

CHARLES LINDBERGH (1902-1974)

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(In collaboration with Dan Olsen & Bruno Bouveret)

Lindbergh was born in Detroit, Michigan on February 4, 1902. His early years were spent mostly in Little Falls, Minnesota, and in Washington D.C. where his father represented the 6th district of Minnesota in the U.S. Congress for ten years. He interrupted his university studies to enrol in a flying school in Lincoln, Nebraska.

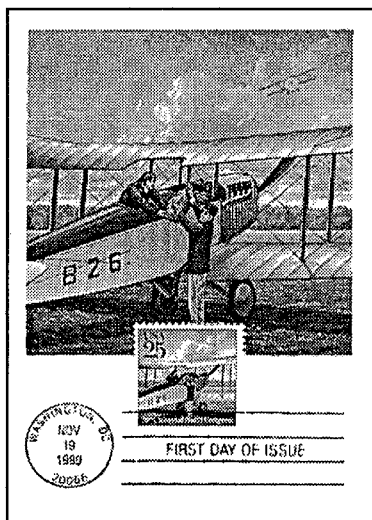
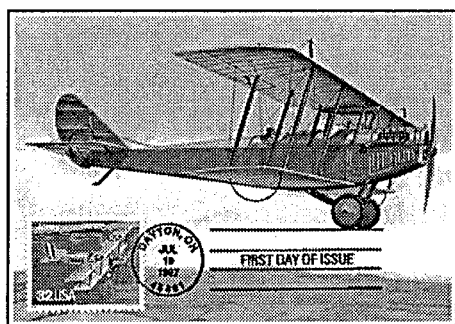
In 1953, he bought from the Souther Field in Americus, Georgia a World War I surplus biplane known as 'Jenny' (see: *Figure 1*) for only \$500. Its official name was JN-4D. An experienced pilot at Souther Field volunteered to help the amateur Lindbergh making about six take offs and landings, and offering him comments and suggestions when necessary.

Lindbergh flew 'Jenny' on barnstorming tours throughout the southern and midwestern states (see: *Figures 2,3,& 4*). After a year at the Army flying schools in Texas (1924-25), he became an airmail pilot. In April 1926 Charles flew the first airmail from St. Louis to Chicago in a De Havilland plane. He sat in the open rear cockpit with the mail sacks stowed in the front cockpit (see: *Figure 4*). The plane took off from St. Louis at 4 P.M., made scheduled stops in Springfield and Peoria, Illinois, and landed in Chicago at 7 P.M. in time to connect with an overnight flight to New York City. If all went according to plan a letter from St. Louis that was on that flight would reach New York City in time for delivery the next day- one day sooner than a letter carried by train. Each week there were 5 round-trip flights between St. Louis and Chicago made by Lindbergh and two other pilots. During the summer months they connected with New York flights 98 percent of the time, earning a reputation for efficiency and reliability. However in early November Lindbergh's plane could not land in Chicago due to thick fog. He ended parachuting off the plane, which crashed on a field outside Chicago, but the mail bags were safe.

It was during this period that Lindbergh succeeded in obtaining the financial backing from a group of St. Louis businessmen to compete for the \$ 25,000 prize offered by Raymond Orteig -a French NY hotel owner- for the first non stop transatlantic flight between New York and Paris.

Lindbergh decided that to successfully complete this flight, a pilot would be better off with a lighter single-engine aircraft, as long as he had room for enough fuel. "I'll take only the food I need to eat and a few concentrated rations. I'll a rubber boat for emergency, and a little extra water." Lindbergh contacted Ryan Airlines, a small firm located in San Diego, Calif., who had quoted the lowest price of \$ 6,000 to built a singe-engine plane capable of flying non stop between New York and Paris, excluding the engine which will cost an additional \$ 4,000.

