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★ Contents

Japan (Dr. Robert M. Spaulding)	
Private Airplane Overprints in Japan, 1919	18
United States (Philip Silver)	
Additional U.S. Air Mail Markings	26
United States (Dr. Paul J. Viel)	
Biographical Notes on Pilot Russell Owen	28
United States (Philip Silver)	
Chicago to Omaha April 23, 1920 Uncatalogued Flight (concluded) ..	33
Balloon (Ernst M. Cohn)	
Hamilton's Continental Balloon Post	36
Indexes. Volume XXIV, Volume XXV	38
Reflections in a Broken Philatelic Mirror	39

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PRIVATE AIRPLANE OVERPRINTS IN JAPAN, 1919

By Dr. Robert M. Spaulding

Small quantities of mail were carried unofficially by airplane in Japan as early as 1912, but the first official experiment with air mail was in October 1919 (see references 3, 4, 12). On 3 October 1919, the Communications Ministry issued two commemorative stamps (Scott C1-2), consisting of a biplane overprint lithographed in red on 50,000 copies of the current surface postcard-rate stamp (Scott #129) and in blue on 30,000 copies of the current surface letter-rate stamp (Scott #131). These were valid only on domestic mail. The Ministry also provided a pictorial commemorative datestamp (Fig. 1) for use "on the day of the flight and for three days thereafter." Both the overprint and the datestamp show a biplane viewed from above in the overprint, from below in the datestamp.

The first flight was scheduled for 4 October, and the special datestamp was used in both Tokyo and Osaka on 4, 5, and 6 October. However, this mail was all sent by surface means, since the flight was postponed because of rain. The first flight actually was made on 22 October from Tokyo to Osaka, with return flight on 23 October. The pictorial datestamp was used again in Tokyo from 20 to 23 October, and in Osaka from 20 to 26 October, and was not valid thereafter. The overprinted stamps were declared invalid for postage after 31 October. Forgeries of the overprint were reported in two Japanese magazines as early as November 1919.

Meanwhile, the Aero Club of America and the Aerial League of America were trying to organize a "First Aerial Derby Around the World." In addition to a 74-member "American National Committee," they appointed a three-member "Special Commission" to recruit participants and arrange for landing facilities in 32 countries. The Special Commissioners, Commodore Louis D. Beaumont (president), Major Charles J. Glidden (executive secretary), and Benjamin Hillman (treasurer), left New York on 10 October 1919 on a 7,300-mile tour of nineteen U.S. cities. On 3 November, they sailed from San Francisco on the Japanese steamer *Siberia Maru* for Japan, their first foreign stop (references 1, 15).

John C. W. Field listed their arrival in Yokohama on 25 November 1919 as the earliest entry in his 1953 pamphlet, *Japan: Overseas and International Flights*. This is erroneous in two respects. They travelled to and from Japan by ship, not by plane, and according to their own publication (reference 15), they reached Yokohama on 17 November. They went from there to Tokyo. Beaumont and Hillman left Tokyo on 3 December by train. Glidden remained in Tokyo for another week "to complete data required," and rejoined the others in Kyoto on 10 December. They then proceeded by rail to Osaka and Kobe, and by ship to Pusan, Korea, and on to Seoul, arriving in the Korean capital on 13 December and leaving on 15 December for Mukden and Peking (reference 15). I cannot find any mention of them in the philatelic magazines then published in Japan. Their own report, published a short time later in Hong Kong, does not mention any overprinted stamps or other philatelic material from their Japan visit (reference 15).



Figure 1.

Genuine Pictorial datestamp.



Figure 4.

Forger pictorial datestamp.

Thirty-one years later, in the 15 February 1950 issue of **Aero Philatelist's Bulletin**, Ira Seebacher reported that he and other Aero Philatelists members had recently met with Henry Kraemer, who "showed [us] virtually all known correspondence, covers, and collateral material of the round-the-world flight made by a group of U.S. army officers back in 1919 in connection with a contemplated International Air Derby. He has several covers with Japanese basic stamps overprinted as are Japan C1 and 2. The only difference is that the basic stamps are not the same ones as those of Japan's first airmails. Kraemer's stamps were never seen by any of those present, are not listed in any catalogue we ever saw, and are definitely on registered covers of which it can be said they are authentic" (reference 8).

Aside from the question of the overprint, two statements in this account are clearly erroneous. The three Special Commissioners did not make a round-the-world flight in 1919, but traveled by ship, and only one of the three was a U.S. army officer. Charles J. Glidden (1857-1927) entered the Army Signal Corps Aviation Section as a first lieutenant on 12 June 1917, and was promoted to captain on 20 February 1918, discharged on 19 August 1919, and promoted a major in the reserve corps on 3 October 1919, five days before the Commission left New York (references 17, 18).

James B. Hatcher, then an editor of the Scott catalogue, reported in the 28 March 1950 **Bulletin of the International Japanese Philatelic Specialists Study Club** that Kraemer had overprints on copies of the Japanese regular series 2, 4, 10, and 20 sen stamps (Scott #130, 132, 137, 139) and the 1919 peace commemoratives (Scott #155-158), as well as the 1½ and 3 sen stamps that had been used for C1-2. Hatcher commented that "tentatively these are regarded as private overprints" (reference 2).

One year later, in the 15 February 1951 **Aero Philatelist's News**, Henry Kraemer published an article with two photographs of a cover (Fig. 2) with two copies of Scott #132 and six of #137, all bearing a biplane overprint, although he omitted #137 from his list of stamps and said mistakenly that C1-2 were overprints on the 1913 unwatermarked stamps (Scott #117, 119) (reference 6). He also illustrated "the letter enclosed in the cover." Although on a letterhead of the Special Commission, this is not a letter but merely a typewritten statement without date, address, salutation, or signature, reading: "Stamps especially overprinted with the plane for the World Flight



Figure 2. Upper portion, showing stamps, of the Tokyo cover, 5 December 1918. The handwritten address is the same as in the Figure 5 cover.

