

THE AIRSHIPS

Based on a true story.

by

Marvin T. Broyhill

LOGLINE: *The Airships* presents the early career of John Towers, widely regarded as the father of U.S. Naval Aviation. The story is climaxed by his leading the first flight across the Atlantic Ocean in May, 1919, eight years before Lindberg's famous solo flight.

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FADE IN:

1 EXT. USS *MICHIGAN* - DAY

SUPER: The newly commissioned USS *Michigan*. 10 January 1911.

BA-WHOOM! One of the huge guns fires. The tracer shell leaves a bright burning trail as it BLAZES OUT out over the horizon.

Lean and athletic ENSIGN JOHN HENRY "JACK" TOWERS, 22, watches the shell with binoculars. He is in a steel cage mounted at the tip of the tall tripod spotting tower. The *Michigan* smartly cuts through the Atlantic Ocean.

2 INT. USS *MICHIGAN* BRIDGE - DAY

CAPTAIN NATHANIEL USHER, 56, is checking the compass heading when Towers enters and salutes.

USHER

So Jack, what do you think of our new twelve-inchers?

TOWERS

(Southern accent)

I figure those big dawgs have a maximum range of 21,000 yards. But the big dawgs are muzzled. Curvature of the Earth. In perfect weather, we can only observe out to 16,000 yards. Can't see the target.

USHER

So what do we do about your big dawgs? Taller spotting tower?

TOWERS

That would make us dangerously top-heavy. A strong storm could roll us over on our beam end.

USHER

You have a better idea?

TOWERS

Yes, sir. Flying machines. They can give us the height we need for artillery spotting.

USHER

They're toys.

TOWERS

Reconnaissance. Imagine having the ability to know the number, type, and deployment of enemy ships before engaging.

USHER

How do we do that?

TOWERS

The Navy has assigned a Captain Chambers the job of investigating aviation. You may have read about his launching a Curtiss flying machine from the *Birmingham*. A few weeks later, they landed one on the *Pennsylvania*.

(hands him a paper)

Sir, this is my request to transfer to Naval Aviation.

USHER

There is no Naval Aviation.

TOWERS

Seems as if Captain Chambers has laid the foundation for it. He'll soon need his own aviators.

USHER

Jack, this is a battleship Navy. Don't throw your career away on something as ridiculous as that.

TOWERS

It won't be long before flying machines equipped with guns and bombs will let us extend our range from thousands of yards to hundreds of miles. A navy that has flying machines will have a big advantage over one that doesn't have them.

USHER

I went to a lot of trouble to get you assigned to the *Michigan* because you are our Navy's best gunnery officer. I'll endorse your request on condition that you stay with us through the gunnery trials because if we win them, then I'll almost surely make admiral. Is that fair?

TOWERS

Yes, sir. That's fair.

3 EXT. HAMMONDSPORT, NEW YORK, TRAIN STATION - DAY

SUPER: Hammondsport, New York. 27 June 1911.

The pretty TRAIN GIRL sees Towers off the train.

TOWERS

I really enjoyed meeting ya.

TRAIN GIRL

You be sure to come see me.

Towers is greeted by LIEUTENANT JUNIOR GRADE THEODORE GORDON "SPUDS" ELLYSON, 23, a muscular, easygoing man.

ELLYSON

Welcome aboard, Jack.

TOWERS

Spuds. Haven't seen you since the Academy. What ya been up to?

ELLYSON

Behold, you are looking at the Navy's very first aviator. I'm to be your flight instructor.

Towers furrows his brow.

ELLYSON

It should have been the other way around. You applied for aviation three months before I did. Captain Chambers convinced Congress to approve the purchase of three aeroplanes. He needed someone to fly them. You weren't available. I was.

TOWERS

I received the orders. Couldn't leave until we completed the gunnery trials.

ELLYSON

The results were widely published. You had the highest score on record. Ninety-nine point nine something. You received a letter of commendation from the President. When Chambers told me about your application, I

ELLYSON (CONT'D)  
 insisted that he grab you.  
 Aviation is the future. We need a  
 celebrity to help promote it.

TOWERS  
 You said three aeroplanes. I  
 thought there were only two.

ELLYSON  
 The Wright brothers are building  
 the third one in Ohio. They  
 taught John Rodgers how to fly.  
 He's Naval Aviator number 2. You  
 will become number 3.

4 EXT. CURTISS AEROPLANE FACTORY - MORNING

The factory is a shed located on Curtiss' farm. Towers  
 follows Ellyson in. Two hydroplanes are under construction.  
 They are met by the reserved GLENN CURTISS, 32.

ELLYSON  
 Jack, I'd like you to meet Glenn  
 Curtiss. Glenn, Jack Towers.

CURTISS  
 Pleasure.

TOWERS  
 Likewise. I've been following  
 your work. Very impressive.  
 Captain Chambers gave me the job  
 of checking the construction of  
 the two hydroplanes. I'd like to  
 see the specifications and plans.

5 INT. CURTISS WORKSHOP - MORNING

Curtiss walks to his desk, where he picks up a paper. He  
 hands it to Towers, who reads it.

CURTISS  
 The specifications.

TOWERS  
 Four sentences?

Curtiss motions him over to the whitewashed wall. On it, he  
 has drawn the plans with a carpenter's pencil.

CURTISS  
 The plans.

Towers is shocked by such improvisational engineering.

## 6 EXT. KINGSLEY FLATS - MORNING

The flat area is next to Keuka Lake. Ellyson shows Towers the linen-covered bamboo aeroplane.

ELLYSON

This is our trainer, *Lizzy*.

TOWERS

One seat?

Ellyson picks up a wooden wedge from the seat.

ELLYSON

We wedge this in the throttle to limit the engine speed. You run her up and down the field until you get the feel of the steering. Then we use a smaller wedge so you can get up enough speed to make short hops. Once you master that, we pull out the wedge, and you are on your own.

Ellyson pulls the propeller, starting the engine. He jumps in and tears off down the field. He quickly returns, climbs out, and urges Towers to get in. Towers eagerly does so.

Ellyson pushes the throttle forward, and *Lizzy* lunges down the field. She picks up speed, then leaps into the air.

Towers doesn't know what to do. He pushes the stick to one side. The left wing drops. Its tip hits the ground.

*Lizzy* cartwheels across the field and crashes. Ellyson runs to the wreckage.

ELLYSON

You hurt?

TOWERS

Just a little banged up.

ELLYSON

Sorry. My fault. I must be a good 30 pounds heavier than you. I didn't adjust for the weight.  
(laughing)  
You've made your first flight.

## 7 INT. CURTISS AEROPLANE FACTORY - DAY

Towers is on crutches as he watches the CURTISS MEN repair the plane. He will carry a slight limp the rest of his life.

TOWERS

When will *Lizzy* be ready to fly?

CURTISS

When will you? You're supposed to fly my machines, not crash them.

8 EXT. KINGSLEY FLATS - DAY

Towers carefully steers *Lizzy* down the field, first to the left and then to the right. He stops and adjusts the wedge.

He speeds down the field. *Lizzy* hops off the ground. Towers pulls back the throttle, and she eases back to the ground. He repeats the run several times, making longer and longer hops.

He removes the wedge and pulls back on the control stick. He soars into the sky.

9 EXT. NEW YORK COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Towers makes a low altitude circle of the field and then climbs. He steers *Lizzy* out over the lake, then soars upward toward a low-lying cloud. He grins in exhilaration.

10 EXT. KINGSLEY FLATS - DAY

Towers is working on the A-1's engine when Ellyson runs up to show him the new edition of *Aero Magazine*. Towers' picture is on the cover.

ELLYSON

The Aero Club has certified you.  
Seems as if you have become the  
Naval Aviation poster boy.

Towers frowns and pushes it away.

11 EXT. GREENBURY POINT NAVY EXPERIMENTAL STATION - DAY

SUPER: Greenbury Point Navy Experimental Station.  
Annapolis, Maryland.

Towers and Ellyson walk up to the colonial style house. Their new boss waits for them on the porch.

CAPTAIN WASHINGTON IRVING CHAMBERS, 45, is a thin, academic-type man with a slight mustache and a receding hairline.

ELLYSON

(saluting)  
Captain Chambers, Ellyson and  
Towers reporting as ordered, sir.

CHAMBERS

Come with me.

12 EXT. SEVERN RIVER SHORE - DAY

The three men walk along the dirt path. Chambers points to the Naval Academy, directly across the river.

CHAMBERS

They taught us at the Academy that the Great Age of Exploration has long been over. I don't agree. We're embarking on a grand voyage into the unknown. We have no idea where it will take us. But we're the Columbuses, the Magellans, the Captain Cooks of the 20th century.

Towers rolls his eyes and lets out a long, low whistle.

13 EXT. ANNAPOLIS AVIATION CAMP - DAY

The camp is a cornfield, barren of structures.

CHAMBERS

Well, gentlemen, this is it. The United States Navy's very first aviation station. Your job is to make it operational. I've got mechanics coming in to help.

14 EXT. ANNAPOLIS AVIATION CAMP - DAY

Towers drives the huge steam-driven tractor. It tows a harvester that cuts down the corn. Ellyson and the TWO MECHANICS stack it into piles, which they burn.

15 EXT. ANNAPOLIS AVIATION CAMP - DAY

Towers and Ellyson sit in the flimsy A-1 biplane eating lunch. There is a high-pitched PFITT and then a loud SMACK. Something has struck the radiator. Water gushes from it.

TOWERS

Hit the deck!

Everyone dives to the ground. Towers sticks his head up.

TOWERS

We're in line with the Academy gunnery range. We're getting hit by the over shots.



16 EXT. ANNAPOLIS AVIATION CAMP - DAWN

Chambers watches his aviators push the A-1 into the river.

TOWERS

Captain Chambers, this is not a good idea. We're just not ready.

CHAMBERS

We're never as ready as we want to be. We've got a lot of jobs here, Jack. They include selling the Gun Club on aviation and getting money out of Congress. We need a dramatic headline.

TOWERS

Gun Club?

CHAMBERS

The battleship admirals, who scoff at aviation.

ELLYSON

I agree with Jack, sir. Trying to fly 147 miles down the Chesapeake Bay to Hampton Roads is not a good idea. No one has ever flown that far before.

CHAMBERS

You've got your orders, gentlemen.

TOWERS & ELLYSON

(saluting)

Aye, aye, sir.

They walk toward the airplane.

ELLYSON

This is madness.

TOWERS

We'll muddle our way through it.

17 EXT. OVER CHESAPEAKE BAY - MORNING

The A-1 flies 50 feet above the water.

18 EXT. DELMARVA PENINSULA - DAY

Towers and Ellyson fly across the narrow peninsula to the Atlantic Ocean. They turn south and follow the coast.

The engine dies. Towers lands the plane in the narrow area between the six-foot surf and the shore.

19 EXT. BUCKROE BEACH - DAY

Towers completes his work on the engine. He checks to ensure that the wires between the struts are tight, then inspects the pontoons. Ellyson lies on the beach, watching him.

TOWERS

I've fixed the radiator, but no telling how long it will last.

ELLYSON

And checked everything else. Why drive yourself so hard?

TOWERS

I wanted to be an engineer, but my parents couldn't afford college. My grandfather led the 8th Georgia Infantry Regiment. He served under Robert E. Lee in all the big Virginia battles. He tried to get me into West Point, but there were no appointments available. So he helped me get into the Naval Academy. I got my education. The Navy is my only chance to make something of myself. Can't blow it.

ELLYSON

So you're a rebel?

TOWERS

I was 14 before I learned that "damn Yankee" is two words.

ELLYSON

(laughs, then...)

We're less than 10 miles from Hampton Roads, so the engine shouldn't heat up that much. Problem is, there is not enough room to take off before hitting the breakers. Too much weight. You're our poster boy. Headlines are the goal. You fly her in, and I'll hitchhike a ride.

20 EXT. HAMPTON ROADS NAVAL BASE - AFTERNOON

Towers easily lands the little plane next to an enormous battleship. He is cheered by THE BATTLESHIP CREW.

21 INT. HAMPTON ROADS RESTAURANT - MORNING

The aviators enter. Ellyson purchases a newspaper. The headline announces, "Daring Navy Flight." He hands it to Towers, who glances at it, frowns, then tosses it aside.

The pretty RESTAURANT GIRL recognizes Towers from the newspaper photo and throws him a big come-hither smile.

22 EXT. HAMPTON ROADS NAVAL BASE - MORNING

Towers and Ellyson test the engine.

ELLYSON  
Everything checks out.

TOWERS  
For now.

They take off.

23 EXT. CHESAPEAKE BAY - DAY

The engine fails again. They glide the plane down to the mouth of the York River and gently set her down.

24 EXT. OYSTER BOAT - DAY

Towers and Ellyson shuck and eat the catch as the oyster boat tows the A-1 to shore.

TOWERS  
It's not the radiator. I think  
the water pump has a bent shaft.

25 EXT. BLACKSMITH SHOP - EVENING

The OYSTERMAN leads the aviators to the country blacksmith shop, where the BLACKSMITH is shoeing horses.

26 INT. BLACKSMITH SHOP - NIGHT

Ellyson holds the red-hot shaft with the blacksmith tongs. Towers hammers it against the anvil.

ELLYSON  
Ever get the feeling that the  
Academy didn't prepare us for the  
right jobs?

27 EXT. ANNAPOLIS AVIATION CAMP - DAY

The aviators land the A-1 and taxi to shore, then walk across the field. Suddenly, PFITTT. PFITTT. PFITTT. The Academy rifle range is back in use. They duck for cover.

ELLYSON  
It's the Gun Club!

They look at each other and break out laughing.

28 EXT. ANNAPOLIS STREET - DAY

Towers is a dapper, laughing gent wearing civvies as he walks and talks with the pretty ANNAPOLIS GIRL.

29 EXT. ANNAPOLIS AVIATION CAMP - DAY

Towers is working on the A-1. A flashy convertible pulls up. The CHAUFFEUR opens the door for FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT, 30. He strides over to Towers and offers his hand in greeting.

ROOSEVELT  
Franklin Delano Roosevelt,  
Assistant Secretary of the Navy.

TOWERS  
Some identification, sir?

Roosevelt shows it to him.

ROOSEVELT  
Drove up to make sure our money  
is being well spent.

TOWERS  
It is. This is one of our two  
aeroplanes. Lieutenant Ellyson is  
up flying the other one.

Roosevelt reads the serial number.

ROOSEVELT  
Ah! The A-1. The Navy's very  
first aeroplane. You must be  
Lieutenant Towers. I read about  
your exciting flight to Hampton  
Roads. You and Ellyson had quite  
an adventure. Wish I could have  
been with you.

He laughs, then changes the subject.

ROOSEVELT

Twenty years ago, my cousin "Teddy" was the Assistant Secretary of the Navy. He funded Dr. Langley's experimental flying machines. Naval aviation must be in the Roosevelt blood, because I'm carrying on his work.

TOWERS

He was good to the Navy, sir.

ROOSEVELT

How about taking me up?

TOWERS

Sorry, sir. Civilians are not permitted aboard Navy aeroplanes.

ROOSEVELT

Lieutenant Towers, I'm your boss.

TOWERS

The Assistant Secretary of the Navy is not in the chain of command, sir. If you get approval from Captain Chambers, I'd be delighted to fly you wherever you want to go.

Roosevelt is shocked that such a junior officer would defy him but likes and respects Towers for following orders.

ROOSEVELT

Where's Chambers?

TOWERS

Washington Naval Yard. He's building a wind tunnel.

Roosevelt waves for the chauffeur to bring the lunch.

ROOSEVELT

Most people think a nation has a navy so it can fight other navies. But that's only incidental to its main job.

TOWERS

Sir?

ROOSEVELT

The wealth of a nation comes from its trade. Almost all goods are transported by ships. The nation

ROOSEVELT (CONT'D)  
that controls the seas controls  
the wealth of the world. The main  
purpose of a navy is to protect  
the trade routes.

TOWERS  
Admiral Mahan's book, *The  
Influence of Sea Power upon  
History*. I dated his niece.

The chauffeur sets out fine china on the lower wing.

ROOSEVELT  
We are expanding our nation's  
great sea power from the surface  
of the ocean into the skies above  
it. Now I would like you to tell  
me about everything you've been  
doing and everything you're  
planning to do.

30 INT. TENT - NIGHT

It's late. Towers and Ellyson play cards. They share a bottle  
of Kentucky bourbon whiskey. Chambers enters.

CHAMBERS  
At ease, gentlemen.

Chambers is exhausted. He flops into a canvas chair.

ELLYSON  
You arrived just in time. Another  
hour, and Jack would have cleaned  
me out. Don't ever, ever play  
cards with him.

CHAMBERS  
I learned that the hard way.

Towers pours Chambers a drink.

TOWERS  
How did it go?

CHAMBERS  
Every time we solve one problem,  
we're confronted with another.

TOWERS  
Roosevelt came by today. Asked me  
to take him for a ride.

CHAMBERS  
Did you?

TOWERS

No, sir. I explained that standing orders prohibited it but added I would gladly do so with your permission.

Chambers shakes his head and chuckles.

TOWERS

What's so funny?

CHAMBERS

Secretary of the Navy Daniels spends most of his time on Capitol Hill trying to get money for us. Roosevelt manages day-to-day operations. He runs the Navy.  
(chuckles again)  
You wouldn't take him for a ride.

Chambers breaks out laughing. Tears come to his eyes.

31 EXT. ANNAPOLIS AVIATION CAMP - AFTERNOON

The aviators are working on the A-1 when Chambers arrives.

CHAMBERS

I know you guys didn't think much of the Hampton Roads publicity stunt, but the headlines did get Congress to loosen the purse strings.

(a little ashamed)

We do what we have to do.

(to Ellyson)

Spuds, you and I are going to find some way to launch and recover aeroplanes from ships.

(to Towers)

We're setting up a flight school. Several candidates are coming in. You're our flight instructor.

32 EXT. ANNAPOLIS AVIATION CAMP - DAY

Towers looks into his sextant, calculating the rate of climb as Ellyson puts the A-1 into a steep climb.

Chambers arrives, accompanied by FIVE YOUNG OFFICERS, all 21.

TOWERS

1,000 feet in 54 seconds.

CHAMBERS

Very good.  
 (indicating the arrivals)  
 Jack, I'd like you to meet your  
 first students. They're all  
 Academy graduates. Ensigns  
 Herbster and Chevalier...

ENSIGNS VICTOR HERBSTER and GODFREY CHEVALIER smartly salute.

CHAMBERS

Bellinger...

ENSIGN PATRICK BELLINGER is an easygoing guy with a quick smile and a good sense of humor. He salutes.

BELLINGER

It's an honor to learn from you.

CHAMBERS

Billingsley...

ENSIGN WILLIAM BILLINGSLEY is a likable eager beaver willing to accept any challenge. He salutes.

BILLINGSLEY

Raring to go, sir.

SECOND LIEUTENANT BERNARD SMITH is surprisingly small.

CHAMBERS

And Lieutenant Smith of the  
 Marine Corps.

TOWERS

Welcome aboard, gentlemen. The  
 first lessons will be to make you  
 excellent swimmers because you  
 will go down at sea. That skill  
 can save your life.

33 EXT. ANNAPOLIS AVIATION CAMP - DAY

LIEUTENANT JUNIOR GRADE HOLDEN C. "DICK" RICHARDSON, 24, is an always-cheerful, six-foot-two bear of a man. He performs a final check on the experimental catapult. It sits next to the shore and is aimed at the river. The A-1 is mounted on it.

ELLYSON

Okay Dick, let her rip.

Richardson pulls the lever. The catapult shoots the plane down the cradle like an artillery shell. It rears up, is caught by a crosswind, then flips over into the water.



Ellyson swims out from under the upside-down airplane and sheepishly grins at Towers.

RICHARDSON  
Launch worked well, but we need a  
better system to hold the plane.

34 INT. ANNAPOLIS TAVERN - NIGHT

Towers plays cards with NAVY OFFICERS. They include lanky ERNEST KING, 26. All are dressed in civilian clothes.

BELLINGER  
I fold.

KING  
I raise you a dollar.

TOWERS  
I see your dollar and raise you  
next month's paycheck.

King looks at his cards and at Towers. He sweats, then drops his cards on the table. Grinning, Towers rakes in the pot. Richardson hugs his lovely wife, FAYE RICHARDSON, 21. They walk over to the bar.

35 INT. ANNAPOLIS TAVERN BAR - NIGHT

Towers is followed and kissed by TWO SEXY TAVERN GIRLS.

RICHARDSON  
What did you have?

