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AIRPOST JOURNAL

The Official Publication of the American Air Mail Society

April 2012 Volume 83, No.4 Whole No. 982

April’s featured article — The Japanese Invasion and the End of the Great Horseshoe Route, Part 1 Page 99
Zeppelins & Aerophilately

Ask for our Free Price List of Worldwide Flight covers and stamps. The following is a small sampling – full list on Website!

United States
Item #4875: 1912 (July 22) Pioneer Flight card. Photo pc of Aviator Paul Peck, Official Mail Carrier. Flown on a Colombia biplane from Coney Island, Ohio, to California, Ohio during the Queen City Aviation Meet. Minor crease in pc as is usual. AAMC 41a .............. $600.00

Item #4926: 1929 (August 6) Round the World Flight with Scott #547, 570 and 571 on 5¢ airmail postal stationery. Addressed to Lakehurst. Cover neatly slit open on left side. Rare franking. ............. $250.00

Australia
Item #3977: 1934 (July) First official airmail from Australia to Papua and New Guinea. VF registered cover. ......................... $40.00

France
Item #4936: 1928 (August 23) Ile de France cover with C4 addressed to French consulate in Paris, properly backstamped. C4 is centered slightly to the right. Lightly folded down the center, otherwise in pristine condition! Maury catalogue value $13,000 ............. $8,500.00

Germany
Item #3312: 1925 (July 31) VF blue European-sized cover, registered, sent airmail from Berlin to Scotland via Bremen. 9 airmails: C12, C13 (x2), C14-16. Neat and Attractive cover. ...................... $100.00

Greece
Item #4489: 1940 (August) Small registered cover sent airmail to Royse, TX, USA. Registry label on reverse as well as New York and Texas backstamps. .................. $75.00

Paraguay
Item #4911 1934 (October 13) 10th South America flight cover sent registered from Asuncion. Colorful franking with 22.50 Zeppelin and four others. Addressed to Braunschweig, Germany. Friedrichshafen, Berlin and Braunschweig cancels on reverse. S.282 ........... $120.00

Henry Gitner Philatelists, Inc.
PO Box 3077T, Middletown NY 10940
Email: hgitner@hgitner.com — http://www.hgitner.com
Many thanks to those who have wished us well and a special salute to those who have come forth with articles and ideas for our Airpost Journal.

We have been working overtime to get everything on the rails and running on schedule. It is easy to fall behind but not so easy to catch up. One feels like a NASCAR driver who finds himself (or herself, Danica) at the back of the pack for any of a number of reasons. The mission is to get back into the race, a determined effort to move up through traffic and challenge for the lead.

We are delighted to see some new features that will be coming on line soon. Keep an eye open for their introduction. Bob Wilcsek, well known to us as the writer of the long-standing “Zeppelin Letters” column, has another great idea.

Another major contributor to the Airpost Journal is John Wilson. His research on the trans-South Atlantic PanAm operations in 1941-1942 has given us new insights and belied a number of long-held assumptions. That said, John recently sent us the following comment:

Now, just a comment. I have been researching and writing about many subjects in my life, ranging from Masonic Ritual (deep stuff) to “Electromagnetic Compatibility in Manufactured Equipment.” I found that as I pursued these further and further, the journals for which I was writing gradually became more esoteric in nature. The inevitable result was that newcomers in the readership were unable to make the jump from their burgeoning interest to the high-level arguments taking place above them.

It is almost impossible for an editor to maintain the right balance, so feel free at any time to tell me to ease off on the deep detail and come closer to earth. I would hate it if readers who liked the art of Norman Rockwell were put off reading because of articles on Cubism (if you see what I mean). Take the Airpost Journal further upward, but don’t let people like me take it out of sight.

And our reply was . .

You are absolutely correct in your observations about content.
We need to – and must – take care of the interests of the mainstream collectors by including content they can relate to well. This is a matter of content balance, always an ongoing challenge to any editor. Care must be taken not to be so esoteric in overall content that many collectors fail to connect. Long complex studies that are undertaken in depth definitely have a place in the journal, but not at the cost of becoming exclusive. Such works can be broken into manageable parts and spread out over two, three or even more issues. This leaves room for greater diversity in subject and articles of varying depth, both essential for a journal directed at a broad membership with diverse interests and widely varying levels of expertise.

Here is an example we recently received: Would you be kind enough to tell me the current purpose of U.S. airmail stamps? Seems simple enough, but there it is and it merits an answer. If this collector posed the question, how many others have the same question but will not ask? Probably quite a few. We must remember to never abandon the basics or assume that everyone is comfortably on board with them. We need to constantly remind ourselves of the importance of diversity in the journal, both subject and depth.

Thank you for bringing this forward. It is really very important.

Recruitment and retention of members is a constant challenge. The decline we have seen in our AAMS membership is quite typical of what most societies in organized philately are experiencing. The reality is that the role of organized philately has changed dramatically over the last two decades. Much of what it offered to collectors is now more readily accessible by internet. Our challenge is to bring to collectors what they cannot get via the internet, benefits and value to be gained by membership and otherwise unavailable.

Our AAMS bylaws provide for a Membership Committee whose mission is building and maintaining our membership. Our vice president, David Steidley, chairs our Membership Committee. The other members are Bill Ford and Dan Gribbin. Please welcome all of them and strive to give them ideas and support in the pursuit of their critically important mission.

One of the actions by the AAMS Board was the dissolution of the “New Issues Service” (NIS). How did that come about? Actually, it was an outgrowth of a complaint sent in by a subscriber to that service. It came as a surprise to me, but I surely do not know everything, so I queried the board at our February meeting at Sarasota. It turned out that no one really knew much about it at all, but there was an understanding that its roots lay in the Aerophilatelic Federation of the Americas (AFA).

