

The USS AKRON & MACON Airships in Florida & the Caribbean – 1933 & 1934

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The USS AKRON & MACON Airships in Florida & the Caribbean – 1933 & 1934

Purpose & Scope

The purpose of this exhibit to tell the story of the rigid US airships flown to Florida and the Caribbean in the middle 1930's. We develop this philatelic history using mail carried on the USS AKRON & MACON, supplemented by event covers from both. We will emphasize flown mail, covers dispatched from international locations, and rare covers seldom seen.

Background

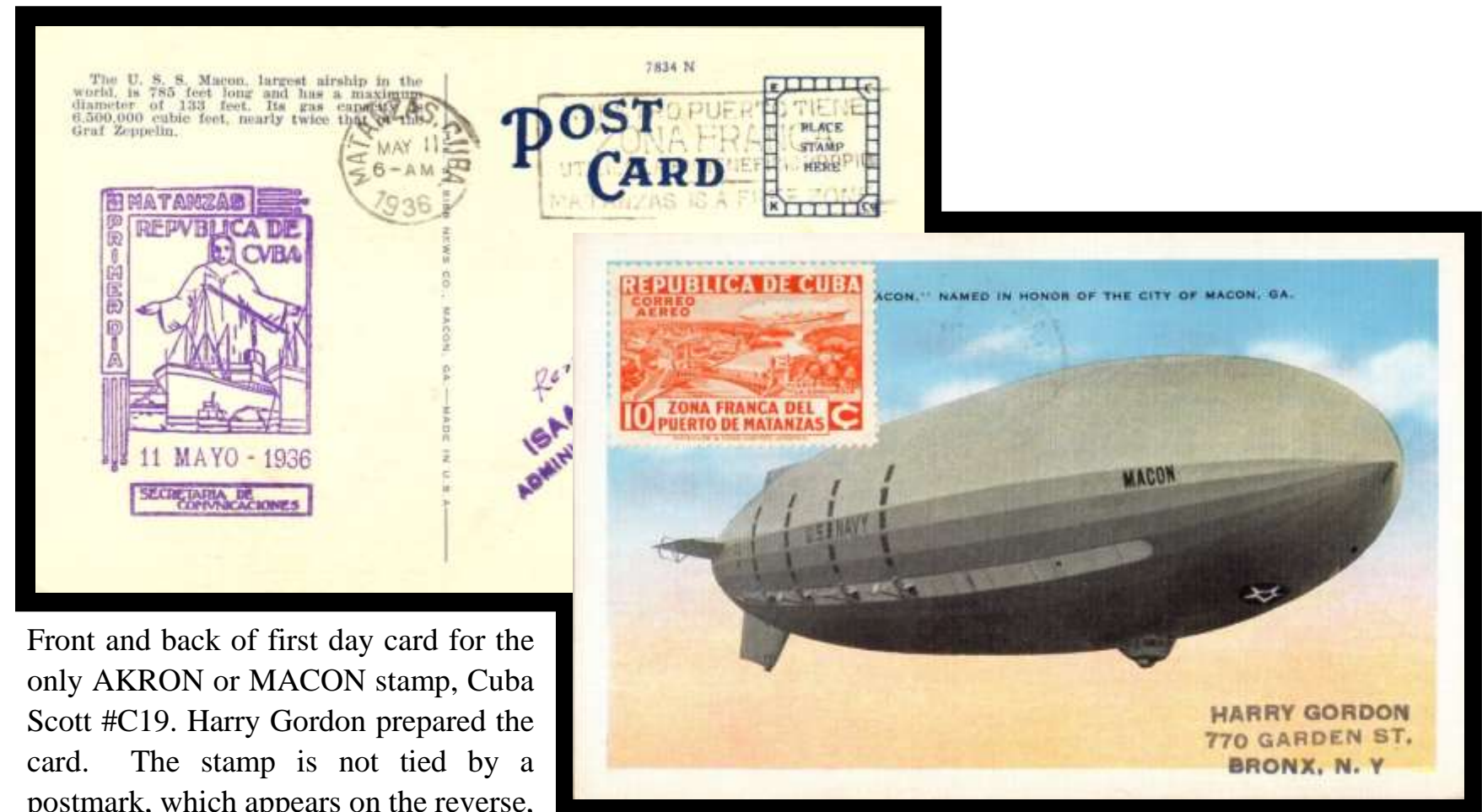
Rigid airships held great promise for long haul transportation during the 1920's and 1930's. Best known is the German LZ 129 Hindenburg and 2017 marked the 80th anniversary of her fiery crash. In the U.S., the Navy supported large airship development for long-range scouting & fleet reconnaissance. Florida and the Islands of the Caribbean played a key role in this development, providing strategic stops for flights on the southern route to and from Africa and Brazil. The USS LOS ANGELES ZR-3 made numerous stops in Florida and the Caribbean from 1925 through 1931, and the Graf Zeppelin LZ-127 stopped in Miami on its way from Brazil to the Chicago World's Fair in 1933.

This exhibit focuses first on the USS AKRON ZRS-4 just before her crash on April 4, 1933 (the AKRON's first flight to Florida occurred in early 1933). The US Navy Christened the USS MACON ZRS-5 on March 11, 1933, and she crashed in the Pacific on February 12, 1935. Four MACON flights to and from the mooring mast in Opa Locka, Florida, are a second focus, with two of those flights to the Caribbean.

Rarity & Uniqueness

Except for covers from two flights of the AKRON in 1932, mail flown on either the AKRON or MACON is quite rare and was carried by the officers and other crew members. We show two of the three different AKRON covers flown from Lakehurst to Miami in this exhibit. With one possible exception, shown in the exhibit, the MACON did not carry any mail to Miami or the Caribbean – we use event covers here to tell that part of the story. For many of the event covers shown, less than 10 made. We highlight particularly rare or noteworthy covers with red borders.

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MACON Crash & Aftermath – the end of an era	4.11

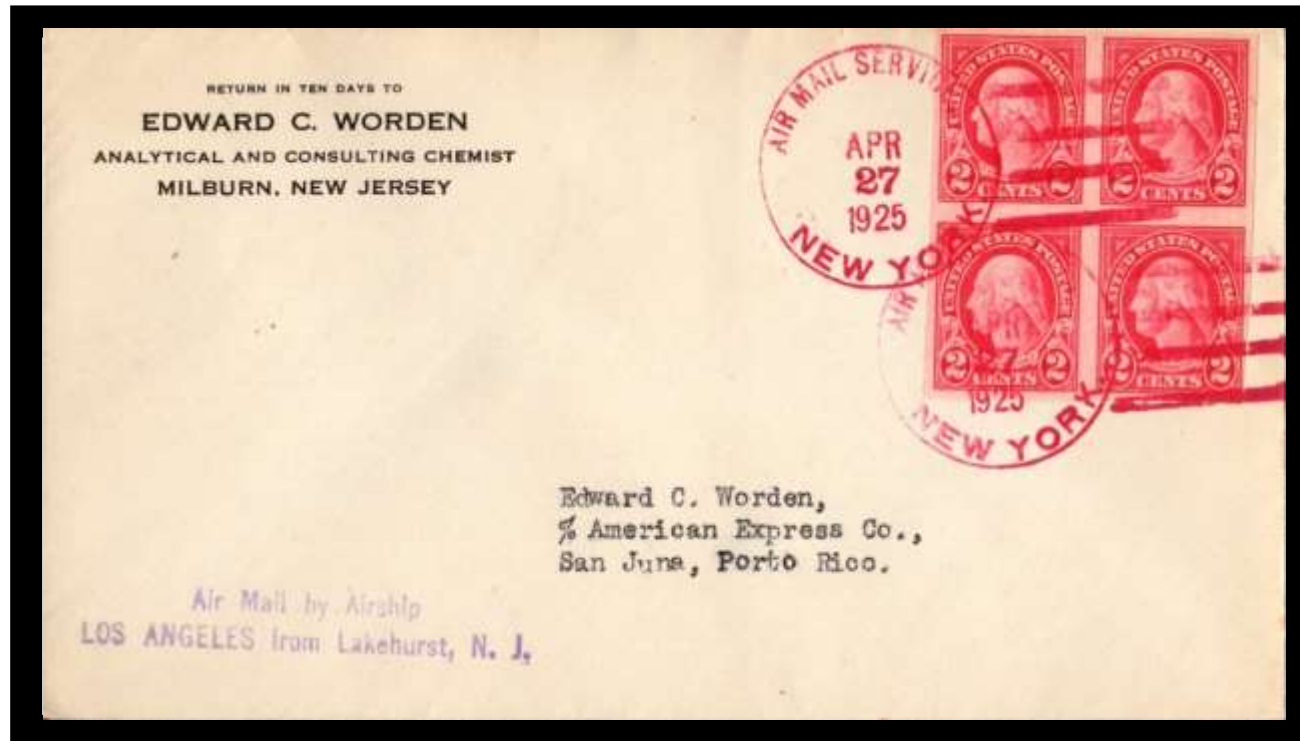


Front and back of first day card for the only AKRON or MACON stamp, Cuba Scott #C19. Harry Gordon prepared the card. The stamp is not tied by a postmark, which appears on the reverse,

Details for critical flights in this exhibit – includes flown covers highlighted in green

Ship	Flight	Date	Up Ship	From	To	Moored	Time	Mail
AKRON	#1 Testing	9/23/1931	3:35 PM	Akron	Akron	9/23/1931	7:25 PM	Yes
	#29 Transcontinental Flight	5/8/1932	6:55 AM	Lakehurst	San Diego	5/11/1932	6:58 PM	Yes
	#58 Enroute; plane tests	1/3/1933	5:19 PM	Lakehurst	Opa Locka	1/4/1933	6:11 PM	Yes
	#59 Cuba Site Inspection	1/7/1933	1:55 PM	Opa Locka	Opa Locka	1/9/1933	6:39 PM	Yes
	#60 Return	1/10/1933	9:38 AM	Opa Locka	Lakehurst	1/11/1933	4:32 AM	No
	#67 Enroute; Site Inspection	3/11/1933	2:05 PM	Lakehurst	Opa Locka	3/12/1933	9:59 PM	No
	#68 - #70 Drills	3/14/1933	10:02 AM	Opa Locka	Opa Locka	3/22/1933	6:05 PM	No
	#71 Return	3/22/1933	11:16 PM	Opa Locka	Lakehurst	3/23/1933	4:52 PM	No
	#73 Crash	4/3/1933	7:28 PM	Lakehurst	Crashed	4/4/1933	12:35 AM	No
MACON	#1 Testing	4/21/1933	6:02 AM	Akron	Akron	4/21/1933	6:50 PM	Yes
	#5 Delivery to Lakehurst	6/23/1933	8:21 PM	Akron	Lakehurst	6/24/1933	4:23 AM	Yes
	#23 Enroute	4/20/1934	9:37 AM	Moffett Field	Opa Locka	4/22/1934	7:07 PM	No
	#24 - #25 Fleet Exercises	5/3/1934	9:00 AM	Opa Locka	Opa Locka	5/13/1934	5:45 AM	No
	#26 Return	5/16/1934	7:07 AM	Opa Locka	Moffett Field	5/18/1934	7:07 AM	No
	#54 Crash	2/11/1935	7:10 AM	Moffett Field	Crashed	2/12/1935	5:15 PM	No

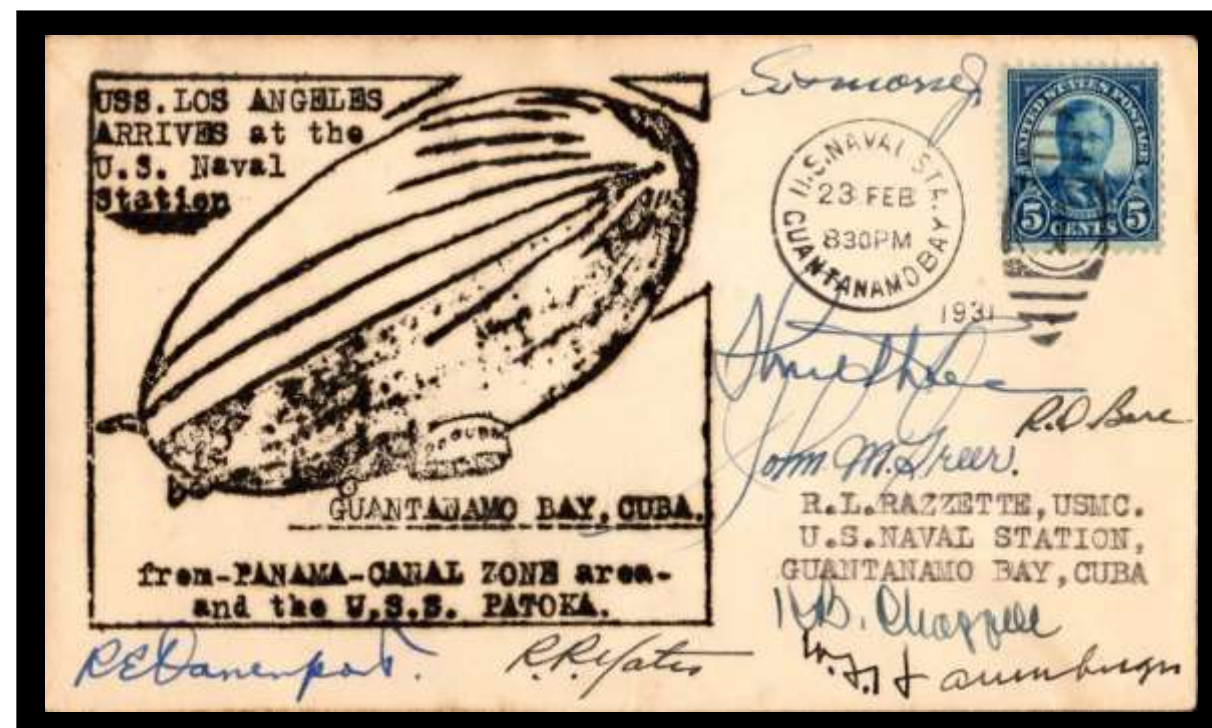
Introduction – USS LOS ANGELES (ZR-3 /LZ-126) in the Caribbean, 1925 - 1931



The USS LOS ANGELES was the first large US airship to fly to the Caribbean. This cover, flown on the 19th flight overall (13th after delivery of the ship from Germany), left Lakehurst on May 3, 1925, and moored at the USS PATOKA in Mayaguez Bay on the 4th. Serviced by Edward Warden, the cover has a less common 2-line directional cachet and the USPS official postmark. It overpays the \$0.02 rate. Two hundred lbs. of mail were carried.



Cover flown on the return trip from Mayaguez Bay to Lakehurst. Up-ship from the USS PATOKA was on May 8th, mooring at Lakehurst on the 9th. Official postmark plus additional markings, including USS PATOKA “cancellation.” Covers with both the Mayaguez and PATOKA cancellations are rare, but the number made is not known.



Cover from the LOS ANGELES' last trip to the Caribbean, February 4 to March 18, 1931, commemorating the arrival of the LOS ANGELES at Guantanamo Bay on February 23rd. The R. L. Razette cached cover is signed by US Navy officers at Guantanamo Bay. The number of these rare covers made is not known.



Copy of original photograph from the collection of the LOS ANGELES moored at the USS PATOKA (AO-9) in Panama Bay in 1931 during her last visit to the Caribbean.

Highlights of Early Flights of the USS AKRON ZRS-4 – First Flight and Delivery to Lakehurst



Cropped and reduced news photo from the collection showing first walk-out of the AKRON from the Goodyear Zeppelin hangar, August 28, 1931.



Unlisted cover carried by Machinist Mate Bill Russell on the AKRON's first flight, signed by LT Morgan Redfield of the USS Akron. Two of these covers have been reported.

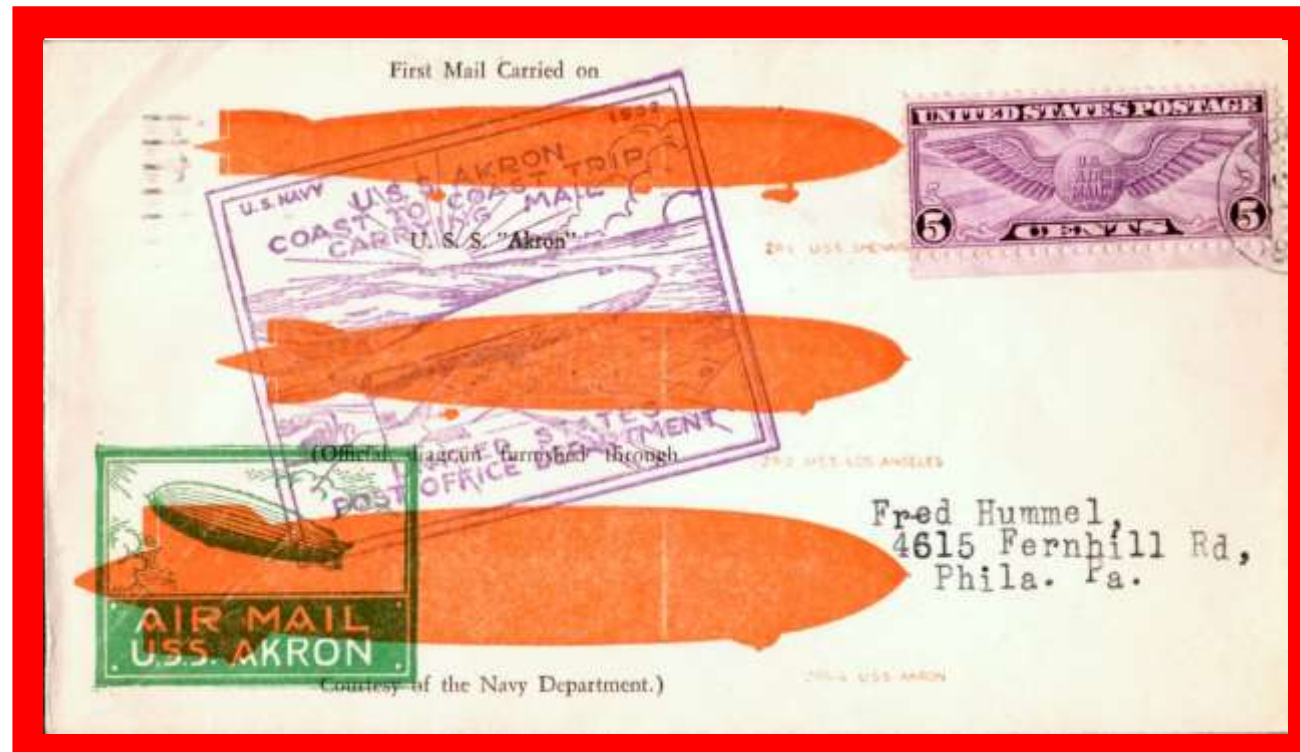


First flight cover with Sept. 23 postmark has a backstamp in Lennoxville, Quebec, on the 25th. The airmail rate to Canada was \$0.06, short-paid by the US C12. The Canadian franking – a C2 and 162 – is incorrect usage. It is signed by the Secretary of the Navy Charles F. Adams III and LCDR Charles E. Rosendahl, CO of the AKRON. First flight event covers with mixed franking are seldom seen, but the number made is unknown.



