

CUBA'S OFFICIAL POSTAL ROCKET



Cuba's postal rocket program stands out ahead of all of the other early rocket programs of the world because it was the only one to be endorsed and backed by a national postal system. It was established to examine the feasibility of a rocket system that could send postal rockets from Havana to any other regional post office in Cuba.

This collection focuses on experiments carried out in early October, 1939 when the characteristics and performance of the pictured rocket were studied during three pre-test launches to specify the best configuration for an official test vehicle. The president of the rocket commission, Dr. Tomas Terry, is pictured holding the C-1 rocket. Business aspects of the project were a responsibility of Cesar Carvallo of the Cuban postal system. Technical matters were left to pyrotechnics expert, A. V. Funes. American representation in this project was provided by a well known rocket philatelist, Fred W. Kessler and his wife.

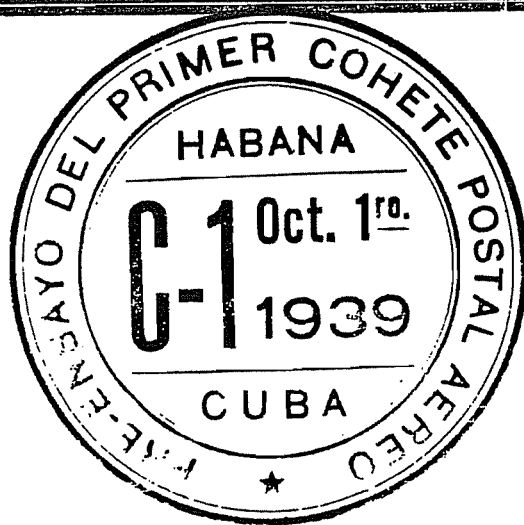
Covers actually flown on the three pre-test launches are the key items in this exhibit, because only a small number flew on each: respectively 60, 21, and 15 or 16. For the official launch, 3000 covers and cards were prepared. Next, a sample of only 200 was launched and then mixed back with the others to prevent their identification. Various stamps, varieties of stamps, cachets, souvenir sheets and cancellations were used both privately and officially by the postal service. They appear on covers and cards for the rocket launches and its many anniversaries as well as on regular mail.

First Pre-Test Launch



First test planned as a flight between provinces of Matanzas and Havana. 1903 Matanzas tax stamp was overprinted, used as franking on specially made covers. Launch actually made on army's Miramar firing range, however, rocket exploded.

C.F.C. PRIMER COHETE POSTAL AEREO



DR. TOMAS A. TERRY. PRESIDENTE DE LA
COMISION PRO-PRIMER COHETE POSTAL.
APARTADO 1222
HABANA

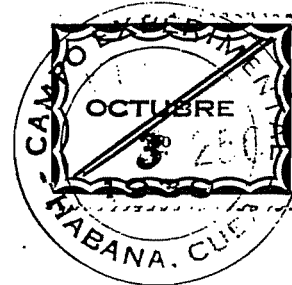
70 of these covers loaded but 10 damaged and only 60 remain. All addressed to Dr. Terry and had a cachet saying, pre-test of the first aerial postal rocket.

Second Pre-Test Launch

Instability of first test explosion was corrected by arranging 6 rocket motors around middle of rocket. Resulted in a successful second flight of 500 meters.



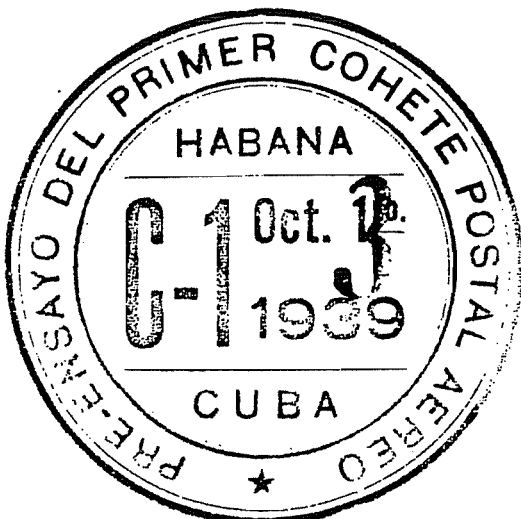
2do Pre-Ensayo
Oct. 3-1939.



