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United States Pioneer No. 5: The Mississippi River Flight

By Thomas J. O'Sullivan

After his mail carrying flight at St. Louis on October 7, 1911, Hugh Robinson went to Minneapolis from where he had agreed to start a trip down the Mississippi to New Orleans.

This project had been conceived by a group of Minneapolis businessmen, who were aviation enthusiasts, headed by Spearman Lewis. They had organized as the Trans Mississippi Flight Association and were sponsored by the Aero Club of St. Louis. H. A. Tuttle was president of the Association and W. G. Nye was its secretary. It had its headquarters in the LaSalle Building in St. Louis. Its purpose was to select an aviator to make the trip, raise funds adequate to pay his expenses and provide him with some additional financial inducement. The association proposed to raise \$20,000 for the flight. The flight was to cover 1,917 miles. It was to surpass by 652 miles the then existing cross-country flight record made by Harry Atwood in flying from St. Louis to New York in August 1911.

The Association had proposed the plan to several pilots. It had met for several days in St. Louis during the second full week in September and, finally on September 18, received a telegram from Hugh Robinson agreeing to make the flight.

The public had become very conscious of long distance flights at that time. On October 9, 1910, William Randolph Hearst had offered a prize of \$50,000 for the first transcontinental flight. Robert Fowler started his cross-country attempt on September 11, 1911 from San Francisco and withdrew from the race on September 28 when he found he could not cross the Rockies. Jimmy Ward left Governors Island in New York on September 13 and gave up at Rathbone, New York on September 22. Cal Rodgers took off from the Sheepshead Bay Race Track in Brooklyn, New York on September 17, 1911 and reached Long Beach, California on November 16, 1911.

Hugh Robinson started in balloons in 1906, switched to heavier-than-air aircraft and became Tom Benoist's first pupil in the flying school at Kinloch Field, St. Louis. His pilot certificate number was 42. He learned to fly hydroplanes at San Diego in 1910 and instructed army pilots there. Robinson was affiliated with the Curtiss Exhibition Company. He was very busy and was booked at many places for flying exhibitions. In 1911 he was married and had two small sons.

Wednesday, October 11 at 10 a.m. was fixed as the day the flight was to begin. Robinson left for Minneapolis as soon as his selection was announced; he arrived on September 21 and stayed at the Hotel Dyckman.

Robinson intended to remain in the city until Sun. Sept. 24 to look over locations in the city suitable for take off. Since his airplane was equipped with pontoons, he could select only water areas, either the river itself or one of the several lakes that dotted the city. He first examined the upper river because a lake take-off would put him over the city at the beginning of his flight, with a cool engine and no place to land if he had trouble at that



Figure 1. One of the two covers flown by Hugh Robinson from Minneapolis to Prairie du Chien.

critical time. He did not anticipate a difficult trip down the river as it would be easy to follow. It was difficult to estimate the time to complete the trip, since that would depend on the weather and the number of stops the Association would want him to make. He hoped to make 200 miles the first day and stop for the night at Prairie du Chien. He planned to fly at 1000 feet, high enough to clear any wires which might be strung across the river. Eventually, Robinson decided to use Lake Calhoun as his base in the city and for his take-off point. This was a large lake, about a mile long on the westerly edge of the city, approximately 5 miles from the river. He had examined other lakes in the city with Harvey S. Haynes and W. G. Nye of the Association. The proximity of other lakes to Lake Calhoun eliminated his previous objection to flying over the city at the start of his trip.

He left Minneapolis Sunday evening to go to Evansville, Indiana where he was scheduled to fly on Thursday, Sept. 28. After that, he was to fly at Sadelia, Missouri for six days at the Missouri State Fair. Then, he was due at St. Louis to fly on Friday, October 6 and to meet the train on which President William Taft was being carried to the Veiled Prophets Celebration. Robinson flew on Sunday, October 8 and carried the mail which is now listed as Pioneer 4.b. The airplane used was the one he intended for the Minneapolis-New Orleans flight. After the St. Louis flight, it was disassembled and sent by express over the Rock Island Railroad to Minneapolis.

The airplane was a standard Curtiss model equipped with two pontoons, constructed of light spruce. It had an airspeed of 60 miles an hour. It was first used in February 1911 at San Diego when Robinson flew out to the U.S.S. Pennsylvania, delivered a message and returned to shore. Its gasoline tank held 18 gallons, enough for 150 to 200 miles of flying. The air-

Handwritten letter enclosed in the Figure 1 cover. The text is written in cursive and includes the date "Sept 13 1932" and the address "Prairie du Chien, Wis.".

