

THE ICAO CORNER

by Albert Pelsser

PARAGUAY - AIR MAIL



Figure 1

This month's story of the series titled "The ICAO Corner" focuses on the stamp set issued by Paraguay on 8 April 1980 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Sir Rowland Hill's death and the 75th anniversary of aviation. The miniature sheet, #1941 of this set (see at Figure 1), is of particular interest in this story.

The designer of the stamps of that issue included the ICAO emblem, surrounded by 75^o ANIVERSARIO DE OACI. Paraguay inadvertently confused the 75th anniversary of the Wright brothers' triumph with ICAO. A previous story on this error appeared in the December 1997 issue of *The Canadian Connection* (see reference below).

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned confusion,

one can notice that the miniature sheet is overloaded with pictures and text. In addition to a reproduction of the first stamps issued by Great Britain in 1840 (Queen Victoria - Penny Black) and Paraguay in 1870 (Vigilant lion supporting liberty cap - Rose), the stamp depicts a Supermarine Spitfire, which is a British single-seat fighter aircraft used by the Royal Air Force and many other Allied countries through the Second World War. Since the Spitfire is painted with the markings FY-F, this aircraft Mk. IX BS435 was flown by Squadron Leader Hugo Throssell Armstrong, Officer Commanding No.611 Squadron; he was shot down on 5 February 1943 whilst flying this aircraft. The small text on the stamp reads *TAMBIEN EN TIEMPOS DE*

GUERRA LOS AVIONES MILITARES TRANSPORTABAN CORRESPONDENCIA and will be further studied in this story.

Sometimes the First World War feels like distant history. However, in this year commemorating the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of WWI, this story is also intended to provide a quick overview of what happened yesterday with the development of airmail before and during wartimes. The seven stamps #1938a-1938g (showing model airplanes on a blue sky with clouds) were printed se-tenant with the following text in the selvage: *SELLOS AVIONES MILITARES* (see at Figure 2), showing a set of military airplanes used during WWI and WWII supposedly carrying mail during wartime.



Figure 2

Only a sporadic interest in air mail was generally shown by postal administrations before the First World War and usually government-sponsored experimental flights took place between 1911 and 1918. However, there were a few first *official* aerial post experiments such as: in India on 18 February 1911 by Henri Pequet with a Sommer biplane, or

in Great Britain on 9 September 1911 by Gustav Hamel in a Farman biplane, or in the United States on 23 September 1911 by Early L. Ovington in a Blériot nicknamed "Dragon-fly" monoplane.

The chief driving force of armies is morale even above discipline and the regular and speedy forwarding of mail is one of the surest means of maintaining the determination of troops. It was therefore hardly surprising that the military leaders very soon had the idea of using air transport to speed up postal services to their armies. At the outbreak of WWI, very few thought of the airplane as an instrument of war; in a short span of time, aviation made itself felt an important factor of victory.

The official beginnings of military airmail can be traced to Europe during WWI. The length of the Eastern and Western Front lines posed serious transport problems for German postal officials and new postal lines were established to relieve the overcrowding on the communication routes by land. A most pressing need, however, was to speed up transmission of military mail and official dispatches between Great Britain and the Continent; several experiments were carried out from May 1915.

As far as France was concerned, the need for military airmail was different, due to short distances involved and the quality of communication routes. The massive arrival of American troops after the USA entered the war in 1917 justified the employment of new measures to speed up the conveyance of American mail and Warrant Officer Houssais transported the first sack of mail from Paris to Saint-Nazaire on 17 August 1918 with a night bomber Letord Let.9. From the beginning of 1918 onwards, Austria established its own military airmail and an air route was started on 11 March 1918 by Pilot A.R. von Marwil between Vienna and Kiev with a Hansa-Brandenburg C.I. biplane.

It was towards the end of that war that air mail service got its real start. Formed on 1 April 1918, the British Royal Air Force (RAF) operated a mail and passenger service for delegates from London to the Paris Peace Conference, by using the light bomber De Havilland DH4 and the heavy bomber Handley Page O/400, both fitted with passenger accommodation; this service ended in September 1919.

Between 1919 and 1939, from one end of the planet to the other, the number of airmail routes multiplied and the world was rapidly becoming an integrated postal village. Indeed, the volume of airborne mail pointed to the need to bring some order onto the international scene. During the 1920s and 1930s, the Universal Postal Union organized six conferences to address, among other topics, the expanding airmail system.

