

1916 | A Swift Aeroplane Called ‘The New York Times’

By [DAVID W. DUNLAP](#) MAY 23, 2016

*[Times Insider](#) shares historic insights from *The New York Times*. In this piece, David W. Dunlap, a metro reporter, looks back at when *The Times* took to the skies.*



The aviator Victor Carlstrom flew this Curtiss biplane, “The New York Times,” from Chicago to New York in November 1916. Credit The New York Times

There was a brief moment a century ago when The New York Times not only delivered your news, it delivered your mail.

Airmail, at that.

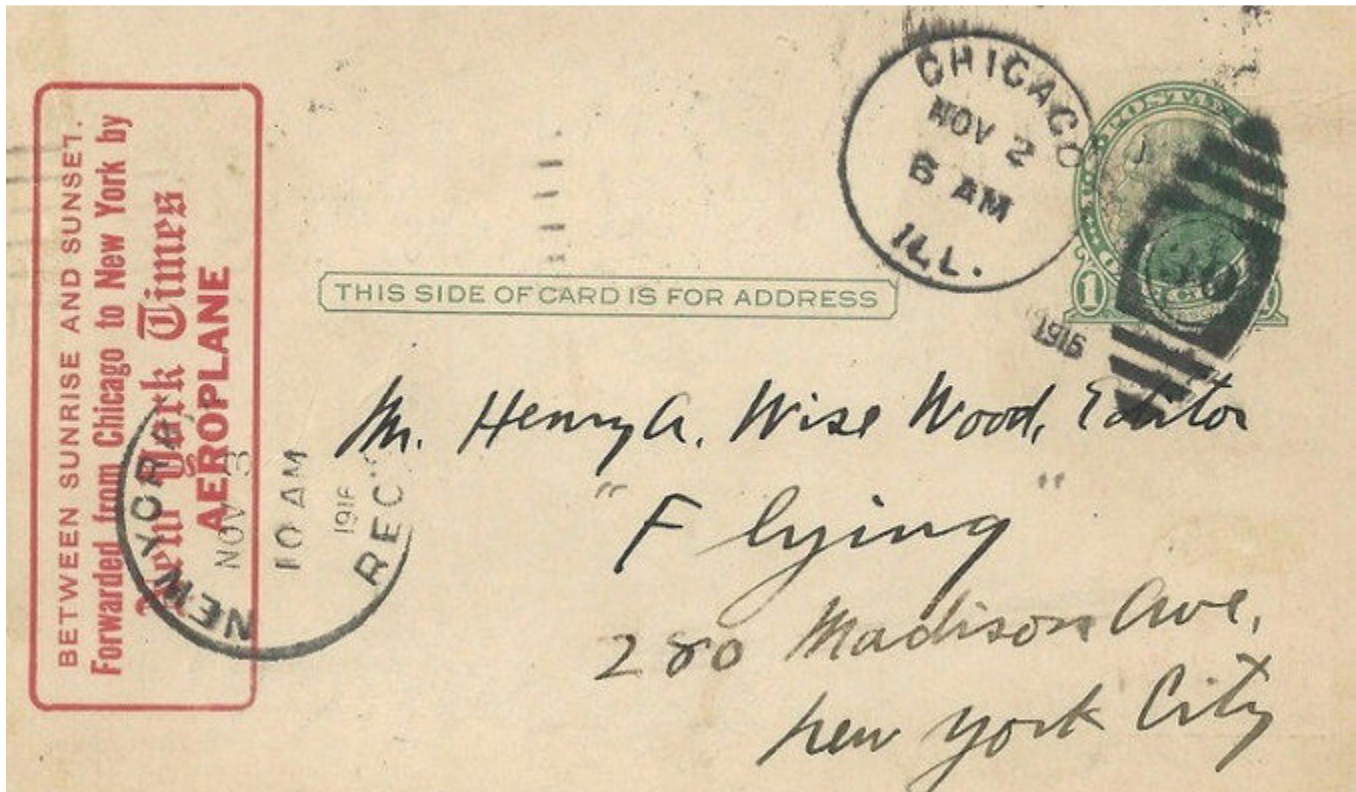
On Nov. 2, 1916, the aviator [Victor Carlstrom took off from an Army field in southwest Chicago](#). His Curtiss biplane, “The New York Times,” was loaded with about 1,000 letters and postcards bound for New York City.

It was Mr. Carlstrom’s hope to fly nonstop between the cities in a single day.

The Times, then [under the editorship of Carr V. Van Anda](#), seized opportunities to promote itself and build circulation by sponsoring aviators and explorers in the early decades of the 20th century. We were brand-conscious before brands were big business.

For its part, the United States Post Office Department was eagerly boosting the idea of moving the mails through the air — at a premium price — but was not yet doing so itself.

So Mr. Carlstrom was [deputized as a temporary, unpaid mail carrier](#). His flight plan was designated by the Post Office as “Special Route No. 635,006, providing for the transmission of mail between New York and Chicago, one time and one way, by The New York Times aeroplane.”



“Between sunrise and sunset,” the post card boasted, but the postmarks told a different story: Nov. 2 in Chicago, Nov. 3 in New York. Credit Courtesy of Don Jones

Included among the letters was a contract between The Times and the B. F. Goodrich Company for 50,000 lines of advertising. (Fourteen “agate lines” of advertising equaled one inch of one newspaper column. A full-page ad at that time would have amounted to about 2,500 lines, so this contract would have covered roughly 20 full-page ads.)

