



*Moments before takeoff
at Bolling Field. National
Geographic Magazine.*

THE THIRD FLIGHT

CHARLES A. LINDBERGH AND AVIATION DIPLOMACY
IN LATIN AMERICA, 1927-1928

BY DR. WESLEY PHILLIPS NEWTON

Charles A. Lindbergh's epic vault across the Atlantic in May, 1927, carried among its various symbols that of transoceanic air travel. However, as Lindbergh pointed out some months after his return from Paris, "planes are not sufficiently developed for safe transatlantic flying at present . . ." But in 1927 planes were engaged in two other phases of air travel, although on a limited basis. To dramatize these phases — intracontinental and intercontinental travel — Lindbergh soon lent his talent and glittering new prestige in flights symbolizing each. In 1927 and from the historical perspective of forty three years, Lindbergh stressed his conscious wish to promote all three phases.²

The May Flight, while one of the most celebrated in history, was in another respect therefore only the first of Lindbergh's early jaunts that attracted public attention and channeled it toward the acceptance of aerial transportation. The Second Flight was a series of flights constituting a tour of the entire continental United States.³ The Third Flight is the subject of this study. Both the Second and Third Flights stemmed from Lindbergh's introduction to Dwight W. Morrow. These two met while Lindbergh was being feted and decorated in Washington in June upon his return from the May Flight. Morrow was at the time a guest in the White House, where Calvin Coolidge was trying to persuade his old Amherst College classmate to head the United States Embassy in combustible Mexico.⁴ It was a case of instant admiration between the tall, reticent, boyishly magnetic flyer and the short and personable associate in J.P. Morgan & Company. To protect the green hero against "wolves" from the forests of opportunism,

Morrow turned to Harry F. Guggenheim, Morrow's associate in the philanthropic Guggenheim Fund for the Promotion of Aeronautics. Briefly acquainted with the flyer before the May Flight, Guggenheim provided isolation in which Lindbergh completed his *We*, and it was the Fund that financed the tour of the States that lasted from July to October, 1927. Guggenheim also personally advised the hero, helping him to sort out and in the main discard numerous offers from motion picture companies and other importuners seeking to ride the crest of Lindbergh's fame. Guggenheim usually took his cue in these matters from Morrow, for indeed Morrow had become by remote control from Wall Street the prime financial adviser to Lindbergh, a relationship that began, according to Lindbergh, "when he [Morrow] offered to arrange for J.P. Morgan & Co. to supervise the handling of my investments . . ."⁵ In August, 1927, while Lindbergh was in the midst of his tour of the States, or the Second Flight, Morrow accepted the post of Ambassador to Mexico; and on September 29, 1927, after public announcement of the acceptance, Lindbergh wrote his financial guru congratulating him and telling him that "from what little I have seen at our border stops, I am afraid that the position will be a difficult one. Of course, in the status of Ambassador, it will be impossible for you to advise me concerning investments, but please accept my sincerest thanks for your past assistance, and if, by any chance, any opportunity should arise where I might be of any aid to you, please call on me."⁶

Morrow soon accepted Lindbergh's offer of aid to his diplomatic mission. The Ambassador-designate, realizing the delicate nature



(Left) General Lazaro Chacon, President of Guatemala and officials greet Charles Lindbergh on his arrival.



(Below) Lindbergh arriving airfield named in his honor, Panama City, Panama. National Geographic Magazine.

of his posting to a country that had long seethed with hostility toward the United States, decided on a ploy: he wanted the famed Lone Eagle to fly to Mexico and assist in the task of charming the Mexicans. Although in historical perspective Lindbergh gave Morrow full credit for originating the Mexican flight idea, the idea apparently stemmed from a Lindbergh remark dropped in the earliest stage of their association. In a letter of October 4, 1927, answering Lindbergh's congratulatory message of September 29, Morrow stated: "You spoke to me once about the possibility of your doing a little flying in Latin-America . . . It would be worth while for us to take it up . . ." Take it up they did before Morrow's departure later in October for Mexico City. There existed, however, a strong barrier to implementation of the plans they discussed.

The U.S. State Department, Morrow's new employer, opposed any immediate implementation because of the yet harsh tone of relations with Mexico; specifically, the Department was not ready to make an exception to the general arms embargo then in effect on Mexico that included all planes whether for hire, sale, *turismo*, business, or diplomacy. Washington had gone as far as to permit Morrow to make a probe in the Mexican Foreign Ministry concerning the flight idea, and the Ambassador, only a few days after his arrival in Mexico City, reported back a positive reaction. But writing to Lindbergh on November 18, 1927, Morrow cautioned

