In 1884, Charles Renard and Arthur C. Krebs, inventors and military officers in the French Army Corps of Engineers, built an elongated balloon, La France, which was a vast improvement over earlier models. La France was the first airship that could return to its starting point in a light wind. It was 165 feet (50.3 meters) long, its maximum diameter was 27 feet (8.2 meters), and it had a capacity of 66,000 cubic feet (1,869 cubic meters). Like the Tissandiers' airship, an electric, battery-powered motor propelled La France, but this one produced 7.5 horsepower (5.6 kilowatts). This motor was later replaced with one that produced 8.5 horsepower (6.3 kilowatts).

A long and slender car consisting of a silk-covered bamboo framework lined with canvas hung below the balloon. The car, which was 108 feet long (33 meters), 4.5 feet (1.4 meters) wide, and 6 feet (1.8 meters) deep, housed the lightweight batteries and the motor. The motor drove a four-bladed wooden tractor propeller that was 23 feet (7 meters) in diameter but which could be inclined upwards when landing to avoid damage to the blades. Renard also provided a rudder and elevator, ballonets, a sliding weight to compensate for any shift in the center of gravity, and a heavy guide rope to assist in landing.
La France airship - 1885 photograph.
2001 National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution

The first flight of La France took place on August 9, 1884. Renard and Krebs landed successfully at the parade ground where they had begun—a flight of only 5 miles (8 kilometers) and 23 minutes but one where they had been in control throughout. During 1884 and 1885, La France made seven flights. Although her batteries limited her flying range, she demonstrated that controlled flight was possible if the airship had a sufficiently powerful lightweight motor.

Source: U.S. Centennial Of Flight Commission

Below is a period map showing the flight path.
LE PREMIER VOL DE "LA FRANCE".

9 AOUT 1884.