The 1937 Hindenburg Phantom Crash Covers

Page 184
Zeppelins & Aerophilately

Ask for our Free Price List of Worldwide Flight covers and stamps. The following is a small sampling – full list on Website!

United States

Item #4028: 1930 (June 2) C14 F-VF on airmail cover. Red German flight cachet and Type II US violet flight cachet. Scott #557, 5¢ Teddy Roosevelt franking sealing flap on reverse. Friedrichshafen June 6 and Lakehurst green receiving cancel on reverse. Flown round trip but without the violet circular stamp $400.00

Item #4931: 1936 (October 2) C18 block of 4 on FDC. Postmarked Haworth, New Jersey (tiny Bergen County suburb of New York City). This unofficial FDC is possibly unique. $950.00

Austria

Item #3098: 1930 (July) Catapult cover PC, “Bremen” to New York. Two airmails on F-VF card addressed to New York, NY, 96 flown. K37AU Hab 20 $150.00

Czechoslovakia

Item #4908: 1936 /Argentina card with dual franking, Czechoslovakia (February 10) 50h PC flown on South America flight with 3 additional stamps, sent to Argentina. Backstamped Buenos Aires February 17. Reposted in Argentina on reverse (March 18) and sent back to Czechoslovakia $250.00

Germany

Item #3027: 1912 (June 18) Gelber Hund flight card in orange with 2x semi-official 1M overprinted 10pf stamp. VF card, Darmstadt cancel. S.13a (€560.00) $350.00

Guatemala

Item #3379: 1936 (May 18) VF Hindenburg 2nd North America Flight on legal-sized airmail cover, registered Guatemala to Germany. Neat attractive franking, C52, C54, C56, C60 on front. Reverse has added stamps 238, 239. Very rare flight not offered by any comprehensive auctions including Corinphila in the past few years. S.411B $2,500.00
‘The China Clipper and the Manhattan Project’

David Crotty (Airpost Journal, February 2012) is right to delve further into the uranium story to help our understanding of the short-lived FAM 22 service and the later flights of the China Clipper to Leopoldville as a branch of FAM 18.

However, on page 63 he begins his “Conclusions” with an obvious error. President Roosevelt never invited Juan Trippe to dinner in London in 1941. President Roosevelt never visited the British Isles throughout the entire course of WWII. The mistake here is to confuse the president with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill.

In June 1941, Juan Trippe did travel to London, to give the annual Wilbur Wright Memorial Lecture to the Royal Aeronautical Society. Having given his lecture Trippe, much to his surprise, was invited to take dinner (again), this time with Winston Churchill. They discussed British communications problems in North Africa.

Robert Daley "An American Saga, Juan Trippe and his Pan Am Empire" (New York, Random House, 1980) especially pages 310-314, reported: "Churchill said that he would cable Roosevelt about this. The route to Cairo must be set up as soon as possible . . ."

Richard Beith

AAMS Changes Welcome

Most issues of the Airpost Journal have little to catch my attention. Not that quality items are not there – my collecting interests are narrow. The March 2012 issue, on the other hand, caught my attention. For some reason “Hello! My name is Vickie” caught my eye and I started reading. When I got to the point where the society was projected to lose $10,000 this year, I said, “Wow! There is a problem there.”

As I read on and saw all the changes being put in place by the current board, I said to myself “politics is never easy,” having sat on many boards myself. I am sure you are going to hear lots of negatives for the changes you are putting in place. I, for one, would like to say thanks to all for taking action to stop the hemorrhaging. We need to be building
resources, not spending them. Keep up the good work.

Tony Crumbley
Charlotte, North Carolina

Return Auction to APJ

I read the special notices in the February 2012 Airpost Journal. I agree with the changes to discontinue the Jack Knight Air Log and the Life Membership program. These changes should help get greater control over AAMS expenses.

However, I think you should continue to publish the auction listings in the Airpost Journal. I am a long-time bidder in the auctions and look first at the auction lists before reading the many interesting articles. I agree that these listings can be accessed on the AAMS website. However, it is convenient to have them in the journal as well. Members are much more likely to bid if the listings are published.

At a minimum, I suggest that you poll members on the question. I think you will find that people really enjoy the auction listings and will regret their deletion from the magazine.

I appreciate all the work that you are doing for the AAMS.

John W. Lyon

And a response from AAMS president Jim Graue:

There is no question that some members really like to see the AAMS auction listings in the Airpost Journal. The overall tone of this letter – positive, constructive and respectful – was especially appreciated. It was passed on to the AAMS board for their consideration. While very well received, the board members unanimously agreed that having the auction on the AAMS website, from which it can be easily printed, and also making it available as a mailed hard copy if desired, assures adequate distribution and access to the auction listings. We hope you continue to support the auction and the AAMS.

Pan Am Story told in Congress Book

David Lamantia and all AAMS students of trans-Pacific airmail should be aware of and reference the AAMS article in the Pacific 97 Congress Book, published by the American Philatelic Congress. Written by AAMS members, “The Last Flight Out: Seven Pan Am Clippers on the Eve of Pearl Harbor,” appears on Page 333. It is unfortunate that this fine piece of research has received so little visibility.

Bob Wilcsek

President’s Message

We are back on schedule with the Airpost Journal! Special thanks to our editor, Vickie Canfield Peters, for an amazing amount of work in improving our journal quality and assuring that it is timely. We have been extremely pleased that many members have taken the time to send us compliments. They are greatly appreciated.

