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Article Summary: For one day in 1938, hundreds of Nebraska towns had direct airmail service.

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Nebraska's National Air Mail Day Districts: Northeastern District (Omaha), Southeastern District (Lincoln), Central District (Grand Island), Western District (North Platte)

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Photographs / Images: Evelyn Sharp of Ord, the youngest woman in the United States to hold a commercial pilot's license; an airmail DeHavilland DH-4 over Jarvis Offutt Field at Fort Crook, Omaha; inset cachet (commemorative envelope) for National Air Mail Week, showing routes flown by pilots picking up the mail in central Nebraska; inset letter from the Chappell, Nebraska, postmaster to the chairman of the Nebraska Department of Aeronautics with a map of the Chappell landing field; inset cachets for Talmadge and Bridgeport, Nebraska; bags of airmail being loaded into a Boeing B-40 at Fort Crook, Omaha; DeHavilland DH-4 circling the light tower on an emergency landing field at an unidentified Nebraska location in 1924; pilots Jack Knight and Clarence Lange modeling cold weather flight suits about 1920; DeHavilland DH-4; transcontinental airmail route in 1921



One of the best known pilots carrying mail for Nebraska's National Air Mail Week was Evelyn Sharp of Ord. Just eighteen years old, Sharp was the youngest woman in the United States to hold a commercial pilot's license. NSHS RG2929-3p

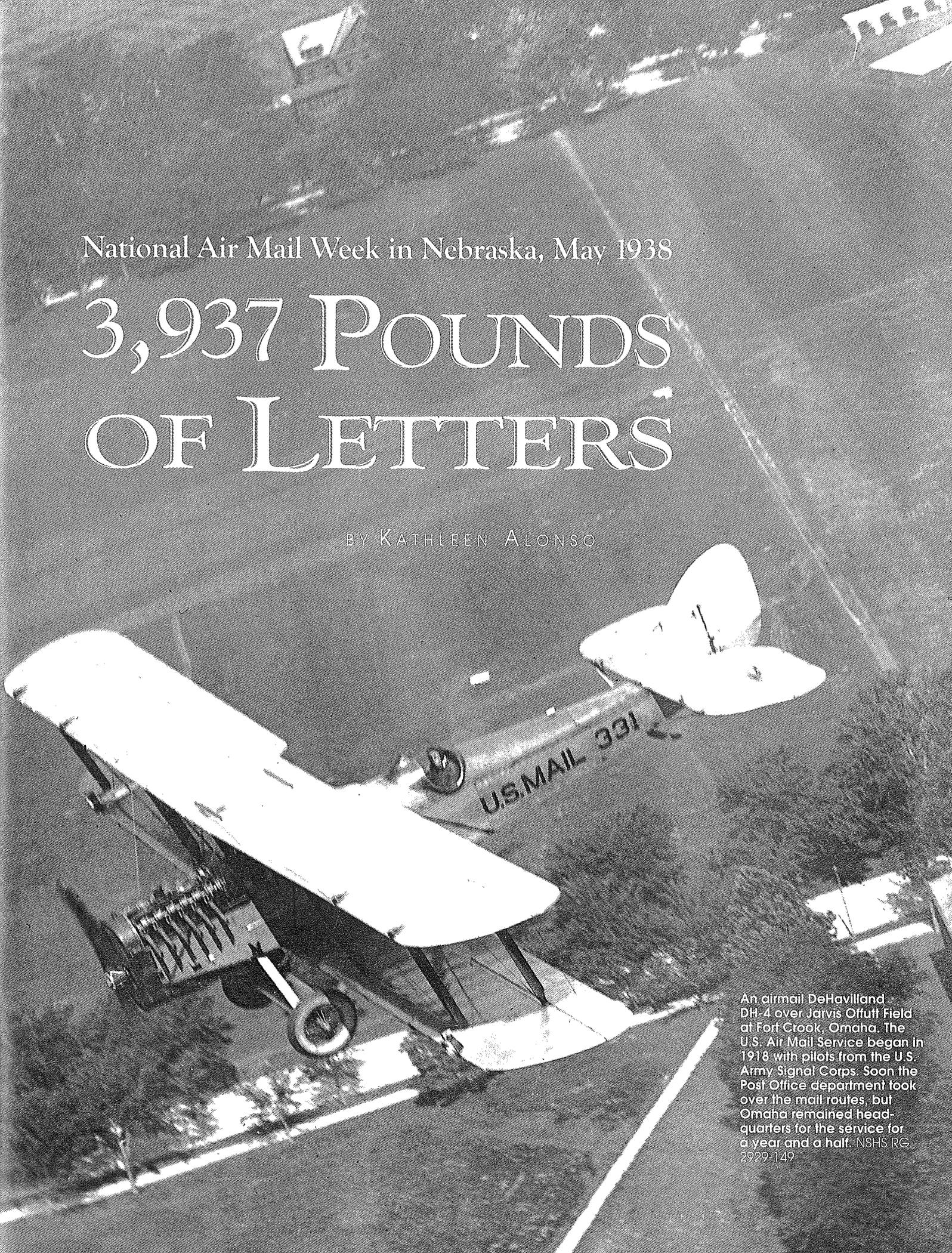
NEITHER SNOW, NOR RAIN, NOR HEAT, NOR GLOOM
OF NIGHT STAYS THESE COURIERS FROM THE SWIFT
COMPLETION OF THEIR APPOINTED ROUNDS.

HERODOTUS, FIFTH CENTURY B.C.

This motto, inscribed on the historic Farley Post Office in New York City, has become so associated with postal dependability that many people do not realize that it is not the official motto of the U.S. Postal Service, but a quotation chosen by the architect for that particular building.



Over the years postal employees on foot, on horseback, in wagons and buggies, on trains, and, more recently, in cars and airplanes, have honored that pledge.



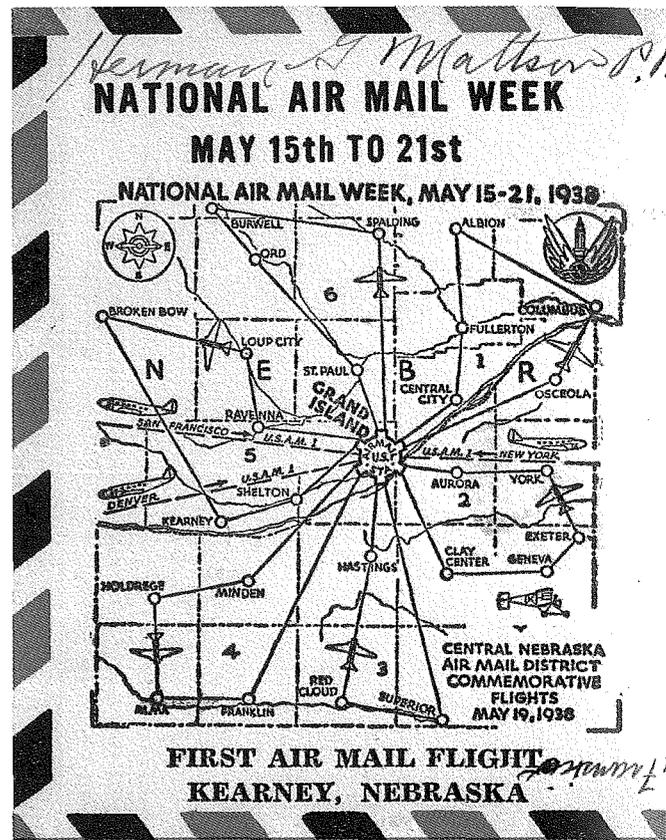
National Air Mail Week in Nebraska, May 1938