Figure 2

Handwritten letter signed by Marilla Grelle, dated "Sept 7 1932". The text is written in cursive and includes the address "Prairie du Chien, Wis.".

Figure 3

Figure 2. Letter enclosed in the Figure 1 cover.

Figure 3. September 7, 1932 letter signed by Marilla Grelle, addressee of the Figure 1 cover, indicating only two covers were flown to Prairie du Chien.

plane on its pontoons drew only a few inches on water and had a foot of space between the tip of the propeller and the surface of the water. Robinson wore a cork life preserver when he was flying. The airplane had a glide angle of 5 to 1. The airplane had painted on it in large letters "Minneapolis Makes Good." Its take-off weight was 800 pounds.

Plans for the flight originally called for stops at Red Wing, Minnesota; La Crosse and Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin; Rock Island and Burlington, Illinois; Keokuk, Iowa; Hannibal and St. Louis, Missouri; Cairo, Illinois; Memphis, Tennessee; Jackson, Mississippi and, finally, New Orleans, Louisiana in the order given. The list later was expanded to include Wabasha, Minnesota; Clinton, Dubuque, Bellevue, Davenport and Muscatine, Iowa; Quincy, Moline, Canton and Alton, Illinois; Cape Girardeau, Missouri; Vicksburg and Natchez, Mississippi, and Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

At various points, exhibitions of flying were to be put on. Robinson intended to land at Jefferson Barracks at St. Louis to give the troops there a chance to see a hydroplane. At Memphis, an auto pathfinding tour was in the planning stage and sponsors President Leehy of the Business Men's Club and W. G. Beauland of the Delta Improvement Association hoped to hold up the start of the tour until Robinson arrived in Memphis so that it could accompany him to New Orleans. Then, the Mississippi State Fair would be in progress early in November and, if Robinson reached Jackson by November 2, perhaps he could leave the river and fly to the State Fair Grounds, 40 miles distant, for an exhibition of flying.



Figure 4. Type of cachet for mail received at Winona.

It had been decided that a special train to accompany the airplane would not be used. In addition to being very costly, it had been found on other occasions that the train was seldom at a point where and when it was needed. Had there been such a train, Mrs. Robinson and her sons would have been aboard it for the trip. Under the circumstances, she decided to stay at St. Louis where she could be in telephone communication with the headquarters of the Association. Parts and an extra engine were stored at St. Louis.

Robinson arrived in Minneapolis on Monday, October 9, 1911. He checked into the Hotel Radisson and immediately went into conference with representatives of the Association. The flight had been plagued with financial troubles from the start. It first was announced that the take-off date would be moved from Wednesday, October 11 to Friday, October 13. Evidently, this was done to give the promoters more time to secure guarantees from the river towns where Robinson intended to stop. The announcement stated that Robinson would give a flying exhibition at Lake Calhoun on Wednesday and that he was pleased to have the take-off date moved to Friday because that was his birthday, because it was Friday the 13th and because he wanted to prove he was not superstitious. On Thursday, he also could go to La Crosse to give an exhibition.

Four mechanics were available to service the airplane. They were in charge of R. H. Young of St. Louis, Robinson's manager. W. J. Shakelford was the chief mechanic.

A crowd estimated at 25,000 viewed his flight on Wednesday. He was at Lake Calhoun in the middle of the afternoon. His mechanics pushed the airplane from the shore about 4:15 and, after a short run on the water, he became airborne. He flew over the lake area for 13 minutes covering several miles on the flight so that people from all areas of the city could see him.

U. G. Pursell, Section Director of the local Weather Bureau, predicted for the Friday take-off, a light southwest wind less than 12 miles an hour and stationary temperatures. He was wrong, for the winds were very strong and blustery on Friday. In spite of the weather and threatening rain, a crowd of about 35,000 gathered at Lake Calhoun for the hoped for take-off at 8 a.m. Robinson estimated the wind at 20 miles an hour at ground level. It was gusty and the surface of the lake was covered with small waves. The crowd

lined the shore, climbed into trees and on house tops and filled canoes and rowboats near the shore. In spite of hope that the wind would abate, it actually increased. Robinson made an attempt to start by moving out into the lake but there the wind proved to be too strong, so he taxied back to shore and called off the start for that day. He took a taxicab back to the hotel and was involved in a collision between his cab and a street car at the corner of Hennipen and Summit Avenue. Fortunately, he was not hurt but a report that he had serious injuries reached his wife in St. Louis and, in alarm, she wired him asking assurance that he was alright.

On Saturday, October 12, it was still cloudy and Robinson decided to wait for better conditions. However, about 9:30 a.m., he took off from the lake and circled it three times at a height of about 500 feet for 11 minutes. A small crowd of about 1,000 people watched his maneuvers. He hoped to start on Sunday at 8 a.m.

