

## HINDENBURG CRASH MAIL - THE SCOUT COVERS

By: Hallvard Slettebø © 2004

Scout franked zeppelin mail has been covered several times earlier in the SOSSI Journal. The most comprehensive article is *Lighter than Air* by Douglas Uzakewicz in SOSSI Journal May/June 1995<sup>[1]</sup>, which also covered the *Hindenburg* crash flight without going in depth. This present article is an attempt to thoroughly describe what is known about the Scout franked *Hindenburg* crash mail.

The German zeppelin *LZ Hindenburg* was an airship, or dirigible, of the rigid type, and was built to carry passengers and mail between Europe and the Americas. The construction began in Friedrichshafen, Germany in 1931 and was completed in 1936. First flown in tests on March 4, 1936, the *Hindenburg* made her first flight on March 26 of the same year. She would make several awe-inspiring flights, carry hundreds of passengers and travel thousands of miles before meeting her fate. The successful flights included ten trips from Europe to North America in 1936, and six trips to South America in 1936 and one trip in 1937.

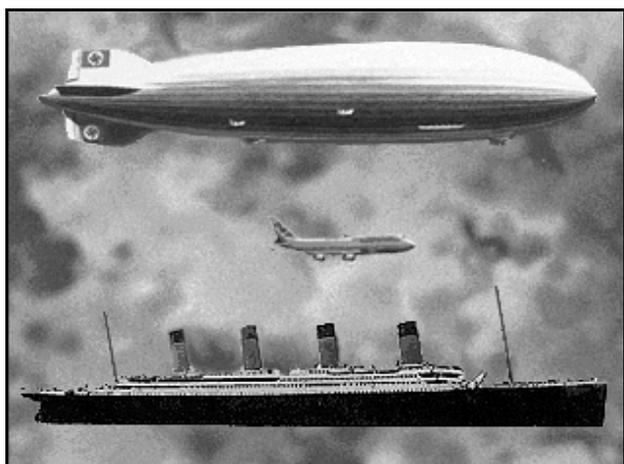
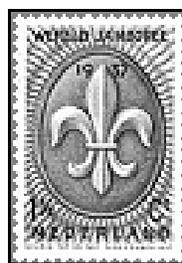


Figure 1: A size comparison of the *Hindenburg* with a Boeing 747 and the *Titanic*. The *Titanic* was only 78 feet longer than the *Hindenburg* at 882 feet long. *Hindenburg* is the largest aircraft ever to have flown.

The passenger cabins were equipped with an upper and lower berth, folding wash basin, a collapsible writing table and a signal used for calling the steward. The accommodations were quite plain compared to those of the luxury steamships of the day, however, most of the passengers' time was spent elsewhere in the ship. The facilities included a lounge, reading and writing room and a smoking room. The promenade provided passengers with a spectacular view of the earth below, and the adjacent dining area could accommodate all fifty passengers in one sitting.



The Fifth World Scout Jamboree took place in the Netherlands in the summer of 1937. On April 1, 1937, the Netherlands issued a series of commemorative postage stamps on the occasion of the event, designed by Pijke Koch. The set consisted of three stamps: 1 ½ cents (domestic printed matter rate), 6 cents (domestic letter rate) and 12 ½ cents (foreign letters).



The designs for the 1 ½ cents and 6 cents values need no further explanation: the 1 ½ cents value shows the Boy Scout badge, and the 6 cents value shows the close-up of a Boy Scout drumming, with flags in the background. Less obvious is why the artist selected *Hermes* for the 12 ½ cents stamp. *Hermes* was the messenger god of ancient Greece, and "as a pathfinder to unknown places, he was ready to help others", the symbolic intention becomes clear. The *Hermes* statue, by the artist Praxiteles, dates from the 4th century B.C., and is now housed in the Archaeological Museum at Olympia, Greece.

The Jamboree stamps saw many different

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usages from the First Day of Issue on April 1, until they were withdrawn from sale on September 1, 1937. Probably the most famous of all the Jamboree connected postal items is the use of the Jamboree stamps in May before the Jamboree opened on mail carried on the last flight of the zeppelin Hindenburg.

*LZ Hindenburg* left Frankfurt am Main, Germany on May 3 on her first North America flight for 1937. The world's largest aircraft ever was 804 feet long and filled with 7 million cubic feet of highly inflammable hydrogen. At Lakehurst, New Jersey, cameramen and reporters waited for her arrival and recorded one of the most famous disasters in history. On landing at Lakehurst on May 6, 1937, the airship burst into flames and was destroyed in about 34 seconds. 13 passengers, 22 crew and one ground crew died. 61 passengers and crew members survived.