3,937 POUNDS OF LETTERS

BY KATHLEEN ALONSO

An airmail DeHavilland DH-4 over Jarvis Offutt Field at Fort Crook, Omaha. The U.S. Air Mail Service began in 1918 with pilots from the U.S. Army Signal Corps. Soon the Post Office department took over the mail routes, but Omaha remained headquarters for the service for a year and a half. NSHS RG 2929-149

In May 1938, while isolationism was the dominant mood at home and Hitler was beginning his march toward anticipated European domination, Nebraska joined the rest of the nation in planning a celebration of the twenty years of U.S. airmail service. Complicated statewide planning by the Department of Aeronautics, pilots, postmasters, and local organizations including chambers of commerce and American Legion posts culminated in a May 19 extravaganza in which 3,937 pounds of airmail were picked up from 215 Nebraska towns and cities by a fleet of airplanes flying a combined total of 10,279 air miles.



THE FIRST OFFICIAL AIRMAIL ROUTE IN THE UNITED States had been established in 1918, connecting New York City, Philadelphia, and Washington DC.¹ In 1938, the nation celebrated the 20th anniversary of that first airmail route by designating May 15–21 as National Air Mail Week. Plans for the week were announced in the March 1, 1938, issue of *American Aviation*.² Several events were scheduled to take place nationwide during the celebration. James Edgerton and George Boyle, the first airmail pilots, were to fly their original routes. Larry Fritz, who made the first commercial flight in 1926, would once again take off from Cleveland. Jack Knight would recreate his historic night flight from Cheyenne to Chicago. All across Nebraska, towns that had burned bonfires to help Knight stay on course in 1921 would do so again.³ An essay contest for high school students would give one student from each state a trip to Washington, D.C., and one national winner a trip to Florida or California.⁴

The main feature of National Air Mail Week was scheduled for Thursday, May 19, when airmail service would be provided to as many towns as possible throughout the nation. The U.S. Post Office Department had set a goal of “one letter

per citizen”⁵ (had the goal been reached the mail system would have been flooded with more than 120 million airmail letters). In addition, each town would be invited to create its own cachet, a commemorative design to mark the event printed or stamped on the envelopes mailed that day. The cachets would have historical significance, and they would be unique items for collectors of philatelic memorabilia.

Harley G. Moorehead, Omaha Postmaster, became the state chairman for National Air Mail Week. His duties consisted primarily of coordinating the state events with national organizations involved in the pick-up flights, such as United Air Lines, and with the national chairman for the week, Paul R. Younts of North Carolina. The Department of Aeronautics handled statewide coordination.

The first step toward providing one-day airmail service to Nebraska’s small towns was to organize the state into four districts, established by the end of March. Omaha, Lincoln, Grand Island, and North Platte were established stops on the transcontinental airmail route, so on May 19, all of the state’s special airmail would have to find its way to one of those cities.



All of Nebraska's airmail was taken to Omaha, Lincoln, Grand Island, or North Platte, established stops on the transcontinental airmail route. The cachet, or commemorative envelope used by several towns in the twenty-four-county Central District, including Kearney, featured a district map showing the routes flown by pilots picking up the mail. NSHS 7721.137

Because the western portions of the district were in the Mountain Time Zone, pick-ups there would have to be scheduled an hour earlier if they were to meet the United Air Lines mail plane at North Platte, which was scheduled to arrive in the morning. The longest route was more than four hundred miles, from Harrison to North Platte via Crawford, Chadron, and Hemingford.⁷ The time change and the distance meant that for many towns, pick-up flights would arrive at nine a.m. or earlier—not a time when spectators could easily gather.

Organizers in the Western District spoke out against the schedule. One pilot wrote to Rodman and Doyle complaining that early flights would “kill the publicity and advertising effect.”⁸ A telegram from Scottsbluff also protested the early schedule. “Communities here absolutely opposed to scheduled early morning airmail flight. If effort to publicize airmail is desired why nullify willing cooperation by ridiculous flight hour when no one will be present celebrate event.”⁹

Organizers eventually responded to the complaints. Moorehead wrote to United Air Lines asking if a later flight through North Platte was possible. The airline replied that it would be impossible to send extra planes to every town in the country that might need one. It seemed as if the only thing to do in the Western District was to “fly when the birdies do and make the 10:03 schedule.”¹⁰ In the end, however, the organizers agreed to a more acceptable arrangement. The pick-up planes would arrive between noon and about 3:30 p.m., depending on a town's location along the route. Doyle wrote to Dollinger, “the Grand Island district and your district were both bringing pressure and it helped us in turning the trick.”¹¹

After the districts were organized, routes were created. Generally, this was the district's responsi-

The Northeastern District, including twenty-four counties, was centered in Omaha. Moorehead was the chairman, and Rudy Mueller, manager of the Omaha Airport, was in charge of organizing the pick-up flights. Since Norfolk had a landing field and was closer to many Northeastern District cities, at least five planes were scheduled to land there, and the mail would be transferred to Omaha.⁶

Lincoln was the center of the Southeastern District, and Lincoln Postmaster Robert C. Fenton served as the district chairman. C. S. Doyle, chairman of the Department of Aeronautics, was in charge of organizing the pick-up flights in the district. He also had to approve all the state's temporary fields that would serve towns without established airfields.

Grand Island was the hub for the twenty-four county Central District, and Grand Island Postmaster Harold C. Menck was the district chairman. Dr. W. W. Arrasmith coordinated the pick-up flights.

The Western District, centered in North Platte, included thirty-one counties, and extended through the Panhandle and much of southwestern Nebraska. The district chairman was Postmaster Harold A. Langford; flights were arranged by W. S. Rodman of Kimball.

Kathleen Alonso received a bachelor's degree from Doane College in 2003. This article grew out of her senior thesis. She is currently working toward a master's degree at the University of Nebraska-Omaha.

United States Post Office

Chappell, Nebraska,

May 5, 1938.

