

## PHILATELIC LAXITY

by Albert Pelsser

### EUGENE ELY

The stories of the first United States aircraft revolved around the Wright Brothers and Glenn Curtiss. Because of his original creations, Glenn Curtiss has been regarded as the country's foremost pioneer. He is widely remembered as the builder of seaplanes and flying boats and a man largely responsible for the successful beginning of U.S. naval aviation.

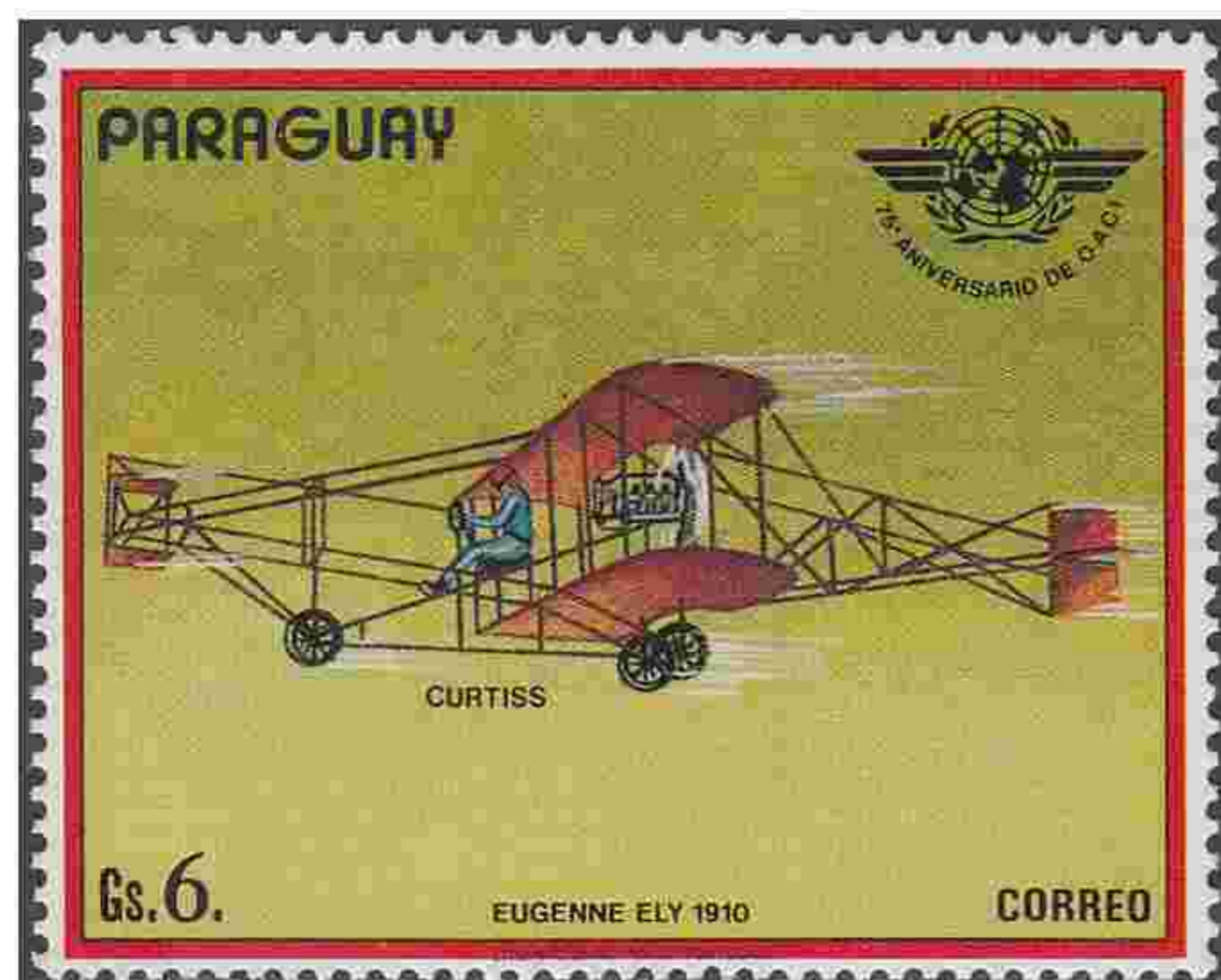


Figure 1

The *June Bug*, possibly named after the common June bug insect was an early aircraft designed by Curtiss,