TOWERS  
Nothing. Not even a pair. I took  
Ernie King on his first flight  
last week. He's a cautious man. I  
knew he wouldn't take the risk.

RICHARDSON  
It was a bluff!

TOWERS  
Nature of the game.

The sexy tavern girls squeeze up against him.

36 EXT. ANNAPOLIS AVIATION CAMP - DAY

Chambers, Towers, and Ellyson watch the new plane land.

CHAMBERS

The B-1. This will give us a chance to compare the Wright and Curtiss control systems.

LIEUTENANT JOHN RODGERS, 22, is fifth-generation Navy and a conceited prima donna. He climbs from the plane.

CHAMBERS

Rodgers, how was the flight?

RODGERS

I'm constantly being teased by everyone for wasting my time with these stupid aeroplanes. We are a battleship navy. Everyone sees aviation as a dead end. It's a career killer.

CHAMBERS

The airplane?

RODGERS

It's a death trap. You shouldn't test it. You should trash it.

CHAMBERS

We'll work out the problems.

RODGERS

You'll work them out. I want to transfer back to the fleet.

37 EXT. ANNAPOLIS AVIATION CAMP - DAY

The MECHANICS roll out the assembled A-2 airplane. It's a land plane with wheels, not pontoons.

ELLYSON

Let's see if the A-2 is as good as Curtiss says it is.

(pulling out a coin)

Flip for the first flight?

Ellyson wins the flip, climbs in, and runs the plane down the field. He clears the ground, and then the engine dies.

The wheels hit the Severn River, and the plane flips over on its back. Ellyson is trapped under it.

Towers runs to the river, kicks off his shoes, and dives into the water. An expert swimmer, he soon reaches the plane, dives under it, and pulls Ellyson to the surface.

## 38 EXT. ANNAPOLIS AVIATION CAMP - MORNING

Billingsley taxis the B-2 out into the river. Towers flags him down and motions for him to return to shore.

TOWERS

So the B-2 came in?

BILLINGSLEY

Yes, sir. Thought I'd take her up for a test flight.

TOWERS

You don't have enough experience for test flying.

BILLINGSLEY

I've got my certification. Naval Aviator number 9. 26 hours of solo time. I'm a natural-born pilot. You said so yourself. You're always saying that good officers take the initiative.

Towers begrudgingly nods his approval. He waves the MECHANIC out of the rear seat. He climbs in.

TOWERS

Okay, strut your stuff.

## 39 EXT. OVER THE SEVERN RIVER - DAY

Billingsley flies the plane down the Chesapeake Bay and encounters a rain squall. He flies around it and climbs higher. A strong following wind batters the plane.

A sudden gust blows the tail up by 60 degrees. Billingsley is hurled forward against the control stick, pushing it forward. The plane plunges into a vertical dive.

The sudden thrust throws Billingsley from the cockpit. He plummets toward the water thousands of feet below.

Towers tries to climb into the pilot's seat, but the plane begins bucking like a wild horse. It flips to one side, tossing him from the cockpit. He luckily grabs a wing strut.

The plane goes into a spiral dive. Towers' body is straight out in the air. He holds on to the strut with both hands.

It requires all of his strength, but Towers pulls himself up onto the wing. He stretches out a leg. He manages to kick the control stick. The plane stalls, then rights itself.

The plane abruptly comes to an almost complete stop, then goes into a flat spin. Towers tries to climb into the cockpit but can't overcome the forces on the plane.

The plane crashes into the water with a loud WHAP.

40 INT. NAVAL ACADEMY HOSPITAL - MORNING

Chambers and Ellyson sit next to Towers' bed. Chambers affectionately pats Towers' forehead with a wet towel. Towers slowly opens his eyes. He is covered with bruises. He painfully tries to pull himself up but can't.

CHAMBERS

Take it easy, Jack. You've been out for three days.

TOWERS

Billingsley? Have they found him?

Chambers shakes his head no.

Ellyson tries to cheer up Towers. He shows him the newspaper. The headline says, "Naval Aviator Defies Death."

ELLYSON

You'll do anything for a headline. Our poster boy.

Towers grimaces.

Chambers picks up a large bag and dumps hundreds of letters onto the bed. Towers tries to lift his arm but can't.

ELLYSON

May I?

Towers nods yes. Ellyson reads a couple of the letters and looks at the pictures of pretty girls that accompany them.

ELLYSON

You're not ready for this.

41 EXT. CHESAPEAKE BAY - AFTERNOON

The PATROL BOAT CREW pulls Billingsley's bloated body from the water. Hungry crabs have shredded his skin.

42 EXT. ANNAPOLIS AVIATION CAMP - DAY

The aviators watch the body being carried to shore.

TOWERS

First Naval aviation fatality.

CHAMBERS

It won't be the last.

Ellyson is visibly shaken.

43 EXT. ANNAPOLIS AVIATION CAMP - DAY

Towers is tuning the engine of the A-2 when Curtiss arrives. Curtiss tosses him a roll of webbing. Towers looks at it.

CURTISS

It's what you asked for. A safety harness to hold pilots in place. It has quick disconnects so they can get out of it fast.

Towers closely examines it.

TOWERS

This would be good for cars too.

44 INT. TOWERS' ANNAPOLIS ROOM - NIGHT

Towers is reading. Ellyson enters and sits down.

ELLYSON

Couldn't sleep again tonight. I've splashed seven times. Only two of my nine lives left.

TOWERS

We need to make flying safer.

ELLYSON

A good aviator has to have self-confidence.

He holds out his hand. It trembles.

ELLYSON

I've lost it. Without it... You know... I'm bilging out of aviation. Returning to the fleet. Rodgers is gone. That leaves you as the Navy's only qualified aviator. You were damn lucky to have survived that crash. You may not be so lucky next time. Get out while you can.

TOWERS

I love flying. Besides, I can't quit. I feel as if I've been put on this course by some great power beyond my control.

ELLYSON

Destiny?

TOWERS

My dad served under General Nathan Forrest, the great cavalryman. He was famous for saying "Get there fustest with the mostest." Dad told me stories about their lightning strikes. Aviation can be the Navy's cavalry. Maybe that's my destiny.

ELLYSON

If you don't get killed first.

TOWERS

Yes. If I don't get killed first.

45 EXT. ANNAPOLIS AVIATION CAMP - DAY

Towers and Bellinger work on an airplane engine. Chambers walks over and sits next to them.

CHAMBERS

(to Towers)

I've been ordered to take over aeronautical research and development. You're to set up and command our new flying school. You're to leave within a week.

(to Bellinger)

As Naval Aviator number 4, you're next in line, so you'll go with him as his exec.

Towers stands and salutes.

TOWERS

Captain Chambers, sir, I've learned a lot from you. Thank you for everything.

CHAMBERS

Save it. You're going to be wrestling alligators.

46 EXT. LONDON BICYCLE CONCESSION - DAY

SUPER: London, England. 29 January 1915.

Towers wanders around, taking in the sights. A PRETTY LONDON GIRL smiles at him. He walks over to the bicycle concession and inspects a bike. The BICYCLE MAN, 64, watches.

TOWERS

How do you work this thing?

BICYCLE MAN

Just push the pedals to go forward. Steer with the handlebars. You stop it by squeezing this handle.

Towers hands him money and climbs on the bike. He pushes off but falls to one side. He sticks out his feet.

TOWERS

(muttering to himself)

Landing gear.

47 EXT. LONDON PARK - DAY

Towers awkwardly struggles to keep his balance.

Fashionably dressed LILY CARSTAIRS, 23, has long, dark hair piled on top of her head like a Gibson Girl. She walks a LITTLE DOG.

Towers tips his hat as he rides past her. She's startled and lets loose of the leash. The dog chases after Towers and attacks his foot. Lily runs after the yapping dog.

Towers pedals faster to escape, shaking his foot to ward off the pest. He looks at the dog rather than ahead and runs into the curb. The sudden jolt sends him flying off the seat, but he holds fast and falls back down on it.

He recovers, only to run into a large branch. The impact knocks him from the bike. Towers lands with a big THUD.

Lily dashes to his side and pulls off the dog. She wipes the blood from Towers' bleeding mouth. She has an English accent.

LILY

Are you dead?

TOWERS

I must be. I see an angel.

LILY

You're not dead, and, believe me, I'm no angel.

Towers shakes the fog from his head, gets his bearings, and stands Academy erect. He formally extends a hand.

TOWERS

Lieutenant John Henry Towers.

LILY  
Lillian Stewart Carstairs.  
(noting his accent)  
You're an American?

TOWERS  
Yes, ma'am.

Lily scrutinizes his uniform.

LILY  
Navy?

TOWERS  
Yes, ma'am.

LILY  
So what's a Yank sailor doing so  
far from home?

TOWERS  
Learning to ride a bicycle.

LILY  
You're not doing a very good job  
of it, Lieutenant.

TOWERS  
It was my first flight, ma'am.

LILY  
Interesting choice of words.

TOWERS  
I'm an aviator.

LILY  
They let you fly aeroplanes?

TOWERS  
Yes, ma'am.

LILY  
Obviously, they've never seen you  
ride a bicycle.

TOWERS  
I'm the "they." I set up the  
Navy's flight instruction school  
in Pensacola, Florida. Ran it for  
two years before coming here.

LILY  
How old are you, Lieutenant?



TOWERS

I turn 30 tomorrow.

LILY

Happy Birthday. Ah! You're an Aquarius. It makes sense. It's an air sign associated with water. You are independent, optimistic, and you rely only on your own judgment. Married?

TOWERS

No, ma'am. Never married.

Lily extends a hand.

LILY

My friends call me Lily.

TOWERS

My friends call me Jack. What about you? Married?

LILY

Gracious, no.

TOWERS

A beautiful young woman like you. Why not?

LILY

Haven't met the right man. Many suitors, but they've been really boring. Stuffy. I'm a Gemini. Also an air sign. Very compatible with Aquarius. I hate boredom. I want some excitement out of life.

She eyes Towers as if she were a horse trader in the market for a good stallion. She bats her eyes. It's her hallmark way of getting what she wants.

LILY

All this talk has made me thirsty. Would you care for tea?

48 INT. VICTORIAN-STYLE TEA SHOP - DAY

Towers opens the door for Lily and they enter the elite London ladies' social center. Towers feels uncomfortable being surrounded by so many women. He and Lily take a table.

TOWERS

Tell me about yourself.

LILY

Not much to tell. My father is an international art dealer. He's holding a big show. Old Masters. French Impressionists. I was helping him out but got bored. Decided to go for a stroll. A friend asked me to walk her dog. Then you fell into my life.

TOWERS

It was very good of you to make sure I was all right.

LILY

I'm not your angel. Father says I'm pampered and spoiled.

TOWERS

Are you?

LILY

(batting her eyes)

Of course. If you were my father, wouldn't you pamper and spoil me? So what brings you here?

TOWERS

To learn how to use airplanes to fight the war.

LILY

The U.S. Navy doesn't know?

TOWERS

We've never had to use them that way. Your country is learning how. Your planes are far more advanced than ours.

LILY

So you're stealing our secrets?

TOWERS

Quite the contrary. Your country is giving them to us. It wants us to get into the war as an ally. It's helping us prepare for it.

LILY

War talk. Boring. Boring! Do you enjoy art?

TOWERS

Haven't had much exposure to it.

LILY

You do lead a sheltered life.

TOWERS

Not really. I served in the Great White Fleet. We sailed around the world. Visited South America, China, Japan. Dozens of exotic ports. I swam the length of Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. Learned to surf in Hawaii. I've even climbed one of the pyramids.

LILY

Sounds exciting.

TOWERS

I've been invited to a reception at the Admiralty on Saturday night. Would you like to accompany me?

LILY

Okay, sailor. You've got a date.

49 INT. CARSTAIRS' HOME - EVENING

The CARSTAIRS' MAID leads Towers into the drawing room. The ultra-luxurious home reflects the great wealth of its owner. Lily's father, CHARLES STEWART CARSTAIRS, 55, stands and offers his hand in welcome.

MR. CARSTAIRS

Charles Stewart Carstairs. You must be Lily's bicycling aviator?

TOWERS

Lieutenant John Towers, sir. I'm much better at flying airplanes than peddling bicycles.

MR. CARSTAIRS

I should hope so.

TOWERS

You're an American?

MR. CARSTAIRS

You seem surprised. Ah! Lily's English accent. We moved here from Philadelphia when she was

MR. CARSTAIRS (CONT'D)  
three. Her mother died a few  
years later. I raised her.

TOWERS  
You did a good job, sir. She's a  
remarkable young lady.

MR. CARSTAIRS  
She's a handful. And then some.  
What do you do, Lieutenant?

TOWERS  
I'm the U.S. Navy Air Attache.

MR. CARSTAIRS  
That's a very important position  
for such a young man. We're a  
Navy family. I was named after my  
famous ancestor, Commodore  
Charles Stewart.

He points to the portrait above the mantel.

MR. CARSTAIRS  
Distinguished himself in the  
First Barbary War. Commanded the  
*Constitution*, "*Old Ironsides*," in  
the War of 1812.

TOWERS  
I studied his tactics. He  
captured several British ships.

MR. CARSTAIRS  
We don't talk about that around  
here. Lily tells me you are  
taking her to a reception at the  
Admiralty. Do you attend many  
social events?

TOWERS  
It's not a ceremonious job, sir.  
Your country is assigning  
airplanes to its capital ships. I  
spend most of my time aboard them  
studying operations. Or I'm at  
air stations or out flying new  
airplanes.

Lily enters wearing an evening gown.

TOWERS  
You are... You are beautiful.

Towers wears his stiffly starched white dress uniform, complete with gold epaulets and ceremonial sword.

LILY  
 You look rather dashing yourself.  
 (batting her eyes)  
 I told Father you were my knight  
 in shining armor.

TOWERS  
 (embarrassed)  
 Shall we go?

They head toward the door.

LILY  
 Good night, Father.

TOWERS  
 Good night, Mister Carstairs. It  
 was a pleasure meeting you.

MR. CARSTAIRS  
 Take care of my little girl.

Towers whips him a salute.

TOWERS  
 Aye, aye, sir.

50 INT. ADMIRALTY RECEPTION - NIGHT

The lavish party is attended by ROYAL NAVAL OFFICERS and their ROYAL NAVY WIVES. Towers and Lily are greeted by SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL, a pudgy man of 46.

CHURCHILL  
 Good evening, Jack.

TOWERS  
 Lily, Sir Winston Churchill,  
 First Lord of the Admiralty. Lord  
 Churchill, Miss Lillian  
 Carstairs.

Churchill graciously kisses Lily's hand.

CHURCHILL  
 What a delightful surprise. I've  
 been after Jack to find himself a  
 good woman. And now... Such a  
 beautiful young lady. I am  
 charmed to meet you, Miss  
 Carstairs. Good for you, Jack.  
 Jolly good for you.

TOWERS  
Please, Sir Winston...

CHURCHILL  
Quite right. I've embarrassed  
you. I apologize.

TOWERS  
How are things at the Admiralty?

CHURCHILL  
The same. Damn German submarines!  
(to Lily)  
We're a bloody island. Dependent  
on supplies from our colonies.  
The damn Krauts are sinking our  
merchant ships. Trying to starve  
us into bloody damn submission.

The AIR RAID SIREN BLASTS. BOMBS EXPLODE. Hunks of the  
ceiling fall. People SCREAM and run from the hall.

Towers and Churchill stand fast. Lily clutches Towers' arm.

CHURCHILL  
(looking up)  
The bombers are a problem too.

Another BOMB EXPLODES. It's really close. The room shudders.  
They dive to the floor and cover their heads.

LILY  
It would be prudent to join the  
others. Seek shelter.

CHURCHILL  
Give the Hun the satisfaction of  
seeing us run from him? Never!

Another BOMB EXPLODES. It's even closer. Debris rains down.

LILY  
The Hun can't see us down here.

Churchill nods agreement. They dash to the door.

More BOMBS EXPLODE. They run out as the building collapses  
behind them.

51 INT. CHURCHILL'S OFFICE - MORNING

TOWERS  
Thank you for seeing me on such  
short notice, Sir Winston.

CHURCHILL

What's on your mind?

TOWERS

There's a very big gap in my aviation education. I've never flown a combat mission.

CHURCHILL

This is our war. Not yours.

TOWERS

I'll go as an observer, sir.

CHURCHILL

You're a U.S. Naval officer. If your plane goes down and you're captured, the Germans will use you to create a political incident. As much as I want the States in the war, it must enter of its own accord. I'll do nothing to provoke its entry.

TOWERS

How can I advise the admirals about air combat if I don't know what I'm talking about?

CHURCHILL

I will permit you to visit our big air station at Dunkirk. But you are not to fly any combat missions. Is that understood?

TOWERS

I understand your position, sir.

Towers salutes, turns, and walks out the door.

52 EXT. OLD BRITISH ADMIRALTY BUILDING - MORNING

The large, majestic building has been the Admiralty headquarters since 1726. Towers walks out, slower than usual. He is in deep thought. He looks up to the third floor and sees Churchill at the window. He quietly states...

TOWERS

You're not my commanding officer.

53 EXT. DUNKIRK ROYAL NAVAL AIR STATION - DAY

Towers walks with SQUADRON COMMANDER SPENSER GREY, 34, along the row of Sopwith 1-1/2 Strutter fighters and the row of Caudron bombers. It's raining.

GREY

We've been ordered to bomb a  
German aerodrome in Belgium.  
We're waiting for the weather.

TOWERS

I'd like to go along.

GREY

Is it okay for you to do that?  
Your country is neutral.

TOWERS

Loan me one of your uniforms and  
a handgun. If we go down, I won't  
let myself be taken alive.

54 EXT. SKIES OVER BELGIUM - DAY

The Caudron bombers are escorted by Sopwith fighters. Grey  
flies one. Towers sits behind him at the machine gun.

They approach the target and are met by an onslaught of flak.  
It BURSTS all around them.

Several German Fokkers attack Grey's plane. Towers is itching  
to fire the machine gun but doesn't get a chance, as other  
fighters continually intercept the Fokkers.

55 EXT. DUNKIRK ROYAL NAVAL AIR STATION - DAY

The planes land. Grey turns back to Towers.

GREY

Well, Jack, you're the first  
American aviator to see air  
combat. What do you think?

TOWERS

Wish I could have shot something.  
That's what I do.

56 EXT. RMS *OLYMPIC* - NIGHT

SUPER: RMS *Olympic*. 23 September 1916.

Towers and Lily look like wealthy aristocracy. He wears the  
latest in London fashions. She wears a chic evening dress.  
They carry their cocktails as they walk the deck.

At the bow, Lily is awed by the majestic panorama of the  
ocean at night. She throws open her arms and exclaims...



LILY

I've never seen so many stars!  
It's as if the heavens have  
opened up and revealed the heart  
and soul of the universe.

She places her hands on the rail.

LILY

I can feel the waves rolling  
beneath us. Thump. Thump. Thump.  
The rhythm. Like the heartbeat of  
the earth. It's marvelous!

She throws her arms around Towers' neck.

LILY

What a wonderful way to celebrate  
our first wedding anniversary. I  
can now understand why you love  
the sea. I'm so thrilled by the  
idea of an exciting new life in  
the New World.

Towers smiles at her childlike innocence. She realizes...

LILY

You don't understand what I'm  
talking about, do you? You look  
at the stars and think about  
celestial navigation. You look at  
the waves and calculate currents.  
Oh, Jack, we are so different.

TOWERS

No, we're not. I know exactly how  
you feel. At the Academy, some of  
our summer cruises were aboard  
sailing ships. Perfect nights  
like this were great, but rough  
seas were far more fun. It was  
man against nature. Big steel  
ships with powerful engines are  
far more efficient than wooden  
ships driven by sails. But they  
changed the nature of sailing to  
pit machines against nature. That  
made it far less personal.

LILY

So that's why you became an  
aviator?

TOWERS

Our flimsy little airplanes are like sailing ships, only much faster. The big difference is that we operate in three dimensions rather than two.

57 INT. TOWERS' HOME - DAY

The large Victorian showpiece is in downtown Washington. Towers carries Lily over the threshold into the lavishly decorated interior. She kisses him.

LILY

Finally, our own home.

He puts her down and walks around, admiring everything.

TOWERS

It was very kind of your father to give it to us. It's a very generous wedding present.

LILY

Father says you're going to outdo the old commodore. Said that a future admiral must have a home befitting his social status. A place to entertain dignitaries. I'm going to make this house the showplace of your capital. I'll have the admirals and their wives eating out of my hand.

TOWERS

Lily, come down out of the clouds. I'm a lowly lieutenant.