Commission and for sending invitations to the Commission. The overprint was being prepared for the first air mail from Tokyo to Osaka when the Commission arrived in Japan." The last statement was certainly untrue; C1-2 were prepared two months before the Commission reached Japan, and had been invalid for nearly a month when the Commissioners arrived.

The first critical evaluation of the Kraemer material was made by Dr. Varro E. Tyler, then chairman of the ISJP Expert Committee, in the June 1962 issue of **Japanese Philately** (reference 16). He had not had access to the actual stamps, but only to the three Kraemer photographs. He concluded that "the cover on which these stamps were placed apparently did pass through the mails, as evidenced by the numbered registry label attached." However, he easily demonstrated that the pictorial postmark on the cover is a crude forgery and commented that "although it is not possible to state conclusively, careful examination of the enlarged photograph of these eight stamps leaves little doubt that the overprints, too, are forged."

I can find no reference to the Kraemer stamps and covers before 1950 or after 1962, until they turned up again in a 16 February 1980 Robson Lowe auction in Tokyo of the Japanese air mail collection of the late Dr. James Matejka. Advance publicity for this sale referred to "unique essays on flown cover," although there was no way for such a cover to be flown from Japan to the United States in 1919. Dr. Tyler notified Robson Lowe of the dubious nature of the material, and was told that because of a similar warning from someone in Japan, it already had been withdrawn from the sale. The reserve on the lot had been 3,000,000 yen (then about \$12,600).

Mr. Lowe subsequently sent me photographs of some other material in the lot, including a photograph (Fig. 3) of the "letter," from which it appears that the illustration in the 1951 **Aero Philatelist's News** was altered to fit the narrow-column format of the **News**. In the Lowe photograph of the

material as it is today, the typewritten statement is in two paragraphs of three lines each. In the 1951 illustration, it is arranged in ten lines, uneven at the left, and the printed letterhead was also cut and rearranged to fit the available space.

It is unfortunate that the Kraemer material apparently never has been shown to any expert or expert committee specializing in Japanese philately. Examination by such experts could determine conclusively whether the overprints are forged, and whether they were applied before or after the postmarks on the covers. But photographs alone are more than enough to show that the pictorial datestamp is, as Tyler said in 1962, an obvious and very crude forgery. Mr. Lowe has shown me photographs of three strikes of this marking in the Kraemer material: one (**Fig. 4**) on the 5 December 1919 Tokyo cover that Kraemer illustrated in 1951, one on a 15 December cover from Seoul, Korea (**Fig. 5**), and one on a Peace 10 sen commemorative (Scott #158) affixed to the titlepage of a Japanese-language draft of regulations for the proposed aerial derby.

All three strikes appear to be from the same handstamp. The post office name is "Tokyo" (in ideographs), even on the cover from Korea. Comparison with the genuine datestamp (**Fig. 1**) shows that in the Kraemer strikes the plane has no propeller, its wings do not extend outside the circle, the struts between the wings are missing, part of the landing gear is missing, the date is missing, and many other details are different. Only the strike on the document titlepage ties the stamp. On both covers, the pictorial marking does not touch any stamp.

Moreover, a close reading of Kraemer's 1951 article reveals other discrepancies that add to one's suspicion of this material. First, he said that his stamps "bear the provisional overprints used on the two Japan airmails, Scott #C1-2," but in the very next sentence referred to his stamps as having "private overprints." Conceivably, he could have meant to say that the official overprint plate fell into private hands and was used without authorization on different stamps, but there is no evidence of that. The overprint on his stamps appears, in the photographs, to be merely a private imitation or forgery of the very simple genuine overprint used two months earlier.

Second, Kraemer's references to covers were extremely confused: "Only those [stamps] given the Commission were ever used . . . Special invitations to a social affair were mailed to the members of the Commission and . . . were franked with [three stamps] . . . All such covers are preserved — a total of just four. The other four letters were mailed by the Commission's members to the U.S." The first sentence contradicts the second, unless we are to suppose that the Commission members mailed the invitations to themselves. And why four invitations for three people? Moreover, "just four" in the third sentence contradicts "the other four" in the fourth sentence. Were there four covers, or seven, or eight? And how did a pictorial postmark reading "Tokyo" get on a Korean hotel envelope mailed from Seoul (**Fig. 5**)?

As Tyler said in 1962, the Tokyo cover does appear to have passed through the mails. The registry label looks genuine in the photograph, and so do the cancellations that actually touch the stamps. If the total of 68 sen in postage was not excessive, the cover must have contained much more than the one-page "letter" (**Fig. 3**). In 1919, the Japanese registry fee on

black. (The color of the Kraemer overprints is not mentioned in any account I have seen.)

Both Woodhouse, to whom the 1919 covers are addressed, and Kraemer, who first publicized them in 1950-51, have been mentioned in connection with other questionable material. Three articles by Philip Silver associate Woodhouse with "faked signatures on many 1918 U.S. air mail covers" (references 9, 10, 11). Kraemer had been a stamp dealer in the Philippines from 1940 to 1947, before moving to New York. A substantial number of first day covers of World War II Japanese occupation stamps of the Philippines exist with Kraemer's signature and printed return address, "Henry Kraemer, 204 Alhambra, Manila, P.I." Some of these are genuine, but many have forged postmarks, according to Philippines expert Eugene A. Garrett's report in 1975 (reference 5).

However, it is not at all clear that either Woodhouse or Kraemer was responsible for the 1919 private overprints. After the Kraemer material was withdrawn from the Matejka sale, Robson Lowe examined it himself, and wrote me that the New York arrival postmark on the Seoul cover is "obviously genuine" but that "to my philatelic eye the overprints look ghastly." Unfortunately, the material was returned to the Matejka estate before I could ask Mr. Lowe to examine it more closely to see whether the overprints are under or on top of the apparent genuine datestamps. I am satisfied that both covers shown here passed through the mails in 1919, but whether the overprints were on the stamps then has not been proven (or disproven). The Special Commission letterhead (Fig. 3) looks too elaborate to be a forgery. But why is the statement on it typewritten while the Tokyo cover (as well as the Seoul cover) is addressed entirely in handwriting? If a typewriter was available for writing the enclosure, why was it not used on the cover?

