


BURMA CIVIL CENSOR HAND STAMPS 1939-1943

Purpose: This exhibit will show the types of civil censorship hand stamps used by Burma on regular mail during World War II, explaining when, where, and why they were used. The time frame is from the beginning of the War until the Japanese Occupation.

Importance: The material in this exhibit adds much to what was known about the subject previously.

Exhibit Plan: Single Line Triangle Hand Stamps
Circular "NOT OPENED BY CENSOR" Hand Stamp
Double Line Triangle Hand Stamps

Organization: Items in the sections are grouped by censor station. Additional interesting cover information is given in italics.

Research:  Indicates discovery or research. One previously unrecorded censor hand stamp is shown. Unreported colors or censor numbers and many newly discovered earliest (EKU) or latest known uses (LKU) are presented.

Rarity: Many of the hand stamps shown exist in very small numbers. *Write ups about rarity are in dark red.* Covers with unique or one of only two known hand stamps are double framed in *dark red.*

Map showing the five places in Burma where civil censor hand stamps were used. →

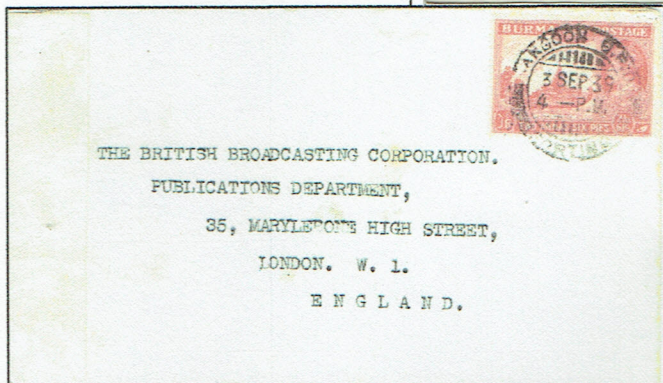


Reference: British Empire Civil Censorship Devices World War II British Asia 6th Edition 2011, Civil Censorship Study Group. Referred to as CCSG in the exhibit. Sixteen discoveries shown are included in a draft of the 7th Edition, which has yet to go to press. Two items shown were discovered after this draft.

CENSORSHIP BEGINS IN BURMA

At 12:00 AM September 3, 1939 Britain declared war on Germany. Under the Defence of Burma Act, censorship was immediately introduced on mail leaving the country.

Within a few hours the first civilian censors were appointed in Rangoon. Mail at the censor station was marked with a hand stamp when processed.



←Rangoon-September 3, 1939 4:00 PM (Burma 7 hours ahead of England)

Single line red triangle with 6 cm censor number in the center

Location of censor station at the triangle base – Rangoon



EKU. CCSG incorrectly says first used October 30, 1939.

