

L'OISEAU BLANC (THE WHITE BIRD) A FLIGHT INTO THE UNKNOWN

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On May 8, 1927, Francois Coli and Charles Nungesser took off from France in a custom-built biplane hoping to become the first to fly non-stop between Paris and New York. On the other side of the Atlantic, Charles Lindbergh was preparing for his solo flight in the opposite direction. Both were competing for the \$25,000 Orteig Prize given to the first to complete the journey.

Heavily loaded with fuel necessary for the 40-hour trip, the L'Oiseau Blanc was sighted over England, then Ireland, as it headed out over the ocean. Unfortunately, Coli and Nungesser were never heard from again. If they had landed, Lindbergh would have cancelled his flight.

The mysterious loss has baffled many since that time. Farmers and woodsmen near Machias, Maine, came forward to give their accounts of hearing a low flying plane and the sound of a crash at the time the L'Oiseau Blanc would have been flying overhead on its way to New York. Others near Harbor Grace, Newfoundland spoke of seeing a plane trailing white smoke as it passed by. Some have speculated the plane encountered trouble over Ireland and flew back toward France, crashing in the English Channel. To this day, investigative organizations continue their search. They have not found conclusive evidence of the wreckage.

In 1967, 40 years after their flight, France issued a stamp and first day cover honoring the flyers.



The monument to the flyers in Étretat, France, the last place the plane was to be seen over French soil, is in the lower left of the cachet. The monument was destroyed in WWII by the German occupiers and was replaced by a new monument in 1962.

The plane is also correctly depicted with its landing gear missing. It was jettisoned on takeoff to reduce weight. The L'Oiseau Blanc was planning a water landing in front of the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor.

The under carriage is on display at the French Air and Space Museum at Paris's Le Bourget airport. You can see it at:

<https://www.museeairespace.fr/aller-plus-haut/collections/train-datterrissage-du-levasseur-pl-8-oiseau-blanc/>

In 1997, St. Pierre and Miquelon, a French island territory off the coast of Newfoundland, issued an airmail stamp. Recent work to find the engine block centers on an area of ocean floor near the island.



Also, in 1997, France commemorated both the L'Oiseau Blanc and the Spirit of St. Louis on an airmail stamp.



Charles Lindbergh, in his Spirit of St. Louis, would become the first to fly non-stop between New York and Paris. His accomplishment would overshadow the tragic loss of L'Oiseau Blanc. Later he wrote the two pilots "vanished like midnight ghosts."

The 1927 United States Lindbergh issue