The AFA was merged into the American Air Mail Society in the early 1990s, so 20 years had passed. Those who could remember it thought it had died at some time in the undefined past. No one was aware that it currently existed. However, the NIS subscriber with the problem certainly seemed to see the AAMS as the parent organization. So, based on what little we knew, the AAMS board dissolved the relationship and this was duly conveyed to John Bloor in Englewood, Colorado, the current NIS manager.

We received a very nice response from John wherein he explained that the NIS, to the best of his knowledge, has always been independent of the major societies. According to John, “The NIS was never affiliated with the AAMS, the AFA or the Jack Knight Air Mail Society.” Small wonder that there was little to no awareness of it within AAMS. One might then ask why the NIS subscriber with a problem came to the AAMS seeking resolution. We have no answer for that one, but it is not important at this point because it has been taken care of.

So, cutting to the chase, we (AAMS) took unnecessary action in dissolving a service we knew little about and apparently, in fact, were never affiliated with. We appreciate having all this clarified and John Bloor’s patience and understanding.

So what is the NIS? Please refer to John Bloor’s article, “The Air Transport Label Catalog” in this issue. If you collect airline-related items as collateral material associated with your airmail covers, you may find it of interest.
Just Briefly . . .

I’ve been running a number of column ideas through my head and I have a couple good ones. Both require some additional research on my part. Look for those in future issues.

In the meantime, I’d like to introduce some new features of the Airpost Journal. First is the “Question Corner.” This is a section devoted to inquiring minds that want to know. Anyone who has a question, about anything relating to airmail, is encouraged to send it to me via email or snail mail. If you have an illustration to accompany the question, all the better.

I’ll run the question and we’ll draw on the experience and expertise of the entire membership to get the answer. Answers will run under the same “Question Corner” standing head. (A standing head is a headline that appears as a regular part of a column or feature. An example is the standing head at the top of this article.)

So, send in those questions. Remember: the only silly question is the one that doesn’t get asked.

Another feature I hope will become regular is what I’ve called “My Favorite Cover.” This is a space to run a copy of a cover you find interesting or unusual. It might be your favorite because of a destination, franking, backstamps, auxiliary markings or cachets. Why you like it doesn’t matter.

Again, just send a scan and a couple of paragraphs about the cover. This could include where and when you bought it and why it caught your eye in the first place. I expect we’ll run some pretty unique things!

This is YOUR journal. Tell me what you’d like to see and I’ll try to oblige. Better yet, write something and submit it. We have a byline waiting for you.

YOU are the American Air Mail Society’s
The Japanese Invasion and the End of the Great Horseshoe Route

Part 1

Alistair Watt

Introduction

If the entry of Italy into the war in 1940 was a sword cut across the throat of the old Empire air route to Australia, then the Japanese onslaught of December 1941 was the war club which bludgeoned the Horseshoe Route into total submission. The events of June 1940 were virtually over in a day but it took some three months to close the passage of the Horseshoe Route through Burma and Melanesia.

Although it is somewhat reasonable to accuse the British Establishment of complacency over the power and ability of the Japanese to make their dramatic advances, a measure of forward thinking was evident from those authorities who were responsible for keeping the airways open. Recognizing that the Malayan peninsula could not be held in the event of a shooting war, steps were taken in the latter half of 1941 to survey and provide for alternative refuelling stopovers and routes which could be “phased” in if territory was lost to the enemy. These phases have been well documented and illustrated in several references although some differences in the dating of route changes can be found. Those interested in the most up-to-date analysis are referred to www.nzstamps.org.uk/horseshoe so eruditely prepared by Dr. Bob Clark.

The foresight of those involved in planning these emergency routes is well reflected by the actual events which ensued in those critical three months of December 1941 through February 1942. This article brings together an up-to-date history of the end of the Horseshoe Route and the military events, and relates them to the postal history of individual covers.

Japanese Invasion

The first landing point of the Japanese was at Kota Baru on the northeast coast of Malaya, just after midnight on the 8th of December 1941. This was actually, in real time, a few hours before the surprise events at Pearl Harbor. Unlike Pearl Harbor, this attack was not a “surprise;” the invasion fleet was discovered and tracked towards its destination. However, the defending allied forces were much constrained by a political dictate that the Japanese must be seen to have made the first aggressive act of war. So, no action was taken until the landings began.

Simultaneously with the landing in Malaya, the Japanese were able to move immediately into Thailand with no resistance (if not with some connivance), and occupied Bangkok that same day. With their powerful army air arm and against a much inferior force, the Japanese were able to establish air superiority very rapidly. This was to cause immediate reaction by those responsible for the civilian air routes.

Reserve Route 1

Proud indicates that towards the end of October 1941 there was no longer an overnight stopover in Bangkok although it was still on the route. It was evidently considered too risky. On December 8, the flights intended to transit into Bangkok that day were quickly diverted onto the first of the major route “Phases,” so swiftly, in fact, that BOAC senior managers Runciman and Branker were stranded and had to evacuate overland out of Thailand.

This Reserve Route 1 was intended to take the flights down the western side of the Burma – Malayan coast via Mergui and Penang to
Singapore. However, due to the power of the Japanese forces and the rapidity with which they were able to achieve air superiority, it was only possible to make one single such service, WS145 ex Sydney, on December 8 itself. After only two days in action, the skies over the war zone were virtually dominated by the Japanese.

**Reserve Route 2**

On December 9 Reserve Route 2 was adopted. This took the services out into the Indian Ocean with refuelling stops in the isolated Andaman Islands, then to Sabang and Medan on the western coast of Sumatra before proceeding to Singapore.

This route was relatively safe for a while. However, with uncontested access through Thailand, the Japanese quickly reached the Indian Ocean coast. They occupied the airfield at Victoria Point in southwest Burma on December 15 and the strategic island base of Penang shortly afterwards. This gave the overwhelming benefit of air cover to the enemy, which now reached out to the previously safe western coastal areas of the Malayan peninsula and Sumatra.

