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THE FATHER OF THE LONE EAGLE

(By: Curtis Erickson)

This is a story of medals. It is also a story of the interlocking fortunes of two continents, of the dynasty but three generations old that joined the two continents, and of the peculiar nature of fate that causes it to place identical characteristics and virtues in three different men and yet sees fit to give contemporary honor and fame to two of them and calumny and discredit to the ^{one} considered by close observers of the family to be the greatest of his line.

It is the story of the Lindberghs -- August, Charles August, and Charles Augustus Junior. The first scorned fate, the second fought fate, and the third conquered it. But it is chiefly the story of the second, Charles August, he who fought fate and received no medals.

This story begins in Sweden, where the family had its genesis. But from the time August moved to Minnesota, the life of the dynasty reads curiously and provocatively like a history of the rank and file of that state from frontier days to days of post-war prosperity.

August, founder of the great Minnesota family, was born in Sweden of humble, sturdy peasant stock. Poorly schooled but well educated, he was endowed with those characteristics that have appeared with unbroken succession in the Lindbergh family ever since -- open mindedness, independence, sensitivity, and courage.

These traits plus his persuasive speaking ability and natural flare for leadership sent him, at the early age of 39, to represent the common

people of his country in the Rickstag of Sweden which office -- ^{new} (the highest award his country could offer him -- he held for twelve years until his departure for America. During all twelve of these years, because he fought against vested interests and vested institutions, he was branded as dangerously radical and a revolutionist.

The Scandinavians are frequently referred to as a remarkable people. When they believe in something, they will fight openly and forcefully for it. But they leave personalities alone. Thus, while radical August Lindbergh was politically hated by Swedish Tories, personally, he was well liked. And when he announced his intention to relinquish his high position and go to America -- a country strange and new to him and fraught with unknown dangers and hardships -- he was given as a parting gift the first of the Lindbergh medals by his political enemies who were his personal friends. The medal was of gold and it was inscribed with words expressing the esteem in which he was held by those he had spent twelve effective years of his life fighting.

So August Lindbergh came to America. It took a great courage to do this. He was no longer a young man. Fifty years of his life had been spent in Sweden and these years had brought him honor and distinction. His future was bright at home and it therefore wasn't necessary for him to leave to improve his condition. Charles the Fifteenth, King of Sweden, was his intimate and admiring friend. His place in his native land was pleasant and assured.

On the other hand, America was six long dreary weeks of sea voyage away and Minnesota was two months farther away than that. He would have to hew his home out of virgin wilderness. Hostile Indians, hating the white man for his robbing thieving habits, were constantly going on the warpath to murder and pillage thereby to vindicate themselves. All the honors and prestige that belonged to him as a member of the Swedish Rickstag would be

unknown in the new world. He, at the ripe age of fifty, would have to start as did other pioneers -- at scratch.

~~But~~ he never hesitated. His mind ~~was~~ made up, he departed on the long tedious journey. After three weary months, he arrived at the falls of St. Anthony and filled his oxen-driven prairie schooner with the necessities he would need homesteading. Here, also, he cut the last bond that tied him to the old country by trading his gold medal for a breaking plow.

The further adventures of August Lindbergh, the story of his literally cutting a home out of the forest, the cruel accident that deprived him of one of his arms, the Indian fighting period when for his family's sake he took gun against a people with whose cause he sympathized, all these would make a gripping, fascinating story in themselves. But this is primarily the story of the second of the Lindberghs, Charles August -- so-named after August's good friend, the King of Sweden -- and therefore these have no place in this account save as a preface and a background to the life of this second great Lindbergh, he whose destiny was as important to the destiny of America as was his father's to the destiny of Sweden.

On January 20, 1859, just before August and Louise sailed for the New World their son, Charles August, was born. He counted his age in months only when his family settled in Stearns county to pursue their hardy life. His early childhood and youth were typical of frontier childhoods. He, who was later to be called un-American and unpatriotic by his enemies, knew the smell of burning buildings and the sound of the blood-curdling war-whoop when redmen took the trail against white interlopers. He knew lean years when the wilderness would barely give forth enough food to last the season. As only frontier people can, he knew the meaning of Thanksgiving Day. Like Lincoln, he, too, did much of his reading by fire-light because kerosene was too precious to be wasted for ordinary purposes. All the privations and hardships known

to American pioneers from the Pilgrims on were his early environment.

His ^{home} was a mecca for Scandinavians newly arrived. It served as sort of a break for them between the new world and the old.

