

History of the DC-4 SkyMaster Plane Design Used on United States Airmail Postal Material

PURPOSE & SCOPE: This exhibit chronicles the image of the DC-4 SkyMaster military transport used in the design of one of the **longest running series of airmail stamps and stationery ever issued** in United States postal history. The inflight image was used on more than **17 types** of postal material issued in ten of the years between 1946 and 1958. Over 7.2 billion stamps, hundreds of thousands of stationery envelopes and Air Letters were issued, making the iconic plane image one of **the most recognized airmail designs** of all time.

ORGANIZATION & PRESENTATION: All variations of the DC-4 SkyMaster design will be explored starting with the large plane version of 1946 and then the small plane design of 1947. Next will be the **first Air Letter issued in 1947** followed by the **first ever U.S. airmail coil stamps in 1948**. Finally, the change in background color seen on postal stationery issued in 1958 will be illustrated.

The exhibit also examines the different ink printing methods used in 1949 as well as various postage rate changes along with revalued stationery and other interesting aspects of the various DC-4 SkyMaster stamps and stationery that have been issued over the years.

Collecting categories such as Plate Blocks, First Day Covers, Booklets/Panes, Coils/Pairs, Special Covers, Air Letters, Postal Stationery and Single Stamps are also highlighted.

The presentation is essentially in Stamp and Stationery issued date sequence utilizing First Day Covers to convey the history of the DC-4 SkyMaster stamps and stationery.

Note - It was not possible to obtain (at a reasonable cost) an original of the revalued Centenary Stationery Envelope displayed on page 14. Since it represents part of the DC-4 SkyMaster history it was deemed necessary to include an image so the exhibit would be complete as possible.

Pages 2-4	DC-4 SkyMaster Large Plane – First Time Issued, Rate Reduction & Stationery
Pages 5-6	DC-4 SkyMaster Small Plane – Design Change & Air Letters
Page 7	Mail Carrying Modes of Transportation
Pages 8-11	DC-4 SkyMaster Small Plane – Rate Change, New Printing Methods, Coil's & Booklets
Pages 12-14	DC-4 SkyMaster Large Plane – Stationery, Surcharge & Rate Revalued
Pages 15-16	DC-4 SkyMaster Small/Large Plane – Air Letters, Rate Change, Color Changes & Airlift

BACKGROUND: The DC-4 SkyMaster had its maiden flight on February 14th, 1942 and soon after became the workhorse of the U.S. military and its allies during WW II. After the war it played a crucial role in the Berlin Airlift of 1948-1949. It quickly became one of the primary planes used in airmail delivery and the commercial aviation sector worldwide.

The large DC-4 SkyMaster stamp was first issued in 1946 which heralded in one of the **most sweeping rate reductions in U.S. airmail history!**

This reduced the prevailing rate of 8¢ to 5¢ and for many of the U.S. Territories, such as Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and others the reduction was much greater. This was doubly significant since mail to those territories took weeks to arrive unless sent via air. The rate reduction was of course a considerable savings when sending parcels/mail via air.



The impressive “**Carmine**” color of the stamp alerted postal sorting clerks that the letter or parcel is airmail and in need of rapid dispatch to the airmail facility. The DC-4 SkyMaster Plane symbolized reliability and speed of its time, the epitome of those qualities at the time!



In August of 1946 president Harry S. Truman signed an Act of Congress that reduced the domestic airmail rate from 8¢ to 5¢ per ounce. This was the largest rate reduction in United States airmail history. Even though the new Large DC-4 SkyMaster 5¢ stamp was issued on September 25th, 1946 the reduced rate did not become effective until October 1st, 1946. Therefore 3¢ of additional postage had to be added until the new rate became effective 7 days later.

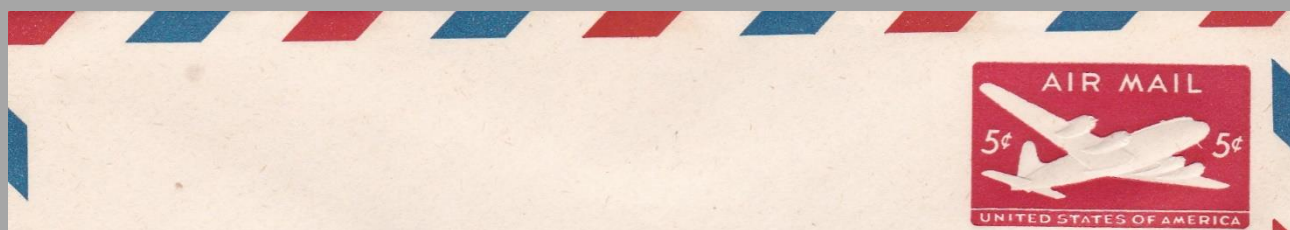


A total of 864,753,100 stamps were issued in sheets of 50 using the Rotary Press Method. The stamp is perforated 11 X 10½ and the stamp color is "Carmine".