Only cover reported flown on the USS Akron delivery flight (#10) from Akron to Lakehurst. It carries the standard Akron Chamber of Commerce Cachet plus pen notation from LT R. S. Mayer. It was cancelled at Lakehurst on arrival.

USS AKRON Transcontinental Flight Carrying U.S. Post Office Department Mail May 8, 1932



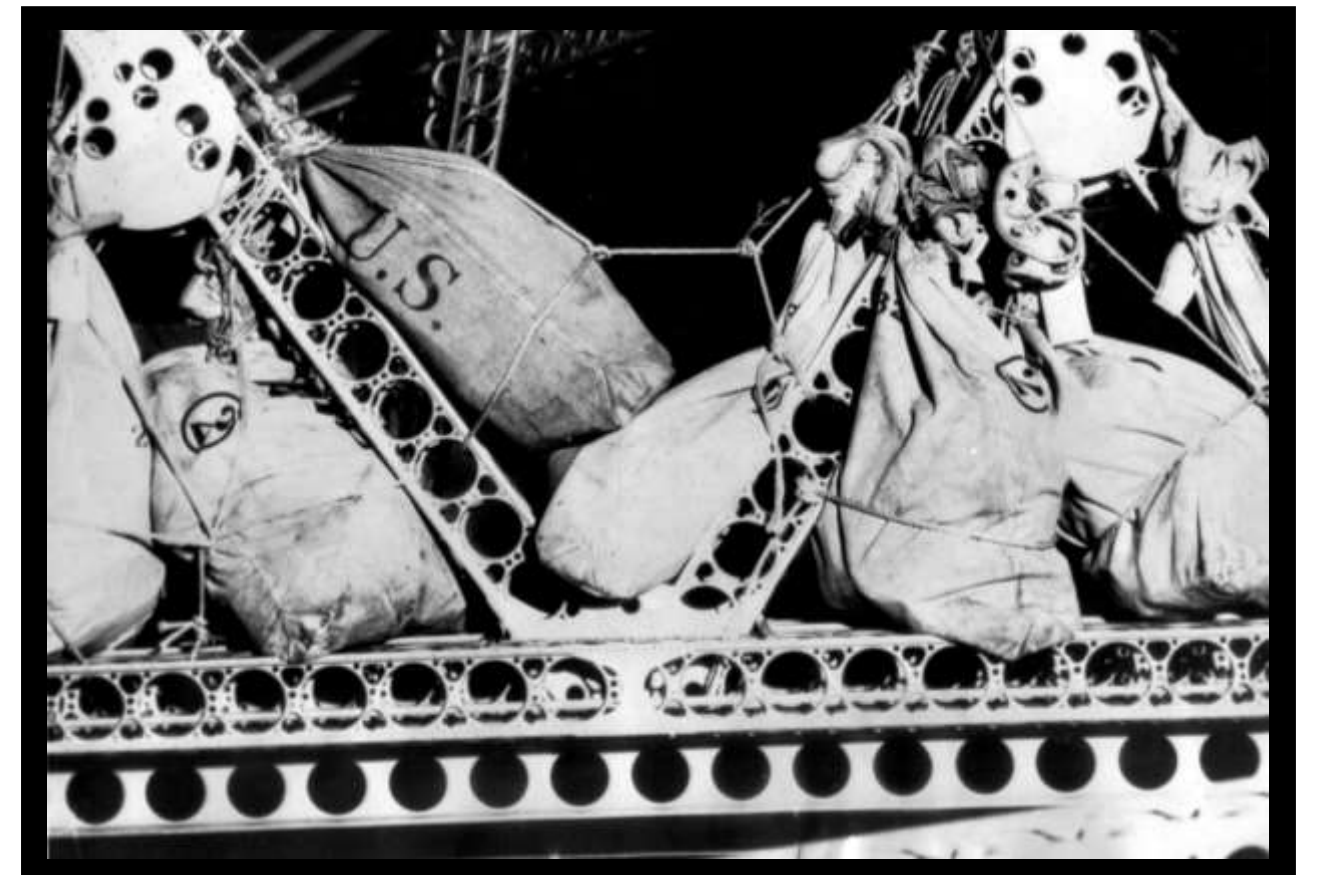
Special Roessler envelope with green printed stamp, and cachet in orange showing the relative size of the SHENANDOAH, LOS ANGELES, and AKRON. Typical Post Office Department cachet in magenta. Covers with all three “cachets” are unreported and seldom seen; the number made is unknown.



One of only two covers signed by all three AKRON commanders: Rosendahl through June 22nd, 1932; Dresel through January 2nd, 1933; McCord went down with the ship on April 4th. Additional “Via U.S. AKRON” added by Harry Gordon; this is the AKRON Encyclopedia reference cover.



Cover posted on February 22, the first day of use of the Canada C3, plus a US C11 tied by the May 6th Lakehurst cancel. The US postage was not necessary. The proper USPS backstamp is present. The cover is signed by crash survivor R. E. Deal. Foreign franking is seldom seen; the number made is unknown.



Reduced news photo of mail on-board the AKRON for the Transcontinental flight, from original in the collection.

USS AKRON A.C. Roessler “Stamps”



A. C. Roessler was a well-known philatelist, printer, and ink expert of the period. He prepared overprinted stamps like the ones shown above left and covers on this page to increase the value of the special covers he made for various flights. In 1933 he was convicted on Federal charges of “Printing items in similitude of obligations of the United States”. He pled guilty and was placed on probation for three years. He also made both perforated and imperf “stamps” like the ones shown above and also printed similar images on some envelopes (i.e. one below right).

Card commemorating the mooring of the AKRON at the USS PATOKA in San Francisco Bay on May 17, 1932. Card, prepared by Reuben Aretz did not reach the PATOKA until September 13 in Bremerton, Washington. The Roessler “stamp” is tied by the receiver cancel. The card is signed by CDR Frank McCord, AKRON CO January 3 – April 4, 1933 – he went down with the ship during the crash.



Experimental shiny silver Roessler envelope with additional USS AKRON line drawing cachet. This cover also exhibits one of Roessler’s “Akron Mail” overprinted stamps. Silver covers for this flight are not reported; given the overprinted stamp this cover is rare and may be unique.



Special Roessler envelope with AKRON line drawing in blue. The franking includes a \$0.01 Washington with Roessler’s “Akron Mail” overprint tied by the Lakehurst postmark. The cover is signed by the three survivors of the AKRON crash, LCDR Wiley, Dean, and Irwin, with typed notation. This cover may be unique.

USS AKRON Flown Mail – Last Half of 1932



Typical cover from the Tactical Training Flight with Post Office Department cachet in magenta. Correct \$0.08 franking for the rate change on July 6. Cover is signed by CDR Charles Rosenthal previous CO of the AKRON. Cover has USPOD backstamp cachet and Lakehurst receiver similar to the one at right.



Cover postmarked July 1 instead of the correct August 1. These covers may have been delivered to Lakehurst on July 1, cancelled, and held for the flight; an error during cancellation is possible. Covers cancelled July 1 should be paid at a \$0.05 rate. This cover is franked with \$0.08, the rate on August 1. These covers are seldom seen, but the number is unknown.



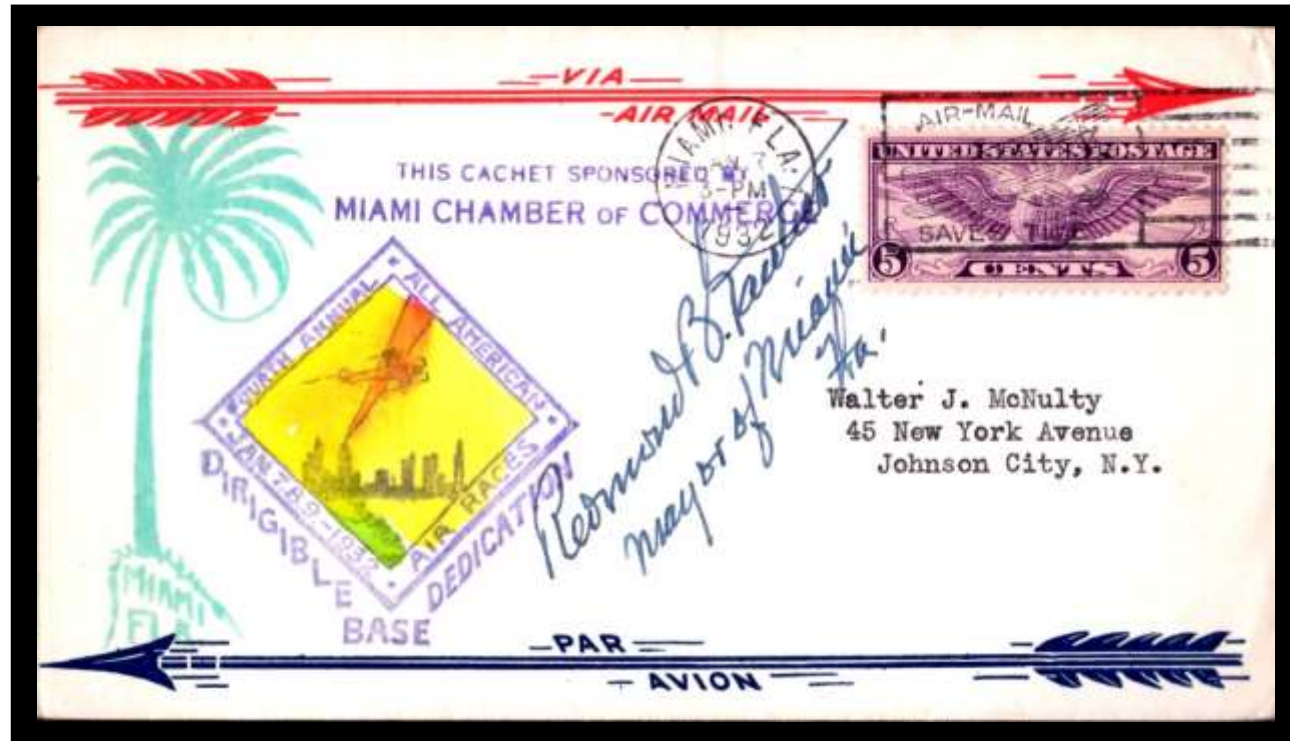
Special Roessler Washington stamped envelope with printed "Air Mail USS. Akron" imprint and one-line "Atlantic Fleet Maneuvers" cachet. Correct \$0.08 air mail rate and USPOD cachet. These covers are seldom seen but the number made is not known.



Cover carried on the November 2nd flight with Fordham Aerophilatelic Society and additional 2-line stamped cachet. It is signed by the Akron Commanding Officer then LCDR Charles Rosendahl – only one reported made; this cover is unique.

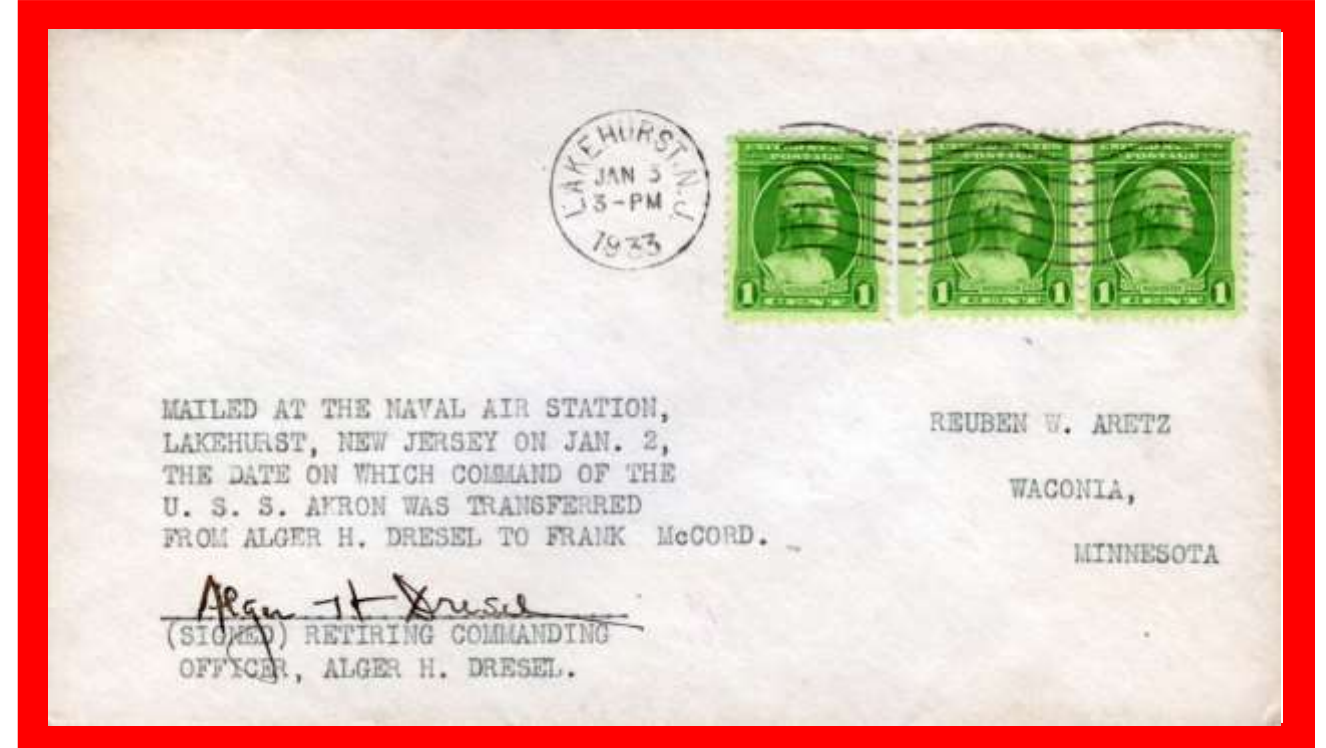
USS AKRON Flights to Miami & the Caribbean - Introduction

Realizing the strategic importance of Florida, the Navy established a Reserve Aviation Training Base in Opa Locka in 1932. The NRATB became the home of a Dirigible Base, with mast over 80' high to moor the larger airships.



Unlisted cover signed by Miami Mayor R. B. Gautier commemorating Miami Air Races and Dirigible Base dedication. Covers with purple stamped cachet are common. Airmail envelope with period hand-coloring and signature may be unique.

Then CDR Alger Dresel was the CO of the USS AKRON before being assigned to the USS MACON. CDR Frank McCord took command of the AKRON on January 2, 1933, and was the CO through the crash on April 4 – he was killed in the crash.



Cover commemorating AKRON change of command on January 2, 1933, with rubber typed cachet signed by CDR Alger Dresel. Only 3 of these covers were made.



Cover commemorating AKRON change of command on January 2, 1933, with rubber stamped cachet signed by CDR Frank McCord. Only 4 of these covers were made.



Cover prepared by Ruben Aretz who signed the cover on the reverse with the notation "1 of 1". Flown round trip from Lakehurst to Miami and the Caribbean on flights 58, 59, & 60, and signed by the new CO of the AKRON, CDR Frank McCord. Only one cover reported made.

USS AKRON Arrives in Miami January 4, 1933



The AKRON left Lakehurst January 3rd, arriving in Miami on the 4th. Unreported cover commemorating flight #58 Lakehurst to Opa Locka (Miami) Period hand colored Chamber cachet is seldom seen, but the number made is not known.



Unlisted cover flown from Lakehurst to Opa Locka, signed by ADM William A. Moffett, who was on the flight. The cover is seldom seen, and may be unique. ADM Moffett was killed 3 months later in the AKRON crash.