For a period of 60 years, the cause of the disaster was blamed on burning hydrogen. One commonly accepted theory was a broken wire cutting one of the gas cells, which resulted in hydrogen escaping and mingling with air under the outer cover. The burning hydrogen theory prevailed, even though Max Pruss, the captain of the doomed ship, insisted there was no indication of gas loss on the bridge, riggers reported all gas cells were evenly inflated, and no one reported smelling garlic, the scent of which had been added to the lifting gas to help detect a leak. So what had set the outer cover afire? It is possible that the actual cause of the fire was the extreme flammability of the covering material brought about by discharges of an electrostatic nature. This interesting theory is discussed by Van Treuren<sup>[2]</sup> and by Duggan<sup>[3]</sup>.

The following pictures the *Hindenburg* disaster at Lakehurst, New Jersey May 6, 1937.

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Of the 17,609 pieces of mail on board, only 358 pieces were salvaged in a burned condition. 176 of the surviving pieces were uncanceled, awaiting to be canceled on the return voyage to Europe. The 147 covers addressed to persons in the U.S.A. were forwarded to the Foreign Airmail Division in New York who sent the items to the addressees' Postmaster with a request to secure a registered receipt. Most of the salvaged mail originated from Germany, but is also recorded from Austria, Danzig, the Netherlands, Saar and Switzerland. Zeppelin mail has always been a popular topic for air-mail collectors, and in particular the *Hindenburg* crash covers are much sought-after. The crash of this great airship ended the era of Zeppelin flights, but created the most elusive covers salvaged from that fiery disaster at Lakehurst, New Jersey that May evening. Of particular interest to Scout collectors are salvaged covers which are franked with one or more stamps of the Dutch 1937 Jamboree issue.

17 Dutch covers were sent from Rotterdam, the Netherlands, to Mr. G. Thoolen, c/o Mr. Donald E. Dickason, Wooster, Ohio, U.S.A. It is understood that each of these covers was franked with one 12 ½ c Jamboree stamp, but this cannot be confirmed due to the fact that the stamp on at least one of the covers was totally destroyed by the fire. The 'Thoolen' covers were postmarked at Rotterdam-Waalhaven on May 1, 1937, then sent to Frankfurt, Germany, and placed on board the *Hindenburg* for the trip to America. Gerhard Thoolen was a stamp dealer in 's Gravenhage (The Hague), the Netherlands. It is known that Mr. Thoolen also sent several covers by the airship *Hindenburg* to his stamp dealer colleague Donald E. Dickason in Wooster, Ohio, in 1936, and Mr. Dickason returned these to Mr. Thoolen upon receipt. Mr. Dickason was then past president of the American Air Mail Society. Mr. Thoolen's *Hindenburg* crash covers were purchased by Mr. Dickason in 1937.

Falk's *Hindenburg* Crash Mail - The

search Goes on, 1976<sup>[4]</sup> lists 17 items mailed from the Netherlands. These are the 'Thoolen' covers mentioned above. Further research by Ganz in Netherlands *Hindenburg* Crash Mail, 1985-86<sup>[5]</sup> and How Many of the Dutch Dispatches Survived?, 1987<sup>[6]</sup> increased the number to 26, that is nine covers in addition to the 17 'Thoolen' covers. The Dutch airmail catalogue Luchtpostcatalogus van Nederland en Overzeese Rijksdelen, 1998 [7] and the two leading zeppelin mail catalogues, Sieger<sup>[8]</sup> and Michel<sup>[9]</sup>, all state only 23 salvaged covers with Dutch franking.

Michel<sup>[9]</sup> mentions specifically that 18 covers to Thoolen at Wooster, OH are recorded (i.e. one cover more than the other sources), and five covers to other addressees. The transmittal letter from Albert Goldman, Postmaster in New York to the Postmaster in Wooster, Ohio dated May 19, 1937 states: Enclosure addressed to: (2 packages) 17 letters Mr. G. Thoolen, Care Mr. Donald E. Dickason, Wooster, Ohio. A letter from the First Assistant Postmaster General Office in Washington DC dated August 13, 1938 to Charles W. Mihle says: the records of this Department indicate that . . . 17 for Mr. Thoolen. It is therefore believed that the number of 'Thoolen' covers presented in the Michel catalogue is incorrect.