Many members have also expressed their approval of the actions taken by the AAMS board to contain costs and streamline our operations. Your understanding and support for making changes seen as securing our future is confirmation that our program for our society is the right course. Many thanks for your kind words of endorsement and encouragement.

* * *

At the recent St. Louis Stamp Expo, I had the opportunity to meet with Ken Martin, the executive director of the American Philatelic Society. He is doing a truly great job in taking on the direction and management of the APS.

Most members will remember Aerophilately 2007, the all-airmail stamp exhibition held at the APS Center in Bellefonte, Pennsylvania. This special show was co-sponsored by APS and AAMS. It was an unqualified success in every way, just a tremendous show and a wonderful time being with so many airmail collectors. There was immediate interest in having another “Aerophilately” in the future. Time, however, has a way of slipping past and the interest in another “Aerophilately” waned, or at least nothing was done by way of pursuing a follow-up.

In 2008, then-president Andrew McFarlane promised to pursue having an “Aerophilately” show in 2012. Nothing came of that and 2012 is now upon us. There is no plan. That said, Ken Martin is very enthusiastic about another “Aerophilately” and, in fact, offered up 2014, only two years hence, as an open date. Wow! That is like the day after tomorrow, isn’t it? Still, we are going to draft a proposal for board consideration very soon. Will an “Aerophilately” show in the fall of 2014 be challenging? Yes, but procrastination is no answer. We have an opportunity here, so let’s see what we might make of it.

* * *

As almost everyone knows, the AAMS publishes the American
Air Mail Catalogue. It is now in its 6th Edition, but the most recent volume was published in 2004. Volume 1 of the Sixth Edition was published in 1998, 14 years ago! The last volume of the Fifth Edition was 1985. One of the major hurdles in maintaining our AAMC publications program is discontinuity of effort. This is seen in lost files, inattention and neglected commitment. The organization needed to sustain an ongoing and vital program for our continued production of the AAMC was set out in last month’s Airpost Journal. We really need to have members step into the positions needed to keep the program alive and running. Join the team!

But back to main subject . . . One of the real problems in setting up our AAMC publishing program is a lack of any centralized records. What happens to the files and records created in making a volume of the AAMC a reality? Apparently, they vanish! We have no central archive where one can find this critical information in a form that lends itself to being easily utilized as the foundation for the successive edition. That is stifling our progress. The lack of any kind of succession plan makes it even more difficult. Our older section editors are dying and no one is there to pick up the ball. Not good.

One of the main aspects of the AAMC organizational plan is the establishment of stable, permanent archive and an ongoing program to maintain them. Ken Martin was most receptive to having us create an AAMC archive at the American Philatelic Research Library. That sets the stage. It is up to us to follow up with this by creating it and maintaining it. We need to fulfill our mission to our hobby and assure that this happens as soon as possible. Bill Fort is on board with archives, but it is more than a one person task, so I am sure he would welcome some assistance.

* * *

Our AAMS Publications Manager is Greg Schmidt. He manages our publications records, orders, inventory and storage. He has done this for decades. He is very thorough and prompt, an excellent player.

We recently reviewed our publications status, prompted by our financial statements reflecting more than $50,000 as inventory assets. The reality is that a substantial part of this will never be realized, as they reflect values for a number of older publications that will never be sold. We need to reduce the inventory to more realistic levels and perhaps even reduce some ongoing storage costs at the same time. The inventory is being reviewed and will be adjusted soon. That will provide a great opportunity for our members, who stand in the front of the line, to capture some of the older AAMS publication they may have missed at very special inventory-reduction pricing. Stay tuned for further information on this.

What else is in the publications inventory? The Airpost Journal! In fact, Greg reports that half of our storage expense is for old Airpost Journals. So we need to look at making a major reduction there, too. Many members, probably most, retain their Airpost Journals. Are you among them? Are you missing any issues? Or would you like an extra copy or two of any past issue? Make up a list because it looks like we need to clean house there and that will probably mean that past issues will be on some kind of super-sale soon.

* * *

A huge THANK YOU to those who have sent articles for our Airpost Journal. We can all take justifiable pride in our journal, but it would not be possible without a continuing stream of articles, features and columns from you, our members. So, please keep those articles coming!

* * *

This month marks the 75th anniversary of the crash of the German dirigible airship LZ-129 Hindenburg at Lakehurst, New Jersey, one of the most famous aviation disasters and the end of the era of lighter-than-air commercial aviation. We take special pleasure in marking this event with an article in this issue by Dieter Leder. He has done a great deal of new research on the recovered airmail, part of which is published here for the first time. No, not everything was already known about this mail and the procedures and circumstances of its origin, recovery and fate. Enjoy the story!
The 1937 Hindenburg Phantom Crash Covers
Dieter Leder

At 7:25 p.m., an almost imperceptible shudder rippled through the airship Hindenburg as it made its landing descent at Lakehurst Naval Air Station, New Jersey. In the control gondola, someone said, “What was that?” Another officer, looking out the window, saw a reflection on the rain-covered field below . . . “We are on fire!”

It was Thursday, May 6, 1937 – 75 years ago this month – when the LZ-129 Hindenburg was completing its first of 18 scheduled flights to North America in 1937. In 34 seconds, it was gone, reduced from the queen of the skies to a smoldering mass of charred duraluminum framework and rubble. The Golden Age of the Zeppelin airships was over.

To mark this signal event in aviation and aeropostal history, Dieter Leder writes about recent research of the airmail flown on this ill-fated flight.