Large DC-4 SkyMaster Plane Plate Block of 4

A Large DC-4 SkyMaster 5¢ Airmail Stationery Envelope was also issued from Washington, D.C. on September 25th, 1946. Additional postage was added to the First Day Issue since the new 5¢ rate was not in effect until October 1st. There were two different printings of the envelope one was Flat Bed Press "die 1" 21½ mm high and the second printing was Rotary Press "die 2" 22 mm high.



Die 1
21½ mm
high



Die 2
22 mm
high



Stationery
Envelope
First Day
of Issue
Cover

On October 1st, 1946 the new domestic airmail rate of 5¢ went into effect. There was no need to add the extra 3¢ in additional postage. This new rate stayed in effect until January 18th, 1949 at which time the airmail rate went to 6¢.

Postal Airmail envelope reflecting the new airmail rate of 5¢ on October 1st, 1946



Postal Airmail Stationery Envelope reflecting the new 5¢ rate October 1st, 1946.



On March 26th, 1947 the United States Postal Service introduced for the first-time a **smaller design of the DC-4 SkyMaster stamp**.

The reason for the smaller version of the stamp was to make it more suitable for stamp rolls (known as “coils”), stamp vending machines and booklets in future issues.

There were 971,903,700 stamps issued in sheets of 100 using the Rotary Press Method and 342,634 First Day Covers issued. The stamp is perforated 10½ X 11 and the color is “Carmine”.



Plate Block Small
DC-4 SkyMaster Plane 5¢ Stamp



First Day Cover commemorating the 5¢ Small DC-4 SkyMaster stamp was issued from Washington, D.C.

The aerogram (Air Letter Sheet) was largely popularized during the Second World War (1939-1945). **It wasn't until April 29th, 1947 that United States Postal Service for the first-time entered the scene with its own Air Letter Sheet.**

The imprinted Small DC-4 SkyMaster 10¢ stamp was used on Air Letter's until it was updated with a jet airliner image on September 10th, 1958.



An aerogram (also called aerogramme or air letter) were thin lightweight piece of foldable and gummed paper in which the letter and envelope are one and the same.

10¢ Small DC-4 SkyMaster Air Letter Sheet First Day of Issue was from Washington, D.C. on April 29th, 1947



The United States Postal Service issued a 5¢ Postal Stationery Envelope from Washington D.C. on May 21st, 1947 commemorating a centenary of the first stamp issued by the United States Government. The embossed stamp had illustrations of mail carrying methods, one of which is the DC-4 SkyMaster. There were two different printings of the envelope one was Flat Bed Press "die 1" 21¾ mm high and the second was Rotary Press "die 22¼ to 22¾" mm high.



The United States Postal Service on January 15th, 1948 issued for the first time in its history an airmail coil stamp. The stamp is a horizontal coil perforated 10 Small DC-4 SkyMaster 5¢ airmail stamp issued in its traditional “Carmine” color.

A total of 33,244,550 stamps were issued in coils of 500. At a retail cost of \$25 per roll a considerable sum for 1948 which normally limited its use to corporations and organizations.

