

1926-1927 PAN-AMERICAN 'GOOD WILL' FLIGHT

Air Commodore Richard N. Gurevitch AO and Andrew Cheung FRPSL

This mission is not only crucial in the development of airmail in Guatemala; it is also of great importance to the early airmails of the Central, South American as well as the Caribbean countries. The original article by Richard Gurevitch was published by Canberra Philatelic Society's Capital Philately Volume 29 No. 2 March 2011. The ISGC is grateful for his permission to reproduce a major part of his article herewith.

Introduction

The First World War saw major advances aviation in aircraft design and the number of trained aviators: Air Forces were formed either as independent arms or as adjuncts of other arms. When the War ended, the redundant military pilots with the availability of surplus aircraft provided the stimulus for expansion of air transport and the more rapid carriage of mail by air. Aviation pioneers sought glory (and financial success) by feats of flying great distances to locations where aviation was hither-to unknown and by opening new routes. These flights were not confined to civilian aviation, but various military organizations also participated in such activities.

In the United States of America, the Army Air Corps undertook a flight from New York to Alaska in 1920, and a Round-the-World flight in 1924. In mid-1926, Major General Mason Patrick, the Chief of the Army Air Corps sought approval for a 'Good Will' flight to visit most countries on Central and South America as well as those in the Caribbean. Approval was given on 24 August 1926, and no time was lost in making arrangements for the twenty-two thousand mile flight. This necessitated selecting the team leader and aircraft, determining the route to be followed, obtaining permission to visit the countries and colonies, and arranging for aviation fuel and spares to be available on-route. Major Herbert Dargue was selected to lead the Flight. Dargue was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1886 and entered the United States Military Academy on June 15, 1907. It was decided that the Flight would consist of six Loening AO-1A amphibian aircraft that were capable of landing on either land or water though only five would participate in the actual journey with the sixth being stationed as a spare at France Field in Canal Zone. The five active aircraft were named after major American cities. They and their crews were:

Aircraft	Crew	
New York (Flagship)	Major H. Dargue	1st Lieutenant E. Whitehead
San Antonio	Captain A. McDaniel	1st Lieutenant C. Robinson
San Francisco	Captain I. Eaker	1st Lieutenant M. Fairchild
Detroit	Captain C. Woolsey	1st Lieutenant J. Benton
St Louis	1st Lieutenant B. Thompson	1st Lieutenant L. Weddington

The Loening AO-1A amphibian aircraft had a maximum speed of 122 mph, a cruising speed of 90 mph, a range of 750 miles and a service ceiling of 13,500 feet.



