

THE LETICIA INCIDENT

COMMISSION FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE TERRITORY OF LETICIA, 1933-1934

This exhibit explores the League of Nations' involvement with the 'Leticia Incident', a territorial dispute between Colombia and Peru. In an attempt to defuse the combat, Colombia and Peru agreed to arbitration by the League of Nations. The League appointed three member states as a "Commission for the Administration of the Territory of Leticia". Each side's military forces were withdrawn and a neutral force under the Commission's supervision policed the disputed area. This was the earliest use of a military force, under international control, for peace-keeping purposes.



War Memorial in Tarapacá, Colombia. Plaque reads, "To the Heroes of the Colombian Air Force; who with true courage gave the best of themselves; flying with their noble aircraft over river and jungle. Declaring over our Amazonia with the sound of their motors the sovereignty of our country during the war with Peru." - Wikipedia/Wikimedia

Exhibit Plan

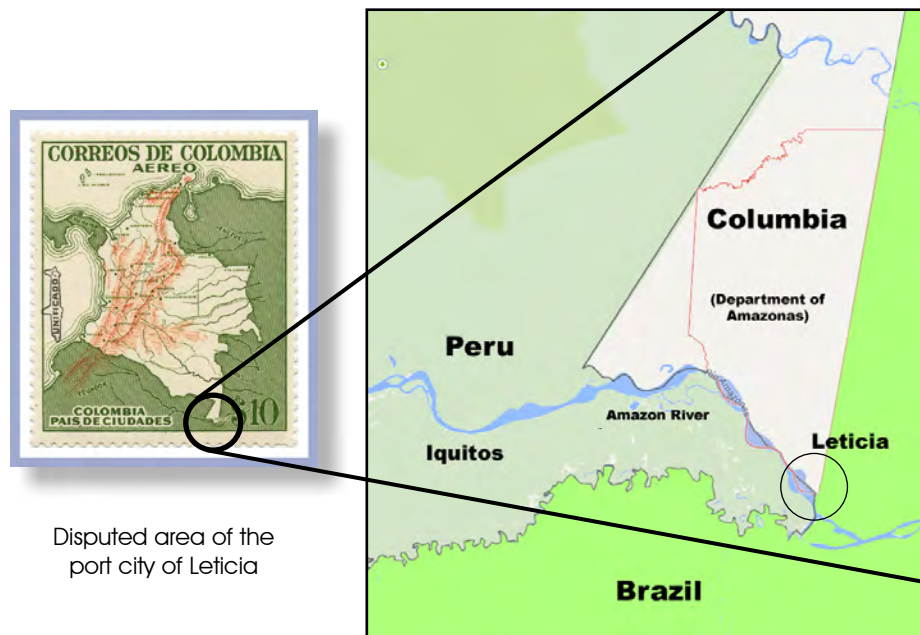
The Port City of Leticia
The Combatants
The Peacemakers
Mail Routes and Aircraft
Outgoing Service Mail
Incoming League Service Mail
Incoming Peacekeeper Mail
Philatelic Mail
References

Background of the area and the port city
Nations and personalities engaging in conflict
Nations and personalities engaging in peace efforts
Delivery of the mail
Mail from the Leticia Commission
League of Nations mail to the Leticia Commission
To the Leticia Commission's Peacekeepers
It actually exists as souvenirs (just not in this exhibit)
Resources and information to support the exhibit

