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Aeronautical imagination and the figure of the French aviator in the Azorean press (1935/1949)

Imaginaire aéronautique et figure de l'aviateur français dans la presse açoréenne (1935-1949)

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OUTLINE

1. Aviation in the Azores
2. The rise of Icarus in the Azores
3. The fall of the mechanical bird
4. Conclusion

TEXT

1 The figure of the aviator is neither homogeneous nor immutable. It varies according to time and context. To contribute to understanding this complex reality, in this article we will contrast two periods in the history of aviation, where we find different representations of aviators. And we will do so by concentrating on the specific context of the Azores Archipelago, in which transport technologies, and aviation in particular, has played a crucial role.

2 The first period came about in the aftermath of the so-called "Atlantic Fever [1]". On the race for the establishment of a transatlantic commercial air route, France sent aeronautical missions to the Azores in 1935 and 1936 to study the conditions for mooring its seaplanes. What prevails in the official speeches of this period – both in the Azores and elsewhere in Europe – is a heroic image of the aviator, which the authors of *Face à l'automate* describe to perfection: "The First World War puts the figure of the pilot on center stage: daring, daredevil, skillfully maneuvering more and more flexible and fast airplanes, he is looked upon as an exceptional being with specific physical qualities and exceptional courage [2]."

3 The second case takes place in the context of the rise of commercial aviation, in 1949, at a time when transatlantic flights made stopovers at the airport of the Azorean island of Santa Maria. If in 1935 the image of the aviator could be associated, as Sophie Poirot-Delpech (1989) puts it, to Icarus – the lonely, adventurous, courageous and reckless man, who defies the elements to accomplish the human dream of flying – at the end of the 1940s the pilot is part of a team, he cannot do without the ground support, the automatisms and the technology. A period Poirot-Delpech rather associates with the image of the mechanical bird (*l'oiseau mécanique*).

4 The press is an important source to study this change in perception, which it helps construct and disseminate. As Robert Wohl puts it, between 1920 and 1950, flying was still not a part of the general public's daily life, who "experienced flight vicariously through the public celebrations of the exploits of aviation heroes and images diffused by various forms of mass culture [3]" e.g. through newspapers. International newspapers played an important role in the first exploratory flights – the first English Channel crossing (1909) and the Atlantic Fever started after the *Daily Mail* set a prize for it. Portuguese newspapers followed the lead: they launched nation-wide subscriptions to fund airplane purchases and later accompanied the pilots in their adventures, which they told first hand [4]. The Azorean press, due to its archipelagic and social reality, longing for their part on the transatlantic aviation history – as had happened in the maritime navigation – and free itself from insularity, followed aviation's international events and celebrated every evolution on the aeronautical use of these islands. The analysis of the texts published in the Azorean press from these two different periods, in the context of specific events in which the French aviator plays a central role, will therefore enable us to better grasp the aeronautical imagery underlying these discourses. We will try to determine, more specifically, what part the image of the aviator plays in them, to establish if in these Portuguese islands journalists underwent the same change in perspective that the researchers identified in the rest of the Western world. But first, let's take a brief look at the role of the Azores in the history of aviation.

1. Aviation in the Azores

5 The Azores Archipelago, with its nine scattered small islands spanning 600 kilometers in the North Atlantic Ocean, between the latitudes 37 and 39 north, approximately 1500 kilometers from Lisbon and 3500 kilometers from New York, was discovered following a search for support to the transatlantic marine navigation. It played a similar role for air navigation.

6 Indeed, the North Atlantic Ocean was considered the most challenging ocean for aviation [5]. The Azores, located halfway between the United States and Europe, where the great promoters of aviation courted authorizations for bases and test flights, became a providential pillar. The first crossing of the Atlantic, in 1919, was successful precisely due to stopovers in the archipelago, thanks to the American aeronautical forces that prolonged their presence there after the end of World War I for that purpose.

7 The 1930s gave way to a less adventurous and more systematic approach to crossing the Atlantic, on larger planes, in both directions and in all seasons. The year 1935 is truly a pivotal moment, since the Azores were once again coveted by the aeronautical powers for test flights in order to establish air routes between Europe and the United States [6]. France is the country which undertook these efforts in the most organized way [7]. In 1935, the aviator Lucien Bossoutrot, accompanied by a cameraman, visited three islands of the archipelago by ferryboat – São Miguel, Terceira and Faial islands – to choose the best spots for mooring transatlantic seaplanes. As a result of this five days' visit, a short film [8] about the possibilities on the use of the Azorean archipelago for international aviation was produced and a "sensational interview" was published in *Correio dos Açôres*, where Bossoutrot states that "in two years, maximum, the air route connecting the Azores to the Old Continent and the New World will be a fact" and that he would return with a small hydroplane for tests flights [9]. This promised second French aeronautical mission, on which the first part of our study will focus, since it was longer, more systematic and, therefore, had a larger echo on the press, also took place in 1935. Henry Nomy, accompanied by a mechanic, a radiotelegraphist and an engineer named Louis Castex, visited the main ports of the Azores, as

well as the lakes of the island of São Miguel in their seaplane to assess the conditions. Louis Castex then continued his journey through the archipelago, after the departure of the other members of the mission, and identified two stretches of land that could be used to build an airport, on the islands of Terceira and Santa Maria [10]. Castex returned the following year with the aviator Paul Codos to start designing an airport at Lajes, on Terceira island, a project that failed. Eventually, it was not Air France Transatlantique, nor the German airline Lufthansa, but rather Pan American Airways, with its *Clippers*, which in the spring of 1939 finally provided regular flights of mail and passengers via the Azores.

8 During the Second World War, Portugal gave the British permission to build a base at Lajes, on Terceira island, and the Americans to build a base on the island of Santa Maria, through Pan American World Airways, by an agreement signed in 1944. After the war, the British left the Azores, the American base settled on the site of the British base, and the island of Santa Maria is henceforth intended for civil aviation. With an airport built in the middle of the Atlantic, after the signing of the Chicago Convention, which regulated the "Freedoms of the Air", the aeronautical powers and their companies were now able to take advantage of the Santa Maria Airport so as to provide support to the international civil aviation.

9 Air France was one of the companies which used this airport for technical stops, in these transatlantic routes, especially with its famous *Constellation*. The second event under study occurred in this period, in 1949, during the crash of a *Constellation* for which a stopover at Santa Maria had been planned.