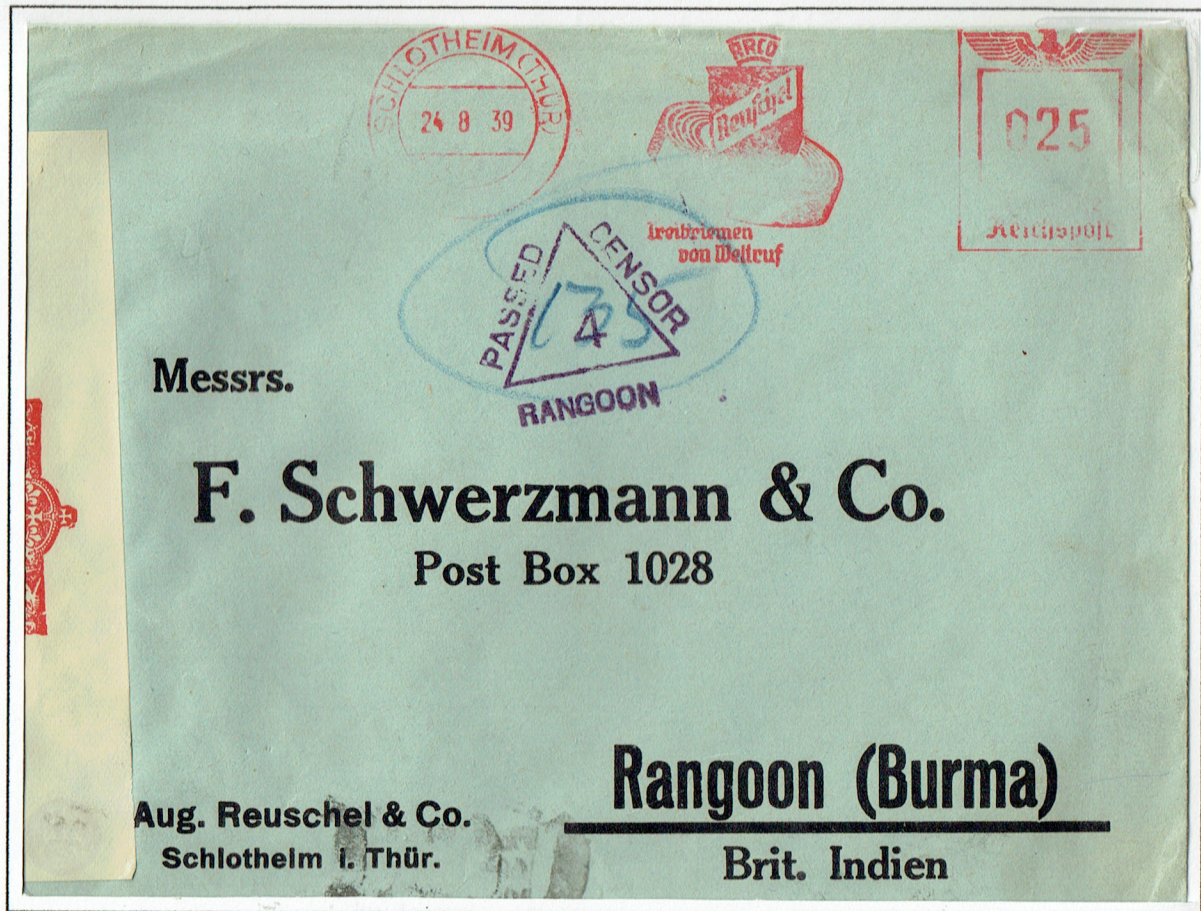
SINGLE LINE TRIANGLE HAND STAMP

Censor numbers 1-9, 11, 29, 30 listed. Listed in violet (most common), red, and green. 7-9, 11, 29, & 30 should not be listed. 🔍

RANGOON LARGE NUMERALS

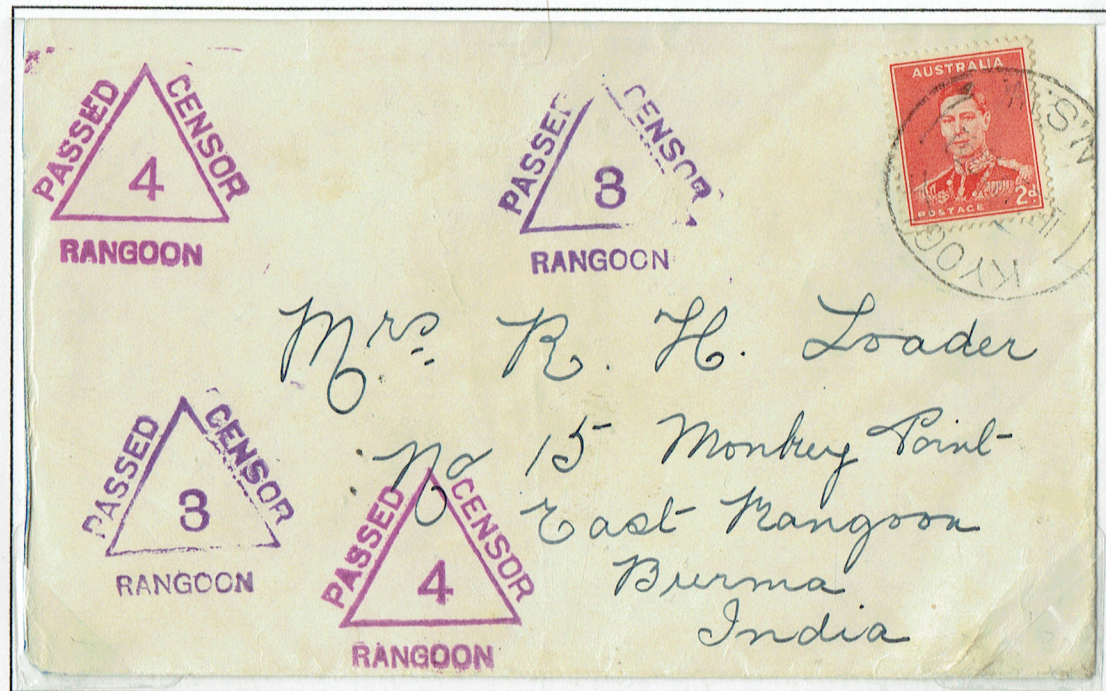
Most Burma foreign mail passed through Rangoon, the largest city with the busiest port and the largest airfield.

