

U.S. International Air Mail in the Months Leading Up To the Attack on Pearl Harbor

Purpose

The purpose of this single frame exhibit is to show how foreign air mail routing quickly and drastically evolved, as War in Europe and in Asia came to the United States. By 1939, air transportation had grown throughout the world and helped drive countries out of the great depression. Just ten years after Lindbergh soloed the Atlantic, commercial air travel was growing rapidly around the world. Across the Pacific to Asia and Africa as well as the Atlantic to Europe, Northern Africa and the Near East. The war would disrupt commercial routes almost overnight. The military took over air routes in both the Atlantic and Pacific. This exhibit shows how both the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans were impacted.

1939 Letter Toledo OH to Germany



December 1939 letter from Toledo OH to Germany.

The Boeing 314 Clipper Capetown



Background

Starting in 1939, the United States had wide ranging foreign air mail routes in both the Pacific and Atlantic. Using majestic Boeing Clippers, flights left daily for Europe, Hawaii and the Asia Pacific region. Destinations included Hawaii, Philippines, Singapore, Hong Kong and China as well as Australia and the South Pacific. From these ports the Middle East and Africa could be reached. In 1940, with war in Europe and war in the Pacific routes began to change and be cancelled. To deal with the reduced number of routes and to help support our allies, the U.S. focused on a Southern Atlantic route to Africa and beyond to Asia. FAM 22 was the Post Office Department's designation of a route that transported mail across the South Atlantic Ocean between the United States, Africa, and Asia. It officially opened on December 6, 1941, and officially ended July 1, 1946. Its most distinctive aspect was the use of Miami as the gateway and transfer office.

1939

International air mail was well established going into 1939. Mail routes in both the Atlantic and the Pacific were moving mail around the world more effectively than ever. President Roosevelt declared 19 August National Aviation Day. 1 September war broke out in Europe; air mail routes were about to be impacted.

Quadruple Rate Letter on Short-lived 4 Month Route to Australia via Atlantic



29 June 39 letter from New York to Newcastle N.S.W. Australia. The default routing was FAM 14 Clipper across the Pacific to Hong Kong and BOAC to Australia. This letter was endorsed for Atlantic service and traveled FAM 18 Clipper to England and then across the Mediterranean on BOAC to Egypt, India and then to Australia. This route was effective June 1939 and suspended in September when war started in Europe. Stamps pay quadruple 70 cent air mail rate to Australia.

Baby Clipper Crash Cover Flight from Miami to Rio de Janeiro Brazil



Image of a S-43 "Baby Clipper"

7 August 1939 air mail letter from Mansfield OH to Rio de Janeiro Brazil. FAM Sikorsky S-43 "Baby" Clipper flight from Miami which crashed in the Amazon basin on 13 August attempting to land in Guanabara Bay. The plane was demolished but the mail was recovered with fire and water damage. The stamps pay the 40 cent air mail rate to Brazil effective from 1 December 1937 to 1 April 1945. 14 people died in the crash when one of the engines appeared to explode and damage a wing.



7 times rate New York NY to Elisabethville Belgian Congo



1 May 1940 New York to Elisabethville Belgian Congo. Flown on a Boeing B-314 flying boat via FAM 18 route from New York to Lisbon Portugal and then onward by British or French carrier to Elisabethville Belgium Congo. Arrived Elisabethville 17 May. Stamps pay the seven times the 50 cent per half ounce air mail rate plus 15 cents for registry fee, 30 cents to Europe and 20 cent surcharge to Belgium Congo.

Returned to Sender from Brooklyn NY Service to Denmark Suspended



December 7 1941 censored air mail letter from Brooklyn NY to Denmark. The letter was sent to Bermuda where it was held and returned to New York.

24 September 1940 censored air mail letter from New York to Tel Aviv Palestine. Censored in Palestine. The stamps pay the 36 cent air mail rate although the trans-Mediterranean route was suspended. The rate via the Pacific was 70 cents. This cover was either accepted under paid on the Pacific route or sent to London for transport to the Levant.