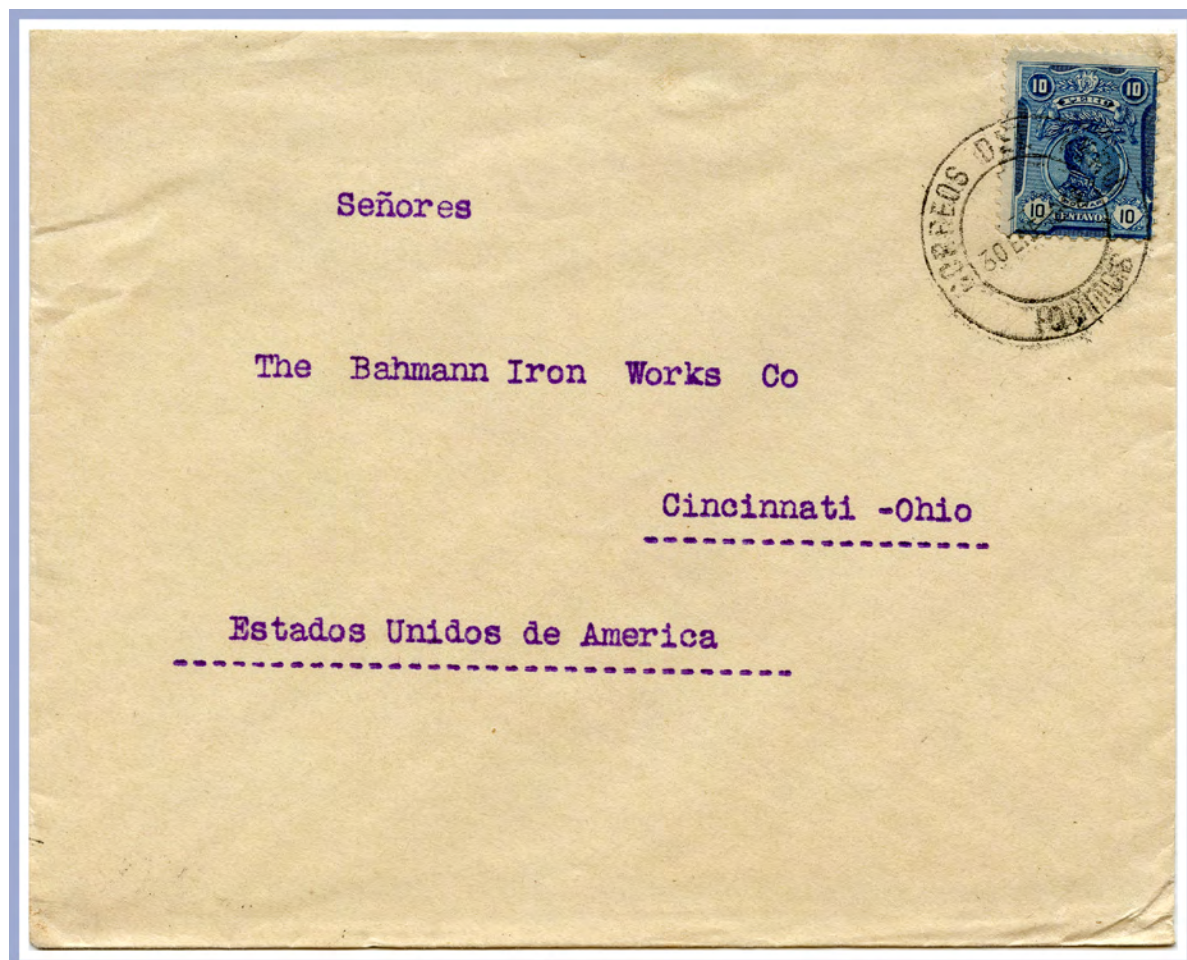
Rarity

Official service mail to and from the Commission is scarce due to the short period of the Commission's existence and its remote location. Only sixteen examples of service mail are currently recorded.

Leticia is the capital of the Department of Amazonas, a trapezoidal shaped area on the banks of the Amazon river and lies at a point called the 'Three Borders' where the countries of Colombia, Brazil and Peru meet. Founded by Peruvian ship captain Benigno Bustamante in 1867, the port city was renamed 'Leticia' by Peruvian engineer Manuel Charón for Miss Leticia Smith of Iquitos, an upriver city.



Disputed area of the
port city of Leticia



Iquitos, Peru to Cincinnati, Ohio, 30 January 1933

Leticia was a Peruvian port city until 1922. Border incidents between Peru and Colombia in 1911 and 1922 occurred due to Colombia's lack of a port directly on the Amazon river for shipping its natural resources, vegetables and fruits.



Postcard depicting Peruvian military and barracks in Leticia, Peru

The governments of Colombia and Peru negotiated an agreement in 1922 giving the trapezoidal 'Department of Amazonas' to Colombia in exchange for Colombia recognizing Peru's claims to an area south of the Putumayo River that was disputed with neighboring Ecuador. The agreement was very unpopular among Peruvians, despite governmental ratification as it was signed in secret and awarded Colombia a region and a port city with a large Peruvian population.



Iquitos, Peru



Iquitos, Peru to Paris France; Surface rate, 22 August 1920

Reduced copy of card rear

A local war between Colombia and Peru erupted in September 1932 when armed Peruvian land owners unhappy with the agreement to give Leticia to Colombia, occupied the public buildings in Leticia. They expelled city officials and the 18 local police officers as there were no Colombian military personnel present. Peruvian President Cerro was aware of the lack of Colombian military in the area and decided to support Peruvian civilians with military action by deploying both naval and air forces.



