

# The Lindbergh Kidnapping

The Bruno Hauptman Trial

# Part I

## The Kidnapping

# The Crime of the Century - March 1932

- Someone had dared to kidnap and kill the infant son of the man then regarded as the world's greatest hero.
- Charles A. Lindbergh, who had flown the first solo flight across the Atlantic Ocean in 1927.
- And his bride, millionaire heiress Anne Morrow.
- Lindberghs' son, Charles Jr., was then 20 months old.

# The Lindberghs



# Charles Lindbergh, Jr.



# The Kidnapping – March 1, 1932

- About 7:00 p.m., the baby had been put to bed.
- His nanny went to check on the baby a little before 10:00 p.m.
- Discovered he was not in his bed.
- She told Mrs. Lindbergh.
- They suspected that Mr. Lindbergh had taken the child as a practical joke.

# Realization

- Lindbergh grew alarmed and insisted it was no joke.
- "Anne, they have stolen our baby."
- A letter was discovered.
- Police called at 10:25 p.m.
- Lindbergh searched the grounds.
- He found a homemade ladder below the nursery window

# The Investigation

- First on the scene the Hopewell police chief.
- He was soon joined by New Jersey State Police officers.
- Home and grounds were searched.
- No evidence was found.
- After midnight, a fingerprint expert arrived.
- He examined the letter and the ladder.



# Initial Evidence

- The ladder had 500 partial fingerprints, most were unusable.
- The note was opened and read.
- Handwritten ransom note was riddled with spelling errors and grammatical irregularities

# The Ransom Note

- Dear Sir! Have 50,000\$ redy 25,000\$ in 20\$ bills 15,000\$ in 10\$ bills and 10,000\$ in 5\$ bills. After 2-4 days we will inform you were to deliver the money. We warn you for making anyding public or for notify the Police. The child is in gut care. Indication for all letters are singnature and 3 holes.
- There were two interconnected circles (colored red and blue) below the message, with one hole punched through the red circle, and 2 other holes punched outside the circles.

# WANTED

INFORMATION AS TO THE  
WHEREABOUTS OF



## CHAS. A. LINDBERGH, JR.

OF HOPEWELL, N. J.

### SON OF COL. CHAS. A. LINDBERGH

World-Famous Aviator

This child was kidnaped from his home  
in Hopewell, N. J., between 8 and 10 p. m.  
on Tuesday, March 1, 1932.

#### DESCRIPTION:

Age, 20 months	Hair, blond, curly
Weight, 27 to 30 lbs.	Eyes, dark blue
Height, 29 inches	Complexion, light
Deep dimple in center of chin	
Dressed in one-piece coverall night suit	

#### ADDRESS ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO

COL. H. N. SCHWARZKOPF, TRENTON, N. J., or  
COL. CHAS. A. LINDBERGH, HOPEWELL, N. J.

ALL COMMUNICATIONS WILL BE TREATED IN CONFIDENCE

March 11, 1932

COL. H. NORMAN SCHWARZKOPF  
Supt. New Jersey State Police, Trenton, N. J.

# Early Players

- Three military colonels offered their aid:
  - ✓ Norman Schwarzkopf - superintendent of the New Jersey State Police.
  - ✓ Henry Breckinridge, a Wall Street lawyer.
  - ✓ William Donovan, WWI hero and later head of the OSS
- Only Schwarzkopf had law enforcement experience.
- He became the Chief Investigator

# Early Assumptions & Actions

- Kidnapping was perpetrated by organized crime figures.
- Letter seemed written by someone who spoke German as his native language.
- Intermediaries with mob connections were brought in..
- Several organized crime figures offered help.
- Al Capone spoke from prison offering to help.

# Not a Federal Crime – But:

- President Herbert Hoover declared that he would “move Heaven and Earth” to recover the child.
- The Bureau of Investigation (not yet called the FBI) was authorized to investigate the case.
- The Coast Guard, Customs Service, Immigration Service and D.C. police were alerted.
- Lindbergh family offered a \$50,000 reward and the state of New Jersey offered another \$25,000.
- \$75,000 was an enormous sum in the midst of the depression.

