

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

COUNT JACQUES DE LESSEPS

Born at Paris, France.....1883
Buried at Gaspé, Québec...1927

- . LEGION OF HONOUR
- . CROIX DE GUERRE
- . DISTINGUISHED SERVICE CROSS (U.S.A.)
- . ORDER OF THE FRENCH NATION

- . PIONEER AIRMAN
- . RENOWNED WORLD WAR II PILOT
- . EXECUTIVE MEMBER AND CHIEF PILOT
OF THE COMPAGNIE AERIENNE FRANCO-
CANADIENNE

KEN ANNETT

COUNT JACQUES DE LESSEPS

1883 - 1927

The first memorial on Canadian soil to airmen flying in Canada, an imposing marble monument designed by the eminent Montreal sculptor, Henri Hebert, was erected in the town of Gaspé, Québec, in August, 1932. In translation from the French inscription, it reads:

TO THE MEMORY OF JACQUES DE LESSEPS
CHEVALIER OF THE LEGION OF HONOUR,
CROIX DE GUERRE, DISTINGUISHED SERVICE
CROSS (U.S.A.)

BORN IN PARIS IN 1883.

THE SECOND PERSON TO FLY ACROSS THE
ENGLISH CHANNEL BY AIRPLANE, IN 1910.
THE FIRST PERSON TO FLY OVER MONTREAL
AND TORONTO.

CITED FOUR TIMES IN THE ORDERS OF THE
DAY, 1914-1918.

LOST AT SEA ON OCTOBER 18, 1927, DURING
A FLIGHT TAKING PHOTOGRAPHS FOR THE
MAP OF GASPÉ.

CITED IN THE ORDER OF THE FRENCH NATION.
HIS BODY IS BURIED IN THE GASPÉ GRAVE-
YARD.

THEODOR CHICKENKO. BORN IN 1894 IN
GOURILOUKA, RUSSIA. ENLISTED IN THE
FRENCH ARMY DURING THE GREAT WAR.

LOST AT SEA WITH JACQUES DE LESSEPS

DE LESSEPS FAMILY BACKGROUND

Count Jacques De Lesseps was the descendent of a family that had been of the French nobility from the time of King Louis XIV and whose members had long distinguished themselves in the service of the State.

His father, Vicomte Ferdinand De Lesseps (1805-1894), who was universally known and honoured for his role in the building of the Suez Canal and his efforts to construct the Panama Canal, is considered to have been, "one of the most powerful embodiments of the creative genius of the 19th century". A man of great gifts and social charm, Ferdinand De Lesseps had been a member of the French Academy, of the Academy of Sciences and had been honoured in both England and France with such high awards as the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour, the Star of India and the freedom of the City of London.

Ferdinand De Lesseps married, when he was 64 years of age, Mlle Autard de Bragard, "une toute jeune créole d'origine anglaise", 21 years of age. She bore him six sons and six daughters - thus Jacques De Lesseps was a member of a large, close-knit family. He was eleven years old when his father died in 1894.

AVIATION BEGINNINGS

The first decade of the 20th century when Jacques De Lesseps was a young man was an exciting and productive time in the long search of man to fly. Only three years into the new century Orville and Wilbur Wright built and flew the first heavier-than-air motor driven flying machine in 1903. The name of Glenn Curtis began to come to public attention as an airplane builder. In France, Louis Blériot, followed the lead of the Wright brothers in America and in 1909 became a national hero by his flight from France to England across the English Channel.

Jacques De Lesseps was drawn irresistibly to this exciting new experience of flight. Following upon Blériot's historic crossing of the Channel, De Lesseps purchased a Blériot monoplane and proceeded to master the art of flying under the direction of Louis Blériot. An apt student, he took to flight so rapidly and

well that in May, 1910, he duplicated his famous tutor's feat by flying from France to England. This exploit brought him to public attention and he soon became the hero of air meets in Europe. Of this early period of his career, a contemporary, Frank Ellis, has left this interesting note:

"...the greatest thrill of my youth in England was the occasion when I encountered the famous French airman, Count Jacques De Lesseps. A friend and I were on our way home from a cycling jaunt on the outskirts of Nottingham, near Colwick Park, when we heard a hum which grew quickly louder and louder, and suddenly, just over the tree-tops, loomed a flying machine which to our startled eyes seemed enormous. Swiftly circling almost over our heads, it settled gently to a landing on one of the great, grassy stretches contained within the park area. Excitedly we mounted our bikes and pedalled furiously to where the landing had taken place, arriving breathlessly just as the pilot was climbing out of the cockpit of his Blériot monoplane. The minute he pushed up his goggles we recognized him as the famous Count De Lesseps, hero of a dozen air meets in Europe. He grinned at us, lit a cigarette, and said something in French. We tried our scanty French on him but he must have thought it was English so we just grinned all round until the park officials arrived and whisked him away and also posted guards around his machine..."

FIRST FLIGHTS IN CANADA

In the same year, 1909, that Louis Blériot flew his monoplane from France to England to make aviation history in Europe, the people of Toronto were introduced to airplane flight by Charles Willard and his Curtiss plane, GOLDEN FLYER, from an improvised base at Scarborough Beach.

were made to hold air meets in 1910 at Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg and Vancouver. To these meets would be invited the world's most distinguished airmen and the latest planes. Jacques De Lesseps agreed to participate and sailed for America in June, 1910, accompanied by his brother, Bertrand, his sister, Mme de la Bégaissiere, his personal physician and his two Elériot monoplanes under the care of the mechanics, Vanoni and Steiner. One of the planes was the famous LA SCARABEE in which he had flown over the English Channel, a two-seater monoplane powered by a 50 H.P. Gnome engine. The other was a single-seater plane with a 35 H.P. Anzoni motor. De Lesseps and his party landed at New York and proceeded from there to Montreal where the first air meet of the summer opened June 27, 1910.

