

Lindymania swept El Paso during aviator's 1927 visit

Garth Brooks in El Paso? No big deal. Let me tell you about when a *real* star came to town.

The man was Charles Lindbergh, who six months earlier had completed the first solo flight across the Atlantic and captured the world's imagination.

For his visit Sept. 25, 1927, El Paso took an unofficial holiday: even the post office closed. An estimated 60,000 people thronged to catch a glimpse of the "boy hero" — a pretty large turnout for a town whose population had just passed 100,000.

Lindbergh was flying from town to town in his plane, the Spirit of St. Louis, to advocate commercial flying. El Paso would be his 54th stop in two months. Here, he would specifically urge the town fathers to build an international airport.

All El Paso had was an airstrip at Fort Bliss — and for this visit, the military had to build a fence around the strip to keep

served for the outbreak of war. Some nuggets:

● "As soon as the colonel departed from the (landing) field, a rush was made for automobiles and (in) what appeared like an unending stream of cars, the journey back to the city started. In clouds of dust, cars, countless almost, traveled back to the main highways, many stopping at every point where another glimpse of the colonel could be obtained." In another story: "Traffic on Fort Boulevard and Piedras was so congested that almost a complete tie-up lasted several minutes."

● A parade from the landing field to El Paso High — along which absolutely every house was decorated, most of them with U.S. flags — took two hours. Lindbergh did not wear a hat, and that caused some consternation to the city officials riding with him. The officials — including the mayor — took off their own hats, in deference to

Lindy's mode of dress. "The sun was getting hotter, but the bare-headed El Pasoans were heroically struggling to follow the example set by the flying colonel. Apparently the sun did not affect him." Eventually, the El Pasoans put their hats back on.

● As the car passed by, flappers "threw in scraps of papers on which their telephone numbers had been written. Either the colonel is immune, or else he does not pay any attention to such overtures. He did not even notice the telephone numbers which had been hurled at him."

● At a press conference, he said he'd never met any women aviators but didn't object to the idea. When reporters asked him "How would you like to go to Juarez and get a glass of real beer?" he calmly said, "I'm sorry, boys."

● He finally showed some emotion — embarrassment — at a banquet that night, when Thomson presented him with an

enormous red sombrero and told him, "Wear the hat!" Lindy looked around. Then he blushed. He put the hat on, quickly took it off, and "wore it again like a good sport" as Thomason draped a red-and-green-striped "zarape" around his shoulders. The crowd went wild.

● He did find one person in El Paso he could talk to: a young aviator from Mexico, who had flown solo from Mexico City to Juarez in one hop. Lindbergh met the man as he prepared to leave the next morning and "was gracious to the young Mexican and explained the workings of his plane minutely to him."

"I've enjoyed El Paso ever so much," Lindy told the mayor just before leaving. Asked if he would be coming back, he replied, "Let's hope we do."

Monica Krause is assistant news editor for the El Paso Times.



Monica Krause

his adoring fans away.

Other rules laid down in advance: Girls wouldn't be allowed to run up to the hero and kiss him. In fact, the only one allowed to shake his hand immediately after the landing would be Mayor R.E. Thomason. The aviator would not be able to attend a banquet in his honor at the country club.

He landed exactly on time, at 2 p.m. Next morning, the Times devoted its entire front page and most of its news section to his visit — treatment usually re-

July 9, 1992

Lifestyle

When Lindbergh visited El Paso

A highlight in Mrs. J.S. Zillich's El Paso memories was the stop here of Charles A. Lindbergh during his tour of the country.

It was shortly after his 1927 non-stop flight to France and Lindbergh, the first pilot to do it, was America's hero.

"I was just a kid," Zillich said. "Lindbergh flew into our airport — it was pretty small then — and was met by the National Guard of El Paso. There was a parade down Montana Street and up Mesa Street where it turned to El Paso High School. There was a platform in the stadium and he spoke from there. The stadium was full and everyone was excited over having the hero here.

"IN FACT, souvenir hunters almost ruined his plane and a guard had to be put on it.

"I don't remember what he said, but he was boyish looking, sort of naive, unassuming and likable. He'd been given a ticker tape parade in New York, and we felt lucky to have him in El Paso."

(Lindbergh's tour was to encourage air-mindedness on behalf of Daniel Guggenheim Fund for Promotion of Aeronautics.)

"I recall also that I heard Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt speak in the same stadium several years later.

"The Crawford Theater had opera once in awhile and I remember my dad taking me to that. There was opera at the Texas Grand occasionally, too, and I remember him taking me there. He was from Louisiana and had gone to the opera in New Orleans, so when an opera



Virginia Turner

came to town, he made it a point to go.

"WE USED TO have picnics at 'The Palisades' in what later became Kern Place. We passed by Stormsville on our way. That's part of Rim Road now. There was nothing there except a lot of rocks and we'd sit around on the rocks and have a lot of fun. We'd hike up and back. We lived at 1405 Angie St., just a block from El Paso High School.

"We moved to El Paso from Shreveport, La. My mother was postmistress there. She retired when she married and my parents moved to El Paso for her health mostly. My father (Thomas O. Tessier) was with the post office, too — and worked in the Registered Division here.

"My brother had a temporary job as motorman on the El Paso - Ysleta interurban, but I never rode on it. I remember the jitneys we had. They had regular routes and they'd pick up people waiting for them, take them to the business area and return. Later, when the street cars were put in, the jitneys went out of service."

ZILLICH ATTENDED Bailey and Morehead Schools — no longer in existence — and El Paso High School. She got her two master's degrees from the College of Mines and Texas Western College (UT El Paso) and taught at Jones and Cour-

chesne County Schools — no longer in existence — before she joined the Ysleta Independent School district, where she retired in 1975 after 35 years.

She and her husband, a native of Wisconsin who is retired from the military service, met in El Paso before World War II, when he was sent here by the National Guard from Chicago.

Zillich teaches Sunday school and English for two hours on Thursday mornings at the First Baptist Church.

"WE TEACH anyone who wants to learn, but most of the students are Taiwanese and Hispanics now. We'd had them from Iran, Venezuela, Brazil, Vietnam. We get most of them through UTEP, many of them wives of foreign students."

Although not a widow, Zillich serves on the Widowed Persons' Service, sponsored by the American Association of Retired Persons and the National Retired Teacher's Association.

She and her husband enjoy traveling and took two trips to Brazil in 1981-1982, when the Brazilian Baptists celebrated the 100th anniversary of the arrival of the first Baptist missionaries, W.B. and Ann Luther Bagby, in 1882.

"The Brazilian Baptists asked lay people to come to different cities in Brazil," she said. "We went to Curitiba, which was 'partnered' with El Paso. It was a blessed experience."

Virginia Turner is a columnist for the El Paso Herald-Post.