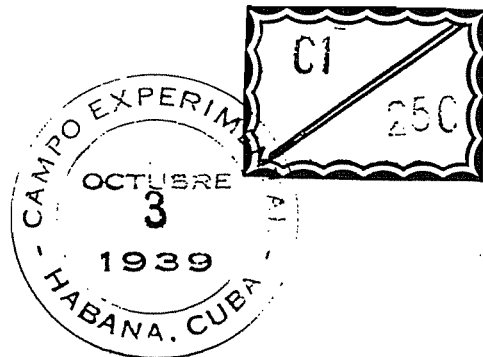
Dr. Tomas A. Terry

Habana.

For this flight, special stamps were made from gummed labels hand stamped with C1, the rocket designation, and a price, 25C. Two colors of labels were used.



2d pre Ensayo
Oct. 3-1939.



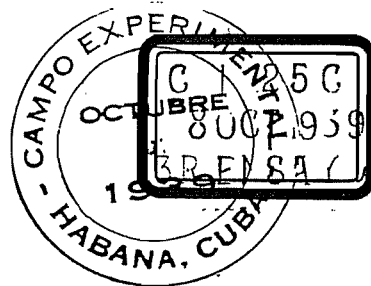
Dr. Tomas A. Terry

Habana.

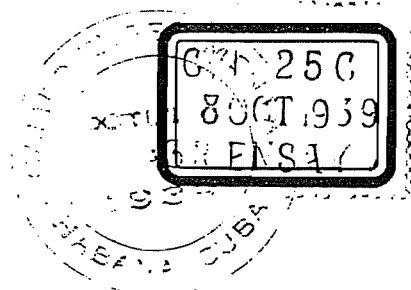
The original cachet was used again with the date over stamped for the October 3 flight date. A large 3 obliterated original day, iro, better than date stamp.

Third Pre-Test Launch

Another successful launch occurred this flight. However, at altitude, strong contrary winds caught rocket and blew it over open sea, where it chuted down.



Different special stamps were used for this flight. Basic labels have smooth borders with rounded corners and three lines of print. Again two colors used.



Most of these covers were unaddressed. This one backstamped Havana on Oct. 8.

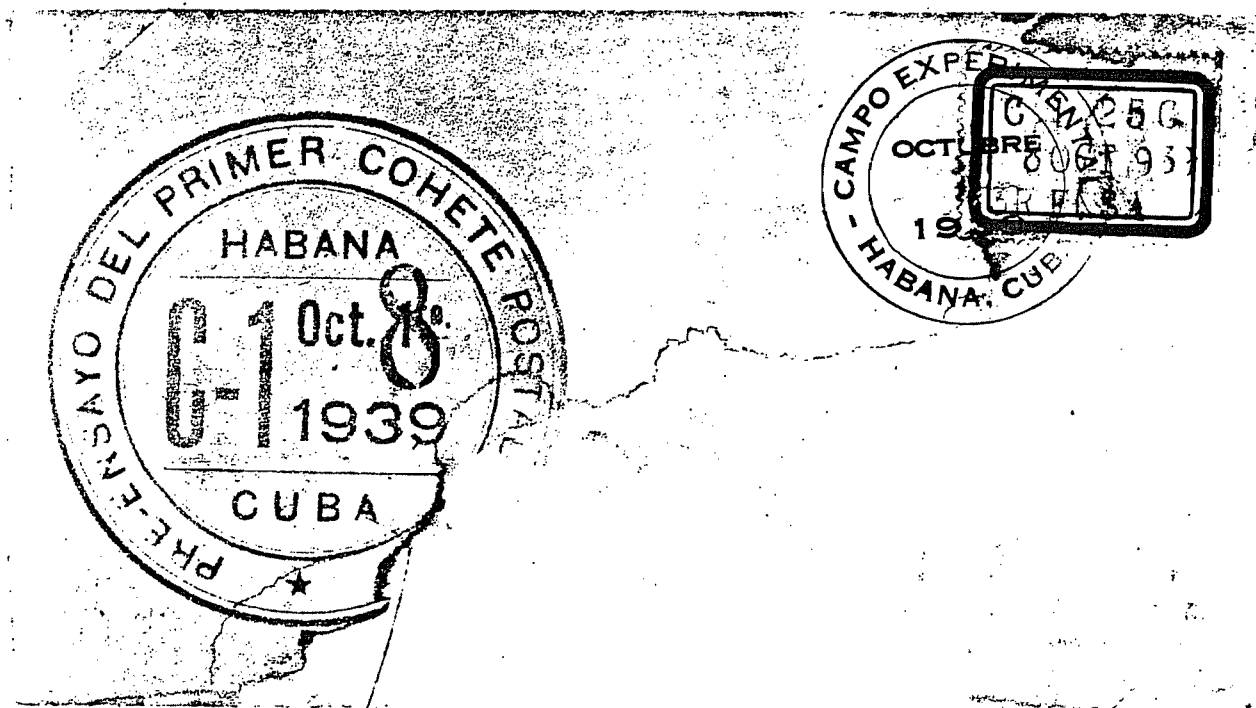
Third Pre-Test Launch



Dr. Tomas A. Terry

Habana.

