



Chasing Icarus: The Seventeen Days in 1910 That Forever Changed American Aviation

Gavin Mortimer

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In October of 1910, only four years before the outbreak of WWI, the precursor of the U.S. Air Force had one plane and a couple of dirigibles. Nobody knew which form of flight would predominate: planes, dirigibles, or balloons. And for a period of 17 days that month, this question was on prime display. The dirigible *America*, captained by Walter Wellman, was trying to cross the Atlantic. At horse racing tracks from Belmont Park in New York to California, huge crowds watched airplanes race above the ovals. And from St. Louis, ballooning teams from around the world took off in pursuit of the Bennett International Balloon Cup, given to the balloon that travelled the furthest distance. The dramatic denouement featuring Americans Alan Hawley and Augustus Post would stun the country. Newspapers, even in the smallest of towns, kept their readers informed of all the latest aerial accidents and international squabbles. The public treated aviators of all kinds like matinee idols.

While the future was anything but clear then, in retrospect these few days nearly 100 years ago laid the foundation for an Air Force that would become the largest and most powerful in the world. In *Chasing Icarus*, Gavin Mortimer has plumbed original and primary sources to paint a vivid picture of the launching point of flight, and an indelible portrait of the late-Edwardian world about to explode into war.

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