

## ACHIEVING THE DREAM

by Albert Pelsser

In 1901, after an especially frustrating series of failed attempts, Wilbur Wright despaired that "not within a thousand years will man ever fly." Many others probably shared the same view. It took only two more years of dedicated work, however, for the Wright brothers to dispel that doubt. It took somewhat longer for the world to accept that human flight was indeed possible. The fact that two brothers in Middle America who had not even graduated from high school could achieve what others had failed to do was beyond the comprehension of many. A closer look reveals that notwithstanding their relative lack of formal education, the Wright brothers, who shared an aptitude for engineering and having a natural aversion to unnecessary risk-taking, were perfectly suited to the task. Step by step, they separated guesswork from fact and solved the mysteries of human flight.

The Wright brothers were fascinated by flight. As bicycle manufacturers and traders, they were ideally placed to consider emerging technologies and complement these with their own initiatives. Inspired by the work of American pioneer Octave Chanute, the Wright brothers were tireless in their research. They found the ideal location for their flying experiments at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, an area of sand dunes offering the opportunity for soft landings

and a useful slope for launches. By 1903, they had resolved the problems that had bedeviled other experiments in flight, that is, lift, control and propulsion, and on 14 December 1903, they flipped a coin for the first chance to fly their craft. Wilbur won, but he stalled and hit the ground, damaging the rudder. Three days later, Orville climbed aboard; the Wright *Flyer 1* flew erratically for twelve seconds and then skidded along the sand just 120 feet from where it had taken off. Three more flights were attempted that day, the last one covering 852 feet in 59 seconds.



Figure 1

The first successful flight of a powered sustained and controlled flying machine by Orville and Wilbur Wright