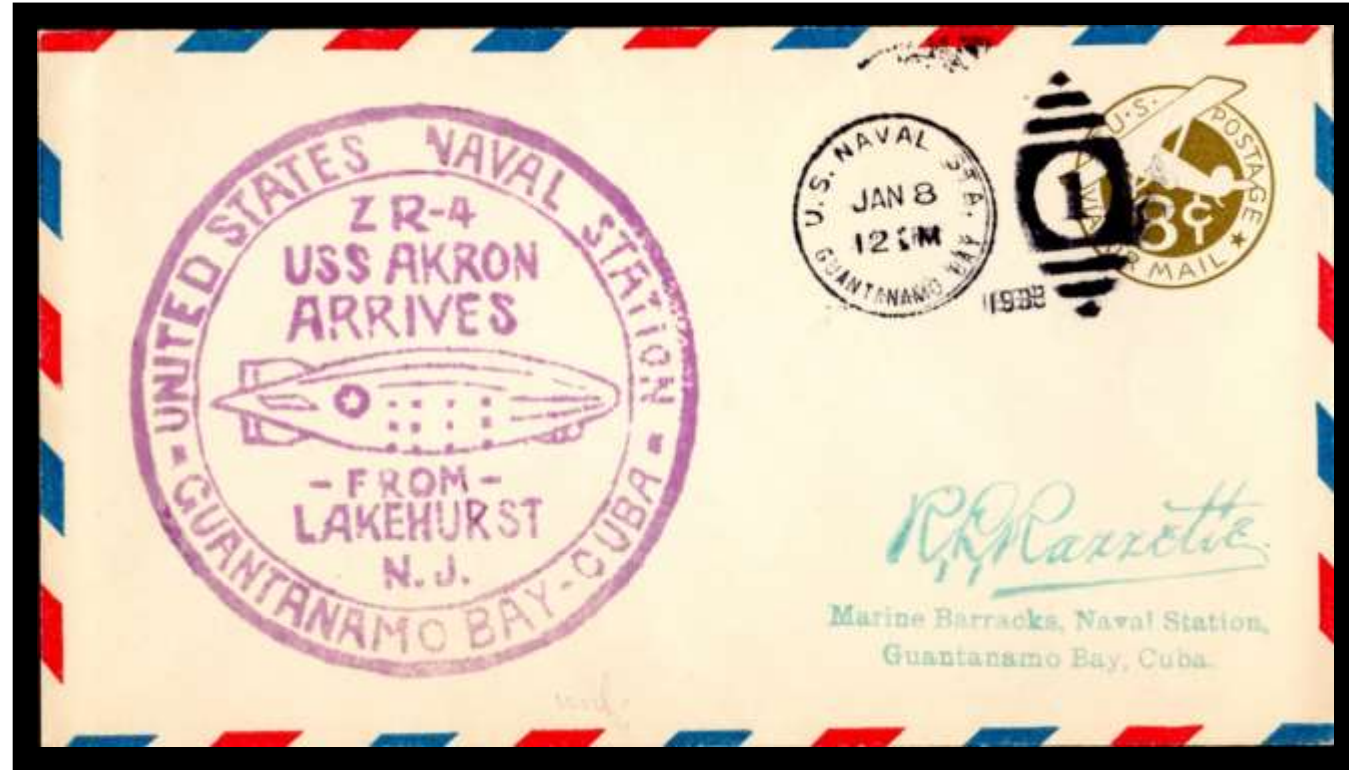


Cover commemorating the AKRON's Fly-over of the Miami Air Races with Miami Chamber of Commerce double rubber stamped cachet, including "First Visit USS Akron." Covers are seldom seen, but the number made is not known. Accompanying ticket for the Air Races showing the AKRON in the background.

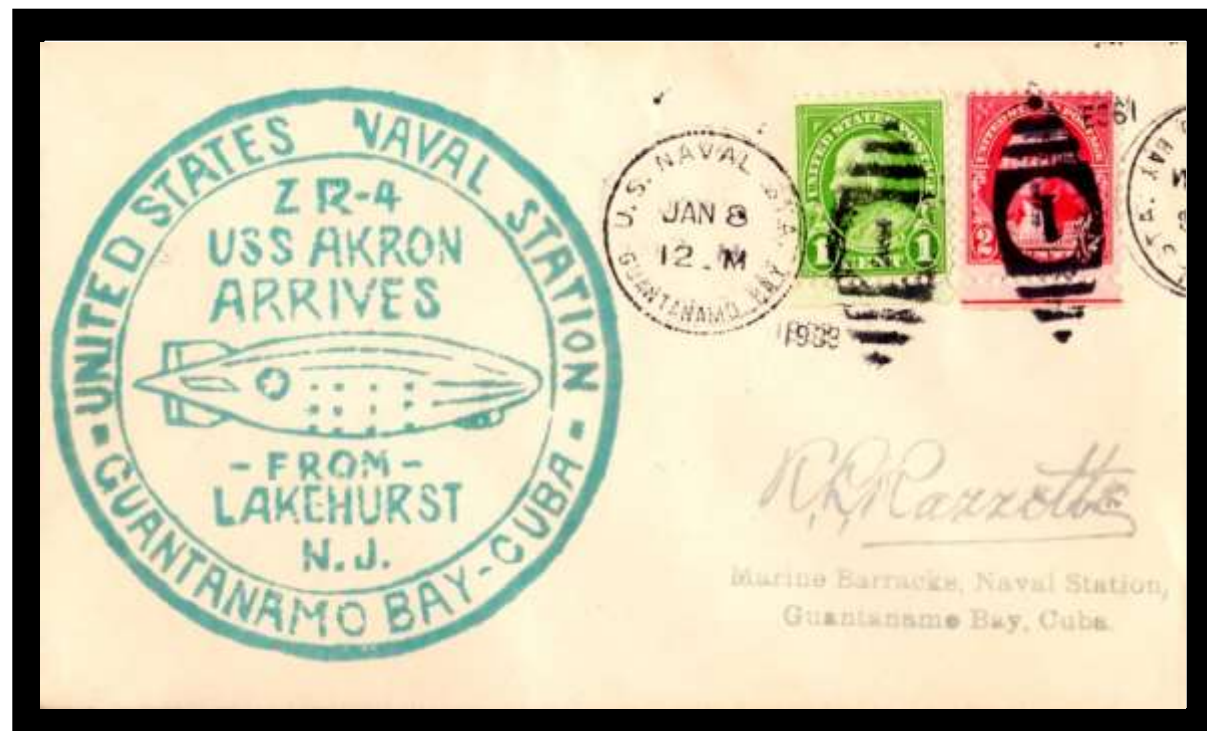


Copy of a news photo from the collection (cropped and reduced to fit) dated January 6, 1933, showing the AKRON flying over the Miami Air Races.

USS AKRON Flight to Guantanamo Bay, Return



Covers prepared by R. L. Razzette commemorating the AKRON's visit to the US Naval Station, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Covers sent regular mail had a green cachet; those sent air mail, magenta – this was a common but seldom reported practice by cachet-makers. A total of 64 covers were reported made.



Cover with Cuba franking and rubber stamped cachet with Guantanamo, Oriente, Cuba, postmark - signed by AKRON CO, CDR Frank McCord. Only one of these covers has been reported.



Cover commemorating the AKRON's departure with R. L. Razzette printed cachet on UC7. 40 covers reported for both regular and air mail.

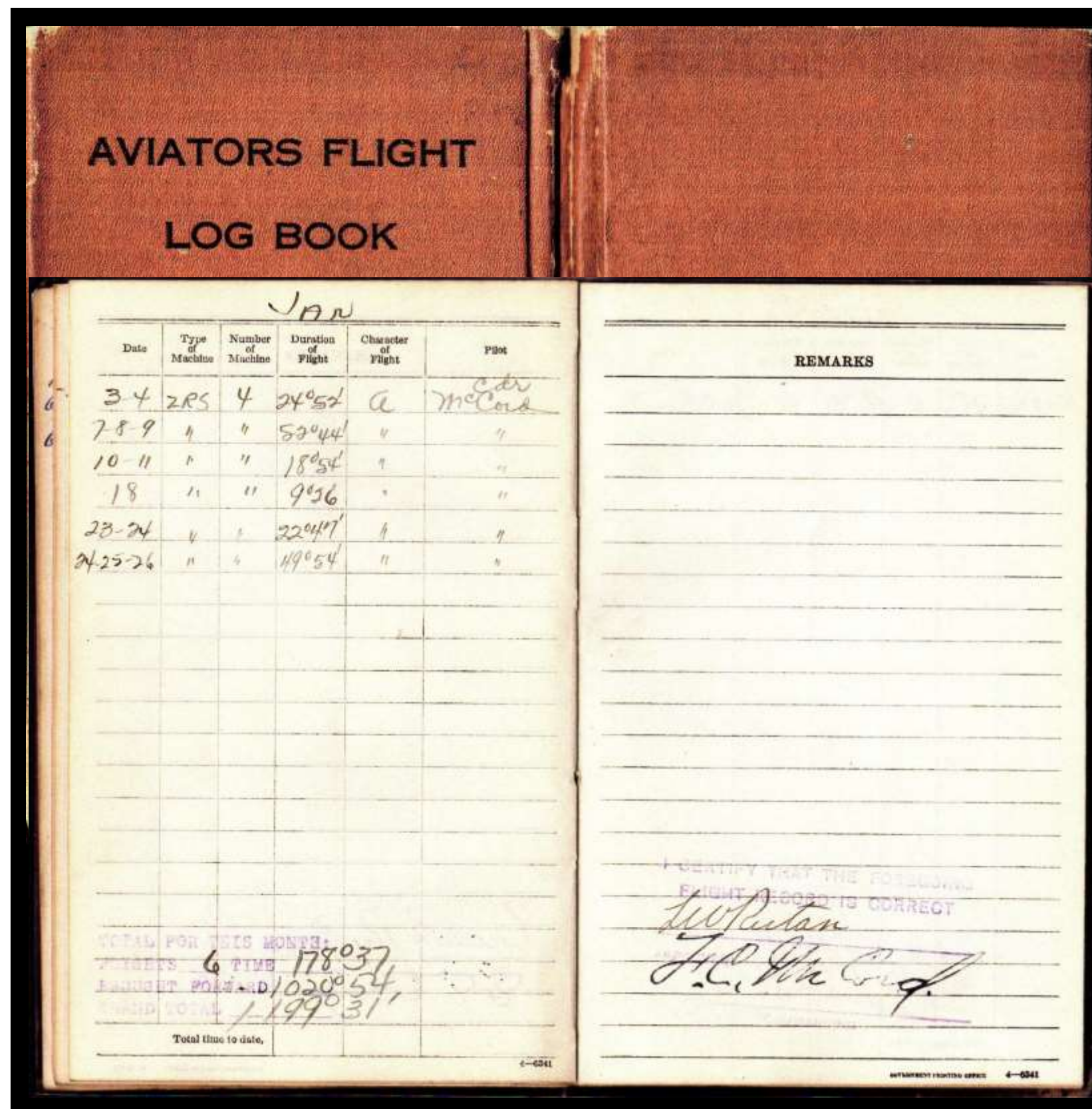
to Miami, and Lakehurst, January, 1933



The MACON departed from Opa Locka on January 10th, heading back to Lakehurst. The Miami Chamber prepared 86 of these covers, commemorating the event.



Cover prepared by Ruben Aretz with typed cachet, commemorating the first flight of the AKRON under the command of CDR Frank McCord. The cover was postmarked on January 17th, after the return of the AKRON to Lakehurst.

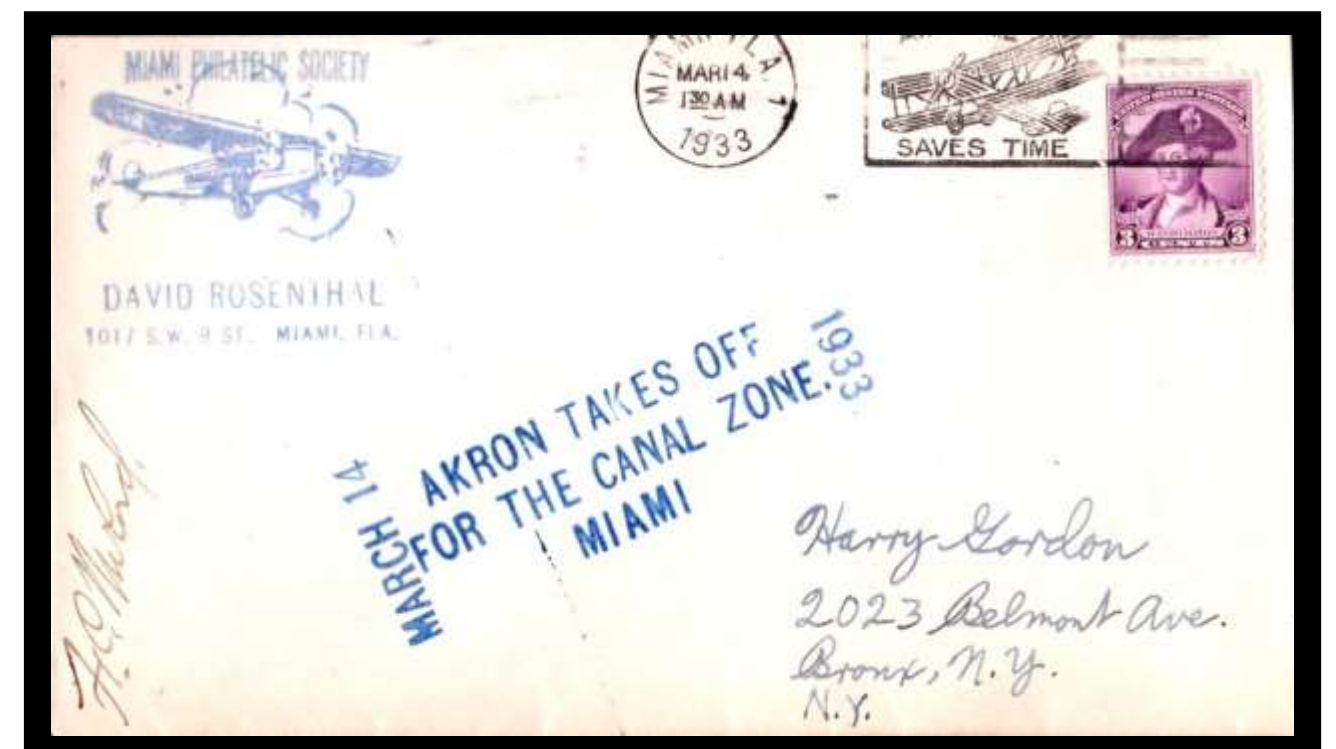


Copy of January, 1933, entry of the Flight Log Book of Lucius W. Rutan, Aviation Chief Machinist Mate, from the collection (reduced to fit). The first log entry is February 25, 1927; the Log spans flights in the J-3 Blimp, USS Los Angeles (ZR-3 – 31 flights), and the USS Akron – last 20 flights. The entry indicates flight details, including duration. Rutan went down with the ship along with CDR McCord on April 4th.

Last Major Flights of the AKRON – Miami, Canal Zone, & Panama



The AKRON left Lakehurst on March 11 for Opa Locka, FL, flight #67. Rubber stamped cachet with cover signed by the Akron CO, CDR Frank McCord. Cover is seldom seen but the number made is unknown; this is the reference copy for the definitive encyclopedia on the USS AKRON covers.



After spending a few days moored at Opa Locka, the AKRON left for Panama and the Canal Zone on March 14. The departure of flight #68 is commemorated by this cover, prepared by the Miami Philatelic Society's David Rosenthal. It is also signed by CDR McCord. Few covers were made.



Cristobal Postmaster notation and signature, with arrival at 8:55 AM and departure at 4:58 PM. The cover is signed by the Postmaster and Claude A. Swanson, Secretary of the Navy, previously US Senator and Governor of Virginia. It was also signed by the Akron CO, CDR Frank McCord. Only one cover was reported made.

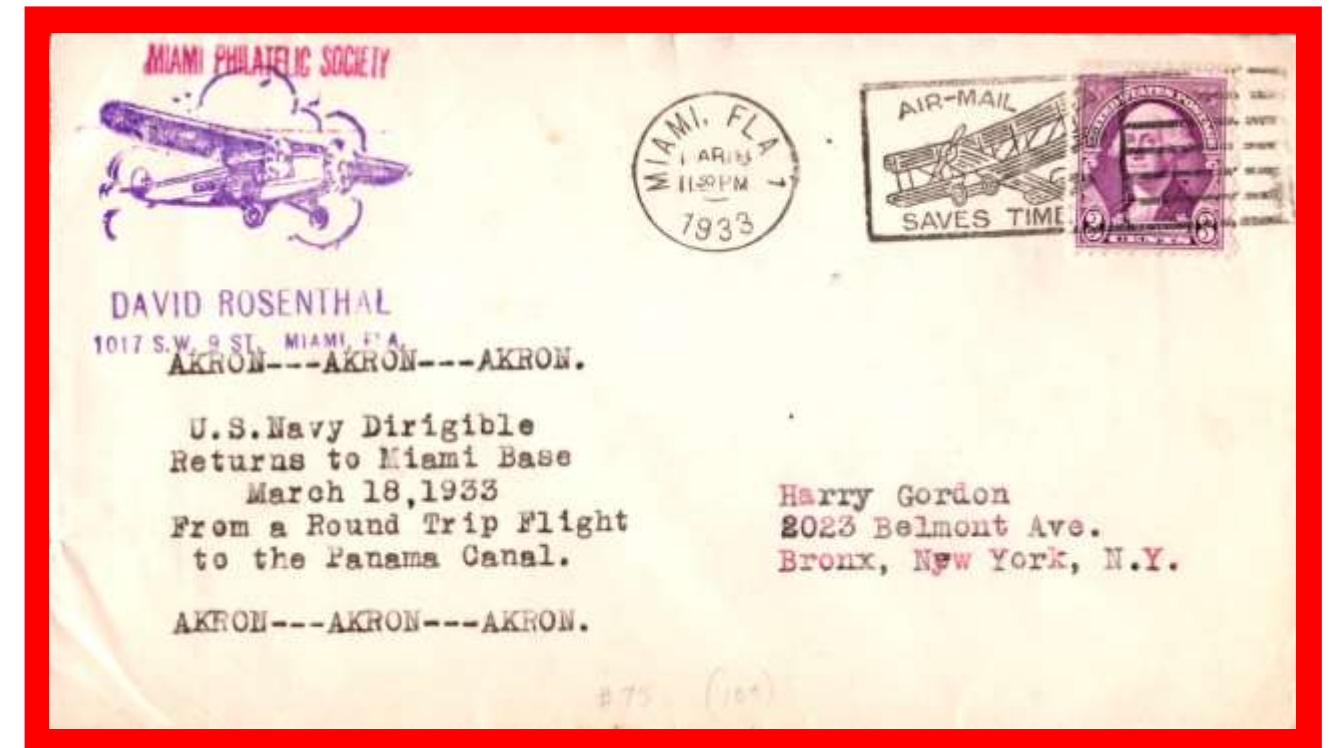


Unused Picture Postcard of the USS Akron over the Canal Zone, Dated March 15, 1933

Last Major Flights of the AKRON – Panama, Miami, Lakehurst, & the Crash



Rubber Stamped "Welcome Akron" cachet and cancel from the Agency Postal de Colon, Panama. The cover is signed by Secretary of the Navy Swanson and Akron CO, Frank McCord. Cover is seldom seen.

