

James Erroll Boyd: 'Canada's Lindbergh'

CHARLES J.G. VERGE

Captain James Erroll Boyd, better known as Erroll, was born in Toronto on November 22, 1891, and is known as Canada's Lindbergh because of his many flying feats. From a very early age, he was a daredevil and curious about flight. Aided and abetted by his older brother, Norman, he once tried parachuting off the roof of the family barn using a bed sheet. The result was failure and a concussion.

In 1912, Norman volunteered his brother for a flight piloted by Lincoln Beachley, known as the King of the Barnstormers. During World War I, as a member of the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, Erroll Boyd applied to join the Royal Air Force but was turned down because he was color-blind. He was accepted by the Royal Naval Air Service and learned to fly in 1915 under Sir John Alcock of the famous Alcock and Brown flying pair that made the first nonstop crossing of the Atlantic in 1919.

Boyd was assigned to squadrons attacking Zeppelins and flying antisubmarine patrols. In 1916, he was shot down over Belgium, a neutral country,

interned and then paroled. He went to North America for six months from May to December 1916, returned to Europe, where he was promoted, and then was sent again to North America in May 1917. There he married Evelyn Carberry, a Broadway singer. During the remainder of the war, he tested planes, including the Curtiss JN4 aircraft with the OX5 engine.

After the war, he had an eclectic work life. He returned to Toronto and opened a garage. He pursued a song-writing career in New York after his song "Dream" became a big hit. He managed New York's Lennox Hotel to support his family and shortly after joined the firm of Crosse and Blackwell, which he lobbied unsuccessfully for sponsorship of a New York-to-Moscow flight. He then did some flying for John Dodge of the famous automobile family.

By 1927, he was back in Canada flying mail for Transcontinental Airways from Rimouski and Montreal to Ottawa to expedite the mail from ships from Europe arriving in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Figure 1 shows an example of a cover sent from Dublin,

Ireland, to Winnipeg, Manitoba, and expedited by the Rimouski-Montreal Sea-Air accelerated Atlantic service. The cover was mailed in 1931, after Boyd had left Transcontinental Airways.

Boyd joined Mexicana Airlines and Pan American World Airways, where he specialized in developing new routes for airmail and payrolls. He flew for Coastal Airways of New York for a few months in 1929-30 until the company went bankrupt. He then worked for an eccentric New York millionaire, Charles A. Levine, who liked to be associated with famous pilots.

Levine was a passenger aboard his plane *Miss Columbia* when Clarence Chamberlin flew it across the ocean in 1927, a mere two weeks after Charles Lindbergh's historical flight. Figure 2 shows an artist's rendering of the plane. Boyd borrowed Levine's Giuseppe M. Bellanca-built *Miss Columbia* for three of his greatest aviation feats. The first was a nonstop return flight from New York to Bermuda, the second was his world-record crossing of the Atlantic, and the third



Figure 1. A cover from Ireland to Winnipeg, expedited by the Rimouski-Montreal Sea-Air accelerated Atlantic service. This cover was flown in 1931 after Captain Boyd left his employment with Transcontinental Airways.



Figure 2. An artist's rendering of the *Miss Columbia*.
Courtesy of the Canadian Aviation Historical Society.

was a record flight from New York to Haiti.

Boyd, along with his passengers Roger Q. Williams and U.S. Navy navigation specialist Lieutenant Harry P. Connor, flew the first nonstop return flight to Bermuda on June 29-30, 1930, in 17 hours, 8 minutes. They flew over Bermuda at 200 feet and dropped mail on the Belmont Manor Golf Club grounds at the back of the Hotel Bermuda because the island had no airport at which to land. The purpose of the flight was to find out if, with the navigation instruments available at the time, a regular airline service could be established between New York and Hamilton, Bermuda. Unfortunately, I have been unable to find images of any of the mail carried to illustrate this flight, and as far as I know, Bermuda has not issued a

stamp to commemorate the flight.

