



Department of Justice

ADDRESS

OF

THE HONORABLE GRIFFIN B. BELL

ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

AT THE

DEDICATION AND UNVEILING OF THE LINDBERGH MEMORIAL

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 30, 1978

11:00 A.M.

SOUTHER FIELD

AMERICUS, GEORGIA

On December 17, I was privileged to be the main speaker at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, on the 75th anniversary of powered flight. On that occasion, I stood at the spot -- once lonely and isolated -- where Wilbur and Orville Wright put their flying machine to actual use in four brief flights late in the cold and windy morning of December 17, 1903.

The two brothers from Dayton, Ohio, were far ahead of their contemporaries in both the Old World and the New. If it had not been for their determination and daring, human flight would have come far later than it did.

Charles Augustus Lindbergh was less than two years old when this momentous but little-noticed event took place at remote Kitty Hawk. Neither he nor his father -- who served the Sixth Minnesota District in Congress for 10 years -- could know that this strange looking Wright biplane, with two propellers and no cockpit, was fashioning for him fame and a lasting place in aviation history.

Neither of the Wright brothers went to college, although they apparently obtained excellent educational backgrounds at home and at high school. Charles Lindbergh was a college dropout. He quit the University of Wisconsin as a sophomore and enrolled in a flying school at Lincoln, Nebraska.

After this flight instruction, an unwavering desire to fly despite a pinched budget brought Charles A. Lindbergh to Americus, Georgia.

He had been on a spring trip to Miami, and he had heard that scores of World War I Curtiss "Jennies" were being sold off at a newly abandoned Army base called Souther field. At Souther, the Minnesotan struck a \$500 deal for a "Jenny" that boasted a brand new Curtiss OX-5 engine.

Now only one problem remained: How to fly it!

Although Lindbergh had done some cross-country flying under the watchful eyes of pilots, he had never soloed. Lindbergh had kept this fact to himself when he bought the "Jenny." His inexperience soon became obvious, however, when he amateurishly bumped the plane down hard after gingerly getting it a few feet off Souther's expansive and ghostly surface.

Lindbergh's autobiography describes how a man by the name of Henderson graciously came to his rescue, jumped into the front cockpit, and gave the green aviator free dual-control instruction in a half-dozen takeoffs and landings.

At about five o'clock, when the May winds had calmed, the man who would only four years later fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean decided to make his first flight alone. The only witness, according to Lindbergh, was an elderly black

visitor to the Field who watched the new pilot rise to 4,500 feet and return to Souther.

The witness was high in his praise of Lindbergh's solo, telling him that he had "looked like a bird." These inspiring words of admiration undoubtedly helped repair the young aviator's damaged ego. As Lindbergh put it, this "gave me confidence."

Lindbergh remained another week at Souther, practicing takeoffs and landings and acquiring about five hours of solo time. He had helped himself to living space in the abandoned barracks and hangars, but now his money was running low. He decided to barnstorm home by way of Texas, navigating with a small-scale map purchased at an Americus drug store.

Although warned that he would be flying over forbidding stretches of the rural South, Lindbergh circled Souther Field in an aerial farewell salute and headed westward from Americus at 10 a.m. on May 17, 1923. He arrived at Meridian, Mississippi, by sunset.

The new airplane owner broke a propeller the next day after being forced down, far off course, by rainstorms 100 miles north of Meridian, but he was irrevocably launched on a barnstorming career that would lead to a place in aviation history.

In 1924 and 1925, he got Army training and, in 1926, became an air mail pilot on the Chicago-St. Louis run.

In those days, aviation was still in its infancy, although the airplane had staked out a military role during World War I. At about this time, one authority tells us that no fewer than 143 American industries ranked ahead of aviation. In 1928, a quarter-century after the first powered flight, an anniversary pilgrimage from Washington to Kitty Hawk involved several forms of land and sea transportation, but no travel whatsoever, to or from, by air.

But Charles A. Lindbergh, air mail pilot, awoke the world to the airplane's potentialities. Lindbergh got the backing of some St. Louis businessmen to go after the long-standing \$25,000 Raymond Orteig prize for the first non-stop flight between New York and Paris.

