

The Raid of the “*Plus Ultra*”. The First Aerial Crossing of the South Atlantic Ocean

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When World War I ended in 1918 the aviators wanting to fly higher and further and they started a race in which everyone wanted to be first. The Spanish pilots were initially excluded by the Moroccan War, which demanded all available air forces be used to put an end to the conflict. Motivated by the successes of *The Alhucemas amphibious landing*, one of best Spanish aviators, Major Ramón Franco presented to the Government in 1925 a project to undertake a flight to Argentina across the South Atlantic Ocean in a *Dornier J Wal* seaplane. In the memorandum, Franco said: *The Spain-Argentina flight would be a worthwhile trial and verification of air navigation. It would also serve to let the entire world know of the merits of our Aviation and allow us to occupy the aeronautical place that belongs to us in aeronautics. It would also help us strengthen our ties with our brothers at the other side of the ocean.* The *Dornier J Wal* was named “*Plus Ultra*” referring to the Discovery of America. The route should be Palos de la Frontera-Las Palmas de Gran Canaria-Cape Verde islands-Fernando Noronha island-Pernambuco-Rio de Janeiro-Montevideo and Buenos Aires. Franco reasoned that the best time of year to make the flight was from December to April. The raid started in the city Palos de la Frontera on 22 January 1926 and ended in Buenos Aires on February 9, after flying 10,825 kilometers in 59 hours and 48 minutes.

Keywords: Ramón Franco, *Dornier J Wal*, “*Plus Ultra*”, Palos de la Frontera, Buenos Aires

The Raid of the “*Plus Ultra*”. The Aerial Crossing of the South Atlantic Ocean

As a consequence of the Spanish-French conference held in the city of Algeciras, in September, 1925, the Spanish Government decided to put an end to the Moroccan insurrection against the Sultan and launched the first air-land-sea operation in world military history. Known as the *Alhucemas amphibious landing*, the operation involved 20,000 soldiers with the strong air support of 162 airplanes.

World War I ended in 1918 and with an aeronautics industry wanting to apply the new developments and innovations introduced during the conflict to Aviation, along with aviators wanting to fly higher and further, a race started in which everyone wanted to be the first. The Spanish pilots were initially excluded by the Moroccan War, which demanded all available air forces be used to put an end to the conflict.

Motivated by the successes of *The Alhucemas amphibious landing*, the Spanish pilots presented to the Government in 1925 a project to undertake three Great Flights. These flights would be to Argentina, the Philippines and the Spanish Guinea, all three being destinations that historically and to this day have intimate ties with Spain.

The mind behind the project of the flight to Buenos Aires was one of best Spanish aviators, the Infantry

ajor Ramon Franco Bahamonde, who was given the *Individual Military Medal* in 1923 due to its heroic actions in the Moroccan War. A tireless worker who always asked more of himself, since 1924 he started to study the feasibility of crossing the Southern Atlantic Ocean, with Buenos Aires as a final destination, which he would keep doing during the course to become a Major in 1925. He believed he could surpass the feats a few years before of the two famous Portuguese pilots, Gago Coutinho and Sacadura Cabral, who required the use of three in succession due to the unfitness of the first two. Ramón Franco believed he could help improve and expand relations between Spain and the Hispano American nations that had been so cool and distant since their independence.

Preparations of the Raid

The seaplanes base of El Atalayón in Melilla is where the project would mature. The expenses of buying books and other materials were paid for by Franco himself. Ramón Franco offered to share his project with another prestigious aviator, the Captain of Engineers, pilot and observer Mariano Barberán, considered to be the finest expert in air navigation in Spain and he enthusiastically accepted the offer. Now united in this fantastic project, they began to consider every detail from a strictly scientific point of view on how to proceed with the development of the projected raid on Buenos Aires. They were ready to use whatever technological advancement there was to help them to build on their knowledge acquired during their practical experience in the Moroccan War with seaplanes flights. From the first moment, Ramón Franco always thought to make this flight across the South Atlantic Ocean in a *Dornier J Wal* seaplane, which he considered to be superior to any land based aircraft.