10 In the Azores, emigration (mainly to Brazil until the 19th century and to the USA thereafter) has always been the solution for the islands' scarcity or natural disasters affecting its 250 thousand total inhabitants' communities, ranging from three hundred (Corvo island) to 120 thousand (São Miguel island): people therefore followed the great events in the history of aviation with renewed interest. The prolific Azorean press played a fundamental role in this. Located essentially on the three most densely populated islands – São Miguel, Terceira and Faial – journalists attended local events but also relayed international information, to which they had access through the medium

waves of the State radios of certain countries[11]. It was surprisingly easier to have access to information regarding the international context than to be aware of what was happening on the other islands of the archipelago. The Azorean press consequently reported every minor episode of the aerial adventures of the twentieth century. It is nowadays an indispensable source for reconstructing those past events, especially local ones, which have been so far somehow neglected by historians.

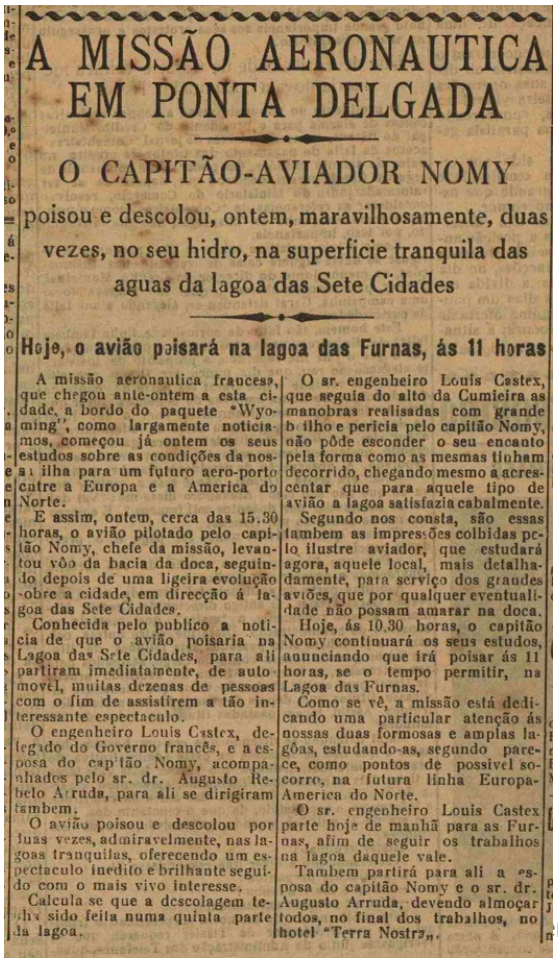
2. The rise of Icarus in the Azores

11 To perceive the media coverage of Henry Nomy's 1935 mission, we will focus on the two most popular newspapers in the Azores during this decade: *Diario dos Açôres* – founded in 1870 and still the oldest Azorean daily newspaper that was, at the time, an afternoon newspaper – and *Correio dos Açôres*, a morning newspaper founded in 1920 by a prominent local politician linked to the autonomist movement. We will study the period going from November 27, 1935 – the day before the arrival of the members of the mission – to December 15 of that same year, the day of their departure. Our corpus comprises 30 articles written by Azorean journalists: 16 published in *Diario dos Açôres*, 14 in *Correio dos Açôres*.

12 The local press covered each one of the aviator's travels and described the atmosphere he found (and created) in the places he visited, on a daily basis. These texts seldom refer to the men accompanying the pilot, the exception being Louis Castex, who is sometimes alluded to. All the attention goes to Henry Nomy: his name appears in large print (fig. 1)[12], and he is extensively mentioned. Hence, the small article in figure 2[13] names him nine times. Moreover, he is generally the subject of the sentences, as in the article of figure 2, where we can read: "Commander Nomy went to Terceira yesterday"; "Commander Nomy arrived to Terceira"; "Commander Nomy was in the city"; "Commander Nomy travelled to Praia da Vitória", "the illustrious aviator had a long talk"; "captain Nomy flew over the city"; "Commander Nomy presented his greetings"; "Commander Nomy brought to this island". Nomy is always the one who acts, never the passive receptor, even when he meets with Azorean authorities who welcome him to the island. The journalist does not say he was received by the

local authorities, but rather that he "had a long talk" or "presented his greetings" to them.

(Fig.1)
"The Aeronautical Mission in Ponta Delgada – Captain-Aviator Nomy – Landed and took-off, yesterday, wonderfully…" ["A Missão Aeronáutica em Ponta Delgada – O Capitão-Aviador Nomy – Poisou e descolou, ontem, maravilhosamente…"]



A MISSÃO AERONAUTICA EM PONTA DELGADA

O CAPITÃO-AVIADOR NOMY

poisou e descolou, ontem, maravilhosamente, duas vezes, no seu hidro, na superficie tranquila das aguas da lagoa das Sete Cidades

Hoje, o avião poisará na lagoa das Furnas, ás 11 horas

A missão aeronautica franceza, que chegou ante-ontem a esta cidade, a bordo do paquete "Wyoming", como largamente noticiamos, começou já ontem os seus estudos sobre as condições da nossa ilha para um futuro aero-porto entre a Europa e a America do Norte.

E assim, ontem, cerca das 15.30 horas, o avião pilotado pelo capitão Nomy, chefe da missão, levantou vôo da bacia da doca, seguindo depois de uma ligeira evolução sobre a cidade, em direcção á lagoa das Sete Cidades.

Conhecida pelo publico a noticia de que o avião poisaria na Lagoa das Sete Cidades, para ali partiram imediatamente, de automovel, muitas dezenas de pessoas com o fim de assistirem a tão interessante espectaculo.

O engenheiro Louis Castex, delegado do Governo francês, e a esposa do capitão Nomy, acompanhados pelo sr. dr. Augusto Rebelo Arruda, para ali se dirigiram tambem.

O avião poisou e descolou por duas vezes, admiravelmente, nas lagoas tranquilas, oferecendo um espectaculo inedito e brilhante seguido com o mais vivo interesse.

Calcula se que a descolagem tenha sido feita numa quinta parte da lagoa.

O sr. engenheiro Louis Castex, que seguia do alto da Cumieira as manobras realisadas com grande brilho e perícia pelo capitão Nomy, não pôde esconder o seu encanto pela forma como as mesmas tinham decorrido, chegando mesmo a acrescentar que para aquele tipo de avião a lagoa satisfazia cabalmente.

Segundo nos consta, são essas tambem as impressões colhidas pelo ilustre aviador, que estudará agora, aquele local, mais detalhadamente, para serviço dos grandes aviões, que por qualquer eventualidade não possam amarar na doca.

