

BNAPS  
AIR MAIL  
STUDY  
GROUP

VOLUME 8 - NUMBER 2

AUGUST 2000

**CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS:**

This is my last opportunity to advise you about our BNAPEX 2000 plans and to invite you all to come to Schaumburg and have a hand in running the Study Group.

We will have a Study Group Meeting. There will be a short business meeting and we will follow it with a "Show and Tell" session. To make this worthwhile we need each attendee to bring some recently, perhaps, acquired gem with a story. Come and tell us what you saw in the stamp or cover and help us to watch out for like items in the "junk" boxes.

Derek Rance has volunteered to put 16 pages together for the Study Group One Frame Exhibit. I know this will be well researched and documented and will make us all aware of the vast number of untold stories that are around.

I look forward to seeing you there.

Sincerely,

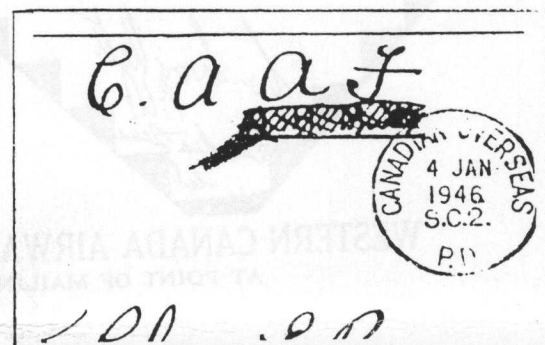
*Ed*

**MYSTERY COVER OF THE MONTH:**

In the April issue of this Newsletter a question was raised as to what the CAAF on a military letter might mean.

John Wannerton has come through with his explanation - saying that he didn't know it was well known to be, "Canadian Army Active Force".

Thanks John for the help.



**AND THE FOLLOWING FROM DAVID WHITELEY:**

2. Regarding the Mystery Cover of the Month I would make the following observations and answer the questions raised. The endorsement "C.A.A.F." stands for Canadian Army Active Force. i.e. Canadian Army forces actually engaged. The Canadian Overseas P.D. was the Canadian overseas Post Office in this case because of the S.C.2. in the dater in London England through which forces mail went before being forwarded to an individuals unit or local A.P.O. or F.P.O. the letter was from Sapper K62177 M. Rook. Sapper Rook would have been a private in the Canadian Royal Engineers. Hopefully this will help clarify the endorsements and cancellations on the letter

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Pilot Signatures:

In an effort to save on space I will trim the covers with the pilot signatures to a slogan size and identify the name. If you should ever want the flight # etc please let me know. BSB.

PER S.S. "EMPRESS of AUSTRALIA"

VIA FIRST AIR MAIL SERVICE

QUEBEC to STRAIT OF BELLE ISLE

AFTER FIVE DAYS RETURN TO

A S Schneider

*A. Schneider*  
Pilot

K F Saunders

*K F Saunders*  
Pilot

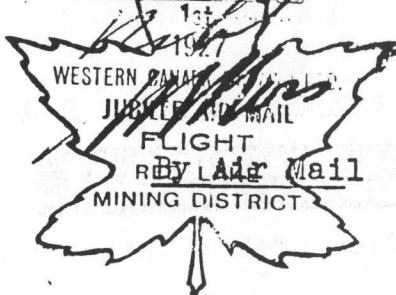
K F Saunders

*K F Saunders*  
Pilot

W. Woollett

*W. Woollett*  
Pilot  
Canada  
ht

WESTERN CANADA AIRWAY  
AT POINT OF MAILING



G.

G.

A. M. Ross

SACHIGO RIVER - ILFORD

*P. Davoud*

P. Davoud



*J.B. Home-Hay*  
Pilot

J.B. Home-Hay (Red printed by rubber stamp)

PAUL B  
CALDER

C.M.G.  
FARRELL

AFTER FIVE DAYS RETURN TO

VIA AIR



*J.P. Calder*  
*P.B. Calder Pilot*

*Zebulon Lewis Leigh*  
*Pilot*

*R.W. Stale*

*Edmund*

*James A. Leigh*  
*Inspector of Postal Service*  
*Zebulon*  
*Pilot*

W.M. Willson,

McLennan,

Alta.

Z. LEIGH

This pilot often signed Z L Leigh or Z Leigh. His name was Zebulon Lewis Leigh. See also Page 19 Apr 97.

Via Air Mail

First Flight: The Pas -

Tavane, N.W.T.