The First 1937 North America Flight of LZ-129 Hindenburg speaks for itself. The most famous air disaster in history is well documented. A total of 357 pieces of mail were officially recovered from the wreckage.

To date, about half the officially recovered crash mail is documented. The other half of the recovered articles is not. Some of the undocumented recovered mail may still be in the private possession of someone with a connection to the crash or a relative of the addressee, kept as a memento. Other pieces may well be in obscure collections. Others could have been lost or destroyed during World War II. Wherever these articles are today, the fact is that we do not have images of them and we know nothing certain about their condition or appearance.

Recovered Mail Findings

The primary information about the mail recovered from the wreckage of the Hindenburg comes from Morgan Annex, the post office in New York that handled it. They kept lists of all 357 officially recovered articles. These lists provide information on how many articles were recovered and also the name and address on each recovered article if it could be discerned. Many years of renewed intense research reveals in detail how the mail was recovered from the wreckage. The events at Lakehurst after the crash have been reconstructed and it was found that nine mail findings were made between May and July 1937. With the reconstruction of the mail processing at Morgan Annex, all recovered articles listed by Morgan Annex in 1937 have been assigned to one of these nine mail findings.

The assignment of a recovered article to a mail finding reveals further useful information for documented mail, but also, and in particular, for undocumented mail. The identification of the mail finding for a given piece provides its post-crash information on the mail recovery itself and the further handling of the item after the crash. In addition, it also reveals detailed pre-crash and crash information about the article, including its initial mail handling and the exact location of the article in the airship at the time of the crash. Occasionally the determination of which specific finding a piece belongs with reveals information about the original dispatch of the article.

The Romeiser Card

One of the Hindenburg mail pieces handled by Morgan Annex in 1937 is a recovered card addressed to Edwin Romeiser at 225 N 63rd St., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The address information is from the Morgan Annex list. The card cannot be illustrated because it is not documented and therefore no image is known to exist. Nevertheless, it has been determined that the Romeiser card belongs to the “Second Finding.” The “Second Finding” mail was discovered in the evening of May 6, 1937 by customs inspectors Regnier and Lynch and others as fire-damaged loose items, among them the Romeiser card.

Small amounts of mail from the “Second Finding” were loaded into the airship by both the Auslandsstelle (foreign section) and Luftpoststelle (airmail section) of the Frankfurt am Main post office. Most of the mail from the “Second Finding” was dispatched during the flight at the on-board post office by crew members and passengers.

The name “Romeiser” does not appear on the crew member or passenger lists of the First 1937 Hindenburg North America Flight. A very powerful tool to research passengers and crew members of this flight is Patrick Russel’s website Faces of the Hindenburg (http://facesofthehindenburg.blogspot.de/) with biographical information of the 97 persons on board the airship. Searching his website for Romeiser reveals an interesting fact: passenger Emma Pannes was born Emma Romeiser. Now, even without any visual evidence of the Romeiser card, we already know a lot about it. It is a postcard, the address is known, the sender of the
card was most likely passenger Emma Pannes, and, like other documented mail of the Second Finding, the Romeiser card is most likely fire damaged.

The Ghost on the Feibusch Card

Another interesting example is the postcard written by passenger Moritz Feibusch. In anticipation of his zeppelin flight, Feibusch had special picture postcards printed, to be flown on the same First 1937 North America Flight. One of these cards was addressed to Mrs. E. Stern at Berlin Charlottenburg. The card was officially recovered and is listed in the Morgan Annex lists.

This card belongs to the “Fourth Finding.” This was mail discovered by Postal Inspector H. R. Nichol in the late afternoon of May 7, 1937. Nichol found passenger and crew member mail addressed to Europe. Although written and dispatched on the outward flight, this mail remained uncanceled, to be handled and postmarked by the Hindenburg postal officer on the return flight to Europe.

Feibusch wrote greetings text on the address side of his card. Further text is written on the picture side, a bit unusual as one normally would not write on the picture side. The manuscript on the picture side of the card is unreadable while the manuscript on the address side is fully readable. The manuscript on the picture side of the Feibusch card was, in fact, not written by Feibusch at all. It is someone else’s writing! Why? It comes from a different (second) card that, at the time of the crash, was stacked right next to the Feibusch card. Due to the affects of fire and water during and after the crash, the manuscript of the second card transferred in part to the picture side of the Feibusch card.

This explains why the manuscript on the back of the Feibusch card is unreadable. Due to the transfer, the script on the Feibusch picture card appears as a mirror image. With a graphics program, the scan of the reverse of this card is easily mirror-inverted. Now the card appears as a mirror image but the now twice mirror-inverted manuscript appears as it was written on the second card. That manuscript is now, for the most part, readable.

Left of Feibusch’s face, fragments of two words can be seen: “Berli . . .” and “Hart . . .” As the Feibusch card was found at the Fourth Finding, the card from which the manuscript on the Feibusch card originated must therefore also belong to the Fourth Finding. Checking the addresses of articles from the Fourth Finding reveals only one matching address: Wundel, Hartmannsweiler Weg 16, Berlin-Zehlendorf.

Additional readable words of the transferred manuscript are “Hindenburg” and “New York.” It clearly appears that a passenger wrote greetings to someone in Berlin. However, this manuscript does not match any of the few recorded manuscripts of passengers. The next-to-last line reads “Ihre” (trans. Yours) so the last line seems to be the name of the passenger. But as with all signatures, it is hardly decipherable. In addition, that line was not fully transferred. Checking again on Patrick Russel’s website for passenger names made it very easy to finally identi-
The card addressed to Wundel is not documented, no image is available. But thanks to the card addressed to Stern, it is known who the sender was and even what the sender wrote while on board the Hindenburg in May 1937.

