

## DOUBLE CANADIANA

by Albert Pelsser

In the years 1978-1980, Paraguay issued several sets of stamps and souvenir sheets commemorating many events in a single issue. Most of these relate to the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Sir Rowland Hill's death and milestones in the history of aviation. The first stamp of Scott #1889-1892A set, issued on 11 June 1979 by this country, is of exceptional interest to our theme of study, as it carries a double relationship to Canada, i.e. the transatlantic flight attempts starting from Newfoundland in 1919 and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) with headquarters in Montreal, Canada. As being a stamp-on-stamp issue, this set pictures in its main design classic and rare stamps from around the world.



Figure 1

Scott #1889a from Paraguay (see Figure 1) shows the first airmail stamp of Newfoundland, also named 3-cent brown Hawker referring to the first attempt of pilot Harry G. Hawker to make a non-stop flight over the Atlantic. The volume of history carried by this Newfoundland stamp is really fascinating and is the subject of the following paragraphs.

### THE NEWFOUNDLAND REGIMENT

Consisting of the island and a coastal portion of the Labrador region, Newfoundland was perhaps the first part of the New World to be explored by Europeans, namely the Vikings about AD 1000. The area was visited in 1497 by the Italian-born explorer John Cabot, who was sailing under the English flag; later in 1534, the French explorer Jacques Cartier visited the island too. In 1583, Sir Humphrey Gilbert took formal possession of Newfoundland in the name of England. In 1867, Newfoundland voters rejected union with Canada, and Newfoundland thus remained a separate political entity until it became the tenth province of the

Canadian Confederation in 1949.

With the outbreak of World War I in 1914 and a few weeks following the British declaration of war on 4 August 1914, the Newfoundland Regiment was formed on 21 August 1914 as a British Imperial Force; by the end of the Great War, over 6,000 men had served in the regiment. The regiment was assigned to the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division of the British Army. Recruitment of volunteers for the regiment was not a major problem during the two first years; however, major losses of life in the regiment in 1916 dramatically lowered the number of men volunteering to serve in the regiment.



Figure 2

The Somme battle in France brought the regiment to near annihilation during the engagements of the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade at Beaumont-Hamel on 1 July 1916; all officers were killed or wounded, and only 68 men remained uninjured. Later, costly major engagements took place on 12 October 1916 during the battle at Gueudecourt (close to Le Transloy). The brutal Somme campaign ended in November 1916; the Allied forces had gained only ten kilometres of ground. However, the terrible cost was approximately 600,000 casualties. Battlefield parks with war memorials to honour Newfoundlanders were established in the five places where they played an important role in a WWI battle; all feature a bronze statue of a caribou, its head held defiantly high. The courage and honour of the regiment throughout

the war resulted in receiving the designation of *Royal* from the British War Office before WWI ended.

The woodland caribou was the symbol of the Royal Newfoundland Royal Regiment. On 2 January 1919, a special set of twelve stamps (Scott #115-126) was issued by Newfoundland to recognize and remember the service and sacrifice of its soldiers and sailors during World War I. Their design shows the head of a caribou (actually an unreal combination of a caribou and a moose) and the text *TRAIL OF THE CARIBOU*, which is said to be originated with Lt. Col. Thomas Nangle, Roman Catholic Chaplain of the Newfoundland Regiment. On eight of these stamps are inscribed the location of a specific engagement in which the regiment participated; among these, the 3¢ red brown Scott #117 (Figure 2) bears the name of Gueudecourt. The other four bore the Latin word *Ubique*, meaning everywhere and recognizing that Newfoundland's sailors could literally be found everywhere on the sea.

