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# The First Indian ROCKET DISPATCHES

by STEPHEN H. SMITH

Hony. Secy., The Indian  
Air Mail Society.

**THREE YEARS**—this is perhaps a long period to arrive at some definite decision as regards the utility of using the Rocket to convey mails, but the results have justified the period.

When the first Rocket Despatches of Austria were being experimented upon in 1831, the general public, including the writer, viewed these early endeavours as shortlived stunts being of little or no practical value. It was not till the first British Rocket firings in June this year that any serious consideration was given to this new method of transporting mails in India by Rocket. The doubting Thomases, once convinced, did not let the grass grow under their feet. A scheme was soon arrived at and Saugor Island was selected as the venue for conducting the first Rocket Despatches of India.

For the convenience of readers and to show the utility of the Rocket it might be well to state that Saugor Island, although situated about 84 miles away at sea from Calcutta as the crow flies, is a difficult spot to reach, mails and passengers being entirely at the mercy of the weather. A quick and good passage would mean four to five days from Calcutta to the Lighthouse at Saugor Island, while in bad weather, seven to nine days would be considered good going.

Once the venue was selected, the Port Authorities at Calcutta who were approached, offered every facility to ensure success. When the history of the Indian Rocket mails is written in the years to

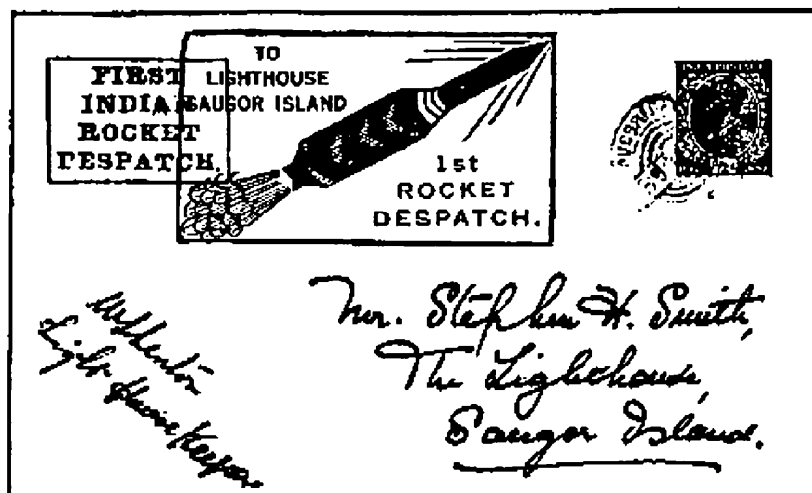
come, let not the historian omit the names of Commander Norcock, R.N. (Rtd.), O.B. E., Commander Gibson, R.N. (Rtd.), O.B. E., Mr. T. M. Oag, Capt. C. H. Potten and Mr. W. Shenton, who helped to reveal the utility of the Rocket as a means of transporting mails in India.

On the 30th of September the Honorary Secretary of the Indian Air Mail Society left Calcutta at about 6:45 A.M. on board the D. V. "Pansy". The shores of Saugor Island were approached at about 3:30 P.M., when the first Ship-to-Shore Rocket conveying 173 despatches was fired by Capt. C. H. Potten.

Unfortunately the rocket, which had been manufactured by the Orient Fireworks Co. of Calcutta, exploded in mid-air, the despatches being scattered all over the sea. All of the despatches, with exception of three, were picked up. The Ship-to-Shore items bear the Saugor Island postmark of the 30th September and a reproduction in green of a rocket in a frame with the following inscription in red:—"Ship-to-Shore 1st Rocket Despatch" also a single line violet cachet reading: "First Firing Ship-to-Shore." The majority of these items were autographed by Capt. Potten.

The above clearly indicates that a rough sea is no impediment to the transport of mails by rocket. Had the Ship-to-Shore items been conveyed by ordinary means of transport, they would have been conveyed by the following different stages: 1st to Diamond Harbour, 2nd to Kakdip, 3rd to Kuchabaria, 4th to Muriganga, thence through swamp and jungle eighteen miles to the Lighthouse.

