



BNAPS  
AIR MAIL  
STUDY  
GROUP

VOLUME 11 - NO 1

APRIL 2003

**CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS:**

We are off to another year of study and appreciation of the stamps and covers of Canadian Air Mail. That there is still much to be discovered always amazes me. Case in point, the article at the back of this issue by Gord Mallett. His persistence in finding the old records, putting them beside the accepted beliefs, and then having the courage to say "I think that there have been a few errors carried forward by others, because it seemed easier."

Another case is the matter of the D w marking which appears in a square on certain covers. Murray Heifetz feels that it is as Don Amos suggests, "DELAYED - WEATHER". Murray then goes on to say that the only copies he can find are Winnipeg postmarks. I have4 been sent a copy of a Windsor and a Brantford postmark. Each may have gone through Winnipeg, but no certainty.

Let us all help our hobby celebrate the 100th anniversary of the first flight in a heavier than air machine. George

**BNAPEX 2003:**

Mike Street lives in Ancaster Ontario, but has volunteered to help the group in London with BNAPEX this year. He wrote to me as follows:

The BNAPEX 2003 Exhibit entry form is now available. If you haven't done so lately, go to the excellent BNAPS web site

[www.bnaps.org](http://www.bnaps.org)

have a look around and then follow the convention links.

Those who are regular visitors to the BNAPS website can go straight to the form

<http://www.bnaps.org/2003exhibit3.htm>

and print as many copies as needed. Completed forms are to be mailed by regular mail to Exhibits Coordinator Tony Shaman, P. O. Box 43103, Eastwood Square, Kitchener, ON N2H 6S9, Canada.

Exhibitors not on line can get a form by writing Tony at the address above.

**THE AIR MAIL STUDY GROUP** is sponsored by the **BRITISH NORTH AMERICA PHILATELIC SOCIETY**. The Study Group Newsletter is published three times a year. (April, August, December). Annual membership dues are \$5.00(US) or \$7.00(Cdn) and are payable to the treasurer of BNAPS Study Group.



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**AIR MAIL STUDY GROUP MEETING - BNAPS LONDON**

The meeting at London will have its main theme devoted to the "OFFICIAL STAMPS" that were Air Mail stamps. There will be a prize for the best presentation of the subject, as judged by those present. Two prizes if there are enough entries.

Here are what seem to the Editor the stamps involved:

5 Hole Perfins    4 Hole Perfins    Overprint O.H.M.S.    Overprint "G"

OAC 1	OCE 1	OC 1	CO 1	CO 2
OAC 2	OCE 2	OC 5		
OAC 3	OCE 3	OC 6		
OAC 4	OCE 4	OC 7		
OAC 5		OC 8		
OAC 6		OC 9		

In addition to these stamps, we will have a round table on any kind of new or unique covers you have found.

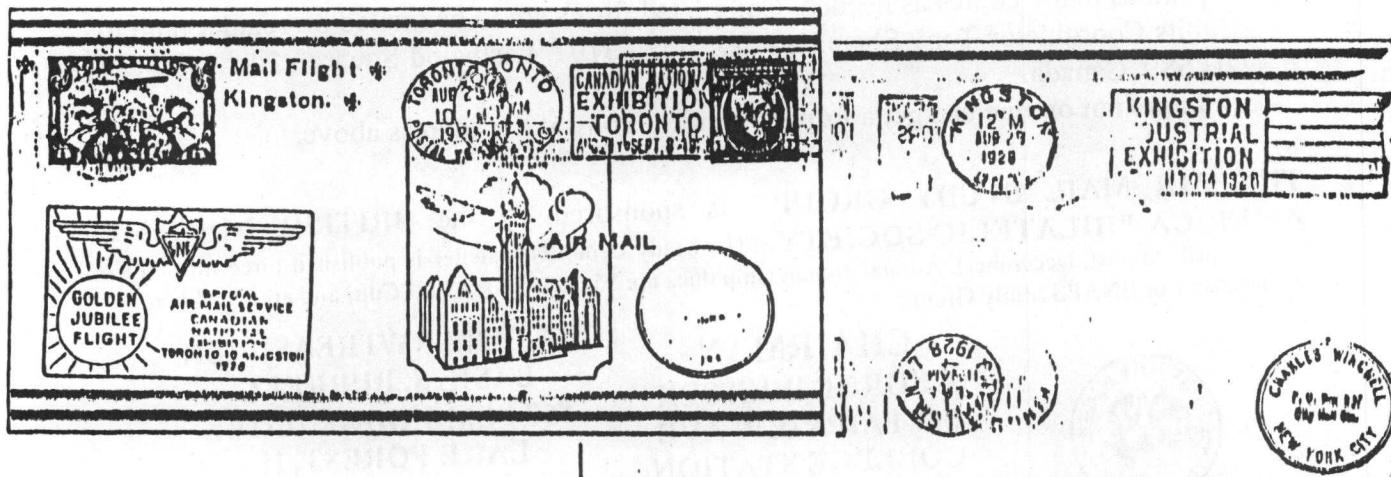
**EDITOR'S COMMENT:**

Taras Cheberiak joined the Air Mail Study Group in 1999 and enjoyed the opportunity to interact with other collectors. I have had a note from his wife, Raya, saying that he died on November 4th, 2002. I am sure we are all saddened by the loss of a fellow philatelist, especially one who knows a FFC from a FDC.