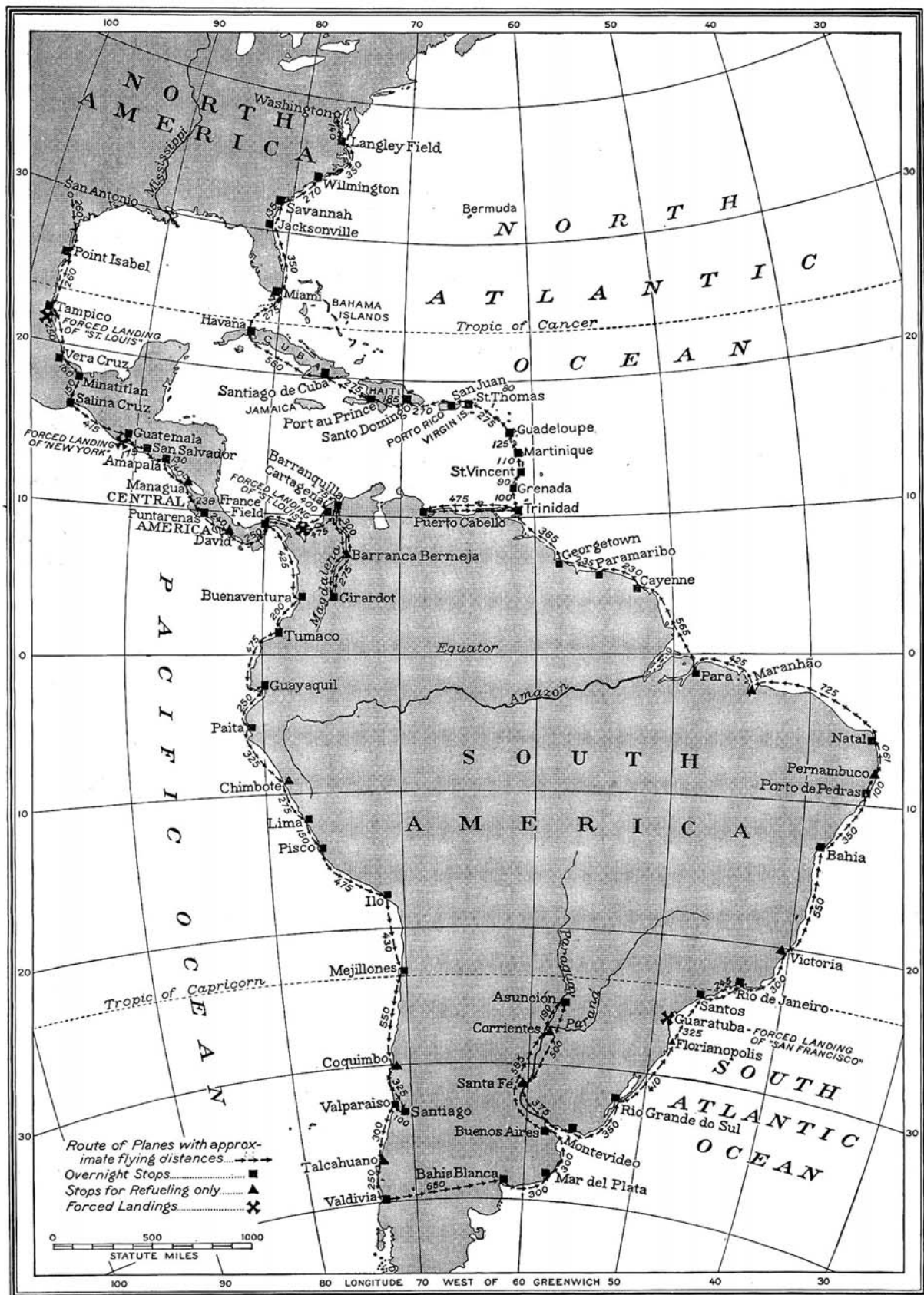
Loening AO-1A Amphibian Aircraft



*Herbert Arthur Dargue
17.11.1886 - 12.12.1941*

Flight Itinerary

The route taken by the Flight as well as the flight leg distances is shown on the map below:



Drawn by James M. Darley

The dates of the stops are tabulated below:

Take off / Landing Site	Arrival	Departure		Take off / Landing Site	Arrival	Departure
USA				Argentina		
San Antonio, Texas		21-Dec-26		Santa Fe	4-Mar-26	4-Mar-26
Mexico				Uruguay		
Point Isabel	21-Dec-26	22-Dec-26		Montevideo	4-Mar-26	8-Mar-26
Tampico	22-Dec-26	30-Dec-26		Brazil		
Vera Cruz	30-Dec-26	31-Dec-26		Rio Grande do Sul	8-Mar-26	9-Mar-26
Minattitlan	31-Dec-26	1-Jan-27		Florianopolis	9-Mar-26	9-Mar-26
Salina Cruz	1-Jan-27	2-Jan-27		Santos	9-Mar-26	10-Mar-26
Guatemala				Rio de Janeiro	10-Mar-26	18-Mar-26
Guatemala City	2-Jan-27	11-Jan-27		Victoria	18-Mar-26	18-Mar-26
El Salvador				Bahai	18-Mar-26	19-Mar-26
San Salvador	11-Jan-27	13-Jan-27		Porto do Pedras	19-Mar-26	20-Mar-26
Honduras				Pernambuco	20-Mar-26	20-Mar-26
Amapala	13-Jan-27	15-Jan-27		Natal	20-Mar-26	21-Mar-26
Nicaragua				Maranhao	21-Mar-26	21-Mar-26
Managua	15-Jan-27	15-Jan-27		Para	21-Mar-26	25-Mar-26
Costa Rica				French Guiana		
Punta Arenas	15-Jan-27	18-Jan-27		Cayenne	25-Mar-26	26-Mar-26
Panama				Dutch Guiana		
David	18-Jan-27	18-Jan-27		Paramaribo	26-Mar-26	27-Mar-26
Canal Zone				British Guiana		
Frances Field	18-Jan-27	23-Jan-27		Georgetown	27-Mar-26	28-Mar-26
Colombia				Trinidad		
Barranquilla	23-Jan-27	24-Jan-27		Port of Spain	28-Mar-26	30-Mar-26
Barranca Bermeja	24-Jan-27	24-Jan-27		Venezuela		
Girardot	24-Jan-27	26-Jan-27		Puerto Cabello	30-Mar-26	4-Apr-26
Barranca Bermeja	26-Jan-27	26-Jan-27		Trinidad		
Barranquilla	26-Jan-27	26-Jan-27		Port of Spain	4-Apr-26	7-Apr-26
Cartegena	26-Jan-27	27-Jan-27		Grenada		
Canal Zone				St George	7-Apr-26	8-Apr-26
Frances Field	27-Jan-27	29-Jan-27		St Vincent		
Colombia				Kingstown	8-Apr-26	9-Apr-26
Buenaventura	29-Jan-27	30-Jan-27		Matinique		
Tumaco	30-Jan-27	1-Feb-27		Fort de France	9-Apr-26	10-Apr-26
Ecuador				Guadeloupe		
Guayaquil	1-Feb-27	2-Feb-27		Pointe a Pitre	10-Apr-26	11-Apr-26
Peru				US Virgin Is		
Paita	2-Feb-27	3-Feb-27		St Thomas	11-Apr-26	12-Apr-26
Chimbote	3-Feb-27	3-Feb-27		Puerto Rico		
Lima	3-Feb-27	6-Feb-27		San Juan	12-Apr-26	14-Apr-26
Pisco	6-Feb-27	7-Feb-27		Dominican Republic		
Ilo	7-Feb-27	17-Feb-27		Santo Domingo	14-Apr-26	16-Apr-26
Chile				Haiti		
Mejillones	17-Feb-27	18-Feb-27		Port-au-Prince	16-Apr-26	18-Apr-26
Coquimbo	18-Feb-27	18-Feb-27		Cuba		
Santiago	18-Feb-27	22-Feb-27		Santiago de Cuba	18-Apr-26	19-Apr-26
Valparaiso	22-Feb-27	23-Feb-27		Havana	19-Apr-26	23-Apr-26
Talcahuana	23-Feb-27	23-Feb-27		USA		
Valdivia	23-Feb-27	24-Feb-27		Miami, Florida	23-Apr-26	25-Apr-26
Argentina				Jacksonville, Florida	25-Apr-26	26-Apr-26
Puerto Belgrano	24-Feb-27	25-Feb-27		Savanna, Georgia	26-Apr-26	28-Apr-26
Mar del Plata	25-Feb-27	26-Feb-27		Wilmington, North Carolina	28-Apr-26	29-Apr-26
Buenos Aires	26-Feb-27	2-Mar-26		Langley Field, Hampton, Virginia	29-Apr-26	2-May-26
Corrientes	2-Mar-26	2-Mar-26		Bolling Field, Washington, DC	2-May-26	
Paraguay						
Asuncion	2-Mar-26	4-Mar-26				

The flight was not without its mishaps, something that must have been anticipated with the positioning of a spare aircraft at Frances Field, Canal Zone. Early on in the flight one of the planes, *New York*, had an aborted take-off on the Guatemala to Salvador leg and had to make a forced landing which destroyed the landing gear. This delayed the Flight in Guatemala for five days. There were several mechanical faults en-route and, in particular, a defective thrust bearing prevented the *San Antonio* from leaving Tumaco, Colombia with the rest of the Flight on 1 February: it wasn't until the 18 February that it was able to continue its journey, but it finally caught up with the rest of the Flight in Montevideo on 5 March.