In addition to the 17 'Thoolen' covers, Ganz [5] reported nine more covers with Dutch franking, and seven of these are franked with Jamboree stamps. To summarize, a total of 26 examples of *Hindenburg* crash mail from the Netherlands are recorded, of which 24 were Scout franked.

The postage rate for regular surface mail from the Netherlands to North America in May 1937 was 12 ½ c for letters up to 20 grammes, 2½ c for printed matter up to 50 gr and 7½ c for postcards. Additional fee for transport by zeppelin was 60 c for letters per 5 gr and for postcards, and 10 c per 5 gr for printed matter [10]. The complete zeppelin mail rate up to 5 gr was thus 12½

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c plus 60 c, total 72½c for letters. Similarly 2½c plus 10 c, total 12½c for printed matter up to 5 gr. The 'Thoolen' covers were each franked with one 12½c stamp, and are thereby correctly franked for printed matter. The covers with six 12½c stamps are overfranked by 2½c.

Sieger<sup>[8]</sup>, Michel<sup>[9]</sup> and Leder<sup>[11]</sup> warn about forged *Hindenburg* crash mail items. The recorded forgeries are covers with genuine German postage stamps and forged or altered postmarks. Mr. Leder informs this writer that to date forgeries have not been detected of the Dutch crash covers.

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<i>Hindenburg</i> Crash Mail Items from the Netherlands (Recorded by Ganz <sup>[5]</sup> )		
No.	Addressee	Postmarked
1-17	Mr. G. Thoolen, c/o Mr. Donald E. Dickason, Wooster, Ohio	Rotterdam-Waalhaven, May 1.
18-20	Donald C. Rose, 1104 Henry Street, St. Joseph, Missouri	Amsterdam Watergraafsmeer, April 30.
21-22	R.F. Lutz, Philadelphia, Pa.	's Hertogenbosch, May 1.
23	Mrs. Benn Lewis, Ocean Ave., Brooklyn, NY	Amsterdam Centraal Station, May 1.
24	Eva List, 1143 Forest Avenue, Ann Arbor, Mich.	Amsterdam Centraal Station, May 2.
25	Mr. P. Mak, Hillside Avenue, Nutley, NJ	Schiedam, May 1.
26	Mrs. E. Le Mee, 6802 Ridge Blvd, Brooklyn, NY	Haarlem, May 1 or 2.



NETHERLANDS/PAYS-BAS  
Scouting Nederland

The following are illustrations of all the recorded *Hindenburg* Crash Mail items from the Netherlands. This is the first time ever that these illustrations are shown together.

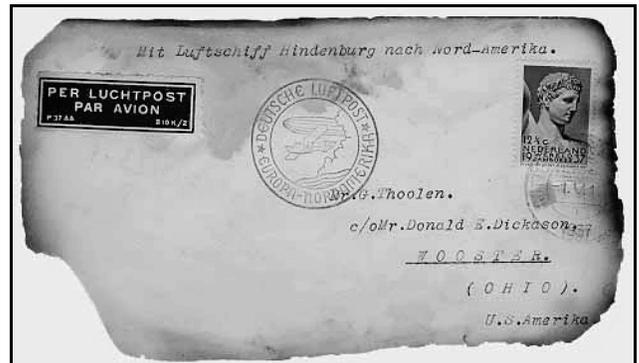


Figure 2: 'Thoolen' cover, franked with one 12½ cents Jamboree stamp (courtesy the owner).

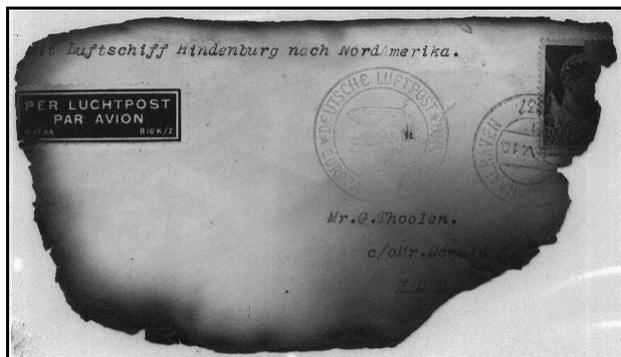


Figure 1: 'Thoolen' cover, franked with one 12½ cents Jamboree stamp (courtesy the owner).



Figure 3: 'Thoolen' cover, franked with one 12½ cents Jamboree stamp (courtesy the owner).

