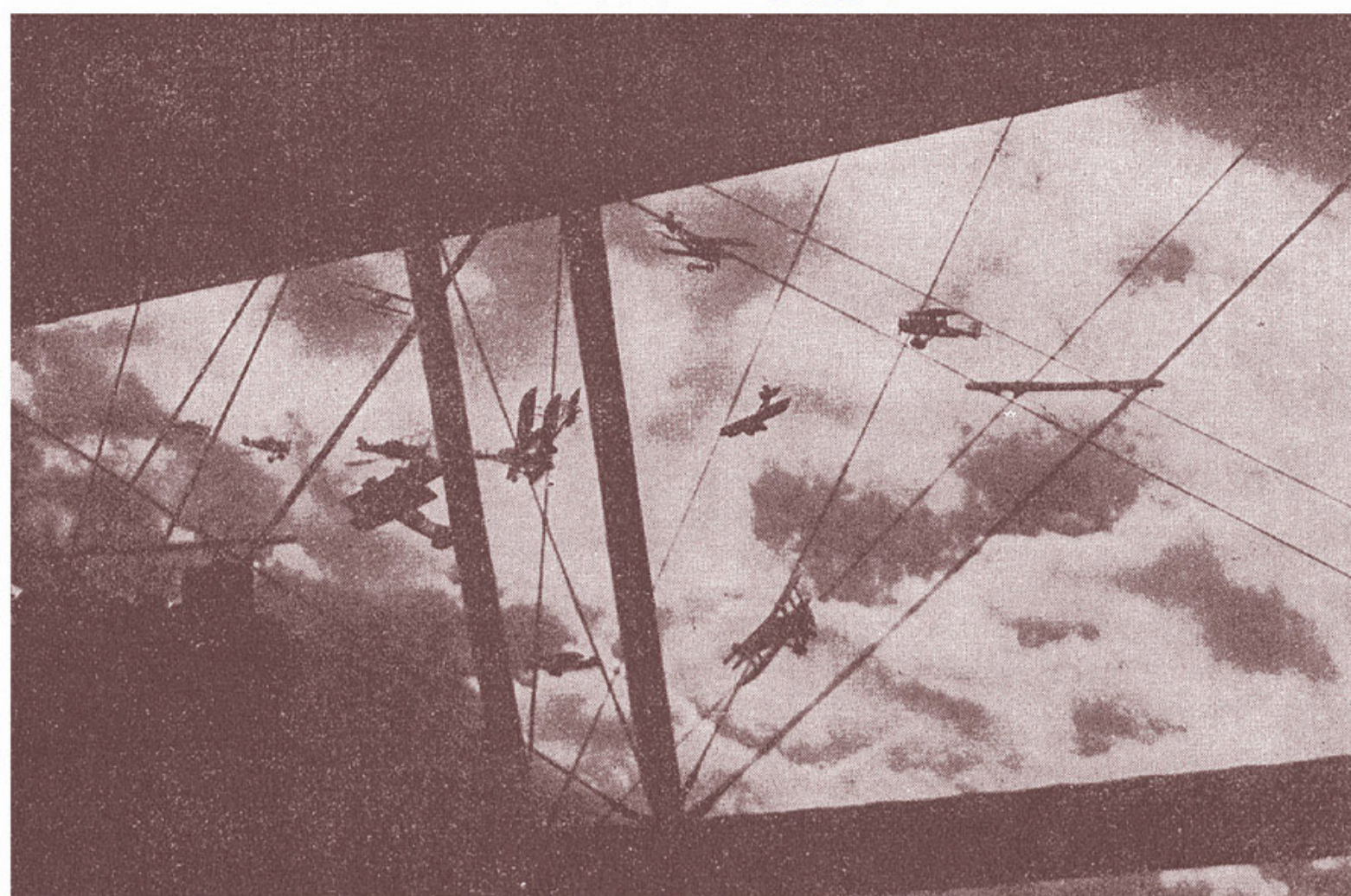
Mr. Hughes also borrowed James Hall from Paramount and Ben Lyons from First National. They were to be loaned, I believe, for only two to three months. They were still working on "Hell's Angels" nearly two years later.

