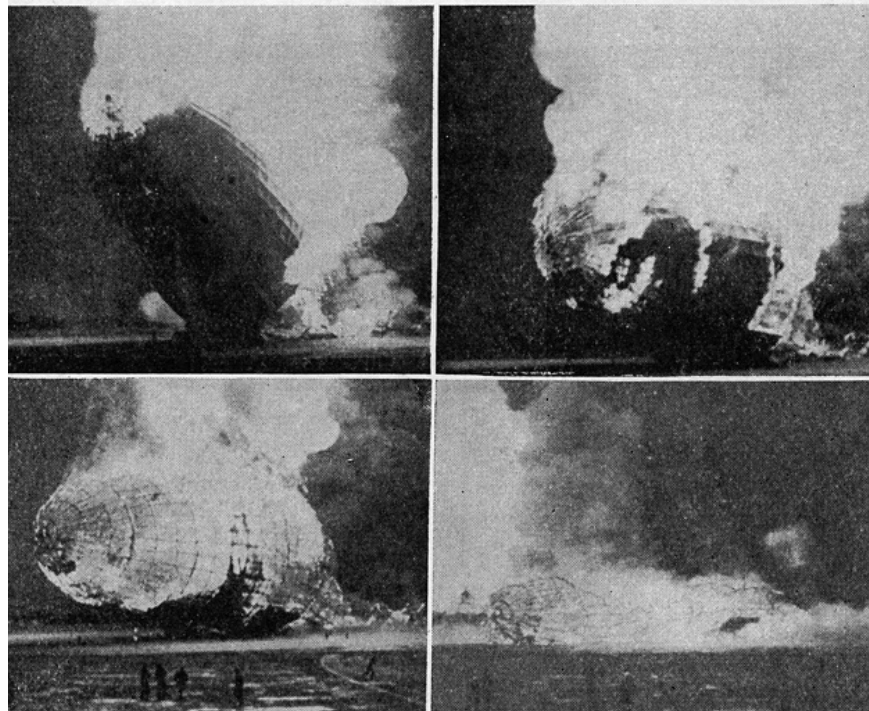


# *Browsing the Web:* **The End of the Hindenburg; Auf Wiedersehen**

*(The starting point for this “Browsing the Web” was two articles from the May 22, 1937 edition of STAMPS Magazine, which we reprinted as a “Yesterday in STAMPS” feature in our May 11, 2012 Mekeel’s & Stamps. In searching for images to enhance that article I found a wealth of material that I could not fit in M&S, but which merited development here. You will also find some Hindenburg and related images in this month’s “Collections” display at JFD.)*

## **The End of the Hindenburg Trail** **by Justin L. Bacharach**



Late on the afternoon of Thursday, May 6th, the haze above Lakehurst was pierced by the huge form of the Zep-  
*pelin Hindenburg*. Just a few short hours later, a yellow  
flare lit up the sky and its glows spelled the end of another  
stage in aero-philately. The air Queen which but a mo-  
ment before had sailed majestically over head collapsed in  
a roar of flaming death carrying its cargo, passengers and

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mail with it. News photographers swarmed around the still flaming wreckage as attempts were made to remove what remained of the cargo. Some of the salvage included 133 letters according to the Post Office in Philadel-



*Postal personnel check mail taken from the Hindenburg following the disaster*

phia, where the mail was sent. Most of the letters were so badly burned as to be undeliverable. The Hindenburg carried 240 pounds of first class and registered mail. All that is left to stamp collectors are the covers carried on its various flights and the stamps that were issued for it.



Count Von Zeppelin, creator of the lighter-than-air craft, is pictured on one stamp of Germany with a Zeppelin background (Sc. C59, left).



In March, 1936, two airmails, a 50 pfennig (Sc. C57) and a 75 pfennig stamp (Sc. C58, above right) were issued in Germany for the *Hindenburg*. A month later Liechtenstein issued a single stamp in her honor (Sc. C15, right). These are the historic mementoes of the world's air ship.