Rain started to fall early on Sunday, continued all day and went into Monday, dropping about one inch of water. Robinson had no thought of trying to fly either day.

Tuesday, October 17 was clear and bright with a slight breeze out of the northwest. Shakelford, the head mechanic, was up early and got to the lake about 7:30 a.m. He decided that conditions could not be better so he telephoned Robinson at the hotel and described the weather for him. Robinson reached the lake about 8:45 a.m. and decided that he should go. 10 gallons of gasoline were put in the tanks, he donned his helmet, goggles, gloves and puttees, and had the mechanics push the airplane out into the water a little after 9 a.m. About 1,500 spectators watched. He taxied out into the lake, turned north, and, after a short run, was airborne. He climbed slowly then banked to return over the crowd towards the south end of the lake. When he reached the river he was at an altitude of 1,000 feet which he maintained during the first day's trip. He followed the curves of the river passing over South St. Paul at 9:25, Hastings at 9:41, Red Wing at 10:05, Lake City at 10:15, Wabasha at 10:30. Word of his progress had been passed down the river and, at each point, crowds, including children who were let out of school, gathered to watch him fly by. Just before 11 a.m., he ran out of gasoline and had to come down. This was at Chimney Rock about 13 miles north of Winona. In nosing into shore, one of the brace wires of the airplane snapped and he also ran over a submerged wing dam, punching a hole in one of the pontoons. He had covered 116 miles at that point. A large crowd had gathered at Winona to welcome him and, when his plight had been learned, launches were sent up river to help him. Emergency repairs were made to the wire and pontoon and the airplane was towed to Winona.

On Wednesday, October 18, repairs were completed but a steady rain fell and, although Robinson hoped to get off before the end of the day, the weather did not improve.

Thursday, October 19 was a good day. The rain stopped during the night and the day was clear and bright with a slight breeze from the northwest. A crowd of about 5,000 was on hand when Robinson took off about 8:15 a.m. He flew down the river about half a mile then turned and came back at a height of no more than 100 feet. He flew north under the Chicago

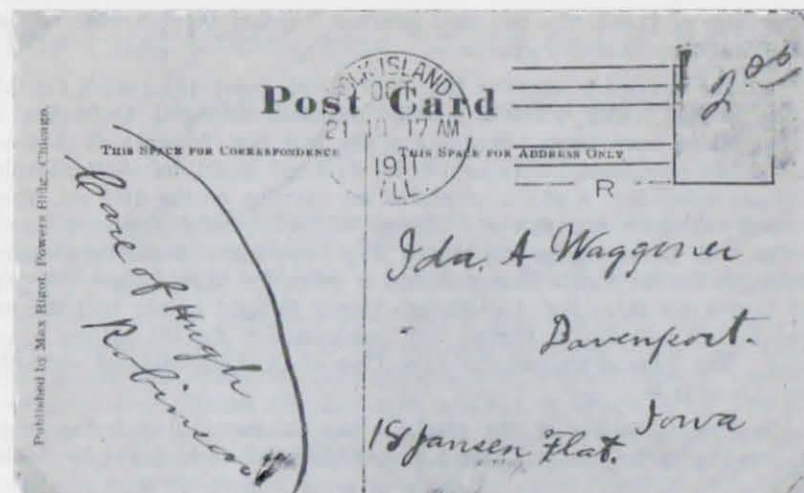


Figure 5. Post Card postmarked October 21, 1911 at Rock Island, Illinois intended for flight leaving from that city.

and Northwestern Railroad bridge where the clearance was only 25 feet and under the high wagon bridge. He banked around, flew back under both bridges, and was on his way down river. He reached La Crosse in 25 minutes where he landed and taxied to the levee at the foot of Main Street. 10,000 people were on hand to greet him. He had coffee and a roll for breakfast. His mechanic filled the gasoline tank and checked the engine oil. Robinson left there about 10 a.m. and arrived at Prairie du Chien about 11 a.m., where he had an early lunch, gave a flying exhibition and departed about 1 p.m. He arrived at Dubuque about 2 p.m. where he intended to stay for the night. About 15,000 people had gathered at the river front and watched him fly under the two bridges spanning the river. He was given a reception at the Majestic Theatre and put up for the night at the Dubuque Club.