Third trial cover has hybrid stamp with same label as second trial, but with a handstamped three lines of print, matching third trial, and no diagonal lines.



Reports differ on whether 15 or 16 covers were carried. This water damaged cover may be the reason for the difference. Others do not show any damage.



The first officially issued rocket stamp was printed by the Cuban Post Office, using an overprint, "Experiment of the - - Postal - - Rocket - - Year of 1939" added to 200,000 especially printed 10 centavo green national air mail stamps.

C.F.C. PRIMER COHETE POSTAL AEREO



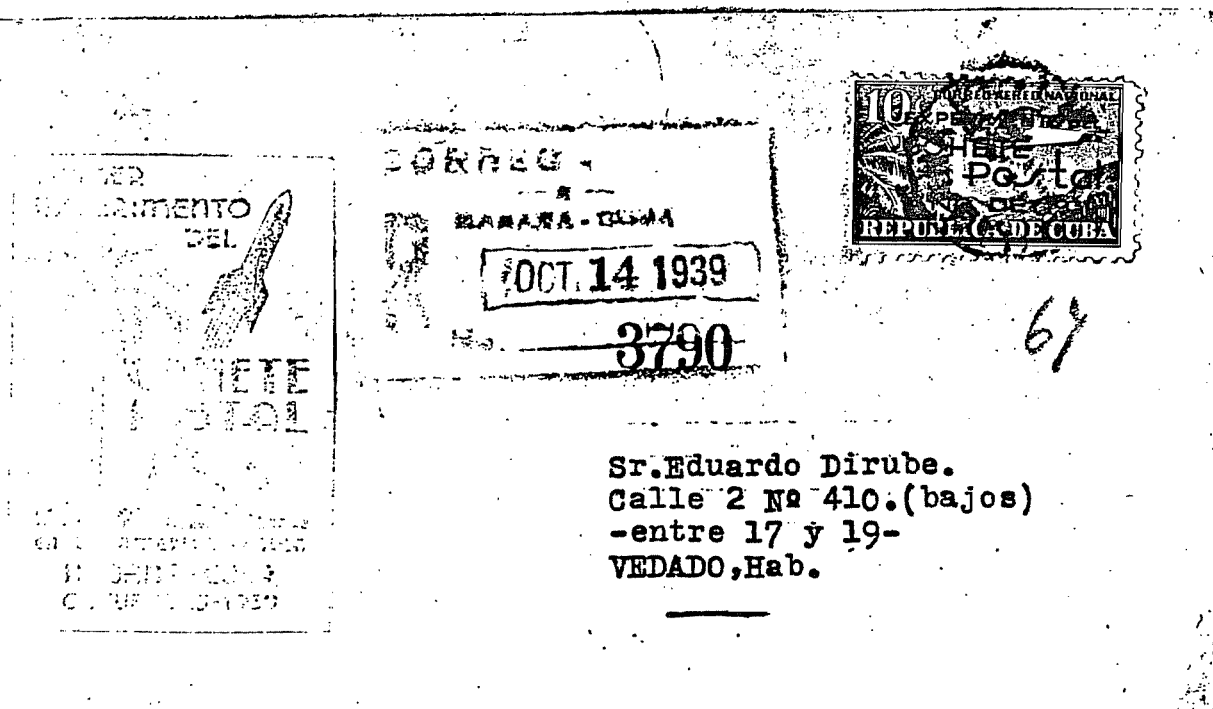
DR. TOMAS A. TERRY, PRESIDENTE DE LA
COMISION PRO-PRIMER COHETE POSTAL.
APARTADO 1222
HABANA

Although 3000 cards and covers were prepared for the flight, only 200 of them, were placed in a packet to be carried. Those 200 are not distinguishable from the others, so any one may have been carried. Special cachet was used on most.

The launch had a renewal of the stability problem as the rocket nosedived into the ground on a twisting path that covered only 15 meters. Although skeptics considered this a disaster, much technology had been learned from experiments.