Hoje, ás 10,30 horas, o capitão Nomy continuará os seus estudos, anunciando que irá poisar ás 11 horas, se o tempo permitir, na Lagoa das Furnas.

Como se vê, a missão está dedicando uma particular atenção ás nossas duas formosas e amplas lagôas, estudando-as, segundo parece, como pontos de possivel socorro, na futura linha Europa-America do Norte.

O sr. engenheiro Louis Castex parte hoje de manhã para as Furnas, afim de seguir os trabalhos na lagoa daquele vale.

Tambem partirá para ali a esposa do capitão Nomy e o sr. dr. Augusto Arruda, devendo almoçar todos, no final dos trabalhos, no hotel "Terra Nostra".

r 28, 1935, p. 2.

13 The epithets display the journalists' admiration for the figure of the aviator. In the article of figure 2, he is "commander Nomy" ("comandante Nomy"), which comes up 7 times, or the "the illustrious aviator" ("o ilustre aviador"), and "Captain Nomy" ("o capitão Nomy"). In other texts he is called the "daring aviator"[14], or the "famous transoceanic aviator"[15]. The admiration for Nomy is such that the fact that France has chosen him to conduct this mission is interpreted as proof of the relevance given to this mission by the French State: "The importance of sending this French mission to the Azores is revealed by the illustrious name of the officer aviator who leads it – the Commandant

Nomy, one of the 'aces' of French aviation who has dealt for the past fourteen years with questions and problems of hydro-aviation [16]."

14 The newspaper articles also reveal the enthusiasm and admiration of the Azorean community for the aviator and his exploits:

> "Many people attended the admirable arrival manoeuvres, cheering the aviators and throwing many rockets into the air [17]."

> "having been enthusiastically greeted, with cheers and applause, and receiving flowers from the public [18]".

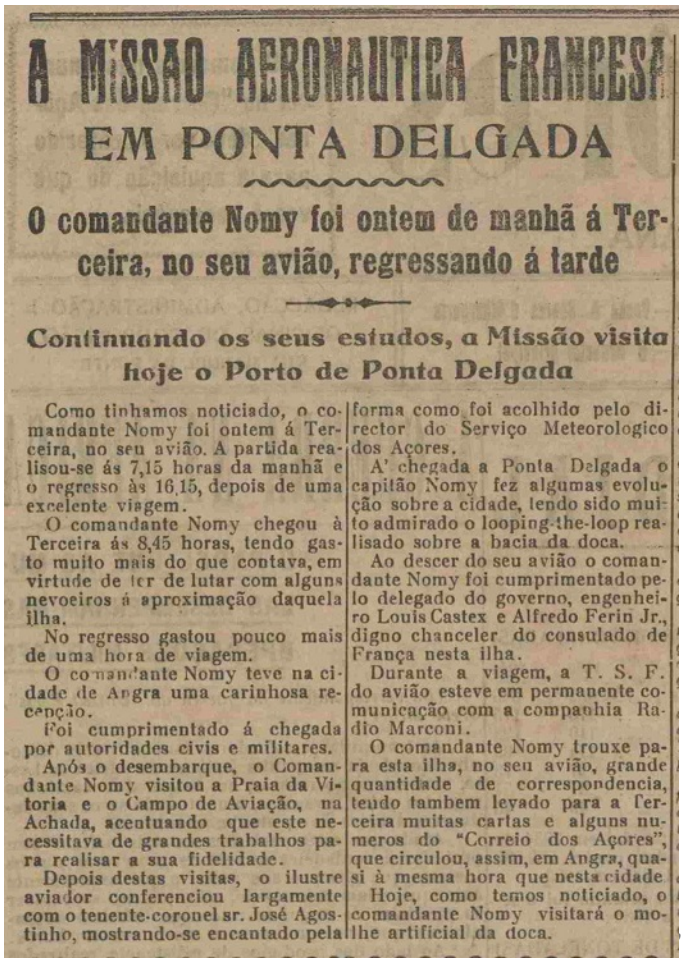
> "It was surely with emotion that the inhabitants of São Miguel have once again seen and heard the French plane fly over our land, in its graceful exercises, in its magisterial flights [19]."

> "Upon his arrival at the hotel, a huge crowd, parked in the neighbourhoods, cheered Captain Nomy and his companions, many rockets having been thrown into the air [20]."

> "Commander Nomy received a warm welcoming at the city of Angra [21]."

> "Having previously undertaken low-altitude flights over the city, followed with keen interest [22]."

(Fig. 2)
"The French Aeronautical mission – in Ponta Delgada – Commander Nomy went to Terceira yesterday morning and returned in the afternoon – The plane will take off tomorow" ["A missão aeronáutica francesa – em Ponta Delgada – O comandante Nomy foi ontem de manhã à Terceira regressando à tarde"]



A MISSÃO AERONAUTICA FRANCESA
EM PONTA DELGADA

O comandante Nomy foi ontem de manhã á Terceira, no seu avião, regressando á tarde

Continuando os seus estudos, a Missão visita hoje o Porto de Ponta Delgada

Como tinhamos noticiado, o comandante Nomy foi ontem á Terceira, no seu avião. A partida realisou-se ás 7,15 horas da manhã e o regresso ás 16,15, depois de uma excelente viagem.

O comandante Nomy chegou á Terceira ás 8,45 horas, tendo gasto muito mais do que contava, em virtude de ter de lutar com alguns nevoeiros á aproximação daquela ilha.

No regresso gastou pouco mais de uma hora de viagem.

O comandante Nomy teve na cidade de Angra uma carinhosa recepção.

Foi cumprimentado á chegada por autoridades civis e militares.

Após o desembarque, o Comandante Nomy visitou a Praia da Vitoria e o Campo de Aviação, na Achada, acentuando que este necessitava de grandes trabalhos para realisar a sua fidelidade.

Depois destas visitas, o ilustre aviador conferenciou largamente com o tenente-coronel sr. José Agostinho, mostrando-se encantado pela forma como foi acolhido pelo director do Serviço Meteorologico dos Açores.

A' chegada a Ponta Delgada o capitão Nomy fez algumas evolução sobre a cidade, tendo sido muito admirado o looping-the-loop realisado sobre a bacia da doca.

Ao descer do seu avião o comandante Nomy foi cumprimentado pelo delegado do governo, engenheiro Louis Castex e Alfredo Ferin Jr., digno chanceler do consulado de França nesta ilha.

Durante a viagem, a T. S. F. do avião esteve em permanente comunicação com a companhia Radio Marconi.