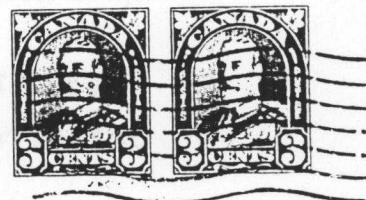
A F MACDONALD

*A.F. Macdonald*

A. F. Macdonald) Flt. Lt.

Officer Commanding

No. 3 G.P.D. R.C.A.F.



Edward R. Tavender,

1211 Colbourne Crescent,

CALGARY, Alberta.

N A DUVAL

*N.A. Duval*

Chibougaman - Oskelaneo - Chibougaman  
(Round Trip)

VIA OSKELANEO, P.Q.

**AIR MAIL**

**FLIGHT 3011 TO ENGLAND:**

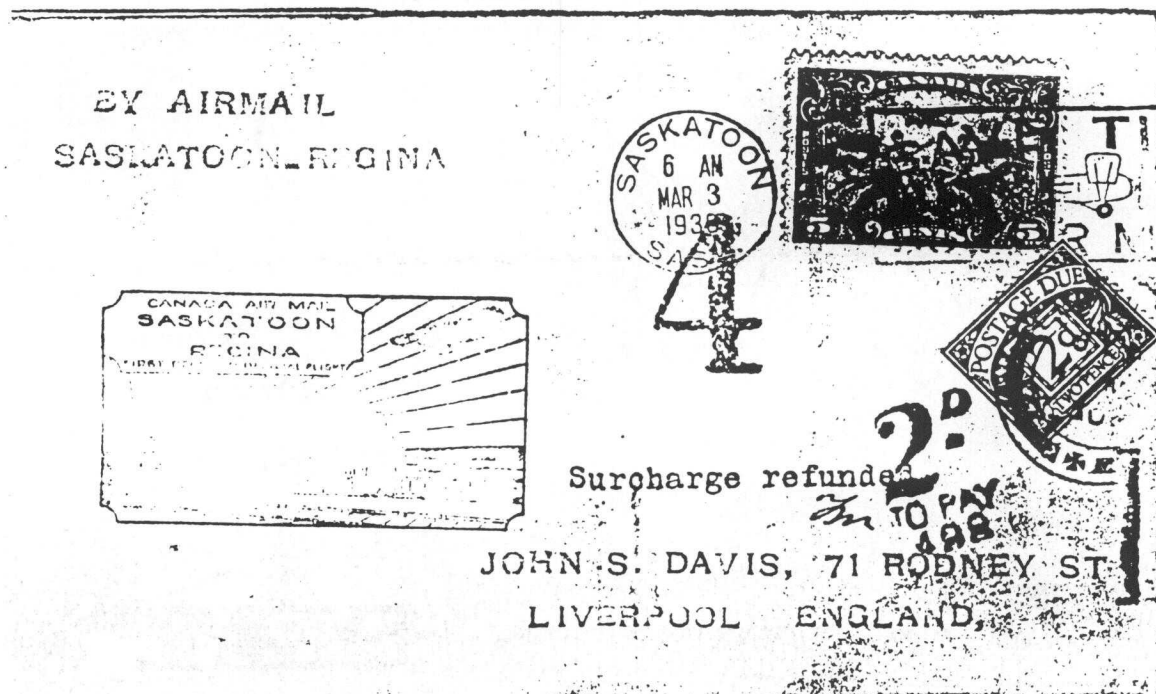
IN APRIL 2000 ISSUE OF THE NEWSLETTER WE SHOWED 2 COVERS FROM FLIGHT 3011 WHICH WERE SENT TO A DEALER IN ENGLAND. THE PROBLEM WAS OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE REFUNDING OF WHAT COULD BE A PROPER 2¢ SURCHARGE.

DAVID WHITELEY HAS STUDIED THIS IN LIGHT OF HIS KNOWLEDGE OF THE OFFICIAL RECORDS OF RATES AND SENDS THE FOLLOWING:

I have just finished reading the April edition of the Airmail study group newsletter and would like to comment on two items.

1. The two letters sent in for comment by a South African Collectot postmarked March 3 and March 10 1930 flown on Flight 3011 and addressed to London, England rated 5c. The Monthly Supplement to the Official Post Office Guide for Postmasters for April 1930 contained an extensive listing of air mail rates to overseas destinations. the published rate in this supplement for air mail matter to "Great Britain and all other places in the British Empire, France, and all places in the North & South American continents (other than Canada and the United States) was 7c. per ounce and 7c. for each subsequent ounce. The rate to Great Britain was changed effective February 2, 1931 to 5c. the first ounce and 10c each subsequent ounce. Unfortunately neither the Post Office Guide, nor the Monthly Supplements nor the Weekly Bulletins announced the actual date of commencement of the 7c. rate. It should however be noted that all airmail rates to foreign or overseas destinations, except the United States were, until the February 1931 Monthly Supplement quoted as a fee **in addition to the ordinary postage to the country in question.** Applying this formula would make the air mail rate to Great Britain 2c. ordinary postage (Empire Rate) plus 5c. airmail fee for the 7c. rate as published in the April 1930 Supplement, which combined the air mail fees and first class postage rates. Why the what appears to be corect postage due fees assessed by both Canada and apparently Britain appear to have been refunded I do not know.

