Commercial Zeppelin Letter Mail to/from South America in 1936

Purpose of Exhibit: Show the postal history aspect of the role played by the zeppelins in the transportation of airmails to and from South America during June - November 1936, the most complex and fascinating period of zeppelin postal history (two zeppelins instead of one, the start of the Spanish Civil War disrupting the mail zeppelin routes, constant changes in routing the mail, etc).

Presentation: Strictly commercial and personal letter mail carried by the Graf Zeppelin and Hindenburg with emphasis on routes, rates, methods of despatch and mail handling. No philatelic mail is included.

Example of 1936 commercial letter mail flown by the Hindenburg to South America (A.V.Roe & Co Ltd of Manchester on backflap, the famous British aircraft manufacturers).

Postal History: During 1936 the two airships of the Deutsche Zeppelin-Reederei (DZR) undertook a total of twenty flights to South America (thirteen by the Graf Zeppelin, seven by the Hindenburg). The first six flights departing Germany between March and June were not part of the regular German airmail service to South America. These, together with the ninth South America flight in July, only carried non-letter mail (printed paper, samples etc). However, as from June till November 1936 the zeppelins co-operated with the airplanes of the Deutsche Lufthansa (DLH) exchanging mails at connection points which frequently changed as dictated by political and social realities and the need to maximize postal operation efficiency.

Coverage: Zeppelin letter mail, two examples (one southbound, one northbound) from each of the thirteen carrying letter mail flights undertaken variously by the Graf Zeppelin and the Hindenburg, two examples (one at each direction) from the sole Graf Zeppelin shuttle flight in November. Preceding these flights two 'abnormal' covers from Chile are shown which were flown as letter mail prior to the engagement of the two airships in the regular German airmail service. Each cover description begins with the official flight number assigned by the DZR (prefixed by G for the LZ-127 Graf Zeppelin, H for the LZ-129 Hindenburg). Emphasis is given to the exchange points of mails between the airplanes of DLH and the airships.

Importance and difficulty of acquisition: This is sheer postal history, the zeppelins contributed greatly to the most successful DLH effort to maintain a fast and reliable South Atlantic airmail service. As the vast majority of covers in the market are philatelic, most of the selected items in this exhibit proved difficult to locate. Most covers are foreign contract mail (ie other than German or Brazilian) not recorded in the standard catalogues Sieger and Michel, nor in the specialized Duggan's Zeppelinpost - LZ 129 Hindenburg book.

Study & Bibliography: A large number of works on zeppelin aerophilately was consulted; however, all the serious student needs to thoroughly understand this complex area are two great books co-authored by J.Duggan and J.Graue: Commercial Zeppelin Flights to South America (Washington, 1995) and Deutsche Lufthansa South Atlantic Airmail Service 1934 - 1939 (Ickenham, UK, 2000).
"Abnormal" Uses from Chile

Graf Zeppelin

3rd 1936 Zeppelin South America Flight North (2nd by Graf Zeppelin), Rio de Janeiro 2/5 2206 - Friedrichshafen 8/5 0652.

*Syndicato Condor was a Brazilian airline, a subsidiary of DLH.

G516: Chile Condor* took the mail up to Rio de Janeiro (30/4) where it was transferred to the Graf Zeppelin to carry it to Friedrichshafen (8/5). Addressed to Lidingoe, Sweden. This was a non-letter mail flight (only printed matter, samples etc were permitted). An exception was made for Chilean mail because the Condor flight from Santiago was delayed making the connection with the DLH service impossible. Postage 7.50 Pesos airmail per 5g, 0.80 Pesos surface rate.

9th 1936 Zeppelin South America Flight North (3rd by Hindenburg), Rio de Janeiro 25/7 0944 - Friedrichshafen 29/7 1019.

H31: Chile Condor to Rio de Janeiro (25/7) where mail was transferred to the Hindenburg to take it to Friedrichshafen (29/7). Addressed to Alpes Maritimes, France (31/7). Again, this was a non-letter mail flight, an exception was made for Chilean mail because of the delay of the Condor flight from Santiago. Postage 7.50 Pesos airmail per 5g, 0.80 Pesos surface rate.

Most elusive pair of covers, both carried as letter mail before their respective airships started carrying the regular German airmail to/from South America in 1936.
Seventh South America Flight

Southbound
Frankfurt 24/6 2052 - Recife 28/6 0735.

**G532: Germany**
Frankfurt despatch (code "e" staging cachet). Loaded on the Graf Zeppelin, crossed the Atlantic and dropped airmail at Natal (28/6 0143). Condor flight to Rio de Janeiro. Postage (Osram meter franking) RM 3.75 airmail (3 × RM 1.25 / 5g), RM 0.25 surface rate.

Fifth by Graf Zeppelin

Northbound
Recife 3/7 0913 - Friedrichshafen 6/7 1931.