# A Second Ransom Letter

- A few days after the kidnapping a new ransom letter arrived in the mail.
- The letter was postmarked in Brooklyn and was genuine, carrying the red and blue marks.
- Lindbergh asked the mob intermediary to pass the letter on to his mob contacts.
- The note ended up in the New York Daily News where it was photographed and distributed.
- Any new ransom note would automatically be suspect.

# Dissent in the Ranks

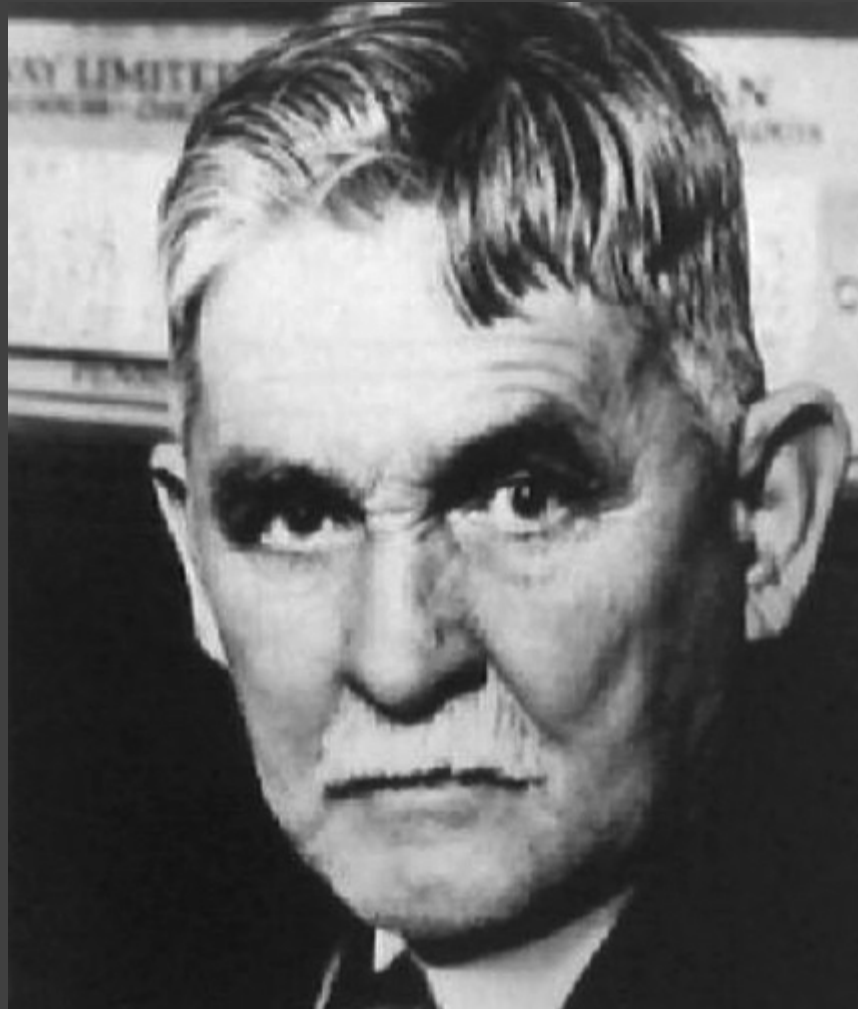
- Another letter arrives postmarked in Brooklyn.
- Ed Mulrooney, Commissioner of the NY Police Dept. came up with a plan to surveil potential mailboxes.
- Mulrooney was willing to organize a police raid to rescue the baby.
- Lindbergh strongly disapproved of the plan. He feared for his son's life.
- He threatened to use his considerable influence to ruin the Mulrooney's career, and Mulrooney acquiesced.



