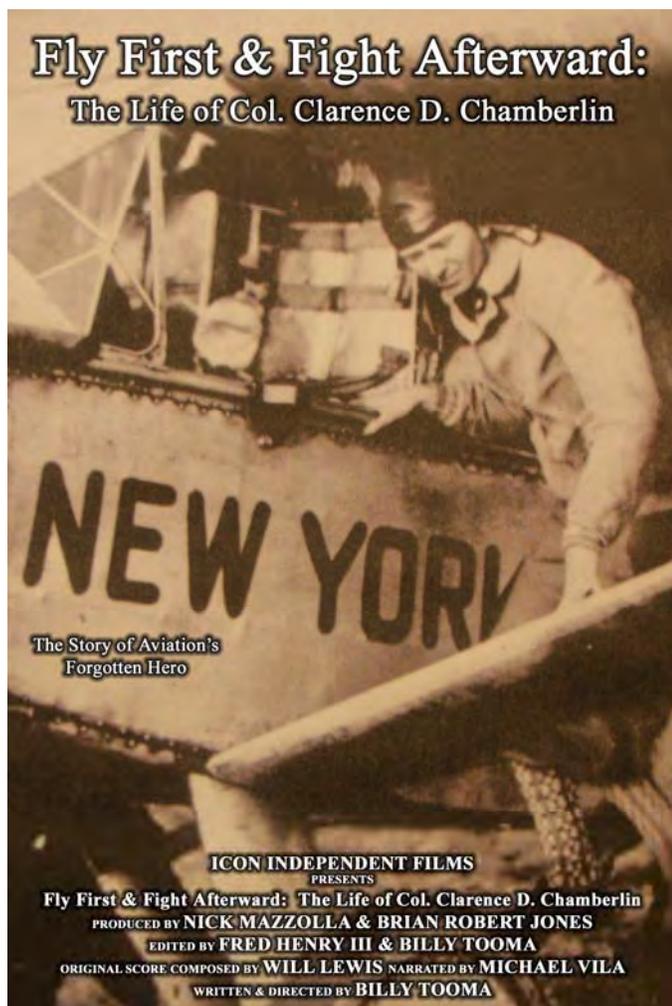


Remembering the Forgotten: The Making of *Fly First & Fight Afterward:* *The Life of Col. Clarence D. Chamberlin*

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Poster for the new Clarence Chamberlin Film, *Fly First & Fight Afterward*, written and directed by Billy Tooma

History can be forgetful. That's the way I see it. There is no such thing as a complete guide to history. It is, quite frankly, impossible. But just because something isn't written down in a textbook doesn't mean it didn't happen. I can remember the first time learning about Charles Lindbergh. Every book placed in front of me touted him the great American flying hero who flew non-stop to Paris. And this is not to diminish or take anything away from the Lone Eagle but I can recall wanting to know what happened next.

In 2006 my film mentor, Karl Petry, introduced me to his friend, Philip Chamberlin via a phone conference. The three-way meeting was to be the igniting point of a documentary on Philip's father, Clarence. Now, I had never heard of Clarence Chamberlin and when I said this, Philip didn't seem surprised. It turned out that Chamberlin, the father, was the answer to my grade school question - what happened next? Well, he's what happened.

Lindbergh had competition in 1927 from several pilots (a little known fact to the general public). They were all vying for the \$25,000 Orteig Prize for the first non-stop hop from New York to Paris, France or vice-versa. Chamberlin, with his Bellanca-made *Columbia*, was seen as Lucky Lindy's biggest threat. The morning of May 20, 1927, just when both pilots were readying their planes, the police showed up and barred the *Columbia* from leaving its hangar. It turned out that Chamberlin's co-pilot, Lloyd Bertaud, had filed an injunction against the plane's owner, Charles Levine, after being unsatisfied with his contract. This gave Lindbergh, who of course was going solo, the chance to take off unchallenged. The rest is now history.

But that wasn't the end to Chamberlin's story, merely a new beginning. Two weeks later, with Levine in tow, he brought the *Columbia* into Germany, breaking Lindbergh's distance record as well as being the first to carry the world's first transatlantic passenger.

Unfortunately, the project proposed by Karl and Philip never happened, but since I had been charged with writing the initial treatment and narration, I ended up holding onto everything. Fast-forward three years later. I'm cleaning out my desk drawers when I stumble upon all of my old notes. Call it serendipity or just good timing but as I perused through the countless pages of information, I was struck with the desire to tell Chamberlin's story myself. I knew this would require a lot of work and even more dedication from my production team. After getting my producers, Nick Mazzolla and Brian Robert Jones, up to speed, I called Karl and got his blessing to move ahead with the project.



Producers Nick Mazzolla and Brian Robert Jones goofing around during research at the NJ Museum's library

My next call was to Philip. He gave me the names and numbers of those who should be interviewed. It took the better part of two weeks but by the end of February '09, the rest of my year was now dedicated to *Fly First & Fight Afterward: The Life of Col. Clarence D. Chamberlin*.

The first interview took place in March. It was with H.V. Pat Reilly, founder of the Aviation Hall of Fame & Museum of NJ. This is a man who knew Chamberlin on a friendship level and whose knowledge of aviation is vast. What Pat helped give to the project was a sense of the past. He was just a small child during the waning years of the Golden Age of Aviation but you could immediately tell how he looked up to those pioneers as gods among men.



Founder of the Aviation Hall of Fame & Museum of New Jersey, H.V. Pat Reilly.