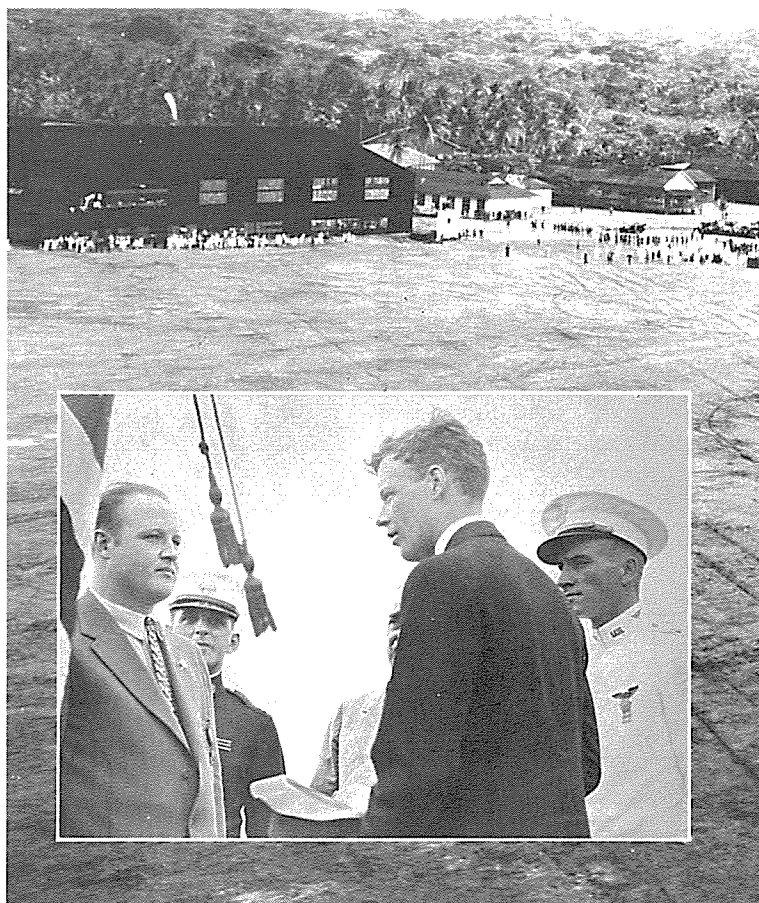
that, while the embargo situation was rapidly clearing up, "if we make a formal request at this time it might raise some questions which we would prefer to defer a month or two." Morrow had been giving additional thought to the flight's length: "What I would like," he wrote in the same letter, "would be to see you plan a trip through the Caribbean, in which you could make Mexico your central point . . ." Morrow's suggestion for an extension of the flight was apparently coincidental with an invitation to Lindbergh from the American Legion branch in Cuba to visit there in February, 1928, when the Sixth Meeting of the Pan America Union was to be in session. The invitation further whetted Lindbergh's desire to fly south.⁸

But he might well have been frustrated indefinitely had it not been for two different patterns of events that suddenly converged at the end of November, 1927. One of these patterns had to do with an official Washington attitude toward using aviation as a tool of diplomacy in Latin America. This is a complex story, for which this study has only time for a brief summary.⁹ Most of the post-war decade, a few United States diplomats in Latin America and the Army Air Corps had sought to have their government sponsor a U.S. airline that would dominate the air lanes in the vicinity of the Panama Canal, in order to checkmate the aerial activities of certain Europeans in Latin America. Such activities were viewed as containing the potential for destruction of the

Canal. Especially alarming was the presence of an airline company in Colombia, only a relatively few air miles from that then most sensitive of strategic entities. This Colombian-chartered company was actually controlled and operated by Germans and one especially able Austrian named Dr. Peter Paul von Bauer. Called SCADTA, the company had itself sought for several years to control the air lanes of the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean and their periphery (Central America, Mexico, Florida), but Washington had thwarted its ambitions. Yet, it was not until the aftermath of Lindbergh's first great flight that Washington was truly motivated to promote an American alternative to SCADTA. Then more than now government subsidy was a necessity for extensive airline operations. Conveniently, the basis for an alternative — called Pan American Airways — had, despite only scant official support, begun to operate from Key West to Havana in October, 1927. In panicked reaction to the American threat to its Caribbean ambitions, SCADTA mounted a strident propaganda campaign designed to pressure Washington into allowing it use of the Panama Canal Zone — the requisite base in those days for air line connections between the Caribbean and its periphery with much of South America. Ironically, the SCADTA propaganda achieved the exact opposite of its intended result. On November 23, 1927, a committee of U.S. executive department representatives met, discussed the SCADTA situation, and formulated the first comprehensive aviation diplomacy in U.S. history; for the strategic purpose of safeguarding the Canal against potential aerial threats and also for the economic advantages to be gained from swifter communications with Latin America, the committee recommended that the U.S. government inspire a private airline system connecting the United States and Latin America by means of adequate financial sustenance and diplomatic backing. The committee suggested two main routes to South America, one along the Greater and Lesser Antilles and one from Cuba to Mexico to Central America to the Canal Zone, near which some sort of connection would probably have to be made with SCADTA.¹⁰ This then was one pattern of events.

