Les Selby: Frame 1/5

The Golden Age of the Rigid Airship

Aim:
This exhibit will explore the development of the rigid airship during the first 4 decades of the Twentieth Century in Germany, the United States and Great Britain as shown by stamps and postal history. The rigid airships carried thousands of passengers and tons of mail and heavy cargo between continents at a time when the airplane was still in its infancy.

Scope:
Although the first balloon free flight occurred in France in the 1780s, the challenge for aviators was to develop a vessel that could be directed in flight. The rigid airship proved to be the most reliable for long distance flight. The Germans were the first to successfully create rigid airships, and Ferdinand von Zeppelin received a patent for his design in Germany in 1895. This exhibit will focus on the three countries that successfully produced rigid airships - Germany, the United States and Great Britain. Based on the number of flights, Germany is the predominant focus.



Above: Germany issued 2 stamps In 1938 for the 100th anniversary of the birth of Graf von Zeppelin

Zeppelin's first successful flight took place near Lake Constance, Germany, in July, 1900. By 1908, Zeppelin had enough support that he could establish the Luftschiffbau Zeppelin GmbH to produce rigid airships commercially, and in 1909 he founded the world's first airline, Deutsche Luftschiffahrts-Aktiengesellschaft. By 1914, DELAG had safely carried over 32,700 passengers on more than 1500 flights in Europe. The outbreak of war brought an end to passenger flights, but the demand for military airships brought the manufacturing company huge success. After the war, the company struggled to begin peacetime production. The new *Graf Zeppelin* proved the reliability of zeppelin technology, and the company focused on a new age of luxury air travel. Passenger flights ended in 1937 when the *Hindenburg* crashed while landing at Lakehurst, New Jersey.

In the USA, the rigid airship was developed principally as a weapon of war. There was immense national pride in the US Navy's airships, and the public pursued both flown covers and mail that commemorated special airship events.

Great Britain had initial success with military rigid airships, and the world's first transatlantic round flight was actually completed in 1919 by His Majesty's Airship *R-34*. But there was little investment until the Imperial Airship Scheme was developed in the mid-twenties. *His Majesty's Airship R-100* successfully flew to Canada in 1930, and there was great excitement until the *R-101* crashed in France a few months later.

Rare items are mounted on red paper

ORGANIZATION

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1. Zeppelin's Initial Success & World War 1

Graf von Zeppelin spent years developing the rigid airship. The first zeppelin flight was in July 1900, and by 1909, he was able to start Deutsche Luftschiffahrts, A.G., (DELAG), as an airline with fare-paying passengers. As new zeppelins were constructed, the airline grew steadily in its first decade with the introduction of *LZ-10 Schwaben*, *LZ-11 Viktoria Luise*, *LZ-13 Hansa*, and *LZ-17 Sachen*.



Above: Special post cards with semi-official postage flown by the *Schwaben* for the 1912 Aeronautical Fortnight exhibit of the Grand Duchy of Hessen. One was cancelled in Darmstadt for the June 12th flight and one in Frankfurt au Main for the June 15th flight. The Aeronautical Fortnight flights were the first airmail flights in Germany.

By the start of the Great War, DELAG zeppelins had carried 37,250 passengers on 1,600 flights, without a single injury. Almost two thirds of the passengers (including royalty, politicians and military officers) were transported without charge to promote the airships, but over 10,000 passengers had paid full fare.

Although DELAG had to cease flights upon the outbreak of the First World War, the conflict brought financial success to the Luftschiffbau Zeppelin as the German Army and Navy ordered more than 85 military zeppelins during the war.

Zeppelin's Initial Success & World War 1



Above: German propaganda post card from WWI showing officers in bivouac with a military zeppelin above



Above: The zeppelin *Hannsa* over the fleet near Helgoland

After its defeat, the allies forbid Germany to build or own dirigibles, but Hugo Eckener was able to convince the Americans to order a zeppelin for their navy from Luftschiffbau Zeppelin. After that delivery, a number of famous pilots gave lectures throughout Germany to raise funds through donations and the sale of postcards and labels to fund the company.

Zeppelin's Initial Success & World War 1



Above: 5 pf and 10 pf Zeppelin-Eckener Spende labels



Above: Two patriotic Spende postcards

Public support was excellent, and donations and a small government grant allowed manufacturing of commercial airships to begin again in Friedrichshafen in 1926.

2. The American Rigid Airships

The Union Army flew military observation balloons in the Civil War, and American forces operated some manned balloons during World War I. Based on the success of the German zeppelins during the Great War, the military decided to develop their own rigid airships and assigned the responsibility to the Navy. The first US rigid airship, the *Shenandoah* (*ZR-1*) was built at the Lakehurst Naval Air Station in 1922-23.

While the *Shenandoah* was still under construction, the Navy decided to add to its fleet with the purchase a British dirigible. The Royal Airship Works in Cardington had ceased work on all British airships when the Armistice was signed, but the US Navy paid for the work to be completed on *R38* and it was redesignated as *LZ-2*. An American crew was sent to England to learn how to operate the airship. However, on August 21, 1921, during its fifth flight, the rigid airship split into two, killing 44 of the 49 men aboard.

As a naval airship, the *Shenandoah* never officially carried mail. In July 1925, the Navy arranged to fly the *Shenandoah* to the Governors' Conference in Bar Harbour, Maine to show the politicians its new airship and to take a number of dignitaries on short flights. A New York stamp dealer, Eddie Buser, mailed 125 covers to the Postmaster at Lakehurst and asked him to put the covers on board the *Shenandoah*. The Lakehurst postmaster applied a July 3rd cancellation and had Buser's covers along with a few from two collectors carried on the airship. Due to the strong demand for airship covers, New Jersey stamp dealer A.C. Roessler prepared covers but the postmaster did not put his on the flight. Roessler obtained a copy of the *USS Patoka* cancellation and then sold covers from his shop. These Roessler covers are recognized in the Zeppelin philatelic catalogues as "unflown" event covers.



Above: An "unflown" Governors' Conference event cover prepared by A. C. Roessler

Two months after the Governors' Conference, the *Shenandoah* crashed in Ohio during a violent storm and 14 crewmembers were killed.

