

# Cuban rocket fiasco fizzles sale of stamp

The world's first stamp devoted to a postal rocket was issued by Cuba on Oct. 15, 1939 (Scott C31). The story behind this stamp is unusual, to say the least.

Many dignitaries gathered at the launching ceremony to wit-

## Space Topics

By Les Winick

ness a postal innovation that the experimenters felt would revolutionize communications on the island.

The Minister of Communications was anxious for the trial flight to succeed; he had visions of using postal rockets to send letters to remote villages in the mountains.

Unfortunately, his vision was slightly clouded by the head of the Postal Rocket Committee, Dr. Tomas Terry, who also happened to be his son-in-law.

Dr. Terry was an enthusiastic rocket mail collector who knew of the postal rocket experiments in the early 1920s by the Europeans.

He wanted to bring this glory to his homeland. With relatives in high places, Dr. Terry found it relatively easy to get an official postal rocket overprint for the occasion.

The technical expert of the team was a Dr. Funes who actually worked for a fireworks firm in charge of pyrotechnic displays. Two of the first three trial launchings went beauti-

fully, and the rocket performed almost flawlessly.

When the big day came, and everyone gathered around the rocket, observers kept insisting that more and more covers be stuffed in the rocket. Dr. Funes obliged and simply added additional gunpowder as fuel.

The rocket was ignited, grandly left the launch platform, fizzled and came to the ground less than one foot away.

There are several stories as to how many covers were actually flown in the rocket called "Marilyn I." (The name came from Dr. Terry's daughter who was born one week before the flight.)

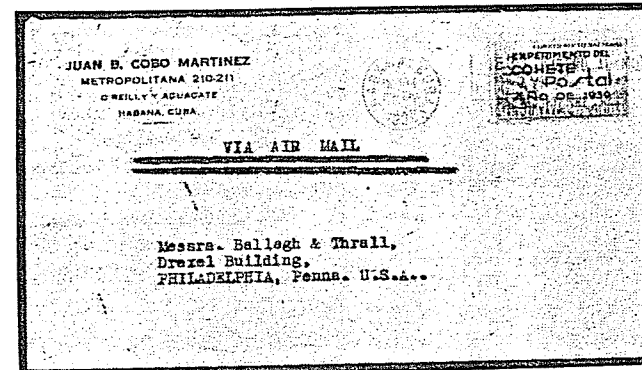
One account states that all the Oct. 15, 1939, first day covers were in the rocket.

A more reliable version claims that a maximum of 50 covers were placed in the postal rocket, and that, after the flight, these 50 were interspersed with all the other covers. Approximately 3,000 FDCs are supposed to have been produced.

Two hundred thousand of the stamps had been overprinted as authorized by Presiden-

tial Decree No. 2330 dated Sept. 1, 1939.

The proceeds from the sale of 20,000 of these stamps were to go to the Cohete Postal Commission to defray expenses for



Postally used cover dated Oct. 17, 1939, with the Cuban rocket mail overprinted stamp. The stamp was on public sale for only three days, Oct. 16-18.

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the first aerial rocket in Latin America.

Due to the poor publicity given to the rocket experiment, there was no public interest in the stamp. The stamps were taken off sale on Oct. 18, only three days after the rocket fiasco.

Since the minister of communications wanted his son-in-law to get the proceeds from the sale of 20,000 of the stamps, the stamp was used for

mass mailings of tobacco to Spain during the Spanish Civil War.

These were canceled and completely obliterated by black strokes made with large brushes by postal clerks.

The really rare covers are those postally used during the three days of public sale.

The beautiful aspect of these particular covers are that they are usually found in a dealer's miscellaneous or junk box. ■

## Sarasota sets white elephant sale

The Sarasota Philatelic Club will stage a white elephant sale July 12, 7 p.m., in the General Telephone and Electric Building, Ringling Boulevard, Sarasota, Fla.

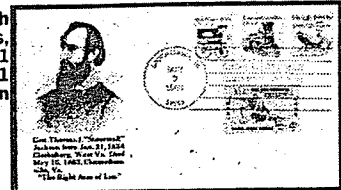
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