

# ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY

*Writer, Poet and Pioneering Aviator*

*"To be a man is to be responsible; to be ashamed of miseries you did not cause; to be proud of your comrades' victories; to be aware, when setting one stone, that you are building a world."*

*- Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (Livre de Poche n°68, p. 59)*



## *The Little Prince*

There have been few stories published that have captured the hearts and minds of children and adults quite like Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince* (The Little Prince), which recently celebrated its 70th anniversary. It is an enchanting tale of a pilot stranded in the desert meeting a young prince, who has travelled to earth from his home on a small asteroid in search of friendship and greater understanding. As the pilot attempts to repair his downed plane, the little prince shares the story of his life with him, recounting tales of other planets visited and odd people encountered. Originally intended as a children's book, the story tenderly unfolds, revealing many profound and idealistic observations about life and human nature. One of the novella's most frequently used quotes is from one of the fox's many lessons, "On ne voit bien qu'avec le cœur. L'essentiel est invisible pour les yeux." ("One sees clearly only with the heart. What is essential is invisible to the eye.")

Written in the author's native French, and then translated into English by Katherine Woods, *The Little Prince* was first published in the United States in April 1943 by Reynal & Hitchcock. As his works were banned by the Vichy Regime, the novella would only appear in Saint-Exupéry's homeland, in November 1945, after Saint-Exupéry's death, and after the liberation of France from German occupation. Since the late 1940s, *The Little Prince* has sold more than 140 million copies and has been translated into more than 210 languages.

## *Writing from experience*

The life story of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry is as fascinating as the plots in his novels. Born into French aristocracy in Lyon, on 29 June 1900, he was the third of five children of the Countess Marie de Fonscolombe and Count Jean de Saint Exupéry. He fell in love with flying at the age of twelve while watching aircraft taking off and landing on the airfield of Ambérieu-en-Bugey in south-eastern France. The plucky youngster





convinced Gabriel Salvez to take him for a spin in the cockpit of a Berthaud-Wroblewski, assuring the sceptical pilot that his mother wouldn't mind. His first flight left an indelible mark on him, igniting a passion that would stay with him all his life.

Saint-Exupéry began his military service in 1921 with the 2nd Regiment of Light Cavalry in Neuhoef near Strasbourg, where he took private flying lessons. He was offered a transfer from the French Army to the French Air Force a year later. Saint-Exupéry received his pilot's wings after being posted to the 37th Fighter Regiment in Casablanca, Morocco. He was later reposted to the 34th Aviation Regiment at Le Bourget just outside Paris, where he experienced the first of his many aircraft crashes.

He left the air force for a period, taking an office job, but by 1926 he was flying again, becoming one of the pioneers of international postal flight. He spent some time working for Aéropostale, between Toulouse and Dakar, and then moved on to the Spanish zone of South Morocco, where he fulfilled the role of stopover manager for the Cape Juby Airfield. While there, he was responsible for negotiating the safe release of downed pilots who had been taken hostage by hostile Moors, a task which earned him his first Légion d'Honneur from the French Government.

In 1929, after Saint-Exupéry's novella, *L'Aviateur* (The Aviator) was published in a short-lived literary magazine *Le Navire d'Argent* (The Silver Ship), he was inspired to write his first full-length novel, *Courrier Sud* (Southern Mail), based upon his pioneering flights for the French airmail service and revolving around an investigation into the disappearance of an aviator in the Sahara Desert. The novel was adapted for film in 1937 as *Courrier Sud*, directed by Pierre Billon.

Later in 1929 he accepted a transfer to Argentina, where, as the director of the airline Aeroposta Argentina, he surveyed new air routes across South America, negotiating agreements and on occasion flying the airmail and performing reconnaissance for downed fliers. It was during this time that regular night flights, which were fraught with risk, were introduced and Saint-Exupéry wrote *Vol de Nuit* (Night Flight), a tale of the challenges facing pilots and their heroism in surmounting them. Published in 1931, *Night Flight* was the first of his major works to gain widespread acclaim, winning the French literary prize, *Prix Femina*.