In early September 1930, Boyd flew the *Miss Columbia* from Toronto's Leaside Airport to Montreal's St. Hubert airport, where his friend Connor joined him. For the purpose of this flight, Boyd renamed the *Miss Columbia* the *Maple Leaf*. While in Montreal, the plane was impounded because another pilot had registered a lien on the plane, claiming Levine owed him money. Several weeks later the lien was lifted. Boyd's transatlantic expedition was notoriously short of money, causing him to skip out without paying his hotel bill in Montreal.

Boyd and his friends arrived in Harbour Grace, Newfoundland, on September 22 after

a 10-day stopover in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, because of bad weather. The Newfoundland Post Office immediately asked them whether they would be willing to carry mail on their flight. They agreed on September 24 on the condition that there be only one bag of mail weighing no more than five pounds.

The post office promptly produced a flyer informing the general population that a special stamp would be available on September 25 and 160



Figure 4. The 50¢ stamp issued by Newfoundland for Boyd's transatlantic flight. Courtesy of the Canadian Postal Archives.

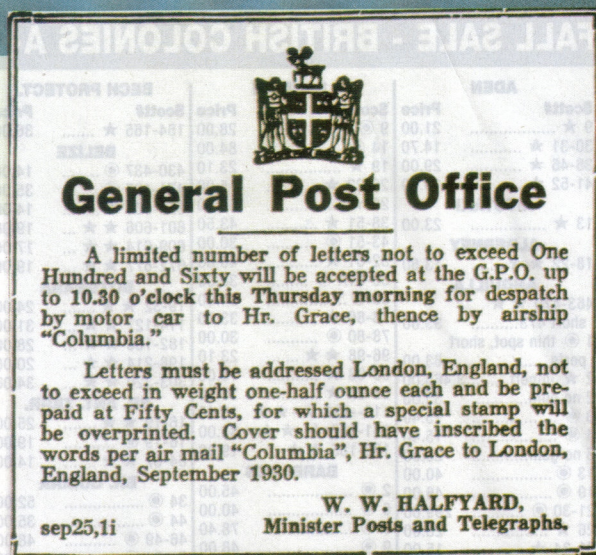


Figure 3. Newfoundland's General Post Office proclamation announcing the special stamps and the *Miss Columbia* flight. Courtesy Sotheby's, from the Sir Gawaine Baillie sale.



Figure 5. A block of four shows the setting of the surcharge plate. Five such blocks are known. Courtesy of the Canadian Postal Archives.

