

## How many Nicaragua 1930 Graf Zeppelin flight covers are there?

Europe - Pan America flight occurred in May-June • No landing at Havana

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In 2015, Daniel F. Kelleher Auctions of Danbury, Connecticut, sold a few 1930 Zeppelin flight covers franked with stamps from Nicaragua.

I noted that each lot was described in the same manner. In particular, each cover was listed as being "exceptionally rare with Sieger reporting only eleven mixed franking items flown, this being one of only six covers with the \$1.30 Zeppelin stamp." <sup>1</sup> Reference to two Zeppelin catalog numbers followed: Michel No. 68Gb and Sieger No. 64IX. <sup>2,3</sup>

The Sieger *Zeppelin Post Katalog* in effect records that five cards and six covers were carried on the 1930 Europe-Pan America flight. I remembered seeing these covers on sale regularly in previous years, so I wondered if auction firms were offering the same covers over and over. Because all covers look very similar, I decided to challenge the Sieger census.

### Historical background

The severe limitations that the Allies imposed on Germany after World War I included halting the production of the large rigid airships called zeppelins. Only after the United States Navy ordered an airship in 1924 was Luftschiffbau Zeppelin GmbH

(the zeppelin manufacturing company) again allowed to operate. The company then produced the LZ-126, which the United States renamed *USS Los Angeles*.

The company's next new airship was the LZ-127, named the *Graf Zeppelin*. Ownership was transferred to the Deutsche-Luftschiffahrts-Aktiengesellschaft company (DELAG), the commercial affiliate of the Zeppelin company that operated the zeppelin flights from 1905 until spring 1935, except during WWI.

The *Graf Zeppelin* was christened on July 8, 1928. It made test flights in Germany and in October 1928 flew to the United States. In early 1929, it made two Mediterranean flights, and in August 1929 it became the first airship to completely circumnavigate the earth (northern hemisphere).

To promote commercial use of zeppelins, the LZ-127 carried passengers and mail. For its inaugural flight to South America, the plan was to depart from Germany for Brazil and then fly to the United States before returning to Germany, with intermediate stops or mail drops in or over Spain, the Canary Islands, Cuba, and Spain again. The actual stops made on the flight and their dates are listed in the box below, left. Mail drops also were made over the Cape Verde Islands and Bahia, Brazil. <sup>4</sup>

For the May-June 1930 flight, called the 1930 Europe – Pan America flight, an advertisement instructed collectors to send their mail to F. W. von Meister, the agent in New York City. Von Meister would ensure proper distribution to company agents in the various countries where a stop was expected. The advertisement stated that they will "collect, list and number letters and postal cards which are addressed to be forwarded via Graf Zeppelin." <sup>5</sup>

For the intermediate stop planned in Cuba, dealers prepared a number of covers and cards to be flown from Managua, Nicaragua, to Cuba, then to be flown on the *Graf Zeppelin* from Havana to Lakehurst, New Jersey, and then to Germany.

Unfortunately, because of a severe storm, the *Graf Zeppelin* made no stop at or mail drop over Cuba. Instead, mail that had arrived at Havana for Lakehurst was carried by boat to New York City, including the covers airmailed from Nicaragua.

On April 19, 1930, the United States issued three

### Europe – Pan America Flight of the *Graf Zeppelin*, May-June 1930

Friedrichshafen, Germany, to Seville, Spain, to Recife and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to Recife, to Lakehurst, New Jersey, and to Friedrichshafen, Germany

Depart	From	To	Arrive
05-18	Friedrichshafen	Seville	05-19
05-20	Seville	Recife	05-22
05-24	Recife	Rio de Janeiro	05-25
05-25	Rio de Janeiro	Recife	05-26
05-28	Recife	Lakehurst	05-31
06-03	Lakehurst	Seville	06-05
06-05	Seville	Friedrichshafen	06-06

Connecting airplane flights carried mail from non-contract countries, including Nicaragua, to the contract countries where the zeppelin landed.

airmail stamps for use on the 1930 Pan-American flight (Scott C13-C15). The zeppelin company and the U.S. Post Office Department shared the proceeds from the sale of the stamps. With the U.S. stamps alone, the DELAG received \$100,000.<sup>6</sup>

Special handstamps or cachets were prepared for each demonstration flight. Covers carried in 1930 from



Figure 1. Flight cachet applied in the United States by the U.S. Post Office Department to covers for the 1930 Europe-Pan America flight of the *Graf Zeppelin*. It was applied in purple.