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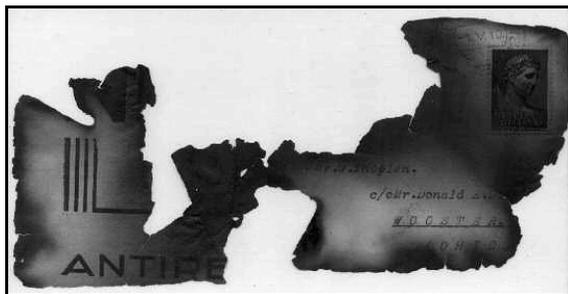


Figure 4: 'Thoolen' cover, franked with one 12½ cents Jamboree stamp (courtesy the owner). This envelope is still contained within its original USPOD sealed wrapper.



Figure 5: 'Thoolen' cover, franked with one 12½ cents Jamboree stamp (courtesy Chiani-Auktion, Switzerland).



Figure 6: 'Thoolen' cover, franked with one 12½ cents Jamboree stamp (courtesy Ulrich Felzmann Briefmarken- und Münz-Auktionen, Germany).

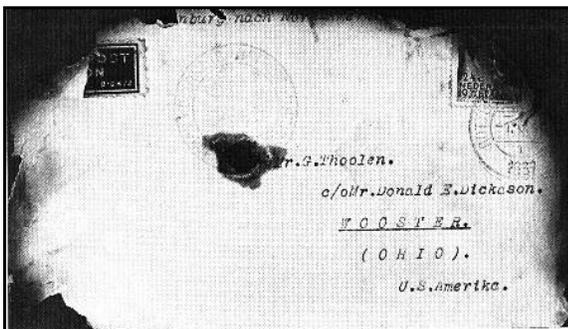


Figure 7: 'Thoolen' cover, franked with one 12½ cents Jamboree stamp (courtesy The Zeppelin Collector).

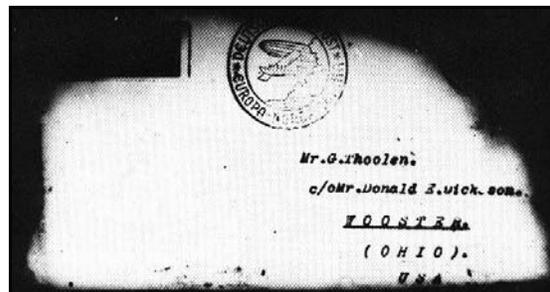


Figure 8: 'Thoolen' cover, franked with one 12½ cents Jamboree stamp (courtesy The Zeppelin Collector).



Figure 9: a (above and b top next page) 'Thoolen' cover, franked with one 12½ cents Jamboree stamp (courtesy The American Philatelist and The Zeppelin Collector). These two illustrations are believed to be of the same cover.

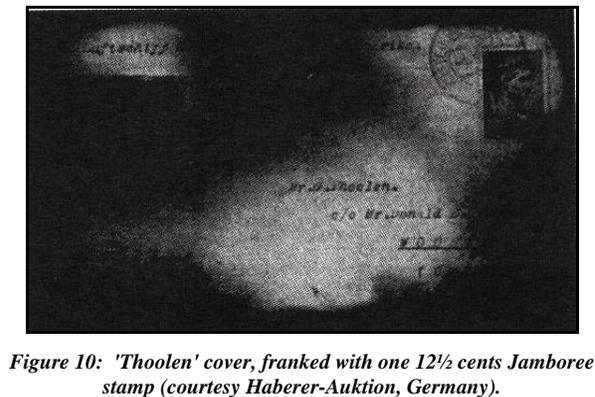
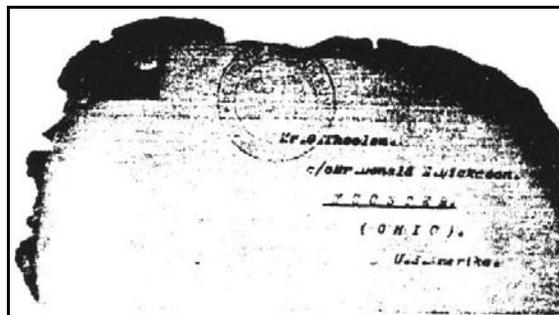


Figure 10: 'Thoolen' cover, franked with one 12½ cents Jamboree stamp (courtesy Haberer-Auktion, Germany).

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Figure 11: 'Thoolen' cover, franked with one 12½ cents Jamboree stamp (courtesy Kover King, Inc., NY).