FROM GERMANY BEFORE WAR DECLARED – CENSORED IN RANGOON



Schlotheim, Germany-Aug 24, 1939-7 days before German invasion of Poland. Surface mail. Censor hand stamp and resealing tape applied at Rangoon. Delivery back stamp-Nov 8, 1939.

FROM AUSTRALIA – TWO SHADES OF VIOLET HAND STAMPS



Kyogle, NSW-Dec 19, 1939. Back stamped: East Rangoon-Jan 20, 1940. Surface mail. Blue-violet and red-violet censor hand stamps. Not opened.

OUTBOUND NON-EMPIRE MAIL (100% CENSORED)



Rangoon-April 29, 1940. Censor hand stamp and resealing tape applied. Franked for KLM air service but flown higher priced BOAC. Back stamped Rangoon-January 2, 1941. CCSG lists Feb 23, 1941 the LKU. CCSG regards 1941 a typo, and now considers this the true LKU. 🔍

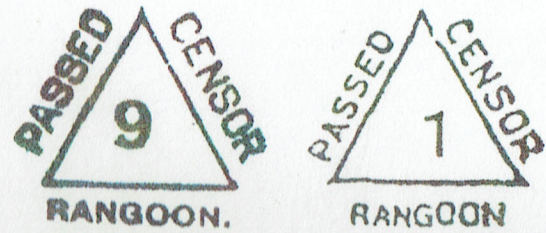
OUTBOUND EMPIRE MAIL (10% CENSORED)



Postmark from reverse † Rangoon-Dec 14, 1939. Mauritius-Feb 3, 1940. Censor hand stamp applied but not opened. Surface mail. Like the other hand stamps on this page, the Censor 6 marking has no period after Rangoon.

PASSED BY CENSOR around a triangle marking indicates an item was processed by a censor station. It does not indicate whether it was opened and read.

SINGLE LINE TRIANGLE HAND STAMP



The censor marks with the period after Rangoon also differ in the size and position of the letters around the triangle.

Censor hand stamps with a period after Rangoon are listed separately. Numbers 6 & 9 listed in red & violet. First appeared Oct 1939. The listing should say numbers 7-9.

RANGOON LARGE NUMERALS PERIOD AFTER RANGOON



Thongwa-February 19, 1940. New LKU Printed matter mail - not opened.



Rangoon-Nov 1, 1939. Not opened. First Flight Rangoon to Chungking via CNAC (Chinese National Aviation Company). This became an important way for Burma and the rest of the world to communicate with China and beyond.

Censor 7 number with period not listed.

This mark is listed separately with no censor number. Two examples documented by the exhibitor.

Postmark from reverse ↓



Henzada-February 17, 1940. Not opened. Surface mail. Censor hand stamps 6 (no period as always) and 8 (with period as always) applied at Rangoon. Censor number 8 with period not listed.