Stamps Pay Suspended Rate New York NY to Tel Aviv Palestine





13 February 1941 air mail and letter from Wilmington DE to Calcutta India. 70 cent FAM 14 via Hong Kong on PanAm Clipper. KNILM Manila-Batavia and KLM or BOAC Horseshoe Route Batavia-Calcutta. The letter was not opened by a censor.

18 June 1941 letter from Montreal Canada to Albertville Belgium Congo. Until 1941 the USPO had no formal way to move airmail to locations between the Sahara Desert and Namibia. This letter found a way. The letter traveled from Montreal Canada to New York on 19 June, San Francisco 20 June, Honolulu 25 June, Singapore 22 July, Kisumu Kenya 22 July, Kampala Uganda 25 July arriving in Albertville Belgium Congo 3 August. The letter was censored in Singapore,



18 November 1941 air mail letter from New York NY to Manila Philippines. New York to San Francisco en route to Manila Philippine Islands. Stamps pay the 50 cent 1/2 oz. FAM rate to Philippine Islands.

The letters below show the two consecutive and short lived rates via the Pacific that were followed by the 2 December 1941 FAM 22 rate via the Atlantic

95 Cent 1/2 Oz. Effective under 1 year: 6 August 1940 through 17 July 1941

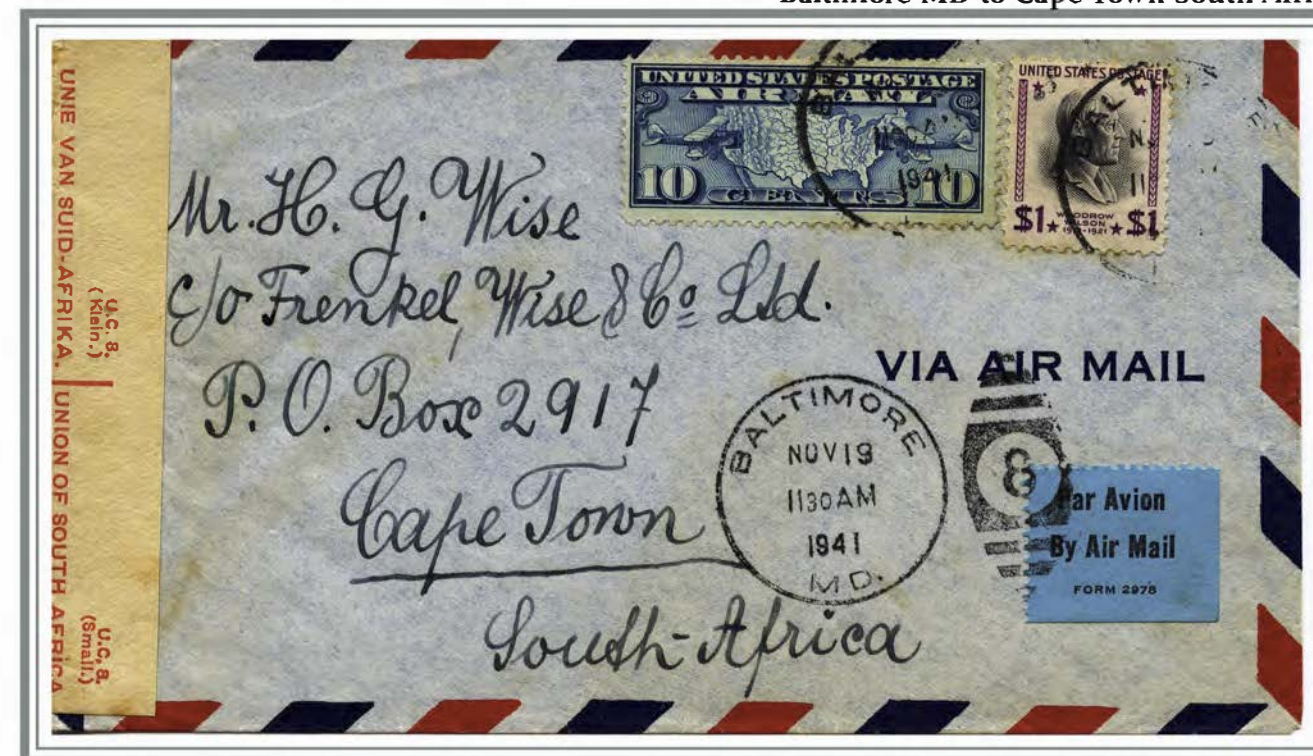
Youngstown OH to Bloemfontein South Africa



18 February 1941 air mail letter from Youngstown OH to Bloemfontein South Africa. Stamps pay the 95 cent air mail rate via Hong Kong or Singapore and Cairo effective 6 August 1940 through 17 July 1941.

