

The concept of hot-air ballooning goes back thousands of years, but someone physically putting a hot-air balloon into the air didn't happen until about 1783.

The Montgolfier Brothers, Jacques-Étienne and Joseph-Michel, initially sent a sheep, a chicken, and a duck up into the air successfully. Following their initial flight triumph, they decided to send up two men up for about 20 minutes.

These two men were Pilatre de Rozier and Marquis François d'Arlandes, who were not condemned criminals as King Louis XVI had originally wanted. In fact, de Rozier, known as the world's first balloonist, had to petition the King to be on the first manned hot-air balloon flight.

After manned hot-air balloon flights became a reality, the next step in the evolution of balloons, came the first manned hydrogen balloon flight by Jacques Charles with Nicolas-Louis Robert on Dec. 1, 1783. The balloon reportedly made it up to 3,000 meters high.

Flying across the English Channel was the next significant milestone in ballooning, a feat accomplished by Jean-Pierre Blanchard Jan. 7, 1785.

The first manned balloon flight in America was on Jan. 10, 1793 by Jean-Pierre Blanchard using a hydrogen-filled balloon. President George Washington was in attendance as the balloon took off.

Balloons served in the military and were utilized for scientific research purposes throughout the world throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. The invention of the blimp early in the 20th century caused the hot-air balloon to be phased out by many militaries.

Modern hot-air balloons would be created by Paul Edward Yost as part of a commission by the Navy in the 1950s to see how balloons could be used for other military and scientific applications. While the military idea faded out, Yost continued to see how the balloons could be used for civilian purposes.

On Oct. 22, 1960, Yost piloted the maiden flight of the new type of hot-air balloon known around the world today.