**G535: Brazil** Condor flight (2/7 0830) to Recife where loaded on the Graf Zeppelin (3/7 0913) to be exchanged at Seville (6/7 0230). DLH flew the mail to Frankfurt (arrival 6/7 1220, 7 hours 11 minutes ahead of Graf Zeppelin arrival at Friedrichshafen). Addressed to Trondheim, Norway. Postage 4$200 per 5g (combined air + surface rates).
Eighth South America Flight

**Southbound**
Fridrichshafen 9/7
0412- Recife 12/7 0827.

_G537: Germany_ Berlin despatch (code "a" staging cachet). Mail was flown by DLH to Seville (9/7 1456) where picked up by the *Graf Zeppelin* (10/7 0420), and dropped at Natal (12/7 0422). From there Condor flights to Buenos Aires. Postage RM 1.50 per 5g airmail, RM 0.25 surface rate.

**Northbound**
Recife 17/7 0915-
Frankfurt 20/7 1834.

_G540: Brazil_ Condor to Recife (17/7 0915), mail loaded on the *Graf Zeppelin* to be taken by a direct flight service to Frankfurt (20/7 1834). There was _no airmail exchange_ to DLH at Seville because the Spanish civil war had just broken out. Mail taken to Munich Railway PO and sent by Postal Train D65 to Naples where transferred to the Air France Far East service. Carried via Corfu, Athens, Castelrosso to Beirut (24/7). Postage 10$400 (2 x 5$200 / 5g for Middle East), there was an extra 1$000 per 5g airmail fee for the trip from Europe to Beirut.

Most unusual destination and one of a handful of Zeppelin covers recorded with extra airmail postage.
Tenth South America Flight

*The 9th South America Flight did not carry letter mail.*

**Southbound**
Friedrichshafen 30/7 0009 - Recife 2/8 0703.

**G543** Italy via Frankfurt (code "e" staging cachet). DLH depart from Frankfurt 30/7 0454, 3 hours 45 minutes after Graf Zeppelin departure from Friedrichshafen. Due to civil war in Spain DLH avoided Seville and flew mails to Montelimar, France (30/7 0858) where picked up by the Graf Zeppelin (30/7 0935) to be taken to Recife (2/8 0703). No mail drop at Natal. Condor to Buenos Aires (3/8). Postage L 7.50 airmail per 5g, L 1.25 surface, L 1.50 registration.

**Northbound**
Recife 7/8 0926 - Friedrichshafen 10/8 1500.

**G546** Argentina Condor to Recife where picked up by the Graf Zeppelin (7/8 0926). No DLH service on this flight due to civil war in Spain. Dropped all mails in Loewenthal (10/8 1427), Germany, except mails destined for France and Italy which were dropped at Montelimar (10/8 0944). Postage 1.00 Peso airmail per 5g, 0.15 Pesos surface rate. Elusive example of the airmail drop (just one sack) at Montelimar.
Southbound
Friedrichshafen
13/8 0658 -
Recife 16/8 0817.

Eleventh South America Flight
Eighth by Graf Zeppelin

G547: Germany Frankfurt despatch (code "c" staging cachet). Mail was loaded on Graf Zeppelin at Friedrichshafen (13/8 0657) and taken to Recife (16/8 0815). No mail drop at Natal. There was no DLH service except from French mails. From Recife Condor to Lima, Peru. Postage RM 4.50 airmail (3 x RM 1.50 / 5g), RM 0.25 surface rate. As the sender did not affix stamps for the surface rate, this was done by the PO employee; the sender was duly invoiced by the German PO.

Northbound
Recife 21/8 1103 -
Frankfurt 24/8 2243.

G550: Argentina Condor to Recife where picked up by the Graf Zeppelin (21/8 1103). Dropped airmail to DLH at Alavera Flugplatz, Lisbon (23/8 2350). French mails as this one were off-loaded at Marseille, other mails arrived at Frankfurt (24/8 1036), 12 hours 7 minutes ahead of Graf Zeppelin arrival. Same day arrival at Paris. Postage 1.00 Peso airmail per 5g, 0.15 Pesos surface rate.
Twelfth South America Flight

Southbound
Frankfurt 27/8 0454 - Rio de Janeiro 30/8 2053.

This was Hindenburg's first flight as part of the regular German airmail service to South America.

H37: Denmark via Frankfurt (code "b" staging cachet) where loaded on the Hindenburg (27/8 0454). No DLH service except for Italian and French mails. Mail dropped at Natal (29/8 2232) and from there Condor to Rio de Janeiro. Postage Kr 2.30 airmail per 5g, Kr 0.30 surface rate.

