

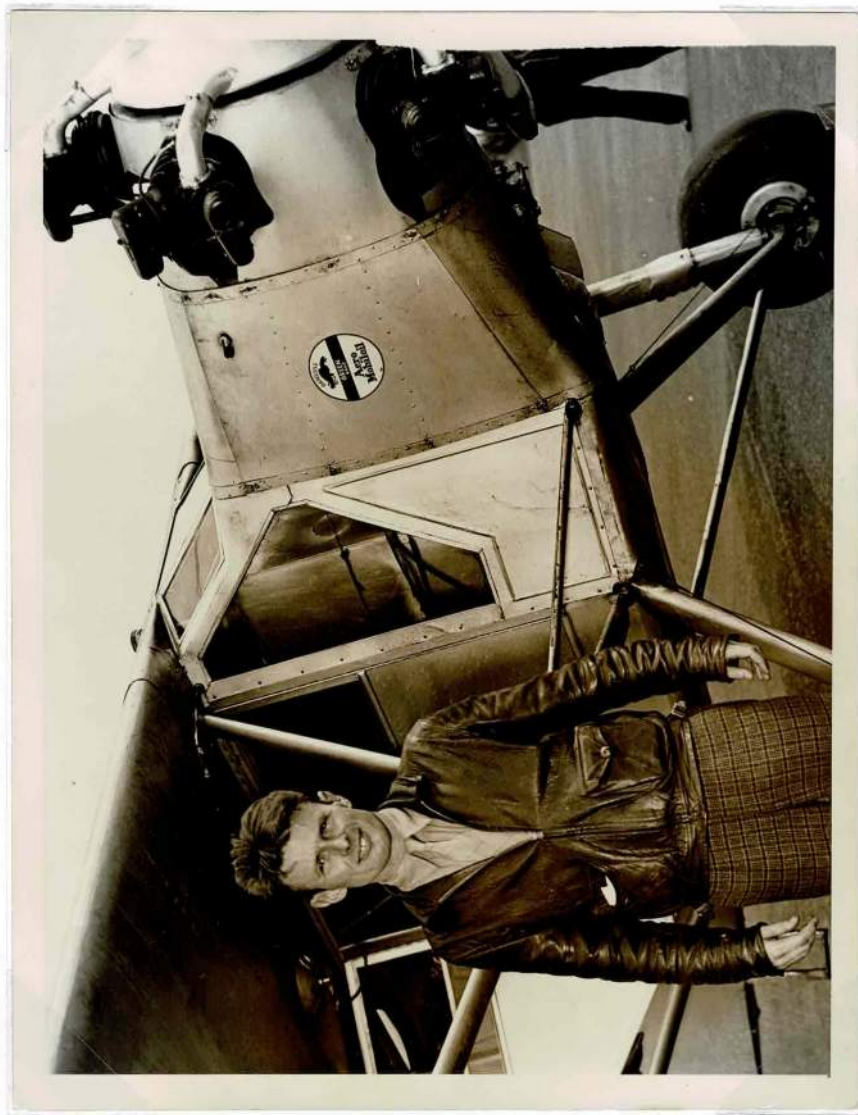
DOUGLAS WRONG WAY CORRIGAN

Douglas Corrigan flew from Long Beach, California to New York on 9th July 1938 in a somewhat dilapidated Curtiss Robin single engine monoplane. He then took off from Floyd Bennett Field, Brooklyn on 17th July on the return journey to California but landed the following day in Baldonnel airport, just outside Dublin, Ireland. His flight lasted 28 hours and 13 minutes. Hence the nicknames "Wrong Way" and "Non Stop" were born. Corrigan claimed that it was a navigational error that caused him to fly in the wrong direction, heavy cloud combined with misreading his compass where the needle which he thought was pointing west was actually pointing east. If Douglas Corrigan did in fact make this mistake, he is a very lucky man, if he made no mistake, then he joins the band of all time great navigators