On Friday, October 20 Robinson was up and prepared to take off at 8 a.m. However, a leak was discovered in the oil tank. Repairs on this delayed him until 10:20 a.m. when he left for the south. After taking off, he circled in front of the town half a dozen times for the benefit of the crowd, which was there to bid him good speed. He reached Bellevue, Iowa at 10:46 a.m., remained there until 12:20 p.m., passed over Savanna at 12:30 p.m. and landed at Clinton at 12:55 p.m. He expected to leave for Rock Island at 3 p.m. and did reach there late in the afternoon. At Rock Island, he had covered 371 miles.

On Saturday, October 21, he decided to abandon the flight. After he arrived at Rock Island, he stayed at the Harper House and conferred with his financial manager, R. H. Gammon. Robinson had received a check for \$3,000 before he left Minneapolis. This was the amount which had been raised in that city. But no other money had been given him and Gammon could not see that any additional money was forthcoming. In fact, Lambert, President of the Aero Club of St. Louis, had just wired that St. Louis had withdrawn

its guarantee of \$1,000. The two men then put together the following release to the press over Robinson's name:

"I have decided to abandon the flight at this point, the reason for this decision is that cities which originally promised financial assistance in the undertaking have taken advantage of the fact that, because of unfavorable weather conditions I was unable to start my flight from Minneapolis on the day scheduled. A storm prevented my starting on the date set. They thereupon withdrew guarantees. Citizens of Minneapolis, however, were satisfied with the arrangements though they were most liberal contributors to the funds for the flight. They gave me a check for \$3,000 before starting. From here south there isn't half enough money in sight to pay half the expenses to say nothing for leaving any compensation for the efforts I am making." The Association and the Aero Club of St. Louis did not seriously dispute these facts.

On Sunday, October 22, the airplane was disassembled and dispatched by express to Enid, Oklahoma where an exhibiton was to be made by Robinson.

A Mississippi River trip was later completed by Tony Jannus in a Benoist type 12 tractor equipped with pontoons when he flew down the river to New Orleans from Omaha beginning on Nov. 7, 1912.

The Association thought that interest in the flight would be stimulated if Robinson could carry mail during the trip. The proposal was discussed with Postmaster General Frank Hitchcock. His approval was received on Oct. 9, 1911. No number was given to the mail route. Anyone in Minneapolis could mail a card or letter with regular postage to be carried by Robinson. The mail would be deposited in ordinary letter boxes. However, it had to be endorsed in the lower left hand corner "Care Aviator Robinson-Hydro Aeroplane Route." H. D. Hale, Postmaster at Minneapolis, announced this on Tuesday, Oct. 10 and stated that mail would be accepted on Thursday, October 12 at noon. Such mail could be addressed to points along the river at which stops were to be made. Hale ordered that any mail received would be held and postmarked on Oct. 11, sorted into bundles for the various stops, put into an official mail sack and delivered to Robinson at his room in the Hotel Radisson. Robinson took the sack with him each day he went to the lake in hopes of starting his trip. The sack was to be tied onto the airplane alongside Robinson. Newspaper reports indicate that the sack and its contents weighed about 25 pounds when Robinson took off on Oct. 17. The Association also made arrangements for mail to be collected at other points besides Minneapolis and instructions similar to that given by Hale were also issued by the postmasters at other stops along the route. This is apparent from the card mailed at Rock Island.

The items seen from the flight have written inscriptions in the lower left corner as directed but one item was noted with a typed direction to Robinson.

One of the letters carried by Robinson was from J. D. Williams, Acting Mayor of Minneapolis addressed to Martin Behrman, Mayor of New Orleans. It read: "Minneapolis, head of navigation sends greetings to New Orleans,

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The First Portuguese to Ascend in Balloon: Oporto -- 1903 and 1904

By Frank Lemos da Silveira

For a reasonably precise history of the earliest balloon ascensions in Portugal, one must first of all look for the origins of this wish to fly and the circumstances that probably led to the sudden desire to rise in a balloon.

In the absence of explicit documents, I have concluded from those that I have found and analyzed, that this sensitization of the Portuguese was the result of the first demonstrations given by the French pilot E. Carton — a series of seven flights, five at Lisbon and two at Oporto, from July 26 to September 13, 1903 — which were attended by large crowds of enthusiasts. There were about 20 thousand paid admissions, and an immense public crowded around the highest areas in town.