December 30, 1939. Not opened. Surface mail. LKU.

SINGLE LINE TRIANGLE HAND STAMP

AKYAB WITH PERIOD

A censorship station was also established at Akyab.



A hand stamp is listed in violet with censor number 1 and a period after Akyab. Two examples documented by the exhibitor.

Mail was able to leave Burma from Akyab by going west without going through Rangoon. Akyab had a port and was a regular stop by BOAC on the Australia to England route.

← Akyab-October 30, 1939
Resealing tape applied at Akyab.
Latest known use.

Exhibitor has discovered a hand stamp in black with censor number 7 and no period after Akyab. Only reported example.

CCSG plans to list with a separate catalog number in their next edition.



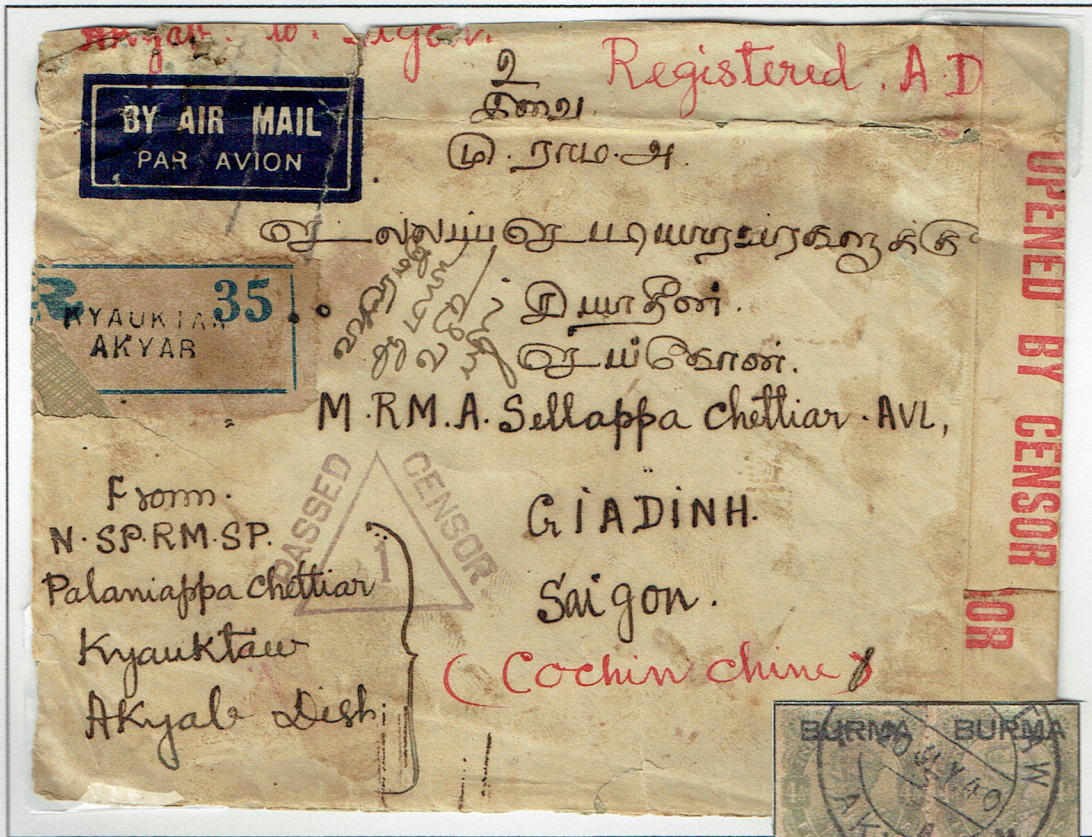
Franking on reverse

AKYAB WITHOUT PERIOD



Paungde-May 15, 1940
Hand stamp applied but no resealing tape.

