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Garros, Roland

By [Eric Mahieu](#)

Garros, *Roland* Adrien Georges
French aviation pioneer and fighter pilot
Born 06 October 1888 in Saint-Denis-de-la-Réunion, France
Died 05 October 1918 in Saint-Morel, France

Roland Garros was a well-known French aviation pioneer before the war and successfully fought in a squadron as a fighter pilot during World War 1. His invention, firing through axis propeller, allowed him to win some aerial victories. After being taken prisoner early in the war, he escaped in February 1918. He died in a dogfight one month before the end of the war.

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Early Life and World War One

Roland Garros (1888-1918) was born on 6 October 1888 at Saint-Denis de la Réunion. He was a French aviation pioneer before World War I and took part in many aviation meetings and races. He became famous as the first man to cross Mediterranean Sea on 23 September 1913. Owner of several world records of altitude, he joined the MS 23 squadron when World War I began.

Later he worked with the engineer [Raymond Saulnier \(1881-1964\)](#) on a system of [machine guns](#) which fired through the propeller axis. The propeller was fitted with deflectors in order to deviate bullets. With his Morane Saulnier type L, Garros shot down three German [planes](#) in April 1915. Unfortunately, his plane broke down just after his third victory and he had to land in enemy territory

without being able to fire.

Post-Prisoner of War Career and Death

Garros became a [prisoner of war](#) in [Germany](#) and tried to escape several times without success. Finally he succeeded along with another pilot [Anselme Marchal \(1882-1921\)](#) in February 1918. Hoping to fight again after three years in captivity, he found that [technology](#) had changed by 1918. He had to learn to pilot new aircraft like the SPAD XIII and new air combat tactics as the time of individual duels had ended long ago. He joined Squadron 26, now SPA 26, but his health became precarious and his latent myopia increasingly troublesome. However, he won a last victory before his plane exploded in midair on 5 October 1918 during a dogfight. Today, Roland Garros' name is inseparable from the famous annual Parisian tennis tournament which was inaugurated in 1928 by [Emile Lesieur \(1885-1985\)](#) in memory of his friend who had been an amateur tennis player before war.

Eric Mahieu, Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès

Section Editor: [Alexandre Lafon](#)

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