Figure 2. On-board cachet, applied in red by crew on board the *Graf Zeppelin*. The cachet refers to the Europe – Pan America flight as the Südamerikafahrt 1930, or the South America flight.



Figure 3. The two arrival postmarks used at Friedrichshafen, Germany, in June 1930 on *Graf Zeppelin* covers and cards.

Lakehurst to Germany show two souvenir cachets. The U.S. Post Office Department applied the purple diamond shaped marking pictured in **Figure 1**.

A circular cachet in red, shown in **Figure 2**, was applied on board the *Graf Zeppelin*.

Covers carried on a commercial zeppelin flight were postmarked on arrival at Friedrichshafen, Germany. For the 1930 Europe-Pan America flight, Friedrichshafen used two June 6, 1930, postmarks. They are a circular handstamped marking and a roller marking with killer bars. **Figure 3** pictures them. "Bodensee" is the German name for Lake Constance.

## Census

Because I do not have access to a philatelic library where auction catalogs are kept, I had to rely on information available online. Even with this limitation, I was able to locate more covers than what the Sieger catalog accounts for. What follows are the results of my research and study.

### 1) A Kummer card and a Kummer cover

I found one card and one cover addressed to Mrs. A. Kummer, Cottbus, Germany. Affixed to the card, shown in **Figure 4**, are the following stamps of Nicaragua: a 2-centavo León Cathedral of 1914 (Scott 410), a 25-centavo Airplanes Over Mount Momotombo of 1929 (C4), and a 1-centavo R. de C. postal tax stamp of 1929 (RA40).

In addition, the card bears a United States 65¢ *Graf Zeppelin Over Ocean* stamp (Scott C13), for the postage fee for carriage of a card to Germany on the *Graf Zeppelin*.

The cover to A. Kummer, shown on page 4 in **Figure 5**, bears the same Nicaragua franking, but a



Figure 4. Card from Managua to New York City (under separate cover), then by the *Graf Zeppelin* to Friedrichshafen, Germany.





Figure 5. Envelope from Managua to New York City (under separate cover), then by the *Graf Zeppelin* to Friedrichshafen, Germany.

\$1.35 Graf Zeppelin Over Atlantic stamp (Scott C14) is affixed to the cover for the postage rate for carriage of a letter (envelope) to Germany on the *Graf Zeppelin*.

The Kummer mailpieces were not registered. They were flown from Managua to New York City under separate cover or with a removable label. They each bear on their fronts the following postmarks in addition to the flight cachets: two boxed Managua May 20, 1930, postmarks in violet, and a New York City, Varick St. Sta., May 24, 1930, duplex postmark.

I do not have images of the backs, but the cover is described as backstamped with the scarce Friedrichshafen wavy lines roller shown in Figure 3.

The frankings on the Kummer card and the Kummer cover show that they were prepared in advance. Effective May 15, 1929, through May 14, 1930, an envelope required 2 centavos postage plus 1 centavo R. de C. postal tax for surface mail to the United States. If carried by Pan American Airways to Miami, an additional 25 centavos was required.

Had the Kummer items been franked when they were actually mailed (May 20, 1930), they would have required an airmail rate of 15 centavos. The rate was reduced effective May 15, 1930.

For surface mail, the Kummer card required only 1 centavo postage and 1 centavo postal tax, so it is overpaid by 1 centavo.

The absence of a U.S. address and addressee and of a Miami postmark on the Kummer cover and card indicate that they were mailed under cover to a contact in probably New York City who ensured that the U.S. Graf Zeppelin stamps were affixed.

## 2) Behrens cards

For the 1930 Europe-Pan America flight, I located images of four cards prepared for Behrens-Neuheiten-

Dienst, a German producer of philatelic items. Figure 6 pictures one such card, postmarked and registered at Managua May 15, 1930.