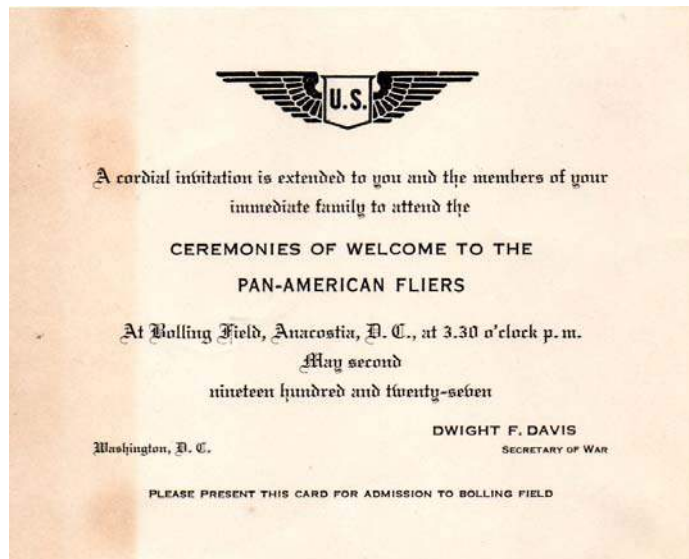
The major disaster to the Flight, though, occurred on 26 February while flying over Buenos Aires. The Flight had landed safely in the harbour at Buenos Aires earlier in the day and, after a reception, the Flight left the harbour to cover the short distance of around ten miles to a military field at Palomar. While on this short manoeuvre two planes collided in mid-air. They simply drifted into one another. These were the *Detroit* and the *New York*. The pilots in the latter plane, Major Dargue and Lieutenant Whitehead, parachuted to safety but the pilots of the former plane, Captain Woolsey and Lieutenant Benton, perished in the resultant crash. No blame was apportioned for the collision and the later inquiry deemed that the accident was unavoidable as, due to the relevant flying positions of the two aircraft, neither pilot would have seen the other plane in time to avoid the collision. The *Detroit* had had a broken cable that raised and lowered the landing wheels and had landed and taken off again at Buenos Aires harbour with the wheels retracted. On the short flight to Palomar, Lieutenant Benton had the job of going out onto the right wing to crank the wheels down into a landing position. This was a normal well practiced manoeuvre and Lieutenant Benton removed his parachute to climb out onto the wing. Captain Woolsey doubtless had most of his attention focused on Lieutenant Benton on the wing and, at the same time, Major Dargue's main focus of attention was on an Argentine escort plane that was reportedly flying under him. As a result of the crash, Lieutenants Whitehead and Weddington were ordered to proceed to the Canal Zone by rail and boat to pick-up the spare aircraft at France Field and to rejoin the flight at Puerto Cabello in Venezuela. In the meantime Major Dargue took the *St Louis* as his command aircraft. There were other incidences and unservicabilities some of which are annotated on the map of flight.

Throughout the flight, high dignitaries in all countries visited greeted Major Dargue and his airmen, and Major Dargue presented letters of Good Will from the President of the United States to Heads of State. In some cases, the aircraft did not land at the respective capital cities and Major Dargue traveled by road to meet the particular Head of State.



*Aircrew with two members of the Venezuelan welcoming committee in Caracas.
Major Dargue is seated center left.*

Four crews completed the flight and on their return at Washington, they were greeted by President Coolidge, who presented the citation of the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) to all the returning aircrew. (The DFC was a new award and its medal had not been struck at the time.) The *San Francisco*, only aircraft to complete the entire flight, was given to the Smithsonian Institution on December 1927.



Official invitation card for the welcome ceremony of the fliers at Bolling Airfield, Anacostia D.C.



President Coolidge with returning aircrew upon their presentation with their citations for the Distinguished Flying Cross.

Souvenir Envelopes

The aircraft were not officially allowed to carry mail, and indeed, the noted American aero-philatelist of the day, A.C. Roessler complained to the US War Department to the effect that he was denied sending mail on the flight, to which the War Department responded that no mail had been carried. However, there were numerous violations where letters were indeed carried, some of which entered the postal system and others were merely delivered by other means: these violations will be discussed later.

In addition, all aircrew carried flight souvenir envelopes with them, and on-route attached stamps of the nations or colonies visited to these envelopes as well as having the stamps cancelled per favour by the relevant postal authorities. These souvenir envelopes were initially sent to the aircrew at their departure point of Kelly Field, San Antonio, Texas: they were sent from New York, San Francisco, California, Chicago Illinois, and even San Antonio itself. Some envelopes were on-posted to Mexico from San Antonio where particular flight member took them up. In all, each member of the flight carried about 45 envelopes, amounting a total 435 envelopes, but about 80 envelopes were lost with the *Detroit* in its mid-air collision over Buenos Aires. Thus it is believed that about 350 envelopes were survived the entire flight.

Not all the souvenir envelopes are the same. The extent of the stamps and cancellations they bear depended not only on the diligence of the particular aircrew member in having his envelope franked but also on whether he was able at the visited locality. Envelopes carried by Major Dargue bear the largest number of stamps and frankings, as Major Dargue, the Flight Commander, was afforded the greatest considerations by obliging officials, and because he visited each en-route capital city.