**Reserve Route 3**

The Japanese pressure was inexorable and the loss of a civilian KLM DC-3 to direct enemy action at Medan on December 28 brought matters to a head. By this time, Singapore was well under the hammer and the decision had to be made that it was no longer tenable to fly through there on the main route. Reserve Route 3 was introduced on December 30 with flights down the west coast of Sumatra and hence directly to Batavia. Singapore was to be serviced by shuttle flights to and from Batavia, mainly by Qantas flying boats but also reportedly by KLM land aircraft.

These crucial flights continued, with increasing difficulty, through January. Singapore was besieged by January 30, 1942, and the Japanese assault on the island commenced on February 8. The Qantas flying boat Corio was shot down by Japanese fighters off Timor island on January 29, 1942. Japanese air superiority was now almost total in the fighting zone and from February 4 it was considered too dangerous to make the flights into Singapore.

**Horseshoe Route Cut**

A couple more through services from India were made via Batavia and Tjilatjap in Java, but the inevitable had to be faced: the Horseshoe Route was becoming too unsafe to continue. The last through service out of Sydney to Durban was NE160 that departed on January 26, and that into Sydney, NE161, arrived there on February 21, 1942. The great Empire Horseshoe Route was now severed. Singapore had already surrendered on February 15.

In his wonderful wartime-published book, Front-Line Airline, Bennett–Remner provides extracts from Qantas flight captains’ log books. It is relevant to look at these in order to gain some idea of the risks being taken to get these services through to their destinations. The reports selected are those directly relating to two of the covers described below.
Qantas Service NE155, Rangoon to Sibolga, Sumatra

Cover No. 1

NE160 28/1 -22/2/1942 Captain R.B.Tapp VH-ADU Camilla Karachi.

Cover No.1 is dated November 10, 1941 in London. It is correctly franked at 1s/3d for the Horseshoe Route transit. It would probably have left the UK on November 18 on the ship Clan Macneil, arriving in Durban on December 26, 1941. It could have been put straight onto northbound service NE151 that left Durban the next day. However, even with that immediate turnaround, it would not have arrived in the Far East war zone until the end of the first week of January.

But it was too late! By then, because of the very rapid Japanese advance down the Malayan Peninsula, it was impossible for this cover to have reached its intended destination in Selangor. On the other hand, Proud indicates that mail which came into Durban at that time went “on by sea to India etc.” In either event, for this cover the Horseshoe Route had already ended. The May 28, 1942 backstamp proves that this letter spent a great deal of time somewhere in limbo before ending up back with the sender!

Cover No. 2 was sent from Capetown, South Africa, December 2, 1941. Note the special wartime Christmas postage stamp.

The cover most likely left Durban on December 6 on Flight NE 145, the last “normal” Horseshoe Route flight from there. The war zone was transited via the first overnight stop at Port Blair in the Andaman Islands and into Singapore on December 18. This service terminated in Sydney on December 23, so the mail was there just in time for Christmas!

Cover No 3. came from A.I.F. Post Office No. 16, December 21, 1941, and also Australian Base P.O. No. 1, December 22, 1941. The cover is addressed to Australian aerophilatelist H. N. Eustis and is backstamped Adelaide, Australia, January 9, 1942. This was from the MEF.
area and clearly went by airmail.

The first assumption would be that it went out of Cairo on service NE149, arriving Sydney on January 7, 1942. This was the first service that excluded Singapore from the route. The only connection to the island was now by the shuttle flights from Batavia. However, as it is certainly a military forces mail item, the possibility that it went through to Australia on a KLM service must be considered. There was, in fact, a KLM flight that left Lydda, Palestine on December 25, 1941, arriving Bandoen, Java on December 29.

Cover No. 4.

Cover No. 4 is from Darwin, December 23, 1941. There was no delay in the internal Australian airmail system. If this cover was processed and censored very promptly, it could possibly have been placed onto Qantas service WS150 that departed Darwin early on the morning of December 24. The service went out to Durban with little incident, although it was the first not to make the overnight stop at Singapore before going through to Sabang. Could the censors have worked that quickly?

On the other hand it is just as likely it went on the next Qantas service, WS151, which departed Darwin on December 27. This service went through without difficulty but made an overnight stop at Port Blair in the Andaman Islands, well out of the way of Japanese fighters.

There is yet another intriguing and possible alternative. The cover is addressed to an Australian Army recipient in the MEF area.
Australian forces airmail to this destination was being carried on KLM Dakota flights from Bandoeng, Java to Lydda, Palestine at that time. The “crash” covers referred to on the next page dramatically confirm this. Proud indicates that KNILM flights departed Darwin on both the 24th and 27th of December, hence this cover could have gone on the latter date, at least, for a possible connection with the KLM service at Batavia on December 28.

The problem with this is that on the evening of December 28, the aircraft involved was destroyed by Japanese action while on the ground at Medan. Brian Peace, in La Catastrophe (September 2009) states: “The mail on board the aircraft was recovered, some in a damaged condition, and forwarded on the next available service.” The article illustrates the two known covers from this incident that are confirmed by inscription and cachet. Both these items are addressed to military recipients in the MEF and are dated Perth, December 19, 1941 and Melbourne, December 17, respectively. Looking at these two dates from southern Australian states, and that of December 23 for the Darwin cover (No. 4), the use of the word “intriguing” is self-explanatory. Is the Darwin cover an unscathed survivor from the Medan incident? Unfortunately, and frustratingly, there are no backstamps to offer any clues.

Cover No 5 originated at Field Post Office 501, January 3, 1942. This post office was on Singapore at that time. This cover would probably have been flown out of Singapore to Batavia on one of the first shuttle flights. There is no backstamp to confirm exactly when, but the most likely flight was that from Singapore on January 6, 1942. The R.A.F. censor stamp does raise a point of interest: were any mail services being carried out by military aircraft?