The intrepid aviator established contacts with the Dornier Company because he was of the opinion that the seaplane should be propelled by engines more powerful as the 450 HP *Napier Lion*. On being notified of these actions, the Director of Military Aeronautics, General Jorge Soriano, ordered Ramón Franco to present a cost estimate and report for the project to be submitted to the President of the Government.

On July 22, 1925, Ramón Franco and Mariano Barberán presented to General Soriano a memorandum of the flight that the author summarizes:

“In recent years there have been long flights in airplanes guided by radio directed finding installed on board directed by signals emitted by radiotelegraphic stations that act in the style of lighthouses guiding the aircraft and allowing them to calculate their exact locations. The Spain-Argentina flight would be a worthwhile trial and verification of air navigation. It would also serve to let the entire world know of the merits of our Aviation and allow us to occupy the aeronautical place that belongs to us in aeronautics. It would also help us strengthen our ties with our brothers at the other side of the ocean. Also this raid would be the best way to strengthen the ties that always existed between Spain and Argentina. Two great nations that despite their independence and their geographical separation, form a single motherland for Spaniards and Argentineans united by a common language, race and feelings.

The military seaplane that we propose to make the crossing is the twin engine Dornier Wal, which was renowned for his high quality war service in Morocco. This plane also has demonstrated its fines qualities by taking part in numerous foreign expeditions and breaking great number of world records. The fuel capacity is 4,000 liters and it has an operational range of 3,300 kilometers and the maximum weight is 6,800 kilograms, making it possible to carry that quantity of fuel and everything else necessary for such a long raid such as pares parts, goniometric and radiotelegraphic installations, instruments, tools, baggage, provisions, for several days, etc.

This raid will demonstrate the possible link by air of our nation to our brothers and sisters in South America.

We can prove Spanish Aviation to be worthy of the name of our beloved homeland on the other side of the Ocean, carrying to them burst of optimism and hope in our resurgence.

To complete all of the preparations by the month of December, it would advisable to approve the project quickly to give the people involved in making the crossing time to prepare and check everything including navigational experiments and flight tests”.¹

The memorandum continued with a meteorological study of the route. The initial route was to be Palos de la Frontera-Las Palmas de Gran Canaria-Proto Praia (in Cape Verde)-Natal-Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires, but in the end the circumstances would force them to include two extra landings in the island of Fernando Noronha and Montevideo, and Natal had to be substituted by Pernambuco. Ramón Franco and Mariano Barberán reasoned that the best time of year to make the flight was from December to April.

Characteristics of the Dornier J Wal “Plus Ultra”

Approved the flight project, the Dornier Company of Friedrichshafen was charged to construct in its factory in Marina di Pisa (Italy) a seaplane with the specified characteristics. As an acceptance test, it was required to fly with a maximum practical load of 3,300 kilograms at a speed of 185 kilometers per hour, to climb to 3,000 meters above sea level with this load and to fly with only a single engine at 500 meters above sea level without losing altitude.

The seaplane is floating fuselage type twin-engine monoplane comprised of a fuselage. At its sides it has two floating wings that serve to support the struts of the support surfaces assuring stability while navigating in the water and increasing overall support during flight.

The radiotelegraphic station is a Marconi with an antenna of cooper wire, 100 meters length. There is also an emergency distress call antenna that is mounted on a strut to transmit from the sea. The radiogoniometer is also Marconi, with antennas forming two squares. For astronomic navigation the “*Plus Ultra*” will have onboard a bubble sextant.

Type: Dornier J Wal. Twin-engine seaplane, for reconnaissance and bombing.

Dimensions: Wingspan 22.5 m. Length 17.25 m. Height 5.2 m. Wing surface 96 square meters.

Manufacturer: Construzioni Meccaniche Aeronautiche, S.A. Marina di Pisa (Italy).

Power Plant: Two engines Napier Lion, 450 HP each one. *Weights:* Empty 3,500 kg. With maximum load 6,800 kg. *Performance:* Cruising speed 175 Km/h; Maximun speed 197 km/h. *Construction:* Wings of duralumin and canvas. Fuselage of duralumin. *Crew:* Two pilots and two observers.

