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Young Adult Nonfiction

Three Across: The Great Transatlantic Air Race of 1927
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It is 1927. Three rudimentary airplanes and their pilots wait at Roosevelt Field on Long Island, vying to become the first to complete a nonstop transatlantic flight to Paris. To the winner comes immortal glory and a purse of $25,000. The cost of failure is likely death in the unforgiving Atlantic.

All three planes are powered by the Wright brothers' fabulous new Whirlwind engine, but otherwise they are as different as their pilots. The odds-on favorite is the *Columbia*, with renowned test pilot Clarence Chamberlin at its controls and its owner Charles Levine as co-pilot. Famed Arctic explorer Richard E. Byrd captains the largest of the planes, the *America*, and its three-man crew.

The final aviator is the little known Charles A. "Slim" Lindbergh and his *Spirit of St. Louis*. He is given poor odds against the much better known pilots, and his plan of completing the flight solo, without sleep for more than thirty hours, borders on recklessness. He also seems to be an unlikely candidate for the incredible fame the completion of a successful flight will bring. Though he is handsome and photogenic, the young man is soft-spoken and shy, unlike the flamboyant Levine or unflappable Byrd.

Yet, of course, it is Lindbergh who first seizes the opportunity afforded by a break in the weather and takes to the skies in the early morning of May 20, 1927, and it is “Lucky” Lindbergh who manages to be the first to land in Paris. Much has been written over the ensuing eighty years about the aviator who became the most famous man in the world with his courageous flight, yet almost lost to the dry dust of history are the exploits of the other two planes and their crew. With this fascinating tale of the events surrounding all three of the historic flights, the author reminds a modern audience, now accustomed to the routine safety of transatlantic jets, of the incredible derring-do of these men and the worldwide acclaim they achieved.

Writing in a brisk yet wonderfully descriptive style, the author has crafted this book for young readers and adults alike to enjoy. For example, he recounts the alarming moment when the exhausted pilot of the *Columbia* was startled awake a few minutes after turning over the controls to an inexperienced Levine: ZOOT “Something was dramatically wrong. The *Columbia* was spiraling toward the ground at high speed.” Levine had stalled out the engine trying to climb above the clouds. In what seemed like a lifetime Chamberlin managed to gently coax the *Columbia* out of a three-mile death spiral and leveled the plane off at 4,000 feet. He was emotionally drained by the frightening experience. The fearless Levine thought it all good fun: like being on a “bucking bronco.”

The author has written sixteen nonfiction books for young readers. He has won the National Jewish Book Award twice, and his biography of Edward R. Murrow, *With Heroic Truth* , won the Golden Kite Honor Award for Nonfiction.

This superb book will appeal to readers of all ages who love adventure tales, and particularly to those who have an interest in early aviation.

Alan J. Couture