LILY

Father is an excellent judge of people. He believes in you.  
(batting her eyes)  
Now you have a quiet desk job, and we have a wonderful home. We can live like a normal couple.

TOWERS

Navy life is never normal.

LILY

There is so much I want to do and see. I can't wait to get started. Where are the Indians?

58 EXT. STATE, WAR, AND NAVY BUILDING - MORNING

SUPER: State, War, and Navy Building.  
Washington, D.C. 3 October 1916.

The ornate building is next door to the White House.

59 INT. STATE, WAR, AND NAVY BUILDING - MORNING

Towers wanders around, trying to find some trace of aviation. He asks various NAVY DEPARTMENT PERSONNEL for help.

60 INT. AVIATION DESK - DAY

Towers sees a small wood desk with a sign, "Aviation Desk."

LIEUTENANT JUNIOR GRADE BUCK BRONSON, 25, leans back in his chair, his feet on the desk. He reads a newspaper.

TOWERS

Buck, haven't seen you since you  
Pensacola and now you're running  
the Aviation Department?

BRONSON

Hi Jack. I've been reading your  
reports and have been very  
impressed by your observations  
and recommendations. There is no  
aviation department. Just me.

TOWERS

How many airplanes do you have?  
Aviators? Air stations?

BRONSON

Here's the morning report.

Towers scans the page and angrily slams it down on the desk.

TOWERS

Has anyone read my reports?

BRONSON

Admiral Benson had them sent to  
me. I read the first few. I tried  
to discuss them with him, but he  
cut me off. Wasn't interested.

61 INT. ADMIRAL BENSON'S OFFICE - MORNING

The sign on the door reads "Chief of Naval Operations."  
Towers enters. ADMIRAL WILLIAM S. BENSON, 64, is a tough-  
looking, balding man with little patience.

TOWERS  
 (saluting)  
 Lieutenant Towers reporting for  
 duty, sir.

BENSON  
 Stand at ease. You're to relieve  
 Lieutenant Bronson and take over  
 the aviation desk.

TOWERS  
 Sir, I just left him. The Navy  
 has grossly neglected aviation.

BENSON  
 Aviation is a waste of money that  
 can be much better used for the  
 fleet. Go play with your silly  
 aeroplanes, but leave me alone.  
 You're excused, Lieutenant.

62 INT. TOWERS' HOME - NOON

Towers stomps in, clenching his fists and growling to  
 himself. Lily meets him.

LILY  
 What's wrong?

TOWERS  
 So much needs to be done, and  
 they haven't done anything. They  
 won't let me do anything.

LILY  
 Don't keep anger bottled up. Get  
 it out of your system. Scream!

TOWERS  
 Naval officers don't do that.

63 INT. ARMY-NAVY CLUB BALLROOM - NIGHT

It's a major Navy reception. The ballroom is filled with NAVY  
 OFFICERS and their NAVY WIVES.

The FAT NAVY WIFE, 61, is shocked and speechless. Her ADMIRAL  
 HUSBAND, 62, scowls at Towers. Towers takes Lily's arm and  
 firmly, but gently escorts her from the ballroom.

64 INT. TOWERS' HOME - NIGHT

Towers and Lily enter, both angry.

TOWERS

Your behavior was inappropriate.

LILY

Did you expect me to bow down to that fat old cow just because she's an admiral's wife?

TOWERS

We don't bow down to people here.

LILY

She is stupid and ill-bred. Couldn't even use the right fork. I mentioned the great artist Botticelli. She thought he was an Italian pasta.

TOWERS

That's no excuse for rudeness.

LILY

She is a stupid, fat, ignorant, and ugly old cow with crude manners and a pompous husband!

TOWERS

A European aristocrat once visited George Washington at his plantation. As they were walking around, they ran into a slave. The slave took off his hat and said, "Good mornin', General." Washington took off his hat and said good morning back. His guest was shocked. "You take off your hat to a slave?" Washington replied, "Should I let him be more of a gentleman than I am?"

LILY

It is a new world!

TOWERS

Here, being a lady is not about peerage, social standing, or wealth. It's about being kind, understanding, and gracious.

LILY

I'm a Gemini. Our astrological symbol is the twins because we are two people. You've always

LILY (CONT'D)  
 seen the goodie-goodie Lily.  
 Tonight you met the Wicked Witch.

She laughs. It breaks the tension. Towers laughs.

TOWERS  
 I think of it as spunk.

They throw themselves at one another.

65 EXT. RICHARDSON'S HOME - EVENING

Towers and Lily enter the backyard. Richardson is grilling food on the barbecue. The RICHARDSON CHILDREN play.

RICHARDSON  
 Hi, Jack. Glad ya'll came.

TOWERS  
 Dick, I'd like you to meet my wife, Lily. Lily, my best friend, Dick Richardson. We graduated from the Academy together.

RICHARDSON  
 My lovely and loving wife, Faye.

LILY  
 Pleased to meet you.

FAYE  
 How did you manage to ground him? I didn't think Jack would ever get married. He was always such a busy bee, flying from flower to flower to flower.

LILY  
 Oh!

FAYE  
 When we were at Annapolis, he was seeing five girls at the same time. Plus writing to others.

It creates an awkward moment.

RICHARDSON  
 (changing the subject)  
 Jack taught me how to fly.

TOWERS  
 Dick's an engineer. Never was happy with anything he ever flew. He was always tinkering, trying

TOWERS (CONT'D)  
to improve everything. He's now  
our best airplane designer.

LILY  
(to Faye)  
Can we talk privately?

Faye nods and walks her toward the house.

RICHARDSON  
What are you working on?

TOWERS  
Nothing. All I do is attend  
meetings and fight the Gun Club.  
Boards. Committees. All talk. No  
one does anything.

Towers reaches into his pocket and pulls out a badge.

TOWERS  
My one and only accomplishment. A  
distinctive uniform insignia for  
Naval aviators. A winged shield  
with a fouled anchor.

He hands it to Richardson, who holds it up and admires it.

RICHARDSON  
Aviator wings!

RICHARDSON'S SON runs over to his father and tugs on his leg.  
Richardson picks up the boy and warmly hugs him.

RICHARDSON  
Lily is a jewel. Love her. Take  
care of her. Family is the most  
important thing in the world. I'm  
thinking about leaving the Navy  
to spend more time with Faye and  
the kids.

TOWERS  
You can't do that. It looks like  
prohibition will be ratified. If  
it is, you'll have to help me  
build a still.

66 INT. TOWERS' CAR - NIGHT

TOWERS  
About that bee thing...

LILY

Jack, you're a sailor. Girl in every port sort of thing? This flower entertained a few bees herself. Forget it.

TOWERS

You? What do you mean by that?

Lily simply smiles and bats her eyes. She give him a few moments to worry, then changes the subject.

LILY

Dick told me how frustrated you are. I know you're very angry. You need to relieve the pressure. When I get that way, I climb into the shower and scream. Try it.

TOWERS

I can't do that.

Lily carefully sizes up her new husband.

LILY

Do you know how to sail? I'm not talking about big navy ships. Small sailboats.

TOWERS

Of course.

LILY

Let's go sailing. I really enjoyed the voyage over. We need some time together. Just the two of us. You have an abundance of accrued leave, and they won't let you do anything at work. Let's rent a boat and go sailing.

TOWERS

You don't rent boats, my dear. You charter them.

67 EXT. ANNAPOLIS YACHT BASIN - MORNING

Towers pushes the wheelbarrow of supplies down the dock. He stops in front of the schooner. Lily's arms are full.

LILY

Jack, would you pull that rope to bring the boat closer?



TOWERS

It's a line. When a rope is brought aboard a ship, it becomes a line. If it's attached to the movable corner of a sail, it becomes a sheet.

Lily rolls her eyes, then steps aboard.

LILY

Would you be a dear? Carry the groceries downstairs. Just put them on the kitchen floor.

TOWERS

Lily, sweetheart, I'd be glad to haul the provisions below and stow them on the galley deck.

LILY

Do me one more favor, dear. This is our vacation. Can we speak the same language? I'm afraid to ask about the toilet facilities.

68 EXT. SCHOONER - AFTERNOON

It's a beautiful fall day. With its two polished wooden masts and huge spread of canvas, the small ship is a tribute to the great age of sail. Lily mans the helm. Towers adjusts the sheets, then relieves Lily. She pulls out a bottle.

LILY

I know how much you love your Kentucky bourbon whiskey.

Towers waves it off.

LILY

You're on vacation, Jack. You're the captain of your own ship. Your Wicked Witch is lusting for your body. What more could you want? Lighten up.

(batting her eyes)

Pretend you're a sailor on shore leave and do nothing but party and chase women. Or, I should say, this wicked, wicked one.

She pours him a drink. Towers takes it and salutes.

TOWERS

Aye, aye, sir.

He downs it in a single swig. She refills the glass.

69 EXT. SCHOONER - LATER

Lily is on the bow and holds on to the forestay. The wind blows her hair. She waves for Towers to join her. He lashes the helm and staggers to her side. He is rather tipsy.

LILY

What are you angry about?

TOWERS

Benson. The Gun Club.

LILY

Scream at him. Scream at the whole damn Gun Club. Scream into the wind. No one can see you or hear you. It will make you feel a lot better. Go ahead. Do it!

TOWERS

Damn it, Benson. You're sailing the wrong course.

LILY

My God, Jack. You can do better than that. Yell out what you really think. Yell it loud.

TOWERS

Benson, you're an obsolete ass. You don't have the sense of a bilge rat. You and the whole damn Gun Club should be keelhauled.

LILY

That's better. But really let it out. Scream at that obsolete ass with every ounce of strength in your body. Stop being an uptight naval officer and learn to be a sailor. I've always heard that they are famous for their cursing. Tell Benson off. Put him in his place. Curse him to high heaven. Get it out of your system. Damn it, sailor, do it!

TOWERS

(whipping her a salute)  
Aye, aye, skipper.

Lily returns to the helm. Towers screams. The sound of the rushing wind makes it impossible to hear the words.

The intensity of his screams increases. He waves his arms, then his fists, verbally lashing his enemies. Lily smiles.

70 INT. SCHOONER - EVENING

Towers wakes up. Lily is curled up in his arms.

LILY

I've never seen you sleep so well. How do you feel?

TOWERS

Purged. Clean. Relaxed. At one with myself.

LILY

Good. You needed it. When you get back, you'll be in much better shape to fight your battles. Meanwhile, sailor, your hot sea wife is throwing herself at you.

She passionately kisses him.

TOWERS

How do you feel about... About making a baby?

LILY

That would be wonderful.

71 INT. TOWERS' HOME - MORNING

Towers starts to leave for work.

LILY

Remember the old commodore. He'd fire a... What do you call it? A broadside volley?

TOWERS

(with a big grin)  
I've not yet begun to fight.

72 INT. ADMIRAL BENSON'S OFFICE - MORNING

Towers confidently struts in and salutes.

BENSON

What's on your mind?

TOWERS

Japan has long resented our trade with China and our owning the Philippines. It has been building

TOWERS (CONT'D)

a huge navy to force us out of the western Pacific. We've been preparing to fight a battleship war with Japan to protect our trade routes.

BENSON

So?

TOWERS

We will soon be shipping more and more war supplies to Britain. The German U-boats will surely attack our merchant ships. We're going to be forced into an anti-submarine war. Battleships are useless against submarines.

Benson gives Towers a dirty look.

TOWERS

The U.S. Navy has been preparing for the wrong type of war. With the wrong enemy. In the wrong ocean. Using the wrong weapons.

BENSON

You're out of line, Lieutenant!

TOWERS

My duty is to keep my superior officers informed of the military situation. That's what I'm doing.

BENSON

Get your damn ass out of here.

73 EXT. BISHOP ROCK - DAY

SUPER: SS *Housatonic*. Near Sicily. 4 February 1917.

The *Housatonic* is a small American merchant ship. She steams past the tiny lighthouse-covered Bishop Rock.

The *U-53* has surfaced. A LOOKOUT points to the merchant ship. The U-BOAT SKIPPER maneuvers his boat to point-blank range and orders the deck gun fired.

The shell hits the *Housatonic* amidships. She violently EXPLODES, erupts into flames, and quickly sinks.

74 INT. ADMIRAL BENSON'S OFFICE - MORNING

Benson sits at his desk. His tie is loosened. His eyes are red. His hair is ruffled, and he's unshaven. Towers enters.

TOWERS  
Lieutenant Tow...

BENSON  
At ease, Towers. Have a seat.

TOWERS  
Aye, aye, sir.

BENSON  
The Germans have declared  
unrestricted submarine warfare  
against all neutral nations.  
President Wilson has severed  
diplomatic relations. The Krauts  
sank one of our merchantmen.

Benson holds up Towers' reports.

BENSON  
I've been up all night reading  
your reports. Very thorough. They  
should have been brought to my  
attention. What are your  
recommendations?

Towers knows the stakes are high. He falls back on his card-playing bluffing skills and doesn't answer. Benson waits for a response. There is none. Tension builds. Finally...

TOWERS  
I think I should present them to  
Secretary Daniels.

BENSON  
You'll present them to me.

TOWERS  
You don't have the authority or  
the funds to implement them, and  
wouldn't if you could.

BENSON  
Insubordination is a court-  
martial offense.

Towers calls his bluff.

TOWERS  
Then court-martial me. Let's put  
all the cards on the table where  
everyone can see them.

Benson doesn't want his misdirected efforts revealed.

BENSON

I'll arrange the meeting.

75 INT. DANIELS' OFFICE - MORNING

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY, JOSEPHUS DANIELS, 58, is an enormous hulk of a man with a commanding presence and a deep, booming voice. He listens to Benson. Roosevelt sits quietly nearby.

BENSON

I'm setting up a convoy system. Our destroyers will escort and protect our merchant ships. Lieutenant Towers has studied how the British have handled the submarine problem.

TOWERS

Intelligence shows the Germans now have over 100 U-boats. They are deadly! And difficult for ships to detect. One can sneak into New York Harbor, sink a dozen ships, and easily escape undetected.

DANIELS

How do we combat them?

TOWERS

Subs have very little air. They almost always travel on the surface and only submerge when at risk. Even then, they can be seen from above. The British use both blimps and airplanes to find them. They radio the positions. Destroyers attack and destroy.

DANIELS

What are your recommendations?

TOWERS

We must first protect our ports. Then provide air cover for our ships from port to convoy.

DANIELS

What will it take to do that?

TOWERS

A lot more than a dinky aviation desk. We need a Naval Air Force.

DANIELS

Can you be more specific?

TOWERS

Large air stations protecting our major ports. Smaller ones to cover the minor ports and the 2,500 miles of our eastern coast. Several thousand airplanes and blimps. Aviators to fly them. Mechanics to keep them flying.

DANIELS

Work up the details so I can ask Congress to authorize the appropriations.

(to Roosevelt)

Franklin, review our budget. Shift as much money as you can to aviation.

(to Towers)

Your job is to build an Air Force for the Navy. You're in charge.

(to Benson)

Get him a bigger desk.

76 INT. AVIATION DESK - DAY

Towers studies the reports covering his small wooden desk. Bellinger enters. Towers dashes to his old friend and gives him a warm handshake.

TOWERS

Am I glad to see you, Pat. Sorry to pull you away from flight testing, but I need help. All we have are trainers. We need modern warplanes. Get with Curtiss. See what he can come up with. Go over to England and France. Check out what they have. Find out what we can license to build here.

TWO SAILORS deliver a new large steel desk.

BELLINGER

So you now command a BSD?

TOWERS

A what?

BELLINGER  
 Big Steel Desk.  
 (saluting as he leaves)  
 Anchors aweigh.

77 INT. RICHARDSON'S OFFICE - DAY

The tiny cubicle is filled with models and reports.

RICHARDSON  
 What's up?

TOWERS  
 Congress has authorized the  
 purchase of 4,000 airplanes, and  
 we don't have an aircraft  
 industry large enough to build  
 them. I need you to figure out  
 how to get the planes made and  
 delivered in the shortest  
 possible time.

78 INT. AVIATION DESK - DAY

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER ALBERT CUSHING "PUTTY" READ, 32, is only five feet four. The nickname comes from his pale complexion. He is self-conscious and shy. He broadly grins.

READ  
 Hi, Jack. You sent for me?

TOWERS  
 Welcome aboard, Putty. I need you  
 to set up our air stations.  
 You'll need to find the land and  
 acquire it. Then design and build  
 the air stations.

79 INT. TOWERS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lily lies in bed, reading a book. The clock shows that it's after midnight. Towers comes in, exhausted.

LILY  
 Jack?

He falls across the bed without undressing and instantly falls asleep. Lily gently strokes his hair.

80 INT. TOWERS' BEDROOM - DAWN

The alarm clock goes off. Towers drags himself into the bathroom.



81 INT. TOWERS' KITCHEN - DAWN

Towers comes into the kitchen, ready for work. Lily gives him a kiss and serves breakfast.

LILY

I never see you any more.

TOWERS

Daniels has dumped one hell of a big job on me.

LILY

I love you, and I miss you.

82 INT. AVIATION DESK - DAY

Roosevelt stops by Towers' desk.

ROOSEVELT

How are you doing?

TOWERS

Big time bootstrapping. I'm having almost all of my aviators trained as flight instructors. Their first job will be to train more aviators, then train them as flight instructors too.

A SECRETARY receives a teletype message. She screams.

SECRETARY

President Wilson has asked Congress to declare war.

ROOSEVELT

We have our work cut out for us.

83 EXT. NAVY DEPARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

SUPER: New Navy Department Building. 14 July 1917.

SAILORS carry furniture into the new building.

84 INT. AVIATION DEPARTMENT - DAY

Towers walks into the huge open room. It showcases a sign stating "Aviation Department," but the room is barren except for Towers' BSD. OTHER SAILORS then carry in more desks.

They are followed by a half dozen NAVAL OFFICERS. They hastily man the desks and attach homemade signs identifying the desks as "recruitment," "training," "research and development," "procurement," and "air stations."

TWO DELIVERY MEN arrive. They set up a chest-high drafting table. Towers moves everything from his desk to it.

TOWERS

Turn the BSD over to someone else. You can't command an air force sitting on your ass.

85 INT. TOWERS' HOME

Towers walks in. Lily greets him with a smile and a drink.

LILY

How are you holding up?

TOWERS

(gulping down the drink)  
I feel like I'm very far out on an extremely fragile limb. For the first time in my life, I'm scared. Scared of failure.

LILY

You'll do just fine. Don't even think about that word.

86 INT. AVIATION DEPARTMENT - DAY

Towers now commands SEVERAL DOZEN NAVAL OFFICERS, over FIFTY ENLISTED MEN, and a DOZEN WOMEN SECRETARIES. Large charts and graphs show great progress. It's a whirlwind of activity.

MUSIC: "Over There." ("The Yanks are coming...")

Towers' tall desk has become the bridge of his ship. He stands in the middle of the chaos, competently and quickly answering questions, resolving problems, and issuing orders.

Roosevelt enters and is impressed by the scene.

ROOSEVELT

Jack, when is the last time you had a day off?

Towers shrugs. He doesn't know.

ROOSEVELT

You need a break. I'd like you and your lovely wife to spend a few days with me and my family at Hyde Park. Returning to the country recharges me. It will be good for you.

TOWERS  
Can't leave. Too much to do.

ROOSEVELT  
(handing them to him)  
Orders from Daniels.

Towers sees that he has no choice.

TOWERS  
Lily has been after me to take  
some time off.

ROOSEVELT  
Good. No war talk. Just cabbages  
and kings. Do you play cards?

TOWERS  
I'll warn you, sir. I've very  
good and play for high stakes.  
The winnings help me cover Lily's  
expensive tastes.

ROOSEVELT  
You've met your match.

87 INT. ADMIRAL BENSON'S OFFICE - DAY

TOWERS  
We're making excellent progress  
in all areas. My officers are  
doing an outstanding job.

BENSON  
Good.

TOWERS  
We'll soon be going on the  
offensive and need to develop  
combat tactics. I have many ideas  
on the subject. I need to be  
commanding the units we'll be  
setting up in England so I can  
develop them.

BENSON  
You were given your job by  
Secretary Daniels. You're the  
only aviator he trusts. He  
considers you indispensable and  
sure as hell isn't going to let  
you go. Nothing I can do about  
it. You're stuck where you are.

88 INT. RICHARDSON'S OFFICE - DAY

TOWERS

Dick, we've got a problem. Can't get our new planes to England. The Army allocates the shipping and gives us little space. The few ships we did get were sunk by the U-boats. We need an airplane that can fly all the way across the Atlantic Ocean.

RICHARDSON

You're asking for the impossible.