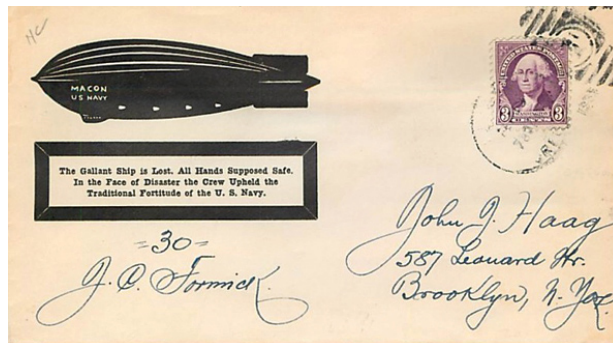
Many American collectors had made arrangements to send mail on the return flight of the *Hindenburg*. This, together with regular mail, which was to have been carried, was turned over to the Post Office in New York for

dispatch by United States Liner *American Farmer* which carried it to Plymouth and from there it was sent by air mail to its ultimate destination. Requests from philatelists who were anxious only to receive special flight covers, for the return of their mail, were acceded to by the New York Post Office.

The Hindenburg was insured for approximately \$2,500,000, which included insurance on the lives of its passengers and crew. No definite statement as to whether this also covered the mail has yet been obtained, but it is believed that the German government will reimburse all senders of registered mail.

## **Auf Wiedersehen, Hindenburg** **by John J. Haag**

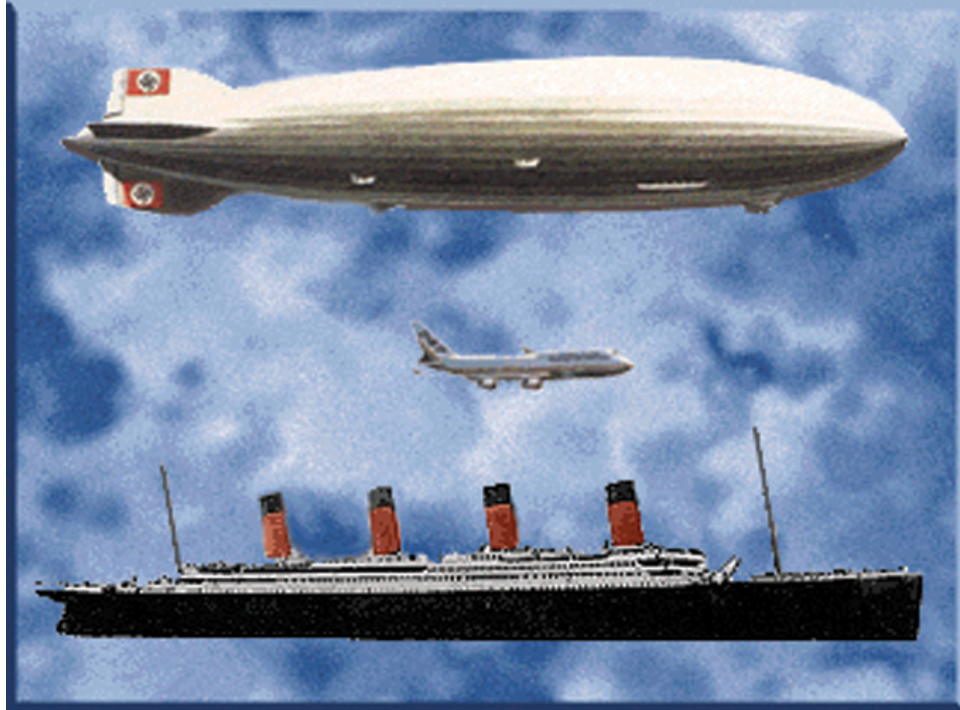
On our book shelf stands our cover albums telling the dramatic stories of the life of the Akron and Macon in cachets and clippings.



