‘Legends of the Sky: The Liberty Plane’ tells the story of America’s first war plane and its courageous pilots

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Legends of the Sky: The Liberty Plane is an independent production that chronicles the story of America’s first war plane – the DH-4 – and the enormous contributions the aircraft made to aviation history.

With never-seen-before digital footage that’s been beautifully restored and colorized, the one-hour documentary details how the aircraft was designed and mass-produced and introduces viewers to the pioneering American pilots who flew the Liberty Plane in battle over Europe during the First World War and back home with the U.S. air mail service.

Legends of the Sky: The Liberty Plane
KET Monday, Nov. 7 • 9/8 pm
KET2 Thursday, Nov. 10 • 9/8 pm
Stream at KET.org and the PBS Video app

When the United States first entered World War I, its Army Air Service lacked a combat-ready aircraft – a liability that prompted a global search to identify an aircraft suitable for mass production at home and combat operations abroad. The aircraft that won out was the single-engine DH-4, designed by Geoffrey de Havilland, dubbed the “Liberty Plane.”

In less than one year, the United States did the “manifestly impossible,” adopting the DH-4 airframe, designing and producing a massive 12 cylinder 400 horsepower engine, and enlisting three rival American companies to manufacture 9,500 of the two-seat aircraft.

The pilots who first flew the plane over the war-torn skies of France during World War I were dubbed The Liberty Squadron. Facing a competent and well-armed enemy, the U.S. pilots soon proved the Liberty Plane’s worth on the battefield, running observation missions to discover enemy positions, bombing enemy lines in battles such as the Meuse-Argonne offensive in 1918 and supporting the famed Lost Battalion, the nine companies of the U.S.

77th Division that had been cut off from Allied resupply efforts in the Argonne Forest and stranded for three days without food, water and ammunition.

Legends of the Sky: The Liberty Plane also chronicles the DH-4's contribution to postwar aircraft advancements, including its starring role in the first airplane race across the continental United States, in air-to-air refueling experiments that ultimately made long-distance flight possible, and in the beginnings of the fledging U.S. air mail service, flying daredevil routes over the Rocky Mountains with nothing more than a compass and a road map.

Legends of the Sky: The Liberty Plane is directed and produced by Dorian and Elaine Walker of Bowling Green, Kentucky.

Free screening of 'The Liberty Plane' in Bowling Green on Nov. 5

Join KET for a free screening of *Legends of the Sky: The Liberty Plane* on Saturday, Nov. 5, at The Capitol, Warren County Public Library, at 416 East Main Street in Bowling Green.

Doors open at 1 pm CT, and the screening begins at 2 pm CT. To register, visit to KET.org/Events.

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