

# The Cover Story (Quiz Answer from the June Newsletter)

UNITED STATES MISSILE MAIL by Josh Furman

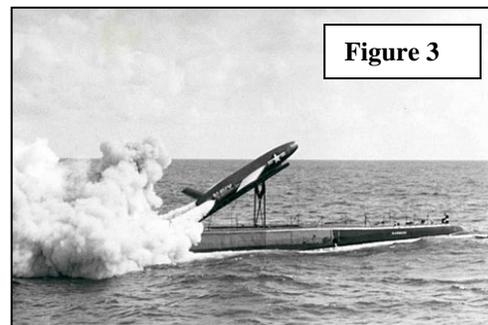
"Throughout its history, the Postal Service enthusiastically has explored faster, more efficient forms of mail transportation. Technologies now commonplace—railroad, automobile, and airplane—were embraced by the Post Office Department at their radical birth, when they were considered new-fangled, unworkable contraptions by many.

One such technology, however, remains only a footnote in the history of mail delivery. On June 8, 1959, in a move a postal official heralded as "of historic significance to the peoples of the entire world," the Navy submarine U.S.S. Barbero fired a guided missile carrying 3,000 letters at the Naval Auxiliary Air Station in Mayport, Florida. "Before man reaches the moon," the official was quoted as saying, "mail will be delivered within hours from New York to California, to Britain, to India or Australia by guided missiles."

History proved differently...<sup>1</sup> The 'official' that the Postal Service was referencing was none other than Arthur E. Summerfield, Postmaster General at the time. He had been appointed by Dwight D. Eisenhower with the change in administration on Jan. 21, 1953.

But of course the event had a philatelic aspect. The letters, 3,000 of them, were enclosed in a Regulus I guided missile, and this missile was launched from the U. S. S. Barbero to the Naval Auxiliary Air Station in Mayport, Florida. The cover photo shows one of the flown pieces on this historic journey. **Figure 3** shows a photo of the actual launch of the missile from the after deck of the submarine.

The U.S.S. Barbero, SSG-317, had a long and varied history. She was a Balao-class submarine, named for a family of fishes commonly called surgeon fish. She was launched in December 1943 and commissioned on April 29, 1944. Her war operations included two war patrols during which she is credited with sinking three Japanese merchant ships while patrolling in the Java and South China Seas.



After a trial as a cargo sub, the Balao was re-commissioned in 1955 and equipped to launch the Regulus I nuclear cruise missile. A hangar housing two missiles and a launcher were situated on the after deck. One of the limitations of the Regulus was that the firing submarine had to surface, the missile then being rolled out onto the launcher and fired.

In preparation for this new mail delivery method, the Post Office Department officially established a branch Post Office on Barbero and delivered some 3,000 pieces of mail to it before Barbero left Norfolk, Virginia. The mail consisted entirely of commemorative postal covers addressed to President Eisenhower, other government officials, the Postmasters General of all members of the Universal Postal Union, and other special recipients. [**Figure 1** on the front cover of the newsletter is a good example.] The covers contained a letter from U. S. Postmaster General Summerfield proclaiming the expected benefits of this new method of mail delivery. The postage (four cents domestic and eight cents international) was cancelled "USS Barbero 8 June 9:30 am 1959" before the boat put to sea. The mail was loaded into a training missile and the vessel headed into the Atlantic Ocean.

The rocket flight from the Atlantic took about twenty minutes, and the missile landed safely at Mayport, Florida. The mail was forwarded to the Jacksonville Post Office for further sorting and routing. So what did the U. S. Navy get out of all this hubbub? Well, obviously, but subtly, the Navy trumpeted the flexibility and accuracy of its, ahem, nuclear missile program. It was your typical win-win situation.

The cover noted as **Figure 2** on the newsletter front cover, celebrates the arrival of the rocket mail at Mayport. (And the prize for the correct answer) After witnessing the landing, Summerfield stated in part, "We stand on the threshold of rocket mail". We never crossed that threshold.

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<sup>1</sup> History of the United States Postal Service, Publication 100, Washington DC, 1993

# Number 8 and 9 by Jim Pullin

I have recently exhibited my gold medal exhibit, “American Sailing Packets on the North Atlantic” in two stamp shows in the northeast. I am pleased to report that they did well in both shows.

First, at the Northern Federation of Stamp Clubs Philatelic Show in Boxborough, the exhibit received a gold medal. In the Rochester Philatelic Association show in Rochester, New York the Exhibit did even better. It was awarded the Reserve Grand, gold, the APS Medal for Research, the American Philatelic Congress Award for Excellence in Written Text, the Lighthouse Stamp Society award for Best Exhibit with a Nautical Component and the United States Philatelic Classics Society Award for Best United States Exhibit with Greater than 75% up to the First Bureau Issue of 1894. This is the third time I have been awarded the United States Philatelic Society Award.

With one more gold medal awarded to this exhibit and I will be a candidate for a Diamond Award from the American Association of Philatelic Exhibitors – something to look forward to.

I am currently working on both of gold medal exhibits to increase impact and power -- by reducing both exhibits by 30%. The membership of the CFSC will hear more about this concept in future programs where the wisdom of such an approach will be shared as to the reasons why an exhibitor would want to do this. LESS IS BETTER, THAN MORE.

[Editor’s note: For those of us who have been frustrated and/or exasperated exhibitors, the rarefied heights achieved by Jim Pullin are only something to wish for. The endless patience and work that goes into building a gold medal winning exhibit is extraordinary. Please congratulate Jim on his achievements the next time you see him.]



## WAS ROWLAND HILL ALWAYS RIGHT? HIS FOLLY by John Latter

Rowland Hill, as Post Master General of Great Britain came up with another idea (I think increased PO profits were his inspiration). He proposed a special letter sheet and a companion envelope – he commissioned a well-known artist – a Mr. William Mulready - to create designs for these new products. Hill believed that the postal stationary would appeal to the general public. The Mulready products could only be purchased from the PO & therefore the design would, in effect, be the receipt for pre-payment.

Some people considered the Mulready designed stationary was an attempt by the PO, and the government, to control the availability of envelopes, and thus control the flow of information – both public and private - through the postal system – a **practice not unlike America’s NSA today!** At the same time many folk thought the design itself was too elaborate and various stationary manufacturers created lampoons with great similarity to the Mulready products. Just 6 days after their introduction Hill wrote – *“I fear we shall have to substitute some other stamp for the design by Mulready.....the public have shown their disregard, and even distaste for beauty.....”*



Within two months a decision was made to get rid of the Mulready products. I wonder how many were destroyed – it does appear that a number were snapped up by businesses (at a discount?) to print price lists to be sent to prospective customers. The Mulready letter sheets and envelopes became known as **HILL’S FOLLY.**