1-1-1960

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PIioneer Overseas Airman Recognized

By Hampton Dunn

key west --- today, it’s nothing to fly over water for long distances; pilots go around the world, astronauts zoom to the moon. But in the year 1913 the challenge of an overseas flight attracted daredevils of the day.

The cuban government had offered $5,000 to the first aviator to make the 90-mile jump between the island of cuba and the mainland of the united states. up till then there had been only one flight over the water in all aviation history. This was a 12-mile flight somewhere in Europe.

key west, the southernmost city of the U.S., was all excited that day of May 19, 1913, when not one, but three, pilots decided to try their luck.

handsome, 26-year-old Augustin Pardla Orduna stepped into a seaplane biplane near the present Naval Annex on Caroline Street, when it was the to-be terminus of the Florida East Coast Railway. there was a strong family connection between Parla and cuba. although he was born in key west on oct. 11, 1887, his parents were cuban exiles who had fled their native land during the struggle for their country’s independence.

Parla succeeded in his historic journey, landing at El Mariel, cuba. He is honored with a bust memorial erected at the entrance to the Key West International Airport (photo).

Meanwhile, an American flier, John A. Douglas McCurdy, who earlier had gone down to the sea and was rescued by Navy Vessels in the cross-water attempt, and Domingo Rosillo, a cuban, also flew safely to Havana---but Parla had the honor of being first.
THE SOCIETY OF HONOR, STATE OF FLORIDA, BELIEVES THIS TRIBUTE TO
AGUSTIN PARAÑA ORDURA,
BORN IN GREY WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 9, 1932,
OF SPANISH PARENTAGE, EXILES DURING THE BATTLE
FOR THEIR COUNTRY'S INDEPENDENCE,
WHO WAS THE FIRST MAN TO FLY THE 10 MILLION
OVER THE SEA FROM GREY WEDNESDAY
TO EL MARIEL, CUBA, ON MAY 3, 1961
IN HONOR TO HIS MEMORY

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