

There are men who have marked the history of the aeronautics by placing on their record lists of world raids and world records.

Paul Codos, in the thirties, at the height of glory, is adored by world authorities, civil or military and the people of Hirson. Very quickly, he goes into oblivion. A Memory Failure?

Paul Joseph Codos was born May 1, 1896 in Iviers (Aisne) to Paul Charles Oscar Codos, native of Morgny-en-Thiérache, farmer, and Marie Marthe Varlet d'Iviers. In the 1920s, the widow Marie Marthe Codos left her farm at Iviers and moved to Hirson. Her daughter Thérèse opened a lingerie-dry goods shop at 94, rue de Charleville [Charles de Gaulle]. Paul Codos was, according to his census record in town hall, a Hirson citizen from 1919 to 1946. Initially, he lived at 38 rue de la Capelle opposite the Ecole Supérieure Professionnelle of the boys, then to his Sister Therese's apartment, in Paris's 18th precinct .

In 1947, Miss Thérèse, a respected woman, very esteemed but frail, closed her business. On the advice of her brother Paul, she retired at the age of 54, to the orphanage of the Savart foundation in Saint-Michel-en-Thiérache. In 1960, the Institution closed its doors. Therese had no choice, so she settled in Paris's 16th precinct. In 1981 she passed away.

Engaged on all fronts

As for Paul Codos, the youngest of five children, son of a peasant of the Thiérache area, he is employed in his first job, that of a typographer. This job is of short duration. On September 8, 1914, at the age of 18, he went through the Saint-Quentin recruiting office. He is given registration number 338 for the duration of the war of 1914-18. He joins the 24th regiment of the artillery as a 2nd gunner. On November 14, 1914, he found himself on the front line of Verdun and the Somme. Here he received a citation from the army: "This soldier-telephonist is full of zeal and enthusiasm in his service. On the 17th of May, 1916, at the time of an air raid, his post having been bombarded by two shells, he went immediately to restore the post, without worrying about the projectiles which fell around him, thus giving a good example. Initiative, cold blood, and absolute contempt for danger. "

His feet in the slush, his head in the clouds, an idea arises: He will be an aviator. "I had witnessed," he said, "the prowess of the planes of command, of bombing, of hunting. I knew that when the crews returned from their mission a warm and warm human life awaited them. Certainly, there are risks. Our fate was no more favorable. In addition, I was nailed to the ground, half asphyxiated by gases, disgusted with the land that smelled of death. Living or dying in the sky seemed easy to me. What a temptation for an ardent soul, that singular combat!"

He applied for a transfer. He suffered a refusal from his hierarchy. The days, the months passed, our thiérachien does not give up. On the eighth attempt he obtained a favorable opinion. On November 25, 1917, Paul Codos was called to transport himself to the Division. He is seconded to the 1st aviation group. When passing the exam of general questions, he announces to the examiner that he is a typographer. "Ah! You are a topographer. Perfect, my friend, the maps will have no secret for you.

The commander confused typographer and topographer ... No matter, a career of pilot-aviator takes shape. On November 30, 1917, Paul Codos arrived in Istres, then the flight school at Nieuwpoort in Miramas where he learned acrobatic piloting on "la Grosse Julie". In January 1918, his pilot's license in his pocket, he hopes to join a squadron. In vain! The Armistice of November 11th is signed. The opportunity to show one's abilities does not arise. On August 29, 1919, sergeant Codos was demobilized and it was the expectation.

On June 20, 1920, Paul Codos received a letter inviting him to appear at the Compagnie des Messageries Aériennes. Overflow of joy! - That was yes! I had won; Many dates had faded but not that of June 20, 1920. My great dream after the war was realized. I had the sky for my domain. He agreed to be a pilot of "Breguet 14" aircraft between Avord and Istres. The adventure will be of short duration, he is requested to pack his luggage. The Compagnie des Messageries Aériennes has gone out of business. Disappointment for our man.

Night flights

In 1921, Doroman, administrator of Aérotransports Ernoult proposed to him to join his company to fly the daily connections between Bordeaux-Toulouse-Montpellier. Here he made the acquaintance of Dieudonné Costes called "Dedieu", the ace of the war of the East. These two men will, some years later, fly together. Aérotransports, without warning, went bankrupt. Codos is placed on the bench.

Two months pass. It is Pierre Ducat, director of the Trans-Safara Air Network Society who welcomes him on his Alger-Biskra-Toggourt lines. Desert flights are not without risk. The equipment is old! During a routine flight, the plane piloted by Codos crashes near Biskra. Our thiérachien is seriously wounded in the face and limbs. He is confined to a hospital bed for seven months. The diagnosis of surgeons is reserved. Codos would remain crippled for life. Error!