Joshua Stoff, curator of the Cradle of Aviation Museum in Garden City, Long Island, NY, came next. When I was told that this was the guy to talk to, everyone just kept saying it was because he wrote the book on

transatlantic flying. I chalked that up to the old metaphor, but, it turned out, he literally did write the book! His contribution came in the form of deep knowledge of the technology of the era as well as the history of Long Island's famous flying fields.

In June, my executive producer, my dad, William, and I took a flight out to Las Vegas, NV. There I would meet Philip Chamberlin for the first time, face-to-face. I discovered a man who had nothing but love for his father. The way Philip talked about him really made me see how Chamberlin's personal life was just as important as his professional flying career. It was a very pleasant interview and it helped me understand that I was helping a son preserve his dad's life story.

That following month it was up to the state of Maine. Two planes and a four hour car ride found me in the home of Clarisse L. Hodgkins-Finkel, Chamberlin's eldest daughter. In her dining room, with the beautiful scenic view of her farm serving as the backdrop, she showed off her incredible storytelling ability. She gave to me not only anecdotes and commentary on her father's life, but also on his courtship and marriage to her mother, Louise. It was, by all counts, a most pleasurable interview.

When August came along, dad and I flew out to Iowa, where, in Chamberlin's hometown of Denison, we met with historian, Mearl T. Luvaas. What was really fascinating about Mearl was that here I was, talking to a man who probably didn't have that much of a different childhood and early adult life than Chamberlin himself. What Mearl contributed was a down to earth view of the subject matter. I couldn't have asked for a better time.

As summer turned into fall, I finally got the chance to interview Shea Oakley, executive director of the Aviation Hall of Fame & Museum of NJ. Shea had admitted that his true expertise was aviation from the 1960s-on, but when the camera started rolling he completely enthralled me with his knowledge of Chamberlin's time period. Shea's input gave the documentary a greater historical perspective.





Shea Oakley (Executive Director of the Aviation Hall of Fame & Museum of NJ) and Billy Tooma.

My last sit down happened by fortunate accident. My fiancé's father, John Biondo, had overheard me discussing the project during its infancy and began recalling information on the Golden Age and Chamberlin. As a graduate of Aviation High School, NY, John had come across a good amount of the material I was now uncovering. His interview helped bridge gaps and put together fragments. Without him, I would have been in trouble.

Aside from the interviews, it was also my job to accumulate the B-roll for the movie. B-roll is any kind of footage that can be cut into the interviews to help illustrate the story and move it along. Because of the NJ and NY Museums and Chamberlin family, I was able to compile over 400 photographs and newspaper clippings as well as 1920s/30s newsreel footage. In addition, Philip also supplied a 1965 recording of his father giving an interview. I had the subject's own words! Being able to gather all of this wonderful material made me begin to think that I might have been meant to do this documentary.

With the year coming to a close, and my interviews completed, I knew that post-production was ready to commence. Having hours upon hours of raw footage to review, catalogue, and work off of, I came to the conclusion that I would need a co-editor with me. Enter Fred Henry III. Together, the two of us spent the better part of two weeks, without much sleep, splicing together all of the footage to a rough narration I had written to help tell Chamberlin's story. It was a rough start, and we even had to cut whole sections for pacing reasons, but the first cut got done without issue.

It was now time for the recording of the narration. I had never intended on doing it myself and my producer, Brian, suggest Michael Vila. Michael had acted in a

previous movie of ours and I was very familiar with his deep, commanding voice. We gave him the narration printout and within a week had him under the microphone. It took one afternoon and we never needed another.

Music had always been a concern. I wasn't sure if I'd be able to get a score done but out of nowhere came Will Lewis. What he was able to do was nothing less than amazing. His original score helped set the mood throughout the documentary. With him came Rob Guizio, who signed on as sound designer, and gave life to the silent newsreel footage. He created a flawless sync-up.

Months of tweaking the entire project resulted in a 110-minute movie on aviation's forgotten hero. It was an experience I didn't expect and one that I would never forget. It makes me sad knowing Chamberlin, who died in 1976, will never be able to see the project but the fact that his children and their families can see this lasting tribute to him brings me happiness. What's been done here is that history is being reminded that someone came directly after Lindbergh and that he did it with just as much modesty and humility because all Chamberlin wanted to do was fly.

Fly First & Fight Afterward: The Life of Col. Clarence D. Chamberlin is currently awaiting acceptance from over 40 film festivals for a 2011 release.

Written & Directed by Billy Tooma
Executive Producers - Billy Tooma, William Tooma
Produced by Nick Mazzolla, Brian Robert Jones
Associate Producers - Karl Petry, Karlo Tooma
Narrated by Michael Vila
Original Score Composed by Will Lewis
Sound Designer - Rob Guizio
Edited by Fred Henry III, Billy Tooma

Information on the Filmmaker:

*Billy Tooma is the 26 year-old owner and operator of Icon Independent Films which he founded in July 2006. He received his BA in English Literature & Secondary Education from William Paterson University where he later earned his MA in English Writing. In September 2010, he celebrated the publication of his first book, **The Great Obesity Crisis & Other Poems**. He is currently an Adjunct Professor of English at Essex County College in Newark, NJ.*

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Above: Chamberlin looking dapper in a tuxedo. Right: Chamberlin shakes hands with Ehrenfried Günther Freiherr von Hünefeld (Baron von Hünefeld) who was one of the first to fly the North Atlantic from Europe to America. Below: Bert Acosta and Chamberlin, probably sharing a flying story.