August Lindbergh's natural leadership ability played an early, and important part among the settlers before he had been in the state more than six years. There was no school, and he assembled the men of the neighborhood, told them they had better wait no longer to start one, and offered his granary for the purpose if they would help him remodel it to its new educational needs. It was in this half-log, half-frame building that Charles August had his first schooling.

It would be pleasant to say at this point that young Charles was the shining light of his class and showed an early precocity that was a key to his later career and ability. But to do so would be to disregard fact. The young Swede's teachers, frankly, despised of his future. His classmates, records tell, did find him a shining-light, however, and his early school career was not unlike that of an immortalized typical frontier youth of another section of the country-- Tom Sawyer. Deviltry, hooky, and pedant-applied whippings characterized this episode of his life. Characteristically, the whippings were unpleasant to him not so much because of the physical pain as because of the publicity they gave him.

It would be difficult to state baldly that young Charles disliked school and education. It perhaps would be nearer to the truth to say instead that he passionately loved nature and freedom and that school circumscribed these. Hence his impressive A.W.O.L. record.

However, while his early formal education threatened to send him forth into society as ignorant and uninformed, his home environment more than counteracted this threat. Both August and Louise were well-read. The elder Lindbergh,

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in fact, was a true scholar. Pettiness, personalities, and gossip found little place in family discussions. Instead, the problems of the world both contemporary and from times immemorial were discussed. And when the boy was not out in the woods hunting or trapping and drinking in his much-loved freedom, he was seeping in a culture such as very few homes can offer.

Then, as he grew into manhood without anyone's having had advance information about his plans for life, young Lindbergh announced that he was going to study law. He undoubtedly had been thinking the matter over for some time in his wanderings in the woods, and probably his innately altruistic nature was the prime motive which led him to choose a career that would enable him to do the most good for humanity. There was a preparatory school in the region of Sauk Center known as Coogan's Academy after the name of the Catholic priest who established the institution. Lindbergh worked his way through there by trapping and hunting. In the fall of 1881, he entered the Law School of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. Two years later he was graduated and after a year spent acquiring general experience, he hung up his shingle in Little Falls, Minnesota.

Typically and auspiciously, he turned down the first case that came his way because it was clear that justice was on the side of the other party. Nor was this the only case he turned down. This practice eventually turned out to be as good for his pocketbook as for his conscience. His reputation as an honest lawyer was clearly established, and from then on his business experienced quick and startling growth. His practice became the best in his part of the state. It became a local tradition that any case Charles Lindbergh took into court would be won because right was on his side. Not only did farmers and small business men employ him, but all the larger interests in his community also gave him their legal work. Both the Sauk Center banks had

him handle their cases.

As he emerged into a successful lawyer, he also emerged into a successful land-owner, and by the same means -- honesty. His holdings grew and his turnovers were always profitable. Nor did any one with whom he did business ever complain of being unjustly used. It was but a short time before the poor frontier boy was one of the most prosperous men in a rapidly prospering community. So, for twenty years, he accrued wealth and good will. By this time old August was dead. Louise was shortly to follow. And Charles August was married for the second time. Evangeline Land was his second wife and the mother of his only child by that marriage, Charles Augustus Lindbergh, Jr., who was later in life to be known as The Lone Eagle.

Then, as had been the case with his father back in Sweden, the good will he had accumulated throughout the years took expression in 1906 in a demand that he run for Congress. He was ready for the job all right, but unwilling to run. Even as had been the case with his father in the old country, it took pressure of all kinds to make him see that his duty lay in running for Congress. Duty was the only pressure that could make him run. A Congressman's salary was not equal to his profitable yearly income as realtor and lawyer, and his inborn modesty made him shy from seeking public office. But the call of duty, that was something different. No Lindbergh had ever refused this call, and Charles was not the man to break the precedent.

To some, this might sound like typical old-time, wheelhorse politician's lingo. But nothing was further from the truth in the case of Lindbergh, and it is necessary to delve a bit more deeply into the frontier tradition that had sunk into Charles August's conscience from his early youth on to understand his attitude.

In those days, politics on the frontier was an exciting thing. Never in the history of America has there been a more concrete and specific class-

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consciousness than was found among the farmers of the Northwest. The class-consciousness of the frontiersmen that swept Andrew Jackson into the presidency might compare with it, but certainly doesn't supercede it. To give expression to this class-consciousness, wave after wave of agrarian radicalism swept the Northwest. ¹¹or did the movers of these waves look upon themselves as radicals or revolutionists; rather did they consider themselves restorationists of the original American democracy and, consequently, in the light of history, true conservatives.

