

AIR POSTS OF NEWFOUNDLAND

by Gilbert A. Penny

Along with the famous and infamous who, in their early attempts to fly, met with either spectacular success or complete failure, were those with their feet on the ground and their eyes to the future use of the airplane. One such person was Postmaster General J. A. Robinson of Newfoundland, who in looking to the use of aircraft for carrying mail, gave to the Philatelic world a slice of aviation history rivaling the adventures of "Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines". Thus, for the collector of airmails and for the collectors of British North America stamps, one of the most exciting collections to assemble, study and write-up is that of the airpost stamps of Newfoundland. The stamps are steeped in the history of aviation and with the lives of people that helped make aviation a way of life for "Man and His World".

The first of the Newfoundland airs (C1) was an overprint "First Trans-Atlantic Air Post, April 1919" on two hundred copies of the three-cent, red-brown Trail of the Caribou issue (117). This stamp is a rarity of the Philatelic world, as it was issued for an attempted (first) non-stop flight over the Atlantic from Newfoundland by pilot H. G. Hawker and his navigator Grieve. For this flight, Postmaster General Robinson had 200 copies overprinted at the "Daily News" office. Ninety-five of these copies were actually used on mail; eighteen others were either destroyed or damaged; eleven were presented to officials; and, seventy-six mint copies were sold to the general public for \$25.00 each, with the money going to the Marine Disaster Fund. Failure was the reward of Hawker and Grieve. Approximately 1500 miles out to sea, their aircraft was forced down. They (and the mail they carried) were rescued by a ship. The mail was later delivered to its destination as evidenced by the back stamp on the covers.

Another attempt at a trans-Atlantic flight also ended in failure. In this instance, the aircraft Raymor, piloted by Captain Raynham, crashed at St. Johns, Newfoundland. For this flight, PM Robinson prepared a small quantity of special stamps by overprinting in manuscript, the words "Aerial Atlantic Mail, JAR" (SG-142a) on the same 3 cent Trail of the Caribou used for the Hawker attempt. Since this stamp was manuscript overprinted, it is considered by

some collectors to be a provisional and not an attempt at an "official" air mail; but, since there was not a definitive air mail stamp in existence, this point is open to a bit of academic debate.

Actually, there were two attempts by the Raymor in 1919 (May and July), both ending in a crash. As a result, there are less than ten examples of this particular stamp in existence. It is here that PM Robinson demonstrated his faith in the future of "air mail". He had the overprint "1st Atlantic Air Post, Martinsyde, Raynham, Morgan", applied to the one-cent green; two-cent red; three-cent red-brown; five-cent ultramarine; and twenty-four cent bistre stamps (SAN, 3-7) of the 1919 Trail of the Caribou issue. Although these airmail stamps were prepared, they were not released for issue. Airmail was still in the crawling stage. A second attempt at an airpost stamp was the overprint "Trans-Atlantic Air Post, 1919. One Dollar" (C2) on the fifteen-cent scarlet, Seals stamp of the Cabot issue (70). This particular stamp was over-printed for use on the mail carried on the first successful flight across the Atlantic by Alcock & Brown (St. Johns, Newfoundland to Derrygimla, Cliffden Co., Galway, Ireland). For this particular feat, Alcock & Brown shared a \$50,000 prize offered by the London Daily Mail, and in addition, received Knighthoods. As a point of interest, their Vickers-Vimey twin-engined biplane made an average speed of 120 miles per hour and completed the trip in sixteen hours and twenty-seven minutes.

Once again, anticipating a continued need for air mail stamps, PM Robinson had Mr. J. Withers of the "Royal Gazette" overprint another 10,000 of the fifteen-cent Seals stamp. For the specialist this overprint produced a series of varieties. The overprinted stamps were issued in sheets of twenty-five on which there were 17 normal surcharges: seven were without the comma after the word "POST" and one was without the period after "1919". Of the 10,000 stamps available, 6,800 were normal; 2,400 were of type B; 400 type C; and 400 of type D (see FIG. 1).

The third airport stamp was an overprint "Air Mail to Halifax, N.S. 1921" (C3) on the red thirty-five cent Iceberg off St. Johns stamp of the Cabot issue. There were 14,000