**Covers with dual flight cachets:**

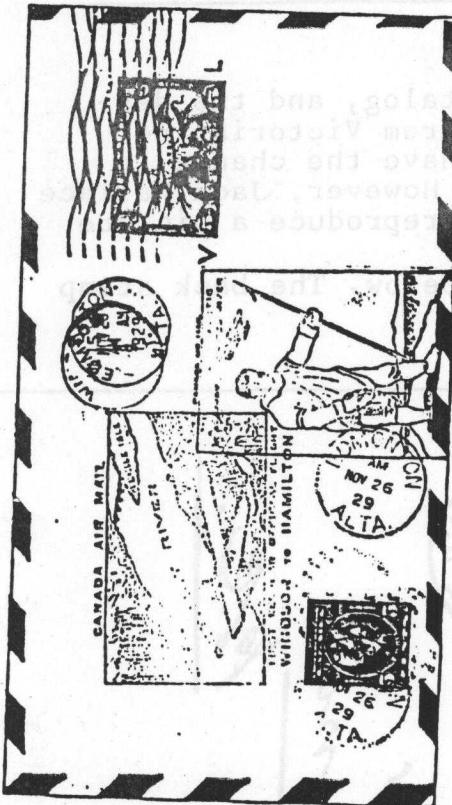
In last August's issue, page 21, the question was asked, "Why were some covers used twice to get FFC cachets? As usual these questions seem to ask more questions than they answer. Chris Hargreaves was kind enough to send me the following examples from his collection.

The one below would seem to ask the question, "are we really collecting First Flight Covers, when we include flights over the same route, and for celebration purposes, not FFC's?"



#2839 29 Aug 28 Toronto to Kingston (Canadian Nat'l Exhibition)

#2933c 9 Jun 29 Toronto to Kingston (Kingston Airport Dedication)



Front above and back below of:

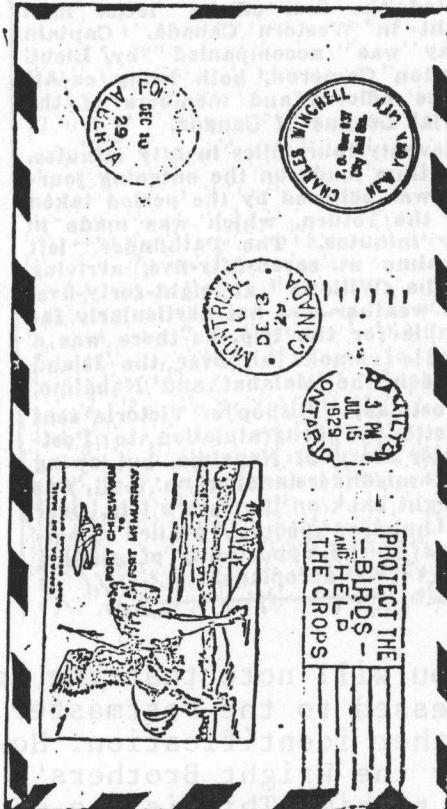
- #2945 15 Jul 29 Toronto - Hamilton
- #2967 26 Nov 29 Ft McMurray to Fort Chipewyan

Were things really that bad before the stock market crash? So bad one had to reuse his envelopes?

Front above and back below off:

- #2945j 15 Jul 29 Windsor - Hamilton
- #2967j 26 Nov 29 Ft McMurray to Arctic Red River

Who was Charles Winchell?  
Why merge these two very different flights?



## Pioneer Flight -17: VICTORIA / NANAIMO

This flight is listed on page 28 of the catalog, and the description tells the story of the first flight from Victoria and back. It isn't often that we mere collectors have the chance to see such a rare cover, given the listed cost. However, Jack Wallace owns one of the covers and has allowed us to reproduce a picture of the Victoria to Nanaimo leg of the journey.

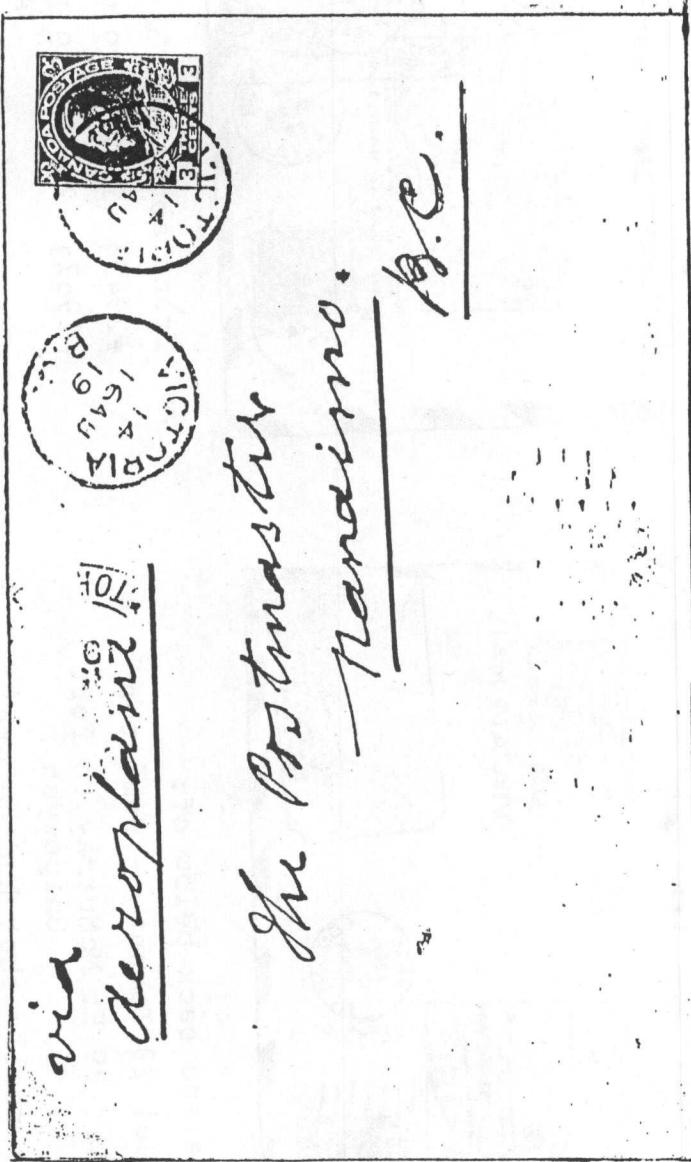
The cover and newspaper article are shown below. The back stamp on this cover is NANAIMO AUG 16 1919 BC.