O comandante Nomy trouxe para esta ilha, no seu avião, grande quantidade de correspondencia, tendo tambem levado para a Terceira muitas cartas e alguns numeros do "Correio dos Açores", que circulou, assim, em Angra, quasi á mesma hora que nesta cidade.

Hoje, como temos noticiado, o comandante Nomy visitará o molhe artificial da doca.

, p. 2.

15 These excerpts show that the crowd is even willing to travel to witness the manoeuvres of the aviator, which they follow with emotion ("warm welcoming", "with emotion") and enthusiasm ("enthusiastically", "cheering", "applause" "throwing (...) rockets"). The journalists' choice of word also clearly shows the admiration for the pilot and his maneuvers: "admirable", "graceful", "magisterial". It is true that Nomy is looked upon with increased hope, since the possibility of building a base for transatlantic flights in the Azores depends upon him and on the report he will present to his superiors. Nevertheless, these examples clearly show that the aviator is revered by the Azoreans. According to Françoise Lucbert and Stéphane Tison, in the beginning of the twentieth century, the aviator presented himself as a star, whose success and social prestige was partly due to the press coverage of his feats. He embodied the qualities his contemporaries aspired to and posits himself as a true hero (Lucbert, Tison, 2016: 30). Nomy is indeed perceived as an exceptional, competent, audacious human being, a true hero.

3. The fall of the mechanical bird

16 The 1949 event is quite different from the previous one, since it is an accident, one of the most covered by the media in the history of the French civil aviation: that of the *Constellation* of Air France which was supposed to fly from Paris to New York with a stopover in Santa Maria and crashed on the island of São Miguel, on the night of October 28, 1949. On board were two celebrities: Marcel Cerdan, the world boxing champion, who was on his way to New York to meet the famous French singer Edith Piaf, with whom he had an affair, and the French classical violinist Ginette Neveu, travelling to the United States for a series of concerts. At a time when a lot was invested in flight safety – at the level of aircraft, of technology but also of the discourse on aviation – the fall of an airplane and the death of its passengers, notwithstanding the human losses, was felt, as a failure of aviation.

17 The accident occurred under unclear circumstances: the Santa Maria control tower was in contact with the crew. When changing to "visual flight", the pilot confirmed to the control tower that he had a good visibility over the runway. Soon after, all communication with the airplane was lost, and it crashed nearly 100 kilometers away, on the opposite island, São Miguel [23].

18 After the first moments of apprehension, issues of diplomacy took over: the causes of the accident being difficult to determine, tensions arose between the different entities involved, in seeking the guilty party. Either there had been an error in the air (human error or mechanical failure), a hypothesis refuted by the French, or an error on the ground (on the part of the men in the control tower or the equipment they used), a possibility denied by the Portuguese.

19 To understand what place is given to the aviator during the media coverage of this accident, we will study the articles published in the top three Azorean newspapers at that time (the ones with the largest circulation), between October 28, the day of the accident, and November 29, 1949. Our corpus will comprise texts of *Correio dos Açôres*, where we found 6 briefs as well as 16 larger articles on this accident (among which articles written by journalists, but also a testimony, an interview and two press releases issued by Portuguese en-

tities); in the newspaper *Diario dos Açôres* there are 13 texts about the accident (mainly articles, but also one press release from a Portuguese authority, a public letter of acknowledgement from an entity and a chronicle); in the daily newspaper *Açores*, 11 texts have been identified (mainly articles and the same official press release mentioned above), as well as 7 briefs.

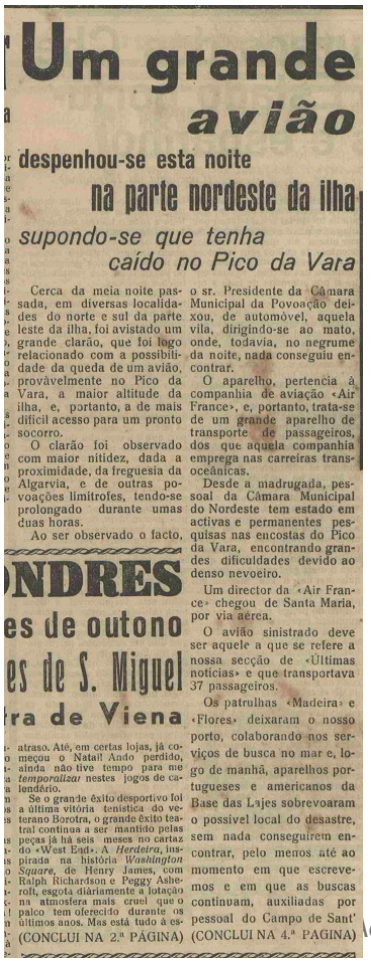
20 What is most striking, especially when comparing these texts with those of the 1930's, is that the aviator is rarely evoked, either in the speech of journalists, or in the texts written by the national authorities or members of the community. In the event of an accident, it would seem logical for the pilot, who captains the aircraft and who is ultimately responsible, to be regularly mentioned in the newspapers. However, in these forty texts, the pilot, Jean de la Noüe, is only identified through his name in the lists of victims, although he was considered an ace of aviation, having served as a pilot during World War I and later worked for Aéropostale. In our *corpus*, we found one single exception to this, in an article from *Correio dos Açôres*, which explicitly refers to the aviator. In it we can read: "The commander of the aircraft was Jean de Lanolle [*sic*], 37 years old, one of the most experienced pilots of the North Atlantic lines, counting 6700 hours [of flight] [24]". We should point out, however, that the title of this article is "Among the victims of the catastrophe of the plain of Air France in this island were famous names of painting, cinema and journalism". Before the pilot is mentioned, the journalist identifies the celebrities on board – Neveu and Cerdan are the first – people who are vaguely related to celebrities (such as someone who worked for Walt Disney, the artist), then puts out a list of the anonymous passengers and finishes with the pilot and finally the rest of his crew. The reference to the pilot shows that the reason why he is not mentioned in the regional newspapers is not because his achievements were unknown to the local journalists, but rather because he is not held directly responsible for the accident.

21 Conversely, the newspapers all regularly allude to Marcel Cerdan and Ginette Neveu. According to Nathalie Roseau and Marie Thébaud-Sorger [25], this is typical of the post-war period, where flying is still an elitist activity and entails the diffusion of a representation of commercial flights where the image of stars, descending on the tarmac, plays an important role. Hence, *Diario dos Açôres* name either Cerdan

or Neveu (or both) in its issues on October 31, November 2, November 22; *Correio dos Açôres* identifies Cerdan in its very first article on the accident, October 29, and publishes a biography of Ginette Neveu on November 9.

