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By Charles Apple | THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

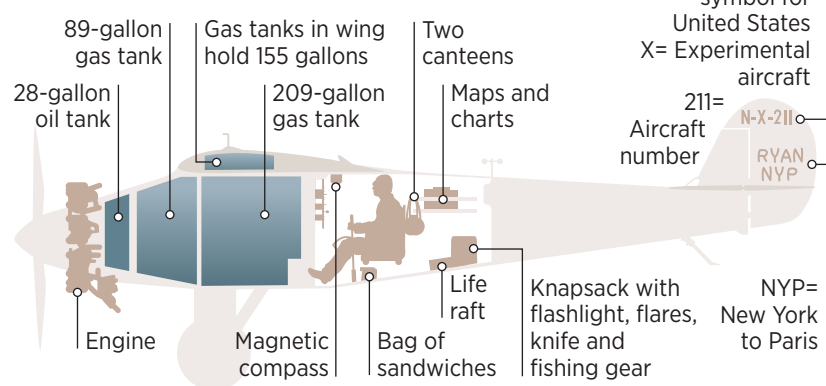
Ninety-five years ago, 25-year-old barnstormer and airmail pilot Charles Lindbergh set out from Long Island, New York, to cross the Atlantic nonstop in a single-engine plane specially built for his feat. He arrived in Paris 33½ hours later exhausted but as a household name.

AN AMBITIOUS PLAN FOR A 25-YEAR-OLD

A native of Detroit, Charles Lindbergh learned how to fly at age 20. At age 23, Lindbergh bought a surplus World War I biplane and toured the country as a stunt pilot and “wing walker” for a flying show. At age 24, he shipped out to the Army Air Service flying school and earned a commission as a lieutenant in the U.S. Army reserves. At age 26, he became an air mail pilot — the first to regularly fly between St. Louis and Chicago. But in 1926, Raymond Orteig, the French owner of large New York City hotels, renewed his challenge for an aviator or aviators to fly a plane nonstop between New York and Paris. Pilots had flown from

Newfoundland to Ireland. But this would be nearly twice that distance. Orteig offered the prize of \$25,000 to the first who could do that. Several prominent aviators set their sights on winning Orteig’s money. Among them: 25-year-old Lindbergh. By this time, Lindbergh and his exploits were well known in the St. Louis area. He talked local businessmen into putting up \$15,000 to fund his effort. Lindbergh then sat down to make calculations on just how much fuel he would need to make the trip and how light he could possibly make a plane for a single pilot. Never mind the toll such a feat would take on a pilot.

LINDY’S CUSTOM-BUILT ‘SPIRIT’



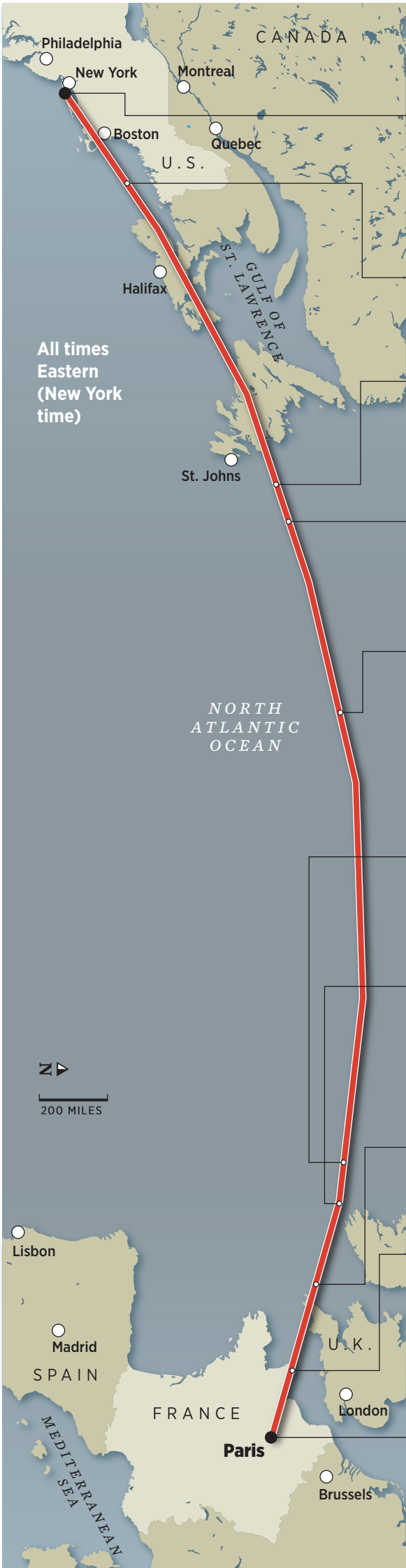
Lindbergh recruited the Ryan Airline Corp. of San Diego to build a plane to his specifications, with extra fuel tanks and 10 feet of extra wingspan to support the weight at takeoff. Lindbergh decided he didn’t need a comfy — but heavy — leather seat, so he had a lightweight wicker chair installed instead. He also gave up a radio, a gas guage, nighttime navigation lights — even a parachute. He figured he wouldn’t need to see forward while in flight — there wasn’t much air traffic to contend with in 1927 — so he had an enormous fuel tank installed where the pilot would normally sit and in front of where his

