

XV Anniversary Of World's First Official Rocket Post

by DR. MAX KRONSTEIN

ON October 15, 1954 the Club Filatelico de la Republica de Cuba commemorated the XV Anniversary of the world's first official rocket post by using a light green vignette (2 x 2 1/4 inches) with the blue image of the official cachet used in 1939 and with the additional text "XV ANIVERSARIO CLUB FILATELICO REPUBLICA DE CUBA 1954".

The covers which show the vignette have an additional blue cachet and the vignette has the postal cancellation "ADMON de CORREOS - 15 OCT 1954 - HABANA - CUBA".

These covers commemorate the first official rocket post launching of October 15, 1939. This experiment was carried out by Senor Enrique Fumes of Habana, who had constructed the actual rocket used in this postal experiment.

The official launching was preceded by a number of trial starts, some of which carried commemorative covers also. Very little had been published about the various covers of these pre-postal flights, but we have now received the pertinent data through the friendly cooperation of Dr. Tomas A. Terry, who was the chairman of the Commission which organized the Cuba experiments.

There follows a listing of the Cuba Rocket post experiments of 1939:

1. OCTOBER 1, 1939: FIRST EXPERIMENTAL START.

For the commemorative covers a grey "nonpostal" provisional stamp of the Province of Matanzas, inscribed "Consejo Provincial de Matanzas-25-Veinticinco Centavos - 25" was overprinted "PRIMER

COHETE AEREO - 1939".

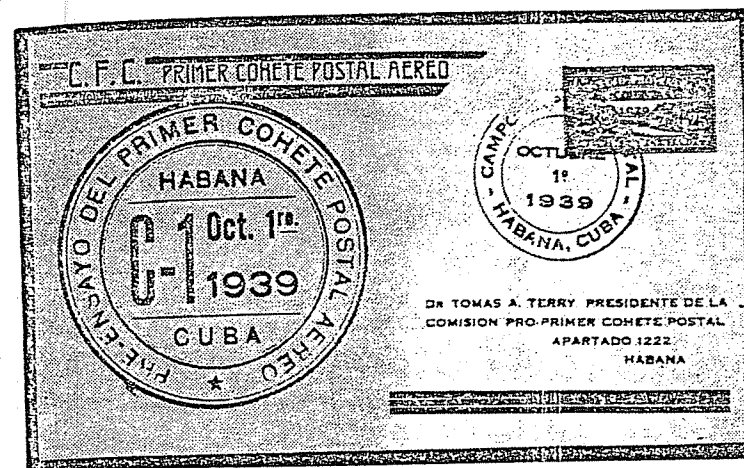
This specific provincial stamp was used, because it had initially been planned to start the official experiment at a place near the border of the province of Habana and to direct it to a point inside the province of Matanzas. This plan was later abandoned. On flown covers of the first trial flight the rocket stamp shows the cancellation "CAMP EXPERIMENTAL - OCTUBRE 1 1939 - HABANA, CUBA". A large blue commemorative cachet was applied to these covers: "PRE-ENSAYO DEL PRIMER COHETE POSTAL AEREO - HABANA - C-1 - Oct. 1re - 1939 - CUBA". The flight of this first trial rocket was unsuccessful, since the rocket went to the ground near the starting place:

NUMBER OF ROCKET STAMP FOR THE FIRST TRIAL FLIGHT - 80;

NUMBER OF COVERS - 60.

2. OCTOBER 3, 1939: SECOND TRIAL START.

Instead of the earlier rocket stamp white labels with a blue border were marked with a double line from the left lower to the right upper corner. In the upper space the marking was stamped: "C1", in the under part the value "25 C". The same cancellation was used as for the first start, but the date was changed to a "3" in blue color. The same special round cachet was used also, but again the date was changed by an overprinted figure over the earlier date in the cachet.



● Cover from the First Experimental Rocket Firing Bearing Provisional Overprinted Stamp.

This rocket flew over a distance of more than 500 meters.

NUMBER OF FLOWN COVERS - 21.

3. OCTOBER 8, 1939: THIRD TRIAL START.

This time a label was used with a red border and the text was stamped in by a rubber stamp in blue color "C1 25 C - 8 OCT. 1939 - 3R ENSAYO".

