

This Day in History... February 13, 1923

Happy Birthday Chuck Yeager

The first person to break the sound barrier, Chuck Yeager was born on February 13, 1923, in Myra, West Virginia.

From a young age, Yeager had an aptitude for working with machines. He grew up helping his father repair the machinery at his natural gas drilling business and could rebuild a car engine by the time he was a teenager.

Shortly after graduating from high school, Yeager joined the Army Air Corps in September 1941. After two years of training, which he picked up remarkably quickly, Yeager traveled to England and first saw combat in February 1944. Though he was shot down on his eighth mission, he managed to evade capture and returned to service. By the war's end, he flew over 60 combat missions and claimed 12.5 aerial victories, including shooting down four FW 190s in one day. Of that experience he said, "I knew that dogfighting was what I was born to do."



The X-15 rocket plane appears on this Priority Mail stamp. The X-planes were experimental US aircraft created to test the technology of supersonic and space flight.

After the war, Yeager returned to America and married his fiancé, Glennis Faye Dickhouse, for whom his planes were all named. He briefly worked as a flight instructor before taking a job as assistant maintenance officer in the Flight Test Division. In that role, he got to fly nearly every fighter that came out of maintenance. Yeager's flying skills were recognized, and he was selected in 1946 to join a new test pilot school. After graduating, Yeager received a great honor – he was chosen to pilot the rocket-powered Bell X-1 in an attempt to break the sound barrier.

Since the early 1940s, aviation scientists had been working to solve the problem of breaking the "sound barrier" – the sharp increase in aerodynamic drag that aircraft experience as they approach the speed of sound. For this purpose, the Bell Aircraft Company and the National Advisory Committee on Aeronautics built the rocket-powered X-1.

Yeager made his first test flight on August 29, 1947, reaching a speed of Mach .85. In the following months, he made several other flights coming closer to his goal of Mach 1. Then, on October 14, 1947, Yeager was air-launched from under the bomb bay of a B-29 bomber. When Yeager reached 42,000 feet, he hit a speed of 700 miles per hour and accelerated past Mach 1 – the speed of sound. Due to the top-secret nature of the flight, his accomplishment was kept from the public until the following year.

Yeager commanded fighter squadrons during the Vietnam War and continued to test new airplanes for the military until his retirement in 1975. That year, he was awarded a Congressional Medal of Honor for the part he played in breaking the sound barrier. In 2012, he flew in an F-15 to re-enact his historic 1947 record on its 65th anniversary.

Yeager's accomplishment was honored on a 1997 postage stamp (pictured above). The first day ceremony for the stamp, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the flight, took place at the Air Force Base where the historic event happened. The stamp includes microprinting for security. With a magnifying glass, "X-1" can be seen on the horizontal stabilizer on the tail and a row of three "USPS" is above the wing. Other microprinting caused controversy because on the nose of the plane is written "Glamorous Glennia," a misspelling of Yeager's plane "Glamorous Glennis," named after his wife.



Issued in 1997 to mark the 50th anniversary of Yeager's historic flight.



This Express Mail stamp features a side view of the X-15 plane. Only three X-15 planes were built. They made 199 flights from 1959 to 1968. Thirteen of those flights exceeded 50 miles in altitude, the US criterion for spaceflight. The eight pilots on those flights qualified as astronauts.

This Day in History... February 13, 1923

Happy Birthday Chuck Yeager

The first person to break the sound barrier, Chuck Yeager was born on February 13, 1923, in Myra, West Virginia.

From a young age, Yeager had an aptitude for working with machines. He grew up helping his father repair the machinery at his natural gas drilling business and could rebuild a car engine by the time he was a teenager.

Shortly after graduating from high school, Yeager joined the Army Air Corps in September 1941. After two years of training, which he picked up remarkably quickly, Yeager traveled to England and first saw combat in February 1944. Though he was shot down on his eighth mission, he managed to evade capture and returned to service. By the war's end, he flew over 60 combat missions and claimed 12.5 aerial victories, including shooting down four FW 190s in one day. Of that experience he said, "I knew that dogfighting was what I was born to do."



The X-15 rocket plane appears on this Priority Mail stamp. The X-planes were experimental US aircraft created to test the technology of supersonic and space flight.

After the war, Yeager returned to America and married his fiancé, Glennis Faye Dickhouse, for whom his planes were all named. He briefly worked as a flight instructor before taking a job as assistant maintenance officer in the Flight Test Division. In that role, he got to fly nearly every fighter that came out of maintenance. Yeager's flying skills were recognized, and he was selected in 1946 to join a new test pilot school. After graduating, Yeager received a great honor – he was chosen to pilot the rocket-powered Bell X-1 in an attempt to break the sound barrier.

Since the early 1940s, aviation scientists had been working to solve the problem of breaking the "sound barrier" – the sharp increase in aerodynamic drag that aircraft experience as they approach the speed of sound. For this purpose, the Bell Aircraft Company and the National Advisory Committee on Aeronautics built the rocket-powered X-1.

Yeager made his first test flight on August 29, 1947, reaching a speed of Mach .85. In the following months, he made several other flights coming closer to his goal of Mach 1. Then, on October 14, 1947, Yeager was air-launched from under the bomb bay of a B-29 bomber. When Yeager reached 42,000 feet, he hit a speed of 700 miles per hour and accelerated past Mach 1 – the speed of sound. Due to the top-secret nature of the flight, his accomplishment was kept from the public until the following year.

Yeager commanded fighter squadrons during the Vietnam War and continued to test new airplanes for the military until his retirement in 1975. That year, he was awarded a Congressional Medal of Honor for the part he played in breaking the sound barrier. In 2012, he flew in an F-15 to re-enact his historic 1947 record on its 65th anniversary.

Yeager's accomplishment was honored on a 1997 postage stamp (pictured above). The first day ceremony for the stamp, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the flight, took place at the Air Force Base where the historic event happened. The stamp includes microprinting for security. With a magnifying glass, "X-1" can be seen on the horizontal stabilizer on the tail and a row of three "USPS" is above the wing. Other microprinting caused controversy because on the nose of the plane is written "Glamorous Glennia," a misspelling of Yeager's plane "Glamorous Glennis," named after his wife.



Issued in 1997 to mark the 50th anniversary of Yeager's historic flight.



This Express Mail stamp features a side view of the X-15 plane. Only three X-15 planes were built. They made 199 flights from 1959 to 1968. Thirteen of those flights exceeded 50 miles in altitude, the US criterion for spaceflight. The eight pilots on those flights qualified as astronauts.