

## ***Atlantic Fever – Lindbergh, His Competitors, and the Race to Cross the Atlantic***

***By Joe Jackson***

All of us who love airplanes have our own fantasies concerning aircraft and journeys. Some of them are possible, some not. For myself, I will never land or take off on an aircraft carrier. I will never fly a C-130 on skis (or in any other configuration), and will probably never fly a single-engine propeller-driven aircraft across the Atlantic Ocean. But that does not keep me from reading about others who have done so.

Over the years I have read just about everything that Charles Lindbergh wrote, and an awful lot that was written about him. But when I picked up *“Atlantic Fever – Lindbergh, His Competitors, and the Race to Cross the Atlantic”*, by Joe Jackson, I realized that I really did not know much about other pilots with their eyes on the prize.

And it was a magnificent prize, and there was a lot of interest in winning. First, some details about the prize. In 1919, Raymond Orteig, an expatriate French hotelier, put up a prize of \$25,000 for the first person to fly between Paris and New York, within the following five years. Although the rules were well-understood at the time, they have become fuzzy for many of us over the years. First, the prize was not for the first person or crew to cross the Atlantic. That trip had been accomplished in 1919 by a team led by U.S. Navy Lt-Commander Albert Read. It took eleven days and for stops, but they did it.

And it was not for the first non-stop flight across the Atlantic. That was also accomplished in 1919 by Capt John Alcock and Lt. Arthur Brown when they flew from Newfoundland to Ireland.

No, it was specifically for a non-stop trip between Paris and New York, flying in either direction. But the prize was not awarded within the five year period stipulated, and so was re-offered in 1924 with no time limit. And even at that, there were no serious attempts for the next three years.

And it was not to be awarded for the first pilot to make the flight solo. In fact, common wisdom at the time was that the flight could not be accomplished solo, but needed a crew of two to four.

Joe Jackson has woven a magnificent story. Sure, we know how it ends. But the side stories of famous names in aviation are what catch our interest. There is Richard Byrd, the man who first flew across the North Pole. (Or did he?)

There is Giuseppe Bellanca, who put his money and his designs into the ring. (For a touch of history, there are still a lot of fine Bellanca airplanes in the air. Find one and enjoy.)

And other aviator names that were common knowledge after the Great

War and through the 1920's but which have faded from our memory: the Frenchman, Rene Fonck, the Allies' "Ace of Aces" during the recent air war over Europe; the Italian, Cmdr. Francesco de Penedo who had flown all over Europe, South America, and the Orient; the American test pilot Clarence Chamberlin; and a score of others.

And where did the money come from to finance the aircraft, the fuel, the parts the living expenses of the pilots and mechanics? We find people like John Rockefeller with his oil money,

Edsel Ford with his cars, and Rodman Wanamaker with his department stores in all of the world's major cities.

And then there is the background of the United States and the world at large. The story is spread across the 1920's, a time when anything was possible (except legal drinking in the U.S.) and the new national press and newsreels created overnight heroes.

Joe Jackson has spun a fascinating story, worthy of your time.