### HAWKER'S TRANSATLANTIC ATTEMPT



Figure 3

On 1 April 1913, Lord Northcliffe and England's *London Daily Mail* put up a prize of UK£10,000 for the first non-stop aerial crossing over the Atlantic in either direction and £5,000 for a round-Britain flight in a British-designed aeroplane. Conditions were attached to this prize as follows: trip to be completed in 72 hours, takeoff and landing points anywhere in the USA, Canada or the British Isles. Due to WWI, the competition was put on hold until war ended. Shortly after the signing of the Armistice on 11 November 1918, the competition was re-established, but the rules were somewhat changed so that no former enemy pilots or aircraft would be allowed to participate in the race; also, the non-stop trans-ocean flight was to be completed

from west to east only. Indirectly, pilots would also favour this direction; oceanographic studies showed that the effect of the Coriolis force as a consequence of the Earth's rotation caused winds to swing to their right in the Northern hemisphere, so aeroplanes going west to east could travel a little faster by benefiting from a tail wind. It is interesting to note that, at that time, American crews were forbidden from accepting any possible prize money, even offered or earned.

As Newfoundland was the most eastern part of North America, it was the logical choice by pioneers as being the most favourable place to take off. The aviation technology developed for the Great War held a lot of promise and, in April 1919, various competitors arrived at St. John's, Newfoundland, to prepare their respective flights eastward across the Atlantic Ocean.

On 12 April 1919, Newfoundland overprinted in black 200 stamps of the 3c Caribou Scott #117 with the following text: *FIRST TRANS-ATLANTIC AIR POST, APRIL, 1919*, to carry a limited quantity of mail on the first attempt in that month to make a non-stop flight from North America to Great Britain. The overprinting was done at the offices of the *Daily News* in St. John's. This stamp became Newfoundland's first airmail issue Scott #C1 (Figure 3), a truly great philatelic classic. Only 95 stamps were used on letters, and are extremely valuable today because of their rarity; they must be seen as part of the early Canadian air mail story.

All told, there had been nine British entries posted for the *Daily Mail's* prize. The British team with pilot Harry Hawker and his navigator Lt. Cdr. Mackenzie Grieve from the Royal Navy arrived in Newfoundland late March 1919. Their aircraft was a Rolls Royce-powered Sopwith biplane, specially designed for transatlantic commercial transport and named *Atlantic*. On 10 April, they made a test flight for a transatlantic attempt. The only thing delaying them was poor weather. Subsequently, on 18 May 1919, they found the weather sufficiently encouraging, and they set out at 6:48 p.m. Unfortunately, chronic overheating of the engine brought them down the next day after 14½ hours of flight, while still about 750 miles short of their final destination. They were rescued by the Danish ship *SS Mary*. It is recorded that the *Daily Mail* awarded them a consolation prize of 5,000 pounds for their gallant attempt.

Four days after the crash, an American steamer found the abandoned aeroplane, with its mail water-soaked, but intact, and consisting of 87 pieces of first flight covers bearing Scott #C1 and postmarked 12 April 1919; the mail was eventually delivered.

Later on 14-15 June 1919, Capt. John Alcock and Lt. Arthur Whitten-Brown, both British, were the first crew to fly their converted Vickers Vimy biplane bomber non-stop across the Atlantic ocean, after a flight of 16 hours and 57 minutes.

## ICAO'S ANNIVERSARY

The second interest of Canadiana collectors in the set of stamps mentioned in the first paragraph of this article is the International Civil Aviation Organization. The designer of those stamps included the ICAO emblem, surrounded by *75º Aniversario de OACI*. Paraguay inadvertently confused the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wright brothers' triumph, who made the first successful flight of a manned

heavier-than-air vehicle on 17 December 1903, with ICAO which, even today, has not yet reached such a milestone. Furthermore, it should be noted that the date of issuance of the set by Paraguay in June 1979 did not correspond to an anniversary of the first flight (which should have been in 1978) nor to an anniversary celebrated by ICAO (the closest was in April 1977, according a prior article published in *The Canadian Connection*, Volume 11, Number 4, December 1997). This is a true example of philatelic inexactitude.

### CHECKLIST

Paraguay	1889	1979 Jun 11	Sir Rowland Hill death centenary, ICAO logo, stamp-on-stamp Newfoundland #C1
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