On 30 December 1935, just before three in the morning, Saint-Exupéry, and his mechanic-navigator André Prévot, crashed in the Sahara Desert. They were attempting to break the speed record in a Paris-to-Saigon air race with a prize of 150 000 Francs and were 19 hours and 44 minutes into their journey. Both the pilot and his navigator survived the crash only to face rapid dehydration under the searing desert sun. Their maps proved unreliable and they found themselves lost amongst the sand dunes, with only a day's worth of liquids and a small ration of food. After four days filled with mirages and auditory hallucinations, they were discovered by a Bedouin, who treated them with a local rehydration remedy that saved their lives.

Saint-Exupéry drew on this experience in his 1939 memoir, *Wind, Sand and Stars*, which won several awards. It was also referenced in part in his only children's novella, *The Little Prince*.

After Germany invaded France in 1940, Saint-Exupéry rejoined the French Air Force and flew a Bloch MB 174 with the GR II/33 Reconnaissance Squadron. During the Nazi occupation he witnessed much death and destruction, and was ardently against France's armistice with Germany. After escaping through Portugal, he went

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into exile in North America, arriving in New York on 31 December 1940, intent on quickly convincing the United States to enter the war against Nazi Germany. His wife Consuelo joined him in New York several months later. Between January 1941 and April 1943, the couple lived in New York City's Central Park South, Ashroken on Long Island, and in Manhattan. During the late Spring of 1942, they also spent several weeks in Quebec City in Canada, and it was on their return that he wrote the novella *The Little Prince*. During his residence in New York he also wrote *Pilote de Guerre* (Flight to Arras), which earned widespread acclaim, and *Lettre à un Otage* (Letter to a Hostage), dedicated to the 40 million French living under Nazi oppression, plus numerous shorter pieces in support of France.

### *The death of an aviator*

Unable to sit idly by, Saint-Exupéry departed in April 1943 with an American military convoy bound for Algiers, to fly with the Free French Air Force, and fight with the Allies in a Mediterranean-based squadron. He was 43-years-old, far older than most men in operational units, and eight years over the age limit for such pilots; furthermore, he suffered pain and immobility due to his many previous crash injuries. He was so determined to contribute to the Allied war effort that he petitioned endlessly for an exemption, which was finally granted by General Dwight Eisenhower.

Along with a number of other pilots, Saint-Exupéry was assigned to F-5 Lightnings, which, aside from being described as 'war-weary, non-airworthy craft', were also more sophisticated than the models he had previously flown. To become flight ready, he undertook seven weeks of training before his first mission. He was grounded for eight months after wrecking a P-38 on his second mission through engine failure, but was later reinstated to flight duty on the personal intervention of General Ira Eaker, Deputy Commander of the US Army Air Force, with the provision that he would fly only five missions.

Saint-Exupéry had many quirks, one of which was reading and writing while flying his single-seat F-5B, a specially configured P-38 reconnaissance variant. He would take a lined notebook with him on his long, solitary flights, and some of his philosophical writings were created while he reflected on the world below.

As a result of his physical and mental deterioration (depression brought on by the false claims by the Vichy Regime that he was in fact one of its members), there was talk of removing him from flying status. Saint-Exupéry took off in an unarmed P-38 from an airbase on Corsica on his ninth reconnaissance mission on 31 July 1944, just a month after his 44th birthday. His task was to collect intelligence on German troop movements in and around the Rhone Valley, prior to the Allied invasion of Southern France (Operation Dragoon). It was a mission from which he did not return and his dramatic disappearance made international headlines. Several days after he vanished, an unidentifiable body wearing French colours was found east of the Frioul archipelago south of Marseille. The unidentified airman was buried in Carqueiranne in September that year.

In May 2000, Luc Vanrell, a diver, discovered the partial remains of a Lockheed P-38 Lightning spread over thousands of square metres of the seabed off the coast of Marseille. After a two-year delay, imposed by the French Government, what was left of the aircraft was recovered





in October 2003. On 7 April 2004, Patrick Granjean, head of the French Ministry of Culture, Captain Frederic Solano of the French Air Force and investigators from the French Underwater Archaeological Department, confirmed that the remnants of the crash wreckage were, indeed, from Saint-Exupéry's P-38 F-5B. It is believed that the large debris field was as a result of the aircraft hitting the surface at high speed. Only a small portion of it was recovered and there were no obvious marks or holes that could be attributed to gunfire as the cause of the crash.