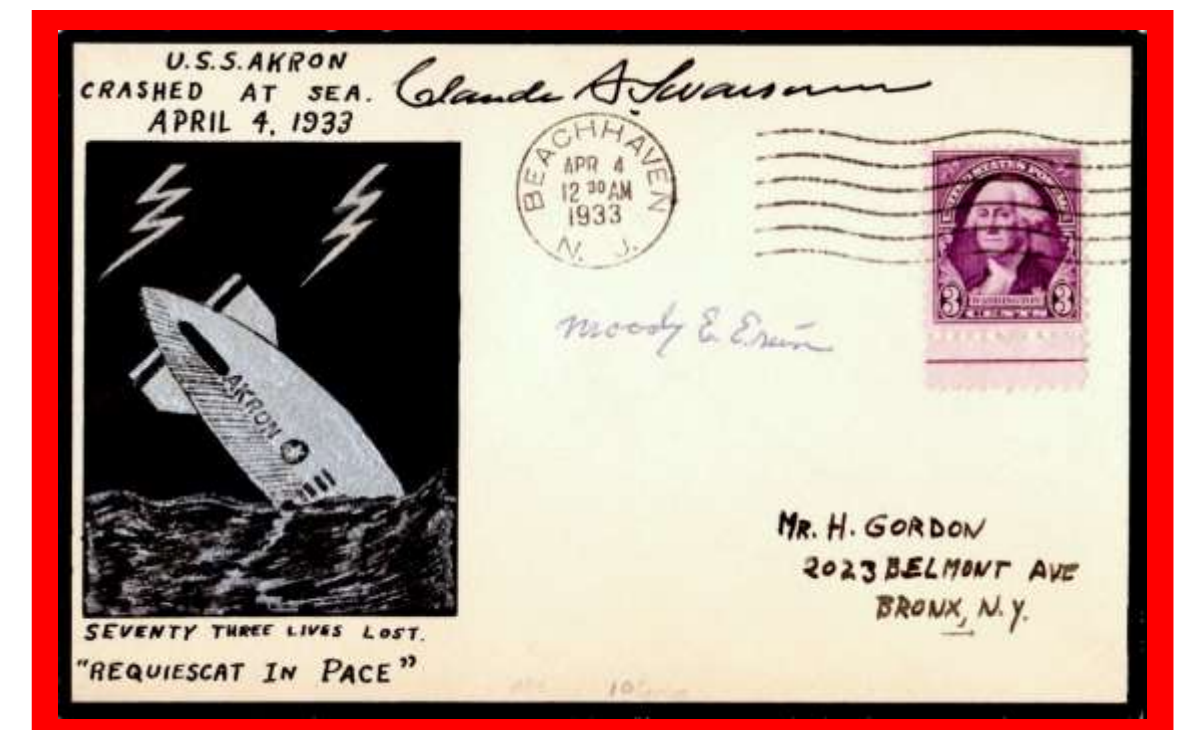


The AKRON was scheduled to return to Lakehurst on March 18; it was held over until the 22nd for additional drills (flight #71). This David Rosenthal cover commemorates the departure from Opa Locka. Ten covers were reported made.

The USS AKRON Crashed on April 4, 1932, Off the New Jersey Coast



Cover prepared by the Fordham AeroPhilatelic Society commemorates the return of the AKRON to Lakehurst on March 23rd. Twenty five covers were made.



Hand painted cover signed by Secretary of the Navy, Claude A. Swanson, and Akron Survivor Moody E. Erwin. The Akron went down 20 miles east of Beach Haven - one of ten covers reported made.

USS MACON Christening March 11, 1933

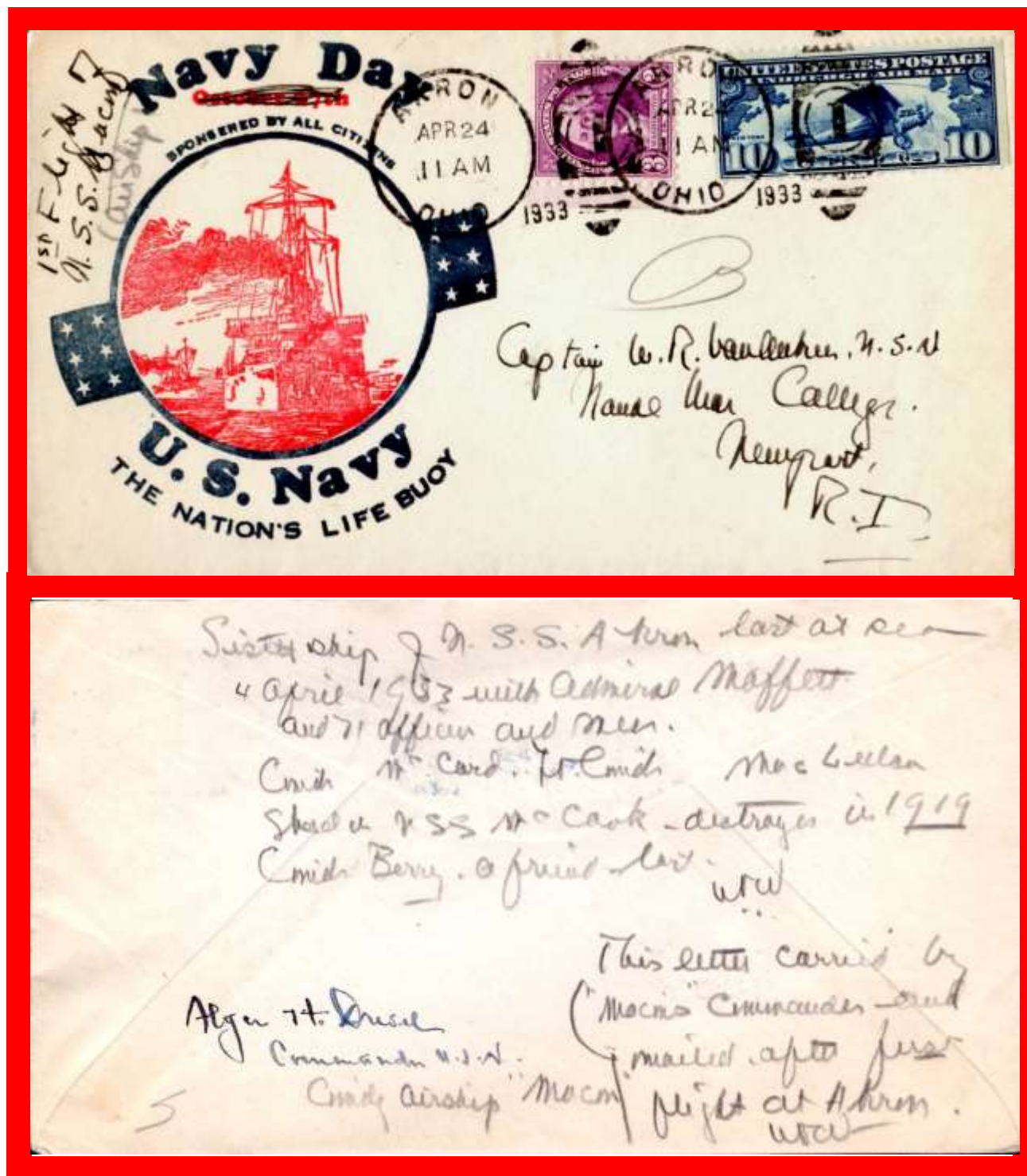


Macon Skin Material Composite with “Macon” stamping; pass for Christening Ceremony at right.



Akron Chamber of Commerce cacheted cover signed by ADM William A. Moffett and his wife, Jeanette Whitton Moffett who Christened the Macon. Admiral Moffett was lost less than one month later in the crash of the USS Akron. Very rare cover with both signatures; may be unique.

Flown Mail - USS MACON First & Lakehurst Delivery Flights April – June, 1933



Mr. William O. Boss

This is to verify that the cover which you showed me (the copy of which is shown above) was one of 4 covers which I sent in an envelope to the US Macon's Commander, A.H. Dresel, along with an enclosed note asking him to carry the covers on the Macon's delivery flight from Akron, Ohio, to Lakehurst, New Jersey. All of my letters were returned individually by mail to me bearing the Lakehurst postmark date of June 24, 1933, without comment or signatures. Since I mailed the covers to Commander A.H. Dresel at Akron, Ohio, only a few days prior the delivery flight, I believe that he did actually carry the covers on the Macon and mailed them to me upon his arrival at Lakehurst on June 24th.

Reuben W. Aretz
Reuben W. Aretz

July 10, 1980

Covers carried and on the MACON's first flight signed on the reverse by MACON CO, CDR Alger Dresel. Ioor Navy Day cacheted cover was serviced by and addressed to CAPT W. R. van Auken in his own hand; he later served as the CO of the USS Oklahoma and was a member of the Macon Crash Board of Inquiry. The notation on the reverse in the lower right is was also penned by CAPT van Auken. Four cover are known to exist.

The envelope for the cover above was originally prepared by A. C. Roessler for the USS AKRON Coast to Coast flight in May, 1932. Reuben Aretz added the typed cachet and address. The provenance for the flown cover is partially established by the accompanying letter from Aretz (part of this collection) – originally part of the collection of Bill Boss and later Allen Klein. It is the reference cover from the definitive encyclopedia of USS MACON covers.

MACON Delivery - Lakehurst to NAS Sunnyvale



The MACON departed Lakehurst at 6:05 PM on October 12, 1933, heading SSE down the coast. Cover postmarked 5 minutes before up-ship has hand-drawn cachet by Stephen E. Hutnick. Very few covers were made and they are seldom seen; however, the number made is not known.



The MACON passed over Fort Worth, TX, at 8 PM on the 13th. This cover prepared by the Postmaster of Ft. Worth with notation of time of the fly-over is the reference cover for the definitive encyclopedia of USS Macon covers - seldom seen; the number made is unknown.

MACON Arrival - Lakehurst to NAS Sunnyvale October, 1933 – February, 1934



Commemorative arrival cover postmarked at Moffett Field 8 minutes after mooring. Covers with the “Goodyear Blimp greets the Macon” cachet are common. However, those printed on the special Tillie Ellett Ford Tri-Motor Airmail envelopes are seldom seen.



One of 35 covers made for the 6th flight from Moffett Field. Cover prepared by Albert Brown was postmarked on the Macon’s departure (up ship at 11:32 AM) and again on her return to Moffett Field (Moored at 4:28 PM). It was intended to be carried but did not make the flight, with “Not Carried” add-on cachet.

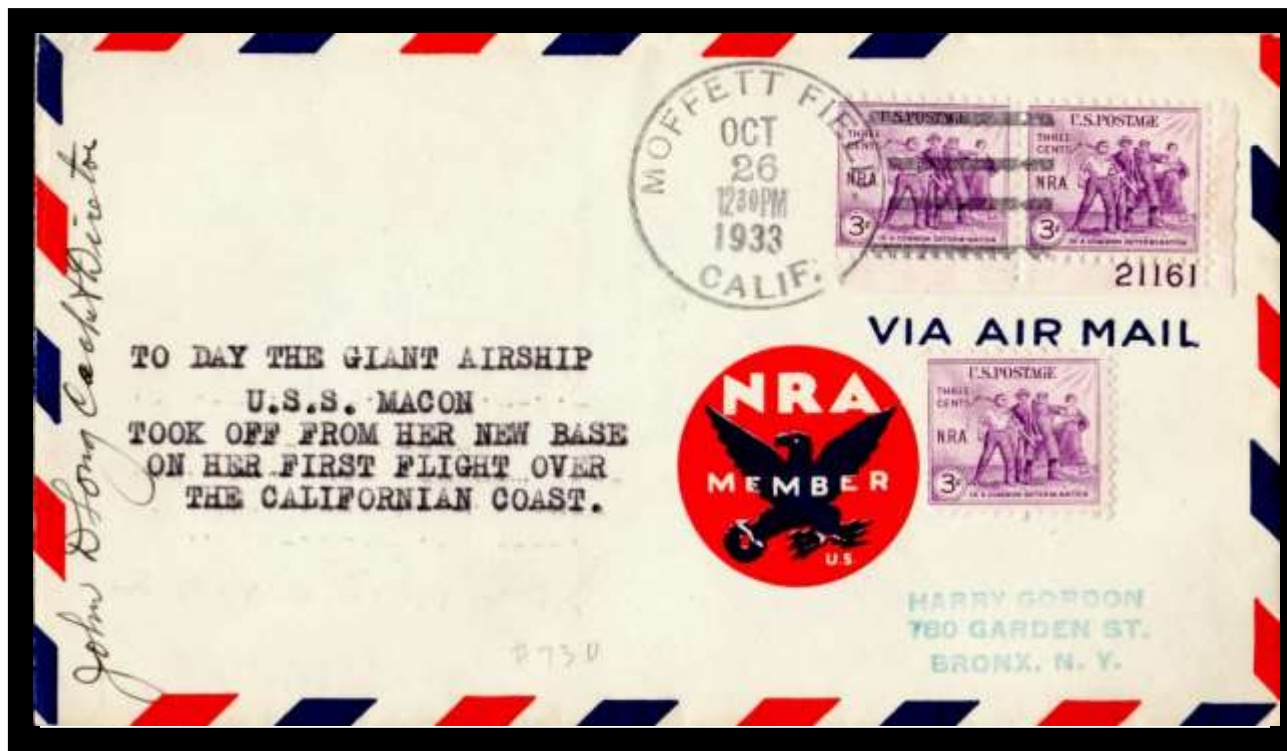


Reduced photo from the collection looking NNW showing the USS Macon hovering above Moffett Field. The road in the foreground is the location of US Highway 101.

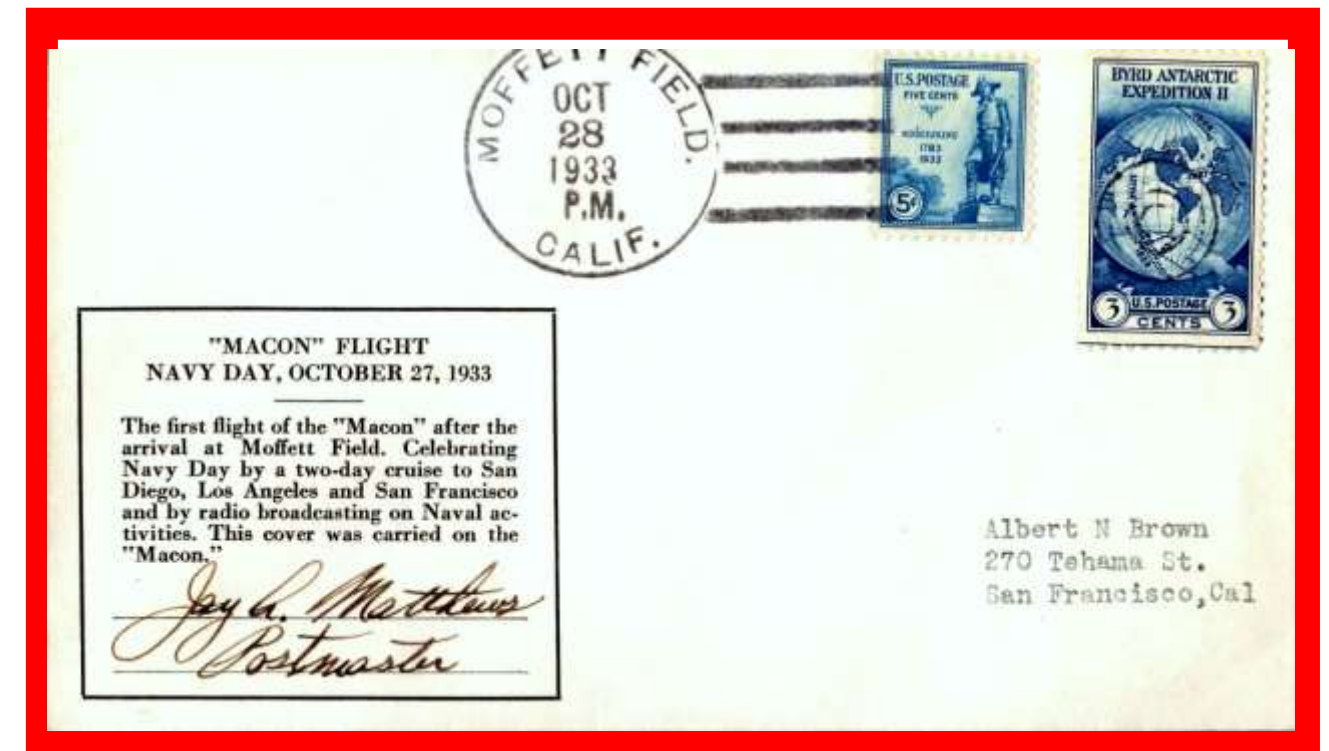


Cover flown on the 6th flight addressed to foremost Macon collector Harry Gordon. Note the additional \$0.05 franking for the flight. Signed by ADM David F. Sellers, CINC US Fleet and RADM Ernest J. King, Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics; King became COMINCH and CNO simultaneously during WWII, and was promoted to Fleet ADM in 1944.