Cover No 6 was sent from Indian Section Base P.O. 4, January 22, 1942. This post office was on Singapore at that time. It is backstamped Poona, India, February 4, 1942.

This cover would have been flown out of Singapore on one of the shuttle flights between the besieged island and Batavia, probably between the 25th and 28th of January, then on service WS159 out of Batavia January 30 before arriving in Calcutta on February 1. The sender of the letter was an Indian army patient in a military hospital, and as this went on one of the last flights out of Singapore, one wonders what his fate might have been. It is a poignant reminder that our “covers” were actually more than just a piece of folded paper.

— To Be Continued —
An Unusual Last Flight Cover and a Mystery Solved

David Lamantia

I have been collecting Pacific Clipper postal history for several years, and when I saw the illustrated cover, my interest was immediately piqued. It is postmarked November 20, 1941 at Burlington, Iowa and addressed to Lucknow, India. The 70¢ “Prexie” franking correctly pays the single rate for trans-Pacific Clipper airmail service from the U.S. to India. The cover is backstamped Lucknow, December 8, 1941, 8:50 a.m.

Based on the postmark date of November 20, 1941, the cover had to have been flown on one of the last Clipper flights leaving San Francisco. The flight records note that the last pre-war flight of the China Clipper left San Francisco on November 19. This is the day before this cover was posted in Iowa, so this China Clipper flight is out.

The next regular trans-Pacific flight to leave San Francisco was the historic last pre-war flight of the Pacific Clipper that departed San Francisco on December 1 and arrived in Auckland, New Zealand on December 7. It is important to keep in mind that December 7 was the date in the U.S., but the date in Auckland was December 8 because Auckland is 19 hours ahead of San Francisco time. In any event, since this cover was backstamped December 8 in Lucknow, India, there is no way it could have been on the last flight of the Pacific Clipper that arrived in Auckland on December 8.

How did this cover get from Iowa to India in the total transit time of 18 days, November 20 to December 8?

A closer examination of the flight schedules revealed that the China Clipper was delayed in Honolulu from November 20 to November 24. A Pan Am “Shuttle Service” flight left San Francisco on November 22 and arrived in Honolulu on November 23. The shuttle service was initiated by Pan Am in August 1941 to carry passengers, freight and mail from San Francisco and Los Angeles to Honolulu and back, once or twice a week. There was the answer!

This cover was flown from Burlington, Iowa to San Francisco, and then put on the shuttle service flight which left San Francisco on November 22 and arrived in Honolulu on November 23. The cover was then transferred to the China Clipper which left Honolulu on November 24 and arrived in Singapore on November 29. This left plenty of time for the cover to be flown from Singapore to Calcutta, and after being censored in India, finally transported to Lucknow, where it was backstamped December 8, 1941.

This is a truly interesting and unusual cover, flown by the Pan Am Shuttle Service from San Francisco to Honolulu and from there on the last pre-war flight of the China Clipper!

References
1. Hans Aitink and Egbert Hovencamp: Bridging the Continents in Wartime
2. Jon Krupnick: Pacific Pioneers, The Rest of the Story
Uranium from Leopoldville?

John Wilson

Dave Crotty raised a metaphorical eyebrow at a mention of the story of uranium being carried on a Pan American Boeing 314 from Leopoldville, and like many of the tales of “FAM-22,” it requires a little more research to see if this is fact or fiction.

The most persuasive text was written by Professor William R. Stanley:

In late 1941, or early in 1942, a Clipper purportedly arrived at Fisherman’s Lake carrying a load of sandbags filled with uranium ore from the Belgian Congo. It was from this shipment that Enrico Fermi and his co-workers carried out the first successful chain reaction of the atom. This was in early December 1942, when a light bulb was illuminated under the stands at the University of Chicago’s old Stagg Field.

Professor Stanley repeated this text almost word for word in another article and gave as his own reference a private letter written to him in 1975 by J. Leslie, Director PanAm History Project. However, it is unclear from where Leslie obtained his information.

The question is: Does this stand up to closer examination?

Since the subject of uranium is irrevocably tied to the history of The Manhattan Project, the best reference is undoubtedly the book written by Major General K. D. Nichols since he was the officer in charge of the Manhattan District and was therefore as close to the source as it was possible to be. General Nichols describes how, in late 1940, Edgar Sengier, the head of Union Minière, ordered 1,200 tons of uranium ore from the Shinkolobwe mine in the Belgian Congo shipped via Angola to New York to remove it from possible acquisition by Axis or Vichy operations.

On September 18, 1942, Nichols met Sengier and they agreed that the uranium ore, by now in a warehouse on Staten Island, would be bought and used by the United States. It was this ore that produced the first workable quantity of uranium for the Manhattan Project.

Nichols then relates how more than 3,000 tons of uranium ore remaining in the Congo was carried by fast freigheter to America, with 250 tons shipped on October 10, 250 tons on October 20 and November 10. The balance was shipped in lots of 400 tons each month from December 1942 to May 1943. One shipment was apparently lost to a U-boat, but detailed research into recorded U-boat sinkings has not identified which ship was sunk.

Quantities such as these were clearly impossible to carry by air and one might conclude that Stanley’s account is in error. However, there must have been a basis for these reports and one can only speculate as to what might have been in the “sandbags” carried on one of the Boeing flights. One reasonable suggestion is that the bags were actually ore samples from the Shinkolobwe mine, but Stanley’s dates do not mesh with the information from either Nichols or Jones, both of which suggest that acquisition activity began later in 1942.

It is still possible, however, that samples from the spoil heaps at Shinkolobwe that proved to be high in uranium content could have been shipped clandestinely earlier in the year. The cargo manifests for Special Missions 6, 10 and 16 (Leopoldville flights 6001/2, 6003/4 and 6005/6) show no unusual cargo, but, of course, if the cargo contained uranium samples it would hardly have been openly declared.

