

MY FIRST THREE CACHET COVER DESIGNS

By Philip S. Dockter

Growing up in the early 1960s my brothers and I all had our own hobbies. . . . we collected stamps and coins. Our Dad would bring us home a big bag of coins from the bank so we could rummage thru that heavy bag and find all sorts of neat coins. There would be Indian head pennies, Buffalo nickels and Mercury head dimes, and even some steel pennies from WWII would show up. There were lots of pennies from the early teens, and the first Lincoln head pennies from 1909 showed their heads!

For some reason, I began to have an interest in First Day of Issue covers. These were mostly ArtCraft covers. I liked the designs and the feel of the steel etched engravings. Each cover seemed to tell a story in their small cachets. I had no idea what these covers were all about. And, *WHAT* was a first day cover, anyway?

My first cover project...

In 1988, a 50th anniversary of a very famous flight was approaching. In some way I wanted to celebrate that event, but HOW? I knew that the pilot of that flight was still living here in California. Maybe he might like my idea that was cooking around in my head. Perhaps I can design a cover like the ArtCraft covers that I had collected all those years ago! As a graphic designer, this job would be an easy task for me to do. I have worked with printers for many years, and had a good printer that could easily do the job of printing my covers.

This aviation event was to be a celebration of Douglas "Wrong Way" Corrigan's epic flight, mistakenly flying the *wrong way* to Ireland in 1938! Corrigan was one of those colorful characters of the 1930s who had a big idea to make a transcontinental non-stop flight from Long Beach, California to Roosevelt Field at Long Island, New York. Doug owned a 1929 used monocoque airplane that he had bought out of his savings while working as an airplane mechanic.

In 1927, Corrigan worked at Ryan Aircraft in San Diego as a welder. He helped build Charles Lindbergh's 'Spirit of St. Louis' as a welder on the metal tubular structure of the famous aircraft that would carry Lindbergh on his most celebrated flight across the Atlantic in 1927. Charles Lindbergh was Doug's hero, and in 1938, eleven years after Lindbergh's flight, Doug had the very same idea. Why not, Doug thought to himself... I could do the very same crossing of the Atlantic Ocean as my hero, Lindbergh!

Well, there was no way stopping ol' Doug. He had his mind made up. Doug worked for weeks late into the night installing extra fuel tanks and a fully rebuilt engine into his 1929 Curtiss Robin which he had named "Sunshine." It was now July 1938, and Doug was ready for his long flight. He flew non-stop from Long Beach to Roosevelt Field in New York. He was proud of himself for being able to do all this alone on his meager salary in his ancient aircraft!

When Doug landed at Long Island, officials were amazed that he had crossed the country in such an ancient looking jalopy! Without telling the officials at Roosevelt Field, Doug filed his flight plan to fly back to Long Beach, California. Doug filled his fuel tanks to the max, and was off again, this time to cross the Atlantic just as Lindbergh had done! Doug had made it, landing in Dublin, Ireland. He had claimed that his compass was not in working order. Douglas Corrigan, the 'Flying Irishman' gained instant acclaim! Newspapers quickly named him 'WRONG WAY' Corrigan. He received a hero's welcome in Ireland and here in the U.S.! Doug got a ticker-tape parade in New York City, and in many cities he was a guest of honor. Headlines in newspapers of his flight read backwards (wrong way), and he even received a watch that ran the wrong way! Later that year, Doug wrote a book about his life, "That's My Story". In 1939, RKO Pictures even made a film of his life titled, 'The Flying Irishman.'" Amazing enough, Doug played himself in that film... several songs were even written, and sheet music was published.

In later years, Doug raised a family, worked for Douglas Aircraft testing aircraft, and, during WWII, ferried aircraft to England. Fifty years later in 1988, he accepted an invitation from the people of Ireland who asked an aging, yet spry, 'Wrong Way' Corrigan to return to their country. They never forgot his amazing and daring flight!

Well, I didn't either... I designed a cover honoring Douglas Corrigan's 1938 wrong way flight! I had printed 500 covers which I had postmarked in New York, July 17, 1988, on the date that Doug left for Ireland, 50 years to the day. I even had some postmarked in Ireland. In August of 1988, the City of Hawthorne, California invited Doug to their annual Airfaire. Doug was really up for this event, and the chance to tell his story again of his now famous *wrong way* flight to Ireland. Doug also brought along another famous relic of that flight, his 1929 Curtiss Robin, which he kept in pieces in his garage in Santa Ana all these years! Doug and other mechanics helped re-assemble this famous aircraft to be on display during the Airfaire. I also helped to assemble Corrigan's aircraft. When Doug wasn't looking, I slipped a box of these envelopes into the cabin of this historic airplane!