# The Third Letter

- The day after Lindbergh rejected Mulroony's plan, a third letter mailed from Brooklyn arrived.
- The ransom had been doubled to \$100,000.
- John F. Condon, a 72-year old school teacher in the Bronx writes a letter to the newspaper offering his help in any way.
- The newspaper receives a letter purportedly written by the kidnappers authorizing Condon to act as their intermediary.
- Lindbergh accepted the letter as genuine.

# John F. Condon (Jafsie)



# The Next Steps

- Following the latest letter's instructions, Condon places an ad in the NY American: "Money is Ready."
- Meeting eventually scheduled for late one evening at the Woodlawn Cemetery.
- Man stayed in the shadows, but Condon said man sounded foreign.
- Condon expressed doubt that the man actually had the baby.
- A few days later Condon receives a toddler's sleeping suit which Lindbergh identified as his son's.

# Part I – Summary



**The Lindbergh  
Baby Kidnap**

# Part II

## Discovery & Arrest

# The Rendezvous

- Condon puts a new ad in the paper:  
“Money is ready. No cops. No secret service. I come alone, like last time.”
- Condon receives a letter from purported kidnappers saying they are ready to accept payment.
- Identifiable currency is prepared.
- Condon receives a series of instructions leading him and Lindbergh all over Manhattan.
- Eventually the money is delivered in another cemetery.

# The Exchange

- Condon turns over \$50,000 saying that's all that could be raised.
- The man takes the money and hands over a note.
- Lindbergh had not informed the police of the meeting and the suspect leaves without being followed.
- The note leads Lindbergh on a wide goose chase.
- Lindbergh admitted he had been fooled.

# Body Found

- On May 12, 1932, delivery truck driver William Allen pulled his truck to the side of a road about 4.5 miles from the Lindbergh home.
- He went to a grove of trees to urinate, and there he discovered the corpse of a toddler.
- Allen notified police, who took the body to a morgue in nearby Trenton, New Jersey.
- The body was badly decomposed.



# The Body

- The skull was badly fractured.
- The left leg and both hands were missing.
- Lindbergh and Gow quickly identified the baby.
- They surmised that the child had been killed by a blow to the head.
- The body was cremated soon afterwards.

# New Law Passed

- Once it was learned that the Little Eaglet was dead, the U.S. Congress rushed through legislation making kidnapping a federal crime.
- The Bureau of Investigations could now aid the case more directly

# Suspects

- In July 1932, with few leads, officials began to suspect an "inside job".
- Suspicions fell upon Violet Sharp, a British household servant of the Lindbergh home.
- She had given conflicting testimony about her whereabouts on the night of the kidnapping and acted nervous and suspicious when questioned.
- She eventually committed suicide after repeated questioning by the authorities.

# Case in the Doldrums

- There were no developments and little evidence of any sort.
- Police turned their attention to tracking the ransom payments.
- During the following three years, a few of the bills turned up in scattered locations — as far away as Chicago and Minneapolis.
- But the people spending them eluded capture.

# A Gold Certificate



# A New Suspect

- Gold Certificates were to be turned in by May 1, 1933. After that day, they would be worthless.
- A few days before the deadline, a man in Manhattan brought in \$2,990 of the ransom money to be exchanged.
- The bank was so busy, however, that no one remembered him.
- He had filled out a required form, giving his name as J. J. Faulkner.

# Faulkner Leads to Geissler

- When authorities visited the address, they learned no one named Faulkner had lived there.
- U.S. Treasury officials eventually learned that a woman named Jane Faulkner had lived at the address in question in 1913.
- She had moved after she married a German man named Geissler.
- The couple was tracked down, and both denied any involvement in the crime.

# Geissler's Family

- Mr. Geissler had two children from his first marriage.
- Geissler's son worked as a florist and lived about one block from Condon.
- Geissler's daughter had married a German gardener.
- Condon tentatively identifies the voice the gardener as having a voice very similar to "John", the man he had met in the cemeteries.
- The police followed up on this lead, but the gardener killed himself.