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Scott#	Price	Scott#	Price	Scott#	Price
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30-31 ★	14.70	14 ●	84.00	BELIZE	
36-46 ★	29.00	19 ★	23.10	430-437 ●	14.00
41-52 ★	18.00	20-23 ★	15.00	471-487 ●	35.00
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13 ★	23.00	38-51 ★	43.50	601-606 ★	19.00
ALDERNEY		43-51 ●	30.00	609-614 ★	17.00
18-22 ★	13.50	52-61 ●	40.00	672-677 ★	19.00
ANGUILLA		60-61A ●	38.00	BOTSWANA	
463-479 ★	33.60	63 ●	34.00	19-32 ★	24.00
short 473.....		78-80 ★	33.00	114-127 ★	31.00
1 ● thin spot, short		78-80 ●	30.00	182-186 ★	28.00
perfs.....	63.00	96-98 ★	23.10	198-214 ★	20.00
2 ★ imperf.....	3,465.00	97-98 ★	15.50	303-320 ★	34.00
2 no gum.....	35.00	119-129 ★	15.40	BR. ANT. TERR.	
3 ●.....	15.40	141-152 ★	33.00	16-19 ★	25.00
4 ●.....	15.40	182-185 ★	19.00	16-19 ●	19.00
5 no gum.....	28.00	BARBADOS		64-67 ★	14.00
13 ●.....	40.00	2 ●	45.00	BR. GUIANA	
19 ●.....	46.00	6 ●	40.00	34 ●	52.00
21-30 ●	299.00	8 ●	78.40	44 ●	35.00
26 ★	23.00	9 ●	48.00	46-49 ●	48.00
31-34 ★	15.00	8 ●	48.00	51-54 ●	35.00
35 ●	14.00	9 ● cut close	14.00	58 ★	31.00
54-55 ★	25.50	17 ●	27.00	64 ●	35.00
241-257 ★	19.60	27 ●	40.00	66 ●	14.00
ASCENSION		37 ●	63.00	117 no gum	13.00
33-36 ★	30.00	56a ●	22.40	144 ●	18.00
40a-49a ★ short #41		56a ●	22.40	147 ●	45.00
Perf 13 1/2.....	155.00	61a ●	42.00	147 ● corner dmgd	14.00
40-46a ★ 40, 41, 41a,		63a ★	70.00	154 ★	14.00
42b, 43b, 44c, 44d, 45a,		66 ★	29.00	196 ●	24.00
46a.....	16.80	66 no gum	29.00	201 ●	30.00
41 ★	16.80	67 ★	20.00	205-09 ●	20.00
44 ★	42.00	70-79 ★	82.00	253-67 ★	23.00
48a ★	28.00	77 ●	16.00	253-67 ★	29.00
49 ★	26.00	79 ★	34.00	0.6 ●	53.00
62-74 ★	53.80	81-89 ★	133.00	BR. HONDURAS	
75-88 ★	33.00	102-108 ★	40.00	1-3 ●	140.00
75-88 ●	33.00	104-107 ★	25.00	8 no gum	18.00
BR. CENTRAL AFRICA		108 ●	35.00	167-78 ★	25.00
6 ★	10.00	110-112 ★	26.00	BR. INDIAN OC. TERR.	
11 ●	56.00	116-124 ★	28.00	94-105 ●	15.00
11 ★	40.00	119-126 ★	111.00	BRUNEI	
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24 ★	42.00	139 ★	14.00	29 ★	21.00
27 ●	34.00	140-150 ★	63.00	31 ★	15.00
34 ●	11.00	156 ★	34.00	34 ★	19.00
10 ●	42.00	178 ★	7.00	34 ★	19.00
BR. EAST AFRICA		178 ★	16.00	54 ●	19.00
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43 ★	34.00	872-885 ★	25.00	BURMA	
47 ★	62.00	B1a-c ★ pair of	28.00	18A-22, 24-33 ★	51.00
48 ★	33.00	B1a & B1c.....		043-53 ★	35.00
59a ●	53.00	BARBUDA		CAPE OF GOOD HOPE	
63 ★	21.00	113-129 ★ incl. 128a,		1 ●	112.00
71 ★	23.00	Wmk upright.....	17.00	3 ● cut close	35.00
72-80 ● Wmk 2	28.00	1209-1216 ★	30.00	3b ●	336.00
81 ★ Wmk 2.....	14.00	BASUTOLAND		3b ● creased	245.00
83a ● Wmk 2.....	15.00	46-56 ★	33.00	4 ● cut close, corner	10.00
84 ★	42.00	BECHUANALAND		missing.....	10.00
87 ★ Wmk 2.....	35.00	1 ★	26.00	4 ● cut close	28.00
90 ★	24.00	3 ★	23.00	4 ● cut close	19.00
92 ★	35.00	3 no gum.....	14.00	4 ● nick in bottom	10.00
93 ★	28.00	4 ●	14.00	margin.....	10.00
96 no gum.....	105.00	7 no gum.....	14.00	5 ● pin hole, cut	35.00
98 ★ slit toning..	35.00	8 ★	47.00	close.....	49.00
102 ● Wmk 1.....	20.00	18 ★	35.00	6 ● 2 margins...	25.00
102 ★	28.00	24 ●	12.00	6a ● cut close, corner	25.00
BAHRAIN		BECH. PROTECT.		missing.....	140.00
7 ★	14.00	69-73 ★	17.00		

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Figure 6. One of the 48 flown covers mailed bearing the special air-mail stamp. The stamp is struck with the October 9, 1930, Harbour Grace postmark.