\$1.10 1/2 Oz. Effective 4 1/2 months: 18 July 1941 Through 1 December 1941

Baltimore MD to Cape Town South Africa

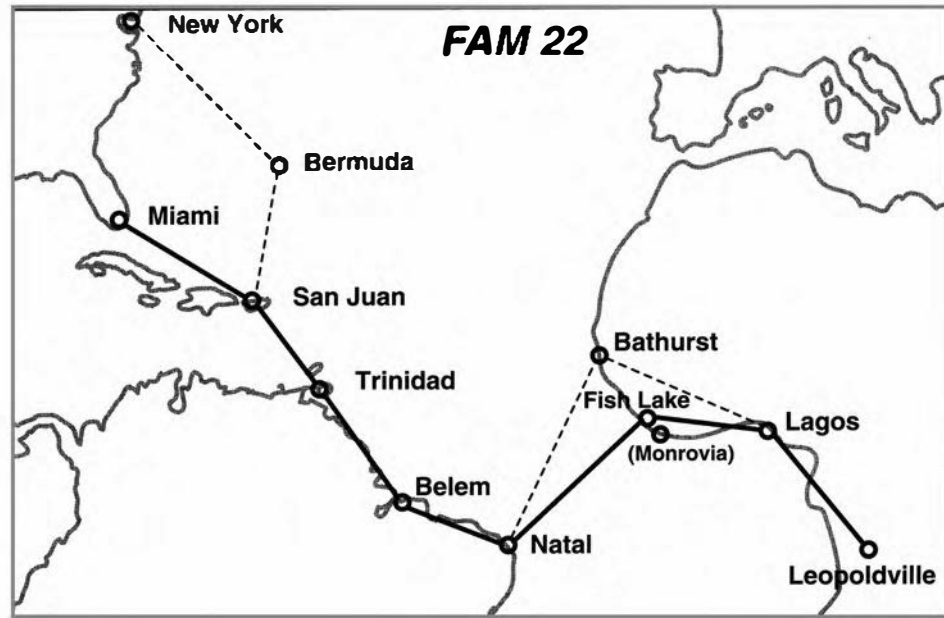


19 November 1941 censored air mail letter from Baltimore MD to Cape Town South Africa. Stamps pay the \$1.10 airmail rate via Hong Kong or Singapore and Cairo effective 18 July 1941 through 1 December 1941. Censored in South Africa.

