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PHILATELIC CONGRESS OF INDIA
The National Federation for Philately

1935 Cover from Aden to Recife on Deutsche Lufthansa Catapult Air Mail, intended for carriage on the Graf Zeppelin LZ-127

—by Piyush Khaitan



Fig 1. This cover posted in Aden was intended to fly on the Graf Zeppelin from Friedrichshafen to Recife, but instead made it on the Catapult Air Mail service. This is the first recorded mail of this type from Aden.

I actually turned down this cover when it was first offered to me for sale a few months ago because it was intended to be flown by Zeppelin, but missed the flight and was sent a week later on the Deutsche Lufthansa Catapult air mail flight. Fortunately for me, the seller was persistent, insisted I reconsider, and he then requested the expert, Dieter Leder of the Zeppelin Study Group to share his opinion in support. Mr. Leder was kind enough to do so, and I have borrowed liberally from his information, and from additional material listed at the end to put together the story of this cover's interesting journey.

ABOUT ZEPPELIN AND CATAPULT FLIGHTS TO SOUTH AMERICA IN 1935:

Between April and June 1935 Zeppelin flights occurred every two weeks, alternating the weekly mail service to South America with Deutsche Lufthansa (DLH) Catapult mail services. Zeppelin flights were directly between Friedrichshafen and Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil via Larache, Spanish Morocco, where connection was made with DLH flights carrying late airmail from Berlin and Stuttgart. From July 1st 1935 DLH became the exclusive

German carrier of letter mail on the South Atlantic route as it had proved both faster and more reliable than the Zeppelin service, while at the same time, DLH and Air France began cooperative twice-weekly airmail service on the South Atlantic route (DLH from Stuttgart on Thursday, Air France from Paris on Sunday). Zeppelin continued to provide only non-letter mail services (Trans-Atlantic flights 8 to 14) except on those occasions where refitting of the catapult supply ships restricted trans-Atlantic flights. The non-letter airmail included printed matter, business and printed papers, samples, packets and parcels.

For sending mail by aircraft across the South Atlantic, the mail was flown first to Seville, Las Palmas, or Bathurst (Gambia). It was then transferred to a flying boat. The earliest flights were by Dornier Wals, later Super Wals, and then in 1935, Dornier Do18's. These aircraft lacked sufficient range to cross the Atlantic from Europe nonstop. Instead, the flying boats would land in Tenerife, in the Canary Islands, or Horta in the Azores, for refueling. There they would land and taxi onto a landing mat such as the Hein Mat, and then be lifted aboard ship

by crane. In September 1934, the larger Super Wal was introduced. This aircraft had the range to fly from Bathurst to Natal, and so the WESTFALEN was repositioned off the coast of Gambia so that it could catapult the ten-ton aircraft for the nonstop flight. For the return flight, the SCHWABENLAND was positioned off Natal, near the island of Fernando de Noronha. When catapulted at take off speed from these ships, the seaplanes could be heavier, and hence carry more mail as compared with a take off from the sea, which required the planes to be much lighter.

In late October 1935 the DLH catapult supply ships were withdrawn for servicing. The Graf Zeppelin was again used for regular South trans-Atlantic mail delivery. For the Germany-South America flights 15 and 16 the Graf Zeppelin also picked up mail that was delivered via DLH to Larache. Between flights 15 and 16 there was one further DLH flight to South America (Departure from Stuttgart 31st October, arrival 2nd November). For the period 15th – 30th November the LZ-127 made three return flights from Recife to Bathurst, Gambia delivering northbound mail to the DLH and picking up southbound mail from DLH. These flights, known as “pendelfahrten” (pendulum) or shuttle flights, involved picking up the mail in Bathurst in special wire baskets dropped from the airship.

ENGLAND AND BRITISH TERRITORIES JOIN AS PARTICIPATING NATIONS:

England joined the Zeppelin Air Mail Service to South America in March 1932. Zeppelin mail from England, Ireland and other British Territories was collected in London and forwarded to Berlin, from where it was transported by special connecting plane to Friedrichshafen, where it was loaded onboard the Graf Zeppelin for its journey to Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil, South America. This route is confirmed by the manuscript endorsements on Zeppelin mail “*Pour dirigible Graf Zeppelin via London/Overland*” or “*via Friedrichshafen (Allemagne)*”.

Mail for carriage by Zeppelin was only accepted from Participating Nations (ie: those to which the airship flew) and Treaty Nations (ie: those who had a contract with the German post office department). India was not a Treaty Nation, but mail from India is known to have been carried on Zeppelin flights to South America. It is thought that it was accepted without additional charge purely as a courtesy, so these covers bear postage at the rates applicable to Europe.

THE ADEN COVER AND IT'S JOURNEY:

The Aden registered cover is franked with British India King George V Silver Jubilee stamps issued earlier that year in 1935. India stamps were used for postage in



Fig 2. A cover from Delhi to Recife mailed on an earlier service of the Graf Zeppelin in June 1934, and bearing the correct endorsement 'By Airship Graf Zeppelin via London/Overland', and the 'By Airship Graf Zeppelin' etiquette. See fig. 4 for the alteration to this by the postal authorities in Germany because it missed the flight.

