

Chapter 61

The Air Mail Stamps

Air mail stamps are the favorites of many collectors. The great adventures and daring of the early air mail pilots captured the imagination of the nation. The collecting of the plate numbers of the air mail stamps can also be a great adventure with daunting challenges.

The classic stamp is the first air mail stamp - the 24c red and blue airplane issued in 1918. Of course, the drama of the inverted center on this stamp adds to the glamour. One frame and one center plate was used to print this stamp. Plate singles are not difficult to find but a plate strip or plate block showing both plate numbers is a very attractive item and well worth the cost. Only one plate each was needed to print the 6c and 16c air mail stamps of 1918 and these plates are easy to find. The set of three stamps issued in 1923 can almost be considered part of the 4th Bureau series because of the frame design similarities. Four plates were used to print each of these stamps and again all can be located without too much trouble. The 10c, 15c, and 20c Map stamps were issued in 1926 with a total of 20 plates and all are easy to find.

The 10c Lindbergh commemorative air mail stamp of 1927 commemorated an historic event and also provided the first real problem for the plate number collector. Twelve plates printed the sheet stamps and these are easy to find but the first commemorative booklet stamp was printed from four plates and these are tough items to find. These booklet plates are scarce to rare. The booklet was printed on the flat plate press but the plate number placement on the plates was similar to the rotary press booklet plates so that partial plate numbers exist only when the trimming of the panes was not exact.

The year 1928 saw the issuance of the 5c Beacon stamp. 98 frame and center plates went to press but four of the center plates reportedly had only 100 impressions each. Three of these plates are unreported and only one copy exists of the fourth. The 5c Beacon is the first air mail stamp for which multiple plate number combinations exist and slightly over 1000 combinations have been recorded. Assembling a combination collection of this stamp would be a fascinating project for the collector who can afford it.

Four stamps appeared in 1930, beginning with a 5c Winged Globe stamp. Thirteen plates printed this stamp and the last five are somewhat uncommon but not really difficult to find. The big issue of the year was the set of three Graf Zeppelin stamps. These stamps were on sale only about a month during the depression era. Consequently, not many were bought and this has elevated this set to be the 'king' of the air mails on a price basis. Four plates were used to print each of the three values and, even though the stamps are costly, plate number copies are easily available and if you have the money, these twelve plates are simple to obtain. The 50c Zeppelin stamp

of 1933 was printed from four plates and this is a very easy item to complete. The 5c Winged Globe reappeared on the rotary press and an 8c Winged Globe stamp was issued and all of the plates used are common. The three Trans-Pacific air mails of 1935-37 are another easy group with four plates used to print each stamp.

The 6c Eagle stamp of 1938 is one of my favorite designs with the colors helping to create a spectacular stamp. This issue is great fun for the combination collector, with almost 600 combinations available, and many of these exist both with and without arrows. The 16 frame plates are easy to find except for plate 22192 which is the toughest plate, but the 38 center plates have some tough numbers with plates 22197-22200 being the scarcest. The 6c eagle frame plates were 100 subject plates while the center plates were only 50 subjects which helps explain why so many more center plates were required.

The 1941 Transport series consisted of seven denominations of the same design ranging from 6c through 50c although the 8c did not appear until 1944 when the air mail rate increased to 8c. This issue was heavily collected by matched set collectors and, though there were some plates producing short press runs, enough copies were saved so that none of the plates is really difficult. The 6c Transport also appeared in booklet format with ten plates to press. All ten plates are reported and the last four are quite scarce. A 5c Skymaster stamp was issued in 1946 when the postage rate was lowered. 32 plates went to press with some of the later plates having short press runs. Thanks again to the matched set collectors for finding enough of these plates to make it easy for today's collectors. The 5c Skymaster was changed to a small format in 1947 and eight sheet plates and two coil plates were used. The sheet plates are no problem, the coil plates are more difficult, but none of these is really scarce. A set of three international air mail stamps were issued in 1947 and these remained in use over ten years. All three of these stamps were printed by both the wet and dry methods. The toughest plates to find are the last two 10c wet printed plates (24898-9). I remember finding these in the post office around 1960 as I started my plate number collecting career. The last four 25c wet printing plates (23671-2 and 23681-2) are also difficult to find.

A number of commemorative air mail stamps were issued starting with the 1948 New York City stamp and all of the plates on these issues are very easy to find. The next real problem for the plate number collector is the 6c Skymaster stamp of 1949 which remained in use until 1957. The last two sheet plates are a bit scarce but it is the coil and booklet plates that are difficult. Two of the ten coil plates are unreported and many of the remaining coil and booklet plates are quite scarce.

