



The PHILATELIC REVIEW
Of The Federated Philatelic Clubs of Southern California
And Federation Reporter
May 2006

**SESCAL
prospectus
available**

The prospectus for SESCAL 2006 is available at the SESCAL Web site, www.sescal.org or by mail from exhibits chairman Howard P. Green, 15125 Arlette Drive, Victorville, CA 92394; e-mail HowBetGreen@aol.com. The deadline to apply is Sept. 8 or until frames are filled.

SESCAL will be Oct. 13-15 at the Radisson Hotel at Los Angeles Airport, 6225 W. Century Blvd., Los Angeles.

The China Stamp Society will hold its national meeting at SESCAL, and these groups plan regional meetings: Eire Philatelic Association, U.S. Philatelic Classics Society, Scandinavian Collectors Club and Philatelic Library, COPAPHIL, Columbia/Panama Philatelic Study Group, Canal Zone Study Group, Society of Israel Philatelists, American Association of Philatelic Exhibitors., American Air Mail Society, and American First Day Cover Society.

SESCAL is an open competition with no restrictions as to membership or residence for exhibitors. Except for those in the one-frame exhibit category, exhibits must have at least four frames and no more than 10. Fees are \$10 per frame for adults and \$3 per frame for youths.

Exhibitors must submit seven copies of a reference bibliography, title page and/or exhibit plan our outline for the judges.

Minutes of the
**Federated Philatelic Clubs
of Southern California**

meeting of Jan. 28, 2006

The meeting was called to order by President William O'Connor a little after 2 p.m. in a meeting room at the Hampton Inn, San Diego, during SANDICAL. Les Lanphear was thanked for arranging the meeting room.

An attendance sheet was passed, members and guests present:

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| Howard Green | Past President and Philatelic Society of Los Angeles |
| Betty Green | SESCAL |
| Richard Willing | Past President |
| Les Lanphear | Phil. 25, Past President |
| Wallace Craig | China Society |
| Waltraud Helms | Treasurer |
| Bill O'Connor | President, Eire Philatelic Association, Poway Stamp Club |
| Marian Bowman | Simi Valley and Conejo Valley Philatelic Societies |
| Jim Bowman | Simi Valley and Conejo Valley Philatelic Societies, Past President |
| Jerry Kasper | Vice President and Webmaster |
| Jean Kasper | Guest, Philatelic Society of Los Angeles |
| Charlotte Gulsby | Secretary, and Beach Cities Stamp Club |

The minutes of the last meeting were corrected: Spelling of James McGuigan and Lois Evens-de Violini and that the McDonnell Douglas Philatelic Club is now doing business as Beach Cities Stamp Club.

The treasure reported a balance as of Dec. 31, 2005, of \$252.36. The report was accepted, a copy of which is attached to the minutes.

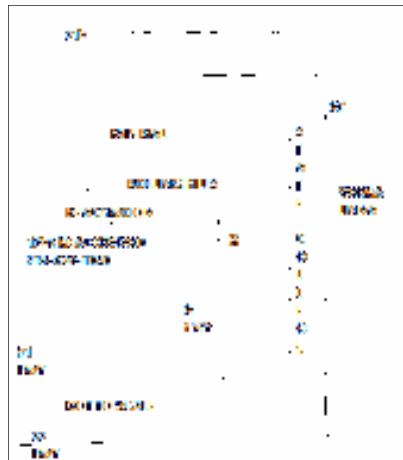
Old Business:

Changes to the Federation's constitution. It was moved, seconded and passed that the changes be filed with the state of California.

(Continued on page 2)

Federation to meet June 24

The Federation will meet at noon, Saturday, June 24, at the home of Fred Kingdom, 1608 Beachwood, Yorba Linda; phone 714-529-1050. Neither Wallace Craig nor the editor is an artist, but the map at left might be of some help.



About us

The Philatelic Review is published three times a year by The Federated Philatelic Clubs of Southern California.

The SESCAL Web site, which also includes information about the Federation and a list of member clubs, is at www.sescal.org

News about Federation or club events and other articles should be sent to the editor, John Weigle, at P.O. Box 6536, Ventura, CA 93006-6536 or, by e-mail, to jweigle@vcnet.com

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Authors tell story of early air mail

By John Weigle*Editor*

Today, when even letters going comparatively short distances travel by air, we take the idea of air mail for granted.