“This is the first advertising order ever sent through the mails by aeroplane and is said to be the largest tire advertising contract filed with a newspaper,” The Times said. [“R. H. Macy & Co. received an order for goods from a customer in Chicago.”](#) We were evidently a century ahead of Amazon’s drones.

Post cards issued by The Times boasted proudly: “Between Sunrise and Sunset. Forwarded From Chicago to New York by New York Times Aeroplane.”

The mail got through. Examples of it are “prized by collectors of pioneer airmail memorabilia,” Matthew Healey wrote in the official exhibition catalog of the [World Stamp Show](#), which begins May 28 in New York.

But the flight did not proceed as planned.



Victor Carlstrom, right, and Maj. Gen. Leonard Wood, who officially welcomed him to Governors Island after his two-day flight from Chicago. Credit The New York Times

“Everything was going fine until I got a little past Erie,” Mr. Carlstrom said. “Then I noticed that [gasoline was running out beneath the machine](#). Something was wrong, of course, and I knew I had to stop and investigate. There wasn’t any telling how much gas I had lost nor how much I had left to go on. I was right past Erie, but I turned around and went back there because I knew I would want to be near a big city and near a telephone.”

A nut had worked loose in the gasoline line, it turned out. It was a small enough problem, but it fouled the effort to get to New York by nightfall. Instead, Mr. Carlstrom settled on [Hammondsport](#), N.Y.

The Times could at least take satisfaction from the fact that the Chicago-to-Erie leg of the journey had set a “[new American nonstop record](#)” of 452 miles.



The printed legend, known as a “cachet,” on one of the post cards carried by Victor Carlstrom. Credit Courtesy of Don Jones

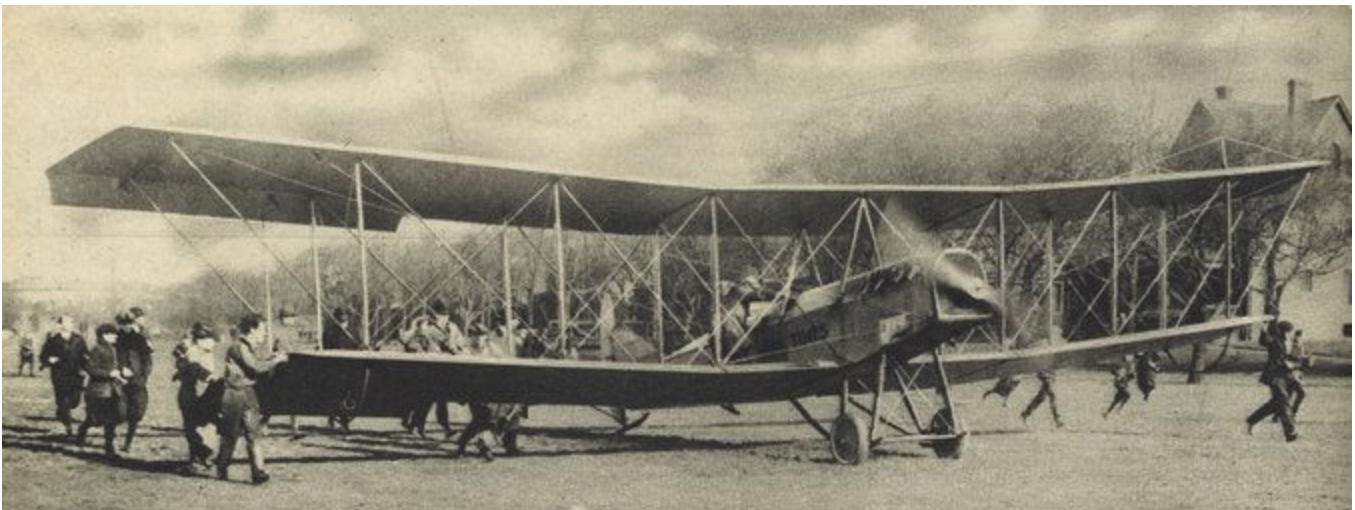
And the next day, Mr. Carlstrom arrived on Governors Island, in New York Harbor, about [four minutes earlier than expected](#).

Displaying the cheerful resolve that seemed to characterize pioneering pilots, he said, “It would have been a cinch to have made the flight without a stop if it hadn’t been for [that confounded nut](#).”

“Some day,” he vowed, “I’m going to leave Chicago at 6 o’clock and have lunch in New York at noon. I can do it, too. This flight proved it.”

On Nov. 19, the aviator [Ruth Law smashed his nonstop record](#) by flying 590 miles, from Chicago to [Hornell](#), N.Y. “Miss Law has shown us all the way and set a new mark at which I, for one, will be glad to shoot,” Mr. Carlstrom said graciously.

Mr. Carlstrom’s flying career lasted only six more months. On May 9, 1917, [he and a student, Cary P. Epes, were killed](#) when the biplane they were flying seemed to crumple in midair over Newport News, Va., before plummeting to the ground.



“The New York Times” reaches New York, one day late but four minutes ahead of schedule. The Times’s Mid-Week Pictorial rotogravure magazine devoted a page to the story. Credit The New York Times

Not long before, “The New York Times” had also met its fate at Newport News, according to a 2004 [biographical compilation](#) by Christine Carlstrom-Trick Tamaru. Mr. Carlstrom was going to take his brother Carl for a spin in the aeroplane. “But something went wrong,” the account said, “and he crashed in shallow water before our startled eyes. It was a sorry sight to see the big plane sink into the water with the name ‘New York Times’ slowly disappearing under the waves.”