Once on foot, the future does not smile at him. The company is in liquidation, it no longer has its place in the ranks of the air network. In 1924, he returned to Compagnie Aérienne Française, whose specialty was the organization of aerial meetings. For want of better, Codos is on this path. Then Air-Union gives him a hand. Codos signs the contract he receives from Nogues, chief pilot and co-director of France-Romania. Presented to Bajac, chief pilot and war aviator, Paul Codos will say of Bajac: "A face so soft and sweet that the whiteness of his hair made him even more amiable, moreover a gentleman."

On January 27, 1926, with a Farman biplane dubbed the "Goliath" with two Salmson engines of 260 hp, Codos and Agnus completed the first night flights for freight transport on the Paris-London route and the following year on that of London-Marseilles. Codos, who is full of praise, observes his companion: "How many times have I secretly admired the calm and skill of a teammate like Agnus! As an athlete, his strength was matched only by his sweetness. "

During an overnight flight, the "Goliath" experiences a sudden change of power. Rouyer, a mechanic, has understood everything. Listening only to his courage, he pulled himself out of the cockpit and, clinging to the wires, reached the engine. Codos surprised, reduces speed. Rouyer takes from his pockets a forceps, duct tape, and wire. As an experienced mechanic, he patches the faulty piping. Codos was scared of his life and exploded: - "You are completely mad! I

shouted to say something." Our tightrope walker, back in his trembling position, shrugs his shoulders.

Nostalgia for the country that saw him born!

Paul Codos, confined to the 6th floor in a modest hotel room in Paris's 18th precinct comes regularly recharged to Thiérache, straddling his sacred bike: Not just any bike, a big Harley Davidson.

In September 1928, he was the guest of honor for the great motorsport event organized by the Trade Union of Hirson. This festival is held at the "Champ-Roland" where an air show takes place. Paul Codos lends himself readily to the spectacle of two trapeze artists, Roland Toutain and Maryse Hilz, who, suspended by the feet under the plane to pick up pennants. Our virtuoso of the broom handle will say: "It's a circus".

This type of demonstration is not his "cup of tea." The adventure he dreams of is to fly and break records. He has doubts, though. Would he be an airline pilot? Would he be admitted into the court of the famous aviators?

"I do not feel precisely the soul of a young girl making her debut in the world, but a first flight, for a pilot, is a bit like the intoxication of a first ball" exclaims Paul Codos at dawn to embark on the adventure.

From Indochina, he dreams of it!

"What about a trip to Indochina?" was the question posed by Dieudonné Costes to Paul Codos who seized on this idea. He dared not believe in luck, he who, secretly, cherished the dream of a Paris-Saigon-Tokyo journey with a twin-engine Blériot.

On February 19, 1929, at 1740, despite uncertain weather and with a Breguet 14 biplane, 550 hp Hispano-Suiza engine, named "Dragon of Annam," Costes, Codos as second pilot, and Bellonte as the mechanic take off from Le Bourget for the flight from Paris to Hanoi. According to Costes, they will take three and a half days to reach Indochina.

At 500 meters of altitude, the engine of the "Dragon of Annam" coughs, the propeller stops. Costes decided to land. On the approach to land, the "Dragon of Annam" strikes a pylon. It crashes along the median of the Paris-Strasbourg railway line, a few kilometers from Bondy. Costes and Bellonte get away with a few bruises. Paul Codos is stuck in the pile of wreckage. He suffers a sprained ankle, muscle tears and back pain. The dream of his first ball flies away. It will be two months of hospital care!

On December 15, 1929, Codos and Costes decided that in January-February 1930 with a Breguet-Bidon, called the "Question mark", named the "Red" by its color, and a Hispano-Suiza engine of 600 HP, will tackle the closed-circuit speed record at Narbonne-Nîmes. They will fly 23 hours and 22 minutes, covering 8029 kilometers. France is the holder of the largest aerial trophy. Both names are in the list of international charts. They nail to the pillory the Germans and the Italians: Ferrarin and Del Prete who had previously traveled 7666 kilometers.

The North Atlantic escapes him!

On July 23, 1930, with the "Question mark", Codos is approached to do a big flight over the Atlantic Ocean in the direction of New York. On the eve of the flight, it is abandoned. In the calculation of takeoff weight, a second pilot cannot be accommodated. Codos is disappointed. The crew is composed of Dieudonné Costes and Maurice Bellonte, radio navigator. Costes, calculator, estimates a journey of 6310 kilometers to be carried out in 36 hours.