The printed cards name as the addressee Behrens in Braunschweig. This means they were mail to be carried from Cuba to Germany, as confirmed by the “De Habana à Friedrichshafen” directive in French lightly handstamped in purple at the left side of the Figure 6 card. This directive indicated the expected planned flight for the card on the *Graf Zeppelin*: Havana via Lakehurst to Friedrichshafen. As noted, the stop at Havana did not happen.

Behrens used a network of agents to ensure the delivery of its covers and cards. An agent acting on behalf of Behrens registered the cards in Managua and sent them to Cuba. The cards bear the following Nicaragua stamps: front, 5-centavo National Palace (Scott 488), 50-centavo Airplanes (C5), two 15c on 25c Airplanes (C7), and two 20c on 25c Airplanes



Figure 6. Registered card printed with two Graf Zeppelin directives, one red and one black. The black directive is handstamped in purple with a directive for Havana. The card was not flown on the *Graf Zeppelin*.

(C8); back, 1c National Palace (513), 10c León Cathedral (490). The stamps total 136 centavos.

Understanding the frankings on the Behrens cards and covers is not as simple as the Kummer items. The absence of Cuban stamps on the card demonstrates that Behrens expected that the DELAG company operating the *Graf Zeppelin* would accept and carry covers from other countries sent to Cuba to be picked up. I am aware of a Panama cover that transited Cuba before being picked up by the *Graf Zeppelin* in the United States at Lakehurst.

Part of the franking on the Figure 6 card can be explained as follows: 6 centavos for a card mailed to a foreign country (not a member of the Pan American Postal Union) and 10 centavos for registration. The 6-centavo card rate was in effect from April 1, 1921, through September 14, 1930.

Because the 15-centavo-on-25-centavo Airplanes stamp (C7) was issued May 15, 1930, it is clear that the cards were not franked in advance, unlike the Kummer items. The airmail rate then was 15 centavos from Managua to Cuba via Pan American Airways (same rate to North America).

I did not find any information on the rate for the Havana-Friedrichshafen leg (via Lakehurst) of the planned but canceled Graf Zeppelin flight from Havana. I assume that the airmail stamps overpayment of 105 centavos would represent the cost of the zeppelin flight.

After it became known that the *Graf Zeppelin* would not stop in Cuba, an agent in Havana or Cuban officials forwarded the cards to Behrens in Germany. They would have been carried by ship from Havana to Germany by closed bag, because the cards bear no transit U.S. registry marking.

The cards were postmarked in Braunschweig on June 1, 1930, a few days before the arrival of the *Graf Zeppelin* in Germany. Accordingly, the cards bear neither the special zeppelin handstamped cachets nor a U.S. Graf Zeppelin stamp.

It was only in May 2020 that I noted the existence of the Behrens cards. One card was listed in December 2019 by an European auction firm. Its description correctly stated that, if the card were intended to be carried by the *Graf Zeppelin*, it was not so transported. Accompanied by a Sieger certificate, the lot sold for 185 euros.

Two similar cards were offered on eBay in March 2020 and April 2020. Unfortunately I did not keep the description of the March 2020 lot. When I look at

the amount paid (\$1,350), I seriously doubt that the new owner knew he was purchasing an item that was not carried on the *Graf Zeppelin* or any zeppelin (or perhaps he did know).

The Behrens card offered in April 2020 did not fly on the *Graf Zeppelin*, but it was priced at a hefty 1,199 euros, with a clear (but incorrect) reference to the First Europe-Pan America flight (Michel 68, Sieger 64 IX), while stating it was handled in Braunschweig on June 1, 1930, during the hour 5 a.m. to 6 a.m. (in the postmark "1-6. 30. 5-6V").

### 3) Behrens covers

In addition to cards, Behrens-Neuheiten-Dienst prepared covers. Behrens did not use the service of F.W. von Meister, the Luftschiffbau Zeppelin agent in New York City. Instead, the firm made its own arrangements with Victor Weiskopf of New York City, the first addressee printed on the covers.

Weiskopf was responsible for collecting the flight covers, for ensuring the U.S. stamp was affixed, and for forwarding the covers to Germany via zeppelin. **Figure 7** shows the front of one such cover. **Figure 8** on page 6 shows its back.