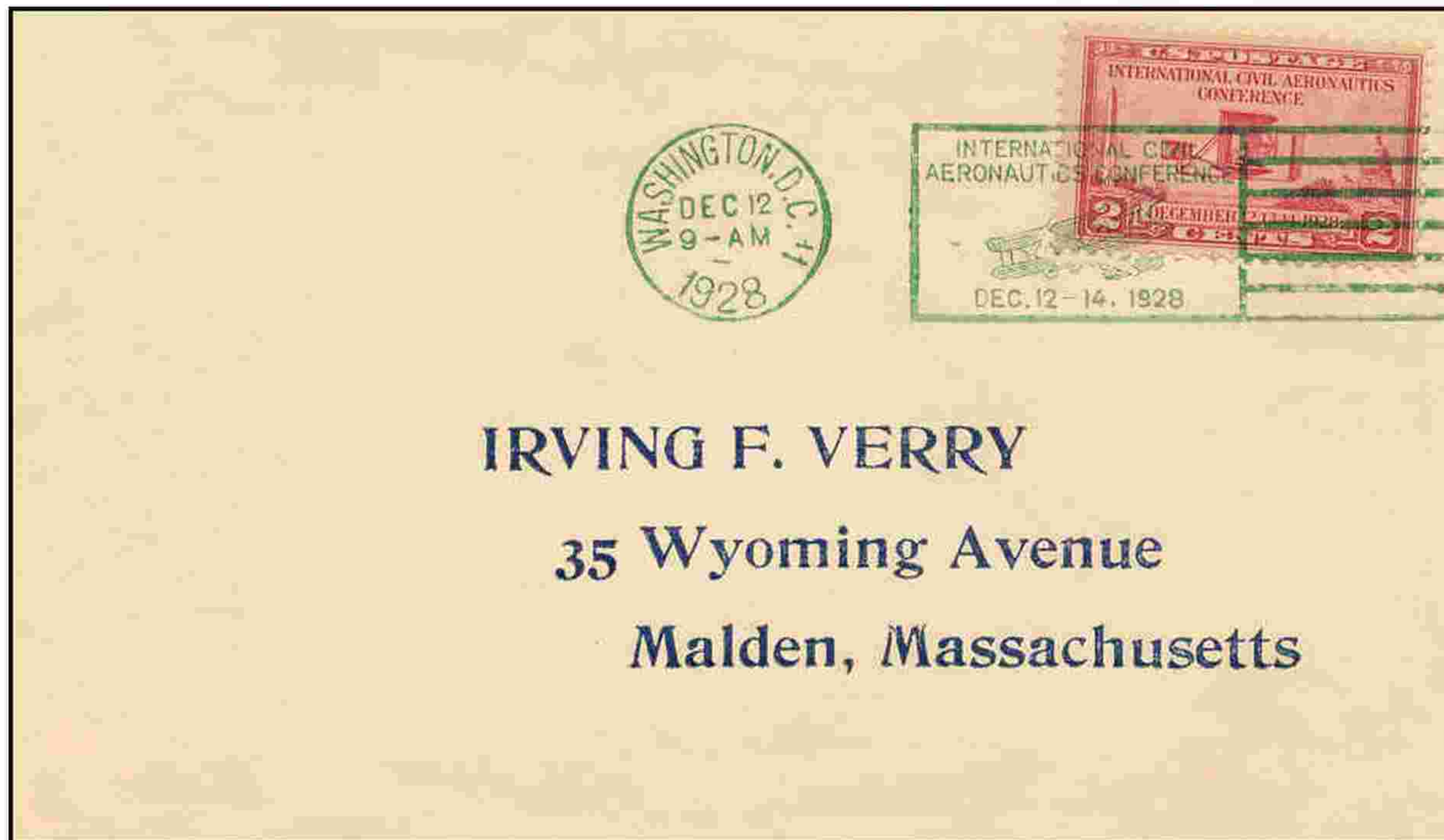


Figure 2

marked the beginning of the evolution of flight and civil aviation. It was a remarkable prelude to a century that would see the world changed forever by air travel. After an initial pioneering age filled with adventure and trials, the convenience of air travel, airfreight and airmail became part

of our everyday lives. With the signing of the Convention on International Civil Aviation on 7 December 1944 in Chicago (which established the International Civil Aviation Organization, ICAO, the first Agency of the United Nations located in Montreal), unparalleled global cooperation among



Figure 3

all states and the world aviation community made it possible to meet the objective of a safe, secure and efficient mode of transportation which would contribute to fostering greater understanding among peoples of the world.

Over 200 postage stamps from dozens of countries have been issued thus far to honour the Wright brothers. By the end of 2003, many countries worldwide will have issued postal products to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first powered flight. The first stamp depicting an airplane was a United States 20-cent parcel post stamp showing a Wright brothers' Model B airplane (Scott #Q8, see Figure 1), built in 1910 for use by a training school, and not to carry mail as indicated on the stamp. This parcel post stamp, issued in 1913, was a design ahead of its time, since it symbolized a mode of transportation whose full development and implementation were still years away. Partly because of its thematic interest as the first stamp picturing an airplane and partly because of its genuine scarcity, this stamp is particularly sought after.

There are some who believe that Orville and Wilbur Wright were not first to master powered and controlled flight. Richard Pearse is credited with two documented powered airplane flights that took place in New Zealand in 1902-1903; one cannot assert, however, that these two flights were controlled, as both ended in crashes. Gustav Whitehead, a German-born American, is reported to have made many flights by motorized monoplanes prior to the Wrights. His devotees claim that he made the first powered airplane flight on 14 August 1901, near Bridgeport, Colorado; many of the various eyewitness accounts of his

flight were not reported, however, until the 1930s.

The Wrights' flight was commemorated 75 years ago by the International Civil Aeronautics Conference, held in Washington from 12 to 14 December 1928. On this occasion, the United States issued two commemorative stamps (Scott #649-650); the first image of the Wrights' biplane on a U.S. stamp appeared on Scott #649. This issue is part of the *forerunners* of ICAO, i.e. stamps related to inter-governmental meetings or bodies dealing with international civil aviation prior to the birth of ICAO in 1944. Orville Wright was the guest of honour and Charles Lindbergh was also present. The legendary stamp dealer Albert C. Roessler added his own tribute to the Wright brothers by privately overprinting the stamps, as a sales gimmick soon after they were issued, with the words *KITTY HAWK* and *N.C.* inside a circle.

A special machine cancel in green ink was prepared and used on covers bearing the stamps issued for the Civil Aeronautics Conference (see Figures 2 and 3 for the first day and last day cancellations). On 17 December 1928, the delegates at the Conference, Orville Wright and other members of the Wright family, together with friends and thousands of visitors, proceeded to Kitty Hawk to dedicate monuments at the scene of the first flight; on this occasion, commemorative covers were postmarked *KITTY HAWK N.C. P.M. DEC. 17 1928*. The cover at Figure 4, commemorating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first flight, shows a nice view in elevation of the Wright brothers' plane.

Today, the Wright brothers must be included among the sharpest intellects that shaped the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

