

The Lone Eagle

For Charles Lindbergh—a young man determined to make aviation history—the sky was no longer the limit

Characters

Charles A. Lindbergh
 Evangeline Lindbergh, *his mother*
 Erolf Bahl, *barnstorming pilot*
 William Robertson } *airmail*
 Frank Robertson } *pioneers*
 Harry Knight, *president of the St. Louis Flying Club*
 Harold Bixby, *pilot and businessman*
 *Photographer
 *Reporter
 Georges Pelletier d'Olisy, *famous French pilot*
 *Adele Belcourt, *woman in a crowd*
 *Jacques Claude, *man in a crowd*
 Myron Herrick, *U.S. Ambassador to France*
 Narrators A-E
 *Indicates a fictional or composite character. All others were real people.

Word to Know

- **barnstormer** (*n*): a 1920s stunt pilot who performed at fairs and took people on short flights; some also gave flying lessons

WEB WATCH
 Lindbergh Newsreel
archive.org/details/Lindberg1927

PROLOGUE

Narrator A: Charles Lindbergh was just shy of 2 years old when the Wright brothers made the world's first-ever airplane flight in December 1903. The son of a U.S. Congressman, Lindbergh had a childhood split between Minnesota and Washington, D.C. As a young boy, he was happiest when roaming through the wilderness. Then, at age 10, he saw test flights at Fort Myers, Virginia. It changed his life. In time, his fascination with flight would change the world as well.

SCENE 1

Lincoln, Nebraska, 1922
Narrator B: Lindbergh, now 20, has one passion: airplanes. He drops out of college to attend flying school in Nebraska. Soon, his mother pays him a visit.
Charles A. Lindbergh: Mother, I'm going to become a **barnstormer**.
Evangeline Lindbergh: What? Does this mean you'll be walking on the wings and hanging off an airplane like a circus clown?
C. Lindbergh: I'll do whatever it takes to fly. Please say hello to my new boss, Mr. Bahl.
Erolf Bahl: Mrs. Lindbergh, barnstorming is the only way to make people see that flying is the future.
E. Lindbergh: I know you love flying, son, but is it worth the risk?

C. Lindbergh: Every time I look at the clouds in the sky, I know I want to be a pilot.

SCENE 2

St. Louis, Missouri, 1925
Narrator C: After two years of barnstorming, Lindbergh enlists in the U.S. Army's flight school. After finishing first in his class, he becomes a first lieutenant in the Missouri National Guard in St. Louis. While there, he meets two brothers who own an aircraft company.
Lindbergh: I'm barnstorming, teaching, and test-flying, but I could use a steady job.

William Robertson: Word is, you're the best around. Come work for us.
Frank Robertson: We just won a Post Office contract to deliver mail between Chicago and St. Louis.
Lindbergh: Sign me up! I'm ready.
W. Robertson: I have to warn you: 31 of the first 40 men to fly the mail have been killed in crashes.
Lindbergh: I'll just have to be better than everyone else.
Narrator D: While delivering the mail, Lindbergh hones his skills—and survives two plane crashes.

SCENE 3

St. Louis, Missouri, 1926
Narrator E: In 1919, Raymond Orteig, a New York hotel owner,
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“Every time I look at the clouds in the sky, I know I want to be a pilot.”



In what is probably a composite photo, the *Spirit of St. Louis*, piloted by Lindbergh (inset), flies past the Eiffel Tower in Paris in 1927.

Lindbergh's Transatlantic Flight: New York to Paris



SOURCE: *The Spirit of St. Louis*, by Charles A. Lindbergh

had offered \$25,000 to the first person who could fly nonstop from New York to Paris, France. But for seven years, no one had succeeded.

Lindbergh: I need a new challenge—maybe the Orteig prize!
Harry Knight: It's too dangerous, Lindbergh. Six men have already died trying to win that money.

Lindbergh: I can do it! I've spent almost 2,000 hours in the air.

Knight: Who'd be your co-pilot?

Lindbergh: No one. I'll save fuel by keeping the weight down. I'll take nothing extra—no communications devices, not even a parachute.

Harold Bixby: What kind of plane could fly 3,000 miles in one trip?

Lindbergh: A single-engine craft. Something small, with a good engine and lots of room for fuel.

Bixby: Ryan Airlines in San Diego can make the type of plane you'll need. If you're willing to risk your life, some St. Louis business associates and I will pay for the plane.

Lindbergh: In that case, why don't we call it the *Spirit of St. Louis*?

Knight: You'll make history—if you make it to Paris.

SCENE 4

Roosevelt Field, Long Island, New York, May 20, 1927

Narrator A: The *Spirit of St. Louis* is fueled up and ready to go.

Page 1 of *The New York Times* for May 22, 1927, trumpets the historic flight.

Lindbergh checks the plane before heading across the Atlantic (see map). Spectators line the runway. Reporters and photographers swarm the pilot.

Photographer: Hey, Lindy, smile!

Reporter: Mr. Lindbergh, you're facing a long, tough trip. What are you taking with you on the plane?

