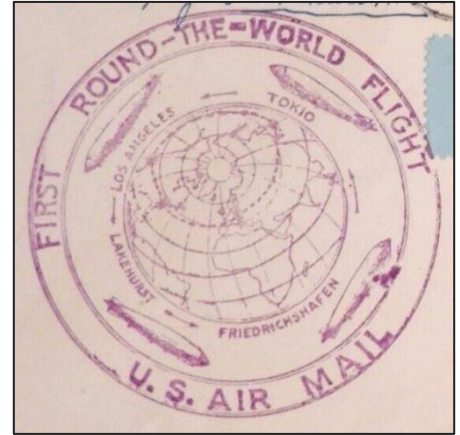


A Not Nearly Round-the-World Cover

By Patrick Crosby

Letters and cards were eagerly sent by stamp collectors to be placed on a 1929 round-the-world flight on no less than the German airship L.Z. 127, the *Graf Zeppelin*. The mailed articles were also to receive a large, attractive "Round-the-World" handstamp cachet. Now, a cover that made it all around the world, or at least across an ocean, on a zeppelin is certainly desirable. But I am happy with the featured postal card from the same flight which never left the United States. First some background.

The United States Post Office Department (USPOD) accepted a suggestion by Germany to participate in flying covers and cards (private postcards or government postal cards) on the *Graf Zeppelin* "...scheduled to sail August 7, 1929, on a round the world cruise starting and ending at Lakehurst, NJ via Friedrichshafen, Germany, Tokio, Japan, and Los Angeles, Calif." The airship would then fly back to Germany. Not just mail was carried, but it was said that the passenger list looked like an international *Who's Who*. Mail for the flight had been forwarded to New York, NY (and later to Los Angeles, CA) from post offices across the nation whose postmasters had been notified.



Handstamp cachet used on flights.



This cover was prepared in Los Angeles and flown to Lakehurst, NJ.

Departure was at 12:40 a.m., Aug. 8, 1929, and the airship cruised at an average speed of 70.7 mph for 21,200 miles in just under 21 days, 8 hours. Including all the varied flight destination possibilities for collectors, 43,000 pieces of mail were carried. Most of the USPOD mail was prepared in New York, NY, but covers for the last legs of the journey, like the featured **cover above**, were prepared in Los Angeles, CA, using the same round cachet as New York but only if the cover's cross-country trip ended in Lakehurst, since some covers remained on the return flight to Germany.

There were different letter and card fees depending on which segments of the flight a cover was to travel, which a sender was to note on the front of the cover. Card fees were half those of letters. For examples, Lakehurst to Germany - letter \$1, card 50¢; Lakehurst to Tokyo - letter \$2, card \$1. Round the world (Lakehurst to Lakehurst) letter - \$3.50, card \$1.75. These were special fees for being aboard the *Graf Zeppelin* and additional regular USPOD international postage rates were required – 5¢ for letters and 3¢ for cards. Not all mail for the flight was posted in the U.S., so there are foreign usages to collect.

The above rates were first published in the *Postal Bulletin* of Aug. 1, 1929, the flight departed Lakehurst Aug. 8, 1929, but it wasn't until the Aug. 15, 1929, *Postal Bulletin* that the fees and postage for the last spans of the journey were announced, and these were for the combined charge (fees and U.S. postage). From Los Angeles to Lakehurst - letter 60¢, card 30¢. The featured card is overpaid by 1¢, but the large 10¢ (Sc. C10) and 20¢ (Sc. C9) airmail stamps are more appropriate than the 29¢ in added definitive stamps sometimes seen on this 1¢ postal card. The sender correctly marked the card "By German Airship L.Z. 127 from Los Angeles to Lakehurst N.J."

The *Graf Zeppelin* touched down in Los Angeles from Tokyo on Aug. 25, 1929. The featured card was then placed on board and flew only cross-country.

Cards arriving at Lakehurst at the end of the cruise were postmarked with a light green, dated International machine cancel illustrated with a zeppelin and "Graf Zeppelin Round-the-World Flight" within.



Items that were to continue on the return trip to Germany did not receive this cancel.

Now for the special (to me) part. Jan. 1, 1949 is generally considered the first day there was a domestic airmail card rate. This meant 4¢ for a card and 6¢ for a letter, and a new airmail postal card was issued. But over 20 years previously, for one day and one day only (Aug. 28, 1929), there was a domestic airmail card rate in effect of 30¢ for the last leg of the Round-the-World *Graf Zeppelin* cruise, Los Angeles, CA to Lakehurst, NJ.

Note that the much-desired U.S. *Graf Zeppelin* airmail stamps (Sc. C13, C14 and C15) were not issued until 1930, meant for a different special flight of the *Graf Zeppelin*, the Europe-Pan American Round flight. In browsing USPOD *Postal Bulletins* I found these high value stamps (65¢, \$1.30, and \$2.60) presented a unique problem – the stamps were being removed while covers were in transit. A district postal inspector was to be notified of every such occurrence and "...all such depredations shall be traced to its source." If time allowed, senders (collectors) were to be notified so new covers could be prepared.

References:

- Donald B. Holmes, *Air Mail an Illustrated History 1793-1981* (Clarkson N. Potter, New York, NY, 1981)
- *The Postal Bulletin* (Washington D.C.) (esp. Nos. 15059, 15071, 15280) available for free at www.uspostalbulletins.com
- Anthony S. Wawrukiewicz and Henry W. Beecher, *U.S. Domestic Postal Rates, 1872-2011* (Bellefonte, PA: American Philatelic Society, 2011) [Available from APS]

Patrick Crosby is a member of the Nevada Stamp Study Society and collects U.S. postal stationery, stamps and post-cards with an emphasis on postal history.