

The Adventure

Written by Alex Rodrigues

Monday, 22 November 2010 00:06 - Last Updated Monday, 22 November 2010 06:38

by  **José Raphael Toscano**

The twenties of this century brought about the strongest competition of men and machines ever recorded by History, transforming the Atlantic Ocean in a true graveyard of heroes - a generation of men to whom mankind is deeply indebted: Colli, Alan Cobhan, Magadalena, Sacadura, Saint Romain, Mermoz ... and so many others.

Aged 26, he devised, organised, funded, commanded and carried out the historical flight, having as crew navigator Newton Draga, co-pilot Arthur Cunha, replaced by João Negrão, and Vasco Cinquini, mechanic.

The initiative - which received no help whatsoever, either governmental or private - was marked by events which made it into a true epopee, with episodes of pursuit, heroism, treason, sabotage, diseases, forbearance, renunciation and courage, competing against the most important powers of the day, both in Europe and in America, in cultural, scientific and economic terms.

At the most dramatic and dangerous moment of the flight, 2.400 Km. away from Brazil, when the Jahú alighted on the waters near the Island of São Tiago (in Porto Praia), Archipelago of Cabo Verde, for refuelling and repairs, the auxiliary pilot sailed for Europe, and, upon arrival contacted the press in order to demoralise the man who had hired him till the end of the route. The pilot's impulsive statements, perhaps distorted by the press, brought about intense international impact, which even gave rise to a diplomatic problem between Spain and Brazil.

After noticing the presence of water, household soap and sand in the fuel deposits, Commander Ribeiro de Barros decides to disassemble the engines of the aircraft, having found a piece of brass at the bottom of the carter of the propeller, a foreign body introduced with the premeditated intention of damaging the mechanic ensemble and thus cause the interruption of the flight.

All these facts became public knowledge and the Brazilian Government sent a telegram to the Commander of the "Jahú", in Porto Praia, ordering him to interrupt the crossing, pack the

The Adventure

Written by Alex Rodrigues

Monday, 22 November 2010 00:06 - Last Updated Monday, 22 November 2010 06:38

aircraft and return to Brazil.

Extremely angry at the wording of the message, the airman promptly answered, also by telegram: "His Excellency the President. Mind the responsibilities of your High Office and do not interfere in matters Your Excellency knows nothing about and on which you have not been called to comment. Signed: Commander Barros.

In view of the facts which embittered the young pilot, and in a gesture of total renunciation, his mother, Margarida Ribeiro de Barros, understanding her son's anguish and the anxiety of Brazilians, sends him a telegram from Brazil. Said telegram became part of the history of the "Jahú":

"We applaud your attitude. Do not dismantle the aircraft ... Interrupting the trip will mean failure. The wings of the aeroplane represent the Brazilian Flag ... Your mother's blessings, Margarida".

Osorio Ribeiro, a brother of the Commander, hires a new co-pilot in Brazil - João Negrão - and proceeds with him to Cabo Verde. When he meets the Commander of the "Jahú", thin, pale and weakened by the fourth successive attack of malaria, at the sight of his brother and realising the vicissitudes he had been through, Osorio Ribeiro burst into tears.

April 28th, 1927 - 04.30 a.m.

The population of the Island of São Tiago (Cabo Verde) awakens in fear at the deafening roar of 1.100 HP (550 in each engine) of power in full rotation, spitting fire through the 24 exhaust tubes. As an enraged monster, the "Jahú" tears wave after wave, levers on its wings and finally takes flight. The aircraft flies around the island many times, in order to gain altitude, while the lights in the small town below are turned on and stay behind...

Bringing the neck close to his chest, Ribeiro de Barros shouts at his fellow-travellers: Turn off all lights on board. I want to see the Southern Cross, even if it is the last time.

The Adventure

Written by Alex Rodrigues

Monday, 22 November 2010 00:06 - Last Updated Monday, 22 November 2010 06:38

And he adjusts the muzzle of the aircraft, bound for Brazil.

An eleven-hour flight

Storms and strong winds shake the "Jahú".

Frozen water thrown by the propellers penetrate the open cock-pit, abundantly flowing on Barros' leather jacket, soaking his overall and boots and turning the floor of the cock-pit into a puddle.

A strong blast is heard, followed by a heave of the aircraft. The crew stands in alert. The "Jahú", which so far had shown so much strength, starts giving signs of weariness. The rear propeller had been damaged. Barros asks his crew to keep calm, while he slowly reduces the rear engine to 500 RPM, testing the aeroplane's response. Immediately afterwards he increases the rotation of the front engine to 1500, 1600, 1700. The plane has reached the limits of its aerodynamic sustainability, but the altimeter remains stable: 250 m of altitude. The average altitude in that historical flight was 300 meters, at a speed of 190 Km per hour, an absolute record for the following ten years.