During the session of November 26, 1903 of the French Society for Aerial Navigation (Societe Francaise de Navigation Aerienne), at Paris,

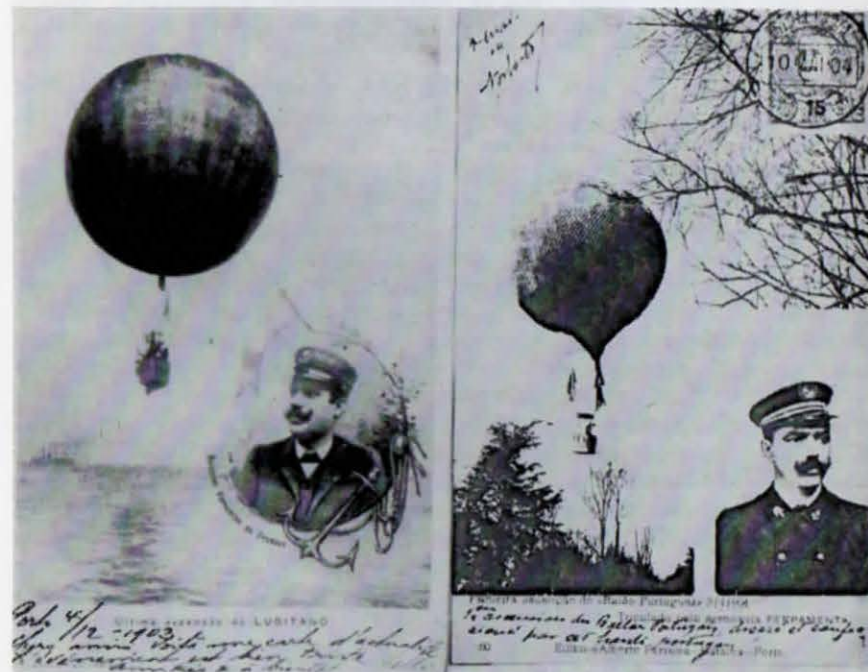


Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 1. Take-off of the Balloon Luzitano on November 21, 1903.

Figure 2. A contemporary post card postmarked May 10, 1904 showing the take-off of the Balloon Portuguez on April 3, 1904.

Carton gave an account of his ascensions in Portugal and Spain, At that meeting he referred to them as". . . ascensions which were all of short duration, especially in Portugal, because of the winds from the North and the nearness of the seas . . ." That is a very significant statement which must be remembered.

1903 — FLIGHT UNTO DEATH

The event that may be considered as the initial step in the history of Portuguese aviation was the ascension of the first Portuguese balloonist, Belchior Fernandes da Fonseca. The Balloon Luzitano (1,000m³) took off from Oporto (Crystal Palace) at noon on the 21st of November, 1903. It was piloted by Fernandes da Fonseca, chemist at Gaya, accompanied by two friends, the sportsmen Cesar Marques dos Santos and Jose Antonio de Almeida, who had financed the undertaking.

It was a risky exploit in view of the proximity of the sea and it terminated tragically when the balloon was blown out over the Atlantic by strong winds and was never seen again.

Asked to provide some information on the subject of this disaster, at the scientific session mentioned above, Carton stated that Belchior da Fonseca had recently bought the "Luzitano" from the French builder, L. Godard, had made only four ascensions (one of which had been with Carton) and — tragic imprudence — knew nothing about maneuvering with the triangular-base conical anchor.

The picture post card reproduced here, which shows the take-off of the "Luzitano," is one of the scarce souvenirs circulated in 1903 about that unlucky demonstration. (see **Figure 1.**)

1904 — CROWNED WITH SUCCESS

Antonio da Costa Bernardes, an industrial bread baker established in the town of Fervença (Gaya), who was known by the nickname "Ferramenta" (tools) because of his inventive spirit, having attended the aeronaut Carton's demonstrations, decided right away to build an aerostat himself. Though he had not been able to obtain any literature on the subject, he proceeded with some preliminary studies and, in September 1903, started to construct a balloon. That is how the Balloon Portuguese (1,200 m³) was born.

Having built it, Antonio Bernardes requested permission to make a first ascent. However, the civil governor of Oporto, Dr. Adolpho Pimentel, who had not forgotten the fatal accident of the previous year, forbade a free ascent and set a number of conditions: the balloon would have to remain captive, attached to a cable of 200 meters, and would be allowed to carry only the pilot in its basket.

Preparations were made in accordance with those directions, and the launching of the "Portuguez" took place in the gardens of the Crystal Palace at 2 p.m. on April 3, 1904.

However, the cable of the balloon got caught in the branches of the trees close to the place of ascension — perhaps, even on purpose — and then the quick "Ferramenta" cut the cable with a precise stroke of his knife.

Thus freed, the balloon rose softly, staying almost steady at 600 meters

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Reminiscences of an Early CAM Pilot

By Dr. Paul J. Viel

While vacationing in California this summer, I had the good fortune to arrange a meeting among Dr. Perham C. Nahl, Editor of the **American Air Mail Catalogue**, Leon D. Cuddeback, inaugural pilot on CAM 5 and CAM 32, and myself. For one delightful hour, the three of us sat in Cuddeback's comfortable home in Walnut Creek, while he recounted his early experiences with Varney Airlines and his role in the development of air mail service in the Northwest. This article reports some highlights of that interview and provides anecdotal information of interest to collectors of these routes.