Flown Mail on Early Flights of the USS MACON from Moffett Field



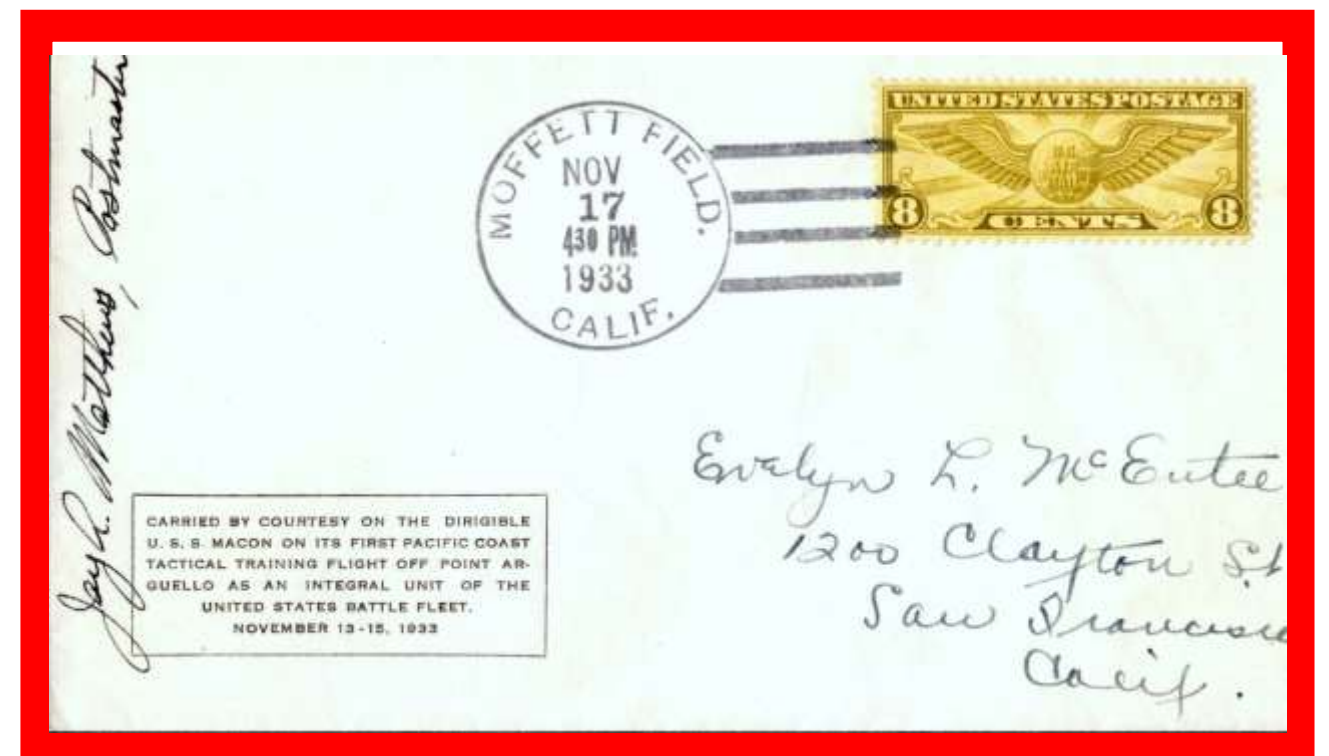
The MACON'S first flight from Moffett Field departed at 12:11 PM on October 26, 1933, heading to Southern California and the Pacific. This cover prepared and signed by J. D. Long is the reference for the definitive Encyclopedia on USS AKRON and MACON covers. 10 Covers were made.



This cover was prepared by and addressed to Albert Brown, President, West Coast Air Mail Society. 24 covers were flown, postmarked on the MACON's return and signed by the Moffett Field Postmaster.

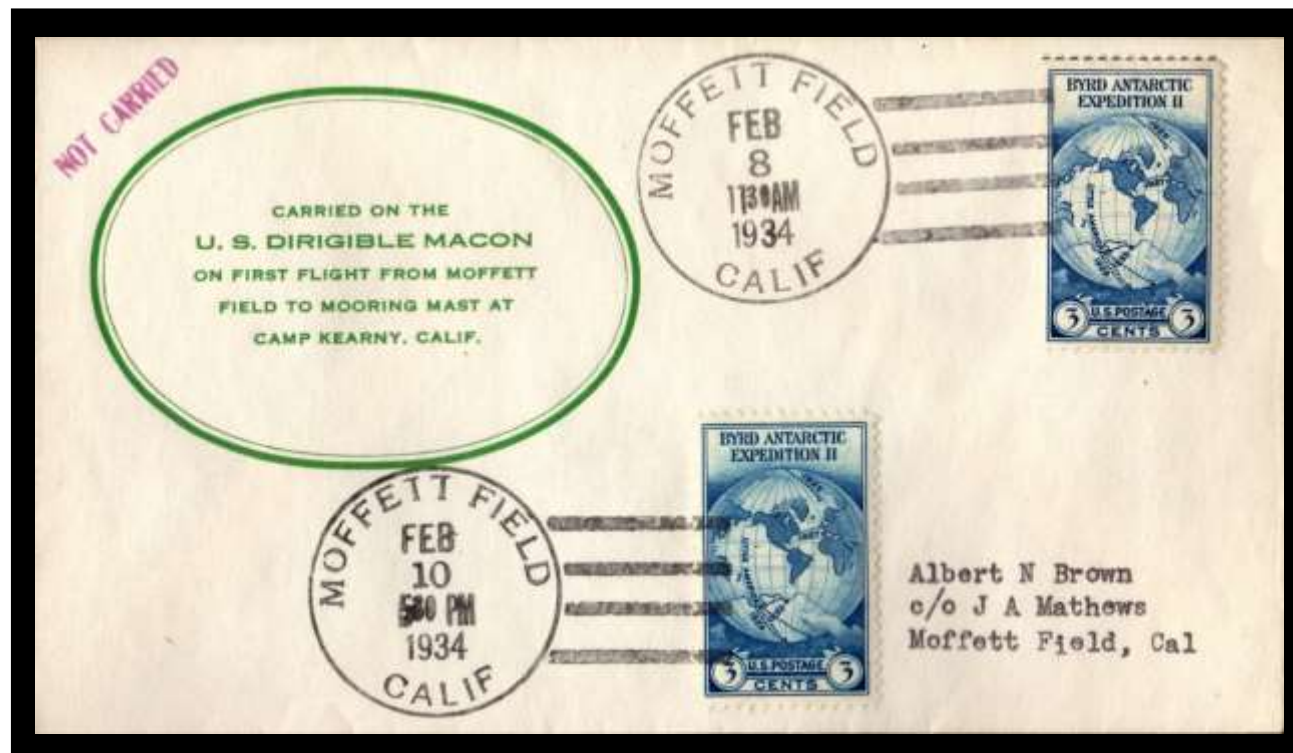


First West Coast maneuvers for the MACON November 14 - 17, 1933 - cover prepared and signed by the Moffett Field Postmaster Jay Matthews. It is seldom seen and may be unique, but the number made is not known. It is the reference cover for the definitive Encyclopedia of USS AKRON and MACON covers



One of 24 covers flown on the 3rd flight from Moffett Field, prepared by Albert Brown. It was postmarked on the MACON's return to Moffett Field – signed by the Moffett Field Postmaster.

October, 1933 – February, 1934



One of 35 covers made for the 6th flight from Moffett Field. Cover prepared by Albert Brown was postmarked on the Macon's departure (up ship at 11:32 AM) and again on her return to Moffett Field (Moored at 4:28 PM). It was intended to be carried but did not make the flight, with "Not Carried" add-on cachet.

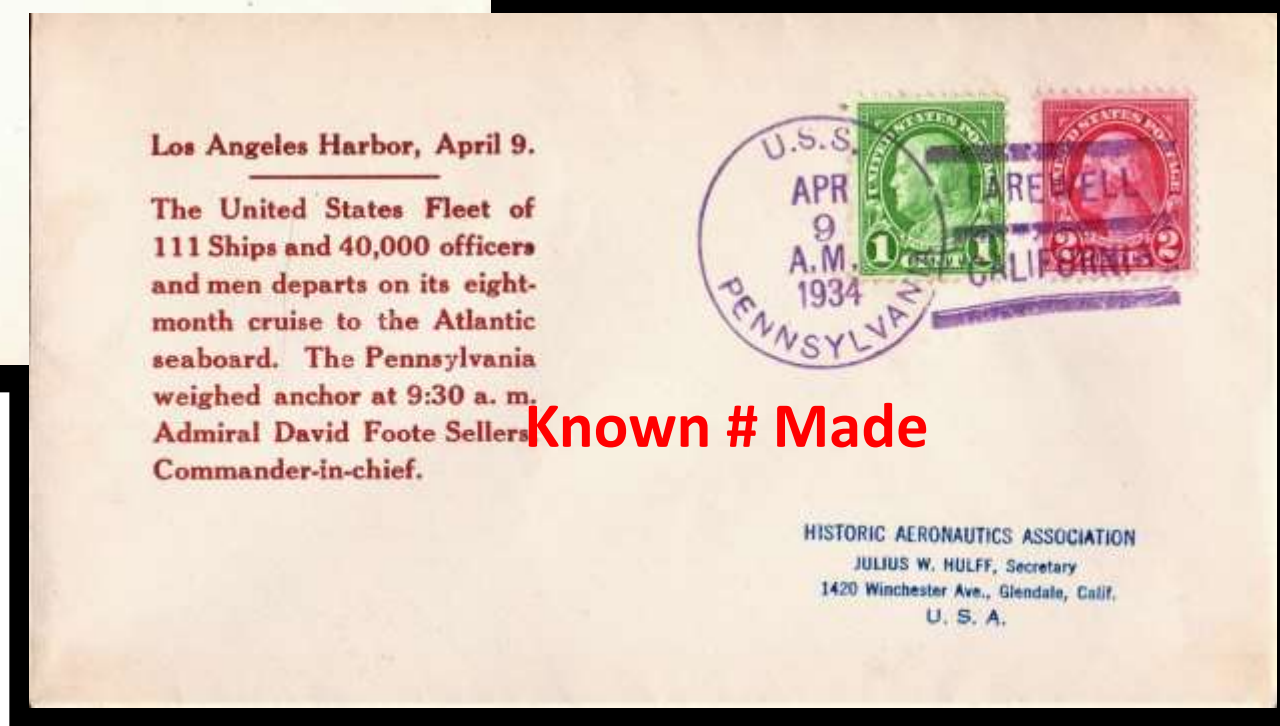


Cover flown on the 6th flight addressed to foremost Macon collector Harry Gordon. Note the additional \$0.05 franking for the flight. Signed by ADM David F. Sellers, CINC US Fleet and RADM Ernest J. King, Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics; King became COMINCH and CNO simultaneously during WWII, and was promoted to Fleet ADM in 1944.

In preparation for the MACON's trip to Florida, the Navy arranged for training exercises with the Fleet, which was on its way to the Atlantic and Caribbean. The MACON departed from Moffett Field at 3:01 PM on April 9th. The twice-mailed cover at right is postmarked 30 minutes after up-ship. It was mailed again upon the MACON's return on April 12th. Albert Brown prepared three of these covers with the news clipping.



The relatively common cover at left, prepared by Edward Hacker, commemorates the MACON's departure for this trip, the 9th flight from Moffett Field (22nd flight overall).



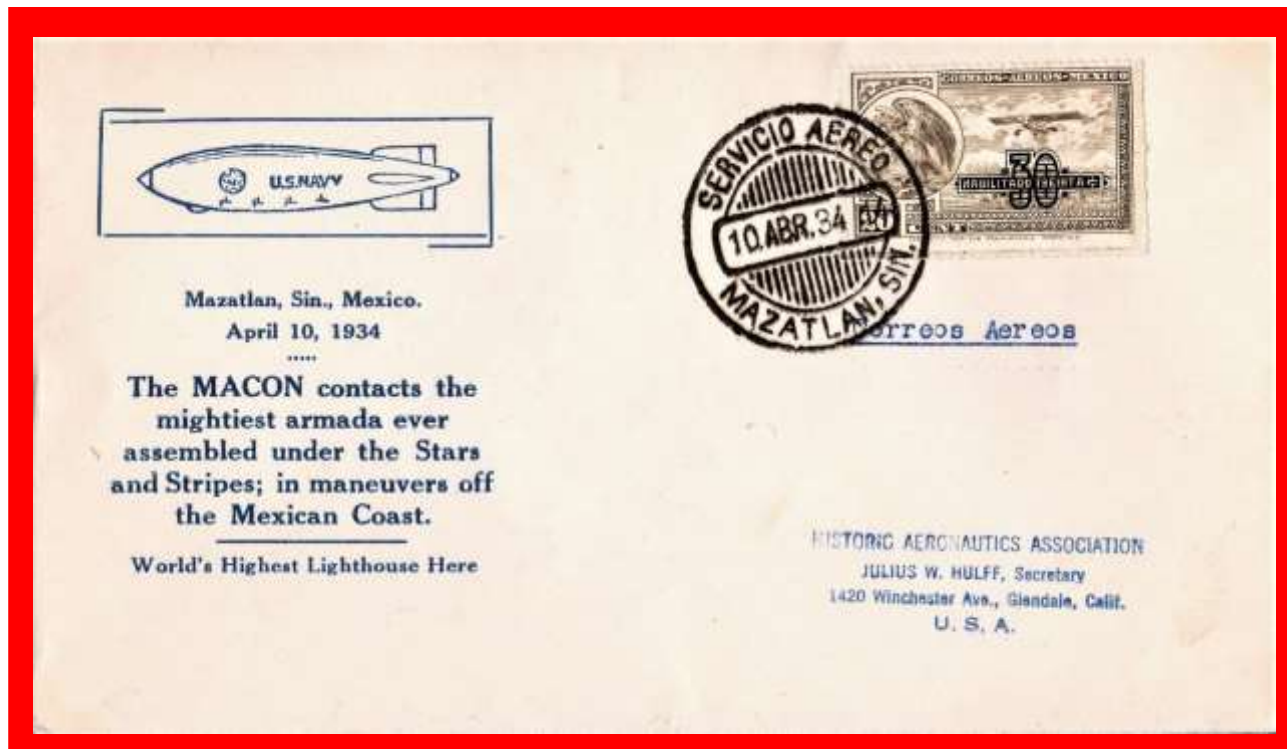
Known # Made

The cover at right from the Fleet Flag Ship provides details on the movement of the Fleet from the Pacific to the Atlantic and Caribbean. This cover prepared by Julius Hulff is #8 of 12 made.

Training Flight for MACON's Exercises in the Caribbean



MACON's exercises with the fleet began at 5:00 AM on April 10th in an area about 300 miles south of San Diego, near Guadalupe Island. Richard Dumonte prepared 75 covers cancelled on board the USS PORTLAND to commemorate the exercises.



The MACON did not travel far enough south east to visit the Mexican coast. However, Julius Hulff prepared this cover to commemorate the MACON's operations off the west coast of Baja California. The airmail cover is franked with a less common Mexico Scott #C46. Only 10 covers were made.



USS LEXINGTON cover with Byrd Powell/Oscar Fatout cachets. The positional cancellation places the MACON just off the coast at Cabo san Lucas. The MACON was released from the exercises in the afternoon of April 11th and returned to Moffett Field, with the fleet continued on to Panama. This cover is seldom seen but the number made is not known.



The MACON returned to Moffett Field on the 12th, mooring at 5:10 PM. The Edward Hacker cover at left, commemorating the return, is postmarked 20 minutes after mooring. Twenty covers were made.



The MACON left Moffett Field on Friday, April 20, 1934, at 9:37 AM, for Florida and Fleet exercises in the Caribbean. The MACON traveled out over the Pacific to Southern California, arriving in the Los Angeles area at 5PM. Self-addressed cover at left has Edward Hacker cachet, postmarked 40 minutes after up-ship. The unlisted cover is seldom seen – the number made is not known.



Unreported Long Beach cover has combo Byrd Powell/Oscar Fatout cachets. The “man on a flying trapeze” cachet is the emblem of the MACON’S F9C squadron. The MACON then traveled east over what is now Interstate 10, until heading SE at Indio, following the railroad right of way toward Yuma, AZ,. These covers are rare; the number made is unknown.