TOWERS

Shortest direct route is Labrador to Ireland. That's over 2,000 miles. Too far. But it's only 1,350 miles from Labrador to the Azores. That's doable.

RICHARDSON

That's still way beyond the limits of our technology.

TOWERS

We'll establish new limits. Right now, airplanes can only patrol a hundred miles from the coast. The U-boats stay out beyond that. Longer-range planes could escort convoys much longer distances.

Richardson rubs his chin in deep thought.

89 INT. TOWERS' HOME - NIGHT

It's very late at night. Towers drags himself in. The enormous responsibilities have taken their toll. He's lost much of his former playfulness and is quiet and somber.

Lily welcomes him with a kiss. She is obviously pregnant. He collapses in his easy chair, exhausted. She pours him a drink of his Kentucky bourbon whiskey. He gulps it down.

LILY

You can't keep this up.

TOWERS

The Germans sank 309 Allied ships last month. Hundreds of good men are being killed every day. It's my job to protect them.

LILY

It is a big Navy. You can't do everything yourself.

TOWERS

We have only 46 aviators. I'm the most experienced, the only one who has actual combat experience.

He leans back and immediately falls asleep. Lily takes off his shoes, pulls a blanket over him, and gives him a kiss.

90 INT. NAVY MODEL BASIN - DAY

The large water tank is 10 feet wide and over a quarter mile long. Towers joins Richardson as he carefully observes the hull model being pulled by the towing carriage.

RICHARDSON

I've been thinking about your long-distance convoy escort idea.

Richardson lifts the model from the tank and grins proudly as he hands it to Towers, who examines it.

RICHARDSON

I threw out the idea of using a conventional fuselage. Decided the plane should have a ship's hull. If my calculations are correct, then this baby can land and take off in Force 6 seas: 24-knot winds and 8-foot waves.

Towers' eyes light up. He grins.

TOWERS

Assign several of them to a convoy. Give them a tender for refueling and repairs.

RICHARDSON

And they can fly across the ocean, providing constant patrols against the German subs.

TOWERS

The range and fuel requirements will require a huge plane. Really big! Can you make it fly?

RICHARDSON

Have teams working on the engines, controls. Everything.

## 91 INT. TOWERS' HOME - EVENING

Once again, it's late when Towers gets in. It's the same routine: kiss, drink, and collapse. Lily is now six months pregnant.

LILY

You can't keep this up. You really do need a break.

TOWERS

Wish I could take one.

LILY

You were always busy back in England, but you always managed to find time for us. We had fun.

TOWERS

Yes, we did.

LILY

Jack, I'm in a foreign country. I know few people. I'm lonely. I miss you. I know you have more important priorities, but at least put me on the list. Please.

## 92 EXT. ROCKAWAY NAVAL AIR STATION - DAY

The naval air station is located on a small peninsula flanked by Jamaica Bay and the Atlantic Ocean.

SUPER: Rockaway Naval Air Station. Queens, New York.

Richardson talks with flight engineer LIEUTENANT BRENTON RHODES, 27, and mechanic CHIEF BOATSWAIN LLOYD MOORE, 32, as they work on the NC-1. The biplane is the largest in the world. Her wingspan is the width of one and a quarter football fields, and she is four stories tall. She has three engines. The pilot seats are mounted on top of the hull.

TOWERS

How's it going, Dick?

RICHARDSON

She's a good, solid ship, but we've had to change many things.

TOWERS

Convoys follow the North Atlantic trade routes. The pilots will need protection from the cold. We must move them into the hull.

RICHARDSON

You got it.

TOWERS

Let's see how she flies.

Towers and Richardson climb into the pilot seats and put on the harnesses. They crank up the engines and taxi to the bay. They test the steering, then make a few short hops.

Richardson pushes the throttles forward. The giant bird lunges across Jamaica Bay. She easily lifts off.

Towers takes the controls. He eases her into a long, slow banking turn. Both proudly grin at one another.

93 EXT. SKIES OVER WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY

SUPER: Washington, D.C. 11 November 1918.

Flying the NC-1, Towers and Richardson buzz the U.S. Capitol, turn, then fly across the nearby Anacostia River.

94 EXT. ANACOSTIA NAVAL AIR STATION - DAY

They smoothly land on the quiet river and taxi to shore. Roosevelt immediately begins bragging to the SENATORS.

ROOSEVELT

The NC planes will be able to fly enormous distances, protecting our merchant ships from U-boats.

REPORTER

NC? What's that?

ROOSEVELT

N for Navy; C for Curtis. We designed it. He built it.

A NAVAL OFFICER runs up carrying a teletype message. Roosevelt reads it and announces...

ROOSEVELT

Germany has surrendered!

Pandemonium breaks out as everyone cheers.

95 EXT. CAPITOL HILL STEPS - DAY

GENERAL WILLIAM "BILLY" MITCHELL, 40, is a tall, rugged-looking man who wears a menacing scowl. He walks down the steps of the U.S. Capitol and is besieged by REPORTERS.

MITCHELL

Last spring, our British allies combined the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service into one command: the Royal Air Force. It has equal status with the Army and the Navy. It, American, and other Allied forces attacked the Germans with over 1,500 airplanes. We decimated the German army and broke the stalemate of trench warfare. Germany was forced to surrender.

(making his pitch)

Air power won the war. No battle can now be won on land or sea without control of the air. We should follow Britain's example. I have proposed to Congress that our country combine Army and Navy aviation into an independent United States Air Force.

96 INT. DANIELS' OFFICE - MORNING

ADMIRAL HENRY WILSON, 60, enters. He is a stern-faced old salt, a throwback to the days of wooden ships and iron men.

WILSON

Mr. Secretary?

DANIELS

Come on in, Henry.

Towers and Richardson snap to attention.

DANIELS

Commander Towers. Commander Richardson. I'd like for you to meet Admiral Henry Wilson. He commands the Atlantic Fleet.

Aloof Wilson nods, acknowledging their presence.

DANIELS

Be seated, gentlemen.

(once they have)

We've got a problem, Henry.

Daniels hands him a newspaper. The front page is dominated by a large picture of General Billy Mitchell, accompanied by the headline, "Mitchell Calls for Separate Air Force."



DANIELS

Mitchell's a war hero. His popularity could result in his getting his own air force. The Navy has another war on its hands. One for the very survival of our country's naval aviation.

WILSON

(scanning the article)

Hummmmm.

DANIELS

Commander Towers has come up with a war plan.

TOWERS

Mitchell is using the press to gain public support. We need to beat him at his own game. The Navy has to grab the headlines away from him by doing something really spectacular. Something that validates and promotes independent naval aviation.

WILSON

Promotes naval aviation?

DANIELS

Now that the war is over, the *London Daily Mail* has resurrected its 10,000-pound prize for the first airplane to fly across the Atlantic Ocean. The newspapers are filled with stories about it.

TOWERS

At least two groups in England and four here in the States are building airplanes for it. It has become a race - a major world event. The U.S. Navy must win it.

WILSON

Such a flight is impossible.

TOWERS

Our new NC airship has a range of 1,550 miles. It can't make it across the Atlantic nonstop. But we can do it by breaking the flight into five legs.

(pointing to his map)

## TOWERS (CONT'D)

New York to Halifax, then to Labrador. From there, the long leg to the Azores, then to Portugal, then England. Total distance around 4,000 miles.

Wilson and Benson exchange glances. Both frown.

## WILSON

Commander, have you ever served in the North Atlantic?

## TOWERS

No, sir.

## WILSON

Halifax? Labrador? The North Atlantic is the most treacherous and unpredictable stretch of water in the world. Powerful storms pop up out of nowhere. Enormous waves can capsize battleships. No flimsy airplane could possibly survive such hostile conditions.

## TOWERS

We'll be flying over those waves, not sailing through them, sir.

## WILSON

Hummph.

## TOWERS

We can't land in Labrador until the ice breaks up in April. The storm season will have largely passed. The Azores are covered with mountains, and we can't risk flying into one. We'll have to fly at night so we can land during the day. We'll have a full moon on 14 May. That's the target date for the long Azores leg.

## WILSON

Commander, you're really putting yourself in harm's way.

Richardson raises an eyebrow but says nothing.

## TOWERS

Admiral Wilson, the biggest problem is navigation. There are

TOWERS (CONT'D)

no landmarks at sea, and we'll be flying in the dark. Sir, I need you to run a line of picket ships the length of our course. They'll be our lighthouses. Plus, we'll need support ships. Close to 100 ships in all.

Wilson is stunned by the enormity of the request. He furrows his brow in deep thought, then frowns menacingly.

BENSON

Well, Henry?

WILSON

Commander Towers, you're asking for half of the Atlantic Fleet.

(reprimanding him)

You flyboys have a propensity for demeaning jokes about the officers of our battleship Navy, whom you disrespectfully refer to as the Gun Club.

(bragging)

I consider myself a senior member and am proud of it. Ships of the line have been protecting our nation since the days of John Paul Jones.

TOWERS

Sir...

WILSON

Don't interrupt me, Commander. I don't have a crystal ball, so I can't see into the future. I have no idea how important aviation may or may not be to the Navy in the years to come. And I can see substantial merit to General Mitchell's call for unity of command.

(to Daniels)

This flight is nothing more than a publicity stunt designed to promote naval aviation at the expense of the fleet.

Jaws drop. Eyes widen. Everyone is shocked by the condemnation. A blanket of silence covers the room.

WILSON

But that aside. First and foremost is my loyalty to the United States Navy in whatever form it may eventually take.

(he vows)

As long as there is breath in my body, I'm not letting any God-damn, pompous, self-righteous, Army-son-of-a-bitch bastard take anything away from our Navy. The Atlantic Fleet Gun Club will provide all the support you need.

TOWERS breathes a big sigh of relief.

TOWERS

Thank you, sir.

DANIELS

Admiral Wilson, as usual, you are right on target. This is a publicity stunt. I didn't want to say anything before you spoke your piece, but President Wilson not only approved it but has also ordered us to win the race.

(to Roosevelt)

Franklin, you brought Towers' idea to me. We need to turn this flight into a major news event. And we must milk it for all we can get out of it. No one is as good at charming the press as you are. You're to personally take charge of publicity. I want a new headline every day.

(with a devious smile)

I'll have the senators and congressmen so busy talking about the Navy's daring Trans-Atlantic Flight, they'll forget all about that egomaniac Mitchell and his damn joint Army-Navy Air Force.

97 INT. NAVY DEPARTMENT CAFETERIA - NOON

Richardson doesn't eat. He plays with his lunch.

TOWERS

We got what we wanted.

RICHARDSON

You got what you wanted.

TOWERS

The NC is your baby. You want to put her to the test.

RICHARDSON

Not like this. I've been in the flying business a long time. Know that every flight is a risk. I've learned to take things one step at a time. We're not doing that.

TOWERS

So?

RICHARDSON

The NC-1 is the largest, most advanced, and most complicated airplane ever built. It's been flown only 53 hours. We've ordered three more NCs but don't even have them yet, so we can't test them.

TOWERS

No time. We're in a race.

RICHARDSON

Only way we could get the NC-1 into the air was by using the new experimental high-compression Liberty engines. The Army used earlier models on its DH.4 bombers. They exploded and burst into flames. Earned the plane the nickname of "Flying Coffin."

TOWERS

They fixed the problems.

RICHARDSON

These new engines haven't been adequately tested. Radical new wide-blade propeller design. Tested on only one flight. New radios developed for the war, but never used in actual operations. Flying at night with untried navigation equipment.

TOWERS

Think of the flight as a shakedown cruise.

RICHARDSON

Hell, Jack, no plane has ever flown more than 125 miles out over the ocean. Simultaneously testing all these things in a four-thousand-mile flight across the Atlantic Ocean goes way beyond asking for trouble. It virtually guarantees it.

TOWERS

We'll muddle our way through it.

RICHARDSON

You're gambling, Jack. Big time. How do you figure the odds?

TOWERS

My best guess is that only one of the four planes will make it. That's all it takes to win. The other three will be rescued by the picket ships. But I'm hedging my bet. I want you as my pilot.

RICHARDSON

It's crazy. It's madness!

TOWERS

The big problem is Mitchell. Do you want to be in HIS air force? Do you want to lose everything we've worked for? We must protect our naval aviation.

(with a big grin)

Remember the football march Lieutenant Zimmerman wrote for our graduating class? We sang it at the Army-Navy game.

(he quietly sings)

"Stand Navy down the field, sails set to the sky. We'll never change our course, so Army you steer shy-y-y-y. Roll up the score, Navy, Anchors Aweigh. Sail Navy down the field and sink the Army, sink the Army Grey."

(NOTE: These are the original lyrics of "Anchors Aweigh," written for the U.S. Naval Academy Class of 1906. Same tune as the modern-day lyrics written in 1950.)

RICHARDSON

Every Don Quixote needs a Sancho Panza to keep him out of trouble. I guess I've always secretly wanted to fight a windmill. But suppose we are one of the three planes that goes down?

TOWERS

We'll probably get our feet wet. Then I transfer my flag and take over command of the survivor.

(bragging)

You and I will be the first men to fly across the Atlantic Ocean.

98 INT. TOWERS' HOME - AFTERNOON

Towers cautiously enters. Lily holds a martini.

LILY

They approved it?

TOWERS

Yes.

LILY

(gulping the drink)

A toast to the hero. You're going to get yourself killed.

She's close to full term. She begins to cry. Towers takes the drink and puts it down. He gently takes her hands.

TOWERS

We're taking every possible precaution. We'll make it. Everything is going to be just fine. You'll see.

LILY

The Navy now has plenty of aviators, so you don't have to make this flight. Glenn Curtiss has offered you a job. Father wants you to open a New York showroom. Both pay far more than the Navy. We'll have time to be together. We can have fun again.

TOWERS

Curtiss probably wants me to sell airplanes to the Navy, and I don't know a thing about art.

LILY

You promised me things would be better once the war was over, so I put aside all my feelings and supported you.

TOWERS

And I love you for that.

LILY

This is a risk you don't have to take. What if I lose you? I'll be a widow. A 27-year-old pregnant widow. What will become of me? What will become of our baby? Why are you pursuing this madness?

TOWERS

It's not madness. Sit down. Let me try to explain.

They sit on the sofa. Towers holds her hands.

TOWERS

Try to imagine a ballplayer who has spent years developing his skills. He's practiced and practiced. Then when the big game comes, he's not allowed to play. He warms the bench. We've just been through the biggest war in history. The first one to use air power. There were air battles all over Europe. Where was I? Flying a desk in Washington.

(almost pleading)

Damn it, Lily, the Trans-Atlantic Flight is like a second chance. It may be my only one. My last one. I can't sit it out. I couldn't live with myself.

Lily is angry. The Wicked Witch attacks.

LILY

I was there for you when you needed me, and now I really need you. You've made your choice, and now I'm making mine. Get out. Pack your bags and get the hell out of this house.



99 INT. ROCKAWAY HANGAR - DAY

Towers is surrounded by his key men.

TOWERS

Dick, you're still our engineer.  
Putty, I'm putting you in charge  
of the logistics. Need you to  
make sure the tenders have  
everything we could possibly  
need. We don't want any horseshoe  
nails. Breese...

LIEUTENANT JAMES L. BREESE, 29, steps forward.

TOWERS

Breese, you're the engine expert.  
I want you to learn all there is  
to know about the new Liberties.  
(to Bellinger)  
Pat, I need you to find us a  
suitable base in Newfoundland.  
Have you met Stone?

LIEUTENANT ELMER STONE, 32, teases the others.

STONE

Coast Guard Aviator Number 1.  
Came out of the revenue service.  
Looks like I'm the only one here  
that's not Navy trade school.

The Naval Academy graduates grin.

100 EXT. ROCKAWAY NAVAL AIR STATION - DAY

LIEUTENANT MARC "PETE" MITSCHER, 30, is small, thin, and  
almost bald. He looks frail. He always wears a baseball cap.  
He steers the NC-2 to shore. As with all the planes, she is  
identified by her number. He gets out and tells Towers...

MITSCHER

I'm having a tough time getting  
her off the water only half  
loaded. She's underpowered.

RICHARDSON

The new Liberty is the most  
powerful engine available.

MITSCHER

Add a fourth one.

RICHARDSON

Pete Mitscher, you missed your calling. You should have been an aeronautical engineer.

101 INT. ROCKAWAY HANGAR - AFTERNOON

Curtiss supervises his CURTISS WORKMEN as they install a fourth engine on the NC-2. She now has two nacelles. Each contains two engines, a tractor, and a pusher.

102 EXT. ROCKAWAY NAVAL AIR STATION - DAY

A fancy chauffeur-driven limousine stops at the edge of the security line. Roosevelt gets out. He is mobbed by the PRESS.

ROOSEVELT

Good morning, gentlemen. I'll answer your questions in due time. First, I have to do my job. Please be patient with me.

Roosevelt struts over to Towers. The NAVY SENTRIES prevent the press from following. Towers smartly salutes.

ROOSEVELT

You're due to take off in three weeks. Are you going to make it?

TOWERS

Aye, aye, sir.

ROOSEVELT

Wanted to see our newest plane.

TOWERS

This is the NC-3, sir.

ROOSEVELT

How about a quick tour?

Roosevelt follows Towers up the ladder. They walk down the hull to the stern and crawl into the hatch.

103 INT. NC-3 - DAY

They crawl down the hull through the watertight compartments. Nine enormous aluminum fuel tanks run along the center line.

104 EXT. NC-3 - DAY

The two men climb out of the pilot compartments and stand on the hull.

ROOSEVELT  
 How about taking me for a ride?  
 (hands him a paper)  
 This time I've brought a written  
 authorization from the Secretary  
 of the Navy.

Towers smiles and nods yes.

Towers waves aboard copilot LIEUTENANT DAVID MCCULLOCH, 28.

Roosevelt sits on the hull, a leg dangling into each of the  
 pilot compartments. Towers gets up and rigs a harness for  
 him, then sits in the pilot seat.

ROOSEVELT  
 Tell the sentries to let the  
 reporters in.

Towers starts the engines.

Roosevelt smartly thrusts his pointed hand forward, motioning  
 for the pilots to take off. A gaggle of PHOTOGRAPHERS and  
 NEWSREEL CAMERAMEN take his picture. Roosevelt waves and  
 smiles at them. It looks as if he is commanding the flight.

The NC-3 taxis out to Jamaica Bay and takes off.

105 EXT. OVER JAMAICA BAY - DAY

Roosevelt grins ear to ear, enjoying the bumpy flight.

106 INT. ROCKAWAY HANGAR - DAY

Glenn Curtiss personally supervises his small army of Curtiss  
 workmen as they assemble the NC-4.

TOWERS  
 Putty, you command the NC-4.

Read looks at the many pieces sprawled across the hangar  
 floor. His eyes spring open in shock.

READ  
 We're scheduled to take off in  
 only six days. It hasn't even  
 been assembled, much less flown.

TOWERS  
 Get on it. Take command.

107 EXT. ROCKAWAY NAVAL AIR STATION - AFTERNOON

The weather rapidly kicks up. Towers and Richardson run to  
 the hangar door and are met by gale force winds.

LIGHTNING FLASHES across the sky. The HIGH WINDS blow the heavy rain almost horizontally across the ground.

Towers and Richardson run down to the shore to see the NC-1 bobbing up and down on twelve-foot waves.

They rush into the water to help a DOZEN SEAMEN as they try to push the launch through the crashing surf. They are constantly thrown back by the massive waves.

The ferocious waves toss the NC-1 toward shore. A large breaker picks her up and hurls her down on the end of the marine railway. The impact tears off her left wingtip float.

The left wing falls into the boiling surf. The next breaker smashes into it with the force of a hurricane. It buckles the struts and grotesquely twists the wing. Towers helplessly looks on, clenching his fists.

108 EXT. ROCKAWAY HANGAR - MORNING

Towers and Richardson inspect the NC-1.

RICHARDSON

The cracks in the hull can be repaired. Wing is a total loss.

TOWERS

Can we get a new one?

RICHARDSON

The jigs have been dismantled. No way they can be put back together in time to build a new wing.

MITSCHER

Bad engine configuration on the NC-2. Should have added the fourth engine as a pusher behind the center one. Not enough time to change it back. Fix One. Give her Two's wing.

109 INT. ROCKAWAY HANGAR - NIGHT

The clock shows 00:15 hours. The Curtiss workmen are exhausted. They drag themselves out the door. The GROUND CREW springs into action. SAILORS roll in drums of fuel.

The pump motor sparks. The fuel drum erupts into flames.

CHIEF PETTY OFFICER BOB CHRISTENSEN, 28, is the engineer.