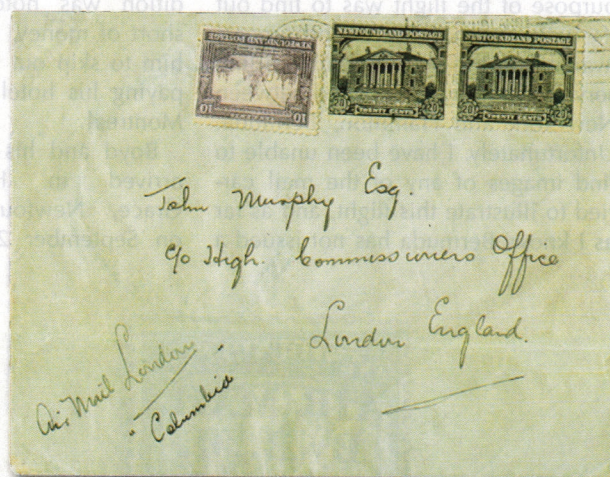


Figure 7. Some covers on the transatlantic flight were mailed without the special stamp but paying the 50¢ flight rate.

letters would be accepted on the flight. The flyer is shown in Figure 3.

Three sheets of the 36¢ value of the 1919 Caribou issue (Scott 126) were surcharged with the black surcharge reading "Trans/Atlantic/AIR MAIL/By B.M./"Columbia"/September 1930/50 cents" on seven lines. This stamp is listed in the Scott catalog as Scott C5 and shown here

December 2006



Figure 8. Haiti issued this special airmail stamp for the return voyage of Miss Columbia.

in Figure 4. The first line is linotyped, and the others are typeset. The three sheets were divided into blocks of four for the purpose of printing the surcharge, as shown in Figure 5. Each of the four surcharges used in the printing plate are different and have been plated by experts.

The surcharge work was done at the offices of *The Royal Gazette* owned by the firm of David R. Thistle & Co. Of the 300 stamps produced, 48 were sold in Harbour Grace and the remainder were available at the General Post Office in St. John's. All the stamps sold in Harbour Grace and 110 of those available in St. John's were used on mail for the flight. An example of a flown cover is shown in Figure 6. Most of those posted in St. John's bear two datestamps, September 25 and October 9, while those mailed in Harbour Grace only have an October 9 postmark.

In addition, an unknown number of letters bearing 50¢ in postage and postcards bearing 4¢ or 5¢ in postage were accepted when it was found that the bag could carry more than the maximum 160 letters first advertised. Some sources indicate that there were 230 such additional letters and postcards. Figure 7 shows two covers mailed without the special stamp but paying the 50¢ rate.

The plane left on October 10 and was forced to land the next day, short of fuel, on a beach on Tresco Island, one of the Scilly Islands near Land's End in England. Once the plane was refueled, Boyd and his passengers made their way to their final destination: Croydon, England. Some of

The 1897 Diamond Jubilee Issue Queen Victoria Plate Proofs

SPECIAL OFFER #200



Perhaps the most popular set ever released by Canada is the long set of sixteen stamps issued to commemorate the 60th year of Queen Victoria's reign in 1837. These stamps were the first ever Canadian commemoratives (Scott #50-65). The set was the first and last to have such a wide range of face values, running from the half cent right up to the \$5.00 top value. The total face value of over \$16.00 was an enormous amount of money at the time, beyond the reach of many collectors. There was precedent however for such an issue. The United States has released a long set of commemoratives for the 400th anniversary of Columbus in 1892. This set also had five dollar value stamps, and in fact was printed by the same company.