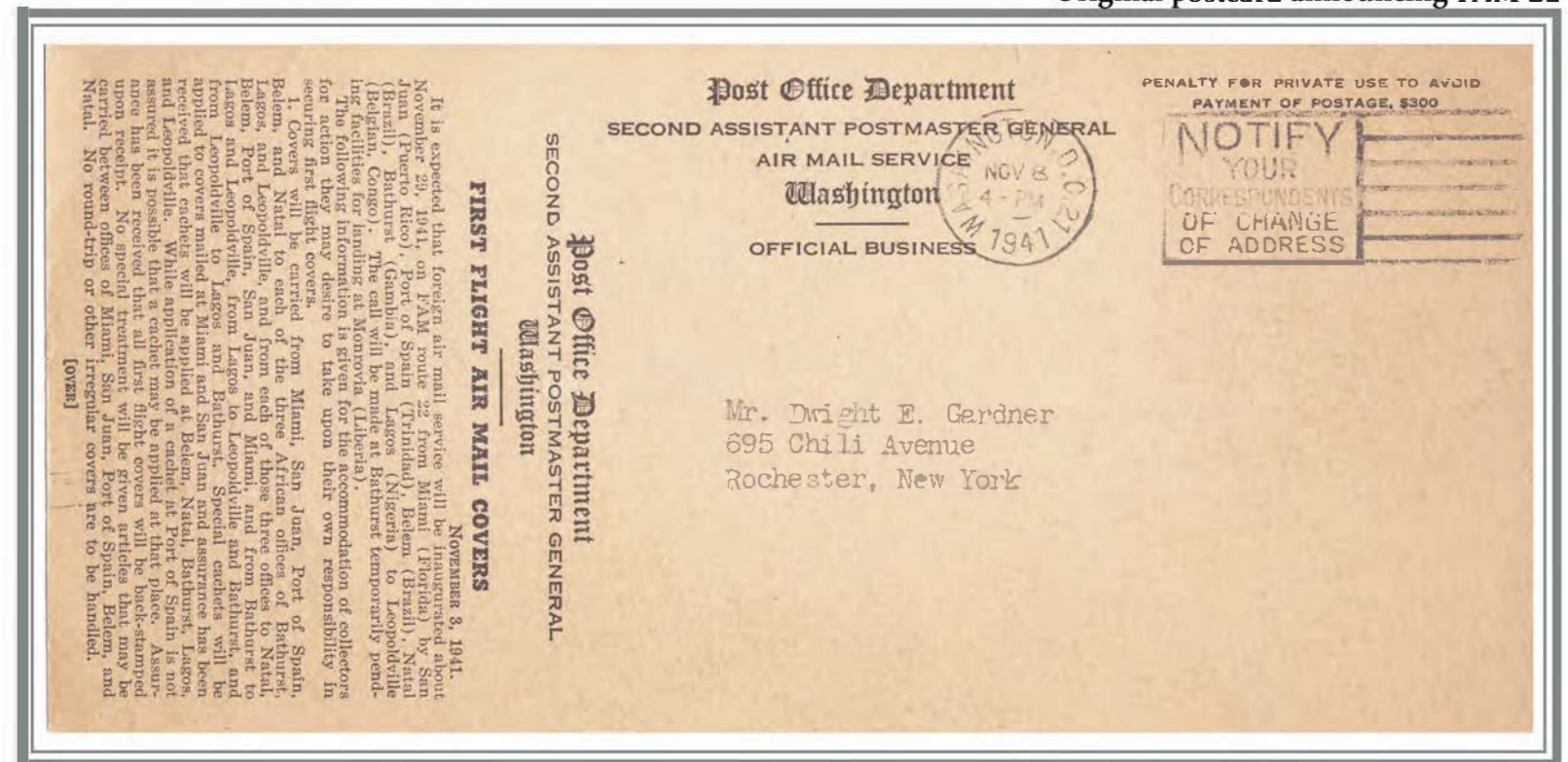
Opening the FAM 22 South Atlantic Route to Africa and Asia

6 December 1941

The Southern route across the Atlantic was not a result of the United States entering the war. The key need for FAM 22 was to move men, supplies to Africa in support of the Allied war efforts as well as mail. It also supported the need to maintain access to strategic materials available in Africa. This was the gateway to Asia as the U.S. was engulfed in a world war.



Original postcard announcing FAM 22



Only recorded example of this cachet on New York first flight cover



5 December 1941 cacheted first flight airmail cover from New York to Mildenhall Great Britain. The envelope is unsealed sent without enclosures, thus it was not censored. The stamp pays the 1/2 ounce airmail rate to Gambia and sea service on to Great Britain. The cachet was designed by Harry Gordon.

First Flight Personal letter Claremont CA to Yakusu Belgium Congo Through Miami



4 December 1941 censored air mail letter from Claremont CA to Yakusu Belgium Congo. Stamps overpay 60 cent air mail rate. Censored Belgium Congo.

A Date That Will Live in Infamy
7 December 1941 The Anzac Clipper To Honolulu

The December 6-7 *Anzac Clipper* flight from San Francisco to Hawaii, piloted by Captain Turner left San Francisco 40 minutes late. The plane had left the day before and returned for maintenance. On 7 December the plane was less than one hour from Honolulu, the first refueling stop, when the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor began. The Anzac received the message 'CASE 7, CONDITION A' meaning that war had started in the Pacific. Pan Am's pre-arranged plan was to reroute to Hilo.