The rate change of 1958 required a 7c stamp and one depicting a jet plane was issued in a blue color. The stamp was issued in sheet, booklet, and coil format and in 1960 the color was changed to red. Some of the plates used to print the sheets, booklets, and coils are known in both colors, which makes a nice display. The 7c coil had four 432 subject coil plates used and two are unreported and two are very scarce. The rates again increased in 1963 to 8c and new innovations again added to the interest. The 8c air mail stamp in booklet format was printed in panes of five with a slogan occupying the space normally used by a sixth stamp. Three different slogans were used during the life of the

booklet stamp. Four plates were used for slogan 1, two plates for slogan 2 (naturally the scarcest of the slogans), and 24 plates for slogan 3. Apparently the post office had either lost interest in the slogans, or they thought they had finally gotten it right with slogan 3. The 10c rate appeared in 1967 and booklet plates appeared in both the 320 and 400 subject formats. I do not consider these plates to be normally available and only one copy has been found, probably due to a miscut.

The rest of the air mail stamps and plates follow a familiar pattern. The sheet plates are easy to find, the coil plates are very difficult, and the booklet plates are impossible except those printed from 360 subject plates.

The BEP tried an interesting experiment in 1985 with the 33c Verville and the 39c Sperry air mail stamps. The printing cylinders printed two panes of each stamp per impression. This may have appeared to be a good idea to reduce the number of printing cylinders required except that if the required quantities differed, as they did, then you end up with too much of the lesser used stamp. The problem was resolved by a later issue of the 39c Sperry stamp from printing cylinders consisting only of this stamp. This reissue was done after the end of the BEP's postage stamp plate number series.

The air mail stamps were produced by a small 3% of the total plates used for all stamps but this small group is composed of very interesting stamps. 947 plates are available and it is quite a challenge to get even 90% of this total because of the difficulties in obtaining the booklet and coil plates. Some of the stamps are costly, but most of the plates, in singles, can be found at a very reasonable cost and the result is a beautiful display.

There is a fascinating group of plates used to print odd items that do not fit readily into a convenient category and the next chapter will look at these stamps.

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		Air Mail Series Totals							
Series	Subject	Plate	Assigned	To Press	Available	Available	Unreported	I Have	
		Type			Real P#	Code P#			
	(totals)		1418	1049	920	27	17		
1918	6c Air Mail	100F	2	1	1		0		
1918	16c Air Mail	100F	1	1	1		0		
1918	24c Air Mail frame	100F	1	1	1		0		
1918	24c Air Mail center	100F	1	1	1		0		
1923	8c Air Mail	400F	4	4	4		0		
1923	16c Air Mail	400F	4	4	4		0		
1923	24c Air Mail	400F	4	4	4		0		
1926	10c Map Air Mail	200F	9	8	8		0		
1926	15c Map Air Mail	200F	8	4	4		0		
1926	20c Map Air Mail	200F	9	8	8		0		
1927	10c Lindbergh Air Mail	200F	16	12	12		0		
1927	10c Lindbergh Air Mail book	180F	4	4	4		0		
1928	5c Beacon Air Mail frame	100F	71	55	55		0		
1928	5c Beacon Air Mail center	100F	44	43	43		3		
1930	65c Graf Zeppelin	200F	4	4	4		0		
1930	\$1.30 Graf Zeppelin	200F	4	4	4		0		
1930	\$2.60 Graf Zeppelin	200F	5	4	4		0		
1930	5c Winged Globe	200F	16	13	13		0		
1930	5c Winged Globe	200R	4	2	2		0		
1932	8c Winged Globe	200R	6	6	6		0		
1933	50c Zeppelin	200F	4	4	4		0		
1934	6c Winged Globe	200R	8	6	6		0		
1935	25c Trans Pacific	200F	4	4	4		0		
1937	20c Trans Pacific	200F	4	4	4		0		
1937	50c Trans Pacific	200F	4	4	4		0		
1938	6c Eagle center	50F	56	38	38		0		
1938	6c Eagle center	100F	1	0	0				
1938	6c Eagle frame	100F	32	16	16		0		
1939	30c Winged Globe	200F	4	4	4		0		
1941	6c Transport	200R	40	40	40		0		
1941	6c Transport book	180R	10	10	10		0		
1944	8c Transport	200R	26	22	22		0		
1941	10c Transport	200R	4	4	4		0		
1941	15c Transport	200R	4	4	4		0		
1941	20c Transport	200R	4	2	2		0		
1941	30c Transport	200R	4	2	2		0		
1941	50c Transport	200R	4	2	2		0		
1946	5c Skymaster	200R	36	32	32		0		
1946	5c Skymaster book	180R	4	0	0				
1947	5c Skymaster	400R	10	8	8		0		
1947	5c Skymaster coil	170R	4	2	2		0		
1947	10c Pan-Am Building	200R	9	6	6		0		
1947	15c NY Skyline	200R	12	12	12		0		
1947	25c Oakland Bay Bridge	200R	12	10	10		0		
1948	5c NY City Air Mail	400R	5	2	2		0		
1949	10c UPU Air Mail	200R	3	2	2		0		