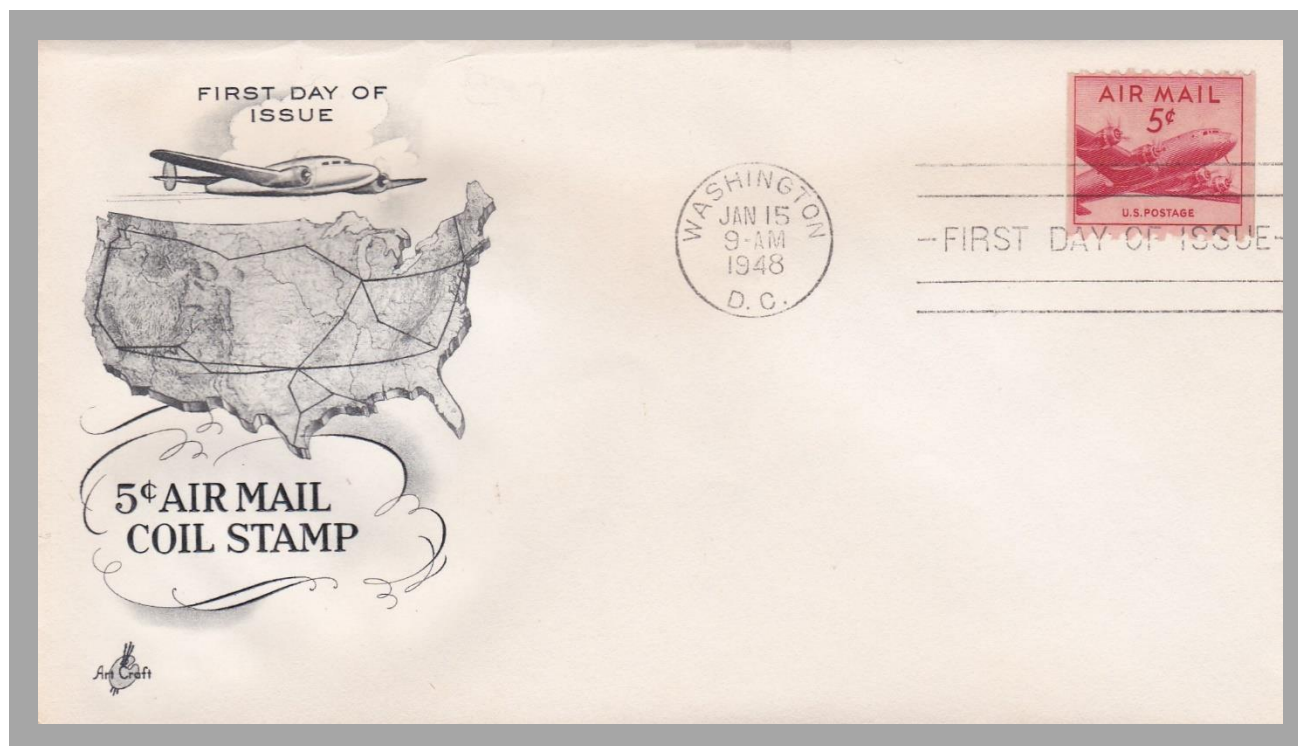
The rolls weren’t compatible with most vending machines of the period which also limited the stamps usage by the average person on the street.



Pair Small DC-4 SkyMaster
Coil 5¢ Stamp



Line Pair Small DC-4 SkyMaster
Coil 5¢ Stamp



A total of 192,084 First Day Covers were
issued from Washington, D.C.

On January 18th, 1949 the United States Postal Service issued a 6¢ Small DC-4 SkyMaster airmail stamp to conform with the rate increase from 5¢ to 6¢. There were 5,070,095,200 stamps issued in sheets of 100.

Two printing methods were utilized. The “Dry” method used paper with 5-10% moisture content which produced a sharper image than the “Wet” method which used paper with 15-35% moisture content. The higher moisture content caused the ink to spread and look lighter.

Starting in the late 50’s all postage stamps were being printed using the “Dry” method.

“Wet” Printing Method Plate Block
#’s went up to 25339



“Dry” Printing Method Plate Block
#’s starting at 25340



266,790 First Day Covers of the 6¢ Small DC-4 SkyMaster were Issued from Washington, D.C.



The United States Postal Service on August 25th, 1949 issued a horizontal coil perforated 10 Small DC-4 SkyMaster 6¢ airmail stamp. A total of 260,307,500 stamps were issued using the Rotary Press Method.