Again the same cancellation was used and the same cachet with the changed date "8" instead of "3". This rocket flew about 200 meters.

NUMBER OF FLOWN COVERS - 16.

4. OCTOBER 15, 1939. THE OFFICIAL START OF THE WORLD'S FIRST POSTAL ROCKET.

This was the first public experimental rocket launching in Latin America and was held in Habana under the auspices of the Philatelic Club of Cuba and the Department of Communications. A 10c airport stamp in green color was overprinted by the postal authorities (in

black) "EXPERIMENTO DEL - COHETE POSTAL - ANO DE 1939". 200,000 stamps were issued. The covers bear a green cachet (rocket raising above the palm trees). This cachet was designed by Mrs. Alicia Kessler, and was inscribed: PRIMER EXPERIMENTO DEL COHETE POSTAL en la America Latina - HABANA - CUBA - OCTUBRE 15. 1939. The postage stamps have the Habana postal cancellation of the day.

Since a total of 2581 covers had been posted (1000 special covers such as shown on page 1033 of the *American Air Mail Catalogue* and 1581 other covers), this total was by far greater than the capacity of the rocket. Therefore 50 covers were loaded into the rocket for the actual launching, but since they did not receive any special marking different from the other covers it is not possible to identify these 50 covers from the others.

About 300 persons attended the start at the Habana Sports Casino. The flight was not fully successful, since the rocket nose-dived, taking

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a downward twist and landing not very far from the starting place. In the accident the rocket lost its head and could not be launched again. Nevertheless, the launching of the first official postal rocket in our neighbor republic of Cuba was an historical event and collectors all over the world joined with friends there in commemorating this special anniversary.

Philatelic Agency Now Selling Stamp Packets

The Post Office Department announced recently the sale of special stamp packets through the Philatelic Agency.

A special packet containing a variety of commemorative stamps in blocks of four; including two plate number blocks, having a face value of \$2.24, plus 3c postage, total \$2.27, will be available immediately.

There is also available a smaller packet containing a variety of single commemorative, air mail, and ordinary stamps having a face value of 97c, plus 3c postage, which will sell for \$1.00. There is no limit to the number of packets an individual may purchase but registration should be provided if the stamps are to be dispatched by that service.

Remittances for these stamps should be made by postal money order or certified check payable to the Philatelic Agency and sent to the Philatelic Agency, Post Office Department, Washington 25, D. C.

Patrons may obtain a special order blank for these items from the Philatelic Agency, Post Office Department, Washington, D. C., by sending a self-addressed stamped envelope for same. To insure prompt shipment, orders for these packets should include no other stamp issues.

THE AIRPOST JOURNAL

Death Claims Famous Pioneer Trans-Ocean Pilot

It is with sincere regret that we take note of the passing of Captain R. O. D. Sullivan, an early Pan American World Airways captain who pioneered the early flights over both the Atlantic and Pacific. "ROD" as he was affectionately known by a host of friends had joined Pan American in 1929 and at the time of his retirement in 1942 had made over 100 trans-Atlantic crossings.

There was no one more willing to do favors for collectors than Captain Sullivan. He would go out of his way to extend every effort to mail covers and autograph them for collectors, very often without being requested to do so.

He was a quiet, unassuming and reserved man who took the honors bestowed upon him in his stride. Along with Captain Musick and crew members, Wright, Noonan, Canady and Jarboe, he pioneered the flight from San Francisco to Honolulu, April 16, 1933. He too was in command of the ship that flew the trial flight to Guam and returned on November 5, 1935.

ROD next came into the limelight when he inaugurated the first Atlantic service to Bermuda on March 16, 1938. The AIRPOST JOURNAL of April 1940 carried a complete review of the various Bermuda services and the cover of the same issue depicts Captain Sullivan shaking hands with the then-Colonial Postmaster of Hamilton, Bermuda.

While this inaugural flight was only to Bermuda, it was nevertheless ironical that his death should occur almost on the eve of Pan America's 50,000th trans-Atlantic crossing.

Captain Sullivan upon his retirement had joined his son in the wholesale electrical business in North Carolina and it was there that death came at the age of 62. With his passing, the former team of Musick and Sullivan has become a legend.

Richard L. Single

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