# FIRST LOCAL AERIAL MAIL IS SUCCESS

**Pathfinder II, Delivers Victoria  
Letters in Nanaimo Within  
55 Minutes—Returned In  
Fast Time of 50 Minutes.**

Arriving in Nanaimo fifty-five minutes after leaving the Willows aerodrome, the Pathfinder II, piloted by Captain J. Orny, yesterday completed the first official letter mail flight in Western Canada. Captain Orny was accompanied by Lieut Gordon Camerell, both being ex-Air Force officers and members of the Aerial League of Canada.

Seventy-four miles in fifty minutes. The time minded on the outgoing journey was eclipsed by the period taken for the return, which was made in fifty minutes. The Pathfinder left Nanaimo at seven-fifty-five, arriving at the Willows at eight-forty-five. The weather was not particularly favorable for the trip, as there was a cloud of smoke all over the island between the Malahat and Nanaimo. Postmaster Bishop of Victoria sent a letter of congratulation to Postmaster Horn of Nanaimo, but owing to a misunderstanding no mail was brought back on the return trip. Over one hundred people availed themselves of the opportunity of sending letters via aeroplane.



You will note that the cover from Victoria to Nanaimo was addressed to the Postmaster at Nanaimo. There is no return address or other identification. However, in these heady days only 16 years after the Wright Brothers I guess a Postmaster did open the mail sent to him. This is the case here and on the next page is the letter. It is from Thomas Futcher.

1599 Towt Bay Road,  
Victoria, B.C.

Aug. 16. 19

The Postmaster

Nanaimo.

B.C.

Dear Sir,

Kindly return me in the enclosed addressed envelope, (folded in same way as enclosed envelope,) the envelope of this letter to you. I wish to keep this as a memento of this first aerial post on Vancouver Island.

and oblige yours faithfully

Gros. A. Futchur.

My guess is this is what he says:

Dear Sir

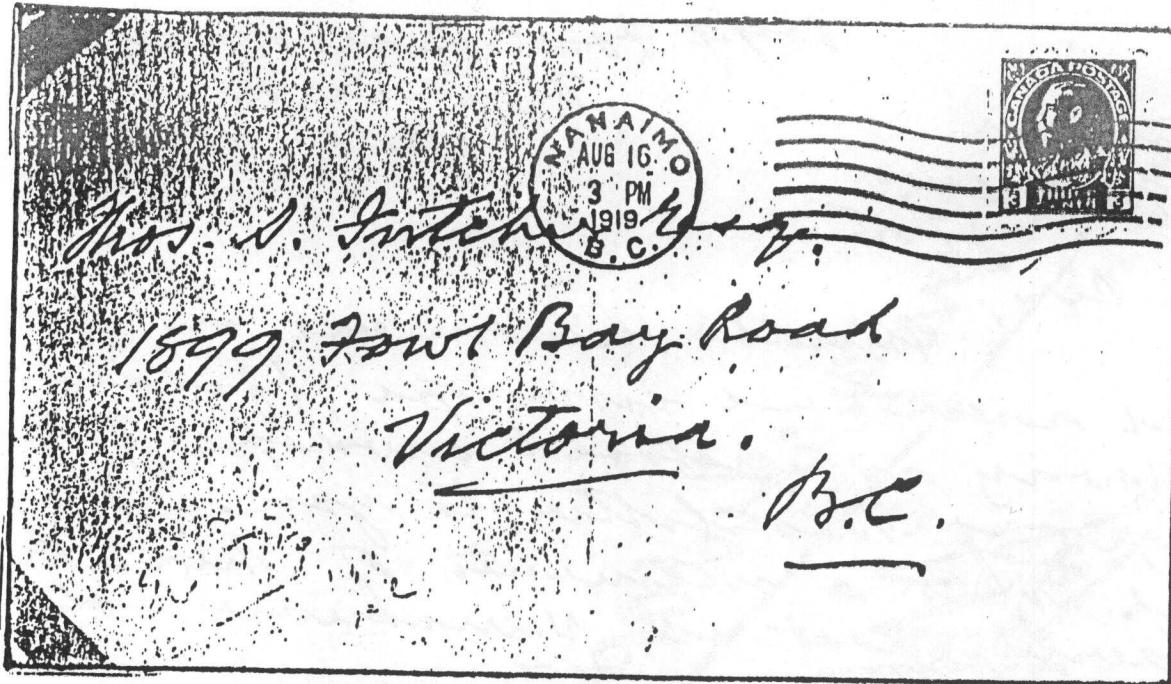
Kindly return me in the enclosed addressed envelope, (folded in same way as enclosed envelope,) the envelope of this letter to you. I wish to keep it as a memento of this first aerial post on Vancouver Island. and oblige yours faithfully,