Peruvian President
Luis Cerro



Peruvian Gunboat
the 'America'



Peruvian Air Force
Waterlow Specimen



Colombian President Herrera responded with a military action to send 1500 soldiers to repel the invaders. It took Colombia a short time to organize a naval response. The Air Force however was immediately composed of commercial aircraft newly outfitted with machine guns and pilots flying Junkers F-13 seaplanes for SCADTA.



Colombian President
Enrique Olaya Herrera



SCADTA - Junkers seaplane
Misperforation

The Colombian Navy attacked Tarapacá (across the river from Leticia). Leticia was well defended and Tarapacá had no Peruvian troops. The Peruvian Air Force then attacked the Colombian naval ships but the bombs dropped missed their targets.

After a speech on April 30, 1933 at the Lima Senatal Dome, President Cerro was shot and died. With the assassination of Cerro, the main impetus for war disappeared quickly.



The combat continued into May 1933, when a cease-fire was negotiated by Brazilian diplomat Candido Mariano de Silva Rondon.

Candido Mariano
de Silva Rondon



President Luís Cerro
Specimen block of four (orange)



Alfonso Lopez Pumarejo



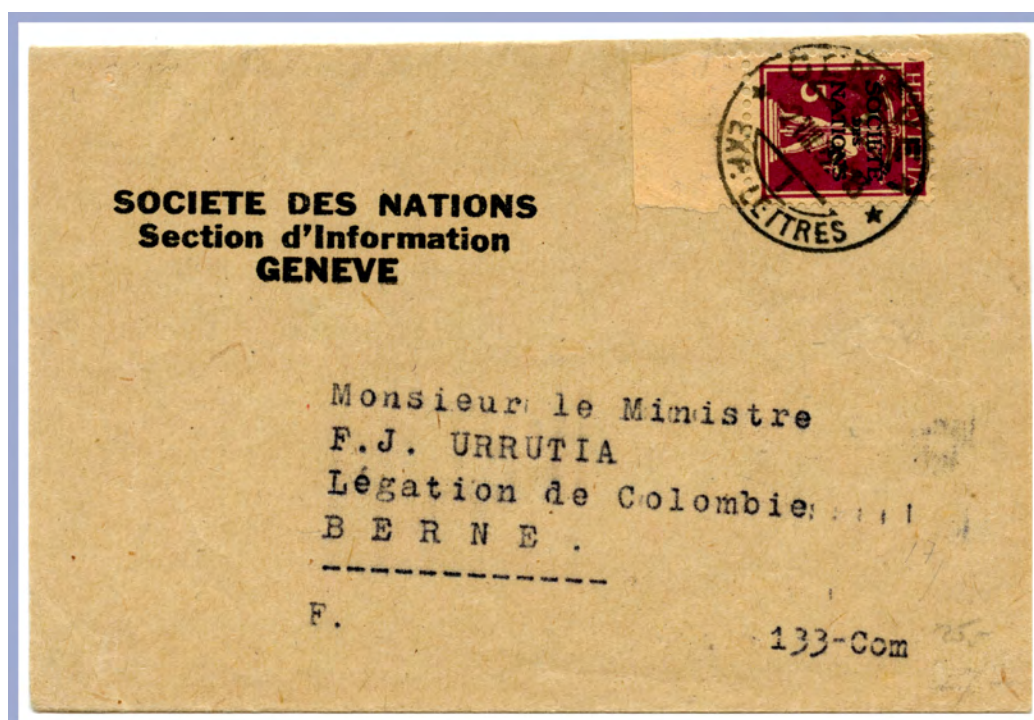
Casa Natal del ex-Presidente
Alfonso López Pumarejo
Honda - Tolima

First Day of Issue for Alfonso Lopez Pumarejo issue with pictorial cancellation



Ministry of Foreign Relations, Lima, Peru to Brooklyn, New York; 17 May 1932
Foreign surface letter rate 30c plus 20c certificate fee

Both Peru and Colombia, as members of the League of Nations, agreed to allow the League of Nations to act as the intermediary in mediating the dispute to find an answer to the ongoing dispute and develop a treaty both could sign.



League of Nations, Geneva to the Colombian Legation in Bern, Switzerland; 2 August 1929
Printed matter rate from Geneva (newspaper sleeve)



Eamon De Valera

Eamon De Valera, the League of Nations' Council President, appointed an international commission composed of Guatemala, Ireland and Spain to address the disagreement and to find a peaceful solution.