I have several covers rated at 7c. to the United Kingdom in this period and one or two that wrre short paid the 2c. Empire rated and were assessed the correct postage due 2d. or 4c. (double the deficiency). By answering one qustion I have raised another.





Flight 2907 (NWT Flights) Old 515.

The following story was published in the December 1953 issue of "THE POSTMARK", a monthly issue of the Canadian Postal Service. It is written from the Post Office people's point of view and contains information from PO records.

This story also explains, beyond the AAMS scope, the hazards and cold associated with the experimental flights. It explains the different date stamps that may have bothered you the collector. Thus the story of a flight that took place 70 years ago.

## *Wings North!*

### **Early Mail Services Down The Mackenzie**

(PART I)

CHRISTMASTIDE and postal service have been long associated with the Northwest Territories. Thirty-three years ago, for example, a delighted community some 365 miles north of Edmonton as the crow flies waited with happy anticipation for the arrival of a special dog-train, sent out by the Post Office from Fort McMurray to bring them their Christmas mail.

When the huskies panted in to the post with some 250 pounds of letters and parcels, the feat was hailed as a classic example of Post Office "up-to-dateness".

Of course there had been winter and summer services to the north for a great many years before. The late R. W. Hale, whose name is famous in northern postal service, tells how on joining the Edmonton Inspector's office in 1913 he was amazed with the immensity of the Northwest Territories—a million square miles of almost virgin territory bounded on the north by the Arctic itself, nearly 2,000 miles away.

Edmonton was the Jumping Off Point—and from the Alberta border to the Arctic there were not more than 750 whites amid a population of 5,000 Indians and Eskimos, yet millions of dollars worth of furs were exported annually.

In contrast to the present Air Mail system, open-season access to the country was by flat-bottomed scow, and later by steamer over part of the route; and by dog team, and later by flat sleighs drawn by rangy horses from Fort McMurray to Fort Resolution, during the "freeze up".

In a subsequent article we will deal with the earlier days. It may be interesting to many throughout the service to note that in 1915 the late P. T. Coolican, then Post Office Inspector, and later Assistant Deputy Postmaster General, travelled from Edmonton to Fort Smith, and was impressed during his arduous trip with the potentialities of air mail service.

An old photograph of the special Christmas trip of 1920 shows the Christmas bags starting off from Fort McMurray by dog team and gives some idea of the limitations of such ser-

**CHRISTMAS MAIL, 1920**—In December of that year the P.O. Department authorized a special trip between Fort McMurray and Fort Smith to carry Christmas Mail. The round trip into the N.W.T. covered 600 miles and was performed in 24 days. Here is the dog-train ready to start from Fort McMurray (now McMurray), Alta. In the group, left to right—Mr. Petty, Hudson Bay Manager; Col. J. K. Cornwall (known as Apostle of The North); R. W. Hale, Inspector, Post Office Dept., and Mr. McDougall, dog-team driver.



vice. The total load of a sled was 500 pounds and of this no more than 250 lb. at most could be mail.

Mail actually travelled unofficially by air in this region as early as March 1921. This story will be told in a coming number.

In 1924 Mr. Hale was instructed to ascertain whether air developments were sufficiently advanced for regular air service. Thanks to C. H. (Punch) Dickins, then a flying officer in the R.C.A.F. a report was submitted which proved to be almost uncanny in its predictions regarding the value of the plane to hinterland communication. Even at that date Mr. Dickins was experimenting in winter flying.

### *Experimental Flight*

So following permission being given by the Post Office Mr. Dickins undertook an experimental flight with the mails in January 1929, his destination being Fort Simpson. Accompanied by Post Office Inspector T. J. Reilly (later D.P.O.I. Edmonton, and recently retired); Fred Lundy, Agent, Western Airways, and Engineer Lou Parmenter, he left Edmonton in a Fokker plane on Friday, January 18th. The date was unlucky—for 40 miles out they had to land at Fedorah, and were forced to return to Edmonton due to ice particles forming in the carburetor.

The field in which the landing was made belonged to a former Edmonton Letter Carrier, Mr. Berry. Mr. Reilly drove four miles from his farm through the drifts to phone Edmonton, where Mr. Leger, Dist. Superintendent, accompanied by G. M. Beaton (now Edmonton's D.P.O.I.) drove out and brought Messrs. Reilly and Lundy back to Edmonton, until the flight was again ready to start.