This then answers the question of how Futcher got his letter back. But we know it was not flown and there is no backstamp on the Nanaimo to Victoria cover. Therefore it probably went by train on the Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway.

Jack also related his experience of having talked with Gerry Walburn about this flight. He was asked to send some covers. He didn't do it because he was convinced that air mail was not feasable because mail was carried by train on a daily basis.

The only other flight I can find is #3047, 13 Sep 30, Vancouver to Nanaimo and return.

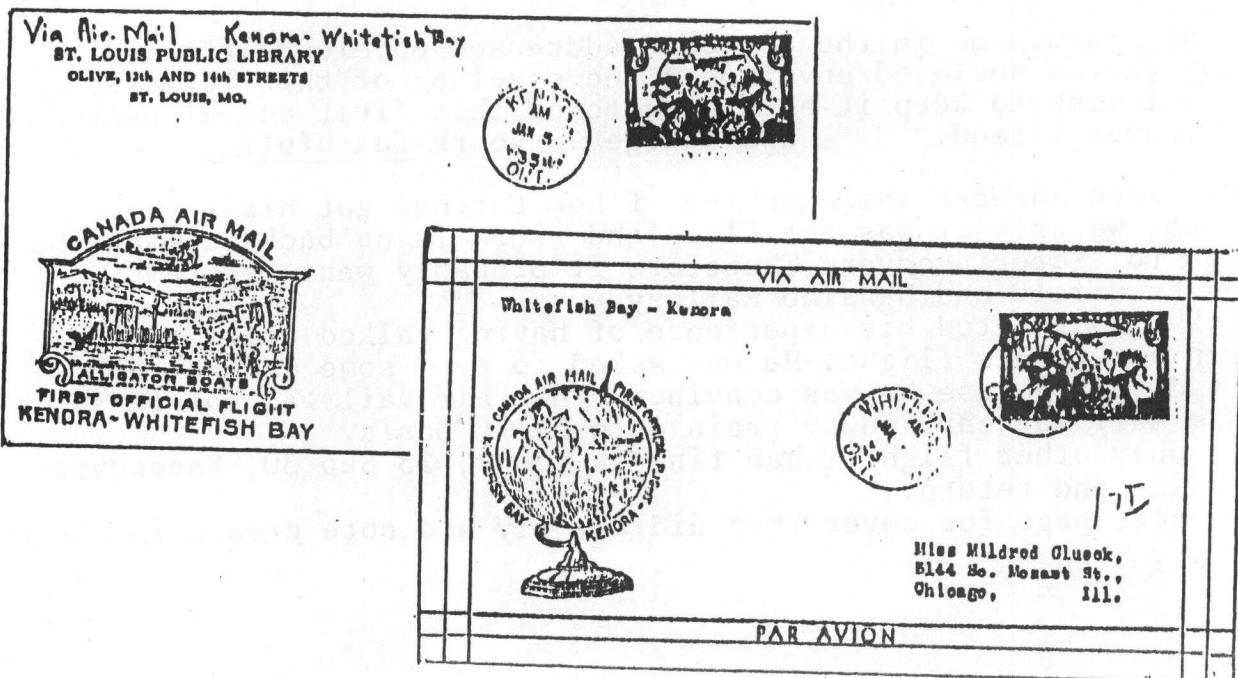
See next page for cover that did not fly and note crease in center.



NO  
BACK  
STAMP

### FLIGHT 3501

On January 5th, 1935 the Canadian Post Office began Air Mail service from Kenora, Ont. to Whitefish Bay, Ont. These few cold facts tell us nothing about the pilot, U.S. Wagner, or about the kind of individual he was. Unfortunately we have to wait for this pioneer aviator's obituary to get to know him. We are indebted to Dave McGill for picking this one from The Globe and Daily Mail of Monday January 6th, 2003. PLEASE READ ON - - -



## LIVES LIVED

### **Ulysses Stanley Wagner**

Olympian, bush pilot, airline executive. Born March 2, 1908, in Pueblo, Colo. Died Oct. 11, 2002, in Winnipeg, of a stroke, aged 94.

While Stan Wagner was Manitoba's senior sports mandarin and oldest Olympian, most of his long life was spent in Canadian aviation. For 48 years Stan was either a renowned bush pilot or a widely respected airline executive, and he reminisced frequently about those days during his 27-year retirement.

