

DE PINEDO DELAYED OVER CANADA

by Albert Pelsser

An earlier article dealing with, inter alia, the aviation accomplishments of Colonel Francesco de Pinedo, was published in *The Canadian Connection*, Volume 18, Number 2, June 2004, and provided some details shown on the Paraguayan souvenir sheet Scott #1859 (see Figure 1) issued for the international stamp exhibition in Riccione, Italy, in 1978. This souvenir sheet also commemorated the 50th anniversary of de Pinedo's world tour in 1927, reaching three continents with a double-crossing of the Atlantic Ocean and promoting a sense of national pride among Italians living abroad. The purpose of this article is to provide more insight on the Canadian side of his trip.

Born in Naples, Italy, Francesco de Pinedo was an active promoter and participant in a series of good-will tours to various points on the globe. Whereas all of these flights were impressive in nature, de Pinedo's tour of the Western Hemisphere was a particularly outstanding feat that brought the Italian aviator international acclaim.

During the 1920s and 1930s, Italy was a world leader in aviation with 18 companies producing aircraft; the industry owed no small debt to the first Italian aviation pioneers. Among these, Alessandro Marchetti joined the Savoia Company in 1922 and designed racing seaplanes and huge twin-hulled flying boats, including the S.55 aircraft. With its two sleek hulls joined like Siamese twins by a single, broad and sweeping wing, the S.55 plane's appearance was outstanding. The cockpit was located in the centre of the wing itself, above which were perched two tandem-mounted Isotta-Franchini V-6 engines

capable of developing more than 1,000 H.P. In the way of accessories, the plane was equipped with top-quality navigational instruments, a salt distiller, a life raft, and even a complete array of fishing gear. The advantages of hefty engine power were naturally offset by larger fuel consumption. To attend to this, de Pinedo had the plane fitted with tanks capable of holding more than 1,000 gallons of gasoline.

In 1927, de Pinedo's Savoia-Marchetti S.55, christened the *Santa Maria*, made the 29,180-mile cruise of the two Americas, with 51 stops, in 193 hours' flying time. The Savoia-Marchetti flying-boat S.55 achieved great fame through many spectacular long-distance flights, the object of which was to prove the airplane to be the most practical method of rapid transportation for commercial purposes. De Pinedo and his two-member crew (Captain Engineer Carlo del Prete and Mechanic Vitale Zacchetti) flew his Savoia-Marchetti S.55 from Sesto Calende, near Milan, Italy, on 12 February 1927 to South America by way of West Africa, up to New Orleans and Chicago in the

United States, and thence to Montreal, his first intended stop in Canada. From there, he planned to leave for Quebec City and Trepassy Bay, at the southeast of Newfoundland and then leap back over the Atlantic to the Azores, with the hope of being back in Rome for 24 May, on King's Day in Italy. De Pinedo was the first pilot to fly a foreign aircraft to the United States.

The original aircraft S.55 was accidentally destroyed by fire on 16 April 1927 while moored at Roosevelt Dam in Phoenix, Arizona; the careless disposal of a lit



Figure 1

cigarette by a labourer ignited the gasoline and destroyed the plane. The Italian government sent a new S.55, now named *Santa Maria II*, to New York from where de Pinedo and his crew continued their tour. The only difference between the *Santa Maria II* and the original *Santa Maria* was the Latin inscription painted on the wings below the motors, reading *Post Fata Resurgo* ("After Fate The Resurrection") signifying that the present machine had been resurrected after fate had overtaken its predecessor.

De Pinedo was expected to leave Chicago on 16 July 1927; however, due to ignition trouble, he decided to postpone his departure for Montreal until the following day, making up for lost time by flying directly to Shippigan Island, New Brunswick, instead of going to Quebec City as originally planned. On 17 July, flying from Chicago, he landed on the water off the Victoria Pier in Montreal at 18:30, being delayed two and an half hours at Stony Point, U.S.A., and Long Point, Canada, on Lake Erie, as a leak had developed in the radiator. Shipping in the port of Montreal was virtually suspended throughout the course of that afternoon; the entire wharf at the foot of McGill Street was packed with crowds. Montreal thus became the aviator's second stop in Canada.

After a small reception on the harbour yacht *Bethalma* and an official visit at City Hall, de Pinedo was the guest of honour at a reception, for the benefit of members of the Italian community, hosted at the "Stanley Hall," an old movie theatre on Stanley Street. He was presented with a reproduction of the caravel *Santa Maria* on which Columbus discovered America, with wings added to bring it up to date. Later in the evening, he was given a banquet in the Windsor Hotel, where he stayed for the night.

The following day, on 18 May 1927, inclement weather in Montreal and reports of foggy air navigation conditions in the St. Lawrence Gulf made de Pinedo decide to postpone his early departure; the flying boat took the air at 12:15 for the next stop at Shippigan Island, New Brunswick, where fuel would be taken aboard and weather reports received, before continuing to Trepassey Bay. He followed the St. Lawrence river at a very low altitude because of the poor visibility; however, easterly winds and continuing rain forced de Pinedo to reverse course back to

Quebec City when in the vicinity of Rivière-du-Loup. He landed for an unscheduled stop in Quebec at the Louise dock at 15:15, and the crew was taken to the stately Château Frontenac Hotel.

From Quebec, after a one-hour stop in Rimouski on 19 May because of foggy weather, de Pinedo finally reached Shippegan, New Brunswick, where he arrived at 17:55. Because of foggy conditions prevailing on the Newfoundland coast, three bases were established at various points on the island for the Italian aviator.

The next day, after encountering much fog interspersed with patches of clear air, de Pinedo arrived at Trepassey Bay, Newfoundland, just after 18:00. This was his last stop before the transatlantic leg, for which 150 cases of Shell gasoline and 25 cases of Castrol motor oil had been stored awaiting his arrival. Village after village flashed the word to the world that de Pinedo had passed and then turned to look for another adventurer, Charles Lindbergh, who was due in the same vicinity soon after the Italian for the first solo transatlantic flight. The accommodation for de Pinedo's crew at Trepassey was set up in two railway cars.

On 22 May, de Pinedo attempted to take off for the transatlantic flight to the Azores. The motorboat towing the plane broke down however, and it was taking too long to assume the take-off position because of choppy water and gusting wind; worse, the wind changed to a westerly direction and was no longer favourable to a safe take-off.

The *Santa Maria* eventually took off from the harbour of Trepassey Bay on 23 May. It could not make Horta in the Azores because of strong head winds and had to be towed the last 200 miles by a fishing boat. After repairs and stops in Portugal and Spain, de Pinedo reached Ostia harbour, Rome, Italy, on 16 June 1927. Bad weather conditions over the East coast had delayed his flight over Canada by four days.

The aforementioned souvenir sheet includes a world map of de Pinedo's flight. Montreal, Quebec, and Trepassey are all named on the map, meaning that the route represented on the map is de Pinedo's original plan. The sheet also commemorates the 30th anniversary of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the headquarters of which have been in Montreal since 1945. The souvenir sheet therefore provides double Canadiana content.

CHECKLIST

Paraguay	1859s/s	1978 Jul 19	Francisco de Pinedo, map of his flight, 30th anniversary of ICAO
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