Two days later the plane took off again landing at Lac la Biche where it remained until the 22nd when it started for Waterways and landed on the Clearwater River. On the 23rd the Fokker was taxied over the ice to McMurray and in a temperature of 56 below zero the start was made for the Far North. After landing at Fort Chipewyan, 150 miles from McMurray, Fort Fitzgerald was passed and a landing was made at Fort Smith (265 miles from McMurray and some 600 miles from Edmonton).

The posts had all been warned in advance to expect the plane and arrangements had been made at each to have markers placed on the river, to indicate safe landing places. These markers were small spruce, which could be carefully discerned from the air.

At Fort Smith it was found that the river had gone down to such an extent that hummocks had formed of snow and ice and the aircraft landed in a series of jarring bumps and bounces.

On the following day (January 24) Punch Dickins decided that owing to the irregular surface of the ice it would be advisable to return to Fort Fitzgerald without a load. The engine, however, lost power because of the continuous forming of ice in the carburetor in the sub zero weather, and the pilot came down to 800 feet and circled about in vain seeking a good spot to land.

Failing this he took off for Fort Resolution (400 miles from McMurray and approx. 700 miles from Edmonton) which he reached at 1 p.m. in a temperature of 62 degrees below zero! There Inspector Reilly left the plane and established Money Order business at that office while Dickins and Parmenter continued along to Hay River, staying overnight at Fort Providence and proceeding to Fort Simpson on January 26th.

### *Comes To Grief*

They commenced the return trip on Sunday, January 27th carrying outgoing mail, and furs and bringing along "Rags" Wilson, a well known fur trader. As they swooped down to the landing at Fort Resolution their undercarriage struck a hummock and buckled. Down went the nose, and one tip of their propellor was curled into a graceful scroll while the other end was seriously bent.



THE BROKEN PROPELLOR—Left to right: Pilot C. H. (Punch) Dickins, T. J. Reilly, Lou Parmenter, Engineer, and "Rags" Wilson, trapper.

One aluminum blade was straightened out, but when working on the curled propellor, nine priceless inches of aluminum snapped off. It was necessary to file off an equal length from the other blade and the question then was "would the plane fly?"

Airplane repairs at Fort Resolution were a "first" for that settlement. But with that character for improvisation that hall marks Canadians—the "prop" was straightened out. Dickins and Parmenter, with assistance from the Mission started to work in the open. The front of the plane was raised on gasoline drums and with the aid of a waterpipe from the Roman Catholic mission, the undercarriage was roughly mended.

### *Repair Work In 40 Below*

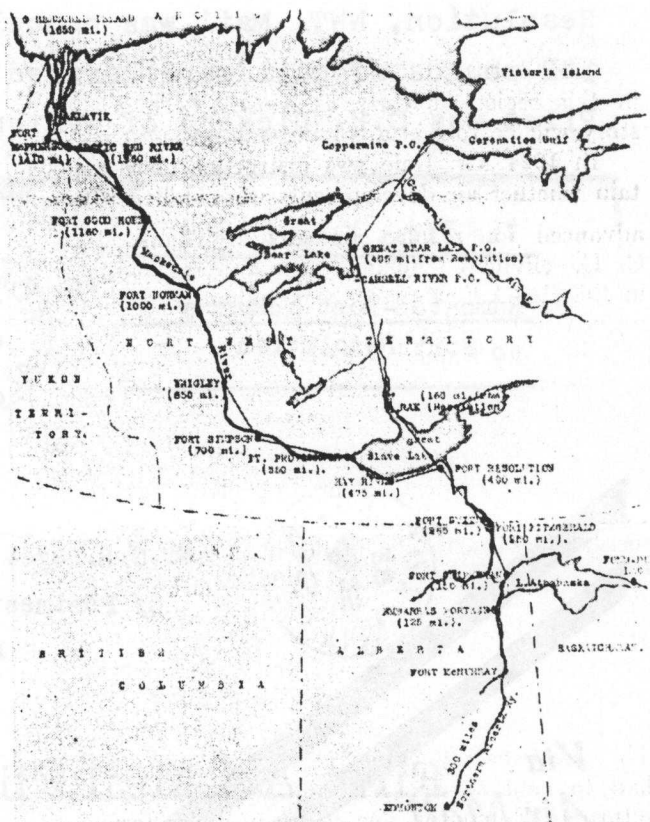
The chief difficulty came in straightening out the blades in a temperature of 40 below by the windy shore of Great Slave Lake with the tools which were available plus what gadgets they could improvise.

