

1380 REGISTRY

1938 SEP 22 PM 4 48

ACADEMY
OF MOTION PICTURE ARTS
& SCIENCES HOLLYWOOD
John Ford

"PLANE FOUR FROM BARANCA"

FLYING STORY

Howard Hawks
September 9, 1938

FLYING STORY

Howard Hawks
September 9, 1938

This is a story of a girl and a group of men whom I knew. They were flyers operating through Mexico and Central America. Almost all of them were outcasts -- men who could not fly in the States -- who for various reasons had been refused license to fly by the United States Department of Commerce. There was no question of their ability for collectively and individually they were the finest pilots I've ever seen but they had been grounded because of accidents, drinking, stunting, smuggling -- each man's existence almost a story in itself. They flew old, obsolete planes, rebuilt after crashes, new planes that had like themselves been refused license to fly, anything that could be bought cheaply. Their flying fields were usually just a home post with makeshift hangars, their landing fields anywhere they could put down. They had no radio equipment and it probably wouldn't have done them much good had they had it.

They flew anywhere carried prospectors to country almost impossible to reach in any other way, dropped their passengers and picked them up three months later. (A great scene took place after each of these trips on the pilot's return -- they all gathered over a map and each man made his own map to be used in picking up the passengers in case of the death of the pilot who did the outgoing trip.) They carried gold, silver, equipment, acid, dynamite, T.N.T. -- anything that people would pay them to carry.



Their living accommodations were bad, they were lonely, women-starved and only stayed on for one thing -- love of flying.

Imagine almost daily trips -- with a load of explosives -- flying as far as half their gasoline would take them, landing where a plane had never landed before.

The boys carried little homemade wind indicators, small bottles of acid which dropped to the ground broke and gave out smoke for wind direction, then they flew back and forth, close down, to study the proposed landing field, then down to roll their wheels lightly on the ground - up again and back to see the impression made by the wheels (a great deal of the ground is swampy), down again with more pressure on the wheels - another inspection and finally a landing.

Often their take-offs required such a run, because of the high altitude, that they had to change direction on the ground. The excessive use of the rudder in accomplishing this caused the fabric to be torn and ripped by stones blasted back against it and the boys would return with little or no rudder surface so that home landings were quite a thing to watch.

There was a peculiar spirit about the whole thing like the attitude of the men in "Test Pilot" -- there is no glory in the thing -- no flag to wave -- only love for the air.

Tex was in charge of the outfit I knew best. You could only guess at his history because he didn't talk much even when drinking -- and that was most of the time. Tex was rather young and had been through a crash and resultant fire

that had burned one side of his face and left rather interesting scars. Because of this he hadn't much expression, except in his eyes, but that was enough. He ran the outfit the only way it could be run -- by complete domination -- what he said went and everybody knew he'd do twice anything he asked to have done.

Just before I met him Tex had married Bonnie -- they were a great pair. She was blonde, pretty, full of life and a great sense of humour. She had a peculiar way of expressing herself, using odd synonyms for what she wanted to say. Outwardly unlike Tex she was strangely like him otherwise. She loved flying as much as he did, not just the riding around but that strange love for the air that the men had. Bonnie had been married before to one of the other pilots. He had been killed and she had drifted and knocked around until meeting Tex. According to the various tales Bonnie knew immediately what she wanted and Tex did not -- and so the war started.

I met them soon after their marriage and an amusing thing happened. One of the other pilots had previously acquired a German recording clock. It was intended for installation in his plane to give him a record of his flying time. It contained a stylus and upon insertion of a paper disc the stylus would record on that disc, by an oscillating line, the exact minute the motor was started -- the vibration of taxiing the plane would make a line of deeper irregular vibrations and then the line would change as the plane took the air and record the flight, then the bump of landing and then again when the motor

was shut off so the exact record of motor time and flying hours was made.

The clock had arrived before Tex' marriage and on that night Tex' best friend had hung the clock below the springs of the marriage bed -- sneaked in and gotten it the next day, and on the night I met them Tex and Bonnie received a nicely framed record of their marriage night. Bonnie proudly hung it over the mantel in the living room.

I'm not going into a description of the other men except that they were a wild, crazy crew -- and of various nationalities and types, yet strangely alike.

They told many stories of experiences of their own and of other men who had flown down there. One story, particularly interesting, of a young fellow who had come down to fly with them. He had brought with him his wife, young and inexperienced as himself. He hadn't been able to fit in -- lost his nerve and started to go to pieces. Tex had liked the wife and been contemptuous of the boy. Tex hadn't many morals or scruples and in a place where a good-looking white woman is practically never seen started after the wife. Bonnie complicated the whole situation, she did everything she could to get in Tex's way.

This is the story I want to do, using the background of this group of men and their spirit -- daily adventures -- as a beginning -- the arrival of the boy and his wife -- a girl equipped to handle polite men -- used to mild social flirtations, suddenly thrown into a group of hard, women-hungry men.