

**CANAL ZONE: SPECIAL DELIVERY MAIL
SYNOPSIS: INDYPEX 2025**



Treatment and Background Information

Exhibit shows range of Canal Zone Special Delivery mail from 1908 to 1931, including outgoing and incoming postal history. Given number of scarcer items and 40 years I have been collecting this material it would be very difficult to duplicate this exhibit.

Organization

The organization is simple. The first part shows outgoing Special Delivery mail, followed by incoming mail, and then foreign usages. The chapter on outgoing mail is in chronological order by rates. The rates are a combination of the Special Delivery fee and the Canal Zone postal rate. Incoming and foreign usages are at the end of the exhibit. If there is information pertinent to cover(s) on a page a black box with text shows that information.

Importance

Prior to the electronic age of texts, emails, international telecommunications, and business transfers, the only way to speedily convey information was via the mail and special delivery. For American workers in the Canal Zone this was a method to ensure bills were paid, money delivered, or important information was delivered back to families in the United States. This was especially true during the early airmail era of the 1930s to 1950s when the majority of Special Delivery letters were sent.

Personal Study and Research

I have been a collector of Canal Zone postal history for over 45 years and co-authored 2018 Canal Zone Study Group handbook *Canal Zone Airmail Rates* based on research at National Archives, Library of Congress, American Philatelic Society Library, examining majority of larger Canal Zone collections. I was also editor of Canal Zone Study Group journal *Canal Zone Philatelist* and authored numerous articles. Given this, I have not marked original research on the exhibit pages as the result would be little blue magnifying glasses on an overwhelming number of pages.

Condition

Covers in this exhibit are in good condition given that they originated from or ended up in a very humid tropical climate. When I see a cover that was torn open by addressee or has rougher edges because it carried a heavier load these are signs that cover was used. Because of this, I have not had any of my material repaired or cleaned. I upgrade covers with condition problems whenever possible.

Rarity

Rare items have a bold red frame. While a large number of the special delivery covers from the 1930s to 1950s can be found in dealer stocks and on eBay, material from the 1907 to 1930 era is much less frequently encountered. Interestingly, starting in the early 1970s Special Delivery mail from the Canal Zone becomes more difficult to acquire. With one exception, most of the collections I either personally examined or asked the owner for information showed that there are probably fewer than 5 covers known of the last rate. While there was no incoming Special Delivery service a fair number of covers are known sent to the Canal Zone via Special Delivery. Foreign usages are rare; both as incoming and outgoing mail. For outgoing mail to foreign countries, I would estimate that fewer than 20 covers are known.

Canal Zone Special Delivery Mail

June 25, 1904 - July 5, 1932: 10 cents Special Delivery & 2 cents Surface Letter

There is no record of when special delivery letters began to be mailed from the Canal Zone. Technically since U.S. stamps were used and the service only took place in the U.S. people could have availed themselves from the start of the Canal Zone Postal Service. However, the earliest reported usages date to 1906. Effective July 1, 1907, regular issue stamps could be used to pay the special delivery fee, provided so marked.

This exhibit shows, in chronological order, all of the different rate combinations that were possible during the time period when Special Delivery was used. This would be two cents for the pre airmail era (after which Special Delivery was not sent surface) and the Canal Zone airmail letter rate thereafter until first class mail was established and air mail rates abolished. Special delivery in the 1906-1930 era and 1970-1979 era are the most difficult to find.

Since all Canal Zone mail was delivered to post offices boxes there was officially no incoming Special Delivery service. However, examples are known. The Canal Zone Postal Service regulations stated that special delivery to foreign countries was not available unless a special agreement had been put in place with that country. However, no list has been found and examples are quite scarce.

Rarer items are outlined in **RED**. When a new rate is introduced it is in **BLACK** in the upper left corner. Additional information provided is in a boxed square. This is the first time that all rate combinations have been displayed in an exhibit.

Title Page & Special Delivery Mailed in the Canal Zone:

Frame 1, page 1
Frame 6, page 8
Frame 7, page 6
Frame 7, page 8

Corozal - Pasadena, California. November 12, 1908.
Hand stamp "Special Delivery paid / at Office of first address"



Culebra - Washington, District of Columbia. Hand stamp "FEE PAID" May 12, 1906. Arrived May 18th. Forwarded via Special Delivery to Charleston, South Carolina. Arrived 20th. Variety with broken line under "N" of "CENTS".



Cristobal - Boston, Massachusetts. November 22, 1919. Arrived December 2nd.
Handstamp "SPECIAL DELIVERY"
Only reported Opening of the Panama Canal commemoratives on Special Delivery cover.