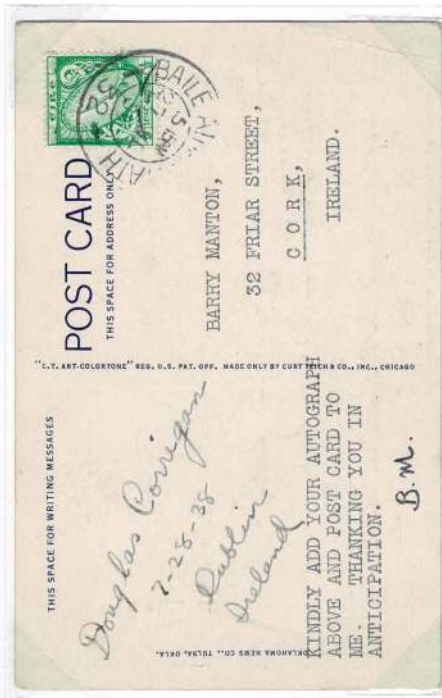
Exhibit Scope and Plan

Exhibit looks at the detail of the historic flight on 17th July 1938 and the fame that followed Corrigan's achievement.

1. Corrigan's Flight
2. Leaving Ireland, returning to New York
3. Riding the wave of heroism - ticker tape parades
4. The Flying Irishman - film of the famous flight
5. The final landing - a lifetime of fame



Douglas Corrigan at Roosevelt Airport with his Curtiss Robin OX-5 plane, International News Photos, 16th August 1938.



Pre-stamped postcard sent under cover to Corrigan, requesting his signature and that card be returned to sender by post. Returned to sender on 27th July 1928

Douglas Corrigan at the time of this flight was already an experienced pilot. He was born to American Irish parents in Galveston, Texas but settled in Los Angeles with his mother, brother and sister. He made his first solo flight on 25th March 1926 at the age of 19, the same year he started working for the Ryan Aeronautical Company whose base was at the airfield where he took his first flight. However, he was based at their San Diego plant.

Corrigan rotated through several jobs as an aircraft mechanic and eventually received his transport pilot licence in October 1929. The following year, he teamed up with his friend Steve Rich to establish a passenger service between small towns on the East Coast.



Corrigan was involved in the wing assembly and fuel tank installation of Charles Lindbergh's "Spirit of St Louis". He was also part of the team that extended the wing of this plane to 10 feet and he proudly relates in his autobiography how it was he who pulled the chocks from Lindbergh's plane when he took off from San Diego on the flight to New York, in preparation for the planned flight across the Atlantic.

Left: US 1977 commemorative for the 50th anniversary of the first transatlantic flight in which Charles Lindbergh soloed from New York to Paris.

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Corrigan purchased the used 1929 Curtiss Robin OX-5 plane for \$310. He initially modified the plane’s engine using two old Wright Whirlwind J6-5 engines (increasing the HP from 90 to 165) and he installed additional fuel tanks. By 1935 he made his first application to the Bureau of Air Commerce to make a non stop flight from New York to Ireland, the first of many applications to be rejected as the plane was not considered robust enough for a transatlantic flight. It was certified for inland flights, for which the requirements were less arduous. Repeated modifications and applications for permission to fly across the Atlantic were refused, with the regulations increasing with each year. By 1937, his plane was not even approved for cross country flights. By 1938, he had invested a total of \$900 in the Curtiss Robin and had again been certified for inland flights and specifically for a return transcontinental flight from Los Angeles to New York. This 9th July flight took 27 hours at a cruising speed of 85 miles per hour. Corrigan’s flight plan indicated he would return to Los Angeles on 17th July, and he aimed to fulfil that by taking off at 5:15 with 320 US gallons of aviation fuel and 16 US gallons of oil. The rest is history, as 28 hours and 13 minutes later, he landed in a small airfield on the edge of Dublin city, without the benefit of a radio and using a 20 year old compass. Throughout his life, Corrigan stuck to the somewhat unlikely story that he had indeed made an error.