THE MONTREAL MEET OF 1910

In its retrospective column, OF MANY THINGS, by Edgar Andrew Collard, the Montreal GAZETTE recently recalled, in fascinating detail, the Montreal air meet of June, 1910. Copies of these articles are appended to this issue of GASPE OF YESTERDAY. Certainly, Count Jacques De Lesseps was the most interesting personality of the Montreal meet and his historic flight over the City of Montreal and environs in LA SCARABEE made aviation history in Canada. De Lesseps was the hero of the hour and the crowds that flocked to the meet testified to the high level of public interest in aviation.

AIR MEETS IN TORONTO AND NEW YORK

Following the highly successful meet at Montreal the pioneer airmen and their planes moved on to Toronto for an air meet held at Weston from July 9th. The flight of De Lesseps over Toronto was wildly acclaimed. While in that city De Lesseps was a guest at the home of the President of the Canadian Northern Railway, Sir William Mackenzie where he met and courted a daughter of the family, Thérèse Grace Mackenzie. When De Lesseps later moved on to New York for demonstrations of flying, including a flight from Belmont Park to the Statue of Liberty and back, Grace Mackenzie and her sisters, Kathleen and Ethel joined him there. When news

reached Sir William in Toronto that daughter Grace had actually flown with De Lesseps he is said to have wired, sternly, "COME HOME AT ONCE". Actually Grace was making aviation history as the first Canadian woman to fly. The De Lesseps-Mackenzie romance culminated with their marriage in London, England, in the following year. Count and Countess Grace Mackenzie De Lesseps took up residence in Paris and the Count continued his aviation career in those years when Europe was moving inexorably to the outbreak of the Great War of 1914-1918. Two sons and two daughters were born to the De Lesseps.

DE LESSEPS AND WORLD WAR I.

Personal conviction, firmly based on his family background and traditions, made it inevitable that Count Jacques De Lesseps would volunteer his services to France on the outbreak of the Great War. This conviction was admirably reflected later in his LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT where he wrote, with respect to his sons:

"...qu'ils soient dignes de leurs aïeux qui ont été des serviteurs fidèles, vaillant, désintéressés de notre pays: La France. Je veux que mes enfants se rapellent toujours qu'ils sont Français et qu'on doit être d'autant plus attaché à sa patrie, qu'elle connait des heures graves et qu'elle est malheureuse.

Leur chemin devra toujours être celui de l'honneur, leur devise, celle que leur grand-pere nous répétait a son lit de mort:

"FAIS CE QUE DOIS, ADVIENNE QUE POURRA "

As a wartime pilot and leader of a French aerial squadron during World War I, Count Jacques De Lesseps won mention in dispatches no less than four times. He was awarded the Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, the Croix de Guerre and the American Distinguished Service Cross.

DE LESSEPS IN GASPE

That the post-war period was a difficult time for Count Jacques De Lesseps, as for many other war veterans, is echoed again in his WILL where he wrote:

"...Je demande a Dieu de me donner le temps et la force de rétablir ma situation. de désintéresser tous ceux qui ont pu souffrir de l'échec de l'affaire dans laquelle j'étais entré apres la guerre..."

It was evidently in the perspective of improving his situation that he came to Gaspé, Québec in 1926 as an executive member and chief pilot of the Compagnie Aerienne Franco-Canadienne. His company had obtained a contract from the Government of Québec to conduct an aerial photographic survey for mapping of the Gaspé Peninsula. A main seaplane base was established on the shore of the beautifully sheltered Gaspé Basin and a sub-base at Goose Lake. Five Schreck flying boats were brought to the Gaspé base - four of these planes were powered by 180 H.P. Hispano-Suizo engines while the fifth and larger seaplane had a Napier Jupiter engine of 420 H.P.

Count De Lesseps became well and favourably known to the citizens of Gaspé. The late Charles Davis, prominent merchant and onetime Mayor of Gaspé, recalled the daily, friendly visits of the Count to the Davis Company store and office. Another prominent Gaspé merchant, Percy Hyman of the William Hyman Co. recalled the sharing of many a meal with Count De Lesseps in the dining room of the Baker's Hotel. In particular, he remembered their conversation on the morning of the Count's last, tragic flight, when he had warned the Count that weather conditions might be veru bad beyond Gaspé's sheltering mountains. The Ursuline Sisters into whose care Count De Lesseps had entrusted his daughters, Catherine (Kitty) and Elizabeth, on summer visit with him in Gaspé, recalled the remarkably fine qualities of the Count. The proprietor of the Morin Hotel, where De Lesseps had lived for a time, remembered him as a "real gentleman".