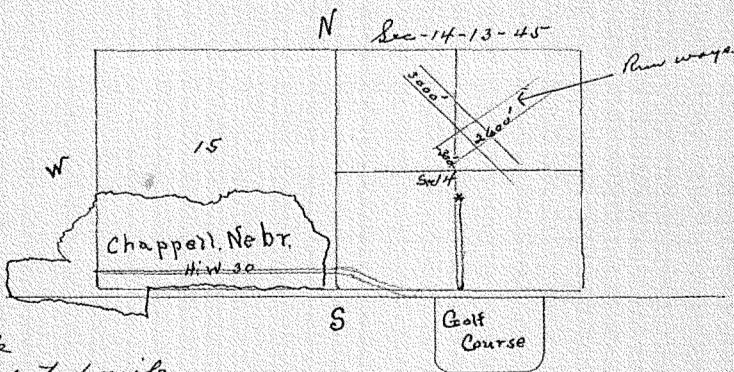
CLASS
IN REPLYING
MENTION INITIALS AND DATE

C. S. Doyle,
Lincoln, Nebraska.

Dear Sir:- In Re:-Landing Field description.

I will endeavor to draw a plan showing the location of the emergency landing field located here. Your instructions will be complied with.

Respectfully,
W. E. McCaulley
W. E. McCaulley, Postmaster.
By A. Taylor
ctk



had to be found. By the end of March, a bulletin had gone out requesting all eligible pilots to sign up for airmail flights.¹³ To qualify for delivering mail, a pilot was required to have a private or commercial license and own or have access to an airplane. One pilot was able to borrow a plane from the Miller Brothers Chevrolet Company in Valentine.¹⁴ Ultimately nearly sixty pilots flew routes, and a few more remained on standby in case of emergency.¹⁵

To apply, a pilot wrote to the Aeronautics

“DON'T DISAPPOINT
THE PEOPLE, BUT DON'T RUN
UNNECESSARY RISKS.”

Commission stating his or her license number and the registration number of the plane to be used.¹⁶ Before taking off, each pilot was required to become a temporary employee of the Post Office Department and fill out a waiver releasing the department from liability for any damages done to the plane.¹⁷

Most of the pilots were unknown outside their hometowns, although a few were more noteworthy. Arrasmith, Doyle, and Rodman all doubled as pilots in their respective districts. Perhaps the most famous pilot—and the only woman—was Evelyn Sharp of Ord. Just eighteen years old, Sharp was the youngest woman in the nation holding a commercial pilot's license, which she had received only a few weeks earlier.¹⁸

Although C. S. Doyle had personally inspected every field to be used, he cautioned the pilots to follow their own judgment, not his. They had a fine line to walk. “Don't disappoint the people, but don't run unnecessary risks.”¹⁹ Throughout the correspondence with pilots and communities, C. S. Doyle and the other organizers made it clear that the pilots would receive no compensation for their services. Delivering the mail was strictly a volunteer effort. Towns receiving airmail service provided five dollars to help with oil and gas expenses.

One of the purposes of National Air Mail Week was to promote airmail service and perhaps expand it by providing regular service to more towns. In a letter to the postmasters of the Central District, Harold Menck of Grand Island noted that the Post Office Department had conducted some

The postmaster in each town was responsible for finding an appropriate landing field and was required to submit a map to C. S. Doyle, chairman of the Nebraska Department of Aeronautics. A few towns, like Chappell, had established runways. Most used a convenient hayfield.

Two major formats were used. The first was to have a plane start in a hub city, such as Grand Island, fly to three, four, or perhaps five towns, then return to the hub with a cargo of airmail. This circle method worked well for Lincoln and Grand Island, where the territory covered was relatively small.

Another option was to have a pilot start in his hometown and fly to the hub city, picking up mail along the way. This was the plan used in the Western District where the starting points were as much as four hundred miles from North Platte. This method was also used on some routes flying into Omaha, although some planes in the Northeast District flew circle routes out of Norfolk. Towns were still being added to routes as late as a week before the event. Laurel, Dorchester, Western, Wallace, Wauneta, Elsie, and Madrid were among the last-minute additions.¹²

While the districts were being arranged, pilots

experimental feeder-line flights in recent years. He also wrote that aviation authorities considered the Air Mail Week flights “a national practical experiment. . . with a view of actually establishing actual airmail service to cities not now included on regular airmail routes.”²⁰

Perhaps the most difficult thing about flying mail out of small towns was finding a place to land the planes, since most of the towns involved did not have an airport or an established airstrip. The postmaster of each town was in charge of finding an appropriate field and submitting the location to the State Aeronautics Commission, following the clear guidelines established by state and district organizers. Dr. Arrasmith sent a letter to postmasters in the Central District instructing them to send a map with the top three field choices, noting any obstacles to a landing such as trees, buildings, and power lines, and specifying the crop planted on the field. He also reminded the field selectors that planes land and take off against the wind.²¹

Postmaster C. L. Bennett of Broken Bow responded by explaining how he “went out and carefully looked over the field and no crops are planted on the runways indicated on the map enclosed.” He also noted that there were no badger burrows or debris on the field, and “of course, as this is our regular city field that has all been taken care of”²² (It is impossible to tell if Bennett was being ironic or just thorough).

C. S. Doyle also provided information about field expectations. One of his bulletins made it clear that the field must be large enough, marked by a large flag, and kept clear of all unauthorized persons on the day of the pick-up flight.²³ At the end of April, Doyle sent a letter advising towns that the Department of Aeronautics needed information about their field sites immediately.²⁴ He also stated that the field should be firm, preferably meadow or hay land. It was to be at least 80 rods (one quarter-mile) long.

There was no standard format for the landing-field maps. Dr. Arrasmith’s bulletin recommended using a township map, and some towns did so. Other towns submitted varied formats that ranged from a quick sketch to more professional maps such as the one drawn by mechanical drawing students in Superior and the detailed topographic map from Arcadia.²⁵

The variety of temporary landing fields was as large as the variety of maps. The certification of the Ord airport had expired by 1938, but the runway was still there and in use. Like many towns, Chambers used an airstrip—it was not an official