# Condon Goes Over the Top

- Condon's actions were becoming increasingly flamboyant.
- On one occasion, while riding a city bus, he saw a suspect and, announcing his secret identity, ordered the bus to a stop.
- The startled driver complied, and Condon darted from the bus, though Condon's target eluded him.
- The police threatened to charge him as an accomplice to the crime.

# The Gold Notes

- The serial numbers of the ransom bills were recorded and a list distributed to banks across the nation.
- The ransom was paid in gold notes, which were slated to be removed from circulation in 1933. This made them very noticeable.
- Investigators followed the gold note trail for two years.
- Most of the bills were passed in or near New York City.

# Follow the Money

- More than two years after the kidnapping, in September 1934, a gold certificate from the ransom money was referred to New York Police detectives.
- They had been able to track down many bills from the ransom hoard to places throughout New York City.
- The bills were being passed mainly along the route of the Lexington Avenue subway.

# The Big Break in the Case

- A suspicious gas station attendant wrote the license plate of a customer in the margin of his gold note bill.
- The car was registered to Bruno Richard Hauptmann, who was arrested the next day.
- At the time of his arrest, he was carrying a \$20 ransom bill.
- Another \$14,000 in ransom money was found hidden in his garage.
- At his trial, a detailed accounting of Hauptmann's finances indicated a sudden rise in wealth just after the ransom had been paid.

# Bruno Richard Hauptmann



# Hauptmann's Story

- The story Hauptmann gave was that the money had been left with him by a friend and former business partner, Isidor Fisch.
- Fisch had returned to Germany in 1933 and died there.
- Only then, Hauptmann reported, did he learn that the shoe box left with him contained a considerable sum of money.
- Hauptmann consistently denied any connection to the crime or knowledge that the money came from the ransom.

# Part II - Summary



# Part II

## The Trial



# Basic Information

- Hauptmann was charged with kidnapping and murder.
- He pleaded not guilty.
- Trial was held in Flemington, NJ.
- Edward J. Reilly was hired by the NY Daily Mirror to serve as Hauptmann's attorney.
- David Wilentz, Attorney General of NY led the prosecution.

# Evidence Against Hauptmann

- Handwriting Evidence
- Eyewitness Testimony
- The Ladder
- The Gold Notes

# Handwriting Evidence

- Comparing the ransom notes to samples of Hauptmann's handwriting revealed similarities in grammar, spelling and penmanship.
- Several handwriting experts testified against Hauptmann.
- Defense attorney Edward Reilly's promise to produce just as many experts to deny the writing was Hauptmann's.

# Handwriting Comparisons

and not when I would gladly wear the negro-brown  
 my fatherhood, I want to be by your side, wearing at the  
 heart, I was not and the blame, but later came down  
 but you were wrongfully taken to have your own way  
 but everything that makes children from the same way  
 police keep their fathers and mothers; the mother  
 will be good for something like study, one of  
 the letters said was for; thank you for the letter  
 and for your money, we will send back the letter  
 with perhaps, even that we send down, the address at  
 first, but being very bright so you will have  
 from us, you can not tell more at all to be

18 June  
 21 June  
 27 June  
 1875

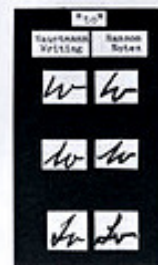
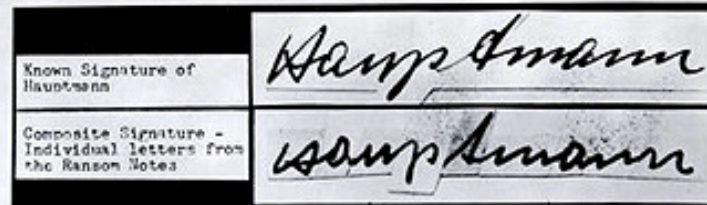
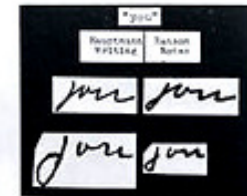
Baking very much