TRAGEDY STRIKES

On October 18th., 1927, Count Jacques De Lesseps and his mechanic, Theodore Chickenko took off from Gaspé Basin on a routine aerial photography flight. They were airborne and beyond recall when an urgent call was received at Gaspé from Mont Joli warning of storm conditions over the St. Lawrence. The last persons to sight the De Lesseps seaplane in flight were the residents of the village of St. Félicité, near Matane on the north coast of Gaspesia. They later reported that the plane was in evident difficulty in a storm of great ferocity and that the pilot had tried, in vain, to gain sufficient altitude to rise over the mountains and reach the calmer waters of Lake Matapedia. Unable to make it, De Lesseps was obliged to turn back and the plane was quickly lost to sight in the storm over the St. Lawrence. There were no witnesses of the tragic end of that final flight.

A wing of the De Lesseps plane was washed ashore subsequently and seven weeks after the date of the flight the body of Count Jacques De Lesseps was found on the shore of Clambank Cove, Port au Port Peninsula, Newfoundland. The body of his Russian born mechanic was not recovered.

BURIAL AT GASPE

The remains of Count De Lesseps were brought back to Gaspé where the burial service, with Bishop Ross of Gaspé officiating, was held on December 14th., 1927, in the presence of members of his family, representatives of government and numerous Gaspesians. In death, the wish that he had set down in his WILL was respected, namely:

"...Je desire etre enterré ou je me
trouverai et avec la plus grande
simplicité..."

Thus was Count Jacques De Lesseps laid to rest in the historic soil of Gaspé where four centuries earlier his fellow countryman, Jacques Cartier, had

In his own time and way, Count Jacques De Lesseps was as courageous a pioneer in the skies of Europe and America as his countryman, Jacques Cartier, had been in maritime exploration and accomplishment.

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A wing of the De Lesseps plane was washed ashore approximately and seven weeks after the date of the flight the body of Count Jacques De Lesseps was found on the shore of Lakeshore Cove, north of Fort Peninsula, Newfoundland. The body of his Russian-born mechanic was not recovered.

BURIAL AT GASPÉ

The remains of Count De Lesseps were brought back to Gaspé where the burial service, with Bishop Jean de Gaspé officiating, was held on December 15th, 1927. In the presence of members of his family, representatives of government and numerous Gaspésians. In death, the wish that he had set down in his will was respected, namely:

"...Je desire être enterré en ce lieu
trouvé et avec la plus grande
simplicité..."

Thus was Count Jacques De Lesseps laid to rest in the historic soil of Gaspé where four centuries earlier his fellow countryman, Jacques Cartier, had first set foot on the shore.

The count in the sky

Royal Canadian Mounted Police from St. John's (now known as St. John's) were to maintain order. The band of the 8th Regiment would entertain the crowd between the scheduled flight. Other arrangements were provided by a midway. It had many booths, even a restaurant.

"Count Jacques de Lesseps was the hero of the hour," said George A. Dickson. He captured the favor of the crowd by being so easy in the manner so obliging.

When the scheduled flight was delayed and the crowd was growing restless, the managers would appear in the crowd. Even when he had already been up several times, he would smile and urge to go up again, to give the people something to look

The count was then a young man not yet 30, he was well set up, though small — suave, unostentatious, with a cool eye. His manner had extraordinary ease. Today it would be called "fast-talk." When he flew low over the grandstand he appeared as calm as if he were on a comfortable

Never mechanical

His flying was never a mechanical process. He made it an art. As an air pilot he earned his personal reputation. His power in handling his flying machine inspired onlookers to poetic phrases.

One observer wrote: "The sky-rocket, sweet motion and graceful start and finish of de Lesseps appeared to the crowd. He strained after effect, but the ease and the perfection of a stately swim in the bosom of a lake."

Another observer said that the plane "seemed to understand what was wanted." It responded in every touch of its master's hand, with "a static movement." When he landed the plane "skirted along the ground like a skater on its skates and."

Yet, while demonstrating his nonchalant skill, the count was never an obvious show-off. He was content to let his skill speak for itself. When congratulated on his feat he would say "Oh, not too good." His personal competitor for the admission of the crowd was Walter

It decided to organize an expedition at the time of the flight in North America. It was the Wright brothers, the sons of Samuel, the air flight in the United States to take part. At that time the Wright brothers were the most advanced in their research, but they agreed to send some of their best plans and their best systems.

The club sought to form an outdoor flying school.

THE FOLLOWING ACCOUNTS OF
 "THE COUNT IN THE SKY" AND
 "FIRST PLANE OVER MONTREAL"
 BY EDGAR ANDREW COLLARD,
 PUBLISHED BY THE MONTREAL
 GAZETTE'S COLUMN "OF MANY
 THINGS" ARE INCLUDED HERE
 WITH THE KIND PERMISSION OF
 THE AUTHOR.

Count Jacques de Lesseps arrived in Montreal with his mother, Barbara, and his sister, Madame de la Bergeronnie. The secretary of the automobile and Aero Club, George A. Dickson, used to recall that "the gentlemen were dressed in morning coats, gloves and silk hats." Madame de la Bergeronnie was "delightfully situated in the lower town park."

An accident of the most serious kind happened here from several factors at the time — details just above the Levesque railway station. They were young flying men.

The Count de Lesseps went out to examine it. He was "pale but over-joyous and enthusiastic." Such a feat he said would never do. He "simply waved his hand."

That night an army of men went to work on it. They removed a great block. That tower had been left standing the length of the field. Later the runway was enlarged and extended. It was filled.

