

Did You Know?

The Graf Zeppelin Stamps By: Alex Gill

One of the most desired United States airmail stamps are the set of three depicting the famous Graf Zeppelin airship. Issued for delivery of mail carried aboard the airship on the routes to the United States via Germany and Brazil, the set was primarily printed with collectors in mind. Although the set was also created as a goodwill gesture towards Germany, it was a financial loss for the post office as approximately 93.5% of revenue generated by the sale of these stamps went to the Zeppelin Airship Works in Germany.

In 1928, the 775-foot-long Graf Zeppelin made its debut flight and set new distance records. Its manufacturer wished to show off the airship in a series of flights through Germany to Brazil and onto the United States. In preparation of the event, the United States Post Office issued three stamps a month ahead of its historic transatlantic flight in three denominations and colors, 65-cents, \$1.30 and \$2.20 (Scott No's C13-C15). These stamps were issued to pay the postage for mail carried aboard the airship paying various rates used along the flight routes. All three stamps were first issued in Washington D.C. on April 19th, 1930 before the airship left Friedrichshafen, Germany on May 30, 1930 and placed on sale at other post offices on April 21, 1930.

All three stamps were printed by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, which had only six weeks to design, print and distribute the stamps for customers to use in time for the flight. In anticipation of the flight, stamps were printed in quantities of 1 million each in sheets of 200 stamps cut into panes of 50. Unfortunately, of the 1 million printed for each stamp, only 227,260 stamps were sold overall or about 71% of the amount printed. After the stamps were withdrawn from sale on June 30, 1930, the remaining stock was destroyed. The lowest of the three denominations, 65-cents (Scott C13) paid the postcard rate. Of the 1 million printed, only 93,336 stamps were sold. The second stamp, Scott C14, was denominated \$1.30 and paid the postcard and letter rates for the flight that departed Germany to Brazil and to the United States. Of the 1 million printed, only 72,428 were sold. Finally, of the 1 million printed for the last denomination, \$2.60 only 61,296 were sold.

Despite their low sales, the stamps created controversy among collectors at the time. For most, a face value of \$4.55 was a considerable sum during The Great Depression. Some mailers even felt that post office overcharged the cost of the stamps while trying to increase demand by destroying the remaining quantities. Over time, the stamps have increased in popularity and mail specially canceled on the airship has become highly sought after by collectors. Three years later, the airship made an appearance on Scott C18, a 50-cent stamp issued for the 1933 Century of Progress nicknamed the "Baby Zeppelin."



US Scott C13.



US Scott C14.



US Scott C15.



The "Baby Zeppelin" stamp
(US Scott C18)

