

# Flyboys (2006)

Rated PG-13. Running time: 2 hours 20 min.

Our content ratings (0-10): Violence 1; Language 1; Sex/Nudity 4.

Our star rating (1-5): 3

Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money.' Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that.'

James 4:13-15

Director Tony Bell's *Flyboys* is a film with lavish special effects, combining the thrill of aerial combat in vintage WW 1 bi-planes with a touch of tender romance. I thought it would appeal to both males and females, but its poor showing at the box office has already relegated it to the cheap seat theaters. Because the scenes of aerial combat take place across a vast canvass of open sky I urge you to see it now while you still can on a big screen.

The story is loosely based on the Lafayette Escadrille, a squadron of ace pilots made up of Americans who did not wait for their nation to come to the aid of the French and British during WW 1. The plot follows the formula of a dozen combat films made during WW 2—tough trainer, an assortment of candidates from all walks of life, including of course, the cocky one (see *The Guardian*), and the deaths of several as they enter actual combat.

Two of the many characters are based on real-life

persons—Capt. Thenault (Jean Reno) and African-American boxer Eugene Skinner (Abdul Salis). The former trained the green American recruits, and the latter (his actual name was Eugene Bullard) became the first member of his race to become a combat pilot, though as the film's "Afterwards" tells us, when Skinner joined up with the Americans, when they entered the war, he was not allowed to fly an airplane despite his extensive combat experience.

There is an improbable "meet cute" scene when Blaine Rawlings (James Franco) crashes his plane into a provincial bordello and is taken with the lovely Lucienne (Jennifer Decker). Willing to overlook her vocation, he is relieved to learn that she is there delivering cheese. There follows a touching romance and then an even more improbable rescue from the Germans who over-run her farm. And so on, and on, until a climactic air battle fills the skies with blazing machine guns and planes crashing to earth—and even a spectacular duel with a huge zeppelin. So, park your brain and sit back and enjoy the action of a real popcorn movie.

*Reprinted from the Fall 2006 Visual Parables.*