

# **ARGENTINE AIR MAIL: CARRIERS, ROUTES, AND RATES, 1917-1946**

## **SYNOPSIS**

**Purpose:** To illustrate, through a history of the carriers of air mail to and from Argentina, the development of Argentine domestic and foreign air mail routes and the evolution of Argentine postal air mail rates from 1917 to 1946. Examples of transit mail are also provided. Precursor, test or experimental flights are shown only if they were linked to the development of routes or improvements to commercial aviation.

**Scope:** Chronologically, the scope of the exhibit runs from 1917 to 1946, i.e. from the beginnings of commercial aviation through World War II and the resumption of more normal peacetime service. The majority of the covers are out-bound from Argentina. In-bound covers are included to help illustrate routing and the range of carriers involved in getting air mail to Argentina.

**Organization:** I have tried several organizational schemes for this exhibit and have finally (?) decided to arrange the material chronologically by carrier. Routes and rates are shown, by carrier, as they evolved over time.

### **I. The Early Years, 1917-1924.**

- Experimental flight, 1917, Buenos Aires to Montevideo.
- Compañía Rioplatense de Aviación, 1923-1924.

### **II. The German Presence, 1925-1941.**

- Aero-Lloyd Córdoba, 1925-1926
- Junkers Mission, 1926
- Sindicato Condor, 1927-1941
- Luftschiffbau Zeppelin, Deutsche Zeppelin Reederei, Deutsche Luft Hansa, 1930-1939

### **III. French Initiatives, 1925-1940.**

- Compagnie Générale Aéropostale/Aeroposta Argentina, 1927-1933
- Air France, 1933-1940, 1946

### **IV. United States Airlines, 1929-1946.**

- Precursor: Doolittle's flights, 1928.
- NYRBA (New York, Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires Airline), 1929-1930.
- Panagra, 1929-1946 (FAM-9)
- Pan American, 1931-1946 (FAM-10, 18, 22)

**V. LATI (Linee Aeree Transcontinentale Italiane), 1938-1941.**

**VI. Argentine Airlines, 1935-1946.**

- Aeroposta Argentina (national company), 1935-1946.
- Corporación Sudamericana de Servicios Aereos, 1938-1945
- LADE (Lineas Aereas del Estado), 1940-1946

**VII. Minor Carriers: Faucett, (Peru); CAUSA (Uruguay), 1937-1938**

**VIII. British South American Airways, 1946.**

**Research: 1. Early flights.** The literature on early flights in Argentina contains a good deal of confusion and misinformation. There is no example for the 1912 flights, which were intended to support the creation of a Military Air School and did no more than circle an airdrome near Buenos Aires. They were not intended to show the feasibility of air mail service. Nor did they do nothing with respect to identifying prospective routes. Hence there is no “example” of such a cover in this exhibit. For further information on this and other early flights see Goodwin, “Early Argentine Air Mail, 1912-1924: Intention and Practice”, *Airpost Journal* (AAMS) August 2005, pp. 319-25.

Secondly, some dealer literature suggests that there was an attempt by Aero-Córdoba to extend its route to Tigre, a suburb of Buenos Aires. Indeed, it has been noted that a first flight was “planned but not executed” on March 1, 1926. No such route was ever planned and all of the covers I have seen mailed from Villa Dolores or Córdoba to Tigre were addressed to the fairly well-known airmail collector and author Pablo Busch, who *lived* in Tigre. The covers *were flown* to Río IV and then carried by the Central Argentine Railway to Tigre, on the main line to Buenos Aires. Finally, it would make no sense to terminate in Tigre. The Palomar Airdrome in Buenos Aires would have been far more appropriate.

**2. LANE: an early trial flight? “Official” Mail?** An intriguing cover (VI.) that suggests that although LANE (Linea Aérea Nord Este) officially initiated air mail service in January 1944, the line *was* operated by the Argentine Army Air Force in 1940 and may have carried some mail. The cachet directs the cover to the attention of the Aviation Command and in that it does not carry postage for air mail suggests that it was carried free of charge—perhaps as “official” mail.

**3. Argentine air mail rates.** The Argentine rates structure for air mail is complex. For the 1930s in particular, official sources are extraordinarily difficult to locate. Regular air mail rates, ordinary rates, special rates, concessionary rates, different rates for different carriers, and the rapidity with which they changed demand the patience of Job and the detective skills of Agatha Christie! This exhibit, for the first time, attempts to address the Gordian knot of air mail rates.

**Highlights:** Highlights are bordered in red. Since the terms “scarce” and “rare” are relative terms open to a range of interpretation, in some cases I prefer to characterize the highlighted items as “uncommon” and “elusive”, which reflects their difficulty of acquisition. Very early scarce covers include the 1917 flight from Buenos Aires to Montevideo (I.) and the and Compañía Rio Platense de Aviación (Junkers) (II.) and Aero-Lloyd Córdoba (Junkers) (II.). The C.G.A./Aeroposta Argentina first flights are uncommon (III.) and the crash cover (1930) is scarce. The famous author/pilot Antoine de Saint-Exupéry flew (and signed) a featured cover in Aeroposta’s inaugural flight between Comodoro Rivadavia and Buenos Aires. On the same page is a scarce trial flight cover for the same route. The NYRBA inaugural flight from Buenos Aires to Santiago, Chile, is notable as are first flight covers to Cuba (11 flown) and from Trinidad (15 flown) (IV). The PANAGRA crash cover (IV.) is illustrative of the dangers of flying in the Andes. Although the plane vanished in 1938 it was not located until 1941, when bodies and some mail were recovered. The unsuccessful precursor Italian Rome-Buenos Aires flight crash cover is scarce (V.). The cover from an internee of the German battleship “Graf Spee” is historically interesting and scarce. A cover from Desvio Kilometro 187 to Java in 1933 is scarce in terms of both origin and destination. (III.). The British South American Airways first flight—commercial usage—is scarce. (VIII.).

**Of note.** Noteworthy covers include: 1. Special *PANAGRA* promotional rate to Chile (IV.); 2. *CGA* additional surcharges assessed between March 27, 1929 and July 4, 1930 for flights to Europe beyond France (III) 3. “Sample without Value” label (reduced rate) and reduced concessionary tariff for a periodical (III.) (Scarcity? I have never seen other examples). 4. Air mail from Slovakia (III.). This is a very difficult point of origin and the amount of mail sent to Argentina was probably very small; 5. “Across the Lines” (IV.) Most mail censored by the Germans in Paris (**Ax**), was for the Red Cross. This commercial cover to Switzerland is an unusual exception. 6. The first southbound flight of DLH South American service *and* the first *Condor* service from Brazil to Buenos Aires is important. (II) 7. The first direct flight from Brazil to Argentina - Flight L 415 – is a difficult cover to acquire (II.).

**Difficulty of Acquisition:** Obviously the highlighted covers are hard to find and in some cases are scarce. But it must be noted that most of the exhibit consists of commercial or nonphilatelic mail. It has taken more than a decade to assemble this material. Particularly difficult to locate were many of the Argentine domestic flights, especially those from sparsely populated Patagonia. Then, too, it was a challenge to find Argentine covers with appropriate rates for all manner of usage.

### **Sources:**

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Special thanks to Jorge Alberto Vilas and his extraordinary knowledge of Argentine postal rates.  
Maps were derived from Davies, *A History of the World's Airlines*, Boyle, *Airmail Operations During World War II*, and Paul B. Goodwin, *Global Studies: Latin America*.