Northbound

H38: Peru Panagra * flight to Santiago (2/9) and Condor to Recife, where mail picked up by the Hindenburg (5/9 0030). Mail dropped to DLH at Lisbon (7/9 1210) to be taken to Frankfurt (7/9 2124), arrival there 19 hours 19 minutes ahead of Hindenburg arrival at Friedrichshafen. Postage 1.50 Soles airmail per 5g, 0.15 Soles surface rate.

Most elusive example of Peruvian Hindenburg mail.

*Pan American-Grace (Panagra) flew through Peru on its regular airmail route down the West Coast of South America.
Thirteenth South America Flight

Southbound
Frankfurt 9/9 1802 - Recife 12/9 2238.

G555: Switzerland via Marseille (10/9) where DLH took over (thus no red staging cachet) to Lisbon (replaced Montelimar as exchange point due to civil war in Spain). At Lisbon (10/9 1640) mail was transferred to the Graf Zeppelin to be dropped at Natal (12/9 1800), Condor to Buenos Aires. Postage SFr 5.70 airmail (3 x SFr 1.90 per 5g), SFr 0.30 surface rate. The only Swiss zeppelin cover via Marseille seen by the exhibitor.

Northbound
Recife 18/9 0954 - Friedrichshafen 21/9 0730.

G558: Brazil Condor from Rio to Recife, mail picked up by the Graf Zeppelin (18/9 0954) to be dropped to DLH at Las Palmas (20/9 0548) - this was the first drop at Las Palmas on return flights. Mail arrived at Frankfurt (20/9 2030), 11 hours before the arrival of Graf Zeppelin at Friedrichshafen. Postage 8$400 (2 x 4$200 / 5g).
Southbound
Friedrichshafen
23/9 2106 -
Recife 27/9 1935.

G559: Germany (code "d" staging cachet). Taken by rail to Friedrichshafen and loaded on the Graf Zeppelin, but late mail was carried by DLH from Frankfurt (24/9 0430, ie 7 hours 24 minutes after Graf Zeppelin) to Lisbon (24/9 1428) where picked up by the Graf Zeppelin (24/9 2209). Dropped airmail at Natal (27/9 0931). Condor to Santiago. Postage RM 1.50 airmail per 5g, RM 0.25 surface rate, Registration RM 0.30.

Northbound
Recife 2/10 0946 -
Friedrichshafen 5/10

G562: Chile (29/9) Condor flew the mail to Recife. Mail transferred to the Graf Zeppelin (2/10 0946), dropped at Las Palmas (4/10 0933). DLH flew the mails to Frankfurt (arrival 5/10 0004), 15 hours before the arrival of Graf Zeppelin. Postage 9.50 Pesos airmail per 5g, 0.80 Pesos surface rate. The cover was found 0.5g (!) overweight, thus taxed RM 2.37 on arrival.
Fifteenth South America Flight

Southbound
Friedrichshafen 8/10 0712 - Recife 11/10 0700.

G563: France via Marseille where DLH took over (8/10 - thus no red staging cachet). The DLH airplane had departed Frankfurt 8/10 0440, 3 hours 32 minutes before Graf Zeppelin departure from Friedrichshafen. At Las Palmas (9/10 1438) mail was picked up by the Graf Zeppelin and carried to Recife (11/10 0700) as for this flight there was no airmail drop at Natal. Postage Fr 8.50 per 5g airmail, Fr 1.50 surface rate.

Northbound
Recife 16/10 0926 - Friedrichshafen 19/10 2118.

G566: Peru Panagra to Santiago (14/10) where Condor took over up to Recife. Mail loaded on the Graf Zeppelin (16/10 0926), airmail dropped at Las Palmas (18/10 1216). DLH flew the mail to Frankfurt (19/10 0322, 18 hours 56 minutes before arrival of Graf Zeppelin at Friedrichshafen. Postage 3 Soles airmail (2 x 1.50 Soles / 5g), 0.15 Soles surface rate.
**Sixteenth South America Flight**

**Southbound**
Frankfurt 21/10 0728 -
Rio de Janeiro 25/10 2309.

**H48:** France via Marseille (22/10) where DLH took over (thus no red staging cachet). The DLH airplane had already departed Frankfurt 22/10 0045, 21 hours 17 minutes after departure of Hindenburg. At Bathurst, Gambia (23/10 0220) mail was transferred to the Hindenburg with mail drops at Natal (23/10 2317) and Recife (24/10 0152). Postage Fr 8.50 per 5g airmail, Fr 1.50 surface rate.

**H50:** Uruguay Condor took the mail up to Recife. Mail transferred to the Hindenburg (30/10 0904), dropped at Las Palmas (1/11 0600). DLH flew the mails to Frankfurt arriving 1/11 2350, 22 hours 34 minutes ahead of Hindenburg. Postage 50 cents airmail per 5g, 12 cents surface rate. Very few Hindenburg covers from Uruguay are recorded.