The officially authorized overprints, Scott C1-2, were valid only until 31 October, and only on domestic mail. Why would postal clerks in both Tokyo and Seoul accept, for use on international registered mail, stamps that not only had not been authorized by any official decree but could be classified as "defaced" under Japanese postal law? If the private overprints were applied in Tokyo in 1919, it is hard to see how either Woodhouse or Kraemer could be responsible. And since Glidden, Beaumont, and Hillman were in Japan for only a short time and could hardly have seen either the genuine C1-2 or the genuine October pictorial datestamp before arriving in Japan, they are not likely to have originated the private imitations.

If the overprints were on the stamps at the time of mailing in 1919, I think the most likely explanation is that they were prepared by some Japanese aviation leader to compliment the American visitors, and not to deceive philatelists. Such a Japanese might also have persuaded, or helped Glidden persuade, a Tokyo postal clerk to accept the stamps on registered international mail. And knowing that the forged or imitation pictorial datestamp was completely unofficial, such a Japanese would have seen no reason not to give Glidden the actual handstamp as a souvenir. That would explain how a strike from this handstamp could appear on the Seoul cover.

Another puzzle is where the covers and loose stamps were from 1919 to 1950. I have been unable to determine when Woodhouse died. He was first listed in *Who's Who in America* in 1918, at the early age of thirty-four. He

ended his connection with *Aerial Age Weekly* in 1920, and during the next four years was busy with plans for railroad and other development in Turkey and with Roald Amundsen's Arctic expedition plans. Woodhouse's biographical sketch was not reprinted in *Who's Who in America* after 1925, and in the 1942 edition, his name was on a long list of those "dropped for reasons other than death." Henry Kraemer, who seems to have come to New York sometime between 1947 and 1950, could have acquired the material from Woodhouse or his estate at that time, or by some other means at an earlier date. More information is needed.

References

- (1) *Aerial Age Weekly* (New York), issues for 22 December 1919, 12 January 1920, 2 February 1920, 14 June 1920, 3 January 1921, 14 February 1921.
- (2) Alexander, R. P., "Unlisted Japanese Airmail", in *Bulletin of the International Japanese Philatelic Specialists Study Club*, 5:3 (28 March 1950), p. 6. This cites information from (8) along with comments by James B. Hatcher.
- (3) Bertalanffy, Felix D., "Japan's First Airmail. 1912", in *Japanese Philately*, 30:2 (April 1975), pp. 51-62.
- (4) Fisher, George A., Jr., "The 1919 'First Airmails' of Japan", in *Japanese Philately*, 14:6 (December 1959), pp. 229-236.
- (5) Garrett, Eugene A., "Japanese Philippines Counterfeit First Day Covers", in *Japanese Philately*, 30:4 (August 1975), pp. 158-167, a revised and expanded version of articles previously published in *First Days* and *Linn's Stamp News*.
- (6) Kraemer, Henry, "The First Around the World Aerial Derby", in *Aero Philatelist's News*, 4:4 (15 February 1951), pp. 14-15. Reprinted in *Bulletin of the International Society for Japanese Philately*, 6:3 (April-May 1951), pp. 37-39.
- (7) *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, Vol. 15 (1916), p. 403.
- (8) Seebacher, Ira, "Unlisted Japanese Airmail", in *Aero Philatelist's Bulletin*, No. 13 (February 1950), p. 2. This was cited in (2) along with other details.
- (9) Silver, Philip, "Phones, Philately, and Fakery", in *American Philatelist*, 95:4 (April 1981), p. 334.
- (10) Silver, Philip, "U.S. Counterfeit Autographs on 1918 First Trip Covers", in *American Philatelist*, 93:1 (January 1979), pp. 31-33, including a full reprint of article of the same title by Henry M. Goodkind from *Aero Philatelist Annals*, October 1961.
- (11) Silver, Philip, "U.S. Counterfeit Autographs on 1918 First Trip Covers", in *American Philatelist*, 93:7 (July 1979), pp. 610-611. Sequel to (10).
- (12) Spaulding, Robert M., "The 1919 Airmail Flights", in *Japanese Philately*, 20:3 (June 1965), pp. 92-96.

(Continued on page 40)

Additional U.S. Air Mail Markings

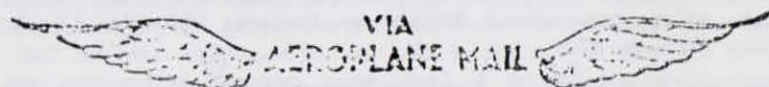
By Philip Silver

Most collectors are afflicted by the completeness syndrome, a disease which has proved immune to all attempts to eradicate it. I plead guilty, too. Each time I have submitted an additional article on the fascinating field of United States air mail markings, it was with the thought that it would be the last; completeness finally had been achieved.

This, then, is the fifth in the series; I now am convinced completeness forever will escape me. (1.) Either new items have been found by me or interested aficionados have written in with additional examples. William A. Elgie, Jr., George Y. Fisher, Kent Kobersteen, Don Lussky, V. Peter V.R. Mason, John Mattler, Robert W. Murch, Emmett Peter, Jr., Thomas W. Priestler and Robert A. Ramsey furnished examples of markings found in their collections. Their help is gratefully acknowledged.

In the "Review of United States Air Mail Markings Since 1918," on pages 50 and 51 of the January 1977 issue, I listed several 1918 and 1919 "Air Mail Service Designation" markings, which I indicated appeared to have been produced officially. I did state, however, that some of those markings might be of private origin.

In the case of the handstamp "VIA/ AEROPLANE MAIL (with wings at right and left)," I have been able to identify it as an official Post Office Department product. I located it on a penalty envelope with the corner card of the Second Assistant Postmaster General of the Post Office Department. The cover is postmarked September 8, 1920 at New York for the first trans-continental flight from that city (see illustration).