"Aviation Park" was the name given this landmark. It had a great appearance. The ground was a two-acre. The grass was a green of cover and maintenance. The field was on a hillside. The tower along its length, being wide for the aviation club. It

The first airplane over Montreal was flown by Count Jacques de Lesseps during the evening of July 1, 1908. And there has never been an aviation school.

When the count arrived in his plane on the field at Levesque park the excitement was biggest that had ever been felt in Canada, he did not wear an aviator's costume. He was dressed in a frock coat, but for a stroll in a park.

Behind the count walked in the crowd. The count carried the "Aviation Park" flag. When the count took his place on the field he was seen to look out his back and pointed it to the crowd. Only then did he get into his plane. The next morning he flew off in his machine and landed in the town. . . . with the number "100" on the fuselage.

Count Jacques de Lesseps, French aviator, his father, Count Ferdinand de Lesseps, built the Suez Canal and the Panama Canal. The Count de Lesseps was born on July 11 and landed in Montreal on the evening of July 1, 1908. Count Jacques de Lesseps was one of the first to fly over the city.

He had distinguished himself in French aviation in his first airplane, Le Globe, in the place he had flown over the English Channel early in 1906. Only a few months later, he gave Montebello his last flight, an aviation over the city.

It caused a sensation. People rushed from their homes, shops were crowded with onlookers and streets, and great lines were formed to get their first glimpse of the flying "Count." Montebello in fact made such a landing back and staying

Count Jacques de Lesseps had been brought to Montreal by the Automobile Club (now the Royal Automobile Club). This extraordinary feat had attracted the attention of the press in the city. How it was to take part in promoting the new aviation school in the city.

For two years it even engaged a new name. "The Aviator" and "Aero Club of Canada." It was the first time in the history of the city.

The count in the sky

The first airplane over Montreal was flown by Comte Jacques de Lesseps during the evening of July 2, 1910. And there has never been an aviator so stylish.

When the comte strode to his plane on the airfield at Lakeside, past the grandstand (the biggest that had ever been built in Canada), he did not wear an aviator's costume. He was dressed like a modish Parisian, out for a stroll on a boulevard.

Behind the comte walked his valet. The valet carried the "aerial costume." When the comte reached his plane, he took off his fashionable black coat and handed it to the valet. Only then did he get into his aviator's overalls. The next moment "he was off in his machine and gliding easily into the air . . . with the utmost grace and steadiness."

Comte Jacques de Lesseps was a French aristocrat. His father was Vi-Comte Ferdinand de Lesseps, who built the Suez Canal and began the building of the Panama Canal. The Vicomte, at the age of 64, married a girl of 21 and fathered 12 children. Comte Jacques de Lesseps was one of six sons.

First over the city

He had distinguished himself in French aviation in his Bleriot airplane, *Le Scarabée*. In this plane he had flown over the English Channel early in 1910. Only a few months later, he gave Montrealers their first sight of an airplane over their city.

It caused a sensation: "People rushed from their houses, shops were emptied of customers and clerks, and streetcars stopped to let their passengers have a view of the flying Frenchman." Montrealers in thousands stood leaning back and staring up.

Comte Jacques de Lesseps had been brought to Montreal by the Automobile Club (now the Royal Automobile Club). This enterprising association had sponsored the automobile as the new means of transportation on the ground. Now it was to take part in promoting the new transportation in the air.

For two years it even adopted a new name; it became "The Automobile and Aero Club of Canada." It thought big and it acted fast. In 1910

it decided to organize an international air meet on the Island of Montreal — one of the first in North America.

It asked the Wright brothers, pioneers of heavier-than-air flight in the United States, to take part. At that time the Wright brothers were too much absorbed in their research, but they agreed to send some of their best planes and their best aviators.

The club sought in Paris an outstanding French aviator. Comte Jacques de Lesseps, at first hesitant, agreed to come for \$10,000 for flights on the Island of Montreal (then later in Toronto), with \$5,000 for expenses.

J.A.D. McCurdy, who had recently made a flight at Baddeck in Nova Scotia, would be present with his plane. Other aviators joined.

The meet had grown to such proportions that the club was claiming the equipment on the field would be "larger than it was in any other meets held in America." It would make aviation history.

Comte de Lesseps arrived in Montreal with his brother, Bertrand, and his sister, Madame de la Bégassière. The secretary of the Automobile and Aero Club, George A. McNames, used to recall that "the gentleman were dressed in morning coats, gloves and silk hats." Madame de la Bégassière was "delightfully attired in the latest from Paris."

An airfield for the meet was being hastily improvised. The club had leased fields from several farmers at Lakeside — fields just above the Lakeside railway station. They were rough farming land.

The Comte de Lesseps went out to examine it. He was "polite but nevertheless businesslike." Such a field, he said, would never do. He "simply waved his hand."

That night an army of men went to work on it. They removed a snake fence. That fence had been left standing the length of the field. Later the runway was enlarged and smoothed. Ditches were filled.

"Aviation Park" was the name given this makeshift field. It was a picturesque spot. Trees bordered it on two sides. The green sward was a "mass of clover and marguerites."

Soon the field took on a holiday air. Tents arose along its margin. Some were for the aviators, others for the

Royal Canadian Dragoons from St. Johns (now known as Saint-Jean), there to maintain order. The band of the 65th Regiment would entertain the crowd between the scheduled flights. Other amusements were provided by a midway. It had fancy booths, even a restaurant.

"Comte Jacques de Lesseps was the hero of the meet," said George A. McNames. He captured the favor of the crowds by being so easy in his manner, so obliging.