Observations: Was the best seaplane of its time, because of its speed, range, and all metal construction.²

The Crew of the Dornier J Wal Goes to Marina Di Pisa

With the cost estimate and report presented by both pilots approved by the President of the Government, the Dornier Company of Friedrichshafen was ordered to begin construction in its factory in Marina di Pisa of a seaplane with the specific characteristics. Just a proposed by the Director of Military Aeronautics, this *Dornier J Wal* would be one of the series produced by the company for deliver to the Spanish Aviation in September 1925, but introducing the necessary modifications so that it could transport larger loads, with a stronger hull and floats and essential navigation equipment installed. Ramón Franco and Mariano Barberán would immediately travel to

¹ R. Franco and M. Barberán (1925), Memoria del Vuelo de España a Argentina.

² Aviones Militares Españoles. (1986), Madrid. Aviation Institute of History and Culture.

Pisa with the aim of carrying out acceptance test and direct the installation of the modifications.

However Ramón Franco was faced with a serious problem, weeks later for personal reasons, Mariano Barberán temporary left the Military Aeronautics, and Ramon Franco was forced to urgently look for another Pilot and Observer with the required competences and qualities for such a venture. By direction of General Soriano was chosen the Artillery Captain Julio Ruiz de Alda, born in the town of Estella, province of Navarra, who had to make a great effort to learn about the new techniques related to navigation and radio operation as well as radiogoniometrics. His fine professional qualifications allowed him to quickly train for his task. However, Ramón Franco also needed a mechanic to look after his *Dornier J Wal* and who was not afraid of flying many hours above the sea, for which he had to be a seaplane mechanic. Franco had it easy here, his own mechanic, the young specialist and soldier Pablo Rada Ustarroz, who was also from Navarra and born in Caparroso.

In the middle of October 1925 the crew of the “*Plus Ultra*” went to Marina di Pisa to begin the training program with the *Dornier J Wal*. Franco and Ruiz de Alda do not leave anything to chance and because of this they executed with care every required detail that they had studied and proposed. Among this was the weight of the three of them, because of this, they devoted themselves to make severe sacrifices, rigorous gymnastic exercises and reduces diets, to reach the minimum desired weight, as well as to get accustomed to withstanding various days of the tortures of hunger and thirst, in case circumstances of the flight forced them to land in the Atlantic.

At Marina di Pisa Franco and Ruiz de Alda, set about to get the *Dornier J Wal* in perfect flight conditions to conveniently install of the equipment and perform all of the tests established in the contract, to comply with all of the specifications previously stated in the description and characteristics of the “*Plus Ultra*”. On 12 November the crew left Marina di Pisa on a course to Barcelona to carry out the final tests and during the flight observed some defects in stability and harshness in the control that were rectified at the base of the seaplanes *Dornier J Wal* in Melilla. The aircraft would be numbered *W-12* and its military plate would be *M-MWAL*.

Ramón Franco and Ruiz de Alda traveled to Madrid to resolve official formalities and authorizations and also paid his respects to the Minister of the Navy, Admiral Cornejo, to whom stated his need to rely on the collaboration of two Spanish Navy warships to protect the flight and also would supply logistic support and help with air navigation to Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro respectively. The Minister granted them use the *Blas de Lezo* cruiser and the *Alsedo* destroyer for the trip, but answer to Franco as compensation that an officer of the Navy be onboard the seaplane and recommended that it be naval Lieutenant Juan Manuel Durán, born in Jerez de la Frontera, a pilot well-known by the aviators, having lent service at the base of Melilla. As they had to reduce the weight of the seaplane to a minimum, the Admiral and Franco came to an agreement that for the most delicate stage of the flight, the crossing from Cape Verde Islands to Pernambuco, Lieutenant Durán would be on board the *Alsedo*, one of the two ships assigned to secure the route of the seaplane. Because of this demand, Alonso, a photographer from the Central Cabinet of the Military Aeronautics and aviation reporter for most of the newspapers was only authorized to be on board from Palos de La Frontera to Las Palmas. Franco and Ruiz de Alda returned to Melilla to check and calibrate the compasses, sextants, chronometers and the rest of the scientific instruments necessary. They modified the fuel installations and carried out a meticulous adjustment of the seaplane.