A violet hand stamp listed with no town name, censor number 1, and only known used at Akyab. CCSG estimates four or fewer known. 7 examples documented by the exhibitor. 🔍



Kyaukat Akyab-July 20, 1940. Akyab REG-July 23, 1940. New LKU by 78 days. 🔍



Postmark from reverse

Mandalay was the second largest city in Burma
A censor station was opened there at the same time as Rangoon and Akyab.

MANDALAY

A violet hand stamp with censor number 3 is recorded used in October 1939. Two covers recorded by the exhibitor. 🔍

→ Bhamo-Nov 19, 1939. Latest known use. 🔍

In Dec 1939 the Mandalay censor station was closed. There was little need as most foreign mail censored there still needed to travel through Rangoon.



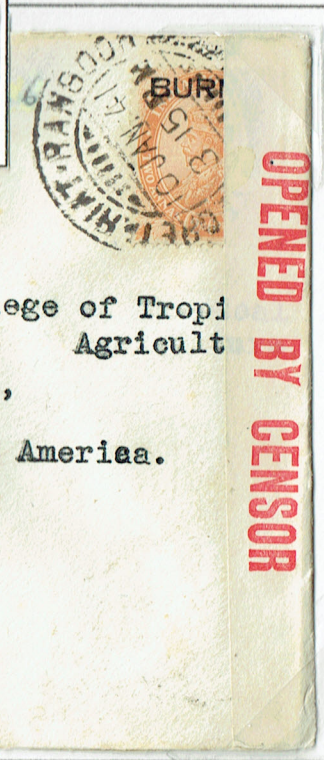
In April 1940 censor hand stamps appeared in Rangoon only with smaller 4 cm numbers to better accommodate two-digit censor numbers. Censor numbers 1-24 listed. Colors violet and green listed.

At times mail from other countries went through Burma either by accident or as transit mail. They too were subject to censorship.



← Rangoon-April 29, 1940
New earliest known use by 4 days.
Resealing tape applied at Rangoon

Censored again (octagon) and resealed at Egypt



Rangoon-January 10, 1941 →

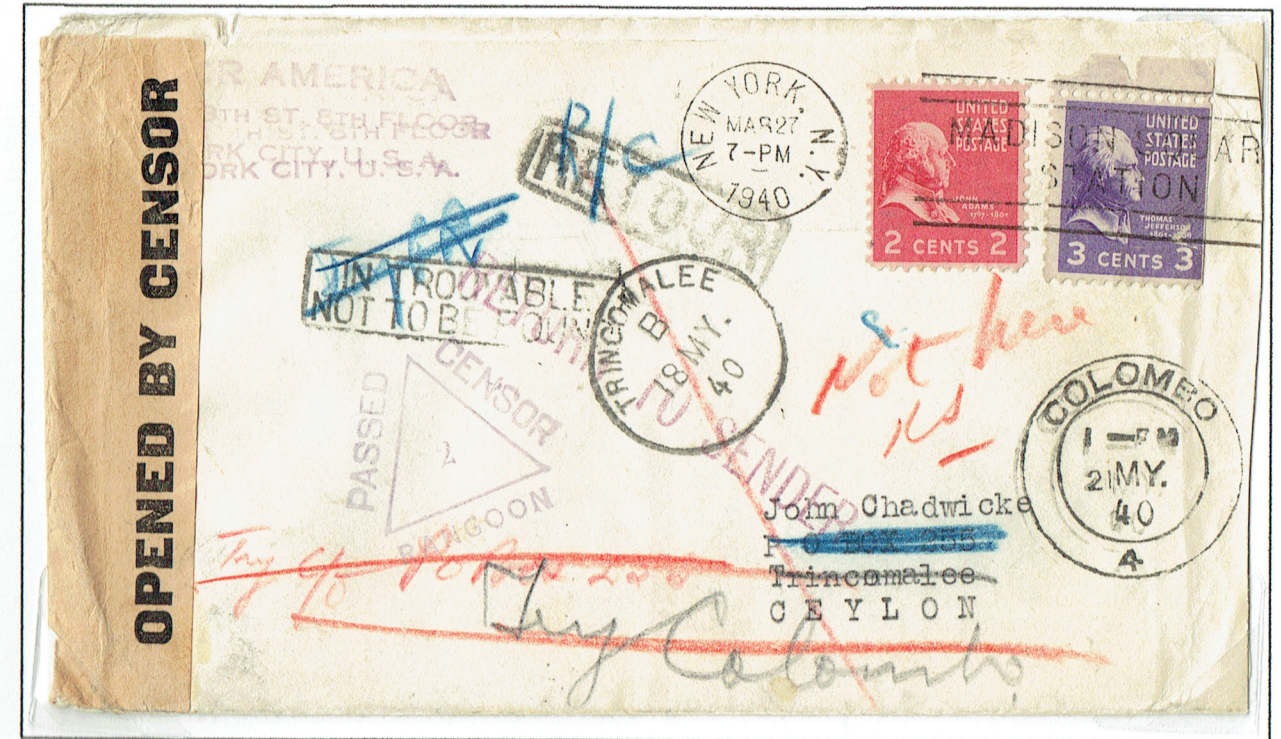
Two-digit censor number - 23
Smaller numerals easily fit.



