7:52 A.M., May 20, 1927

Lucky Lindy - Charles Lindbergh lifts off from Long Island by Stan Stokes
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At 7:52 A.M., May 20, 1927 Charles Lindbergh gunned the engine of the "Spirit of St Louis" and aimed her down the dirt runway of Roosevelt Field, Long Island. Heavily laden with fuel, the plane bounced down the muddy field, gradually became airborne and barely cleared the telephone wires at the field's edge. The crowd of 500 thought they had witnessed a miracle. Thirty-three and one half-hours and 3,500 miles later he landed in Paris, the first to fly the Atlantic alone.

Working as a mail pilot a year earlier he heard of the $25,000 prize for the first flight between New York and Paris. Backed by a group of St. Louis businessmen, Lindbergh supervised the building of his special plane and set out after the prize. Other teams were attempting the feat - some had met disaster. Lindbergh equipped himself with four sandwiches, two canteens of water and 451 gallons of gas. Midway through the flight "sleet began to cling to the plane. That worried me a great deal and I debated whether I should keep on or go back. I decided I must not think any more about going back."

On the evening of May 21, he crossed the coast of France, followed the Seine River to Paris and touched down at Le Bourget Field at 10:22P.M. The waiting crowd of 100,000 rushed the plane. "I saw there was danger of killing people with my propeller and I quickly came to a stop." He became an instant hero, "the Lone Eagle." New York City gave him the largest ticker tape parade ever, the president awarded him the Distinguished Flying Cross. His feat electrified the nation and inspired enthusiastic interest in aviation.

Takeoff

Bad weather and the prospect that his transatlantic flight would be delayed for a number of days greeted Lindbergh upon his arrival in New York. However, on May 19th, a favorable weather report predicted a break in the rain prompting Lindbergh to make his attempt the next day. He arrived at the airfield before dawn the next morning, prepared his

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plane for flight and began his historic journey:


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"*About 7:40 A.M. the motor was started and at 7:52 I took off on the flight for Paris. The field was a little soft due to the rain during the night and the heavily loaded plane gathered speed very slowly. After passing the halfway mark, however, it was apparent that I would be able to clear the obstructions at the end. I passed over a tractor by about fifteen feet and a telephone line by about twenty, with a fair reserve of flying speed. I believe that the ship would have taken off from a hard field with at least five hundred pounds more weight. I turned slightly to the right to avoid some high trees on a hill directly ahead, but by the time I had gone a few hundred yards I had sufficient altitude to clear all obstructions and throttled the engine down to 1750 R.P.M. I took up a compass course at once and soon reached Long Island Sound where the Curtiss Oriole with its photographer, which had been escorting me, turned back.*"

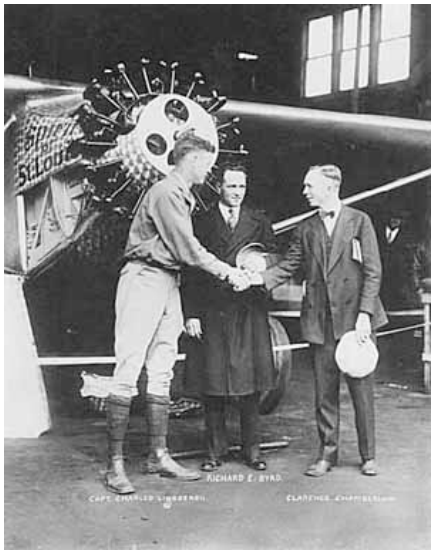
Darkness

Lindbergh continued his flight over Cape Cod and Nova Scotia and headed for the open Atlantic as darkness fell:

"*Darkness set in about 8:15 and a thin, low fog formed over the sea through which the white bergs showed up with surprising clearness. This fog became thicker and increased in height until within two hours I was just skimming the top of storm clouds at about ten thousand feet. Even at this altitude there was a thick haze through which only the stars directly overhead could be seen. There was no moon and it was very dark. The tops of some of the storm clouds were several thousand feet above me and at one time, when I attempted to fly through one of the larger clouds, sleet started to collect on the plane and I was forced to turn around and get back into clear air immediately and then fly around any clouds which I could not get over.*"