The weather conditions are not good. What does it matter? From Le Bourget they are scheduled to depart on 1 September. After 37 hours and 17 minutes of flight, the wheels of the "Question mark" land on the American airport of Curtiss Field. The flight is certified by authorities. The Battle of the Atlantic is won.

On February 4, 1931, Codos was appointed deputy chief pilot at Air-Union. Two years later, the Company merged with Air France. It inaugurated the Paris-Rome and Paris-Madrid services. Paul Codos is part of the journey. O! This is not his panacea. His dream is invariably that of performing long flights and records.

In July 1931, Costes being called to other tasks, entrusts the "Question mark" to Codos. On September 11, 1931, the "Question mark" was ready. Paul Codos attacks the Paris-New York flight with Henri Robida, navigator. Codos and Robida in 37 hours flying, Costes and Bellonte [sic]. They won the long-term world record with a single stroke

The Orient, another adventure!

Ah! The East. An adventure that gives vertigo! Paul Codos aligns himself on one of the runways of Le Bourget. He is not alone in contention. Experienced pilots such as Joseph-Le-Brix, Doret and Mesmin on a Dewoitine named the "Trait d'union" have the same ambition. From the take-off, the "Question mark" keeps its promises, it is regular in altitude or even higher speed than its competitors. Calm flat, finally almost over the Ruhr, Codos crosses the German border when he hears suspicious noises under the hood. He is seeing a decline in altitude. The altimeter does its job. He says the plane is sinking. This does not bode well. Codos empties the fuel tanks. The machine must be saved. A cultivable area near Düsseldorf will do. Codos has the rage and Robida ... the tears. So many efforts were wiped out in a few minutes. Once on land, Codos learns that the "Trait d'union" has crashed in the Ural Mountains. Doret had given the order to jump out in a parachute. He alone was able to do it. The "Trait d'union" carries Joseph-Le-Brix and Mesmin. Another news reaches the ears of Codos. The "Question mark" would be retired. Farewell, friends. Farewell, "

The glorious epic of two men

5 August 1933 NEW YORK-RAYAK ROSSI-CODOS The fate is cast! On August 5, 1933, our two airmen surpassed the exploits of Icarus. They cross oceans and continents to conquer new exploits. They land on August 7 in RAYAK (Syria). The world record of distance in a straight line is beaten (9104 km) in 55 hours of flying at an average speed of 164 km/h.

On August 4, 1933, the North Atlantic provided Codos with a challenge.. The single-engine Blériot, with a 500 HP Hispano-Suiza engine, and named the "Joseph-Le-Brix" is transported in parts to New York, aboard the boat "Champlain". On August 5, the "Joseph-le-Brix" has flown.

Maurice Rossi and Paul Codos took off at about 6 am from Floyd-Bennett airport under the statue of Liberty. The Yankees are amazed: "Frenchmen undertake the most ambitious flight that has ever been made."

August 5, 1933 - NEW YORK-RAYAK - Paul CODOS world record of distance in a straight line. On 6 August, at 10.20 pm, they passed over Le Bourget. The first stage was completed, i.e. 5800 kilometers in 33 hours and 40 minutes. On the tarmac, for Mrs. Codos and Mrs. Rossi, there is strong emotion. Paul Codos declares: "Intense moments."

The first act of the journey was played and won. Below our wings, the people we cherish most were there, giving us signals. For weeks we had been separated. We would have liked to hug them, but in records of this kind, stopovers for kissing are forbidden. It's cruel. Just a few words scribbled on a piece of paper thrown out of the cabin for the women.

The second act is a problem. Above Munich, a radio message of a possible failure is transmitted: "Demoralized, we just found a gas leak and abnormal consumption. Let's beat the record nevertheless. We have fuel as far as Baghdad, but we ask for escort to Aleppo. Check on us between Vienna and Rhodes."

A few hours later, the Minister of Air announces that Codos and Rossi have passed over the island of Rhodes with reassuring news. The previous record held by Boardman and Polando is already beaten.

After 55 hours and 30 minutes of flight and having covered 9104 km, the plane landed at Rayak (Syria) 80 kilometers from Damascus. Victory! The world record distance from New York-Rayak nonstop is beaten. Codos laughs: "Long live the French Wings, long live Syria, long live France!" And this thought: "A flight is made only out of audacity, of tenacity and a sort of unconsciousness." He is not satisfied, any more than Rossi, for that matter. They were aiming further. The pack of reporters-photographers hangs around our heroes.