The *Dornier J Wal* was named “*Plus Ultra*” by Rafael Fernández de Castro, the official chronicler of the city of Melilla, referring to the Discovery of America, with which destroyed the myth of the legendary non *Plus Ultra* of the Columns of Hercules.

When the tests and preparations were finished, the aviators were ordered to travel to Madrid to receive the best wishes of His Majestic the King Alfonso XIII and the Government. There were given letters of greeting by the King to the Presidents of Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina, where they would make stops. His Majestic the King bid farewell to the aviators with a sincere and cordial embrace, that Franco declared was very emotional. For political reasons the Government decided that as raid was to be carried out on Hispano America nations, the starting point should be the same as that used by Christopher Columbus in 1492, the Andalusian town of Palos de la Frontera.

On January 19, 1926 the aviators got ready to fly to Huelva. A huge crowd met them at the Mar Chica docks together with the military and civil authorities of Melilla to see off the “*Plus Ultra*”. Four hours later the aircraft landed on the waters of the Tinto River. On the morning of the 21 the aircraft arrived in Palos de la Frontera and Ramon Franco would excitedly declare: “*Upon landing on the Rio Tinto the Plus Ultra is anointed by this river’s red waters and ceases being a war vessel in order to become a peace messenger that will open the aerial routes between Spain and those lands discovered and inhabited by its sons*”.

The “*Plus Ultra*” Crosses the South Atlantic Ocean

At dawn on January 22, 1926 the crewmembers of the “*Plus Ultra*” were prepared to begin the raid. For the few hours that they had slept, they heard the lullabies of the strumming guitars that could be heard the entire night. Surrounded by friends, colleagues and an enthusiastic multitude they went to Mass at the church of San Jorge of Palos de la Frontera, the same church that Christopher Columbus prayed before he began his voyage on August 3, 1492. Also attending were Prince Alfonso de Orleans and Prince Carlos de Borbón, representing the Royal Family, the Director of Military Aeronautics, the official Diplomatic Corps of Madrid, regional authorities and innumerable aviators. While the church bells rang jubilantly, dozens of boats were lined up in columns of honor on both banks of the Tinto River. To give them an air escort on their take off to South America, and to glory, twenty aircrafts had flown in from Seville.

Shortly before eight in the morning the seaplane *Dornier J Wal “Plus Ultra”* started its engines and in the midst of a delirious and enthusiasm of over 40,000 souls crowded together the shores of the river, at 07:55 on January 22, 1926 a historic moment in Aviation History, began its take off. Seconds later, they over-flew the monument to Columbus located in the la Rábida Monastery and set course for the Canary Islands. All the supplies that they carried were 2 kg of ham, another 2 kg of sugar, a kilogram of coffee, another kilogram of cocoa bean, 3 kg of biscuits and 5 kg of figs. They also carried a bottle of cognac and another one of Jerez wine, as well as a thermos bottle and a water distiller.

But nothing can be better than to quote the book “*De Palos al Plata*” (it means From Palos de la Frontera to the Plata River) that was written by Franco and Ruiz de Alda about the historic raid. In reference to the first leg, Ruiz de Alda said: “*When the “Plus Ultra” left Palos de la Frontera was surrounded by large clouds that reduced the visibility, but soon was in visual contact with Cádiz and a ship. At 11:00 hours we began to hear the stations at Las Palmas and Tenerife. These signals confirmed the route that we were following. We were very confident in the radiogoniometer. Seven hours and five minutes after the take-off we flew over the island of Fuerteventura and later we passed over the island of Gran Canaria without seeing it until the radiogoniometer marked the presence of its station. A cloud then opened and we saw that was over Puerto de la Luz, where the ‘Pus Ultra’ made a sea landing at 16:03 Iberian Peninsula time. We arranged to leave two days later; a directional control had failed and then we decided to drop off Mr. Alonso, reporter for the flight, get rid of some gasoline and*

they fly the plane to Gando Bay. This bay offered better protection from the rough northern-eastern winds. This caused us to lose two days more and arrive to Cape Verde Islands with barely enough time to take advantage of the January Moon”. On this leg they would cover 1,315 kilometers and log eight hours and eight minutes, flying an average 163 km/h.