Ireland

Lindbergh continued his course, at times skimming only 10 feet above the waves as he tried to find a way around the fog and maintain his course. The appearance of fishing boats below alerted him that he was nearing land: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"*The first indication of my approach to the European Coast was a small fishing boat which I first noticed a few miles ahead and slightly to the south of my course. There were several of these fishing boats grouped within a few miles of each other.*

I flew over the first boat without seeing any signs of life. As I circled over the second, however, a man's face appeared, looking out of the cabin window.

I have carried on short conversations with people on the ground by flying low with throttled engine, and shouting a question, and receiving the answer by some signal. When I saw this fisherman I decided to try to get him to point towards land. I had no sooner made the decision than the futility of the effort became apparent. In all likelihood he could not speak English, and even if he could he would undoubtedly be far too astounded to answer. However, I circled again and closing the throttle as the plane passed within a few feet of the boat I shouted, "Which way is Ireland?" Of course the attempt was useless, and I continued on my course.

Less than an hour later a rugged and semi-mountainous coastline appeared to the northeast. I was flying less than two hundred feet from the water when I sighted it. The shore was fairly distinct and not over ten or fifteen miles away. A light haze coupled with numerous storm areas had prevented my seeing it from a long distance.

The coastline came down from the north and curved towards the east. I had very little doubt that it was the southwestern end of Ireland, but in order to make sure I changed my course towards the nearest point of land.

I located Cape Valencia and Dingle Bay, then resumed my compass course towards Paris."

Landing

Lindbergh flew over Ireland and then England at an altitude of about 1500 feet as he headed towards France. The weather cleared and flying conditions became almost perfect. The coast of France and the City of Cherbourg passed beneath his wings as darkness fell a second time during his flight.


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"*The sun went down shortly after passing Cherbourg and soon the beacons along the Paris-London airway became visible.*

I first saw the lights of Paris a little before 10 P.M., or 5 P.M., New York time, and a few minutes later I was circling the Eiffel Tower at an attitude of about four thousand feet.

The lights of Le Bourget were plainly visible, but appeared to be very close to Paris. I had understood that the field was farther from the city, so continued out to the northeast into the country for four or five miles to make sure that there was not another field farther out which might be Le Bourget. Then I returned and spiralled (sic) down closer to the lights. Presently I could make out long lines of hangars, and the roads appeared to be jammed with cars.

I flew low over the field once, then circled around into the wind and landed."

But suddenly, a hysterical, ecstatic crowd broke through the restraining ropes and stampeded toward him, cheering and shouting. As he opened the door, he was lifted down and hoisted onto the shoulders of the police, who carried him through the surging crowd, cries of "Vive" ringing through the night. He had conquered the Atlantic alone, covering 3,610 miles in 33 1/2 hours. He had won the Orteig prize!

From the balcony of the American Embassy the following morning, he responded briefly and modestly to the persistent calls of the great crowd which had gathered. For hours after he retreated back inside, they shouted, clapped, and waved their hats and handkerchiefs. In the days that followed, his fame as a hero grew to unbelievable proportions as he took Europe by storm. The President of France pinned the Legion of Honor upon the lapel of his borrowed suit and thousands of messages poured in upon him.

It was as if everyone saw in him something that they sought in themselves - a spirit of adventure and achievement in life. Somehow he represented the symbol of hope in a weary world, for there was something unique about his integrity, courage, and indifference to honors. "He had started with no purpose but to arrive. He remained with no desire but to serve. He sought nothing, he was offered all."

Returning Home

When he came home to America aboard the USS Memphis, a majestic convoy of warships and aircraft escorted him up the Chesapeake and Potomac to Washington. President Coolidge welcomed him home and bestowed the Distinguished Flying Cross upon him. His New York reception was the wildest in the city's history as 4 million people lined the parade route and Mayor Jimmy Walker pinned New York's Medal of Valor upon him. Finally, when it was all over, he turned and flew to St. Louis for a rest and to contemplate. His epic flight would become the one singular event which electrified the world and changed the whole course of history.