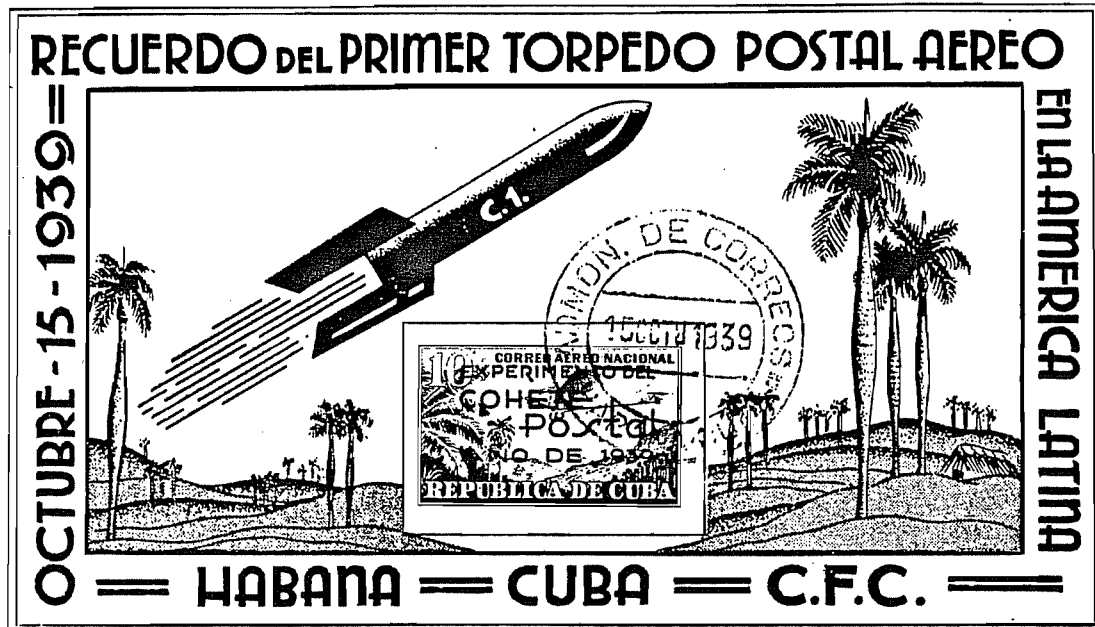
Of the total posting, there were also 50 registered covers and 500 cards. All were given cachets designed by Alicia Kessler, wife of U.S. rocket enthusiast.



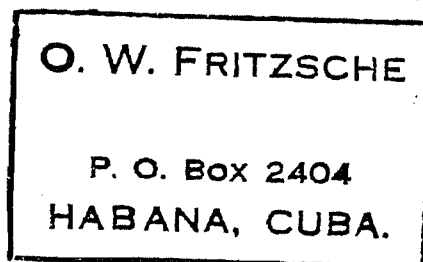
Another registered cover has handstamps in red.

Official Test Launch

Special commemorative cards designed by Mrs. Kessler were prepared for test.

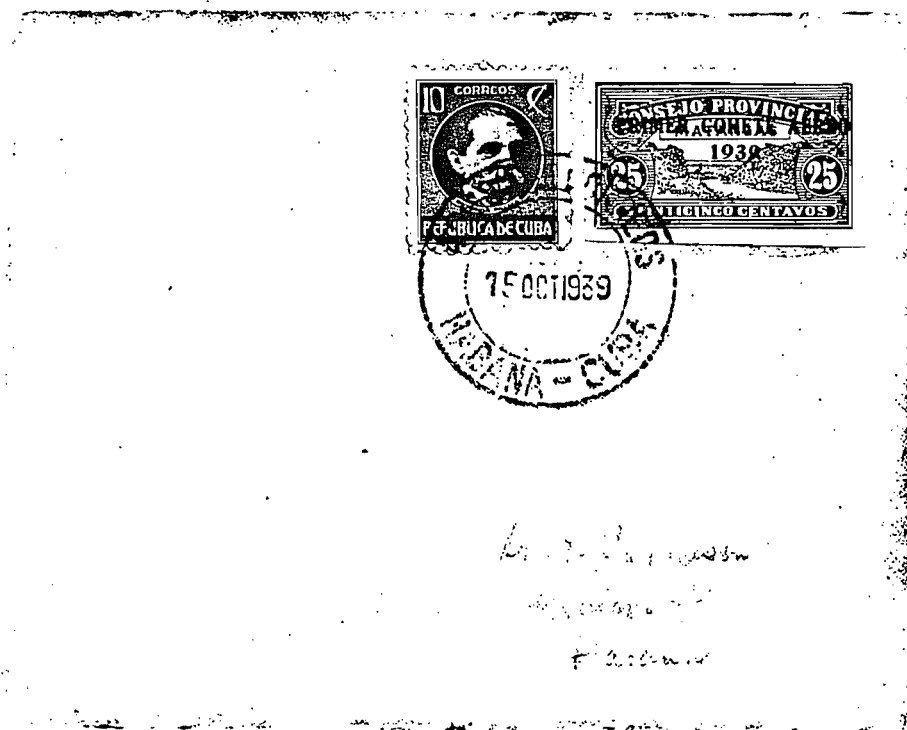


Handstamp instead of machine was used for the official cancellation on cards.