It should be noted that all the substantial shipping activity took place after the last Boeing flight from Miami to Leopoldville (Flight 6023/6024) on October 18, 1942. Despite what has been recently published as a “timetable” for flights to Leopoldville, no evidence has been presented by Proud or anyone else that any such flights took place before or after 6023/6024 except for the civilian CAA proving flight in November 1941 and the first philatelic flight in December.

Detailed searches of the Pan American files at the University of Miami have produced definitive evidence of the Special Mission and C&N flights of the Boeing 314s but no evidence of flights to and from Leopoldville other than 6001 to 6024. If properly referenced evidence exists, someone needs to show it.

References
Bridging the History of Flight –
From Amelia Earhart to the
Apollo 11 Moon Landing

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Earle L. Ovington – More of the Story
And an Honor Denied by the USPS

John M. Hotchner

Art Groten’s excellent article “Centenary Celebration of the First Official Air Mail Flight” (Airpost Journal, October 2011) sent me diving into my files for the following story. It is adapted from one I wrote for Linn’s Stamp News in 1994 when I became aware of an earlier attempt to get the USPS to issue a stamp commemorating Ovington’s feat.

Earle Ovington

On Sept. 23, 1911, Earle L. Ovington (1879-1936) piloted a Bleriot monoplane in the first official air mail flight. The setting was the International Aviation Tournament held at Garden City, N.Y. Ovington, who had once been an assistant to Thomas Edison before turning to aviation, had won the Boston Globe prize of $10,000 in the Tri-State, New England Races earlier in 1911.

Postmaster General Frank Hitchcock appointed Ovington “First Aeroplane Mail Carrier” and was on hand at Aeroplane Station No. 1 at Garden City Estates, N.Y. to hand him the mail sack. The flight went without incident to the post office at Mineola, Long Island, N.Y.

Flights were made each day from September 23 to September 30, except September 29. More than 43,000 pieces of mail were carried during that period. Figure 1 is an autographed version of Ovington’s postcard done at the time of the Garden City Estates flights. It is inscribed “To Harry N. Smith [the surname is not entirely clear] with kind regards from Earle Ovington, First U.S. Air Mail Pilot (1911).” On the reverse is the signed note dated April 13, 1931, shown in Figure 2. It reads: “This is one of the original postcards especially made for First U.S. Air Mail. Shows Bleriot monoplane & 70 H.P. Gnome motor used to carry the mail. Earle Ovington”

An Ovington Airmail Postage Stamp

In 1971, Jack H. T. Prentice of Palos Verdes Estates, California tried to generate a campaign to mark the Ovington airmail flight. His let-
ter of March 15, 1971 to the American Topical Association seeking support for his campaign is shown in Figure 3. Figure 4 is the design he proposed for the stamp.

Despite wide support Prentice received from aviation groups, the idea didn’t fly; possibly because the 60th anniversary of an event would not normally be commemorated philatelically. Of course the 50th anniversary had gone by in 1961 without recognition and now the 100th anniversary in 2011 has also been missed.

Ovington or Wiseman?

Incidentally, there is a competing claim to the Ovington flight as the first officially sanctioned airmail. Frederick Wiseman flew a biplane from Petaluma to Santa Rosa, California on February 17, 1911. On board were 50 copies of the Santa Rosa Press Democrat and three letters written in Petaluma that were to be delivered in Santa Rosa. One of these was from Petaluma postmaster J.E. Olmstead to Santa Rosa postmaster H.F. Tripp. Olmstead wrote:

"Petaluma sends, via air route, congratulations and felicitations upon the successful mastery of the air by a Sonoma County boy in an aeroplane conceived by Sonoma County brains and erected by Sonoma County workmen. Speed the day when the United States mail between our sister cities, of which this letter is the pioneer, may all leave by the air route with speed and safety."

Though Wiseman left Petaluma on February 17, he didn’t complete the flight until the following day due to engine troubles. Still, Wiseman’s flight is acknowledged to be the first airplane-carried mail flight officially sanctioned by the U.S. post office and available to the public. The trouble is that the letters may not have been part of the official mailstream and no flown examples from the flight have surfaced. Thus, Ovington clearly holds the honor of carrying the first mail by airplane sanctioned by the Post Office Department in Washington, D.C.
One Hundredth Anniversary

The People’s Aviation Meet
 Dominguez Field, Los Angeles, January 20-28, 1912

Bob Dille

A colorful poster advertised the Third International People’s Aviation Meet in Los Angeles, California on January 20-28, 1912. Pilots who participated included Lincoln Beachey, Charles F. Willard, Glenn L. Martin, Clifford Turpin, Blanche Stuart Scott and Farnum Fish. They were some of the best and most famous pilots of the time.

Los Angeles Postmaster William H. Harrison established a postal sub-station on the grounds at Dominguez Field. Martin, Turpin and Willard flew mail from there to Compton, California, about four miles, where it was dropped from their planes, retrieved and taken by car to the Dominguez sub-station for processing.

Blanche Stuart Scott

Blanche Stuart Scott was the first woman to drive an automobile (a Willys-Overland dubbed “Lady Overland”) from coast to coast (New York City to San Francisco) May 16 to July 23, 1910. Near Dayton, Ohio, she saw a Wright airplane in flight and lost no time in arranging a flight when she reached California. She was determined to receive training from Glenn Curtiss in Hammondsport, New York. It took considerable support but she became his first and only female student. He placed a block on the throttle to prevent her from taking off while practicing taxiing, but it did not prevent her from flying solo before he intended. The exact date is uncertain because...
the records were lost in a fire, but either Scott or Bessica Raiche flew solo first and became the first female aviator in the U.S.

