

Why did Lindbergh leave the windows open?

Bob Van der Linden gives us the answer.

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Charles Lindbergh (in fedora) and a mechanic check out the Spirit of St. Louis' engine circa 1927. (Library of Congress)

A couple of questions arrived recently about Charles Lindbergh and his historic transatlantic flight in The Spirit of St. Louis.

After rereading a biography of Lindbergh, Irvin Lush of Louisville, Kentucky wonders about the famed pilot's biggest fear: running out of gas. Lush notes some of the things Lindbergh did to lighten Spirit and thus conserve fuel. "He trimmed the edges from his maps, he tore pages from his notebooks, just to save an ounce or two," Lush writes. "But he flew the entire trip with the airplane's windows open. He could have improved his range by 10 or 12 percent just by closing the windows. Why didn't he? It's been driving me crazy for years."

For the answer, we turned to Bob Van der Linden, the airplane's curator at the National Air and Space Museum. "Lindbergh deliberately left the windows open so that the blast of cold air would help keep him awake, and so that he could feel in better communication with the aircraft," Van der Linden writes in an email.

He adds that in Lindbergh's book, "The Spirit of St. Louis," "Lindbergh clearly states that while all of the test measurements had been made with the windows closed to minimize drag,

he realized that it was more important to stay connected with the flight...He felt that the tradeoff was worth the increased drag. Obviously, he was right."

Ted Wise of North Palm Beach, Florida, writes to us in amazement that Lindbergh's logbook, which was pilfered from the cockpit after his landing at Le Bourget Aerodrome outside Paris on May 21, 1927, has never been found.

"Perhaps it's in someone's attic in a trunk of a great grandparent who was at Le Bourget airport that day," Wise writes. "The possibilities are as numerous as the places it could be hiding. Hopefully it is intact somewhere and [was] not inadvertently destroyed during World War II."

The loss of the logbook "was a devastating thing for him," grandson Erik Lindbergh told *Air & Space* in 2009. His grandfather had to rely solely on his memory in recreating the flight for his memoir—not an easy task. "After spending 33 hours in a plane, it would be hard just to recall all the parts of the flight," said Erik.