The design of the Jubilees is somewhat unusual in that it features two portraits of the same Monarch. The "young queen" is the famous Chalon Head used for so many British Colonial stamps. The "old queen" is from the Angeli portrait, which was also used for the subsequent Canadian Leaf and Numeral definitive issues of 1897-1898. On the day of issue, long line-ups could be found at Canadian post offices waiting for the doors to open. Complete sets were only available in larger cities, often being sold in a small envelope suitably inscribed. The half cent and six cent values were speculated in, and were not normally sold singly.

Plate proofs of this set were always rare and desirable. Before 1990 they typically brought \$10,000 or more per set of singles. Then the American Bank Note Company auction in September 1990 made more available to collectors. The sale contained some three hundred odd sets. Of these a set of sheets (50 sets) was taken by the Canada Postal Museum. Others were sold in sheet form and have not been broken up. Of particular note is the fact that the proofs that did exist before the archives auction are not in the best of condition. They are not fresh and often have faults, having been poorly handled over the years.

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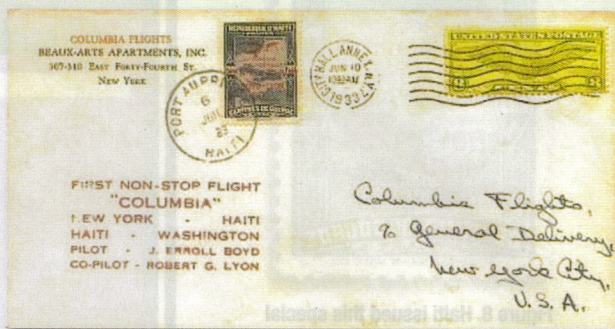


Figure 9. A properly used Haiti Miss Columbia stamp on the return flight to Washington D.C.

the covers on the flight received arrival cancellations at London's different postal district offices. The rarest of the arrival datestamps is that applied at the Communications Office of the Air Ministry at Croydon.

Several forgeries of the stamp are known, including those produced by David Thistle when he was duped by an imposter posing as a government official requiring that he print additional stamps. These forgeries are easily recognizable, having a thick, heavy and blurred impression.

A stamp issued by the country of destination commemorated Boyd's next record flight. The flight left New York's Floyd Bennett Field on June 10, 1933, with two passengers, Robert G. Lyon and H.P. Davis. The plane should have landed in Port-au-Prince, Haiti's capital, the next day; however, bad weather forced it to land in Saint Marc (Artibonite Department). When the weather cleared, they proceeded to the capital and were received by Haitian President Sténio Vincent (1874-1959) who awarded Boyd the Order of National Honor and Merit. Boyd then invited Vincent and the magistrate (mayor) of Port-au-Prince, F. Duvignand, to come aboard for a flight over the capital.

Haiti issued a stamp (Scott C4A) to commemorate the return flight to Washington, D.C. (Figure 8). The red surcharge showing *Miss Columbia* also bears the words "Columbia/Vol Direct/N-Y - P-AU-P/BOYD - LYON/60 cts." in five lines (Figure 9). The surcharge was applied to the 1924 violet blue 20-centime stamp (Scott 317) showing an old map of the West Indies.

On July 15, 1933, after the return from Haiti, *Miss Columbia* was flown from New York on a "complimentary flight" to Toronto (Erroll Boyd's birthplace), but this flight did not get much publicity because it coincided with the arrival of General Balbo's flight squadron on its way from Shediac to the Chicago World's Fair.

Miss Columbia was destroyed on January 25, 1924, in a fire in the Bellanca hangars in Wilmington, Delaware. Boyd died a United States citizen in Florida in 1960. He had retired to Florida from his job with aircraft manufacturer Higgins Industries of New Orleans.

For more information on Boyd and his exploits, read Ross Smyth's *Canada's Lindbergh: the Erroll Boyd Story* (General Store Publishing, 1997). ■