

The Cover Story

Oh, The Things you can Learn Stamp Collecting! The 1930 U.S. Graf Zeppelin Postage Stamps

by Mike Schumacher

The Zeppelin was a type of rigid airship named after the German Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin [**Figure A1, on front cover**] who pioneered rigid airship development at the beginning of the 20th century. Zeppelin's notions were first formulated in 1874 and developed in detail in 1893. They were patented in Germany in 1895 and in the United States in 1899. After the outstanding success of the Zeppelin design, the word zeppelin came to be commonly used to refer to all rigid airships. The principal feature of Zeppelin's design was a fabric-covered rigid metal framework made up from transverse rings and longitudinal girders containing a number of individual gasbags. Zeppelins were first flown commercially in 1910 by Deutsche Luftschiffahrts-AG (DELAG). By mid-1914, DELAG had carried over 10,000 fare-paying passengers on over 1,500 flights.

In 1928, the Graf Zeppelin set new long-distance airship records. In honor of its achievements, the Zeppelin Company planned for the Graf Zeppelin to fly to Europe, Brazil and Rio de Janeiro. In an agreement with The German Zeppelin Airship Works and as a good will gesture toward Germany, the United States Post Office produced a set of 3 separate Airmail postage stamps that commemorated the Graf Zeppelin and the coming transatlantic flight, which were used to pay the postage for mail carried aboard the Zeppelin. Mail would be carried and delivered from Germany to points in North and South America and back again.

The three stamps all featured the Graf Zeppelin in various configurations. The stamps were issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing* and debuted in Washington D.C. on April 19, 1930, one month before the historic trans-Atlantic first flight was made. The stamps were also placed on sale at other selected post offices on April 21, 1930.

65¢ Graf Zeppelin over the Atlantic [Figure A2, on front cover]

The green 65-cent Graf Zeppelin stamp depicts the Graf Zeppelin flying eastward over the Atlantic Ocean. Like the other two denominations of \$1.30 and \$2.60 its inscription along the top reads GRAF ZEPPELIN -- EUROPE PAN AMERICAN FLIGHT, and UNITED STATES POSTAGE along the bottom. The lowest of the three denominations, this issue paid the post card rate which were carried on the last leg of the journey from the United States to Seville, Spain. The Scotts catalog number for this issue is C13. Out of one million stamps printed, the total quantities sold for this issue were 93,336.

\$1.30 Graf Zeppelin and map of Atlantic Ocean [Figure A3 on front cover]