Behrens Nicaragua covers all bear the same stamps: front, 50-centavo Airplanes (Scott C5), two 15c on 25c Airplanes (C7), two 20c on 25c Airplanes (C8), and a U.S. \$1.30 Graf Zeppelin Over Atlantic stamp (C14), for the zeppelin postage to Germany; back, 2-centavo León Cathedral (410), 4-centavo León Cathedral (487), and 1-centavo Numeral postal



**Figure 7.** Registered cover printed with two Graf Zeppelin directives, one red and one black. The black directive is covered by the U.S. stamp. The cover was flown on the *Graf Zeppelin* from Lakehurst to Germany.





Figure 8. The back of the Figure 7 cover mailed May 15, 1930, from Managua, to Havana, New York City, and Braunschweig, Germany.

tax (RA37), for a total of 127 centavos. Other than the Graf Zeppelin flight cachets on the front, the following markings are present on the covers:

- Managua violet box – May 15, 1930 (front)
- Managua red registration box – (front)
- Habana black circle – May 18, 1930 (back)
- New York black registry oval – May 22, 1930 (back)
- New York red registry oval – May 23, 1930 (back)
- New York black duplex – May 27, 1930 (front)
- Friedrichshafen arrival circle – June 1, 1930 (back)

Again, the absence of Cuban stamps on the covers demonstrates that Behrens expected that the *Graf Zeppelin*, if it had landed in Havana, would accept and carry covers from other countries sent to Cuba to be picked up.

Because the covers are addressed to Victor Weiskopf in New York City, I believe that the Nicaragua franking needed only to cover the cost of the airmail from Managua to Cuba plus the Havana-Lakehurst leg of the zeppelin flight.

If covers were to be carried from Cuba to Germany, they would have been addressed only to Behrens in Braunschweig.

As with the Behrens cards, the Behrens covers were not franked prior to May 15. This is attested by the presence of two 15c-on-25c Airplanes stamps (C7, issued May 15) and two 20c-on-25c Airplanes stamps (C8) on the front of the cover.

Both Cuba and the United States were members of the Unión Postal Panamericana, and the letter rate to either from Nicaragua was the same.

The registration box provides the weight of a Behrens cover: 15 grams. The Pan American airmail rate was set by ¼ ounce increments, or 14 grams.

Because a Behrens cover exceeded ¼ ounce by 1 gram, it required a double airmail rate. The letter rate within the Unión Postal Panamericana was per 20 grams, requiring only one letter rate. The franking is then explained as follow: 3 centavos for letter and tax, 3 centavos for registration, 30 centavos for airmail, leaving a balance of 91 centavos for the Havana-Lakehurst flight.

Ten Behrens covers are included in my census, and they all look very similar. I tried using various markers to distinguish them: Managua registration number and the size of the blue X, the location of the cachets on the cover, the position of the New York City duplex cancel, the alignment of the handwritten letter under the “from Habana to Lakehurst” printed in red, and various marks such as the presence of excess ink.

Finally, only the position of the New York City duplex postmark provided a unique discriminatory criterion. The ten covers are pictured on page 8. The cover shown in Figure 7 and Figure 8 is repeated as cover No. 5. The text under each cover describes the location of the New York City duplex in relation to the word “befördern” printed at center left.

It is interesting to note that a Behrens cover was used to illustrate the 20-córdoba souvenir sheet issued in 1980 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the death of Sir Rowland Hill. Figure 9 pictures



Figure 9. The Behrens cover pictured on this 1980 souvenir sheet is cover No. 10 in the Behrens census, shown on page 8.





Figure 10. The stamp designer altered the location of the U.S. stamp on the Behrens cover shown on these 1980 Rowland Hill stamps.

this sheet. The multipurpose sheet (Scott 2160) also noted Nicaragua's participation in the 1980 Olympic Games and the 1979 Year of Liberation. This cover is included in the census as cover No. 10, shown on page 8.

Part of cover No. 8 in the census is pictured on the 5-córdoba stamp in each of two sets issued to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the death of Sir Rowland Hill. **Figure 10** pictures both stamps.

One stamp has the overprint for the Year of Liberation and the Moscow Olympics in red (Scott 2145), and the other stamp has it in silver (2220). On each stamp, the image of the cover does not match the image of cover No. 8, and I believe that the stamp designer edited the image of the cover.