Another had to do with the extraordinary and almost immediate success that Ambassador Morrow had in improving the image of the United States in Mexican eyes. Although the administration of President Plutarco Elías Calles had decided to ease tensions before Morrow's arrival,¹¹ nonetheless one must give great credit to the astuteness of the former banker — symbol of much the Mexicans hated about their northern neighbor — and a man who could not even speak Spanish. On November 29, 1927, Under-Secretary of State Robert E. Olds wrote Morrow that "the rapid swing in the right direction since your arrival in Mexico has created an entirely new atmosphere . . ." In the same letter the Under-Secretary informed Morrow that Lindbergh had arranged an upcoming meeting with Olds in New York City to discuss the proposed flight to Mexico, which, stated Olds, "In the present circumstances I, personally, feel very much more inclined to encourage . . . The Secretary intends to bring the matter up at the Cabinet meeting this morning . . ." Thus the cabinet meeting of November 29 became crucial for the whole of aviation diplomacy toward Latin America, for it was at the same meeting that the recommendations of November 23 concerning an airline to Latin America were also considered by Coolidge and his Cabinet. These recommendations received their stamp of approval. Four days [that is on December 3, 1927] after the rather fateful Cabinet meeting, Under-Secretary Olds wired Morrow that he had met with Lindbergh and "associates" in New York City and they had all tentatively agreed upon a flight to Mexico, subject to Morrow's final approval. Not only was the Department's previous objection to the flight removed, reported Olds, but such a flight might have "distinct advantages . . . at this juncture . . ." He did not spell out these advantages, but their distinctiveness was such that Olds suggested the flight be extended through Central America and thence to Cuba.¹²

It really goes without stating that Morrow concurred in these plans, as they were essentially his. But one must now look closely at the motivations of the other parties. It seems obvious from the



timing of the events just related that the Lindbergh flight and the airline-to-Latin America recommendations were not considered at the Cabinet meeting of November 29 as unrelated topics. No doubt the dramatically improved climate in Mexico made it easier for Washington to make an exception to the embargo's strictures on flights there. But why an extension to Central America, where, because of the recent United States intervention in Nicaragua's civil war, the U.S. image was poor? The answer seems to be that an atmosphere of good will was not a prerequisite for Lindbergh's visit to all the places the State Department now wished him to go. It appears that Lindbergh's charm and prestige were not only envisioned as an opportune antidote to hostility that yet lingered in Central America over Nicaragua, but also seen as timely psychological preparation for a United States airline along a planned main route to the strategic Canal Zone. What more logical thing than to employ the world's most celebrated aviator to advance an aviation project with a high diplomatic priority?

What was the Lone Eagle's conscious role in Washington's plans regarding him? Lindbergh wrote this author, "The motives for my flights coincided with rather than resulted from government policy. Where I could aid in this coincidence, I did." He did not remember (1971) being told before the Third Flight of the government's Aviation Strategy as recommended on November 23 and approved on November 29, 1927; but "I feel sure I would not have objected to accepting a 'second mission' [that of fostering the strategy] if I had been asked to do so . . ."¹³ The first mission, of course, was to aid Morrow in his Mexican diplomacy.

The weight of evidence makes it probable that Lindbergh was not given a pre-flight briefing on the strategy of November. He was eager to go, so there was no need to make duty an impetus. Apparently not even his adviser and originator of the flight idea, Morrow, was informed of the strategy.¹⁴ Why were both principals kept in the dark? They had no vital need to know; and at the time final preparations for the flight were taken shape, certain factors made secrecy imperative. Premature leak of flight plans by a Mexican source — possibly the telegraph office — demonstrated why diplomatic channels were not the most reliable conduits for sensitive information. In December, government officials were holding secret conferences with officers of Pan American Air-



Spirit of St. Louis touching down, France Field, Canal Zone. USAF

(Insert) Reception committee welcomes Lindbergh, France Field. USAF

ways, persuading these officers to let their airline become the instrument of the new aviation diplomacy, while congressional figures and postal nabobs were huddling to prepare legislation that would yield an air mail subsidy sufficient to induce a company to take risks and bear the rigors of establishing air routes over a vast and politically unstable expanse of territory. If this planning were prematurely revealed, there was danger from likely domestic critics and would-be domestic competition of Pan American Airways, not to mention SCADTA's continuing pressure. With Colombian diplomatic support, Peter Paul von Bauer, Director of SCADTA, was in Washington at that very time trying to salvage his company's cause.¹⁵

The first public statement of the new aviation diplomacy came from President Coolidge in his State of the Union message of December 6; however, his references were general enough not to give away the contours of the planning then in progress. Newspapers were mainly devoid of references in December. But in January, 1928, after plans were in motion, a few details began to appear in that medium.¹⁶

Another important pre-flight matter: who was to pay for the journey? Lindbergh maintained (1970) he did. It "cost me only a few hundred dollars" and "I always stayed at embassies and legations . . . therefore had no hotel bills. I was seldom, if ever, charged for the gasoline and oil put in my tanks . . ." The Guggenheim Fund, financial sponsor of the Second Flight, did not contribute money to the Third Flight, according to testimony of Guggenheim and Lindbergh at the time and the latter in historical perspective. Considering the Guggenheim interests in Latin America, this was a prudent stance by the Fund.¹⁷

