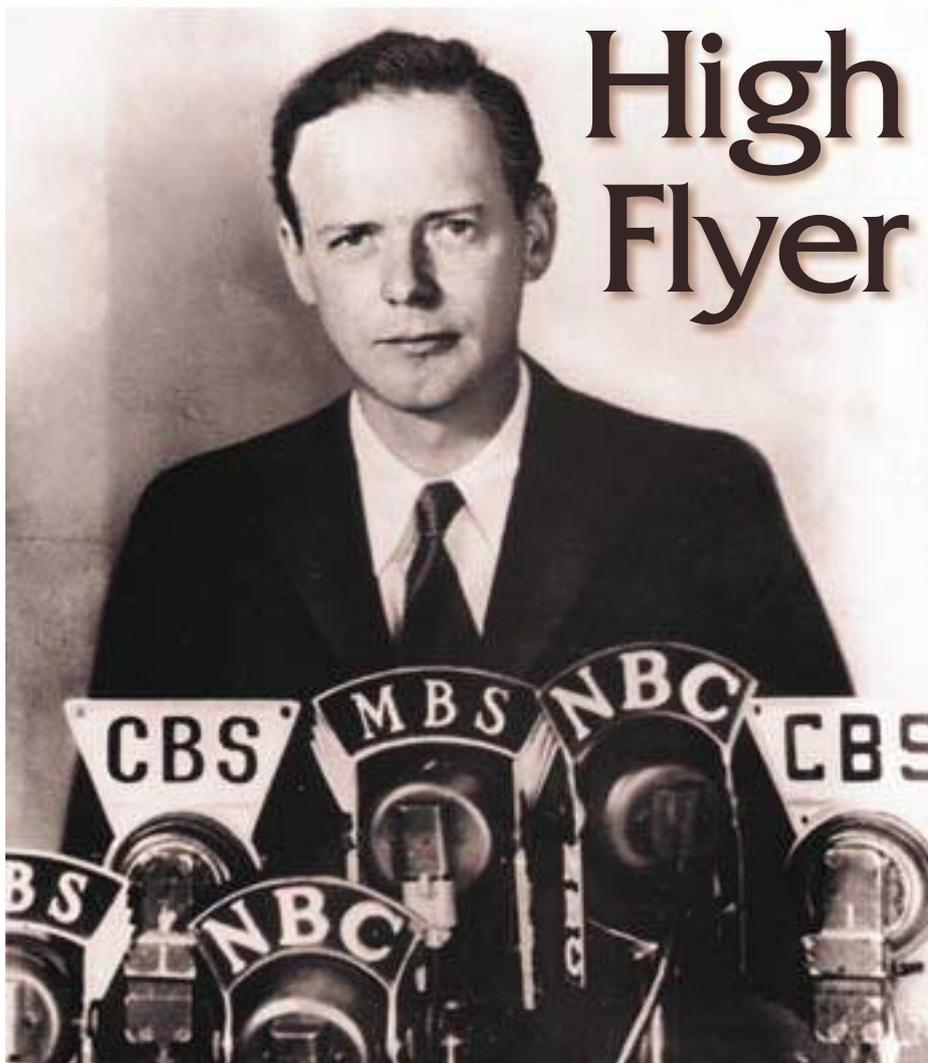


Dauntless High Flyer



false, FDR's image of Lindbergh persists, and Frum conjured it to attack modern conservatives who opposed the Bush administration's ill-conceived adventure in Iraq. Even Lindbergh, he wrote, "ceased accommodating Axis aggression after Pearl Harbor." Of course, Lindbergh never "accommodated Axis aggression," and his heroic combat service against the Japanese reveals Frum's remark for the bald demagoguery it was.

American Hero Against the War

Most Americans are familiar with Lindbergh's exploits before World War II, when he made the first nonstop flight from New York to Paris in 1927. The flight elevated Lindbergh to international fame. Mobs descended upon him wherever he landed; he was a hero not only to Americans but also across the world.