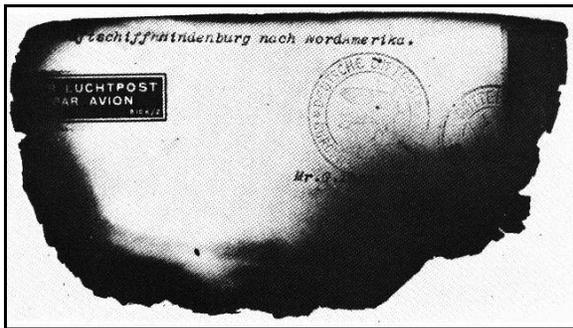


Figure 12: 'Thoolen' cover, was probably also franked with one 12½ cents Jamboree stamp (courtesy The Zeppelin Collector).

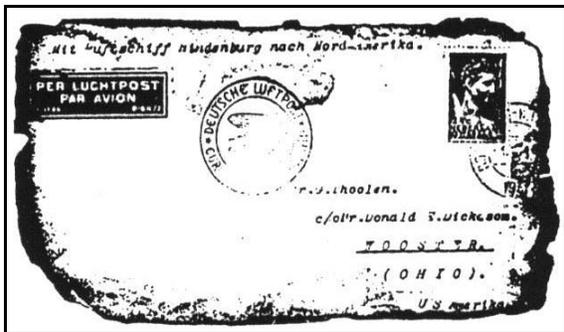


Figure 13: 'Thoolen' cover, franked with one 12½ cents Jamboree stamp (courtesy The Zeppelin Collector).

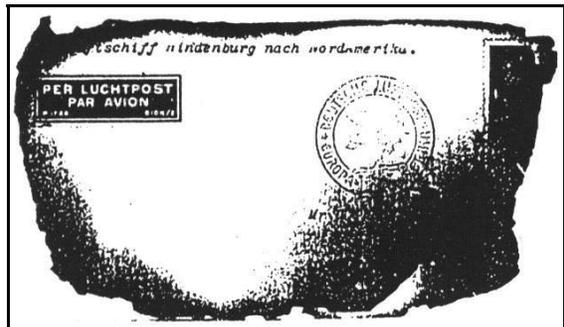


Figure 14: 'Thoolen' cover, franked with one 12½ cents Jamboree stamp (courtesy The Zeppelin Collector).

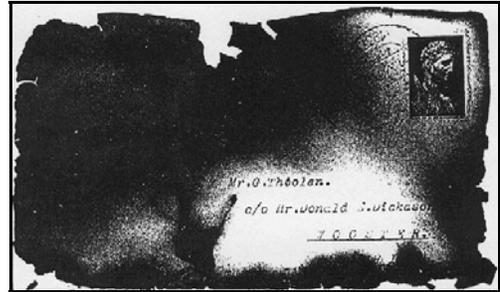


Figure 15: 'Thoolen' cover, franked with one 12½ cents Jamboree stamp (courtesy Steve Ivy Philatelic Auctions, Inc., NY)

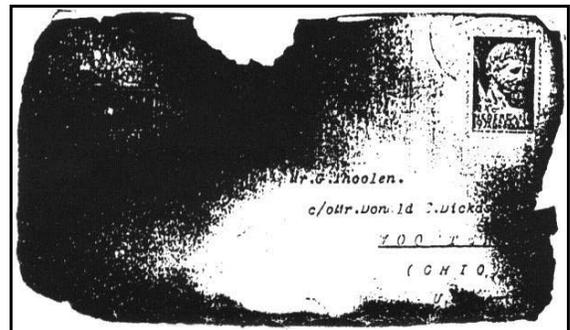


Figure 16: 'Thoolen' cover, franked with one 12½ cents Jamboree stamp (courtesy The Zeppelin Collector).



Figure 17: 'Thoolen' cover, franked with one 12½ cents Jamboree stamp (courtesy The Zeppelin Collector).



Figure 18: Cover to Mr. Donald C. Rose, St. Joseph, Missouri (courtesy Heinrich Kohler, Germany and Chiani-Auktion, Switzerland). Franked with block of six 12½ cents Jamboree stamps.