MACON Begins Transcontinental Flight to Florida



From Los Angeles, the MACON headed SE through Thermal, CA, to take advantage of the low altitude terrain. She following the railroad right of way, passing through Yuma, AZ, on the way to Phoenix and Tucson. The cover above is #1 of 6 covers prepared by Julius Hulff. It contained an insert (at right) penned by the Postmaster, indicating the time the MACON passed over Thermal.



The MACON followed the Gila River (near what is now Interstate 8) to Phoenix, meeting up with Interstate 10 to Tucson, onto El Paso, TX. It was easy for the MACON to follow the Southern Pacific Railroad; Interstate 10 was built nearby 20 years later. The cover at left is #1 of 8 covers prepared by Julius Hulff.



The MACON's trip through West Texas became one the defining moments in her history. Even though the path east through El Paso was the lowest route, the altitude exceeded the MACON's normal operating range. Combined with unfavorable weather (strong sunlight and significant clear air turbulence), disaster struck in the mountains between Sierra Blanca and Van Horn, Texas.

The cover at top left pinpoints the time the MACON passed over El Paso and entered into Texas on April 21. This cover is unique as illustrated in the MACON cover reference encyclopedia.

The stresses from the turbulence were too much for the MACON causing the structure around the port fin to buckle. Repairs made on the spot saved the MACON from a catastrophic end.

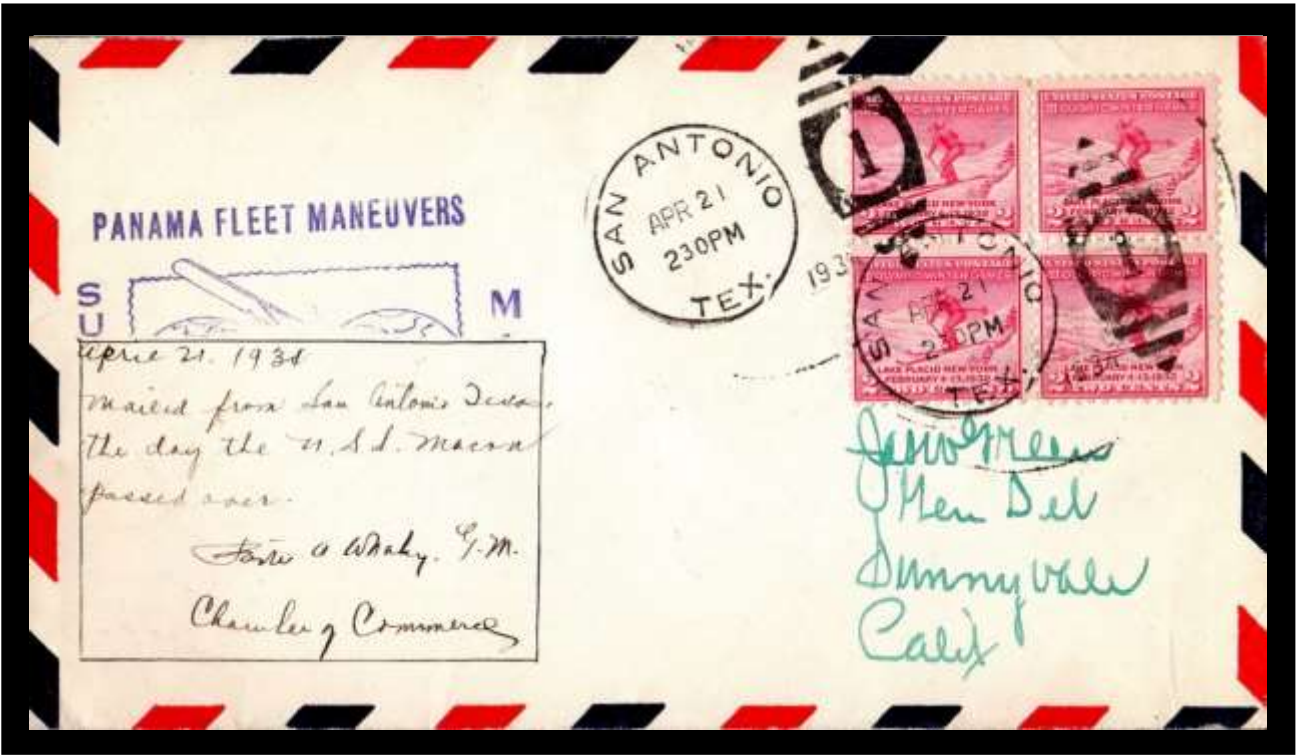
The two covers at lower left commemorate the passage of the MACON through the pass where the damage was sustained.



The Sierra Blanca cover is the definitive reference cover for the MACON cover encyclopedia. The Van Horn cover, is not listed; in both cases less than 5 covers were made.



After the near disaster in the mountains of SW Texas, the MACON sped on its way, reaching San Antonio at approximately 6:00 PM on the 21st. The cover at right commemorates this flyover with James Green's Sunnyvale Chamber cachet overprinted with the hand notation by the San Antonio Chamber. Few of these covers were made.



The MACON passed over Lake Charles, LA, 200 Miles west of New Orleans at 11:30 PM on the 21st. Cover at left with Chamber of Commerce stamp over city seal has pen notation by the Postmaster. Few were made.



Cover at right has not been reported. The red Edward Hacker Zeppelin cachet has been overprinted with the green Crescent City Stamp club cachet and addressed to Hacker. Cover is seldom seen; the number made is less than 20.



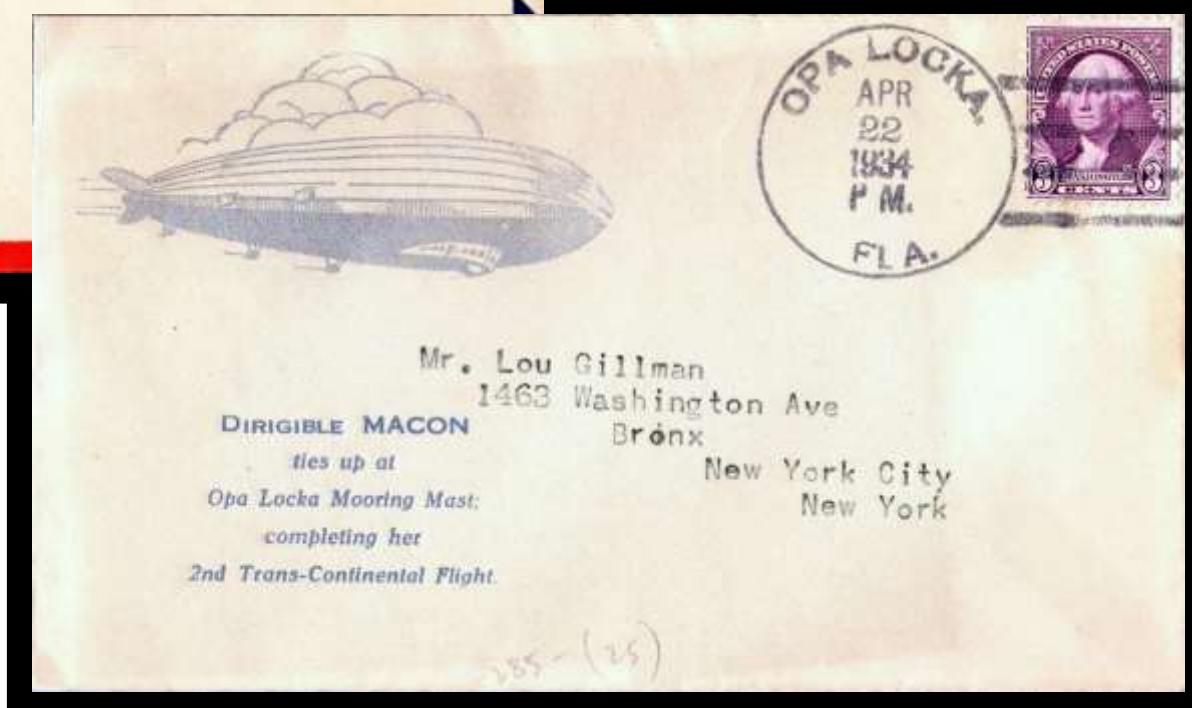
MACON Arrives in



After passing New Orleans. The MACON made her way along the coast, passing Pensacola, FL, early the morning of April 22nd. The cover at left commemorates this fly over. It is another James Green cover with double cachet and notation from the Chamber President. Few of these covers were made.



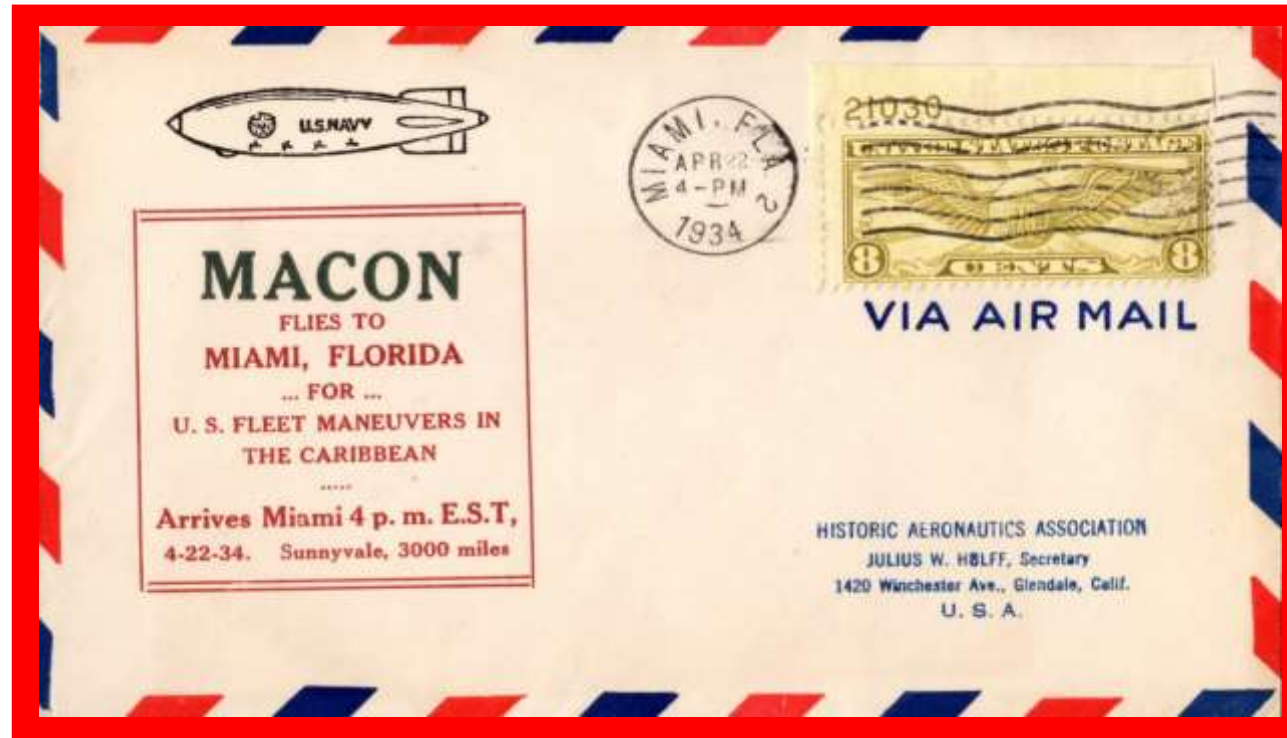
The MACON reached her final destination – the dirigible base in Opa Locka, 10 miles NNW of Miami. Fifty-five hours after leaving Moffett Field, the Macon moored at 7:07 PM on April 22nd, commemorated by the covers below left.



The cover above, serviced by Paul Garretson is common – 99 reported made. Twenty-five of the Lou Gilman covers at right have been reported.

Florida April 22, 1934

Numerous cachet-makers produced covers with the 4:00 PM Miami postmark, for the MACON's arrival. Two examples are shown here. The Julius Hulff cover at right is addressed to Hulff's Historic Aeronautics Association - #5 of 7 made.



Colorful cover from Richard Dumonte (US size #10) with both machine and hand cancels. Thirty-six covers have been reported.

Cover Flown from Moffett Field to Miami?

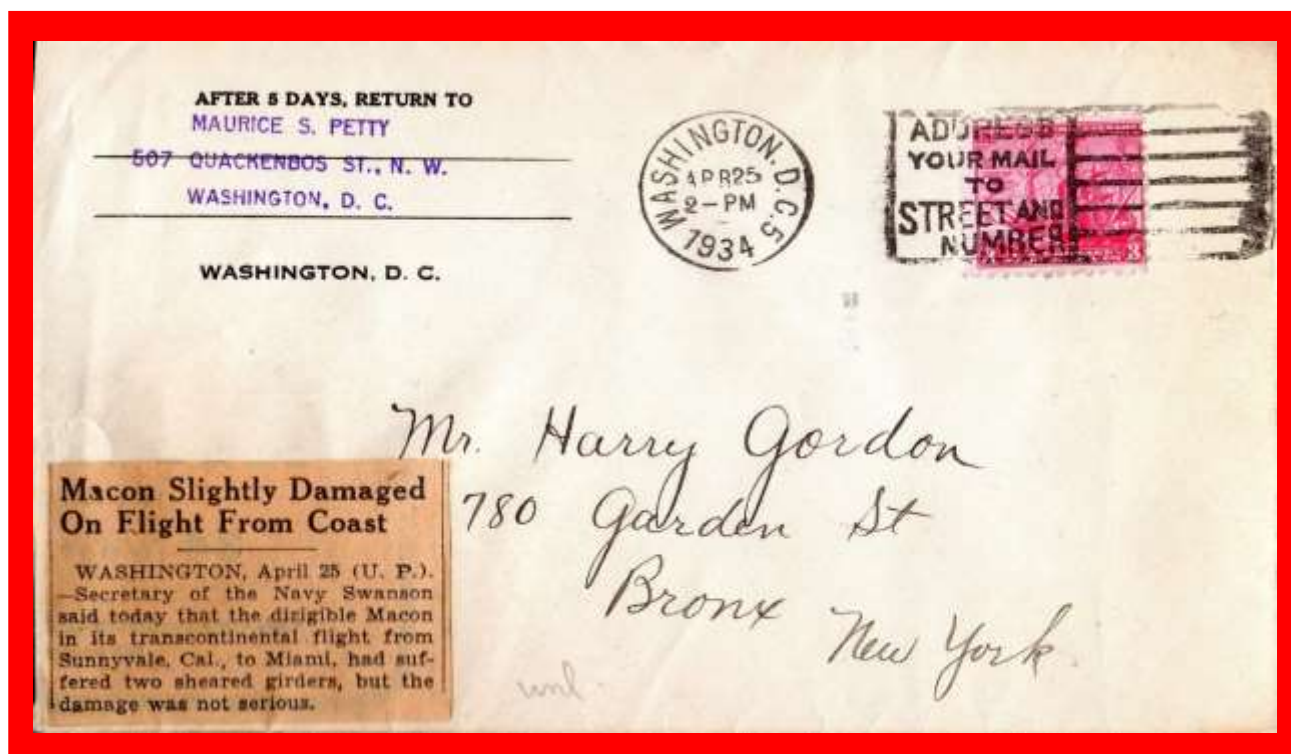


No flown USS MACON covers have been reported for this trip between Moffett Field in Sunnyvale, California, and Miami. This recently (re)discovered cover was dispatched from Sunnyvale before the flight with a common Chamber cachet (250 regular sized covers were made with this cachet). Upon arrival in Miami, the Postmaster signed the cover and it was then delivered to David Rosenthal, President of the Miami Philatelic Society. He added their cachet to the front and back of the cover (a copy of the reverse of the cover is also shown). He also added the pen notation suggesting the cover must have been carried on the MACON. It is possible the cover was carried by regular airmail. However, the flight over a weekend (the MACON left on Friday and arrived on Sunday), and the bad weather in the Miami area during this period make this possibility very unlikely. The cover was quite likely carried by the MACON CO, CDR Dresel or one of the senior officers.

MACON Damage Repairs - Opa Locka



Personnel and materials were sent immediately after the damage report to Florida from Goodyear Zeppelin in Ohio to make repairs. This Miami Chamber cover is signed by the Chief Engineer Dr. Karl Arnestein, and other senior Zeppelin design engineers – H. Leibert, K. Bauch, E. Schoattel, W. Mosebach, B. Schnitzer, K. Huerttle, and W. Klemperer. Bach traveled to Florida for the repairs. Covers with this cachet are common; this cover with the signatures is unique.