Stan had a spectacular, headline-making brush with death 65 years ago. He was airborne over McKenzie Island, near Red Lake, Ont., when the engine and propeller suddenly went quiet. After a rough landing, Stan realized the engine had fallen off, the propeller shearing 1.2 metres from one float as it hurtled into the water. Stan swam into the partly submerged cabin to search for life preservers, but they were irretrievably lodged beneath the weekly meat order. He simply sat atop the sinking cabin until help arrived. Stan quipped to his rescuers, "You're shaking hands with a dead man." He retained his legendary bravado, even after learning that 40,000 blasting caps were also aboard. Stan helped tow the wreckage to shore and he later flew out in a different aircraft.

Stan was born in Pueblo, Colo., where his family had gone in a vain attempt at curing his father Louis of tuberculosis. They returned home to Plum Coulee, Man., but the elder Wagner died when Stan was only nine months old.

Stan abandoned accountancy studies at the University of Manitoba to follow his dream of becoming a pilot. To finance lessons, Stan clerked at the Ford assembly plant in Winnipeg. Daily, at dawn prior to a long shift at Ford, he logged time at Western Canada Airways' first flight school. Stan was also an original member of the Winnipeg Flying Club.

Stan was a member of the city's senior hockey team, The Winnipegs, which won Canada's famed amateur hockey prize, the Allan Cup. Subsequently, they represented Canada and won hockey gold in the third Winter Olympics at Lake Placid, New York, in 1932. Tremendous crowds jubilantly greeted the Olympians as they were paraded through downtown Winnipeg. Stan was inducted into the Manitoba Sports Hall of Fame in 1987, where his Olympic treasures were donated.

Stan flew freight to northern Manitoba communities and mines until he joined Canadian Airways as senior pilot and Kenora base manager in 1934. Under his management, air service to Red Lake was vastly expanded and improved. Known for his dependability (flying long hours and countless mercy flights in extreme weather conditions above unforgiving terrain), Stan routinely loaded tons of freight — and unthawed engines.

He held superintendent positions at Sioux Lookout, Ont., Whitehorse and Winnipeg before becoming the first employee of the new Central Northern Airways, which became Transair Ltd. Stan retired as general manager and vice-president in 1975 to care for his wife, Marie Souchen, who had Parkinson's disease.

She died in 1987 after 52 years of marriage. They were childless, but surrounded by a wide web of family, friends and pets. Through inheritances, wise investments, and frugality, Stan left an estate worth \$2-million; he made substantial bequests to Canadian charities.

Stan was bashful about honours, but he held many. He was a founder and life member of the Western Canada Aviation Museum, and the Province of Manitoba named a lake in Stan's honour.

Fiercely independent and unpretentiously low-key, Stan flew until age 75, drove until 92, and was determined to live to 100. Such is the very spirit that propelled Ulysses Stanley Wagner throughout his distinguished life.

**John Richthammer**

*John Richthammer was Stan's biographer.*



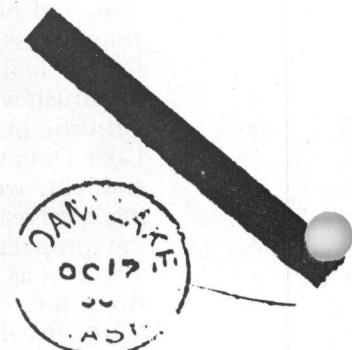
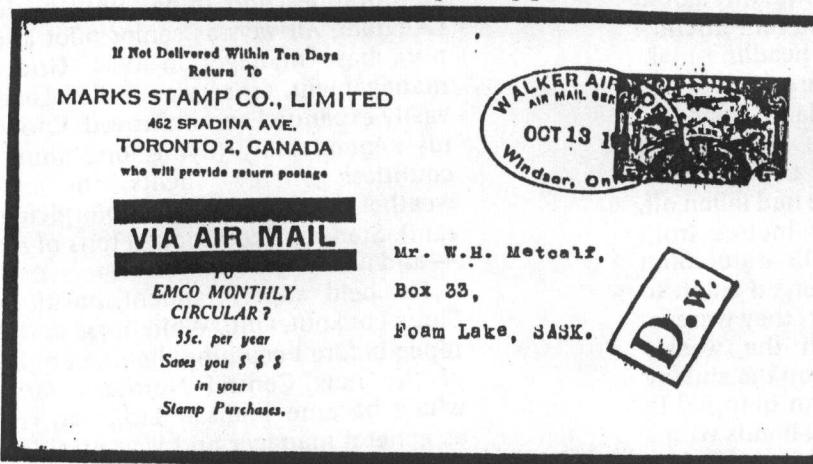
Stan Wagner

D W ;

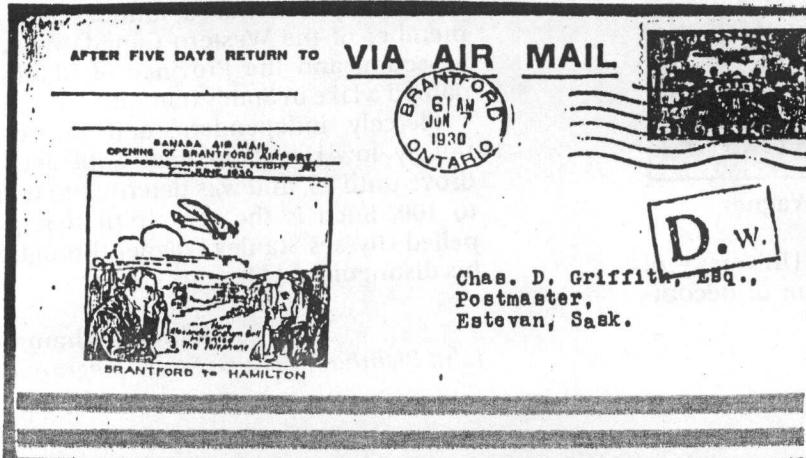
Here are the covers that George Dresser was speaking about in his comments. First cover is cancelled on October 13th, 1930 at Windsor. The backstamp is October 17th, at Foam Lake. This helps with the "Delayed weather" argument.