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1949	15c UPU Air Mail	200R	4	4	4	0
1949	25c UPU Air Mail	200R	2	2	2	0
1949	6c Alexandria	200R	6	6	6	0
1949	6c Skymaster	400R	33	22	22	0
1949	6c Skymaster book	360R	16	12	12	0
1949	6c Skymaster coil	170R	10	10	10	2
1949	6c Skymaster coil	384R	2	0	0	
1949	6c Wright Brothers	200R	4	4	4	0
1952	80c Hawaii Air Mail	200R	5	3	3	0
1953	6c Powered Flight	200R	6	6	6	0
1954	4c Eagle Air Mail	400R	6	4	4	0
1957	6c US Air Force	200R	6	4	4	0
1957	7c Jet	400R	6	0	0	
1958	5c Eagle Air Mail	400R	4	4	4	0
1958	7c Alaska	200R	8	4	4	0
1958	7c Jet	400R	22	20	20	0
1958	7c Jet book	360R	8	8	8	0
1958	7c Jet coil	384R	5	4	4	0
1958	7c Jet coil	432R	4	4	4	2
1959	10c Liberty Bell	200R	5	3	3	0
1959	10c Pan-Am Games	200R	6	2	2	0
1959	15c Statue of Liberty	200R	8	4	4	0
1959	25c Lincoln	200R	16	11	11	0
1959	7c Hawaii	200R	4	4	4	0
1959	7c Jupiter	200R	5	4	4	0
1960	10c Inter-Amer. Conf.	200R	4	0	0	
1961	13c Liberty Bell	200R	10	8	8	0
1961	15c Statue Of Liberty	200R	35	19	19	0
1963	15c Blair	200R	4	2	2	0
1963	6c Eagle	400R	4	2	2	0
1963	8c Capitol	400R	33	24	24	0
1963	8c Capitol book slogan 1	360R	6	4	4	0
1963	8c Capitol book slogan 2	360R	2	2	2	0
1963	8c Capitol book slogan 3	360R	31	24	24	0
1963	8c Capitol coil	432R	19	8	8	6
1963	8c Earhart	200R	5	4	4	0
1964	8c Goddard	200R	5	4	4	0
1967	8c Alaska	200R	10	4	4	0
1967	10c Star Runway	400R	18	16	16	0
1967	10c Star Runway book (5)	360R	4	4	4	0
1967	10c Star Runway book (8)	320R	12	10	0	
1967	10c Star Runway book (8)	400R	7	4	0	0
1967	10c Star Runway coil	432R	11	10	10	2
1967	20c Audubon	200R	17	5	5	0
1967	9c Air Mail	400R	4	0	0	
1967	9c Air Mail book	320R	4	0	0	
1967	9c Air Mail coil	432R	4	0	0	
1968	10c 50th Anniv. Air Mail	200R	5	4	4	0
1968	10c 50th Anniv. Air Mail (offset)	200L	15	10	0	
1968	20c Air Mail	200R	16	11	11	0
1968	20c Air Mail offset	200L	12	8	0	
1969	10c Moon Landing	128R	32	15	15	0

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1969	10c Moon Landing offset	128L	24	14	0		
1971	9c Delta Wing	400R	2	2	2		0
1971	11c Jet Airliner	400R	11	8	8		0
1971	11c Jet Airliner book	360R	8	6	6		0
1971	11c Jet Airliner coil	432R	6	6	6		0
1971	17c Statue of Liberty	200R	11	8	8		0
1971	21c USA and Jet	200R	25	19	19		0
1971	21c USA and Jet offset	200L	23	20	0		
1972	11c Olympics Air Mail	200C	5	5	5		0
1972	11c City of Refuge	200R	9	8	8		0
1972	11c City of Refuge offset	200L	8	4	0		
1973	11c Electronics	200R	8	6	6		0
1973	11c Electronics offset	200L	6	6	0		
1974	13c Winged Envelope	400R	8	6	6		0
1974	13c Winged Envelope book	360R	6	6	6		0
1974	13c Winged Envelope coil	432R	8	8	8		2
1974	18c Statue of Liberty	200R	11	8	8		0
1974	26c Mount Rushmore	200R	10	8	8		0
1975	25c Plane and Globes	200R	8	7	7		0
1975	31c Plane, Globe and Flag	200R	32	16	16		0
1978	31c Wright Brothers	400R	12	9	9		0
1978	31c Wright Brothers offset	400L	16	15	0		
1979	31c Olympics Air Mail	200C	6	6	6		0
1979	21c Chanute Air Mail	400R	12	8	8		0
1979	21c Chanute Air Mail offset	400L	6	6	0		
1979	25c Wiley Post Air Mail	400R	6	4	4		0
1979	25c Wiley Post Air Mail offset	400L	10	5	0		
1980	28c Scott Air Mail	200C	6	6	6		0
1980	35c Curtiss Air Mail	200C	6	6	6		0
1980	40c Mazzei Air Mail	200C	18	12	12		0
1983	28c Olympic Air Mail	200C	9	8		8	0
1983	35c Olympic Air Mail	200C	4	4		4	0
1983	40c Olympic Air Mail	200C	8	4		4	0
1985	33c/39c Verville and Sperry	200C	10	6		6	0
1985	44c TransPacific	200C	5	5		5	0