

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).

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 Lidingö, 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.

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 x
RM 1.25 / 5g),
RM 0.25 surface
rate.



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).

Southbound

Friedrichshafen 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.

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, 3hours 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.



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.

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
Rio de Janeiro
4/9 0250 -
Friedrichshafen
8/9 1645.

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.

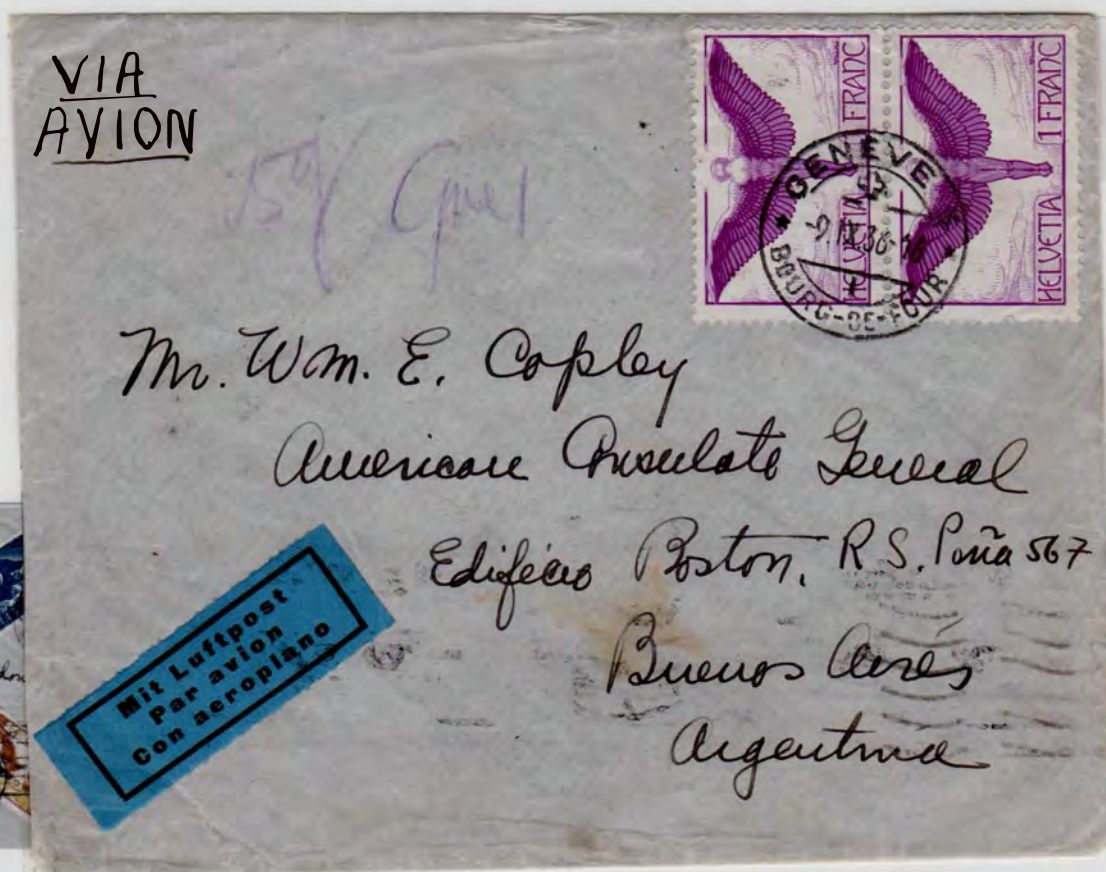
Most elusive example of Peruvian *Hindenburg* mail.

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

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.

