



France celebrates 50 years since Concorde's first flight

The Concorde project was first launched in 1962, although it would be several years before the aircraft would go supersonic and make it possible for 128 passengers to travel from Paris to New York in just three hours.

Concorde's first flight - which took place on Sunday March 2, 1969 just after 15h40 in front of waiting journalists and engineers - had previously been delayed due to mist, fog, and low cloud cover, but the decision was taken to go ahead in the afternoon, as the clouds finally cleared. Once it had been decided, the flight was slightly delayed even further due to several technical difficulties before take-off.

Once all was declared ready to go, the real test began. At 15h40 and 11 seconds, Concorde began takeoff, reaching 300 kph in just 23 seconds. The aircraft remained at the "slow" speed of 250 knots (around 460 kph).

There were reportedly several more errors in the cockpit as the plane continued to fly, including a false alarm for a "dropped parachute" and air-cooling problems. André Turcat - the lead test pilot - decided to cut the flight short and began the descent. This was another unknown - how the plane would handle the landing - but all went well. After 42 minutes, the maiden flight was complete. The flight was deemed a success, but also seen as a marker of the renaissance of French aeronautics, which had been at a low ebb after the Second World War. The success of Concorde would go on to be attributed as the forerunner of the later triumph of French aircraft giant, Airbus. Concorde entered commercial service in 1976 - under both Air France and British Airways livery - and would continue flying regularly for 27 years.

50 Years Ago: One Small Step, One Giant Leap

The first part of President John F. Kennedy's bold challenge to the nation, made more than eight years earlier - to land a man on the Moon - was successfully accomplished on July 20, 1969. The second part of the challenge, the safe return to Earth, would have to wait four more days.

Apollo 11 astronauts Neil A. Armstrong, Edwin E. "Buzz" Aldrin, and Michael Collins awoke to start their fifth day in space at the end of their ninth revolution around the Moon. After a quick breakfast, Aldrin and Armstrong began re-activating the Lunar Module (LM) *Eagle*, including deploying its landing gear, and donned their pressure suits.

Near the end of the 12th orbit around the Moon, the Mission Control Centre radioed up to Apollo 11 that they were GO to undock. The event took place behind the Moon during the start of their 13th revolution. After they reappeared from behind the Moon, Armstrong radioed their status to MCC saying, "The *Eagle* has wings."

From this point on, events happened rather quickly.

At about 5,000 feet and descending about 100 feet per second, Armstrong took over manual control of *Eagle's* attitude. As they passed through 3,000 feet with their descent rate slowed to 70 feet/second, MCC gave them the GO for landing.

At about 600 feet, noticing *Eagle's* computer was taking them down into a boulder-strewn area near West Crater, Armstrong took over manual control of the descent and decided to overfly the rough area and look for smoother terrain to land on. At precisely 3:17:40 PM Houston time on July 20, 1969, Aldrin called out "Contact light," indicating that at least one of three probes had made contact with the Moon.

Three seconds later, Armstrong called out "Shutdown", indicating the engine was shut off. They were on the Moon. Armstrong radioed to MCC: "Houston, *Tranquility Base* here. The *Eagle* has landed".

Aldrin and Armstrong then began preparations for their historic spacewalk. At 9:56 PM Houston time Armstrong firmly planted his left foot onto the lunar surface, proclaiming, "That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind."