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It was now that the Daniel Guggenheim Fund sponsored him on a three month nation-wide tour. Flying the "Spirit of St. Louis," he touched down in 49 states, visited 92 cities, gave 147 speeches, and rode 1,290 miles in parades. Tired, but satisfied with the job he had done in promoting aviation, he returned to New York. He made a good will tour at the request of Ambassador Dwight Morrow. It was here that he first met Anne Morrow, daughter of the Ambassador, a meeting that would blossom into romance. After Mexico, he visited twelve other Central American and West Indies countries, conveying goodwill all along the 9,000 mile flight tour.

On March 21,1929, President Coolidge presented him with the nation's highest honor, the Congressional Medal of Honor. Throughout the rest of his life he would continue to serve America as an advisor on aviation. He resigned his commission as a Colonel in the reserves an April 29, 1941, but he served in the Pacific theater during World War II as a technical advisor. He taught American fighter pilots how to get increased range from their planes - as much as fifty percent more. He flew several combat missions in P-38 fighters and on at least one sortie shot down a Japanese plane. After the war, he continued to serve his country in many ways and on April 7, 1954, he was appointed a Brigadier General in the Air Force Reserves.

"Lindbergh Flies the Atlantic, 1927," EyeWitness to History, www.eyewitnesstohistory.com (1999).

Certification of Charles Lindbergh's flight required several documents to prove the performance

The Fédération Aéronautique Internationale (FAI) - the World Air

Sports Federation - is the sole organisation authorized to certify aeronautical and astronautical world records worlwide.

Orteig Prize check made out to Charles Lindbergh

The certification of Charles Lindbergh's flight required several documents to prove the performance. A sealed barograph, an instrument working with atmospheric pressure, was loaded on the aircraft; its six-hour cylinder recorded the altitudes flown and proved that the flight was uninterrupted. The start of the flight was attested by the US National Aeronautic Association and the Procès-verbal established by the Aéro-Club de France on Lindbergh's arrival attested that the barograph was found sealed and reported that 322 litres of gas (85 gallons) remained in the sealed tanks. This Procès-verbal was signed by no less than 13 French officials, the US Ambassador Myron Herrick, the Belgian Air Attaché Willy Coppens and, of course Charles Lindbergh himself. Finally, the FAI General Secretary Paul Tissandier informed the National Aeronautic Association on August 31st, 1927, that Lindbergh's flight was certified as the Class-C World Record for non-stop flight over a distance of 5809 kilometres".

Pictures of the barograph, six-hour cylinder recorded, and certified world record documents

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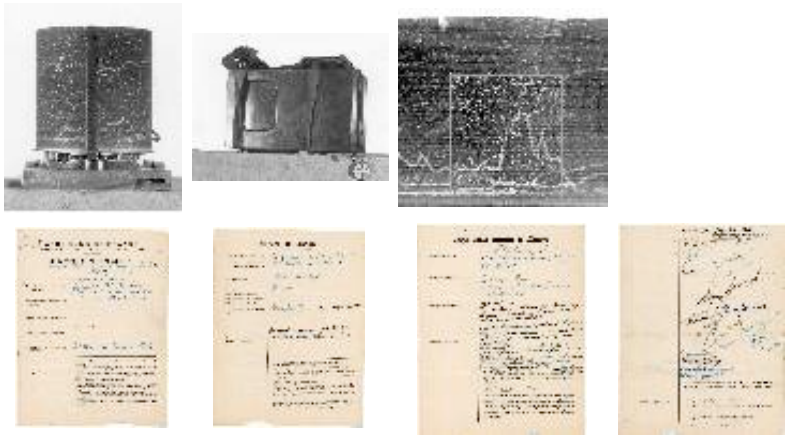

Source of information: The Fédération Aéronautique Internationale (FAI)

Lighting a bonfire

I was astonished at the effect my successful landing in France had on the nations of the world. To me, it was like a match lighting a bonfire.
– Charles A. Lindbergh