who first flew it on 21 May 1908. Curtiss made three successful flights in the *June Bug* on 21 June, and within a week, he was breaking his own records with flights of over 1000 yards. From October, the *June Bug* was modified by adding floats to it in an attempt to create a seaplane. Renamed *Loon*, attempts to fly it began on 28 November 1908. Although the aircraft could achieve speeds of up to 43 km/h on the water, it could not take off; on 2 January 1909, it went out of control and sank. When it was recovered, it finally rotted away in a nearby boathouse. Although Curtiss failed in his first attempts to fly from water, he persisted and eventually achieved success.

Glenn Curtiss was always looking for possible new exhibition aviators; he found out that pilot Eugene Ely, born in Iowa in 1886, had a logical theory of flight and a keen interest in the machines themselves; thus Curtiss signed with Ely as one of his display pilots. In October 1910, Captain Washington Irvine Chambers, who was responsible for aviation matters at the U.S. Navy Department, was interested in flying a plane from a ship. Upon hearing that, Ely volunteered for the task. In a few weeks' time, Chambers managed to generate an historic achievement that marked the physical beginning of U.S. Navy flying. A

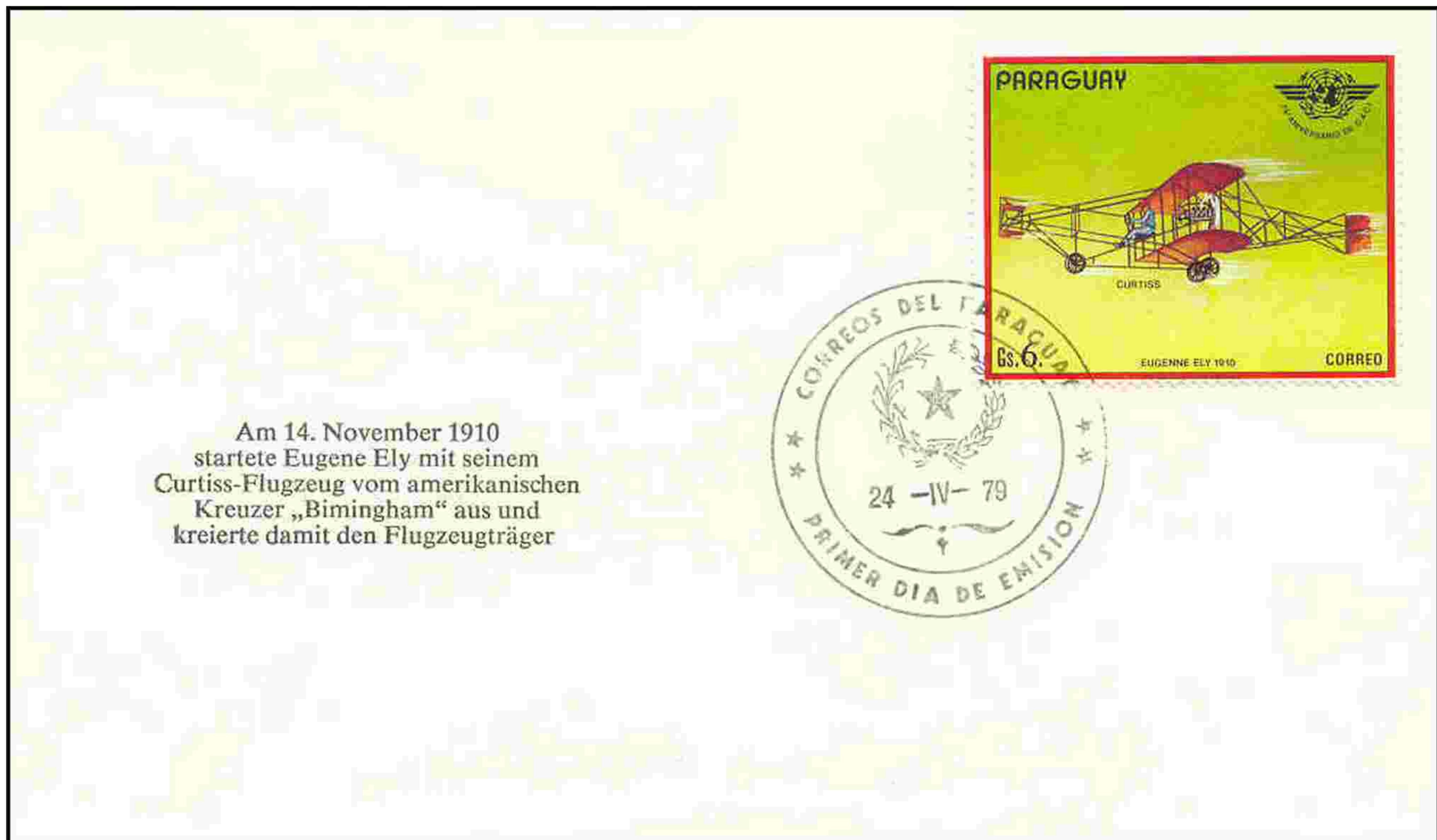


Figure 2

wooden platform was constructed over the foredeck of the light cruiser USS *Birmingham*. On 14 November 1910, Ely made the first take-off from the cruiser in a Curtiss Type III pusher biplane. Although the aircraft briefly touched water and damaged its propeller, Ely was able to maintain control and landed four kilometres distant.

Two months later, on 18 January 1911, Ely flew out of Presidio grounds overlooking San Francisco Bay to alight on the quarterdeck of the armoured cruiser USS *Pennsylvania*, anchored in the Bay. After lunch on board with the skipper, Ely flew back to San Francisco. This was the first airplane to land on a ship.

These pioneering flights, however modest, presaged an era in which great aircraft carriers would roam the world's oceans. Glenn Curtiss' seaplanes and flying boats gave naval flight its start.