When the scheduled flights were delayed, and the crowd was growing restless, the managers would appeal to the count. Even when he had already been up several times, he would smile and agree to go up again, to give the people something to look at.

The comte was then a young man, not yet 30. He was well set up, though small — suave, moustached, with soulful eyes. His manner had extraordinary ease. Today it would be called "laid-back." When he flew low over the grandstand he appeared as calm "as if he were on a comfortable divan."

Never mechanical

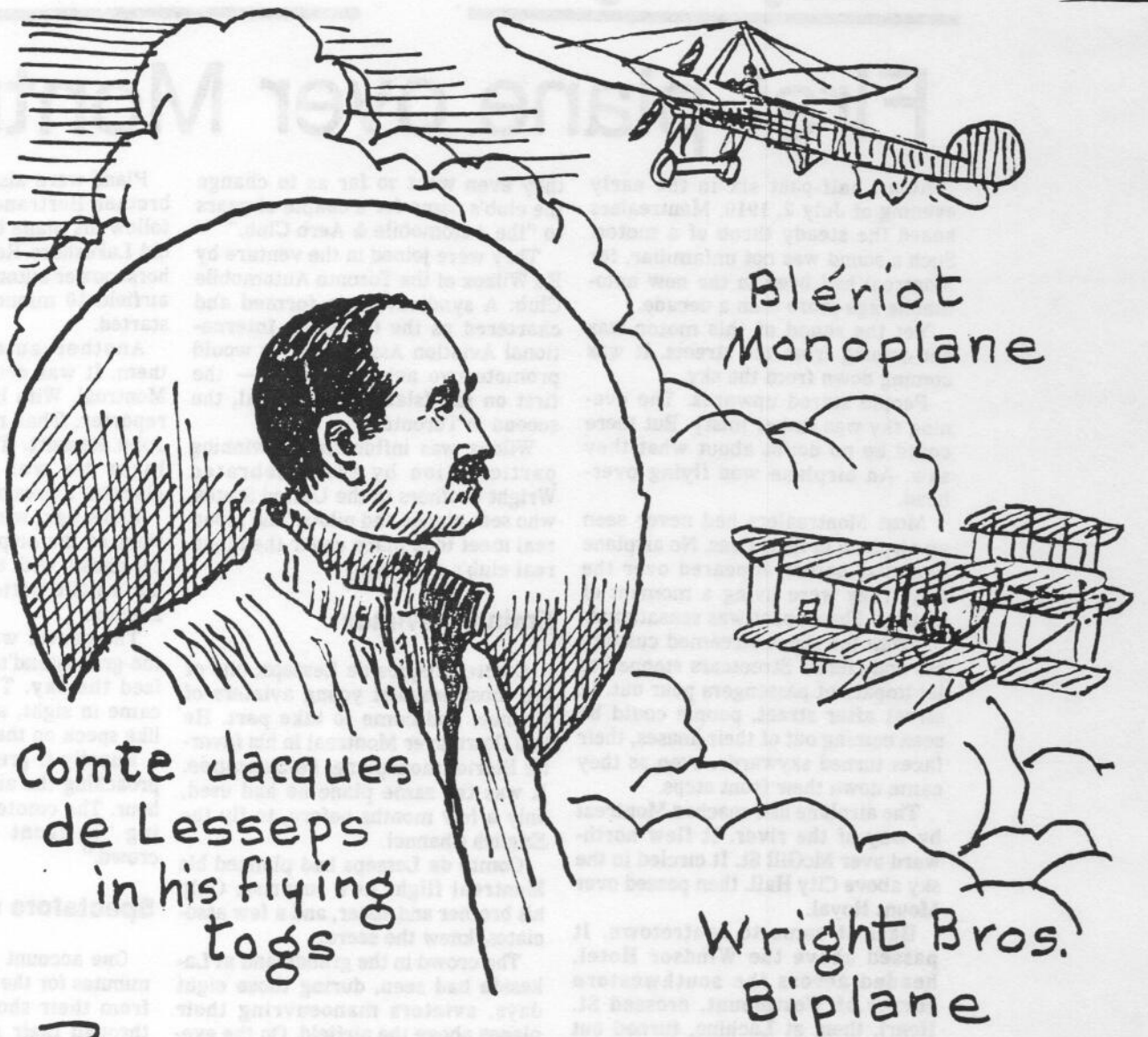
His flying was never a mechanical process. He made it an art. As an art it seemed his personal expression. His grace in handling his flying machine inspired onlookers to poetic phrases.

One observer wrote: "The symmetry, sweet motion and graceful start and finish of de Lesseps appealed to the crowd. No straining after effect, but the ease and live perfection of a stately swan in the bosom of a lake."

Another observer said that the plane "seemed to understand what was wanted." It "responded to every touch of its master's hand" with "ecstatic movements." When he landed, the plane "skimmed along the ground like a skylark to its hidden nest."

Yet, while demonstrating his nonchalant skill, the comte was never an odious showoff. He was modest about it all. When congratulated on all sides, he simply said: "Merci, merci." And he would add: "Ce n'est rien."

His principal competitor for the adulation of the crowd was Walter Brookings, the aviator sent by the



Comte Jacques
de Lesseps
in his flying
togs

Blériot
Monoplane

Wright Bros.
Biplane

JOHN SKETCHBOOK
Collins Early days of aviation in Montreal

Wright brothers. Brookins was a contrast to the count. He had the American's "hawk-like profile." Without any pretension to fashion, he rolled up his sleeves; he wore oil-stained trousers.

