

Preparation: Escape of the Duck
Adapted from *Hero Tales, Volume III*, by Dave and Neta Jackson

A birthday gift of an airplane ride inspired Betty Greene to become a pilot herself. Instrumental in the founding of the Missionary Aviation Fellowship, Betty became their first official pilot.

The red Waco biplane was coming in a little too fast for the strange airfield in El Real, Mexico, but I wanted the new pilot, George Wiggins, to get a feel for the plane. He touched down all right, but the biplane had a large radial engine that made it difficult to see the runway ahead once the tail was on the ground. And at this airport, an unfamiliar pilot could be in trouble if he couldn't see where he was going because the runway was not straight. Halfway down the field, it turned a little bit, and right at the turn was an old shack.

"Watch the shack, George!" I cautioned. George cut the corner, but the wings hit the building. Crunch! The plane spun around and came to a shuddering stop.

I winced. It wasn't my fault, but this wasn't the way I wanted to end my first assignment on the mission field. George Wiggins had come down to replace me so I could go to Peru and fly another plane for Cameron Townsend, the founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators.

Now, Nate Saint, MAF's mechanic, would have to spend several months in Mexico repairing the Waco before it could fly again.

Once I was in Peru, I faced another problem. The plane I was to fly was a Grumman Duck that could land on water or the ground—ideal for the many rivers in the Amazon Basin—but it was trapped in the city of Lima on the west coast. The missionaries who needed it were on the other side of the towering Andes Mountains.

The military man who turned the plane over to MAF looked me up and down thoughtfully. "No woman can fly this brute," he growled at me, "much less take it over the mountains."

I just smiled. I knew God had prepared me when I had done high-altitude testing during the war. I had had experience flying many different kinds of aircraft as a WASP.

My first attempt to cross the mountains was blocked by clouds. Three days later the weather looked better, and I and Cameron Townsend took off in the morning. At twelve thousand feet, I put on my oxygen mask. Higher and higher we went looking for a gap in the clouds that would let us fly through a canyon. Would the Duck ever escape? At sixteen thousand feet we followed a mountain river up its gorge until we just skimmed over the pass. But ahead, all we could see was a blanket of clouds stretching out to the east. How would we ever get down through the clouds to land at the town of San Ramon?

On I flew, praying that if I couldn't find a way down through the clouds, the clouds behind me would not close in to prevent my return back through the pass. Then a hole appeared below me, and I threaded the old Duck down through it where I could fly along for sixty or seventy miles under the clouds but above the plateau. When the plateau dropped away, another layer of clouds lay on the basin floor. I hesitated to go much lower until I was certain I could land at San Ramon. If I could not land, I did not want to have to climb all those thousands of feet back up to cross back over the Andes.

Finally, I sighted San Ramon through a break in the clouds. Gratefully, I circled the Duck through the break to a perfect landing.

I grinned at Cameron Townsend. I had just become the first woman pilot to cross the Andes Mountains.

Whatever God takes us through can prepare us for future assignments in His service.