Official cachet was applied to the reverse of the cards for better appearance.

Although not official, left over Matanzas overprints were brought out once more for official and unofficial covers.



This one was used in combination with a regular stamp for meeting air mail rate, even though transmitted to Havana.



Another was used on this card which was cancelled unofficially with a "CASINO DEPORTIVO" handstamp. An official cancellation was also applied to the front and the official cachet, blue rather than black, applied to the reverse side.

PRIMER COHETE POSTAL
C - 1.

PREMIER FUSEE POSTALE



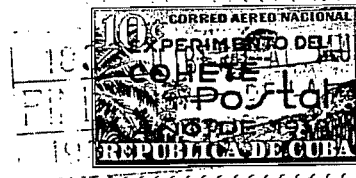
FIRST MAIL ROCKET

VALOR 20 C.

A souvenir sheet, based on Mrs. Kessler's cachet and selling for 20 centavos, was printed and sold by the rocket commission for more money to aid the project.

CORREO AEREO  VIA AIR MAIL

VIA AIRMAIL

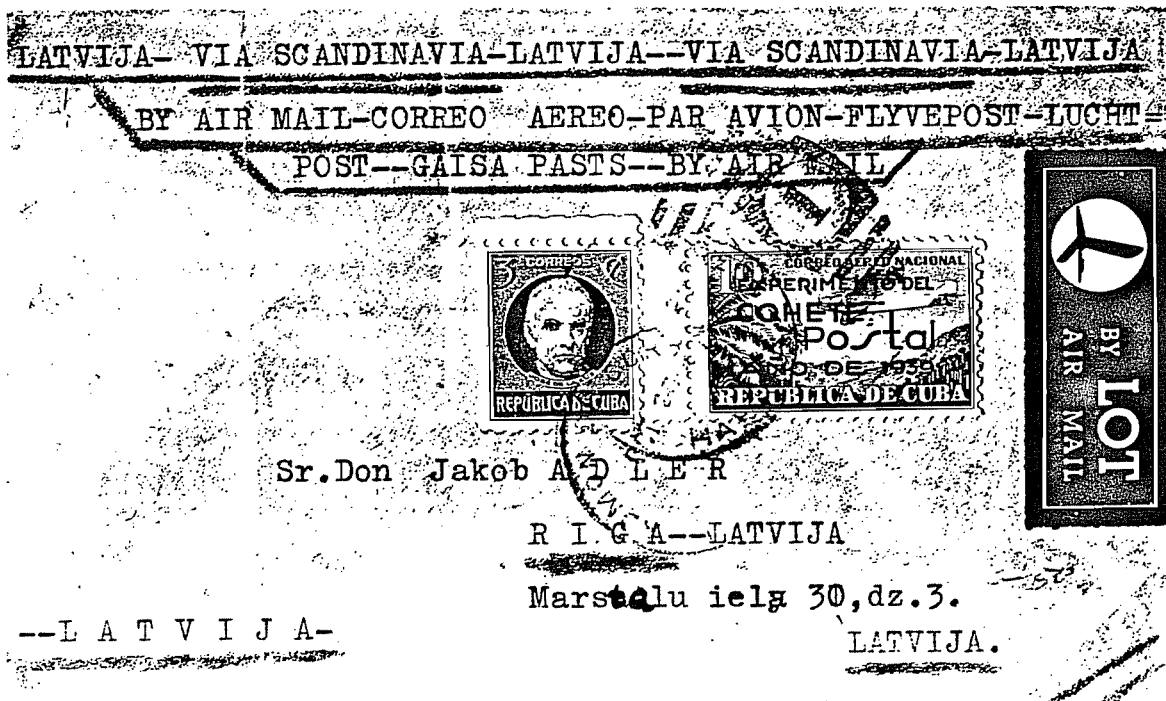


The Star Drilling Machine Co.,

Akron, Ohio,

U. S. A.

Att: Mr. J. H. Nelson.