It is common knowledge that, on April 6, 1926, Cuddeback flew the first consignment of mail on CAM 5 from Pasco, Washington to Elko, Nevada via Boise, Idaho. However, Cuddeback had not been scheduled to make that flight, and it was only through a flight mechanic's negligence that he found himself in the cockpit on that historic morning.

On the day before the flight was scheduled to begin, pilots George Buck and Joe Taff were practice-flying their Swallow biplane. Buck, the intended pilot for the Pasco run, wanted to familiarize himself with the aircraft and terrain north of Boise. During the flight, the engine started misfiring. Buck, believing it was a clogged fuel line, landed the plane but was unable to locate the problem. He restarted the engine and was airborne once again. Moments later, the engine started missing as before, forcing a second landing. On the



Leon D. Cuddeback, circa 1930.

ground, Buck inspected the fuel line, but again the source of the difficulty eluded him. Mystified, Buck and Taff took off again. On the third such forced landing, Buck struck some large sagebrush and up-ended the aircraft, breaking the propeller and puncturing one wing. Buck and Taff sustained facial injuries. Pilots and aircraft were, in effect, out of commission.

Back in Boise, Cuddeback (who was Operations Officer and reserve pilot) received word from Pasco that the plane had crashed. A second pilot and plane were desperately needed in time for the next day's inauguration. Grabbing a pair of goggles, Cuddeback jumped in the company's No. 3 Swallow, took off for Pasco and the rest is history.

Weeks later, Cuddeback discovered why Buck's engine had failed. As he explained it, "The Swallows came from the factory equipped with aluminum fuel tanks. These were gravity-fed types, located in the center of the upper wing. The pilots didn't like these tanks because it was difficult to make field repairs on them. So, Varney mechanics replaced the aluminum tank with one they had made from 'turn-plate' (sheet metal). Its seams were soldered together. But they hadn't been careful enough in cleaning the solder spatters out of the tank before mounting it on the aircraft." It turned out, these flat solder flakes floated around in the gasoline and would sometimes lodge over the fuel outlet and choke-off fuel to the engine. On landing, the spatters would jog loose and gasoline could flow freely again. The intermittent nature of the problem made it extremely difficult to diagnose. "Most of us thought it was simply water in the gasoline," Cuddeback said. Thereafter, extra care was taken to insure all spatters were removed from the tank. The problem was solved.

Cuddeback is a mirthful storyteller. In one hilarious account, he recalled his physical distress upon landing at Elko. It seems he had been unable to relieve himself at Boise, his time being monopolized by a large crowd of exuberant well-wishers. To add to his discomfort, he encountered terrific thunderstorms south of Boise. Being unfamiliar with the terrain and, because visibility was poor, he was obliged to fly some twenty feet above the ground in order to see the roads. According to him, "There were no flight maps of that region and none of us understood how to read a compass. All I had was a sketch of the route which Walter Varney had made for me on the back of a postcard and a general sense of where I was headed."

Drenched with rain, exhausted by the cold and nearly driven wild by bladder pressure, he landed finally at Elko. "What should greet me there, but yet another helluva big crowd. Well, by that time I wasn't even civil!" he said with a laugh. The crowd gaped in amazement as this wild-eyed pilot dashed for the nearest facility. "Oh it was awful," adding with a wry grin, "Shortly after that, we installed relief tubes in the planes for the pilots."

Three years later, on September 15, 1929, Varney Airlines extended air mail service to Spokane and the coastal cities of Seattle, Tacoma and Portland (CAM 32). Mail from these cities was brought to Pasco from whence it could be dispatched to Salt Lake City, there to connect with the trans-continental route.

On the inaugural flight from Spokane to Pasco, over 800 pounds of mail were carried. (1) This was an unprecedented amount of mail and re-



Leon D. Cuddeback (center) with Drs. Perham C. Nahl (right) and Paul J. Viel.

quired two aircraft to haul it: one piloted by Russ Owen, the other by Cuddeback. The question put to Cuddeback was, why **so much** mail? Spokane was after all a relatively small town at that time. Where did all that mail come from? Cuddeback explained that nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of the total weight of that load was taken up with wooden postcards (nearly 10,000 of them) each weighing one ounce. "We had a lot of public-relations people in Spokane, who wanted to make a big deal of the flight," he said. The carrier was paid according to the weight of the payload, so it was to Varney's advantage to accept the extra weight of the postcards. (2)

Further to CAM 32s' background, Cuddeback disclosed that the pilot bringing mail eastbound from Seattle, via Tacoma and Portland, broke a landing gear on his landing at Pasco. Some of that mail, destined to connect with Salt Lake over CAM 5 had to be held over until the next morning (September 16). "We just didn't tell anybody about it," he said with a grin.