The Phantom Netherlands Cover

The last example of phantom Hindenburg crash covers is an article from the Netherlands. To date, 26 articles of recovered Hindenburg mail originated from the Netherlands (the status of one more letter from Holland is pending). All 26 Dutch articles are presented on Hallvard Slettebø’s website Hindenburg Crash Mail – The Scout Covers (http://www.slettebo.no/scout/hindenburg.htm). One of the recovered Dutch letters addressed to Donald C. Rose reveals visual evidence of still another article from Holland, making a new total of 27 articles from Holland.

A transfer of three Dutch stamps can be seen on the reverse of one of the Rose letters. The stamp on the left cannot be identified, but the middle stamp is the Dutch 12½ cents Hermes Head and the stamp on the right is the 1½-cents Lily, both from the Dutch 1937 Scout Jamboree stamp issue. Checking the postage of the documented Dutch crash covers on Slettebø’s website reveals no matching image! This clearly shows that the transferred image originated on a so-far undocumented item from Holland. No other features are known about this “phantom” piece, only the three transferred images of Dutch stamps and the fact that it belongs to the “Sixth Finding.”

Conclusion

The 1937 Hindenburg “phantom” crash covers: they have not been seen, but we know what they look like. Maybe, some day . . .

LZ-129 Hindenburg, Zeppelin Crash Mail, the new book by Dieter Leder on the Hindenburg crash mail, details the processing and fate of the mail when the airship crashed at Lakehurst, New Jersey, on May 6, 1937. For more information on this new publication, see www.eZEP.de
After hundreds of hours studying thousands of pages of primary source documents, it is possible to reach some conclusions about the Pan American wartime flights between Miami and Leopoldville. Rather than attempt to tell the entire story in one very long document, it is clearer and probably more digestible to examine each aspect as a short “bite” of information. This will both help readers understand the sequence of events and to allow time for informed comments and questions on each topic as it appears.

First, let’s outline the basic facts about the actual flights between Miami and Leopoldville. There has been considerable misunderstanding in the past, largely based on hearsay and personal opinion(s), with a general belief that a Boeing B-314 flew a regular fortnightly schedule carrying mail between Miami and Leopoldville via the West Indies, Brazil and West Africa. This has now been shown to be incorrect. From the data available in the Richter Library at the University of Miami, the table below shows the probable actual flights together with references for those who wish to use them. Apart from the proving flight and the first philatelic flight, there were 12 round trips numbered 6001/6002 to 6023/6024 (odd numbers eastbound, even numbers westbound).
Pan American Airways Route 6: Departures from New York

Information from Pan American Airways Archives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flight</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Aircraft</th>
<th>Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6001</td>
<td>December 20, 1941</td>
<td>NC-18612</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6003</td>
<td>January 15, 1942</td>
<td>NC-18612</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6005</td>
<td>February 20, 1942</td>
<td>NC-18612</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6007</td>
<td>April 12, 1942</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6009</td>
<td>May 5, 1942</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6011</td>
<td>May 28, 1942</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6013</td>
<td>Not Confirmed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6015</td>
<td>July 6, 1942</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6017</td>
<td>August 5, 1942</td>
<td>NC-18612</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6019</td>
<td>August 30, 1942</td>
<td>NC-18612</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6021</td>
<td>September 22, 1942</td>
<td>NC-18612</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6023</td>
<td>October 16, 1942</td>
<td>NC-18612</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
1. Became Special Mission 06. Mail carried on return from Leopoldville.
2. Special Mission 10
3. Special mission 16 from Leopoldville onward
4. Inaugurated two shuttles Natal-Fish Lake-Lagos on Route 6
5. Became Special Mission 32 on return to Natal. From Leopoldville-Lagos-Fish Lake, then Natal – Lagos shuttle before returning to NY
6. Last Route 6 flight to Leopoldville

Reference: Special Collection 314, Richter Library, University of Miami, Miami, Florida
6017, 6019, 6021, 6023 confirmed dates, Box 260 Folder 56. Also letter dated 23 November 1942 confirming there were no Route 6 flights after 6023/24.
6005, 6007, 6015 confirmed dates, Box 260 Folder 54.
6011 confirmed dates, Box 260 Folder 33.
6003, 6007, 6009, 6011, 6015, 6017, 6019, 6021, 6023 all listed by Berry/Rodina.

Confirmation of 12 round trips (24 Atlantic crossings) comes from PanAm general practice, using odd numbered flights outward and even numbered flights as the return. Also, and more persuasively, from taking the logged flying hours of approximately 60 hours New York – Leopoldville and 60 hours return (a total round-trip of 120 hours) and dividing this into the total chargeable flying hours for flights 6001 to 6024 inclusive given in the PanAm archive box listed as Reference 2. This confirms that only 12 Route 6 Miami – Leopoldville round trips were made in the period December 1941 to October 1942, after which the route closed. The average round trip flying hours are taken from actual flight records and crew logbooks.

Those are the factual records. Now to the fantasy.

Attempts to derive a flight schedule have been made in the past by both Aitink/Hovenkamp and Boyle without much success, but the most recent publication of a schedule for the Miami – Leopoldville flights is that by Proud. In this we find three pages of data purporting to be a record of all flights between Miami and Leopoldville up to March 1943, but if we remove the philatelic first flight, as done in the accompanying table, we find no less than 32 flights listed between December 21, 1941 and April 8, 1943. Since it is clear from a wealth of primary evidence that the last flight on Route 6 left on October 18, 1942, the flights listed by Proud after that date are sheer fantasy.

