

All Aboard for the *Graf Zeppelin's* Flight Around the World!

Exhibit Synopsis

This Display Class exhibit tells the remarkable story of the *Graf Zeppelin's* 1929 Around-The-World Flight in a manner intended to capture the imaginations of philatelists and non-philatelists alike, by integrating mail from the flight with contemporaneous artifacts that lend unique color, context, and interest to the underlying story.

The flight officially began on August 7, 1929 in Lakehurst, N.J., and concluded there on August 29th of the same year, with intermediate stops at Friedrichshafen, Germany; Tokyo, Japan; and Los Angeles, California. From the alternative German perspective, the flight began in Friedrichshafen on August 15th and ended when the airship returned there on September 4th. Mail from the flight was carried across five flight legs, with dispatches picked up and delivered at each landing site. Dispatches from the United States, Germany, and Japan were carried on the flight, along with mail from six “treaty” states (Danzig, Saar, Austria, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands and Switzerland) that had postal/financial agreements with the zeppelin company.

The exhibit provides comprehensive treatment of the mail from the flight, focusing on rates, routes, and markings. Dispatches from the Americas, Germany, Japan, and each of the “treaty” states are shown, along with examples of mail delivered from the zeppelin in both official and unofficial (“wild”) mail drops. The flown mail is complemented by newspaper headlines that trace the zeppelin’s route, by photos of passengers and crew whose mail is shown, by on-board menus from each flight leg, and by other period items that visually document the flight and help enhance viewer interest.

Treatment: The exhibit’s title is an invitation for viewers to come aboard and explore the philately and history of the *Graf Zeppelin's* Around-The-World Flight. The title page includes statements of purpose and scope that define the subject matter and an outline of the exhibit plan, which corresponds to the zeppelin’s flight path around the world. A brief introduction is also included for context and to set the stage for the exhibit’s content. The title page also alerts the viewer to red borders that have been placed around objects to signify special importance and magnifying glasses that have been co-located with items to highlight pieces discovered by the exhibitor or to denote unusual personal research.

Importance: The *Graf Zeppelin's* Around-The-World Flight was not only a triumph of aviation history, but a groundbreaking event in the development of international air mail, as it demonstrated the ability of rigid airships to deliver mail over vast distances, in record time, and at a reasonable cost. Ultimately, the flight would lay the groundwork for the development of regular airship mail service between Europe and South America (*Graf Zeppelin, 1932-37*) and Europe and North America (*Hindenburg, 1936-37*), reducing mail transit times to less than half of what had been possible with ocean-going mail.

The material in the exhibit was assembled over a period approaching thirty years. The philatelic and collateral material is sourced from dozens of dealers, auctions, and fellow collectors world-wide, both within and outside of philately. A comprehensive exhibit of this flight is extremely challenging given the modest numbers of items flown on many of the flight legs (particularly treaty and drop mail.) The elusiveness of these items is compounded by keen collector interest, which not only sharpens competition, but tends to keep rare items off the market for extended periods of time. The comprehensiveness of the exhibit, its combination of elusive and rare items (see “Rarity” below), the exceptional quality of the items shown, and the breadth of the collateral material make the exhibit impossible to duplicate.

Philatelic and Subject Knowledge: Each object has been carefully selected to develop the story in a comprehensive, accurate, and compelling way, in harmony with the overall exhibit plan. This includes selecting mail with correct franking (where possible), showing mail from passengers and crew, exhibiting original images of those individuals, displaying items addressed to other prominent individuals, incorporating mail to exotic destinations, and including express, special delivery, postage due and “received too late” items. Unusual frankings are included where possible to enhance philatelic interest. The exhibitor has also sought to guide the viewer through the exhibit with concise descriptions and narrative that provide details about the items and their broader place in the story of the flight.

Personal Study and Research: The exhibitor has conducted on-site research into the Around-The-World Flight at the Zeppelin Company Archives in Friedrichshafen, Germany, scoured contemporaneous news accounts, read extensively about the flight in memoirs of its participants, researched international newsreel footage of the voyage, studied images of cards and covers from decades of international auction catalogs, and reviewed relevant materials from the National Geographic Society. The exhibit also features original Swiss postal documents, discovered by the exhibitor, which break down, for the first time, numbers of cards and covers flown from Switzerland and Liechtenstein to Tokyo, Los Angeles, Lakehurst, and Friedrichshafen. Additional items reflecting personal research or discoveries are highlighted with a magnifying glass symbol and accompanying explanations. The exhibitor has also written about the flight in the philatelic press and lectured about the flight at a major philatelic exhibition (GASS 2024).

Rarity and Condition: Much of the treaty and drop mail from the Around-The-World Flight is either elusive or outright rare. There is a census of treaty mail in the dual language treatise “*Zeppelin Weltrundfahrt 1929*” by Hans Sander (1989). That census is corroborated by the Michel and Sieger Zeppelin Post catalogs, which generally agree with Sander’s census numbers. The quantities of official German drop mail were originally recorded by the Zeppelin Company in its archives, and have been republished in the above catalogs. Likewise, U.S. and Japanese postal authorities recorded the numbers of items dispatched on the Around-The-World Flight from their nations. There are no records of the total amount of German mail dispatched from Friedrichshafen, although tallies were maintained for items receiving German “bordpost” cancellations. While the catalogs provide complete information for treaty and drop mail quantities, those numbers denote items *originally flown*, not the numbers of *surviving examples*. It is generally understood that widespread destruction in major German cities during World War II caused substantial philatelic holdings to vanish. Consequently, quantities flown as recorded in *Sander*, *Michel* and *Sieger* do not reflect the quantities that remain today, a reality that is painfully evident when one studies world-wide auction offerings over the past several decades.