Some of the official stamps were later used on regular air mail letters.

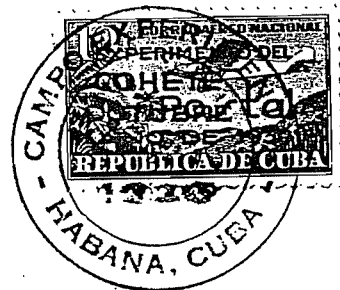
First Anniversary of Test Launch

First anniversary of official flight was again time for covers.



A special souvenir sheet picturing the official stamp was used on this cover and official cancellation applied at Havana P.O.

Rafael R. Garcia,
Apartado 129,
Habana, Cuba.



Ralph Brombach,
34 E. Willow Grove Ave.,
Chestnut Hill,
Phila., Pa., U. S. A.

Official stamp used on anniversary cover with two cachets, one preprinted and attached, the other a handstamp. Cancellation, Campo Experimental handstamp.

CLUB FILATELICO DE LA
REPUBLICA DE CUBA

OCTUBRE 15 DE 1939



OCTUBRE 15 DE 1940

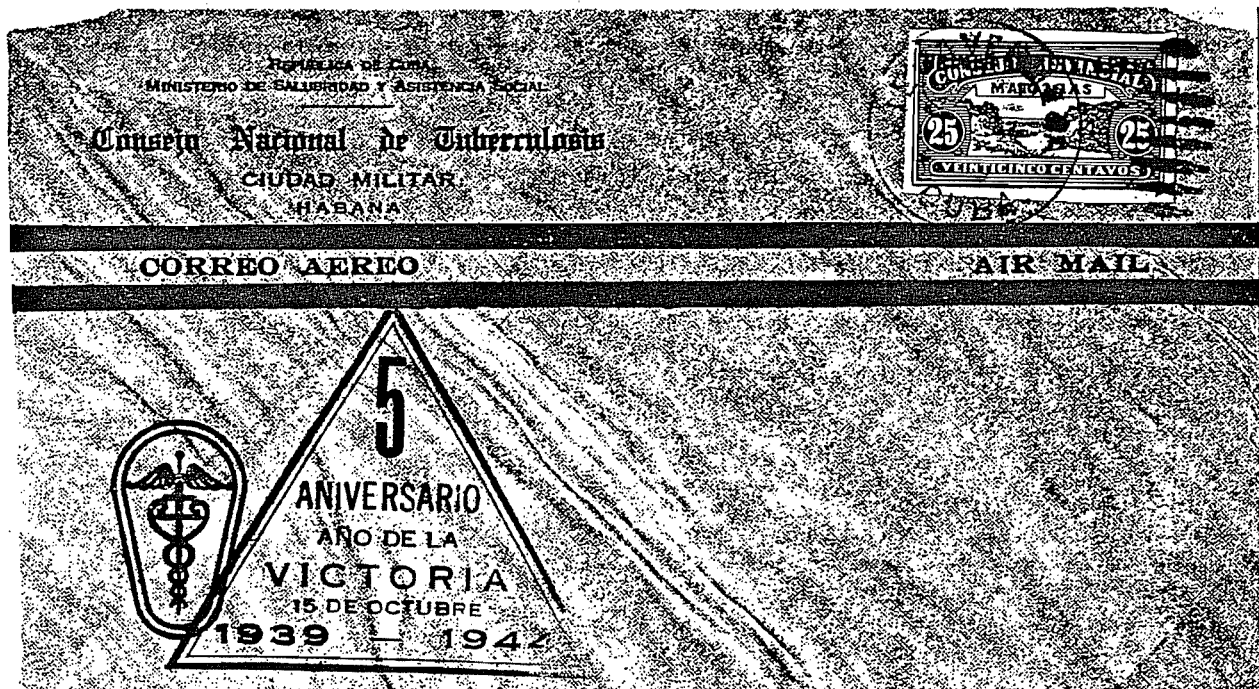
PRIMER ANIVERSARIO DEL
COHETE POSTAL AEREO

VALOR 20c.

Another similar souvenir sheet was printed and sold
for the first anniversary for the same 20 centavos.