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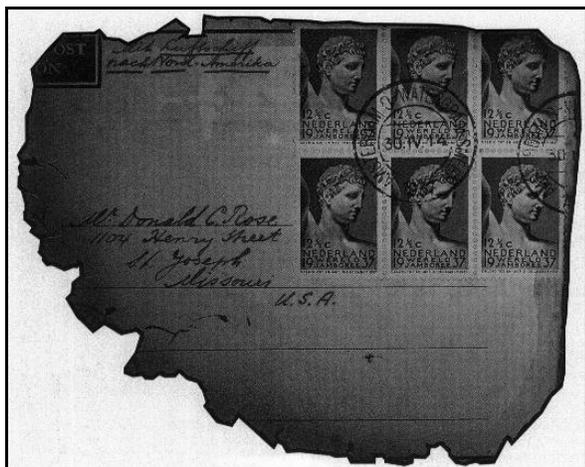


Figure 18a: Comparing the two illustrations, it could look like that the cover edges have been trimmed. The top image shows, however, the cover with its back side (and possibly with contents) which makes the cover looking larger. The bottom image shows the same cover, but the image was taken of the front side only, without contents and backside.

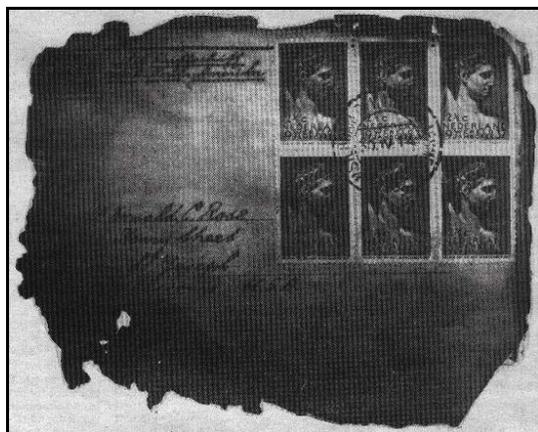


Figure 19: Cover to Mr. Donald C. Rose, St. Joseph, Missouri (courtesy Superb Auctions, Torrance, CA and Kohler-Auktion, Germany). Franked with block of six 12½ cents Jamboree stamps. The top illustration is possibly of the front only, and the bottom illustration shows the cover with its backside.

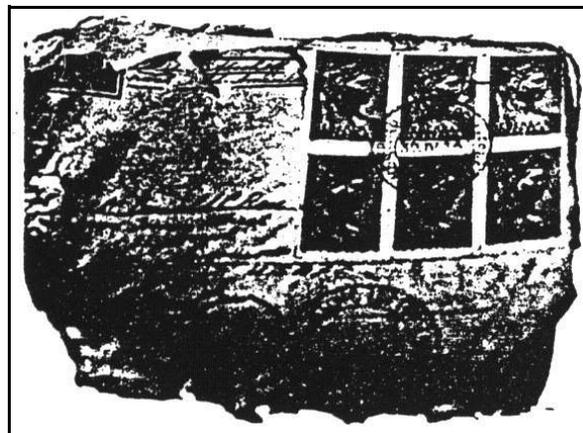
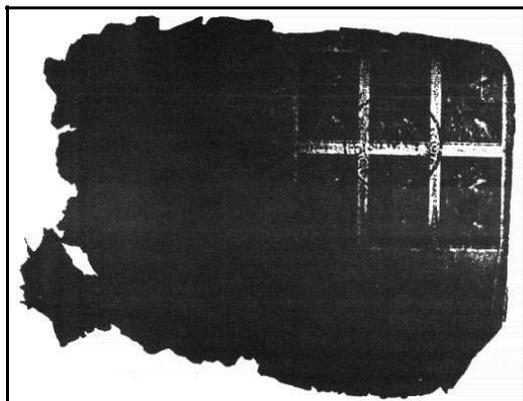


Figure 20: Cover to Mr. Donald C. Rose, St. Joseph, Missouri (courtesy The Zeppelin Collector). Franked with block of six 12½ cents Jamboree stamps.

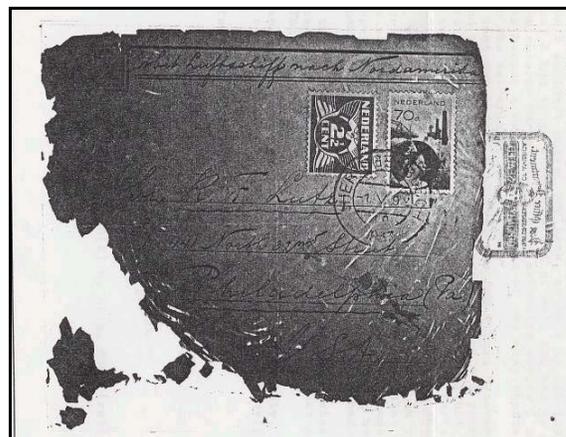


Figure 21: Cover to R.F. Lutz, Philadelphia, Pa. (courtesy Cheryl Ganz). Franked with one 2½ cents and one 70 cents non-Jamboree stamps.