League of Nations in Geneva
Specimen Overprint

Commission Member States

Commission Support States



Guatemala



Ireland



Spain



Brazil
overprint variety



Cuba



United States

The international commission included representatives from League of Nations member countries Brazil and Cuba in diplomatic and administrative support roles. The United States was invited to participate with a military advisor.



U.S. War Department, Card #53 by Rosin & Co., Phila. & New York, Printed in Germany circa 1935

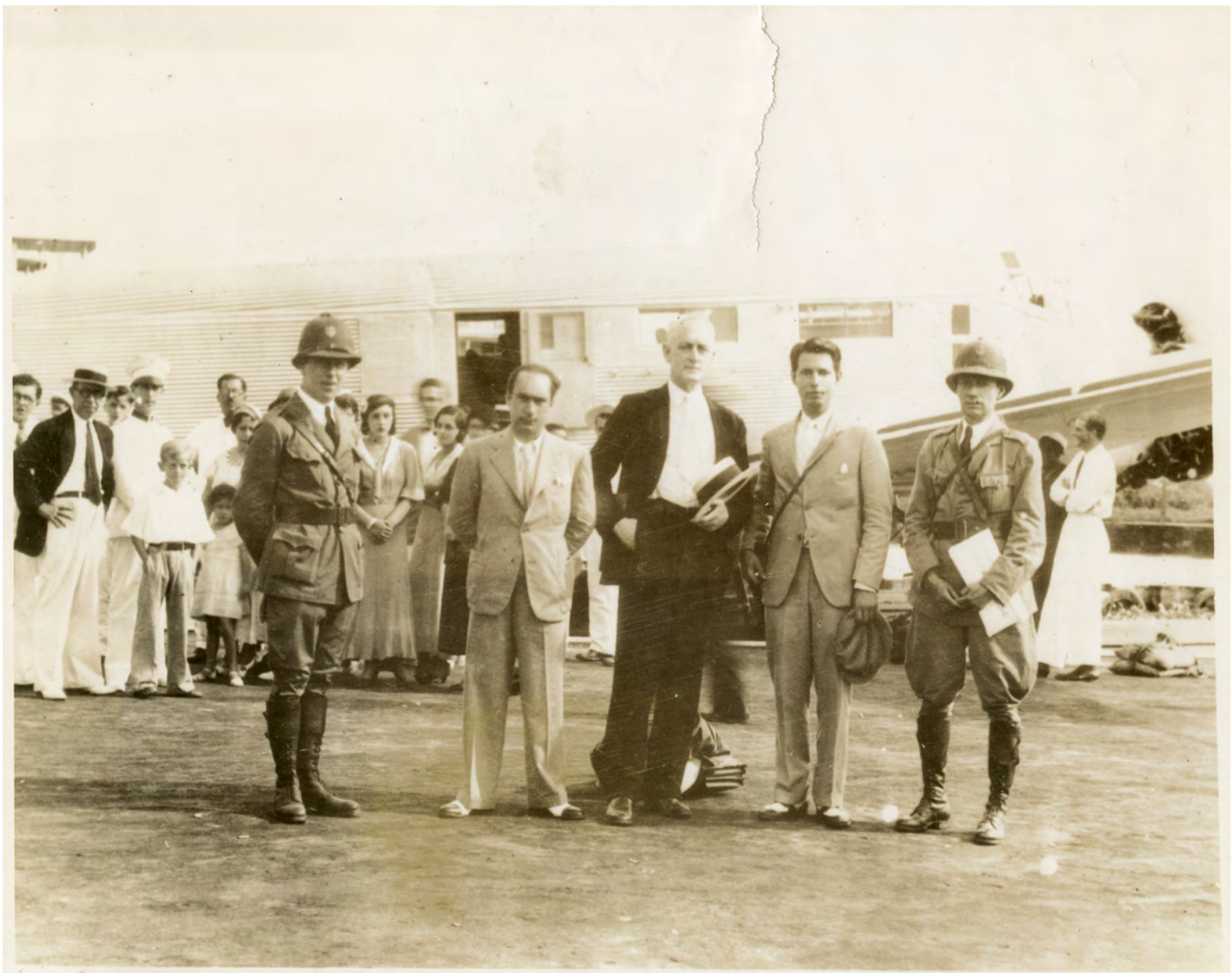


Barranquilla

The commission's members and representatives arrived in Colombia via the main city of Barranquilla to continue to Bogota or even onward to Leticia in the south.



