



**PRESS RELEASE**  
For 13 November 2017

## **Paul Cornu's "flying bicycle": the 110th anniversary of the first helicopter flight**

Lausanne, Switzerland, 8 November 2017 - **On 13 November 1907, French engineer and bicycle maker Paul Cornu made history by becoming the first man to fly in a rotary wing aircraft.**

The primitive helicopter – a twin-rotor craft powered by a 24-horsepower engine – only lifted Cornu about 1.5m off the ground, holding him there for 20 seconds at Coquainvilliers, near Lisieux in France.

But that was enough for Cornu to take his place in the history books as the first man to successfully fly a rotary wing aircraft.

### **About Paul Cornu**

Paul Cornu was born in 1881 in the French town of Lisieux, where the local high school is named after him to this day.

Once he reached working age, he joined his father in the family business, an Automobile, Cycles and Motorcycles shop where his talent for engineering became clear.

Cornu died in 1944, when his home was destroyed during a World War Two Allied bombardment.

### **Cornu's "flying bicycle"**

Like the Wright Brothers, Cornu was a bicycle maker who dreamed of flight.

His inventive skills first came to the fore when, at the age of 24, he designed and built a working, two-rotor model helicopter weighing 13kg.

The success of this invention, which he demonstrated at the annual agricultural fair in Lisieux on 4 October 1906, encouraged him to build a large-scale version capable of carrying a passenger.

The helicopter he built had two rotors mounted one behind the other, a 24-horsepower Antoinette engine, and movable flat surfaces, or control vanes, mounted under the rotors for steering purposes.

It was with this machine, known as his "flying bicycle", that he achieved the first manned helicopter flight on 13 November 1907.

### **A short history of helicopters**

Helicopters are a relatively recent invention. But their origins may date back to the 15th century, when Leonardo da Vinci sketched a reed, linen and wire "airscrew" device designed to compress air to obtain flight.

Da Vinci never tested his theory, which is perhaps a good thing as modern scientists believe it would have been too heavy to get off the ground.

In fact, it took hundreds more years for the first actual helicopter to take flight.

That was in 1877, when Italian Enrico Forlanini flew an unmanned helicopter weighing 350kg to a height of 13 metres for 20 seconds.

The next big leap forward came in 1907, a few months before Cornu's historic flight, when French inventors the Breguet brothers accomplished a manned flight that lasted 60 seconds but was held in position by men standing on the ground.

Later developments of note included the first rotorcraft record registered by the FAI – a 736-metre flight made by the Marquis of Pescara near Paris in 1924 – and the maiden flight of the VS-300, the world's first practical helicopter designed by Igor Sikorsky, in September 1939.

#### **Notes for editors**

> Pictures: <http://bit.ly/cornu1907>

#### **About FAI**

FAI, the World Air Sports Federation ([www.fai.org](http://www.fai.org)), is the world governing body for air sports and for certifying world aviation and space records. The FAI was founded in 1905 and is a non-governmental and non-profit-making organisation recognised by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

FAI activities include Aerobatics, Aeromodelling, Airships, Amateur-Built and Experimental Aircraft, Balloons, Drones, Gliding, Hang Gliding, Helicopters, Manpowered Flying, Microlights, Parachuting, Paragliding, Paramotors, Power Flying and all other Aeronautic and Astronautic sporting activities.

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