Charles Lindbergh Essay, Research Paper

Charles Lindbergh

(1902 – 1974)

Charles Augustus Lindbergh was born on Feb. 4, 1902, in Detroit. He grew up on a farm near Little Falls, Minnesota. He was the son of Charles Augustus Lindbergh, Sr., a lawyer, and his wife, Evangeline Land Lodge. Lindbergh’s father served as a U.S. congressman from Minnesota from 1907 to 1917.

In childhood, Lindbergh showed exceptional mechanical ability. At the age of 18 years, he entered the University of Wisconsin to study engineering. However, Lindbergh was more interested in the exciting, young field of aviation than he was in school. After two years, he left school to become a barnstormer, a pilot who performed daredevil stunts at fairs.

In 1924, Lindbergh enlisted in the United States Army so that he could be trained as an Army Air Service Reserve pilot. In 1925, he graduated from the Army’s flight-training school at Brooks and Kelly fields, near San Antonio, as the best pilot in his class. After Lindbergh completed his Army training, the Robertson Aircraft Corporation of St. Louis hired him to fly the mail between St. Louis and Chicago. He gained a reputation as a cautious and capable pilot.

In 1919, a New York City hotel owner named Raymond Orteig offered $25,000 to the first aviator to fly nonstop from New York to Paris. Several pilots were killed or injured while competing for the Orteig prize. By 1927, it had still not been won. Lindbergh believed he could win it if he had the right airplane. He persuaded nine St. Louis businessmen to help him finance the cost of a plane. Lindbergh chose Ryan Aeronautical Company of San Diego to manufacture a special plane, which he helped design. He named the plane the Spirit of St. Louis. On May 10-11, 1927, Lindbergh tested the plane flying from San Diego to New York City, with an overnight stop in St. Louis. The flight took 20 hours 21 minutes, a transcontinental record.

On May 20, Lindbergh took off in the Spirit of St. Louis from Roosevelt Field, near New York City, at 7:52 A.M. He landed at Le Bourget Field, near Paris, on May 21 at 10:21 P.M. Paris time (5:21 P.M. New York time). Thousands of cheering people had gathered to meet him. He had flown more than 3,600 miles (5,790 kilometers) in 33 1/2 hours. Lindbergh’s heroic flight thrilled people throughout the world. He was honored with awards, celebrations, and parades. President Calvin Coolidge gave Lindbergh the Congressional Medal of Honor and the Distinguished Flying Cross.

In 1927, Lindbergh published a book about his transatlantic flight. The title referred to Lindbergh and his plane. Lindbergh flew throughout the United States to encourage air-mindedness on behalf of the Daniel Guggenheim Fund for the Promotion of Aeronautics. Lindbergh learned about the pioneer rocket research of Robert H. Goddard, a Clark University physics professor. Lindbergh persuaded the Guggenheim family to support Goddard’s experiments, which later led to the development of missiles, satellites, and space travel. Lindbergh also worked for several airlines as a technical adviser.

At the request of the U.S. government, Lindbergh flew to various Latin-American countries in December 1927 as a symbol of American good will. While in Mexico, he met Anne Spencer Morrow, the daughter of Dwight W. Morrow, the American ambassador there. Lindbergh married Anne Morrow in 1929. He taught her to fly, and they went on many flying expeditions together throughout the world, charting new routes for various airlines. Anne Morrow Lindbergh also became famous for her poetry and other writings.

Lindbergh invented an “artificial heart” between 1931 and 1935. He developed it for Alexis Carrel, a French surgeon and biologist whose research included experiments in keeping organs alive outside the body. Lindbergh’s device could pump the substances necessary for life throughout the tissues of an organ.

On March 1, 1932, the Lindberghs’ 20-month-old son, Charles Augustus, Jr., was kidnapped from the family home in New Jersey. About ten weeks later, his body was found. In 1934, police arrested a carpenter, Bruno Richard Hauptmann, and charged him with the murder. Hauptmann was convicted of the crime. He was executed in 1936. The press sensationalized the tragedy. Reporters, photographers, and curious onlookers pestered the Lindberghs constantly. In 1935, after the Hauptmann trial, Lindbergh, his wife, and their 3-year-old son, Jon, moved to Europe in search of privacy and safety.

The Lindbergh kidnapping led Congress to pass the “Lindbergh law.” This law makes kidnapping a federal offense if the victim is taken across state lines or if the mail service is used for ransom demands.

Lindbergh traveled widely and developed an interest in the cultures of peoples in Africa and the Philippines. In the late 1960’s, he ended his years of silence to speak out for the conservation movement. He especially campaigned for the protection of humpback and blue whales, two species of whales in danger of extinction. Lindbergh opposed the development of supersonic transport planes because he feared the effects the planes might have on the earth’s atmosphere.

Lindbergh died of cancer on Aug. 26, 1974, in his home on the Hawaiian island of Maui. The Autobiography of Values, a collection of Lindbergh’s writings, was published In 1978.