In Washington, where Lindbergh had come early in December to depart, honors continued to pile up. Recently made a Trustee of the Guggenheim Fund, he now received the prestigious Carnegie award and was voted the Medal of Honor by Congress. On the floor of the House he received the accolade of the United States' "most attractive citizen" by Speaker Nicholas Longworth. At the apogee of his glory, he checked weather reports preparatory to commencing the non-stop phase to Mexico City of this Third Flight. The Mexicans and Morrow awaited him with heightened

expectation. The latter had tried to persuade Lindbergh to fly to Mexico City in short stages, but the Lone Eagle had told him, "You get me invited and I will do the flying."¹⁸

To give the appearance of a private flight, while invitations had been arranged behind the scenes by Morrow and other diplomats, they appeared in newspaper announcements to have been unsolicited. These invitations from the desired places had begun to arrive. Lindbergh sent President Calles an appreciative acceptance of the Mexican Executive's assurance that the Lone Eagle would be received with affection in Mexico.¹⁹ On December 12, Lindbergh inspected weather reports and they were gloomy. Then, on the morning of December 13, with the prospects of slightly improved conditions, he decided to go. With Lindbergh clad in a yellow flight suit, at Bolling Field, 12:20 p.m., witnessed by a small group, the fuel-burdened *Spirit of St. Louis* began its struggle along a muddy runway and finally lifted itself to avoid the Potomac, then zoomed to clear some trees.²⁰

Lindbergh flew without a radio, for there existed then no adequate communications net. He had few prospects of a lighted airfield should he have needed to descend after darkness closed. He carried no parachute because of cramped space and trust in his craft. As he passed over Virginia and parts of North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama, "fog, showers, and rain were all waiting for us . . ." The generally poor visibility necessitated more instrument flying than on the May Flight. Nightfall brought several consecutive hours of complete blindness before he was able to detect the ground again, somewhere in Mississippi, he thought. The night, in fact, lasted over twice as long as over the Atlantic because of the difference in direction. Departing Louisiana, he soon looked down on the lights of Houston, around 2:00 a.m.; but encountered thick fog along the Mexican Gulf Coast. A special new altimeter enabled him to drop low enough to glimpse now and then "the white line of surf . . ." Still on course at Tampico — identified by its oil tanks — he passed inland for the relatively easy leg to the capital. Then "something went wrong and I guess it was me . . ."²¹

At Balbuena Field on the outskirts of Mexico City, the morning of December 14, thousands of Mexicans anticipated him,



attracted by his fame. Mexican Army planes waited to rise and escort him in. A civil aircraft resembling Lindbergh's arrived from Tampico and brought a roar, but it belonged to Compania Mexicana de Aviacion (CMA), the country's struggling pioneer airline. Tension grew cruel after the ETA of noon arrived and two more hours dragged by with no sign. Morrow descended from the Presidential box and paced, Calles smoked one cigarette after another. Suddenly, stirring the weary and thirsty crowd, drawing back some of the departing, came word that the plane had been seen to the northwest.²² Lindbergh recalled in historical perspective:

The mountain between Tampico and the Valley of Mexico were fog and cloud covered. The best maps I had been able to obtain were poor, and I was unable to locate my position after reaching the Valley, which was clear. Eventually, I reached the city of Toluca which I identified by a sign on the brick side-wall of a hotel . . . As I recall, I arrived at Mexico City about two hours late . . .²³

At 2:30 p.m., Mexico time, the speck of the plane appeared, and the escort took off to meet it. It came down gracefully over a hanger and landed on the grassy but dry field, spraying dust that momentarily obscured it. The crowd broke for the hero and only a circling wall of police motorcycles prevented plane and pilot from being engulfed. The relieved Morrow came to fetch him to Calles, who greeted Lindbergh with obviously sincere warmth, not usual for a man who was a cynical politician. Riding with Morrow to the Embassy, Lindbergh was preceded by crack cavalry as thousands roared. Mrs. Morrow informed her diary: " . . . Oh! The crowds in the streets on the way to the Embassy! — On trees, on telegraph poles, tops of cars, roofs, even the towers of the cathedral. Flowers and confetti were flung every moment . . ."²⁴