Figure 22: Cover to R.F. Lutz, Philadelphia, Pa. (courtesy Cheryl Ganz and Roger Koerber auction). Franked with one 2½ cents and one 70 cents non-Jamboree stamps.

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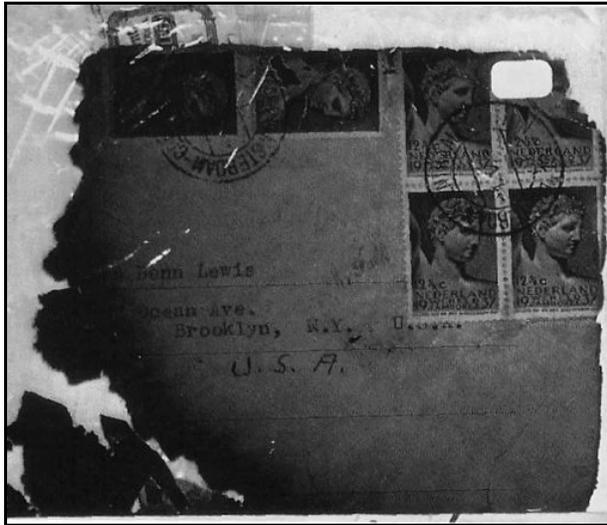


Figure 23: Cover to Mrs. Benn Lewis, Brooklyn, NY (courtesy Cheryl Ganz and Michael Rogers auction). Franked with six 12½ cents Jamboree stamps. This envelope is still contained within its original USPOD sealed wrapper.

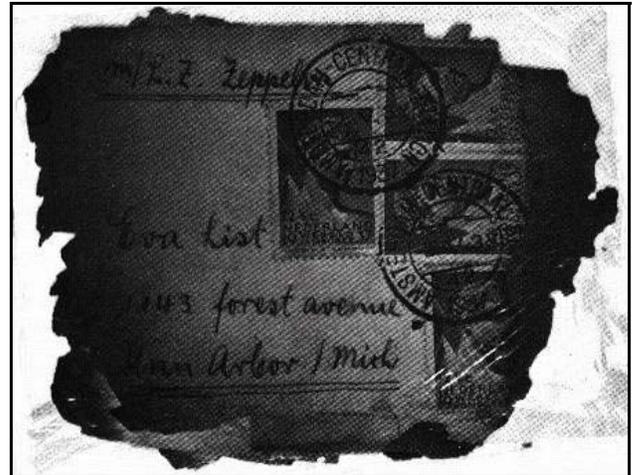


Figure 24: Cover to Eva List, Ann Arbor, Mich. (courtesy Western Auction, Torrance, CA). Franked with four 12½ cents Jamboree stamps.

**Information on Sales and Prices for the Hindenburg Crash Mail Items from the Netherlands:**

Catalogue value according to Sieger<sup>[8]</sup> is 17,500 Euros (approx. \$22,900) for all Hindenburg

crash mail items sent via Friedrichshafen.

Michel [9] differentiates between the originating countries, and catalogue values are 15,000 Euros (approx. \$19,600) for the 'Thoolen' covers and 20,000 Euros (approx. \$26,200) for other Dutch covers.

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**SALES INFORMATION BY ITEM FOR HINDENBURG CRASH ITEMS**

ITEM NO	SPECIFIC SALE INFORMATION FOR SCOUT FRANKED ITEMS
1	Corinphila, Switzerland, auction sale May, 2001. Hammer price approx. \$14,000 <sup>+</sup>
2	Weiss Philatelics, Bethlehem, PA, auction sale No. 121, April 16, 1994. Philatelic Pathfinders, Jericho, NY, private sale, 1994.
3 & 4	No information available.
5	Chiani-Auktion, Switzerland, auction sale May 12-16, 2003. Hammer price CHF 10,800 <sup>+</sup> (approx. \$8,000)
6	Ulrich Felzmann Briefmarken- und Münz-Auktionen, Germany, auction sale October 17-18, 2003. Hammer price 9,000 Euros <sup>+</sup> (approx. \$11,400)
7 - 9	No information available.
10	Haberer-Auktion, Germany, auction sale.
11	Kover King, Inc., NY, auction sale.
12 - 14	No information available.
15	Steve Ivy Philatelic Auctions, Inc., NY, auction sale.
16 & 17	No information available.
18	Heinrich Köhler, Germany, auction sale. Chiani-Auktion, Switzerland, auction sale May 12-16, 2003. Hammer price CHF 14,400 <sup>+</sup> (approx. \$11,200)
19	Superb Auctions, Torrance, CA, auction sale. Köhler-Auktion, Germany, auction sale.
20 & 21	No information available.
22	Roger Koerber, auction sale.
23	Michael Rogers, September 22, 1991, auction sale.
24	Western Auction, Torrance, CA, auction sale 1979.
25	No information available.
26	Greg Manning Auctions, Inc., New York, NY, auction sale January 27-28, 1983.