← Maymyo-March 4, 1941
New latest known use by 31 days.

← Flown BOAC on the Horseshoe Route to Durban, South Africa and ship beyond to Great Britain.

→ Flown BOAC to Rangoon to connect with the CNAC to Hong Kong service via Chungking to connect with the PAA Trans Pacific and Trans Atlantic service to England via Lisbon.



New York-March 27, 1940. Found in Burma. Rangoon back stamp May 8, 1940
Not opened in Burma but hand stamp applied. Ceylon back stamps: May 18, 21, 23, 24, 25.
Resealing tape applied in Ceylon. Returned to sender: New York back stamp-October 5, 1940.

INDIA TO ENGLAND VIA BURMA



→ Bombay-Feb 12, 1941
NOT OPENED BY CENSOR applied at Bombay.

Transit mail - green censor hand stamp applied at Rangoon.

Resealing tape applied at London

SINGLE LINE TRIANGLE HAND STAMP

LASHIO

In January 1940 a new censorship station was opened in Lashio near the China border.

A flatter triangle violet hand stamp was used with no censor number in the center. CCSG estimates four or fewer are known. Seven examples documented by the exhibitor. 🔍

This station was needed because some foreign mail left Burma via Lashio without needing to go through Rangoon. The Burma Road to Kunming began at Lashio. CNAC flew Lashio - Kunming and beyond.

Lashio-Nov 1940, Kunming-Nov 9, 1940→
Not opened. Censor hand stamp applied.