22 The fascination previously elicited by the aviator is now also triggered by the celebrities, but it is mostly linked to the aircraft itself. This becomes clear when we consider the headlines reporting the accident for the first time in the four newspapers. *Diario dos Açôres*, the only newspaper to announce the crash of the plane the same day it occurred, on October 28, chose the title "A big plane crashed tonight in the northeastern part of the island. It is believed to have fallen down at Pico da Vara". (fig. 3)[26] "A big plane" is detached from the text and put in larger prints, thus calling the attention of the reader.

(Fig. 3)
"A big plane – crashed last night – in the northeastern part of the Island" ["Um grande avião - despenhou-se esta noite - na parte nordeste da ilha"]



Um grande
avião
despenhou-se esta noite
na parte nordeste da ilha
supondo-se que tenha
caído no Pico da Vara

Cerca da meia noite passada, em diversas localidades do norte e sul da parte leste da ilha, foi avistado um grande clarão, que foi logo relacionado com a possibilidade da queda de um avião, provàvelmente no Pico da Vara, a maior altitude da ilha, e, portanto, a de mais difícil acesso para um pronto socorro.

O clarão foi observado com maior nitidez, dada a proximidade, da freguesia da Algarvia, e de outras povoações limítrofes, tendo-se prolongado durante umas duas horas.

Ao ser observado o facto, o sr. Presidente da Câmara Municipal da Povoação deixou, de automóvel, aquela vila, dirigindo-se ao mato, onde, todavia, no negrume da noite, nada conseguiu encontrar.

O aparelho, pertencia à companhia de aviação «Air France», e, portanto, trata-se de um grande aparelho de transporte de passageiros, dos que aquela companhia emprega nas carreiras transoceânicas.

Desde a madrugada, pessoal da Câmara Municipal do Nordeste tem estado em activas e permanentes pesquisas nas encostas do Pico da Vara, encontrando grandes dificuldades devido ao denso nevoeiro.

Um director da «Air France» chegou de Santa Maria, por via aérea.

O avião sinistrado deve ser aquele a que se refere a nossa secção de «Últimas notícias» e que transportava 37 passageiros.

Os patrulhas «Madeira» e «Flores» deixaram o nosso porto, colaborando nos serviços de busca no mar e, logo de manhã, aparelhos portugueses e americanos da Base das Lajes sobrevoaram o possível local do desastre, sem nada conseguirem encontrar, pelo menos até ao momento em que escrevemos e em que as buscas continuam, auxiliadas por pessoal do Campo de Sant'

(CONCLUI NA 4.ª PAGINA)

NDRES
es de outono
es de S. Miguel
ra de Viena

atraso. Até, em certas lojas, já começou o Natal! Ando perdido, ainda não tive tempo para me *temporalizar* nestes jogos de calendário.

Se o grande êxito desportivo foi a última vitória tenística do veterano Borotra, o grande êxito teatral continua a ser mantido pelas peças já há seis meses no cartaz do «West End». A *Herdeira*, inspirada na história *Washington Square*, de Henry James, com Ralph Richardson e Peggy Ashcroft, esgota diàriamente a lotação na atmosfera mais cruel que o palco tem oferecido durante os últimos anos. Mas está tudo à es-

(CONCLUI NA 2.ª PÁGINA)

[26] *Diario dos Açôres*, October 28, 1949, p. 1.

23 The other three newspapers report the accident the next day, on October 29. The title of the article by *Correio dos Açôres* focuses on the location, then on the aircraft (and the airline) and finally on the victims (fig. 4)[27]: "On this island of São Miguel in the coast of Pico da Vara, an Air France aircraft has fallen into flames with 48 victims already carbonized". The *Açores* opted for the following title (fig. 5)[28]: "Yesterday crashed in Pico Redondo, in the Northeast [at Nordeste?], a Constellation of Air France. Its 48 occupants perished". This title also draws attention to the aircraft, highlighted by the larger print. If we bare in mind that journalists carefully choose their titles, we can see that the first reference is to the location, which justifies the relevance of the news to the reader, whereas the second goes to the aircraft and the airplane company. The aircraft is always the subject of the sentence, the pilot and the crew are not even named.

(Fig. 4)

"On this island of S. Miguel – on the coast of Pico da Vara – fell in flames – a plane – from Air France with 48 – victims already carbonized" ["Nesta ilha de S. Miguel, nas faldas do Pico da Vara, caiu incendiado um aparelho da "Air France" com 48 vítimas já carbonizadas"]



Nesta ilha de S. Miguel

nas faldas do Pico da Vara caíu incendiado um aparelho da "AIR FRANCE" com 48 vítimas já carbonizadas

A notícia de que um grande desastre de aviação tinha tido lugar na madrugada de ontem, na parte nordeste desta ilha, correu depressa pela cidade.

Os boatos eram contraditórios, mas ao mesmo tempo, os telegramas que chegavam a esta cidade de Londres e Paris, enviados por agencias telegráficas, atingiram no decorrer do dia, um quantitativo que pode computar-se por centenas.

Tudo indicava, por tanto tratar-se de uma grande catástrofe, sabendo-se então que um *super-constelation* da «Air France», das duas para as três horas da madrugada, fôra avistado na freguesia da Algarvia, envolvido em chamas, vindo a despenhar-se no Pico Redondo nas faldas do Pico da Vara de que resultou a morte de 11 tripulantes e 37 passageiros, entre os quais Marcel Cerdan, campeão francês de *box*, que seguia para a América, afim de disputar o campeonato mundial no dia 1 do próximo mês.

Das estações do norte dos C. T. T. informaram-nos amavelmente que os destroços do avião se encontravam em puro *ferro*, estando os corpos das vitimas carbonizados, em dois montões, a muitos metros de distância.

Os socorros

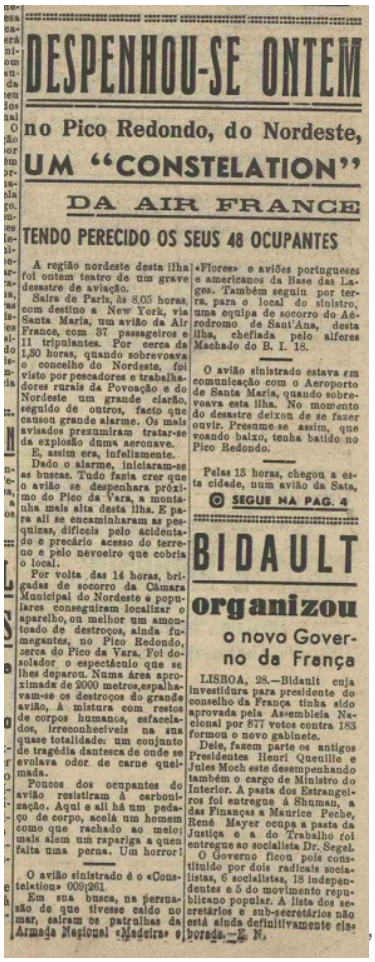
Enquanto não foi localizado o desastre, os patrulhas »Madeira» e «Flores», estacionados no nosso porto, fizeram rumo ao mar, tendo sido a

(*Continua na 4.ª pág.*)

tober 29, 1949, p. 1.

