

FLYING THE SECRET SKY



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Filmmaker William VanDerKloot grew up hearing his father make occasional references to Sir Winston Churchill around the supper table. It wasn't until his school asked students to bring in WWII memorabilia from home that he fully understood what his father did during the war.

"My mother said, why don't you bring this—and it was a picture of the Prime Minister signed, 'To Bill VanDerKloot, my pilot, Winston Churchill.' I brought it into class and the teacher was astounded and said, 'Is this yours?' Because the first question people ask is, 'Oh, so your father is British?' And I say, 'No, he is American. An American civilian!'"

Driven by curiosity and fascination, VanDerKloot delved into his father's wartime career. He discovered his father was part of a secret mission that involved hundreds of civilian and military flyers who risked their lives while pioneering global air routes. That mission was the RAF Ferry Command and it delivered tens of thousands of American-built bombers to the UK during the war's darkest hour.

Shedding light on this unheralded wartime operation, pilots like Captain VanDerKloot and Kirk Kerkorian tell how they were recruited by the secretive Clayton Knight Committee, which set up offices in fine hotels across the US. They recruited American pilots for Britain before the US had even entered the war. Lured by the romance of the mission, pilots were offered a chance to fly the latest aircraft on dangerous flights across the North Atlantic and later to exotic locales, while contributing to the war effort.

It's been said that the weather was the deadliest enemy of the air war, and Ferry Command pilots battled that enemy with every mission. These crews flew experimental, transoceanic flights in short-range bomber aircraft, fresh off American assembly lines. With few navigational aids, they braved ice storms, the undiscovered force of jet stream winds and the constant risk of running out of fuel in flights that lasted up to 15 hours. Over 500 Ferry Command airmen lost their lives on these dangerous missions.

Their adventures branded them expert pilots as they improvised their way through countless dangers. And the experience delivered Bill VanDerKloot to No. 10 Downing Street in July 1942, where he was asked by the Prime Minister himself, to be his wartime pilot, heading a civilian crew of American and Canadian Ferry Command airmen.

Flying the Secret Sky: The Story of RAF Ferry Command weaves together first-hand accounts of this adventuresome wartime experience. Captain VanDerKloot and his surviving Canadian Flight Engineer, John Affleck, tell what it was like to fly the Prime Minister to key wartime meetings across the globe.

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CREDITS

Writer, Director and Producer: Bill VanDerKloot

A production of VanDerKloot Film & Television

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