

FADE IN:

EXT. THE SKY OVER NORTHEASTERN FRANCE - DAWN

Sunward, they climb into a breathless blue sky, so deep it almost silences their Clerget engines, but the fiercest blue cannot quiet what all fighter pilots try not to hear, their terror scream upon impact and a mother's graveside sobs.

SUPER: "APRIL 20, 1918 - VAUX-SUR-SOMME, FRANCE"

The three Sopwith Camels, enveloped now in a thick cloud that challenges their tight formation, plow the mist blind. They rise and fall on invisible currents, scarves flutter behind goggled heads, necks craned, eyes wary, on the hunt.

Almost cloud free, hazy flashes appear. Faint, then sharp, red bursts! Hot guns on the nose of a bloody Fokker triplane!

Stunned. They swerve and peel off in different directions. The center plane pulls up and THE RED BARON slips beneath her, his bullets gouge the olive drab underbelly as he dives.

The wounded Camel climbs, black oily smoke pukes from her engine, and then lazily turns over, inverted, and begins the spinning death dance all too familiar to the British squadrons - the prey of Manfred von Richthofen's Flying Circus.

Unbeknownst to the two remaining Camels, the German ace barrel rolls up above them, cuts his engine in a dead stall, and drifts back behind his next target, coffin quiet.

The victim has no chance, hardly time to realize he's dead as 7.92mm bullets splinter the cockpit, wood and canvas explode all around his shuddering form.

He slumps onto his stick and the plane falls from the sky in a white plume, the deadly gas vapor trail, streaking with him into the ground, shock-buried in a fiery black mushroom.

The last pilot, frantic, searches the sky. It's pointless.

In the blinding sun, he spots the triple wing silhouette, but too late. Bursts lift him out of his seat, a maniacal dance that tosses him over the side, adrift like a rag doll.

The Camel falls back, now a slow pirouette, gravity's death grip firm, she plunges, and cartwheels through a treeline.

White silk scarf trailing, the Red Baron veers back toward the German lines with no emotion, and by habit checks his twin Spandau machine guns. The German ace survives another day, his 80th kill unofficial, and does so without a smile.

He pulls up and the red Fokker's top wing blurs closer, then clears into a bright scarlet patch that becomes an "Indian Girl" canoe. It rests on an expansive porch guarded by six fat, creamy pillars, the home of Orville Wright.

EXT. THE WRIGHT MANSION - AFTERNOON

Presidential, the wraparound porch fronts a Classical Revival mansion. It commands a steep hill dotted with Hawthorn trees that defend a long circle driveway. Thomas Jefferson would not appear out of place on the front portico balcony.

SUPER: "HAWTHORN HILL, DAYTON, OHIO"

INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Three men sit in an opulent drawing room. ORVILLE WRIGHT (46), pale, slight, maybe 140 pounds, and well under six feet with a heavy mustache, rests in a comfortable wingback chair across from two stiff men perched on a new sofa.

Dressed to the nines, Orville sports a crisp 3-piece gray gabardine suit, pearl waistcoat, high collar, bronze ascot, stickpin, matching cufflinks, and a dull gold pocket watch.

Mostly bald, a wisp in front, Edgar Allen Poe comes to mind. He cuts a fine figure for a middle-aged man with an engaging soft smile and tinkling blue-gray eyes, the Santa eyes children instantly trust.

JOHN MCMAHON (43), edges from the couch and offers Orville the "Dayton Journal." Short, also middle-aged, and although a full head of hair handsome, McMahon feels mousy with a waxy complexion that trust cannot settle upon easily.

JOHN MCMAHON

Seen today's paper, Mister Wright?

Orville receives the paper, folds it into crisp quarters, and holds it at arm's length, a fast headline scan.

ORVILLE

Since we'll spend the next two weeks on your book, Orville will do nicely.

JOHN MCMAHON

As you wish. Any comment on the Red Baron being shot down?

Orville does not take the bait.

ORVILLE

You mean do I have any remarks about our invention killing 80 men?

EARL FINDLEY (41), shifts uneasily, grunts. Average in almost every way, yet quaintly honest, even likable, but milquetoast.

EARL FINDLEY

Well, sir. Orville. To be frank, thousands have died in this war, from your...invention.

Orville reads him with a punctilious scrutiny, sizes him up, but says nothing, apparently satisfied he is no real threat.

EARL FINDLEY

I mean, besides the 80 men the Red Baron killed, that is. What I mean-

ORVILLE

You wonder if I feel remorse or even guilt over it being used as a weapon?

He returns the paper to McMahon in a sword-like thrust.

ORVILLE

I do not.

The fight is on, Orville sparked alive by it.

JOHN MCMAHON

But it's responsible for the deaths-

ORVILLE

No more than any other tool turned into a weapon. A knife, a hammer, pistol. All amoral objects.

EARL FINDLEY

Surely you concede it's more of a weapon than we've ever seen before.

JOHN MCMAHON

Or any tool, for that matter.

ORVILLE

I concede it is a tool that men utilize how they may, even modifying it with machine guns and bombs. Wilbur and I thought it would end wars, transcend boundaries, make troop movements obvious. End wars, gentlemen, not further them.