American – *USS Los Angeles*

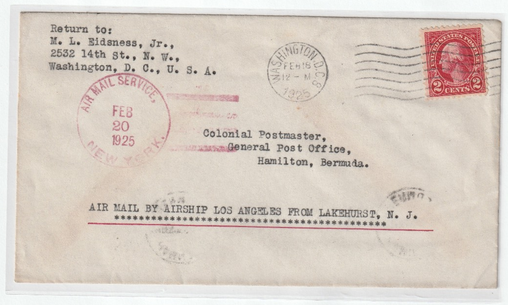
Although the Versailles Treaty forbid Germany from owning or manufacturing any airships, after the *LZ-2* disaster the United States was able to convince its allies to allow Germany to build one zeppelin (designated as *LZ-126* by Luftschiffbau Zeppelin) for the US Navy. As the allies refused permission for Germany to construct a military rigid airship, the Americans agreed to accept a civilian zeppelin. *LZ-126* was completed in the summer of 1924, and had her first flight in August. The German post office announced that mail would be carried on the rigid airship's delivery flight to America. Due to a 150 kg. weight restriction and an overwhelming demand, the Reichspost had to instruct all post offices to refuse any further mail as of September 15th. On October 12th, the zeppelin left Friedrichshafen under the command of Hugo Eckener for her transatlantic flight to the United States. After 81 hours she arrived at the U.S. Naval Air Station at Lakehurst.



Above: Large cover with violet "Mit Luftschiff Z. R. 3 befördert" confirmation mark carried on the *LZ-126* delivery flight to America. Later christened the *USS Los Angeles*, she became the most successful American airship

American – *USS Los Angeles*

A test of the *Los Angeles* was scheduled to fly to Bermuda in February, 1925. The Post Office announced that mail sent to New York and marked "Airmail by Airship *Los Angeles* from Lakehurst, N.J." would be carried. This was the first official American airship mail.



Above: A cover that was carried on the *USS Los Angeles*' 1st flight to Bermuda – mail was dropped from the airship



Above: Postcard showing the Goodyear-Zeppelin hanger in Akron where new US airships would be constructed

American – *USS Los Angeles*



Above: Cover from the USS Los Angeles' 2nd flight to Bermuda in April



Above: Cover from the *Los Angeles*' May 3rd flight to San Juan. Over 300 pounds of mail was transferred to the *USS Patoka*, a Navy tender that had been converted to an airship depot with the addition of an airship mast

American – *USS Akron*



Above: Unflown cover issued by Akron Chamber of Commerce celebrating the airship named after their town



Above: Other communities were proud of their connection to the airships. The Kenosha Chamber of Commerce marked the flight of the *USS Akron* over their city with souvenir covers

American – *USS Akron*

The Navy permitted the *Akron* to carry Mail for the Post Office for the first time in May, 1932.



Above: Cover with 1928 Beacon Air Mail stamp showing the "Coast to Coast Carrying Mail" PO Handstamp



Above: A envelope from one of first printing of stamped stationary carried on the Coast to Coast flight
To generate extra revenue, the US Post Office announced all mail would receive special hand stamps to prove authenticity. Over 41,700 covers and postcards were carried on the *USS Akron*'s Transcontinental flight from Lakehurst, New Jersey to Camp Kearney (San Diego), California.

American – *USS Akron*



Above: The United States Post Office applied a "Carrying Mail" handstamp to the front of all covers before the flight and "Coast to Coast" stamp to the back



Above: Back stamp applied to all covers flown on the Tactical Training flight (shown reduced)

After the *USS Akron*'s return to Lakehurst in August, the Navy agreed to let the *Akron* carry mail on a Tactical Training flight. The Post Office applied a special mail handstamp to all mail before loading.



Above: Cover with the US Post Office "Carrying Mail" handstamp that was applied in Lakehurst

The Goodyear-Zeppelin completed the *Akron*'s sistership, the *USS Macon, ZRS-5,* in early 1933.

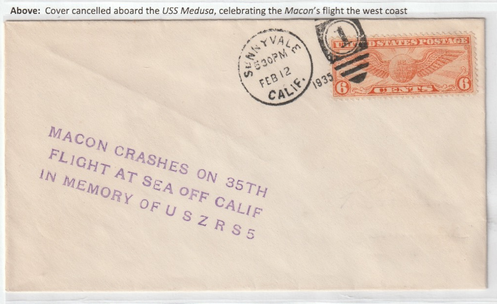
On April 3rd, the *USS Akron* was caught in a thunderstorm off the coast of New Jersey and crashed into the ocean. The accident claimed the lives of 73 of the 76 people aboard, including Admiral Moffett.

American – *USS Macon*

The *USS Macon* had her first flight a month after the *Akron* crash, and was commissioned on 23 June 1933. She made headlines in June, 1934, when she located the cruiser *Houston*, which was carrying President Roosevelt back from a trip to Hawaii.



Above: Cover cancelled aboard the *USS Medusa*, celebrating the *Macon*'s flight the west coast

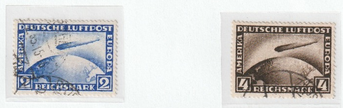


Above: Cover created to mark the crash of the *USS Macon* in February, 1935

3. Germany – The *Graf Zeppelin*'s Proving Flights

With the signing of the Locarno Treaties in 1926, Germany was permitted to build civilian airships and Luftschiffbau Zeppelin GmbH began construction of a new zeppelin designed to carry passengers and freight. Christened the *Graf Zeppelin* on July 8, 1928 by Countess Brandenstein, the daughter of the late Count, the airship made her 1st flight on September 18, 1928, under the command of Hugo Eckener.

Two days later, on September 20th the Reichspost issued the world's first zeppelin stamps.



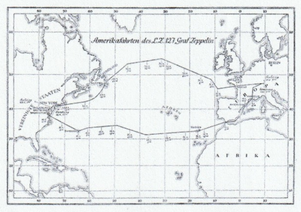
Above: The 2M stamp for mailing a post card and 4 M stamp to mail a letter on the first flight to the United States

On October 11th the *Graf Zeppelin* left for her first flight to the United States carrying 20 passengers (including American naval officer Charles E. Rosendahl and the famous Hearst newspaper reporter, Lady Grace Drummond-Hay) and a crew of 40. In the hold were 66,000 pieces of mail, all specially franked to commemorate the *Graf Zeppelin's* first Atlantic flight.