CHRISTENSEN

Fire! Fire!

He grabs a fire extinguisher and squirts foam on the flaming drum. Other workmen grab extinguishers and join in.

The pump is still running. The heat melts the hose fitting. The pump shoots out a huge stream of gasoline. It bursts into flames with a deafening WHOOF.

The fire quickly shoots across the hangar floor.

Breese jumps down from the NC-4 to see the flames under her tail. He grabs a fire extinguisher and tries to put them out.

Men from outside see the flames and rush in. Some men fight the fires. Others roll the fuel drums out the hangar door.

110 INT. ROCKAWAY HANGAR - NIGHT

Towers runs in to see everyone covered with sweat and soot.

TOWERS

Anyone hurt?

Everyone motions that they are okay. Richardson rushes in. He and Towers walk around, assessing the damage. They are shocked by the devastation. The NC-1's right wing is completely destroyed. The NC-4's tail is burned to a crisp.

RICHARDSON

We still have the right wing from the NC-2. We can cannibalize her tail too.

BREESE

We only have two days.

TOWERS

Call Curtiss. We need all the help we can get.

111 EXT. ROCKAWAY NAVAL AIR STATION - DAWN

It is 06:45 hours when Curtiss and his exhausted Curtiss workmen return. They plunge into the impossible task at hand.

The fire truck sits between the two planes. FIREMEN stand by each one, their extinguishers ready.

112 EXT. ROCKAWAY NAVAL AIR STATION - MORNING

Dirty and exhausted Curtiss workmen push the two planes out of the hangar. All that remains of the NC-2 is her hull.

113 EXT. ROCKAWAY NAVAL AIR STATION - AFTERNOON

A small Caterpillar tractor pulls the NC-4 up the marine railroad. Read jumps off the wing.

READ

The hull leaks like a sieve. We shipped almost 800 gallons of water in only 10 minutes.

The NC-4 slips off the carriage. A support brace cuts through her hull. The sudden jolt breaks the wing supports.

TOWERS

Jackleg it!

114 EXT. ROCKAWAY NAVAL AIR STATION - DAY

Large white numbers painted on top of their wings, sides, and bellies identify the enormous airships as "1," "3," and "4." They sit on huge carriages.

Roosevelt leaps to the podium. Flashing his famous smile, he announces...

ROOSEVELT

This is a truly historic occasion. Today we stand before three remarkable... It's really not appropriate to call them airplanes because they are far more than that. They are airships. We are here today to take the unprecedented action of commissioning them into the United States Navy, just as if they were surface ships.

The bugle blows as the ensign is raised at the stern and the jack on the bow of each of the three planes. Roosevelt motions for Towers to join him. They shake hands and grin.

ROOSEVELT

Commander Towers and his air crews are to go to fly them across the Atlantic Ocean.

REPORTER

Is the Navy trying to win the 10,000-pound prize for being the first to fly across the Atlantic?

ROOSEVELT

The United States Navy will not enter that competition.

ROOSEVELT (CONT'D)  
 Officially, this is an extensive  
 flight test of a new airplane.

Newsreel cameras roll, and FLASHBULBS EXPLODE.

ROOSEVELT  
 No one has ever attempted such a  
 daring feat. We will show the  
 entire world our great American  
 engineering abilities. Our Yankee  
 ingenuity. And the great skills  
 of our fearless naval aviators.

The SPECTATORS go wild, shouting and screaming.

115 INT. ROCKAWAY HANGAR - DAY

Spit-and-polish CAPTAIN HARRIS LANING, 44, enters.

LANING  
 At ease. I'm Captain Harris  
 Laning, Chief of Staff, Atlantic  
 Destroyer Fleet. I'm here to get  
 your ship deployment plan.

Towers walks over to him and spreads out his chart.

TOWERS  
 We'll need one of your ships  
 every 50 miles. Their primary  
 mission is to provide navigation  
 aids. If necessary, they must  
 perform search and rescue.

LANING  
 That will be their primary  
 mission. You guys are crazy to  
 even attempt this foolish stunt.

TOWERS  
 (hands him a thick report)  
 It's all in here.

LANING  
 General Mitchell claims that  
 airplanes can sink battleships.  
 What do you think?

TOWERS  
 Planes can now carry big armor-  
 piercing bombs. They can be  
 rigged to carry torpedoes. You  
 can't hit a small, fast airplane  
 with a big gun. Battleships are

TOWERS (CONT'D)  
sitting ducks. The firepower is  
all going in one direction.

Laning grumbles to himself as he walks away.

RICHARDSON  
Gun Club.

The aviators break out laughing.

116 INT. NC-4 - DAY

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER ROBERT A. LAVENDER, 32, is checking the  
radios. The NC-4 radioman, ENSIGN HERBERT C. RODD, 22, is  
removing wires from the top of the hull.

LAVENDER  
What are you doing?

RODD  
Rerouting the radio wires. They  
mounted the fourth engine almost  
directly above me. All those  
spark plugs firing off is bound  
to cause radio interference.

LAVENDER  
I'm the senior radio officer. You  
cannot modify the system without  
official authorization. Put the  
wires back where they belong.

Lavender leaves. Rodd goes back to his rerouting.

117 INT. TOWERS' HOME - MORNING

Faye knocks on the door. Scruffy Lily answers.

FAYE  
My God, Lily. You're skin and  
bones. Have you been eating?

Lily shakes her head no.

118 INT. TOWERS' KITCHEN - MORNING

Faye fixes canned soup and serves it. As Lily finishes...

FAYE  
Let's get you cleaned up.

119 INT. TOWERS' BATHROOM

Lily is in the bathtub. Faye washes her hair.



FAYE

Jack is very worried about you.  
He telephoned and asked me to see  
how you're doing.

LILY

Jack is not going to survive this  
stupid flight.

Lily starts to cry. Faye hugs her.

120 INT. TOWERS' BEDROOM - MORNING

Lily sits on the bed. Faye brushes her hair.

LILY

I'm a delicate flower. Jack is my  
soil. Without him to nurture me,  
I'm shriveling up. I'm dying.

FAYE

Stop being so melodramatic. A  
Navy wife must be as tough as her  
husband. Lily, you must learn to  
stand on your own two feet.

LILY

The bloody fool is going to get  
himself killed. I know it.

FAYE

Dick's flying Jack's plane. I  
have absolutely no doubt that  
both will be just fine.

LILY

How can you be so sure?

FAYE

Our guys are resourceful. You  
just have to trust them.

Faye stands, walks around Lily, then sits on the bed, facing  
her. She admonishes the younger woman.

FAYE

You once told me Jack was your  
knight in shining armor. Knights  
are supposed to be out slaying  
dragons. That's what they do.  
They don't sit at home and  
nurture flowers. If Jack did  
that, he wouldn't be much of a  
knight. You certainly wouldn't

FAYE (CONT'D)

feel the same way about him. You can't have it both ways.

LILY

I never thought about that.

FAYE

You threw him out, and he can divorce you for that. That's a surefire way of losing him. If you want to keep your knight, then you'd damn well better get on board. Either that or run home to Daddy. Shape up or ship out.

121 EXT. ROCKAWAY SECURITY GATE - AFTERNOON

Towers is surprised to see Lily waiting for him.

LILY

I came to tell you I'm sorry. I only thought about myself. I should have been thinking about you. About us.

Lily's tummy bulges out. Towers carefully leans over and kisses her. Her knees buckle. Towers takes her arm and escorts her away.

122 INT. NEW YORK HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Lily comes out of the bathroom. A towel is wrapped around her wet hair. She wears an attractive nightgown.

LILY

I feel better now. Think I've caught my second wind.

TOWERS

I've missed you. I've thought a lot about the things you've said. You're right. Pat or Putty could have led this flight. I was wrong about Curtiss too. He knows the Navy is overstocked on airplanes. He's looking to the civilian market. He believes the NCs have laid the groundwork for long-distance passenger flights. He's convinced there will be a huge demand for them. That's the job he has in mind for me.

LILY

Don't you even think about it, sailor! I read the newspapers. I know the Navy is refitting a big coal ship. Adding a flying deck. It will be the Navy's first ship to carry airplanes. Entire squadrons of them. That's a really big ball game. I know you won't be happy unless you are in the middle of it. Go for it.

TOWERS

A ship that carries coal is called a collier. One that carries airplanes is called an aircraft carrier.

Lily rolls her eyes, then tries to crawl in bed. She has difficulty shifting the weight of her very pregnant stomach. Towers gently picks her up and lays her on the bed.

LILY

Thank you, dear.

Towers crawls in beside her. She smothers him with kisses.

LILY

I love you so very, very much.

123 INT. ROCKAWAY HANGAR - DAWN

SUPER: Day 1. Thursday. 8 May 1919.

A happy Towers enters. Bellinger stands by the NC-1. A sign has been attached next to her bow identification number, modifying it to read "1-1/2." Towers examines it.

BELLINGER

(grinning)

The NC-1 hull and the NC-2 wings.  
More appropriate designation.

Towers holds back his smile. He walks to the center of the hangar and addresses the air crews.

TOWERS

Each plane must maintain its own navigation and be prepared to go it alone at any time. If a plane goes down, then it is on its own. There are plenty of search and rescue vessels. Any questions?

STONE

Some of us just got here. We haven't had enough time to get familiar with our plane. It's a monster. We're not ready, sir.

TOWERS

We're never as ready as we want.

READ

The planes aren't ready. NC-4 has only had a one-hour test flight.

The men are nervous about undertaking such a long and dangerous flight with so little preparation.

TOWERS

We'll muddle our way through it.

A SAILOR runs to Towers with messages. He reviews them.

TOWERS

Weather reports. We have clear skies to Halifax, but we may hit some really nasty winds.

RICHARDSON

(loudly sings)

"Sail Navy down the field and sink the Army, sink the Army Grey."

Towers waves his laughing air crews out of the hangar.

124 EXT. ROCKAWAY NAVAL AIR STATION - DAWN

Each air crew has an aircraft commander/navigator, pilot, copilot, radio operator, and two flight engineers, who are enlisted men. All wear heavy winter flying suits.

The 18 men walk to their planes. Roosevelt shakes the hand of each one, wishing him well. There are dozens of REPORTERS.

Faye, Lily, and other NAVY WIVES watch their husbands with a mix of pride and apprehension.

The NC-4 sits on the marine railway carriage. Her sister ships are in the bay, their pontoons resting on the shore, bows pointing toward the open water. Their crews board them.

The Aircraft commanders/navigators crawl into their hatch at the tip of the bow. Bellinger commands the NC-1; Towers, the NC-3, Towers; and Read, the NC-4.

The pilots climb into their compartments and start the engines. The ROAR is deafening.

The NC-1 and the NC-3 cast off and taxi into the bay.

The Caterpillar tractor pushes the NC-4 down the twin rails into the water. She floats off the carriage and follows.

The three airships line up abreast. They rev up their big Liberty 400 engines. Towers waves his arm in a circle and then throws it forward, pointing ahead.

The enormous airships leap forward, like racehorse whales charging from the starting gate. They go faster and faster. Their V-shaped hulls cut smartly through the water, throwing out huge sheets of spray. One by one, they lift off the bay.

They rapidly climb into the sky. They fall into a tight inverted V formation as they fly past the Manhattan skyline. They make a sweeping U-turn and fly across the peninsula.

125 EXT. OFF CAPE COD - DAY

Towers spots the alternating black and white puffs of smoke coming from the USS *McDermut*, the first of the picket ships.

126 EXT. CAPITOL HILL STEPS - DAY

General Mitchell is surrounded by reporters.

MITCHELL

The Navy has always been a bastion of stupidity, but this latest adventure takes the grand prize. Stepping stones of ships spread across the Atlantic. A walk in the park. And a very, very expensive one for the American taxpayer. The Navy's stupidity is only exceeded by its inefficiency.

127 EXT. ROOSEVELT'S OFFICE - DAY

Reporters flock around the Assistant Secretary of the Navy.

ROOSEVELT

General Mitchell is wrong about the cost to the American taxpayer. The Navy is constantly training. If the ships weren't supporting the Trans-Atlantic Flight, they would be engaged in other exercises. Absolutely no difference in costs to the

ROOSEVELT (CONT'D)

taxpayer. The NCs are the most advanced airplanes ever built. They went from concept to flight testing in less than a year. Is that inefficiency? If so, then I'd like to see a lot more of it.

(he strikes back)

General Mitchell failed to mention that a Trans-Atlantic Flight was far beyond the capability of the Army Air Service. When faced with the challenge, the Army tucked its tail between its legs and ran away like a frightened dog. All it can do is bark. Woof, woof, Mitchell. Woof. Woof.

128 INT. NC-4 - DAY

Flight engineer Breese monitors the engine gauges. He tugs on the trousers of copilot WALTER HINTON, 25, to get his attention. The engines throw out a DEAFENING ROAR, making communication difficult. Breese screams into his microphone.

BREESE

No oil pressure.

129 EXT. NC-4 - DAY

The giant lumbering airship cruises at only 85 miles per hour. Breese connects his safety line to the hull. He climbs onto the wing and inspects the aft center engine.

The forward center engine EXPLODES. Smoke and steam gush out of it. Read shuts it down.

130 INT. NC-4 - DAY

Radioman Rodd yells into his microphone.

RODD

S.O.S. This is U.S. Navy NC-4.  
Off Cape Cod. We've lost two  
engines. We're going down. S.O.S.

131 EXT. NC-3 - DAY

Towers hears the distress call over his earphones. He looks back to see the NC-4 steadily losing altitude.

132 EXT. PLACENTIA, NEWFOUNDLAND - DAY

SUPER: Placentia, Newfoundland, Canada.

The HAWKER GROUND CREW carefully unloads the Sopwith *Atlantic* from the freighter *Digby*. The airplane is a modified bomber. HARRY HAWKER, 30, is surrounded by REPORTERS.

REPORTER

Mister Hawker, have you set a date for your flight yet?

HAWKER

I'm going to wait until the Yanks have really stuck their necks out. Then I'm going to chop them off. One 22-hour flight across the big blue pond. I'm going to beat the Yanks to the finish line at the last possible minute. Won't their faces be red!

133 EXT. OCEAN OFF CAPE COD - DAY

Hinton easily lands the NC-4 on the three-foot waves and shuts down the two remaining engines. The plane drifts. Breese and Read inspect the engines. Rodd joins them.

RODD

I had to crank in the antenna for the long-range radio. It won't work in the water. We are so low that the short-range radio can only get out a weak signal. The destroyers are so busy chatting with each other about us, I can't get through to them.

134 EXT. HALIFAX LEG - DAY

Aboard the NC-3, Towers sees the smoke rising above the second destroyer, the USS *Kimberly*, partially covered by fog.

135 EXT. OFF CAPE COD - DAY

The NC-4 wallows in the waves. Read sees a distant destroyer, but it doesn't see the plane. It steams away. Read uses his sextant to take a sun sighting. He checks his chart and passes the new course to the pilot.

READ

Crank up the two good engines.  
Head to Chatham Air Station.

136 EXT. SHORT BROTHERS FACTORY - DAY

SUPER: Short Brothers Aviation Factory.  
Rochester, England.

EUSTACE SHORT and OSWALD SHORT check out their latest aeronautical creation: the Swirl, N-111 *Shamrock*. It has an incredible 171-foot wingspan but only one engine. A shamrock is painted on its side. They brief PILOT WOOD.

EUSTACE SHORT

We figure her range is 3,200 miles. More than enough to fly from Ireland to North America, even with the contrary winds.

OSWALD SHORT

We could really use that 10,000-pound prize money.

PILOT WOOD

Count on it, lads. I'll fly up to Ireland today and make the Atlantic flight tomorrow.

137 EXT. HALIFAX LEG - DAY

Towers sees a squall ahead. The NC-3 climbs to get over it.

The NC-1 uses the opposite tack and drops down.

High winds toss the airships up and down and from side to side. The planes are being shaken to pieces.

138 EXT. NC-3 - DAY

The NC-3 emerges from the squall. Towers and the pilots see a huge rainbow reaching from the earth to the clouds, four times as high as it is thick. It's a good omen.

Towers and Richardson grin and throw a "thumbs up" to one another.

139 EXT. OVER THE IRISH SEA - DAY

The *Shamrock* smoothly flies through the morning sky.

Suddenly, its engine coughs, then dies. The *Shamrock* is a land plane. She has wheels, not pontoons.

Wood glides her in for a landing on the Irish Sea. She hits the surface with a SLAM. The waves rip off her landing gear. She flips over.

140 EXT. HALIFAX HARBOR - AFTERNOON

SUPER: Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.



The NC-3 drops down on the Atlantic and taxis toward the harbor entrance. Towers climbs out of his hatch, walks down the hull, and shouts to Richardson...

TOWERS

A little under nine hours. That's the longest any plane has ever flown over water.

As the NC-3 enters the harbor, factory and ship WHISTLES BLOW a welcoming greeting.

SPECTATORS and PRESS are everywhere. The NC-3 taxis to her tender. Towers sees the NC-1 approaching.

The NC-1 makes a long descending turn and lands.

141 EXT. USS *BALTIMORE* - AFTERNOON

Richardson taxis the NC-3 toward the USS *Baltimore*. Rhodes drops the ground anchor. The *Baltimore* sends over a launch. Towers and his pilots hop in.

They board the *Baltimore* and are met by jovial CAPTAIN WAT TYLER CLUVERIUS, 45.

TOWERS

Permission to come aboard, sir?

CLUVERIUS

Permission granted.

TOWERS

Have you heard from the NC-4?

CLUVERIUS

Not yet. Everyone is out looking for it. Your men will be okay.

Engineer Rhodes arrives from the NC-3 in another launch.

RHODES

We've got three cracked props.

CLUVERIUS

We're well stocked.

The NC-1 taxis over to the *Baltimore* and drops anchor.

Bellinger and his crew arrive on a launch. They salute the OFFICER OF THE DECK and rush to Towers.

BELLINGER

The props are all cracked.

RICHARDSON

The new wide-blade props can't  
take the change in temperature.

TOWERS

We'll use the replacements they  
have here for the Labrador run,  
but get us standard Navy oak  
propellers for the Azores leg.

142 EXT. OCEAN OFF CAPE COD - NIGHT

It's a bright clear night. The sky sparkles with an abundance  
of bright stars. The Atlantic is calm.

The NC-4 continues her voyage. Stone steers the plane. Read  
and Hinton sit on the wing, casually eating sandwiches.

An enormous whale blows, then surfaces next to the airship  
behind Read. It's the great grandson of Moby Dick. Its huge  
eye carefully examines the aviators.

Hinton sees it and chokes on his sandwich.

HINTON

(very quietly)

We've got company.

Read turns around and sees the huge whale.

READ

It's a sperm whale. They eat  
plankton, not people. In view of  
our size, shape, and hull color,  
let's hope that it's not  
farsighted and horny.

HINTON

I certainly don't want to be  
screwed by a damn whale.

Read picks up the water jug, stands, and throws it at the  
whale, narrowly missing its huge eye.

READ

Go find yourself another date.  
We're already taken.

He motions for the pilot to increase speed and bear  
starboard. The NC-4 leaves the whale in its wake.

143 INT. WASHINGTON MOVIE PALACE - NIGHT

Daniels and Roosevelt usher in a large group of SENATORS and  
CONGRESSMEN. The enormous theater is packed.

NEWSREEL: Original footage of the start of the famous Trans-Atlantic Flight. The silent pictures are accompanied by the ORIGINAL TITLE CARDS announcing the start of the flight.

144 EXT. CHATHAM NAVAL AIR STATION - EARLY MORNING

SUPER: Day 2. Friday. 9 May 1919.  
Chatham Naval Air Station. Chatham, Massachusetts.

The NC-4 taxis into the air station to be met by a throng of NAVY PERSONNEL, led by CAPTAIN PHILLIP EATON, 42.

EATON  
Welcome aboard, Commander.

READ  
We need two engines.

EATON  
The NCs are the only Navy planes that use the Liberties. We don't have any, but I'll get them.

145 INT. ROOSEVELT'S LIMOUSINE - MORNING

Roosevelt is on his way to work and sees the NEWSBOY hawking newspapers. He has his chauffeur stop to buy one.

The headline states, "Navy Begins Daring Trans-Atlantic Flight. The NC-4 Lost at Sea." Roosevelt frowns.

146 EXT. HALIFAX HARBOR - MORNING

MECHANICS work on the NC-1. Richardson tries to start the engines, but they won't turn over. He tells Towers...

RICHARDSON  
Oil is thick because of the cold.

SAILORS man the steam ducts, warming up the engines. Richardson tries again. There is a loud GRINDING NOISE.