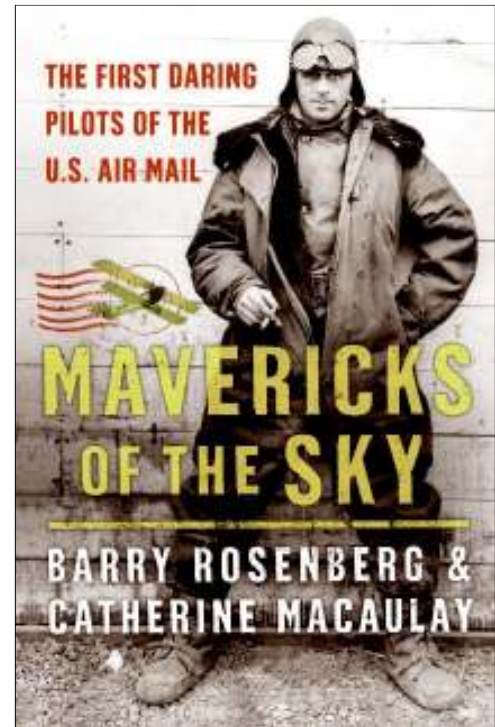
But if it hadn't been for two largely forgotten bureaucrats in the Post Office Department and pilots so daring that they became known as The Suicide Club, U.S. air mail and commercial aviation might be much different than they are today — if they existed at all.

The exciting, and deadly, story of the first three years of U.S. air mail — 1918 to 1921 — are told in the book "Mavericks of the Sky" by Barry Rosenberg and Catherine Macaulay, who spoke to the Ventura County Philatelic Society in April.

Twenty-six air mail pilots, mechanics and ground personnel were killed from May 1918 to February 1921, Rosenberg said.

"Fueled by a common bravado, courage and naivete, the pilots of the U.S. Air Mail Service chartered the first unknown course to what is today a worldwide network of air transportation in which individual aircraft routinely transport tens of thousands of pounds of cargo and hundreds of people on nonstop flights in excess of 6,000 miles," the authors wrote in the book's epilogue.

Although the basics of early air mail service — number of planes and pilots, crashes, pounds of mail carried — are easily found, "the accounts of people like (pilot "Wild"



Bill) Hopson have been lost to time," Rosenberg said. Most of the pilots were young and did not have families to tell their stories to, he said.

Hopson, who is pictured on the book's dust jacket but who was mistakenly not identified in the credits, survived the first three years of service but was killed in an air mail crash in 1928 near Clarion, Pa. "When he died

(Continued on page 3)

More on minutes ...

(Continued from page 1)

New Business:

Officers for 2006: President — Jerry Kasper
Vice President — Jim Bowman
Secretary — Charlotte Gulsby
Temporary Treasurer — Waltraud Helms

(Editor's note: The vice president and temporary treasurer changed after the meeting and are reflected in the About us column on page 2.)

Theme for SESCAL 2006 shall be decided by the SECAL Planning Committee.

The need for new exhibition frames was again discussed.

Next meeting Saturday, June 24, 2006, will be held at a member's home; the honor will be announced in the next issue of the Philatelic Review.

Meeting was adjourned at 3:45 p.m.

**Respectfully submitted,
Charlotte Gulsby, Secretary**

More on 'Mavericks of the Sky' ...

(Continued from page 2)

he had spent eight years flying the mail and covered more than 400,000 miles, second only to Jack Knight."

Rosenberg and Macaulay, who split their time between Calabasas, Calif., and Westchester, N.Y., said they wanted to write history that portrayed the adventure and danger of air mail's early years, and they met their goal. As they wrote, Rosenberg said, he and Macaulay felt accompanied by the spirits of the pilots, and they kept Hopson's picture in their writing area for inspiration.

Before air mail, there was no commercial use of airplanes, Rosenberg said. They were purely weapons of war or tools of barnstormers. In fact, the Army agreed to provide some planes and pilots to the Post Office as a way to train military pilots, "who were dying by the legions" not in combat but because they lacked flying experience to handle bad weather and flying over mountains.

That's how Maj. Reuben Fleet, who had been the executive officer for Col. Henry "Hap" Arnold, who was in charge of Army aviation, ended up being assigned to the Post Office Department, where two people were about to open a new era for both mail and aviation.

Fleet was told to develop an air mail service from New York to Washington with a stopover in Philadelphia and with northbound and southbound flights six days a week — and given nine days to make it happen.

He had no pilots, no planes and no landing fields or ground operations.

The bureaucrats who gave Fleet the assignment he called impossible were Postmaster General Albert Sidney Burleson and Second Assistant Postmaster General Otto Praeger. Even today, the second assistant postmaster general is in charge of transportation.

The original Curtiss Jenny had a range of 90 miles and speed of 90 mph, which would have made even flights made by hopping from field to field difficult if not impossible (it's 140 miles from Washington, D.C., to Philadelphia.

Fleet turned to Curtiss Aeroplane for bigger engines and a larger fuel tank.

Fleet secured the use of the small, tree-lined Potomac Park in Washington, which was used for polo games; a farmer's field in Bustleton, Pa.; and Belmont Park Race Track on Long Island.

Fleet had his choice of the best pilots he could find except for "a couple ... that the post office forced on him" because of patronage, Rosenberg said.

Burleson and Praeger "really believed in the power of technology and the progressive politics of (President) Woodrow Wilson," and agreed with him that it was government's job to encourage the growth of technology.