(Actual size is three inches)

Corrections should be made to several of the earlier articles. On page 53 of the January 1977 article, I listed "1930 — By Air Mail to Exchange Office" as an "Expedited" marking. It should have been shown in the "Miscellaneous" category. As a matter of fact, that marking was listed correctly under "Miscellaneous" on page 15 of the July 1979 article. Such markings were applied in the office of first dispatch on air mail letters with foreign destinations. At the exchange office — letters for Europe, for example, were sent to the Varick Street Exchange Post Office in New York City — the letters would be rated for onward dispatch.

The distinction between "Expedited" and "Late" or "No Connection" markings is blurred in many instances. Thus, in the January 1977 article, several markings were included in the "Late" or "No Connection" section, which more appropriately should have been listed as "Expedited" markings. Future listings will designate as "Late" or "No Connection" markings only those where it is indicated that a plane was late.

Thus, several markings listed under "Late" or "No Connection" in the January 1977 article should be changed to the "Expedited" category:

page 53 — 1928 Sent by rail to avoid delay (completely underlined)

page 53 — 1929 Dispatched via train
to avoid delay

page 54 — 1930 DISPATCHED BY TRAIN TO AVOID DELAY

On page 14 of the July 1979 article, several markings were listed under the "Late" or "No Connection" category. These also should be changed to the "Expedited" category:

1928 Dispatched by rail to avoid delay

1928 Forwarded by train to
expedite delivery

1930 DISPATCHED BY TRAIN
TO AVOID DELAY

1932 Dispatched by rail from Dallas, Tex.
to advance arrival at destination

The following additional markings add another small measure of completeness to those found in the previous four articles. Members are requested to advise me of other markings found in their collections.

"Air Mail Service Designation" markings

- 1924 Air Mail Via Cheyenne, Wyo.
- 1936 WAKE ISLAND (between three parallel bars,
CLIPPER MAIL part of a Naval handstamp)
- 1936 VIA AIR MAIL
Steamer-Plane Service
- 1942 SOLDIER'S MAIL
VIA CLIPPER AIR MAIL
- 1943 Via Air Mail
except over the Pacific

"Expedited" markings

- 1920 This letter was
advanced by Air Mail
- 1930 Received via train at
Colo. Springs, Colo.
- 1931 DESPATCHED BY TRAIN
FROM BUFFALO
- 1932 Dispatched by train
from Buffalo

"Late" or "No Connection" markings

- 1926 RECEIVED AT CHICAGO, ILLINOIS TOO
LATE TO CONNECT MAIL PLANE
..... (DATE)
AND FORWARDED BY TRAIN FIRST AVAILABLE
DISPATCH

(Continued on page 40)

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON PILOT RUSSELL OWEN

By Dr. Paul J. Veil

In the January 1981 issue of the "Annals," I reported the career highlights of Leon D. Cuddeback, inaugural pilot on CAM 5, and one of the two pilots to launch CAM 32. This article provides a biographical sketch and anecdotal information on the other CAM 32 pilot, Russell Owen.

Little is known of his childhood other than he was born in Missouri and was one of eleven children. His eldest brother, a pilot in the Army Air Corps, taught Russ to fly in 1918. Following a tour of duty with the U.S. Marines in Guam, Owen moved to Boise, Idaho in 1927. There, he held a string of jobs connected with flying. He gave flying lessons, flew aerial reconnaissance on sheep herds, and barnstormed to promote local carnivals. He married in 1928. (His wife, Jewel, lives now in Miami, and provided much information for this article.)

In the spring of 1929, Owen became friends with several pilots who flew with Varney Air Lines. This fledgling company flew the U.S. Mail from Pasco to Salt Lake thru Boise (CAM 5). Chief Pilot and Operations Manager, Leon D. Cuddeback, hired Owen to fly the Spokane to Pasco segment of CAM 32, which was scheduled to open in the fall.

On the afternoon of September 15, 1929, Owen and Cuddeback, each flying a Stearman biplane, carried the first consignment of CAM 32 mail from Spokane to Pasco. Both pilots autographed many of the inaugural covers (See **Figure 1**), and copies are fairly easy to obtain. Two planes were required for the flight because of the unprecedented amount and weight of the mail to be carried. It seems several thousand wooden postcards were in the payload which increased the weight considerably.(1)

In the months following inauguration, Owen settled into a comfortable flight routine. Each morning, he flew Pasco's mail to Spokane, landing there about 8 o'clock. A waiting truck hurried the mail to the post office for distribution in the morning's delivery. He was free for the rest of the day. At 5 p.m., Spokane's outgoing mail arrived at the airport. By 5:40 p.m., Owen was in the air. The flight back to Pasco took about an hour and a half.

There are several interesting footnotes to the inaugural week of CAM 32. On September 12, forest fires broke out along the eastern half of the Washington-Oregon state line. Unseasonably warm weather made this the second longest dry spell on record. There had been no rain since June 22. These fires burned virtually unchecked until September 23, when rain storms helped bring them under control. By the 17th, fires had consumed some 19,000 acres in Clark County, Washington, and over 2,000 acres in the Umpqua National Forest, Oregon. At its height, nearly 8,000 fire fighters battled the blaze. A dense smoke plume drifted in a northeasterly direction.

On the day CAM 32 was scheduled to begin, visibility in Pasco and Spokane was obscured by smoke. Indeed, the inaugural westbound mail out of Pasco for Portland was delayed a day because of it. On the 17th, visibility



Figure 1. CAM 32 inaugural cover autographed by Russell Owen

over Spokane was so poor that Owen circled the field for more than an hour before it cleared enough for him to land. Walter Varney suspended operations for the rest of that day (the 17th) and the next. The air cleared slightly on the 19th which allowed Owen to fly back to Pasco.