Bogota



LEAGUE'S LETICIA COMMISSION ARRIVES IN COLOMBIA

Barranquilla, Colombia ... The three members of the League of Nations Commission, pictured just before they left here on the last lap, by air, of their trip to Leticia, Colombia, where they settled the dispute between Colombia and Peru over the territory. Left to right an center are, Captain Francisco Iglesias representing Spain; Colonel Arthur Brown of the United States, and Doctor Armando Mencia of Cuba, Secretary of the Commission.

(International News Photo - 6-22-33)



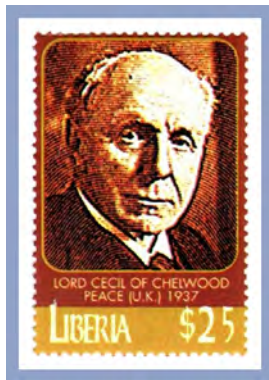
Ministry of Foreign Relations
Bogota, Colombia

A provisional peace agreement in 1933 allowed Leticia Commission representatives to work out details of a treaty at the Ministry of Foreign Relations in Bogota. A force of Colombian soldiers, under command of the League's 'Leticia Commission', policed the area. They were the first international peacekeepers. Colombian soldiers serve the U.N. in other areas to this day.



Colombian peacekeepers

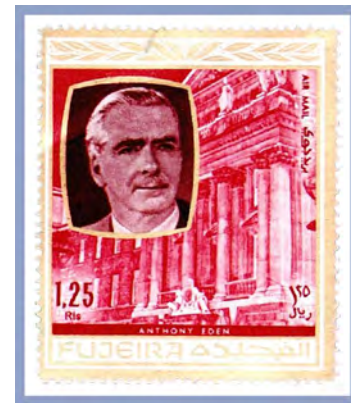
League of Nations Council members



Lord Cecil of Chelwood



Sean T. O'Kelly



Anthony Eden



Edvard Benes



August Zaleski

The League of Nations Council awarded the disputed area to Colombia on June 19, 1934 based on the previous agreement between the two nations. Peru, out-classed militarily in the region, decided to accept the decision and the area remained part of Colombia.



Leticia, Colombia on the
banks of the Amazon River



Barranquilla - mail route origin

International mail routes to and from Colombia focused on the northwest coast of the country and the city of Barranquilla. Mail routes began there and flew nearly directly south, intersecting Bogota along the way.



SCADTA airmail issue

Within Colombia, airmail was flown by SCADTA - the Sociedad Colombo-Alemana de Transportes Aereos. Founded and also operated by Colombians and mainly German pilots, it was the first airline in the Americas.



'R' - Registration
'GB' - Great Britain



Hugo Junkers

SCADTA flew Junkers F-13 seaplanes designed and produced by Hugo Junkers. Mail was routed along inland waterways as airmail routes south did not intersect with major cities and landing strips were unavailable.



