



## America's Lone Eagle

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There was a buzz of intense excitement and preparation at Roosevelt Field near Garden City, Long Island, New York. Three airplanes were in their hangars, and their anxious crews were hourly scanning the lowering sky and reading the weather reports, eager for the first indication of favorable weather, that they might jump off on the long, adventurous flight across the Atlantic. Lieutenant Commander Richard E. Byrd of the United States Navy was ready with his triple-engined plane, the "America." Another plane, the "Columbia," was ready to start on the long flight. And a little monoplane, the "Spirit of St. Louis," was ready to go as soon as its brave young pilot should say the word. The clouds had been dark and lowering for days, and when night fell on Thursday, May 19, a drizzling rain fell lazily from the dull, heavy gray canopy overhead, and fitful bursts of wind came now and then from the northeast. There could hardly be much worse weather for flying, and there was little prospect of an immediate hop-off.

After supper in the Garden City Hotel, Charles Lindbergh took a stroll around the hotel grounds, studying the sky. It seemed so unfavorable that at eleven o'clock he climbed into bed, hoping the morrow might bring better weather. His friends kept close tab on the government reports, which came in hourly, and also surveyed the sky at regular intervals. At midnight the skies began to clear, and the report from Washington reported fair weather for Friday. By two o'clock conditions seemed so favorable that they awakened Lindbergh from his sound, untroubled sleep, and in a moment he was wide-awake and donning his flying clothes. This was the hour to which he had been looking forward for many months, and he was prepared and ready.

When only a boy of ten, he saw his first airplane, and was captivated by it. There, on the spot, his boyish heart determined that someday he would be an aviator; and that resolve made in boyhood was never forgotten.

During boyhood and young manhood he experimented with toy balloons and parachutes. After finishing high school, he studied mechanical engineering at Wisconsin University. In 1921 he entered the Lincoln Aircraft School for aviators at Lincoln, Nebraska. The next year he took his first flight as a passenger in an airplane, which only confirmed him in his boyhood ambition to be an aviator. At the aircraft school he proved so apt a pupil that he was soon flying alone.

In the year 1925 Lindbergh was graduated from the Advanced Flying School at Kelly Field, San Antonio, Texas, and then entered the Air Service of the United States Government as second lieutenant in the Army Air Corps Reserve.

He became a pilot for the air mail service in April, 1925, flying each night between St. Louis and Chicago.

It was in the fall of 1926 that he first thought of a nonstop flight from New York to Paris. Some scoffed at the idea, and many sought to dissuade him from such a venture; but some big-hearted business men had confidence in the courageous young pilot, and they financed the building of the monoplane, the "Spirit of St. Louis."

As he was awakened from his sound sleep that May morning in 1927, it may have seemed like a dream to him; but he was shortly to know that it was a reality. Outside his hotel an automobile was waiting for him, and he was soon whirled away to the hangar. The mechanics began a minute inspection of the plane, and filled its big tanks with four hundred forty-eight gallons of gasoline, which was more than it had ever carried into the air. Two aluminum canteens with four quarts of water were hung beside the pilot's seat, and five sandwiches were given him. Someone asked, "Are you taking enough food and water?"

"Surely," Lindbergh replied with a broad smile; "if I get to Paris, I won't need any more, and if I don't get there, I won't need any more either."

There were plenty who doubted whether he would get across or not, for no one had ever made the trip alone, and just a few days before, two bold, brave Frenchmen, Nungesser and Coli, had attempted to fly from Paris to New York, which attempt had ended tragically, for nothing more was ever heard of them.

As a precaution against a possible accident, Lindbergh took along a strong linen fishline and some hooks. If he were compelled to fish for food, he wanted to be ready. In his pocket he carried a heavy bladed knife. A pneumatic raft was tucked away in the plane, ready to be used in case of a forced landing on the water, and four lifeboat fuses were taken to be used as signals.

By this time the first gray streaks of dawn could be seen in the east, and a crowd of newspaper and cameramen had gathered. Being satisfied that all was in readiness, the young aviator climbed into the cabin, the mechanics pulled away the blocks from the wheels, he called, "So long!" to the expectant waiting throng, and at exactly 7:52 the heavily burdened plane started down the runway, and slowly rose from the soft mud of Roosevelt Field.

For a moment the hearts of that vast crowd seemed to stop beating, and throats went dry, while tears trickled down the cheeks of many. He was only a boy, clean, confident, courageous, starting on one of the most daring and thrilling adventures of all time. On both sides of the Atlantic, millions of prayers ascended for the young pilot. A tense, expectant mood settled down over the whole world as the "Spirit of St. Louis" took to the clouds.