They figured it was their right and their inalienable duty to rescue themselves and their country from men they considered at slightly worse than plunderers and thieves and vandals and pirates---the monopolists and expropriators. They were against monopoly in general and specifically against monopoly of those products which were so vital to the welfare of the farmers of the Northwest: wood, coal, railroads, grain elevators, land, money, and thus, conversely for state ownership and control of these same. Jeffersonians of the Jackson variety, they were really puritans of democracy. Having built the frontier they logically and rightfully figured it was theirs to reap its profits. Marxism, which was sweeping Europe and making certain gains in Eastern United States at the time had not reached them in their faraway section of the world. They were conscious only of immediate evils and immediate reforms, in other words, of literal adherence to the principles of 1776. They figured any system of society which adhered to the constitution was good enough for the future.

These "radical" agrarian waves had taken political expression in the past through such groups as the Anti-Monopoly party of Ignatius Donnelly, the much derided Greenback movement, and the still active Populist party. But mostly had they taken expression through the capture, wherever possible, of pol-

itical prestige and power by way of the old political parties.

If ever a man was born to be the living expression of the spirit of agrarian class-consciousness and frontier revolt, that man was Charles August Lindbergh at the time he was asked he run for Congress. He had breathed this spirit into his being in his early years along with the fresh, clear air of the Northwest, and when he was told that his ability and his popularity plus his understanding of agrarianism were tantamount to a duty to run for Congress, he could not refuse. Later in life, his passionate Jacksonianism was to be tempered with a belief in industrial democracy as well, but at the time he was purely agrarian and the ideal man for the job. So he consented to having his name placed before the Sixth district in the Republican party's primaries. Winning of this primary was assurance of election.

His campaign was short, inexpensive, persuasive, and free from the taint of personalities which his opponent employed freely. He ran on his reputation primarily, and when the votes were counted, he emerged victor by a vote of sixteen thousand, seven hundred and sixty-two to thirteen thousand, one hundred and fifteen for his opponent.

Thence, the scene of his activities shifted from Little Falls to Washington D. C. where he was ultimately to emerge a figure of national prominence and speculation.

He went to Washington with well-defined ideas as to his task, and, on December 2, 1917, when the Sixtieth Congress gathered to usher in the new session, C. A. Lindbergh was there. With him was his five year old son young Charles Augustus, Jr.

Strangely enough, Lindbergh's first two votes as a Congressman were reactionary in the extreme. Along with a majority of the Minnesota delegation he voted for Jim Cannon for Speaker and for the adoption of the old procedure

rules. His newness to the job and his unfamiliarity with the congressional set-up may account for this.

Then for three whole months he sat without taking further active part in the doings of Congress. His period of silence ended March 4, 1908, when he made his maiden speech. In this the accumulated observations of the three months of silence made themselves felt. He criticised the procedure of law-making. He decried the waste of time, he belittled the concentration on extraneous and unimportant matters, and finally, he came to the kernel of his speech, a dissertation on the financial question, a masterful, scholarly treatise on the subject which interested him most. It embraced an uncompromising opposition to the existent monopoly of money and credit.

From that time on, his whole public career was a battle against camouflaged precedent and against what he termed "Invisible Government." The more he battled, the more powerful enemies he made. The more powerful enemies he made, the more unfavorable publicity he received. And, ironically, the more unfavorable publicity he received, the more friends he made among the common people. It was but a short time before he became a national figure. As one Minneapolis editor said of him in 1909, "From practically an isolated and unknown member to one of the most prominent in Congress, is the record of Hon. Charles A. Lindbergh."

"Invisible Government" to which he referred, was government by monopoly control. Specifically, it was control of the government and of human destinies by the money monopoly. He state his case succinctly when he said:

"Most men are in a condition of poverty now. Also, we absolutely know that the trusts, as a result of the centralizing of the control of the industrial agencies and material resources, operated in connection with their juggling of credits and money, have made us dependent upon the trusts for employment.

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This is the industrial slavery that the capitalist interests prefer to chattel slavery.

"Knowing these facts, will the people continue to remain in such a state of bondage? Certainly not! The trusts have taught us the principle of combination. If it is good and profitable for the trusts, it is good and profitable for the people. It would be better to have one great trust created by all of the people for their common benefit than to have our actions controlled by several trusts operated for the individual benefit of a few persons."

Thus his philosophy. It might be described as agrarian socialism. Or maybe the term devolved by the Farmer-Laborites in their 1934 campaign would be better: Cooperative Commonwealth. But whatever it is called, suffice it to say that it was about this philosophy that a tremendous mass movement, dramatized around the personality of Charles August Lindbergh, was beginning to form in Minnesota.