Paul Codos does not go away: "It's heartbreaking. With this machine, this engine, without the bad weather, we could have exceeded the 10,000 kilometers."

Welcomed as a hero

On Sunday, October 29, 1933, the town of Hirson pays a solemn homage to the child of the country. The streets are decorated. The ace of the broom handle is "plucked" from his sister's house. On board a sedan preceded by Municipal orchestra, patriotic and associative delegations, our hero, his mother, his wife and his sister Therese are acclaimed by the Hirsonnais under "Vive Codos." It's delirium. M. Emile Villemant, the first magistrate of the town of Hirson, welcomed him to the Hotel de Ville in these terms: "I receive you in all simplicity, you are here at home. Paul Codos is carried in triumph to the Salle d'Aumale where he receives the honors of Doctor Jules Gobert, Deputy Mayor who considers: "Paul Codos becomes a model of courage, tenacity, audacity and firmness. It was because he had been brought up by a French mother, a mother to whom he had learned what courage and will, self-denial and faith in the future."

The Hirson population acclaimed, without interruption, our local hero under the cries of "Vive

Codos." The whole family is moved. The women receive a wreath of flowers. The Municipal Orchestra plays La Marseillaise. Paul Codos stammered a few words of thanks to the Hirsonnais, his loved ones who supported him in the ordeals and he had a thought for his companion, Maurice Rossi.

Heaven does not wait!

Honors is one thing, piloting is quite different. On May 27, 1934, Codos and Rossi with the "Joseph-Le-Brix" attempt another attempt. This time from West to East, Paris-New York-San Francisco. The goal is to beat their own record from East to West

In flight, a radio message comes from General Denain, Minister of Air: "At the moment you fly over America, happy to announce Rossi is promoted Captain and Codos, appointed Commander Legion of Honor. The France you serve heroically is grateful to you. Congratulations affectionately."

For our two pilots, the conditions of flight are not at the rendezvous. Codos was forced to fly to Floyd Bennett after 38 hours of flight, covering 5809 kilometers at a speed of 151 kilometers per hour.

The Honours!

Codos and Rossi are received at the "White House" by Franklin Roosevelt who hardly suspects that the mission, initially set by the pilots, has not come to an end. For our virtuosos of the propeller, it is a failure. Why? On takeoff, the propeller hit a branch of a tree.

Invitation of the Hirsonnais

On September 23, 1934, Paul Codos with other obligations declined the invitation of the Union Vélocipédique Hirsonnaise for the race Paris-Hirson whose departure is fixed Le Bourget. On 22 December 1935, on returning to Thiérachian lands, he was the guest of honor of Henri Sohier, President of the Fraternelle des Poilus d'Hirson, for a "chat" for the benefit of the Works. It will be followed by a hearing by the Municipal Harmony led by Jean Leclabart, its President. 1935, a pivotal year. Unless we are mistaken, we do not hear much about our pilot-aviator on the Hirson region.

Atlantic Missions

On February 16, 1936, Codos-Rossi embarked on a Paris-Santiago flight. Once in the air there is a heartbreaking observation, the fuselage of "Joseph-Le-Brix" is covered with engine oil. Codos, defeated by the elements? Above the Atlantic Ocean, he turned around and landed on Porto-Praia [Cape Verde Islands].

Philosopher, our hero, he believes: "One must never give up on an idea but only when faced with the evidence of the impossible. "

On April 13, 1936, Codos was appointed chief pilot at Air France. The company that hardly appreciates foreign competition charges Codos to fly to the Islands of the Azores, Mr. Louis Castes, deputy of Mr. Couhé, director, general manager of Air France Transatlantique. It is a question of discovering a land of stops for a line France-North America. Negotiations are

dragging on. The Americans have the last word and they set up "their base" in Lagens. A beautiful opportunity missed by France.

On August 20, 1937, Codos still does not disarm. With Maurice Arnoux, second pilot and Louis Agnus, a radio mechanic aboard a Breguet "Fulgur" named "Raoul Ribière", he took the lead in the Istres-Damas-Paris speed race. The meter displays 6190 kilometers at an hourly average of 308 kilometers per hour.

In the wake, along with Laurent Guerrero, second pilot and Salvat, navigator, Codos performs with his Farman 2220, his first crossing of the South Atlantic. He beat the speed record of the Dakar-Natal round-trip crossings by challenging the "Doldrums" which had not deprived themselves of shaking the crew. This new record distance of 3 hours by the aircraft "Centaure" and 6 hours, by the seaplanes "Latécoère 300" one of which is dubbed the "Croix-du-Sud", the seaplane on which, on December 7, 1936, Jean Mermoz disappeared.