The following are some of the elusive and rare items contained in the exhibit, including recorded census numbers from the sources discussed above:

Mail to Friedrichshafen (First Landing)

- Canal Zone Card (quantity undocumented, but known to be very rare. The card in the exhibit is shown in Sander’s book as Fig. 207.)

Mail to Tokyo

- Danzig Card (19 total Covers and Cards Flown)
- Liechtenstein Cover (4 Covers and 8 Cards Flown)
- Netherlands Card (20 total Covers and Cards Flown)

Mail to Los Angeles

- Danzig Card (9 total Covers and Cards Flown)
- Danzig Cover (9 total Covers and Cards Flown)
- Liechtenstein Cover (2 Covers and 0 Cards Flown)

Mail to Friedrichshafen

- Danzig Card (10 Cards Flown)
- Danzig Cover (18 Covers Flown)
- Liechtenstein Cover (3 Covers and 2 Cards Flown)

Lakehurst – Friedrichshafen (Second Landing)

- Canada Card (Unique per Sander; the card in exhibit is shown in his book as Fig. 210)
- Canal Zone Cover (Quantity undocumented, but known to be relatively rare)

German Bordpost - Official and Unofficial ("Wild") Mail Drops

- Berlin Wild Drop Card (quantity undocumented – uncommon)
- Berlin Official Drop Card (69 Cards and Covers Dropped)
- Danzig Drop Card (22 Cards and 1 Cover Dropped)
- Königsberg Drop Card (37 Cards and Covers Dropped)
- Yakutsk, Siberia Drop Card (73 Cards and Covers Dropped)
- Porrentruy, Switzerland Drop Card (24 Cards and 4 Covers Dropped)
- Basel, Switzerland Drop Card (45 Cards and 2 Covers Dropped)

Rare Mixed Frankings (All with Postage Paying Correct Rates for Respective Flight Legs)

- USA/Germany
- Austria/USA
- Germany/Japan
- Japan/USA

Covers Twice Flown via Zeppelin Airships

- 1929 America Flight and 1929 Around-The-World Flight (Unlisted)
- 1929 Around-The-World Flight and 1936 *Hindenburg* 1st North American Flight (Unlisted)

Condition: The exhibitor has sought out the highest quality examples available - a challenging task given the scarcity of so many of the key items in the philatelic marketplace. To the maximum extent possible, the selected cards and covers are free from soil and stains, contain sound examples of affixed postage, and feature clear postal markings. All ephemera in the exhibit has been selected using similar standards, and is, without exception, original to the time period.

Presentation: The exhibitor has sought to arrange page layout and explanatory material in a logical, balanced, and accessible way to enhance the exhibit's interest and overall visual appeal.

References: For the philatelic aspects of the flight, the judges are referred to the following:

1. Sander, Hans. *Zeppelin Weltrundfahrt 1929*. Waldbüttelbrunn, Germany (1989)
2. Hill, James. The 1929 Around-The-World Flight of the Graf Zeppelin. *American Philatelist* (June 2025)
3. *Michel Zeppelin und Flugpost Spezial Katalog*. Schwaneberger Verlag, Unterschleissheim, Germany (2017)
4. *Sieger Zeppelinpost-Katalog*. Sieger-Verlag, Lorch, Württemberg (2001).

All Aboard for the *Graf Zeppelin's* Flight Around the World!

Welcome Aboard!

On this fascinating philatelic journey, you can travel aboard the German airship *Graf Zeppelin* during its iconic 1929 Around-The-World Flight. Throughout August and early September of that year, the giant zeppelin accomplished what no other aircraft had ever done, circumnavigating the globe. The trip would not have been possible without the financial support of stamp collectors across the world, and this exhibit highlights their contribution to the effort through a comprehensive look at their mail from the flight. For added enjoyment, meet passengers and crew who made the journey and see the postcards that they mailed while on board. Get a glimpse into the luxury of zeppelin travel by viewing on-board menus from each of the airship's five flight legs. Follow the *Graf Zeppelin's* progress through newspaper headlines that reported each new triumph as the ship made its way around the globe. Climb on board and witness, through philately, one of the most remarkable achievements in aviation history.

Objective

The objective of this Display Class exhibit is to provide comprehensive treatment of the mail flown on the *Graf Zeppelin's* 1929 Around-The-World Flight, with a traditional emphasis on rates, routes, and markings. To enhance viewer interest, the mail is shown with contemporaneous ephemera that adds color and context to the underlying story.

Scope

Postcards and letters from each of the five flight legs are exhibited, including dispatches from the flight's three official sponsor nations: the United States, Germany, and Japan. Among the German dispatches are scarce examples of "drop mail" delivered from the airship in small mail bags equipped with parachute streamers. Mail is also shown from each of six "treaty states" that had postal agreements with the zeppelin company: Austria, Danzig, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands, Saar, and Switzerland.

Rarities, Research, and Exhibitor Discoveries

A significant number of rarities are shown. These are identified by a red border around the object.

Items discovered by the exhibitor or illuminated through personal research are denoted with a



Exhibit Plan

- I. Hugo Eckener's Dream: An Around-The-World Flight by Airship
- II. Financing the Flight: Newspapers and Philatelists
- III. Destination: Friedrichshafen (First Landing)
- IV. Processing German and Treaty State Mail
- V. Mail Drops on the Friedrichshafen-Tokyo Flight Leg
- VI. Destination: Tokyo
- VII. Destination: Los Angeles
- VIII. Destination: Lakehurst
- IX. Mail Drops on the Second Lakehurst-Friedrichshafen Flight Leg
- X. Destination: Friedrichshafen (Second Landing)
- XI. The Legacy of the Around-The-World Flight

Around
the World
with the
Graf Zeppelin



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