

An Earlier May

Jim Alexander

On the morning of May 20, 1927, a young man climbed into a small single-engine airplane and took off from Roosevelt Field, heading eastward. He was seeking a \$25,000 prize offered for the first solo flight between New York and Paris. The plane was stripped down to reduce weight and allow a maximum of gasoline. All he had was a cramped cockpit, no radio, the most rudimentary instruments, an extra gas tank in front requiring the pilot to use a periscope to see forward. His previous experience had been as an air mail pilot; on one earlier occasion, lost in the fog, he had to parachute to ground to save his life.

Charles Lindbergh landed at Paris Le Bourget field 33½ hours later. The exuberance of the crowds and the excitement that ensued began a spectacular response around the world, and a life for the young man that he could never have imagined. Papers covered the story with a zest only seen decades later when man landed on the moon.

Following celebrations in Paris and Europe, he returned to Washington, DC, where another massive celebration included President Calvin

Coolidge presenting him with the Distinguished Flying Cross. Later, Congress awarded him the Congressional Medal of Honor.

At that time, with radios not in widespread home use, much of the news was carried by newspapers and shown in theater newsreels. Several news services took films of his triumphal welcome in Washington, and vied to be the first to show them on the screens of Broadway theaters. One company sent its film by train to New York, while another sent it by plane. The story of the race between the two made its own history.

A special locomotive was put into service by the Pennsylvania Railroad, and all other trains were ordered to stand clear on what is now the Northeast Corridor. In Delaware, the train encountered minor mechanical difficulty, and as it was being fixed, the plane, flown by "Casey" Jones (no relationship to the engineer of railroad lore), flew overhead and passed it. The train resumed, setting speed records. While the pilot parachuted his films to a Long Island lab for processing, the train had carried a developing lab, and its edited films hit the screens on Broadway first. The locomotive of the "train that beat the plane," E6s No. 460, was preserved and is now on display at the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania.

Seeking to take advantage of Lindbergh's popularity and uncertain as to the future competitiveness of passenger air travel, the Pennsylvania Railroad worked with other transport companies to hire Lindbergh as an advisor in setting up the Transcontinental Air Transport system, in which a passenger could leave New York City, travel by train at night, planes by day, and arrive in Los Angeles in 48 hours.

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Lindbergh embarked on a series of goodwill flights in North America, including one to Mexico, where he met Anne Morrow, the daughter of the United States Ambassador. She wrote of her first impression of him: "He is taller than anyone else—you see his head in a moving crowd and you notice his glance, where it turns, as though it were keener, clearer, and brighter than anyone else's, lit with a more intense fire.... I felt the whole world before this to be frivolous, superficial, ephemeral." They were married in 1929. Late in life, she was to author *Gift from the Sea*, a highly regarded inspirational work presaging contemporary themes.

Their lives were not without grief, however. In 1932, their child was kidnapped, leading to the sensational Lindbergh Case, "The Crime of the Century." When they later traveled to Germany, he was impressed by German industry, and came to advocate America's staying out of European entanglements, seeing Germany as a bulwark against Russia. Some felt he was pro-Hitler and anti-Semitic. Later, blocked by President Roosevelt from rejoining the Air Force,

he volunteered as a civilian air advisor in the Pacific, participating in 50 combat missions. In 1954, President Eisenhower designated him as a Brigadier General in the Air Force Reserve.

In his later years, he developed a strong interest in the environment, writing that "all the achievements of mankind have value only to the extent that they preserve and improve the quality of life."

"Lucky Lindy"—"Slim" to his early friends—died on the Hawaiian island of Maui in 1974. The stone on his modest grave quotes Psalm 139:9: "If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea ..."

The Spirit of St. Louis, which had been named to recognize the plane's sponsors, remains on prominent display at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum.



An article by Jim on the famous plane-train race carrying the Lindbergh reception films may be viewed at <https://jimquest.com/wp-content/uploads/Lindy5.pdf>. ■