From the 20th to the 22nd of November 1937, on Farman 2240, named "Laurent Guerrero" named after a pilot who had disappeared two months earlier, Paul Codos, Marcel Reine, named by Codos the happy pilot, Léo Guimé, radio and Edmond Vautier, under gray skies made the Paris-Buenos Aires flight in 58 hours and 40 minutes. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Argentina, while paying tribute to the crew, observes: "We must expect a bitter struggle between the European nations for the mastery of the South Atlantic. He is preparing for a world war. It is no longer that of the trenches but of the conquest of the air.

Latest flights

On April 1, 1938, Paul Codos was appointed Inspector General of Air France, head of Air Transatlantic Services. He becomes the designer of cabins for high altitude flights. The Second World War is declared, the mobilization of the French is organized. Paul Codos is waiting. O! Not long. One evening in October 1939, he was summoned by the Admiralty. Captain Codos is nominated for a war mission. He takes command of a stratospheric Farman called the "Flammarion". At his side, Henri Guillaumet, second pilot; Comet, observer; Néri, radio; Cavaillès, a mechanic, and Commandant Dailliere, who joined the crew. This is a reconnaissance over the South Atlantic. The German pocket battleships "Graf Spee" and "Von Scheer" undermine the merchant navy. An oil tanker is reported sank off Natal.

On May 25, 1940, Paul Codos was integrated for three months at Air France in a special assignment [Mission Jules Verne]. Paul Codos, Jean Dabry, Fernand Rouchon, Lucien Regnier, Chapaton, Coustaline and Mari provide humanitarian work with the seaplane "Ville-de-Saint-Pierre." They are ordered to supply from Marseille isolated French airmen to Djibouti and Madagascar. Our military is severely lacking in food, medical equipment and medicines.

All has an end, and on July 3, 1940 Paul Codos is demobilized. On August 8, 1940, in accordance with the Official Gazette, Captain Paul Codos was struck out. He is living at 5 Villa Montcalm, Paris 18th precinct. He is not in the "world directory".

Our Thiérachien totaled over his entire career as pilot-aviator: 7598 hours 48 minutes in flight including 135 during the war of 1914-18 and 75 hours 39 minutes in the second conflict. In

October 1943, he entered the resistance in the B.C.R.A network as an intelligence agent.

He is arrested by the Gestapo. Quickly released, he joined the Liberation Army. In January 1952, retirement rings at his door, he profits from it for eight years and then it is the eternal rest.

From Iviers to Marignan

On July 7, 1974, the city of his birth remembers the child of the country. At the foot of his native house, a stela is erected to his memory. Mr. Quaneaux, mayor at the time, surrounded by personalities and Mrs. Paul Codos, widow, recalls the exploits of this adventurer pilot. "Paul Codos inaugurates night trips on the Paris-London line. Each journey is an incessant struggle against the elements. It is the daily school of courage, endurance, audacity and skill. So Paul Codos is one of our best airline pilots. May this modest monument remember him forever and express our gratitude to the hero of the epic transatlantic. "

In Marignane where he spent the war years, the municipality decided on November 8, 1976, that a place would be established in the name of Paul Codos. On 12 February 1977 the official inauguration will be attended by many personalities, former Air France employees, the band of the 4th Air Region, the two survivors of the "Ville de Saint-Pierre" Jean and Dabry Mari, and Madame Marie-Louise Codos, his widow. The press is involved and what praise!

Hirsoned in heart!

On his card at the town hall of Hirson, Paul Codos was registered until 1946, residing in Hirson. Did he have the same honors as at Iviers and Marignane? Parallel to the street Devouge, in the Plain, a cul-de-sac alley is baptized: Codos. Facing the cemetery, near "Champ Roland", next to that of Guillaumet, native of Bouy [Marne] a bar of apartments of the Sixties also displayed his name. Both buildings have taken their toll. A new district will soon come out of the ground which, according to the press: "Put a completely different face in its atmosphere of yesteryear. Will the memory of Paul Codos serve as an example and will he retain his place? Since 1940, has Jean Mermoz not his, at the top of the rue Charles de Gaulle?

Your records are not to be put to personal glory. Titles, distinctions, worldliness, you had nothing to do with it. You preferred, with your companions, to brave fatigue, cold, sleep, storms. Historians have forgotten you. Goodbye, Mr. Codos, aeronautics pioneer in France of the service, January 30, 1960, suffering from cancer, you left this earth for other lands. You have succeeded in not falling into the waves. What is not glorious!

By Jacky Billard and Jean-Marie Gérard.