On 24 April 1979, Paraguay issued a set of nine stamps and one souvenir sheet to commemorate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of civil aviation and the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), whose headquarters have been in Montreal since 1945. One of these stamps, Scott #1880d (Figure 1) shows the Curtiss

aircraft used by Ely for the 1910 first-ever take-off from a ship. The stamp shows an error in spelling of his first name: Eugene is printed with two "n's."

It is interesting to highlight that the text on the left side of the cover, pictured in Figure 2, is in German, probably due to the particularly notable German presence in Paraguay. Although German immigrants had settled in Paraguay before the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it wasn't until the 1920s and 30s that many more arrived. At times, it is as though German were the country's second language (or third, after the indigenous *Guarani*). In this text, there is no spelling error in Ely's first name.

The designer of Paraguayan set of stamps included the ICAO emblem, surrounded by *75º Aniversario de OACI*. Paraguay inadvertently confused the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wright brothers' triumph, who made the first successful flight of a manned heavier-than-air vehicle on 17 December 1903, with ICAO which, even today, has not yet reached such a milestone. Furthermore, it should be noted that the date of issuance of this set by Paraguay did not correspond to an anniversary of the first flight (which should have been in 1978).

CHECKLIST

Paraguay	1880a-1880g	1979 Apr 24	75th anniversary of powered flight, ICAO
Paraguay	1881-1882	1979 Apr 24	Airmail
Paraguay	1883	1979 Apr 24	Souvenir sheet; airmail

## REFERENCES

- Donald, David. *The Encyclopedia of World Aircraft*. Prospero Books, Etobicoke, Canada, 1999.
- Prendergast, Curtiss. *The First Aviators*. Time-Life Books, Alexandria, Virginia, 1981.
- Wood, Ken. "Glenn Curtiss." *Stamp Collector*, 26 September 1987.