(Fig. 5)

"Crashed yesterday – on Pico Redondo, at Nordeste – a 'Constellation' – from Air France – its 48 occupants having perished" ["Despenhou-se ontem no Pico Redondo, do Nordeste, um "Constellation" da Air France, tendo perecido os seus 48 ocupantes"]



DESPENHOU-SE ONTEM

no Pico Redondo, do Nordeste, UM "CONSTELATION"

DA AIR FRANCE

TENDO PERECIDO OS SEUS 48 OCUPANTES

A região nordeste desta ilha foi ontem teatro de um grave desastre de aviação.

Saíra de Paris, às 8,05 horas, com destino a New York, via Santa Maria, um avião da Air France, com 37 passageiros e 11 tripulantes. Por cerca da 1,30 horas, quando sobrevoava o concelho do Nordeste, foi visto por pescadores e trabalhadores rurais da Povoação e do Nordeste um grande clarão, seguido de outros, facto que causou grande alarme. Os mais avisados presumiram tratar-se da explosão dum aeronave.

E, assim era, infelizmente.

Dado o alarme, iniciaram-se as buscas. Tudo fazia crer que o avião se despenhara próximo do Pico da Vara, a montanha mais alta desta ilha. E para ali se encaminharam as pesquizas, difíceis pelo acidentado e precário acesso do terreno e pelo nevoeiro que cobria o local.

Por volta das 14 horas, brigadas de socorro da Câmara Municipal do Nordeste e populares conseguiram localizar o aparelho, ou melhor um amontoado de destroços, ainda fumegantes, no Pico Redondo, serra do Pico da Vara. Foi desolador o espectáculo que se lhes deparou. Numa área aproximada de 2000 metros, espalhavam-se os destroços do grande avião. A mistura com restos de corpos humanos, esfacelados, irreconhecíveis na sua quase totalidade: um conjunto de tragédia dantesca de onde se evolava odor de carne queimada.

Poucos dos ocupantes do avião resistiram à carbonização. Aqui e ali há um pedaço de corpo, acolá um homem como que rachado ao meio; mais além um rapariga a quem falta uma perna. Um horror!

O avião sinistrado é o «Constelation» 009/261.

Em sua busca, na persuasão de que tivesse caído no mar, saíram os patrulhas da Armada Nacional «Madeira» e «Flores» e aviões portugueses e americanos da Base das Lages. Também seguiu por terra, para o local do sinistro, uma equipa de socorro do Aeródromo de Sant'Ana, desta ilha, chefiada pelo alferes Machado do B. I. 18.

O avião sinistrado estava em comunicação com o Aeroporto de Santa Maria, quando sobrevoava esta ilha. No momento do desastre deixou de se fazer ouvir. Presume-se assim, que voando baixo, tenha batido no Pico Redondo.

Pelas 13 horas, chegou a esta cidade, num avião da Sata,

SEGUE NA PAG. 4

BIDAULT organizou o novo Governo da França

LISBOA, 28.—Bidault cuja investidura para presidente do conselho da França tinha sido aprovada pela Assembleia Nacional por 377 votos contra 183 formou o novo gabinete.

Dele, fazem parte os antigos Presidentes Henri Queuille e Jules Moch este desempenhando também o cargo de Ministro do Interior. A pasta dos Estrangeiros foi entregue á Shuman, a das Finanças a Maurice Peche, René Mayer ocupa a pasta da Justiça e a do Trabalho foi entregue ao socialista Dr. Segel.

O Governo ficou pois constituido por dois radicais socialistas, 6 socialistas, 18 independentes e 5 do movimento republicano popular. A lista dos secretários e sub-secretários não está ainda definitivamente elaborada.—E. N.

, October 29, 1949, p. 1.

24 The weekly newspaper *Açoriano Oriental* chose a less objective title: "The French wings are in mourning. A terrible disaster has made casualties. 37 passengers and 11 members of the crew of a *Constellation* of Air France north of our island" (fig. 6)[29]. This title first alludes to French aviation, thus putting the accident within the context, then it alludes to the victims and the crew (not only does it not point out the pilot, but the crew is put here at the same level as the other victims), then the aircraft, in italics, and finally the airline. Once again, the italics highlights the aircraft. However, this title distinguishes the crew from the rest of the passengers, and is more subjective: it talks of "mourning" and describes the accident as "terrible", which underlines the human losses.

(Fig. 6)

"French wings in mourning. A terrible disaster – kills 37 passengers and 11 crew members of a Constellation from Air France on the northern lands of out island" ["Asas francesas de luto. Um terrível desastre vitima 37 passageiros e 11 tripulantes de um Constellation da Air France sobre as terras nortenhas da nossa ilha"]



ASAS FRANCESAS DE LUTO

Um terrivel desastre

vitima 37 passageiros e 11 tripulantes de um *Constelation* da Air France sobre as terras nortenhas da nossa ilha.

ÁS primeiras horas da manhã de ontem correu na cidade a noticia de que um grande desastre de aviação tinha tido lugar na parte norte desta ilha.

No entretanto, os telegramas chegados a esta cidade de Londres e Paris e enviados por agencias telegráficas, procurando colher informações, eram ás centenas.

Tudo indicava, portanto, tratar-se de uma grande catástrofe, sabendo-se então que era um *super-Constelation* da «Air France» que, da uma para as duas horas da madrugada, fôra avistado sobrevoando a freguesia da Algarvia, vindo despenhar-se no Pico Redondo nas faldas do Pico da Vara, do que resultou a morte de 11 tripulantes e 37 passageiros, entre os quais Marcel Cerdan, campeão francês de box, que seguia para a América, afim de ali disputar o campeonato mundial, no dia 1 do próximo mês.

Enquanto não foi localizado o desastre, os patrulhas «Madeira» e «Flores», estacionados no nosso porto, fizeram imediatamente rumo ao mar, em procura dos destroços e vitimas ou no seu salvamento, pois supunha-se, pelos informações das pessoas que viráo o clarão das explosões, que o aparelho tivesse caido no mar, o que ao amanhecer se constatou não ser um facto.

