Polish Zeppelin Mail from the Free City of Danzig in the Zygmunt Kopel Collection

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Published in *The London Philatelist*, December 2025

This article investigates one of the most elusive and understudied areas of Polish aerophilately: Zeppelin mail dispatched through the Polish Post Office in the Free City of Danzig (Gdańsk) from 1932 to 1936. Prompted by the dispersal of the late Zygmunt Kopel's collection, the study examines fifteen exceptional Zeppelin covers carried aboard Graf Zeppelin (LZ 127) and Hindenburg (LZ 129) and situates them within their broader postal and historical context.

Drawing on archival sources, auction records, contemporary philatelic literature, and specialist research, the article offers the first comprehensive survey of known Zeppelin mail from the Polish postal service in Danzig. A census identifies at least 101 recorded items, including covers posted directly in Danzig and those routed through Poland before entering the German Zeppelin mail network. The study analyzes postal rates, routes, registration procedures, flight cachets, and transatlantic destinations to reconstruct how this remarkably scarce material was handled and transmitted.

This study focuses on the unusual legal and postal circumstances surrounding these dispatches. Although using PORT GDANSK overprinted stamps on international Zeppelin mail technically violated Polish postal regulations, the correspondence still entered the German airship system and was successfully transported across the Atlantic. The study classifies the surviving covers by transmission method and shows how collectors, dealers, and postal intermediaries devised innovative ways to secure Zeppelin carriage despite official restrictions.

Highlights include covers flown on the celebrated 1933 "Triangle Flight," round-trip Zeppelin mail transported across both South and North America, and the two recorded Danzig dispatches carried aboard the Hindenburg to North America in 1936. The article also examines the important role of dealer-philatelist Alfons Pilarzy in creating and preserving many of these rarities.

By combining original research, census data, and rigorous postal-history analysis, the study substantially contributes to the literature on Zeppelin mail and sheds new light on the operations of the Polish Post Office in the Free City of Danzig.