

ADEN TO BRAZIL BY GERMAN CATAPULT AIRMAIL, NOT ZEPPELIN

- by Piyush Khaitan

I actually turned down this cover (fig. 1) 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.

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. Non-letter airmail included printed matter, business and printed papers, samples, packets and parcels.

Mail was first flown from Stuttgart via Marseille, Seville and Las Palmas to Bathurst (Gambia). For sending mail by aircraft across the South Atlantic, mail 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



Fig. 1:

from Europe non-stop. Hence, two DLH ships, the WESTFALEN and the SCHWABENLAND were positioned at either end of the South Atlantic. Flying boats would land and taxi onto a landing mat such as the Hein Mat, and then be lifted aboard the ship by crane for refuelling. When catapulted at take-off speed from these ships, the seaplanes could be heavier, and hence carry more mail than when taking off from the sea, which required the planes to be much lighter. In September 1934, the larger Super Wal was introduced. This 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 non-stop flight. For the return flight, the SCHWABENLAND was positioned off Natal, near the island of Fernando de Noronha.

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. These shuttle flights from Natal to Bathurst and vice-versa were part of the 16th South America Flight. They happened between outward flight to South America (then shuttle flights) and the return flight to Germany.

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 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 'Par dirigeable Graf Zeppelin via London/Overland' or 'via Friedrichshafen (Allemagne)'. During 1932 to 1933 such mail was first forwarded from London to Berlin, from where it was transported by a special connecting plane to Friedrichshafen. Beginning with 1934, the British mail was routed to Stuttgart (instead of Berlin), and later on such mail was routed on the first possible connection, regardless of which route this was (Berlin, Stuttgart or direct to Friedrichshafen).

Prior to 1934, mail for carriage by Zeppelin was only accepted from Participating Nations (those to which the airship flew) and Treaty Nations (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. British India mail was accepted prior to 1934 with British mixed franking with India postage paying the base rates and the British postage paying the Zeppelin fee as

England was treaty country. Mail from French India was following a different payment scheme; however, courtesy acceptances from both, British and French India, without proper zeppelin postage are also documented. From the end of 1933, the Zeppelin fee was no longer collected based on a special contract but was rather based on a UPU scheme: mail was flown as long as the country of origin had issued a special airmail rate for mail to South America (fig. 2).

The Aden cover and its journey

From 1838 until 1937, Aden was governed as part of British India and was known as the Aden Settlement. The port lies about equidistant from the Suez Canal, Mumbai (Bombay), and Zanzibar, which were all important British possessions. The Aden Settlement used adhesive postage stamps of British India from October 1, 1854 until Aden became a crown colony on April 1, 1937. During this period, the Aden Post Office was administratively under the Bombay G.P.O.

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 Aden until 1937. The total postage on this cover is 13 1/2 annas (16 annas = 1 Rupee under the fractional currency system in use until 1957). 13 1/3 Rupees were equivalent to 1 Pound Sterling at that time. Postage rates for foreign mail from Aden were the same as from India: 3 1/2as. letter rate for Brazil + 6as. air fee + 3as. registration fee = 12 1/2as. 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). 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 operating once a week to South America, and flights were departing the night of



Fig. 2: from Delhi to Recife by Graf Zeppelin in June 1934, with the correct endorsement 'By Airship Graf Zeppelin via London/Overland', and a 'By Airship Graf Zeppelin' etiquette. See fig. 4 for the alteration by the authorities in Germany.



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Wednesday/Thursday from Germany. As stated earlier, this weekly service was operated by the Deutsche Lufthansa catapult service and by the airship operated by Luftschiffbau Zeppelin GmbH respectively on an alternating week basis.

That this cover was intended to be flown by Zeppelin is evident from the routing instruction. On the top left corner of the cover, the red manuscript reads 'Par dirigeable Graf Zeppelin via London/Overland'. The routing instruction was later partially obscured by the 'Mit Deutscher Luftpost' German airmail etiquette (fig. 4). With the October 30 arrival at Berlin, the cover had clearly 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 (fig. 6) also matches the arrival date of the October 31 DLH flight.

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 (fig. 5) was serviced at Stuttgart. While the Zeppelin was departing from



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

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 by regular train services, airmail services, or a mixture of both. 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."

Acknowledgements & references

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