+ incl. expenses.

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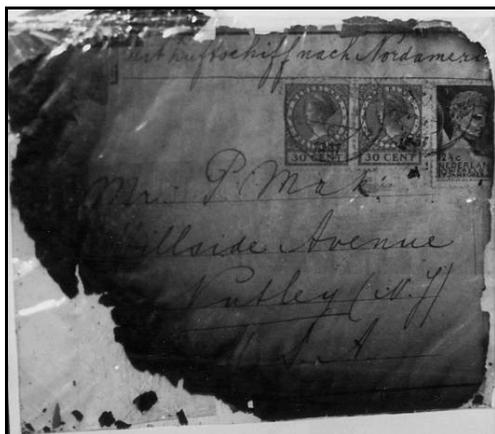


Figure 25: Cover to Mr. P. Mak, Nutley, NJ (courtesy Cheryl Ganz). Franked with one 12½ cents Jamboree stamp and two 30 cents non-Jamboree stamps.

### Acknowledgements:

Thanks to John Adams, Koos Biesheuvel, Panayotis D. Cangelaris, Cheryl R. Ganz, Randall S. Frank, John P. Ineson FRPSL, Robert F. Kan, Dr. Frederick P. Lawrence FRPSL and Dieter Leder for their valuable contributions to this article.

### References:

1. Uzakewicz, Douglas, *Lighter than Air*, SOSSI Journal, May/June 1995, p7-16, with supplement in SOSSI Journal, May/June 1996, pp 12-13.
2. Van Treuren, Richard G., *Odorless, Colorless, Blameless, Air & Space* Smithsonian magazine, May 1997, pp 14-16.
3. Duggan, John, *LZ 129 Hindenburg - The Complete Story*, 2002.
4. Falk, Arthur, *Hindenburg Crash Mail - The search Goes on*, 1976.
5. Ganz, Cheryl, *Netherlands Hindenburg Crash Mail*, The Zeppelin Collector, published in The Jack Knight Air Log & AFA News, July-September 1985, pp 30-33, with updates in January-March 1986 p51, July-September 1986 p47, October 1986 p40.

6. Ganz, Cheryl, *How Many of the Dutch Dispatches Survived?*, The American Philatelist, May 1987, pp458-460.

7. De Vliegende Hollander, *Luchtpost-catalogus van Nederland en Overzeese Rijksdelen*, 1998.

8. Sieger, *Zeppelinpost Spezial-katalog*, 22nd edition, 2001.

9. Michel, *Zeppelin Specialized Catalogue*, 2003.

10. Verschuur, W.F., *Zeppelin en Zeppelinpost*, Jubileumtentoonstellingsgids Alphia '96, 1996.

11. Leder, Dieter, *The Forgeries of the Lakehurst Mail*, The Airpost Journal, June 1998, pp217-220.

### Other resources:

SOSSI website, <http://www.sossi.org> :  
 1937 World Jamboree Zeppelin Scout Mail  
 Scouting Postal History of the 1930's  
 Stamp Collecting Merit Badge

The Cangelaris Philatelic Collection, <http://www.cangelaris.com/exsco.htm>

Scoutpost-Information, Journal of ArGe Pfadfinder e.V., <http://www.arge-pfadfinder.org>

Please inform the editor, or the author directly at [hallvard@slettebo.no](mailto:hallvard@slettebo.no), should you have further information on *Hindenburg* crash covers with Dutch franking. In particular, illustrations of such covers are appreciated.

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around the world. One of these far-flung outposts was Christmas Island, located in the Indian Ocean about 380 kilometers south of Sunda Strait in Indonesia. Christmas Island currently is administered by Australia. Apparently more than one person was sending first day covers from Christmas Island as evidenced by the illustrated cover

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