But on the morning of the 20th, visibility was so poor, Owen did not get out of Pasco until 10:30 a.m. Some forty miles south of Spokane, flight conditions were intolerable. Exhausted by the choking smoke, he made an emergency landing in a meadow near the town of Fishtap. Pilot and plane were unharmed. He made his way to a farm, and arranged for the mail to be brought to Spokane by car. He arrived there with his mail by mid afternoon. By early evening, the air had cleared sufficiently for him to take his usual load back to Pasco. The downed Stearman in Fishtap was retrieved several days later.

Although not listed in the AAMC Catalog, I believe this incident qualifies for an interrupted flight. Unfortunately, the incoming mail at Spokane was not identified as being delayed, so such covers might prove difficult to spot. To be certain, the collector should look for covers postmarked on the evening of the 19th or morning of the 20th, cancelled at Pasco, franked with an air mail stamp (or have indication that they were to be carried by air), and addressed to someone in Spokane.

According to information from his wife, Russ was not in the least bit worried when he was forced down. In a letter to me (2) she related how she had driven the Pasco-Spokane route with Russ several days before the inauguration of CAM 32. "Dozens of times he steered off the highway, taking backroads to reconnoiter emergency landing areas, — which he noted on his map. As it happened, the meadow near Fishtap was one of the very spots he had scouted. So, despite the poor visibility, Russ knew the condition of the field before he landed." Owen was a prudent (if not lucky) man it seems.

The period from 1929 to 1933 were happy years for him. All my sources



Figure 2. Owen with his pet bear in 1930

for this article agree he was a zestful, dashing, energetic individual. Cuddeback recalls, (3) "He was the life of any party. In a minute he could pick out any tune on a piano. He loved to talk and sing. He had many friends." Russ had a pet bear cub which he kept in his back yard (See **Figure 2**). He taught it tricks. Around 10 o'clock each morning, he would bring it on a leash down to the hangar to entertain the flight mechanics. By today's standards, Russ would be considered a superb 'media person'. He loved to stage pseudo-events for publicity. For example, one Christmas he flew the mail from Spokane dressed as Santa Claus. He persuaded the usually conservative Postmaster, T. O. Smith, to pose for a newspaper photo. Smith passed a mail sack stuffed with toys to pilot 'Santa', much to the amusement of the crowd (see **Figure 3**).

Owen had a great sense for dramatic gestures. One rainy afternoon in the early 30's, he was forced down on a wheat field near Ritzville, Washington. The farmer treated him to a steak and potato dinner and several hours of good conversation. Owen so appreciated this hospitality, that for several months afterwards, he tossed out a copy of Spokane's evening paper on the farmer's front lawn as he roared overhead.

In 1931, Varney Airlines merged with three other companies to form United Airlines. Soon, Owen was flying four-passenger Boeing aircraft all over the Northwest. The following year, he received his Master Pilot's license, the highest proficiency rating attainable in American aviation at the time.

Then, in 1933, his luck changed. My sources agree, Owen had long had a bit of a drinking problem, although he usually handled himself well. One afternoon he showed up for work slightly tipsy, and the field manager fired

him on the spot. Shortly thereafter, his wife left him. (There were no children.) Dejected, he sought employment with his old friend Nick Mamer, of Mamer's Flying Service, Spokane. Russ flew odd jobs hauling freight.

In December 1933, a tragedy befell him. Heavy rains had flooded the Wallace-Kellogg Counties of northern Idaho. Roads washed out; many communities were isolated. Mamer, along with other local airlines, mounted an airlift of supplies and emergency personnel to the beleaguered region. Carrying foodstuffs and a passenger, Owen attempted to put down on a largely flooded landing strip outside Osburn, Idaho. He missed the field altogether, plowed into a submerged tree stump and somersaulted the aircraft (See **Figure 4**). Russ escaped with minor injuries but his passenger was killed. Some said it was pilot error, others alleged he had been drinking. Whatever the case, his pilot's license was suspended permanently.

Disgraced, he dropped out of sight until 1936. In that year, he became involved with a group of promoters trying to establish a regular non-stop air route from Anchorage, Alaska to Spokane. Also, they wanted to show that water-cooled automobile engines could be used just as effectively as air-cooled engines to power aircraft. Of course, the much lighter, air-cooled, radial-type aircraft engines, like the Whirlwind J4 and J5, had been in use for many years, but they were expensive. It was hoped aircraft production costs could be reduced considerably by using the much less expensive (though heavier) automobile engine. They mounted a 1935 Plymouth engine in a high wing Fhalin monoplane for the historic attempt.

Owen agreed to fly the craft, even though he did not have a license.



Figure 3. Owen plays Santa Claus to help promote the Air Mail Service out of Spokane. Circa 1930.



Figure 4. The December 27, 1933 crash near Osburn, Idaho, which cost Owen his pilot's license.

When his flight mechanic (4) reminded him of this fact, he responded, "Well, I won't break the law technically, until the moment of liftoff. By then it'll be too late to arrest me, and I won't care what happens to me when I land." For Owen, this was a last-ditch effort to regain legitimacy as a pilot. If he could just complete this flight, he felt all would be forgiven; he would be allowed to fly again.

He took off on schedule. Weather was fine; everything looked good. Alas, as he headed out over the water, he developed an 'oil leak' and had to scrub the flight. But, according to a close personal friend, (5) Russ had foolishly tried to add oil to the engine. For some peculiar reason, in this aircraft the oil fill tube projected into the cockpit under the instrument panel. At the time, the engine was running smoothly with no indication it needed oil. It was a costly mistake in judgement for Russ. When he removed the oil cap, back pressure from the engine blew oil droplets and noxious fumes into the cockpit. Inexplicably, Russ persisted in his attempt, and managed to pour perhaps half a quart down the tube. But by that time there was quite an oily mess in the cockpit. Not knowing how much oil was actually in the engine, he decided to turn around. He was not arrested on his return, but he never piloted an aircraft again.