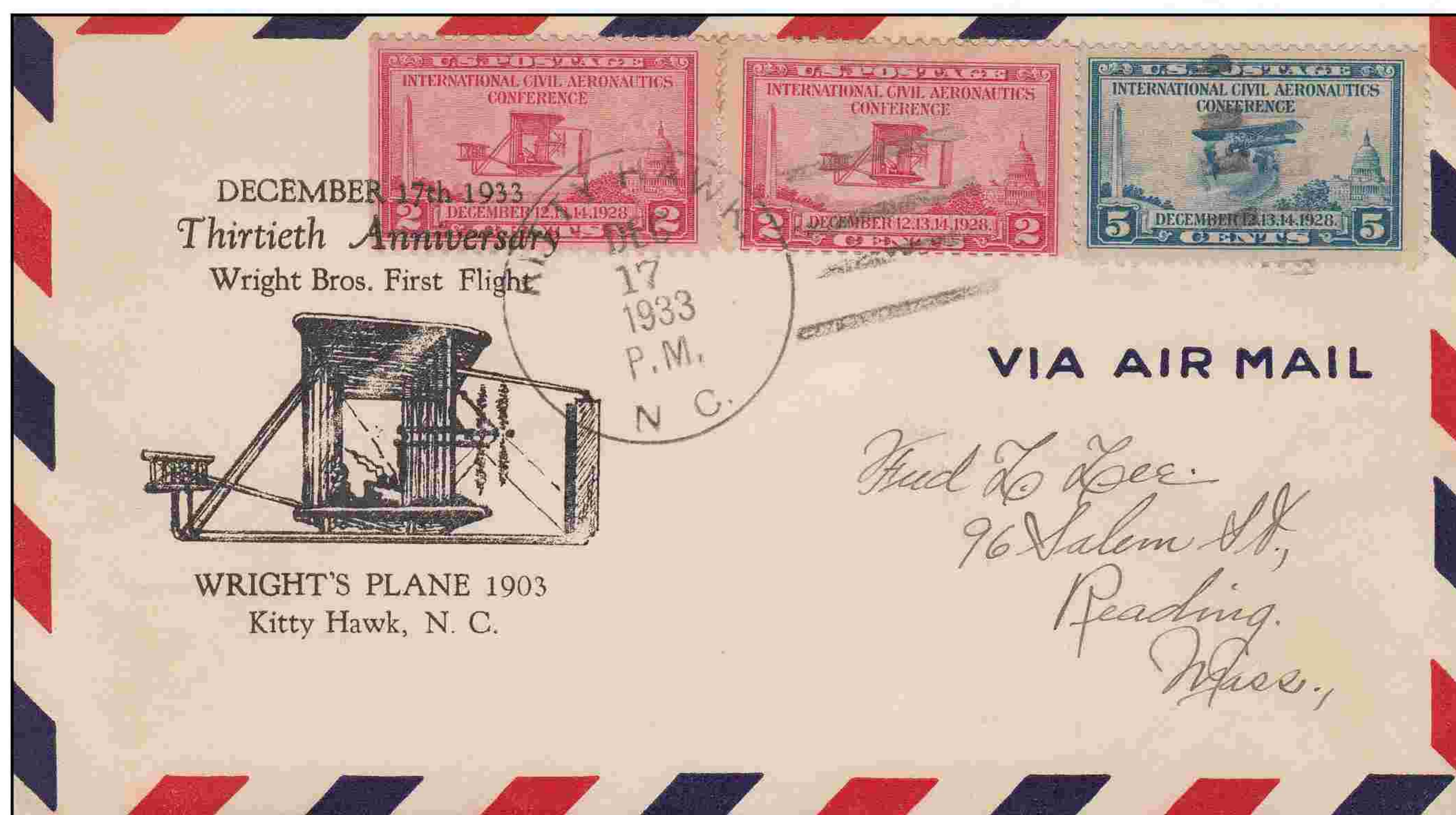


Figure 4

The Wrights' grit, determination and obsession with building a machine that would be capable of sustaining a man had made them true visionaries.

The following provides a comprehensive list of

Wright brothers stamps from the collection specifically related to ICAO. US Scott #C91-92, issued for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the historic flight, was designed by Canadian artist Ken Dallison.

### CHECKLIST

Belize	448	1979 Jul 30	Wright Flyer 1
Bophuthatswana	33-34	1978 Dec 01	Wright Flyer 1; Orville and Wilbur Wright
Cyprus	507	1978 Oct 23	Wright Flyer 1; Orville and Wilbur Wright
Egypt	C174	1978 Dec 31	Wright Flyer 1
Libya	1227p	1984 Dec 07	Wright Flyer 1
Paraguay	1880b	1979 Apr 24	Wright Flyer III (1905)
Sao Tome & Principe	528	1979 Dec 21	Wright Flyer 1
Sierra Leone	682	1985 Feb 28	Wright Flyer 1; Orville and Wilbur Wright
Somalia	452	1977 Dec 23	Wright Flyer 1
Togo	1283	1984 Oct 15	Wright Flyer 1
United States	Q8	1913	Wright Model B airplane
United States	649-650	1928 Dec 12	Wright Flyer 1 and Ryan B-5 Brougham
United States	C91-C92	1978 Sep 23	Wright Flyer 1; Orville and Wilbur Wright; Designed by Canadian Ken Dallison
Uruguay	C433	1978 Jun 13	Wright Flyer 1
Uruguay	C437	1979 Jun 18	Wright Flyer 1; Orville and Wilbur Wright

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