The comte won all the greater favor from the crowd by softening any rivalry with Brookins. When Brookins suggested that de Lesseps fly in his plane as a passenger, the comte at once climbed in. He could be seen waving as they took off.

When they landed, he declared at once that the Wright biplane was much firmer and safer than his own Blériot monoplane. The comte had proved himself not only a good aviator, but a good sport.

Though outwardly calm, the comte was fuming inwardly. His favorite plane, *Le Scarabée* (the one he had used in his flight over the English Channel) had not arrived. It seemed to have been lost somewhere along the transportation route. He had been using at Lakeside a weaker plane.

At last, on the eighth day of the meet, the delayed *Scarabée* arrived. The count's mechanics worked over it till late in the afternoon. The crowd expected him to fly *Le Scarabée* in manoeuvres over the airfield.

To its astonishment, the comte at once headed outward, over Lake St. Louis. Then, turning eastward, he slowly disappeared into the distance.

realized what was happening. He called out to the bewildered crowd: "The comte has gone to Montreal!"

• The history of that historic first flight over Montreal will be told in a subsequent column.

First plane over Montreal

About half-past six in the early evening of July 2, 1910, Montrealers heard the steady throb of a motor. Such a sound was not unfamiliar, for Montreal had been in the new automobile age more than a decade.

Yet the sound of this motor was not coming from the streets. It was coming down from the sky.

People stared upwards. The evening sky was rather misty. But there could be no doubt about what they saw. An airplane was flying overhead.

Most Montrealers had never seen an airplane in their lives. No airplane had ever before appeared over the city. They were living a moment of history. The impact was sensational.

From the shops streamed customers and clerks. Streetcars stopped to let impatient passengers pour out. In street after street, people could be seen coming out of their houses, their faces turned skywards, even as they came down their front steps.

The airplane had reached Montreal by way of the river. It flew northward over McGill St. It circled in the sky above City Hall, then passed over Mount Royal.

Back it came to centretown. It passed above the Windsor Hotel, headed across the southwestern corner of Westmount, crossed St. Henri, then, at Lachine, turned out over Lake St. Louis.

An anxious flight

The apparition came and went within a few minutes. The aviator had no time to linger. He was making an anxious long-distance flight.

He had flown in all the way from Lakeside, on the Lakeshore. By the time he arrived back in Lakeside, he had travelled 30 miles. He had been in the air 49 minutes, three and three-fifth seconds. And he had maintained an average speed of 40 miles an hour. Altogether it had been an astonishing achievement for 1910.

For eight days an international aviation meet, one of the earliest in North America, had been taking place at Lakeside, on an improvised airfield in the farmlands above the railway station. This enterprising venture had been initiated by Montrealers, who were members of the automobile club. In their enthusiasm

they even went so far as to change the club's name for a couple of years to "the Automobile & Aero Club."

They were joined in the venture by Ed Wilcox of the Toronto Automobile Club. A syndicate was formed and chartered as the Canadian International Aviation Association. It would promote two aviation meets — the first on the Island of Montreal, the second in Toronto.

Wilcox was influential in winning participation by the celebrated Wright brothers in the United States, who sent planes and pilots. The Montreal meet took place under the Montreal club's auspices.

Eminent aviator

Comte Jacques de Lesseps, one of the most eminent young aviators of France, had come to take part. He had flown over Montreal in his favorite Blériot monoplane, *Le Scarabée*. It was the same plane he had used, only a few months before, to fly the English Channel.

Comte de Lesseps had planned his Montreal flight as a surprise. Only his brother and sister, and a few associates, knew the secret.

The crowd in the grandstand at Lakeside had seen, during those eight days, aviators manoeuvring their planes above the airfield. On the evening of July 2, they had expected the comte to follow this pattern (as he had earlier in the meet).

But on that Saturday evening, after circling twice above the airfield, he headed off for the lake. His plane became a diminishing speck, until vanishing altogether in the far distance.

Comte de Lesseps was well aware of the danger of attempting so long a flight. He had taken special precautions.

He felt it would be safer for him to fly, as far as possible, over the water; a crash landing would be less likely to end in disaster. A cigar-shaped bladder or float had been installed in the fuselage of his plane, from the tail to the seat. He hoped it might keep him and his plane from sinking until help could arrive.

Even that help had been arranged. Two gasoline-powered yachts were to be in readiness to effect a rescue. One was at Valois, the other at Lachine.

Plans were also made to have his brother Bertrand and a few others follow his plane by driving along the old Lakeshore Rd., in a powerful 60-horsepower automobile. They left the airfield 10 minutes before the flight started.

Another automobile followed them. It was driven by A.E. Rea of Montreal. With him went a *Gazette* reporter. That reporter was young John Bassett. Twenty-seven years later he was to become *The Gazette's* president.

Rea's car, with the reporter, lost sight of the airplane at Dorval. The car ahead, with the aviator's brother, did a little better, but lost sight at Lachine.

The crowd was now standing on the grandstand's benches. It scrutinized the sky. The returning plane came in sight, at first only a cross-like speck on the horizon.

Rapidly it grew bigger. It was approaching the airfield at 50 miles an hour. The comte made an easy landing "in front of the awe-struck crowd."