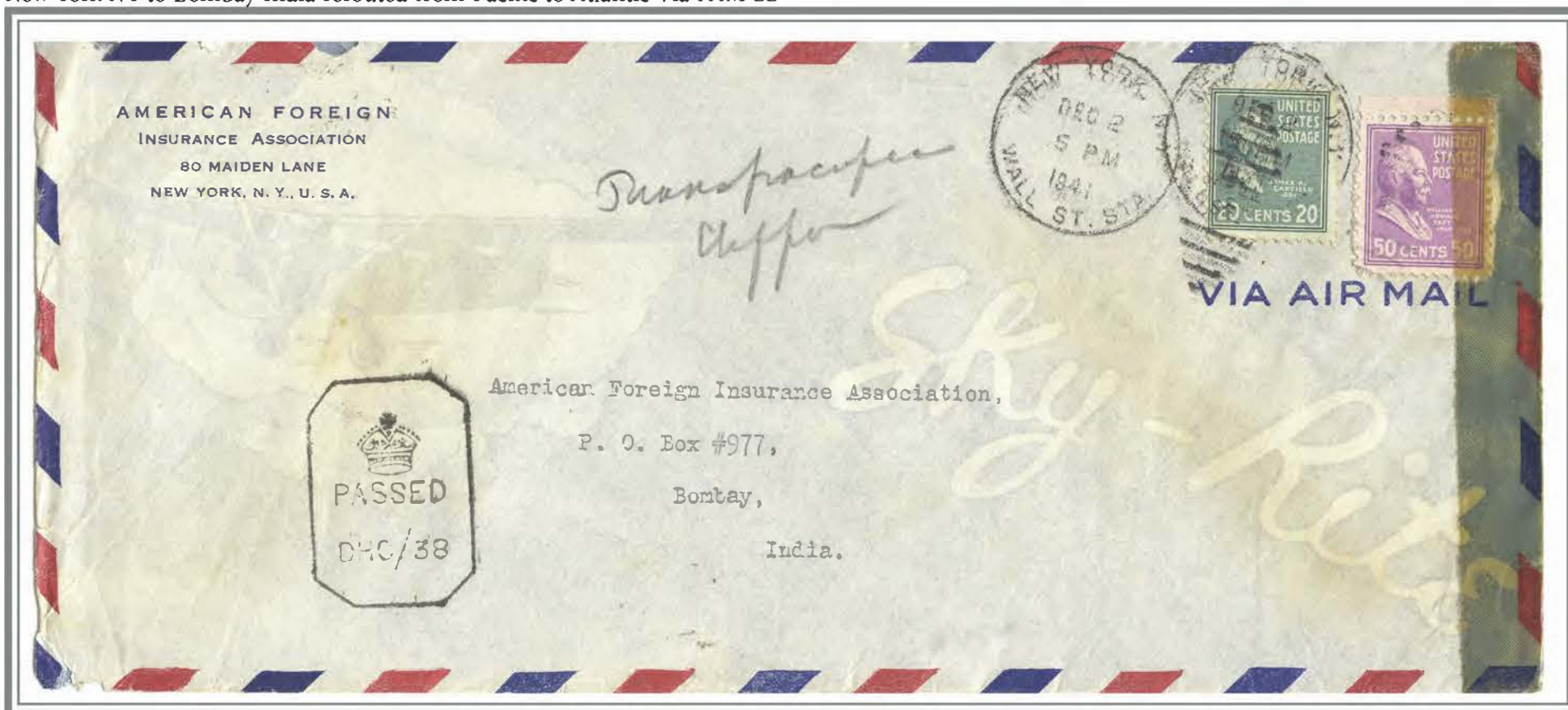
On 14 December the mail was forwarded from Hilo to Honolulu where it was opened and censored by an Information Control Branch censor and hand stamped on the back 'RELEASED BY I.C.B. 85'. On 18 December 1941 the Postmaster General ordered that mail, previously sent via FAM 14 Westbound, was to be rerouted through Miami Eastward through Africa. Censoring was put in place. From 8 December 1941 international mail transited Miami or if to the Northern Atlantic New York.