Ever hopeful for adventure, the following year (1937) he travelled to Canton, China, to train Chinese pilots in their war against Japan. However, he was unable to make the proper diplomatic connections and the enterprise failed. Stranded several months in Hong Kong, he eventually booked passage to San Francisco. He arrived penniless and had to hitch-hike his way to Seattle. During World War 2, he served with the Marines and saw action in

(Continued on page 39)

Chicago To Omaha April 23, 1920 An Uncatalogued Flight

By Philip Silver

(Continued from July, 1981 issue)

2. The Omaha Daily Bee of Friday, May 14th reported that another pilot, Clarence C. Lange "... piloted a De Haviland plane to Omaha from Chicago and will take out one of the first planes after **regular service** is established over the Omaha-Chicago division." (emphasis added)
3. The Omaha Daily News of May 14, 1920 reported that regular service would start on Saturday, May 15th:

"Air mail service between Omaha and Chicago **will start officially** Saturday morning, according to word received today by Acting Postmaster Herbert R. Daniel.

"The first 'ship' to leave Omaha for Chicago carrying first-class mail matter will 'hop' off at Ak-Sar-Ben field at 1 p.m. Saturday May 15th, arriving at the Chicago field about 6 p.m. The plane with a cargo of mail for Iowa City, Ia. and for Omaha will leave Chicago at 7 a.m., arriving here about noon.

"The service will be continued each day. No extra charge will be required on letters that are carried by planes.

"William E. [N] De Wald and Charles Lange are the pilots assigned to Omaha. De Wald will pilot the 'ship' for Chicago Saturday." (emphasis added)

4. The Omaha Daily Bee for Saturday, May 15th stated:

"**Regular aerial mail service** from Chicago to Omaha will begin today, according to an official telegram received yesterday by Postmaster H. S. Daniel from Superintendent of Aerial Mail Service Ridell." (emphasis added)

5. The Omaha Daily News for Sunday, May 16, 1920 reported:

"**OMAHA-BOUND MAIL GOES DOWN**

Flyer From This City Has Better
Luck as Regular Service Opens.

"Disaster rode with the first **regularly scheduled** air mail plane to leave Chicago for Omaha Saturday, according to telephonic advices to the government hangar at Ak-Sar-Ben field, from Iowa City. According to information received, the plane, driven by C. R. Benedict, carrying two pouches of mail for Omaha, was forced to land about 100 miles south and somewhat east of Iowa City, and will be unable to continue its voyage for some time.

Plane Not Wrecked

"The plane is not wrecked, so far as we know, and Pilot

Benedict is safe,' said Herbert D. Smith, chief mechanic at the Omaha station. 'However, he will be unable to continue his flight until repairs are made. Probably he will arrive some time Sunday.'

"Postmaster Herbert S. Daniel was unable to throw any further light on the time of the plane's arrival.

" 'I understand the pilot made a forced landing,' he said.

"William E. [N] De Wald, Omaha pilot, hopped off from Ak-Sar-Ben field at 1 p.m. Saturday with the first load of air mail for Chicago. He reached Iowa City at 3:15, on time, and reported back that he expected to reach Chicago by 2 p.m." (emphasis added)

In a later May 16th edition of the Omaha Daily News, the above report is repeated, in part, with an additional paragraph:

"This was taken by officials to mean that the plane is badly damaged."

Summarizing these reports, it can be concluded that the regularly scheduled air mail service from Chicago to Omaha and from Omaha to Chicago started, as planned, on May 15, 1920. Since the plane from Chicago was apparently damaged, this mail might conceivably deserve crash cover status.

That May 15th was, indeed, the start of a regular air mail service, may be concluded from the following two newspaper reports:

Omaha Daily News, Monday, May 17, 1920

"SECOND AIR MAIL CARRIES 300 POUNDS

"The second air mail plane to leave Omaha for Chicago, carrying 300 pounds of first class mail matter, left the government flying field near the Ak-Sar-Ben race track at 1 p.m. today, piloted by Charles C. Lange.

"William E. [N] De Wald, who left Omaha Saturday noon for Chicago with mail, is expected to land at the local field this afternoon. De Wald will leave Tuesday afternoon on a return trip to Chicago.

"Ray Johnson, pilot of the 'ship' in which W. J. Mc Candles, superintendent of the Omaha-Chicago division, was killed at Os-kaloosa last week, is expected to be back in the service by the later part of the week. Johnson and his plane will be stationed at Iowa City."

Omaha Daily Bee, Tuesday, May 18, 1920

**"Two Mail Planes From Chicago Due
Today; Another Leaves Omaha.**

"Clarence Lange, new member of the Omaha aerial mail squad, will make his initial trip to Chicago today if weather conditions are favorable. Lange expects to sail out of the Ak-Sar-Ben 2/ field at 1 p.m. and is due to arrive in Chicago carrying a load of mail about 4:30 the same day.

"Pilot Benedict, who was scheduled to arrive in Omaha last Saturday, is now in Iowa City. His plane suffered a broken wheel when he was forced to land after getting off the main course due to the heavy fog. Local officials expect Benedict's machine to land this morning in Omaha.

"Pilot De Wald, who was due in Omaha yesterday, was delayed in Chicago because of the heavy downpour of rain in the windy city. Telegrams received from there yesterday stated that De Wald would arrive in Omaha this morning. Both of the west-bound machines carry mail."

This last report from the Omaha Daily Bee reinforces the crash mail status of letters carried on the May 15, 1920 inaugural flight from Chicago to Omaha.

I have gone into this detailed and somewhat repetitious recital of newspaper reports to be sure there was reasonable accuracy in the several stories. It will have been noted that both newspapers, the "Bee" and the "News," corroborate and substantiate the events of the several days. In my opinion, the possibility of error has been eliminated.

Thus, we may conclude, with adequate reason, that the listing for **AAMC 126** is incorrect. It refers to test flights in both directions from the cities named. These were not test flights on May 15, 1920, however; they were the beginning of regular air mail service. The test flight was one made by De Wald from Chicago to Omaha on April 23, 1920.

I suggest, accordingly, that the listings in Volume 1 of the sixth edition be corrected as follows:

(a) change the catalogue number of **AAMC 125** to **124**. This will allow for the addition of a new **AAMC 125** listing, the test flight from Chicago to Omaha on April 23, 1920.