However, the delay, unfortunately, was prolonged days more. Bad sea conditions at Las Palmas and Porto Praia in Cape Verde made the flight unadvisable. During an inspection of the aircraft Pablo Rada detected that one of the cables of the rudder had suffered from excessive rubbing. He then proceeded to its substitution and upon realizing that the new one was going to end up like the previous one he decided to make its passage hole bigger in order to prevent future rubbing. Because of the bad weather conditions they had to delay the departure to Cape Verde until the 26, in the meantime they unloaded sundry equipment and non-essential materials up to 400 kilograms that they shipped to Buenos Aires aboard the Dutch vessel *Gelria*.

The weather conditions improved on Tuesday 26 and they resumed the raid.

Second Stage

I continue with how Ruiz de Alda narrates this leg of the flight:

The “*Plus Ultra*” took off at 07:35, January 26 and flew towards the island of La Sal, the closest one belonging to the Cape Verde archipelago. This stage from Canary Islands to Cape Verde was the most difficult for us with respect to navigation as some islands had limited visibility, but the radiogoniometer served them admirably. All radio stations had been warned that we were able to get the radio signals of the aircraft as it flew. The trade winds had an intensity of 20 knots, which made flying easier, and in order to make a better use of them Ramon Franco decided to fly at a height of 200 meters over waves that were rather high. The most disagreeable part was the food, as we carried nothing but emergency supplies. Only Lieutenant Durán, more farsighted surprised them with some sweets. We did not communicate with Porto Praia, but using the radiogoniometer to receive signals navigating became easy, we heard two stations and merchant ships that were transmitting with different wavelengths. So we could deducing that were in fact, but the pilot, Ramón Franco, had to stay on the controls for the whole nine hours and 50 minutes (or 1,745 km) that the flight lasted. The seaplane arrived to Porto Praia. The visibility was very poor, but we could see the two Spanish war ships, the *Alsedo* and the *Blas de Lezo* who greeted us with gun salutes. We touched down in a bad sea at 17:25.

The “*Plus Ultra*” had broken two world seaplane speed and distance records, for flights over 1,500 km.

The leg from here was the most risky part of the flight and furthermore the forced delay in the Canary Islands almost surely had cause then the use of the January Moon. A loaded down take off would be difficult, and with enough fuel to cover the 2,850 kilometers to the coast of Brazil, combined with the bad seas conditions it presented the possibility that the bottom of the seaplane could give way. To reduce weight they agreed to leave behind various items that were passed to the ship *Blas de Lezo*, only oil, gasoline, water and essential tools remained on board the aircraft. Only they carry very few spare parts for the engines, five kilograms of baggage and ten kilograms of food. As it was agreed with the Minister of the Navy, Lieutenant Durán went to the *Alsedo*.

Third Stage

Ruiz de Alda continues:

We went with the ‘*Plus Ultra*’ to do Inferno Bay, more protected from the winds, towed by a launch. The January Moon already passed and the plan to arrive in daylight was impossible. We had at two in the morning to arrive at Pernambuco before nightfall, it was already too late to land at the Brazilian coast during the day and the crew was not familiar with the port of Pernambuco. So we decided make a water landing at Fernando Noronha Island.

Still, the “*Plus Ultra*” took off with a weight of 3,625 kg even though the maximum authorized weight for such an

aircraft was of 2,000 kg. The island of Fernando Noronha was 2,260 km away and Ramon Franco wanted to be sure that he had enough fuel for the flight since that was the actual flight over the Atlantic Ocean. On January 30, at 06:10 and after a failed take-off due to the aircraft not reaching a speed of 50 km/h, the “*Plus Ultra*” managed to do it normally. Porto Praia and the *Alsedo* were broadcasting for the “*Plus Ultra*” for one hour, but later, from nine in the morning until one in the afternoon, we were incommunicado with the world just for the three hours and we had to navigate using the position of the sun. We flew among clouds at 300 meters above a very choppy sea. After 14:30 we started receiving signals from some vessels that came off our bow and later on from Pernambuco. We entered a zone of equatorial storms that caused them to make detours to avoid them. We only had to face one storm head on, passing underneath, which drenched us with an enormous quantity of water. It was not until 17:00 that we finally received radio signals from the station at Fernando Noronha. When the sun was setting, we sighted the island and even though Franco sped up to 200 km/h he landed almost at night, at 18:35 and started to navigate in the direction of the island’s working lighthouse; we traveled twenty miles in this manner and lit the red and green lights, but the lack of visibility made those at Noronha believe that the seaplane were navigating away from the island. Franco directed the aircraft at an inlet and saw a light, but there was no one.