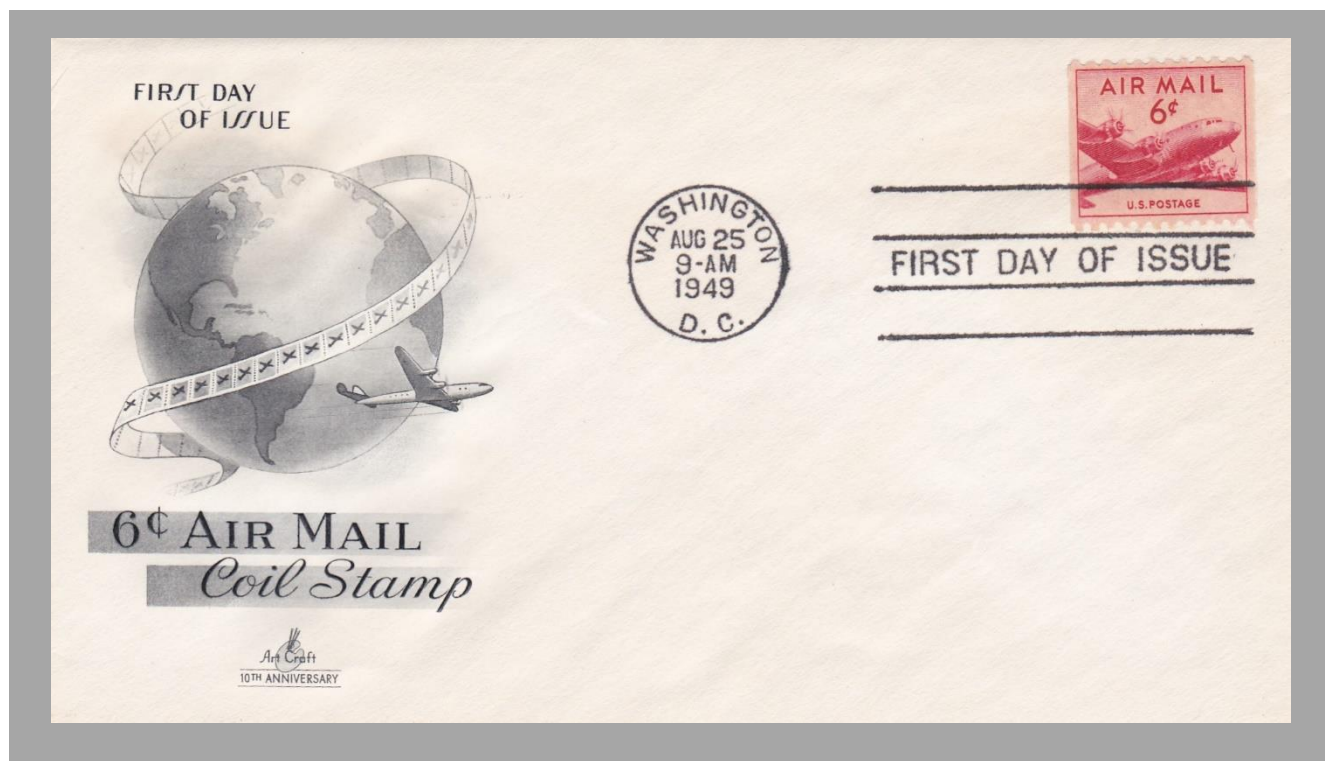
Like the 5¢ coil issued in 1948 the 6¢ coil was not widely used by the general public because it could only be purchased in rolls of 500 at a cost of \$30 per roll.



Pair Small DC-4 SkyMaster
Coil 6¢ Stamp



Line Pair Small DC-4
SkyMaster Coil 6¢ Stamp



240,386 First Day Covers utilizing the 6¢ Small DC-4 SkyMaster coil stamp were issued from Washington, D.C.

On November 18th, 1949 the United States Postal Service issued a Small DC-4 SkyMaster 6¢ airmail stamp in booklet format. **This was the first and only time that the DC-4 SkyMaster stamp was issued in a booklet format.** Both “Wet” and “Dry” printing methods were employed.

This stamp booklet was priced at 73¢ which is 1¢ above the 72¢ value of the stamps within the booklet. It's one of the last two booklets ever issued that was sold at 1¢ above the booklets face value.



