

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900-1944)

Pilot and Author

His friends called him Saint-Ex. In reality, he was named Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. He is one of the greatest French writers. He is also one of the pioneers of aviation. Here is his story.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry was born in Lyon in 1900. At an early age, he dreamt of adventure. His greatest ambition was to be an officer in the Navy. In order to become a Naval officer, one had to pass a very difficult exam. Saint-Exupéry took the exam and failed... there was, fortunately, another solution – aviation. At this time, aviation was extremely dangerous. Danger, risk – this is precisely for what Saint-Exupéry wished. During his military service, he learned to pilot airplanes. Saint-Exupéry had only one idea in his head: to fly.



After his military service, he presented himself to the director of an airline company and expressed to him his desire to become a pilot. The director told him, “Do like everyone else. First, you must become a mechanic.”

Saint-Exupéry worked to become a mechanic. In 1927, he finally reached his goal. He was the pilot of a formation. He completed dangerous missions over the Mediterranean, over the Sahara. He had many accidents over the middle of the desert. Later, he was named the director of his own aviation company in South America. There also, he accomplished many dangerous missions over the Andes.

For Saint-Exupéry, flying wasn't just piloting an airplane. It was also meditating, reflecting. During his missions, Saint-Exupéry thought deeply about solitude, friendship, the meaning of life, the human condition, and liberty. He published his reflections. His books had immediate success.

Unfortunately, the aviation company for which Saint-Exupéry worked was having serious financial problems. Saint-Exupéry had to quit the company. He became a journalist. He went to Spain, Russia, and Germany. He flew when he could.

In 1939, France went to war with Germany. Saint-Exupéry enlisted immediately in the army. Defeat came soon. France was occupied by Hitler's troops.

Saint-Exupéry didn't accept the defeat. He decided to leave France. He settled in the United States [in the Village of Northport on Long Island], where he continued to write. It was in [Northport], New York that he [wrote and then] published *The Little Prince*, one of his most celebrated books. In 1942, American troops landed in North Africa. Saint-Exupéry decided to join the American army. At age 42, he volunteered to be a pilot. He was told that he was too old. He persisted. Finally he obtained satisfaction. He was given an airplane. He accomplished many missions over occupied France. On the 31st of July, 1944, Saint-Exupéry left for his last mission. German airplanes destroyed his airplane over the Mediterranean. On that day, Saint-Exupéry didn't return... in the open sky, he found risk, death, and glory

(Tr. by Jennifer Sposito from *Panorama 2: Lectures Faciles*, by Jean Paul & Rebecca Nalette [DC Heath & Co, 1982])