The immediate impact of Lindbergh during his two week's sojourn in Mexico was evident. Calles sent Coolidge a telegram expressing "most happy felicitations" upon Lindbergh's arrival after a "notable flight accomplished with the greatest success." Mexico City newspapers were filled with details and photographs of the flyer's activities. He dined with Calles, whom he took up for a joy ride in a plane placed at his disposal by CMA. Lindbergh symbolized the many U.S. tourists of the future in this place where revolutionary violence was gradually subsiding by visiting the pyramids of Teotihuacan. He also went to a bullfight, in a when-in-Rome gesture defying frenetic appeals and protests in the United States against his attendance. In an appearance before the Mexican Chamber of Deputies he received the same kind of acclaim as during his appearance in the U.S. House a few days

before. He was surrounded by children and flowers, hailed by laborers and aristocrats. While examining and flying military aircraft he established rapport with such Mexican Army pilots as Captain Emilio Carranza, who was destined to die in a crash in New Jersey in a bid to emulate Lindbergh's success in Mexico.²⁵ The only negative event of his stay occurred while he was present at a speech by ex-President Alvaro Obregon in which the Revolutionary hero attacked the "yellow press" of the United States for alleged claims that Mexico would receive Lindbergh in a less than friendly manner; Mexico had given the lie to the claims, stated Obregon, who went on to praise Lindbergh for representing a non-materialistic spirit among U.S. youth.²⁶

In a homey touch, and with an assist from the Ford company, Lindbergh's mother flew in a Ford Stout Trimotor to join him in spending Christmas in the Embassy in Mexico City. A resident of the Embassy who came to have increasing affection for Mrs. Lindbergh's son was the Ambassador's middle daughter Anne Spencer Morrow. But at the end of the year Lindbergh had to take his leave and he flew to Central America.²⁷

Lindbergh was not the first person to fly through Central America but his reception was unmatched by few visitors before or since. Although there were some petitions condemning U.S. policy in Nicaragua and asking Lindbergh to turn back, "I was not aware of any unusual currents of hostility in Central America," Lindbergh later recalled. And in the main he had little reason to. Crowds threatened to smother him out of obvious adoration after the trim silver Ryan landed at each primitive landing field; statesmen sang his name.²⁸ President Lazaro Chacon of Guatemala telegraphed Coolidge that Lindbergh was a "welcome messenger of peace and friendship between the United States and its brothers of the continent . . ."

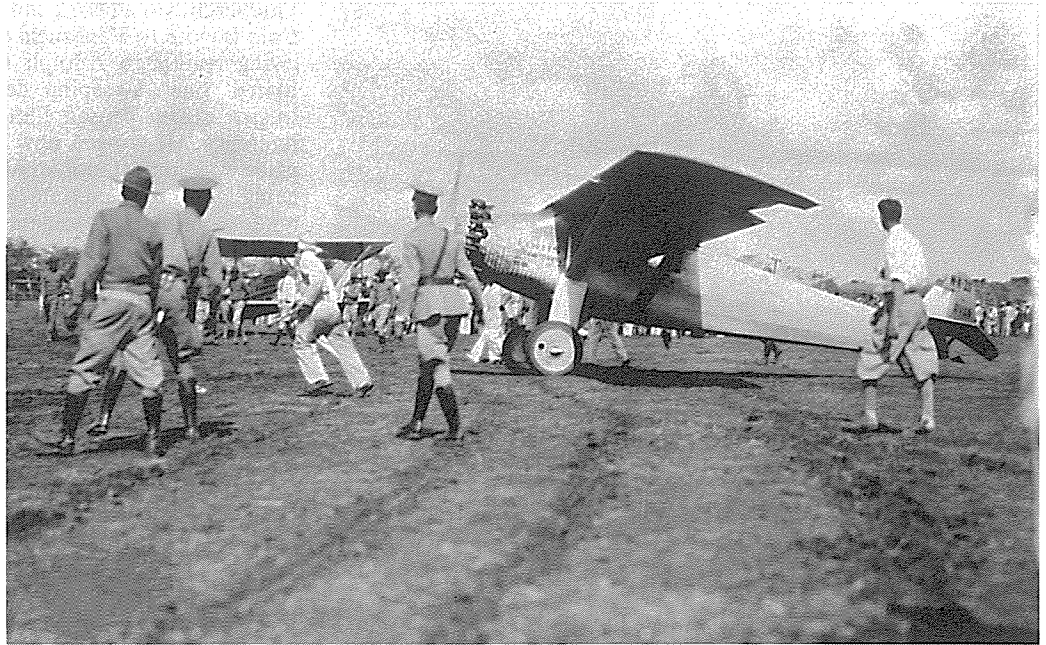
Concerning the problem area of Nicaragua, Lindbergh remembered (1971) of being warned "prior to my flight southward to Nicaragua, to fly at altitudes out of rifle range" over territory where the forces of Augusto Sandino — a pioneer guerrilla tactician of the 20th century — operated. There were no incidents at Managua after Lindbergh landed on January 5, 1928, at the newly created Marine air field, and popular and official response was as enthusiastic as anywhere else in Central America. But as he prepared to take off on January 7 to continue his flight of peace, a Marine warplane arrived from the scene of fighting.²⁹

In Costa Rica, according to Carlos Ma. Jimenez G., historian of his country's aviation, amidst the greatest welcome tended any visitor there, the president told Lindbergh, "Costa Rica is your home." He thus left behind in Central America an atmosphere

(Left) Colonel Lindbergh makes aerial inspection of artificial lake created by closing Gatun Dam across Chagres River.

(Right) The Spirit of St. Louis lands at Port Au Prince, Haiti.

