

NOTORIOUS MURDERS > MOST FAMOUS

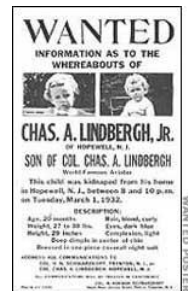
The Lindbergh Kidnapping

By Russell Aiuto

The Crime

On a cold rainy night, March 1, 1932, in the remote rural area near Hopewell, New Jersey, Charles A. Lindbergh, Jr., twenty months old, was kidnapped. Sometime between 8:00 p.m., when his nurse, Betty Gow, checked on the sleeping baby, and 10:00 p.m., when she once again checked on him before retiring for the night, "The Eaglet" (as the newspapers called him) had been removed from his crib.

The only remembered event that indicated that something had gone amiss was earlier, about 9:00 p.m., while the Lindberghs were sitting in the living room. Col. Lindbergh had heard a noise that sounded as if an orange crate had fallen off a chair in the kitchen.



Wanted poster

At 10:25 p.m., Ollie Whately, the Lindbergh caretaker, called the Hopewell Police, and shortly thereafter Col. Lindbergh called the New Jersey State Police. In the cold dark, Lindbergh hunted for signs of the kidnapper, carrying his Springfield rifle. He could see nothing. A number of State Police officers were on the scene, when around midnight their chief, H. Norman Schwarzkopf, arrived to take command.



ARCHIVE PHOTO
Schwarzkopf and Lindbergh

The first of the state police to arrive investigated the outside area. They found footprints in the wet ground below the window, but neglected either to measure them or to make plaster casts of them. There were two deep impressions, presumably made by a ladder. Also, a carpenter's chisel was found near the ladder impressions. Less than a hundred yards away, the ladder, in three sections, was discovered, the bottom section—the widest—was broken. Near a small dirt road, there were tire tracks.

By this time, Lindbergh's lawyer and friend, Henry C. Breckinridge, had arrived. The three colonels (Lindbergh, Breckinridge, and Schwarzkopf) went into the nursery with other officers and Cpl. Frank Kelly, the crime scene and fingerprint man.



POLICE
Ladder at the nursery window



POLICE FILE PHOTO
The nursery

The Ransom Note

On the windowsill was an envelope, spotted earlier by Lindbergh. It was dusted for fingerprints, as were other areas in the room. Officer Schoeffel slit the envelope open with his penknife. He removed a single sheet of folded paper. It had been written with blue ink. The note was handed to Lindbergh. It read:

Dear Sir!

Have 50000\$ redy with 2500\$ in 20\$ bills 1500\$ in 10\$ bills and 1000\$ in 5\$ bills. After 2-4 days we will inform you were to deliver the Mony.

We warn you for making anyding public or for notify the polise the child is in gute care.

Indication for all letters are singnature and 3 holes.

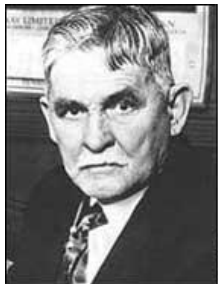


The ransom note

At the bottom right-hand corner of the sheet of paper was a drawing of two interlocking circles, each about an inch in diameter. The area where the circles intersected had been colored red. Three small holes had been punched into the design. Kelly found only a single unidentifiable smudge on the envelope, nothing on the sheet of paper.

Lindbergh took charge. He and Breckinridge decided that the best way of obtaining the return of the baby was to do whatever the kidnapers asked. Schwarzkopf, in awe of Lindbergh, had no choice, even though he pointed out that Lindbergh legally could not offer immunity to the criminals.

On March 4, a second ransom letter was received. It scolded Lindbergh for involving the police, and upped the ransom demand to \$70,000. The same symbol of interlocking circles was at the bottom of the note. Thinking that this note might have been intercepted by the police, a third letter was sent the next day to Breckinridge's office, to be delivered to Lindbergh. It essentially repeated the information contained in the March 4th letter.



John Condon

One week after the child was kidnapped, John F. Condon offered his services as go-between.

The kidnapers accepted his offer, Lindbergh accepted his offer, and negotiations were authorized. Condon placed an ad, as instructed, in the New York American, notifying the kidnapers that the money was ready. He concocted a code name based on his initials — "Jafsie," a condensation of J.F.C. On March 12, Condon received written instructions, delivered by a cab driver. Despite not having the money, Condon set off to meet with a kidnapper in Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx. The kidnapper had a Germanic accent and asked for the money. Condon told him that he didn't have it, and that he couldn't deliver it until he had seen the baby. The man, who told Condon that his name was John and that he was Scandinavian, said that he could not let Condon see the baby — "Number One will be mad" — but that he would send Condon a "token," the baby's sleeping suit, by Monday morning.

After Condon's initial meeting with "Cemetery John" in Woodlawn Cemetery, the child's sleeping suit was mailed to Condon, as John had promised. After an additional exchange of advertisements by Condon and letters from John, a rendezvous for paying the ransom was arranged. Two packages of bills were made, both containing gold certificates, that is, currency that was still based on the gold standard. The bills were not marked but the serial numbers had been recorded.