The \$1.30 Graf Zeppelin stamp was cropped and moved almost two centimeters to the right so that its left edge would appear within the interior frame of the 5-córdoba stamp to be issued. A distinguishing characteristic of cover No. 8 is the position of the time "4 P M" in the New York, N.Y., postmark at the front of the body of the *Graf Zeppelin*.

#### 4) A Philipp Kosack cover

Philipp Kosack & Company, another German philatelic firm, also prepared covers to be carried by the *Graf Zeppelin* from Lakehurst to Friedrichshafen. Ernesto Hammer was his agent in Nicaragua.

Hammer franked the cover, shown in **Figure 11**, with a "Correo Aéreo / 1929 / P.A.A" overprinted 25-centavo orange National Palace stamp (Scott C1), a "Correo Aéreo / 1929 / P.A.A" overprinted black brown 25-centavo National Palace stamp (C2), a 25-centavo Airplanes stamp (C4), a 50-centavo Airplanes (C5), a 1-córdoba Airplanes (C6), a 15c-on-25c Airplanes with double overprint (C7b), a 20c-on-25c Airplanes with inverted overprint (C8b), and 25-centavo dark violet National Palace stamp (521), for a total of 2.85 cordobas.

The cover bears the following markings:

- Managua red box – May 15, 1930 (front)
- Managua red registration box – (front)
- Miami purple registry circle – May 15, 1930 (back)
- New York black foreign oval – May 19, 1930 (back)
- Berlin black arrival circle – May 29, 1930 (back)

The red registration box stamped on the cover provides the weight of the cover: 10 grams. The cover



Figure 11. This Philipp Kosack cover was prepared for carriage by the *Graf Zeppelin*, but it did not fly on board the *Graf Zeppelin*.





Cover 2. New York duplex postmark circle aligned under "er" of "befördern"



Cover 3. New York duplex postmark circle aligned under "ör" of "befördern"



Cover 4. New York duplex postmark circle aligned under "de" of "befördern"



Cover 6. New York duplex postmark circle aligned under "be" of "befördern" and top of circle on third horizontal line



Cover 7. New York duplex postmark circle aligned under "ö" of "befördern" and top of circle on third horizontal line



Cover 8. New York duplex postmark circle aligned under "ö" of "befördern" and top of circle on second horizontal line



Cover 9. New York duplex postmark circle aligned under "ör" of "befördern" and top of circle between second and third line



Cover 1. Front and back.  
New York duplex postmark circle aligned under "be" of "befördern" and top of circle on second horizontal line



Cover 10. New York duplex postmark circle aligned under "d" of "befördern" and top of circle just above second horizontal line



Cover 5. Front and back.  
New York duplex postmark circle aligned under "fö" of "befördern" (also pictured in Figure 7 and Figure 8)



is preprinted with the directives "VIA AIR MAIL" in blue and "MIAMI-LAKEHURST" in red.

The franking is explained as follow: 10 centavos for the letter rate to Europe (for the first 20 grams or less), 10 centavos for registration, and 15 centavos for airmail. This leaves a balance of 2.50 córbobas for the Lakehurst-Friedrichshafen *Graf Zeppelin* flight.

There is no U.S. address or addressee named on the front of the cover. It appears that Kusack would have relied on the "MIAMI - LAKEHURST" and "(via «GRAF ZEPPELIN») – FRIEDRICHSHAFEN" preprinted directives to ensure that U.S. officials would forward the cover to Lakehurst once it arrived at Miami from Nicaragua.

Service via the *Graf Zeppelin* was refused for the cover because it did not bear a U.S. \$1.30 Graf Zeppelin stamp. The U.S. Post Office Department then sent the cover to Germany by ship, and it was sent onward from Berlin on May 29, 1930.

### Summary

When I started my study, I suspected that the number of covers and cards franked with stamps of Nicaragua and carried in 1930 by the *Graf Zeppelin* was understated, but I did not know to what extent.

Based on the Sieger census, I know that there are at least five cards. Until I have more accurate information, I have to assume that the Figure 4 Kummer card I found was accounted for by Sieger.

