

☆☆ Hollywood Remembered ☆☆

The Dark Secrets of Charles A. Lindbergh — By Darwin Porter

The other night I watched the Billy Wilder film, *The Spirit of St. Louis*, which I had not seen since I was in college. It starred the lovable James Stewart as the celebrated aviator, Charles A. Lindbergh, who entered the history books in 1927 when he flew his single-engine airplane, *The Spirit of St. Louis*, nonstop from New York's Long Island to Le Bourget in Paris. His achievement stunned the world, as thousands in Paris turned out to greet this genuine hero.

He made very different headlines once again in 1932, when the world learned that his infant baby, Charles A. Lindbergh, Jr., had been kidnapped from the family's home in New Jersey, during a caper that was referred to in the press as "The Crime of the Century." The world mourned with Charles and his wife, Anne Morrow, when their beloved boy was found dead. Eventually, in 1936, an unemployed carpenter, Bruno Hauptmann, was arrested, tried, convicted, and electrocuted for the crime.

At that point, Lindbergh was viewed as one of the most sympathetic figures in America, but his story hardly ended there.

Between 1936 and 1938, he made several trips to Nazi Germany, where he was warmly received at the invitation of the Luftwaffe's Hermann Göring. During one of them, Lindbergh referred to the Luftwaffe as "the greatest air force on earth" and asserted that "Hitler is a great man who has done much for the German race." He shocked Americans by saying "I have discovered in Germany a sense of decency and values far ahead of our own."

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He also delivered an anti-Semitic attack, accusing the American Jew of "being the chief agitator in urging the United States into a European war." Then, Göring awarded him the Commander Cross of the German Eagle.

Back in America as late as 1940, Lindbergh was the chief spokesman for the America First Committee, urging the country to stay out of the war. Of course, after the attack on Pearl Harbor, that argument faded into history. FDR denounced the aviator as a "defeatist and appeaser," which prompted Lindbergh to resign his commission in the U.S. Army Air Corps.

He redeemed himself in 1944 in the Pacific when, as a civilian, he flew 50 bomber raids on Japanese-held posts. He won the praise of General Douglas MacArthur.

Lindbergh's fascination with Germany, however, continued during the post-war years. One night at a dinner party in Munich, when I was researching a Frommer travel guide, I met Rudolf Schroeck, who revealed to me a shocking secret. He was working on a book called *The Double Life of Charles A. Lindbergh*. He made the stunning revelation that Lindbergh was the head



Charles A. Lindbergh

of, and maintained, three separate families in Germany in addition to his wife, Anne Morrow Lindbergh, and their five children—Jon, Land Morrow, Anne Spencer, Scott, and Reeve—in America.

The aviator visited his three German mistresses and their children between five and seven times a year from 1957 until he died in 1974. Two of his mistresses were sisters, Brigitte and Marietta Hesshaimer, who lived in a small Bavarian town of Geretsreid, south of Munich.

With Brigitte, he fathered three children: Dyrk (born 1958), Astrid (1960), and David (1967). The children did not know he was a famous aviator, since he used the alias of "Careau Kent." Lindbergh was also the father of Marietta's two sons—Vago (born 1960), and Christophe (1966). None of his offspring knew that their father was an international aviation hero until Astrid read a feature story in a German magazine about his exploits.

An East Prussian aristocrat, known only as "Valeska," had introduced the Hesshaimer sisters to Lindbergh. "Valeska" had functioned as Lindbergh's private secretary in Europe. With him, she had a son in 1959 and a daughter in 1961. At one time, all three mistresses had lived together in the same apartment in Rome until they discovered that he was involved with each of them. On his death bed in August of 1974, Lindbergh begged those closest to him not to reveal the secret of his four "wives," only one of whom, of course, was legitimate.

Reeve, the younger daughter of the American branch of the Lindbergh family, finally discovered the truth about her hero father's secret German families. Her shock and horror has appeared in a memoir called *Forward From Here, Leaving Middle Age and Other Unexpected Adventures*.

In reading over Lindbergh's secret file, J. Edgar Hoover, shortly before his own death in 1972, scribbled: "He called himself a Lutheran but with all those wives, he should have been a Mormon."

Perhaps one day, Hollywood will make a true biopic about this amazing man and how he managed to fall in love with four different women and have children he deeply cared for with all of them.

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