As Europe headed for war, Lindbergh was circumspect about the United States joining the slaughter. An officer in the U.S. Army Air Corps, Lindbergh lived in Europe for a while, and visited Nazi Germany eight times. He inspected German armaments and aircraft and warned that German air power was growing. On a trip to Germany in 1938, A. Scott Berg wrote in his biography, *Lindbergh*, he met Hermann Goering at the American Embassy at the invitation of the American ambassador, who hoped introducing Goering to Lindbergh would improve German-American relations and, importantly, improve the plight of Jews forced to flee the country. Goering unexpectedly awarded Lindbergh the *Verdienstkreuz Deutscher Adler*, the Service Cross of the German Eagle, for his contributions to aviation and the flight over the Atlantic.

When Hitler's armies blitzkrieged Poland in 1939, Lindbergh forthrightly opposed American entry into the war. "A Europe divided by war," he wrote in *Reader's Digest*, "reduces the stature of our civilization and lessens the security of all western nations. It destroys life, and art, and the spiritual growth that spring from peaceful intercourse among men." Lindbergh warned prophetically, "we should never enter a war unless it is absolutely essential to the future welfare of our nation," and "we must either keep out of European wars entirely, or stay in European affairs permanently."

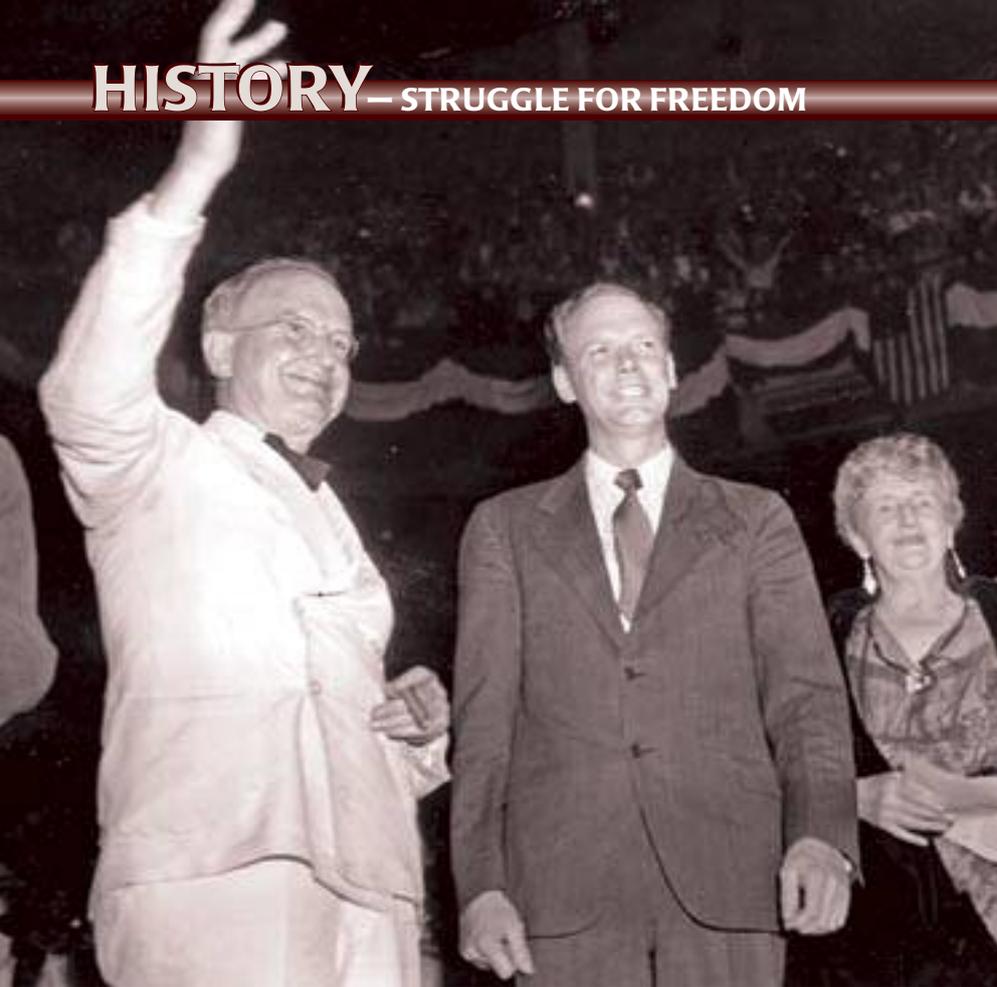
Charles Lindbergh campaigned to keep the United States out of war as leader of the America First Committee, then placed himself in harm's way when we did go to war.