**Northbound**
Recife 30/10 0904 -
Frankfurt 2/11 2224.
Seventeenth South America Flight

Twelfth by Graf Zeppelin

Southbound
Friedrichshafen
29/10 0738
(delayed) - Recife
1/11 0549.

G568: Netherlands via Frankfurt (code "c" staging cachet) and from there to Friedrichshafen where it was loaded on the Graf Zeppelin (29/10 0172). Carried all the way to Recife (1/11 0550) and by Condor to Buenos Aires. There was no exchange of mails between DLH and the Graf Zeppelin (due to bad weather the airship had to delay the scheduled departure date). Postage 80 cents airmail per 5g, 12.50 cents surface rate.

Northbound
Recife 6/11 0944 - Friedrichshafen
9/11 1536.

G571: Uruguay Condor took the mail up to Recife. Mail loaded onto the Graf Zeppelin (6/11 0944), dropped at Las Palmas (8/11 1206). DLH flew the mails to Frankfurt arriving 9/11 1310, 2 hours 26 minutes ahead of Graf Zeppelin arrival at Friedrichshafen. Postage 50 cents airmail per 5g, 12 cents surface.
Eighteenth South America Flight

Southbound
Frankfurt 05/11 1725 - Rio de Janeiro 9/11 1715.

H51: Sweden via Frankfurt (code "b" staging cachet) where loaded on the Hindenburg (5/11 1725), flying all the way to drop mail at Natal (8/11 1823). Condor to Buenos Aires. There was no exchange of mail from DLH to Hindenburg, as the airship departed a day late (Thu instead of Wed). Postage Kr 4.00 airmail (2 x Kr 2.00 / 5g), Kr 0.30 surface rate.

Northbound
Rio de Janeiro 12/11 0858 - Frankfurt 16/11 1855.

H52: Argentina Condor to Recife, mail picked up by the Hindenburg (13/11 0918). Mail dropped to DLH at Las Palmas (15/11 1145). French mails off-loaded at Marseille and turned over to Air France, other mails were taken to Frankfurt (arrival 16/11 0521, 13 hours 34 minutes ahead of Hindenburg). Postage 2.00 Pesos airmail (2 x 1.00 Peso / 5g), 0.15 Pesos surface rate.
Nineteenth South America Flight

Southbound
Friedrichshafen
11/11 0740 - Recife
14/11 1912.

G572: Germany Frankfurt despatch (code "b" staging cachet). Posted twelve hours after the Graf Zeppelin departure from Friedrichshafen, it was flown by DLH from Frankfurt to Bathurst where picked up by the Graf Zeppelin (13/11 0825) and dropped to Natal (14/11 0900). From there Condor to Santiago. Postage RM 12.00 airmail (8 x RM 1.50 / 5g), RM 0.40 (double) surface rate.

Northbound
Recife 27/11 1015 - Friedrichshafen 1/12 0010.

G578: Peru Panagra to Santiago (25/1/1) where Condor took over up to Recife. Mail transferred to the Graf Zeppelin (27/11 1015), and dropped at Las Palmas (29/11 1030). DLH flew the mails to Frankfurt, arrival 30/11 0248, 22 hours 22 minutes ahead of Graf Zeppelin arrival. Postage airmail 1.50 Soles per 5g, 0.15 Soles surface rate.
1936 Zeppelin South America Shuttle Flight, Recife 20/11 2158 - Bathurst 22/11 0704 to 0754 - Recife 23/11 1144.

**G575**: Chile Condor took the mail up to Recife. Mail transferred to the *Graf Zeppelin* (20/11 2158) for the outward leg of the shuttle flight, dropped at Bathurst (22/11 0746). DLH flew the mails to Frankfurt (arrival 23/11 1144) via Las Palmas, Seville and Marseille. Addressed to St Gallen, Switzerland. Postage 9.50 Pesos airmail per 5g, 0.80 Pesos surface rate.

**G575**: Great Britain via Frankfurt (code "b" staging cachet). DLH departed 19/11 0445 and flew the mail to Bathurst (20/11 1356) where picked up by the *Graf Zeppelin* (22/11 0754) to return to Recife (23/11 1144), thus concluding the shuttle flight.
Summary: In the period June - November 1936 thirteen carrying letter mail flights were undertaken variously by the Graf Zeppelin and the Hindenburg, as well as a sole Graf Zeppelin shuttle flight in November. These were part of the regular German South Atlantic Airmail Service and were dictated by cost-efficiency analysis on the part of Deutsche Lufthansa. In December 1936, the German airmail service to South America, returned to business as usual, ie to the use of the faster airplane service. The airships continued to carry non-letter mail. The Hindenburg disaster in Lakehurst New Jersey on 6 May 1937 brought a sad end to the role played by the airships in commercial aviation.