The navigator, who leans on the maps can hardly use the ruler and the compass, lifts his right arm making a fist and jabbing at the air in a ritual gesture of victory, and shouts: "We have crossed the Equator" ... then he passes to Barros, through Negrão, a note in trembling scrawl - LAT. 2º. S.

Barros attempts at a smile and scribbles in the back of the note: "450 litres", handing it back to Braga.

17 hours

The "Jahú" triumphantly alights on Brazilian waters, in the Northern Bay of the Island of

The Adventure

Written by Alex Rodrigues

Monday, 22 November 2010 00:06 - Last Updated Monday, 22 November 2010 06:38

Fernando de Noronha.

The tanks still contained 250 litres of fuel, as validated by Commander Nisbet, on the Angelo Toso, an Italian boat which witnessed the alighting from afar.

It was the conquest of the Brazilian race in the realm of space, a fact acknowledged world-wide at the time. The Brazilian airman received decorations, honours, prizes, diplomas and awards from many foreign governments.

Ten years after the victorious flight of "Jahú", the International Aviators' League, based in Paris, France, awarded Commander Barros its important decoration, the Harmon Trophy, as a token of its recognition, appointing him at the same time Vice-President of the League.

In Brazil, homages and celebrations in honour of the crew of the "Jahú" lasted for several months, as recorded by different publications of those days.

In 1930, João Ribeiro de Barros buys a Breguet aeroplane in France, and gives it his mother's name, Margarida, deceased the year before, aimed at flying from Rio de Janeiro to Paris. When he was going to the airfield "Campo dos Affonsos", in Rio de Janeiro, to start the new adventure, he was prevented from boarding the aircraft. The aeroplane was confiscated by the Government in order to be used to fight the rebellious forces of the State of São Paulo where a revolution had just started.

The mid-forties

One day, being Ribeiro de Barros at his farm in Rio de Janeiro, he was surprised by the arrival of Police-chief Amazo Neto accompanied by eight detectives. Barros is arrested, allegedly for being responsible for publishing an underground newspaper against Vargas' dictatorship.

The police search his house in Jahú and he is taken under escort to São Paulo, where his

The Adventure

Written by Alex Rodrigues

Monday, 22 November 2010 00:06 - Last Updated Monday, 22 November 2010 06:38

apartment is also searched. Nothing being found to corroborate the charges, he was released.

The airman from Jahú returns to his Irissanga country deeply distressed, silently brooding and accepting human infamy and his own misfortune. Barros died in his brother's arms on July 20th, 1947.

The American myth Charles Lindbergh completed his New York - Paris flight on May 21st, 1927, i.e., 23 days after the Brazilian airman João Ribeiro de Barros had flown across the Atlantic Ocean.

The hydro-aeroplane "Jahú", as well as dozens of trophies, diplomas, gold and silver cards, precious stones set in goldsmith objects, documents, medals, decorations and objects related to the flight - donated by the Ribeiro de Barros family - are kept by the Aeronautics Museum in São Paulo, managed by the Santos Dumont Foundation.

On the occasion of the first centennial of the City of Jahú, in 1953, as per an initiative of the Jahú Rotary Club and by means of public fund raising, a granite mausoleum was built on Siqueira Campos Square and dedicated to the hero. It has a bronze statue of the aviator. An important road linking the centre of the State of São Paulo to the State's western border also bears the name of Commander João Ribeiro de Barros.

Commander João Ribeiro de Barros

Contribution by Doctor José Ribeiro de Barros Filho (a nephew of the Commander's)

The Adventure

Written by Alex Rodrigues

Monday, 22 November 2010 00:06 - Last Updated Monday, 22 November 2010 06:38

Born on April 4th, 1900, at Irissanga, a farm belonging to his parents, in the municipality of Jaú, in the State of São Paulo. As a child he had a restless spirit, reluctantly accepting his parents' disciplinary programme. Out of seven Brothers he was the most rebellious one, having been at times in intimate terms with the ferule! He started his studies at "Atheneu JAHÚense", in Jaú, São Paulo, a school founded in 1853 by his grandfather, Captain José Ribeiro de Camargo Barros - one of the Republican Conventionals of Itú. He attended secondary school at "Instituto de Ciências e Letras", in São Paulo, and later entered São Paulo University, to graduate in Law. In 1919, however, following his fate, he decided to deepen his knowledge of mechanical engineering, a subject which had already attracted him for some time.