Eliminating the flights listed by Proud as occurring after October 18, 1942, the Proud table still shows 22 flights in the period when Pan American records show only 12. More fantasy! In the preface of Proud’s book, an explanation is given by Proud, that dates shown in italics (in the tables) “are not actual and have been arrived at using the timetables or interpolation.” This is a helpful comment but it does follow, as confirmed by Crotty in an interview with Proud, that dates shown in normal type are to be taken as provably correct. With one exception (February 8, 1943, and hence fantasy in any case), all flights listed by Proud from the U.S. are indicated by him as provably correct.

How do we check this proof?

In any normal quasi-academic text, we would look to the references. Unfortunately, and as is generally known, Proud does not give any references, so the information cannot be confirmed. Bland statements to the effect that “Information came to me in bits and pieces” can hardly be regarded as adequate.

So here is the challenge: Either the table compiled by Proud is fact or it is fantasy. If it can be proven by proper original-source references that it is fact, then a suitable apology will be issued to Proud and his devoted followers. On the other hand, if it cannot be proven that
Proud’s table is fact but is indeed largely fantasy, then Proud should himself issue an apology to all those up-and-coming collectors who have been woefully misled and to the postal history community in general who paid $120 for his book.

As Sergeant Joe Friday used to say on “Dragnet” (does anyone remember that?), “Just the facts, ma’am.”

References
2. PanAm Archive Box 105, Folder 26.

The Pilot Who Couldn’t Say ‘No’

Don Lussky

A recent eBay acquisition is a letter from Dwight Church, the unfortunate pilot of AAMC Interrupted Flight Crash 380519NY. A surprisingly successful exploitation of airmail lead to his interrupted flight. Here’s an explanation of the events that lead up to the avoidable accident in the words of the pilot who couldn’t say “no.”

FIRST NATIONAL AIR MAIL WEEK CELEBRATION

In March 1938 the Post Office Department sent out requests for local airplane pilots to volunteer to fly airmail on one flight, May 19, 1938, to celebrate National Air Mail Week. Since I was the only pilot in the area at that time, I promised to pick up one bag, not to exceed 25 pounds weight, at each of five locations (Canton, Gouverneur, Potsdam, Massena and Ogdensburg) and fly them all to Syracuse, the designated terminal.

Later on the postmaster at Alexandria Bay wrote and asked me if I would stop there also and pick up a sack of airmail for them. I figured that the six bags that I had promised to carry would only weigh about as much as one passenger, so I agreed to take on Alexandria Bay, too. Then, about a week before the flight, the postmaster at Lowville phoned to ask if I could pick up their airmail and I agreed if they would not have more than 25 pounds.

On the morning of May 19th, I started out from Canton with the sack shown in the photo. I flew to Gouverneur, picked up their bag, then to Potsdam, and then on to Massena. At Massena they were waiting for me with a large long bag, full and heavy. I told them it was badly over weight (I imagine about 75 pounds). But there didn’t seem to be much I could do about it, so we loaded it in.

By now I was well crowded. My
airplane was a single seater, 35 inches wide with a small luggage compartment behind the seat, about the size of a suitcase. It had a 100 h.p. engine and cruised 100 mph, license number 113K Monosport.

At Ogdensburg they were just grading the airport and had smoothed off a strip the day before. I remember it was soft dirt and not too smooth. The postmaster and several prominent citizens came tugging a big long sack, about the same size and weight as the bag at Massena. I explained that I was overloaded, that the bag was much too heavy, and that I still had two more pickups to make. But they urged me to be a good sport, there seemed to be little I could do gracefully, so we loaded it in.

At Alexandria Bay I landed on the Wellsley Island field where Ed Noble kept his airplane during the summer. Thank God, the bag they brought out was light, not more than 15 pounds.

From there I was flying to Lowville for the last pickup. There was a light rain falling and an east wind. I was to land on the Virkler Hill Farm, almost across from hospital. They had set up an American flag near the middle of the field to give the wind direction. However, due to local conditions and obstructions from the farm buildings and trees, the flag indicated a south wind, so I came in from the north, across the field and toward the farm buildings. As I leveled off to land I could only see the top of the barn ahead and realized that it was down hill. At about that instant the plane dropped to the right due to the extra weight on that side, then the east wind under the left wing turned the plane sharply around to the right, damaging the wing tip and crumbling the right wheel. So from Lowville a truck took all the mail to Syracuse.

As we go through life we learn best by experience, or fate perhaps, but that day I learned several things: Don’t oversubscribe yourself needlessly. Know your limitations and stand up to them. I should have stuck to my original plan for five pickups in St. Lawrence County.

By request, for my good life long friend, Atwood Manley, By (signed) Dwight Church No. 7765 April 25th, 1965, Canton, New York

Note: May 19, 1938 was part of National Air Mail Week celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the inauguration of regular air mail service by the U. S. Post Office Department.
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The Japanese Invasion and the End of the Great Horseshoe Route

Part 2

Alistair Watt

Horseshoe Route Cut, continued

Cover No. 7 has a faint but definite cds of Melbourne, January 22, 1942, and a Bombay backstamp of February 7, 1942. It would almost certainly have been on service WS160, which left Sydney on January 25, 1942. This rare cover was on the final completed Horseshoe Route flight out of Australia.