wicker seat was installed. Lindbergh’s logic: In case of a crash, he didn’t want to be between a fuel tank and the engine. He could see out while landing by subtly banking his craft right and left. On May 12, Lindbergh piloted his new plane — named The Spirit of St. Louis, in honor of his backers — from the Ryan factory in San Diego to New York, setting a transcontinental record. But then bad weather set in, delaying his hop across the Atlantic. When the perfect morning finally arrived, Lindbergh was exhausted: A noisy poker game had kept him awake.

AFTER LINDY’S FEAT

Lindbergh’s successful flight made him an overnight worldwide sensation. He was celebrated with a ticker tape parade in New York. The president awarded him the Distinguished Flying Cross. The U.S. Post Office issued a 10-cent air mail stamp showing the Spirit of St. Louis. He was promoted to colonel in the U.S. Army reserves Air Corps. But five years later, Lindbergh’s fame came crashing down when his 20-month-old son was kidnapped from the home in Hopewell, N.J., where Lindbergh lived with his wife, Anne. The baby was found dead nearby two months later. A German

immigrant carpenter was charged with the crime, was found guilty and executed. Hounded by press photographers, Lindbergh and Anne moved to Europe, where he took an interest in advances in aviation by Nazi Germany. Lindbergh returned to the U.S. in 1939, advocating for the U.S. to remain neutral in the war in Europe and expressing anti-Semitic views. This cost Lindbergh many fans in the U.S. Lindbergh pursued various scientific interests until his death in 1974.



3,600 MILES
33½ HOURS
ONE PILOT

MAY 20
7:52 a.m.
Lindbergh takes off from Roosevelt Field on Long Island with 450 gallons of fuel. He barely clears telephone lines at the end of the runway.

10:52 a.m.
Lindbergh begins to grow sleepy. He descends to within 10 feet of the water.

7:52 p.m.
Night falls. Stars appear in the sky, but heavy fog obscures the ocean. Lindbergh climbs to 7,500 feet to try to stay above bad weather.

8:52 p.m.
Lindbergh notices sleet collecting on the plane. He turns back for a bit and then flies around other storm clouds.

MAY 21
2:52 a.m.
A little more than halfway to Paris, the sun rises. Lindbergh finds himself nodding off. For the next few hours, he struggles to stay awake and even begins to hallucinate. The fog finally burns off around 5 a.m.

9:52 a.m.
Lindbergh finds several small fishing boats. He descends and yells for help finding Ireland, but no one responds.

10:52 a.m.
Lindbergh spots land off to his left. He veers toward it and identifies it as the southern tip of Ireland. He’s 2.5 hours ahead of schedule and less than three miles off course.

12:52 p.m.
Eager to reach France while it’s still daylight, Lindbergh increases his speed to 110 mph.

2:52 p.m.
The sun sets on the Spirit of St. Louis as it flies over the French coastal town of Cherbourg.

5:22 p.m.
Lindbergh has trouble identifying Le Bourget Aerodrome outside Paris — he’s confused by more lights than he expected. Those lights turn out to be roads jammed with cars, headed to witness his arrival. Lindbergh touches down at 10:22 p.m. local time. He hasn’t slept in 55 hours.

Sources: “Lindbergh” by A. Scott Berg, “The Aviators: Eddie Rickenbacker, Jimmy Doolittle, Charles Lindbergh and the Epic Age of Flight” by Winston Groom, “Smithsonian Flight: The Complete History of Aviation” by R.G. Grant, Charles Lindbergh.com, Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, History.com, Space.com, Library of Congress