He drops out his Law studies in the second academic year and leaves alone for the United States, where he enrolls at a university just time enough to acquire more advanced knowledge on Aeronautics Technique. Two years later he returns to Brazil, to visit his family, and goes back to the United States, for a second stay during which he takes a course on piloting and aeronautic navigation. His orientating professor during that course was transoceanic navigator Gago Coutinho, the pioneer of the Atlantic crossing, with stopovers, who had then invented the Artificial Horizon Sextant, for long-distance flights. Barros and Coutinho became life-long great friends. In 1922, Ribeiro de Barros joins the Aviation School of Campinas, in Campinas, São Paulo, where his instructor was the well-known and competent German airman Ernest Steckmann. Ribeiro de Barros got his flying license from that school, in 1923, using a French-made "Caudron" 80 HP aircraft, and, according to the regulations of the Paris-based "Fédération Aéronautique Internationale", he obtains International Flying License nº 80.

From 1924 to 1925 he takes a trip to Germany, where he follows a course on air acrobatics in Berlin, and at the same time avails himself of the opportunity to improve his knowledge of the German language. He was extremely gifted for languages, having a good command of English, German, Spanish and Italian. As from that time, João Ribeiro de Barros was already equipped to make his most cherished dream come true: the air crossing of the Atlantic - NON-STOP! And indeed, in 1927 he left for Italy, where he intended to purchase at Savoia-Marchetti an aircraft with which he was already familiar. The factory, however, refused to sell him a new machine, and offered him instead a unit of the same model which had had an accident in North Africa, when flown by Count Casagrande, some time before, as the Italian airman was trying to link Europe and America by air. Eventhough, having examined the crashed hydroplane, Ribeiro de Barros accepted the proposal, bought the aeroplane and tried to refurbish and modify it in what he deemed necessary. When everything was ready, after any amount of accidents, shortcomings and sabotage - (this is a work of History) - finally, at dawn, on April 28th, 1927, Hydroplane "**JAHÚ**", christened with the name of his home town, receives the voice of command, turns on its two powerful "Isotta-Fraschini" engines, still in a trial period, each of

The Adventure

Written by Alex Rodrigues

Monday, 22 November 2010 00:06 - Last Updated Monday, 22 November 2010 06:38

them with 12 cylinders in the "V" position and with 1.100 horsepower, and takes off resolutely, progressing above the ocean surface, with its keels geared to the Southern Cross! At a constant altitude of 250 meters and at an average speed of 190 Km per hour - an absolute record - the huge red bird flies for 12 uninterrupted hours, with the route of 223^o magnetic, to victoriously alight in Brazilian waters, at the Northern Cove of Fernando de Noronha. The speed record of the Jahú remained unsurpassed for the next ten years, which granted Ribeiro de Barros the 1937 most coveted "Harmon" Trophy of the "Ligue Internationale des Aviateurs", the highest award an flying-pilot could be offered in the whole world. It is believed the second "Harmon" to be given to the Americas to be the one received by American Aviator Charles Lindbergh, who crossed the Atlantic on board his "Spirit of Saint Louis" on May 21st, 1927, 23 days after the Jahú crossing. Lindbergh's flight counted on the support of the American Government and was further encouraged by a 25.000 dollar award.

In 1928, our Atlantic pioneer undertook a trip around the world, after having received many honours and decorations from most of the civilised countries of the planet, which immediately acknowledged the advance reached with Barros' raid in terms of transoceanic flight, as well as the fearlessness with which Commander Ribeiro de Barros and his faithful crew met the unknown airspace above the Atlantic - the graveyard of a generation of heroes, to whom humankind is so highly indebted. Ribeiro de Barros died in the same rural estate in which he had been born, on July 20th, 1947, his remains having been buried in a monument mausoleum erected to honour his memory, in the main square of the city of Jaú - his hometown.

This is, briefly, a collection of important topics on the life of Commander João Ribeiro de Barros, Americas' pioneer in the crossing of the Atlantic and one of the leading characters in the History of humankind.

HONOURS AWARDED TO COMMANDER RIBEIRO DE BARROS

The Adventure

Written by Alex Rodrigues

Monday, 22 November 2010 00:06 - Last Updated Monday, 22 November 2010 06:38

The "Harmon Trophy", highest honour awarded by Paris-based "Ligue Internationale des Aviateurs" to flying-pilots having achieved an aviation prowess not surpassed in the ten following years;

Commander of the "Military Order of Christ", by the Presidency of Portugal;

Awarded the "Légion d'Honneur" of France;

Commander of the "Order of Saint Gregory", by the Italian Royal Crown;

Elected Vice-President of Paris-based "Ligue Internationale des Aviateurs";

