

*110 years of the first air mail in the world, 1911 Allahabad - Naini flight by Henri Pequet*

**Silvia Vaccari**

## **The first airmail in the world, 1911 flight Allahabad - Naini**

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Henri Pequet was a French aviator, who in late 1910 signed a contract as a pilot with the British Humber Company in Coventry, Birmingham. Humber was in charge of organising aerial demonstrations in India to celebrate the Industrial and Agricultural Fair of Allahabad entitled "United Provinces Exhibition".

Pequet was not alone but in the company of his mechanic, Mr. Haffkin, and the English pilot Keith Davies (who piloted a Blériot XI). Together with the manager of Humber, Capt. Walter George Windham, they boarded the passenger ship "SS Persia" headed for Bombay. From the Indian capital they were to continue by train to Allahabad.

At the same time, Sir Geoffrey Clarke "Postmaster of the United Provinces", organised the transport of a postal load by air, from one city to another, in order to arouse greater interest among the visitors attending the Fair.

On 18th February 1911, after a few weeks of preparation, a curious crowd witnessed the take off of Henri Pequet's aircraft. In the belly of the Sommer, which took flight from the lawn of the Allahabad pole, there were 15 kg of postal load consisting of approximately 6,500 letters and 40 postcards. The aircraft flew over the Jamuna River, a tributary of the Ganges, and landed after 27 minutes of flight in Naini Junction, an important railway junction about 10 km from Allahabad.



By handing over the postal load to an official of the post office, Henri Pequet became the world's first air postman. All the letters and the 40 postcards (most of which were cracked due to damage during transport) received the cancellation with the special magenta-coloured double circle postmark "FIRST AERIAL POST U.P. EXHIBITION ALLAHABAD", with the profile of an airplane flying over a relief and the date "1911" depicted at the centre.

Silvia Vaccari Airmail and Space celebrates

**The story of the first postal flight** in the world by presenting one of those 40 rare postcards, signed by the pilot Henri Pequet

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