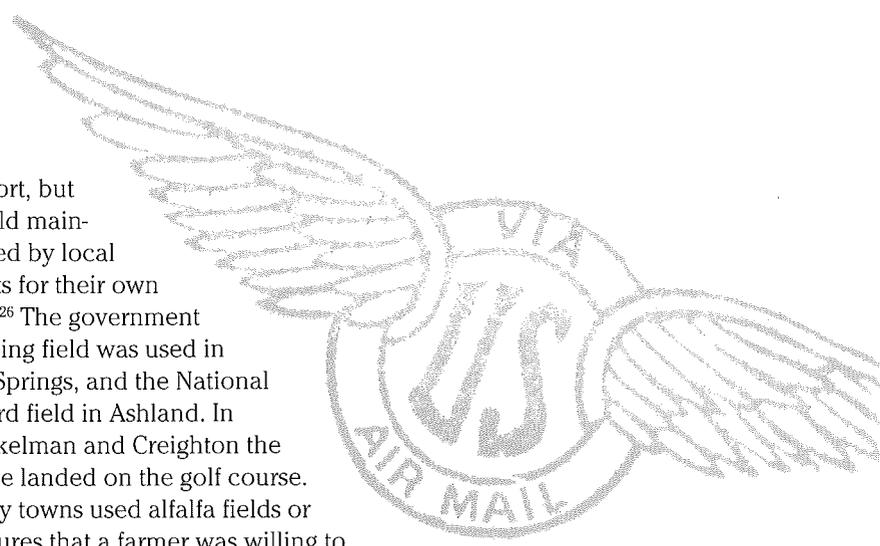
airport, but a field maintained by local pilots for their own use.²⁶ The government landing field was used in Big Springs, and the National Guard field in Ashland. In Benkelman and Creighton the plane landed on the golf course. Many towns used alfalfa fields or pastures that a farmer was willing to donate for a day.

Most communities picked any suitable field near town, but Howe’s landing site had a connection to the history of the mail service. Nearby was a four-room house owned by George and Jefferson Cumings where the town’s first mail had been delivered. Jefferson Cumings had been Howe’s postmaster when mail delivery began there in the 1880s.²⁷

Once a town had selected a field, the choice had to be approved by the Aeronautics Commission. C. S. Doyle began inspecting fields on Sunday April 24. “Unsuitable fields were noted and new sites selected. Postmasters at the various towns were requested to secure permissions for use of new field sites.”²⁸ Most fields were inspected May 6–12. During that week Doyle traveled hundreds of miles a day.²⁹ He would spend the morning working on correspondence and six or seven hours in the afternoon approving landing fields.³⁰ That left any town whose field was not approved less than two weeks to find a suitable site. As Doyle stated in his report to the Department of Aeronautics, he did suggest alternate landing sites. For example, he wrote to Adams rejecting the primary field, but noted that there was a large hay meadow southwest of town that would be suitable if the owner’s permission could be secured.³¹

Many towns that were unable to arrange their own pick-up flights made arrangements to send mail to the nearest town that did land a plane. Nearly half of the letters put on the plane in Benkelman came from Parks and Max.³² Auburn collected mail from Peru and Brock as well as from its own citizens.³³ Albion sent out nearly a thousand letters of its own, as well as some from St. Edward, Petersberg, and Boone.³⁴ Ong’s postmaster went to the nearest pick-up town and sent greetings to the Department of Aeronautics, noting that his town was the only Ong in the entire postal directory.³⁵

Local organizations, such as American Legion



clubs, contributed to the success of the flights. Largely due to the influence of Dr. Arrasmith and Harold Menck, both Legion members, many bulletins were sent advising postmasters to ask the Legion for help. One of the first bulletins that Menck sent to postmasters in the Central District regarding the pick-up flights explained that a preliminary schedule had been drawn up with the help of Legion clubs. The bulletin also suggested, "sponsorship of the flight in your city while remaining entirely under your authority, might be participated in by The Local Post of The American Legion."³⁶ In many towns, Legion members were in charge of keeping spectators off the landing fields, sometimes with the help of the Boy Scouts. Some of the pilot waivers were witnessed by post commanders of the American Legion.³⁷

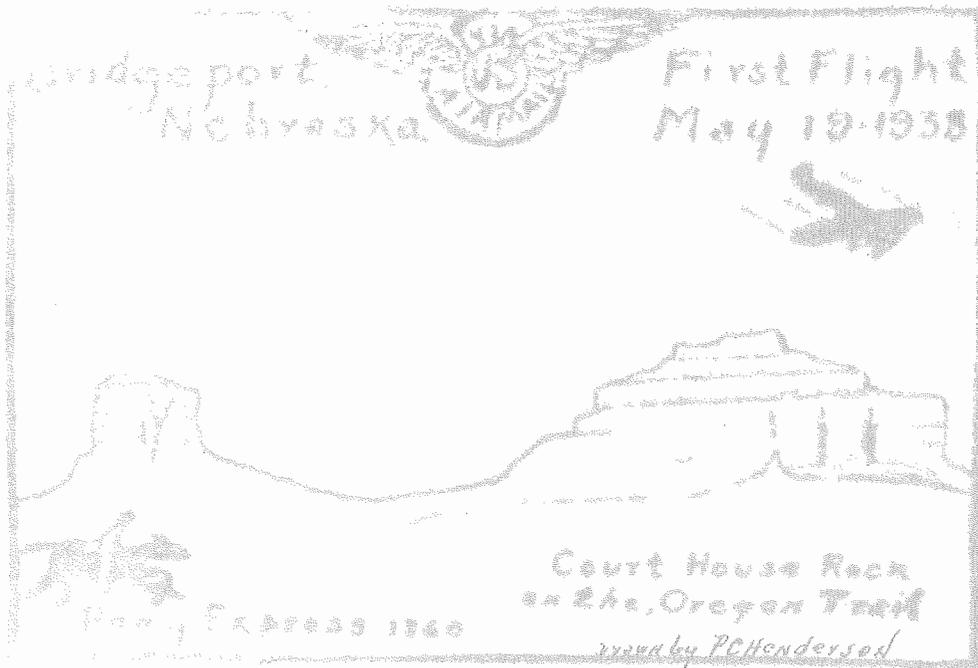
Organizations such as chambers of commerce, commercial clubs, and Lions clubs helped with the event in various towns by locating a field or generating publicity. Businesses were also involved. In

Spalding stores offered airmail specials, good for May 19 only. Among other things, farmers could get ten cents a pound for roosters they wanted to sell. The local newspaper went out a day early with two pages of Air Mail Day ads.³⁸