Award granted by His Majesty King Albert I, of Belgium, as "Haut Protecteur de la Ligue Internationale des Aviateurs", Brussels;

Honorary member of the "Reale Aeroclub d'Italia";

Decorated with the "Swastika", by the Government of Germany, at the time the highest civilian honour of Germany;

Commander of the "Order of Saint Maurice", by the Italian Royal Crown;

Diploma of "Grande Ufficiale de l'Ordine della Corona d'Italia", offered by His Majesty King Vittorio Emmanuelle III (a very seldom awarded distinction which allowed the holder to address the King as a cousin);

The Adventure

Written by Alex Rodrigues

Monday, 22 November 2010 00:06 - Last Updated Monday, 22 November 2010 06:38

Special guest of the German Government (von Hindenburg) to participate of the crossing of the Atlantic on board the world's most famous dirigible, the Graf Zeppelin (stateroom nº 13), on a Berlin-bound trip with a stopover in Friederichshafen;

Order of the "Cross of Malta" with the Italian Coat of Arms;

Captain of the State Police of São Paulo;

Honorary Major of the Brazilian Army;

The "Laurel Crown" - after Rui Barbosa, Ribeiro de Barros was the second Brazilian citizen to wear such crown, at Recife's Law School, in the State of Pernambuco;

Honorary member of Brazil's Aeroclub;

Ribeiro de Barros was honoured with a telegram of congratulations and acknowledgement by Alberto Santos Dumont, the forefather of aviation;

Diploma of the "Order of Aeronautic Merit", in the degree of Officer, within the Corps of Special Graduates, awarded *post mortem*, in 1954, by the President of the Republic of Brazil, in his capacity as Great Master of said order;

There are streets, squares and avenues bearing his name in most state-capitals and major cities in Brazil;

A large 450 Km long road, in the State of São Paulo, crossing the city of Jaú, in the centre of

The Adventure

Written by Alex Rodrigues

Monday, 22 November 2010 00:06 - Last Updated Monday, 22 November 2010 06:38

the State;

Two impressive monuments, in stone and bronze, in his hometown Jaú;

A large stone and bronze monument, in São Paulo, honouring transoceanic aviators Francesco de Pinedo, of Italy and João Ribeiro de Barros, of Brazil.

The House of Representatives of the State of São Paulo has approved some time ago a proposal to change the name of Cumbica International Airport to "Commander João Ribeiro de Barros International Airport", as "Leonardo da Vinci", in Italy; "Charles de Gaulle", in France; "John F. Kennedy", in the United States, and "Santos Dumont", in Rio de Janeiro, and many others, all over the world, honouring their respective heroes.

But ... unfortunately, the matter has been left to oblivion! Perhaps, as a noble gesture of acknowledgement, our Ministry of the Air Force might help completing this most deserved honour, in favour of the one who, displaying audacity, courage and great unselfishness, brought so much glory to Brazilian aviation, becoming even a part of humankind's most cherished assets, such as heroes of all times, those who "*by means of their valiant deeds free themselves from the laws of death*".

An Addendum of Clarification

The Adventure

Written by Alex Rodrigues

Monday, 22 November 2010 00:06 - Last Updated Monday, 22 November 2010 06:38

This air raid was planned to have been carried out in three different stages, although its whole length, from Genoa to Santo Amaro (São Paulo), i.e., the link Europe/Brazil was always contemplated in the programme.

1st stage: mainly meant to "transport" the hydroplane to the land geographical position - along the African coast - as close as possible to Brazil. This stage, however, proved to be the most complicated and time-consuming, having had many technical problems directly caused by sabotage, with the clear aim of preventing Ribeiro de Barros from carrying out his plan. With enormous sacrifice, however, difficulties were overcome, and the "JAHÚ" was ready for its main target.

2nd stage: This was indeed the main stage of the whole venture: crossing the Atlantic Ocean, on a straight, non-stop flight, fully carried out, according to historical and press descriptions, then publicised all over the world, which incidentally accounts for the large amount of trophies (medals, decorations, diplomas, etc.) granted Commander Ribeiro de Barros, as "official" acknowledgement of that spectacular epopee! The "Harmon Trophy" awarded to Ribeiro de Barros, ten years after the raid, was exclusively due to that main stage of the trip.

3rd stage: From Fernando de Noronha to Santo Amaro (São Paulo) with stopovers in Natal, Recife, Salvador, Rio de Janeiro and Santo Amaro. This stage was accomplished solely due to requests by the "Celebration Committee" and in order to allow the public to acclaim the crew. That is why some historians and encyclopaedia-writers kept a less precise image of the "JAHÚ" flight, assuming it took place with countless stopovers!