



Still Standing Tall

by Joseph A. Harriss

DID YOU HEAR THE ONE ABOUT the lady who married the Eiffel Tower? No, really. Erika La Tour Eiffel had had other infatuations with objects, including Lance, the bow with which she became an archery champion, and the Berlin Wall. But, now in her late 30s, she tossed those over and promised to love, honor, and obey the tower in an intimate ceremony in Paris. She duly changed her name to reflect her marital status. A photo showed the smiling, comely newlywed hugging her riveted husband, who maintained a dignified reserve. Admittedly, said Erika, there is a bit of a problem in the marriage: "The issue of intimacy, or rather lack of it."

Maybe Erika fell under the tower's spell. Hearts beat faster there, as evidenced by a physiological study done the year it was built. The savants noted that, "On rising by elevator to the third platform, the pulse beats faster, and, especially in women, there is a psychic excitement that is translated by gaiety, animated and joyous conversation, laughter, and the irresistible desire to go still higher—in sum, a general excitement." The people at the TripAdvisor website concur that it inspires romance. After in-depth study, they concluded that the Eiffel Tower is the number-one place in the world to propose.

Okay, Erika does live in San Francisco, and maybe this, as the French expression has it, explains that. But the Eiffel Tower has indeed stirred strong emotions ever since its construction for the great Paris World's Fair of 1889. To start with, many in this hidebound country were scandalized by something so daring and, well, *different*. In 1888, with the tower rising to its ultimate height of 1,000 feet faster than seemed possible, some 40 self-appointed arbiters of taste, including the composer Charles Gounod and the writer Guy de Maupassant, signed a strident petition protesting against "the erection in the heart of our capital of the odious column of bolted metal." Maupassant in particular later sulked that he left Paris because of "this tall, skinny pyramid of iron ladders."

But the public, then as now, loved the tower. Nearly 2 million visited it during the fair. Not only the great unwashed, but also the likes of the Prince of Wales, the king of Greece, the shah of Persia, and Archduke Vladimir of Russia, not to mention Buffalo Bill Cody. An impressed Thomas Edison rode the elevator to the top and presented Gustave Eiffel, who had a small apartment there (where it's said he entertained certain Belle Époque belles), with the first phonograph recording of *La Marseillaise*. Edison dedicated it to "Monsieur Eiffel, the Engineer, the brave builder of so gigantic and original a specimen of modern Engineering."

The crowds kept coming. Over 200 million have visited it since its construction. Today it is the most frequented and, statistics show, most photographed monument in the world, with about 7 million paid visits a year. In France it easily tops the Arch of Triumph, Notre Dame Cathedral, the châteaux of the Loire Valley, and Mont Saint-Michel in Normandy. It also outdraws comparable attractions in the U.S. such as the Washington Monument and the Statue of Liberty.

Still more crowds will be attracted by this summer's celebrations for the tower's 120th anniversary, which is being marked by special exhibits at the Paris city hall and on the second platform of the tower itself. Coincidentally it is getting a new paint job, with 25 men, nimble employees of a Greek company that specializes in painting ships and smokestacks, clambering among its girders to brush on some 60 tons of paint in the subtle shade known as Eiffel Tower Brown. (Fortunately, past French newspaper campaigns in favor of a patriotic tower resplendent in tones of *bleu-blanc-rouge* never got off the ground.)

My own epiphany occurred one evening when I took a stroll on the Champ de Mars, not far from my home in Paris. I found myself beneath the Eiffel Tower and glanced up. Above me the gigantic, intricate tracery of crisscrossing girders soared more

majestically than the columns and vaults of any Gothic cathedral. I was held, fascinated—awestruck is not too strong a word. And I was reminded of Eiffel's rebuttal to those who complained that his tower would be ugly: "There is an attraction and a charm inherent in the colossal that is not subject to ordinary theories of art," he insisted. "The tower will be the tallest edifice ever raised by man. Will it not therefore be imposing in its own way? I believe that the tower will have its own beauty."

Artists, poets, and philosophers eventually came to agree with him. The tower has been the subject of paintings by Chagall, Dufy, Picasso, Utrillo, Van Dongen, and other icons of modern art. Poets and writers like Guillaume Apollinaire, Jean Cocteau, and Jean Giraudoux have rhapsodized about it. Among philosophers, Roland Barthes, grand panjandrum of structuralism in European and American universities, has done more high-flown double-doming about the tower than any other, devoting an entire book to analyzing it. The tower eludes reason and becomes the ultimate symbol, he posits, by being "fully useless." For him it is "the inevitable sign, for it means everything."