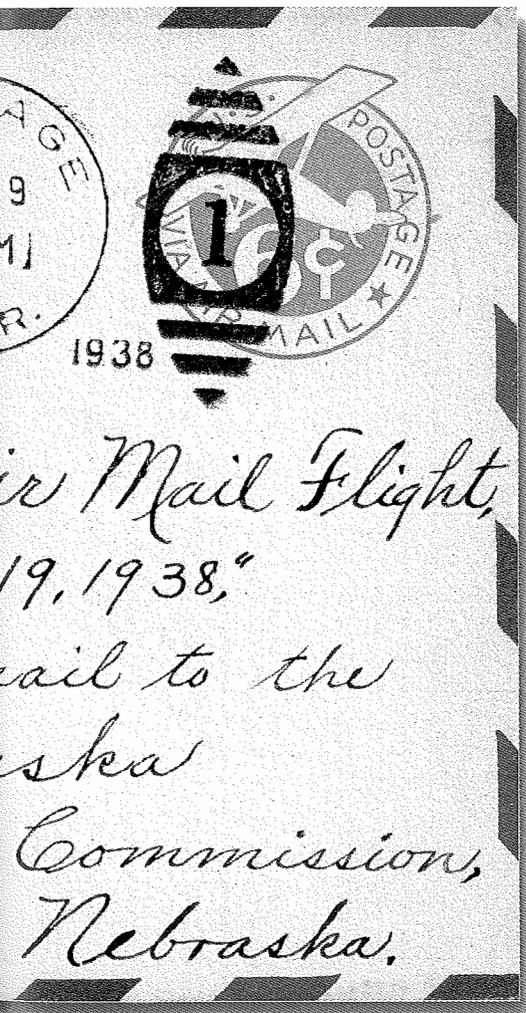
Organizations also supported Air Mail Week by sending out airmail. The Loup City Chamber of Commerce printed a four-page bulletin advertising the Middle Loup Valley Project. One page was left blank so that an individual could write a personal note.³⁹ Minden sent out a total of 175 pounds of mail including 150 pounds mailed by one firm as an advertising stunt.⁴⁰

The most widespread means of participation in the airmail flights was the creation of a cachet for all outgoing mail. Nearly every pick-up town in Nebraska had one, and the variety of decorative commemorative designs is an interesting study in local pride. In the Central District, Dr. Arrasmith created a cachet that featured a map of all flight routes coming into Grand Island. Many towns in





The cachets commemorating each town's first (and in some cases, only) airmail pick-up ranged from skillfully drawn scenes like the "Talmage Wheatfield" to rudimentary line drawings like Bridgeport's Courthouse and Jail rocks. All, however were expressions of local pride. NSHS 7721-233; NSHS 7721-44



the district put their name on this district stamp to use for their outgoing mail. York used the central district cachet for the back of its envelopes, but created its own cachet for the front: A stagecoach, a train, and an airplane to represent the expansion of the mail service.⁴¹

Other cachets were used in more than one town. Many places in Lancaster County used Lincoln's cachet, which featured the state capitol. Another common cachet featured an outline of the United States with the town receiving the flight marked, and often a town slogan. North Platte had two slogans, one referring to it as the home of Buffalo Bill, and the second claiming to be the site of the first lighted air field in the nation. Big Springs was one of many towns to use the town's name flanked by a pair of wings.

Other cachets were unique. Valley's cachet featured an outline of the state with major highways and railroads intersecting at the town. Under this was the caption "All Trails Lead to Valley." Chadron's cachet showed a Pony Express rider next to a tent labeled as the first post office, established in 1885. Beatrice's cachet showed the first Nebraska homestead (often said to be the first in the nation).

Cachets doubled as ads for town events. Fremont and Stapleton, for example, designed cachets to promote the fair and the rodeo, respectively. Dozens of other cachets were created to provide evidence of the towns' first airmail pick-up or of the special flights on May 19.

At Fort Crook, Omaha, bags of airmail are loaded into a Boeing Air Transport B-40. Private contractors began carrying airmail in 1927, with Boeing winning the contract for the Chicago-to-San Francisco leg. By Air Mail Week in 1938 Boeing and three other carriers had combined to form United Air Lines. NSHS RG3883-323



C. S. Doyle requested that each Nebraska town send a copy of its cachet to the Aeronautics Commission for use in an exhibit. Of the more than two hundred towns served, only Burchard, Daykin, Haigler, Curtis, Randolph, and Seward failed to send one.⁴² The cachets were displayed in the Nebraska State Historical Society museum in Lincoln in 1938. Also featured were photographs of the pilots who flew the airmail routes.

Many towns planned celebrations around the pick-up flights. The most elaborate was held in Broken Bow. Like the other towns in the Central District, Broken Bow had two planes scheduled to land that day. The first, which came at 7:00 AM, was met with little fanfare. The second plane, landing at 1:00 PM, provided the main feature of the day.

The events began at 11:30 AM with the Legion Junior Drum Corps performing an exhibition drill in the public square. Then the crowd gathered at the airport to listen to speeches and music until the plane arrived. After the plane took off carrying the town's mail, the high school band gave a concert. At 2:00 PM other planes flew low over the business district dropping gift certificates. A balloon ascension team that often performed with circuses then launched a hot air balloon from the

town square, then parachuted to the ground.⁴³

Bands, parades, and speeches were highlights of celebrations in many towns. Several communities gave airmail envelopes to schoolchildren, and some communities closed schools so students could join in the festivities. Loup City's children formed a parade three blocks long as they walked to the railroad station, where cars were waiting to take them to the landing field.⁴⁴

When the airmail flight left Wilber, nine homing pigeons were released, each carrying a message to Crete. Fifteen minutes later most of the pigeons had arrived. The messages were taken to the post office and distributed Friday morning. The mayor, the postmaster, and the editor of the *Crete News* were among those who received pigeon-post letters.⁴⁵ Wilber was promoting both an old and the newest delivery systems on May 19: Its mail was taken from the post office to the plane's landing site on horseback by a man costumed as a Pony Express rider.⁴⁶

Since the main feature of May 19 was the airmail planes, crowds were expected at the landing fields. Concern about the safety of the crowd and the pilots led to stern warnings about keeping unauthorized people off the field while the plane