Cover No. 8 went from Calcutta to Australia, January 30, 1942. There is no backstamp but there are Indian and Australian censor markings.

There are a couple of possibilities to consider for the travels of this cover. If it was processed and censored very quickly, it could have been placed on service NE158 which left Calcutta on the morning of January 31 and arrived at Sydney on February 12, making the first flight via Tjalatjap, Java. However, it is important to note that the time of the datemark on the cover is 7:30 p.m., so it would have to been handled very expeditiously indeed to catch the flight the next morning.

It is much more likely that the cover did not leave Calcutta until February 10 on service NE160. Note the delay; the next service, NE159, in fact terminated at Calcutta. Service NE160 was flown throughout by the flying boat *Camilla* from Durban to Australia, reaching Darwin late on
February 18. The report of Qantas Captain Tapp in *Front-Line Airline* by E. Bennet Bremner, confirms that mail was carried on this flight, and that NE160 was the last Horseshoe Route service from Karachi to Sydney.

The morning of February 19, 1942 was marked by the occasion of the first Japanese attack on Darwin. The *Camilla* narrowly avoided being destroyed there by Japanese bombers. It only escaped by being heroically flown away to safety during the raid on neighboring Groote Eylandt. The aircraft later returned to Darwin to pick up passengers and mail, leaving there before dawn on February 20. It continued via Townsville, eventually reaching Sydney on the evening of February 21. The *Camilla* did not survive long; it crashed into the sea off Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea in 1943.

A member of 2./29th Battalion AIF sent Cover No. 9 from BPO No. 28 at Singapore, February 2, 1942. This cover is a real wartime enigma. The sender’s battalion had been badly mauled by the Japanese during fighting on the Malayan Peninsula and had been withdrawn into Singapore for regrouping. The Japanese commenced their siege of the island on January 31. The *Camilla* did not survive long; it crashed into the sea off Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea in 1943.

Bremner indicates that a quarter-ton of mail was carried, as well as evacuees, on this final emergency flight.

However, there is a manuscript arrival date of March 4, a 30-day transit time to Australia. The enemy landing on Singapore commenced on February 8 and the allied forces surrendered a week later, February 15, 1942. It appears that this cover left Singapore on a late military flight or perhaps by an emergency sea evacuation, as indicated by the Australian contemporary news clipping.

Cover No. 10 was postmarked in Sydney, February 9, 1942. By this date Singapore was undergoing invasion and was to surrender February 15. The letter never reached its destination. It was possibly put onto service WS162 which departed Sydney on February 10, but that only went as far as Darwin. The cachet is poignant and self-explanatory. The Dead Letter Office backstamp of March 23, 1942 confirms its fate.

Cover No. 11 is an airmail cover from Rangoon to Darwin, dated January 30, 1942. It arrived at a military
unit in Darwin and received an April 8, 1942 cachet. The cover certainly missed the last southbound Qantas service (NE158) out of Rangoon on February 1, 1942. It must have found its way down to Australia by a tortuous sea route, thus avoiding Japanese action.

Interestingly, the sender was a member of “Tulip Force,” a Special Forces unit being trained to operate behind enemy lines. This unit was to fight its way out of Burma along the Lashio Road. For a while it then trained Chinese forces in guerrilla warfare techniques.

Cover No. 12 went from Mawkwe, Burma to India, February 13, 1942. It is backstamped Kandanoor, India, February 26 and received an Indian censor marking.

The first possibility is that this cover was dispatched on WS163, the last Horseshoe Route service out of Rangoon, on February 16, which arrived Calcutta on the evening of February 18. Maukwe is some 250 miles north of Rangoon on a main route, so it is conceivable that it could make the flight. The eight days from Calcutta (first landing point in India) until its arrival at Kandanoor could be attributed to delays in censorship and internal transportation in India.

At this stage of history, however, Indian National Airways Ltd. (INA) was operating an emergency service through from India to Burma, presumably to provide for the large Indian military contingent operating in that theater of war. The final flight by INA out of Rangoon to Calcutta was on February 17, so that is clearly a possibility. A week later, on February 24, this routing was in fact replaced by an INA service directly out of Magwe (Maukwe) itself to Calcutta. For that possibility, the cover would have to have been processed very rapidly in India in order to reach its destination on the 26th of that month.

The final alternative is that the cover was transported north to Lashio in central Burma and placed onto the Chinese (CNAC) service going through there, and hence to Calcutta. This would account for the long time spent in transit.

In viewing all the alternatives, the most likely is that this is an Indian army origin cover that was on the final INA service out of Ran-
Mail Operations

At this point, it is worth looking at the mail operations side of these wartime services.

Towards the end of 1941, the Horseshoe Route was under severe stress. The wear and tear on the flying boats and their crews took a toll as the volume of mail between Australia and her overseas forces increased. Qantas agreed to take over the task of manning the aircraft through to Karachi instead of Singapore. It is relevant to note that the crews involved were operating a common pool of BOAC and Qantas aircraft. The first such flight from Australia to Karachi was October 16, 1941, with the return service from Karachi departing October 23.

Parallel with this, BOAC had also negotiated an arrangement in June 1941 for KLM to carry military forces mail from the MEF down to Singapore, where it was mandatory to be transferred to Qantas. Although KLM subsidiary KNILM was flying regular services into Australia at that time, strong political action, particularly by Sir Hudson Fysh, prevented the Dutch from getting their hands on any of the mail contracts that Qantas saw as their own!