Cuddeback started to fly in 1921 at the age of 23. He received most of his flight instruction from barnstorming pilots. After Varney Airlines merged with three other companies to form United Airlines in the early 30's, he served as Operations Officer and Division Superintendent at United's Salt Lake office. During WWII, he was a Lt. Colonel in the Army Air Corps and served with the 332nd Troop Carrier Wing in the South Pacific. He was awarded the Legion of Merit for coordinating the air transport of over 15,000 tons of cargo and some 50,000 military personnel to forward areas.

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United States C1 Air Mail Cover: An Unusual Usage

By Philip Silver

The United States 6-cent air mail stamp, Scott C1, was issued on December 10, 1918. It marked the first time in this country's fledgling attempt at flying the mail on a regular basis that a stamp was issued to pay for air mail service alone. Both the 24-cent and 16-cent stamps which preceded it, Scott C3 and C2, contained a "built-in" fee of 10 cents for special delivery service. With the appearance of this new 6-cent stamp, patrons of the air mail service — then operating on a regular basis only on the route between Washington and New York — could pay for that service alone without being obligated to pay for special delivery service, in addition.

It was the hope of the Post Office Department that the reduction in rate to 6 cents for each ounce would give a boost to the lagging air mail service. As explained in several of my previous articles, that service left much to be desired. Even if flown the same day as mailed, business letters were frequently delivered to their addressees after the close of business, necessitating next day delivery. At 24 cents and 16 cents an ounce in the prior periods before the rate change, the air mail service had fought a losing battle with first-class service, which cost only 3 cents an ounce, and frequently delivered the mail in less time.

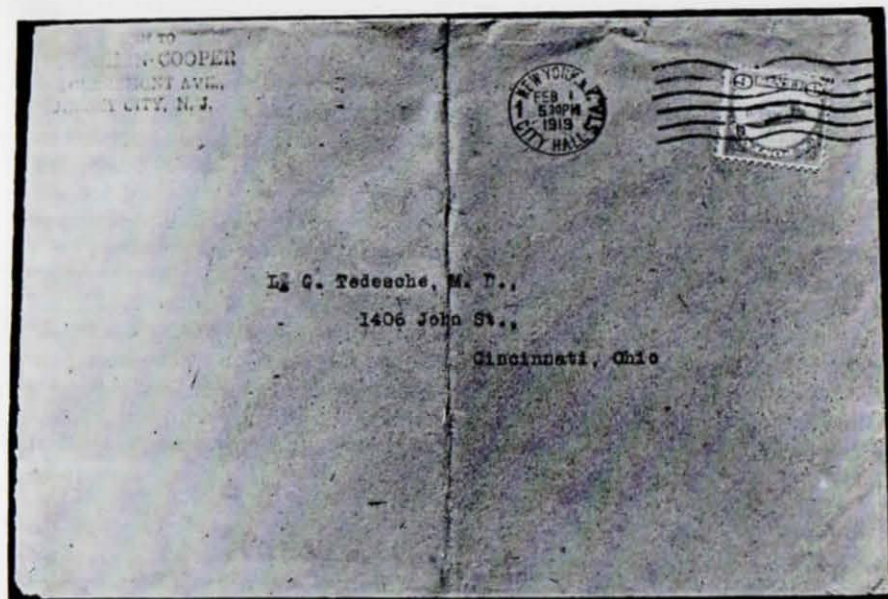
The hopes of the Post Office Department were not fulfilled, however. Fewer and fewer patrons availed themselves of the air mail service. Finally, on July 18, 1919, it exhaled its last breath. By Order Number 3336, the Postmaster General announced that, effective on that date, air mail service was discontinued. Some first-class mail was to be carried by air, however, if planes were available. The Post Office Department kept the planes flying in the hope of proving the eventual effectiveness of the air mail service and in establishing a transcontinental route between New York and San Francisco.

That hope was not to be realized until six years later on July 1, 1924.

Flown air mail covers franked with the C1 stamp in the period between December 16, 1918 and July 18, 1919 are not common. If one were to state that C3 and C2 commercial covers used in the proper periods are scarce, the adverb for flown C1 air mail covers would have to be **rare**!