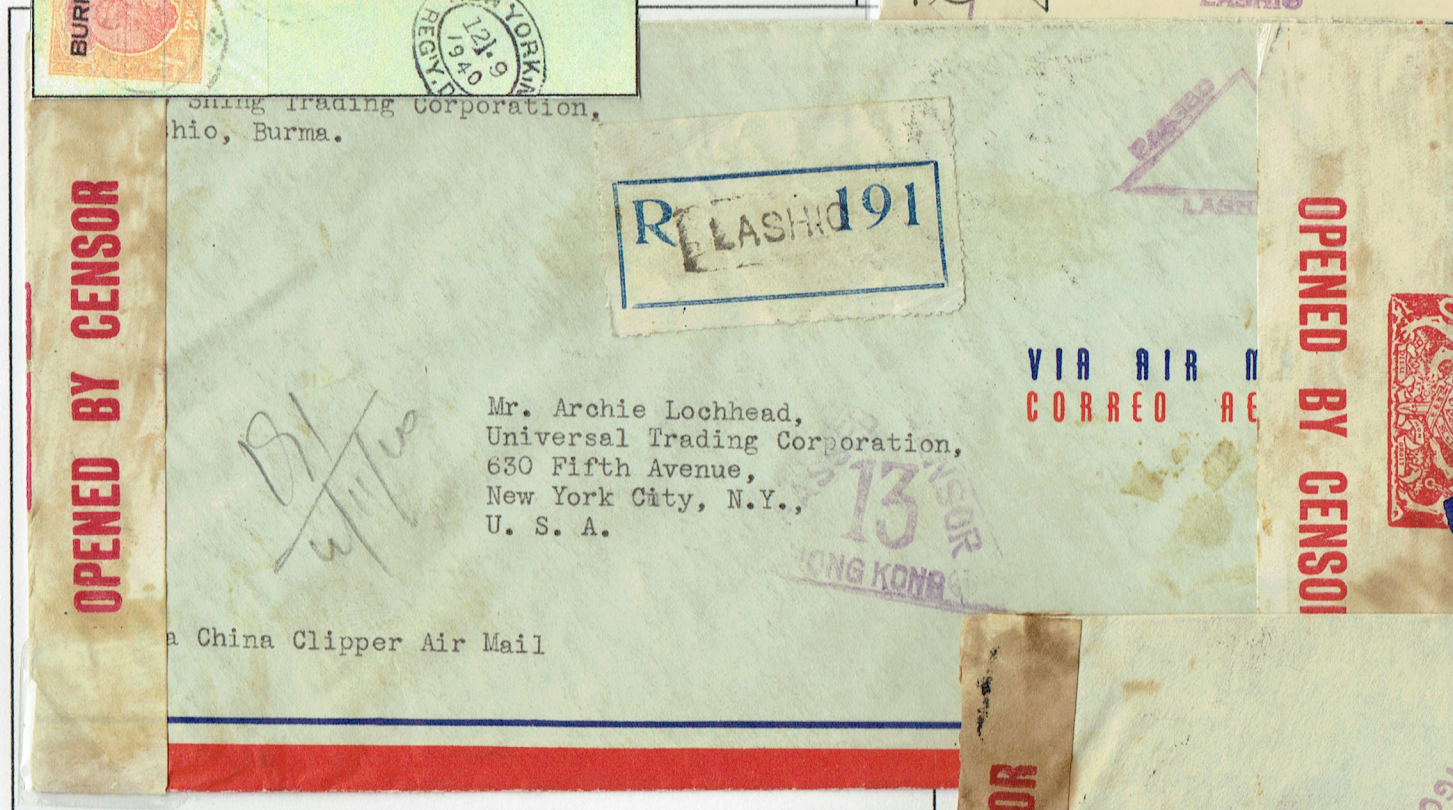


←From reverse ↓



←
Lashio, November 4, 1940
Opened and censored at Lashio

CNAC to Hong Kong via Kunming to connect with PAA Trans-Pacific service to USA.
Opened and censored again at Hong Kong.
Back stamp: New York–December 12, 1940
Flown on Honolulu departed Hong Kong December 2, 1940.



LASHIO AND RANGOON HAND STAMPS ON THE SAME COVER→

Badwin (Northern Shan State)-January 14, 1941.
Lashio back stamp January 16.

Much mail passing through Lashio was headed into western and central China and this was sent to that censor station. Surface mail for Shanghai in eastern China however was to go via Rangoon. Redirected to Rangoon and again censored.

One of three known to the exhibitor showing full hand stamps from two different stations. Censor 34 not listed on Rangoon single line triangle small numeral hand stamp. 🔍



In April 1941 a new circular hand stamp in violet came into use in Rangoon only.
NOT OPENED BY CENSOR BURMA
 Censor numbers 10-65 listed.

This hand stamp indicated it was a deliberate choice by a censor not to open. India and Hong Kong had previously introduced similar hand stamps.

→
 Inbound from Netherlands East Indies
 Bataviacentrum-April 13, 1941
 Resealing tape, **CENSUUR**,
 and red censor marks at Batavia.
 PASSED BY CENSOR 49 at Malaya.

🔍 Censor number 3 not listed.
 Hand stamp in green not listed.



← Maymyo-May 10, 1941
 Resealing tape and triangle censor mark applied at Bombay.