Two important events occurred between the two wars. In 1927, at the Hague Conference, an agreement was



Figure 3

reached establishing the airline companies as officially recognized carriers of mail at the maximum remuneration of 6 postal gold francs per metric ton-kilogram. In 1938, at the European Air Mail Conference in Brussels, a general agreement on non-surcharged air mail was reached, thus widening the use of air mail.

Another interesting element of the miniature sheet is the reproduction of a flight cover sent on 31 August 1933 from Plymouth, Devon, UK to Montevideo, Uruguay, with all cachets and transit markings, and flown on the 6th LZ-127 Graf Zeppelin flight to South America. As an intercontinental commercial airship, the Graf Zeppelin operated regular scheduled services during the summer season mainly from Friedrichshafen, Germany to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil between 1932 and 1937. The cover also bears the green Great Western Railway label in its upper-left corner, which is the second study item of this story.

A short return in history is necessary if one wants to understand how the *Air Mail* labels were born. During the first years of the development of aviation, the essential goal of the manufacturers of planes and the pilots was to fly and join an airport not too distant. But these flights were very expensive and an idea arose rather quickly with much success: that of labels.

Thus, for the first air meetings or shows, special labels were printed. The interested parties, among whom some informed collectors, could buy these labels, stick them on covers that were then transported in very small number on board these planes, often flown by militaries.

With the launching of the first aviation companies, the planes gained in power, autonomy and safety and carried mail with the help of a contract with the Post Office and the payment of a flat-rate amount. Several aviation companies, eager to be made known by a growing interested public, printed and distributed special labels *By Air Mail*, with the mention of their name of course.

As of the years 1920-1925, the postal administrations started to organize official air postal connec-

tions, on the basis of contracts signed with private airline companies. To be able to distinguish these covers to be transported by planes from the other covers, the postal administrations prepared special labels *By Air Mail*, which conferred on the cover the right to be conveyed by the air route. At the first times of the airmail, countries used their own colour labels.

The Great Western Railway (GWR) Company was a British railway company that linked London with the South-West and West of England and most of Wales. On 12 April 1933, the GWR inaugurated a railway-air service between Cardiff and Plymouth (extended to Birmingham on 22 May 1933), using a Westland Wessex aircraft supplied by Imperial Airways. Against payment of a special tax of 3-old-pence (denoted on the label by the letter D for Latin *denarius*), a private label (see at Figure 3) was affixed on the cover when handed in for transmission. The mail was then embarked and carried until its destination, using railway and aircraft as means of transportation.

The large and quite imposing air mail stamp at Figure 3 was designed by G. Sawyer and printed in lithography by Waterlow and Sons, Ltd., London; its colour is pale green with a red serial number impressed on each stamp for counting purposes. The aircraft shown on this stamp seems to be the Westland Wessex IV registered G-ABEG, which was also depicted in another position on ICAO stamp Botswana #350 (as it was leased by Imperial Airways to Rhodesia and Nyasaland Airways); however, it was not the one used by GWR for mail transportation.

The second prototype of the Westland Wessex IV series, registered G-AAGW, was leased by Imperial Airways to Great Western Railway for its air mail services. This service only operated for a single summer season and the last mail flight took place on the date 30 September 1933.

The world airlines had just begun to form a coherent network, when the Second World War put a sudden end to the air mail endeavours; air transport was

restricted and civilian aircraft fleets were requisitioned to fulfill the needs of national defense. As World War II progressed and more countries were drawn into the conflict, existing airmail routes were continually being adjusted and

new routes were developed to create "safe" fly zones for commercial aircraft. During WWII, military airmail became one of the most important possibilities for communications between the front and the homeland.

CHECKLIST

Botswana	349-354	1984 Oct 08	40 th Anniversary of ICAO
Paraguay	1938a-1938g	1980 Apr 08	Sir Rowland Hill death centenary, incorrectly marks ICAO 75th anniversary
Paraguay	1939-1940	1980 Apr 08	Sir Rowland Hill death centenary, incorrectly marks ICAO 75th anniversary
Paraguay	1941s/s	1980 Apr 08	Sir Rowland Hill death centenary, incorrectly marks ICAO 75th anniversary

REFERENCES

"History of Air Cargo and Airmail from the 18th Century," Camille Allaz, Christopher Foyle Publishing, 1998, p.413.
http://www.icao.int/secretariat/PostalHistory/tcc_75th_anniversary_of_icao.pdf
<http://www.philatelly.cyng.org.uk/SAG-GreatWesternRailway.html>