My very first cover



**Douglas Corrigan now in his 80s assembling his Curtiss Robin at Hawthorne Airport,
August 1988.**

By 1996, my passion for aviation history had grown. I became friends with a legendary test pilot, Chalmers 'Slick' Goodlin. Goodlin was Bell Aircraft's chief test pilot in 1946, who flew the Bell XS-1 (XS: Experimental Supersonic) on its first powered test flight on December 10, 1946 at Muroc Army Air Base, now Edwards AFB in California. The Bell XS-1 was designed to be the first rocket-powered aircraft to penetrate the sound-barrier. The 50th anniversary of Slick's historic flight was rapidly approaching and I wanted to design a cover that would celebrate this historic aviation event for my friend, Slick Goodlin. Mr. Goodlin liked my idea and my cachet design, so I proceeded with my new project and second cachet. I had a connection with the Edwards Flight Test Historical Museum at Edwards AFB. They wanted some of the XS-1 covers that they could sell to raise funds for their newly established museum. All these covers were postmarked at Edwards Air Force Base on December 10, 1996. Slick Goodlin agreed to sign many of these covers for the museum. Chalmers 'Slick' Goodlin was one of the key test pilots written about in Tom Wolfe's best selling book, "The Right Stuff!" Wolfe said of Slick, "*He was first with the Right Stuff!*"



My second cover



A dashing 'Slick' Goodlin made 26 proven test flights in the Bell XS-1 before the US Air Force took over the program from Bell Aircraft.



Chalmers Goodlin at his home in Coral Gables, Florida, 2001

Coming quickly around the corner was another aviation milestone event involving, the Bell X-1

Aircraft, once again, and I wanted to be involved. This time, another famous and legendary test pilot was to be honored for his flights in the Bell X-1 aircraft, Brig. Gen. Charles 'Chuck' Yeager's famous record breaking flight **-first to break the sound barrier**. Shortly after my cover design for Slick Goodlin had been met with some praise, I knew that Yeager's 50th anniversary was rapidly approaching. Since I had an "in" with the Edwards Flight Test Museum, I quickly came up with a cachet design, now on a #10 size envelope. Little did I know that this was to be a much bigger event!

It was early 1997, and I had a neat cachet design that the Flight Test Historical Museum liked and approved. Even the legendary Chuck Yeager liked my cachet. At this early date, the word was out that Yeager's historic flight would be honored with a United States postage stamp to be issued on Oct. 14, 1997, the 50th anniversary date of his flight. WOW! What a great combo. . . a cover to honor Yeager's X-1 flight and a postage stamp, too! This was too good to be true, except for one thing... the first day of issue ceremonies for the 'Breaking of the Sound Barrier' postage stamp was to be held in Washington, D.C. at the Smithsonian Air & Space Museum, where the famous little orange rocket X-1 aircraft that

Yeager flew was hanging in the Milestones of Flight Gallery. Fortunately, some high ranking postal officials and others came to the right decision that the correct place for the first day ceremonies should take place where the sound barrier flight had taken place, Edwards AFB in California!



Official unveiling of the Supersonic postage stamp by Gen. Yeager, ceremonies held at Edwards AFB, October 14, 1997.



A signed AP cover that was FLOWN and signed by Gen. Yeager.

The 50th anniversary of Yeager's famous flight was weeks away, and Edwards AFB and the USPS were gearing up for an all out public historic event. Gen. Yeager would pilot and re-create his record flight through the sound barrier in a U.S. Air Force F-15 at the exact time, 50 years to the minute! The

Edwards Museum would print 2,000 #10 size cacheted covers, and Brig. Gen. Chuck Yeager agreed to sign 1,200 of them serviced with the new stamp and cancelled on this first day of issue. These would be numbered and sold at the event for \$50 each. The Air Force, along with Gen. Yeager, agreed that all 2,000 envelopes would be FLOWN through the sound barrier high above Edwards AFB on Yeager's F-15! When word of these FLOWN and signed covers became public before the event, orders for these historic first day covers came in from all over the country and the World!