Sep 10 1874

being let out and walk in the woods over  
and follow Waltham Bay to the farm  
let the money with you tomorrow and  
walk I will meet you the boy as on the  
boat they it is a small boat 10 feet  
long two persons are on the boat they are  
sweat you will find the boat between  
some wet land and Graham's water tower  
along

W. W. Wagon  
John Wagon  
Sept 19, 1931  
101 N. W. Wagon

20



# Eyewitness Evidence

- No one witnessed the crime, or saw him with the Lindbergh child, but Hauptmann was identified by several witnesses.
- Some said they had seen him in his car near the Lindbergh estate on the day of the kidnapping.
- Others were cashiers who said he had passed ransom bills.
- One was a cab driver who said he had delivered a note for Hauptmann to ransom go-between Dr. John Condon.

# More Eyewitness Testimony

- A New York fashion model said she saw Hauptmann following Condon during ransom negotiations.
- Condon was unable or unwilling to identify Hauptmann after his arrest
- However, during the trial Condon said Hauptmann was the man to whom he gave the ransom money.

# The Ladder

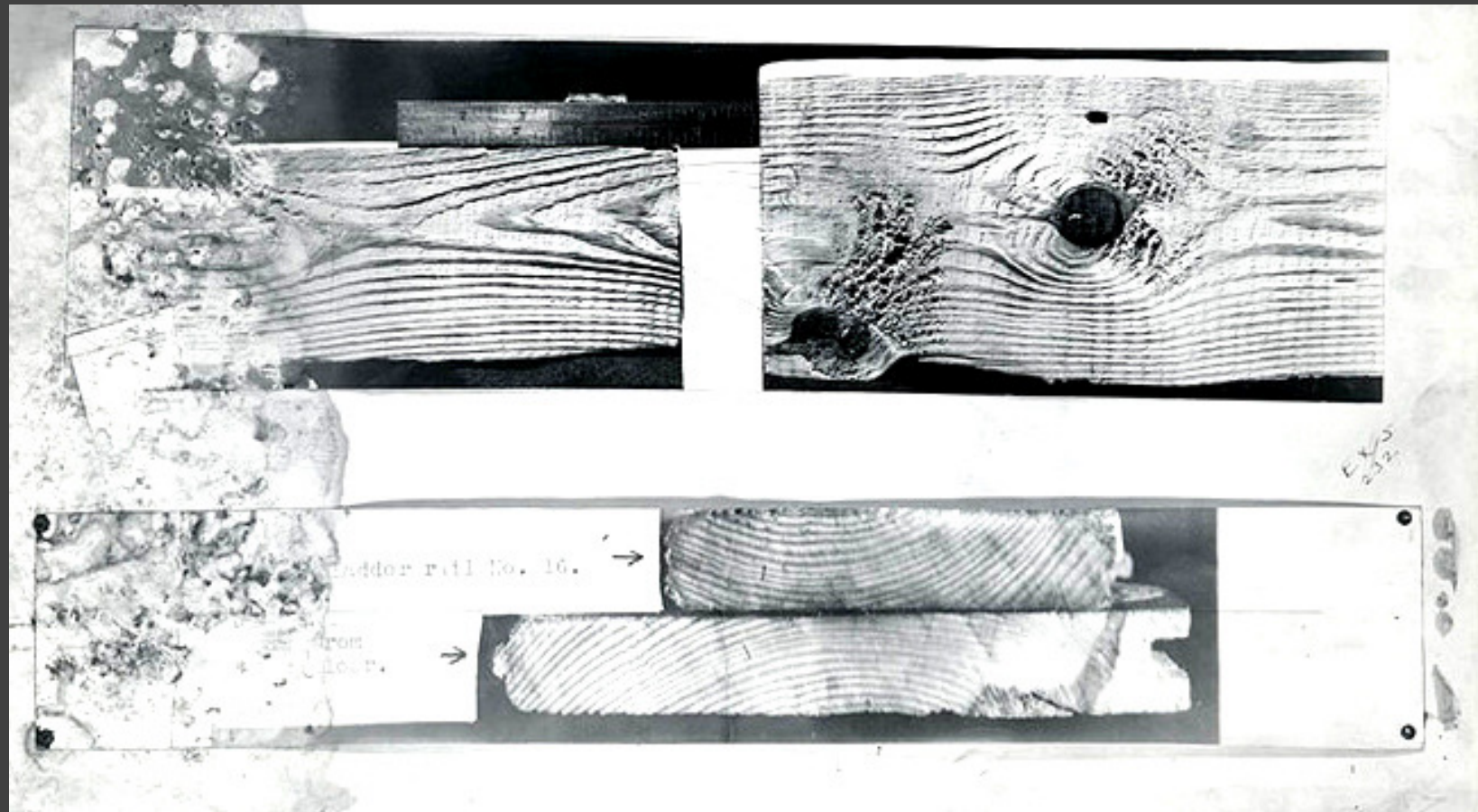
- The ladder used to reach the nursery window on the second story at the Lindbergh estate was left behind at the scene.
- It was a homemade device, in three sections, designed for ease of transport in a car.
- “Wood Experts” traced the ladder's wood through marks left by a faulty sawmill blade.
- One load of the wood had been shipped to a Queens, NY lumberyard near Hauptmann's home.