(b) add new **AAMC 125** listing as follows:

- 125 1920, April, 23 — Chicago, Ill.-Omaha, Nebr. This was an authorized test flight on the proposed transcontinental route. Pilot William N. De Wald took off from Chicago at 8:45 a.m. in a De Haviland plane with 200 pounds of mail. He stopped first at Iowa City, Iowa, arriving at 1:35 p.m. and then took off for Omaha. He landed at the Ak-Sar-Ben field at 4:26 p.m.

Chicago to Omaha

.....3./

(c) change **AAMC 126** as follows:

- 126 1920, May 15 — Omaha, Nebr.-Chicago, Ill. This marked the beginning of regular air mail service. Mail was carried in both directions. A regular city machine canceller was used at Omaha. Covers bear a magenta, dateless receiving Chicago handstamp with "AIR MAIL SERVICE" in the upper part of the circle and "CHICAGO" in the lower part. Outgoing mail from Chicago received the city cancellation. Pilot William N. De Wald flew 200 pounds of mail for Chicago with a stop-over in Iowa City. Pilot C. R. Benedict flew 265 pounds of mail from Chicago. Benedict crash-landed his plane 100 miles southeast of Iowa City because of a fog.

(Continued on page 39)

Hamilton's Continental Balloon Post

By Ernst M. Cohn

In a recent sales list, I found a picture of what looks like an envelope, about 5 x 2 3/4 inches, described as "Great Britain 1845. Hamilton Continental Balloon Post. An extremely interesting and rare item. Price on request." As I gazed upon that piece, it slowly dawned upon me that there wasn't a single hand-written marking on it.

In the upper right corner is an orange-colored type of waffle design, 1 x 1 1/4 inch, upon which is a dark blue balloon. Two men wave flags from its basket. Its equator features the inscription HAMILTONS. Diagonally across the upper left corner is a black stamping, *Via Marseilles*, boldly underlined. The lower left corner shows an orange-red cogwheel-shaped cachet, containing PARIS in its center. The same color stamp pad seems to have been used on the "address", which reads

Continental
Balloon Post.

Clearly, this "cover" was not written by, nor addressed to, anyone. If the dealer knew anything about the item, he didn't say so. My inquiry to him has remained unanswered.

I then decided to ask two British friends, hoping they might have seen the item and know something about it. Francis J. Field is a well-known airpost expert, who I know has delved successfully into the history of similar material. Robert I. Johnson is an officer of the Society of Postal Historians, with very broad philatelic and postal historical knowledge. Both have contributed to the solution of this mystery, for which I wish to thank them.

Francis J. Field, in particular, had already tried to unravel it in the 1930s. While he was not totally successful, the story is reasonably clear anyhow. Mr. Field says he has handled two or three of these items, each acquired by a famous collector.

Mr. Johnson referred me to *The Philatelist* of April and September 1959, the first of which depicts a similar piece. From the difference between that and the one shown here, it appears that five stamping devices were used to create these items.

In a letter written by Victor Hamilton at Dundee and published in the *Sunday Times* (London, probably 1937), he states:

My father, William Hamilton, was one of the original Hamilton Brothers, who founded their Panoramas in 1848. There were four brothers, William, Harry, Joseph, and Alfred, the last painting many of the marvellous scenes . . . The Diorama visited all the large towns in Great Britain and went annually to the Curzon Hall, Birmingham . . . Our Panorama toured until 1911. After that my brother (A. G. Hamilton) and myself started cinemas in various towns, and we have since then revived the Panorama three times by showing it at the Caird Hall, Dundee, during the Christmas season in 1923-24-25, and at the St. George's Hall, Bradford, in 1925.



Another letter in the *Sunday Times* around the same period contains a letter by T. W. A. Lingford, ". . . and the 'envelope advertising a balloon post,' referred to by your correspondent, was doubtless one of the many ways of attracting notice to their performances." That opinion is shared by Victor Hamilton in a letter of 24 April 1937:

I received your letter and card which are very interesting, but I am afraid I cannot remember anything about the Balloon Post. I think it must have been an advertising scheme at the time of the Franco-Prussian War, as we had many scenes depicting this. During the siege of Paris I think they had a Balloon Post, so no doubt these post-cards or envelopes were printed with an imitation stamp on, as if they came from Paris and were used to advertise the Diorama of the Franco-Prussian War.

In view of the fact that that war occurred in 1870-71, the illustrated item probably originated long after 1845. The remainder of the sales description is debatable. The piece certainly has an indirect connection with airpost history and is a collectible. Potential buyers should, however, be aware of its true nature. It is not unlike a host of items that continue to be created to satisfy the craving for souvenirs — in this case of aeronautical events — no matter how remotely the event and the souvenir may be related.

During World War II, overseas military surface mail was FREE. Air mail service, however, was set at 6 cents a half-ounce. When this was established on December 23, 1941, the civilian rate was also 6 cents, but this was for a full ounce. Thus, military personnel paid twice as much for a one-ounce letter. Even on March 26, 1944, when the civilian air mail rate was hiked to 8 cents an ounce, it was still less than the 12 cents for the same weight paid by the boys overseas. So, what kind of a bargain did our military people get?

— P.S.

