A Non-Treaty Postal Agreement of the US Post Office Department with the British Post Office as an early significant step towards the development of US airmail to European, African, Asian, & Australian destinations

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2 June 2016
Origins of US - foreign air service

- Not until 1920 UPU Congress (Madrid), did the UPU recognize air transport sector.

- Following ratification of UPU Article 4b, US could enter an agreement with another postal administration for air service.
  
  - *Aerial services established for the conveyance of correspondence between two or more countries are considered extraordinary services.*

- Earliest US Post Office Department agreement for air service was made with the British Post Office (1922). It permitted air service for US letters from Cairo to Baghdad.
British Post Office

January 1922

- Make use of French air service for further European and African destinations
- Kilogram basis instead of letter basis
  - Less complex accounting
  - Reduce risk of financial losses due to low mail volume
  - May overwhelm Baghdad check for each letter for postage
British Post Office
January 1922

• To simplify accounting, German Post Office proposed German senders to use British postage stamps.

• British Post Office believed that this would create “an impossible system to work internationally”.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Despatch of</th>
<th>Total Weight</th>
<th>Weight of bags</th>
<th>No.of offi. Pkts.</th>
<th>No.of private letters</th>
<th>No.of air fees at 6d. each</th>
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<td>25 Dec. (interim)</td>
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<td>29 Dec.</td>
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<td>6 Jan.</td>
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<td>92 lb.</td>
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Deduct for:
- Weight of unpaid offi. Pkts.
- Including at any rate

1 Colonial Office despatch of probably at least 6 lb.

7 0
85 0

Av. No of 6d. recd. per lb. gross = 1627 / 85 = 19.1
Revenue = 98.56d.

"Kilo." say 6lb.
British Post Office

January 1922

• British Post Office allowed US and Canadian postal administrations access to Cairo-Baghdad air service at 9s 6d.

• Forms sent to US and Canada Post Office.

The Secretary,

(2) In view of the considerations urged by the Secretary it is agreed that the system of payment on the gross weight of mail be the only one offered.

(3) As accounting with France and Switzerland is now on a gold franc basis, it is desirable to express the rate chargeable in gold francs. 22 Fr. gold is the present equivalent of 20s. and should be charged per kilogramme gross.

(4) Agreed.

(Sgd.) S. Barratt.
for Acct. General.
19 Jan, 1922.

Note. General Williamson decided to make the charge to the U.S.A. and Canada 9s. 6d. instead of 9s. a lb, and the Forms II forwarded to those offices were amended accordingly.

(Sgd.) A.R.H.
21/1.
Cairo-Baghdad air service

- Earliest known US cover using British air service
- Only known registered cover using 1922 rate (with correctly franked US stamps).

Total transit time 25 days
From London to Basra, transit time was 5 days.
British Post Office
Offer
10 May 1925

Sir,

With reference to the Post Office letter of the 13th of March last, I am directed by the Postmaster General to confirm the cablegram sent to you on the 8th instant stating that Air Mail Despatches from this country would begin on the 9th instant.

I am to enclose two copies of a supplement to the Post Office Air Mail Leaflet which was issued on the 6th instant giving particulars of certain new or resumed Air Mails from this Country to the Continent, as well as of the new Air Mail to the Western United States. It is hoped to set up shortly seasonal Air Mails to the East Baltic Countries and to Russia. These mails would be forwarded by morning air service from London to Berlin, thence, if flight has been regular, by night train to Königsberg, and thence again by air next day to (a) Memel, Riga, Reval and Helsingfors, or (b) Kovno, Smolensk and Moscow. This would make it possible for a letter to reach Helsingfors or Moscow in 1½ days if sent by ordinary route all the way. The Postmaster General will no doubt be informed if you would like to make use during the coming season of any of the Air Mail facilities provided between this country and the Continent.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

(Sgd.) E.L.A. Poakes.

for the Secretary.

The Second Assistant Postmaster General,
WASHINGTON.
US Post Office Department Acceptance

26 June 1925

- New York Post Office designated as an exchange post office to prepare and dispatch airmail articles.
- Airmail to be placed in separate sacks for London with “special list”.

