

CHARLES LINDBERGH AND THE CANADIAN CONFEDERATION

by Albert Pelsser

Never in aviation history has an heroic endeavour so stirred the public imagination as Charles Lindbergh's non-stop solo crossing of the Atlantic in 1927. When the First World War ended, it was assumed that the aeroplane had improved immensely over the course of four years of combat use. In fact, it was the aircraft engine which had improved the most with additional power making biplane structures practicable; the financial incentives and air races that had prompted pre-war development would need to be revived if aviation was to leap forward after World War I.

In the United States, Raymond Orteig, a wealthy French hotel owner in New York City, had in 1919 offered an award of \$25,000 to the first person to fly solo across the North Atlantic, from New York to Paris. After many pilots lost their lives trying, this prize was finally won in 1927 by Charles August Lindbergh, a little-known American Army Air Service reserve pilot. His single-engine Ryan NYP monoplane, named *Spirit of St. Louis*, landed safely on 21 May 1927 at Le Bourget airport, Paris, after a flight of 33½ hours departing from New York and travelling at an average speed of 173 km/h.



Figure 2

The engine is the heart of an aeroplane, but the pilot remains its soul. Lindbergh's aircraft was powered by a reliable Wright Whirlwind air-cooled radial engine; because of its size and the huge amount of fuel, the Ryan NYP was a single-seater with direct forward vision blocked by a huge tank; the side windows and a retractable periscope were the only ways to see out of the cockpit. One engine and one pilot: it was the most dangerous possible

combination for a long flight. However, Lindbergh seized the opportunity of high pressure over the Atlantic and consequent fair weather to take off for a long flight. With over a day's flying ahead, Lindbergh's greatest battle was staying awake; feeling his eyes close, he would stick his face into a rush of cold air from outside. Because of the excess weight of the fuel, Lindbergh refused to carry too many personal items with him; so far, four envelopes are known to have been carried on the flight.

President Calvin Coolidge had sent the U.S. Navy cruiser *Memphis* to bring the *Spirit of St. Louis* back home; he had also invited the public to send airmail greetings to Lindbergh at his reception by the President on 11 June 1927.



Figure 3

Lindbergh then went on various triumphal tours in North and Central America. To celebrate the sixtieth year of the Canadian Confederation, Prime Minister Mackenzie King invited Lindbergh shortly after his exploit to lead a flypast of aircraft over the Parliament Building's Peace Tower in Ottawa. On 2 July 1927, escorted by twelve U.S. Army Air Corps Curtiss Hawks, Lindbergh's Ryan monoplane landed. On 4 July, he circled Ottawa for a full thirty minutes before flying home. This short journey in Ottawa has made Lindbergh and his *Spirit of St. Louis* of special interest to our theme of study.

It is worth noting that two French airmen, Dieudonné Costes and Maurice Bellonte, complemented Lindbergh's 1927 flight with a first direct non-stop trip in the more difficult east-to-west direction, leaving Le Bourget airfield near Paris on 1 September 1930. Their aircraft, a