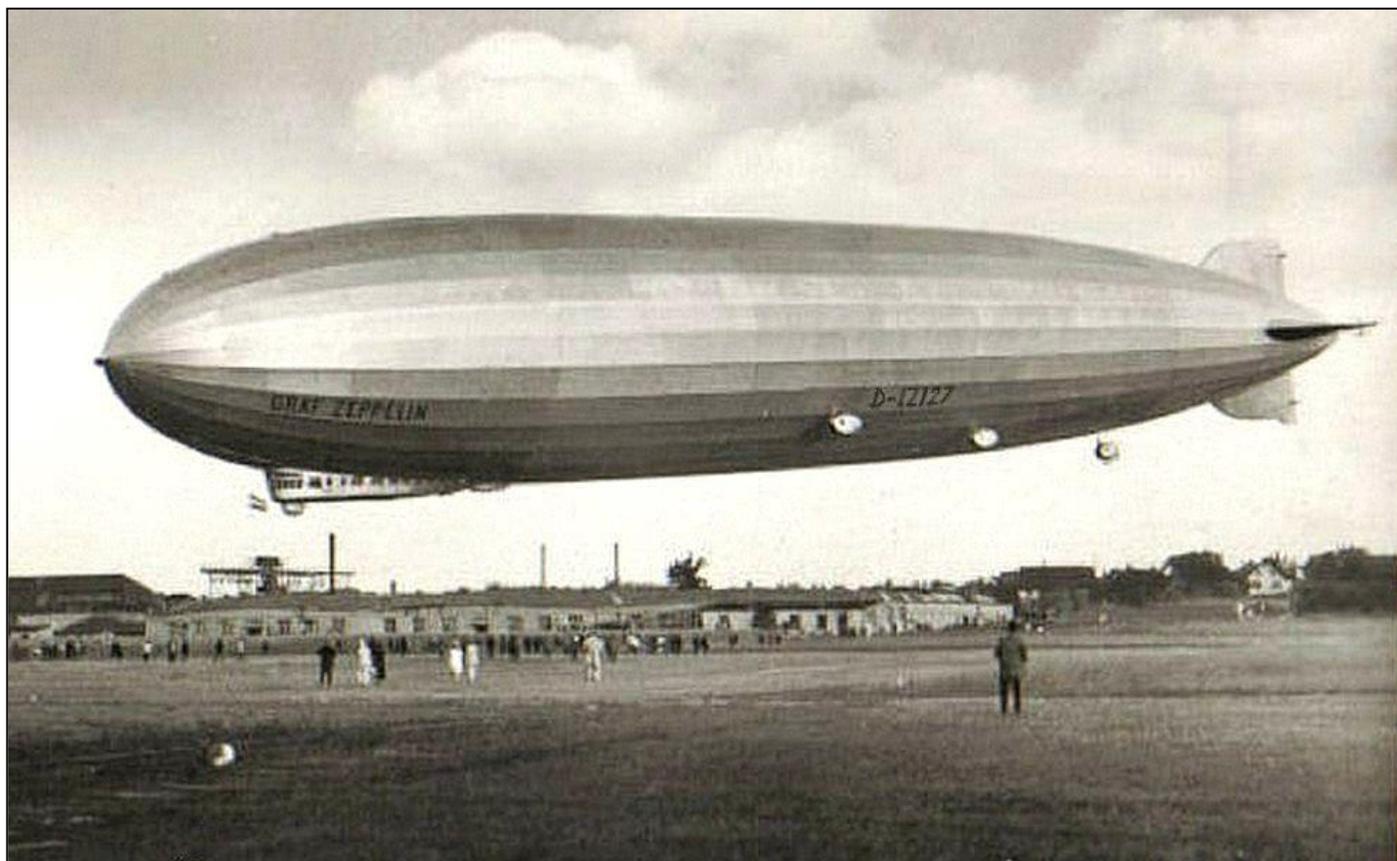
The brown \$1.30 Graf Zeppelin stamp was depicting the Graf Zeppelin flying westward, super-imposed over a map of the continents of Europe and South and North America with the names of various cities depicted in it. This issue paid the postcard and letter rates on the May 1930 Pan American flight that departed from Germany, flying to Brazil and then the United States. Postage rates depended on the distance between points along the route. The Scotts catalog number for this issue is C14. Out of one million stamps printed, the total quantities sold for this issue were only 72,428.

\$2.60 Graf Zeppelin and Globe [Figure A4 on front cover]

The blue \$2.60 Graf Zeppelin stamp depicts the Graf Zeppelin in among clouds and superimposed over a globe and traveling in a westerly direction. This issue was designed by C.A. Huston and A.R. Meissner. The Scotts catalog number for this issue is C15. Out of one million stamps printed, the total quantities sold for this issue were only 61,296.

The \$1.30 and \$2.60 stamps paid the postage for postcards and letters respectively that were carried on the round-trip flight via Friedrichshafen or Seville. The round-trip letter rate was \$3.90, the exact amount which could be paid with the \$2.60 and \$1.30 stamps. Mail franked with the Zeppelin stamps was forwarded to Germany by boat where it was picked up at Friedrichshafen and put aboard the Graf Zeppelin.

The Graf Zeppelin departed from Friedrichshafen, Germany on the May 30, 1930, and returned there on June 6. The week-long flight of the Graf Zeppelin extended from Germany to Brazil and on to the United States and then returned to Friedrichshafen.



Endnote

* The Bureau of Engraving and Printing created plates of two hundred postage stamps situated in four panes consisting of fifty stamps each. The stamps sheets were perforated with 11-gauge perforations. Because a margin (selvage) of paper extended around all four sides of each sheet there are no stamps with straight edges. The three stamps all featured the Graf Zeppelin in various configurations. The set of three stamps shared a common border design inscribed with the words GRAF ZEPPELIN and EUROPE – PAN AMERICAN FLIGHT in upper case letters along near the top of the border, and with the words UNITED STATES POSTAGE, also in upper case, along the bottom border. The stamps were printed in different colors for each denomination with denominations that paid the various rates used along the route on the flight. The attractive stamps were highly publicized but were considered controversial among some collectors of the time and others and refused to purchase these issues, complaining that the Post Office was charging too much while at the same time were trying to drive up the demand for these stamps by destroying the unsold issues. The \$4.55 face value for the set of three stamps represented a lot of money during the depression years of their release. A total of 1,000,000 of each stamp denomination were printed, but only 227,260 stamps in all were sold, or 7% of the total amount printed. The Zeppelin stamps were withdrawn from sale on June 30, 1930 and the remaining stocks were destroyed by the Post Office.