The 6-cent air mail stamp is frequently found used in pairs during late 1919 and early 1920 to pay for other services. Registration and special delivery fees during that period were 10 cents for each service. On one ounce letters, the first-class fee of 2 cents had to be paid, in addition. Thus, a pair of C1 air mail stamps paid the 10-cent registration or special delivery fee plus the 2-cent first-class fee. Though such covers are not too common either, the collector of U.S. C1 air mail postal history items will frequently have to be satisfied with covers showing registry or special delivery usage.

Several years ago, I acquired the illustrated cover, franked with "a



single copy of the C1 air mail stamp. At first examination, I thought I had one of the rare C1 flown covers used in the period previously noted, December 16, 1918 to July 18, 1919. A more critical analysis disabused me of that conclusion. The cover is postmarked February 1, 1919 at New York City and is addressed to Cincinnati, Ohio. But there was no air mail route on that date between New York and the midwest. Experimental flights between New York and Chicago, with stops in Pennsylvania and Ohio, had been made in September and December of 1918. The December flights from both terminals resulted in failure. It was not until May 15, 1919 that an air route was finally established between New York City and Cleveland, Ohio. What service was given, then, on the illustrated cover?

My conclusion is that the C1 air mail stamp paid for first-class service only. It will be remembered that, as a war measure, the first-class fee had been increased from 2 cents to 3 cents an ounce, effective as of November 2, 1917. The 3-cent first-class rate remained in effect until July 1, 1919. On that date, it was restored to the former rate of 2 cents. Since the illustrated item is an oversize envelope (5" by 7½") I reason that, together with its contents, it weighed in excess of one ounce and not more than two ounces. If that conclusion is valid, the C1 air mail stamp paid for the two-ounce, first-class rate of 6 cents.

If so, this represents an unusual use of the 6-cent air mail stamp. It is the only such example I have ever seen in my more than 35 year association with United States air mail stamps and postal history. If my readers will examine the covers in their collections, I will be grateful for advice about similar covers. Until then, I will remain firmly rooted in my conclusion and allow myself the luxury of believing the illustrated cover represents a unique usage.

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terminus of the great inland waterway by Hugh Robinson, first hydro-airplane aviator to make the flight down the Mississippi River."

Robinson dropped mail at Winona and picked up mail at that point. The mail received at Winona was cacheted as shown in **Fig 4**. At La Crosse, he delivered to a representative of the local post office two packets of letters: one from Minneapolis and one from Winona. At Prairie du Chien, only two letters were delivered by Robinson. Mail was undoubtedly handled in a similar manner at his other stops. When the flight was abandoned at Rock Island, the mail sack would have been given to the postal authorities there and its contents handled in the ordinary course of the mails. The mail held at Rock Island for points to the south was postmarked Oct. 21. (**Figure 5**)

Mail from Robinson's flight has always been known to aerophilatelic historians. It was noted in Russell L. Stultz's list of Pioneer Mail Flights in the Collector's Journal of Chicago in 1917. The flight was first catalogued in the 1931 Standard Airpost Catalogue. Items from the flight are extremely rare and it may be that none had been discovered prior to that date. However, Robinson must have had 700-800 letters and cards in the mail sack to equal the 25 pounds reported.

Robinson continued as a flyer for the Curtiss Exhibition Company. He took his airplane to Europe and gave many demonstrations along the French coast in the early part of 1912. He participated in hydroplane races at Monaco in February of that year. In November 1912, he helped Tom Benoist design an airboat which was flown over the Mississippi River with Robinson as test pilot. Later, the 2 men broke relationship. Robinson continued his interest in flying and went to Florida where he had a laboratory and acted as an aeronautical engineer. He was living there in 1948.

FIRST PORTUGUESE BALLOON —

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altitude above the Serra do Pilar. After ballast had been thrown out, it rose to 1,200 meters and passed Maria Pia bridge in the direction of Campanhan, where it rose to 1,500 meters.

Then, Antonio Bernardes prepared his rescent, which was normal down to 300 meters. At that point, a strong wind pushed the aerostat towards S. Cosme. It finally landed on uncultivated soil at S. Miguel, near Gondomar.

A quite uncommon souvenir of this blissful flight of 1904, a picture post card of the take-off of the "Portuquez," is shown in **Figure 2**.

REMINISCENCES OF CAM PILOT —

(Continued from page 29)

Now 82 years of age, Cuddeback is a charming and witty gentleman, one of the few remaining pioneers of U.S. air mail history. Perry Nahl and I are fortunate indeed to have met him.

Notes:

1. See AAMC. Fifth Ed. Vol. 2, p. 808.
2. See Viel's article in October 1980 **Airpost Journal**.