Farmers, small business men, independent bankers, and laborers back in his home state were hanging onto his every word. Public opinion was forming and crystalizing around his idea. The people of Minnesota looked to him for leadership. And, looking to him for their inspiration, other leaders, preaching the same message and striving for the same goal, were arising, including such men as A. C. Townley, Magnus Johnson, Dr. Hendrik Shipstead, and, in an indirect way, Earnest Lundeen, Floyd Olson, and Elmer Benson.

So firmly behind him was his constituency that everytime he stood for re-election, he was returned by overwhelming majorities -- This despite the fact that hundreds and thousands of dollars were spent by moneyed interests to bring about his defeat. An old guard political opponent of his, when asked to explain the reason for Lindbergh's continued reelection despite the Herculean efforts to defeat him, facetiously replied, "So much money is poured into his district every election year to defeat him that it keeps the district

prosperous and the people like it that way."

If events had been permitted to take a natural course, no one knows how far Lindbergh and the increasingly large group about him may have gone in their efforts towards reform. However, across the Atlantic ocean ominous events were taking place. An Austrian Archduke and his wife had been assassinated at Sarajevo by a frenzied and patriotic Serb named Princip and the nations of Europe were engaged in a titanic struggle that threatened to envelope the United States. Americans, thanks to the terrific bombardment of propaganda from the Old World, were taking sides. Certain Americans were deciding it would be profitable for their nation to take part in that struggle. And Lindbergh's attention was distracted by his new battle to keep us from entering the European melee. Consistently, he fitted the institution of war into the camp of his constant enemy, the Invisible Government.

As he had against the money trust, he now fought specifically against our entry into the war. In speech after speech he attempted to lay the blame for war at the feet of capitalism. "Special privilege," he said, "was born in militarism, maintains itself by militarism, now has its support in militarism, and under the guise of preparedness seeks to perpetuate its power. The first step to permanent preparedness to oust special privilege." Thus, he fought against our participating in the European calamity. To him preparedness for America meant first to do away with the cause of war. And the cause of war he had already outlined in two little books, "Banking & Currency," and "Invisible Government and the Consequences of It."

His enemies naturally seized upon the advantage he gave them in a war hysterical nation. He had anticipated what would happen to him as a consequence of his courageous stand, however, when he said, "The man who 'stands by his country' today is tagged by the war jingoes as pro-German, but that does not make him so. The man who reasons and exercises good sense today may be hung

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in effigy tomorrow by the jingoes."

Meantime the movement he had inspired back in Minnesota was growing in momentum. A. C. Townley, a former Minnesota school teacher who had gone into North Dakota and organized the farmers there into the radical Nonpartisan League ^{for the purpose} to seize control of the Republican party, had succeeded completely and had returned to Minnesota to do the same in his native state. Farmers by the thousands were flocking to the Farmers' Nonpartisan League and complementary organizations. The Working Peoples' Nonpartisan League, was being formed by the laborers and common people of the larger cities. These two groups were working together to capture the Republican party through the primaries. Lindbergh was the man they wanted to head their state ticket.

The idea of running for Governor or United States Senator appealed to him. The honor wasn't as important to him as was the fact that, because of the war, the situation had changed and it was necessary for him to apply his talents on a larger scale. As Governor or Senator, his influence would be more widely felt. He was sure of being reelected to Congress from the Sixth district if he cared to run. He wasn't so sure that he would be able to win running throughout the state where his personal reputation wasn't as well known and where the growing hostility of the powerful interests were having a greater effect than they were where he was known personally.

However, he was not afraid to run and announced that he would go after the Senatorship. The reason he turned down the Governorship was because J. A. A. Burnquist, candidate for the office, had announced that he would fight for and support the progressive policies advocated by the Nonpartisan Leagues and by Lindbergh's other followers. Because Lindbergh did not wish to split the progressive vote, he left the field clear for Burnquist and filed for Senator in the Republican primaries.

After a spirited campaign he was defeated by Frank B. Kellogg, who has

since won fame as author of the Kellogg Peace Pact and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. While this was a great disappointment to him, he wasn't entirely dissatisfied. His retirement gave him a chance to look after his own personal affairs and to finish his book, "Why Is Your Country at War, and What Happens to You After the War, and Related Subjects," which ~~book~~ came out in July 1917.

For by now the United States had plunged into the European fray and Lindbergh was anxious to continue his battle against the money trusts and to make the war what it was pledged to be -- a war for democracy.

He was cynical about being able to do this, however, and almost prophetic. "There isn't any such thing," he said to a couple of his friends, "as a war for democracy. And all real democrats will suffer just as deeply and mortally as the boys in the trenches. The movement toward good government will be set back more than we have advanced in a generation. I'll probably go down. You are younger and may live to see a recovery from this shell-shock to civilization."