Fifth Anniversary of Test Launch

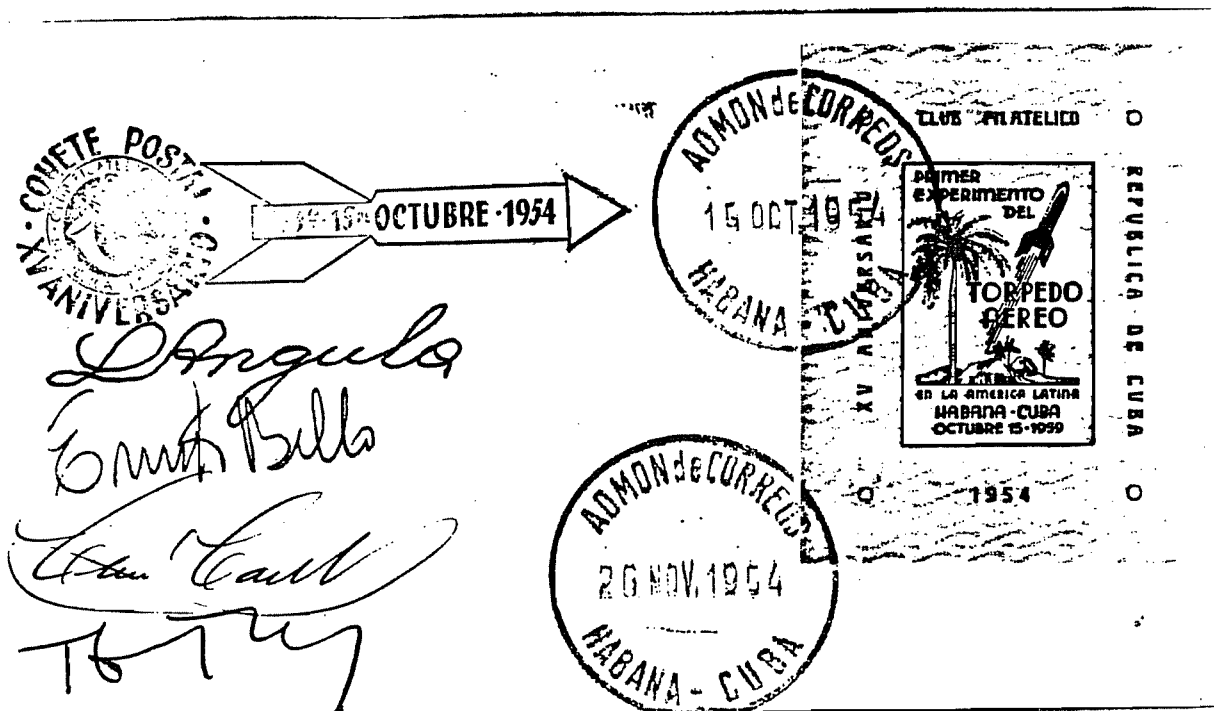
A Matanzas stamp was again used for the fifth anniversary, probably by Ernesto Bello, director for TB stamp programs and member of postal rocket commission.



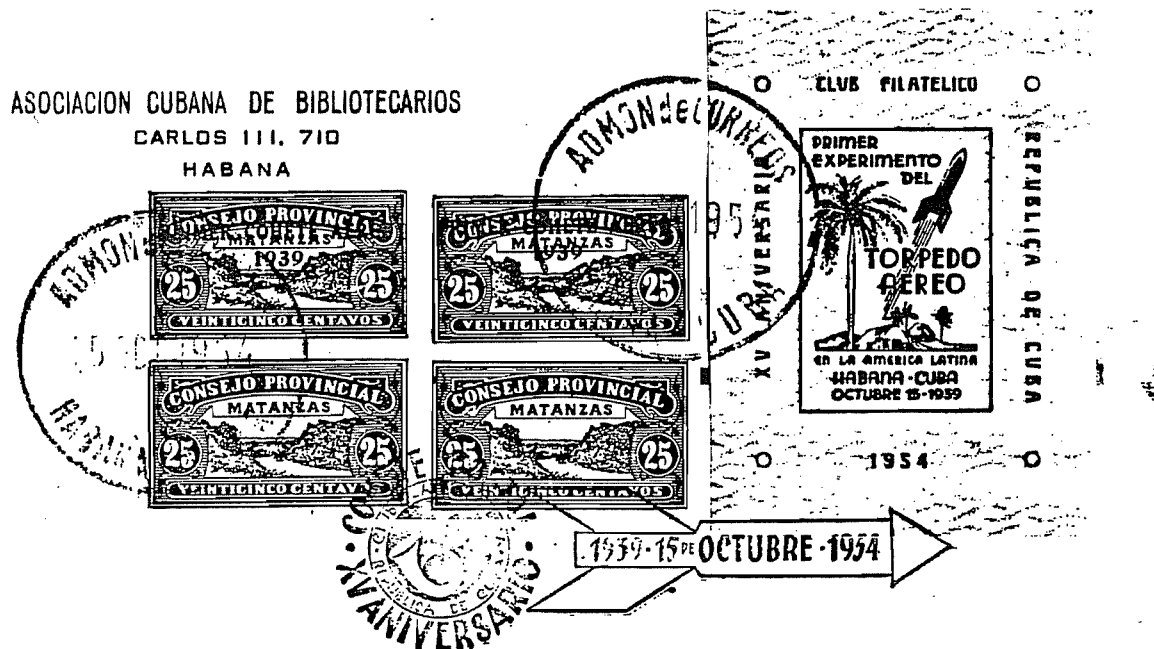
Medical and postal rocket cachets as well as Matanzas overprint, cancelled in Vieja Bermeja, Matanzas province, near Havana border site originally planned.