*A Macon cover from John Haag's collection*

On our desk lies another album whose pages we slowly turn. Our first page pictures a giant of the skies—the LZ 129, the Hindenburg. Her size can best be portrayed in the following facts regarding the dirigible. Size—813 feet long; greatest diameter—135 feet; gas compartments—16 gas cells, each independent of the other, holding a total of 6,709,990 cubic feet of hydrogen; motors—four Diesel crude oil motors with a maximum combined capacity of 4,200 horsepower; speed—an average of 80 to 90 miles an hour; cruising range—approximately 8,000 miles; passenger capacity—50 in 25 cabins for trans-oceanic flights, 150 for one-day trips without sleeping accommodations;





*A relative size comparison of the Hindenburg, the Titanic and, in between, that small plane is a Boeing 747!*

freight capacity—44,000 to 55,000 pounds. The outside hull was mostly cotton, stretched by a new device, much more tightly than on the Graf Zeppelin. The girders were mostly of an aluminum alloy. Of the two decks, the upper carried cabins in the middle, a large dining hall, community writing and reading rooms with a promenade deck 180 feet long. The lower deck contained a bar smoking room, kitchen, crew dining room, shower baths and the purser's office. The cabins each contained two beds, of which the upper could be swung back during the day while the lower was converted into a sofa, clothes closet, disappearing wash basin and hot air heating equipment. The furniture was mostly of aluminum, including tables, lamps, bedsteads, ash trays and kitchen equipment, in addition to a grand piano of light metal and leather. The ship was designed and constructed by Dr. Ludwig Duerr, having taken three years to build, and was decorated by Professor Ernst Breuhaus, of Berlin.

Following these details comes pictures showing her various phases of construction and then the first cover,

mailed at the time of her christening. It was on March 4th, 1936, that the Hindenburg first took to the air and maneuvered about Lake Constance for more than three hours with Commander Hugo Eckener in the control room. Her second test flight took place on March 5th and lasted two hours and fifty-two minutes. On March 17th she made her first endurance and night flight test by remaining in the air all day, flying in the vicinity of Lake Constance and over Bavaria and Salzburg.

The first cover carried by her is dated March 23rd and is cancelled “Luftschiff LZ 129” in a double circle with the date in the center-bars. This cancel was placed on mail matter aboard exclusively. All mail cancelled at the P.O. with the regular Friedrichshafen cancel received a special cachet reading “Mit Luftschiff LZ 129 befördert.”



*Hindenburg March 23, 1936 trial flight cover franked with both of the 50pf & 75pf Hindenburg stamps and cachet (bottom center).*

Her first accident occurred on March 26th when, leaving her hangar, she met a gust of wind which pressed the stern to the ground and damaged her rudder. She joined the Graf Zeppelin in the air and circled around Lake Constance, but came down shortly.



*Cover carried from Brazil to Germany on the 1936 return flight. (From the National Postal Museum site, [www.npm.si.edu](http://www.npm.si.edu))*

At 11:40 p.m., Eastern standard time, March 31st, she took to the air on her first South America trip. At 6:20 a.m., April 4th, she reached the mooring mast at the Santa Cruz airport, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The next day she pointed

her nose for home and landed at Friedrichshafen at 6:35 p.m. on April 10th. One of her engines stalled off Gibraltar and the second was disabled over the Mediterranean. With the remaining two engines functioning perfectly, she limped to her home hangar up the Rhone Valley.

At 4:50 p.m., N. Y. daylight time, May 6th, to the cheers of 10,000 persons, she inaugurated the first of a contemplated series of regular flights to America, when she upship and headed for the United States. 61 hours and 38 minutes later, at 6:31 a.m., May 9th, she was moored safely at the Naval Air Station at Lakehurst, N.J. A moment of danger threatened in the final delicate task of securing her to the mobile mooring mast. Arriving far ahead of schedule she found an inadequate ground crew on hand. Emergency volunteer hands were recruited from among newspaper men and other civilians, however, until soldiers arrived, and the big ship was guided into her hangar safely.



*A cover posted from Liechtenstein May 4, 1936 and flown on the First North America flight, with May 9 New York arrival Registry mark.*



The *Hindenburg* left the Air Station at 11:27 p.m., N. Y. time, Monday, May 11th, and arrived at Frankfort on the Main at 4:55 a.m., May 14th (11:55 p.m., N.Y. time, May 13th), completing the first two-way commercial airship flight across the North Atlantic. The flight took 48 hours, and 28 minutes, clipping 6 hours and 54 minutes off the record established by the Graf Zeppelin. Nine other trips to the U.S. followed and then other trips to South America.

The contents of our history book of cachets and clippings ends here. All that remains is to add the clippings as follows.