Clockwise fr Left: *Figure 1*: Curtiss JN-4 Jenny, flown by barnstorming pilots during the 1920s. Original painting by John Batchelor. Issue: July 19, 1997. Cancel: First Day, regular, Dayton, OH. *Figure 2*: Curtiss Jenny biplane pioneered airmail transport. On May 15, 1918 the first regular airmail service in the U.S. was begun between New York and Washington D.C. Issue: Sept. 3, 1975. Cancel: Apr. 15, 1995 concordant, Areland, FL. *Figure 3*: Curtiss Jenny biplane (on card), Lindbergh and a 'Jenny' (on stamp). By 1926 Lindbergh was flying the mail between St. Louis and Chicago. Issue: July 30, 1993. Cancel: First Day, regular, Washington D.C. *Figure 4* Curtiss Jenny biplane. The mail bags are placed in the front cockpit. Airmail service prided itself on flying in all kinds of weather, in spite of accidents that claimed the life of one pilot in six in 1920 alone. Issue: Nov. 19, 1989. Cancel: F.D., regular, Washington D.C.



Lindbergh had the final say in every major design decision. It was he who insisted on putting the cockpit at the back, even though it meant he would have no forward vision, except for a periscope giving any forward vision at all. Sitting in the back would be safer, and he would have no trouble seeing out as long as there were windows on both sides of the closed cockpit. The plane was designed to carry 425 gallons of fuel to cover the 3600-mile distance between New York and Paris and 400 miles more in case he would have to make any detours because of bad weather.

On April 28, 1927 the plane named *'The Spirit of St. Louis'* (see: *Figure 5*), at the request of his St. Louis financial backers, was ready for its first test flight. Lindbergh took off from the company's airfield at Dutch Flats, and was amazed at how quickly the plane accelerated and achieved its top speed of 128 miles per hour (see: *Figure 6*).

Meanwhile two French pilots Charles Nungesser and Francois Coli (see: *Figure 7*) were also interested on making the first non stop transatlantic flight and claiming the Orteig prize. On May 8, 1927 at dawn, the French pilots Nungesser and Coli left Paris in their biplane 'Levasseur' nicknamed '*L'oiseau blanc*', 'the White Bird' (see: *Figure 8*). The French pilots were bound for New York, where they were expected to land the following day. On May 9, after reports came from Nova Scotia, Maine, and Boston, Mass. that Nungesser's plane had been sighted, all news of the French pilots ceased. Their plane never reached New York, and those who had seen it began to doubt their own eyes. One thing was certain, time had run out as far as Nungesser's fuel supply was concerned, which meant his biplane had been forced down somewhere on land or at sea. Their exact fate remains a mystery to this day.

Lindbergh plotted carefully his New York to Paris route (on ship charts). He would fly northward over New England, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland, and then eastward across the Atlantic, past the southern corner of Ireland, over a small strip of England, and then over the English Channel inside France to land on the dot that marked Paris.

On May 20, 1927 early in the morning, when there was an unexpected clearing in the weather, Lindbergh took off from Roosevelt Field, Long Island, NY. The plane bumped twice back on the runway, as he struggled to keep it in balance. It finally reached takeoff speed with only hundred yards of runway and flew just above some telephone wires at the end of the field (see: *Figures 9 & 10*). The plane climbed to an altitude of 200 feet, then 300. Because the plane was overloaded with fuel, it had to travel at a low altitude. Lindbergh checked the instrument board, and set the plane on the right compass reading for the first segment of the flight. The *Spirit of St. Louis* headed north to the shore of Connecticut, and slowly climbed to 500 feet.

People in Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts went out on rooftops and on trees, hoping to catch a glimpse of the *Spirit of St. Louis*. All over the United States people had gathered before their radios to hear the latest news on Lindbergh's flight. It was almost as if he were flying for all Americans.

By nine fifty-two A.M. Lindbergh crossed Cape Cod, Mass. and headed out over

Clockwise fr Left. *Figure 5: Lindbergh and the Spirit of St. Louis.* Issue: May 28, 1998, for the Celebrate the Century series, the 1920s. Cancel: April 28, 1999, San Diego, CA (exact place it was built 52 years to the date). *Figure 6: The Spirit of St. Louis* in flight (on card), *Lindbergh and the Spirit of St. Louis* (on stamp). Issue: May 28, 1998. Cancel: First Day, regular, Chicago, Ill. *Figure 7: Pilots Nungesser & Coli* in the cockpit of their Levasseur PL-8 biplane. Issue: May 6, 1967 for the 40th anniver. of their ill fated flight. Cancel: First Day, concordant, Paris. *Figure 8: L'oiseau blanc (the White Bird)*, Nungesser's Levasseur PL-8 biplane (stamp's, secondary subject). Issue: June 4, 1977. Cancel: F.D. special, Le Bourget, Paris.