Newspaper offices waited almost breathlessly for any word telling of his progress. He passed over Massachusetts, Nova Scotia, and then out over Newfoundland for the big jump across the Atlantic. Then for several hours a blanket of static settled down over the Atlantic Coast, and no word was heard of the boy and his plane.

Darkness came soon after he left Newfoundland, and a damp, cold fog hung over the North Atlantic. And then a sleet storm, the deadliest enemy of aviators, raged around the "Spirit of St. Louis," until even brave-hearted "Lindy" wondered if the elements might win in the struggle.

In the inky blackness of night, with the great angry ocean beneath him, and with the talons of death reaching out from the fog and sleet, he flew steadily on, his only companion his throbbing engine. It is little wonder that in speaking of his great feat he always used the pronoun "we,"

referring to himself and the "Spirit of St. Louis." In the dead of night he felt the pangs of hunger; and there, two miles above the Atlantic, he ate part of his lunch of sandwiches and drank freely from the water canteens.

One thing was in his favor, the night was short, for he was flying toward the sun. Never was dawn looked for more eagerly, and to no human being had it ever been more heartening. Morning passed, and noon drew near. As he peered anxiously toward the east, a low gray shore line appeared. He could hardly believe his eyes, but this was Ireland! The Atlantic was behind him, and he was safe! But he must go on, for the beacons of England and France were only a few hours away.

Happily now, this son of the Vikings in the "Spirit of St. Louis," sped on toward France. At ten o'clock that night he was over Paris, and, after circling about the Eiffel Tower, he flew to Le Bourget, and landed in the midst of a delirious, jostling throng of more than 100,000 souls. The hazardous journey was at an end, and he was safe.

A deafening shout went up from one hundred thousand throats, and the great pulsating mob crowded in around him, anxious to touch him or even to get a glimpse of the Lone Eagle. One of the greatest feats of all time had been accomplished. He had been in the air thirty-three hours and a half, and had covered more than thirty-six hundred miles. It was an exciting moment for Lindbergh. He was exultant and happy to think the trying ordeal was finished, that he had succeeded. His concern now for the moment was for his precious plane; and his next job was to get away from the surging mob that had come out to welcome him.

After the excitement of the moment was over, his thoughts turned to his mother in Detroit, four thousand miles away, and, calling her on the telephone, he told her of his trip. We shall leave to your imagination the conversation between mother and son.

"Lindy" won the hearts of the French people by his modesty, his frankness, and courage. It would take many pages to tell of the honors that came to him during his stay abroad. Wherever he went, great crowds were ready to welcome him and to do him honor. He visited Belgium, and was cordially received at the royal palace. At Croyden Field in England, he was welcomed by a half million people. He was warmly received by King George V and England's greatest statesmen.

When he was ready to return home the cruiser "Memphis" was placed at his service by President Coolidge. On reaching the United States, the cities vied with one another in their welcoming, and the enthusiasm of the people was unbounded. Without a doubt he received the greatest welcome that had ever been extended to any man in all time. Letters and telegrams poured in offering him fabulous sums of money if he would connect with the motion-picture industry or enter some other commercial enterprise. For them all he had one manly reply, "Gentlemen, I am not for sale."

In spite of the fact that he had been flattered, that kings, princes, statesmen, and the whole world had done him honor, he kept his head, and came through the grueling test the same modest, unassuming youth who had conceived the idea of flying across the Atlantic. We marvel when we think of his courage, fortitude, and bravery in making that memorable flight alone across the ocean, but more miraculous still is the fact that he could receive flattery, honor, and offers of wealth, and remain pure and true and untainted. Surely this is a lesson in manliness and modesty that young men should ever remember.

Some call him "Lucky Lindy." But it was more than luck that figured in his success. One reason was a dominant purpose that shaped his life from boyhood. When he was a mere lad, he determined that he would be an aviator, and he worked, saved, and sacrificed to that end. As a boy he refused to touch tobacco or alcohol, and even coffee, for he wanted to keep his body fit. When he was in college, he did

not care for dancing, and went to bed early. His standards in flying school were of the highest. It was impossible to get him to play cards or to dissipate in any way. He kept his mind and body clean and in tune for the trying and difficult work of flying. At banquets in France when wine was drunk in his honor, he did not drink. Balls were arranged in his honor in France, and the girls were eager and anxious to have a dance with the young hero; and they were always disappointed when informed that he did not dance.

In the government air mail service he had an enviable record for courage, skill, and clean living. And when he told his superior, Major William H. Robertson, that he felt he could jump across the Atlantic if someone would furnish him with the plane, Major Robertson said, "If anybody can jump the Atlantic and grab the prize, Lindbergh can." And he did. While others were living a fast, free life, he was striving for the mastery, and he won.