Plans were made for ten flights to the U.S. in 1937. At 3:15 p.m., E.D.T., May 3rd, 1937, she pointed her nose toward Lakehurst. Severe and constant headwinds delayed her greatly and she was twelve hours late in reaching our shores. At 3:07 p.m., May 6th, she was over N.Y., and was sighted over Lakehurst at 4:12 p.m. Thunder and lightning rent the air, and landing was postponed. About 7 p.m. she prepared to land. Soon two ground cables were lowered as she headed for the mast.

It was 7:23 p.m. A blinding light flashed across the sky. Spectators who had gathered to watch the landing of the silver giant were horrified to see it break into flames, and stood transfixed as with terrible swiftness the fire took the entire ship in its embrace. It was all over in sixty seconds.

Page after page of pictures will follow in my album. They will grimly portray the last moments of the Hindenburg. The last will show a twisted mass of metal, all that remains of what once was the Queen of the Skies. One space will be left open for that cover which, we hope, still bears our name and address in the mail taken from the Hindenburg to the Philadelphia post office, the cover which we had on board for the Hindenburg's first 1937 flight to the United States.

And so we add one more volume to our shelf, upon the last page of which we sadly write "Finis." Our cover-clipping album of the Hindenburg is now closed. Once more cover collectors have formed a collection of glorious con-

quest, which though it ended in disaster, wrote pioneer pages in the history of air conquest.

Two albums still remain active—those devoted to the Los Angeles and the Graf Zeppelin. A new album has been started for the LZ 130. And soon the indomitable spirit of daring men, undaunted by the tragedies of the past, will begin to write the story which will make up its pages.

“Auf Wiedersehen. Hindenburg.”



*This completes the “Yesterday” article, as it appeared in Mekeel’s & STAMPS, May 11, 2012. On the pages that follow we will explore further the history and tragic end of the Hindenburg, supported by additional photos and supporting text found in “browsing the web”. JFD.*



## The Hindenburg and the German Zeppelin Program



*8 pfennigs 1927 German semi-postal, Sc. B19, pictures Paul von Hindenburg, second President of Germany, who served from 1925 until he died in August 1934, and after whom the airship was named. The stamps were sold at double the face value, the surtax going to a fund for war invalids.*



The Hindenburg frame while the airship was still under construction. Although it is in German, there is much more to this story, in images and text, at:  
[http://www.zeppelinfan.de/html-seiten/deutsch/luftschiff\\_zeppelin.htm](http://www.zeppelinfan.de/html-seiten/deutsch/luftschiff_zeppelin.htm)

## The Zeppelins and the Nazis



*A Hindenburg North America flight card, canceled March 24, 1937, autographed by Hugo Eckener and Ernst Lehmann. Eckener managed Germany's Zeppelin program and piloted most of the flights of the Graf Zeppelin. Lehmann also piloted Zeppelin airships during this period.*

The relationship was very different between the Nazi party and these two participants in the Zeppelin program. First this background about Hugo Eckener from:

<http://www.airships.net/blog/zeppelin-eckener-spende>

“Transatlantic zeppelin passenger service had long been a goal of Hugo Eckener and others in the Zeppelin Company....but the Zeppelin Company was still struggling financially in the aftermath of World War I and could not afford to build a new passenger zeppelin. Hugo Eckener and others hoped the answer could be found in...which the German people would contribute funds for the new zeppelin.

The Zeppelin-Eckener Spende was launched...on August 20, 1925, as part of the jubilee celebration of the 25th anniversary of the first zeppelin. The Fund raised money through collection boxes and the sale of postcards, coins, unofficial stamps [shown], and other trinkets and memorabilia, and with a series of lectures by airship officers Hugo Eckener, Hans Flemming, Hans von



Schiller, Max Pruss, and Anton Wittemann. (Many airship histories inaccurately include Ernst Lehmann in this list, but Lehmann was working in Akron, Ohio at the time, setting up the new Good-year-Zeppelin joint venture; Lehmann remained in Akron until December, 1926.)