(Below) At St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, Lindbergh does engine maintenance before taking off for Porto Rico. All photos National Geographic Magazine.



of good feelings when he flew on to Panama. As to the flying conditions on his flight through Central America, Lindbergh recalled (1970), "Central American weather then had the reputation of being extraordinarily bad for flying, which of course, turned out not to be the case."³⁰

In both the Canal Zone and the Republic of Panama Lindbergh received tremendous acclaim. In the latter, however, some newspapers characterized him as cold. This was perhaps due to the simultaneous presence of junketing French flyers, who were acclaimed by the same newspapers. One U.S. diplomat there called it a thing of Latin Brotherhood. It may also have been due in part to a growing resentment by Panamanians over the tight control the U.S. government had gained over their airspace as well as that of the Canal Zone.³¹

Somewhat of a mystery yet remains about both Lindbergh and Washington's plans for his route beyond Panama. He seems to have contemplated originally flying either from Panama to Yucatan and thence to Cuba or directly over water from Panama to Cuba. Then the U.S. State Department decided at some point in the planning that it would be expedient for him to visit Colombia, where a degree of bad feelings yet lingered over the loss of Panama but which had oil deposits desired by the U.S. In addition, it was the base of the feared SCADTA and therefore a logical place to apply U.S. aviation diplomacy. Lindbergh did not

wish to make a visit to Colombia a precedent to visiting all South America because time and his Cuban commitment precluded it. However, he was more than willing to fly there and decided to include its neighbor Venezuela also. He recalled (1971) having at the outset a tentative notion for visiting both these countries as one of several options. To the Venezuelan visit Washington was opposed. It is not clear why, and it is likewise unclear why Lindbergh decided to go against Washington's wishes with respect to Venezuela. Ambassador Morrow, while Lindbergh was in Mexico City, reported that the flyer was willing to abide by the State Department's feelings concerning his itinerary. Lindbergh did not remember it that way: "... Basically I wanted to feel my way as I went and to turn back or vary my route accordingly."³²

One influential person in the United States, Adolph H. Ochs, publisher of the *New York Times*, was against Lindbergh going to any place in South America and tried to persuade Morrow to intercede with Lindbergh; Ochs' argument was two-fold: that Lindbergh had become a symbol of the safety of aviation and needless extension of his flight risked an accident that would tarnish the important symbol; and that by visiting only a part of South America, he would provoke jealousy in the other parts, thus affecting any future goodwill tour of that continent. The argument did not prevail. Lindbergh had a vague memory (1971) of Ochs' finally consenting to secure through *Times'* representatives the invitation from Venezuela that Washington had declined to seek.³³

A factor that threatened to force cancellation of the visit to the northern South American countries was a lack of adequate facilities for the *Spirit of St. Louis* in the Colombian capital of Bogota, facilities in that country being generally tailored to SCADTA'S types, hydroplanes and flying boats. Lindbergh remembered (1971) that while red tape for airplanes entering a foreign country in 1927 was quite thick, "Flight plans' in the late 20's were by no means the definitely outlined procedures they are today. A change in plans didn't need much more than a push on the rudder and a change in compass course..." So, when the Colombians gave the green light for a landing in Bogota, it involved on January 26, 1928, little beyond a routine flight for Lindbergh of four and half hours from France Field, Canal Zone, to a stopover at the old colonial fortress city of Cartagena.³⁴

Just why Lindbergh choose Cartagena instead of the SCADTA headquarters at Baranquilla, also on the Atlantic coast, is not certain. Looking back over the years, Lindbergh did not recall (1971) why the choice. Cartagena was closer, but SCADTA'S Peter Paul von Bauer had offered Washington the use of SCADTA facilities for the Lone Eagle; and one of the key officials in form-





Lindbergh checking maps before taking off from San Jose, Costa Rica. National Geographic Magazine.

ulating U.S. aviation diplomacy, William MacCracken, Assistant Secretary for Aeronautics in the Commerce Department, had urged Lindbergh to observe the SCADTA operation.³⁵ However, while the flyer was “aware of Washington’s concern about SCADTA’S operations in relation to the Panama Canal,” he seems not to have had much opportunity to observe, remarking in his dispatches to the *New York Times* only once upon that company — he noted a SCADTA plane moored at a bank of the Magdalena River as he flew along its course on the flight from Cartagena to Bogota. In Bogota, he was greeted with acclaim that equalled his reception anywhere along his track. The U.S. Legation reported to Washington that Lindbergh’s visit had caused a mood swing among Colombians from negative to positive toward the United States and might be a turning point in relations between the two countries.³⁶