RICHARDSON  
Starting motor. Stripped gears.

Towers walks over to Bellinger.

TOWERS  
You go on without us.

Bellinger's NC-1 takes off and soars into the sky.

147 EXT. CHATHAM NAVAL AIR STATION - MORNING

Breese climbs down off the wing and reports to Read.

BREESE

I can rebuild one of them. The other is a total loss. The thrown rod really chewed up her insides.

148 EXT. HALIFAX HARBOR - DAY

The NC-3 takes off.

149 EXT. LABRADOR LEG - AFTERNOON

The NC-3 is struck broadside by heavy winds that blow her sideways. Heavy turbulence kicks her up and down.

She hits a big air pocket and falls hundreds of feet. Towers is almost thrown from the plane but is saved by his harness.

Richardson climbs to 2,500 feet, 3,000 feet, and then 3,500 feet. Finally, at 4,000 feet, the wind is as smooth as the fabric-covered wings.

Everyone shivers from the intense cold. The fourth picket ship, the USS *McKean*, is on station and dead ahead. Smoke rises from her stack.

150 EXT. OVER TREPASSEY BAY - EVENING

SUPER: Trepassey Bay, Newfoundland, Canada.

Towers and Richardson are amazed by the hundreds of icebergs that cover the ocean like a giant fleet of sailing ships.

The sun sets as the NC-3 drops down for her final approach. A powerful gust rolls her over on her port wing. She falls fast and goes into a spiral dive.

Richardson levels her out, just above the surface. The NC-3 is heading straight for the high cliffs that line the shore. Richardson makes a steep banking turn.

Richardson circles around for another try. He puts the NC-3 into a long slow glide. The NC-3 slams into the large swells.

She charges across the bay, kicking up an enormous cloud of spray. The plane is battered by strong crosswinds.

Powerful gusts skid her across the surface and lift her clear off the water. Towers holds on for dear life.

They finally stop. Towers walks down the hull.

151 EXT. NC-3 - EVENING

TOWERS

I've never seen such nasty air.

RICHARDSON  
 Warm Gulf Stream hits cold Arctic  
 Ocean currents. Crosswinds from  
 all directions. Sudden gusts. Up  
 drafts. Down drafts. Like riding  
 the Coney Island roller coaster.

152 EXT. TREPASSEY BAY - EVENING

The NC-3 taxis toward the USS *Aroostook*. Towers is happy to see Bellinger's NC-1 at her stern. The USS *Prairie*, a repair ship, the USS *Hisko*, a tanker, and several destroyers lie at anchor. It's an enormous operation.

153 EXT. USS AROOSTOOK STERN - SUNSET

The *Aroostook* is a minelayer. Her stern is unfolded to form a platform out over the water. Bellinger and Mitscher are on deck. A SAILOR tosses Towers a line, then pulls the NC-3 to the stern. OTHER SAILORS set up a gangplank.

BELLINGER  
 (jokingly yells)  
 I have seen smoother landings.

Richardson sheepishly grins. He and Towers board the ship.

They are met by CAPTAIN JAMES HARVEY TOMB, 44, a tall man of medium build. Towers throws him a salute.

TOMB  
 Welcome to the *Aroostook*.

RICHARDSON  
 It's c...c...c...cold up here.

TOMB  
 You must be tired. I'll show you  
 to your quarters.

Towers points to the engine and steam ducts.

TOWERS  
 Captain, we need to keep the  
 engines warm.

RICHARDSON  
 We need to get us warm.

Tomb orders his sailors to direct the steam ducts on the airship's big engines.

154 EXT. USS AROOSTOOK STERN - MORNING

SUPER: Day 3. Saturday. 10 May 1919.

The two flight crews gather.

TOWERS

I've revised the weight calculations. If we top off the fuel tanks, we can't take off. Too heavy. I'm cutting back to 1,500 gallons. 10,000 pounds.

155 EXT. CHATHAM NAVAL AIR STATION - AFTERNOON

Breese pats the engine.

BREESE

I've rebuilt the forward engine. The new engine is one of the early 300-horsepower models, but it will get us to Labrador. Then we'll swap it out for a new 400.

Read and Stone walk outside to check flight conditions. The wind is rapidly picking up speed. They walk along the shore and see the large waves. They go to the control tower.

156 INT. CHATHAM CONTROL TOWER - MORNING

SUPER: Day 4. Sunday. 11 May 1919.

READ

What do the weather reports say?

CHATHAM FLIGHT CONTROLLER

There's a gale coming down from the north. Fifty-knot winds.

STONE

Towers isn't going anywhere either. We can catch up with him.

157 EXT. CHATHAM NAVAL AIR STATION - MORNING

Breese successfully runs all four of the NC-4 engines. The station is socked in by clouds, driven by gale force winds. Read shakes his head. He will not fly in such weather.

158 EXT. USS AROOSTOOK DECK - MORNING

Towers and Bellinger watch gale force winds propel the hailstones like frozen bullets.

BELLINGER

Not a good day for flying.

159 EXT. USS AROOSTOOK BRIDGE - MORNING

SUPER: Day 5. Monday. 12 May 1919.

The gale has grown into a full-blown storm. Towers and Richardson watch the ships in the harbor drag anchor. They are blown ashore and flounder against the coast.

160 EXT. CHATHAM NAVAL AIR STATION - MORNING

SUPER: Day 6. Tuesday. 13 May 1919.

The weather has cleared. Read and his crew climb into the NC-4 and start the engines. The NC-4 easily takes off.

161 EXT. WATERS OFF CAPE COD - DAY

A propeller begins wobbling. It shakes the plane. Stone drops the NC-4 down onto the water. Breese climbs up onto the wing and checks the engines.

BREESE

Mismatched horsepower. Breaks up the airflow.

READ

The other planes are still in Labrador. If we can get up there today, we may still make the Azores flight. We'll fly up on three engines.

The NC-4 roars across the waves and lifts into the sky.

162 EXT. TREPASSEY BAY - MORNING

SUPER: Day 7. Wednesday. 14 May 1919.

The ships are being towed off the shore when the destroyer USS *Edwards* arrives. The propellers are quickly unloaded.

The new C-5 blimp flies over.

163 INT. USS AROOSTOOK BRIDGE - DAY

Captain Tomb motions his guests to gather around the radio.

164 INT. C-5 GONDOLA - DAY

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER EMORY COIL, 32, laughingly yells into the radio microphone.

COIL

Ahoy, Towers. Coil here.

TOWERS (O.S.)  
Towers here.

COIL  
We've been aloft for 25 hours and  
50 minutes. We have covered 1,177  
miles. New world record.

TOWERS (O.S.)  
Congratulations, Coil.

COIL  
Once we rest and refuel, we're on  
our way across the big blue sea.  
(he jokingly sings)  
We'll be in Ireland before ye.

165 INT. USS AROOSTOOK BRIDGE - DAY

TOWERS  
(angry)  
Daniels! This is his doing! He's  
gone out on a limb with the  
publicity, so he's covering  
his... his... his bet.

RICHARDSON  
As if we didn't have enough damn  
competition. Now we have to race  
our own Navy.

166 EXT. ST. JOHN, NEWFOUNDLAND - DAY

SUPER: St. John, Newfoundland.

The C-5 descends toward the ground. Her tender, a heavy  
cruiser, USS *Chicago*, lies at anchor, waiting for her.

The C-5 drops her manila mooring lines. They are grabbed by  
100 *CHICAGO* SAILORS, who pull her down. They quickly secure  
her to permanent moorings using steel cables.

167 EXT. USS AROOSTOOK STERN - DAY

The mechanics pull off the wide-paddle propellers and replace  
them with new slim ones.

168 EXT. TREPASSEY BAY - DAY

Towers and Richardson are amazed to see gale force winds once  
again barge in from the Atlantic.



169 EXT. ST. JOHN, NEWFOUNDLAND - DAY

The storm hits St. John. The C-5 is tossed around like a pool toy. Her mooring cables become taut. The sailors grab the lines and try to hold her down.

A sudden gust strikes the airship. The C-5's tail rears up into the air. The manila lines are torn from sailors' hands. Others hold on and are lifted into the air.

One by one, they let go and fall to the ground. The steel mooring cables snap. The C-5 is blown out to sea.

170 EXT. LABRADOR LEG - DAY

SUPER: Day 8. Thursday. 15 May 1919.

The NC-4 flies over the third destroyer. Read looks off into the distance and sees the broken and sagging C-5 blimp skimming the surface of the ocean.

171 EXT. TREPASSEY BAY - AFTERNOON

The pilots start their engines and taxi the NC-1 and the NC-3 out the harbor entrance. Strong winds push them to the side. Huge waves break over their bows, drenching the commanders.

Towers looks over to Bellinger and waves his arms in an "X" indicating he should abort. He points back to the harbor. Towers directs the NC-3 as far back into the bay as she can go. He motions for full speed ahead, and she lunges forward.

The NC-3 can't get off the water. Huge breakers lie just outside the harbor entrance. Richardson cuts back the throttles and turns sharply to avoid crashing into them.

Towers motions for the airships to return to the harbor. He looks up to see the NC-4 circling in the sky overhead.

The NC-4 arrives. Read sees the huge waves. He uses the microphone to order the pilot to land.

The NC-4 descends just outside the harbor entrance and taxis into the comparatively tranquil bay.

172 EXT. USS AROOSTOOK STERN - EVENING

TOWERS

We're still too heavy. Dump another hundred gallons of fuel.

RICHARDSON

We can't get off before hitting the breakers. Maybe they'll die down. Let's try again tomorrow.

Read and his crew arrive. The aviators are glad to be united once again. They shake hands and slap each other on the back.

173 EXT. USS AROOSTOOK STERN - MORNING

SUPER: Day 9. Friday. 16 May 1919.

Great flying weather. Towers addresses his shivering crews.

TOWERS

We got off to a rough start, but hopefully the mechanical problems are behind us. By the time we hit station three, we should be out of this nasty air. As we fly south, it will get warmer.

RICHARDSON

(shivering)

Thank God.

TOWERS

We still have to face our biggest challenge. Navigation. This is so critical that I'm going over it one more time.

Towers points to the chart.

TOWERS

For those of you not familiar with them, the Azores are a chain of islands running west by northwest across a distance equal to the width of Tennessee. We have 22 picket ships between here and the first island. It's a very tiny target, so we have to hit it on the first pass. There is not enough reserve fuel to search for it. Once we hit it, the rest should be easy, as there are three more picket ships between it and Ponta Delgada.

174 EXT. TREPASSEY BAY - DAY

The three planes taxi through the harbor entrance. The waves have subsided to eight feet.

The NC-3 rushes through the water, trying to take off. She picks up speed and bounces from one wave to another. She can't get off the water. She continues the run. Her engines wind. She bounces and bounces. The NC-1 can't get off either.

The NC-4 struggles but finally manages to take off.

Towers motions to Bellinger for the airships to return to their tender. Overhead, Read sees them heading back into the harbor. He drops down, lands, and follows them in.

175 INT. NC-3 - MORNING

The aircraft commanders and pilots meet.

TOWERS

The standard propellers don't have as much pull as the new ones designed for the flight.

BELLINGER

How come Read got off?

RICHARDSON

Each of the planes was an improvement over the previous one. The NC-4 is at least 1,500 pounds lighter than the others.

TOWERS

We need to lose a lot more weight. Dump another hundred gallons of fuel. That's 650 pounds. Get rid of the ground anchors. That's several hundred pounds. Toss all those stamp collector first-flight covers. That's probably another 200 pounds. The 20 gallons of spare drinking water is 140 pounds. It goes and all but the most essential spare parts and tools.

Towers looks around to see what else they can take off.

TOWERS

Pull off the watertight doors. Get rid of the extra life jackets. Dump all the provisions except for a couple of sandwiches each. Tear up the floorboards. Just leave enough for passage.

Towers eyes the portable toilet. Moore follows his glance, dashes over to it, and firmly squats on it.

MOORE

No. No.

The comical action relieves the tension. The crew laughs.

TOWERS

Lavender, the emergency radio batteries must weigh at least 300 pounds. Get rid of them.

LAVENDER

They're in the specifications and required by the flight plan.

TOWERS

Get rid of them.

LAVENDER

That radio is our safety net.

TOWERS

That's an order.

Lavender shakes his head and mutters to himself.

176 EXT. TREPASSEY BAY - AFTERNOON

The planes taxi through the harbor entrance.

The NC-3 rushes forward, bouncing from wave to wave. She manages little hops, but it's not enough. Richardson constantly turns the wheel to avoid the icebergs.

Finally, the NC-3 clears the water and is in the air.

Bellinger chooses a slightly different course. The NC-1 has the same problems in taking off but avoids getting close to the icebergs. By comparison, the NC-4 jumps off the water.

Taking advantage of the additional lift caused by the ground effect, the planes fly 100 feet off the water.

177 EXT. OVER USS *GREER* - EVENING

Towers spots the smoke and the searchlight of the USS *Greer*, the first of the picket line destroyers.

A large white tarp is stretched across her deck. An eight-foot number "1" is painted on it. The tarp is brightly illuminated. Each of the picket ships carries such identification.

The NC-3 flies over her. The entire crew is on deck, waving. The *Greer* blows its WHISTLE in welcome.

178 INT. ROOSEVELT'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Roosevelt is talking with a VISITOR. ROOSEVELT'S NAVAL AIDE (Commander Husband Kimmel) quietly walks in, goes to the route chart, and marks off picket ship one. Roosevelt smiles.

179 EXT. OVER USS AARON WARD - SUNSET

It's getting darker. Towers sees a narrow stem of flame shoot into the air. It bursts into a flower, dropping brilliant petals of light.

The star shells continue as they fly over the second picket ship, the *USS Aaron Ward*. (DD-132 is commanded by Captain Raymond Spruance)

A bright red moon rises. It shines in their eyes, making it difficult to see. The NC-1 turns on her navigation lights and pilot instrument panel lights. The NC-4 does likewise.

180 EXT. NC-3 - SUNSET

Richardson tries to turn on his navigation lights. He looks at the wingtips. The lights didn't come on. He tries to turn on the instrument lights. They're dead too.

He uses his flashlight to read the instruments.

181 EXT. STATIONS FOUR, FIVE, AND SIX - NIGHT

The three planes continue on through the darkness. The star shells easily lead them to ship four, the *USS Upshur*, ship five, the *USS Bogg*, and ship six, the *USS Ward* (DD-139).

182 EXT. NC-3 - NIGHT

The sky becomes increasingly overcast. Visibility sharply drops. The pilots can't see their wingtips.

Boatswain Moore stands watch in the rear hatch.

Another NC comes out of the darkness. It's only a few feet off their stern and is going to ram into them. Moore frantically waves the flashlight. The other plane veers off.

183 INT. NC-3 - NIGHT

Moore scampers forward through the hull. He yells in Towers' ear. Towers screams into his microphone.

TOWERS

Break formation. Break formation.  
We need some space. Each ship to  
proceed independently.

Towers discovers the radio is dead. He angrily rips off the microphone and headset.

184 EXT. NC-3 - NIGHT

The sky is now crystal clear. Towers climbs into the copilot seat. A magnificent canopy of stars covers the heavens above. Below, the low-lying clouds look like a soft blanket of snow.

The bright full moon is high in the sky, well off to the east. It's a spectacular panorama.

Ahead, a star shell from ship nine soars out of the clouds below and explodes into a magnificent cascade of light.

Towers looks behind to see a star shell from ship eight. This is the moment that has made everything worthwhile.

RICHARDSON

Isn't it great when a plan comes together? This is as good as it gets.

Naval officers never exhibit emotion. The wind must be burning Towers' eyes, because he has to rub them clear.

Towers jots down a note. He shows it to his friend. It says, "It's as if the heavens have opened up and revealed the heart and soul of the universe."

185 EXT. STATION NINE - NIGHT

The moment is shattered by the star shell that zooms upward only a dozen feet off the NC-3's port wing. It bathes the aircraft in a rainbow of light. Towers doesn't flinch.

186 EXT. NC-4 - DAWN

The sun slowly rises over the horizon. The ordeal of flying through the darkness of night is over.

SUPER: Day 10. Saturday. 17 May 1919.

Picket ship 14, the USS *McDougal*, is below. Read sees a dark wall of clouds in the distance.

187 INT. NC-4 - DAWN

Breese sleeps, stretched out on life jackets. Rodd jots down the incoming message. He crawls down the hull and passes it to Read. It says, "Fog forming ahead. Light fog over ship 16. Heavy fog over ship 19."

188 EXT. STATION 16 - DAWN

MATCHED SHOTS: The three planes are flying many miles apart. One by one, like synchronized swimmers in tempo, each flies into an almost identical area of the huge, ominous fog bank.

189 EXT. NC-1 - MORNING

The fog erases the horizon, disorienting the pilots. Mitscher looks at his flight instruments. The leveling indicator rocks from side to side. It is useless.

He pulls off a shoelace and ties his wedding ring to it. He hangs it from the windshield. It acts as a pendulum. It shows the plane's attitude.

190 INT. NC-4 - MORNING

Radioman Rodd carefully tunes the controls of his radio direction finder. He scribbles a note. He crawls forward and passes it to Read. It says, "Picking up radio signals from ships 21 and 22. Maintain present course."

191 EXT. NC-3 - MORNING

Towers is in his command center, holding his sextant. The fog is so thick that he can barely see the pilots. He motions for Richardson to climb. The NC-3 goes higher and higher.

Towers can't get a sighting. The fog turns into clouds. He notices that the sun is in the wrong position. He pulls out his pocket compass, checks the heading, and frowns.

192 INT. NC-3 - MORNING

Towers crawls down the hull. He tugs on Richardson's pants. There is no response. He tugs several more times. Finally, Richardson's bloodshot eyes appear. Towers drags him down from the pilot station.

RICHARDSON

I'm exhausted. 18 hours flying.  
Not much sleep before that.

Towers gets the medical kit and gives him an injection. It doesn't do any good. Richardson is in a daze.

Towers gives him another injection, slaps his face, then splashes cold water in it. Richardson comes back to normal.

TOWERS

We're going the wrong way. We're  
heading for New York. Come around  
180 degrees.

Towers crawls back to the radio room.

TOWERS

What are you getting on the radio  
direction finder?

## LAVENDER

Static.

193 EXT. NC-4 - MORNING

The NC-4 flies in a very narrow shelf of clear air. There are dark clouds above and thick fog below. Read sees a hole in the fog below. He motions for Stone to drop the plane down.

It looks like a tidal rip in the water, a sign they are close to shore. Read motions for Stone to drop even farther. It's a shoreline, and they are heading directly for it. Read waves for Stone to turn away and drop down a little more.

The NC-4 emerges from the fog. She skims a couple dozen feet above the water, following the shoreline. The crew is thrilled by the sight of a farmhouse. They cheer.

Moments later, Read sees smoke in the distance. The NC-4 flies toward it. The crew sees the USS *Harding*, station 22. Read checks his chart, then yells into the microphone.

READ

We're less than two hours away  
from Ponta Delgada. We've got  
enough fuel to make it.

STONE

Fog is closing in. If we're lucky  
enough to find it, we can't risk  
flying into the mountain.

194 INT. NC-1 - NOON

Bellinger crawls back to the radio room.

BELLINGER

Missed the last three ships. How  
are you doing on the radio  
direction finder?

Radioman LIEUTENANT J.G. HARRY SADENWATER, 28, listens intently to the noise emitted from his headset.

SADENWATER

Can't pick up a thing. All I get  
is interference. Engine static.

Bellinger crawls to the cockpit and pulls on Mitscher's trousers. He motions for him to come down.

195 EXT. HORTA HARBOR - NOON

Read sees the terraced city of Horta rising from the harbor. A cruiser, the USS *Columbia*, rides at anchor.



SUPER: Horta Harbor. Faial Island, Azores.

Stone drops the NC-4 down into the harbor, then taxis over to the *Columbia*. Two motor launches swarm out to meet her. The NC-4 ties up just as the onrushing fog envelops them both.

196 EXT. NC-3 - NOON

Richardson snakes the NC-3 through a gray and white tunnel across the sky. It winds up and down and turns left and right. Blank walls appear, but he plunges into them.

197 EXT. USS *COLUMBIA* - NOON

SUPER: USS *Columbia*.

The *Columbia's* OFFICERS and CREW are jammed around the rails and perched on decks and turrets, cheering and waving their hats. CAPTAIN HARRY BRINSER, 42, greets them.

BRINSER

Welcome aboard. The entire world  
has been waiting to find out  
where the hell you've been.

READ

Where are the other planes?

