

## AVIATION PIONEER'S EXPLOITS STAMPED WORLDWIDE

by NICK A. CUTAJAR

Man's fascination of the bird, his longing to imitate his aloofness, be airborne above the earth, and come close to the bright sun and the glittering stars, is as old as time itself. The ancient myths about Icarus and Phaeton, who tried to make this longing a reality are well known; both, however, met with a tragic end. In the first half of the sixteenth century, Leonardo da Vinci proposed the design of a flying machine which appeared to have solved, at least in theory, the possibility of flying in planes, but unfortunately, man's technological achievements of the time were by far inferior to Vinci's genius. The mathematics of flight and physical laws concerning flight were evolved in the eighteenth century by Newton.

The actual beginnings of flight, however, followed a different path, with man constructing vehicles that were lighter than air, through balloons and airships.

Man first ventured into the air in a balloon filled with hot air, applying the principle that hot air is lighter than cold air, and thus it tends to move upwards. This happened in France in 1783, the daring young man being Pilatre de Rosier, who piloted a paper balloon made by the Montgolfier brothers.

The airship followed the successful balloon and in 1900, Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin (1838-1917), designed a manoeuvrable rigid airship taking to the air that same year. The airship became known affectionately after its German inventor. Otto Lilienthal, (1848-1896), another German aviation pioneer, dedicated himself to attempts at flying in gliders but died in a tragic crash during one of his experimental flights.

### **Aviation Anniversaries**

In many respects, 1978 is an excellent year for commemorating historic feats in aviation. Seventy-five years ago, the American brothers, Orville and Wilbur Wright, made aviation history when they flew for the first time a motorized air-machine. Gliding experiments on the sand dunes of Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, were subsequently followed by the addition of a petrol four-cylinder engine to the bi-plane. Four attempts were made, the longest, of December 17, covering a distance of 852 feet. These flights were the first in which man had been carried from the ground in sustained, controlled flight in a powered heavier-than-air machine.

It is also fifty years ago that two famous Australians, Charles Kingsford-Smith and Charles Ulm, accompanied by the Americans, Harry Lyon and James Warner, succeeded in flying across the Pacific from California, via Hawaii and the Fiji Islands, to Australia, where they landed nine days later in Brisbane.

In another epoch-making attempt, in 1928, an Irish Officer, James Fitzmaurice, Commandant of the Irish Army Air Corps, with two German aviators, Capt. Hermann Kohl and Baron Gunther von Hunefeld, took off on April 12 from Baldonnell in County Dublin on board the "Bremen", a Junkers W33 monoplane, and managed to cross the Atlantic landing on a frozen lake in Greeny Island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence on the evening of April 13. This was the first ever successful east-west crossing of the Atlantic.

Sixty years ago, the Royal Air Force came into being, established during the last year of World War I, on April 1, 1918. The Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Navy Air Service were amalgamated to become the world's first autonomous Air Force.

Postal administrations around the world lost no time (and income) and honoured through postal issues, various pioneers of aviation. Actually the avalanche of aviation-related issues had its beginning last year, when various other anniversaries connected with aviation occurred. Aviation history enthusiasts, and in particular, philatelists specializing in aviation as a theme, will have plenty of new postage stamps and other postal issues to add and choose from, emanating from almost every stamp-issuing entity.

## Lindbergh

According to ASFE (the European Philatelic Press Agency), up to the end of May, 1978, some 567 stamps and other postal issues have been issued, which directly or indirectly honour the American aviation pioneer Charles Lindbergh. By the end of the current year, the number is bound to increase as there is always an issue every month from some corner of the world, celebrating the man who in 1927 on board single-handed of the "Spirit of St. Louis", crossed the Atlantic from New York to Paris in  $33\frac{1}{2}$  hours. That event earned the controversial Lindbergh wild enthusiastic acclaim in France, Belgium, England as well as his home country. Last year several countries paid home to Lt. Charles Lindbergh and his mono-plane's accomplishment, but maybe the most controversial issue in this regard was that released by the U.S. Postal Service.

It was a single 13-cent stamp depicting the "Spirit of St. Louis" over the stormy Atlantic and tactfully omitting the mention of the man who had succeeded to accomplish the first solo transatlantic flight, the U.S. Postal Service sought to commemorate.