On January 29, Lindbergh left Bogota for Maracay, Venezuela, residence of Juan Vicente Gomez. U.S. relations with Dictator Gomez’s Venezuela were better than with most Latin American governments of that time, so it remains obscure why Washington had not been willing to seek an invitation there. One possible reason is that Lindbergh was expected to be in Havana as soon as possible after January 20 (he was not to come before that date so as not to upstage an appearance by President Coolidge), where his magic was expected to boost the United States position on matters of aviation and in general at the Sixth Meeting of the Pan American Union. At the Sixth Meeting, a draft treaty to regulate civil aviation in the Western Hemisphere was on the agenda, and Washington felt that certain features threatened the security of the Panama Canal, for these would have the effect of opening the Canal Zone to airlines such as SCADTA. Peter Paul von Bauer was in Havana to defend these features as adviser to the Colombian delegation.³⁷ The Washington-approved extension of the flight to Colombia meant delaying his arrival in Cuba, but when Lindbergh delayed it even further by including Venezuela and then St. Thomas in the American Virgins, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti, Washington was probably upset. There was no imperative to visit any of these latter places. Assistant Secretary of State MacCracken, writing to the U.S. Ambassador in Cuba, commented peevishly that Lindbergh was “practically making his own plans and I suppose will go to Havana when it meets with his convenience.”³⁸

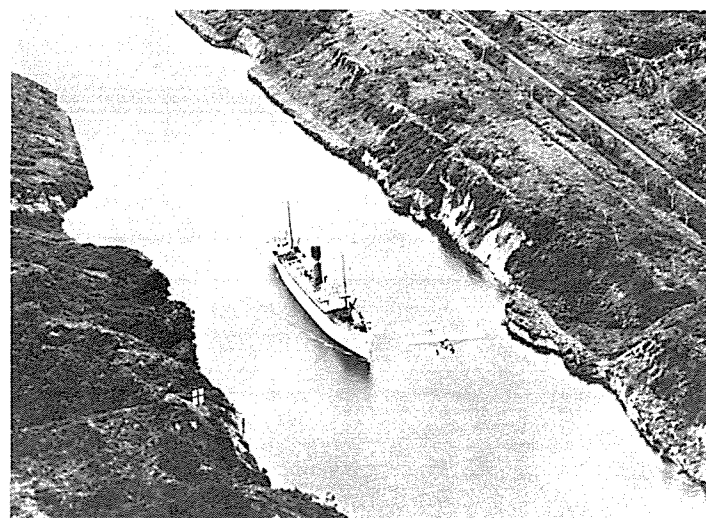
Even Morrow, who had wanted him to include the Caribbean, advised against flying to Venezuela. Why did Lindbergh, in the face of private and official opposition, add the additional places to his itinerary? The route that he finally chose, of course, gave emphasis to “the plans I had laid for taking part in the development of world air routes . . .” One must keep in mind, also, that

Lindbergh was a classic individualist. But on the journey eastward from Bogota to Venezuela only his skill and poise kept him from giving reality to Adolph Ochs’ fears. A massive Andean storm forced one sweeping detour, then billows of clouds and a smaller storm caused him to seek the Caribbean as a point of reference. He winged now over terrain where any type of landing place was almost non-existent. After flying past Caracas before being able to penetrate inland again, he decided to keep his rendezvous with President Gomez at Maracay, which lay some forty-odd miles back to the west of Caracas, and, he recalled (1970), “it was a close race with night to the[unlighted] landing field at Maracay.”³⁹

His reception was warm but the crowds were more disciplined than in most other places. Captivated, Gomez feted and decorated him. At his departure the dictator observed: “There is a man. He is a cavalier of the skies. He examines his plane as a horseman examines his mount before riding.”⁴⁰ The flight from Venezuela to St. Thomas consumed ten hours, the same time it had taken him to reach Maracay. It was not, however, fraught with the same impediments. He did encounter some difficulty breaking out to the Caribbean because of fog over the coastal mountains; and this situation plus the route he chose — a parabola that took him over or near various islands of the Lesser Antilles chain instead of the direct and somewhat shorter, but entirely overwater trip to St. Thomas — made it necessary to race fading light again. Yet, as he expressed it forty-two years later, “I think that in all my flying with a single-engine plane I have avoided long overwater flights where there was an alternative consistent with the objective I had in mind . . .” He could find no reason for a direct flight over water to the Greater Antilles, especially “when the route to Havana via either the [Lesser] Antilles or Yucatan was much more interesting.” But basically his “reason for choosing the route I did was simply that I wanted to fly around the Gulf and Caribbean, touching the continent of South America.”⁴¹

The several hops that took him from St. Thomas to Havana between February 2 and 8 posed no particular flight difficulties, but several things occurred en route that reflected significant political and commercial currents of the time. At the occasion of his appearance before the Puerto Rican legislature, he was presented with a petition that called for Puerto Rican independence; Lindbergh ignored it. In the Dominican Republic he accepted a sack of mail to deliver to Cuba — and later received two sacks in Haiti — inaugurating the air mail service of a small Caribbean line called West Indian Aerial Express between these points. At the time West Indian was seemingly a rival with Pan American for Caribbean primacy but it was destined to be absorbed by the chosen instrument of U.S. aviation diplomacy.⁴² As Lindbergh