BRINSER

The NC-1 radioed at thirteen oh  
five that she was somewhere near  
station 20. Haven't heard from  
the NC-3 since station 17.

The *Columbia* is besieged by a fleet of small boats. The aviators are buried in bouquets of flowers from the LOCALS.

198 INT. NC-1 - NOON

There is a problem. All except one pilot meet in the hull.

CHIEF MACHINIST MATE HARRY KESSLER, 28, points out...

KESSLER

Fuel's low. We're down to two  
hours of flying time.

SADENWATER

Drop down to the surface and cut  
the center engines. I should be  
able to get a direction reading.

BELLINGER

What do you think?

MITSCHER

Depends on the wind force. If the waves are under eight feet, we'll be okay. To the extent they are higher, the risk increases. The problem is the fog is so thick, we can't see the surface. We won't know what we are getting into until we actually land. If the seas are high, then we can't take off. It's risky.

BELLINGER

Should we chance it?

MITSCHER

As I see it, we're going down. Either now or when the fuel runs out. Better to have enough left to take off again.

BELLINGER

(to Sadenwater)

Notify the picket ships that we're lost. We're landing on the ocean so we can use the radio direction finder.

199 EXT. NC-1 - AFTERNOON

Mitscher carefully nurses the controls so the NC-1 drops down in baby steps. Bellinger leans out the side of his commander hatch, trying to see the water surface.

A dark mass comes into view, but it is greatly obscured by the fog. He motions for Mitscher to check it out.

Mitscher stands up in his seat, leans over the side, and strains to see the surface. He shrugs that he can't tell. Bellinger motions for him to land the giant airship.

The NC-1 heads directly into the wind. She skims one swell and then another. Mitscher's eyes spring open in astonishment. The waves are enormous.

The NC-1 slams into a huge wave, then slides down its crest. Her nose plunges into an oncoming rising swell. Bellinger is completely engulfed. The plane comes to an abrupt halt.

Mitscher uses the engines to keep the bow into the wind. The mechanics scamper out onto the wings, checking for damage.

CHRISTENSEN

Wings okay. Wing floats okay.

Sadenwater scurries out the hatch and reports to Bellinger.

SADENWATER

Can't get through. The destroyers  
have jammed the radio waves  
talking to each other.

200 INT. NC-3 - AFTERNOON

Towers and Richardson watch Lavender turn the dial of the  
radio direction finder. Nothing but STATIC.

LAVENDER

I may be able to get a signal if  
you cut off the center engines.

RICHARDSON

We can't maintain altitude with  
just the wing engines. Jack?

TOWERS

If we are on course, then we'll  
fly into a mountain. If not, then  
we'll run out of fuel and be down  
at sea.

RICHARDSON

It's your call.

TOWERS

No contact with the last four  
picket ships. We could be many,  
many miles off course. Dick, take  
her down just far enough for us  
to check the surface.

201 EXT. NC-3 - AFTERNOON

Richardson flies the NC-3 in a long arc to bring her around  
into the wind. He eases her down through curtains of fog.

Towers leans over the side of his bow hatch. He shrugs that  
he can't see the waves. Richardson does likewise.

The future of the flight depends on the wave height, which is  
a very big unknown. Towers tightly grabs the sides of the  
navigation compartment. He holds on so hard that his knuckles  
turn white.

MATCH SHOT: Towers is frustrated and angry. He screams into  
the wind and throws out his fists, just as he did when  
sailing with Lily.

He regains his composure, turns to Richardson, shakes his head in doubt about his decision, and then reluctantly motions for Richardson to land the giant airship.

The NC-3 slices into the crest of a huge wave, bounces off, and then crashes into the next. She momentarily comes to rest on the crest of the third wave.

The forward momentum and lift from the wings carry her over the following trough. The NC-3 stops in midair.

She immediately drops like a rock. She slams down on the water with a giant CRUNCH accompanied by a LOUD CRACK.

Richardson turns to see that the center engine struts are buckled like a bowlegged dog. The NC-3 is fatally ruptured.

202 INT. NC-3 - AFTERNOON

Moore discovers that the crash opened seams. Trickles of water seep into the hull. He mans the bilge pump.

203 EXT. NC-1 - AFTERNOON

Mitscher keeps the NC-1's bow heading into the wind, but it is so strong that she is blown backward.

Bellinger, Christensen, and Kessler rig the plane's sea anchor. They put it over the side in an attempt to control the direction. The powerful seas part the line.

Mitscher turns the helm over to Copilot L. F. BARIN, 28, and climbs out onto the wing. He rigs canvas into a wind chute. He has Barin start the forward center engine as he uses the chute to direct the prop wash to the air-driven generator.

MITSCHER

Get some power to the radio.

Sadenwater pops out of the rear hatch.

SADENWATER

I can receive. Can't transmit.

204 INT. NC-3 - AFTERNOON

Lavender carefully adjusts the radio direction finder and listens for signals. He takes notes.

LAVENDER

We're 50 miles off course. We're south and west of the channel between Faial and Pico.

TOWERS

The radios?

Lavender gives him an admonishing look.

LAVENDER

Useless. This is why we had an  
emergency battery-powered one.  
The one you made me throw out.

The inside of the hull is ankle deep in water.

LAVENDER

We should have kept the hatches  
for the watertight compartments.  
We're going to sink.

TOWERS

No, we won't. We'll muddle our  
way through this.

LAVENDER

Maybe I can rig the long-range  
set so we can use it.

205 EXT. NC-3 - AFTERNOON

Lavender attaches the safety line and crawls down the wing. He reaches into the water and grabs the trailing antenna. He drags it up to the center wing area. He strings it between the wing struts.

Moore removes the wind generator from behind the useless center engine. He remounts it behind the port wing engine. Richardson starts the engine.

206 EXT. NC-1 - AFTERNOON

The sea conditions are really nasty. Mitscher struggles to keep NC-1's bow into the wind, but the gale pushes the plane backward. The NC-1 teeters on the brink of a swell and skids down its slope into the trough.

The heavy winds push her tail into a wave. It tears off her rudders. The plane is tossed from side to side. The port wing dips into the heavy seas. The aileron is ripped off.

The ferocity of the Atlantic is methodically tearing the NC-1 apart, piece by piece.

Worried crew members glance at one another, wondering if they will survive the ordeal. The tension builds.

MITSCHER

Damn it to hell! I should have brought my new fishing gear.

The absurd remark breaks the tension. Everyone laughs.

207 INT. NC-3 - AFTERNOON

Lavender operates the radio.

LAVENDER

I can receive but can't transmit.  
I'm picking up the destroyers.  
They're searching for us between  
stations 17 and 18.

208 EXT. NC-1 - AFTERNOON

The wind chute breaks off. It flies into the generator's propeller, breaking its blade.

A heavy cross sea catches the NC-1 and plunges her into the trough. The wingtip cuts into a wave. It rips off the float.

All hands make their way to the end of the opposite wing to provide a counterweight. They struggle to get through the tangle of stays and wires. They carefully step on only the struts and ribs, so as not to puncture a hole in the fragile fabric-covered wing.

209 INT. NC-3 - AFTERNOON

The seas have somewhat subsided, but the waves are still running 10-12 feet in height, abruptly rocking the airship back and forth.

Trying to keep his balance, Towers uses one hand to hold the chart against the side of the hull. He points with the other.

TOWERS

We are here. 50 miles south of ship 22 and 97 miles southwest of our destination, Ponta Delgada, capital city of the Azores. The wind and current are pushing us east. If we stay on that course, we will miss the island by 27 miles. The next land is Portugal, 800 miles away.

LAVENDER

We tossed off our emergency provisions, the drinking water.

TOWERS

You should have foreseen that the addition of the fourth engine directly over the radios would cause interference.

LAVENDER

You ordered me to get rid of the emergency radio. If we had it now, we wouldn't be in this mess.

The crew understands the danger. The men are tense.

TOWERS

Lavender, that's enough.

(to his crew)

The destroyers are searching for us about 150 miles to the west. We can't contact them.

The crew members anxiously glance at one another. Everyone is very nervous, wondering if they will survive. Towers sees that his men are scared. He reminds them...

TOWERS

Gentlemen, we are United States Navy officers. The NC-3 is a United States Navy ship.

Towers points to the wings.

TOWERS

She has a lot of sail area. We just have to use it.

210 EXT. NC-1 - SUNSET

Mitscher sees the smoke of a ship in the distance. He jumps into the cockpit and starts the engines. Bellinger grabs the Aldis signal lamp. He flashes an S.O.S.

The NC-1 struggles to move through the rough seas. She's lifted, then dropped by the huge waves. It's a wild and wet ride, especially for the rest of the crew that dangles out on the wingtip only a few feet above the churning surface.

The distant ship changes course and steams away. Fog rolls in, blanketing the NC-1 from view.

211 EXT. NC-3 - SUNSET

Towers stands on the hull next to the pilots.

TOWERS

Crank up one of the wing engines.  
Come about. We're going to sail  
stern first. We'll use the tail  
as a staysail.

RICHARDSON

Backasswards it is, sir. Quite  
fitting. It is the Navy way.

TOWERS

(to Rhodes and Moore)  
Break out the sea anchors. We'll  
use them as rudders.

Lavender walks to the stern and removes the flag. He puts it  
back on the staff, upside down. It's the distress signal.

212 EXT. NORTH OF STATION 22 - EVENING

Morale is at an all-time low when a ship pops out of the fog.

SUPER: The Greek merchant ship *SS Ionia*.

The *Ionia* and the NC-1 heave up and down in the heavy seas,  
only 100 yards apart. The *Ionia* drops a lifeboat over the  
side. The *IONIA* OARSMEN row toward the seaplane.

The crest of a wave lifts the lifeboat 20 feet into the air  
as the NC-1 wallows in the trough below. The rolling waves  
reverse the positions of the two vessels. It's a seesaw.

The oarsmen maneuver the boat under the NC-1's nose.  
Carefully timing his leap, the first man makes the big jump  
into the boat. One by one, the others follow.

213 EXT. SS *IONIA* DECK - NIGHT

The rescuers and the aviators climb aboard to be met by  
CAPTAIN B.E. PANIS, 54, a Greek who speaks in broken English.  
The aviators are tired, waterlogged, and scruffy.

PANIS

Lookout see signal. Fog. Much  
fog. No find. Search. Search.

BELLINGER

We need to radio the Navy.

PANIS

Radio? Ah! Radio. No radio.

BELLINGER

We have a ship in Horta. Horta.  
You take us to Horta?



214 EXT. SS *IONIA* - NIGHT

The *Ionia* aims her stern searchlight at the NC-1. The towline is in place. The *Ionia* gently edges forward. The line parts.

Panis looks at the heaving, churning sea. He shakes his head. He waves his arms that he will not attempt it again. The *Ionia* slowly lumbers forward, leaving the NC-1 adrift.

215 EXT. NC-3 - NIGHT

One sailor uses the control wires to adjust the staysail. Another adjusts the sea anchors. Others lie tied to the wing struts trying to catch some needed sleep.

Sleep is impossible as the NC-3 rolls and pitches in the steep waves. Towers and Richardson sit in the pilot seats.

TOWERS

I don't agree with something you said earlier. Here we are, mere men pitted against nature in a desperate battle for survival. Do we win or lose? The stakes are high. Do we live or die?

(he grins)

This is as good as it gets.

216 EXT. SS *IONIA* - DAWN

SUPER: Day 11. Sunday. 18 May 1919.

The *Ionia* steams slowly and cautiously. The fog is very thick. A SAILOR stands on the bow, taking soundings.

217 EXT. NC-3 - DAWN

The fog has lifted. The seas begin kicking up again. A wave reaches up and tears off the trailing edge of the port wing. A second wave carries away a large hunk of the other wing.

Pockets in the fabric hold water, increasing the weight. The wings droop. Richardson and Moore climb out onto them and use knives to slash the fabric, permitting the water to drain.

The sailing-backward technique works well while climbing a wave but is worthless when racing down the other side. The plane invariably falls off to one side.

218 EXT. PLACENTIA, NEWFOUNDLAND - DAY

Harry Hawker speaks to the REPORTERS.

HAWKER

Told you I was going to wait until the last possible minute when the Yanks got their necks stretched way out. Now I'm off to cut the bloody things off.

He climbs into his plane, starts the engine, and takes off.

219 EXT. NC-3 - DAY

Towers looks through his binoculars. He sees the 7,600-foot dark blue peak of Pico. He climbs out of his hatch and walks down the hull to Richardson. He points out the peak.

TOWERS

Should we risk using the engines?

RICHARDSON

The plane is too weak. Might tear off a wing.

Towers licks his finger and holds it up.

TOWERS

A favorable wind!

220 EXT. SS *IONIA* - AFTERNOON

The *Ionia* slowly and carefully steams into the port. Bellinger points to the USS *Columbia*. Captain Panis steers toward her. The *Columbia* sailors wave her away. Bellinger flashes out a message with the Aldis signal light.

The *Columbia* drops a launch over the side. It rushes toward the *Ionia*. Read and his men stand at the rails watching it.

221 EXT. USS *COLUMBIA* - AFTERNOON

Bellinger, Panis, and the NC-1 crew climb up the bosun's ladder to the deck. Read gives Bellinger a big hug.

BELLINGER

Where's Towers?

READ

We don't know.

222 EXT. USS *COLUMBIA* BRIDGE - AFTERNOON

Captain Panis points to the NC-1's position on the chart. Bellinger and Mitscher are surprised that they were 50 miles north of their course.

The *Columbia* skipper, Captain Brinser, writes down the coordinates. He hands them to the radioman.

223 EXT. NC-3 - AFTERNOON

The NC-3 is hit by a squall. The 60-mile-per-hour winds whip up 30-foot waves, thrusting the NC-3 out like a jet-propelled surfboard.

Lavender and Moore adjust the sea anchors and hold on to wing struts, trying to keep the airship in balance.

224 EXT. USS FAIRFAX - SUNSET

The destroyer fights its way through the huge waves. Lookouts with binoculars are at every quarter. One points abeam.

The FAIRFAX SAILORS row their launch toward the NC-1's bow. Suddenly, a big wave tears off the left wing. The huge airship turns turtle. The sailors struggle to attach a line to the hull, but water pours into it. The NC-1 sinks.

225 EXT. TOWERS' HOME - MORNING

Lily hears the COMMOTION outside and opens the door. The REPORTERS scream questions.

One holds up the morning paper. The huge headline announces, "NC-4 in the Azores. NC-1 and NC-3 Lost at Sea."

Lily grabs the paper and ducks inside.

226 EXT. TOWERS' HOME - MORNING

Faye drives up. Lily rushes out of the house and flops her very pregnant body into the car. They drive off, pursued by the reporters.

227 INT. ROOSEVELT'S OFFICE - MORNING

Roosevelt sits at his desk. His aide opens the door for the visitors. Roosevelt stands as Lily and Faye enter.

ROOSEVELT  
Good morning, ladies.

Lily takes a deep breath, then curtly marches over to him. She pushes the newspaper into his smiling face.

LILY  
I want my husband back!

Roosevelt loses the smile.

ROOSEVELT

You have nothing to worry about,  
Lily. We have six destroyers  
looking for each of the planes.

LILY

You've got a whole bloody fleet  
out there. Get all of it looking  
for them!

ROOSEVELT

That's unreasonable.

Lily angrily throws her heavy purse at him. Roosevelt dodges.  
It barely misses his head.

LILY

You are not going to play the  
bloody "all the king's horses and  
all the king's men" game with me.  
My husband is not your Humpty  
Dumpty. You find him, or I'll  
tell the reporters what a bloody,  
blundering, heartless fool you  
are. Do I make myself clear?

ROOSEVELT

Perfectly. I'll take care of it.  
Everything will be all right.

Lily angrily stomps toward the door. She turns back to  
Roosevelt and adds...

LILY

Get on board, Mister. Shape up or  
ship out.

Roosevelt's aide picks up her purse and runs after her.

ROOSEVELT'S AIDE

Your purse.

Lily and Faye exit. Lily slams the door. Roosevelt flops into  
his chair, dumbfounded and shocked. He turns to his aide.

ROOSEVELT

Would your wife have done that  
for you? Eleanor most certainly  
wouldn't have done that for me.

228 INT. OUTSIDE ROOSEVELT'S OFFICE - DAY

Lily turns to Faye and mischievously winks. Faye gasps.

FAYE

There goes Jack's career.

LILY

I don't think so. The important thing is that our men are safe.

229 EXT. NAVY DEPARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Lily and Faye are besieged by reporters.

REPORTER

Have you given up hope?

Lily transforms herself into the faithful, supportive, loving Navy wife the press expects. The demure lady shyly and sweetly answers...

LILY

Given up hope? Why, my faith and confidence in my husband are stronger than ever. I am worried, naturally. But I just know Jack's all right. He told me that he's going to make it. And that's all there is to it.

Lily's eyes pop open. She's in pain! She grabs her abdomen. Her water has broken. It flows down her legs and puddles below her. Faye sees what's happening and motions for help.

230 INT. SICK BAY - DAY

TWO SAILORS carry Lily in their interlocked arms. She's having strong contractions. She tightly grabs her tummy and screams. Faye holds her hand.

NAVY DOCTOR

We don't deliver babies!

FAYE

You do now.

231 EXT. HORTA HARBOR - DAWN

Read looks out into the fog that covers the harbor.

SUPER: Day 12. Monday. 19 May 1919.

Mitscher hands him the radiogram.

MITSCHER

Hawker is out to beat us.

232 EXT. OVER THE ATLANTIC - DAY

Hawker flies his plane toward Ireland. Will he win the race?

233 EXT. NC-3 - DAY

The NC-3's bright yellow wings are but a tiny bobbing speck in the vastness of the deep blue ocean. She slowly but steadily sails toward San Miguel Island. Its huge mountain rises majestically into the fluffy clouds.

234 EXT. PONTA DELGADA - AFTERNOON

SUPER: Ponta Delgada, capital of the Azores.

Ponta Delgada is a beautiful city. The traditional Portuguese buildings are on terraces rising from the harbor. Many buildings carry pictures of the NC aircraft.

235 EXT. PONTA DELGADA - AFTERNOON

Towers sees the breakwater. The NC-3 slowly makes her way to the harbor entrance.

Lavender and Moore cling to the struts, trying to keep the airship in balance. The wingtip is inches from the water.

A huge shark leaps out of the water and takes a big bite out of the leading edge of the wing, inches from Lavender's foot.

LAVENDER

(screams)

A shark! A damn shark!!!

The first shark is joined by another, then still another. A large, angry school of them soon circle the plane. They crash into the hull and bite the wings.

Lavender is terrified.

236 EXT. U.S. MARINE BATTERY - AFTERNOON

The MARINE LOOKOUT at the artillery battery in the hills overlooking the city sees the NC-3 through his binoculars. He reports it to the MARINE RADIOMAN, who sends out the message.

237 EXT. USS MELVILLE - AFTERNOON

The USS *Melville* is a destroyer tender. The *MELVILLE* RADIOMAN brings the message to CAPTAIN WARD WORTMAN, 42.

WORTMAN

It can't be the NC-3. She's 200 miles west of us.

MELVILLE RADIOMAN

They said it was a huge seaplane.  
It has "3" painted on it.

WORTMAN

Notify the *Harding*.

238 EXT. USS *HARDING* - AFTERNOON

CAPTAIN HENRY COOKE, 42, reads the message.

COOKE

Get us up to steam. Haul anchor.

239 EXT. PONTA DELGADA HARBOR - AFTERNOON

The *Harding* rushes toward the NC-3. Towers watches the approaching destroyer. He sees its huge bow wave.

He frantically waves his arms for the ship to stop. The *Harding's* crew think it's a greeting. They wave back.

The *Harding's* 1,800 tons sweep around the NC-3. Her enormous wake violently rolls the plane from side to side.

RICHARDSON

(screams at Towers)

The Gun Club is out to get us.

McCulloch and Moore climb out onto the wings and rapidly move back and forth, trying to keep their fragile ship balanced.

The motion excites the sharks even more.

The NC-3 is still being powered by its staysail. Richardson navigates her through the breakwater entrance. The crosswinds push her to starboard, increasing the load on the float.

The strut collapses, and the float is carried away. Its support wire holds.

The float drags behind the wing. The sharks savagely attack it. Moore dashes out with cutters and severs it loose.

McCulloch walks out onto the port wing to restore balance. Richardson climbs into the cockpit and starts the center pusher engine. The teamwork stabilizes the aircraft.

The NC-3, or more properly what is left of her, taxis into port under her own power.