Greta Nissen, if you remember, she was selected for the leading feminine rôle, the remaining cast was assembled



Jean Harlow (a newcomer) and Ben Lyon, below, in one of the romantic episodes in "Hell's Angels." All these were done in silent form when the talkies came. Out they went, and a talking version was made, with Miss Harlow playing the part done silently by Greta Nissen

4 Million Dollars



The most thrilling aerial "dog fight" in motion picture history. High over the Oakland Airport raged the battle, with the forty ships shown opposite taking part. This one exciting scene in which the dare-devil pilots performed cost \$160,000

and on October 31, 1927, the cameras started their record-breaking grind.

A moment's digression, please.

Just prior to the starting of "Hell's Angels" Paramount had released "Wings," an admittedly great film spectacle, the epic of the war in the air. The picture was produced at tremendous cost and with all the experience and facilities of one of the world's largest studios, plus the co-operation of the United States Army and Air Service. "Wings" was a sensation.

Do you think its enormous success and the almost unsurpassable standard it set disturbed Mr. Hughes? Don't be silly. He never turned a hair. With sublime confidence he set out to make a much bigger and much better epic of the air. "Wings," as far as he was concerned, was just a sample that would whet the public appetite for what was going to be the real Peruvian doughnuts in aerial epics, "Hell's Angels."

HOLLYWOOD said it was impossible, or highly improbable. Right here is a good time to mention that to young Howard Hughes nothing is impossible, or at least not until he has spent a lot of money proving it to his complete satisfaction. The word "can't" is anathema. He knows what he wants and he will exhaust every resource in an effort to get it. Many times he has failed, but he also has done a lot of things the wisenheimers said couldn't be done. You have to give him credit for that.

In January, 1928, after some vicissitudes, the dramatic sequences of "Hell's Angels" were completed. None of the aerial scenes had yet been filmed. In those good old days talking pictures were unknown, so "Hell's Angels" was silent. Close to \$400,000 had been spent with a lot yet to be done.

Some of Mr. Hughes' assistants became perturbed. They made so bold as to suggest he might be spending a bit too much money.

He replied that it was his own money.

They couldn't think of a comeback to that one!

They had never seen money spent so freely before and suspected Mr. Hughes might be wrong in certain instances, but they weren't quite sure.

After all, it is almost impossible for a man with an income of \$5,000 a day to be wrong.