Above: The onboard "Mit Luftschiff *LZ127* befördert" confirmation mark was actually applied in Friedrichshafen before the flight as the airship's post office was not yet operational

The *Graf Zeppelin*'s Proving Flights – USA



Map showing the original transatlantic flight route. The *Graf Zeppelin* left Friedrichshafen, flew down the Rhine valley and across southern France, passing over Barcelona to the Atlantic Ocean near Gibraltar. After flying west across the Atlantic, she started north near Bermuda and proceeded to Lakehurst. The return to Europe was by the northern route. (Map from Airships.net)

On the return flight to Germany, the dirigible carried almost 52,000 post cards and 50,000 letters mailed by aviation enthusiasts. To encourage mail use, the U. S. Post Office applied a "First Flight Air Mail United States to Germany" confirmation stamp in violet ink to each piece of mail carried on the flight.





Above: Post card carried by the *Graf Zeppelin* with American Post Office confirmation handstamp

The *Graf Zeppelin*'s Proving Flights – Middle East

To prove her operational ability in hot climates, the first international flight of 1929 was a trip to the Orient flying over Palestine, Lebanon, Athens, Rome & Vienna. The onboard post office was in operation, and the



Above: Cover prepared by stamp dealer A. C. Roessler. The registered label was probably applied after the flight.



Above: Cover cancelled in Friedrichshafen with red confirmation applied during the Orient flight

The *Graf Zeppelin*'s Proving Flights – Mediterranean



Above: A post card mailed to Wurttenberg from Germany bearing the lilac-red "Mittelmeerfahrt 1929" commerative hand stamp.



Left: The reverse of the card (shown reduced) with the Sevilla mail drop back stamp

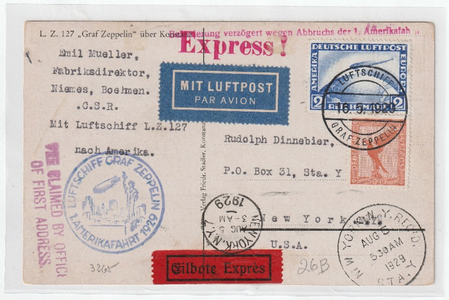


Contemporary German map showing the route of the 1929 Mediterranean flight. There were no landings but mail was dropped at Sevilla, Tanger, San Remo, Barcelona, and Radolfzell. (Map from Middle East Institute Editor's Blog, Feb. 13, 2015)

Les Selby: Frame 2/5

The *Graf Zeppelin*'s Proving Flights – 2nd US Flight

On May 16th the *Graf Zeppelin* began another flight to Lakehurst. Two engines failed over the Atlantic, so Eckener ordered the airship to return to Germany. While flying against a heavy headwind, two more engines failed and the *Graf Zeppelin* was given permission by the French government to make a successful landing with only one engine at an airbase in Cuers, France.



Above: Post card with on board cancellation on 2 RM zeppelin stamp and 10 pf airmail stamp to pay for special delivery. Bearing the "1 Amerikafahrt 1929" handstamp and the "Beforderung verzoggert wegen Abbruchs der 1. Amerikafahrt" red marking confirming the flight interuption. The card was returned to Friedrichshafen and held by the German Post Office until August 1st when the *Graf Zeppelin* left Friedrichshafen on its next flight to Lakehurst. This card is unusual as the US Special Delivery marking were all applied to the address side of the card, as well as the "Fee claimed by Office of First Address" hand stamp

The *Graf Zeppelin*'s Proving Flights – 2nd US Flight



Above: Card with 2M zeppelin stamp and zeppelin cachet prepared by stamp dealer A. C. Roessler that was on the interrupted flight. Held by the Reichspost until the next flight to America



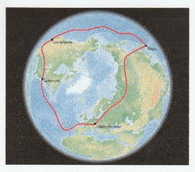
Above: A Roessler cover with 4M zeppelin stamp that was on the interrupted flight and held till August 1st flight

The *Graf Zeppelin*'s Round the World Flight

In 1929, the *Graf Zeppelin* undertook a flight around the world to prove the abilities of the zeppelins in all conditions. The largest sponsor, Hearst newspapers, demanded that the Round the World flight officially start and conclude in the USA. After the August 1st flight to Lakehurst, the *Graf Zeppelin* took on passengers and supplies to began the flight to Friedrichshafen for refuelling. It then flew over the northern republics of the Soviet Union and on to Japan. After 5 days, the *Graf Zeppelin* flew across the Pacific Ocean to Los Angeles. After a stop in Los Angeles, the rigid airship flew on to Lakehurst. The entire circumnavigation (including stops) took 21 days, 5 hours, and 31 minutes to cover 20,651 miles (33,234 km). The press coverage created world-wide publicity for the zeppelin.



Above: Cover flown on the last leg from Los Angeles to Lakehurst. Violet Round-The-World air mail confirmation mark applied by the Post Office in Los Angeles. **Below:** Green Lakehurst receiving mark on the reverse.

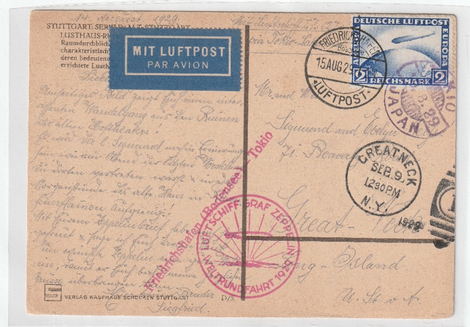




Left: Projection of the *Graf Zeppelin*'s circumnavigation of the globe in 1929.

Map from planehistoria.com

The *Graf Zeppelin*'s Round the World Flight



Above: A post card handstamped with the "Weltrundfahrt 1929" confirmation as well as receiving cancellations in Friedrichshafen, Tokyo and Greatneck, NY. The "Friedrichshafen (Bodensee) – Tokio" mark eased sorting



Above: Sorting marks show this card carried around the world from Friedrichshafen to Friedrichshafen

The *Graf Zeppelin*'s Proving Flights - Europe



Above: Cover carried on the Netherlands flight October 12 – 13, 1929 and dropped at Amsterdam

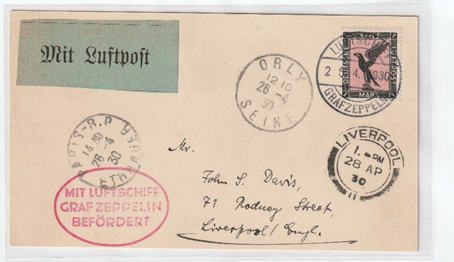


Above: Post card carried on the Swiss flight from Zurich in November and included in mail drop at St. Gallen

The *Graf Zeppelin*'s Proving Flights - Europe



Above: Card carried on the April 22, 1930 flight to Bonn with on board cancellation



Above: Eckner took the *Graf Zeppelin* to England in April to show German technology to the British as they developed their own airship program. He hoped the British might place orders with Luftschiffbau Zeppelin GmbH

The *Graf Zeppelin*'s Europe – Pan American Flight

In 1930, the *Graf Zeppelin* was scheduled to undertake a flight between Spain, Brazil, and the United States. Hugo Eckener convinced American postal officials to issue a set of zeppelin stamps with 93% of the value of stamps on flown mail helping DELAG pay for the Pan-American flight.