Emilio Carranza Memorial

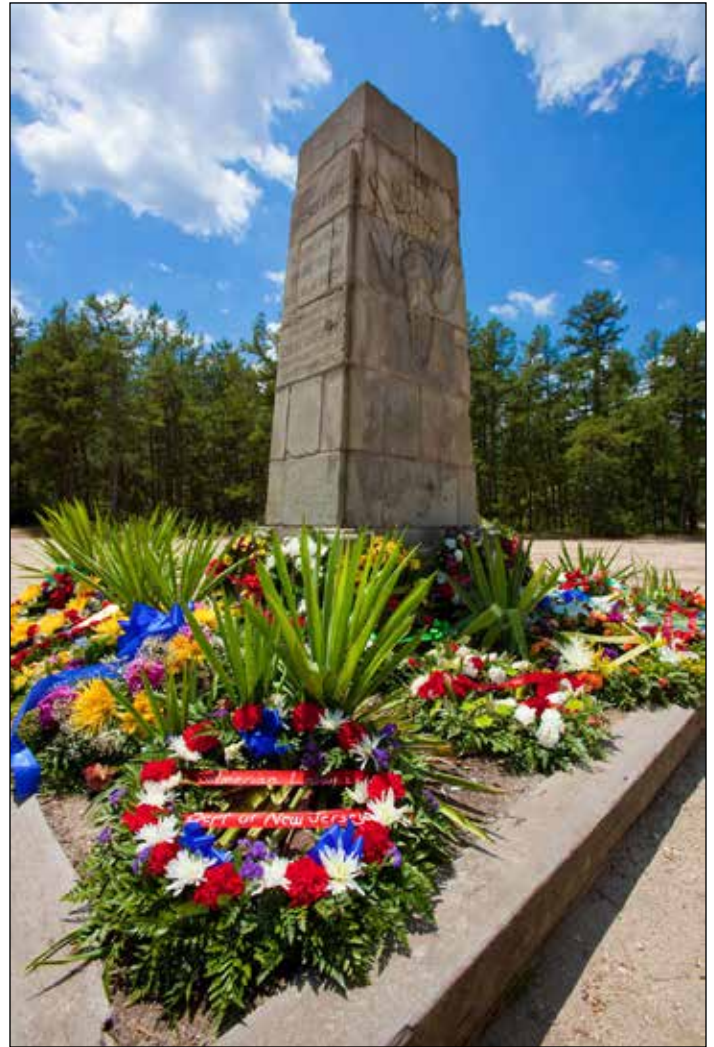
Text and photos by Jim Alexander

Southbound motorists on Route 206, a mile below the Red Lion Circle, pass by a roadside sign pointing to the Carranza Memorial. Most travelers don't know what that is, and fewer take the left turn to see it. Those who do follow a country road that leads them to Tabernacle, where they cross over Medford Lakes Road at the Russo Fruit and Vegetable Farm, and continue south.

Farther along on Carranza Road, the pavement narrows and is less well maintained. The farms give way to pines on both sides, with the occasional sandy road to somewhere unknown branching off left and right. That's the NJ Pinelands. After an especially bumpy stretch, a barely wider part of the road discloses the monument in a clearing on the right.

Who was Carranza, and why is there a memorial to him on the edge of the Pinelands? The story goes back to the glory days when Charles Lindbergh had thrilled the world with his non-stop solo flight from New York to Paris in 1927. It was an era of courageous conquerors of the air, and good will among nations as people stood in awe of these new heroes.

Among the fraternity of early fliers was Emilio Carranza Rodriguez, a descendent of the first popularly-elected President of Mexico. Like Lindbergh, he ventured by plane where none had gone before, with record flights in and around Mexico. In 1928, by age 22 already a national hero, he was selected to undertake a goodwill flight from Mexico City to Washington, D.C. in response to the previous year's flight between the two capitals by Lindbergh. Flying his plane, The Mexico Excelsior, a Ryan Brougham similar to the Spirit of St. Louis, Carranza reached Washington, D.C. on June 12, 1928. The flight was encouraged by Lindbergh, who had become a close friend when he visited Mexico City in late



1927 and met his future wife, Anne Morrow. Major funding for Carranza's flight came from a public collection in Mexico.

His first act after recovering from the arduous flight was to place a wreath at Arlington Cemetery at the Tomb of The Unknown Soldier, cementing the bond between the two nations, and he took a side flight with Lindbergh to Detroit, adding to the spirit of the times.

Following his effusive welcome in Washington, he flew north to New York City. There, Mayor Jimmy Walker presented him with the key to

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the city, and Herbert Hoover, then Secretary of Commerce, also honored him. Although he held only the rank of Captain, he was granted the privilege of reviewing the cadets at West Point.

His return flight from New York City to Mexico was repeatedly delayed by bad weather, and Lindbergh cautioned him to await better flying conditions. It was later asserted that his growing fame caused jealousy back home, and that Mexican General Joaquin Amaro finally telegraphed him to "Leave immediately without excuse or pretext, or the quality of your manhood will be in doubt."

The evening of July 13, 1928, when he received the telegram, he followed orders and immediately returned to the airfield and took off in a driving lightning-filled rainstorm, headed home. He was never heard from again.

The next day, several local people in Burlington County were hunting berries near Chatsworth. Coming upon debris of what looked like an airplane crash, they summoned help from the county seat at Mt. Holly. Members of the American Legion Post 11, which had been formed in 1919, were requested to assist. As

there were then no good roads nearby, they had to hack their way to where parts of Carranza's plane were located, scattered through the trees, and eventually he was found. In his hand was clutched a flashlight from that stormy night, trying to find a place to land in the dense pines. His body was first taken to Buzby's Store in Chatsworth, then to Mt. Holly, where members of the Post stood vigil until Mexican authorities could arrive.

As his funeral train entered Mexico City, airplanes circled it and dropped flowers. Some 250,000 people lined the 10-mile funeral route before burial in the Field of the Illustrious Dead in Dolores Cemetery.

At that time, members of Post 11 determined to honor "the Lindbergh of Mexico" each July with a ceremony at the site of his crash, where there now stands a 12-foot monument which was paid for by the children of Mexico and erected in 1931. On front is a descending Aztec eagle, with footsteps representing his last steps on earth. On the back, an arrow soaring upward to the sky.

Each year, rain or shine, the ceremony is held, often with US military, Mexican government and Carranza family representation. American Legion Medford Post 526 joins Post 11 in the program. Wreaths are laid, speeches made, the respect for Carranza's mission of peace rekindled. At the same time, a ceremony is held at his grave in Mexico.

The next ceremony honoring the Messenger of Peace will take place on July 10, as Post 11 keeps their promise to honor the memory of Captain Carranza and his Mission of Goodwill. The memorial is badly weathered, but the message endures. ■

