

The United States was entering the space race. A man was about to take off into the air. The place was Philadelphia. The year—1793!

The hero of the day was a Frenchman, Jean Pierre Blanchard. He was about to make a trip by balloon. He had made many such trips—forty-four in all. But that was in Europe. This was America's first try.

People had talked about the flight for weeks. A huge crowd had gathered to watch it. George Washington was there. So were Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe.

Now the clock was striking ten. It was time. A band struck up a lively tune. Cannons boomed. Blanchard walked out, carrying a black puppy under his arm. He stopped to greet Washington. As he did so, the President handed him a paper.

Then Blanchard climbed into the blue wicker basket. He looked up at his huge yellow balloon. Then he began to throw the heavy weights out of the basket. Slowly the balloon rose. It hung there above the crowd.

Blanchard knew how to put on a good show. At that moment he pulled out two flags. One was American, one French. He

waved them to the crowd. The people went wild, cheering and clapping.

The balloon climbed higher. It reached 5812 feet. Then it drifted to the east. The worried crowd watched it move out of sight. A few mounted their horses and tried to chase it. But they could not keep up with it. It was moving at twenty miles an hour.

Blanchard flew for forty-five minutes or so. He went about fifteen miles. Then he came down in the woods of New Jersey.

There he ran into a bit of trouble. As he touched ground, a surprised farmer stared at him. The man could not believe his eyes. Who was this visitor from space? Blanchard tried to explain. That just made things worse. He could speak no English at all!

At last he pulled out a letter. It told who he was. It said that he should be allowed to land anywhere. And it was signed by George Washington. That was enough for the farmer. He let Blanchard go on his way.

Blanchard was back in Philadelphia that same night. At six-thirty he visited the President to pay his respects.

That first trip stirred up great interest. Soon American fliers were taking to the air. And that was the start of America's air age.

CHECK YOUR READING

1. **Blanchard was from**
 - A France
 - B England
 - C Germany

2. **This story tells about the first balloon flight**
 - A ever made
 - B made by Blanchard
 - C made in America

3. **When Blanchard appeared at ten o'clock, the crowd was**
 - A surprised
 - B excited
 - C sorry

4. **Just before Blanchard climbed into the basket, Washington gave him a**
 - A puppy
 - B purse
 - C paper

5. **Blanchard made the balloon rise by**
 - A throwing out weights
 - B turning a handle
 - C lighting some powder

6. **As the balloon hung over the crowd, Blanchard**
 - A dropped some flowers
 - B waved two flags
 - C fired a shot

7. **People could not follow the balloon because it**
 - A started too suddenly
 - B flew too high
 - C moved too fast

8. **Blanchard flew for about**
 - A five miles
 - B fifteen miles
 - C fifty miles

9. **The farmer decided to trust Blanchard when he**
 - A read Blanchard's letter
 - B heard Blanchard speak
 - C saw Blanchard's dog

10. **On the night of the flight, Blanchard**
 - A stayed with the farmer
 - B returned to Europe
 - C visited the President