Above: The 65¢ paid the post card rate for 1 flight segment, the $1.30 paid the letter rate, and $2.60 paid the letter for 2 segments. Due to the Depression, only 227,000 of the stamps were sold, and the rest were destroyed latter that year (making the *Graf Zeppelin* stamps the scarcest US issue of the 20th century).



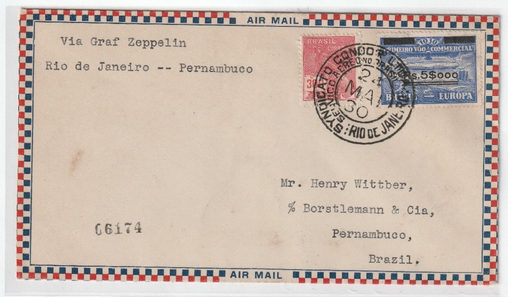
Above: Post card with the 65¢ carried from Lakehurst east to Friedrichshafen. The cover with the $2.60 stamp was loaded on the *Graf Zeppelin* in Friedrichshafen and flown to Brazil and then to Lakehurst. These pieces were marked with the United Sates Post Office's "First Europe Pan-American Round Flight" confirmation marking

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The *Graf Zeppelin*'s Europe – Pan America Flight



Above: Cover with semi-private Condor zeppelin stamp and regular Brazil postage mailed from Recife for the United States. This cover has been signed by Hugo Eckener



Above: Cover loaded during the 2-hour layover in Rio de Janeiro and flown on the return flight to Recife (Pernambuco). Condor confirmation mark on Brazilian stamp with private Condor stamp shows date of posting

The *Graf Zeppelin*'s Europe – Pan America Flight



Above: Airmail card sent from Teaneck to Germany by steamship. Flown from Friedrichshafen to Lakehurst, with German confirmation for flight to South America and the USA. Autographed by Lady Drummond-Hay, a Hearst reporter famous for her passages on zeppelin and airplane adventurers

DELAG officials were able to convince a number of South American countries to issue special stamps for mail to be carried on the *Graf Zeppelin* on its South American flight, with revenue going to the airline.





Above: 5¢ on 10¢ surcharged Airmail stamp and 10¢ overprinted Bolivian Airmail stamp *Graf Zeppelin* mail



Above: In May, 1930, Bolivia surcharged 3 air mail stamps for *Graf Zeppelin* mail

In the same month, Argentina overprinted six of its existing airmail stamps to mark the *Graf Zeppelin* flight. Only 4,375 sets of 5 values with blue overprints and 947 sets with green overprints were sold.

The *Graf Zeppelin*'s Proving Flights 1930



Above: Argentina *Graf Zeppelin* 20¢ and 50¢ overprinted in blue and 20¢ and 90¢ overprinted in green

After the 1930 Pan-American flight, the *Graf Zeppelin* conducted several short flights within Europe. On June 21st, the airship left Friedrichshafen for a four day "Round Germany" flight. Eckener never forgot that public donations had allowed Luftschiffbau Zeppelin to start building the *Graf Zeppelin*, so he took every opportunity to show the people "their" airship.



Above: Card with red "Mit Luftschiff *Graf Zeppelin* Befordert" handstamp from the "Round Germany" flight. Mailed and loaded on board in Munich and carried to Berlin and then unloaded in Hamburg

The *Graf Zeppelin*'s Proving Flights 1930

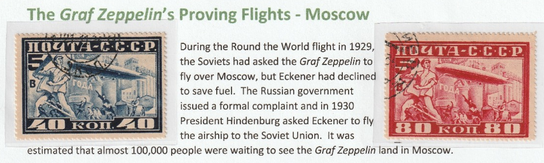


Above: Red confirmation mark on cover from the fight to "liberated" Rhineland that flew July 5 – 7, 1930



Above: Card loaded in Königsberg and cancelled on the *Graf Zeppelin* on a flight to Berlin on August 24th

The *Graf Zeppelin*'s Proving Flights - Moscow



During the Round the World flight in 1929, the Soviets had asked the *Graf Zeppelin* to fly over Moscow, but Eckener had declined to save fuel. The Russian government issued a formal complaint and in 1930 President Hindenburg asked Eckener to fly the airship to the Soviet Union. It was estimated that almost 100,000 people were waiting to see the *Graf Zeppelin* land in Moscow.



Above: Post card with 40K and envelope with 80K Russian special zeppelin stamps (required in addition to the regular postage) that could only be used on the *Graf Zeppelin*'s Moscow to Friedrichshafen flight

The *Graf Zeppelin*'s Proving Flights – Europe 1930



Above: On September 14th the *Graf Zeppelin* conducted a one-day flight to Geneva. This post card was on the return flight to Friedrichshafen, with the Swiss flight confirmation mark is in red

In late September, the airship undertook a round trip Baltic Sea flight from Berlin. Mail drops occurred at Riga, Tallin, Helsinki, and Stockholm. A landing in Helsinki had to be cancelled due to bad weather.

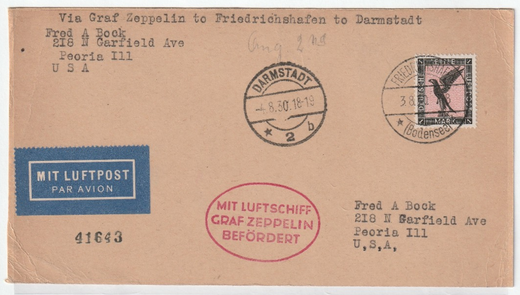


Above: Finland's 1st airmail stamp was valid only on mail that was to be carried on the Baltic Sea flight. After the landing was cancelled, the mail was taken on board by using a rope

The *Graf Zeppelin*'s Proving Flights – Europe 1930



Above: Post card carried on the *Graf Zeppelin*'s Baltic Sea flight in late September with green confirmation mark



Above: Card from the *Graf Zeppelin*'s return flight from Darmstadt in August

4. Germany - The *Graf Zeppelin*'s Flights – 1931-32



Above: Card with Saar stamps from the mail drop at Venlo during the November flight over the Netherlands



Above: Card cancelled during the Saxony flight in November, 1930 with the red confirmation hand stamp

With the success of the flights of the *Graf Zeppelin*, DELAG placed an order for a larger and more modern rigid airship with Luftschiffbau Zeppelin GmbH at the end of 1930.

