

# An Important 1st Helicopter Air Mail Flight

A small, rain-drenched crowd stood in the shelter of a hangar at Morrow Field, anxiously awaiting the expected arrival of the first helicopter to carry official U. S. Airmail from Los Angeles to San Bernardino, Calif., just after 12:00 P. M. on December 1, 1947. All over southern California communications were washed out; cars were stalled and electric power halted. The latter failure had blasted the hopes of Announcer Ernie Ford and technicians from radio station KFXM, present to broadcast the plane's arrival over the Mutual Broadcasting System. Arrival time was near and their "mike" was dead. There were many present in the distinguished gathering who wished they had stayed in their comfortable homes and offices—surely, they thought, even a helicopter cannot come through in weather as terrible as this!

Others present were more optimistic. Postmaster Dyal of San Bernardino, C. M. Belinn, president of Los Angeles Airways, operators of the unusual service and E. S. Ransom, regional superintendent at large of the U. S. Air Transport command assured their friends that all would be well, but in view of the terrific rainstorm even their cheerful viewpoint could have easily been disputed.

The helicopter, carrying among other mail 3,011 collector's covers,



★ ★  
By  
**Fredric  
Holladay**  
★ ★

was due to land exactly at 12:21 P. M. and all eyes were turned toward the hands of the airport clock and they crept closer and closer to the appointed hour. Just as they touched the proper time on the dial, the faint sound of a laboring propeller came from out of the east. With shouts of "there he comes!" the crowd dashed out of the hangar into the pouring rain, to gather round a circular plot of grass on the landing strip—cleared for the descent of the helicopter. Out of the dark and gloomy heavens fluttered an odd apparition, looking like a giant prehistoric bird as it settled softly to earth in the downpour. The crowd fell back until the pilot had turned off the power and the rotary prop slowed to a complete stop. In a few moments the first mail pouches had been cleared from the plane's cabin and the pilot was almost overpowered with congratulations from the drip-

ping crowd. The rain magically ceased long enough for photographs to be taken and the return mail was loaded into the plane. Then as the greeters moved back, the plane's huge propeller spun into action and with a mighty whirring sound the craft leaped into the air—to dwindle off into the murky darkness and disappear in the bank of fog that obscured the distant horizon.



Special cachet used on cover sponsored by the Arrowhead Stamp Club for the first helicopter flight on December 1, 1947.

Postal officials had worked for months to make this first flight possible. Earlier in the year, helicopter service had been inaugurated between Los Angeles and many southern points, but postal officials and air mail patrons had felt that the service was overlooking one of the largest pick-up spots in southern California—San Bernardino. This large community serviced mail from several dozen smaller communities and the extension of helicopter service to this point would shorten air mail service from there to eastern terminals by not only a matter of a few hours but by even a day or two in many cases.

Postmaster Dyal and Superintendent of Mails Barnette of the San Bernardino post office started negotiations to extend the helicopter service to their community in October 1947. After weeks of effort, the service was authorized, with the first flight set for December 1. The Arrowhead Stamp Club of San Bernardino was notified of the impending first flight and they sponsored the issuance of a cachet to commemorate the event. Fredric Holladay, President of the philatelic organization, drew the cachet, which portrayed a helicopter landing on the grounds of the National Orange Show exposition (which it is hoped the plane will later use as its landing place) where the world's largest display of citrus fruits is held yearly. Hundreds of the special covers were distributed throughout



—(Photo by Curt Armstrong)

Left to right: President Fredric Holladay and Oliver F. Laughhead of the Arrowhead Stamp Club showing some of the special cachets carried on the first helicopter air mail flight from Los Angeles to San Bernardino to Igor Sikorsky, developer of the unusual craft.

(See Page 58)