by R. Cort Kirkwood

Four years ago, Canadian immigrant and neoconservative scribe David Frum, who coined the term "Axis of Evil" as a speechwriter for President George W. Bush, accused conservatives who opposed the Iraq War of disloyalty

to the United States. His scurrilous screed was entitled "Unpatriotic Conservatives: The War Against America," and oddly enough, he invoked Charles Lindbergh to make his point.

As leader of the America First movement, Lindbergh counseled against America's entering Europe's second war, a popular position but one that President Franklin Roosevelt used to smear the aviator as pro-Nazi. Though patently



Putting America first: Charles Lindbergh strongly advocated staying out of the war in Europe. He is shown here (center) at Madison Square Garden, where he addressed a massive America First rally.

which became the Committee to Defend America First, enlisted politicians, novelists, and even Eddie Rickenbacker, recipient of the Medal of Honor for his exploits in the skies over Europe during World War I.

Lindbergh's writings and speeches struck a chord. Robert Sherwood, a Roosevelt speechwriter, admitted that Lindbergh was an "extremely eloquent crusader for the cause of isolationism ... undoubtedly Roosevelt's most formidable competitor on the radio." An editor at *Reader's Digest*, Berg wrote, said 94 percent of the mail about Lindbergh's articles supported him. Aside from that, Lindbergh spoke to upwards of 40,000 spectators at a time at such venues as Soldier Field, Madison Square Garden, and the Hollywood Bowl. At one speech, Berg reported, wildly applauding Americans interrupted him 30 times.

No wonder his enemies vilified him. Ralph Ingersoll, publisher of *PM*, called Lindbergh the "spokesman of the fascist fifth column in America." In a radio address, Berg wrote, Sherwood said Lindbergh possessed a "poisoned mind," and accused him "of being a traitor — an unwitting [purveyor] of Nazi propaganda." Walter Winchell called him the "Lone Ostrich." Secretary Ickes repeatedly referred to him as the "Knight of the German Eagle" and called him the "No. 1 United States Nazi fellow traveler." Lindbergh received death threats against his children.

FDR also smeared Lindbergh. At a press conference in April 1941, asked whether Lindbergh would be called to duty to fight, Berg reported, Roosevelt called him an "appeaser." Lindbergh resigned his commission in the Army Air Corps.

Despite some unwise remarks about Jews, in which he admonished the Jewish people for pushing for U.S. entry into the war, Lindbergh was neither anti-Semitic nor a fascist or Nazi, and neither were most of the members of the America First Committee, although a few genuine extremists did try to attach themselves to the mass movement. Rather, the commit-

"As long as America does not decay from within," he said in his first radio address, "we need fear no invasion of this country." Indeed, Lindbergh's great concern, he said, was that America, "guided by uninformed and impractical idealism, might crusade into Europe to destroy Hitler" and open it to the "rape, loot and barbarism" of the Soviet Union, which he believed was the greatest threat to Western Civilization. Still, Berg reports, Lindbergh later wrote that he was "far from being in accord with the philosophy, policy and actions of the Nazi government."