Here is a possibility for this cover. It may have travelled by CPR train from Toronto to Windsor Airport Station in a covering envelope, along with other covers from Marks which were sent to receive the AMF cancellation. It was then redirected back through Toronto by CPR train and was transferred to transcontinental CPR train # 1 or #3, later arriving at Winnipeg. At Winnipeg it would connect with WCA's air transport service, inaugurated March 3, 1930 (AAMC #3011) But here it was that there could be a flight delay due to some kind of inclement weather. The flight would be Winnipeg - Regina - Saskatoon. At this point the cover would transfer to CPR train for the trip East to Foam Lake, Sask. Foam Lake is just a few kilometers east of the town of Kandahar.

QUESTION: Why did this non-first flight cover receive a back-stamp at Foam Lake? Are we missing something here ? Under what circumstances were backstamps applied to flown covers ?



This cover is to celebrate the opening day of the Brantford Airport with a flight Brantford to Hamilton (AAMC 3029). This was an Eastward flight and then connected to a flight to Estevan. As would be expected there was no backstamp at Estevan. QUESTION: Did it travel from Winnipeg by air? Was it at Winnipeg when it got the D w marking. If so did this indicate a flight delay? Winnipeg seems to flood in Springtime, did this happen?



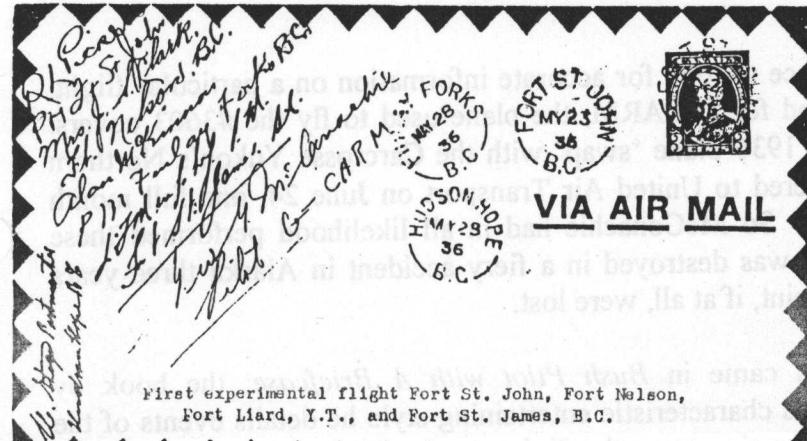
## SIGNATURES

This is third in a series on flight covers which bear the signature of R. W. Hale, Postal Superintendent of the Edmonton & Northwest Territories District. The cover featured here [catalogue #3603] also displays the familiar script of bush pilot G. W. G. McConachie.

### FORT ST. JOHN - FORT NELSON AIRMAIL ROUTE APPRAISAL: MAY 23-28, 1936

Almost without exception Hale covers contain elements that make them extraordinary. #3819 covers [April 2002 Newsletter] required 6 modes of travel and more than 550 days to complete their round-trip. #3616 round-trip covers [August 2002 Newsletter] featured dual franking, a dozen strikes, in excess of 20 signatories, and transport by rail and two different planes. So, what about #3603? The identical write-ups in the fifth and sixth editions of the American Air Mail Catalogue suggest nothing out of the ordinary. The flight is described as "experimental". The route, "Fort St. John - Fort St. James". The dates, "May 23 - 28, 1936". Further it is stated that the covers "received intermediate backstamps at Finlay Forks and Hudson's Hope" and were signed by the postmaster at each office and by Walter Hale and Grant McConachie.