Scott became a member of the Curtiss Exhibition Team by early October 1910. Billed as the “Tomboy of the Air,” she flew inverted and made “Death Drives” from 4,000 feet for other teams, too, earning up to $5,000 a week.

In 1911, she set a distance record of 60 miles. It was the first woman’s long distance flight in the U.S. In 1912, she became a test pilot for Glenn Martin, the first woman test pilot in the U.S.

Scott retired from active flying in 1916 and began a successful career in the media. This probably was a wise decision since larger crowds were demanding ever-increasing thrills and risks, and, as one stunt pilot said, they “came to see us kill ourselves.”

Blanche Scott did make the first jet flight by a woman, with Chuck Yeager in 1948. In 1954, Scott began working in public relations for the United States Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio. She died in 1970.

Blanche Scott was honored with a postage stamp (Scott C99) in 1980. Glenn Curtiss was honored the same year (Scott C100).

Glenn Martin

Glenn L. Martin, born in 1886, was building and selling (for 25 cents) box kites at age six. He was also using sails to increase his speed and reduce effort on his wagon, bicycle and ice skates. He built a copy of Curtiss’ June Bug in 1909 but it was destroyed when he crashed on his test flight.

He began designing aircraft, using silk and bamboo on some, and his mother assisted him in building them. In 1912, he started an aircraft factory in an old church in Los Angeles. To finance his company he performed stunts at fairs and air meets, acted in the 1915 movie “Girl of Yesterday” and even delivered newspapers by air.

Martin hired Donald Douglas, Lawrence Bell and, as chief engineer, Charles F. Willard, “the most experienced aviator in America.” They built a seaplane, the “TT” trainer and the MB-1 bomber for the military by the end of World War I. Martin won the Collier Trophy in 1932 for his B-10 bomber.

One account reports that Martin set a record on May 10, 1912, when he flew a self-built seaplane from Newport Bay, California, to Avalon on Catalina Island and back, a total distance of 68 miles, breaking the English Channel record for over-water flight. He reportedly carried a bag of mail on the return flight and received a $100 prize for his achievement. I have not been able to verify this date, record, carrying of mail or prize. Any information from readers will be welcome.
The Air Transport Label Catalog

John H. Bloor

About the Catalog

Back in the Golden Age of air travel, before the airlines and the TSA discovered reverse alchemy (turning gold into lead), many airlines gave out baggage labels to their customers as advertising and to identify their passengers’ bags. These labels, particularly ones released before about 1950, were often very colorful, with attractive designs. They are actively collected, particularly by those interested in air-related paper ephemera. This includes stamp collectors and postal historians although, for the most part, they have no direct relationship to the airmail.

The most comprehensive source of information about these labels is the Air Transport Label Catalog. This multi-volume work was first published in 1975-1978 by the Aeronautica and Air Label Collectors Club (AALCC) which was part of the Aerophilatelic Federation of the Americas (AFA). The first and several subsequent editions were compiled and edited by Don Thomas with the help of other interested collectors.

There are eight main parts to the catalog, two each for Europe and North America and one each for Latin America, Great Britain and Australia, Asia and Africa. The latest editions of these catalogs came out in 1991-1993. Since then supplements have been issued for each of these volumes. Most of the work on the supplements has been done by David Rowe. At this time the publication of additional supplements is uncertain.

To emphasize the immensity of the airline transport label universe, consider that the eight main catalogues comprise approximately 970 pages with listings and illustrations of about 11,700 labels. The 1998-2000 supplements have another 900 or so pages describing about 10,900 labels. Most of these are relatively common but some are very scarce and expensive. A relative value/scarcity code is given in the catalogue for most labels.

The catalog illustrations are black-and-white images, most reduced in size, of the actual labels. Color would have been great but the technology wasn’t there in the 1970s. A change to color today would require new color scans of all of the labels, an immense, perhaps impossible, task.

Currently, I am the distributor of the catalogs, having taken over from Basil Burrell about a year ago. It is a nonprofit operation. One can order any or all of the sections depending on interests. For information and price lists, contact John H. Bloor, 8727 East Kettle Place, Englewood, Colorado 80112 or by emailing me at aerophil59@yahoo.com.

Sources for Airline Labels

Where can you get airline labels? Many stamp dealers, particularly those who specialize in cinderellas, have at least a few for sale. eBay is a good source. As this is written, searching eBay for “airline labels” gives 1,873 current listings. Most of these are baggage labels. Prices generally range from about $5 to $20.

In some cases baggage label reproductions are offered. These have little or no collectible value. Check descriptions and if in doubt, contact the seller.

A third source is the New Issue Service (NIS). It was started by the AALCC about 35 years ago. AALCC members and other collectors supply the NIS with new and old baggage labels and other airline paper ephemera (e.g., baggage tags, postcards, freight labels, etiquettes). Once or twice a year the NIS mails packets of about 40 to 50 items to subscribers. This is also a nonprofit service. Subscriptions are $7 per year for members in the U.S. (more for those in other countries) for postage and other costs related to packaging and shipping the labels.

NOTE: The New Issues Service (NIS) is NOT affiliated in any way with the American Air Mail Society or the Aerophilatelic Federation of the Americas. The NIS is an independent operation.

Over the years the NIS has been operated by a number of people. About a year ago, William Crabb and I took over this service from Fred Dietz. If you are interested, contact me at the address given above (snail or email) and I will send you more information.
**The Purpose of Airmail Stamps?**

Would you be kind enough to tell me the current purpose of US airmail stamps?

I understand that originally the stamps were so mail would go by planes instead of via ground, but then the U.S. mail switched to sending all stuff by air if it would get there quicker. Or at least that was my understanding. Maybe you can tell me when that was and if they stopped issuing airmail stamps like I believe they did.

So what are U.S. airmail stamps for now and what do you get if you buy and use them? Are they something special for overseas use?