It is not clear as yet how to distinguish the KLM “troop” airmail from that of the corresponding Horseshoe Route mail, but it must be taken into account when analyzing covers such as No 3.

With the commencement of Japanese hostilities, the common pooling of aircraft became a much higher priority. Although Qantas crews provided most of the “heavy lifting” through the war zone, the aircraft themselves came and went as required. In addition to this, following a meeting in Batavia in mid-December between the Dutch and Anglo-Australian authorities, “it was agreed to share all mail and other loadings available to the best advantage of the war effort.”

This makes sense as the Allies were fighting a real war against a common enemy. It was hardly the time for an airline trade war. However, this makes it extremely difficult indeed to definitively determine exactly who carried a particular cover on a particular service sector.

KLM ceased flying through Singapore as early as December 8, hence most mails emanating from there would be Qantas flown, although the Dutch airline did make some shuttle flights up from Batavia. However, there is clear historical evidence of Australian origin airmail being carried by KLM / KNILM. This is the existence of covers from Australia to military recipients in the MEF, covers that were clearly among the 10,000 survivors from the KNILM aircraft Nandoe that was destroyed on the ground at Medan in Sumatra by enemy fighters. (See cover No 4.)

It is useful to note that despite the extreme gravity of the war situation, it was considered most vital to troop morale that the mail services be maintained insofar as possible. When the Corio was shot down into the sea, it was graphically described how one passenger floated to safety using a mailbag.

By the beginning of February 1942, the loss of Singapore was being anticipated and the Australian postal authorities made the rather foolish announcement that services to Singapore were being suspended. This brought an uproar from the troops besieged in Singapore and the gesture was quickly made that the mail service would “resume.” Nevertheless, the flying boat Corinna made the final shuttle flight to Singapore and back to Batavia on February 3-4.

Conclusion

When the Japanese made their
successful landings at Palembang on the north Sumatran coast on February 14, 1942, it became clear that the airmail service from Australia up through southeast Asia and beyond was no longer tenable. When it ceased, the very brave civilian crews had kept the mails flying through the highest danger war zone for three months. It is a note to the credit of Qantas and KLM that airmail service east across the Pacific was terminated by Pan American on December 8, immediately upon the commencement of hostilities.

With the closure of the Horseshoe Route, civilian airmail services from Australia were effectively suspended. They were not to resume until mid-1943 when Qantas commenced its long-range “Catalina” flying boat flights across the wide expanse of the Indian Ocean. But that is another story.

As a final and very sad footnote to the events described in this article, while on one of the final evacuation flights from Java to Australia, the flying boat Circe was lost with all on board, almost certainly shot down by enemy fighters.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, my thanks to Stan Wheatcroft, who, in our many chats over the international phone lines, encouraged my interest in this subject and my involvement with the Imperial Airways Study Group. Thanks to Ken Sanford for his keen editorial eye. Also to Dr. Bob Clark for what has turned out to be a pleasant and extended series of informative and helpful emails. His research published on the internet is a mine of information.

Finally, a retrospective thank you to the late Francis J. Field of Sutton Coldfield, England, who some 40 years ago encouraged a young university student to take an interest in the Horseshoe Route airmails. And to which, after a rather long lapse, I have returned.

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About the Author

My wife and I are now both retired. We live in Victoria, Australia on the Great Ocean Road area. We emigrated from the UK to Australia in 1969. I was professionally a metallurgist, but ran my own furniture business for 30 years.

I am always interested in early aviation. Initially, I began collecting Australian airmail covers when a student in 1966. As we lived near the doyen of aerophilately, Francis J. Field of Sutton Coldfield, he became a great mentor. Through Mr. Field, I was able to make direct contact with aviation pioneers such as Sir Alan Cobham and Sir Hudson Fysh, something that I now consider to have been a privileged honor. By 1968 I was concentrating on wartime Australian airmails, including the fall of Singapore period and the Qantas Indian Ocean Route. Hudson Fysh personally gave me a great deal of background on the Qantas Catalina flights.

For the usual reasons (a young family, mortgage commitments, etc.) I gave up collecting airmails in the early 1970s. I returned to the same pursuit, and specifically wartime airmails, upon retiring a few years ago – I must say with more funds than when I was an impoverished university student. My main interest now is Australian wartime airmail services, but I am also very interested in the China “Over the Hump” service. Finding covers flown to / from and over China / Australia is now my passion. Who out there has some in their collection?
Sweden’s First Charity Airmail Flight

Alan Warren

September 21, 1912 was an historic day for Sweden, a local charity and airmail in that country. Swedish pilot Olle Dahlbeck flew a Sommer monoplane on a flight to mark Barnens Dag or Children’s Day, a special day to recognize the health and welfare of children.

Barnens Dag in Sweden dates to the turn of the 20th century. Figure 1 is a first day cover of the two-value set marking the 200th anniversary of the birth of Swedish sculptor Johan Tobias Sergel, issued September 5, 1940. The cachet celebrates Barnens Dag in September 1940 and the theme is reflected in the cancel. Another interesting aspect of the cancellation is that it was applied at a mobile post office, namely a Bilpost or postal bus.

The Event

Pioneer pilot Olle Dahlbeck promoted the use of airplanes to speed up the transport of mail. In August 1912, the Stockholm newspaper Dagens Nyheter (“Daily News”) printed a special air mail edition that was flown from Stockholm to Uppsala by Dahlbeck, demonstrating his premise. In September the organizers of Stockholm’s Barnens Dag celebration decided to use the airplane to promote the fund-raising event. A special stamp was printed and applied to mail for this celebration.