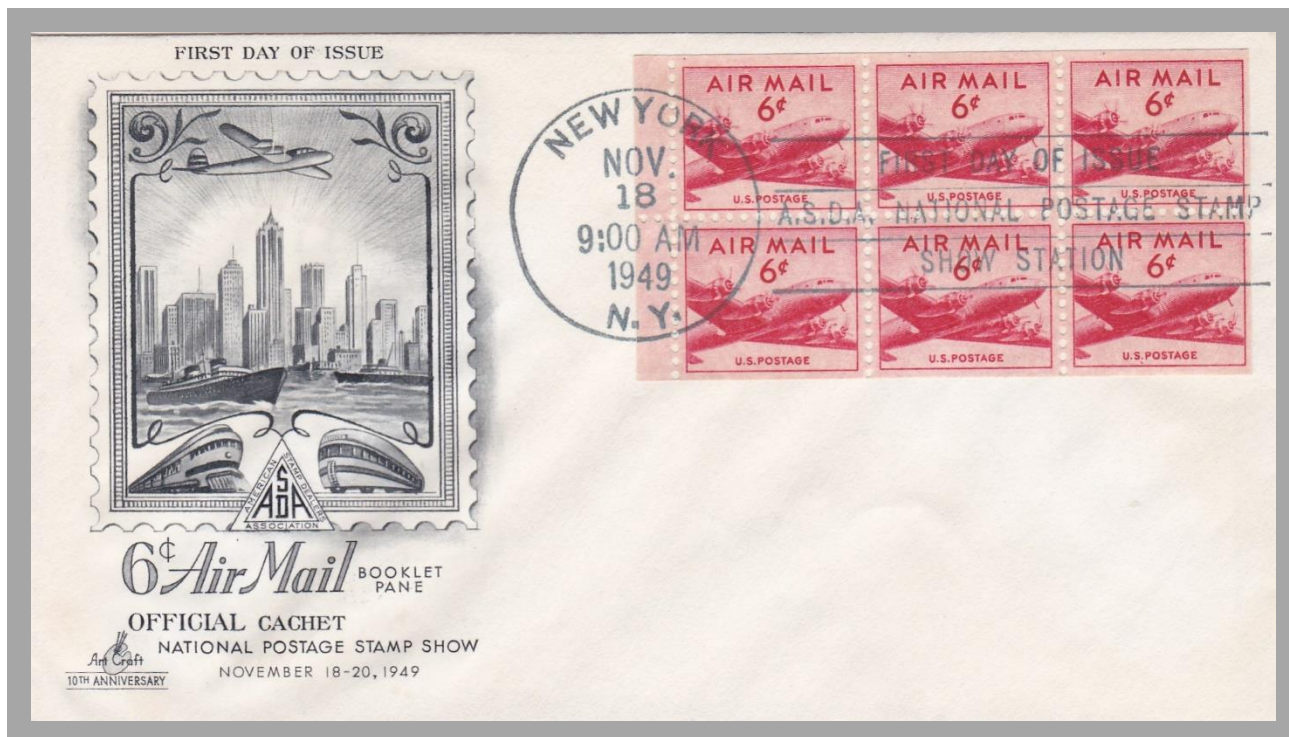
Booklet of 12
Small DC-4
SkyMaster 6¢
Stamps



6¢ Pane DC-4 SkyMaster “Wet” Printing Method



6¢ Pane DC-4 SkyMaster “Dry” Printing Method



First Day Cover of the Small DC-4 SkyMaster 6¢ Booklet Pane
was issued from New York, N.Y.

On September 22nd, 1950 the United States Postal Service issued a 6¢ Large DC-4 SkyMaster stamped envelope. The First Day of Issue was from Philadelphia, Pa.

There were two working die types used to produce this envelope, type 1 and type 2. The type 2 envelope displayed below also has a 1¢ surcharge which was applied to the 6¢ SkyMaster stamped envelope to support the airmail rate of 7¢ in 1958.

In the type 1 the "6¢" leans to the right



In the type 2 the "6" stands upright



In order to support the airmail postage rate of 6¢ in 1951 and 1952 the United States Postal Service applied a revalued mark to a 1946 Large DC-4 SkyMaster 5¢ envelope. There were several variations of the revalued 5¢ envelope which are showed here and on the next page.