As the NC-3 crabs her way into the harbor, the city explodes into life. All the ships quickly "dress" (hang flags) to welcome her. They blow their WHISTLES and SIRENS. Church bells RING. Swarms of SAILORS wave from their ships.

Two Navy launches rush up. The NC-3's long antenna has fallen from the wing struts and drifts in the water. It fouls the first boat's propeller, making it useless.

The other launch pulls up to a wing. A GREEDY SAILOR hacks off bits fabric to sell as souvenirs.

The NC-3 is besieged by a flotilla of civilian boats. PORTUGUESE FISHERMEN jump up onto the wing next to the aviators. Their weight causes it to drop into the water.

The fishermen work their way toward the hull, and the wingtip comes up to reveal a shark falling away from the greedy sailor's leg with half of it in his mouth.

MUSICIANS arrive and play joyous music. PRETTY GIRLS flirt with the aviators. The noise sends the sharks into a frenzy.

The half-dozen Navy ships send their launches to the rescue. The young MISSION COMMANDER uses a short-range radio to execute a skillful, well-coordinated operation.

Several launches shoo away the visitors. One gets under each wingtip to provide support. Another attaches a line to her bow and begins towing her to safety. Another launch takes aboard the crew of the NC-3.

240 EXT. USS *MELVILLE* - AFTERNOON

The tired, unshaven, waterlogged, exhausted, and bedraggled NC-3 crew boards the ship.

WORTMAN

Welcome aboard, gentlemen.

TOWERS

Where are the other two ships?

WORTMAN

NC-4 is in Horta. So is the NC-1 crew. Couldn't save the plane.

241 INT. ROOSEVELT'S OFFICE - DAY

Roosevelt's aide rushes in.

ROOSEVELT'S AIDE

The NC-3 just sailed into Ponta Delgada.

ROOSEVELT

Sailed?



## ROOSEVELT'S AIDE

Towers was forced down at sea. He rigged the NC-3 as a sailing ship. It was a hell of a trip. A 19-hour flight. Then a 57-hour sea voyage.

## ROOSEVELT

That's one for the record books.

The aide hands Roosevelt another dispatch.

## ROOSEVELT AIDE

Hawker went down eight hours after taking off. He was picked up by a ship. It didn't have a radio. We just learned about it.

## ROOSEVELT

We have a clear field.

He beams but remembers that he has a problem.

## ROOSEVELT

Send couriers to all the wives. Let them know their husbands are safe. Immediately! Wait...

(humbly)

Take a letter to Mrs. Towers. "Dear Lily. Jack is safe in the Azores. Strong leaders need strong wives. Jack is a credit to the Navy. So are you."

(to his aide, he adds)

I want you to personally deliver this to her right away. Draw from my personal account and get her a big bunch of showy flowers.

242 EXT. CAPITOL HILL STEPS - DAY

SUPER: Day 13. Tuesday. 20 May 1919.

General Mitchell addresses the swarm of reporters.

## MITCHELL

Columbus set sail with three small ships into a completely unknown ocean. The U.S. Navy flew a meticulously charted and well-marked route. Columbus didn't lose any ships. The Navy started out with four and has already lost three. The Navy still hasn't

MITCHELL (CONT'D)  
 completed the flight. This futile  
 stunt further demonstrates the  
 Navy's gross incompetence.

243 EXT. NAVY DEPARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Roosevelt walks out the front door. He is besieged by  
 reporters. He is angry but controls his temper.

ROOSEVELT  
 Columbus was using a very simple  
 and well-established technology.  
 The man's genius was finding the  
 best possible route across the  
 Atlantic. He had favorable winds  
 and currents during his entire  
 voyage. And excellent weather.

He pauses, then resumes.

ROOSEVELT  
 The NCs pushed past the limits of  
 many technologies. They flew  
 under the worst possible weather  
 conditions. General Mitchell's  
 comparison is valid in only one  
 respect. Columbus' voyage and the  
 Navy's Trans-Atlantic Flight both  
 opened up a New World.

244 EXT. USS *MELVILLE* - AFTERNOON

WORTMAN  
 Radiogram for you. May I?

Towers nods that it's okay for him to read it.

WORTMAN  
 Congratulations on great flight  
 and sea voyage. Charles Stewart  
 Towers successfully launched 18  
 May. 22 hundred hours. Both  
 mother and son shipshape.  
 Congratulations again. Roosevelt.

Towers smiles but then looks worried.

245 EXT. PONTA DELGADA HARBOR

SUPER: Day 13. Tuesday. 20 May 1919.

It's a clear day with ideal flying conditions. The NC-4  
 lands. Towers has appropriated a launch. It dashes over to  
 the airship. He throws his arms around Read, welcoming him.

246 EXT. CAPITOL HILL STEPS - DAY

Mitchell is the only one on the huge white steps. No reporters are there to listen to him.

247 EXT. AZORES U.S. NAVY HEADQUARTERS BUILDING - EVENING

The NC aviators arrive at the ornate building and are warmly greeted by debonair ADMIRAL RICHARD HARRISON JACKSON, 52.

JACKSON

Welcome, gentlemen. Well done.  
Best Navy tradition. I've  
prepared a banquet to honor you  
and your wonderful achievement.

TOWERS

Thank you, sir.

The door opens, and PARTY GUESTS pour out. They congratulate the aviators, shaking hands and patting them on the back.

The NC-4's radioman, Rodd, grabs Lavender's jacket lapels.

RODD

Your uptight going by the book  
cost us two of our planes. If I  
had followed your orders, we  
would have gone down too. We  
could have all been killed. Damn  
shame the sharks didn't get you.

Admiral Jackson takes Towers aside.

JACKSON

When are you going to transfer  
your flag, Commander?

TOWERS

Sir?

JACKSON

When are you going to take over  
command of the NC-4 and finish  
the flight?

Towers watches the well-wishers surrounding shy Read, who basks in the attention. He makes a painful command decision.

TOWERS

I'm not. Read was the only one of  
us to actually fly here. He  
deserves to finish the flight.

JACKSON  
 Commander, Navy regulations  
 require that you take command.  
 You will do so. That's an order.

TOWERS  
 You're not my commanding officer.

JACKSON  
 I command the Azores. While you  
 are here, you are under my  
 command. You will follow orders.

TOWERS  
 Then I must respectfully disobey.

He snaps a salute and walks inside. Jackson is outraged.

JACKSON  
 That's a court-martial offense!

248 INT. ROOSEVELT'S OFFICE - DAY

Roosevelt reads the newspapers. Admiral Benson enters.

BENSON  
 Sir? We have a problem.

ROOSEVELT  
 What?

BENSON  
 Insubordination. A mutiny! Navy  
 regulations clearly state if a  
 commanding officer loses his  
 flagship, then he is to transfer  
 his flag to another ship so that  
 he can resume command. Admiral  
 Jackson radioed that Towers has  
 refused to do that. Jackson  
 asked me to order Towers to do  
 so. I thought I should clear it  
 with you first.

Roosevelt stands, paces the floor, and rubs his chin. He  
 returns to his desk. He hands Benson the morning newspapers.

ROOSEVELT  
 Commander Read is on the front  
 page of every newspaper in the  
 country. He's a national hero.  
 How would it look if the Navy  
 pulled the rug out from under  
 that brave young man?

BENSON

I see your point.

ROOSEVELT

Commander Towers made a very wise decision. Radio Jackson that I back the decision 100%. Tell Towers he's to be awarded our highest honor, the Navy Cross. Read is to be awarded one too.

249 EXT. USS *MELVILLE* - DAY

SUPER: Day 14. Wednesday. 21 May 1919.

Read is on deck. Towers walks up to him.

TOWERS

The *Stockton* is taking me, Bellinger, and our crews to Lisbon. We'll be on hand to officially greet you.

READ

I heard what you did.

TOWERS

You completed the flight. You deserve the credit for it.

READ

But you completed the mission. The purpose of the flight was to prove that naval aviators should be experienced seamen.

(he laughs)

You did an outstanding job of proving just that.

250 EXT. PONTA DELGADA HARBOR - DAY

SUPER: Day 20. Tuesday. 27 May 1919.

The NC-4 skims across the harbor and easily climbs into the sky. She heads east across the ocean toward Portugal.

251 MONTAGE

The Navy's Trans-Atlantic Flight was the biggest media event of the day. The only comparable event is the moon landing that took place a half century later. The aftermath of the flight is extremely well documented.

ORIGINAL NEWSREEL FOOTAGE: The NC-4 lands in Lisbon. Towers warmly greets Read and his crew. Huge crowds cheer.

NEWSPAPER: Two huge words stretch across the entire width of the paper: "WE WON." The subtitle explains, "United States is the First to Fly Across the Atlantic Ocean."

ORIGINAL NEWSREEL FOOTAGE: The NC-4 lands in England. The aviators are entertained by the Royal Aero Club.

ORIGINAL NEWSREEL FOOTAGE: Admiral Benson whisks the aviators to Paris. He presents them to President Woodrow Wilson at the Versailles Peace Settlement. He shakes their hands.

ORIGINAL NEWSREEL FOOTAGE: The aviators return to London. They are taken to the House of Commons. Towers is greeted by his old friend, Winston Churchill, Lord of the Admiralty.

252 EXT. THE TRANSPORT SHIP *ZEPPELIN* - DAY

AMERICAN SOLDIERS climb the gangplank. The ship's captain looks down to see the naval aviators. He is Towers' old friend from their early days of aviation.

ELLYSON

Well if it's not the naval aviation poster boy. Some people will do anything for a headline.

TOWERS

Spuds!

ELLYSON

Welcome aboard. Roosevelt plucked me off my ship, gave me this one, and ordered me to bring you home.

TOWERS

He couldn't have chosen a better man. You'll understand.

ELLYSON

What's wrong?

TOWERS

Ever since the flight... Can't sleep. Toss and turn all night. I've taken a lot of risks. I've been lucky. Sooner or later the odds catch up with you.

ELLYSON

Boy, do I know that feeling.

TOWERS

I have a loving wife and a newborn son. I can't risk their not having a husband and father.

ELLYSON

Jack, you've built a naval air force. Even after all the postwar discharges, you have hundreds of aviators. It's time for you to let the young daredevils take the risks. You should devote your efforts to providing leadership, organization, and support.

TOWERS

Command a Big Steel Desk?

ELLYSON

Command the U.S. Navy Air Force.

253 EXT. NEW YORK HARBOR - DAY

Towers and his aircrews walk down the gangplank. Their Navy wives rush to them, hugging and kissing them.

LILY

Welcome home, sailor.

Lily throws one arm around Towers and kisses him. Towers takes BABY TOWERS from her other arm and plays with him.

TOWERS

Sweet Lily.

LILY

So what now?

TOWERS

Being a good husband and father. I'm going to take a really long leave. Spend time with you. Help with the baby. We'll have fun. Exciting adventures. It's a big country. We'll travel. I'll find you some Indians.

Dashing, dark-haired JUAN TRIPPE, 20, interrupts.

TRIPPE

Commander Towers, I'm Juan Trippe. I was one of your aviators during the war.

TOWERS

Congratulations.

TRIPPE

Your airships are fabulous. I'm working with two aircraft

TRIPPE (CONT'D)  
 companies to develop civilian  
 passenger versions to fly from  
 Florida to the Caribbean, then to  
 South and Central America.

TOWERS  
 That's an ambitious undertaking.

TRIPPE  
 I'm naming it Pan American  
 Airways. I'd like for you to run  
 it. I'm extremely well financed  
 and you'll be very well paid.  
 Many times what admirals get.

LILY  
 He couldn't possibly do that.  
 There's a whole slew of dragons  
 out there that need to be slain.

Trippe looks puzzled. Towers laughs.

TOWERS  
 How old are you?

TRIPPE  
 Twenty.

TOWERS  
 Education?

TRIPPE  
 I left Yale to become a Navy  
 aviator. Wanted to do my part in  
 winning the war.

TOWERS  
 Mr. Trippe, finish your  
 education. You'll need it. Then  
 build your airline.

NAVY SENTRIES create a path through the crowd for Roosevelt.  
 He's formally dressed in a top hat and tails. Benson follows.

ROOSEVELT  
 Hi, Lily. I promised you I'd get  
 him home okay. Happy?

LILY  
 You didn't get him home. Your  
 whole bloody fleet couldn't find  
 him. He found his own way home.  
 But I know you did your best. I  
 thank you for that.



She throws an arm around his neck and gives him a big kiss on the cheek. Roosevelt is embarrassed by the attention.

ROOSEVELT

Jack, I wanted to personally welcome you home and congratulate you on a job well done.

TOWERS

Thank you, sir.

ROOSEVELT

There are big things in the works. I need you fully integrate aviation into the fleet.

Towers pulls Lily close and gives her a kiss.

TOWERS

I'll put it on the list, sir.

Towers leads Lily away. He turns back, smiles, and waves goodbye to Roosevelt.

BENSON

What's with him?

ROOSEVELT

(laughing)  
He'll muddle his way through it.

FADE OUT

**EPILOGUE (OPTIONAL)**

SUPER: The End of the Beginning.

PHOTOGRAPH: 1919 photograph of Roosevelt.

SUPER: Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945).  
Harvard College, class of 1904.

PHOTOGRAPH: 1941 photograph of Roosevelt.

SUPER: Roosevelt was elected President of the United States in 1932. He was reelected in 1936 and 1940. When World War II broke out, as Commander in Chief of the United States Armed Forces, he personally appointed or approved all the senior military commanders.

PHOTOGRAPH: 1919 photograph of Read.

SUPER: Albert Cushing "Putty" Read (1887-1967).  
United States Naval Academy, class of 1907.  
United States Naval Aviator number 24.  
United States Naval Aviation Hall of Honor.

PHOTOGRAPH: 1945 photograph of Read.

PICTURE: Two stars.

SUPER: As commander of the Pensacola Flight Training Center, Rear Admiral Read trained naval aviators during World War II. Under his leadership, it became the largest and finest naval aviation training center in the world.

PHOTOGRAPH: Richardson in 1919.

PICTURE: Eagle (Captain).

SUPER: Holden C. "Dick" Richardson (1878-1960).  
United States Naval Academy, class of 1906.  
Master of Engineering from MIT. 1908.  
United States Naval Aviator number 13.  
United States Naval Aviation Hall of Honor.

Richardson became the first secretary of the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics. During World War II, he headed the Washington Navy Yard Wind Tunnel that tested all the many new Navy airplanes.

PHOTOGRAPH: Bellinger in 1919.

SUPER: Patrick Nieson Lynch "Pat" Bellinger (1885-1962).  
United States Naval Academy, class of 1907.  
United States Naval Aviator number 4.  
United States Naval Aviation Hall of Honor.

PHOTOGRAPH: Bellinger in 1944.

PICTURE: Three stars.

SUPER: Rear Admiral Bellinger was the Senior Naval Air Commander at Pearl Harbor during the Japanese attack on

December 7, 1941. He sent out the first radio alert: "Air raid. Pearl Harbor. This is no drill." He was promoted to vice admiral in 1943.

PHOTOGRAPH: Mitscher in 1919.

SUPER: Marc Andrew "Pete" Mitscher (1887-1947).  
 United States Naval Academy, class of 1910.  
 United States Naval Aviator number 33.  
 United States Naval Aviation Hall of Honor.

PHOTOGRAPH: Mitscher in 1944.

PICTURE: Four stars.

SUPER: On April 18, 1942, Rear Admiral Mitscher commanded the aircraft carrier USS *Hornet* which carried the 16 Army B-25 bombers that made the famous Dolittle Raid on Japan. The raid bolstered American morale. The attack on the Japanese homeland motivated its military to seek revenge.

Japan launched a major attack on June 4-7, 1942. The USS *Hornet*, still under Mitscher's command, helped to sink four Japanese carriers at the Battle of Midway. This battle was the turning point of the Pacific War, as it put Japan on the defensive.

Vice Admiral Mitscher commanded the Fast Carrier Task Force in the Battle of the Philippine Sea on June 19-20, 1944. His 16 aircraft carriers were supported by over 100 battleships, cruisers, destroyers, and submarines, plus hundreds of support ships. It was the largest battle fleet ever seen.

His planes shot down over 600 Japanese aircraft, virtually destroying the Japanese Empire's naval air force in what is now commonly called "The Great Marianas Turkey Shoot." It was by far the largest naval aviation battle in history. He was promoted to full admiral.

PHOTOGRAPH: Towers on cover of *Aero Magazine* (August, 1911).

SUPER: John Henry "Jack" Towers (1885-1955).  
 United States Naval Academy, class of 1906.  
 United States Naval Aviator number 3.  
 United States Naval Aviation Hall of Honor.

PHOTOGRAPH: Towers on *Time Magazine* cover, Jan. 23, 1941.

PICTURE: Four stars.

SUPER: Towers commanded the USS *Langley*, the Navy's first aircraft carrier. He pioneered naval aviation strategy and tactics. He developed new and improved aircraft carriers.

On June 1, 1939, President Roosevelt appointed Towers chief of the newly established Navy Bureau of Aeronautics. He was once again given the job of preparing the U.S. Navy Air Force

for war. He was promoted to rear admiral, becoming the first Navy aviator to achieve flag rank.

Towers convinced the Navy to build aircraft carriers instead of battleships. It built 24 fast Essex-class carriers and 127 smaller carriers. In only three years, Towers expanded the number of Navy aircraft from 2,000 to 39,000. Most were assigned to the Pacific Fleet.

On October 6, 1942, Towers assumed command of the Naval Air Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet. It was the largest naval air force the world has ever known. He was promoted to full admiral, the highest rank in the U.S. Navy.

Admiral Towers is widely regarded as the father of U.S. Naval aviation.

PHOTOGRAPH: General Mitchell in 1919.

PICTURE: One star.

SUPER: General William "Billy" Mitchell (1879-1936).

George Washington University, class of 1897.

Took flying lessons at the Curtiss School in 1908.

SUPER: Billy Mitchell was the most famous American Army aviator of World War I. He was an outspoken advocate of air power. In 1921, in a series of tests, his airplanes sank captured German battleships.

Mitchell later publicly accused Army and Navy leaders of "almost treasonable administration of the national defense." He was court-martialed. He was found guilty of all charges and suspended from active duty for five years. He resigned his commission and campaigned for American air power until his early death in 1936.

In the wake of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt, to recognize his contributions to air power, posthumously promoted Mitchell to major general (two stars) and recommended that he receive the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest award given to a civilian. The B-25 *Mitchell* Bomber was named after him. It was the only American airplane ever named after a person. It was the plane that Mitscher's USS *Hornet* launched against Japan.

Mitchell's goal of a separate air force was realized in 1947 when the U. S. Air Force was officially formed from the U.S. Army Air Force. The Navy and Marines continued to operate their own air forces.

General Mitchell is widely regarded as the "Father of the United States Air Force."

PHOTOGRAPH: Juan Trippe, 1933 *Time Magazine* cover.  
 SUPER: Juan Terry Trippe (1899-1981).  
 SUPER: Yale University, class of 1921.  
 SUPER: United States Naval Aviator number (unknown.)  
 SUPER: National Aviation Hall of Fame.

Trippe returned to Yale and received his degree. In 1927, he established Pan American Airways, often called "Pan Am."

PHOTOGRAPH: U.S. air mail stamp showing Pan Am *China Clipper*.

Pan American began passenger service from Florida to Cuba in 1927, becoming the first international airline. Within eight years, its famous clipper ships were flying around the world.

Modern international air travel began with the NC Trans-Atlantic Flight, as it inspired the creation of Pan Am. Its clipper ships were based on the NC airship design. Ironically, when Towers retired from the Navy, he became Trippe's second in command and ran his airline.

For over a half century, Pan Am was the world's largest and most progressive airline. It was the first airline to successfully make widespread use of the new jet planes.

Juan Trippe is widely regarded as the "Father of Commercial Aviation."

PHOTOGRAPH: The NC-4 in flight.  
 SUPER: The NC-4 was returned to the United States, displayed on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., and then was toured around the country. The U.S. Navy later donated it to the Smithsonian Institution.

PHOTOGRAPH: The NC-4 today.  
 SUPER: The NC-4 is now on display at the National Naval Aviation Museum in Pensacola, Florida. Pensacola was the Navy's first air station, established by Towers in 1914.

PHOTOGRAPH: The CVN-71, modern nuclear aircraft carrier.  
 SUPER: Aircraft carriers made battleships obsolete. They became the Navy's capital ship.

Music: "Anchors Aweigh," modern lyrics.

The CVN-71 is the USS *Theodore Roosevelt*. The still photograph comes to life. It fills the screen. Modern-day jets catapult off the carrier's deck. They fly in tight formation into the magnificent skies over the ocean.

FADE OUT