



Over The Edge: Flying With The Arctic Heros

K.C. Tessendorf

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To conquer a landless region of ragged ice floes and treacherous, ever-changing leads of open water -- this was the challenge for the first courageous men who set out to fly over the North Pole at the turn of the century.

In 1897 a Swede named Salomon Andrée and his crew made the first attempt in a helium balloon...and disappeared into the ice-forming fog. It wasn't until 1930 that their remains -- including intact film from their cameras! -- were discovered. The Amundsen-Ellsworth team embarked on the first arctic venture to use airplanes in 1925 and 1926, only to be beaten to the takeoff by Richard Byrd and Floyd Bennett, whose claim to a successful transpolar flight is still regarded with skepticism. George Wilkins and Ben Eielson also made their bid to fly as far as possible towards the pole and planned to walk the rest of the way, if necessary. During a takeoff attempt, Wilkins was left on the ground twice -- finally, in desperation, clamping his teeth onto a rope trailing from the aircraft. A final attempt by the Italian Umberto Nobile and his dog, Titina, turned into an almost comedic series of blunders that ended in a successful rescue.

These are true stories of intrepid, resourceful fliers who, despite their primitive equipment in a hostile environment, determined to make it "over the Edge."

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