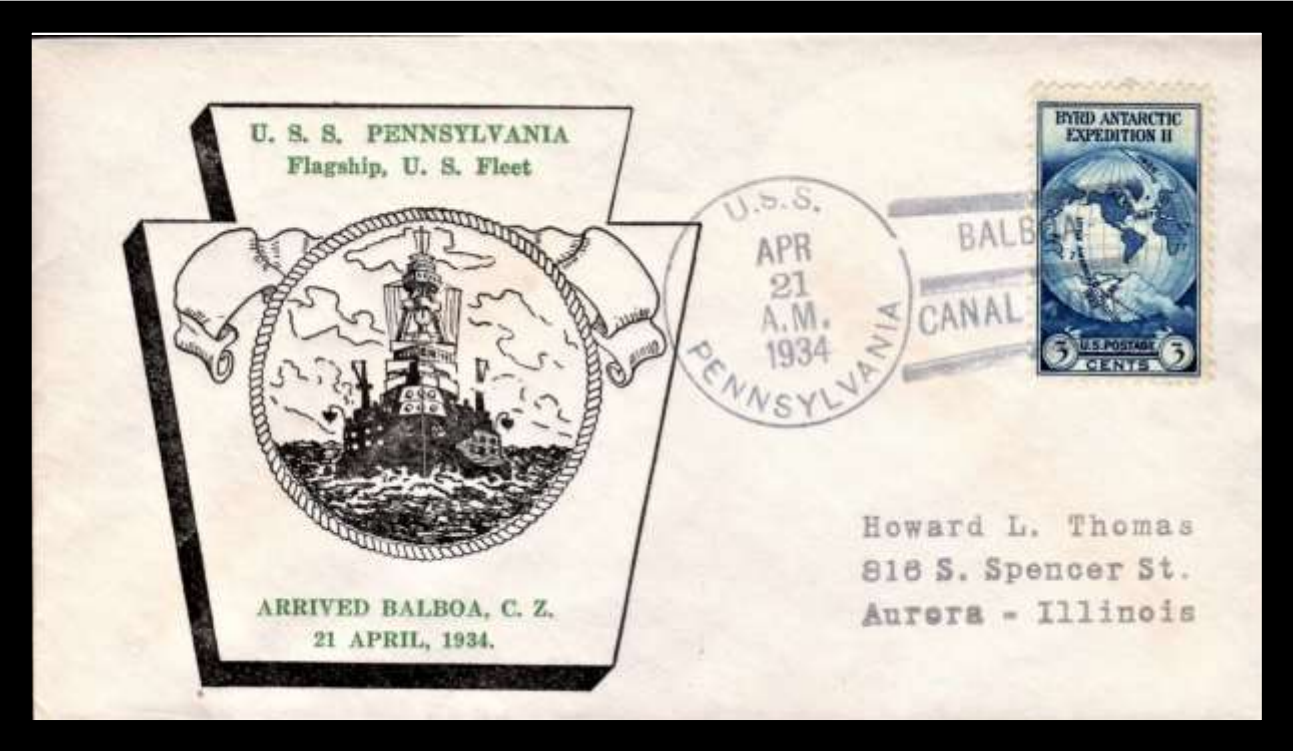


News of the damage was not initially released. This cover was sent to Harry Gordon, well known collector and publisher of the first MACON cover catalog.

Rapid Transfer of the U. S. Fleet from the Pacific to the Caribbean



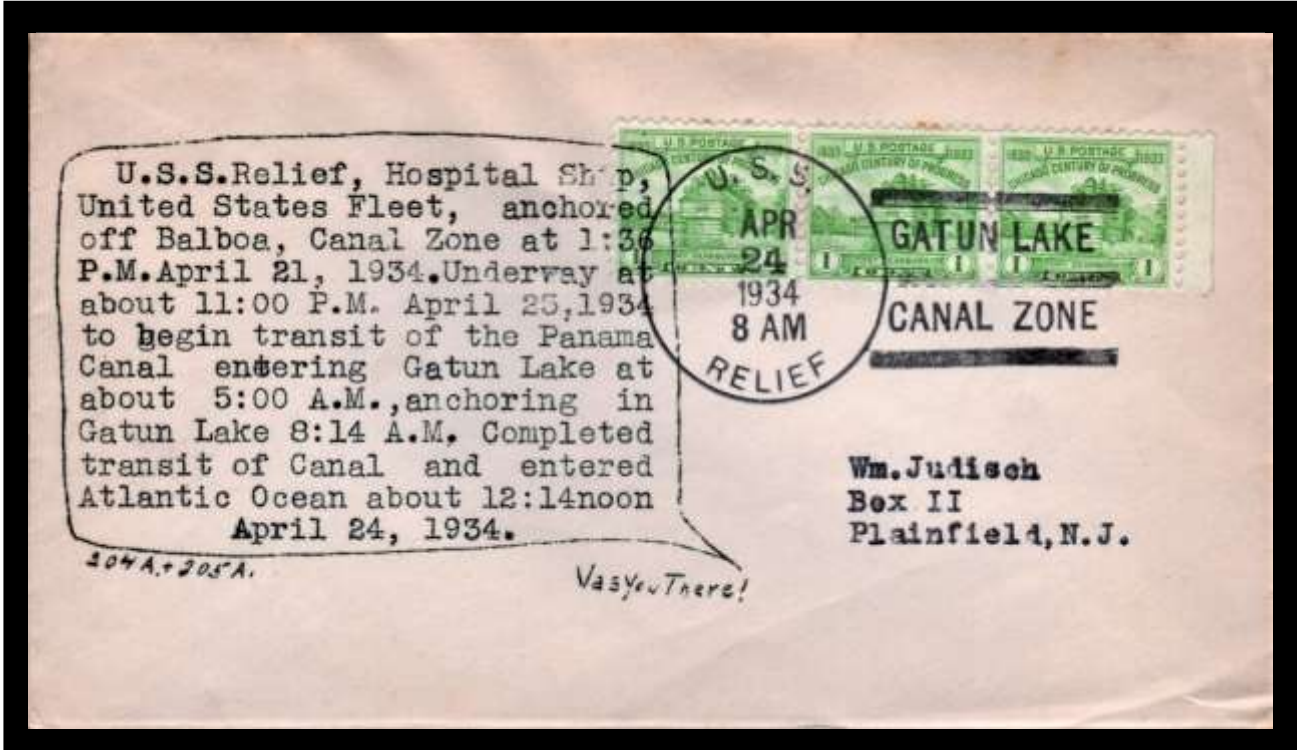
Twice mailed cover from the USS RELIEF hospital ship. After the early April exercises with the MACON, the Fleet headed to the Panama Canal, to assess the time required to move from Pacific to Atlantic. The second postmark commemorates the sighting of the MACON in the Caribbean on May 6th, during to first exercises. Although a May 6th cover is listed, neither an April 10th or twice mailed cover has been reported. Very few were made.



Common cover with Calloway cachet announcing the arrival of the USS PENNSYLVANIA in Balboa, The Canal Zone, on the Pacific side of the Panama Canal.



Twice mailed cover from the USS LEXINGTON. The first double circle postmark commemorates the LEXINGTON's trip through the Panama Canal. The May 8th postmark and 3-line cancellation commemorates the "attack" on the LEXINGTON during the Caribbean exercises. The "attack" was actually from planes of the USS SARATOGA, using the LEXINGTON position information supplied by the MACON. The cover is signed by the CO and XO of the LEXINGTON, CDR Alger Dresel, CO of the MACON, and ADM Ernest J. King. This cover with the signatures is unique.



USS RELIEF cover with cachet describing the journey through the Panama Canal, arriving in the Caribbean on April 24th. Number made is not known.



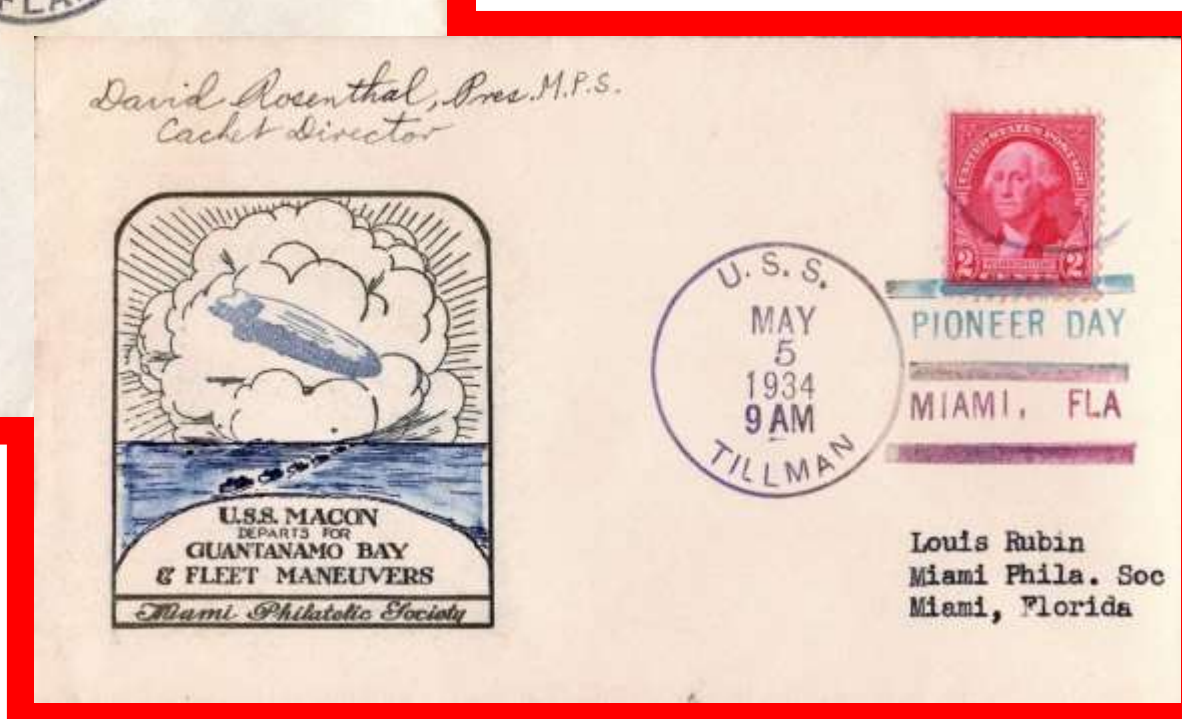
The rare cover at right with Michael Sussman cachet is signed by CDR Dresel and RADM King. It flew to New York, was taken aboard the SS Bremen, and flown via catapult plane to Southampton. It is backstamped in Berlin and Helsinki. Cover is only listed in the Graue Catapult Catalog – very few covers made.



The MACON made two trips from Opa Locka, the first departing on May 5th, at 9:00AM. She flew SSE to a position between Coco Solo and Puerto Rico for Fleet exercises. The cover at left with hand-painted cachet is seldom seen; the number made is unknown.



The MACON flew over South Florida on its way to the Caribbean. The Edward Hacker cover at left has a 10:00 AM Perrine Postmark, for the MACON flyover. Less than 15 covers were made.



Only 3 hand colored USS TILLMAN (DD-135) covers were made to commemorate the flight. The TILLMAN became one if the “50 ships that save the world” when she was transferred to the UK and re-christened the HMS Wells in December, 1940.

First USS MACON Exercises in the Caribbean



The MACON flew over Havana at noon on April 5th. The two covers at right commemorate the fly-over. Both have the proper \$0.10 franking for the airmail rate to the U.S. The top cover is the reference cover for the Macon cover encyclopedia and may be unique.



The MACON continued through South Florida and the Keys on her way to Havana. The Edward Hacker cover at left commemorates the Key Largo flyover. Fourteen covers were made.

The bottom cover is one of 8 covers made on Michael Sussman envelopes with an additional J. J. Specto cachet. The May 5th Havana postmark ties the two Cuban airmails. The cover signed by MACON CO CDR Dresel and RADM Ernest J. King, is addressed to well know collector of the period, Harry Gordon.



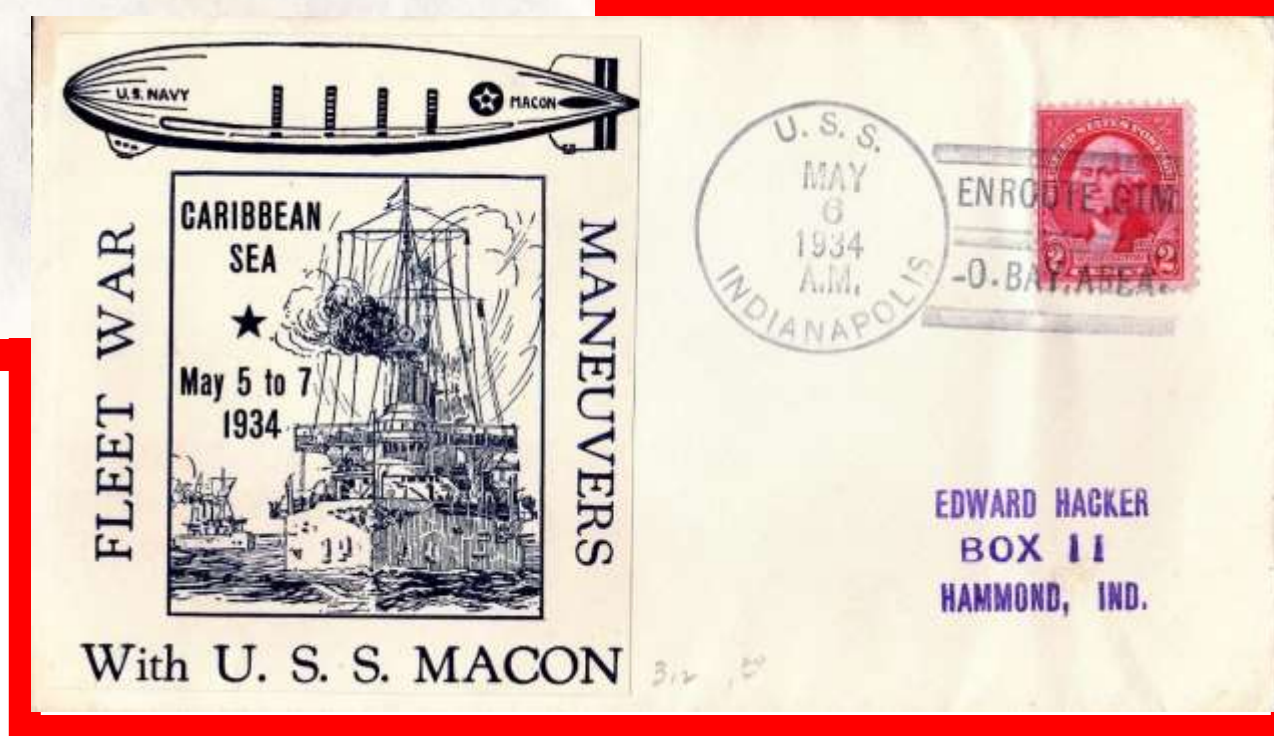


Cover at left from Coco Solo, Canal Zone, commemorates the MACON's participation in the Fleet exercises (Problem XV). Coco Solo was a Naval Submarine Base and Air Station on the Atlantic side of the Panama Canal. The Fleet passed by Coco Solo on their way to the exercises. The cover is signed by Secretary of the Navy Claude A. Swanson; ADM David F. Sellers, Commander in Chief of the US Fleet; ADM Ernest J. King; and CDR Charles E. Rosendahl. It may be unique and is the reference for the MACON cover encyclopedia.



Unlisted Edward Hacker cover at left from the USS TEXAS, which participated in the exercises commencing on May 6th. Fewer than 15 covers were made.

Hacker cover from the USS INDIANAPOLIS postmarked during the exercises. The sinking of the INDIANAPOLIS in July, 1945, and loss of nearly 900 men became a famous case and was made into a movie in 2016. Edward Hacker made 15 of these covers with add-on cachet.





The MACON returned to Opa Locka on May 7th, passing over Matanzas, Cuba. The cover at left, signed by the Postmaster, commemorates the fly-over. Attractively franked with a Lindbergh overprint, “very few covers were made.”

Unreported USS NEVADA, MACON, cover with Panama/Canal Zone mixed franking. Neither the \$0.01 Panama nor the Canal Zone airmail are necessary for this usage. Cover is seldom seen, but the number made is unknown.



The MACON followed the Keys back to Opa Locka. The Hacker cover at left commemorates the fly-over of Islamorada, 15 miles SW of Key Largo, at 11:00 AM. Less than 15 of these covers were made.

After passing over Hollywood, Florida, the MACON moored at Opa Locka at 5:40 PM. The cover at right is seldom seen, but the cachet-maker and number made are not known – reference for the MACON cover encyclopedia.



USS MACON's Second



The MACON spent 3 days at Opa Locka before the next exercises. Up-ship on May 11th was at 8:55 AM. The Miami covers shown here have 11:30 postmarks. The cover above was made by Richard Dumonte; thirty-six covers were made.



The cover above was made by Julius Hulff; it is number 1 of 7 and is the only one on a Roessler envelope.

The MACON passed over Princeton at 9:30 on her way to Puerto Rico. Few covers with the now familiar Edward Hacker cachet at left were made; the number is not known.

Exercises in the Caribbean

The MACON was on station near Puerto Rico early the morning of May 12th. Exercises for the MACON started at 9:55 AM. The cover at right signed by the USS HOUSTON mail clerk indicated a sighting at 11:00 AM. The cover with Edward Hacker cachet is not listed; fewer than 10 were made.