I'm a stamp collector from New Jersey. You might even want to post a short history of airmail stamps on your site, because I think other people might also ask this same question.

Thanks,
Steve Strauss

Greetings, Steve!

Your inquiry re U.S. airmail stamps landed here and I am choosing to offer a reply rather than sending it further into cyberspace.

Transport of mail by air was originally a premium service. The U.S. issued airmail stamps that covered the premium rate. These airmail stamps could only be used for airmail (there are non-compliant uses, however) but they were not required to get airmail service.

As time went on, more and more regular mail was transported by air, in whole or in part, as the postal service converted its normal means of mail transport over any appreciable distance from surface means (truck or train) to air. With the majority of the mail being flown without the payment of the airmail premium rate, the domestic airmail rate was abandoned about 1975. All domestic mail over any significant distance was transported by air as the norm. So, at that point, no more separate airmail stamps were required.

Airmail stamps are still issued for international airmail, so there were airmail stamps in 2011 in denominations of 80¢ for Canada and Mexico and 98¢ for other foreign destinations. These rates recently went up to 85¢ and $1.05, respectively. Surface mail to foreign destinations was deleted as an option a while ago (3 or 4 years?) since, as domestically before, the foreign mail was getting air transport as a matter of routine. So, yes, the current airmail stamp issues are for foreign destinations.

Note that for domestic mail, the surface rate was left in place when everything went air. For international mail, the premium (airmail) rate was left in place and the surface rates were deleted.

The exact dates for these changes in rates and services is not at hand at the moment, but they are well known. Sorry that I do have them here at this moment.

I hope this is helpful and responsive.

Jim Graue

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**Book Review . . .**

*Canal Zone and Panama Aerophilately and Philately Associated With the First Byrd Antarctic Expedition (BAE I), 1928-1930,* by Julius Grigore, Jr. Published by author (2012). 168 pages, soft cover, 8½ x 11. Price: For AAMS members, $36.00 including postage within the USA, add $18.00 for postage outside the USA. Email nyrba2@gmail.com. Also available from Amazon.com

The author is well known for his numerous books and monographs on Canal Zone philately. One might ask: what is the connection between the Canal Zone / Panama and the first Byrd Antarctic Expedition (BAE I)? This monograph delves into two aerophilatelic events that occurred during BAE I. The first was the conquest of the South Pole by Byrd aboard the Ford tri-motor aircraft *Floyd Bennett.* The second was while Byrd was in the Canal Zone, when Pan American Airways flew him in another Ford tri-motor to Boquette, a mountain resort town in the interior of Panama. The author discovered a third connection that involved a B. F. Goodrich-owned aircraft, *Miss Silvertown,* which as a courtesy to BAE I, was tasked to deliver 17 miles of film taken during the two-year period of the expedition by a Paramount News camera crew.

The Postmaster of Cristobal, Canal Zone at the time was Gerald D. Bliss, an ardent aerophilatelist and cover maker. There were quite a
number of philatelists working in the Canal Zone who were members of the Caribbean Stamp Club and they were also devoted aerophilatelists and first day cover enthusiasts and makers.

The S.S. City of New York, which was BAE I’s lead support ship and official U.S. postal facility, entered the Canal Zone on September 15, 1928, on its way to Antarctica. The bulk of all BAE I mail was serviced by the Canal Zone Postal Service. Bliss and members of the Caribbean Stamp Club were able to get a number of covers onboard the ship. This is the major reason so many of the covers from the BAE I have a Canal Zone connection.

All known covers connected with BAE I are shown in color, as well as many other items, such as ink blotters, maps, postcards, etc. There are also many photos connected with the expedition. The author even discovered a cover which is believed to be a fake.

During his research, the author discovered a previously unseen 8.5” x 11” chart that lists 28 different postmarks and cachets used during BAE I.

The book contains extensive notes referring to A. C. Roessler, the New Jersey dealer who was involved with many of the covers from the expedition.

There is an extensive list of bibliographic sources and two appendices. The first one is a chart of variations in S.S. City of New York cancellations and BAE I cachets found on Canal Zone and Panama related covers. The second appendix shows items connected with the Floyd Bennett flight over the South Pole and return to Little America, which was also an interrupted flight.

The book is very well done and the illustrations are very good. I highly recommend it for anyone interested in Canal Zone or Arctic aerophilately.

American Air Mail Catalog News and Updates

Last month there was a brief summary on the status of the American Air Mail Catalog in the Sarasota board meeting report. Here is a bit more on that... and an appeal for members to join the team that will bring the next AAMC edition to reality.

Here is a look at the organization we need to get the AAMC tasks coordinated and moving forward with realistic, achievable objectives.

Please support the Airpost Journal advertisers.
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To volunteer for the American Air Mail Catalog Production Team! Numerous challenging positions are available immediately. Enrich your airmail experience and knowledge.

For more information, contact Jim Graue at jimg@air-pipe.com

Color Scans Needed
The plan calls for a conversion to color for future volumes of the Sixth Edition and into the Seventh Edition. As anyone can see, this means we go back to square one in getting scans of virtually everything. The fact is that practically every member can contribute to this effort. If it is listed in the catalog, or should be, and you own it, we need a color scan. The scans will be gathered into a standing archive that we will be able to draw on in the future.

Scan Specifications
- Full color CMYK scans, full size, minimum 300 dpi, each saved as either a TIF or JPEG file.
- Use AAMC catalog numbers to identify each scan. If the AAMC number is not known, use an “X” number and provide a description on an accompanying summary sheet. Send scan files by email attachments (no more than two TIF files or five JPEG files) if there are not too many; otherwise, copy to a CD or, if there are a great number, a flash drive.

Send scans to: Bill Fort, 13910 Aspen Cove Ct., Houston TX 77077
wcfortiii@aol.com

Thanks everyone!