No entretanto, ao amanhecer aviões portugueses e americanos da Base das Lages lançavam-se em procura do aparelho e só mais tarde e devido ao nevoeiro que caia na serra é que foram encontrados os destroços do Constelation e todo o seu horrivel espectaculo de mutilações.

Do B. I. I. 18, partiram 25 soldados, uma camionete e uma ambulancia, o mesmo sucedendo do Grupo de Artilharia de Guarnição, tendo o Quartel General enviado tambem viaturas.

A direcção do Campo de Sant'Ana, de acordo com o sr. Governador do Distrito, tomou tambem providencias, enviando para o local os devidos socorros, médicos e enfermeiros, tendo ficado todos os Hospitais desta ilha de prevenção, bem assim os Bombeiros Voluntarios.

A's 16 horas e 45 minutos, chegou a Sant'Ana o Inspector da Aviação Civil francesa, M. Deleves Mirepois, acompanhado de seis técnicos que seguiram imediatamente para o local, que fica situado a duas horas do povoado da Algarvia, a fim de verificar emas possiveis causas do desastre.

E' profundamente emocionados com o grande desastre de ontem que escrevemos estas ligeiras linhas, acompanhando as familias das victimas, ainda que as não conheçamos, na sua grande dor, e enviando á direcção da Air France, na pessoa do seu director no aeroporto de Santa Maria, as nossas mais sinceras condolencias por esta tragédia.

100 contos

para o Hospital desta cidade

O sr. Ministro do Interior, informado pelo sr. Governador do Distrito da situação financeira do Hospital desta cidade, enviou ontem uma oferta de 100 contos, destinada a acudir aquela instituição.

Bem haja S. Ex.ª o Sr. Ministro do Interior pelo seu procedimento, e louvores sejam também ao sr. Governador do Distrito como interprete das verdadeiras necessidades do distrito que dirige.

Major Frederico Lopes

Regressou ontem á sua casa de Angra, acompanhado de sua Esposa, o ilustre poeta e escritor sr. Major Frederico Lopes Lopes Jr., a quem agradecemos a gentileza dos seus cumprimentos ao nosso jornal.

Governador do Distrito de Angra do Heroismo

De passagem para o seu distrito, esteve ontem nesta cidade o sr. dr. Candido Forjaz, ilustre Governador do Distrito Autonomo de Angra do Heroismo e que á Capital havia ido assistir á reunião dos Governadores Civis do País.

Os nossos cumprimentos e votos de boa viagem.

Oriental, October 29, 1949, p. 1.

25 These titles emphasize, either by the order attributed to the information or by the typographical choices, the importance of the aircraft, an option the content of the articles reinforces. The airplane is often referred to as the "Constellation" or "the super constellation" or "the four-engine" – and described, after the accident, as "pure iron" or a "metal carcass". The technical aspects of the takeoff and landing procedures are discussed, as well as the devices used on board and on the ground, and the innovations which contribute to the flight safety. The discourses often become so specialized that it is difficult for nonspecialists to follow the reasoning. Because the responsibilities are distributed, they never fall directly on the pilot. In the article of *Diario dos Açôres* of November 2, for instance, we can read "the responsibility for this tragedy should be attributed to the crew, for not having followed the instruction given by Santa Maria airport [30]".

4. Conclusion

26 A mere fourteen years separate the two episodes we worked on. Between 1935 and 1949, however, important changes took place. In aviation, the transition from an experimental phase of solo flying, to commercial aviation, with all the stakes and consequences that this implies such as innovation on aircraft, navigation technologies and regulatory environment; all contributed to shifting the way aviators are perceived by the press and by the population of the Azores.

27 Our findings showed that despite their geographical and often civilizational seclusion, Azoreans followed the Western trend when it came to the figure of the aviator. This shows how intense this change in perspective was, but also the important role played by the local press and radio which brought to this distant archipelago news from the more advanced countries when it came to aviation. Hence, in the Azorean newspapers of the 1930s both the journalists' choices when writing their articles and the inhabitants' reactions they convey clearly show that the aviator is perceived as a kind of demigod, an Icarian figure who defies the laws of nature and risks his life to contribute to the advances in aviation. Whereas in 1949 we find ourselves in full in the era of the mechanical bird (Poirot-Delpech). It is the aircraft, the *Constellation*, which took center stage, with its mesmerizing metallic structure. It is referred to alongside the airline, the crew, the ground staff, the technologies and the passengers. The aircraft was nonetheless led by Jean de la Noüe, former pilot of the *Aéropostale*, an experienced aviator, a true aviation ace and a hero. The press, however, granted him very little attention. If it is true, he is no longer held solely responsible for the crash, it is also true he does not foster the veneration of the public.

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NOTES

1 See E. Jablonski, *Atlantic Fever: The Great Transatlantic Aerial Adventure* (Macmillan: New York, 1972) and J. Jackson, *Atlantic Fever: Lindbergh, His Competitors and the Race to Cross the Atlantic* (Picador: New York, 2012).

2 Our translation from: "La Grande Guerre met sur le devant de la scène la figure du pilote: audacieux, casse-cou, manœuvrant habilement des appareils de plus en plus souples et rapides, il apparaît comme un être hors pair aux qualités physiques spécifiques et doté d'un courage exceptionnel." A. Gras, C. Moricot, S. Poirot-Delpech, V. Scardigli, *Face à l'automate. Le pilote, le contrôleur et l'ingénieur* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1994), 31.

3 R. Wohl, *The spectacle of flight. Aviation and the western imagination, 1920-1950*. (Yale: Yale University Press, 2005), 4.

4 See M. Correia, *Aviadores portugueses. 1920-1934. A aventura dos pioneiros* (Lisboa: A Esfera dos Livros, 2016).

5 See L. Castex, *Iles, relais du ciel* (Paris: VOICI – Univers-Club, Union Générale d'Editions, 1964), 9.

6 For more extensive information on the role played by the Azores during the 1930s in civil aviation, see A. Dobson, *A History of international civil aviation. From its origins through transformative evolution* (New York, London: Routledge, 2017) 28-34; G. Warner, *Under the Goshawk's Wings – A History of Aviation in the Azores / Sob as Asas do Açor – Uma História da Aviação nos Açores* (Ponta Delgada: Letras Lavadas / Publiçor, 2017), 13-36) and A. S. Monteiro, "Louis Castex e as Missões Aeronáuticas Francesas aos Açores (1935-1939)", in *O Faial e a Periferia Açoriana nos Séculos XV a XX – A Horta e os Açores na História da Aviação: nos 75 anos do 1º voo regular transatlântico da Pan American Airways* (Núcleo Cultural da Horta, 2015b),117-118, A. S. Monteiro, *As Ilhas nas Relações Internacionais: o caso de Santa Maria no século XX* (Master's Thesis, 2015a), 105-119.