On the night of April 2, 1932, one day and one month since the Eaglet had been taken, Lindbergh drove Condon to the appointed spot. Condon saw a figure. After a discussion about the whereabouts of the baby, Condon returned to the car to get the money. He had convinced John that there was only \$50,000, and took only the box back to the kidnapper. He gave the box to John, who gave him a note, telling Condon that it should not be opened for six hours. The baby was all right, he told Condon, and was being safely kept on a boat called Nelly. John disappeared into the cemetery, and Condon returned to the car and Lindbergh. They drove away.

About a mile from the cemetery, Condon convinced Lindbergh that it would be all right to open the note. It gave the following instructions:

The boy is on the Boad Nelly. It is a small boad 28 feet long. Two persons are on the boad. The are innosent. you will find the Boad between Horseneck Beach and gay Head near Elizabeth Island.

The baby was not found here. Discovery of the body came later

Investigation

Because Lindbergh and Breckinridge had restrained Schwarzkopf and the other investigative agencies during the attempt to retrieve the child, little had been accomplished in over two months. With the discovery of the child's body on May 12, a mere four miles from the Lindbergh estate, the restraints were gone. The problem was that there was very little to go on.

The physical evidence available, at the time that William Allen stumbled into the woods to relieve himself and found the body, consisted of a chisel, the ladder, and a number of notes from the kidnapers. No useful footprints, no fingerprints.

The autopsy of Charles A. Lindbergh, Jr. was to be carried out by the county physician, Dr. Charles H. Mitchell. Basically, the autopsy provided no clues, except sufficient information in the remains of the baby's clothes, the number of teeth, and his uniquely crossed little toes. There was no question that the corpse had been in the woods for several months, making the time of death very probably around the time of the kidnapping.

Eventually, the ladder became a crucial item of evidence. Schwarzkopf enlisted the aid of wood experts, the most enterprising of whom was Arthur Koehler. From slivers sent to him, he was able to determine that the ladder was constructed from pine from North Carolina, Douglas fir from the West, birch, and Ponderosa pine. Remarkably, Koehler was able to trace some of the ladder lumber from a mill in South Carolina to a lumber dealer in the Bronx. The ladder was both crudely and professionally constructed. Some of the joints and connections showed the work of a carpenter, while the pieces of wood that made up the ladder seemed to have been gathered from a variety of sources.

The Ransom Bills Appear

The first gold notes from the ransom money surfaced shortly after the delivery of the ransom on April 2, 1932. From time to time, ransom bills turned up on a slow but regular basis. Finally, on September 15, 1934, a gas station manager, Walter Lyle, had written the license plate number on a ten-dollar gold certificate used to buy 98 cents worth of gas. The license plate was for a blue, 1930, four-door Dodge whose owner lived at 1279 East 222nd Street, the Bronx. The registration also indicated that the owner was German-born, thirty-five, and a carpenter. His name was Richard Hauptmann.

The police staked out his apartment and Hauptmann was arrested as he drove away. Lieutenant Keaton examined Hauptmann's billfold and found a neatly folded twenty-dollar gold note. It was a Lindbergh bill. Returning to the Hauptmann apartment, the police noticed that he glanced again and again towards the garage that his landlord had allowed him to build. He was asked if that was where he had hidden the ransom money. He said, "I have no money." Later, the garage was dismantled, board by board, and over \$14,000 of the ransom money was found hidden between the wall joists.

Later, Insp. Lewis J. Bornmann of the New Jersey State Police discovered a missing rafter in Hauptmann's attic that corresponded to one of the uprights of the kidnap ladder. Koehler confirmed that the missing length of lumber matched, even to nail holes, the bottom section.

Hauptmann was asked to provide samples of his handwriting.



Richard Hauptmann

During this period, Lindbergh, in disguise, listened as Hauptmann repeated the words of "Cemetery John." Over two years after he had first heard the voice in the cemetery say, "Hey, Doctor," Lindbergh identified Hauptmann's voice as the one he had heard.

After being indicted for extortion in New York —a device to hold Hauptmann in custody —Hauptmann went before the grand jury in New Jersey, so that he could be indicted and then extradited. At the grand jury proceedings, Lindbergh testified to the voice. Attorney General David Wilentz, representing New Jersey, brought a number of police witnesses, as well as Osborn, the handwriting expert. An extradition hearing was then held in New York. Wilentz called many of the same witnesses, including a neighbor of Lindbergh, Millard Whited, who testified that he had seen Hauptmann near the Lindbergh estate a few days before the kidnapping. Judge Hammer, presiding in the extradition hearing, ruled that Hauptmann would be extradited to New Jersey, specifically to the Hunterdon County seat, Flemington, New Jersey, where he would be tried for the kidnapping and murder of Charles A. Lindbergh, Jr.

The Trial

The trial, was indeed a circus, with hundreds of reporters and spectators swelling the small town to several times its population.

After twenty-nine court sessions, 162 witnesses, and 381 exhibits, the case was given to the jury at 11:21 a.m., Wednesday, February 13, 1935.

Eleven and a half hours later the jurors returned, reportedly after five ballots that began seven for guilty, five for acquittal, finally ending with a unanimous vote of guilty.



→The above article is a compilation of sections taken from a full length article about the case at:
http://www.trutv.com/library/crime/notorious_murders/famous/lindbergh/index_1.html