

flight.

In 1935, Corrigan applied to the federal government for permission to make a non-stop flight from New York to Ireland. Officials denied his application, however, because they claimed that his plane was not sound enough to make a non-stop transatlantic trip. Nevertheless, they did certify it for cross-country journeys. In an attempt to get full certification, Corrigan made several modifications to his aircraft over the next two years, but each time he reapplied for permission, officials turned him down.

By 1937, Corrigan had grown tired of "red tape" and decided to try the flight without official sanction (although he never publicly acknowledged such a decision during his lifetime). His plan was to land in New York late at night, after airport officials had already left for the day, fill his gas tanks, and then leave for Ireland. But various mechanical problems while in route to New York caused him to lose his "safe weather window" over the Atlantic, and Corrigan decided not to risk the flight just then. He returned to California to wait for another opportunity the next year.

On July 8, 1938, Corrigan left California for New York. His official flight plan called for him to return to California, and on July 17, Corrigan took off from Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn, New York. He took off in thick fog and headed east because airport officials had told him to lift off in any direction except west since there were some buildings at the western edge of the field. They fully believed Corrigan would turn his plane around and head west toward California once he cleared the airport's airspace. To everyone's surprise, he kept flying eastward. Corrigan insisted that his visibility was so poor that he could only fly by using his compass and claimed his compass indicated he was heading west.

Approximately 26 hours into his flight, Corrigan claimed to have finally dropped down out of the clouds and noticed that he was over a large body of water. Knowing that it was too early to have reached the Pacific Ocean, Corrigan looked down at his compass--and because there was now supposedly more light to see by--suddenly noticed he "had been following the wrong end of the magnetic needle." Within a short time, Corrigan was over Ireland. He landed at Baldonnel Airport, in Dublin, after a 28-hour, 13-minute flight.

When officials questioned Corrigan about the incident, he explained that he had left New York en route to California but had then gotten mixed up in the clouds and flown the wrong way. He also explained about the fog and his mistake with the compass, but they did not believe him. As authorities continued to press him for "the truth," Corrigan finally ended the situation by replying: "That's my story." After failing to sway him from his explanation, officials released Corrigan. The only punishment he received was a brief suspension of his pilot's license, which lasted only until August 4, the day he returned to New York via steamship.

Corrigan returned to the United States a hero. People loved his audacity and spirit. They also had a great deal of fun with the obvious humor of his situation. The New York Post, for example, printed a front-page headline--"Hail to Wrong Way Corrigan!"--backwards. Corrigan also received a Broadway ticker-tape parade with more than a million people lining the street, more people than had turned out to honor Charles Lindbergh after his transatlantic flight.

Corrigan lived a fairly simple life after his famous flight. In the 1950s, he bought an orange grove in Santa Ana, California, and lived there for the remainder of his life. During the 50th anniversary of his flight, some newspapers began reporting that he was going to admit to having flown to Ireland intentionally, but he never publicly acknowledged that fact. Corrigan died on December 9, 1995.

Although Corrigan never admitted that his story was a ruse, most people believe that he