

PHILATELIC LAXITY

by Albert Pelsser

MONOCHROME FUNNELS



Figure 1

Although aircraft design made significant progress during the 1920s, it did not develop to the point where regular mail service was possible across the Atlantic. In the late 1920s, the need for a greater speed in the carriage of mail between Europe and America was recognized. The French were the first to do something to cut this transit time; they equipped the liner *Ile-de-France* with a catapult that would launch from its deck a small flying boat while the ship was still several hours from its destination; this meant that an aircraft could be launched at a distance of up to 500 miles from the nearest port, guaranteeing mail delivery one to two days before the ship actually docked. Such mail was struck with an additional postmark and is today highly collectable.

Paraguay Scott #1892A (see Figure 1), which was issued to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the death of Sir Rowland Hill, depicts the *Ile-de-France*. Like many of the French liners, it was built by *Chantiers et Ateliers Saint-Nazaire*. When it was launched on 14 March 1926, this ship was the largest of the *Compagnie Générale Transatlantique* and the sixth largest in the world. It was the first ship

to employ on a large scale the "art deco" ocean-liner style that characterized the interiors of the great transatlantic passenger ships of the mid-twentieth century. In July 1928, a seaplane catapult was installed at the ship's stern. After this installation, the *Ile-de-France* left Le Havre, France on 8 August 1928 and the hydroplane was catapulted on 13 August when the liner was at 400 miles from the American coast. It landed in New York 24 hours before the liner arrived. This was the first time that a catapult was used to launch a seaplane to carry mail. In July 1929, Germany launched the *Bremen* equipped with airplane and catapult equipment; in 1930, a catapult was fitted on a second German ship, the *Europa*.

The *Ile-de-France* seaplane carried the passengers' mail, franked with a surtax of 10 Fr. As a result of the success of the operation, the French Postal Agent On-board, Jules Cohen, feared that the stock of tax labels 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 (France, Scott #C3) and 1,000 1.50F-Pasteur stamps (France, Scott #C4) with "10Fr", for use on the return leg. In fact, Jules Cohen had planned this overprint by creating the scarcity of 10F-stamps during the outward voyage, and had purchased Berthelot and Pasteur sheets to be overprinted once in New York.



Figure 2

The catapult service on the French liner ended in October 1930. The carriage of mail across the Atlantic Ocean by Zeppelins led to the discontinuation of the so-

called *catapult post* in 1935.

A painting by French artist Joseph de Joux, shown at Figure 2, is a reproduction of the *Ile-de-France*, with its three top-black and low-red funnels; the Paraguayan souvenir sheet had pictured them exclusively in black. The aircraft on the souvenir sheet looks like an FBA 17 flying-boat, built by the Franco-British Aviation Company; the moving spirit behind this company was Frenchman Louis Schreck and it was in France that F.B.A. activities were centered. The FBA 17 is sometimes referred to as the Schreck FBA 17 after its designer. It was an unequal-span flying-boat biplane with a single-step hull; the engine was mounted between the wings to drive the pusher propeller.

In addition to marking the fifty-first anniversary of the first catapult mail (this issue had most likely intended to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the event), the aforementioned souvenir sheet commemorates the 100th anniversary of Rowland Hill's death; it also displays the emblem of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), with the intention of commemorating ICAO's 35th anniversary (ICAO's headquarters have been in Montreal since 1945). As already mentioned in an earlier article published in *The Canadian Connection*, Volume 11, Number 4, December 1997, the anniversary dates of ICAO have always created difficulties in interpretation and have shown inconsistencies in their celebration; in fact, the latter Organization celebrated its 35th anniversary in April of 1982.

CHECKLIST

Paraguay	1892A	1979 Aug 28	Sir Rowland Hill death centenary, ICAO logo
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