The *Graf Zeppelin*'s Flights – 1931-32

The first international flight of the *Graf Zeppelin* in 1931 was to Budapest in late March. Once again, Eckener negotiated with a foreign post office to have special stamps issued that could be used on mail that would be carried on the *Graf Zeppelin*, with the majority of the revenue being given to DELAG.





Above: Hungarian Post Office created zeppelin stamps for the Budapest flight by overprinting existing issues



Above: Post card from the March 28th Hungarian flight struck with the special flight handstamp in blue. This was the largest flight confirmation mark ever used by Deutsche Luftschiffahrts-Aktiengesellschaft

Les Selby: Frame 3/5



Above: Cover mailed on the April flight from Friedrichshafen to Cairo with on board cancel



Above: Post card posted in Cairo with Egyptian airmail stamp overprinted 50 Mm for cards



Above: Cover bearing 100 Mm overprinted stamp for covers that was issued by Egypt on April 6th to commemorate the *Graf Zeppelin*'s second commercial flight of 1931 to the Middle East. Mailed in Cairo with Egyptian cancellation, the black Friedrichshafen handstamp on the reverse was used as a flight confirmation rather than a receiving mark



Above: On May 10th, 1931 the Reichspost issued a new red 1M *Graf Zeppelin* stamp to be used on post cards in Europe

In June, Liechtenstein post office issued 2 stamps in honour of the *Graf Zeppelin*'s flight to that country.



Above: Liechtenstein 1Fr stamp issued for cards and 2Fr for covers carried on the June flight



Above: Three stamps overprinted for mail that was to be exchanged during the flight to Iceland in July, 1931



Above: Registered card with 50 Au and 1 Kr overprinted stamps and green confirmation mark carried on the Iceland flight that was designed to test the *Graf Zeppelin*'s operation in northern climates. Less than 30,000 1-Krone stamps were produced, and very few registered covers were carried on the return flight to Friedrichshafen



Above: Austrian airmail stamps on a card postmarked July 5th, 1931 and carried on the return from Upper Silesia



Above: German 1M stamp on a cover with purple confirmation mark carried on the Austria flight in July



Above: Post card carried on the Round Vienna Flight on July 12th. Black Vienna confirmation stamp is on address side. Mail was dropped at Graz (black confirmation mark on picture side) and forwarded to Vienna through the Austrian postal system. Popular with collectors – over 1900 post cards were transported

Since 1930, plans were discussed to use the *Graf Zeppelin* for a polar flight for scientific research. The *Graf Zeppelin* was stripped of its passenger luxuries and loaded with special equipment. Arrangements were made to rendezvous with an icebreaker in artic waters.



Above: The 1M and 2M stamps issued by the Reichspost in July, 1931 with the POLAR-FAHRT 1931 overprint



Above: Russia issued 4 stamps (perforated & imperforated) that supposedly showed the transfer of mail between the *Graf Zeppelin* and the icebreaker *Malygin*. The 30K and 1R stamps were for registered post cards, and the 35K and the 2R were to be used for registered letters.



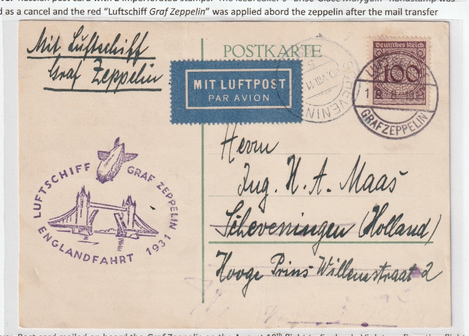
Above: Letter mailed in Friedrichshafen, carried on the polar flight and transferred to the icebreaker *Malygin*



Above: Post card with 1M overprinted German stamp with on board cancel mailed by Hugo Eckener to a contact in Yugoslavia. The icebreaker's "Brise-Glace *Malyguin*" handstamp is used as a cancellation and the red "Luftschief *Graf Zeppelin* Polarfahrt 1931" mark was applied on board



Above: Russian post card with 2 imperforated stamps. The icebreaker's "Brise-Glace *Malyguin*" handstamp was used as a cancel and the red "Luftschiff *Graf Zeppelin*" was applied abord the zeppelin after the mail transfer



Above: Post card mailed on board the *Graf Zeppelin* on the August 18th flight to England. Violet confirmation flight marking and "Luftschiff *Graf Zeppelin*" cancellation applied in the onboard post office



Above: On August 29, 1931 the *Graf Zeppelin* left Friedrichshafen for the first of 3 flights to South America that fall. Postmarked in Friedrichshafen, the green confirmation was applied on board



Above Post card with Austrian airmail stamps carried on the *Graf Zeppelin*'s 2nd South American flight of 1932. To encourage the use of zeppelin mail, the red advertising mark in German and Portuguese applied in the onboard post office notified recipients that "the Airship *Graf Zeppelin* will wait four days in Pernambuco for your answer"



Above: Card mailed by Hugo Eckener during the first of 1st of 9 flights between Germany and South America in 1932. Germany 1RM Zeppelin stamp and 2 airmail stamps canceled with the on board cancel. Lilac flight confirmation applied in the on board post office while the Recife receiving mark added by Brazilian post office



Above: Preprinted Condor airmail envelope with 1932 Brazil zeppelin overprinted stamp sent by Condor airplane from Rio to Recife for transatlantic transportation on the *Graf Zeppelin*'s flight to Friedrichshafen on May 7th



Above left: One of 5 designs overprinted by Argentinian for mail carried on the *Graf Zeppelin* in 1931
Above right: Overprinted stamps issued in August 1931 by Brazil and Paraguay for mail to be carried on that year's first *Graf Zeppelin* South America to Europe flight in September 1931


ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΑ ΤΑΧΥΔΡΟΜΕΙΑ
ΕΛΛΑΣ
ΕΛΛΑΣ
ΕΛΛΑΣ

Les Selby: Frame 4/5



Above: The Italian colony of Cyrenaica issued a set of 6 stamps to celebrate the Rome flight



Above: The Italian colony of Tripolitania's Rome flight commemoratives



Above: An Italian ally, Greece issued a set of 3 stamps showing the *Graf Zeppelin* over the Acropolis. Only 25,000 sets were issued and mint sets are rare.