XV Anniversary of Test Launch

This was an occasion for a new souvenir sheet featuring the Kessler cachet and this special hand stamp rocket cachet, both provided by the "Club Filatelico."



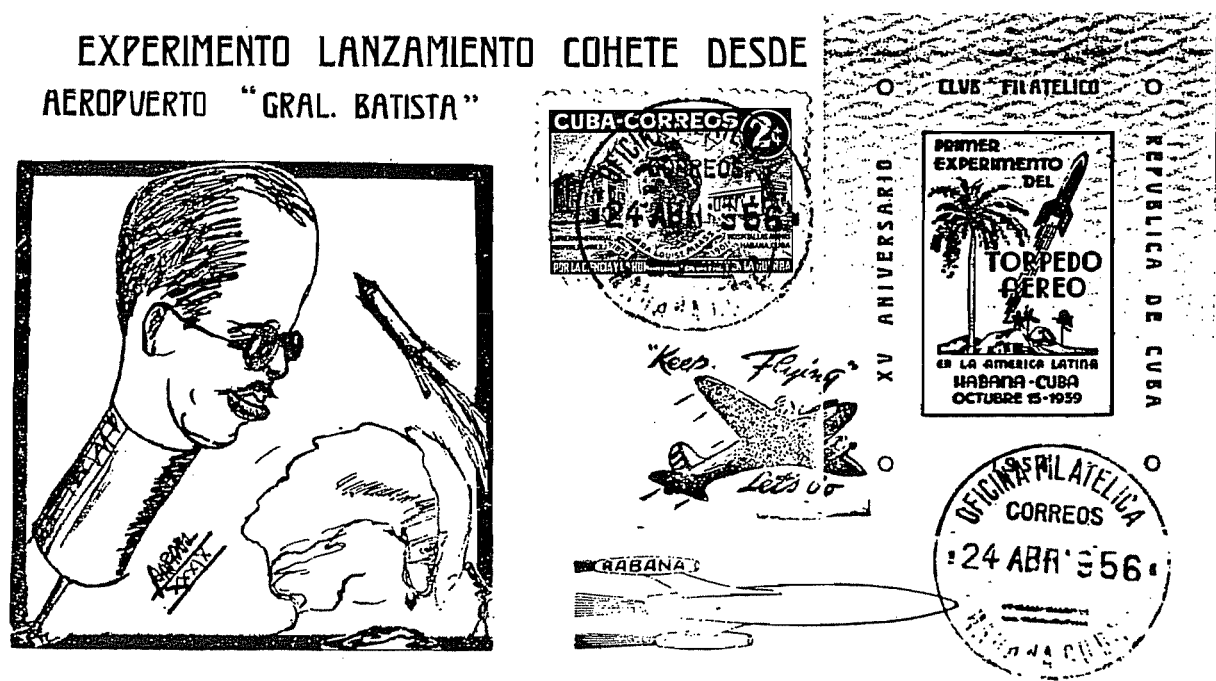
Postal service cancelled cover has signatures of Luis Angulo, president of the club; Ernesto Bello; Cesar Carvallo, chief of the postal service department of international service; and Tomas Terry, as president of the rocket commission.



Block of Matanzas stamps shows the dividing line in the overprinted sheets. The first four rows were overprinted, the last two not. This block has two of each.

XV Anniversary of Test Launch

The XV anniversary postal rocket cachet was used again on the occasion of the launching of a rocket from a jet airplane at Cuba's General Batista airport.



Franking was provided by a Clara Maass commemorative stamp on this cover, which also features the caricature of Dr. Tomas Terry and the postal rocket in 1939.