Orville's eyes flare, loving the fight, a finger wagged.

JOHN MCMAHON

Yes, but surely you feel some regret-

ORVILLE

Regret? Do you regret the invention of fire? It destroys, and purifies.

EARL FINDLEY

All we're asking, Orville is how you feel about it, and its power to kill.

ORVILLE

The heart is where we feel, and the heart is what kills men, not machines. No airplane, knife, or pistol rose up and killed a man on its own accord.

Like a fighter, Orville snatches a quick breath amid blows.

ORVILLE

Or have you seen a miracle of death that did not involve a human heart, Mr. Findley? Or you Mr. McMahon?

Defeated, they hang in the same twisting, awkward air.

EARL FINDLEY

Maybe we should move on. Did you see the man who shot him down?

Orville cocks his head at McMahon, sensing the scrap may be done, but still fully alert if it's just a feint.

JOHN MCMAHON

Yes. Roy Brown.

ORVILLE

Roy! Do tell! Good old Roy.

McMahon hands the newspaper back to a very pleased Orville.

JOHN MCMAHON

One of your students?

ORVILLE

Yes, one of the very first! Marvelous for him to use our invention to stop Richthofen and save so many lives.

They catch Orville's inference, and exchange appreciative glances for a way back to normalcy in the interview.

EARL FINDLEY

Right. Speaking of firsts, let's begin with how you and Wilbur first came to solve the problem of flight?

Orville relents, sword sheathed, and straightens in victory.

ORVILLE

I assume you know about our helio toy, a gift from father, an itinerant preacher, rarely home, but he always brought us some trinket. Always.

Both men give a nod of relief that the tussle seems done.

ORVILLE

That toy gave us hours of fun, and more than that, it made us think. The Bishop always wanted us to think.

JOHN MCMAHON

The Penaud toy flyer?

ORVILLE (nodding)

A wonderful little device of cork, bamboo, and a rubber twist. It inspired us, to experiment and design our own flying toys.

Orville stops, a thought caught on the nail of time that pulls him back. His eyes glint, fondly appreciative.

ORVILLE

To be honest, we worked together as partners, from the very start, but it was Wilbur who made the first inroads, and that almost by chance.

JOHN MCMAHON

Chance?

ORVILLE

To be precise, more by accident.

Orville stares out the window, into the past, relaxing as he remembers, his hand absentmindedly goes to the pocket watch.

ORVILLE

Brilliant, on his way to Yale to be a minister like our father, but not a wallflower. He loved sports, truly a gifted athlete, and that love was our push to Kitty Hawk. But at the time, it was a catastrophe.

EXT. FROZEN POND - AFTERNOON

An aerial shot, 600 snowy acres with a library, hospital, chapel, gardens, barracks, hotel, and ponds. Snow-cleared, one pond moves, quickened by a swarm that chases a flat tin can with hockey sticks, broom handles, and reckless abandon.

SUPER: "32 YEARS PRIOR - THE DAYTON CIVIL WAR VETERANS HOME"

It's a wild free-for-all. Skaters collide, slip, and tumble along in an orgy of pure fun chasing the boy with the can who masterfully weaves through the defense.

ED STINES (18) edges toward the puck-carrying teen, fighting to stay free of the mob, and bangs his stick on the ice.

ED STINES

Over here, Wil! Pass it!

WILBUR

Get open, Ed!

Lincoln lean, muscular, and with sharp healthy features strikingly ordinary, the best skater deftly controls the "puck" with his new hockey stick.

Burned into the fresh birch, the owner, "Wilbur Wright."

WILBUR WRIGHT (18) exudes confidence, and in total control of the fracas, enjoys his athletic prowess over all comers.

He slips past the last defender, a huge boy with rotten teeth, the town bully, OLIVER (15), and with an embarrassing reverse curl that produces sneering profanity that also misses him, Wilbur is home free.

He dodges a hard check with a wild one-legged leap by the next closest boy in the pursuing pack, and without breaking stride, slides the tin can smoothly to Ed through all the other sticks and blades.

Ed takes the miracle pass and we realize it's everyone against Ed and Wil, as Ed fires a one-time shot between two rocks in the snowbank.

WILBUR

He shoots and scores!

As Wilbur turns, arms raised, the pack catches up and collides into him, a sliding jumbled pile of bodies and sticks.

In an icy flash, with vengeful purpose, Oliver aims and swings his stick with brutal force directly into Wilbur's mouth!

Teeth explode, the sick bone-cracking shatter like a skull slammed into a tile floor, and at once the celebration dies.

Splintered teeth bits and blood erupt in a horrific splash over the stick's edge that feels like slow-motion.

Wilbur drops to his knees, a vomited blood pool gushes over him and the ice, spitting sheared teeth into his hand.

The puddle's size and growing scope freezes everyone, cringing, they back away in horror.

No one knows what to do and stand in shock as he convulses, sputtering teeth, pawing at his face, now a scary red mess.

Ed races over, shoves Oliver to the ice, and tears off his own scarf to stop the gush.

Adults hurry onto the pond as the other boys turn away at the bloody pulp that was his mouth. One vomits.