Spectators shocked

One account reads: "It took a few minutes for the spectators to recover from their shock. The thought ran through their minds that the thing was not possible." Then "they clapped, they threw up hats, they shrieked."

Meanwhile, an automobile was thudding up the uneven field. It came near to bouncing out its passenger — Madame de la Bégassière, the comte's sister.

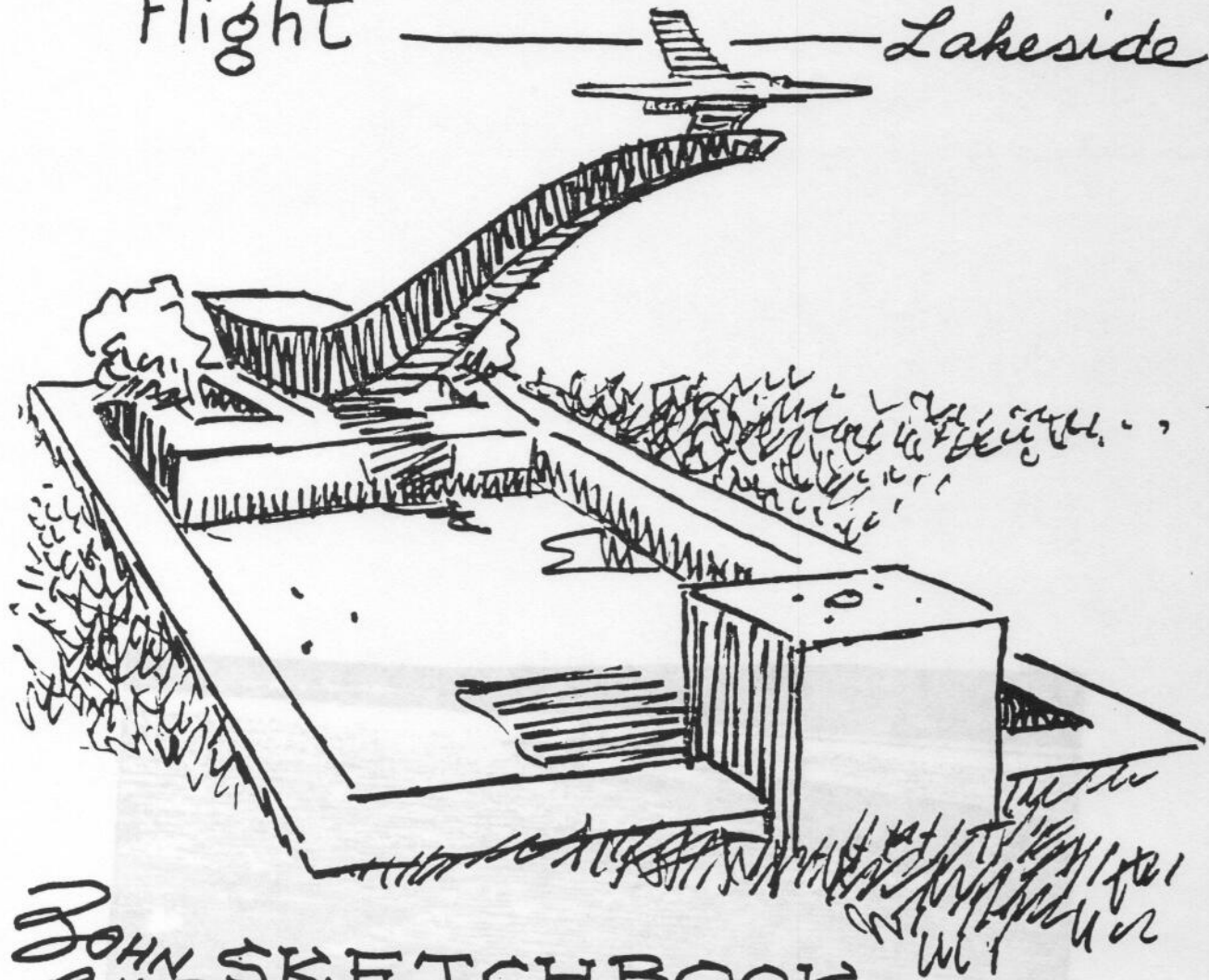
She was coming with roses, ordered confidently in advance. When she came near her brother, she leaped from the car, made her way through the crowd, and presented him with the bouquet.

"Jacques," she said, "your face is too oily for me to kiss you, but you're a wonderful boy."

His face was certainly oily. His monoplane had an open cockpit. The fine wire screen in front of his face only partially shielded him from spurting oil.

Aviators at that time seemed to fly without goggles. His eyes were bloodshot; they watered profusely. Sweat matted his hair.

Monument to De Lesseps Flight



JOHN SKETCHBOOK Collins First Flight in Montreal

The fastidious comte was aware of his unpresentable appearance. He hurried away to clean up. He appeared stylishly dressed "in his street clothes."

In all this confusion, Walter Brookins, a pilot sent to Lakeside by the Wright Brothers, descended from a flight over the field. It had been an important flight; he had established a new Canadian altitude record.

The crowd was too excited by the comte's return to pay much attention to Brookins. De Lesseps sought him out at once. He insisted on giving Brookins half his bouquet.

They were photographed side by side. Then they got into an automobile. Together they drove in front of

the grandstand, sharing the honors of the day.