Figure 1: Libya

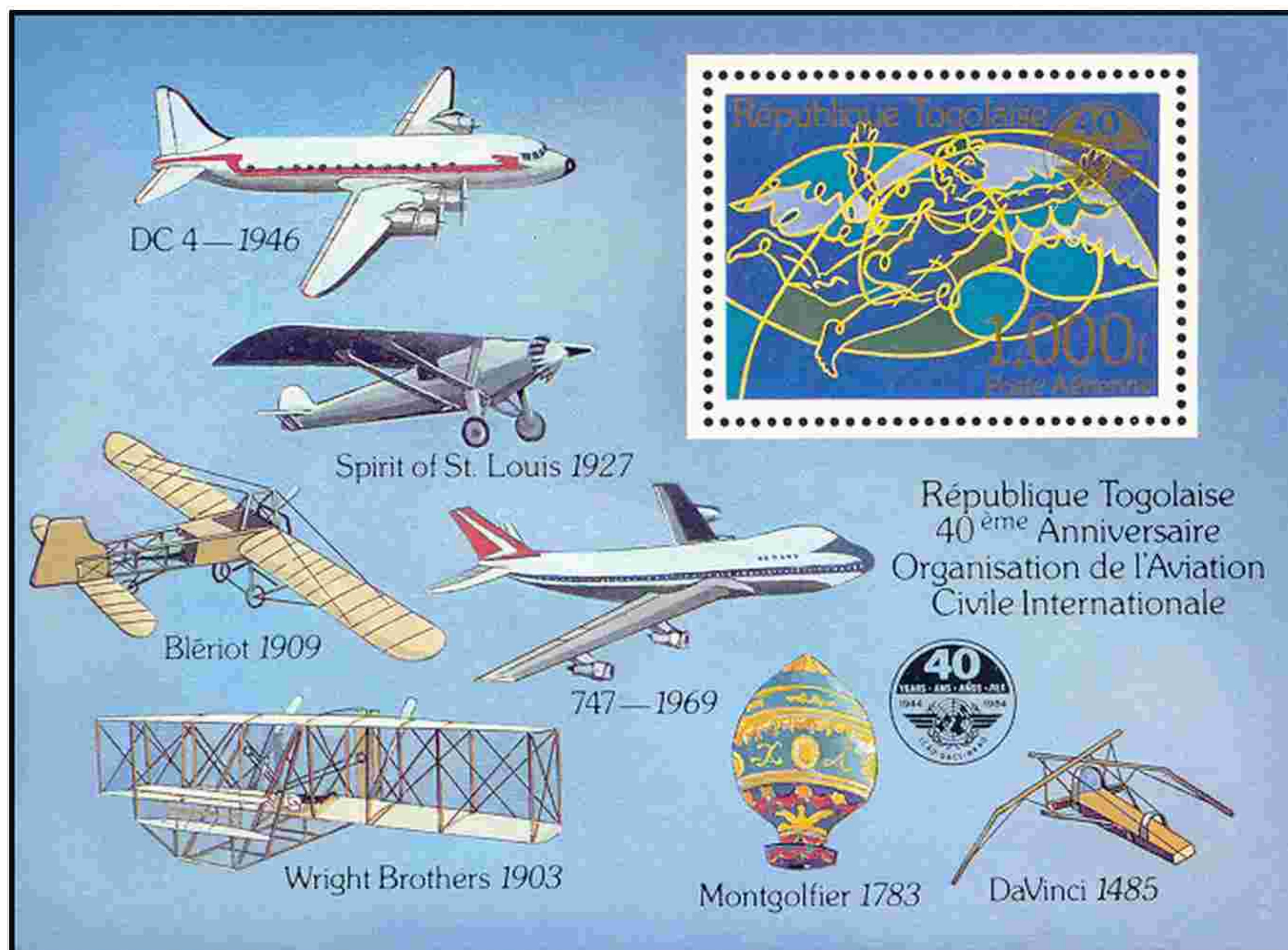


Figure 4

Breguet 19 Super TR model, named *Point d'interrogation* (Question Mark), landed after 37 hours and 18 minutes at Curtiss Field, Long Island, New York. A total of 30 covers were flown, bearing a special cachet noting the flight.

The year 2002 marked the 100th anniversary of Charles Lindbergh's birth and the 75th anniversary of his solo flight across the Atlantic Ocean. His grandson recreated the historic flight by crossing the Atlantic in 17 hours and 7 minutes in a single-engine plane named the *New Spirit of St. Louis*. Lindbergh's heroic aircraft occupies a

place of honour at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC. It has made a total of 174 flights, covering 41,000 miles. A large number of stamps and postmarks exist commemorating Lindbergh's flight; the ones shown in Figures 1 through 4 are from the collection related to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), which has had its headquarters in Montreal, Canada, since 1945.

Togo Scott #1283 (see Figure 4) traces the history of flight from the ornithopter of Da Vinci (1485) to the recent Boeing 747 (1969), including the *Spirit of St. Louis*.

CHECKLIST

Libya	1227n	1984 Dec 07	40th anniversary of ICAO, Charles Lindbergh's <i>Spirit of St. Louis</i>
Sierra Leone	683	1985 Feb 28	40th anniversary of ICAO, Charles Lindbergh, <i>Spirit of St. Louis</i>
St. Thomas & Prince Is.	530	1979 Dec 21	ICAO logo, Charles Lindbergh's <i>Spirit of St. Louis</i>
Togo	1283s/s	1984 Oct 15	40th anniversary of ICAO, Charles Lindbergh's <i>Spirit of St. Louis</i>

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