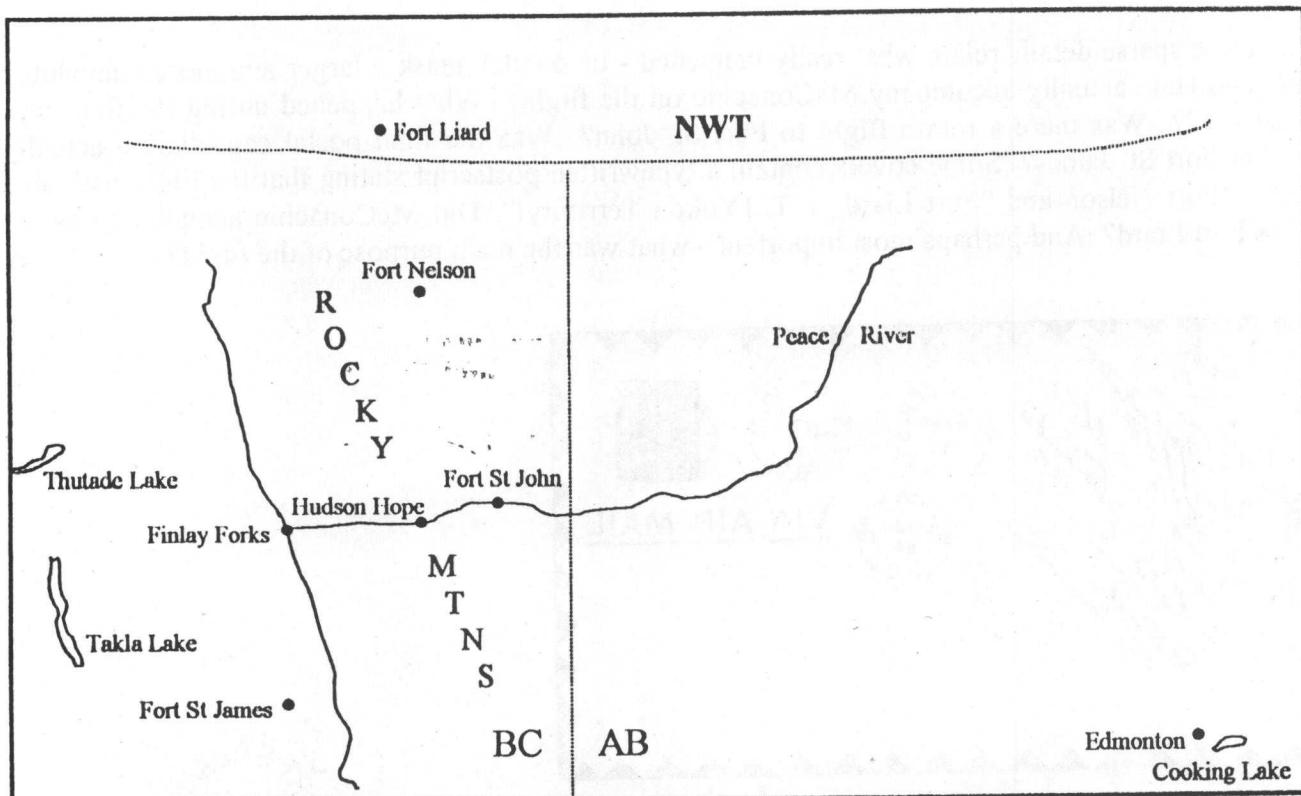
But do these sparse details relate what really happened - or do they mask a larger and more convoluted story? Did Hale actually accompany McConachie on the flight? What happened during the four days May 24 - 27? Was there a return flight to Fort St. John? Was the final postal cancellation actually applied at Fort St. James? Some covers contain a typewritten postscript stating that the flight path also included "Fort Nelson and "Fort Liard, Y.T. [Yukon Territory]". Did McConachie actually fly as far north as Fort Liard? And perhaps most important - what was the main purpose of the flight?



First experimental flight Fort St. John, Fort Nelson,  
Fort Liard, Y.T., and Fort St. James, B.C.

Several avenues were pursued to gain reliable information. An attempt was made to find the flight report. A search for pertinent information in aviation history publications and the newspapers was carried out. Topographical maps of British Columbia were consulted. Computer scans of a pair of #3603's were studied to help determine the order of signing. A synopsis of the findings related to these investigations appears below in bold. The balance of this article outlines the supporting evidence.

**The main purpose of these May 1936 flights by G.W.G. McConachie of United Air Transport was to appraise a proposed British Columbia air mail route, Fort St. John - Fort Nelson. The plane, G-CARM, was a Fairchild FC2W2 with floats. On May 23 postal superintendent R. W. Hale accompanied the pilot on a flight from Cooking Lake, the Edmonton floatplane base, to Fort St. John. Unable to find open water further north at Fort Nelson they doubled back to Fort St. John and on May 24 returned to Cooking Lake. The next day McConachie again headed north to Fort St. John - this time without Hale. He was successful in touching down at Fort Nelson and possibly also further north at Fort Liard, Yukon Territory. On the trip back to base, intermediate stops were made on May 28 at Finlay Forks, Fort St. James and lastly Hudson Hope.**



A plane's flight report is the obvious first place to look for accurate information on a particular flight. Unfortunately no flight reports could be found for G-CARM, the plane used to fly the #3603 covers. McConachie had acquired 'ARM in an early 1936 plane 'swap' with the Carcrosses Yukon's Northern Airways. Records show the plane first registered to United Air Transport on June 24, one full month after the Fort St. John - Fort Nelson flights. So McConachie had in all likelihood performed these flights in an unregistered aircraft! G-CARM was destroyed in a fiery accident in Alaska three years later. No doubt any records on board at that point, if at all, were lost.

The first break in ferreting out information came in *Bush Pilot with A Briefcase*, the book by McConachie's biographer Ronald Keith. In his characteristic entertaining style he details events of the first day, May 23. And he clearly identifies the main reason the flights were undertaken:

"United Air Transport's canary-yellow Fairchild FC2W2 weathercocked into the wind far out from shore at Cooking Lake where McConachie had taxied to take-off position. Crouched in the single-seat cockpit he was intent on the study of his maps as the bush plane drifted, its motor running. In the cabin of the yellow Fairchild, buckled into the only passenger seat, sat Walter Hale, the district postal inspector who had been assigned to make an airmail appraisal of the route between Fort St. John and Fort Nelson. His report to Ottawa would determine the success or failure of the UAT application for an airmail contract on the run."