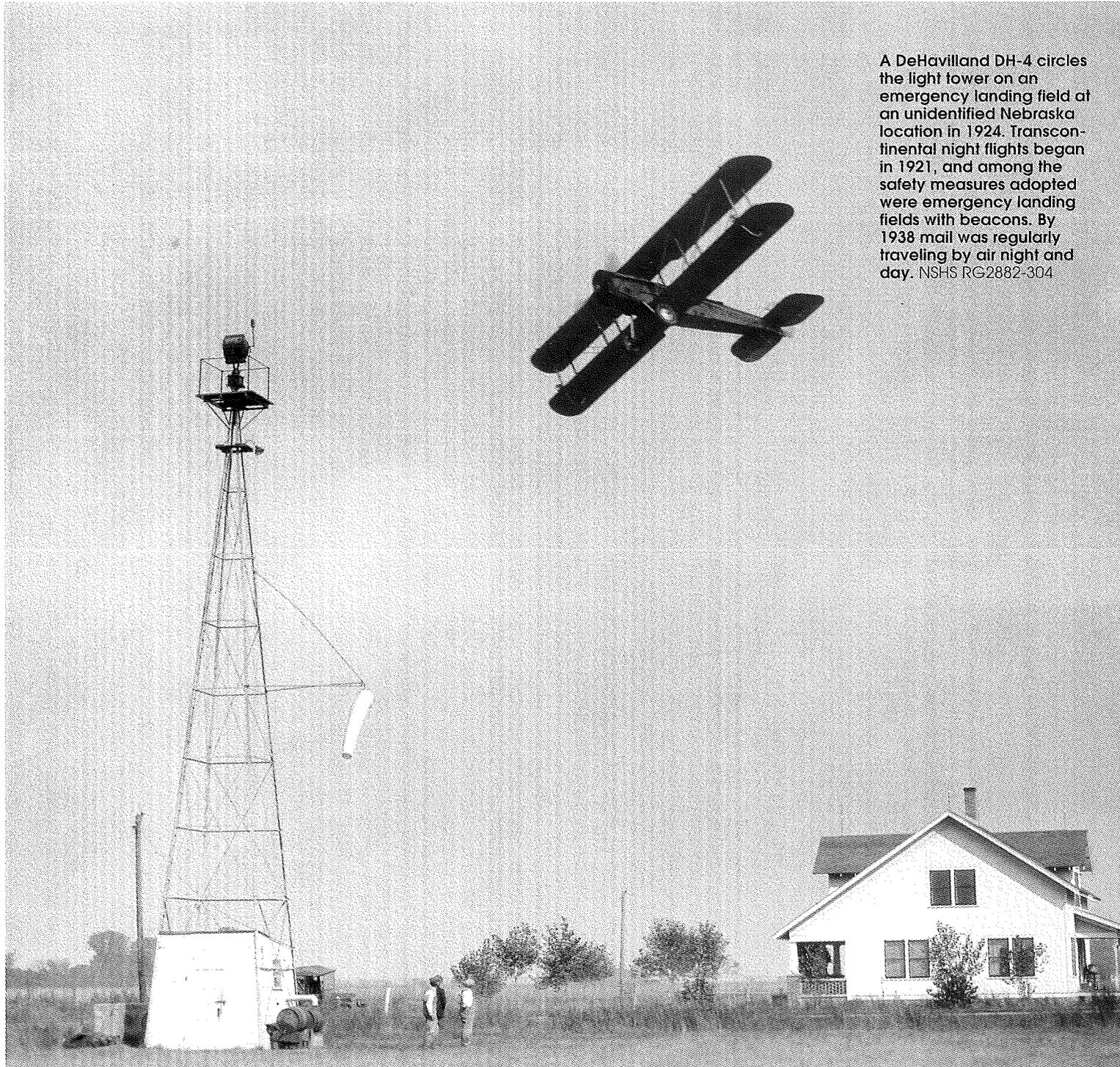
was there. C. S. Doyle and Dr. Arrasmith made it clear in several letters to postmasters that the fields were to be policed. Local papers also noted that the landing fields were to be kept clear, and in many towns the American Legion, the Boy Scouts, or both were responsible for this task.

The hub cities had little time for celebrations. Post offices in Omaha, Lincoln, Grand Island, and North Platte had to sort all the mail and put it on the United Air Lines transcontinental mail flights, and all the hub cities brought postal employees and sorting cases to the airport to handle the job.⁴⁷

E. H. Jeffers, a postal clerk from Omaha, helped out the Grand Island Post Office on May 19. In a

letter to his superintendent he described the activity in Grand Island. The mailroom was set up in a room about fifteen feet square. One clerk handled the in-state mail, while another separated the mail going out of state. Dr. Arrasmith and Postmaster Menck offered tours of the mailroom while a crowd gathered near the airport to watch the mail come in. By the end of the day, the Grand Island airport had handled 151 pouches containing 1,333 pounds of mail.⁴⁸

In North Platte, too, the volume of mail posed challenges. Jack Riordon, another mail clerk from Omaha, came to help sort the enormous quantities of mail, three times what Postmaster Langford had



A DeHavilland DH-4 circles the light tower on an emergency landing field at an unidentified Nebraska location in 1924. Transcontinental night flights began in 1921, and among the safety measures adopted were emergency landing fields with beacons. By 1938 mail was regularly traveling by air night and day. NSHS RG2882-304



Pilots Jack Knight (facing camera) and Clarence Lange model cold weather flight suits about 1920. Knight, based in Omaha, became an Air Mail Service legend by flying an extra leg of the first transcontinental night airmail flight. He recreated it for Air Mail Week in 1938, and several Nebraska towns built bonfires as they had done to guide him in 1921. NSHS RG3882-266a

ters for the national airmail service for a year and a half.⁵⁰ On May 19, Postmaster Moorehead estimated that about 875 pounds of mail or 45,000 letters were flown out of Omaha.

In spite of the advance planning, the airmail flights were not a complete success. One factor was unreliable and uncontrollable—the weather. In the Western District the weather was good, and the flights went well; in the Central and Southeastern districts fog caused some delays, but there were no major mishaps.

The Northeastern District was another matter. Rain and fog seriously delayed the four pilots who were to provide airmail service out of Norfolk. Dr. Brauer attempted to fly out three

times during the day, but the fog would simply not allow it.⁵¹ He flew his route the following day. Andy Risser, also flying out of Norfolk, was forced to stop in Ewing when “he couldn’t see from one telephone pole to the other.”⁵² Like Brauer, Risser flew his route on Friday morning. He arrived in Bassett at 10:20 AM, twenty-four hours late.⁵³

It was the responsibility of individual pilots to decide whether flights should be delayed, and the Aeronautics Commission had no official backup plans in the event of bad weather. Atkinson did

expected. Postal clerks in the airport building being used as a post office sorted mail from twelve planes that had collected mail from fifty-nine cities. More than 50,800 letters were flown in, and an additional 6,000 letters originated in North Platte.⁴⁹

On May 15, the first day of National Air Mail Week, Governor Cochran gave a short speech at the Omaha airport. He spoke about the history of aeronautics in Nebraska, including the night flights at North Platte and Omaha’s role as the headquar-

not hear of the rescheduling, so its mail, more than a thousand letters, was carried out by train.⁵⁴ When Hartington's mail plane came through on May 20, only thirty-five letters were waiting. Six hundred had been sent by train when the mail plane failed to arrive the previous day.⁵⁵

Other pilots flying into Norfolk met with extensive delays. John Halgrimson, who flew out of Ainsworth, arrived four hours late. At one point Halgrimson was flying just above the railroad tracks so that he could see where he was going. Suddenly he saw a train right in front of him. He pulled up, avoiding a major incident, but he reported seeing two men jump off the train.⁵⁶