EVEN IF IT DOESN'T QUITE MEAN EVERYTHING, the tower often has meant outlandish stunts. The harebrained antics began in 1891 when a Paris baker wobbled up the 347 steps to the first platform on stilts, only to be topped later by a clown named Coin-Coin who bumped down them on a unicycle. Philippe Petit, the tightrope walker who made it between New York's Twin Towers, walked a wire for nearly 800 yards from the Trocadero across the Seine to the second platform to celebrate the tower's centenary in 1989.

Naturally we Americans wanted in on the fun. When Charles Lindbergh approached Paris to complete the first transatlantic flight on May 21, 1927, he homed in on "a column of lights pointing upward." Despite his fatigue, he couldn't resist playfully circling the tower before landing the *Spirit of St. Louis* to a hero's welcome at Le Bourget. Only a few days after American (sorry, I meant *French*, of course) troops liberated Paris and the tricolor again floated



above the tower, a B-17 Flying Fortress of the U.S. Army Air Corps zoomed deftly between its legs. Later, Arnold Palmer drove a golf ball off the second platform, getting extra hang time. A former Marine pilot who had flown 824 missions over Vietnam aimed a Beechcraft Bonanza down the Champ de Mars and zipped under the tower. Nowadays terrorist crazies have even bigger stunts in mind: intelligence intercepts show the tower is high on the list of things al Qaeda wannabes would love to blow up.

The loss to the world's heritage would be great, for the tower represents a unique achievement. Several 1,000-foot towers had been proposed by 19th-century engineers to show off their growing technical prowess, notably for London in 1833 and Philadelphia in 1876. Those were never realized, but Eiffel, arguably the greatest engineer of the century, showed it could be done. Working at the forefront of the technology of the age, the man the French call *le magicien du fer* had already built iron structures like train stations and railway bridges, including the highest viaduct in the world, from France to Russia, South America to Indochina. In a spare moment he had also tossed off the internal iron skeleton of the Statue of Liberty.

Eiffel based everything on meticulous pencil-and-paper calculations, with particular attention to wind force. Working from more than 5,000 mechanical drawings, he had the tower's massive stone foundations, 15,000 girders, and 2.5 million rivets in place in just over two years with no loss of life—the Brooklyn Bridge, completed in 1883, took 14 years and some 20 lives, including that of its designer, John Roebling—and 6 percent under budget. It would be hard to duplicate the feat today.

It was only in 2004 that two American mathematicians finally broke the complex mathematical code for the tower's shape that keeps it standing tall. It is, they say, a nonlinear, integro-differential equation yielding an exponential profile. Eiffel had figured that out in his head 120 years ago.

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Cowards on Race

by John H. Fund

BARTLE BULL COULDN'T BELIEVE HIS EYES. The former civil rights lawyer had been arrested in the South during the 1960s. He once forced local officials in Mississippi to remove nooses that were hanging from tree branches outside polling places. But until Election Day 2008 in Philadelphia he had never seen a man brandishing a weapon blocking the entrance to a polling place. He now can't understand why the Obama Justice Department has dropped its

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case against the New Black Panther Party, the hate group the thugs he saw in front of the polling place belonged to.

Bull, who was once Robert Kennedy's New York presidential campaign manager and is a former publisher of the left-wing *Village Voice*, has moderated his politics, going so far as to join Democrats for McCain last year. It was in that capacity that he traveled to Philadelphia on Election Day. When he visited a polling place at 12th and Fairmount he found two men dressed in black combat boots, black berets, and

black uniforms blocking the door. One was brandishing a large police-style nightstick.

McCain volunteers called the police and media, which filmed the whole incident. The police ordered the armed man to leave, but did not take away his weapon. But one of his colleagues didn't go quietly. Minister King Samir Shabazz, head of the New Black Panther Party in Philadelphia, yelled at onlookers: "You are about to be ruled by the black man, cracker!"

In March, Bull got a call from Christian Adams, an attorney with the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, who asked him to provide an affidavit about the incident to support a Justice civil rights lawsuit against the New Black Panther Party and three of its supporters. Bull said he would, provided that Justice followed through on the lawsuit to the very end.

The lawsuit was filed, but none of the defendants answered it. That allowed a federal court in Philadelphia to render a default judgment against the defendants. But Bull was astonished that the government then filed a notice of voluntary dismissal. Charges against the New Black Panther Party and two of the defendants were dropped completely. Shabazz was enjoined from carrying a weapon to a polling place until 2012.

A Justice spokesman issued a statement saying that the department made its decision "based on a careful assessment of the facts and the law." He refused to provide any other explanation or comment. Bull says that a Justice attorney told him, "The decision to drop the case against the other defen-