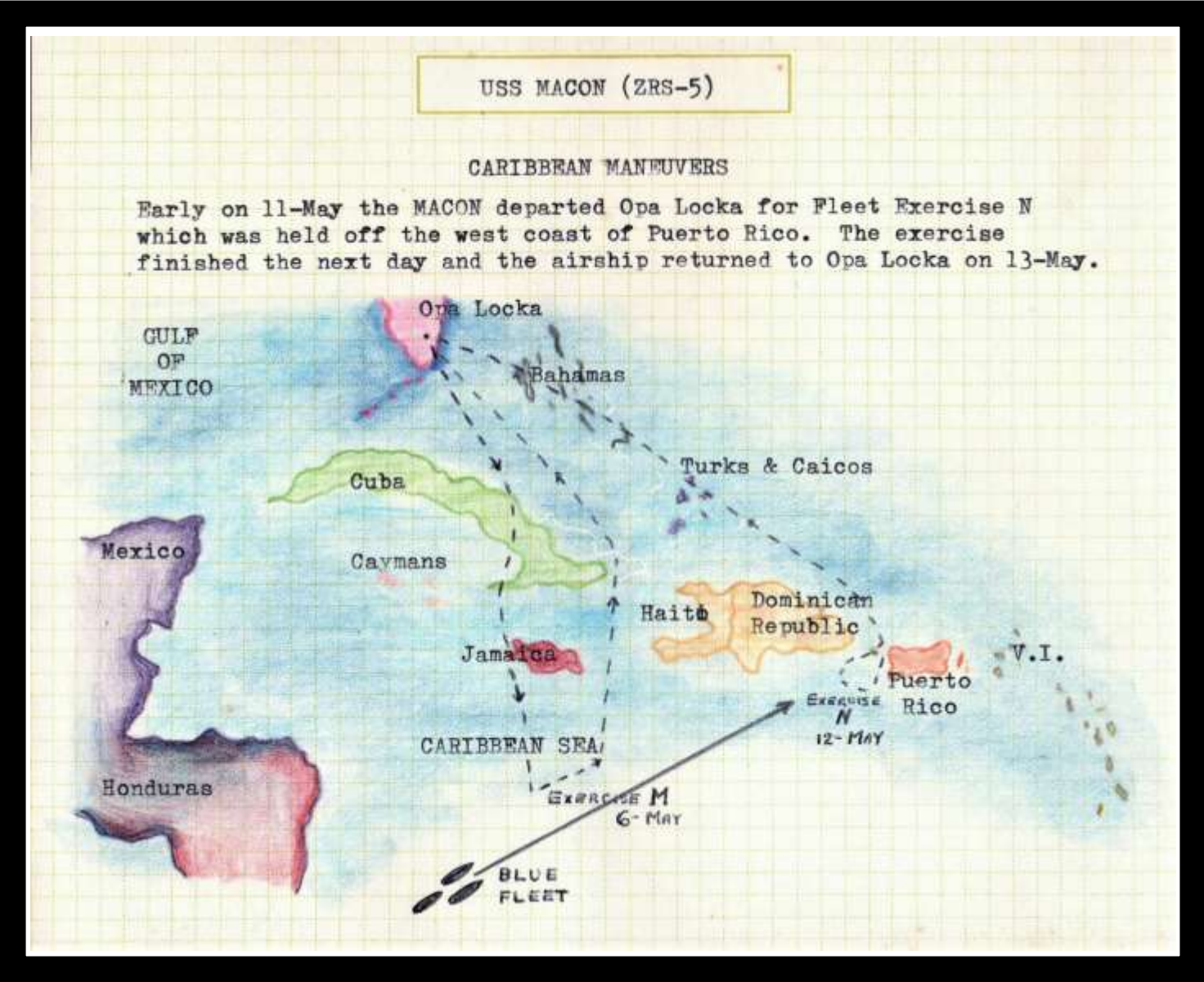


At approximately 3:30 PM the MACON was released from the Exercise. The USS PORTLAND cover at left commemorates the Macon's departure on her way back to Opa Locka. This cover is not listed, seldom seen; with fewer than 10 covers made.



The MACON made the trip back to Opa Locka – over 1000 miles – in 15 hours, mooring at 5:45 AM on May 13th. The Julius Hölff cover at right commemorates the event. This cover is #1 of 7 made.

Summary - USS MACON in the Caribbean



The MACON's operations in the Caribbean from May 5th – the 13th are summarized in the drawing above from an exhibit circa 1960, artist unknown. The original plan had the MACON traveling up the Atlantic Coast with the Fleet after the exercises. Given the need for more permanent repairs to the damage from the east bound flight, the MACON was ordered back to Moffett Field.



The only stamp issued to commemorate the USS ARKRON or MACON is the Cuba Scott #C19, showing the MACON over Matanzas, issued in 1936. A mint imperforate block of 4 is shown at left; the perf 12½ variety is shown on the plan page of the exhibit.

USS MACON Leaves Florida for Moffett Field in California



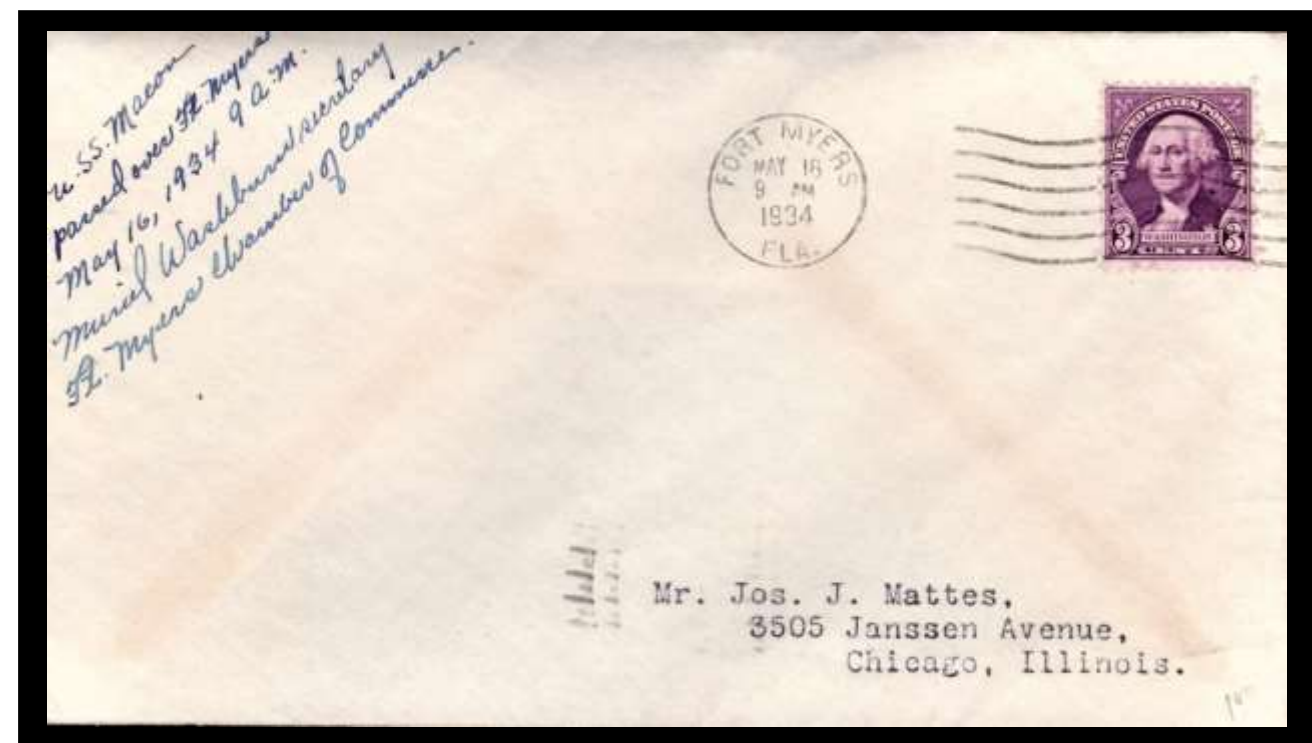
The MACON departed Opa Locka on May 16th at 7:07 AM heading back to Moffett Field, retracing the eastbound path. Michael Sussman cover commemorating departure. The number made is not known – reference for the definitive MACON cover encyclopedia.



Rare cover with Miami postmark 23 minutes after up-ship. Fifteen covers were made. The cachet is in the style of others made by Julius Hulff; however they all appear to be serviced by E. H. Brennecke.



Similar cover to the one at top right commemorating the flyover of Dania, Florida. Dania (now Dania Beach) is 30 miles north of Miami. This cover has not been reported, is seldom seen, but the number made is not known.



After moving up the east coast of Florida, the MACON headed west, passing over Fort Meyers. Cover penned by the Ft. Meyers Chamber secretary commemorates the flyover at 9:00 AM. The number made is not known.

USS MACON In Transit to Moffett Field



Edward Hacker cover at left from USS TILLMAN commemorates the MACON's departure. Twenty-five covers were made.

The MACON made her way across the Gulf of Mexico and into Texas. Once in Texas she took a path farther north than the east bound flight. The cover at top right was penned by the Postmaster in San Angelo Texas for the fly-over at 2:30 AM on May 17th. As usual, over land, the MACON followed a major railroad right of way, from San Angelo to what is now the junction between Interstate 10 and 20. The San Angelo cover is also signed on arrival by the San Diego Postmaster; few covers were made.

The lighter MACON made her way much easier in the morning through the mountains of SW Texas, making it all the way into California by early morning on the 18th. The cover at bottom right commemorating the fly-over of El Centro, California, is seldom seen, but the number made is not known.



USS MACON Back Home at Moffett Field



The MACON arrived at Moffett Field on May 18th at 7:07 AM, a trip of 51 hours. The common Francis James cover above, signed by CDR Herbert Wiley, was postmarked 23 minutes after mooring. Cachet makers would send a proof of the cachet with details on number made, etc. to Harry Gordan author of the first catalog of MACON covers. The report at right signed by the cachet-maker and Oakland cachet director shows the number of airmail and regular mail covers made, typically about 1/3rd airmail 2/3rds regular mail.



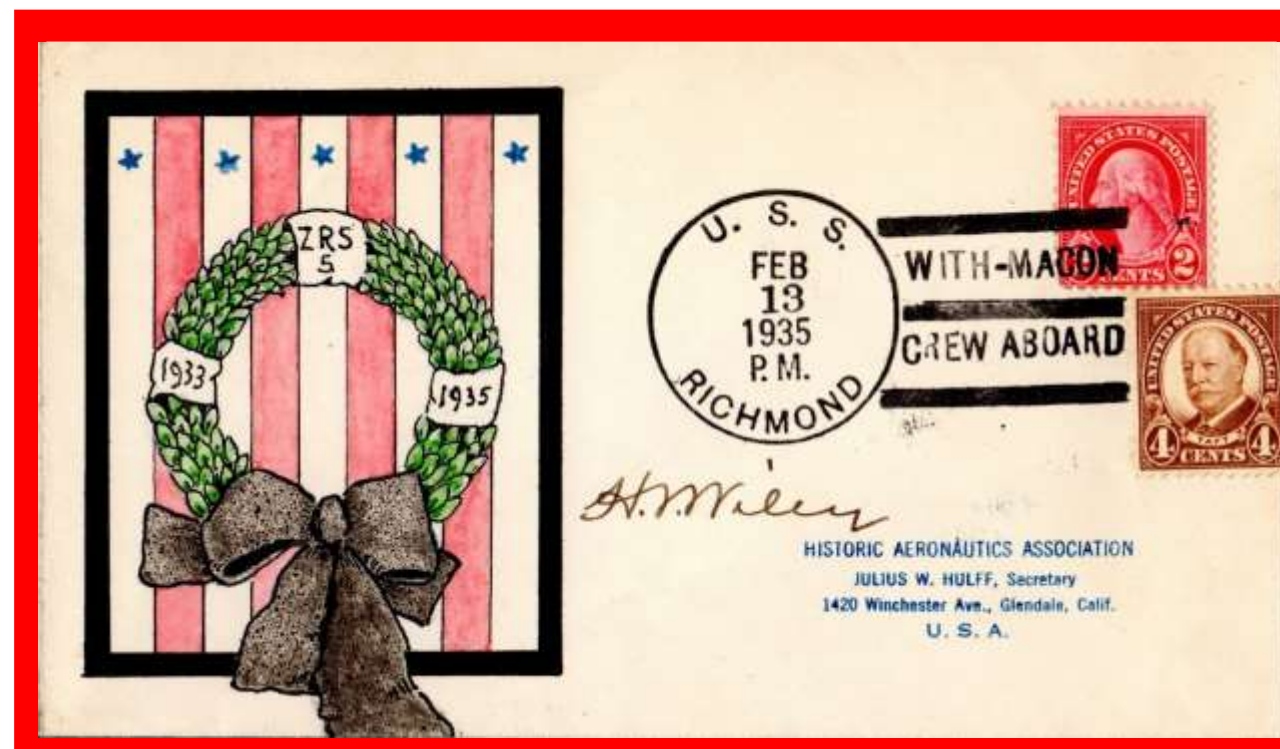
Julius Hulff cachet on Edmund Miller envelope commemorating the MACON arrival at Moffett Field is number 4 of 15 covers made.

The Last Flight and Crash of the USS MACON

The MACON's flight to Florida was the last flight of a large airship to the mast at Opa Locka; the crash of the Hindenburg prevented a visit later in 1937. The MACON would make 29 additional flights during the remainder of 1934 and early 1935. Unfortunately this did not leave time for the final repairs of the damage from the April flight to Miami; these repairs were scheduled for the spring of 1935 as well as a trip to Hawaii – the “flight that never was”. The remaining damage was, at least in part, a cause of the MACON's crash.

The cover at top right summarizes the MACON's last flight, up ship at 7:10 AM on February 11, 1935, with the crash logged at 5:15 PM on the 12th. At 5:05 pm on February 12th, violent wind turbulence damaged the upper tail fin, puncturing one of the Macon's helium gas bags; the series of events that followed caused the crash, and at 5:15 PM an SOS was sent out. The final postmark on the cover was struck 15 minutes after the SOS. The rates on covers with multiple mailings are always problematic. Given the cover never left the Moffett Field Post Office for the first mailing, the rate is over-paid by \$0.05; the franking for the final mailing to the cachet-maker, Edward Hacker is the correct \$0.03. This cover may be unique as others have never been reported.

The USS RICHMOND was just south of the site at the time of the crash. On her way to the assigned search area, the Richmond passed by the bulk of the survivors and rescued 64 members of the Macon's crew. The unreported cover was prepared by Julius Hulff for the arrival of the Richmond on February 13th; it is seldom seen but the number made is unknown

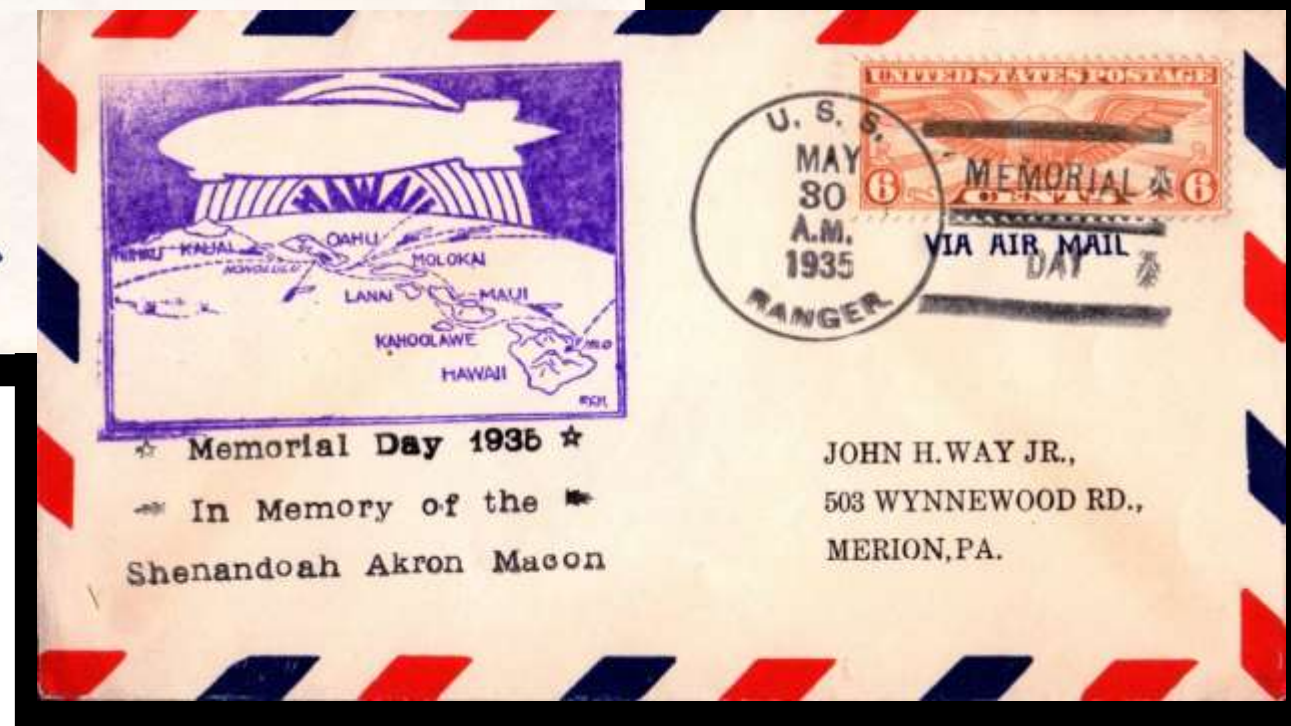


Aftermath & the Flight that Never Was



The flight that never was - cover from the USS TEXAS, signed by the mail clerk for the planned MACON flight up the Coast for the Fleet review. The Navy ordered the MACON back to the West Coast to repair damage from the east-bound flight. Unreported Cover at left has the same cachet as one from the INDIANAPOLIS.

The flight that never was #2 - the Aircraft Carrier USS Ranger cover was prepared using a cachet intended for the MACON's Hawaii trip later in the spring of 1935. It was a recut from a USS AKRON cachet. This unlisted cover is seldom seen, but the number made is not known.



By the time of the Macon crash, winged aircraft had demonstrated promise for long range oceanic missions. The cover at right was flown between The Mainland & Hawaii 2 months after the crash. "Only a few of these covers were (reported) carried on the round trip flight." Flight of the Sikorsky S-42 "Pan Am Clipper" arriving in Honolulu on April 17th, with return flight arriving in Alameda on the 23rd. The Navy favored investment in long-range scout planes vs. additional ZRS's, especially since the cost of one ZRS could buy 20 – 30 sea planes.