Using a Ryan monoplane powered by a Wright "Whirlwind" engine, Lindbergh took off from New York on May 20, 1927, and didn't stop until he got to Paris 33 and 1/2 hours later. In the eyes of the world, Lindbergh had established the fact that the airplane could conquer oceans as well as continents. The powered aircraft's horizons were demonstrated as being limitless, and even today we are still searching for their outer reaches.

President Coolidge sent a naval vessel to fetch Lindbergh back to the United States, and the joyous greetings in Washington, New York and St. Louis bordered on the hysterical.

On June 17, 1927, the surviving co-inventor of the flying machine, Orville Wright, stood on the steps of his Dayton laboratory and watched the "Spirit of St. Louis," piloted by Lindbergh, fly overhead with airplane escort enroute to the St. Louis celebration.

Even before Lindbergh's victorious return to the United States, Orville Wright had sent him a personal invitation to visit Dayton.

"I believe Dayton has had a longer and more intense interest in aviation than any other city of our country," Wright explained in a letter to one of Lindbergh's St. Louis backers, Major A.B. Lambert, who had been treated to a 10-minute flight with Orville at Dayton in 1910.

"For this reason," Orville Wright continued, "it (Dayton) is able to appreciate to the full, Colonel Lindbergh's wonderful flight. I am sure no city will give him a more cordial welcome...."

"Personally," Mr. Wright added, "I have more than ordinary interest in Colonel Lindbergh: first, because he has so strikingly demonstrated the possibility of an art which I had a part in founding; and, second, because his conduct in the midst

of overwhelming popularity has been such as to command the admiration and respect of everyone."

In response to Wright's invitation, Lindbergh arrived at Dayton's Wilbur Wright Field at 7:25 p.m. on June 22, 1927. Crowds were, of course, waiting there and at downtown Dayton. However, Lindbergh -- "politely but firmly," we are told -- instructed the Wright Field commandant to drive through back streets to Wright's Georgian mansion, Hawthorn Hill.

But Lindbergh's Dayton admirers were not easily tricked. An unruly crowd soon took up positions on Wright's lawn and his porch, and in his trees, clamoring for a glimpse of Lindbergh. All hopes for a sedate dinner were shattered, and the same fate was about to befall Wright's mansion.

Under these circumstances, Lindbergh finally consented to appear briefly with Orville Wright on a small balcony at the front portico. Says Marvin W. McFarland, editor of the Wright papers:

"To those who could appreciate what they were seeing, it must have been a memorable moment -- Lindbergh, tall and boyish, on a balcony scarcely big enough for a child to stand on comfortably, and Orville Wright at his side."

According to McFarland, Orville Wright never forgot Lindbergh's sincere gesture in visiting Dayton immediately after his triumphant return to St. Louis.

Early the following morning, Wright took Lindbergh to his laboratory to view the reassembled 1903 Wright Flyer. The Flyer and Lindbergh's "Spirit of St. Louis" now can be seen almost side-by-side in the central lobby of the Air and Space Museum in Washington.

On August 5, 1927, Lindbergh again visited Dayton, and on this occasion the young aviation hero placed a wreath on Wilbur Wright's grave.

While preparing to speak at Kitty Hawk, I learned of several interesting connections between the Department of Justice and the Wrights. Tragically, there was a connection also with Charles A. Lindbergh.

During the evening of March 1, 1932, twenty-month-old Charles A. Lindbergh, Jr. was kidnapped from the second-floor nursery of the Lindbergh's secluded home in New Jersey and later killed. Public outrage against this and other shocking crimes led in the early 1930s to the adoption of an array of Federal statutes to strengthen law enforcement nationally.

A Justice Department agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, participated in investigating the Lindbergh

kidnapping, and Attorney General Homer S. Cummings created a Washington "hot line" to which citizens could (and did) report kidnappings. In 1934, the Justice Department drew up a 12-point anti-crime program, resulting in 21 enactments by the 73rd Congress.

These events flowed mainly from the Lindbergh case, which jolted the nation into the realization that new Federal efforts would be needed to bring law enforcement into the automobile and airplane era.

In later years Lindbergh, like the Wrights, experienced controversy as well as acclaim. And like Orville Wright, Lindbergh lived well past 70, dying in 1974 at the age of 72.

It took people of rare vision, persistence, and courage to bring the airplane from infancy to adulthood, and the Wrights and Lindbergh of course stand out among them.

To speak at two of aviation's historical sites within a single month is indeed a distinct honor.