

# The 1912 Rhein-Main Zeppelin Airmails

## Synopsis – February 2023

The German Reichspost granted permission for a “Postcard Week” to be held from 10<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> June 1912, to raise funds for the “Mother and Baby Care Charity”. These were the first airmail flights made with the permission and cooperation of the Reichspost, who also agreed to recognise the unofficial airmail stamps sold on behalf of the charity and to allow these stamps to be cancelled. The initial week was so successful that the “Postcard Week” was extended for a second week until 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1912. Exhibit contains only official postcards, those sold on behalf of the charity. These were printed on various coloured cards e.g. olive/grey, or orange/yellow and all are headed “Flug-Post-Karte”.

The LZ-10-Schwaben German airship, built by Luftschiffbau Zeppelin in 1911, was the tenth airship built by the company. It is also regarded as the first commercially successful passenger-carrying aircraft, carrying 1,553 passengers on 218 commercial flights. Shortly after the end of postcard week, the Schwaben was destroyed by fire at the end of a flight from Frankfurt to Dusseldorf, when the airship caught fire during a thunderstorm. Some of the crew were hurt as the airship hit the ground but all survived. Hence, carriage of airmail was limited to the two weeks of “Postcard Week”.

The semi-official Rhein-Main airmail stamps were sold at the main post offices of each of the participating cities. These were designed by Professor Kleukens of Darmstadt and letterpress printed on unwatermarked buff paper, by the Osteried printing firm in Frankfurt-am-Main. Each stamp bears the inscription “First German Airmail to the Rhine”. The Rhein-Main airmails could be posted at any mailbox in any of the five cities. Each card carried by Zeppelin airship was required to be franked with the Reichspost 5pf definitive (local postage card rate) and the 10pf semi-official Rhein-Main adhesive. All the costs of the Rhein Airmail adhesives went directly to the charity and senders could choose to increase this contribution by purchasing 20pf or 30pf adhesives.

The main sponsor for the Charity “Postcard Week” was the Grand Duchess Eleonore of Hessen und bei Rhein. She used the rising popularity of aviation to capture the imagination of those living in the Grand Duchy of Hessen. Both the special postcards and special adhesives were sold on behalf of her charity, with the bulk of the funds coming from sale of the stamps. However, Frankfurt-am-Main was not regarded by many to be part of Hessen and copies of postcards featuring the Royal family were not put on sale here. Similarly, most cards in Hessen were pre-stamped with 10pf charity stamp, whereas supplies sent to Frankfurt-am-Main had been pre-stamped primarily with 20pf charity stamps. Exhibit contains complete set of images of all the “Royal Family” photographs taken by Steinacker, the court photographer (with the franking and reverse side shown as reduced copies).

Mail was carried by Schwaben (Zeppelin LZ-10) from each of the five major cities of the German Grand Duchy of Hessen, during the Postcard Week from June 10 to 16<sup>th</sup> June 1912. The five cities are Frankfurt-am-Main, Darmstadt, Mainz, Offenbach and Worms. Mail from Worms is most difficult to find.

### Frankfurt-am-Main Mail

The first flight took off from Frankfurt-am-Main on 12<sup>th</sup> June carrying cards mailed over the previous two days, visiting the towns of Offenbach, Darmstadt and Mainz. Mail was dropped in 25kg bags and mail also taken on board in each of the designated locations. Frankfurt-am-main had a population of 334,978 in 1910 and was located on the river Main, 17 miles north of Darmstadt. The official cards went on sale on 10<sup>th</sup> June and the earliest cards sent have this date. However, the first date of sending for the other four cities was 12<sup>th</sup> June. It has been recorded that 510 kg of mail was carried by air during “postcard charity week”.

The cancellers used are ring type, 39mm in diameter with the inscription “Flugpost am Rhein am Main”. Only one office in each city was used to apply the special cancellation but there is evidence of the use of more than one cancellor in some locations.

**Darmstadt Mail :** The population of Darmstadt was 83,123 in 1910 and it was the capital city of Hessen. Darmstadt was also the major beneficiary city of the charity post card week as funds were being raised for the “Mother and Baby Care” homes located here.

**Offenbach Mail:** The population of Offenbach was 63,372 in 1910 and it was situated on the river Main, only five miles east-south-east of Frankfurt. It is thought that the proximity to Frankfurt is the major reason that the quantity of mail flown here is considerably less than the other cities in Hessen.

**Mainz Mail:** The population of Mainz was 91,179 in 1910 and it was the second largest city in Hessen. Located at the confluence of the Rhine and Main rivers, it lies 20 miles west-south west of Frankfurt.

**Worms Mail:** The city of Worms had a population of 43,841 in 1910 and was situated 20 miles southwest of Darmstadt. It was the 13<sup>th</sup> June before the airship flew from Worms, and dropped mail as part of “ Postcard Week.” From Worms, the airship flew to its home base at Baden-Oos. After the postcard week had been extended the airship took off towards Frankfurt and from there carried mail to Offenbach. The loading of mail from Offenbach was not possible due to the high winds on this visit.

It was originally intended that special post boxes would be provided for the cards but this idea was discarded and a directive was issued by the Reichspostamt saying that Rhein-Main airmails could be posted in any mailbox in any of the five cities

#### Biography

1. Auckland, R.G. The Airmail of 1912, German Postal Specialist 152, Dec 1952. Reprinted from the Germany and Colonies Stamp Club News Sheet.
2. Pizzala, T. Grand Duchess Eleanore’s “Postkartenwoche”, The Rhein/Main Airmails June 1912, Coppermill Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 2009.