

Philatelic Importance: In my view philatelic importance means 1) genuineness, or authenticity, products generated from stamp manufacturing process, and not artificial meaning not produced only for philatelists. i.e. stamps by dubious countries etc. 2) rarity and 3) condition.

To be contd....

Courtesy – [Yukio Onuma](#)

Beginner's Section

The catapult mail

The development of airmail began long before the invention of the airplane, the dirigible or even the balloon. It began with the pigeon post, which was used by armies many years before the birth of Christ to send messages long distances. Since then, all the man-made vehicles of the air have been used to carry letters from one place to another. However, airmail may be the only option for sending mail to some destinations, such as overseas, if the mail cannot wait the time it would take to arrive by ship, sometimes weeks.

Although airborne mail transport had occurred during the nineteenth century, the first official airmail flown by airplane took place in India; on 18 February 1911, French pilot Henri Pequet carried a sack with 6500 letters and 40 picture cards on his Humber-Sommer biplane.

During the late 1920s and early 1930s however, the need for greater speed across Atlantic was recognized in the carriage of mail between Europe and the Americas. Among the ideas developed by commercial enterprises from the military advances was something that came to be called **catapult mail**. It is an interesting story of man's bringing together the knowledge learned from sailing the sea and flying in the air for the benefit of man's needs, as mail could be carried in the last leg by an airplane launched from a ship while still at sea.

The French were the first to do something to cut transit time. In the late 1920's, experiments were undertaken from the deck of big passenger ships. The plane was placed on a trolley, itself placed on a ramp protruding the back of the steamer. The catapulting was done by compressed air and powder that propelled the aircraft at 110km/h. This new system was inaugurated on 13 August 1928, when the Île-de-France liner from the Transatlantic General Company, carrying a *Lioré et Olivier H-198* seaplane, left Le Havre. At 450 miles from the US coast, the seaplane, piloted by Lieutenant Louis Demougeot and registered F-AJHR, was launched via a catapult from the steamship at 14:00 hours and landed in New York at 17:12 before joining the docks for inspection. This first postal liaison was a success and allowed the mail to be delivered approximately 24 hours ahead of a conventional routing. The seaplane carried mail in three bags, franked with a surtax of 10 Fr.



French stamps after overprint

As a result of the operation, The French Postal Agent On-Board, Jules Cohen, feared that the stock of tax label would not be sufficient to ensure franking for the return flight to Le Havre. He convinced the French Consul General in New York that the shortage would cause an important financial prejudice for the postal authorities and persuaded him to overprint locally 3,000 90c-Berthelot stamps and 1,000 1.50Fr-Pasteur stamps with 10Fr, for the return leg. The overprint was done by Emile Cabella, a New York printer. In fact, Jules Cohen had planned this overprint by creating the scarcity of 10Fr stamps during the outward voyage and had purchased Berthelot and Pasteur sheets to be overprinted once in New York.

One month after the inaugural airmail flight to New York, during the crossing New York-Le Havre of the *Île-de-France* liner, Major Blancart authorized the catapult of the Lioré Olivier seaplane piloted by Demougeot and Co-Pilot Montrouseau (Captain, Engineer Officer of 1st class, radio). Off the south of England, the plane flew to Le Havre in the morning of 13 September 1928. The plane was expected to arrive at Cherbourg in the afternoon. A magneto failure forced the seaplane to sediment and could not take off because of an agitated sea. Lieutenant Demougeot and its crew were not found; the many researches were unsuccessful, reinforcing the concern of all. On 14 September, it was with relief that one learned the towing of the aircraft, broken at 28 miles southwest of Bishop Rock.

Even though the *Île-de-France* was not the fastest vessel in the world, it briefly pioneered the quickest mail-system between Europe and the United States. This practice proved too costly, however, and in October 1930 the catapult service discontinued. Also, the strength of the catapulting fatigues the structure of the steamer.

The idea of catapult mail was not fully developed by the French and it was the German, who understood the possibilities in using catapult mail on a regular service. In 1929, the German Norddeutschen Lloyd shipping company installed a catapult on its new liner *Bremen*, from which a seaplane was launched when the ship approached its destination. The first German catapult flight was made on 22 July 1929 during Bremen's maiden voyage, when a Heinkel He12 (registered D-1717) seaplane was launched while the ship was out of New York. In 1930, a catapult was fitted to a second ship, *Europa*, which used a Heinkel He58 aircraft (registered D-1919, a slightly larger aircraft with side-by-side seats and bigger payload). Both Heinkel seaplanes were replaced in 1932 by Junckers Ju46 aircraft.

Flights were only made during the summer season; in the winter, bad weather made launches too dangerous. German catapult flights were not resumed at the beginning of the 1936 season, as the dirigible LZ 129 *Hindenburg* (Luftschiff Zeppelin #129) had begun a regular transatlantic passenger and mail service from March of that year.

With the advance of aviation, transatlantic flights made the catapult mail system unnecessary, but for a period of time it was a successful application of innovation in delivering the mail.



Paraguay first day cover commemorating the 100th anniversary of Sir Rowland Hill's death, with the souvenir sheet reproducing the two stamps from France (overprinted with the ICAO logo). Issued on 24 August 1979.

More information on this issue can be obtained by clicking on the following link:

Paraguay – 100th Anniversary of Rowland Hill Death.



Mail carried on 13 August 1928 by the first postal liaison between La Havre, France and New York. Day of Issue octagonal date stamp on flown catapult cover franked with a surtax of 10Fr (2 x 5Fr), imposed by the decree of 29 July 1928 for airmail.



Private hand-stamp commemorating the catapulted aircraft piloted on the return leg by Lieutenant Demougéot: PREMIERE LIAISON POSTALE AERIEENNE / TRANSATLANTIQUE / PAR HYDRAVION LANCE PAR CATAPULTE DE « L'ILE DE France » / PILOTE: LIEUTENANT DE VAISSEAU L. DEMOUGEOT.



Cover rescued from crash of the seaplane during the return leg of the Île-de-France.



Catapult mail sent from the Bremen, on its return leg to Europe on 2 August 1929.



Catapult mail sent from the Bremen, on its return leg to Europe on 2 August 1929.

With the 5-cent stamp issued to commemorate the International Civil Aeronautics Conference held in Washington, D.C., from 12 to 14 December 1928.

Courtesy : THE POSTAL HISTORY OF ICAO