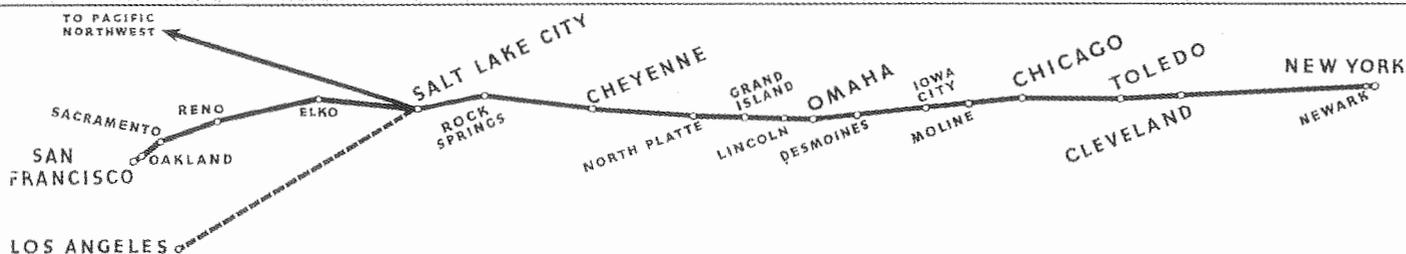
The planes flying directly into Omaha fared a little better, although conditions were wet. The field in Schuyler was muddy, but the plane landed and took off without difficulty. The next stop was Fremont, where it was the postal officials who had to brave the wet conditions. A ten-foot-wide ditch lay between the post office and the landing field. The postmaster and his assistant had to wade through ankle-deep water to carry the mail to the plane.⁵⁷

The Central District had better luck, although

fog created some problems. Burwell, like most towns in the district, was scheduled for two flights. When fog prevented the morning flight from getting through, the mail was driven to Ord. However, the afternoon flight to Burwell was on time.⁵⁸ The morning flight to Ord was delayed when Evelyn Sharp was forced to land near the North Loup River for about half an hour until the fog cleared.⁵⁹ The first flight through Clay Center, Geneva, Exeter, York, and Aurora also was delayed when the pilot lost his way in the fog. He was able to find his course after reading the sign on Sutton's clearly marked train depot. The mail was about twenty minutes late getting into Aurora.⁶⁰ The mail in the Western District was right on schedule, although Everett Hogan had to hurry to keep ahead of a hail storm that chased him from Scottsbluff to North Platte.⁶¹

Despite the weather, the rough fields, and the

The DeHavilland DH-4 was the principal aircraft used when airmail service began in 1918. Originally British, it was redesigned in the U.S. and was the only American-built plane to see combat in World War I. Below the DH-4 is the transcontinental airmail route in 1921. United Air Lines photo. NSHS RG2905-PH1



THE STATE'S PICK-UP PROGRAM WAS AMONG THE MOST EXTENSIVE IN THE NATION.

number of pilots in the air, there were no major accidents during the day. John Frazey, who had never had an accident before, nosed over when he hit a rut while taxiing on Walthill's field. He was not injured, but the plane's propeller was damaged, and a relief flight was sent from Omaha.⁶² John Treinies had to make an emergency landing near David City when his engine failed because of a stuck valve. The landing was successful, and the mail was driven to Bee.⁶³

Some mail was flown only a few miles, while other letters traveled around the world. Several newspaper accounts mention mail going to forty or more states and numerous foreign countries. England, Canada, and Ireland were popular destinations, while some letters went as far as addresses as distant as Siam and the West Indies.⁶⁴ Letters were not the only items sent. The Fuhn studio in Blair received a roll of film from Tekamah less than twenty minutes after it had been mailed.⁶⁵ Saint Paul airmailed a package containing twenty-five baby chicks.⁶⁶

A summary of the mail handled on May 19 can be found in a telegram C. S. Doyle sent to Paul Younts in Charlotte, North Carolina:

Two hundred fifteen towns Ten thousand two hundred seventy-five miles three thousand nine hundred thirty-seven pounds airmail. No trouble.⁶⁷

Many Nebraska newspapers noted that the state's pick-up program was among the most extensive in the nation. By mid April, Nebraska had over 180 stops planned, while Iowa had 42.⁶⁸ Nebraska's response to Air Mail Week and the pick-up flights was a source of pride. The pilots, the Post Office Department, local communities, and state organizers had created an event more successful than many could have imagined.

Although the pick-up flights were by far the biggest event of National Air Mail Week, some Nebraska towns celebrated one other national event. In 1921 Jack Knight had become a legend by flying an extra leg of the first transcontinental airmail flight at night. After flying half the night from Cheyenne to Omaha, Knight had discovered that the pilot who was to relieve him had been grounded by bad weather in Chicago. Knight tore

the Rand McNally road map off the wall and spent the rest of the night flying the next leg of the route, one he had never flown before.⁶⁹

Late Friday, May 20, Knight recreated the Cheyenne-Chicago leg of his historic flight in a twenty-one passenger United Air Lines plane.⁷⁰ Sidney, Seward, Ogallala, North Platte, Grand Island, Aurora, Lincoln, and Omaha were among the towns that built bonfires for Knight, just as they had done in 1922.⁷¹

National Air Mail Week drew attention to the difficulties that had to be overcome in order to improve airmail service. It also recognized the strength of the nation. As Mary Beth McQuarrie of Blair, Nebraska's winner of the National Air Mail Week essay contest, put it:

Out of a hundred failures in the past, out of death and destruction, you have emerged as pure and fine a symbol of idealism as ever a nation conceived. You are our romance and our idealism perfectly wedded. You are America's dream of peace-time unity made splendidly visual. We salute you "Wings Over America."⁷²

NOTES

¹ Carroll V. Glines, *Airmail: How it All Began* (Blue Ridge Summit, PA: Tab Books, 1990), 46–47.

² Charles S. Doyle, "Secretary's Report to Nebraska Aeronautics Commission, Mar.–May, 1938," Nebraska Department of Aeronautics, RG0007, Nebraska State Historical Society (Hereafter NSHS).

³ "Anniversary of Air Mail," *New York Times*, May 19, 1938.

⁴ "Blair Girl State Winner in Air Mail Essay Contest," *The Enterprise*, Blair NE, May 12, 1938.

⁵ Several Nebraska newspapers make this statement.

⁶ All information on towns and routes comes from pilot wavers, RG007, NAMWP, NSHS.

⁷ Revised Schedule of the Western District, RG0007, NAMWP, NSHS.

⁸ Everett Hogan, telegram to C. S. Doyle and W. S. Rodman, May 2, 1938, RG0007, NAMWP, NSHS.

⁹ H. J. Dollinger, S. D. Faulkner, Willard McGriff, telegram, May 5, 1938, RG0007, NAMWP, NSHS.

¹⁰ C. S. Doyle to Harley Moorehead, Apr. 27, 1938, RG0007, NAMW, NSHS.

¹¹ C. S. Doyle to H. J. Dollinger, May 7, 1938, RG0007, NAMWP, NSHS.

