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Movies

'Wings of Eagles' Flies High

By ALTON COOK.

With affection and respect, a gang at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer has made "The Wings of Eagles," the story of their old friend, the late Cmdr. Frank W. Wead. Radio City Music Hall has this inspirational biography of the aviation hero in peace and war, top-rank screen writer and conqueror of his own paralysis.

As Spig Wead, the nickname that clung to him from Annapolis days, he was a pioneer in naval aviation and an early prophet of the dominant role of large carrier fleets. Both stunt flying and astute long-range planning were zooming his Navy career when it was cut short in a bitter accident.

A fall down a stairway at home broke his neck. Doctors pronounced him a hopelessly bed-bound paralytic—if he even survived.

Comes Back on Canes.

As the film quotes him, "The Navy does not teach us to be good losers or any other kind!" He fought his way back from despair and onto his feet until he could walk with canes.

He became an author of scenarios, plays and books. The movie treatment of that phase of his life includes a snip of a brawl between Wallace Beery and Clark Gable from Wead's first and perhaps most important movie, "Hell Divers." It

was the earliest screen revelation of carrier secrets.

Cripple or not, he was taken back into the Navy in World War II for his craft and knowledge, even sent into combat. He is credited with the idea of jeep carriers to replenish losses suffered by the big carriers in first line of battle.

Directed With Devotion.

John Wayne plays his earlier years with a headlong deviltry,

switching to a crusty determination when he faces the great physical ordeal.

Director John Ford always has a sentimental devotion to his subjects, but he brings an extra measure to this one. He also assembles, as usual, a lot of his old favorite plays, Maureen O'Hara, Ward Bond, Olive Carey, Mae Marsh—and adds Dan Dailey in a bouncy comedy role.