One half hour later a boat arrived carrying the Governor of the island’s Secretary, who told us it would be very difficult to disembark. We spent the night in the “*Plus Ultra*”. At daybreak the *Alsedo* arrived and took us to the island.

The seaplane remained moored in the sea to some wood anchored with chains. They had flown 2,305 kilometers in 12 hours and 40 minutes with an average speed of 182 km/h.

On this stage the “*Plus Ultra*” and in the followings from Recife to Rio de Janeiro and from Rio to Montevideo this seaplane broke three world speed and distance records for flights over 1,500 and 2,000 kilometers.

Fourth Leg

During this stage the propeller of the rear engine broke. Ramón Franco had to stop it, and as the front engine to maximum revolutions not give the performance necessary, the aircraft descended to sea level until the crests of the waves, flying at 90 km/h. So, continues Ruiz de Alda, “*We had to throw everything, included the baggage, overboard, to gain some meters of altitude. When we arrived to Pernambuco, and after over fly the coast, Franco make a water landing in the port of Recife at 15:48*”. The aviators had covered 540 kilometers in three hours and 38 minutes. They had crossed the South Atlantic Ocean. In Pernambuco were given them a reception that cannot be described. Some hundreds of Spaniards living there hugged them with intense emotion. The aviators applauded and surrounded by the crowd, managed with great difficulty as the police opened a path to the official automobiles, to pay their respects to the Governor of the state.

On the morning of February 1, the ship *Alsedo* arrived to the port of Recife, carrying all of spare twin-bladed and four bladed propellers that had transported from Spain. On the other hand, Franco had decided dismantled the radiogoniometer because now it was unnecessary for the rest of the flight to Buenos Aires. They would fly along the coast route.

Fifth Stage

Before departing towards Rio de Janeiro they were given a complete weather forecast by the Meteorological Service of the city. As the crew of the “*Plus Ultra*” said, that is what future meteorological preparations should be like for regular flights.

At 05:10, February 4, the “*Plus Ultra*” was taking off without any difficulty. As Ruiz de Alda continues:

This stage of the flight was kind of easy and tourist since apart from some storms, we could almost always fly 200 m above the sea, enjoying a beautiful sight of a shore where wild vegetation sprouted and a jungle disappeared on the horizon. We could even see the inhabitants of the beaches waving at them with flags and salvos. When we arrived at the city of

Bahia we overflew the city and caught a glimpse of the huge number of people clamouring from the rooftops. Due to the sheer amount of salvos that were shot Ramón Franco had to ascend to 400 m so as to avoid being hit by them. During the 2,100 kilometers of the stage, Ramón Franco was seated to the commands control without take a rest. We were receiving meteorological information from eight stations that permit the crew avoid any storms.

When entering the Rio de Janeiro Bay several aircrafts from the Brazilian Naval Aeronautics were awaiting our arrival. So as to prove that we were not tired Franco increased their speed to 200 km/h by diving down, entering in the bay and leaving the small planes behind. After flying around the city the “*Plus Ultra*” landed softly on the waters of Rio de Janeiro at 17:25. We had flown 2,100 km in 12 hours and 16 minutes at an average speed of 171 km/h.

However, they did not expect the amount of canoes and tugboats that met them, despite Franco shouting at them not to get too close so as not to damage the aircraft. A tugboat that was several tons heavy got so close that it damaged the aircraft’s rudder so the aviator asked the naval commander to place an armed guard in order to prevent further damages. When they arrived in the harbour they could barely get in the cars that were waiting for them since there was about a million people waiting for them as well.

The reception of the Brazilian people was impressive and aroused of enthusiasm was jumping over the cars trying to embrace the aviators. The historian José Gomá, in his book *History of the Spanish Aeronautics*, said: “Ramon Franco even had to get on the vehicle’s bonnet because of the people’s clamour. Those estimated that about a million of people filled the main Rio Branco Avenue. From the balconies the women threw flowers in their path and the tributes where so continued that aviators did not have time to check the plane and prepare for the flight to Buenos Aires”.