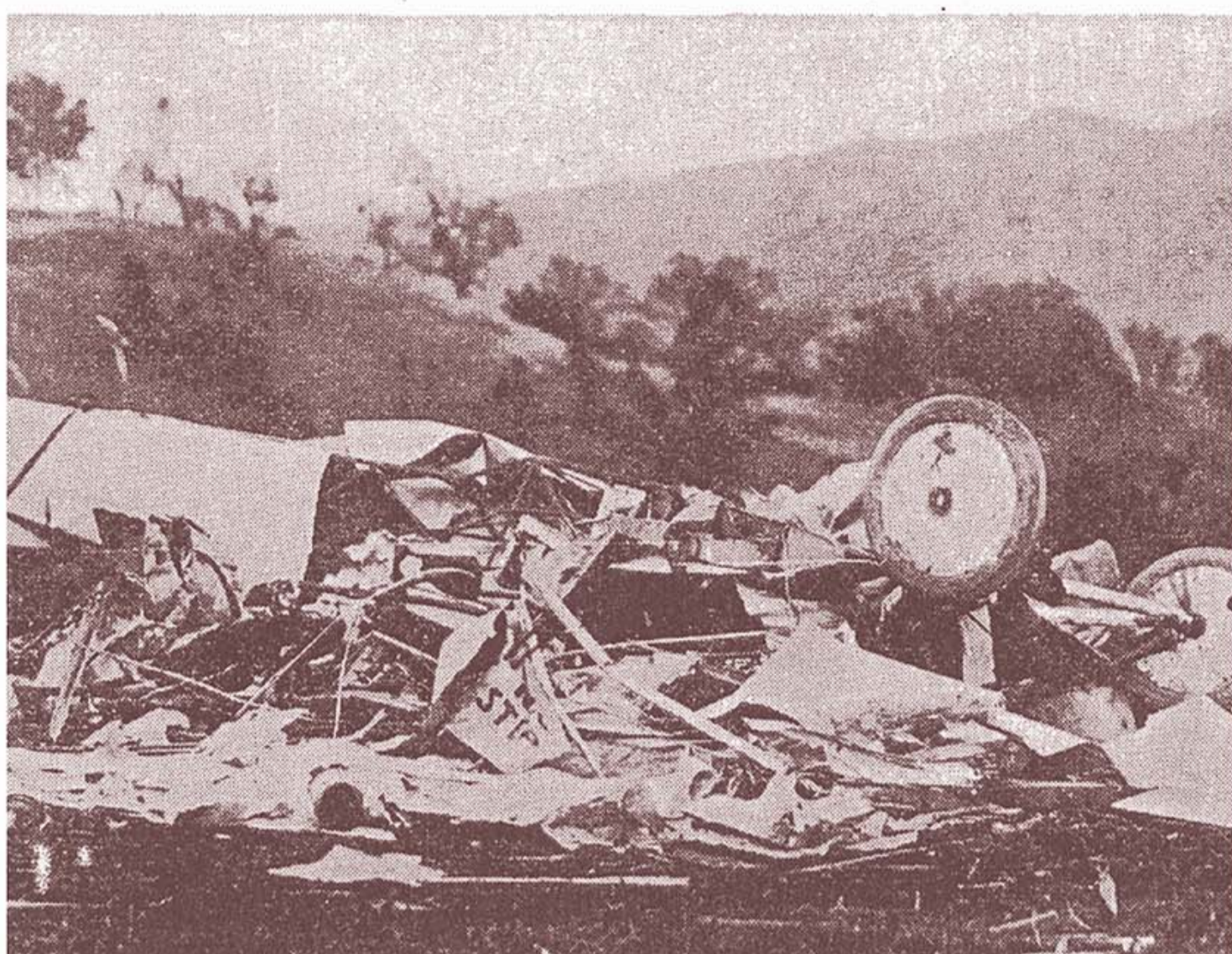
As "Hell's Angels" was a war picture, Mr. Hughes insisted on real war type airplanes. Nothing else would do. His emissaries combed the land for Spads, [PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 118] SE5's, Sopwith Camels and other planes on the wings of which the British—the heroes of the picture are British—fliers had soared to victory, but the war had been over for ten years and they were hard to find. He collected several German Fokkers and a few other war types and then ordered a lot of post-war ships rebuilt to look the part.

He demanded a twin-engined German Gotha bomber, of which none remained in the whole wide world, and finally substituted a twin-motored Sikorsky, masked to look like a Gotha, of which more anon.

HIS aerial fleet assembled, he constructed a complete flying field at Inglewood, the first of several, established machine and repair shops, and hired enough pilots and mechanics to operate a transcontinental airline.

He constructed, at enormous expense, a miniature of London which was to be bombed by a Zeppelin, beautiful replicas of which were also built in miniature.

4 Million Dollars



The remains of a British scout plane after a mid-air crash that occurred during the above battle. Both pilots survived

I don't know why he didn't buy the Graf Zeppelin. I guess it wasn't finished at the time. This sequence cost a mere \$460,000.

Luther Reed, the director, retired upon completion of the dramatic sequences. Mr. Hughes, who had been studying the technicalities of direction, decided to shoot the aerial stuff himself. It was his story, his money and his picture, and he felt the only way to get exactly what he wanted was to do it himself.

At the Inglewood Field one afternoon the whole undertaking nearly came to an untimely end. Mr. Hughes was a flier of some experience himself but apparently not sufficient experience to fly a tricky old Thomas Morse scout plane, which he tried to do. Ignoring the fervid protestations of his staff he started off for a little hop in this deceitful craft.

It was powered with a rotary motor and Mr. Hughes was unfamiliar with the eccentricities of rotary motors. Four hundred feet off the ground he essayed a climbing right hand turn.

The rotary motor performed its customary unfriendly trick and jerked him into a dangerous flat spin. As he whirled earthward someone was heard to murmur, "My God, there goes fifty million dollars and my job!" They rushed to the wreckage to find Mr. Hughes combing pieces of motor out of his hair and rubbing numerous contusions and abrasions. There were no broken bones. The next day he was back on the job.

The first flying casualty occurred about that time. Al Johnson, a stunt flier, was killed while transporting a plane from one location to another.

ABOUT March, 1928, the Inglewood field was abandoned for a new field near Van Nuys, a suburb of Los Angeles. The twin-motored bomber arrived from New York piloted by one Captain Roscoe Turner, whose skill and daring were attested to by the fact that he was the only human being in the world who could or would fly it. It was that kind of an airplane.