Sieger, however, is clearly understating the numbers of covers. Sieger lists only six covers, and I identified 11 (one Kummer and 10 Behrens). Perhaps Sieger might have reported only covers that were accounted for by F.W. von Meister, the Luftschiffbau Zeppelin representative in New York City. Page 8 shows the 10 Behrens covers, including the cover also pictured in Figure 7 and Figure 8. Cover 1 and Cover 5 are out of order.

A few questions remain. As a producer of philatelic items, Behrens would have wanted to include all legs of the flight. Why did I find only Behrens cards for the Cuba-Germany flight and no cover for the same flight? The same question exists for the Cuba-United States leg of the flight: Were there any cards prepared? I would expect to see cards.

It would be interesting to locate a document that would provide the costs for cards and covers to be carried by the *Graf Zeppelin* from Havana to Lakehurst and from Havana to Friedrichshafen.

Such a document, if it were to exist, could help confirm the frankings applied by the agents

in Nicaragua. None of the Nicaragua frankings are understood, and they might be deliberately high.

Keeping a census is a work in progress. To strengthen this research, I would like to hear, via the editor, from readers who have new information about covers or cards from Nicaragua related to the 1930 Europe-Pan America flight of the *Graf Zeppelin*, its inaugural flight to South America.

### Sources of cover images

#### Kummer

- Card No. 1 Shreves Sale No. 87, Nov. 29, 2006, Lot 576  
Spink Shreves Sale 99, Feb. 28-29, 2008, Lot 1098

#### Kummer

- Cover No. 1 Shreves Sale No. 87, Nov. 29, 2006 Lot 577  
Spink Shreves Sale No. 99, Feb. 28-29, 2008 Lot 1097

#### Berhens

- Cover No. 1 Shreves Sale No. 87, Nov. 29, 2006 Lot 578  
Spink Shreves Sale No. 99, Feb. 28-29, 2008 Lot 1099  
For sale on eBay by vendor germanpostalhistory who uses the name gothicstamps on delcampe.com  
Cover No. 2 Kelleher Sale No. 631, Aug. 23-25, 2012, Lot 544  
Cover No. 3 Kelleher Sale No. 631, Aug. 23-25, 2012, Lot 545  
Cover No. 4 Kelleher Sale No. 652, May 21-22, 2014, Lot 1569  
Cover No. 5 Kelleher Sale No. 655, Sept. 9-10, 2014, Lot 1392  
Cover No. 6 Kelleher Sale No. 660, Oct. 25-26, 2014, Lot 3132  
Kelleher Sale No. 668, Oct. 5-6, 2015, Lot 1558  
Cover No. 7 Kelleher Sale No. 669, May 7-9, 2015, Lot 4153  
Cover No. 8 Kelleher Sale No. 672, Aug. 4-6, 2015, Lot 3817  
Shown partially on stamps Scott 2145 and 2220  
Cover No. 9 HBA (Hamburg), April 7, 1994 (*Nicarao* 4:4, page 3)  
Cherrystone June 1997 (*Nicarao* 7:1, page 18)  
Cover No. 10 Illustrated on Nicaragua souvenir sheet Scott 2160

#### Berhens

- Card No. 1 Jennes and Kluettermann Sale No. 76, Dec. 7, 2019, Lot 2363  
Card No. 2 eBay March 22, 2020  
Card No. 3 eBay April 17, 2020  
Card No. 4 *Nicarao*, July 1998, page 19

#### Kosack

- Cover No. 1 <https://www.worthpoint.com/worthopedia>

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Daniel F. Kelleher Auctions LLC, sale No. 672, lot No. 3817, <https://stampauctionnetwork.com/v/v67291.cfm#247>

<sup>2</sup> *Michel Zeppelin Specialized Catalog*, Schwaneberger Verlag, Munich, 2003. In English. Third edition in German, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> *Zeppelin Post Katalog*, 22nd edition, Sieger-Verlag, Lorch, Württemberg, Germany, 2001. Also 20th edition, 1981.

<sup>4</sup> John Duggan and James Graue, *Commercial Zeppelin Flights to South America*, J.L. Diversified, Valleyford, Washington, 1995, page 15.

<sup>5</sup> W. Curley, *The Graf Zeppelin's Flights to South America 1930-1937*, Cardinal Spellman Philatelic Museum, Weston, Massachusetts, 1970, page 4-9 (9 of section 4).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, page 4-4. ■