"But," objected an enthusiastic young acquaintance, "this war is bound to promote progressivism. The government will be forced to take over, or at least control, utilities and monopolies. It will be a demonstration from which we will never recede."

"That sounds logical," replied the Congressman, "but it won't work out. Warborn things never do. Instead of more democracy, either politically or industrially, there will be less. Dictators will spring up, perhaps even here."

And, beholding his own cross, he remarked, "Going over the top isn't half as bad as being under the bottom of a war mania."

While he had fought to the last ditch against our entering the war, once the United States had made its official declaration, he was loyal to the government. He wrote to both Governor Burnquist and President Wilson offering his services. Wilson was glad of this and took advantage of this offer.

But professional patriots and political enemies would not have this so. Reactionaries and Tories were fighting with their backs to the wall in Minnesota to continue the control they had had over state government for so long and were anxious to have their enemy Lindbergh discredited. They forced his resignation from his government position.

Lindbergh learned more about being at the bottom of the war mania when, with the war in full vent, he campaigned as the Nonpartisan League candidate for governor in the Republican primaries of 1918. With his son, Charles Jr., acting as chauffeur, he toured the state from one end to the other pleading passionately for state ownership of monopolies and decrying the bespoiling of the state's timber, iron, and other resources by big interests. His message also took care to explain the fundamental causes of the war and told how future wars could be avoided.

At the same time the Committee of Public Safety sponsored by Governor Burnquist, who no longer had the support of the progressives, was in full control of Minnesota and a state of affairs not unlike the present state of affairs in Germany under Hitler and Italy under Mussolini prevailed. In addition to carrying out the measures necessary to pursuance of the war, this committee was definitely partisan in that it acted as a strike-breaker and used its powers in behalf of reaction and in fighting the Nonpartisan League.

Frenzied mobs greeted Lindbergh wherever he went. He and his followers were accused of disloyalty and pro-Germanism and were threatened. Floggings and tarring-and-featherings were not uncommon, and more than once members of Lindbergh's party were manhandled and beaten up. Lindbergh himself was threatened with lynching. This did not stop him. From iron mine to city and from timber belt to farm, he carried his message. In the face of the most hostile of mobs he never flinched. He was denied use of halls in many villages and towns. So he spoke in the open fields. He was refused admission to certain counties,

so he conducted meetings on the other side of the county lines. The Catholic Church hierarchy fought him due, presumably, to an earlier misunderstanding. But outstanding Catholic laymen throughout the state took the stump in his behalf.

It was exciting, uphill battle - Red Wing hung him in effigy. The Right Reverend Bishop Busch of St. Cloud begged "the good sisters of St. Benedict's Academy and all women to throw their whole soul into the prayer, 'Lindbergh shall not be Governor.' The people were told that a victory for Lindbergh, the pacifist, was a victory for the militaristic Kaiser of Germany. Every conceivable prejudice was appealed to defeat Lindbergh. All he had with which to fight these appeals was his own voice. Newspapers were hostile. Radio was still in its embryonic state. Yet, in the face of all this Lindbergh fought courageously on.

When the votes were tabulated in June, he received 150,000 votes and lost to Burnquist by 50,000. This was hailed as a great victory for "loyalty."

This was Lindbergh's last great campaign. He engaged in one or two others before his death seven years later, but they were unimportant. His victory was already won and lay in the fact that his ideas were no longer the burden of one man alone to bear; they were now the property and mission of a powerful Farmer-Labor party which was, in reality, his brain-child. So when he died, it was only his body that disappeared from earth. His ideas still live, even though he was never rewarded with medals for his efforts in behalf of man.

Not long after his death, his son, third of the Lindbergh dynasty, flew an airplane single-handedly from New York, which he left May 20, 1927, to Paris - an unprecedented flight. The whole world went wild. Overnight the name Lindbergh became the most famous name in the world. Medals galore from practically every government under the sun were awarded him.

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He was the envied friend of royalty and millionaires. Never in the history of man has any hero been so recognized and so rewarded in his own lifetime. Because every one was interested in the name of Lindbergh, many libraries removed from their shelves the three slim anti-capitalist works written by the father and containing the Congressman's radical ideas. Those who hailed the heroism of the young Lindbergh were anxious that the father be forgotten.

Yet the Lone Eagle had nothing that his father didn't have. Those same qualities of character that brought honor -- and medals -- to the former brought near-disaster to the latter. The only difference was that the son chose the non-controversial and less dangerous feat of aviation and of daring the elements while the father engaged in the titanic task of statesmanship in behalf of the common man and daring the wrath of powerful men.

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