Before leaving Rio de Janeiro Franco wanted to perform a test flight to try one of the new propellers and so as to fly over the city to drop notices thanking the people. However, a fire started on the back engine when landing and Pablo Rada had to take his clothes off and throw himself on the flames so as to prevent a disaster from happening. Because of this event he suffered severe burns on his abdominal area that took him several days to recover.

February is a summer month in the southern hemisphere so the President and the aristocracy of the country spend the warm season at the city of Petropolis. In order to meet with President Bernades and hand him the letter that the King of Spain had given them, they took a special train on the 5 and they met with the most special of honours. Back at Rio the crew had to go to many receptions and Pablo Rada’s health started to worry Franco. On the afternoon February 7, Duran got lost for the whole day and Ruiz de Alda and Rada where nowhere to be found at midnight, so Franco had to delay their departure until the 9. Alda and Duran ended showing up but the mechanic was still missing so Franco asked the police lieutenant under him to search for Rada and bring him to the hotel. Finally, the mechanic showed up looking terrible. It appears his admirers had not let him rest for two days straight.

Sixth Leg

At 06:45 February 9, the “*Plus Ultra*” tries to begin the take off. As Ruiz de Alda said:

But it was very difficult because the plane has been loaded with automotive gasoline, since they could not obtain aviation fuel. Franco tried to take off five times, but had to desist and wait until 06:45, when a mild wind started blowing, allowing them to take off 30 minutes later and the aircraft gain elevation. Before flying towards Montevideo Franco flew around the Brazilian bay to make sure that the engines worked normally. We had lost more than two hours but wanted to get to Montevideo before night time. The distance to the Uruguayan capital is 2,060 kilometers and we expect to arrive before the sunset. Because of the presence of storms we had a reason to stay away from the shore, which allowed them to fly a shorter distance to the Uruguayan capital.

At 18:40 we flew over Punta del Este and when they were getting close to Montevideo several aircrafts came to their encounter with a Martinsyde piloted by Lieutenant Colonel Berisso, Chief of the Uruguayan’s Military Aviation, staying very close to the “*Plus Ultra*” and escorting it during the landing. The Spanish seaplane arrived at Montevideo at 19:17. Here also the reception was impressive, thousands of Uruguayans waited for us, sirens from the ships and the factories in the port began to blare and hundreds of rockets exploded in the air to express the joy of the city for the happy arrival of the “*Plus Ultra*”. The Spanish aviators had flown this stage in 12 hours and five minutes.

Once the aircraft had landed the Spanish aviators got on a canoe and headed to the *Montevideo* cruiser where the authorities awaited them amidst the clamouring of about 200,000 people. At 08:00 they got to the mainland but Franco did not allow Rada to disembark in order to let him recuperate from the bad nights spent in Rio and for him to heal his burns. President Serrato met them at the Government’s House on the next day and Franco gave him the King’s message in which Alfonso XIII expressed: “How from the site from where the new Spains where incepted, through his aviators he carried the expression of his fervent interest and trust in the destiny of the beloved Uruguayan people.”

During the audience the President asked to meet Pablo Rada, so Lieutenant Colonel Berisso brought the brave mechanic from the Montevideo. He met with great cordiality by Mr. Serrato. At 11:55 he was back in the “*Plus Ultra*” getting the engines ready.

Seven Stage

At 11:15, February 10, the crew started the engines and few minutes later they flew over Montevideo and Ramon Franco took the direction to Buenos Aires, but then the mechanic Pablo Rada, informed Franco that there was a fuel leak. The pilot shut off the fuel and made a safety water landing. Rada fixed the leak and again Franco initiated the take off and the Spanish aircraft flies over the Argentinian capital at 12:15.

Ruiz de Alda very succinctly described this moment:

The “*Plus Ultra*” arrived to the Argentinean capital at 12:27, escorted for several military aircrafts that went out to meet the Spanish seaplane. Then it would be a memorable day in the world History of Aviation. After the water landing on the harbour the aircraft was travelling fast so as to avoid the hundreds of canoes that wanted to meet them and tying the aircraft to the buoy that had been signalled to them. All the sirens at the harbour and the bells of the city pointed out the historical moment.