Above: Cover with 1 of 6 different San Marino Rome stamps issued for the Rome flight with Italian flight mark and green zeppelin confirmation



Above: Cover with Berlin cancel carried on the 1st South American flight of 1933 with red routing indicating that the cover was included in the Barcelona mail drop



Above: Cover with on board cancel from 25 June 1933 flight to Saar. Black flight confirmation mark



Above: Cover carried on the 5th South American return flight via Sevilla and on to Friedrichshafen. Green Friedrichshafen receiving mark dated August 29th. Two Brazil Condor-Zeppelin Europa Confirmations on back

The volume of South American airship mail to Europe continued to grow as the *Graf Zeppelin* increased the frequency of its flights. In 1933, Paraguay issued a set of 5 stamps showing the dirigible over Brazilian terrain or the *Graf Zeppelin* over the Atlantic.





Above: Paraguay's 1933 stamps issued for *Graf Zeppelin* mail



Above: Cover mailed in Rio for *Graf Zeppelin*'s flight to Recife during the 3rd South American flight of 1933. Green cachet applied by the Brazilian post office before the flight



Above: Both the German and American post offices issued special stamps for the *Graf Zeppelin*'s flight to visit the Chicago 1933 Century of Progress exposition

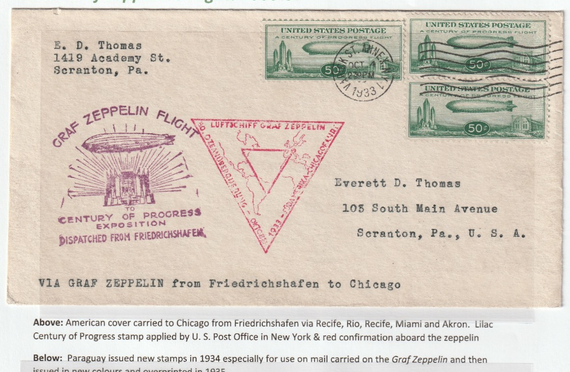


Above: Paraguan registered cover for the "3 continent" flight. Purple confirmation applied by Post Office
Below: Cover mailed on board the *Graf Zeppelin* to Recife with red Chicago Exposition confirmation





Above: To encourage mail revenue, the United States Post Office applied special lilac confirmation marks to all zeppelin mail in the 3 ports visited (Miami, Akron and Chicago) as well as to all American mail sent from New York via ship to Germany for the flight to the Brazil.



Above: American cover carried to Chicago from Friedrichshafen via Recife, Rio, Recife, Miami and Akron. Lilac Century of Progress stamp applied by U. S. Post Office in New York & red confirmation aboard the zeppelin

Below: Paraguay issued new stamps in 1934 especially for use on mail carried on the *Graf Zeppelin* and then issued in new colours and overprinted in 1935





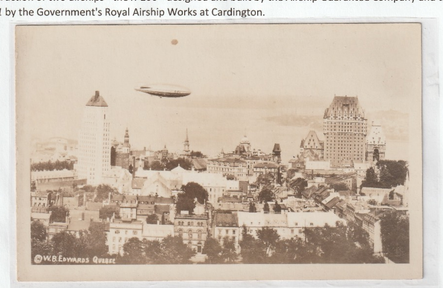
Above: Cover carried on the first commercial flight of 1934 from Friedrichshafen to Berlin. This was the first zeppelin confirmation with a Nazi symbol



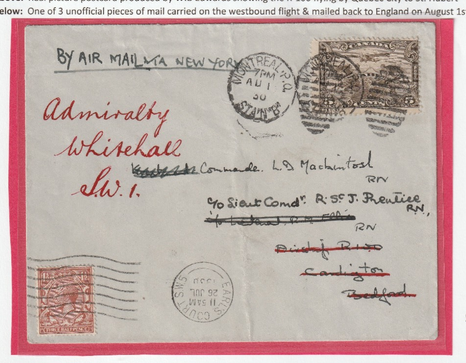
Above: "Get to Know Germany" post card showing the Graf Zeppelin over Lake Constance (Bodensee). On Board cancellation from the September 27th flight over Switzerland

6. England - The Imperial Airship Scheme

The Royal Navy operated airships during WW1. The *R-34*, left Scotland and flew to Mineola, N.Y. in July 1919. The return flight covered over 7,420 miles and was the first intercontinental flight by an airship. Concerned with the success of German airships, the British colonies called on the Empire to develop its own airship network. The Labour government created the Imperial Airship Scheme that included the construction of two airships - the *R-100* - designed and built by the Airship Guarantee Company and the *R-101* by the Government's Royal Airship Works at Cardington.



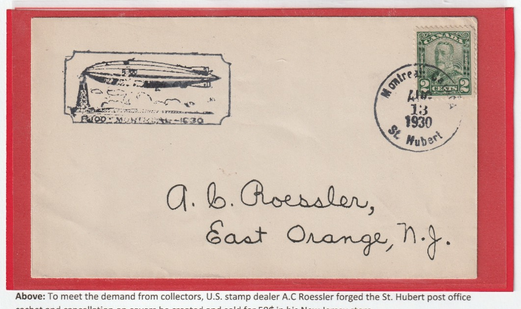
Above: Real picture postcard produced by W.B Edwards showing the R-100 flying by Quebec City to St. Hubert
Below: One of 3 unofficial pieces of mail carried on the westbound flight & mailed back to England on August 1st



In June, 1930 the *R-100* flew on a 12-day visit to Canada. It was estimated that over 1,000,000 people came to see the airship (Montreal's population was only 800,00). The Canadian Royal Mail, which had a post office in the administration building, set up 22 temporary mail boxes on the airport grounds.



Below: Souvenir post card mailed by a tourist at the airport. The *R-100* cachet was applied by the Post Office staff



Above: To meet the demand from collectors, U.S. stamp dealer A.C Roessler forged the St. Hubert post office cachet and cancellation on covers he created and sold for 50¢ in his New Jersey store

To prove the practicability of the British airship, a local flight was undertaken for 16 VIP passengers from the government, military and media.



Above: A real photo postcard showing a photo of the *R-100* on its local flight of Aug. 11th. Notes on the reverse in French say the photographer saw the *R-100* during its flight over Montreal



Above: A real photo post card cancelled in the St. Hubert Airport Post Office on August 1st (the day of arrival) and again on August 13th (the day of departure) and signed by the Postmaster, Georges Faille

The *R-100* left the mooring mast at 10:10 p.m. on August 13th for the 58-hour flight to Cardington. The *R-100* was not authorized to carry mail, and the crew members were warned that anyone carrying mail on board would be fined $25.00 per piece (a large financial penalty during the Depression).