#### *A fitting commemoration*

In June 2004, the fragments of his aircraft were given to the Musée de l'Air et de l'Espace, one of the world's oldest museums dedicated to aeronautics, situated in Le Bourget, Paris. Visitors to the museum are able to learn more about Saint-Exupéry's life which is commemorated in a special exhibit – a joint project by the Swiss watch manufacturer IWC Schaffhausen and the Antoine de Saint-Exupéry-d'Agay Estate. The exhibit covers 1 000m<sup>2</sup> and places the spotlight on time, flying and pilots' watches. Three hundred square metres of the exhibit is dedicated solely to Saint-Exupéry, tracing his life as an airmail pioneer, intellectual, artist and military pilot. In addition to the remnants of his plane, it features artefacts such as photographs, his drawings and letters, and some of his original notebooks, which were published posthumously.

The exhibit is just one of the projects in which IWC has partnered with the Antoine de Saint-Exupéry-d'Agay Estate. IWC is also a partner of the Fondation Antoine de Saint-Exupéry pour la Jeunesse (Saint-Exupéry Youth Foundation), which was created by the heirs of Antoine

de Saint-Exupéry. The foundation offers practical support to many young people in the world who grow up in difficult and often hostile environments where they are confronted daily with conflicts that follow them all the way into adulthood. The foundation and its partners help young men and women to build their own futures, and encourages them to take an active role in society. The work of the foundation is based on the humanist values of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, which are universally shared across the planet. It relies on an extensive international charity network that implements numerous local projects that represent these values.

#### *Homage to Antoine de Saint-Exupéry*

IWC Schaffhausen has been producing watches of lasting value since 1868. With a clear focus on technology and development, the company has gained an international reputation based on a passion for innovative solutions and technical ingenuity. One of the world's leading brands in the luxury watch segment, IWC crafts masterpieces of haute horlogerie at its finest, combining supreme precision with exclusive design.

In 2006, IWC launched a special edition of watches honouring Antoine de Saint-Exupéry with the Pilot's Watch Chrono Automatic, a tribute to the novel *Night Flight*. In 2007, the Pilot's Watch Automatic, honouring the gripping *Southern Mail*, followed, and in 2008 the series continued with the Pilot's Watch UTC, a homage to his poetic *Wind, Sand and Stars*. In 2009 and 2010, the fourth special edition, the Big Pilot's Watch, honoured his outstanding life's work; it was followed in 2011 with the rarely made Big Pilot's Watch Perpetual Calendar.

In 2012, in recognition of IWC Schaffhausen's 70-year tradition in the manufacture of Pilot's Watches and as a tribute to mark Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's memorable first flight, the company released its sixth special edition in his memory: the Pilot's Watch Chronograph Edition Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. Crafted in 18-carat red gold with a poignant special engraving of a Lightning P-38, the last aircraft he ever flew, embellishes the back of the watch. In 2013 IWC celebrated the 70th birthday of *The Little Prince* with the launch of two limited special editions: the Big Pilot's Watch Perpetual Calendar Edition "Le Petit Prince" and the Pilot's Watch Mark XVII Edition "Le Petit Prince". Common to all the special editions is that each one has featured a single model in platinum, which has gone up for auction. How the proceeds from the auction are used is decided in cooperation with the Fondation Antoine de Saint-Exupéry for Youth, which ensures that the donation reflects values espoused by Saint-Exupéry.

#### *The right to read*

One of the projects that IWC holds dear is located in Cambodia, where the foundation works closely with Sipar, a non-government

organisation that equips school and mobile libraries, and supplies reading material to remote areas. "Children in Cambodia are lacking basic necessities; among other things, many do not have access to a school and therefore are denied the ability to read.

In 2009, IWC opened a library in Cambodia in collaboration with Sipar and the Antoine de Saint-Exupéry Youth Foundation. Education is key in the battle against illiteracy, and this library was our first contribution to this quest. The next step will be dedicated to building a school," comments IWC CEO, Georges Kern.

As part of the collaboration, and with the support of IWC Schaffhausen, a new school building with an adjoining library is currently being constructed in the village of Roluos in the province of Siem Reap, and will be completed by the Spring of 2014.

In addition, part of the proceeds from sales of the special editions, Big Pilot's Watch Perpetual Calendar Edition "Le Petit Prince" and the Pilot's Watch Mark XVII Edition "Le Petit Prince" will go to the foundation to support its worldwide commitment against illiteracy. Quite in keeping with the thinking of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, who once wrote, "Your task is not to foresee the future, but to enable it." ■ Lindsay Grubb