7 Between 1929 and 1933, France held the monopoly of the air route, through a Portuguese company owned by the French *Aéropostale*. It lost this privileged position when it failed to meet the requirements of the agreement (See M. S. Pinto, *Transporte Aéreo e Poder Político* (Lisboa: Coisas de Ler, 2010), 275-279.

8 Archives Gaumont Pathé, CM 93 – ARCHIPEL DES AÇORES (L'), "L'archipel des Açores comme relais sur une voie aérienne Europe-États-Unis", Prise de vue: 01/06/1935.

9 *Correio dos Açôres*, 6-6-35, 1.

10 Castex left and extensive and detailed account of his aeronautical experiences in the Azores in three of his works (See L. Castex, *Iles, relais du ciel* (Paris: VOICI – Univers-Club, Union Générale d'Editions, 1964); L. Castex, *L'Age de l'Air – 25 Ans d'Aviation Commerciale Dans le Monde* (1920-1945), (Paris: Etienne Chiron, Editeur – Librarie Aeronautique, 1945a); L. Castex, *Mon Tour du Monde en Avion* (Paris: Librarie Plon, 1945b).

11 See S. Serpa Silva, C. Cordeiro (coord.) *A História da Imprensa e a Imprensa na História: o contributo dos Açores* (Ponta Delgada: CEGF / CEIS20, 2009).

12 *Correio dos Açôres*, 28-11-35, p.2.

13 *Correio dos Açôres*, 5-12-35, p.2.

14 "arrojados aviadores" *Diario dos Açôres*, 29-11-35.

15 "famoso aviador transoceanico" *Correio dos Açôres*, 27-11-35.

16 "A importância da vinda desta missão francesa aos Açores ficou logo marcada pelo nome ilustre do oficial aviador que figura à sua frente – o Comandante Nomy, um dos "ases" da aviação francesa que há catorze anos se ocupa de questões e problemas de hidro-aviação" (*Correio dos Açôres*, 11-12-35).

17 "Numerosas pessoas assistiram às admiráveis manobras de chegada, aclamando os aviadores e subindo ao ar muitos foguetes." (*Diario dos Açôres*, 28-11-35).

18 "tendo sido entusiasticamente saudados com vivas e palmas e oferecendo-lhes os manifestantes flôres" (*Diario dos Açôres*, 29-11-35).

19 "Com emoção, por certo, viram e ouviram os micaelenses, mais uma vez, sobrevoando a nossa terra, o avião francês, nos seus exercícios graciosos, em seus vôos magistrais." (*Diario dos Açôres*, 14-12-35).

20 "Ao chegar ao hotel, uma grande multidão, que estacionava nas proximidades, ovacionou o capitão Nomy e os seus companheiros, subindo por essa ocasião ao ar muitos foguetes." (*Correio dos Açôres*, 29-11-35).

21 "O comandante Nomy teve na cidade de Angra uma carinhosa recepção" (*Correio dos Açôres*, 5-12-35).

22 "tendo antes feito também alguns vôos muito baixos sobre a cidade, que foram seguidos com vivo interesse" (*Correio dos Açôres*, 8-12-35).

23 To learn more about this crash read the French official report, published on this website: http://aviatechno.net/constellation/suivi_matricule.php?mat=F-BAZN. A fictional account was also written by A. Bosc, *Constellation* ([Trans. Willard Wood], New York: Other Press, 2016).

24 "O comandante do aparelho era Jean de Lanolle, de 37 anos, um dos pilotos mais experimentados das carreiras do Atlântico-Norte, com 6700 horas, o que equivale 1300.00 quilometros percorridos." (*Correio dos Açôres*, 3-11-49).

25 N. Roseau, M. Thébaud-Sorger, *L'Emprise du vol. De l'Invention à la Massification: Histoire d'une culture moderne* (Genève: Metis Presses, 2013).

26 *Diario dos Açôres*, 28-10-49, p.1.

27 *Correio dos Açôres*, 29-10-49, p.1.

28 *Açores*, 29-10-49, p.1.

29 *Açoriano Oriental*, 28-10-49, p.1.

30 "a responsabilidade da tragédia deve ser atribuída à tripulação por esta não cumprir as instruções do Aeroporto de Santa Maria". (*Diario dos Açôres*, 2-11-49)

ABSTRACTS

English

In the aftermath of "Atlantic Fever", several test crews from the most advanced nations in aviation came to the Azores, fighting for the establishment of commercial routes between the Old and the New World. This context explains the 1935 aeronautical mission of the French aviator, Henry Nomy. The analysis of articles in the Azorean newspapers of this period shows the emphasis on the heroic figure of the aviator. In this article, we contrast this aeronautical imaginary with the one prevailing in the Azorean press' coverage of the accident of the *Constellation* of Air France, which flew from Paris to New York with a stopover in Santa Maria (Azores) and crashed on the island of São Miguel on October 28, 1949. Studying the articles in these newspapers allows us to grasp a change in the aeronautical imaginary (this time associated with civil aviation): the admiration previously focused on the aviator was now focused on the aircraft itself.

Français
À la suite de la « fièvre de l'Atlantique », plusieurs équipages de test provenant des nations d'avant-garde dans le domaine de l'aviation arrivent aux Açores, se battant pour l'établissement de routes commerciales entre le Vieux et le Nouveau Monde. C'est ce contexte qui explique la mission aéronautique de 1935 de l'aviateur français Henry Nomy. L'analyse des articles des journaux açoréens de cette époque montre que l'accent y est mis sur la figure héroïque de l'aviateur. Dans cet article, nous faisons contraster cet imaginaire de l'aviation avec celui qui prévaut dans la couverture faite par la presse açoréenne de l'accident du *Constellation* d'Air France qui assurait la liaison Paris-New York avec escale à Santa Maria (Açores) et s'est écrasé sur l'île de São Miguel, le 28 octobre 1949. L'analyse des articles de ces journaux permet de saisir une modification dans l'imaginaire aéronautique (associé cette fois-ci à l'aviation commerciale) : l'admiration auparavant suscitée par l'aviateur est maintenant provoquée par l'appareil proprement dit.

INDEX

Keywords
aviator, civil aviation, aeronautical imaginary, press, Azores, Portugal, France

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