Flight Diverted By Attack on Pearl Harbor
Mail Redirected to the Eastbound Route



Anzac Clipper at anchor

New York NY to Bombay India rerouted from Pacific to Atlantic Via FAM 22

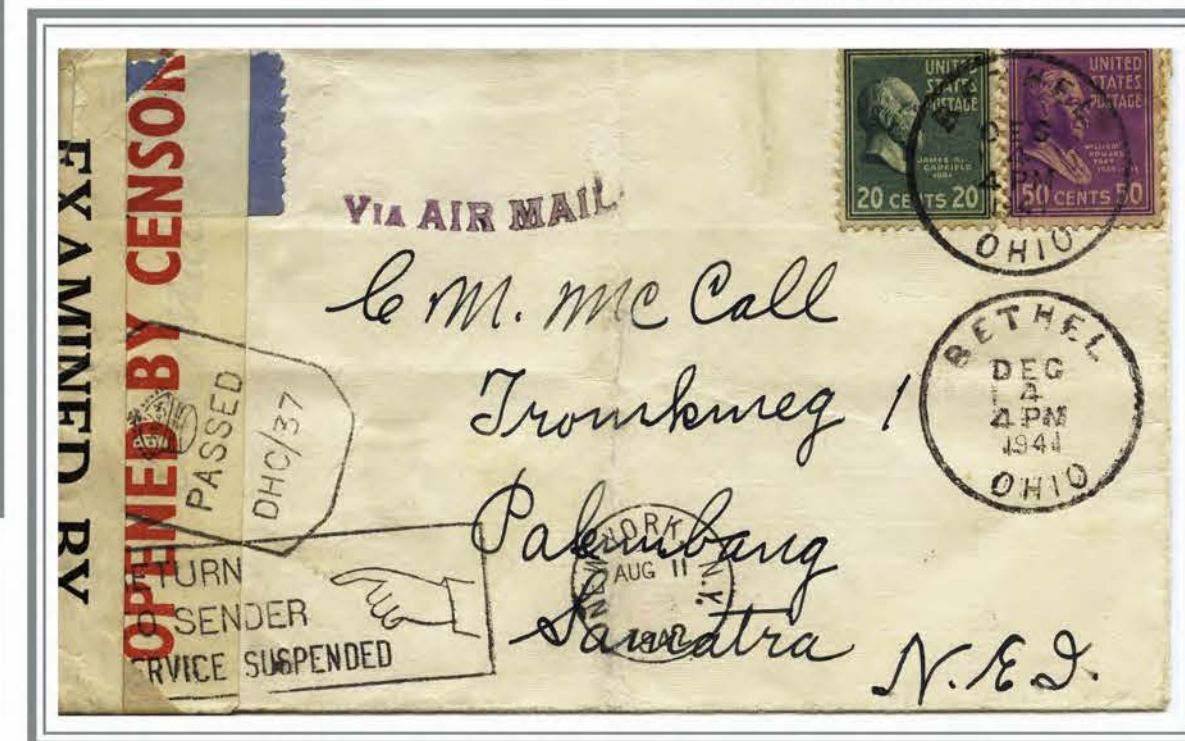


2 December 1941 censored air mail letter from New York to Bombay India. From New York the letter was sent to San Francisco by air and then routed to Honolulu by the *Anzac Clipper*. Returned to San Francisco, forwarded to Miami and rerouted via Miami on a FAM 22 flight to West Africa and on to Bombay India arriving 24 March. Censored in Honolulu by the I.C.B. and in Bombay by British Imperial Censorship (handstamp on front). Stamps pay 70 cent 1/2 ounce rate to India.

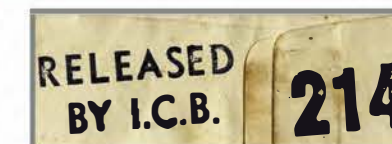


Partial reverse 100%

In transit to Sumatra Returned to Sender



4 December 1941 censored airmail letter from Bethel OH to Sumatra N. E. I. This letter returned to San Francisco on 14 December, and to Miami, Belgian Congo, and Calcutta. From Calcutta there was no way forward so the letter was returned to New York where it was released 11 August 1942 and returned to Bethel OH. Most likely delayed along the return route because of high priority war requirements.