Covers carried by Major Dargue, Lieutenant Fairchild and Lieutenant Robinson are illustrated here:-



Major Dargue Carried Envelope – Opened Out Outside

The envelope was sent from City Hall Station, New York on 10 December 1926, paying airmail postage, but the mail plane from Chicago was delayed, and the letter traveled by train to San Antonio. The envelope is franked by all the countries visited. Airmail cancellations are found on Costa Rican, Guatemalan, and Haitian stamps, and the Cuban stamp bears a special airmail cancellation especially produced for the flight. The Guatemala 'Correo Aereo' chop was brought out for Major Dargue, and the Haitian 'AVION' cachet is normally only found on Dargue's envelopes. Some of the stamps used are only found with Dargue envelopes, e.g. the Paraguayan airmail stamp, the Peruvian 'Plebiscite Issue' postal tax stamp, and the unofficially overprinted Ecuadorian stamp (this stamp is discussed later).



Lieutenant Fairchild Carried Envelope – Opened Out Outside

This envelope was posted from Oakland (San Francisco), California on 10 December 1926 and would have been flown to Fort Worth Texas and the carried by surface mail to San Antonio. The envelope was carried on the *San Francisco*, captained by Eaker. The Venezuelan stamp affixed to the envelope is a perforated 'G.N.' (Gobierno Nacional) to denote its official status: these stamps are rarely found on 'Good Will' flight envelopes.



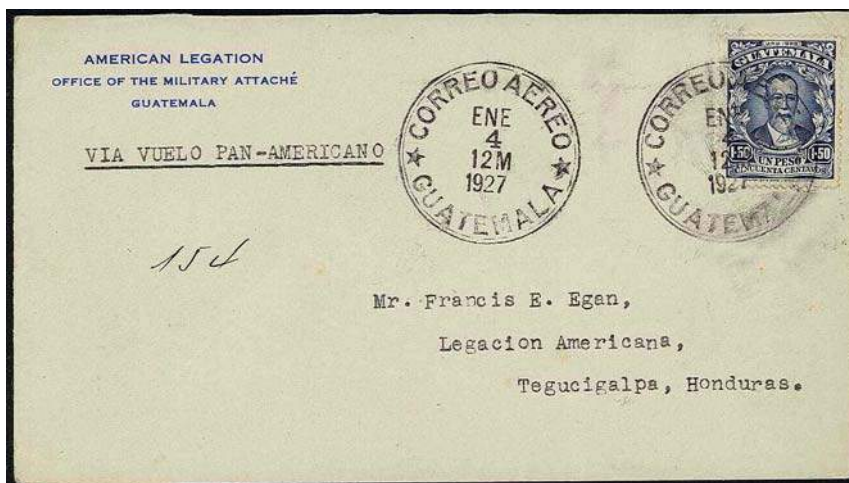
Lieutenant Robinson Carried Envelope – Opened Out Outside

This envelope was posted from Chicago on 7 December 1926 and would have been flown to Fort Worth Texas and the carried by surface mail to San Antonio, arriving on 9 December 1926. The Flight did not depart until 21 December 1926 but for some unknown reason the envelope was sent by surface mail to Tampico, Mexico to catch up with the Flight. The envelope bears far fewer frankings than either the Dargue or Fairchild envelopes.

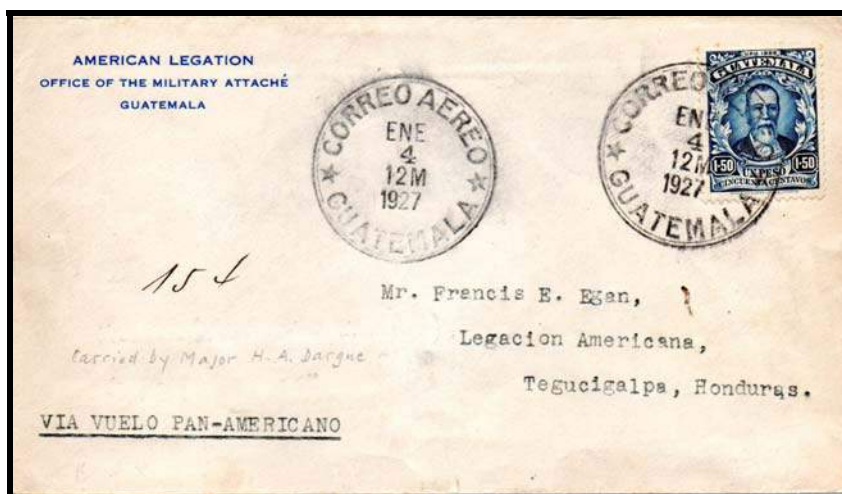
Carried Mail

Despite the prohibition of privately carried mail of these flights, covers are known carried by favour between various locations, some were sent through the post office and others are without postal marking.