# The Ladder





# Wood Experts



# More Ladder Evidence

- A side rail on the ladder showed nail holes that suggested it had been used before.
- “Wood Experts” determined that the wood matched a board in Hauptmann's attic.
- During the trial, defense attorneys insisted that "there's no such thing as a wood expert!"
- They said that the ladder had been tampered with by police.

# Additional Evidence

- The prosecutors noted that Condon's address and telephone number had been found written in pencil on a closet door in Hauptmann's home.
- Hauptmann himself admitted in a police interview that he had written Condon's address on the closet door:
  - “I was a little bit interested and maybe I was just by the closet, and reading the paper and put down the address.”
- When asked about Condon's telephone number, he could respond only, "I can't give you any explanation about the telephone number."

# The Final Evidence

- Condon and Lindbergh both testified that Hauptmann was “John”.
- Another witness, Amandus Hockmuth, testified that he saw Hauptmann near the scene of the crime.
- The defense did not challenge the identification of the body.

# The Verdict

- The jury deliberated for 11 hours and took five ballots.
- Hauptman was convicted of the crimes and sentenced to death.
- His appeals were rejected.
- NJ Governor Harold Hoffman granted a temporary reprieve so that the NJ Board of Pardons could review the case.
- The Board found no reason to overturn the verdict.

# The Conclusion

- Hauptmann turned down a \$90,000 offer from a Hearst newspaper for a confession.
- He refused a last-minute offer to commute his execution to a life sentence in exchange for a confession.
- He was electrocuted on April 3, 1936, just over four years after the kidnapping.
- He maintained his innocence to the end.

# Part III – Summary



# Hauptmann's Last Letter

Gov. Harold G. Hoffman (March 31, 1936)

Your Excellence:

My writing is not for fear of losing my life, this is in the hands of God, it is His will. I will go gladly, it means the end of my tremendous suffering. Only in thinking of my wife and my little boy, that is breaking my heart. I know until this terrible crime is solvet, they will have to suffer under the weight of my unfair conviction.

I beg you, Attorney General, believe at least a dying man. Please investigate, because the case is not solvet, it only adds another death to the Lindbergh case.