Aden until 1937. The total postage on this cover is 13 ½ annas. (16 annas = 1 Rupee under the fractional currency system in use until 1957). 13.33 Rupees were equivalent to 1 Pound Sterling at that time. Postage rates for Foreign Mail from Aden were the same as from India. Postage rate comprised of 3 ½ annas as the letter rate for Brazil + 6 annas Air Fees + 3 annas Registration Fee for foreign mail. This adds up to 12 ½ annas. The additional 1 anna franking is not explained,

The sender Paul Griss from Switzerland is a well known sender for Zeppelin mail and the addressee was Zeppelin crew member Albert Thasler. Lots of philatelic Zeppelin mail was addressed to crew members since Zeppelin mail to South America had to be addressed to South America. And as not everyone had an uncle in South America, they used the crew members as addressees.

The cover was dispatched from Aden on October 13, and the next postmark is from Berlin on October 30.



Fig 3. Transit mark at Berlin dated 30 October 1935 indicating that the cover reached too late for the intended Zeppelin flight which had already departed on 23 October. Rather than waiting for the next Zeppelin service on 7 November, the postal authorities decided to send the cover by the Catapult Air Mail service leaving from Stuttgart on 31 October.

With 17 days in transit, we think that the cover went by surface (or had a very bad airmail connection), perhaps via London. It was intended for carriage on the October 23 (Wednesday), Zeppelin departure for South America, Zeppelin flight #490, arrival at Recife due on 26 October. The German airmail service was flying once a week to South America, and flights were departing the night of Wednesday/Thursday from Germany. As stated earlier, this service was operated by the catapult service operated by Deutsche Lufthansa on a bi-weekly basis, and on the alternate weeks, the service was operated by airship operated by Luftschiffbau Zeppelin GmbH.

This cover was intended to go by Zeppelin as per the routing instruction. On the top left corner, the red manuscript reads "Pour dirigible Graf Zeppelin via London/Overland". The routing instruction was later partially obscured by the "Mit Deutscher Luftpost" German airmail etiquette.



Fig 4. Since the cover was being sent on the Catapult Air Mail service, and not by Zeppelin, the postal authorities in Germany affixed the 'Mit Deutscher Luftpost' etiquette on top of the original endorsement. See Fig 2.

With the October 30 arrival at Berlin, the cover clearly had missed the October 23 Zeppelin departure. Since the cover was intended for Zeppelin, the post office should have held the cover for another week to make the Zeppelin flight #496 departing on November 7. Instead of holding the cover, and delaying the arrival in South America by a full week, they sent it on the next service to South America, and this was the October 31 DLH departure on Thursday, for South America (flight #L 119), arrival 2 November. The arrival mark at Pernambuco of November 3 also matches the arrival date of the October 31 DLH flight.



Fig 5. Arrival stamp at Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil on 3 November 1935.

THE RED CACHET:

All mail handled in Germany which went on the German airmail service (regardless of carrier DLH or Zeppelin) received the red flight cachet. So the flight cachet alone does not indicate which service the cover was finally on, only dispatch, transit and arrival marking indicate the service. In 1935 any mail with the red Deutsche Luftpost, Europa – Sudamerika, 'e' cachet was serviced at Stuttgart.



Fig 6. The red cachet applied to all German airmail. The letter 'e' indicates it was serviced at Stuttgart.

While the Zeppelin was departing from Friedrichshafen the DLH flights were departing from Stuttgart (and later in 1936 from Frankfurt). All mail for the DLH service was sent to Stuttgart and was serviced there. Only very late mail with a tight connection at Stuttgart was serviced at other places, e.g. Berlin. Such late mail went on the Berlin-Stuttgart connection service (DLH) or Berlin-Friedrichshafen connection service (Zeppelin). So any mail dispatched in time was sent by train or regular airmail to Stuttgart and received the flight cachet with the letter 'e', the late mail at Berlin received the 'a' cachet from Berlin. Since the Aden cover reached Berlin on October 30 at 6 am, there was plenty of time to make it to Stuttgart for the October 31, 5 am departure to South America. This was doable by regular train services or by regular airmail services (or a mixture of both services). This also explains why the cover has a regular Berlin transit marking and the Stuttgart flight cachet, and why the cover never was at Friedrichshafen.

So, while it is a catapult cover and was not flown by Zeppelin, it still belongs to a Zeppelin collection since it was previously intended for the Zeppelin service but was sent on the catapult service to ensure a faster delivery. Mr. Leder adds, "I have more than 50,000 Zeppelin and catapult covers recorded. I have checked my files and I have not yet recorded any Aden mail with British India postage. This is the first Aden cover I have seen. So it is really rare. I am not saying that it is unique because it

is a philatelic cover and I am quite sure that the sender prepared more than just this one cover."

Acknowledgement&list of information referred to in preparing this article:

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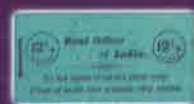
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