

BENITO LOYGORRI

When I heard as a young boy the story of how Lement Ader flew in 1890 aboard “Eole” I received a life time infusion of love for the air “Eole” which means “airplane” in French, remains forever as the name for this type of machine. I was 18 when Orville Wright first flew his plane “Flyer 1”, on December 17, 1903 across the beach at Kitty Hawk. An airplane that could be controlled by a pilot caught my young imagination since the one that Ader flew could not. In later years, I never missed chasing after the Wright brothers when they toured Europe. I saw them at Le Mans and at Pau in France, and gobbled up their every word, together with that of other aerial pioneers of the day like Farman, Bleriot, Voisin and Latham. These men were my heroes.

On July 25, 1909 Louis Bleriot flew across the English Channel, his feat proving that this type of craft had reached a state of reliability that would permit long voyages. I knew now that I would some day fly my own airplane and began to take classes at the Voisin School in Mourmelon, near Reims. I had first thought of going to the school in Moulineaux near Paris but the word got out that they were having problems with aerial congestion.

The Voisin brothers had contracted with Hubert Latham to manage the business and thanks to him I became proficient enough to fly alone on extended trips around the country side. I was friendly with people in the government and when I heard Spain was about to establish an Air Ministry and issue flying permits I jumped and was awarded Pilots License #1 for Spain. The date on my pilots license is August 30, 1910. I was 25 years old. A few weeks later the heir to the Spanish throne, Alfonso de Orleans y Borbon, who began to fly at the time as I and had attended many of the same air shows, did his best to take my #1 license away. He failed and received License #2 on October 23, 1910.

I was invited to show off this novel machine to the Queen of Spain at the newly inaugurated ‘Cuatro Vientos’ airdrome near Madrid. I think Queen Maria Cristina was as excited as I since she had heard so much about flying from her son, Alfonso. As soon as she arrived she climbed onto a small wooden step and peered into my plane, eyes busily prying into every detail of this wondrous new machine. The Queen shook my hand, wished me luck and walked to the shade of a large tree where several chairs had been placed. In the picture below, the Queens party is directly behind my airplane.



I climbed aboard with the help of my aide who then walked over to stand by the large wooden two bladed propeller that was almost ten feet long. My bi-plane was a marvel in modern technology. The engine of the latest design sat right behind me. It rolled on the ground on four wheels. A stick between my legs was connected with wires to the tail which would guide it right or left and to the aileron(sp) that would make it go up or down. I'd flown it several times before in Maumelon, France, then flew it down to Madrid. The air Museum in Madrid exhibits the purchase contract for that plane as well as the little wooden step used by the Queen.

Convinced the plane was ready to fly, I gave the signal to my aide to spin the propeller, which to be sure was a job only for young strong men. And smart too, for when the engine started he had to quickly leap away from the huge propeller. After three tries the motor coughed and came to life in a huge cloud of smoke. I adjusted the mixture of the fuel and once it was running smoothly, I increased the power through a small handle on my left side and began to move. The Queen and her entourage sat agape.

The field had been neatly trimmed. I worked the plane back to a fence, turned it around, checked the sound of the engine once again, applied speed and began to move. About five hundred feet down the field we were airborne. The day was bright and sunny with a light breeze. I gently increased power and my plane rose to about 75 feet and I kept it there as I circled the field. At full speed, perhaps 55 kilometers per hour, I flew right over the Queen and her entourage, they all waving with much enthusiasm. My landing was easy, and with no way to stop the plane, I eased it in gently and stepped down. I think the Queen was the most excited of all the people there.

I spent quite some time in the area around San Sebastian, Spain and right across the French border in Biarritz, both very popular summer resorts. The beach at San Sebastian is long and in the summer, full of people taking the sun, and dipping in the cool water. During the summer of 1910, I took to flying low over the beach together with my buddies Tabuteau y Morane. On clear days with a dark blue sky we would put on one heck of a show. Airplanes were still quite a rarity and people from all over would jam the beach to watch the show.

Besides I had a cute girl friend in San Sebastian whose parents had a house on the beach. Her name was Donostiarra de Minondo, and she was as pretty as Basque girls get. One windy day I was buzzing her house and on my third time around a gust caught me, the plane dropped a bit, and the wheels touched the tiles on the roof of her house, knocking off a bunch. Her father was steaming mad, and I stayed far away for a couple of weeks. He cooled down to the point where he allowed me to take her daughter up for a plane ride.

We took off on October 1, 1910. All was going great. We buzzed the beach at San Sebastian a half dozen times, flew out to the hill on the Western point when suddenly I heard a faint sputter from the engine. I quickly looked around for a place to land just in case. The beach at San Sebastian was mobbed with people. My girlfriend had no idea what was going on. With the sputtering getting worse, I worked my way over to the Ondarriega Beach, also loaded with people, and let her down just off the beach, in less than one meter of water. Donostierra never flew with me again. As a matter of fact, I

don't recall she ever spoke to me again either. Good thing. Her father would have no doubt chopped me into small chunks as the Basque's are apt to do with people they don't care for. C'est la vie. Besides, I had a bunch of other girl friends.



Spain issued a series of stamps commemorating the four air pioneers. I got the 10 peseta stamp.