Partial reverse 100%

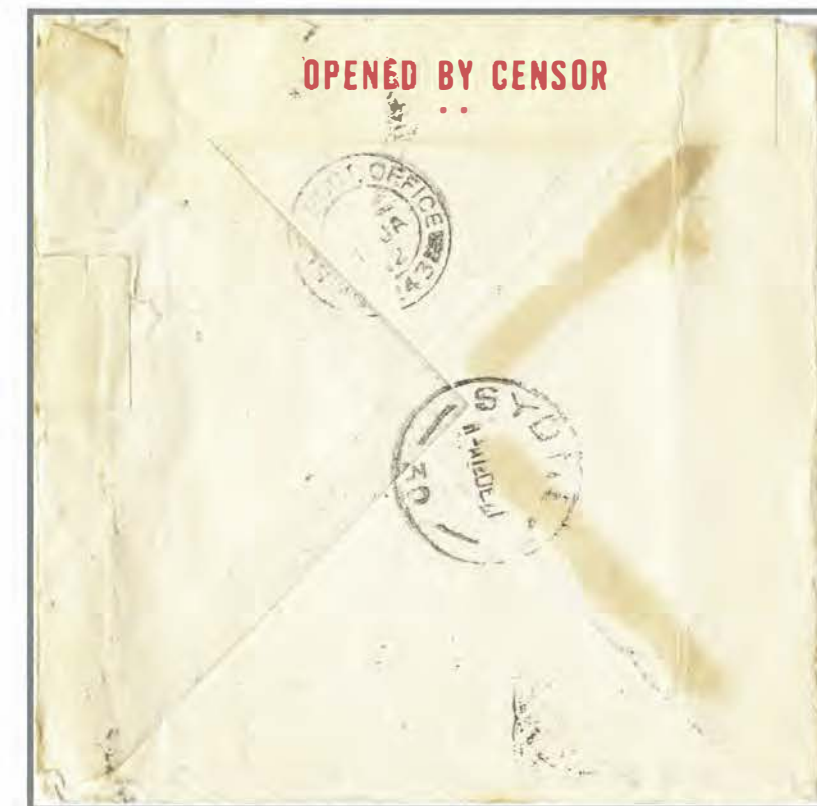
The Long Way Home With War Full-On

The last prewar westbound flight of the *Pacific Clipper* from Honolulu, piloted by Robert Ford, was three days out Pearl Harbor. As the Clipper traveled Westward, to save the plane, Ford needed to stay ahead of the Japanese advancement in the Pacific. The plane crossed Asia to the west coast of Africa and returned from Leopoldville along part of the FAM 22 route and was **the first commercial plane to circle the earth**. No mail was carried beyond New Zealand. While not well known today, Robert Ford is a true hero and remains a part of the romance of the clippers.



Robert Ford pilot of *Pacific Clipper*

New York NY to Sydney Australia



Reverse 80%

30 November 1941 letter from New York City to Sydney Australia. The letter left San Francisco 1 December 1941 FAM 14 flight to Honolulu. Departed Hawaii on the *Pacific Clipper* on 4 December FAM 19 to Canton Island, Fiji, New Caledonia, and on the New Zealand. With word of the attack on Pearl Harbor, the mail was unloaded, the letter was forwarded to Jerusalem.

Stamps pay the 70 cent 1/2 ounce airmail rate from United States to Australia.

The *Pacific Clipper* continued its around the world trip with refueling stops including Leopoldville Belgian Congo, created by preparation for FAM 22. On occasion only low octane fuel was available. The historic and heroic flight of the *Pacific Clipper* from Auckland went via Gladstone and Darwin Australia, Surabaya Java, Trincomalee Ceylon, Karachi India, Bahrain, Khartoum Sudan, Leopoldville Belgian Congo, Natal Brazil, Port of Spain, Trinidad and New York. The plane arrived at La Guardia's Marine Air Terminal 6 January 1942.

With the Miami FAM 22 Gateway to Brazil and Africa open, supplies, men and mail were able to flow to Africa on to Asia. Air mail routes across the Pacific were gone. Routes through the Mediterranean were gone. Over time they would return as the Axis Powers were pushed back. Miami over the hump to China became the longest air mail route in the world.