Officers at the US Legation in Guatemala City prevailed on Major Dargue to carry a few flight covers franked 1926 issue 1.50 peso adhesive stamp (first 20 grams surface letter rate to the Interior or PAPU countries) to Honduras and Costa Rica. Such covers were cancelled using a single-ring datestamp drawn from the Postmaster's safe that had previously been used on first flight mail between Guatemala City and Santa Rosa in 1926. Honduras receiver struck on the reverse proving that these were carried by air. Very few such covers, possibly less than five according to Moorhouse were carried thus considered as one of the rarest Guatemalan airmail covers in extant. Three are shown here, all addressed to Francis E. Egan:-



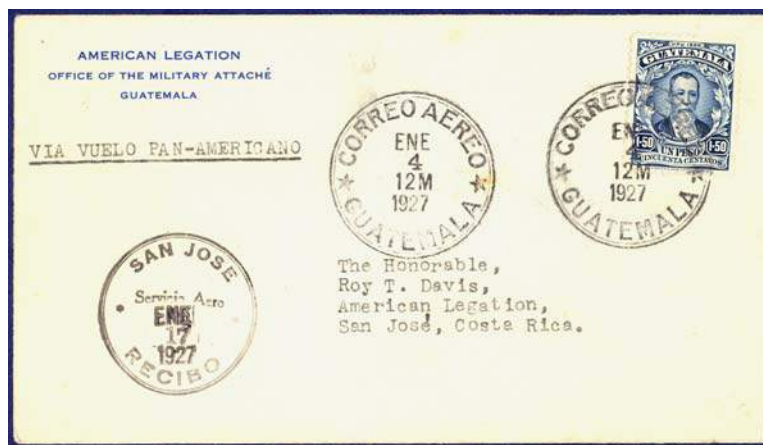
ex. Moorhouse



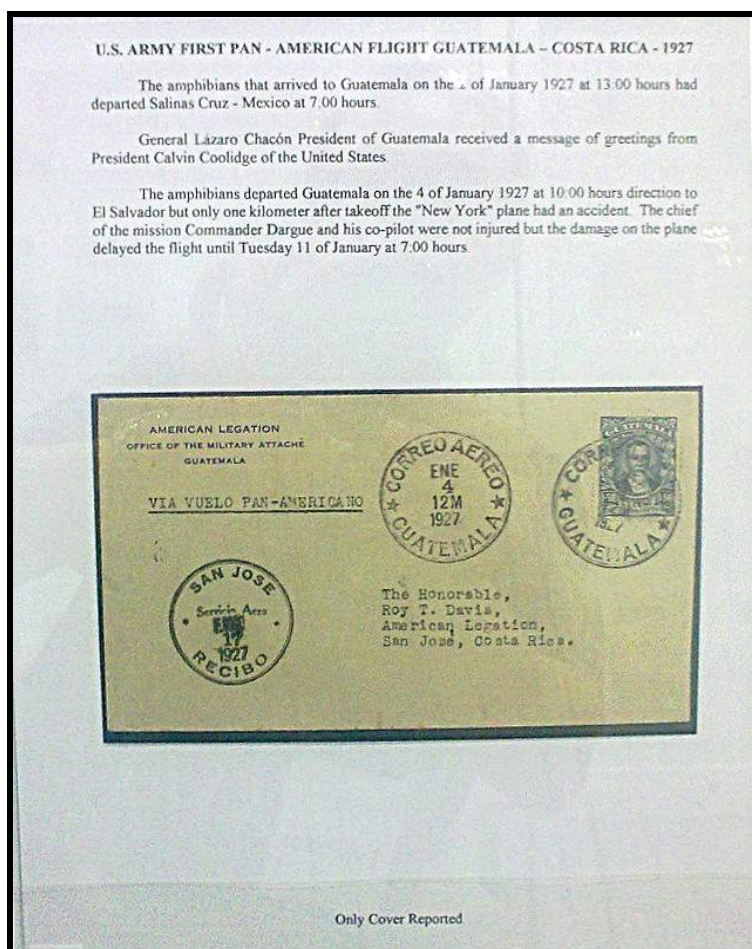
In the collection of Andrew Cheung



Illustrated by Captain Julius Grigore in his book³



In the collection of Richard Gurevitch



The exhibit page of Enrique Bialikamien (Costa Rica) at Philakorea 2014



In the collection of Andrew Cheung

Some covers addressed to Roy T. Davis, the US Minister in Costa Rica were sent from Guatemala City to San Jose, Costa Rica.