*Hugo Eckener at the White House shaking hands with U.S. President Calvin Coolidge after delivery of LZ-126, which became the U.S. Navy airship Los Angeles; Ernst Lehmann is at the far left.*

The official name of the fund was the Zeppelin-Eckener-Spende des Deutschen Volkes (the Zeppelin Eckener Fund of the German People) and Eckener appealed strongly to German nationalist sentiment...

Many Germans...had a hunger for national pride in the 1920s...and Eckener sensed he could tap into that feeling. Eckener believed the Zeppelin Company was a “national treasure.”

...But Eckener’s efforts were initially opposed by the German federal government in Berlin, which was in the process of negotiating with the Allies to relax the restrictions imposed under the Versailles Treaty....government officials also feared that Eckener would...raise just enough to compel the federal government to add funds of its own, which the German treasury could not afford....

Financially the Fund was not a success in its own right...raised only 2-1/2 million of the 7 million marks needed for a new airship, confirming the fears of the German Finance Ministry, which felt obligated to contribute 1 million marks of public money to the project. The remaining funds were provided by the Zeppelin Company...



Regarding Lehmann, we learn from  
<http://www.airships.net/captain-ernst-lehmann>

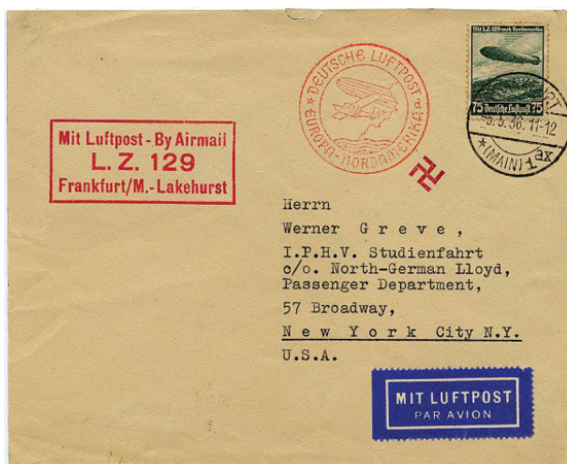
...After the [first World] war Lehmann worked at the Zeppelin Company in Friedrichshafen...and in 1923 he moved to Akron, Ohio as Vice President of Engineering for the newly-formed Goodyear-Zeppelin joint venture.

Lehmann served under Eckener as an officer on the transatlantic delivery flight of LZ-126, which became the U.S. Navy airship *Los Angeles*...Lehmann later served under Eckener on most of the important flights of LZ-127 Graf Zeppelin, and was often in command of Graf Zeppelin himself.

While Hugo Eckener was deeply troubled by the rise of National Socialism and became known as an opponent of the regime, Ernst Lehmann did not share Eckener's hostility to the Nazis, and in return for his cooperation with the Nazi Party, Lehmann was given the leadership of the Deutsche Zeppelin-Reederei and airship operations.

Less than three weeks after Hindenburg's first flight... Lehmann cancelled important flight tests to accommodate a request by the Nazi Ministry of Propaganda for Hindenburg and Graf Zeppelin to make a joint three day propaganda flight in support of Adolf Hitler despite unfavorable weather conditions....Hugo Eckener...criticised Lehmann for endangering the brand new ship, and the entire zeppelin program, to curry favor with the Nazis.

Despite his support of the Hitler regime, however, Lehmann never actually joined the Nazi Party. (Only two of the seven active zeppelin commanders were Party members.)



*A May 5, 1936 Hindenburg North American flight cover with a swastika—a scarce cover as Eckener did not want the Nazis to politicize the Zeppelin.*

## Early Successes

Shown here are a few of the many Hindenburg flight covers that are available to collectors.



A cover to Pennsylvania, carried on the May 1936 North America flight of the Hindenburg.



A cover from South Bend, Indiana to Sweden, carried on the Hindenburg's First North American Flight, with the violet flight cachet on the front, and a black receiver dated May 14, 1936, at Frankfurt am Main on the reverse.



A Hindenburg first North America flight cover from 1936, posted at the TIPEX show in New York, and flown to Germany.





The Hindenburg over lower Manhattan and Battery Park during its May 1936 First North America flight.



A cover flown on the return trip of the Hindenburg, April 1936, from Brazil to Germany.