By Friday the aircraft was ready for the test. Punch taxied up and down Resolution Bay, then "giving her the gun" became airborne—the old crate would fly after all! He flew back to Fort Smith that night and then south to McMurray, while those left behind regarded his trip with deepest misgivings.

Now, it appears that when the plane came to grief, and while its repair seemed a slim possibility Dickins arranged for an Indian to start out with a dog train on the morning of January 28th and carry a message to Fort Smith for transmission to Edmonton, ordering repair parts. There was no radio transmission station at Fort Resolution in those days. The Indian reached Fort Smith on Thursday, January 31st after four days on the trail, and just a day later in flew Dickins and his engineer in the repaired plane! Western Canada Airways despatched Pilot Buchanan with a new Super Universal Fokker from Winnipeg to McMurray and met Dickins when he arrived there.

Thus it was that on February 5th that Pilot Dickins flew to Resolution, in the new Plane, picked up Inspector Reilly, together with mail and furs and flew non-stop to McMurray in two hours and 40 minutes—a distance of 400 miles.

Mr. Reilly treasures the blade of the broken propellor at his home as a souvenir of this epochal flight. He informs The Postmark that



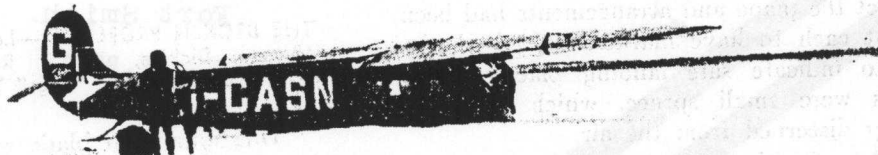
Map of Northwest Territories served by air in 1929 flight.

the planes used were single-engine Fokker Super-Universals.

And so ended the experimental flight. The scene was all set for the first official air mail flight down the Athabaska, Slave and Mackenzie Rivers which was undertaken by four aircraft in December 1929, an account of which will appear in our next issue.

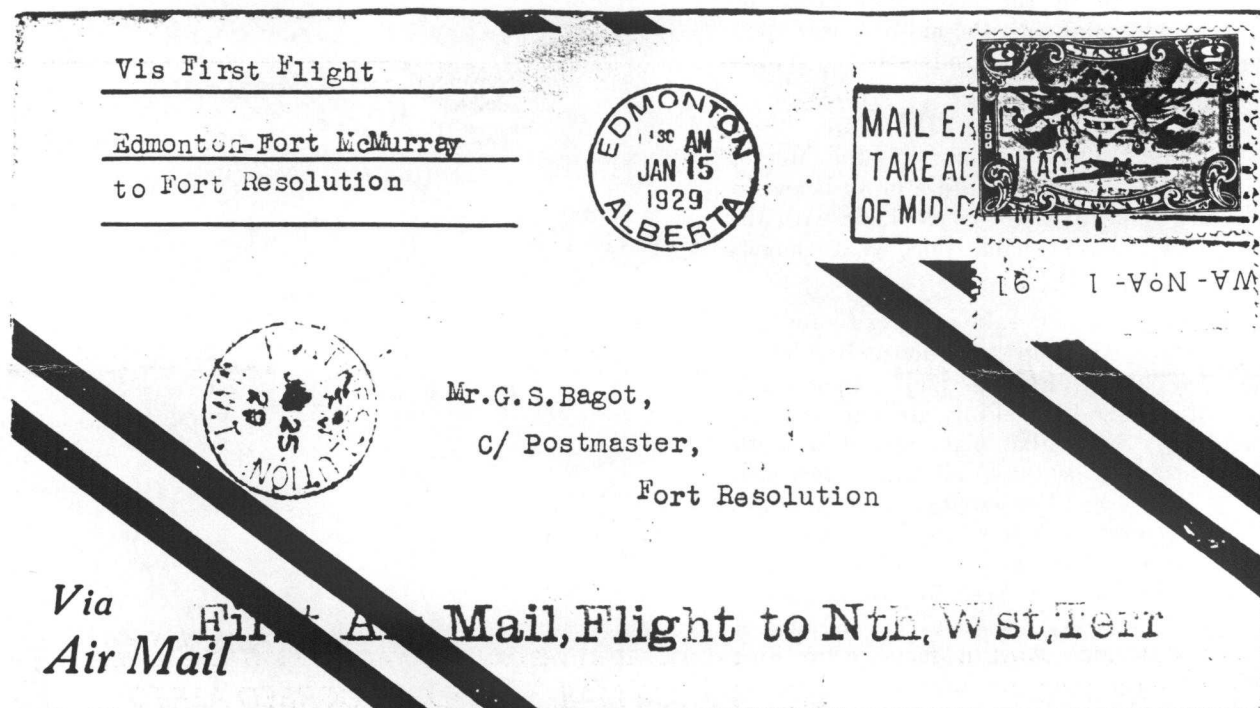
Mr. Dickins is at present the General Manager of the De Havilland Company, Toronto. His engineer, Lou Parmenter is with the Trans Canada Air Lines. Mr. Reilly rose to the position of District Post Office Inspector of the Edmonton district, and only recently retired from active service.