Flying over Panama Canal, Lindbergh passes an American ship. National Geographic Magazine



recalled (1971) the incident: "I was asked to carry the mail sacks, and saw no reason not to do so. There wasn't much mail in them." In Haiti, scene of an ongoing U.S. occupation, an anti-American effort to induce a boycott of the flyer resulted in failure and his reception was not unlike those at previous stops.⁴³

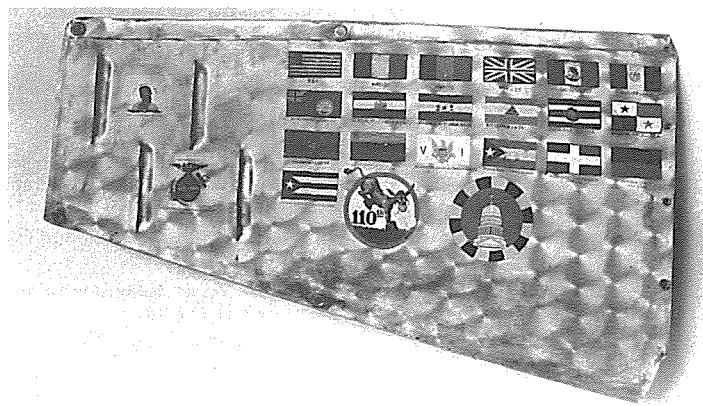
Lindbergh arrived in Havana on February 8. He was too late to influence directly or indirectly Latin American acquiescence in Washington's desires regarding the civil aviation treaty under consideration by the Sixth Pan American Meeting. By February 8, the U.S. delegation had been forced to modify its position considerably, so much so that officials in Washington, fearing danger to the Panama Canal, subsequently withheld the accord from the Senate's ratification consideration until the danger appeared to have ebbed.⁴⁴ During his five days sojourn in Havana, Lindbergh gave joy rides to VIP's and was feted and toasted. There to woo him was the prime mover of Pan American Airways, Juan T. Trippe, and J.H. Rand, President of Remington-Rand, who was to be the principal backer of Pan American's greatest early U.S. airline rival for Latin American primacy, an airline eventually named New York-Rio-Buenos Aires (NYRBA). Like West Indian Aerial Express, NYRBA would suffer defeat and absorption at the hands of Pan American. Although Lindbergh became an adviser to Pan American and participant in the rivalry with NYRBA, in retrospect he claimed, "I did not contemplate a connection with Pan American until much later" after meeting Trippe in Havana.⁴⁵

On his final leg, Havana to St. Louis, "both compasses malfunctioned over the Florida Strait, at night. The earth inductor needle wobbled back and forth. The liquid compass card rotated without stopping. Could recognize no stars through heavy haze. Located position, at daybreak, over Bahama Islands, nearly 300 miles off course . . ." Lindbergh managed to take the *Spirit* on to St. Louis and Lambert Field and more acclaim.⁴⁶ Thus it ended as it began: lost, found, worship.

Besides completing the Third Flight safely and symbolizing inter-continental aerial transport as he had planned, what else did Lindbergh accomplish? The late Howard F. Cline, foremost historian of Mexican-United States relations, has written that Lindbergh paid a diplomatic dividend in Mexico. Elsewhere, it is hard to assess his general or specific diplomatic influence except where aviation was concerned. And Pan American Airways was not able to follow along behind and easily benefit in every place Lindbergh had visited. In some countries in Central America, in Colombia, and even in Venezuela the company had a hard struggle to win concessions and it did not always gain the monopolistic stance it sought. Although Lindbergh denied (1970) acting as publicity agent for any one airline on the Third Flight, he made a conscious effort to break ground for airline service: "During my Gulf and Caribbean tour, as during my (previous) tour of the United States, I emphasized in practically all my addresses the need for and value of airlines."⁴⁷

Pan American certainly appreciated the psychological value, as well as the technological skills, of Charles A. Lindbergh. He inaugurated several Pan American routes in the Gulf-Caribbean area as well as surveyed for the company in those skies. In 1929, he and his wife, Anne Spencer Morrow Lindbergh, accompanied Trippe and his wife on a flight around the Gulf and Caribbean. One stop was in Venezuela to soften up the old dictator, Gomez, who was still holding out. Gomez lavished affection upon Lindbergh, but it was months later before he finally yielded a concession to Pan American.⁴⁸ Washington continued to prize the Lone Eagle as a diplomat. Late in 1931, Lindbergh was scheduled to pay a visit to Colombia, where Pan American and SCADTA had by then come to terms. He was, however, forty-eight hours late, for his presence was requested at a reception in Washington for the Italian Foreign Minister.⁴⁹

When he finally landed at Barranquilla in a Sikorsky S-40, "The American Clipper," crowds swarmed to the dock.⁵⁰ His magic still prevailed.



Miniature flags of Latin-American countries, together with flags of other nations visited, adorned the cowling of the Spirit of St. Louis, February 13, 1928 when Lindbergh flew from Cuba to St. Louis. Smithsonian Institution.

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