As for others, "everyone really felt that the airplane was a waste of time" and the idea of flying mail was certainly not worth the money being sought, Rosenberg said.

On the day of the inaugural flight (May 15, 1918), Wilson, assistant secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt, Alexander Graham Bell and many others gathered at Potomac Park. Fleet flew the plane to the park. The ceremonies and speeches began. Rookie pilot George Leroy Boyle, one of the patronage pilots, was to fly out.

He tried, and the engine wouldn't turn over. The crew tried a few more times. No luck.

"It turned out, of course, that they had forgotten to refill the fuel tank" after Fleet landed and the ground crew checked the plane, Rosenberg said.

Finally, the plane took to the air.

Fleet had told Boyle to simply follow the railroad tracks to Philadelphia but forgot to mention that the tracks ran south, too. Boyle went south and crashed (he survived). The northern flight failed, but the southern flight succeeded.

Actor Douglas Fairbanks, just on the verge of stardom, was one of many actors who agreed to sell war bonds. As a stunt, he put an air mail stamp on his forehead and "mailed" himself from Washington to New York. Just like the other mail, he had to sit in the cargo compartment.

"There was really no one tougher at the time than the air mail pilots," Rosenberg said, so it was logical that Fairbanks would want to play the role of one.

He raised \$5 million with the flight, Rosenberg said.

The general public was slow to accept air mail. It cost more than sending a letter by train, and on many routes, the trains could deliver the mail faster than the planes, even when all went all on a flight. The trains could go to the heart of a city and get the mail close to the post office. The planes, on the other hand, had to land far from the central city, and the mail had to be trucked to the post office.

Praeger and Burleson knew they had to do something the trains could not do if air mail was to survive. The solution, they decided, was to fly to the West Coast over the mountains and cities that slowed the trains.

Chicago would be the first stop, linking the center of government in Washington, D.C., to the center of commerce in the Midwest. The trip took 20 to 22 hours by train; they figured the 700-mile trip (as the crow flies) could be done in seven to nine hours by air.

"The task, though, was easier said than done," Rosenberg said.

It involved, among other things, flying over the Allegheny Mountains. Central Pennsylvania was regularly covered with fog, and the mountains were covered with trees, which could mean disaster for a pilot making an emergency landing. The route became known as Hell's Stretch because more pilots were killed on it than any other.

The Army severed its connection to air mail when the war ended, and it became a civilian operation.

Burleson and Praeger decided to make the first Washington-Chicago flight a race, with pilots using different types of planes. "They were constantly trying to figure out what made the airplanes work — and more important, what made them not work," Rosenberg explained.

The two also wanted regular flights.

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More on 'Mavericks of the Sky' ...

(Continued from page 3)

"No one had ever tried to fly (mail) day in and day out," Rosenberg said. Pilots had to fight leaking radiators, rain, thunder and more.

The early days saw one woman in the air mail service, Katherine Stinson, who had worked at the family flying school and who sought the air mail job because it was the only way she could continue to fly when the war started.

She made the New York to Chicago flight, following an experienced air mail pilot one way and leading the flight on the way back. When she was the first to land on the return flight, reporters, interpreting the flight as a race, trumpeted the idea that the female flier had beaten her male counterpart.

Stinson was so embarrassed that she quit. She went to Europe trying to help the war effort by flying but ended up driving an ambulance for the Red Cross. After the Armistice, she tried, but failed, to get permission to deliver

the mail to the occupying troops in Germany. She contracted tuberculosis, returned home and was cured in 1924 but rarely, if ever, flew again.

The year 1920 was a terrible one for air mail, Rosenberg said. Pilots were dying in Hell's Stretch and "the service was really going nowhere."

It was threatened with cancellation, Wilson had suffered a stroke, and the Republicans were trying to kill the air mail service.

Praeger came up with the idea of flying across the country in a day and a half. But there was no navigation system or consistent weather forecasting or a way to get weather information to the pilots in the air.

The planes could fly 150 miles, and it was decided to fly in relays. It was February 1921, and "this was really a last ditch effort to save the service," Rosenberg explained.

Bad weather defeated the two planes flying east. The pilot of one westbound

plane crashed and was killed.

Jack Knight made it, forced to keep flying as relief pilots gave up and went home, sure that Knight, too, has been forced to give up the attempt or had crashed.

Knight's flight captured the nation's imagination. Nine days later, Rosenberg said, Warren G. Harding took office, and money was appropriated for air mail service.

The new administration, however, insisted on fewer routes flown more consistently and safely. Ultimately, private companies took over more and more of the routes.

Rosenberg and Macaulay spent five years researching the book and three years writing it, he said. They visited archives in Chicago, Washington, D.C., San Diego and Albuquerque, N.M., among others.

"Mavericks of the Sky" costs \$25.95. It is published by HarperCollins Publishers.

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