A Non-Treaty Postal Agreement of the United States Post Office Department with the British Post Office as a significant early step towards the development of United States airmail to foreign destinations
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Abstract

From the initiation of regular U.S. transcontinental airmail service (1924) until the onset of the U.S. entry into World War II (1941), the world witnessed a dramatic evolution of commercial airmail service.

The numerous rates and routes involved in this developmental era are reminiscent of the complex pre-Universal Postal Union (U.P.U.) period of transoceanic steamship mail (1838–1875) to the eventual establishment of the U.P.U. standard rate system. Ultimately, the once complex airmail rate structure (e.g., sanctioned use of mixed franking, highly diverse selection of routes and rates, and the cobbling of agreements between countries to establish new postal routes) gave rise to a simpler standard airmail route and rate structure which we use today. However, a notable difference between nineteenth century steamship service and the twentieth century early air service was the absence of any treaties between collaborating nations.

Instead of a postal treaty, there is a single-page acceptance letter from the Second Assistance U.S. Postmaster General to the Secretary of the British Post Office for the use of British airmail services. On June 26, 1925, the U.S. Post Office Department (U.S.P.O.D.) established an agreement with the British Post Office to transmit airmail via the New York Post Office Exchange to continental Europe by way of Great Britain. On June 29th, the U.S.P.O.D. announced the agreement in the New York Post Office Daily. This airmail collaboration, which ultimately led to additional U.S. airmail service via the British Post Office to Asia, Africa, and Australia, began two years before the Hague Air Conference (1927) and four years before the London U.P.U. Congress (1929).

Shortly following the establishment of the Hague Agreement, similar to the earlier established U.S.-British agreement, the U.S.P.O.D. entered into agreements with the postal administrations of France and the Netherlands to carry airmail across Europe and eventually to French and Dutch colonies within Africa and Asia. A new era began that allowed significantly faster means of global communications.

Following the new process established by The Hague Conference and London U.P.U. Congress, a new accounting system was required to track payments for airmail service made between the U.S.P.O.D. and other collaborating nations. Evidence of the U.S.P.O.D. financial
accounting process can be found in a ledger, which contains accounts that record payments for airmail services between 1928 and 1933. The ledger's content reveals important data that demonstrate the volume of airmail sent via European carriers and the associated charges paid to countries for airmail service.

Ultimately, foreign postal administrations reached even more distant destinations from the U.S. (e.g., China and Australia). Air service remained a dynamic and ever-changing industry. The European Postal Administration of Great Britain, France, and the Netherlands continued to service U.S.P.O.D. airmail to Africa, Asia, and Australia, even after the U.S.P.O.D. developed contracts with Pan American Airways for airmail service to Asia via the Pacific Ocean. With the onset of World War II, the European air service started to experience political challenges and by the early 1940s, most air service via Europe ceased. Only after the War did the consolidation of airmail rates start, thus giving rise to the simpler airmail route and rate structure that remains generally intact today.