A cover flown on the Hindenburg to Berlin on the "Olympiafahrt" [Olympics flight] for the opening ceremonies of the 1936 Summer Olympic Games, August 1, 1936.



## The Final Days

This postcard was meant to be carried on a flight over Germany on May 1, 1937, that was cancelled. It was instead loaded onto the Hindenburg on its last flight of the Hindenburg, from Frankfurt-am-Main. To satisfy the original intent of the mailers, it was dropped with other similar cards



and letters in a weighted pouch over Köln (Cologne), Germany.



“Thoolen” cover

This cover, and several other “Thoolen” covers are part of an excellent presentation at:

<http://www.slettebo.no/scout/hindenburg.htm>

We quote from the site:

...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 [among other countries...A number of 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 12½c Jamboree stamp, but this cannot be confirmed....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. Gerard Thoolen was a stamp dealer in...the Netherlands. The website includes a census, with images, of the “Thoolen” covers.

*Of particular interest to some specialists, this “Thoolen” cover, franked with one 12½ cents Jamboree stamp, is shown on the reverse as it was placed in a U.S.P.O.D. sealed wrapper.*



*This 1937 cover was supposed to be carried by the May 1937 return flight of the Hindenburg. Instead, the cover that had been prepared as a Registered cover, from Flushing, N.Y., with the U.S. stamps canceled*

*(to pay the postage to Lakehurst, N.J.) but the Germany stamps not canceled (as they would have been canceled on the return flight). Unlike most returned items this one received a “Return to Sender” label from the New York Post Office, Foreign Section at the Morgan Annex with four line green handstamp “Zeppelin Disaster/Lakewood, N.J. 5-6-’37/Service suspended/indefinitely”, plus additional “See Washington Bulletin/#17163 - April 14, 1937” in manuscript and postmarked on May 6, 1937, the day of the crash. The cover also has a Flushing May 7 backstamp. It is believed that the fast processing of this return item on the very night of the crash may be the cause for the mistake “Lakewood” instead of “Lakehurst” in the cachet.”*

## The Hindenburg Memorial

The site of the Hindenburg crash at what was then Lakehurst Naval Air Station is marked with a chain outlined pad and bronze plaque where the airship's gondola came crashing down, and a small model of the Hindenburg on a pole. Hangar #1, which is seen in the background, is where the airship was to be housed after landing. It was designated a Registered National Historic Landmark, but because of its status as a Naval facility, pre-registration is required for tours, and foreign nationals are permitted on the tours.



*An aerial view of the crash site a few days after the crash.*



*The Hindenburg protruding from the Lakehurst Hangar #1 on a prior flight.*



## The Sabotage Conspiracy

At the time, and ever since, there has been a conspiracy theory that the Hindenburg was the victim of sabotage by anti-Nazis.

One of those who added to this belief—and may even have been the original source was non other than pro-Nazi sympathizer Ernst Lehmann. As explained at the site, <http://www.airships.net/captain-ernst-lehmann>, mentioned earlier:

Lehmann...was onboard [Hindenburg] as an observer during its final flight, which was commanded by Max Pruss. There is some reason to believe that Lehmann may have exercised de facto operational control during Hindenburg's final landing maneuver....

Lehmann sustained serious injuries...and died the next day. Before dying, Lehmann told American airship officer and Lakehurst commander Charles Rosendahl that he believed Hindenburg must have been destroyed by an “infernal machine” (Hollenmaschine), presumably referring to a bomb or other sabotage device, or possibly a shot fired from the ground.



*Lehmann's casket at a memorial service at the New York pier before being shipped back to Germany.*

## Philatelic Tributes

To my knowledge there were no stamps memorializing the Hindenburg issued immediately after the disaster. Over the years, however, postal administrations have featured the Hindenburg, primarily on issues that were intended for sale to collectors rather than for postal use.

Here are a couple of examples.



*Maldives 1992 Mysteries of the Universe "Explosion of the Hindenburg" Souvenir Sheet. Presumably, the "Mystery" is exactly what started the fire that engulfed the huge, hydrogen-filled airship.*



*Chad 1988 "Gold Foil" Hindenburg stamp. Rather than being a serious memorial, it's primary purpose apparently was for sale to unknowing collectors enticed by the word "gold".*

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