Seaplane along river route

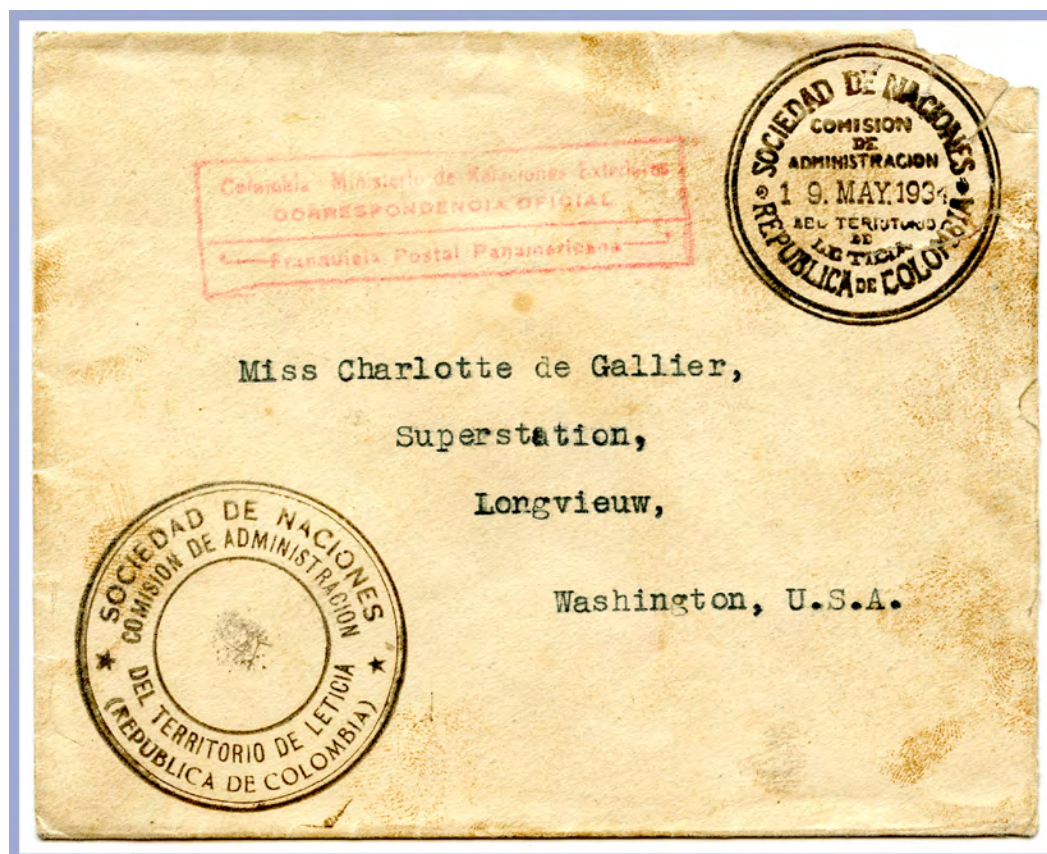


Junkers F13 seaplane

Outgoing Service Mail from Leticia Commission

Official service mail from the Leticia Commission was sent via the Colombian Ministry of External Affairs using the Pan American Postal Franking privilege indicated by a boxed marking declaring postage paid. This payment was only valid to member countries within the Pan American Union.

Eight recorded examples of 'official service' mail from the Leticia Commission



Official mail from Secretary of the Commission for the Territory of Leticia, Colombia, May 19, 1934
via Colombian Ministry of Foreign Relations Bogota, Columbia, June 2, 1934
to Longview, Washington, U.S.A.

Surface rate paid by postal franking privilege indicia of the Pan American Union of States

Colombia - Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores CORRESPONDENCIA OFICIAL
Franquiela Postal Panamericana

"Colombia - Ministry of Foreign Relations
Official Correspondence
Pan American Postal Franking"



Reduced copy of cover obverse



"Ministry of Foreign Relations"
(Colombia)

Incoming League Mail to Leticia Commission

Correspondence between the League of Nations in Geneva, Switzerland and the Leticia Commission relied on a military air courier service as there was no commercial airmail system to the port city of Leticia. Evidence for the military courier lies in the Military Airmail and Express markings found on incoming Committee mail from the League.

Six recorded examples of mail to the Commission from the League of Nations



League of Nations (using overprinted Swiss issues), Geneva, Switzerland, December 30, 1933
to Secretary of the Commission for the Territory of Leticia, Colombia via Barranquilla, January 15, 1934
Received by Colombian Express Military Mail, Bogota, January 16, 1934 and forwarded January 17, 1934
Airmail rate to Columbia via New York, N.Y.
30¢ < 20 grams surface rate plus 6F airmail fee (11 grams = 3 x 2F per 5 gram) (Convenience franking - 90c overpaid)



"Military Airmail Service"



Reduced copy of cover obverse (inverted for ease in reading)



"Military Express Mail Service"

Incoming League Mail to Leticia Commission

Only recorded example with official business boxed office of origin cachet (COMPT.)



League of Nations (using Swiss overprinted issues), Geneva, Switzerland, May 30, 1934
from the Comptroller's office - boxed COMPT. accounting services office of origin cachet
to Secretary of the Commission for the Territory of Leticia, Colombia, via Barranquilla, June 4, 1934
received Bogota, June 5, 1934 and routed to Express Military Mail, June 5, 1934
Received June 8, 1934 and forwarded via Colombian Express Military Mail, Bogota, June 12, 1934
Postage rate to Colombia via New York, N.Y.
30¢ < 20 grams surface rate plus 2F airmail fee (< 5 grams = 2F per 5 gram)

(Latest recorded correspondence to or from the Leticia Commission)

