



Scott Blue feels at home in minus-40 temperatures

Take off!

By Greg David

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'Ice Pilots' risk it all to fly WWII planes up north

Scott Blue, a rookie co-pilot at Buffalo Airways, always thought that life at the airline – based in Yellowknife – would make a good TV show. So when History Television came calling, he wasn't surprised.

Hence *Ice Pilots NWT*, a 13-part doc that follows the six-foot-seven Toronto native and a motley crew of fellow pilots, mechanics and office staff who are a part of Buffalo Joe McBryan's business of flying Second World War airplanes around the frozen north.

"I read an article about two years ago, about tourists going up to Buffalo from the U.K. and Germany, to see these old World War II planes in action," says David Gullason (*Stunt Dawgs*, *Untold Stories of the ER*), creator and producer of *Ice Pilots*, on the line from Vancouver.

"They are really only in museums in all the other parts of the world. And once I learned more about it, I was like 'Wow, this is incredible.' World War II planes flying around in the Arctic, with young guys who want to be pilots. I said, 'This is a TV show.' I called them and reached [Joe's son] Mikey McBryan, and we started talking about doing it."

Ice Pilots completes, as Blue jokes, the "land, sea and air" documentation of the north, which has been covered in History Television's *Ice Road Truckers* and Discovery's *Deadliest Catch*. Viewers clearly can't get enough of stories of strife and struggle in sub-zero temperatures. But why?

"I think it's just an adventure," Blue explains from Buffalo Airways' offices in Yellowknife.

"It's the last frontier for a lot of people. So few of the population have been up here; a small percentage have ever explored north of 60. People just don't know. They are blown away. Is it really that dangerous? Is it that insane? Is it that cold at minus-40?"

"People in the south, from city to city there are differences, but when you get this far north you have to take things seriously because if you go out in your car and break down at the side of the road at minus-40, you better hope you have a whack of candles and some sort of locator system because you can get into trouble pretty quick.

"There is the threat of death, and a harshness. And it's real. It really is that cold."

Watching *Ice Pilots*, you can feel the cold emanating from the TV screen in waves. The kind of cold that makes the snot in your nose instantly crackle, when looking good takes a distant back seat to keeping warm in that hat with the ear flaps, and when metal can snap as easily as a piece of peanut brittle.

And it's not like replacement parts can be ordered for the aircrafts. Second World War stalwarts such as the Douglas DC-3 and DC-4, and the Curtiss C-46 Commando, were built to ship troops and supplies during the war; now they're ferrying supplies and passengers to remote northern outposts such as Norman Wells, NT.

Cameras capture it all, including an incident that could have turned deadly when Blue and captain AJ Decoste suffered engine failure while returning from Buffalo.

"I was thinking that we were going to be OK regardless," Blue admits. "We had no cargo in the hold, so we knew we were going to be able to fly even better. We were on our way home, and had a lot of altitude to work with. I had 100 per cent faith in my captain.

"But you have to do things on schedule and ahead of the plane. You kind of have to park you fear and negative thoughts and concentrate on the job. Once you get down on the ground and outside of the plane, that's when you deal with the fear.

"The beers certainly went down that night!"

Ice Pilots NWT debuts Wednesday at 10 p.m. ET/PT on History

Think you could be an Ice Pilot? greg@tvguide.ca