I thank your Excellence, from the bottom of my heart, and may God bless you,

Respectfully,  
Bruno Richard Hauptmann



# Hauptmann's Last Statement

(April 3, 1936)

I am glad that my life in a world which has not understood me has ended. Soon I will be at home with my Lord, so I am dying an innocent man. Should, however, my death serve for the purpose of abolishing capital punishment—such a punishment being arrived at only by circumstantial evidence—I feel that my death has not been in vain. I am at peace with God. I repeat, I protest my innocence of the crime for which I was convicted. However, I die with no malice or hatred in my heart. The love of Christ has filled my soul and I am happy in Him.

*(Translated from German)*

# Did Hauptmann Do It?

- As with all notorious crimes, the Lindbergh kidnapping has attracted at least its fair share of hoaxes and alternative theories.
- Several books have been written proclaiming Hauptmann's innocence. These books variously criticize the police for:
  - ✓ allowing the crime scenes to become contaminated
  - ✓ Lindbergh and his associates for interfering with the investigation
  - ✓ Hauptmann's trial lawyers for ineffectively representing him
  - ✓ the reliability of the witnesses and the physical evidence presented at the trial.

# Hoax Theories

- The Lindbergh Kidnapping Hoax
  - <http://www.lindberghkidnappinghoax.com/>
- “I am the Lindbergh Baby”
  - <http://www.charlesalindberghjr.com/>
- *The Airman and the Carpenter*
- *Crime of the Century*

## *THE AIRMAN AND THE CARPENTER*

The Lindbergh Kidnapping and the Framing of Richard Hauptmann  
By Ludovic Kennedy

- Leading questions asked
- Hearsay evidence admitted
- Testimony offered and accepted without corroboration or proof
- A whole mass of evidence which would have cleared Hauptmann, ruthlessly suppressed or destroyed.

## *THE AIRMAN AND THE CARPENTER*

The Lindbergh Kidnapping and the Framing of Richard Hauptmann

By Ludovic Kennedy

- The conduct of the press was, if anything, worse
- The newspapers branded Hauptmann as the Lindbergh baby's kidnapper and murderer
- No one in America was given the opportunity to consider a contrary view
- The press continued to assert his guilt until the day of his execution
- They embellished their stories with either inventions or, more often, downright lies.

## *THE AIRMAN AND THE CARPENTER*

The Lindbergh Kidnapping and the Framing of Richard Hauptmann

By Ludovic Kennedy

- Hauptmann's steadfast refusals to 'confess'
- Public prejudice then was so strong, the desire for a scapegoat so universal, that people were blinded
- Lindbergh was the hero who could do no wrong
- Hauptmann the immigrant with a criminal record.

## *THE AIRMAN AND THE CARPENTER*

The Lindbergh Kidnapping and the Framing of Richard Hauptmann

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- It seems inconceivable that Hauptmann would have:
  - Agreed so readily to copy out sections of the ransom notes with their uniquely peculiar misspellings
  - Agreed initially that he must have written on a board in his bedroom closet the address and telephone number which turned out to be that of the ransom money negotiator, Dr Condon
  - Told the gas station attendant to whom he gave one of the ransom bills that he had a hundred more at home
  - Most convincing of all, refused until death to admit to any part in the crime

# *CRIME OF THE CENTURY*

The Lindbergh Kidnapping Hoax

By Gregory Ahlgren & Stephen Monier

- Lindbergh had always been fond of practical jokes
- In carrying out his practical joke he accidentally killed his son
  - He was carrying his son down a ladder when the ladder broke and he dropped his son
  - The child dropped to the granite ledge below
  - The impact crushed his skull
- He needed to cover it up by creating a fake kidnapping scenario