It wasn't long before the character assassins unsheathed their long knives to butcher Lindbergh's reputation. The medal from Goering haunted the famed aviator during his tenacious fight to stop the United States from entering the war, and even before Lindbergh embarked on his crusade for America First, Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes said Lindbergh "forfeits his right to be an American." Berg noted that columnist Dorothy Thompson, "who only months earlier had praised Lindbergh for following the courageous [isolationist] path of his father [prior to World War I]," called him a "somber cretin" and a "pro-

Nazi recipient of a German medal." Lindbergh, Thompson said, was a would-be "American Fuehrer."

But Lindbergh also had his supporters. Among them were the majority of the American people and notables from across the political spectrum, such as Norman Thomas, John Foster Dulles, Herbert Hoover, and Robert R. McCormick, publisher of the *Chicago Tribune*. "We all knew you could fly straight," wrote Frank Lloyd Wright. "Now we know you can think straight." There were also Senators William Borah, Burton K. Wheeler, Gerald P. Nye, and Patrick McCarren.

Yet "Lindbergh found himself drawn to a group of young men," Berg wrote, some law students at Yale. Their leader, Bob Stuart, was the son of a vice president at Quaker Oats. He, along with future Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart, future Kennedy brother-in-law Sargent Shriver, and future congressman and President Gerald R. Ford, formed a group that advocated a non-interventionist platform for American military policy. The platform summarized Lindbergh's anti-war homilies: the United States can be secure only if she is "impregnable" to attack. The group,

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tee, with Lindbergh as chief spokesman, was unalterably opposed to war, and FDR knew they had to be stopped. His rhetoric to the contrary, FDR desperately wanted to plunge the country into war and America First stood in his way. It opposed FDR's Lend Lease program to arm Britain and the Soviet Union and threatened to detail FDR's plans.

And the committee was stopped when the Japanese Imperial Navy smashed the U.S. fleet at Pearl Harbor on December 7. Unknown at the time to either the public or the America Firsters was the large and compelling body of evidence that showed FDR knew the attack was coming, yet did not inform the American commanders at Pearl. He knew the attack would plunge the nation into war not only in the Pacific but also in Europe.* The America First Committee disbanded as the U.S. fleet lay smoking at Pearl.

After the Japanese attack, Lindbergh resolved to get in the fight and help his country, and sought reinstatement of his Army Commission, but FDR and his hit men derailed the attempt. The despicable Ickes wrote a memorandum to FDR about Lindbergh as notable for its stratospheric hyperbole as for its contemptible lies.

He is a ruthless and conscious fascist, motivated by a hatred of you personally and a contempt for democracy in general.... His actions have been coldly calculated with a view to attaining ultimate power for himself.... Hence it is important for him to have a military service record. [FDR must not bestow upon] this loyal friend of Hitler a precious opportunity on a golden platter. It would be ... a tragic disservice to American democracy to give one of its bitterest and most ruthless enemies a chance to gain a military record. I ardently hope that

* For more information about government foreknowledge of Pearl Harbor, see James Perloff's June 4, 2001 TNA article "Pearl Harbor: The Facts Behind the Fiction," available online at www.jbs.org/node/1106.

Tens of thousands of Americans filled Madison Square Garden to attend an America First rally. The huge gathering reflected the popular support noninterventionism enjoyed at the time.

this convinced fascist will not be given the opportunity to wear the uniform of the United States. He should be buried in merciful oblivion.

FDR replied that he agreed "wholeheartedly," and later said, "I'll clip that young man's wings."

But FDR didn't clip anything, least of all the Lone Eagle's wings. Lindbergh was ready to fight. The only way was working for defense contractors, and in so doing Lindbergh saved the lives of pilots by training them how to maneuver and save fuel. He also fought the Japanese.

Lindbergh Goes to War

Lindbergh's largely unknown war career began in 1942, when he brought his encyclopedic knowledge of aircraft and flying to bear on several problems facing not only military aircraft but also pilots. "He

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became a human guinea pig," Berg wrote, to show pilots they could train themselves to recognize hypoxia, or oxygen depletion, in high-altitude flights. Lindbergh nearly crashed a P-47 after he was overcome by hypoxia, and he proved his point in the laboratory. Lindbergh also helped develop the Navy-Marine Corsair and taught pilots how to fly it. At United Aircraft, which produced the Corsair, he "outguessed, outflowed and outshot" two of the Marine Corps' top fighter pilots in a mock dogfight. He was 41 years old.