The same evening at about 5 P.M., the First Indian Rocket Despatches on land were fired by Mr. W. Shenton. On this



ROCKET POST COVER described in this article. The cover is autographed by Mr. W. Shenton, the Lighthouse Keeper.

occasion a rocket manufactured by Messrs. Jas. Pain & Sons was used to convey 220 despatches. Owing to want of experience as regards fixing up this type of rocket, and to the weight of the despatches, the distance covered was only 122 yards, 5 inches across a small creek. Among the 220 despatches there were three Rocket Post items of Holland, viz., covers bearing the printed 5 cent green and one cent brown rocket stamps, the 1 1/2d gld. blue, and the 1 1/2 gld, overprinted on the 5 cent green stamp.

The first land firing items bear in blue, a Rocket in a frame and the inscription "To Lighthouse, Saugor Island, 1st Rocket Despatch" in red. The postmark is Saugor Island, 30th September, while the cachet is in dark red, reads: "First-Indian Rocket-Despatch." Almost all the covers were autographed by Mr. Shenton, the Lighthouse Keeper.

Aerophilatelists will be interested to learn that eight items were fired twice, first from ship-to-shore and second on land. These eight covers bear all the identification marks of both firings and are autographed by Mr. Shenton and Commander Potten.

The first Shore-to-Ship firing took place at about 9:00 A.M. on the 3rd of October from the Semaphore Station at Saugor Island. The rocket which was of British manufacture, was the product of Messrs. James Pain & Sons, Sk. Rashon Ali, the head semaphore attendant, fired the rocket which contained 135 despatches, a distance of 946 yards.

The despatches which were securely packed in a waterproof case, fell into the

sea, having failed to reach the R.S.V. "Guide." They were, however, picked up by a small Indian boat and delivered by previous arrangement to Muriganga.

The Shore-to-Ship items bear a reproduction of a rocket in red enclosed in a frame with the following inscription in green "Shore-to-Ship" 1st Rocket Despatch. The Muriganga postmark is 4th October. The majority of items have been autographed by Sk. Rashon Ali in indelible pencil. All items also bear a violet cachet "3rd October, 1934" and a black cachet "From Saugor Island."

The first successful Ship-to-Shore rocket firing took place on the 4th October, when a rocket manufactured by the Orient Fireworks Co. was fired at Diamond Harbour by the Hony. Secretary of the Indian Air Mail Society. The rocket as its predecessor burst in mid-air, but fortunately just over the beach a distance of 73 yards. Seventy-five items were carried. These may be recognized by the Diamond Harbour postmark of 4th October and a white label bearing the following inscription in black—"Rocket Despatch"—Diamond Harbour—"Ship-to-Shore." A violet cachet reading "Ship-to-Shore" binds the label to the cover.

The above experiments have clearly proved that the rocket, as a means of quickly transporting mails, is of the greatest utility where rough weather is a serious hindrance to all other means of transport. The minimum time saved on the "Ship-to-Shore despatches although the rocket exploded, was four whole days, while the same may be said of the "Shore-to-Ship" despatches. In rough weather the time saved would have been eight days.

## AIRS OF THE MONTH . . .

By ALTON J. BLANK

All data on New Issues of Air Mail Stamps should be sent direct to Editor Alton J. Blank, 1850 Burnett Avenue, East Cleveland, Ohio.

**M**EXICO'S permanent issue, released the first of December is very attractive and does honor to the traditions of the country. The designs are distinctly native in treatment.

Italy continues on her rampage, Chile adds four more to her long series and the U.S.S.R. details the facts of their latest, scheduled for appearance this month.

● **CHILE** ● The newest, just released, are the 20P. olive brown and 30P. dark gray, both showing the outline of a plane,

a compass in the corner and the Southern Cross. The 40P. violet gray and the 50P. plum presents a plane's outline, its shadow, ornamental squares, and lightning rays in the background. All of the centavos values and the 3, 4, 6, and 8 Pesos must yet be issued.

● **CYRENAICA** ● An air set of ten values and one official stamp (11 in all) has been issued for the King's birthday and the Rome-Mogadiscio flight. The 25L plus 2L light green pictures Victor Emmanuel in uniform with a background of palms and a plane.

● **ERITREA** ● The 25L plus 2L of this set of 10 values shows the King in uniform wearing a steel trench helmet. The background is comprised of trees, mountain scenery and the usual distant