A uniformed OFFICER (32) pushes through the boys.

OFFICER

Let me through. I'm a doctor.

He pulls Ed away and removes the scarf. Deathly pale, Wilbur's red-splattered face contrasts starkly against his blue-gray eyes that roll away in a faint. He goes limp.

OFFICER

He's in shock! Get a stretcher!

The crowd parts and he's whisked away. His hockey stick, left alone and abandoned on the cold ice, busted in two, Wilbur Wright now cracked in half.

EXT. THE WRIGHT HOME - EVENING

A modest white two-story Victorian corner home, with warm windows and chimney smoke curls above a snowy roof, sits tight against another nondescript Victorian home.

SUPER: "THE WRIGHT HOME"

INT. BEDROOM - EVENING

DOCTOR SPITLER (50) closes the door carefully. He sets his bag down on the hallway table and walks the short hall to another second-story bedroom.

Kneeling in the dim light, an Elijah with frosted Amish beard, gentle eyes, and mostly bald, MILTON WRIGHT (58) prays. The doctor hesitates, then taps on the open door.

MILTON WRIGHT

In Thy precious and holy name, Lord
Jesus. Amen.

DOCTOR SPITLER

Bishop? Forgive me, but a word, if
I may?

MILTON WRIGHT
Of course, Doctor. How is she?

DOCTOR SPITLER
No better, I'm afraid. Tuberculosis
is a heartless malady.

MILTON WRIGHT
I see. Will she walk?

DOCTOR SPITLER
Short distances, room to room perhaps,
but I'm afraid her remaining time
will be mostly to bed.

MILTON WRIGHT
Then we'll need help?

DOCTOR SPITLER
Someone will have to care for her-

A loud slurry of voices downstairs, the door slams, and the
rush of shouts enter the stairway.

They both rush to the railing and see Wilbur's bandaged head,
lolling from side to side in a man's arms, coming up the
stairs, led by ORVILLE (15).

ORVILLE
Father, it's Wil...he's hurt bad!
Got a stick to the mouth. Oliver-

MILTON WRIGHT
What? How bad?

DOCTOR SPITLER
Bring him in here. My bag.

ORVILLE
He's lost a lot of blood...and teeth.
A lot of teeth.

DOCTOR SPITLER
He'll need a dentist. Someone fetch
Dr. Lilly.

Milton tries to inspect his son, but he's passed by too quick.

They lay Wilbur in his bed, Milton drops to his knees, and
the doctor removes the bloody rags. Milton takes Wilbur's
hand and murmurs focused prayers.

Orville can't watch his unrecognizable brother's purple,
swollen face, the glazed, lifeless eyes, and slips away.

INT. PARLOR - MORNING

Milton sits down by Orville and his sister, KATHARINE (12), a serious little girl.

MILTON WRIGHT
He's lost eight teeth and will have
to be fitted.

KATHARINE
Fitted with what, Poppa?

MILTON WRIGHT
False teeth, and soon, which means
removing more teeth. Maybe all.

Katharine grimaces, shudders the gruesome image away.

ORVILLE
Poor Wil. How soon?

MILTON WRIGHT
Not right away. His gums are swollen
and Doctor Spitler fears infection.

KATHARINE
But how can he eat with no teeth?

MILTON WRIGHT
Just broths and sauces. He'll be
abed for some weeks yet, I fear.

ORVILLE
But you're leaving again. Mother
can't take care of Wil, can she?

Milton's face reveals he has not shared all the bad news.

MILTON WRIGHT
We shall all need to care for him.
Mother will do what she can, God
must do the rest. Children.

Milton bows his head, and they follow his lead.

MILTON WRIGHT
Dear Lord, we lift our family up to
You in our time of need for Wilbur
and Susan, who so need Your help....

MONTAGE - WILBUR'S DEPRESSION

- Wilbur in bed, his face monstrous, swollen, and bandaged,
he turns away from Milton and Orville to face the wall.

- The year 1886 moves past the home, flutters in the air, then mixes into a snowbank, and disappears.
 - Orv tries to coax him out of bed with a book, but no luck.
 - A crumpled Yale application remains on the parlor desk.
 - The year 1887 ghosts past Wilbur, asleep in bed, mid-day, and swooshes out the window, absorbed in the clouds, gone.
 - Orville invites his date inside, but Wilbur notices and, as they enter, he drifts upstairs with a tray of food.
 - A birthday party crowds the tiny dining room, but no Wilbur. A distracted Orville feigns a smile at his flaming cake.
 - An 1888 appears over a darkened Wright home, drifts skyward, turns on edge, and then falls apart, sprinkled like raindrops.
 - A familiar bed, the same form, unchanged from the first scene, except now on Wilbur's nightstand, false teeth.
 - In her bed, a frail Susan hacks a vicious cough. Katherine stands by, helpless, afraid, while Wilbur consoles his sister.
- We're back, our glimpse of what is to come in hand.

MILTON WRIGHT

And we ask all of this in Your holy
name, and according to Your will, in
Jesus' name. Amen.

Both children stay bowed, eyes open, tears to the brim.
Neither one wants to admit their fear by looking at the other.