Above: A. C. Roessler bribed a crewmember to carry 26 envelopes canceled in St. Hubert on August 13th on the return flight to Cardington. British postage stamps were added and cancelled in London on August 16th, proving that each envelope was unofficially flown on the *R-100*. Roessler than sold these covers to collectors from his store in New Jersey

On the flight to England, the rigid airship carried Canadian reporters from both the English and French press and a few dignitaries, including Group Captain E.W Stedman, the Chief Aeronautical Engineer of the Canadian Department of National Defence. The airship made use of the gulf stream and managed to knock off almost 21 hours from the western flight, arriving on 16th August 1930 at 11:06 A.M. after 2,995 miles and a trip of 57 hours 56 minutes. The airship was put back into the shed at Cardington for inspection and maintenance.

Following the *R-100*'s successful flight to Canada, the staff at the Royal Airship Works felt increasing urgency to prove that the redesigned *R-101* was an aeronautical marvel. After a short test flight, the Air Ministry was pressured by Lord Thompson, the Secretary of State for Air, to issue a Certificate of Airworthiness so he could fly on the *R-101* on its maiden flight to India. Lord Thompson was one of the most vocal proponents of the British Airship Scheme, and wanted to be back in England to address the Imperial Conference and gain additional support for the Imperial Airship Scheme. Just after 6:30 p.m. on October 4th, 1930, the *R-101* lifted off from Cardington to make the crossing over the English Channel. In the midst of a storm, at 2:00 a.m. on October 5th, the rigid airship hit a hill near the French village of Beauvais. It bust into flames, killing 44 of the 48 people aboard, including Lord Thompson.



Above: Real picture post card showing the *R-101* on a test flight over England



Above: Map showing the final flight of the *R-101* (map from https://www.airshipsonline.com/airships/r101

7. Germany - The *Hindenburg*

In March 1935, the Nazi government incorporated Deutsche Zeppelin-Reederei as a joint venture between Luftschiffbau Zeppelin, the Ministry of Aviation, and Lufthansa (the former Deutsche Luft Hansa). Prior to the launch of the new LZ-*129*, Luftschiffbau Zeppelin had to modify the design of the *Hindenburg* so it could use hydrogen when the American government refused to supply helium to Nazi Germany.

On March 4, 1936, the *LZ-129* was walked out of the construction shed for the first time. The next day, Eckener announced that the new zeppelin was named *Hindenburg* in honour of the German President.



Above: Just 2 weeks after the 1st flight, Germany issued s stamps showing the new *LZ-129* flying over the ocean.



Above: Cover flown on the *Hindenburg*'s sixth trial flight on March 23, 1936. This was the dirigible's first flight that carried mail and the stamps were cancelled in the onboard post office

The Nazis had reoccupied the Rhineland in early March in contravention of the Treaty of Versailles, and Hitler called for a referendum so the German people could vote on his actions. Reichminister Joseph Goebbels ordered the *Graf Zeppelin* and the *Hindenburg* to deliver Nazi propaganda. during the "Deutschland flight". Starting on March 26th, the dirigibles conducted flights in tandem dropping leaflets and broadcasting martial music and political speeches. Over 98% of the voters gave their approval.



Above: Cover & leaflet carried on *LZ-129*'s propaganda flight from March 26-29th. There was no advance notice so this flight had the lowest volume of mail of any *Hindenburg* flight

The *Hindenburg*'s first commercial flight to Rio de Janeiro started on March 31st, 1936. The Nazis had awarded a monopoly for regular mail to South America to Lufthansa, so zeppelins were restricted to carrying printed matter, merchandise samples, business papers, parcels and registered mail.



Above: Souvenir card mailed in Brazil and carried on the *Hindenburg*'s first east bound flight from Rio de Janeiro



Above: Registered cover to New York carried on the *Hindenburg*'s first flight to North America, May 6 - 9, 1936. Addressed to F. W. von Meister, the Zeppelin Company's representative in North America

Les Selby: Frame 5/5



Above: Post card addressed to England with the *Hindenburg*'s on board 1st North American flight cancellation



Above: All mail on the return flight received a US Post Office cachet in violet ink. Franked with proper US postage of 40¢, the cover was given a Frankfurt (Main) receiving mark on May 14th. The envelope was then sent by ship to the USA where it received a St. Louis receiving mark on May 27th



Above: Cover with U.S. Post Office applied First Trans-Atlantic Flight violet confirmation mark showing the *Hindenburg*'s route superimposed on two globes and naming Lakehurst and Frankfurt-am-Main. This cover was over franked at 75¢ unless there was a heavy enclosure. The envelope was opened by German customs and resealed with custom's tape



Above: Reverse of cover showing the customs' resealing tape and the Frankfurt machine receiving mark with Hindenburg illustration (shown reduced)



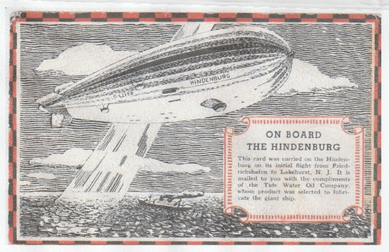
Left: Liechtenstein issued a set of two zeppelin stamps for the *Hindenburg*'s first North American flight. 1fr for cards showed the *Hindenburg* and the 2fr for covers showed the *Graf Zeppelin*





Above: Registered card & cover with new Liechtenstein zeppelin stamps issued to honour the *Hindenburg*





Above: Post card produced by the Tide Water Company promoting its Veedol lubricating oil. Although German postal regulations stated meter mail could not be carried on the airships, an exception was made for this advertising campaign. The international post card rate of 15Rpf was paid by means of a machine franking and the zeppelin mail surcharge was paid by the *LZ-129* stamp. The message side is shown reduced



Above: Cover cancelled in the onboard post office during the *Hindenburg*'s 3rd flight to North America. The cover is addressed to F. W. von Meister, the Deutsche Zeppelin-Reederei's representative in North America



Above: A registered cover posted & cancelled in the Olympic Village and then loaded on the airship for the August 5th flight to Lakehurst. The "Europa-Nordamerika" confirmation marking was applied on board the *Hindenburg*

At Goebbels' request, the Olympic rings were painted on both sides of the *Hindenburg*.