Dahlbeck loaded two mail sacks aboard a Bristol biplane at Stockholm’s Gärdet Field in the early morning of September 21. Unfortunately, as soon as he was aloft a gust of wind forced the plane into the ground, damaging its propeller. At this point the pilot used his Sommer monoplane and tried again later in the afternoon.

This time he successfully reached the Järva Field, about nine miles north of Stockholm, and dropped the sacks. Before reaching Järva, Dahlbeck dropped two floral wreaths over Stockholm stadium to mark the place where the Olympic Games were held earlier that year and to recognize the special Barnens Dag parade that was in progress.

Two more attempts were made to fly mail for this charity. The first took place the next day, September 22, but engine trouble caused Dahlbeck to land at sea, resulting in water-damaged mail. A third attempt was made on September 26 with the repaired Bristol plane. This time bad weather shortened the flight; Dahlbeck just flew around the airfield and landed again.

The Card

Both letters and postcards were used in the mail for these flights. Figure 2 shows use of the 5-öre Jubilee postal card of 1897 that commem-
orates the 25th anniversary of the reign of King Oscar II. The card was intended to be used only domestically. However, sometimes it is found used to foreign destinations with additional franking or with total franking that ignored the indicium. The special semi-official “airmail” stamp was applied and the indicium was canceled with the marking used on the mail for all three flights.

The Stamp

For these flights, a semi-official airmail stamp was printed and sold for 60 öre. The value is not imprinted on the stamp. The money was used to cover the domestic mail cost, the airmail fee and to raise funds for the Barnens Dag charity. One stamp was applied to letters and cards for domestic use and two stamps were required for foreign destinations. The border reads “1912 / Barnens Dag” and in the center is the wording “Sveriges Första Flygpost” (Sweden’s First Airmail).

A total of 10,000 copies of the stamp were printed in sheets of 64 and about 3,200 were sold at book stores, tobacconists and other shops for use on mail to be carried on these three flights. The stamp is perforated but is also known imperforate. The remaining stamps were not destroyed; in 1937, 4,800 of them were overprinted to mark the 25th anniversary of the first airmail delivery. Thus 2,000 mint copies remained from the original printing.

The 1937 overprint reads “Barnens Ö / Flygpost / 16.9.37” and the side marking “Silverjubiléet 1937.” This time the stamp had no value and was applied in addition to normal postage. The 25-year commemorative Jubilee flight carrying mail with the overprinted semi-official stamp took place September 16, 1937.

The Cancellation

For the three Barnens Dag flights in 1912, the semi-official airmail stamp was cancelled “Sveriges Första Flygpost / September 1912” (Figure 3). The cancel was placed on the postage. Occasionally the semi-official airmail stamp is tied with an arrival marking.

The beneficiary of Sweden’s first charity airmail flight was the Barnens Dag Society of Stockholm. The charity later became one that was celebrated nationwide. The semi-official airmail stamp is considered to be Sweden’s first airmail stamp. However, the first official airmails were the 1920 official stamps overprinted “Luftpost” followed in 1930 by the two-value night mail airmail over Stockholm issue. Airmail cancellations in Sweden continued during the teens for various domestic events, and, later, first flight mail.

References


An Unexpected First Flight Cover

Harlan B. Radford, Jr.

On May 18, 1991, United Airlines began new Boeing 747-400 service on the Washington, D.C. to Paris route. According to the American Air Mail Catalogue, Sixth Edition, Volume Two (page 325), no philatelic announcement was made by the U.S. Postal Service via their official publication, The Postal Bulletin. However, a very small number of collector-submitted and prepared airmail envelopes were actually given philatelic treatment and dispatched on the inaugural Paris-bound flight bearing official USPS cachet imprints, despite no announcement.

The recipient of this unusual first flight cover speculates just how these few envelopes were provided cachets and what may have caused the mix-up. Perhaps it was a matter of timing and the subsequent incorrect processing by Washington D.C. post office personnel of a collector’s request for another or different inaugural flight service.

Originally, a total of four 50¢ airmail-stamped and self-addressed envelopes were prepared and mailed to the Washington D.C. Main Post Office with instructions that they be held for the United Airlines inaugural flight from Washington to Hamilton, Bermuda, scheduled for April 10, 1991. This collector never sent envelopes requesting cachets or service on the May 18 inaugural United flight to Paris.

However, for some unknown reason, the four covers intended
for the Hamilton-bound inaugural were surprisingly given the red United Airlines Washington – Paris flight pictorial cachet and postmarked with a Washington hand-cancel device. Although none of the four covers received a Paris backstamp, it is presumed these covers were actually flown there.

By 1991 the USPS support for flight cachets was ending. The early 1990s was the time when the USPS gradually discontinued its longstanding practice of announcing, authorizing and providing official philatelic treatment to first flight covers submitted by collectors. The first flight cover shown here is one of the last receiving such special treatment by the USPS, marking the end of an era. Within another year, official first flight cachets would be a thing of the past!

Apparently by mere happenstance, these few envelopes represent the only official first flight covers carried on this inaugural flight. Has anyone else seen actual or reported similar flight covers bearing the same philatelic markings?

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12195 Fowler, Dale, Honesdale, PA. AM. By: S. Reinhard
12196 Owens, John B., Lebanon, NH. FAM PA HC FF FFUS First flights to/from Barbados. By: AAMS Website

Reinstated
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