

# THE GRAND TOUR

## PEDRO ZANNI'S ROUND-THE-WORLD FLIGHT ATTEMPT, 1924 / PART TWO

In *TAH49* RICARDO M. LEZON detailed Argentinian pioneer aviator Pedro Zanni's preparations for his ambitious circumnavigation of the globe by air 100 years ago. Here, using Zanni's own words, he traces the Argentinian's epic journey across two continents, in which he overcame numerous setbacks — only to be defeated by a big wave in Japan

EARLY IN THE morning of July 26, 1924, Fokker C IV biplane *Ciudad de Buenos Aires* sat outside the manufacturer's hangar at Schiphol undergoing final preparations for an epic global circumnavigation flight to be undertaken by Argentinian pilot Pedro Zanni and his mechanic Felipe Beltrame. Unfortunately, weather reports were not encouraging, making it impossible for the local airliners to leave. Zanni, however, was a determined man and, having already spent two days grounded, he decided to press on regardless of the weather.

### AND AWAY!

Thus at 0600hr on July 26 Zanni and Beltrame undertook a parade for Mayor Angel María Zuloaga, Director of the *Escuela de Aviación Militar* (Military Aviation School), who was to depart later in the day and join Zanni in Paris. After *Alférez de Fragata* Nelson Tomás Page had been forced to retire from the circumnavigation attempt in his role as second pilot owing to illness (see Part One in *TAH49*), Zuloaga felt that a second pilot/navigator would be required for two sectors of the proposed route, namely the Japan—Alaska and Newfoundland—Europe legs. Concerned about this, he announced that the *Ministerio de Marina* would select an officer to accompany Zanni on those sectors.

After breakfast and a thorough briefing, Zanni and Beltrame climbed into the Napier Lion-

engined aircraft and strapped in. From this point we follow a composite account of the flight that draws heavily on Zanni's diaries and information from other sources. Zanni's recollections and comments are hereafter presented in italics.

*"We left Amsterdam at 0635hr despite the bad weather. I managed to get through to Rotterdam, where I encountered mist and rain which forced me to descend 5km [3 miles] from the airfield. I decided to land and wait until the weather conditions improved. At 0945hr I took off heading for Mons [in Belgium], where the conditions were the same up to Le Cateau-Cambrésis [in northern France]. This forced me to fly at [an altitude of] 15–20m [50–65ft], skimming the treetops. As a precautionary measure I decided to land in the vicinity of Le Cateau-Cambrésis at 1245hr."*

Zanni and Beltrame left Le Cateau-Cambrésis at 1400hr and headed to Le Bourget, where they landed at 1450hr. Their arrival in Paris was a surprise to those who had gathered there, who thought the pair might continue to Lyon owing to heavy storms. At Le Bourget Zanni and Beltrame were greeted by a group of Argentinian citizens, among them members of the national polo team, who had won Gold at the Summer Olympics held in the French capital that same month.

The weather remained unfavourable, however, with heavy rain and a 32kt wind. Commercial pilots operating on the Amsterdam—Paris route were astonished to learn of Zanni's flight, stating that they would not have flown in such

Mayor Pedro Leandro Zanni (furthest right) and his mechanic Felipe Beltrame (middle) while undertaking maintenance on their Napier Lion-engined Fokker C IV floatplane Provincia de Buenos Aires in Japan in October 1924. The pair had started their journey from Amsterdam in Fokker C IV landplane Ciudad de Buenos Aires on July 26, but the latter was written off in a take-off accident at Hanoi in August, forcing a change of plan for the intrepid pair.

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