While the U.S. paid a token homage to him, other countries made it up by producing lavishly designed stamps, some of which included a portrait of Charles A. Lindbergh. Grenada, for example, released a set of seven stamps plus a Souvenir Sheet to mark the 75th Anniversary of the Zeppelin's first controlled flight and Lindbergh's solo crossing of the Atlantic, with his portrait on two stamps and the airman in the cockpit of the "Spirit" on another. In March, another issue composed of seven odd stamps and a Sheet was released by Dominica, commemorating the same aviation pioneers as Grenada, the first four dedicated to Lindbergh, the other to Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin (1838-1917).

## **The Wright Brothers**

Pride of place this year goes to the Wright Brothers, who are portrayed on several postage stamps. Antigua, in March, dedicated a set of seven and a block to the Wrights, depicting various mechanical and aeronautical aspects of the first engined aircraft flown seventy-five years ago. Togo too had another six stamps and a sheet, one stamp showing Orville Wright injured in the first airplane crash of 1908.

This was followed by Dominica in July with a set of four and a S.S. honouring W. & O. Wright. The 40c stamp shows the 1908 Flyer, which was flown in Europe where the Wright Brothers met with King Edward VIII of England and King Alfonso of Spain. The Souvenir Sheet accompanying the Dominican set portrays the Wrights with their Flyer III and symbol, while the upper half of the border incorporates a variety of pre-Wright Brothers flying machines and gliders.

Turks & Caicos Islands, in promoting a six-valued set, themed "Progress in Aviation" and issued in July, combined the achievements of the Wrights with local aviation. The 1c stamp showed Flyer III, based on a famous 1908 photograph, flying over New York's Statue of Liberty, implying easy access to the Islands. A Cessna 337, known locally as the "Push and Pull", because of the front and back props, is depicted on the 6c stamp, the plane used for local traffic between the Islands and the weekly service to Hawaii. Wilbur Wright's portrait signature appear on the \$2 stamp.

The Maldive Islands, in February 1978 issued a ten-value set honouring not only the Wright Brothers, but other aviation pioneers such as Otto Lilienthal of Germany, the English A.V. Roe, Clifton Hadley and O. Chanute. Otto Lienthal's 1891 guider, the balloon of the French Montgolfier Brothers, the Wright Brothers' monoplane and Bleriot's machine are featured on the annual Youth Stamps of the Federal Republic of Germany.

The United States marked the 75th anniversary of the Wright Brothers' historic first powered flight of 1903 with a pair of 31-cent international airmail

stamps, issued on September 23 in Dayton, Ohio, the hometown of the Wrights. The brothers left Dayton with their airplane on September 23, 1903, headed for Kitty Hawk, North. The stamps were designed by Ken Dallison who is noted in the art world for portraying man's achievements with machinery with drawings featuring both people and the machines they operate. The stamps honouring the Wright Brothers are the first in a new series of international airmail stamps to be issued over the next few years. Subsequent stamps in the series will honour other American aviation pioneers and significant aviation developments.

The technical characteristics are of some importance. The stamps were printed by the offset and intaglio methods, yellow, red, brown, blue and black the offset colours, blue and black the intaglio colours. The U.S. Postal Service noted that green phosphor rather than red phosphor was used in "tagging" the stamps during production. Phosphor is the element in the stamp design which activates automatic mail processing equipment. Before domestic airmail was phased out in the United States, it was necessary to use two types of phosphor to differentiate between airmail and first-class mail. That requirement no longer exists and the green phosphor is less expensive to use in production.

### **Charles Kingsford-Smith**

On 31 May, 1928, Charles Kingsford-Smith and Charles Ulm together with navigator Harry Lyon and radio operator James Warner, took off from Oakland Field in San Francisco to fly the 7,389 miles to Eagle Farm, Brisbane, Australia. During this epoch-making flight, their aircraft, the "Southern Cross", was to fly via Honolulu in Hawaii and Suva in Fiji.

In March, Australia paid homage to Kingsford-Smith and Ulm, as well as to two other famous Australian pilots, Bert Hinkler and Harry Hawker through four stamps each of 18-cent denomination. A Souvenir Sheet adjoining the issue, incorporated four imperforate stamps, two of the Kingsford-Smith design and two of the Ulm design, alongside an interpretation of the "Southern Cross" on its flight across the Pacific. Meanwhile, Australia celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the Royal Flying Doctor Service with a single 18-cent stamp, showing a Baron Beechcraft coming to land at a station airstrip.