# *CRIME OF THE CENTURY*

The Lindbergh Kidnapping Hoax

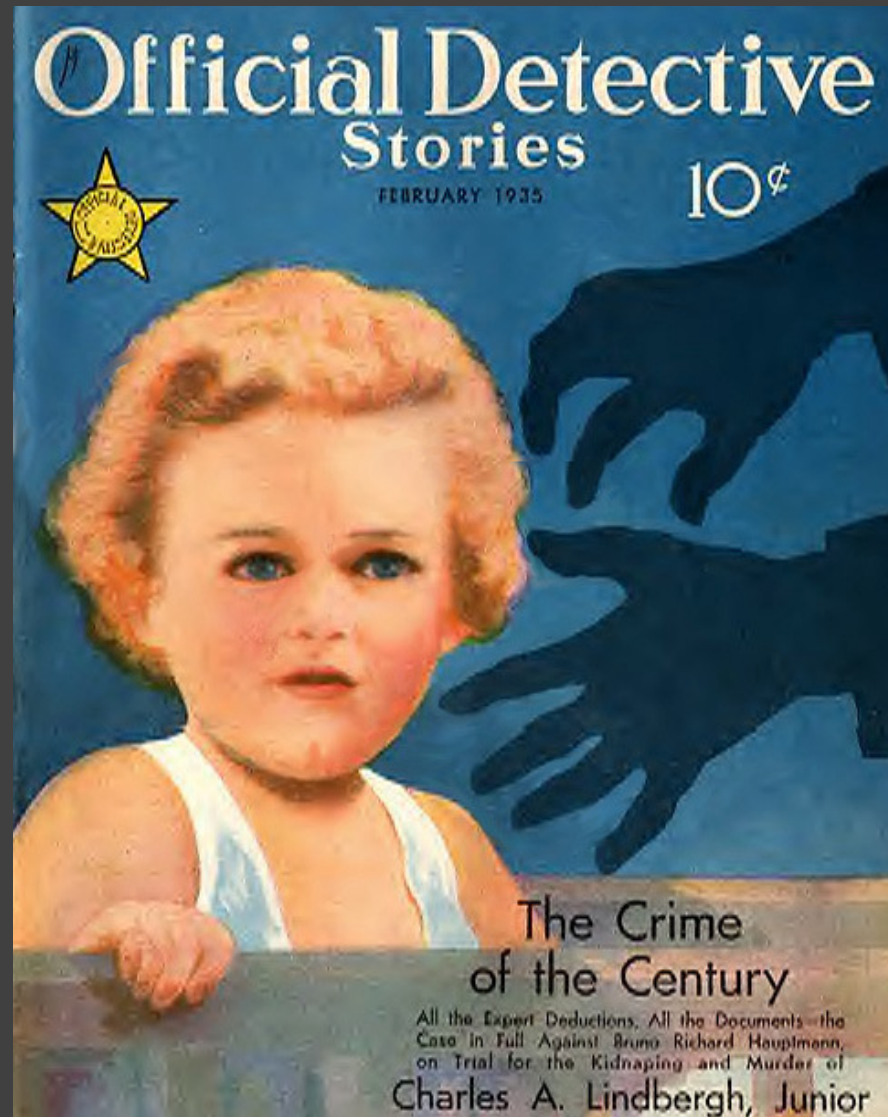
By Gregory Ahlgren & Stephen Monier

- He had to do five things:
  1. He had to make sure that *he* did not find the empty crib
  2. He had to set the time of the "kidnap" so that it occurred when he had an alibi with the person most likely to suspect him: Anne herself.
  3. To complete the kidnap scenario he had to get a ransom note into the nursery.
  4. He had to do something about the "fingerprint problem" once the police were involved.
  5. He had to consistently play the role of the father as victim and make sure that suspicion focused anywhere but on him.

# Did Hauptmann Really Do It?

- In today's world, there are always conspiracy theorists who see events differently than the rest of us.
- We've just seen two of these theories, but there are more.
- I'll let you decide what really happened.

# Representation in the Arts - Then



# Representation in the Arts - Now

- 1976 TV movie, *The Lindbergh Kidnapping Case*, starred Anthony Hopkins as Bruno Hauptmann.
- Subject of the 1996 Golden Globe and Emmy nominated HBO movie, *Crime of the Century*.
- In Philip Roth's 2004 novel *The Plot Against America*, the narrator describes theories about the kidnapping.

THE END?