Honors came to de Lesseps not only on the airfield. They came from across the river, at Caughnawaga. Two days later the comte was made an Indian chief. They gave him the name: "The man with the great wings."

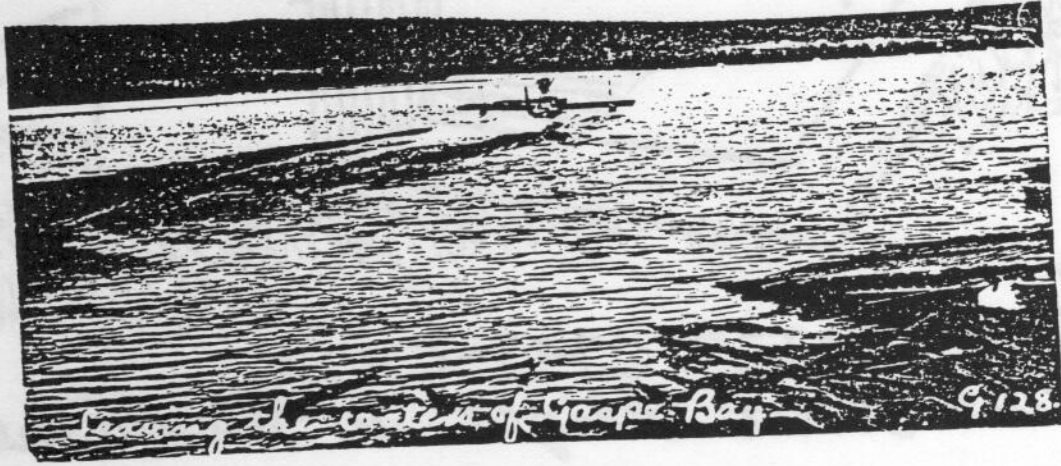
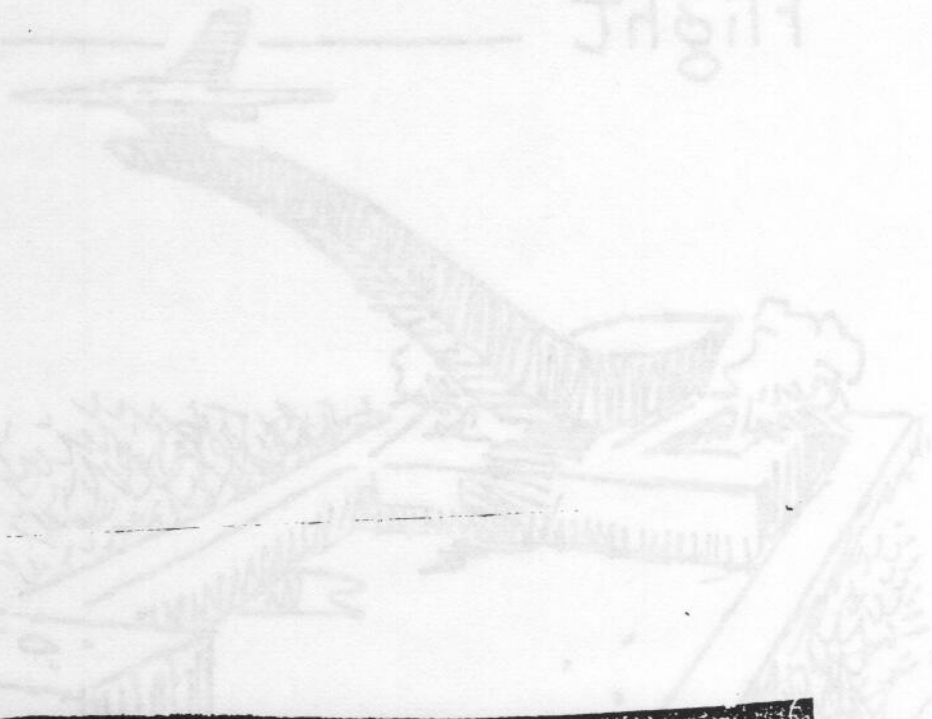
Comte Jacques de Lesseps, like all pioneers of aviation, was risking his life on every flight. In the end, aviation claimed him.

In 1927 he undertook an autumn flight over the St. Lawrence from Gaspé to Val Brilliant. His plane ran into a wild storm. Its shattered fragments drifted ashore, before his body was found. He was buried at Gaspé.

In Montreal, the year before, Comte de Lesseps had drawn up a holograph will. "I wish to be buried," he wrote, "where they will find me

... "I want all who have comforted me with their affection to know I was remembering them, with all my heart, till the very end"

Monument to
De Lesseps
Flight



Leaving the coast of Gaspe Bay 9/28

1908

In Montreal, the year 1908
was a time of great activity
and progress. The city was
growing rapidly, and the
people were proud of their
achievements. The year was
marked by many important
events, and the people were
looking forward to the future
with confidence.

The government during the
last few years has been
very successful in its
policy. It has managed to
keep the country in a
state of peace and
prosperity. The people
are very satisfied with
the government's actions,
and they are looking
forward to the future
with confidence.

In 1907 the government
passed a law which
gave the people more
rights. This was a
great step forward,
and the people were
very pleased with it.
The government was
also successful in
its foreign policy,
and the country was
looking better than
ever.

The last few years were
very successful for
the country. The
government was
very wise in its
policy, and the
people were very
satisfied with it.
The country was
looking better than
ever, and the
people were very
proud of their
achievements.