Above: The *Hindenburg* flew over the stadium during the opening ceremony. Post card with red confirmation marking applied on board the airship. The 2 Olympic semi-postals were cancelled at the Rhein-Main airport



Above: Cover with on board post office cancellations and flight confirmation from the 8th American flight of 1936



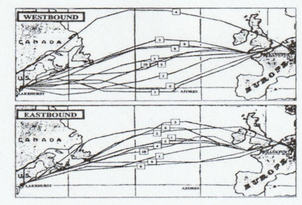
Above: A reverse of a cover mailed on board the *Hindenburg* on the return leg of the 8th North American flight of 1936. Postage was paid by 4 German Olympic semi-postal stamps issued in May to which the red Europa-Nordamerika confirmation mark was applied. The back of the cover bears a June 22nd horse race souvenir sheet with Munich Riem 1936 watermark on the sheet margin with the on board cancellation dated September 23rd as well as the Rhein-Main receiving mark dated the 24th and the Vlotho city receiving mark dated September 25th

In 1936, the *Hindenburg* completed a total of 10 flights to North America and 7 flights to South America in addition to 6 flights in Europe (including the propaganda flights ordered by Goebbels). The *Graf Zeppelin* accomplished 13 round trips to South America and several flights within Europe that year, so the Deutsche Zeppelin-Reederei fleet was proving to be a profitable venture.



Above: On board cancellations on this cover addressed to F. W. von Meister from the 9th North American flight of 1936. His office developed a significant business selling flown covers to collectors who wanted philatelic mail.

One more flight to North America and 3 flights to South America completed the 1936 season. The *Hindenburg* was then put into the hanger for winter maintenance and more passenger cabins were added.

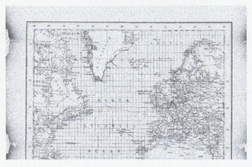


Above: Map showing the *Hindenburg*'s 1936 flight routes to and from North America

In March 1937 the Hindenburg two round trips over Germany. On one flight, Ernst Udet conducted a landing of a biplane onto a trapeze hook system attached to airship in flight. Turbulence made landing difficult. The airship left Frankfurt on March 16th for its first South American flight.



Above: This cover bears a red cancelation from the *Hindenburg* for the cancelled May 1st Germany flight. The red text in the square box explains that "Mail dropping during the North American Flight due to cancellation of Germany Flight." This cover was included in two bags dropped over Cologne on her way to New York on May 3rd



Left: Passengers on the flight were given a map and they could track the flight route using daily announcements. Although all the Command Car's logs and maps were destroyed, this map kept by passenger Peter Belin shows the final flight route.

(map from Zeppelin Hindenburg by Grossman, Ganz & Russel)

A few seconds after dropping mooring lines there was an explosion on board and the *Hindenburg* burst into flames. Of the 97 on board, 35 passengers and crew died. Of the estimated 17,609 pieces of mail on this flight, postal authorities salvaged approximately 358 covers and cards. Of these, 176 salvaged items were unburned (with a few exceptions) because they were stored in a protective, sealed pouch awaiting postal service on the return flight, and they later received a paquebot postmark.



Above: The US Post Office Department enclosed this recovered cover in glassine envelope and officially sealed it before delivery to the addressee. Only 182 damaged envelopes could be identified and forwarded to addressee

Both the American and German governments conducted investigations into the crash, but neither commission could determine the exact cause of the crash.

The crew of the *Graf Zeppelin* were informed of the *Hindenburg* disaster while flying from Brazil. The passengers were not informed until the airship landed at Frankfurt am Main. All zeppelin flights were suspended, and the *Graf Zeppelin* was retired one month later. It was deflated, hung in a hanger and exhibited to paying visitors. Prior to the crash, the *Graf Zeppelin* and the *Hindenburg* together had carried a total of 47,008 kilograms of mail and 38,272 kilograms of freight.



Above: Cover sent to German stamp dealer H. Sieger for the 1st east bound flight of 1937. Returned to sender with red Post Office notice of airship disaster



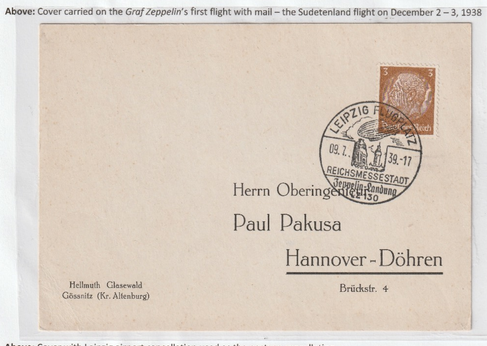
Above: Post card sent by Deutsche Zeppelin-Reederi about 6 months before inflation to promote the new airship after the *Hindenburg*'s destruction. Special red meter stamp used to publicize the new *LZ-130*

8. Germany - The 2nd *Graf Zeppelin*

The *LZ-130*, the second airship to bear the name *Graf Zeppelin*, was launched in September 1938.



Above: Cover carried on the *Graf Zeppelin*'s first flight with mail – the Sudetenland flight on December 2 – 3, 1938



Above: Cover with Leipzig airport cancellation used as the postage cancellation



Above: The address side of the card showing the airport confirmation mark used for the Görlitz flight that was conducted on July 16 – 17, 1939



Above: Post card carried on the *Graf Zeppelin*'s 600 km flight to participate in the Kassel air show



Above: On July 22nd, the *Graf Zeppelin* made a two-day flight to Bielefeld and Munster. The upper cover has a red flight confirmation and black Bielefield landing mark while the lower cover has a Munster flight cancellation



Above: Mailed in Frankfurt for the August 6th flight to Wurzburg, Bavaria (cover partially windowed)



Above: Cover with red Eger flight confirmation mark and the black Eger cancel applied after mail was unloaded

9. The End of the Era

A flight to Königsberg was planned for August 26th, but was cancelled. It had been decided by the Aviation Ministry that the airships should be grounded due to the imminent war. *The LZ-130* was removed from its hangar, turned around and walked back into the hangar for public display.



Above: Cover prepared for the Zwickau and Königsberg flight. Red flight confirmation mark was applied before cancellation and the red flight cancellation notice was applied before mail was sent by regular post

On 29 February 1940, Hermann Goering issued the order to scrap both *Graf Zeppelins* and the unfinished framework of *LZ-131*, since the metal was needed for military aircraft. By April 27th, Luftwaffe work crews finished cutting up the airships and the Age of the Rigid Airship had ended.



Above: Photo showing the destruction of the Frankfurt zeppelin sheds by Luftwaffe personnel in 1940