Lindbergh then asked the Marines to go



After the Japanese attack, Lindbergh resolved to get in the fight and do all he could to aid the American war effort. The only way was working for defense contractors, and in so doing Lindbergh saved the lives of pilots by training them how to maneuver and save fuel.

to the Pacific to study airplanes to develop new models. As well, Berg wrote, “after two years of being sidelined he yearned to see action at the front.” Lindbergh saw plenty of it — *as a civilian!* Soon after arriving, he had flown “more than a dozen combat missions” against the Japanese. He next asked Col. Charles MacDonald, the commander of “Satan’s Angels,” for permission to fly their plane, the P-38. Derided by MacDonald’s deputy as “too old for this kind of stuff,” the next day, Lindbergh strafed a Japanese barge.

On July 28, 1944, Lindbergh struck again, this time in the air. On their way to strafe a Japanese target at a small island, Lindbergh encountered a Japanese fighter that was eluding two of the P-38s in his flight. “Lindbergh got his first sight of a Japanese plane in the air,” Berg wrote, “closing in head-on with their combined speed close to six hundred miles per hour.” The chances of colliding with the enemy on such a course are high. “Lindbergh fired for several seconds, seeing his machine gun tracer bullets and 20 mm. cannon shells pelt” the Japanese plane; “but a collision seemed unavoidable.” The planes passed each other within five feet, then the Japanese aircraft knifed toward the sea. Unsurprisingly, the news spread quickly at the airbase: “Lindbergh got a Jap.”

On Lindbergh’s heroism, Berg quotes MacDonald, who saved Lindbergh’s life by shooting down a Japanese Zero chasing the Lone Eagle: “Lindbergh was indefatigable. He flew more missions than was normally expected of a regular combat pilot. He dive-bombed enemy positions, sank barges and patrolled our landing forces on Noemfoor Island. He was shot at by almost every anti-aircraft gun the Nips had.” Lindbergh flew more than 25 combat missions. General Douglas MacArthur

asked him to teach pilots about fuel consumption and told him “he could do any kind of flying in any plane he wanted.”

During his work with P-38s, Lindbergh taught pilots how to preserve fuel. Before Lindbergh “got a Jap,” a maintenance crew chief, Berg wrote, noticed that Lindbergh always returned with more gas than the other pilots. “By raising manifold pressure and lowering revolutions per minute,” Lindbergh explained, “the engines would consume less gasoline, gallons that could be translated into time in the air and an increase in combat radius.” The young pilots didn’t believe it; they worried about damaging their engines. “These are military engines,” Lindbergh replied, “built to take punishments. So punish them.” It wasn’t long before Satan’s Angels, Berg wrote, “stretched their six-to-eight-hour missions to ten hours, al-

lowing them to surprise the Japanese with attacks deeper into their territory than they expected.” The new radius of the P-38 was 700 miles.

Knowing History

So a middle-aged man who was opposed to a war did more to win it than its unprincipled, duplicitous architects. This was likely lost on Frum, if he even knew it, when he lambasted today’s America First conservatives and implied they are traitors who “forfeit their rights to be Americans,” to paraphrase Ickes, because they are, Frum wrote, “thinking about defeat, and wishing for it, and they will take pleasure in it if it should happen.” Anti-war conservatives, Frum charged, hate their country. Understandably, they answered Frum with equal measure, not least because a recent immigrant had the gall to tell conservatives with ancestors who fought with Washington and Lee what it means to be an American. ■



Call of duty: Though Lindbergh opposed U.S. entry into WWII prior to Pearl Harbor, after the Japanese attack, he did what he could to support the war effort, including flying combat missions. He is shown here (right) at a South Sea base in 1944.