The Damaged  
Plane at Fort  
Resolution, Jan.,  
1929.



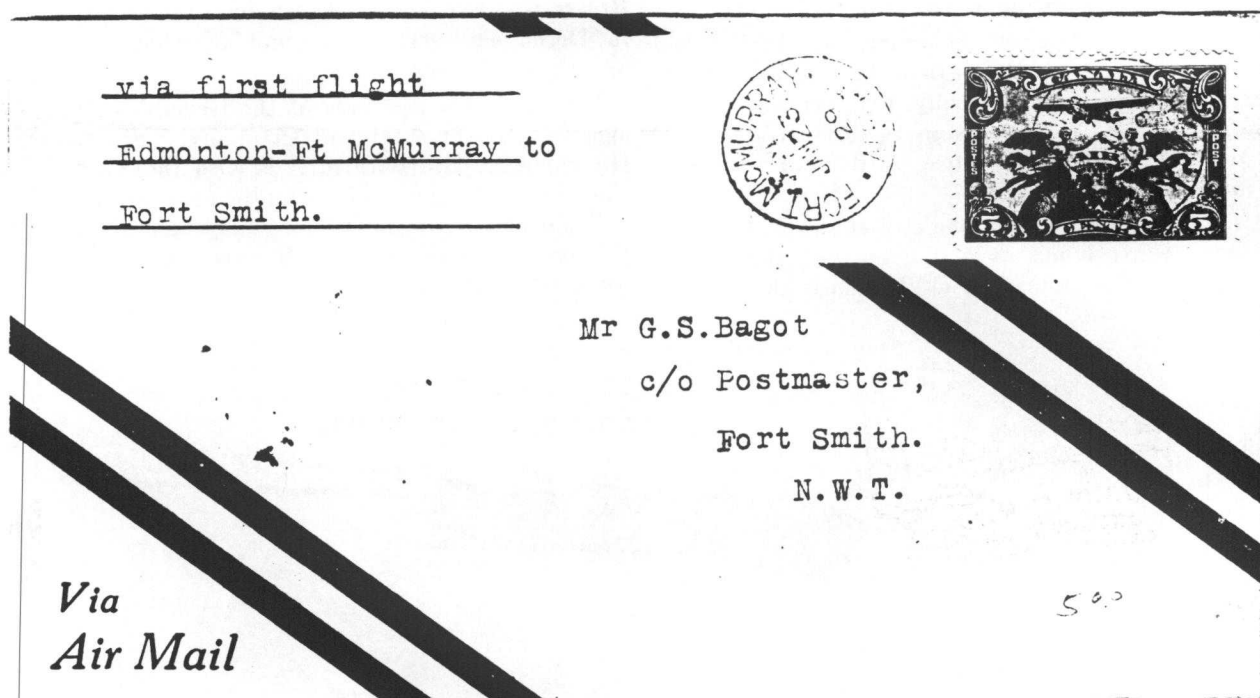


This is a January 23, 1929 flight from Edmonton to Fort Resolution, NWT. Mail was cancelled at Edmonton Jan 15th. 142 pounds of mail were carried and backstamped Jan 25th. Pilot was C.H. Dickens of Western Canada Airways.



AAMS # 2907c

This is a January 23rd flight from Edmonton/Ft McMurray to Fort Smith, N.W.T. 19 pounds carried and backstamped 23 Jan 29.