His flight is perhaps best captured a few years later by the US journalist and Pulitzer Prize winner, H.R. Knickerbocker: “*You may say that Corrigan’s flight could not be compared to Lindbergh’s in its sensational appeal as the first solo flight across the ocean. Yes, but in another way the obscure little Irishman’s flight was the more audacious of the two. Lindbergh had a plane specially constructed, the finest money can buy. He had lavish financial backing, friends to help him at every turn. Corrigan had nothing but his own ambition, courage and ability. His plane, a nine year old Curtiss Robin, was the most wretched-looking jalopy. As I looked it over at the Dublin aerodrome I really marvelled that anyone could have been rash enough even to go in the air with it, much less fly the Atlantic. He built it, or rebuilt it, practically as a boy*

would build a scooter out of a soapbox and a pair of old roller skates. It looked it. The nose of the engine hood was a mass of patches soldered by Corrigan himself into a crazy-quilt design. The door behind which Corrigan crouched for twenty-eight hours was fastened together with a piece of bailing wire. The reserve gasoline tanks put together by Corrigan, left him so little room that he had to sit hunched forward with his knees cramped and not enough window space to see the ground when landing”.

While no mail was carried on this flight, Corrigan went on to sign his autograph on many thousands of philatelic offerings, attended many celebration parades and even starred as himself in a major motion movie called “*The Flying Irishman*”. I have collected many authenticated photographs and philatelic offerings bearing his signature, a small selection of which are shown here. Indeed, well known Dublin Philatelist W.J. Hutchinson was pictured with Corrigan on the 18th July 1938 in his role as “Customs clearing Agent and Philatelist”, a photograph he had turned into an advertising postcard the following week. Before Corrigan left Ireland, he got a significant amount of pre-stamped mail requesting his signature, such as that from Barry Manton in Cork, which Corrigan signed on 28th July.

The American Aviation authorities were very unhappy with Corrigan’s “*mistake*” but his pilot’s certificate was only suspended for 14 days. Corrigan attended many functions and dinners in Dublin and travelled by train to Cork where he was met by the Lord Mayor James Hickey and paraded through the city to Cobh port where he boarded the Manhattan steamship bound for New York, arriving on 4th August just as his suspension was complete

The steamer also transported his plane back to New York. His arrival sparked the sending of many commemorative covers such as those by James Heartwell from Brooklyn. The following day, Corrigan was treated to a hero’s ticker tape parade in New York where he perched on the back seat of an open phaeton, waving to the thousands who jammed the sidewalks and the windows of the surrounding buildings and who created a confetti blizzard as tons of torn telephone books came out the windows

This was the first of several parades, where American Airways arranged a tour to Philadelphia, Boston, St. Louis, Newark, as guests of each of the mayors. This was followed by parades in both Chicago and Washington. A month after his return, Corrigan attended The National Air Races in Cleveland where the commemorative covers carried the hand stamp CORRIGAN Day.

Corrigan’s autobiography “*That’s My Story*” was published in Liberty Magazine with Part 1 appearing on 5th November 1938 and in book form on 15th December 1938. He went on to act as himself in the movie biography “*The Flying Irishman*” in 1939 for which he earned \$75,000, thirty years his salary as an aircraft mechanic. In 1946 he ran for the U.S. Senate in California on behalf of the Prohibition Party but he gained less than 2% of the vote. Corrigan retired from aviation activities in 1950 and settled in an 18 acre orange and lemon grove in Santa Ana, California. However, he remained a celebrated personality throughout his life, with no shortage of product or service promotional opportunities. He also continued to inspire many philatelic tributes to his famous flight but always maintained publicly that he had made the flight by mistake, right up to his death on 9th December 1995. His plane now resides in the Planes of Fame museum in Chino, California, where it is displayed, albeit in a dismantled state.

References

1. Douglas Corrigan, “*That’s My Story*”, published by E.P. Dutton & Company Inc., New York, 1938.
2. Douglas Corrigan, “*That’s My Story*”, published by Liberty Magazine, Vol. 15, No 45,46,47,48, starting 5th November 1938.
3. The Bethlehem Globe – Times, 18th July 1938 edition.
4. New York journal and American, 5th August 1938 edition.