Kingsford-Smith and Ulm touched down at the Albert Park Sports Oval in Suva on the afternoon of Tuesday, 5 June, during their Trans-Pacific Flight. The "Southern Cross" was the first aircraft ever to land in Fiji, necessitating contingency plans both for the landing and the take-off of June 7. The "Southern Cross" touched down at Eagle Farm, Brisbane on June 10, 1928, where it is now preserved and displayed; the aircraft used by Kingsford-Smith was a Fokker F.VIIB-3M powered by three 215 h.p. Armstrong Siddley Lynxes.

On June 26, Fiji commemorated the historic landing of the "Cross" and the Trans-Pacific flight with the issue of two stamps one of which showed the "Southern Cross" after landing at Suva, the other prior to take-off from Fiji at Naselai Beach. Another stamp in the Fijian issue commemorated the Wright Brothers first flight on December 17, 1903.

## **The Royal Air Force**

The Isle of Man had very close links with the RAF and a set of four stamps from the Isle commemorated the 6th Anniversary of the Royal Air Force, reflecting aircraft development of the last six decades. The fourth stamp in the Fijian series referred to earlier, also commemorated the RAF Anniversary, the stamp showing the famous Bristol Fighter F2B.

This aircraft was the most successful of F.S. Barnwell's many designs for the British and Colonial Aeroplane Company. The earlier version, the F2A was armed with a centrally mounted synchronised Vickers machine gun and a single Lewis in the rear cockpit. The improved version, F2B had the same armaments but incorporated wider-span tailplanes, modified from lower centre and better vision from the front cockpit. Its assignments during World War I became famous and it was much feared and respected by the enemy. The Bristol Fighter was also used in Palestine and Italy. Some five thousand five hundred Bristols were ordered by the Royal Flying Corps. Plans were drawn up for large scale production of the Bristol Fighter in the United States, but only twenty-seven aircrafts were built before the contract was terminated. The Bristol Fighter remained in post-war RAF service as a standard type until 1932, and is shown on the 30c stamp from Fiji, while a Bristol Scout of 1915 is shown on the 7p value of the four-value series from the Isle of Man.

## **Aviation Progress**

Charles Kingsford-Smith, the Wright Brothers and the Dutchman Anthony Fokker are pictured on a series of four from Western Samoa. The Falkland Islands on April 28, 1978 marketed a two-stamp issue to mark the 26th Anniversary of the First Direct Flight from Southampton, U.K. to Stanley, on East Falkland. Ghana, on the other hand, sought to celebrate the progress in aviation over the years and during the same month, released four stamps proposing to mark: the first powered flight of the Wright Brothers on the 8p stamp; the first practical airliner, the Heracles on the 30p; the first jet airliner D.H. Comet, on the 60p; and the first supersonic airliner, the Concorde, on the 1cd.

The Concorde was also the subject of four stamps released by the new Hebrides Condominium on May 0, this year. It is, of course, particularly appropriate that Concorde, a prime example of Anglo-French co-operation in

*(Continued on page 27)*

*(Continued from page 24)*

the scientific and technical fields, should be commemorated philatelically by the Condominium, a country that has been jointly governed by Britain and France since 1906. National airlines were the subject of other stamp issues which reflected aviation progress. Thus the Philippines, last year marked the 50th Anniversary of Pan Am with a set of stamps while Spain marked IBERIA's fiftieth anniversary last year too. Czechoslovakia, this year hosting PRAGA 78, the International Philatelic Exhibition, during 1977 had a set dedicated to early aviation, while Hungary, in October 1977 had a set of airmail stamps depicting modern aircrafts and in November dedicated a set to the history of the airship. Soviet aircraft industry was the subject of a set of 6 stamps released in August 1977.

*(Continued on page 32)*

*(Continued from page 27)*

## **Famous Air Posts Exhibition**

The May display in Stanley Gibbons' Romano House Gallery was dedicated to rarities and historical souvenirs which portray the exciting and imaginative development of pioneer airway and postal services over continents, oceans and polar regions, spanning the period of the 1830's onwards to the late 1920's. Famous names were represented by stamps and covers, some of which signed, of Lindbergh, Kingsford-Smith, Alan Cobham and others whose contributions to aviation enabled the possibilities of today.