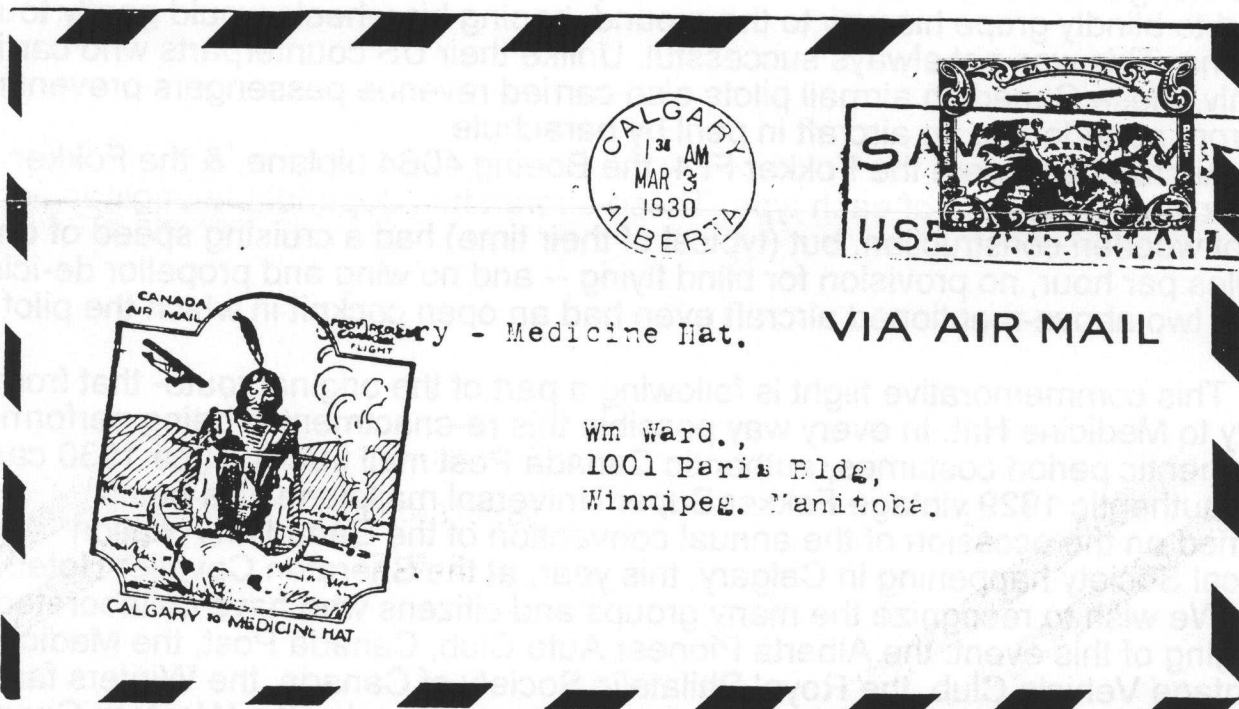
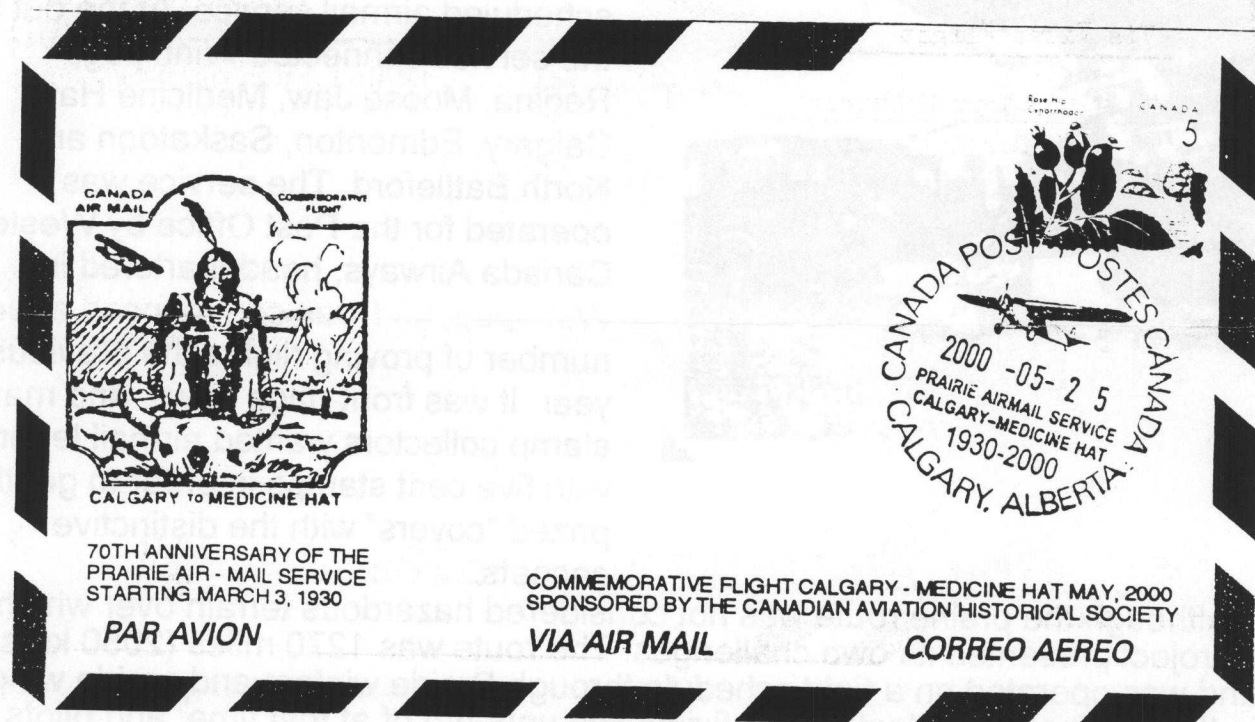




