

Cuban collector disputes United States claim to first official rocket mail flight

By Dr. Tomas Terry

It started with the rocket mail experiment that occurred in Havana on Oct. 15, 1939. There is no reason for doubt or discussion about the official character of the stamp that was issued or the mail service that it effectuated; yet, at the same time, references to the legal aspects of that mail still appear in publications, mainly North American, and cast doubt on the event.

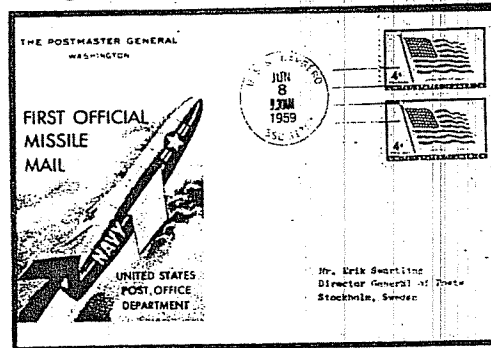
They cannot negate the fact that a stamp has been issued commemorating that test, and furthermore, the canceling of the mail that had to be transported in that experiment, under auspices of the then secretary of communications.

One need only remember the stamps that were issued dedicated to Rosillo and the International Air Train, which, in addition to its commemorative character, had the object of franking the official mail from Cayo Hueso and Havana.

The rocket stamp does not have to be the exception to the rule, but this principal objective is systematically ignored. The Scott catalog, in its 1940 edition, considered the stamp (C31) solely commemorative of mail transport by rocket without specifying official or private nature.

The Sanabria airmail catalog estimated the value of the stamp at 15 cents and defined it as experimental effectuated under the auspices of the Philatelic Club of the Republic of Cuba.

In subsequent years, all re-



This post card was issued to commemorate what the USPOD claimed to be the first official missile mail.

ferred to the stamp as the first officially issued but without reference to the first official rocket mail, which was equally inaugurated.

In summary, the stamp took the entire limelight, but not a word was said about the mail service that was instituted, which was of equal importance.

There were several aerophilatists who admitted that the mail was duly official, but they stated that we were second or third.

The then president of the Rocket Mail Society said the rocket mail of Schmiedl in Austria of March 16, 1933, was first. We had not known of this flight, and we immediately wrote to the director of mails in Vienna, who replied that his department authorized the transport of correspondence by a rocket but "without any official character." We do not feel

this matter deserves further attention.

Due to the launching of the first artificial satellite by the Soviet Union in 1957, the space thematic was started. The Cuban Postal Rocket stamp is considered the precursor, especially since very few space stamps had been issued up to that time. In North America, only three space stamps were issued by 1962.

Various tests were conducted for the transportation of mail by the medium of teledirected space apparatus. These trials were supervised by the technical personnel of the Naval Center of Projectiles, Pacific Division, at Point Magu, Calif., utilizing the Regulus-type missiles launched from submarines.

These were under the aegis of the postal officials of Los Angeles, Port Huelme and Santa Barbara, representing the United States Post Office

Department in Washington, D.C.

Approximately 50 envelopes were sent as souvenirs from the base, canceled at Point Magu, and signed by Adm. Monroe, director of the Projectile Center.

A letter to the postmaster general in Washington brought forth the response that the experimental mail had no official character.

Philatelists now had a new problem in the face of the contradiction of private mail being sent by personnel of official departments.

Many collectors were perplexed as to how to classify that correspondence; however, since none of these covers were sent directly to philatelists, they contributed nothing to the growth of aerophilately.

The majority went to selected functionaries, including the president, secretary of the Navy, admirals and other high-ranking naval officers.

In mid-1959, the USPOD announced that "the United States has commenced the experimental exploration of a new and more perfect technique in communications, that, without doubt, will be of historic significance for the people of the entire world."

On June 8, 1959, the "first official mail by rocket" took place off the Atlantic Coast aboard the teledirected rocket, Regulus.

The submarine, Barbero, proceeded from the Norfolk Naval Base with the Regulus rocket mounted on a catapult and was launched in international waters with the aid of a

JATO (jet assisted take-off) rocket and reached an altitude of 10,000 feet and the speed of sound.

The rocket was recovered in the vicinity of Jacksonville, Fla., and taken to the Aero Naval Aid Station of Mayport. The mail was then placed in the postal system, except for one envelope directed to the president, which was dispatched in a military aircraft and delivered with ceremony at the White House a few hours later.

The mail that was flown by missile consisted of 3,000 envelopes addressed to various officials, mostly government functionaries.

In order that there should be no doubt respecting the official nature of the mail, the covers were printed with the letterhead of the postmaster general.

The covers were franked

with a current 4-cent stamp and were canceled on board the submarine. The basic postal regulation was violated since the postal rate in effect at that time for airmail was 7¢, and all the envelopes should have been returned to the sender for insufficient postage.

I know of two envelopes from the Barbero that arrived in Havana. One was addressed to the embassy of a foreign country, and the other to an official of an American company. Both showed no interest and tossed them in the wastebasket. Thus, a rarity was made, and they are now sold in auctions for prices ranging to \$1,000.