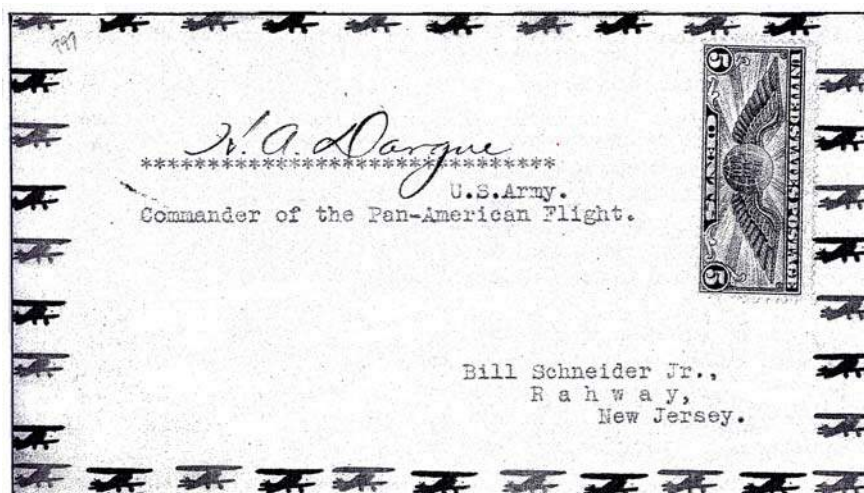
Davis was in the forefront of advocating airmail services in Central America.

Many early airmail flights between the Canal Zone and Costa Rica were at his initiative.

The cover was placed in the post on its delivery to San Jose and shows a San Jose receiver cancellation on the front of the cover.

Very few covers are known (less than five?) and we can trace three from different collections.

This cover is believed to have been privately carried by Major Dargue from Kelly Field Texas to Frances Field, Canal Zone. The 5c US Airmail stamp was not cancelled since it has not gone through the post, but it has Dargue's signature as Flight Commander.



These two covers were sent from San Jose, Costa Rica to Balboa, Canal Zone on 17 January 1927 and would have been carried by Major Dargue who would have taken it by road to Punta Arenas (where his aircraft landed) after his visit to the Capital. The cover was signed and sent from Roy Davis to Crede Calhoun, the Director of Posts in the Canal Zone. The cover entered the Canal Zone postal system at Cristobal on 18 January 1927. About 20 such covers were carried.



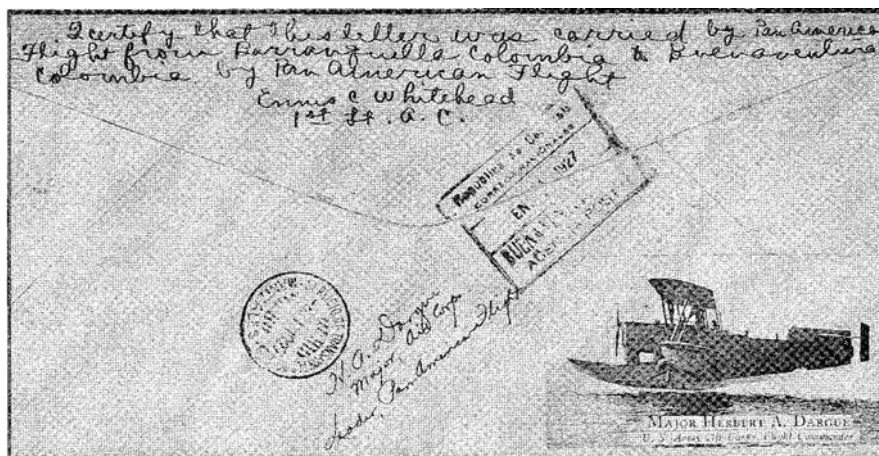
In the collection of Richard Gurevitch



Illustrated by Captain Julius Grigore in his book³



Major Humphreys, an active philatelist, prevailed on Major Dargue to carry three covers from David, Panama to Cristobal, Zone. These covers went through the postal systems of the two countries by arrangement.



