

Ozires Silva, the man who took Brazil to higher flights



Few people have elevated Brazil as high as Ozires Silva. Born on January 8, 1931 in Bauru, São Paulo, Ozires was always an aviation enthusiast. From a young age, when he visited the local aero club in his city, he wondered why there were only foreign aircraft, even with the genuinely Brazilian legacy left by Santos Dumont. He dreamed he could one day admire national planes tearing through the skies. However, at that time, Ozires could not imagine that in 1969, he would help bring Embraer to life, which is now the world's third largest commercial aircraft manufacturer.

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His aviation journey began in 1948, when he joined the Air Force Preparatory School, linked to the Brazilian Air Force (FAB). He received his military license four years later. Ozires dedicated himself to his career as a FAB pilot, serving the 1st and 2nd Transport Aviation Group in Belém, Pará, until 1955. Later, he worked for the National Air Mail, where he remained until 1958.

That year, during a trip to Rio de Janeiro for his technical pilot recertification, Ozires received the news that the Technological Institute of Aeronautics was now administering degrees in aeronautical engineering in Brazil. Ozires enrolled at the Institute in 1959 and graduated in 1962, at the age of 31.

After graduation, Ozires went on to lead the Department of Aircraft at the Institute of Research and Development (IPD), linked to the then Technical Center of Aeronautics (CTA). Today, it's the Department of Aerospace Science and Technology, in São José dos Campos, São Paulo. Working directly with Brazilian Air Force aircraft, Ozires felt a growing desire to produce a genuinely national airplane. At the time, analyzing the industrial initiatives that existed in the sector, he understood that success would depend on both technical perfection and alignment with the demands and needs of the global aviation market.

In 1965, that idea led to the development of a regional aircraft with capacity for nine to 16 passengers, a model that was rejected by the industry after the creation of larger jets. During the development of the project, which bore the name IPD-6504, he received an invitation to complete a master's degree abroad.

Although involved in the design of the new plane, he accepted the challenge and left for the United States to study at the California Institute of Technology, where he would spend a year.

Returning to Brazil in 1966, Ozires led the early production of the IPD-6504 prototype, later called the Bandeirante, a reference to the pioneers of Brazilian national integration. The year 1968 made history with the first flight of the Bandeirante on October 22.

In 1969, after a storm forced Guaratinguetá Airport (SP) to close, Brazil's President, Arthur da Costa e Silva, was forced to make an unscheduled landing in São José dos Campos (SP), and was received by Ozires Silva, as the main local authorities were waiting for the head of state in another city. Knowing the importance of creating a company for the serial production of the Bandeirante, Ozires used this unexpected occasion to convince Costa e Silva to establish a mixed economy company that would enable a Brazilian aircraft manufacturer. On August 19 of the same year, Decree 770, published in the Official Gazette, formalized the creation of Embraer to manufacture 80 units of the Bandeirante. Ozires was named the first superintendent director.

The company began operating from its own facilities in São José dos Campos on January 2, 1970. In addition to the Bandeirante, the company was also commissioned to assemble 112 fighter jets ordered by the Brazilian Air Force and to take over development of the Ipanema agricultural airplane, at the request of the Ministry of Agriculture. The Ipanema is still in production to this day.

Ozires led various projects that promoted Embraer's sustainable growth until 1985. Key to the success of the company, Embraer was known for identifying and exploring latent needs in the market. This paved the way for the company's position to this day.

Key milestones during the early years that Ozires led the company include the design of the EMB 120 Brasília — the company's first pressurized commercial aircraft — and the Tucano — a training aircraft. The company also expanded its operations outside of Brazil with the inauguration of Embraer's Fort Lauderdale, Florida facility.

In 1986, accepting an invitation from Brazil's President José Sarney, Ozires left Embraer and took command of Petrobras. In 1990, Ozires Silva would take over the Brazilian Ministry of Infrastructure and Communications.

During this time, Embraer experienced several difficulties caused by the global economic crisis and heavy investments in the company's CBA-123 project. In 1991, aware of the difficulties being faced by Embraer, Ozires returned to the company with the goal of privatization, a necessary solution for Embraer's long-term survival. After 1,152 days, on December 7, 1994, Embraer shareholding was acquired by Banco Bozzano, PREVI (of Banco do Brasil employees), and SISTEL (of Telebrás), as minority participants, in addition to the US financial group Wasserstein Perella.

After privatization, the new partners nominated Juarez Siqueira de Wanderley as President of Embraer, who was later replaced by Maurício Botelho. Ozires Silva left the company, becoming President of Varig in 2000. He remained in the position for two years.

In 2003, Ozires created Pele Nova Biotecnologia, with the mission of developing therapeutic and dermo-cosmetic innovations based on Brazil's biodiversity.

Over the last decades, Ozires has become an active voice in the country for education, writing several books and articles on the subject, and, from 2006 to 2008, he became the Dean of UNISA (University of Santo Amaro). Since 2008, he has served as the Dean of Unimonte (Mount Serrat University Center). Ozires also lends his name to one of the most important awards for innovation and sustainable entrepreneurship in Brazil.

In September 2017, Ozires was honored at a ceremony in São José dos Campos, where a prototype of the E190-E2 was named after him. The ceremony was a celebration of the life of the man who, 50 years ago, made the dream of building Embraer a reality.

Ozires was also present at the 50th anniversary celebration of the Bandeirante's first flight, in October 2018. Then on August 19, 2019, when Embraer celebrated its 50th anniversary, Ozires joined the celebrations once again. He took the stage accompanied by Mauricio Botelho and Paulo Cesar de Souza e Silva, as well as current president and CEO, Francisco Gomes Neto. On the same day, he was honored by the Legislative Assembly of São Paulo with the Necklace of Honor for Legislative Merit for his work and dedication to the Brazilian aviation and aerospace industry.

The Brazilian aviation industry has become a global reference, thanks to the efforts of many visionaries, but Ozires Silva is undoubtedly one of the greatest among these eternal dreamers.

Publications:

Ozires Silva has written six books: On the Wings of Education: Embraer's Trajectory; Letters to a Young Entrepreneur - Realize Your Dream: It's Worth It; The Takeoff of a Dream: The Story of Embraer's Creation; Ethanol: The Green and Yellow Revolution; An Entrepreneur's Routes; and The Dream that took off, Embraer's Fascinating Story.

In late 2011, his biography was released, titled A Leader of Innovation: Embraer's Creator Biography, written by Decio Fischett. Also in partnership with Decio, in November 2006, Ozires launched another book called Casimiro Montenegro Filho: The Trajectory of a Visionary - The History of the Creator of ITA.

Spouse: Theresinha Silva.

Parents: Arnaldo de Oliveira Silva (Electrician) and Helena Beldinanzi (Seamstress).

Photo gallery: <https://embraer.bynder.com/share/EC1944E0-3C99-44AD-98158274C101B736/>

Embraer 50 years old: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nYSKVXCeg50>

Video: 50 years of Bandeirante: <https://vimeo.com/299664028>

Video: Ozires 80 birthday: <https://vimeo.com/232469150>