A canoe took the crew to the gunboat *Paraná*, where they are met by the Argentinian Marine Minister, the Mayor of Buenos Aires and the Spanish Ambassador. After disembarking at the Arsenal docks they found out that 1,500 policemen had been mobilized to protect the aviators and official visitors who had barely managed to reach the cars that were supposed to take them to the Casa Rosada, the official residency of the President of the Republic, Dr. Alvear. The crowd was incredible, tenths of thousands of people wanted to hug and touch the heroes, from the terraces and balconies, from the trees and street lights, they all threw flowers at them and clamoured their names. An old man from the Spanish town of Avila, who had managed to get on Franco’s car’s running board shouted at him: “I’ve been working here for 30 years, and this moment makes it all worth it. I’ve saved lots of money here. It’s all yours. It’s in a bank and you’re the account’s owner”. Franco, who always seemed cold and undaunted, could no longer contain his emotions and started crying.

Slowly the cars managed to get to the Casa Rosada where President Alvear met them with his Ministers at the Receptions Room. He reached for the aviators and hugged them effusively. Seconds later Franco gave him the message from Alfonso XIII. Then Alvear asked those who were there to stand up and he read the royal letter, which said: “The port of Palos de la Frontera, from where Columbus’ caravels left, will have another famous ephemeris: the one signalling the flight of some hard-working aviators from Spain who hurried to travel a huge distance over the ocean so as to end their travels in Buenos Aires. This daring endeavour has a deep evocation

power and symbolizes, after four centuries of materials ties between old Spain and the hard-working Argentinian people, in which the vigorous mettle of our race blooms rejuvenated”. As the screams of the crowd were deafening the President invited to the aviators out to the balcony, at which time they embraced on behalf of the Argentine people, when it was received with thunderous applause and exclamations.

The total distance and times of the raid of the “*Plus Ultra*” were: 10,825 kilometers and 59 hours and 48 minutes.

Ramón Franco wanted to continue the raid with the “*Plus Ultra*” over all South America, Cuba and the United States and return to Spain crossing the North Atlantic. But when Ramon Franco was finishing the preparations for the flight of the *Plus Ultra*, he would receive the bad news that, due to a decision by the Spanish Government, the historical aircraft, the most of famous of the all *Dornier J Wal* seaplane ever built, would be a gift to the Argentinian people. So, the 11 March, 1926, at 17:00 in an official act, Major Ramon Franco, according to the orders of His Majestic the King of Spain, officially presented to the Government of Argentina the extraordinary aircraft. The seaplane is today at the Railroad Museum in Argentina, at Lujan.

Historical Significance of the Raid of “*Plus Ultra*”

Uniting Spain and Argentina by air on 1926 was a memorable endeavour which was not only recognized by these states but by all the international community and the International Aviators League would give Franco the Harmon Trophy as a reward for the biggest aeronautic feat of the year and would also give Ruiz de Alda the Gold Medal.

The late Spanish position when recognizing the new Hispano American republics after their independence made the gap between Spain and its old colonies widen even further. This problem would become even worse after what we named the Disaster of the 98, since Spain closed itself and fell on a low morale as if our country had lost its pulse. Here is where the flight of the “*Plus Ultra*” becomes truly significant.

The “*Plus Ultra*” meant the reencounter of Spain and the Hispano American nations by restoring the bridges and communication between both peoples at each side of the Atlantic Ocean. It put an end to the consequences of the Disaster of 98, giving the Spaniards their pride back as a nation. It also caused a deep impact on the Hispano American nations since there was the previous Mother Land, ready for the reencounter, to get back their love. That’s how the Hispano American people understood it by giving the Spanish aviators the biggest reception ever known. Even in Brazil, with a Portuguese civilization, there where over a million people clamouring for the crew in Rio de Janeiro. The support in Montevideo and Buenos Aires had no precedents in the history of both cities.

Even the immortal Argentinian tango singer, Carlos Gardel dedicated and composed for them one of his best tangos, which was recorded in Barcelona: “*El vuelo del Águila*” (“*Flying Eagle*”).

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