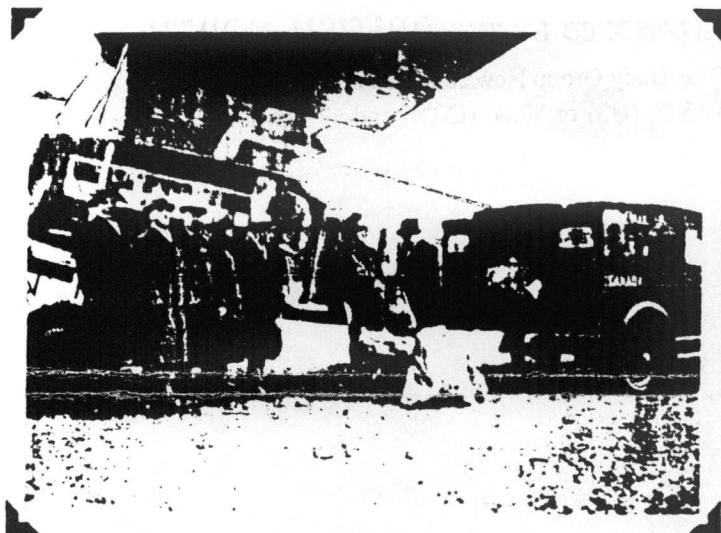
70TH ANNIVERSARY PRAIRIE AIR-MAIL SERVICE.

I JUST GOT MY COPY OF THE ANNIVERSARY FLIGHT COVER AND SHOW IT BELOW WITH THE ORIGINAL, DONE SOME TIME AGO.

IF YOU WANTED TO GET ONE OF THESE YOU CAN FIND THEIR ANNOUNCEMENT IN LAST APRIL'S NEWSLETTER.



## PRAIRIE AIRMAIL SERVICE COMMEMORATIVE FLIGHT MAY 25, 2000



After years of planning and discussion, March 3, 1930 saw the major Western Canadian prairie cities joined through a scheduled airmail service. At the outset, the service connected Winnipeg, Regina, Moose Jaw, Medicine Hat, Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon and North Battleford. The service was operated for the Post Office by Western Canada Airways, headquartered in Winnipeg, and was commenced after a number of proving flights the previous year. It was front page news, and many stamp collectors wanted airmail letters with five cent stamps in order to get the prized "covers" with the distinctive cachets.

Although the prairie route was not considered hazardous terrain over which to fly, the project presented its own challenges. The route was 1270 miles (2050 kms) long, and was operated on a tight schedule through Prairie winters and prairie winds, often in the black of night. Instrument flying was unheard of at that time, and pilots had to guide themselves through the black prairie nights with the aid of light beacons spaced along the routes. More than once the poor pilot, finding himself enveloped in fog, had to blindly grope his way to the ground, hoping his wheels would gently touch terra firma. This was not always successful. Unlike their US counterparts who carried mail only, these Canadian airmail pilots also carried revenue passengers preventing pilots from abandoning an aircraft in peril by parachute.

Aircraft used were the Fokker FI 4, the Boeing 40B4 biplane, & the Fokker Super Universal, several of each type. These aircraft had dependable engines and wings of wooden construction, but (typical of their time) had a cruising speed of only 100 miles per hour, no provision for blind flying -- and no wing and propellor de-icing. The first two above-mentioned aircraft even had an open cockpit in which the pilot sat.

This commemorative flight is following a part of the original route- that from Calgary to Medicine Hat. In every way possible this re-enactment is being performed with authentic period costumes, authentic Canada Post mail trucks, circa 1930 cars -- and an authentic 1929 vintage Fokker Super Universal mailplane. It is being performed on the occasion of the annual convention of the Canadian Aviation Historical Society happening in Calgary, this year, at the Sheraton Cavalier Hotel.

We wish to recognize the many groups and citizens who have collaborated in the staging of this event: the Alberta Pioneer Auto Club, Canada Post, the Medicine Hat Vintage Vehicle Club, the Royal Philatelic Society of Canada, the Winters family airport, Bar XH Aviation, Momentum Design Costume Rentals, the Western Canada Aviation Museum, and many local aviation enthusiasts and philatelists.