C. Lindbergh: I have some sandwiches and water. But no baggage.

E. Lindbergh: Charles, be careful!

C. Lindbergh: Don't worry, Mother. I'll make it. There's no other option.

Narrator B: At 7:52 a.m., the *Spirit of St. Louis* roars to life. Weighed down by 450 gallons of fuel, the plane bounces slowly along the runway.

Reporter: It's impossible! No one can fly nonstop across the Atlantic.

Photographer: Look out! He's going to crash into the telephone wires at the edge of the field.

Narrator C: But at the last possible moment, the plane soars.

Narrator D: Lindbergh passes over New England, Nova Scotia, and



Newfoundland. Now comes the toughest part of the journey: the night ride over the Atlantic. He charts his progress in a journal.

Lindbergh: 11:52 p.m. Altitude: 10,000 feet. Air speed: 90 miles per hour. 500 miles from Newfoundland. Struggling to keep my eyes open, and 20 more hours to go.

Narrator E: Hours pass. Fighting to stay awake, Lindbergh holds his eyelids open with his fingers.

Lindbergh: 10:52 a.m. Land spotted—it must be Ireland. I'm two and a half hours ahead of schedule and less than three miles off course!

SCENE 5

Paris, France, May 21, 1927

Narrator A: At about 4 p.m. New York time (10 p.m. in France),



President Calvin Coolidge awards Lindbergh the Distinguished Flying Cross in Washington, D.C., before a crowd of 500,000.

Lindbergh approaches Paris. A crowd of more than 100,000 people is waiting at Le Bourget airfield.

Georges Pelletier d'Oisy: If he makes it, it'll be a miracle. He's got the nerve, but is that enough?

Adele Belcourt: If anyone knows about such flights, it's you, Georges. You flew from Paris to Tokyo!

Pelletier d'Oisy: Yes, but with 20 stopovers, flying over land, and in daylight. This guy has been flying nonstop for more than 30 hours, alone—and over a vast ocean.

Jacques Claude: He's either the bravest man ever, or the craziest.

Narrator B: The crowd roars.

Belcourt: Look! There he is!

Narrator C: At 4:22 p.m., the *Spirit of St. Louis* touches down. After 33 hours and 30 minutes in the air (and 55 hours without sleep), Lindbergh has done it—the first solo, nonstop transatlantic flight.

Pelletier d'Oisy: How did you feel when you finally saw land again?

Lindbergh: The way a dead man would feel to live again.

Myron Herrick: You've made our country proud, Charles. Now, is there anything we can get for you?

Lindbergh: A bath and a glass of milk. Then I'll feel better.

Herrick: You'll be taken care of.

Claude: Long live the Lone Eagle!

EPILOGUE

Narrator D: The flight made "Lucky Lindy" an international sensation. President Calvin Coolidge sent a Navy destroyer to bring him home. Upon Lindbergh's return, millions of people turned out for parades in his honor in Washington, D.C., and New York City. A new dance craze, the Lindy Hop, swept the nation.

Narrator E: The glare of attention never faded. The "Lone Eagle" no more, Lindbergh was the first modern celebrity. Reporters and photographers followed his every move, from his wedding to poet Anne Morrow to his greatest tragedy—the kidnapping of his infant son (*see sidebar*).

Narrator A: The heroic glow faded after Lindbergh accepted an award from a Nazi official in 1938, opposed U.S. involvement in World War II, and made anti-Semitic remarks. He withdrew from the public eye, re-emerging only in the 1970s to speak out for environmental conservation. He died at his home in Hawaii in 1974.

—Jim Adams

The "Trial of the Century"

For Lindbergh and his wife, fame turned to horror on March 1, 1932, when their infant son, Charles Jr., was kidnapped from an upstairs room in their New Jersey home.

Lindbergh paid the kidnapper's ransom, but the baby wasn't returned. Two months later, the child's body was found in a nearby woods, his skull crushed.

The press breathlessly reported on the manhunt. In 1934, police arrested Bruno Richard Hauptmann, a German-born carpenter.

The "Trial of the Century" began in January 1935. Some 60,000 reporters and spectators overwhelmed the tiny town of Flemington, New Jersey. It was, said H. L. Mencken, an American journalist and critic, "the greatest story since the Resurrection."

Hauptmann was quickly convicted of murder and, in April 1936, executed in the electric chair. He proclaimed his innocence to the end.

WANTED

INFORMATION AS TO THE WHEREABOUTS OF



CHAS. A. LINDBERGH, JR.
OF HOPEWELL, N. J.

SON OF COL. CHAS. A. LINDBERGH
World-Famous Aviator

This child was kidnapped from his home in Hopewell, N. J., between 8 and 10 p. m. on Tuesday, March 1, 1932.

DESCRIPTION:

Age, 20 months
Weight, 27 to 30 lbs.
Height, 29 inches
Hair, blond, curly
Eyes, dark blue
Complexion, light
Deep dimple in center of chin
Dressed in one-piece coverall night suit