



FÉDÉRATION AÉRONAUTIQUE INTERNATIONALE Ballooning Commission

Hall of Fame

Jean-Pierre François Blanchard

Inducted 2001



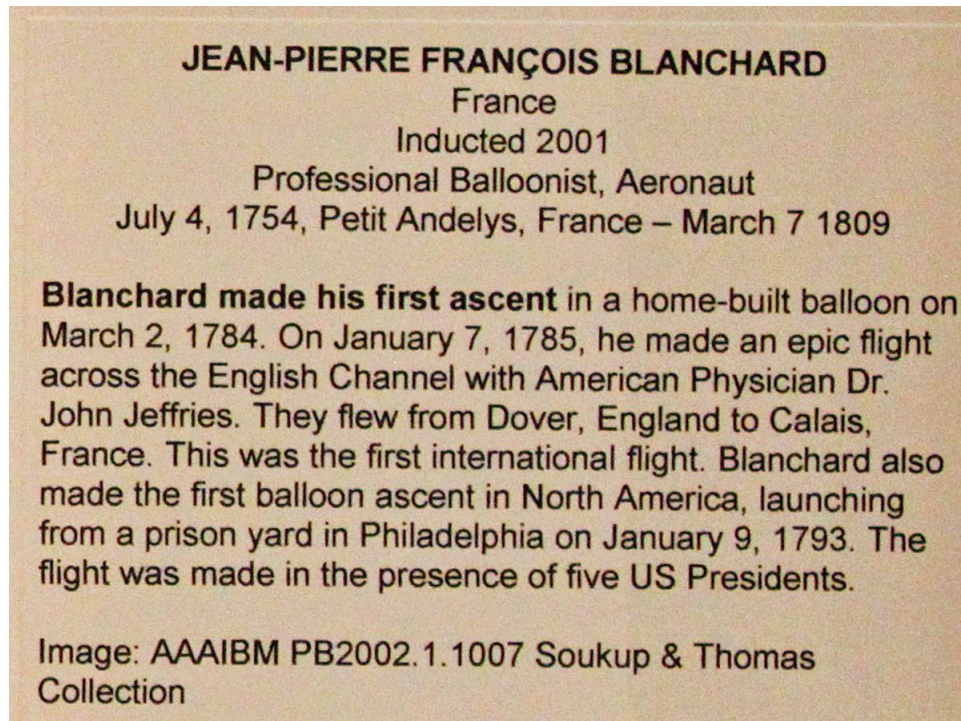


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1753-1809

Jean-Pierre François Blanchard was born the second son of seven children on the 4th of July 1753 to his father, a multi-talented craftsman in Les Andelys-en-Normandie (France).

After only some basic education, he is finding himself in his father's workshop where he quickly learns his trades. At the age of twelve he already invents a rat-trap where the beasts shoot themselves, and four years later he seems to have built a "mechanical" car (without horses) in which he made a journey from Andelys to Rouen, although no plans or precise descriptions were ever found in this respect. However, the newspaper "Le Journal de Paris" relates this voyage on the 17th of August 1779, and announces several new voyages during the following weeks. The same newspaper also announces that J-P Blanchard is the inventor of a revolutionary new hydraulic pump, able to bring water to an elevation of three hundred feet at a rate of 82000 litres per hour. Having unsuccessfully demonstrated his latest invention at several occasions to the authorities, he decides in early 1781 to move to Paris and to start work on a project preoccupying him for several years already: The construction of a "bird like flying machine, with six wings and a tail".

On the 5th of May 1782, the day announced by the "Journal de Paris" to be the day of the first flight, he is however unable, witnessed by a huge crowd, to take off and he becomes the laughing stock of Paris. On the 23rd of May, the French scientist Joseph-Jérôme Lefrançois de Lalande, member of the "Académie des Sciences" publicly declares that J-P Blanchard is a fool and that man will never fly.

J-P Blanchard, inspired by experiences conducted by Tiberio Cavallo, an Italian physicist from Napoli, the Barnabites brothers Stella and Cortenovis from Udine, and by Joseph Priestley's work and book "Research and observations on different kinds of air", is

enthusiastically following the Montgolfier Brothers' and professor Charles' experiences in 1783, and decides to build his own "lighter than air flying machine".

On the 2nd of Mars 1784, J-P Blanchard is finally taking off for the first time in his hydrogen-filled aerostat from the Champ de Mars in Paris. On the 7th of January in 1785, with his American physician friend and sponsor John Jeffries (1744 – 1819), J-P Blanchard successfully makes the first balloon flight across the English Channel from Dover to land after 2 hours and 25 minutes in the forest of Guines near Calais.

Honoured all over Europe, Blanchard became an ardent balloonist making many ascensions and demonstrations, including the first flight over 200 km from Lille to Sevron 26th August 1785, ~~ever jump with a parachute~~, and he decided after his 44th flight (Lübeck, Germany) to leave for the Americas with his son Julien Joseph, where in 1793 he made the first balloon voyage in the United States from Philadelphia. In 1796, after a flight from New-York, his son dies during a tornado destroying his workshop and, ruined, J-P Blanchard decided to go back to Europe.

Continuing his flights and experiences in Europe, in February 1808 he suffers a stroke during a flight in The Hague (Netherlands) and falls from his balloons from a height of 20 meters. He dies from the consequences in Paris on the 7th of March 1809. He had made 60 ascents, a record that stood for about 50 years.