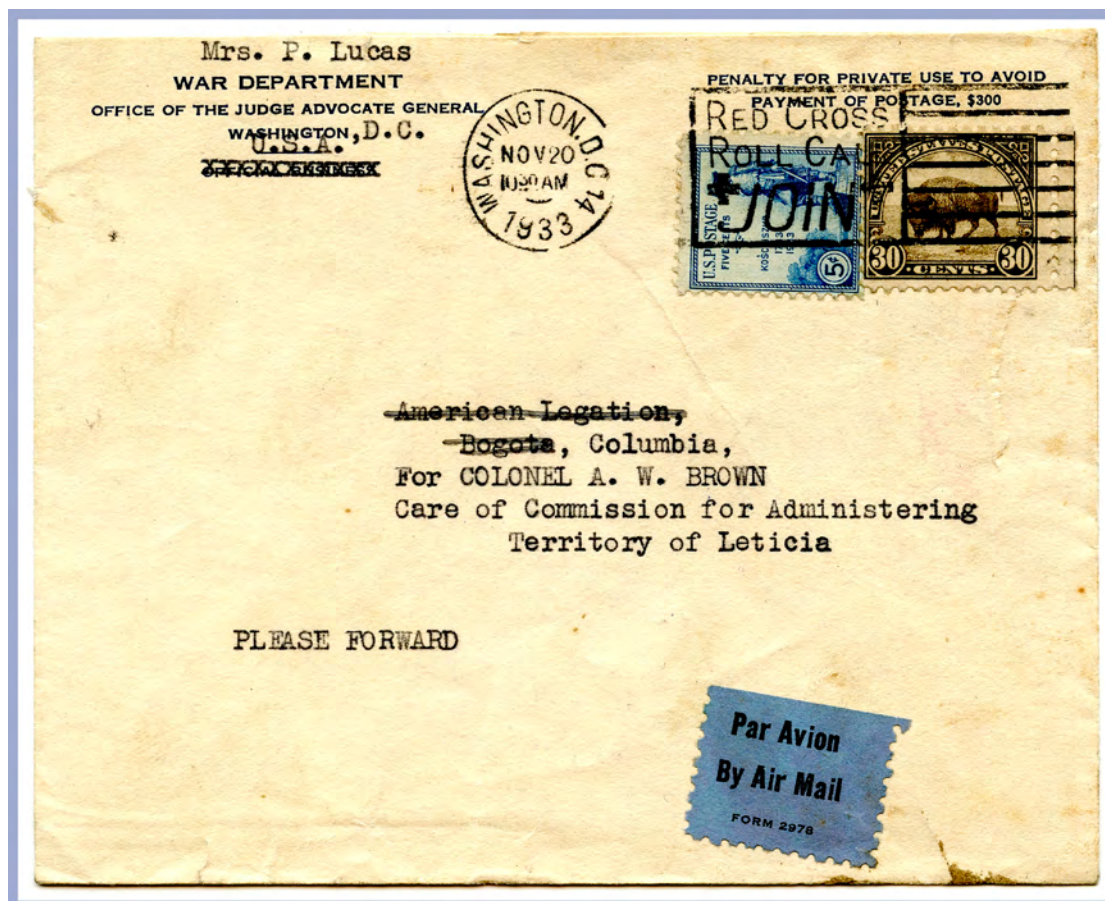


Reduced copy of cover obverse

Incoming Peacekeeper Mail to Leticia Commission

The peacekeeping unit was under direct control of the Leticia Commission and its military advisor group. U.S. War Department service mail to the Commission was addressed to the U.S. military representative of the international Commission.

Only recorded example of service mail to the Leticia Commission military advisor



Penalty envelope of the Office of the Judge Advocate General, War Department, Washington, D.C., November 20, 1933 to U.S. Military Liaison Colonel A.W. Brown, Commission for the Territory of Leticia, Colombia in care of the American Legation in Bogota, received November 24, 1933 Forwarded via Colombian Express Military Mail to Leticia, November 25, 1933 Penalty clause invalid for international destinations resulting in the use of postage stamps Airmail rate to Miami = 5¢; plus FAM service to Colombia = 30¢ per 1/2 oz. as of 6/15/1930

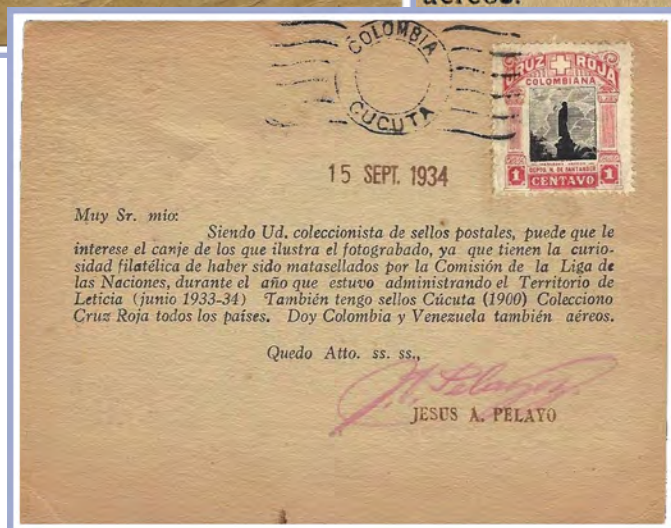


Reduced copy of cover obverse (inverted for ease in reading)

Cards are known from a dealer in Columbia who advertised offering to buy and sell mail from the Commission. An example as pictured below was printed on the rear of the card.