- ¹² C. S. Doyle to Harley Moorehead, May 12, 1938, RG0007, NAMWP, NSHS.
- ¹³ Charles S. Doyle, "Secretary's Report to Nebraska Aeronautics Commission, Mar.-May, 1938," RG0007, NSHS.
- ¹⁴ "Air Mail for Valentine," *Cherry County News*, Apr. 21, 1938.
- ¹⁵ Pilot oaths and wavers, RG0007, NAMW, NSHS.
- ¹⁶ Pilot letters to Nebraska Department of Aeronautics, RG0007, NAMWP, NSHS.
- ¹⁷ Charles S. Doyle, special bulletin to pilots, Mar. 23, 1938, RG0007, NAMWP, NSHS.
- ¹⁸ Diane Ruth Bartels, *Sharpie: The Life Story of Evelyn Sharp-Nebraska Aviatix*, (Lincoln, Nebr.: Dageford Publishing, 1996), 94. Sharp went on to become a member of the Women's Air Force Service Pilots, or WASPs. She died in a plane crash in Apr. 1944.
- ¹⁹ C. S. Doyle, bulletin to pilots, RG0007, NAMWP, NSHS.
- ²⁰ Harold Menek to Central District postmasters, Mar. 18, 1938, RG0007, NAMWP, NSHS.
- ²¹ Dr. W. W. Arrasmith to Central District postmasters, Apr. 15, 1938, RG0007, NAMWP, NSHS.
- ²² C.L. Bennett, Broken Bow Postmaster to C.S. Doyle, RG0007, NAMWP, NSHS.
- ²³ C. S. Doyle to postmasters at pick up stops, RG0007, NAMWP, NSHS.
- ²⁴ C. S. Doyle to postmasters, Apr. 25, 1938, RG0007, NAMWP, NSHS.
- ²⁵ Correspondence with towns, RG0007, NAMWP, NSHS.
- ²⁶ "Air Mail Pickup Successful Here," *Chambers Sun*, May 26, 1938.
- ²⁷ *Nemaha County Herald*, May 26, 1938.
- ²⁸ Charles S. Doyle, "Secretary's Report to Nebraska Aeronautics Commission, Mar.-May, 1938," RG0007, NSHS.
- ²⁹ "Air Mail Pilot Delayed," *Battle Creek Paper*, May 19, 1938.
- ³⁰ Charles S. Doyle, "Secretary's Report to Nebraska Aeronautics Commission, Mar.-May, 1938," RG0007, NSHS.
- ³¹ C. S. Doyle to Adams postmaster, May 6, 1938, RG0007, NAMWP, NSHS.
- ³² "Parks, Benkelman, Max send 1st Air Mail Cargo," *Benkelman Post*, May 20, 1938.
- ³³ "Nemaha County Air Ace Makes Record," *Nemaha County Herald*, May 26, 1938.
- ³⁴ "Albion Post Office did Good Business on Air Mail Day," *Albion Weekly News*, May 26, 1938.
- ³⁵ Ong's greeting to Nebraska Department of Aeronautics, RG0007, NAMWP, NSHS.
- ³⁶ Harold Menck, bulletin to Post Masters in Central District Cities. Mar. 18, 1938, RG0007, NAMWP, NSHS.
- ³⁷ Pilot wavers, RG0007, NAMWP, NSHS.
- ³⁸ "Special Bargains Planned by Spalding Merchants," *Spalding Enterprise*, May 12, 1938.
- ³⁹ "Plans Being Made to Observe Air Mail Week Here," *Sherman Co. Times*, Apr. 28, 1938.
- ⁴⁰ "Beaver City Record High in Air Mail Dispatch," *Times-Tribune*, May 26, 1938.
- ⁴¹ All cachet information comes from cachet collections organized by C. S. Doyle and Harley Moorehead, donated to NSHS and displayed by the museum in 1938.
- ⁴² C. S. Doyle to Harley Moorehead, May 31, 1938, RG0007, NAMWP, NSHS.
- ⁴³ "Big Plans Here for Air Mail Day Celebration," *Custer County Chief*, May 12, 1938.
- ⁴⁴ "Air Mail Planes made 2 Successful Flight here Last Thursday," *Sherman County Times*, May 19, 1938.
- ⁴⁵ "First Pigeon Air Mail Also Arrived," *Crete News*, May 26, 1938.
- ⁴⁶ "Air Mail Week News," *Wilber Republican*, May 13, 1938.
- ⁴⁷ From Grand Island, Lincoln, North Platte, and Omaha papers, May 19-20, 1938.
- ⁴⁸ E. H. Jeffers to Superintendent R.M.S., Omaha, RG0007, NAMWP, NSHS.
- ⁴⁹ "Local Airport Kept Busy as Special Planes Arrive," *North Platte Daily Bulletin*, May 20, 1938.
- ⁵⁰ Speech from Omaha Airport, May 15, 1938, RG0001, Robert Cochran, SG31, Box 68, NSHS.
- ⁵¹ "Air Mail Fliers Forced Down by Fog, Low Ceiling," *Norfolk Daily News*, May 19, 1938.
- ⁵² "Special Flights Being Finished Today," *Norfolk Daily News*, May 20, 1938.
- ⁵³ "Air Mail Goes Out One Day Late," *Rock Creek Leader*, May 26, 1938.
- ⁵⁴ *Atkinson Graphic*, May 20, 1938.
- ⁵⁵ "Special Flight Held One Day Late," *Cedar County News*, May 20, 1938.
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- ⁵⁷ "Postal Officials Here Wade Ditch to Deliver Mail," *Fremont Daily Tribune*, May 19, 1938.
- ⁵⁸ *Burwell Tribune*, May 19, 1938.
- ⁵⁹ E. H. Jeffers to Superintendent R.M.S. of Omaha, May 20, 1938, RG0007, NAMWP, NSHS.
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- ⁶¹ "Air Mail Cargo from Here Totals Above 100 Pounds," *Scottsbluff Daily Star-Herald*, May 20, 1938.
- ⁶² "Mail Plane Noses Over, Bends Prop," *Walthill Citizen*, May 19, 1938, RG0007, NAMW, NSHS.
- ⁶³ "59 Pilots Fly Mail Today," *York Daily News-Times*, May 19, 1938.
- ⁶⁴ "Air Mail Pick up at Crawford Large," *Crawford Tribune*, May 20, 1938.
- ⁶⁵ "Air Mail on Schedule Here Today," *The Enterprise*, Blair, NE, May 19, 1938.
- ⁶⁶ "First Air Mail for St. Paul," *Howard County Herald*, May 25, 1938.
- ⁶⁷ Charles S. Doyle, telegram to Paul Younts, RG0007, NAMWP, NSHS.
- ⁶⁸ "Arrange Air Mail Stops," *Alliance Times and Herald*, Apr. 22, 1938.
- ⁶⁹ Glines, p. 62-66.
- ⁷⁰ "Knight, Waiter Review 1st Night Mail Flight," *Omaha World-Herald*, May 20, 1938.
- ⁷¹ "Bonfire Flight is Re-enacted Here Tonight," *Aurora News*, May 20, 1938.
- ⁷² "Blair Girl State Winner in Air Mail Essay Contest," *Blair Paper*, May 12, 1938.