Caddo Field lay amid acres of potato patches, bean fields and chicken ranches. During his occupancy Mr. Hughes was just a heavy sugar daddy for the surrounding farmers. His planes¹ persisted in landing where they shouldn't, and he was frequently required to pay top prices for large areas of head lettuce, celery and other produce that his mischievous airships had rendered unfit for table consumption. Numerous fruit trees were also to be found in his Gargantuan market basket.

There was one scene of the bomber taking off that he insisted on getting. The field wasn't large enough for that particular shot, so he bought, at famine prices, a bumper crop of Irish potatoes that were ripening in an adjoining field, leveled and graded the new terrain—and then decided not to take the shot. A chicken rancher collected handsomely because the "Hell's Angels" planes made his White Leghorns scramble so frantically for cover that many were killed in the rush.

At Caddo Field, and several other places, Mr. Hughes put the prodigal Eric Von Stroheim's nose completely out of joint. I refer to his proclivities for exposing astonishing lengths of film for what anyone else would have regarded as trivial scenes. For one little close-up of the valves of an airplane engine—it would not run more than 25 feet in the finished picture—Mr. Hughes and a corps of cameramen consumed 20,000 feet of film. How mortified Von Stroheim must have been when he heard about that! On another insert scene, a close-up of a length of cable running off a reel, he got what he wanted with a mere 18,000 feet of film.

4 Million Dollars

THERE was a small scene in the Zeppelin sequence that, so his assistants tell me, Mr. Hughes took over 100 times before it was to his liking. When the cameraman asked which of the 100 scenes should be printed Mr. Hughes displayed an amazingly retentive mind by promptly replying "Number one and number sixteen."

In October, 1928, after a year's continuous shooting, the picture was nearly finished—so everyone thought. There were just a few aerial shots to be made. They involved a mere 40 airplanes and required clouds for their effective filming. For the first time since he had started Mr. Hughes was stymied.

He could buy almost anything he wanted, but not clouds. He simply had to have them. Southern California is notoriously free from them in the fall. In Northern California they abound—cirrus, nimbus, cumulus, any kind you want.

If the clouds wouldn't come to Mr. Hughes, Mr. Hughes would go to the clouds, so he packed his 40 planes and 40 pilots and cameramen and technicians and assistants to Oakland, California, and established headquarters at Oakland Airport. Incidentally, Oakland Airport is one of the few municipal airports in the country to show an operating profit. Per-

FINALLY the proper sort of clouds appeared and the 40 planes climbed into them and staged a thrilling "dog-fight" that is said to be worth every dollar the trip cost. If that is true, as I am reliably informed it is, it must be a great dog-fight. The trip cost scores of thousands of dollars.

Another digression, if you don't mind.

During all this time "Hell's Angels" was not Mr. Hughes' only activity. He found time to buy Thomas Meighan's contract from Paramount at a very tidy figure and make two pictures with this star, one of which, "The Racket," was excellent. It is said he was also realizing a handsome profit from renting out the services of Louis Wolheim and Lewis Milestone, both of whom he held under contract—a profit that was probably offset by a loss of more than \$75,000 which he paid Raymond Griffith whom he had placed under contract and then found he couldn't use.

After the Oakland delay the company came home to really finish the picture. The last important thing to be done was crash the bomber. This spectacular scene entailed spinning the huge plane down several thousand feet and then pulling it out, the actual crash to be made by other means.

Here Mr. Hughes struck another snag. Captain Turner, who had flown the thing under the most hazardous conditions, begged to be excused. He not only begged, he insisted. The bomber, he said, might be spun, but not with his body aboard. He was convinced that if it was ever put into a tail spin it would never come out until it crashed. A lot of other fliers agreed. Mr. Hughes was undaunted. He wanted the bomber to spin, therefore it was going to spin.

"Daredevil Al" Wilson, who had done much spectacular flying in "Hell's Angels," volunteered for the job—for a cash bonus. When he left the ground with a mechanic named Phil Jones inside the fuselage where he was to work smoke pots that would give the effect of a falling burning plane, Mr. Hughes had no idea his thirst for realism would be so thoroughly assuaged. Wilson climbed to 5,000 feet, kicked the bomber into a spin and promptly bailed out with his parachute. Jones, inside the body of the craft and apparently unaware that Wilson was no longer at the controls, stayed until it was too late and was instantly killed in the crash.