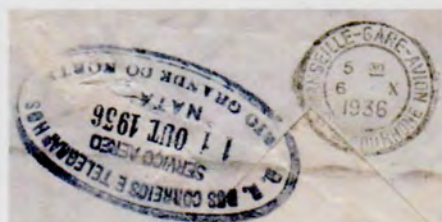
Fifteenth South America Flight

Eleventh by Graf Zeppelin

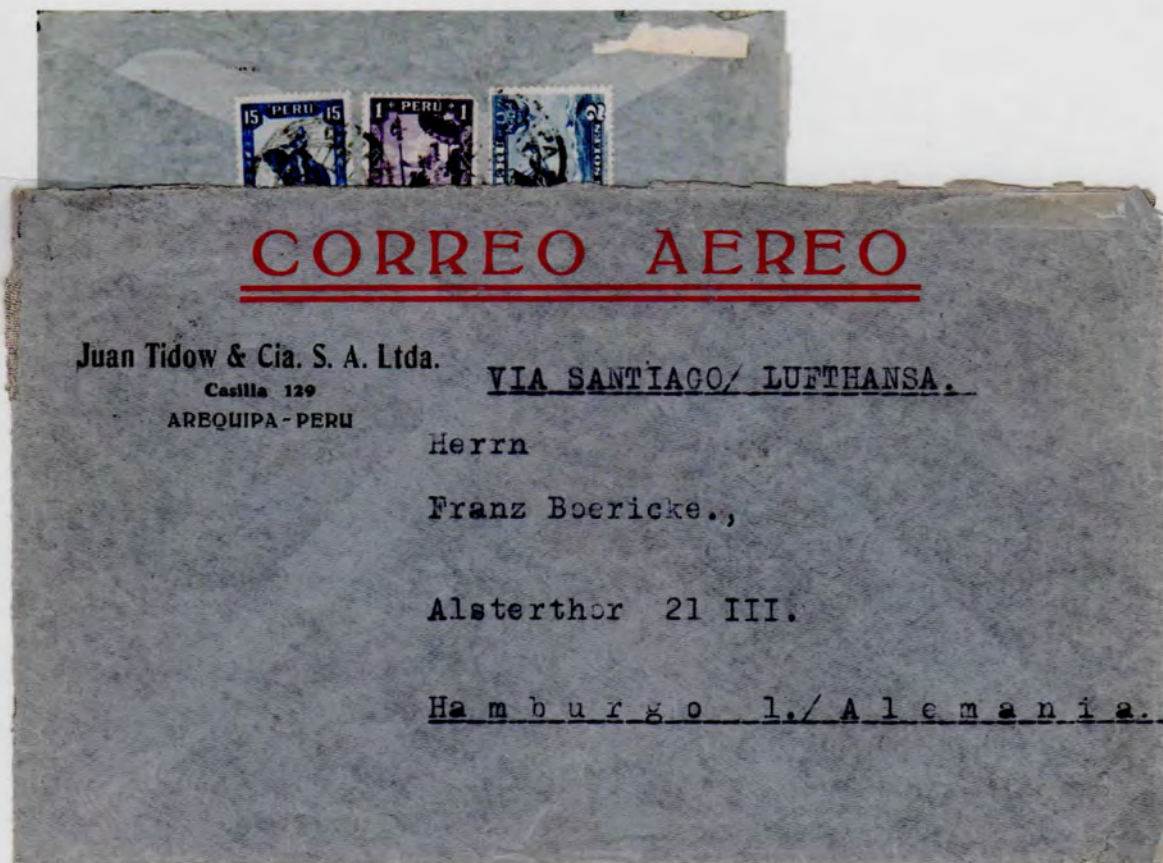
Southbound

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* (16/1 09260), 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