The Secretary,
General Post Office,
London, E. C. 1,
England.

My dear Sir:

By direction of the Postmaster General, I have the honor to advert to your reply No. 61174/25, dated the 15th ultimo, to this Department's letter No. 45124-135-139-179-193/97 of the 19th of March last, with which reply you enclose copies of a supplement to the Post Office Air Mail Leaflet issued on the 6th ultimo, giving particulars of certain Air Mails from Great Britain to the Continent of Europe.

With reference to the foregoing, I have to inform you that this Department agrees to make use of the above mentioned Air Mail Service as occasion offers.

The New York Post Office has been designated as an exchange post office to prepare and dispatch the Air Mail articles concerned; and has been instructed to cause letters for transmission by the Air Mail Service in question to be made up by that office in separate packages or sacks for London accompanied by a special list or statement, in line with the practice followed by the New York Office in dispatching articles for forwarding through the Haifa-Bagdad Motor Route.

Very truly yours,
For Second Assistant Postmaster General.

E. R. White,
Superintendent.
NY Post Office Daily
29 June 1925

Announcement of air service via England to Continental Europe, Morocco, and western Algeria
British air service to Continental Europe

Earliest known US cover using British air service to Europe.

20 August 1925

Surface mail (SF to NY to England, UPU rate): 5¢
Airmail (England to Italy, 6¢/oz.): 6¢
NY exchange office prepares registered and ordinary mail for dispatch.

- Registered mail contained in smaller inner sack
- Special mail sack labeled "London Transit Air Mail"

First sack dispatched per S.S. AQUITANIA on June 30th
NY to London
Transit form
20 July 1925

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<td>Algeria and Morocco</td>
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Recapitulation:

- Rates at 4 cents: Algeria (6), Iran (2), Italy (2), Latvia (1), Lithuania (4), Belgium (1), Bulgaria (1), Czecho-Slovakia (2), Lithuania (1), Morocco (6)
- Rates at 6 cents: Algeria (2), Austria (2), Belguim (1), Bulgaria (1), Czecho-Slovakia (2), Estonia (4), Norway (3), Persia (2), Poland (2), Portugal (1), Russia (5)
- Rates at 8 cents: Algeria (2), Austria (2), Belguim (1), Bulgaria (1), Czecho-Slovakia (2), Estonia (4), Norway (3), Persia (2), Poland (2), Portugal (1), Russia (5)
- Rates at 10 cents: Algeria (2), Austria (2), Belguim (1), Bulgaria (1), Czecho-Slovakia (2), Estonia (4), Norway (3), Persia (2), Poland (2), Portugal (1), Russia (5)
- Rates at 12 cents: Algeria (2), Austria (2), Belguim (1), Bulgaria (1), Czecho-Slovakia (2), Estonia (4), Norway (3), Persia (2), Poland (2), Portugal (1), Russia (5)
- Rates at 14 cents: Algeria (2), Austria (2), Belguim (1), Bulgaria (1), Czecho-Slovakia (2), Estonia (4), Norway (3), Persia (2), Poland (2), Portugal (1), Russia (5)
- Rates at 16 cents: Algeria (2), Austria (2), Belguim (1), Bulgaria (1), Czecho-Slovakia (2), Estonia (4), Norway (3), Persia (2), Poland (2), Portugal (1), Russia (5)

Total Credit $1

Signature of Despatching Officer: 
Signature of Receiving Officer: 

D-246-7/20/25
US Post Office Department

26 August 1925

• US mail for air service to the Continent and West Africa to be submitted separately from parcel account
Internal British Post Office note
23 July 1925

- Monthly statement prepared in US dollars based on NY transit forms.
- US Dollars converted to British Sterling (one pence to ½ cent)
- Amounts due to British Post Office will be billed quarterly in the Transit Parcel Account
German Post Office, Berlin
15 September 1925

• Following letter from Frank Kreuter (Philadelphia), “nothing is known” of Agreement regarding air service.