"McConachie also had a full load of eggs and oranges, because, as he later explained, 'We were setting out on a thousand-mile return trip deadhead. The post office wasn't paying for it. I might as well take a payload. The people up at Fort Nelson were really isolated, hardly ever saw a fresh orange or an egg, so why not fly some in and sell them at fabulous prices?' As McConachie stowed the maps to return his attention ... he squirmed around to open the door of the cabin section. Floating oranges! ... The plane, the eggs, the oranges and the postal inspector were going under! The Fairchild was sinking tail first."

Apparently the rumbling of the noisy engine had smothered Hale's shouts of warning. The problem was with the floats. The weight of the heavily overloaded plane [McConachie often chanced this risky practice] had caused the float inspection caps to lift off during the taxiing. Keith then details the rest of the episode - including the maneuver used by McConachie to save the plane and its cargo. Later, after repacking the eggs and oranges and drying our Hale, they finally took off for Fort Nelson. The author concludes: "On his return trip to Edmonton, Inspector Hale's favourable report resulted in the award of a government contract for UAT to carry mail between Fort St. John and Fort Nelson ten return trips a year, which was monthly minus freeze-up and break-up."

An article in the May 26, 1936 *Edmonton Bulletin* provided the next lead. Entitled "6 Pontoon-Equipped Machines Take Off From Cooking Lake", it outlines the flights of 5 Canadian Airways and Mackenzie Air Service pilots who "hit the sky trail to the barren lands and ostentatiously opened the north's flying season". A short column is devoted to a sixth pilot - McConachie:

#### McCONACHIE BUSY

Pilot Grant McConachie of United Air Transport, who flew to Fort St. John Saturday, returned here Sunday and went back to Fort St. John Monday, with two passengers. On the first trip, with Postal Superintendent R. W. Hale as passenger, he flew over Fort Nelson but returned to Fort St. John when he found he could not land at the more northerly point.

**So - there were in fact TWO distinct circuits flown! Each circuit was a round-trip flown from the Cooking Lake floatplane base.**

To help complete the story - the signatures, cancellations and typed postscript all provide valuable clues. McConachie and Hale had the covers signed and cancelled by the Fort St John postmaster on Saturday May 23. On Sunday they returned to the Cooking Lake floatplane base. McConachie again flew north the next day, unaccompanied by Hale. He was successful in splashing down at Fort Nelson where he had the covers signed, although this time not by a post office employee. Fort Nelson's post office first opened only eight months later, in January 1937. Perhaps the signatory, Mrs. Clark, was in line to be named as its first postmaster at that point.

Although one cover variety lists Fort Liard as a destination, it is questionable whether sufficient spring melting would have taken place that far north to allow McConachie to effect a water landing. Further, there is no Fort Liard signature on cover. Fort Liard's post office did not open until July 1938, so a postmaster signature would not have been possible anyway. But, given McConachie's penchant for collecting signatures, he no doubt would have had some citizen sign the covers.

McConachie's route south to the Finlay Forks region is uncertain. It is possible that from the Fort Nelson/Fort Liard region he followed the Liard River west and then headed south through the Rocky Mountain Trench. But this would have been risky at best and of no real advantage to him. Most probably he would fly south and then follow the Peace River west through the Rocky Mountains, to the area of its headwaters – the usual route he travelled. His destination mid-week was possibly Takla Lake/Thutade Lake. He had started flying prospectors into this region in early 1933. Then in November 1935 he had abandoned a Fokker over winter at Takla Lake due to an engine blowout. Perhaps one of his passengers on this trip was a mechanic he was leaving there to effect repairs. If so, it is likely that he then travelled further north to Thutade Lake as he had done the three previous springs.

The order of the postmaster signatures, all applied on May 28, fills in the rest of the story. The sequence of signing and accompanying application of cancellations was Finlay Forks – Fort St James – Hudson Hope [spelled Hudson's Hope today]. Interestingly, although the Fort St James cancellation was applied as a backstamp, it was not the final destination – it was however the most southerly. It appears that both McConachie and Hale might have signed prior to the start of the flights. Another possibility is that McConachie and Hale applied their scripts sometime after the postmasters had done so.

**First Circuit Cancellation:**

FORT ST JOHN / MY 23 / 36 / BC

**Second Circuit Cancellations:**

[in order of application]

FINLAY FORKS / MAY 28 / 36 / BC

FORT ST. JAMES / MY 28 / 36 / BC

HUDSON HOPE / MY 28 / 36 / BC

**Signatories:**

[in probable order of signing]

G W G McConachie: Pilot G-CARM

R W Hale: Supt Postal Service

R L Pickell: PM Ft St John

Mrs J S Clark: Ft Nelson BC

Alan McKinnon: PM Finlay Forks BC

L F Murphy: PM Ft St. James

H Stege: PM Hudson Hope

Success of the venture resulted in an Air Stage contract being awarded in January 1937 [AAMC #3701]. The monthly service was Fort St. John - Fort Nelson and Fort St. John - Fort Grahame via Gold Bar and Finlay Forks. In June 1937 an Air Stage contract commenced for the Fort St. James district [AAMC #3709]. One month later, regular Air Mail service started on the Edmonton - Whitehorse route via Fort Nelson [AAMC #3713]. McConachie must have been elated! His goal all along had been to establish an airmail/passenger/freight service to the Yukon and Alaska via the Edmonton - Fort Nelson corridor.