Fifth by *Hindenburg*

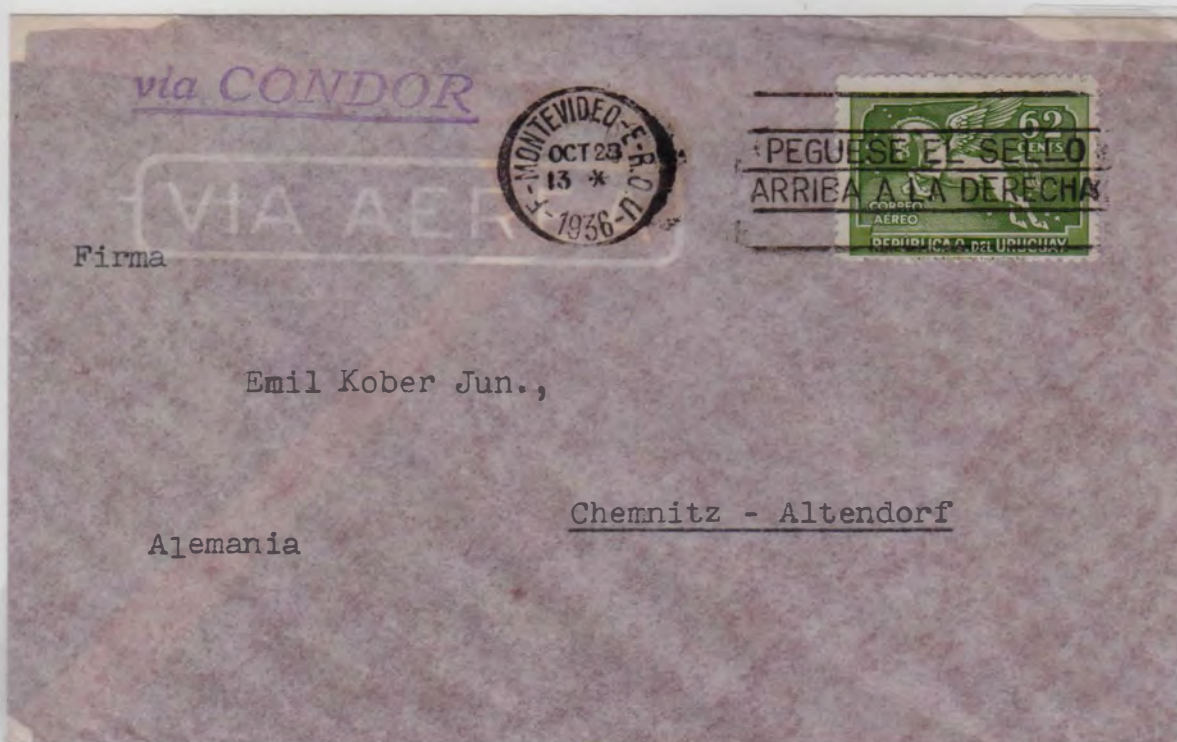
Southbound

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.



Northbound

Recife 30/10 0904 -

Frankfurt 2/11 2224.

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.**

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

Eighteenth South America Flight

Sixth by *Hindenburg*

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

Thirteenth by *Graf Zeppelin*

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 (25/11) 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.

Twentieth South America Flight

Seventh by *Hindenburg*

Southbound

Frankfurt 25/11 0729
- Rio de Janeiro 29/11
0628.

H53: Germany

Frankfurt dispatch
(code "b" cachet).
Late airmail (posted
at Berlin nine hours
after the departure of
Hindenburg from
Frankfurt) was carried
by DLH (26/11 0822)
to **Bathurst**, picked
up by the airship
(27/11 0800), dropped
at Natal (28/11 0722).
Condor to Porto
Alegre. Postage RM
1.25 per 5g, RM 0.25
surface.

Mit Luftpost!

GRANDE DO SUL IV



Herrn Dipl.Ing. Herbert Schmitt,

Novo Hotel Jung,

MIT LUFTPOST
PAR AVION

P O R T O A L E G R E

Brasilien.

Northbound

Recife 4/12 0916 -
Frankfurt 7/12 2050.

H56: Brazil Condor

to Recife, mail
picked up by the
Hindenburg (4/12
0916), dropped to
DLH at **Las Palmas**
(6/12 0600), flown
to Frankfurt with
arrival 6/12 2247,
22 hours 3 minutes
ahead of
Hindenburg. Postage
4\$200 per 5g.

Germany

Herrn

Karl Otto Grieshaber

MIT LUFTPOST
PAR AVION
BY AIR MAIL

F r e i b u r g / B r e i s g a

Adolf Hitlerstrasse 78

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.