INDEX TO VOLUME XXIV

July 1980 to January 1981

(Compiled by the Editor)

Canada. 50th Anniversary of the First Air Mail Flight in Western Canada (Richard K. Malott)	5
Editorial. "Never Hinged" stamps	15
Portugal. The First Portuguese to Ascend in Balloon: Oporto-1903 and 1904 (Frank Lemos da Silveira)	25
United States. The 50-Cent Two-Ocean Air Mail Rate from Hawaii (Philip Silver)	2
C2: July 13, 1918 "Pre-First Flight" Covers (Philip Silver)	10
Printing Oddities on the U.S. 1918 Air Mail Issue (Joe R. Kirker, Jr.)	12
United States Pioneer No. 5: The Mississippi River Flight (Thomas J. O'Sullivan)	18
Reminiscences of an Early CAM Pilot (Paul J. Viel)	27
United States C1 Air Mail Cover: An Unusual Usage (Philip Silver)	30
Uruguay. Zeppelin Posts — South American Flights 1932: A correction (Philip Silver)	14
Zeppelin. Zeppelin Posts — South American Flights 1932: A correction (Philip Silver)	14

INDEX TO VOLUME XXV

July 1981 to January 1982

(Compiled by the Editor)

Aero Philatelist Annals. Index to Volume XXIII (July 1979 to January 1980) 9 Index to Volume XXIV (July 1980 to January 1981)	38
Index to Volume XXV (July 1981 to January 1982)	38
Argentina-Uruguay. World's First International Air Mail Flight (Juan Bosco Oberti)	2
Balloon Post. Hamilton's Continental Balloon Post (Ernst M. Cohn)	36
Editorial. Final number of this publication	39
Japan. Private Airplane Overprints in Japan, 1919 (Dr. Robert M. Spaulding)	18
United States. Additional U.S. Air Mail Markings (Philip Silver)	15
Additional U.S. Air Mail Markings (Philip Silver)	26
Biographical Notes on Pilot Russell Owen (Dr. Paul J. Viel)	28
Chicago to Omaha April 23, 1920, Uncatalogued Flight Part 1 (Philip Silver)	10
Chicago to Omaha April 23, 1920 Uncatalogued Flight Part 2 (Philip Silver)	33
More on the World's First Air Mail Etiquettes (Joseph R. Kirker, Jr.)	6
Third May 15, 1918 First Flight Wrapper "Located" (Philip Silver)	5

Reflections in a Broken Editorial Mirror

With this issue, the **Aero Philatelist Annals** completes thirty years of life. It also fades from the philatelic scene because this is the last number to be published. I say this with considerable regret.

In the thirty years of its existence, the **Annals** has had only two editors, Henry M. Goodkind and me. Goodkind's name appeared on the masthead with the July 1953 issue; he died in 1970. Except for a short hiatus, I have had the editorial responsibilities since then. As the second editor, it is my unfortunate duty to preside at the **Annals** demise.

The basic reason for that demise is the lack of articles to fill the book. I have made several appeals for articles without much success. Members of the Society who had the knowledge and could write did not. It is useless to point a finger. As a consequence, the editor had to fill almost half of each issue himself. This was an intolerable situation; it could not continue.

I hope that those of you who have the knowledge will put it down on paper for publication in the **Airpost Journal**. Collections are born to live and eventually to die. The written word lives. Hail and farewell!

— P. S.

CHICAGO TO OMAHA APRIL 23, 1920 —

(Continued from page 35)

Omaha to Chicago	3./
Chicago to Omaha	3./

Notes:

1. From John Heywood's "Proverbs" (1546). See also Shakespeare's "All's well that ends well."
2. Ak-Sar-Ben field referred to throughout this article, is Nebraska spelled backwards.
3. Prices will be added when the sixth edition is published some time in the future.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON PILOT RUSSELL OWEN —

(Continued from page 32)

the South Pacific. In August 1962, at the age of 63, he collapsed on a sidewalk in downtown Seattle. He died alone and impoverished, an ignoble end to a once colorful figure in Northwest air mail history.

Notes:

- (1.) For more information on these postcards, see Viel's articles which appeared in the October, 1980, and September 1981 **Airpost Journals**.
- (2.) Jewel Heath, personal communication, March 23, 1981.
- (3.) Leon D. Cuddeback, personal communication, March 9, 1981.
- (4.) John Dean, personal communication, April 11, 1981.
- (5.) Robert Seamahorn, personal communication, May 5, 1981.

PRIVATE AIRPLANE OVERPRINTS IN JAPAN, 1919 —

(Continued from page 25)

- (13) Spaulding, Robert M., "1919 Privately Overprinted 'Airmail' Stamps", in **Japanese Philately**, 35:3 (June 1980), pp. 131-132.
- (14) Spaulding, Robert M., "1919.12.5 Cover With Forged Airplane Overprint and Forged Commemorative Datestamp", in **Japanese Philately**, 35.5 (October 1980), pp. 248-249.
- (15) Special Commission Organizing the First Aerial Derby Around the World Under the Rules of the "Federation Aeronautique Internationale", **Bulletin** No. 1, containing reports dated "Tokyo, December 19, 1919", "Tokyo, December 4, 1919", and "Seoul, Corea, December 15, 1919", but printed in Hong Kong in late 1919 or early 1920, according to the Library of Congress.
- (16) Tyler, Varro E., "The Unofficial Air Mail Overprints", in **Japanese Philately**, 17:3 (June 1962), pp. 78-79.
- (17) **Webster's American Biographies** (1974), p. 405.
- (18) **Who's Who in America**, 1924-25, entries for Glidden and Woodhouse.

ADDITIONAL U.S. AIR MAIL MARKINGS —

(Continued from page 27)

- | | |
|------|--|
| 1928 | FLIGHT CANCELLED AT
DALLAS, TEX. FORWARDED BY
TRAIN TO AVOID DELAY

"Short Paid" markings |
| 1930 | Insufficient postage
for air mail

"Miscellaneous" markings |
| 1918 | SEND A LETTER BY AIRPLANE
ESPECIALLY TO ONE "OVER THERE"
IT WILL BE A REAL TREAT.
(<i>"over there"</i> in italics) |
| 1926 | FIRST
ZONE ONLY |
| 1930 | Via Air Mail
to Exch. Office |

- (1.) January 1977, January 1978, July 1979 and July 1981.

Since the publication of my article on the fifth, 1932, South American trip of the Graf Zeppelin, I have received letters from several members. Each stated he had a cover similar to the one illustrated on page 14 of the July 1980 issue of the **Aero Philatelist Annals**. Some of the writers submitted photos or photocopies of covers in their collections.

Thanks are due Heinz Gappe, Herman Kerst, Thomas P. Knapp and Ian Nutley for heeding my request for additional material to bolster the need for the suggested catalogue correction.

— P.S.