Each envelope contained a letter signed by the postmaster general pointing out the great importance of the mail. It enumerated various advantages and stated, "... that this rep-

(Please turn to page 67)

A SENTRY SAFE FOR YOUR HOME IS "PEACE OF MIND" FOR YOU!

sentry



You'll sleep easier when you protect your stamps and other valuables in a burglar-resistant, fire-resistant Sentry S-8 Home & Office Safe. It's U.L. Listed! 220 pounds of protection at a low, low price. Every family should have one!

- FREE DELIVERY, CONTINENTAL U.S.
- Satisfied customers coast to coast
- Furniture cabinets available for "concealed protection"
- Low, low prices
- Top service

WRITE FOR FREE CATALOG!

Value-tique Inc., 111-C Irving St., Leonia, N.J. 07605

Cost is 100% Tax-Deductible when Safe is used to Store Income or Tax Records!

HARMERS

New York

YEAR SETS!

UNITED STATES MINT SINGLES

First official rocket mail flight . . .

(Continued from page 66)

resents the FIRST OFFICIAL EXPERIMENT of transportation realized by the Postal Service."

Yet, much later in a speech about the event, this same writer referred to the mail as "the first known official use of a projectile for the transportation of mail by a postal service."

There is no doubt that the first official use of a rocket was in Havana on Oct. 15, 1939, a full 20 years before the event of the North Americans.

It is incomprehensible to me that a postmaster general could be ignorant of this fact. On June 15, 1959, I wrote to

Gibbons sets South Africa auction

Stanley Gibbons (Pty.) Ltd., agents to Stanley Gibbons International Ltd., London, will hold a public stamp auction in the Parktown Room of the Landdrost Hotel, corner of Plein and Twist streets, Johannesburg, South Africa, Aug. 2, 7 p.m.

Admission to the sale is by catalog only. Catalogs can be obtained from Stanley Gibbons Auctions Ltd., Drury House, Russell Street, London WC2B 5HD, England, for £1 (approximately \$2.11 U.S.).

Summerfield the following:

"I have read your statements effectuated with all success by the teledirected apparatus *Regulus I*, launched the 8th of this month from the submarine U.S.S. *Barbero*.

"In reference to this mail and to the correspondence that was transported, you pronounce it 'the first official use that is known of a projectile by a postal department.'

"I regret to inform you that you have not taken into account the following information.

"The reality is that the first official correspondence by rocket was transported in Ha-

vana on October 15, 1939 under the organization and responsibility of the Cuban postal authorities with a commemorative stamp that was issued for the occasion.

"With much pleasure, I would be able to submit any other information that you deem necessary for a due rectification.

"Yours truly, /Tomas A. Terry"

Evading the issue raised in my letter, I received the following reply from the Division of Philately dated Washington, July 23, 1959.

"Dear Dr. Terry:

"Thank you for your letter of June 15 to the Postmaster-General concerning the official mail by projectile accomplished by the Department.

"The information that you expound about 'the first official mail by rocket in Havana' is very interesting and we feel very pleased to enter this information in our files.

"The Postmaster assumed

the responsibility for the dispatch of 3,000 letters transported in the projectile launched from the submarine U.S.S. *Barbero* to Florida. As you know beyond dispute, he has shown himself to be very interested in the possibility of guided missiles for transportation of mail.

"He has publicly discussed that possibility and has been present personally at the tests that have been carried out recently.

"The receivers of these letters were mainly the members of the Cabinet, Congress, and other high functionaries." The letter was signed by Franklin R. Bruns Jr., director, Division of Philately.

As can be seen, the principal Philatelic quiz

A philatelic quiz by Erik Martini is set for the meeting of the Milwaukee Philatelic Society, July 21, 7:30 p.m., Howard Johnson Motor Lodge, 1716 W. Layton Ave., Milwaukee, Wis.

objective of my letter was bypassed to treat the feasibility of rocket mail. I never doubted this and believed in its possibility 20 years earlier.

It was not necessary to affirm that 3,000 envelopes carried by *Regulus I* were not addressed to philatelists, who are exploited by having to pay increased sums of money to obtain these covers, as compared to ours which represented an expenditure of 10¢.

I also have a letter from a retired Cuban postal official dated June 20, 1960, stating that "... no one can place in doubt the official intervention in the case and the reception given it by the postal authorities.

"It is not necessary to remember that we assembled a Commission in relation to the project, the Secretary of Communications presided, with participation of the Secretary of Justice and other civil and military personalities."

Copies of this letter were sent to the director of the Divi-

sion of Philately, the *Official Gazette*, and the *Postal Bulletin*, along with other documents.

I was surprised to learn that a postal dignitary at an aerpostal congress in Washington in 1976 stated that "... we were the first to realize official rocket mail and are now likewise in establishing international communications."

I do not consider it necessary to rebut anew that incorrect statement with proofs that are already in the hands of the U.S. Postal Service, nor do I wish to repeat the arguments that demonstrate a proven fact that nobody doubts.

It is true that it is not easy to establish "first place" in a determined historic deed of historic importance, but when that fact is fully proven, one has to give wide berth to those who attribute to themselves priority to a deed first accomplished by others.

(Editor's note: This article was translated by Philip Mintz.)

● WANTED TO BUY ●
GREENLAND & FAROE ISLANDS

Scott

XX

X

©

PARCEL POST STAMPS: We Pay From 60% of Scott Value.

AND

INVESTMENT OFFERS
BUYING AND SELLING