

This Day in History... August 8, 1929

Graf Zeppelin Begins Round-The-World Journey From New Jersey

On August 8, 1929, the *Graf Zeppelin* departed the airfield in Lakehurst, New Jersey, to return 21 days later.

The *Graf Zeppelin* dirigible was named after its designer – Count (“Graf” in German) Ferdinand von Zeppelin. An aluminum-framed, lighter-than-air craft, the *Graf* made its first dramatic trans-Atlantic voyage in 1928. That voyage saw three crew members dangling from the outside of the massive ship, trying to make crucial repairs during a raging storm in the mid-Atlantic! That first trip was riddled with danger, but it ended successfully and those that followed were smoother.

The first attempt to fly the zeppelin around the globe began on May 14, 1929. Engine troubles forced the *Graf* to land in France, after which it was returned to Germany. Mail that was carried aboard this initial flight received a note stating “*Beförderung verzögert wegen Abbruchs der 1. Ameriksfahrt*” (“Delivery delayed due to cancellation of the 1st America trip”). This is sometimes called the “Interrupted America Flight.”



The \$1.30 brown issue (*Zeppelin between continents*) paid the postage of a letter going one way.

ticker-tape parade and he was called the “Magellan of the Air.” He then returned to Friedrichshafen on September 4, after more than a month of piloting the zeppelin around the world.

The popularity of this trip created “Zeppelin Mania” and inspired several later flights. The following year, the *Graf Zeppelin* made another trip across the Atlantic, and the US issued three stamps to frank mail on that flight.

Graf Zeppelin Airmail Stamps

The *Graf Zeppelin* quickly became an international sensation. The 1920s had seen several amazing advances in technology, and Charles Lindbergh’s incredible 1927 non-stop flight from New York City to Paris had captured the world’s attention.

Still, many Americans had never seen an airplane flying. It was hard for them to imagine a 776-foot German airship flying overhead at 80 miles per hour! So the announcement that this technological wonder was traveling to the US in 1930 on a round-trip voyage between Europe and North and South America generated a lot of excitement – welcome news in the midst of the Great Depression.

To mark the occasion – and help fund the trip – the United States issued three airmail stamps. It was the only official flight for which the Zeppelin airmail stamps were issued. The “Zeps” documented for all time the importance of the giant aircraft in the development of world airmail service. They were also issued in limited quantities – fewer than 94,000 of each denomination, and the unsold stamps were later destroyed.



Stamp issued for the Century of Progress Exposition in 1933.



The 65¢ green issue (*Zeppelin over the Atlantic*) paid the postage for a post card traveling via *Graf Zeppelin* one way.

The zeppelin finally left Friedrichshafen on August 1 and arrived safely in Lakehurst on August 5. Though the flight had begun in Germany, newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst made a deal with the trip’s planner and pilot Dr. Hugo Eckener to claim Lakehurst as the trip’s starting point. Hearst had supplied much of the necessary funds to make the trip possible, and also got exclusive reporting rights.

So the trip from Lakehurst began on August 8, passing the Statue of Liberty, one of Hearst’s requirements. The crew of 40, plus 22 passengers and thousands of pieces of mail, reached Friedrichshafen on August 10. Among the passengers was correspondent Lady Grace Drummond-Hay, who became the first woman to circumnavigate the earth by air on that trip. From there it made stops in Japan and Los Angeles before returning to Lakehurst on August 29. The 21-day, 5½-hour trip was the fastest up to that point.

Thousands of people around the world looked to the skies to watch the *Graf* fly over their homes. When it returned to Lakehurst, Dr. Eckener was honored with a



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Americans scrambled to buy the stamps and send mail aboard this historic flight. The stamps were placed on sale April 19, 1930. To send a letter aboard the *Graf Zeppelin*’s round trip, one had to buy the stamps, affix them to the postcard or letter, and place it in the mail in New York City or Lakehurst, New Jersey, to be canceled. The mail was then sent by steamer to Germany and placed aboard the airship for its three-day journey to Brazil. The *Graf Zeppelin* then flew to New Jersey, where more mail and passengers joined for the final leg of the trip to the airship’s home base, Friedrichshafen. Mail could also be sent on portions of the journey.

The *Graf Zeppelin*’s history included many records, chief among them: it was the only airship to fly around the world. Its safety record was also impressive – not a single passenger or crew member was harmed on the daring *Graf Zeppelin* flights. The stamps and covers carried aboard the *Graf Zeppelin* have fascinated collectors from that time on – and they always will.

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