• GPO asks for details about US-British air agreement.
German Post Office formally informed of US-British air service agreement of June.
British air service to Continental Europe

• Only known use of UPU surcharge rate supplementary fee paid on an airmail post card.

• Black Type G supplementary mail marking with pier code #3 was applied shipside
  • French Line, Pier 88, North River, West 48th Street

19 July 1929

Surface mail (NY to England, UPU surcharge rate): 3¢
UPU surcharge rate, supplementary fee: 3¢
Airmail (England to Germany, 4¢/oz.): 4¢
British air service to Africa

• Airmail to South Africa did not exist in 1931, so it traveled by air as far as possible (likely Sudan), then by surface.

• Per records of the US National Archives, $2.97 was paid by the US the British for airmail services that was sent to Khartoum.
  • from October 1930 to September 1931

28 November 1931

Surface mail (NY to England, UPU rate): 5¢
Airmail (England to Khartoum, 12¢/half oz.): 12¢
Surface mail (Khartoum to South Africa): --

Transit time was 23 days
British air service to Asia

Surface mail (NY to England, UPU rate): 5¢
Airmail (England to Hong Kong, 34¢/half oz.): 68¢

14 January 1938

17 day transit time
Use of mixed franking needed until UPU regulations were ratified.

• No rules applied to international mail via airways unless an agreement between postal administrations existed.

• If one did not exist, some postal administrations demanded that postage be paid at dispatch to receive air service.
Canada via US airmail to England

Expedited mail from/to central and western areas of Canada since Canadian trans-continental air routes did not exist at the time.
Tanganyika via US airmail to Canada

17 August 1927

Surface mail (Tanganyika to London to NY, UPU rate): 25¢ (Tanganyika)
Airmail (NY to Detroit, 10¢/half oz.): 10¢ (US)
Surface mail (Detroit to Canada): --
Registry fee: 30¢ (Tanganyika)
Austria via early US FAM airmail to Nicaragua

Surface mail (Austria to NY, UPU rate): 40 groschen (Austria)
Airmail (NY to Miami to Nicaragua, 25¢/half oz.): 25¢ (US)
Registry fee: 60 groschen (Austria)

31 October 1929

Total transit time was 17 days; transit was 5 days from NY to Nicaragua
Special Conference at The Hague

• With the increasing number of air services, the UPU called a special conference at The Hague (September 1927).

• It provided international air mail with a system of universal regulation.

• Ratified at the 1929 UPU Congress (London), three basic areas of agreement were ratified:
  – (1) "freedom of transit" through any UPU member country;
  – (2) establishment of the airmail fee;
  – (3) regulations describing how and when airmail payments are made.
French air service to Europe

- In 1928, US Post Office Department entered into an agreement with French Postal Administration.

- French air service for certain routes to European destinations became available (previously accessed only via England).

Surface mail (NY to France, UPU rate): 8¢
Airmail (France to Scotland, 4¢/oz.): 8¢
Registry fee: 15¢
1¢ overpaid

Transit time was 9 days
French air service to Europe (then surface mail to Japan)

Only known US airmail letter that traveled to Asia via airmail to the USSR then surface mail to Japan.

28 June 1935

First class mail (Boston to NY): --
Surface mail (NY to France, UPU rate): 5¢
Airmail (France to Eastern USSR via Berlin, 27¢/half oz.): 27¢
Surface mail (Eastern USSR to Japan): --

“Received with airmail”
French air service to Asia

Transit time was 22 days

Surface mail (NY to France, UPU rate): 5¢
Airmail (France to French Indochina, 39¢/half oz.): 39¢

3 March 1937
French air service to Africa

Short-lived rate lasting 13 weeks

Surface mail (NY to France, UPU rate): 5¢ (postage due)
Airmail (France to Liberia, 28¢/half oz.): 28¢

Transit time was 15 days

3 May 1937
Dutch air service to Asia

Although instructions were written to travel via London, it actually traveled via Amsterdam and paid the correct rate.
THANK YOU