

EARLY AIRMAIL and the LIFE OF JOHN P. CHARLTON

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Synopsis:

The story of early airmail service from its inception and growth in New Jersey, and the tragic story of pilot John P. Charlton.

Early Airmail Service

- An outgrowth of World War I, and the pilots who trained for missions abroad, the Air Mail Service was established in 1918. Airmail service was dangerous, with many pilots dying in crashes. One pilot died for every 115,325 miles flown in 1919. The service faced challenges like poor weather, lack of emergency landing fields, and inadequate aircraft safety.

John P. Charlton's Life

- John P. Charlton joined the U.S. Air Mail Service in October 1919 after serving in WWI. He was a skilled athlete and had a promising background, graduating from Phillips Academy in 1917. Charlton died on October 30, 1919, in a crash caused by dense fog while flying a de Havilland DH.4.

Impact of Early Airmail Pilots

- Early pilots laid the groundwork for modern airmail services, despite the high risks involved. The first year of operation showed a profit, with postal revenues totaling \$162,000 against costs of \$143,000. The service completed 1,208 airmail flights in its first year, with 90 forced landings.

Legacy

- Charlton's story highlights the sacrifices made by early airmail pilots in service to their country. The National Postal Museum commemorates the early airmail pilots, referred to as the "Suicide Club."