Lieutenant Whitehead carried a number of covers from Barranquilla to Buenaventura in Colombia when he flew the leg on 26/29 January 1927. These covers were franked with Scadta stamps; however, the covers had postmarks quite out of keeping with the flown dates. It is thought that already used covers were carried by favour and then annotated by Dargue and Whitehead to that effect. They would not have gone through the post for the 'Good Will' flight carriage. The Official US Army Air Corps picture of the Loening AO-1A aircraft would have been affixed at a later date to the bottom back corner of the cover.



Whilst at Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Major Dargue was prevailed upon to carry 95 covers back to the United States. At that time Haiti was under US military administration. It is thought that this was a gesture to counter the disappointment some weeks earlier when De Pinedo refused to carry some prepared airmail covers to mark his flight. The cachets prepared for the De Pinedo mail was again used on the 'Good Will' flight covers. Although the Haitian Post Office processed the covers, they were not placed into the US postal system as such when they arrived in the United States, rather, the covers were placed into separate envelopes and mailed to addressees from Washington.

Ecuadorian Unofficial Airmail Stamps

In July 1923 some Ecuadorian 'Official' stamps were privately overprinted with a 'bi-plane' and the wording 'AVIACION / ECUADOR' on 1c, 3c & 4c or just 'ECUADOR' on 2c & 5c for a special flight but all covers bearing those stamps were lost due to plane crash. When Major Dargue visited Ecuador and asked for 'airmail stamps', he was given what's left for his own souvenir envelopes and therefore only his envelopes have those stamps. Dargue envelopes are recorded bearing the 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5 centavos stamps of the series.



1c affixed to the Dargue cover of Richard Gurevitch



2c affixed to the Dargue cover of Andrew Cheung



Illustrated by Captain Julius Grigore in his book³



Illustrated by Captain Julius Grigore in his book³

Collectability and Rarity

About 350 souvenir envelopes returned with the Flight and were probably sought by airmail collectors. The aircrew themselves probably kept copies as mementos of their journey. Thus the survival rate for the souvenir envelopes is probably very high. Nevertheless, collectors of airmails of any of the countries whose stamps are affixed to the souvenir envelopes would want copies for their collections, which would dilute their availability. Moreover, the souvenir envelopes differ depending on which one was carried by a Flight member. The Dargue envelopes are particularly sought as they bear the largest number of stamps and frankings as well as bearing stamps not contained on any other envelopes, and moreover, many of the Dargue envelopes differ from each other. The Eaker and Fairchild envelopes are sought because they were flown on the *San Francisco*. The other souvenir envelopes are not quite so spectacular; yet still command a high price, bearing in mind that any collector of American pioneer airmail flights would desire a copy. On today's market one could expect to pay anything between two and four thousand dollars for a Pan American 'Good Will' Flight souvenir envelope.

Item of mail carried between localities are much scarcer than the souvenir envelopes, but their desirability is very much dependant on where they were flown.

The price commanded by the unfranked letters depends very much on the desires of the collector in question and the importance place in obtaining the item, as it is unlikely that a competitive exhibit without such an item is to be penalized by their omission. However, they are also sought because of they bear Dargue's and other Flight members signatures. Nevertheless, they could command five to nine hundred dollars each.

The flown mail between locations is very scarce, apart for the Haiti to USA items. There is probably less than a handful each of the Guatemala-Honduras and Guatemala-Costa Rica items. There is a strong Central American airmail collecting fraternity and the price they command would be about one and a half thousand dollars each. The Costa Rica to Canal Zone covers are slightly more plentiful than the Guatemala leg covers, yet with the large number of Costa Rican and Canal Zone airmail collectors seeking such an item, those covers would command a price of about one thousand dollars. Only three David, Panama to Cristobal, Canal Zone covers are known and they are particularly sought by Panama and Canal Zone airmail collectors: were they to appear on the market, I would not be surprised if they would command a price of about three thousand dollars each. The Haiti to USA covers regularly appear on eBay and sell for about one hundred dollars.

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 4. Moorhouse, Mr. Brian, The 1926-27 Pan-American Flight, The Mainsheet, November 2003
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