Reduced size



Examples of mass mailing card with advertisement, August 1 and 8, September 14 and October, 1934 have been seen.

Two styles of text are used on the cards as well, see examples to the left.

Muy Sr. mio
Siendo Ud coleccionista de sellos postales, puede que le interese el canje de los que ilustra el fotograbado, ya que tienen la curiosidad filatelica de haber sido matasellados por la comision de la liga de las naciones, durante el ano que estuvo administrando el territorio de leticia (junio 1933-34) Tambien tengo sellos cucuta (1900) Colecciono Cruz Roja todos los paises. Doi Columbia y Venezuela tambien aeros.

Dear Sir,
As you are a stamp collector, you may want to consider the exchange of the illustrated engravings, as they have the philatelic curiosity being postmarked by the Commission of the League of Nations during the year was to administer the territory of Leticia (June 1933-1934). We have also Cucuta seals (1900) Red Cross, collections of all countries including Columbia and Venezuela also airmails.



Example of philatelicly inspired personal mail from the Commission, March 30, 1934 via military airmail April 17, 1934 to Cucuta, Colombia printed on rear of card

Philatelic References:

Brender, Hubert

The League of Nations, Historical Prerequisites for Organization and Activities (philatelic exhibit)

Galletti, Greg

A Special Study - The History of the League of Nations (philatelic exhibit)

(http://www.unpi.com/exhibit_view_frame.asp?intExhibitNumber=1&intCurrentFrameNumber=1)

Hauptmann, Hartmut

League of Nations Collection (personal correspondence)

Powers, Richard

Leticia - A League of Nations Success Story, UNP Journal, Volume 22, number 5, page 9

Radzuweit, Thomas

Development of the United Nations - From the League to the United Nations (philatelic exhibit)

(<https://sites.google.com/site/voelkerbunduno/>)

Struble, George

The League of Nations in Leticia, Tell, Volume LXII, number 1, page 1

SCADTA Flights (personal correspondence)

SCADTA Flights from and to Switzerland (philatelic exhibit)

(<http://www.willamette.edu/~gstruble/phila.htm>)

United Nations Geneva, Switzerland

Philatelic Museum (philatelic exhibit)

Internet References: (click link to go to URL - links active as of 1 August 2016)

Colombia-Peru War of 1932 - About.com, Christopher Minster

(<http://latinamericanhistory.about.com/od/thehistoryofcolombia/p/The-Colombia-Peru-War-Of-1932.htm>)

Colombia The Leticia Conflict - The Library of Congress Country Studies; CIA World Factbook

(http://www.photius.com/countries/colombia/national_security/colombia_national_security_the_leticia_conflict.html)

Leticia, Columbia - Wikipedia

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leticia,_Amazonas)

Leticia Incident - Wikipedia

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leticia_Incident)

Leticia War 1932-1933 - Onwar.com

(<https://www.onwar.com/aced/chrono/c1900s/yr30/fleticiawar1932.htm>)

Notes about these exhibit pages:

When a subject is interesting and there's no option to present it in an accepted exhibit format, storytelling can be used to prepare it for display. In this instance, the object of interest consists of four covers - the postal history of the Leticia Commission 1933-1934. Developing a single frame around four covers is a challenge as there is little chance of obtaining additional covers in my lifetime - most collectors of this material are younger than I am!

Understanding how these four came into being was the key for me. It's been quite the adventure and learning experience in researching and acquiring associated philatelic items to blend the story into something interesting and informative. My hope is the person reading these pages will enjoy the story as much as I have in writing and illustrating it. I consider this as an experimental literature project and a valuable learning experience.

Copyright and Attributions:

Images and designs from postage stamps are copyright of their respective issuing authorities (national postal services as named in the designs). This digital reference is produced on an Apple iMac using Mac OS X, In-Design and Photoshop Elements, Adobe Acrobat, and Apple Safari web browser software. All are trademarked and hereby acknowledged. Materials and data, including design, text, graphics, files, and selection and arrangement thereof, collectively known as 'content', are protected: copyright ©2016, all by fran adams, with all rights reserved internationally.