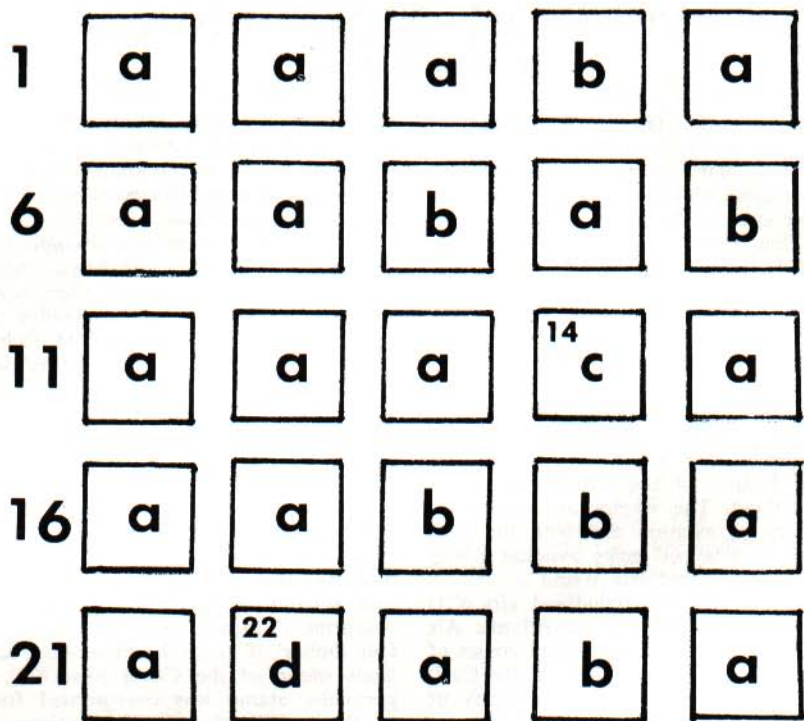


FIG. 1

stamps of this particular issue overprinted by the Post Office for use on the proposed airmail service from Botwood, Nfld. (a pulpwood and mining community of 1300 people situated on the North Shore) to Halifax, N.S. A number of attempts were made to carry the five-thousand or so letters scheduled for this service, but they were finally forwarded by surface mail. Another group of constant varieties was produced by this overprint. Of the 14,000 stamps issued, 3,920 were with normal surcharge; 5,600 had no period after "1921"; 560 had the first "l" of "1921" under the "f" of "Halifax" as well as, no period after "1921"; 2,240 had a spacing of 1.5mm between "Air" and "Mail" (normal has 2.75mm spacing); 1,120 of the small spacing, had no period after 1921; 560 had no period after "1921", and the first "l" of "1921" is under the "f" of "Halifax" (see FIG 2).

The fourth in the overprint series is the sixty-cent Henry VII (74) of the Cabot issue with the overprint "Air Mail De Pinedo 1927" (C4). Three-hundred of the Henry

VII stamps were overprinted by Robinson & Co. Ltd., of St. Johns, Nfld. for use on mail to be carried by the Italian Commander, Francesco De Pinedo on his attempted non-stop flight to Europe in the seaplane Santa Maria II. De Pinedo, like many a predecessor, developed engine trouble and was forced down at sea. At the Azores, repairs were made and he resumed his flight and finally reached Rome. Of the 300 stamps issued, 230 were used on correspondence; Commander De Pinedo was presented with 66 copies; and 4 were destroyed.

On October 9, 1930, the monoplane Columbia, piloted by Captain J. E. Boyd and Lt. H. P. Connor, left Harbour Grace (a fishing town of 2,000 population and the landing point for the cable from England) and flew to Croydon Airport, London, England. D. Thistle (of the Royal Gazette) had, at the request of PM Robinson, overprinted 300 of the thirty-six cent Trail of the Caribou stamps (126) "Trans-Atlantic Air Mail by B. M. Columbia, September 1930 Fifty Cents" (C5) for use on the flight. The New-

1	b	a	b	c	⁵ f
6	d	a	d	b	a
11	b	a	b	b	¹⁵ e
16	b	d	a	d	a
21	b	a	b	b	²⁵ e

FIG. 2

foundland post office, in order to prevent cornering the market, restricted the sale to the envelope. In order to reduce the risk of overprint errors, this stamp was overprinted in blocks of four. Less than one-hundred and fifty mint copies of this stamp are known to exist; twenty of which were in the original blocks of four. Experts have cautioned that forgeries of the "Columbia" overprint exist and care should be exercised when acquiring a copy from other than a reliable source.

In 1931, Newfoundland issued its first definitive series of airport stamps (C 6-8). They were designed by A. B. Perlin and were issued in three values; fifteen-cents, fifty-cents and one dollar. The fifteen-cent issue depicting an aircraft over a wooded snow scene with dog train was for use on local air mail; the fifty-cent depicting a Vickers-Vimey leaving St. John along with a sailing packet was for use on airmail to Canada and the United States; the one-dollar issue depicted the trans-Atlantic

routes of historic flights and was for use on trans-Atlantic mail. In May of 1932, at the direction of the Post Master General, 8,000 of the \$1.00 trans-Atlantic stamps (C8) were overprinted "Trans-Atlantic West to East Per Dornier DO-X May, 1932. One Dollar and Fifty Cents" (C12), for use on the return leg of the DO-X flight to Germany. Of the 8,000 stamps overprinted (by Mr. D. R. Thistle), slightly over 1,800 were actually on flight covers (these covers are dated May 19 or 20). For the specialist, C6 thru 8 were reissued on watermarked paper (C9 thru 11).

Nineteen thirty-three saw the issuance of a new definitive set of airmail stamps (C13-17). They were issued in values of five, ten, thirty, sixty and seventy-five cents. The five-cent stamp depicted a covey of Ptarmigan put to flight; the ten-cent stamp depicted a fishing and camping scene; the thirty-cent stamp depicted a group of sealers on the ice; the sixty-cent value depicted a schooner

(Continued on page 173)