Jim Graue

AAMS Chapters
The following local, regional and national organizations are Chapters of the American Air Mail Society. To enjoy the hobby of aerophilately, the AAMS recommends that collectors contact these groups about programs and meetings, as well as information about bulletins, services and dues.

C.R. Smith Chapter (Northern Texas)
c/o Norman Cohen
Box 29543
Dallas TX 75229-0543

British Chapter - AAMS
C/o Derrick Pillage
32 Central Drive
Bognor Regis PO22 7TT
England
dpillage@argonet.co.uk

Canadian Aerophilatelic Society
Chris Hargreaves
4060 Bath Road
Kingston, ON K7M 4Y4
CANADA
hargreavescp@sympatico.ca

Chicago Air Mail Society
951 Brookside Lane
Deerfield IL 60015-4272
sneulander@comcast.net

Gen. Billy Mitchell Chapter
c/o John R. Fagan
W140 N7470 Lilly Rd.
Menomonee Falls WI 53051-4608
faganfalls@aol.com

Greater Philadelphia Stamp and Collectors Club
c/o Stephen S. Washburne
PO Box 43146
Philadelphia PA 19129-3146
stewwashburne@gmail.com

Jack Knight Air Mail Society
Stephen Neulander
951 Brookside Lane, Deerfield IL 60015
sneulander@comcast.net

Metropolitan Air Post Society
Ernest Wheeler
7 Evelyn Terrace
Wayne NJ 07470-3446
ernestwheeler@hotmail.com

Northwest Chapter - AAMS
Leonard (Len) Lukens
2710 N.E. 131st St.
Portland OR 97230
llukens@easystreet.net

Rocky Mountain Aerophilatelic Club
Secretary
William E. Crabbs
P.O. Box 620695
Littleton CO 80162-0695
wm.crabbs@comcast.net

Southern California Air Mail Society
c/o Bill Keesling
14723 Burbank Blvd.
Van Nuys CA 91411-3336

South East Air Mail Society
c/o Donald Laberteaux
5008 Brandwood Court
Libburn GA 30047
donclab@att.net

Virginia Chapter, AAMS
c/o Rudy Roy
P.O. Box 5367
Virginia Beach VA 23471-0367
RRoyperfin@aol.com

Changes or corrections?
Please send all corrections, additions or changes to:
vcanfieldp@gmail.com
American Air Mail Society

Membership and Subscriptions
Annual membership dues for new members, which includes a subscription to the Airpost Journal is $28 domestic, $33 Canada, $48 Mexico and $58 worldwide.

All foreign dues include first-class airmail shipment.

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Publications Committee
Chairman: Jim Graue, 11911 East Connor Road, Valleyford WA 99036 (jimg@air-pipe.com)

Member Services
Auction Manager: Don Lussky, P.O. Box 1172, Westmont IL 60559
Publications Sales Manager: Greg Schmidt, 1978 Fox Burrow Court, Neenah WI 54956 (gschmidt7@new.rr.com)
Merchandise Sales Manager: J.L. Johnson, Jr., 248 Shore Ave., Eastern Point, Groton CT 06340 (fam14@tvcconnect.net)
Historian: Len Lukens. 2710 N.E. 131st St. Portland OR 97230 (llukens@easystreet.net)
Membership Secretary: Rudy Roy, P.O. Box 5367, Virginia Beach VA 23471-0367 (RRoyPERFIN@aol.com)
Webmaster: David Crotty (webmaster@AmericanAirMailSociety.org)

Slide Presentation
A 40-minute slide presentation (80 slides), covering the history and scope of aerophilately is available with either taped or typewritten narration. Program is available free for postage and $10 deposit. To schedule, contact Roger O. Gilruth, 544 Hampton Ridge Dr., Akron OH 44313. (robeg52@sbcglobal.net)

Advance Bulletin Service
Bulletins for future first flights and airport dedications can be sent to members providing their names and email addresses to Alan Lieberman

Application for Membership
Applicant to provide two references, philatelic preferred. Applicants under the age of 18 must be guaranteed by parent or guardian.
AAMS Membership Report

March 2012
Submitted by Membership Secretary Rudy Roy

New Applicants
12193 Forsythe, Gerald R., Wheeling IL. AM JF GF CAM NAW OT 1D Z HC CL EL AE AL APS FF FFUS. By: S Reinhard

Lapsed
12017 Altchuler, Steven I.
10718 Bloeser, Judith M.
12019 Gagnon, Richard J.
10548 Reiss, Peter T.
08262 Smith, Barry Mein
11933 Speirs, Dale
07361 Stillman, Thomas
11824 Trice, John A.

— Summary —
Total Membership — February 1, 2012.................................1,040
New Members ...........................................................................................+ 1;
Lapsed ...........................................................................................................- 8

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Key to Abbreviations Used to Designate Specialities of Prospective Members

AM - Airpost stamps, mint
AU - Airpost stamps, used
AS - Semi-official stamps
SC - SCADTA
JF - Jet flights
HF - Helicopter flights
PC - Pioneer airpost covers
HC - Historical air covers
SF - Supersonic flights
PA - Pilot autographs
PB - Paris balloon posts
EL - Etiquettes and labels
APS - Aero-postal stationery
FF - Foreign flights
GF - Governmental flights
FAM - FAM covers
CAM - CAM covers
GL - Glider Flights
RP - Rocket posts
NAW - National Air Mail Week
CC - Crash covers
OF - Transocean fights
DC - Dedication covers
Z - Zeppelin covers
CF - Canadian flight covers
ID - Airmail First Flight covers
PIX - Photos and assoc. material
ASTRO - Astrophilately
BC - Balloon covers (not Paris)
CL - Lindberghiana
AE - Amelia Earhart
AL - Aerophilatelic literature
FFUS - First flights by U.S. airlines
X - Interested in exchange with