1951 Type 1 6¢ revalued mark is cross-hatched, and the tips of tail and tail skid are rounded

1951 Type 2 6¢ revalued mark is cross-hatched, and the tips of tail and tail skid are pointed

1952 Type 1 6¢ revalued mark is solid, and the tips of tail and tail skid are rounded

1952 Type 2 6¢ revalued mark is solid, and the tips of tail and tail skid are pointed

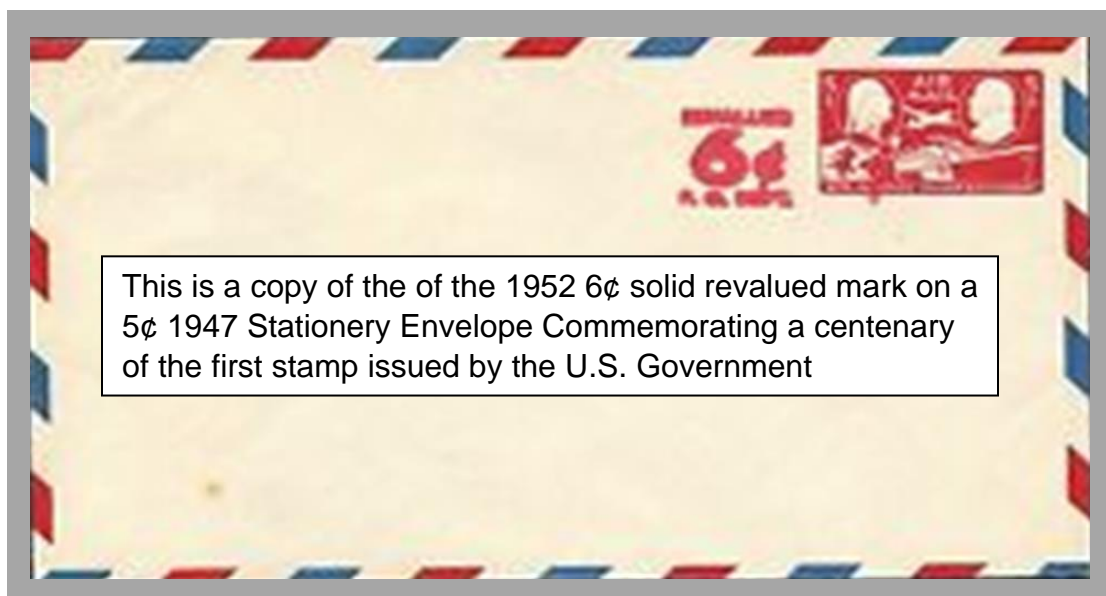


To support the airmail postage rate of 6¢ in 1952 the United States Postal Service applied a revalued stamp mark of 6¢ to the following 1947 5¢ stationery envelopes:

1952 "Die 1 "Rubber Die" 5¢ Large DC-4 SkyMaster with solid 6¢ revalued mark

1952 "Die 2 "Rubber Die" 5¢ Large DC-4 SkyMaster with solid 6¢ revalued mark

1952 Stationery Commemorating a centenary of the first stamp issued with solid 6¢ revalued mark



In 1951, 1953, and 1955 additional 10¢ Air Letter Sheet stationery was issued with the imprinted stamp of the Small DC-4 SkyMaster Plane.

In 1952 the Brussels, Belgium Universal Postal Union Congress required that all Air Letter Sheets be called “Aerogramme” effective July 1st, 1953, thus requiring a change in the production of United States Air Letters.

1951 – “Air Letter” on face in bold print – 4 line description on back

1953 – “Air Letter” and “Aerogramme” on face in bold print – 4 line description on back

1955 – “Air Letter” and “Aerogramme” on face in medium print – 3 line description on back



Air Letter Issued
on July 25th, 1951

Air Letter
Issued on
January 2nd,
1953

An aerogram (also called aerogramme or air letter) were thin lightweight piece of foldable and gummed paper in which the letter and envelope are one and the same.

Air Letter Issued on January 5th, 1955

To keep pace with the current 7¢ airmail rate on July 31st, 1958 the United States Postal Service issued a 7¢ Large DC-4 SkyMaster stamped stationery envelope from Dayton, Ohio. This was the first time that another color “Blue” was used as the background for the embossed DC-4 SkyMaster stamp instead of the traditional “Carmine”. There were 143,428 First Day Covers issued.

*** This issue marks the last time that this DC-4 SkyMaster iconic plane image will be used by the States Postal Service.**

While not the iconic DC-4 SkyMaster image as we have seen so far, the DC-4 SkyMaster was used again in 1998 but this time on a U.S. stamp to commemorate the 1948 Berlin Airlift.



First Day of Issue Cover of the Large DC-4 SkyMaster 7¢ Stationery Envelope

On June 26th, 1998 the United States Postal Service issued a 32¢ stamp to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Berlin Airlift. From June, 1948 to May, 1949 the Soviet Union blocked all land and water routes through East Germany to West Berlin. The allies responded by setting up a series of airlifts to deliver food and supplies to West Berlin. The Soviets lifted their blockade in May, 1949. **The DC-4 SkyMaster Plane played a major role in breaking the Soviet Union's blockade of West Berlin, Germany.**



DC-4 SkyMaster pictured in flight during the Berlin Airlift