

French airplane manufacturer Pierre-Georges Latécoère established the first airmail service between France and Morocco on 1 September 1919, with a fleet of 15 Breguet-14 biplanes. The routes were very hazardous and pilots risked being captured and held for ransom if their plane went down in a desert region. French airmail pilots carried guns and frequently had to stand guard and fend off looters (sometimes while injured) if the plane went down for a crash or emergency landing. In May 1926 a celebrated flier for Latécoère, Jean Mermoz (who inspired Antoine de Saint Exupéry's 1931 novel, *Night Flight*) was captured by Moroccan nomads and imprisoned in a cage for three days until he could be ransomed by the company representative in Casablanca (see www.century-of-flight.net).

Latécoère's service *Lignes Aeriennes Latécoère* began service to Casablanca in the 1920s. Information regarding the development of this service in Morocco may be found in the book *Postal and Airmail Rates in France and Colonies 1920-1945* written by Robert E Picirilli. However, this small article addresses the usage of French denominated postage in the British Post Office in Morocco.

In January 1923 Latécoère's service began to stop in Tangier en route to and from Casablanca and permission was granted to the British Post Office to use the airline for outbound airmail. Inbound airmail had been established in 1920. The rate was 2d to England plus 3d registration plus a 50 centimes airmail surcharge up to 20g. The surcharge was in centimes in order to collect that currency to pay the French airline each month in francs. A letter from the Tangier postmaster in 1924 had indicated this charge was to be paid in centimes in Morocco agencies surcharged stamps. "Three examples of commercial covers sent by air from the British post office in Tangier in 1923-24 have been reported each bearing the 2d letter rate together with an airmail surcharge of 50c paid in centimes denominated overprinted stamps."¹ The cover shown here is somewhat different in that the centimes denominated stamps from the French Post Office have been used to pay the surcharge and are cancelled by the BPO Tangier. This was not necessarily out of line as one other cover is known used in the same manner. Furthermore there is no airmail etiquette nor manuscript par avion applied. The etiquettes were available as two of the other airmail covers I have seen, have them applied. Researching the minutes of the 1920 Madrid UPU Postal Convention and the same for the 1924 Stockholm convention, I find no requirement for the application or manuscript notation denoting airmail. It has been noted that British airmail letters in this time frame to 1925 were very minimal, 10 a day at most, thus compounding the lack of covers known to collectors.

The route onward would have taken it to Toulouse and onward to London, where the registered receiver indicates delivery the next day, 28 April.



¹ "The British Post Office Service In Morocco 1907-57" David Stotter 2007 Published in the UK by the Postal History Society & The British Philatelic Trust