OFFICIAL investigations followed. Wilson was officially absolved from blame, but the Department of Commerce revoked his pilot's license for a period and the Professional Pilot's Association, of which he was a member, requested his resignation, which shows how they felt about it. Anyway, Mr. Hughes got his spin and his crash and it's a good one.

Wilson figured in another sensational accident while working in the picture. He was flying a German Fokker which was not, as subsequent events proved, mechanically in the pink. Just above a heavy blanket of fog that covered Hollywood, the propeller decided to part company with the engine, and did. Whereupon Wilson parted company with the plane, taking his parachute with him. The Fokker landed in the back yards of the Hollywood Boulevard homes of Frank Spearman, the author, and Joseph Schenck, the producer, ruining a great deal of shrubbery. Wilson landed on a house roof three blocks away, fell off and injured his arm. Which proves a roof is no place for an aviator.

"Hell's Angels" may or may not have been

4 Million Dollars

responsible for the death of Burton Skeene, an expert cameraman who photographed many of the aerial scenes. Skeene, it is said, suffered from a bad heart and high blood pressure. A tempting salary kept him on the job while friends were advising him to quit, and a severe stroke finished him.

There were several intentional crashes.

With the bomber crashed, the picture was finished, except for some minor details. That was in March, 1929. Mr. Hughes had only spent somewhere around \$3,000,000 in his year and a half on the job. "Hell's Angels" was cut, edited and previewed in a suburban theater. Lo and behold, something was radically wrong!

It was silent.

None of the actors uttered a syllable.

WITH talkies the rage, Mr. Hughes decided that little shortcoming must be rectified. He would throw away the entire original dramatic sequences, made at a cost of nearly \$400,000, and do it all over with sound. Dialogue was required. Mr. Hughes engaged Joseph March, author of "The Wild Party," for that job. Someone wrote a new continuity. James Hall, Ben Lyon and other members of the original cast were reassembled, at considerably higher salaries. A new and unknown leading lady, Jean Harlow, was engaged. James Whale, who staged "Journey's End," the London and New York stage success, was imported to stage the talking version.

A word about Jean. One day Ben Lyon brought a girl friend to the lot, and got her a test. She was from Chicago, her name was Jean Harlow, and she was just nineteen. She clicked at once. As Harry Lang says, she was "lusciously exquisite and utterly inexperienced in pictures." It was this untried girl that Hughes entrusted with the leading feminine rôle in his mad, wonderful adventure.

And there you are.

The picture is now finished. Oh yes, there are a few details yet to be done. And, of course, Mr. Hughes might decide to do the whole thing over with the new wide-focus film that is coming into vogue—or in German, Norwegian or Esperanto. But that seems doubtful. Hard as it may be to believe, "Hell's Angels" is, barring unforeseen eventualities, just about "in the can," which is Hollywood for completed.

Whether or not it is the greatest epic of the air will be decided by the public when the picture is released. Advance reports differ. Unquestionably it has some magnificent moments. Those who have seen it say the aerial scenes are simply overwhelming in their sweep, their magnitude and their spectacular daring. They say these portions of "Hell's Angels" are undoubtedly the finest ever filmed. Almost no one has yet seen the new talking dramatic story. The old one was not supposed to be so hot. Certainly everyone will want to see "Hell's Angels," if for no other reason than to find out what four million dollars' worth of motion picture looks like.

THAT young Mr. Hughes will ever get his money back is virtually impossible. All of which I daresay is worrying me a great deal more than it is Mr. Hughes, who is probably entirely pleased with the whole affair. Look at all the fun he has had, all the talk he has stirred up, all the joy he has brought to the hearts of thousands of good, and a few bad, citizens of Hollywood. After all, when a man spends four million dollars an awful lot of people are bound to cut in on it.

Among other things, Mr. Hughes has the picture business guessing. No one who knows him will venture to say whether he is an exceedingly smart young man or the exact opposite. As a matter of fact, he is probably both. At least he can't be accused of being afraid to take a chance.

Anyone who will venture four million dollars of his own money in just one motion picture is no coward.



PHOTOPLAY