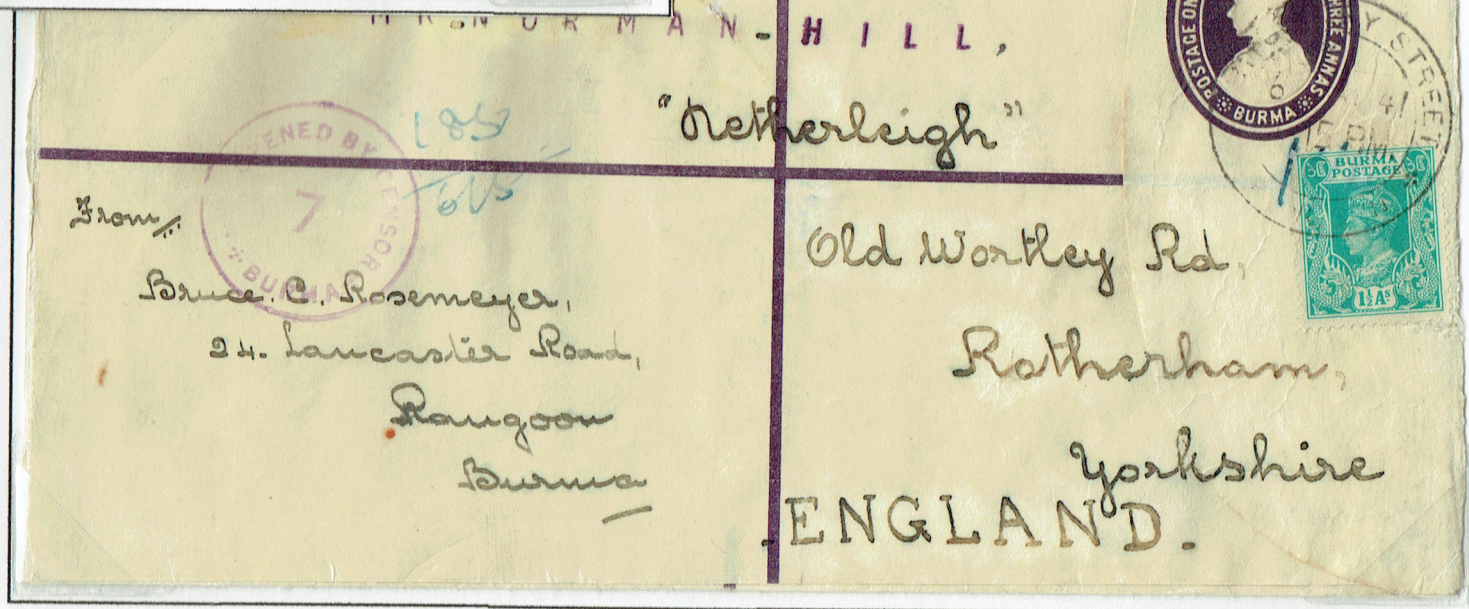
Circular censor mark applied Egypt.
 Back stamped: Alexandria-Aug 12, 1941

*Transferred from battleship HMS Valiant to cruiser HMS Kandahar.
 The British Mediterranean Fleet was headquartered at Alexandria.*

Censor number 6 not listed. 🔍

→
 Montgomery Street,
 Rangoon-May 6, 1941

Censor number
 7 not listed. 🔍



DOUBLE LINE TRIANGLE HAND STAMP

RANGOON X

In March 1941 new double line triangle hand stamps were introduced. Instead of naming the censor stations a letter code was used.

Code X was used for Rangoon. It is listed in violet and green. Censor numbers 2-69 are listed.



Tiddim-March 4, 1941- newly discovered EKU. 🔍

BELGIAN CONGO TO CHINA – CENSORED IN BURMA



Leopoldville-August 20, 1941. Shanghai arrival-October 1, 1941. Belgian Congo and Egyptian resealing tapes applied. Green censor hand stamp applied Rangoon. *South African Airways to Cairo, BOAC to Rangoon, CNAC to Chungking, overland to Shanghai.*

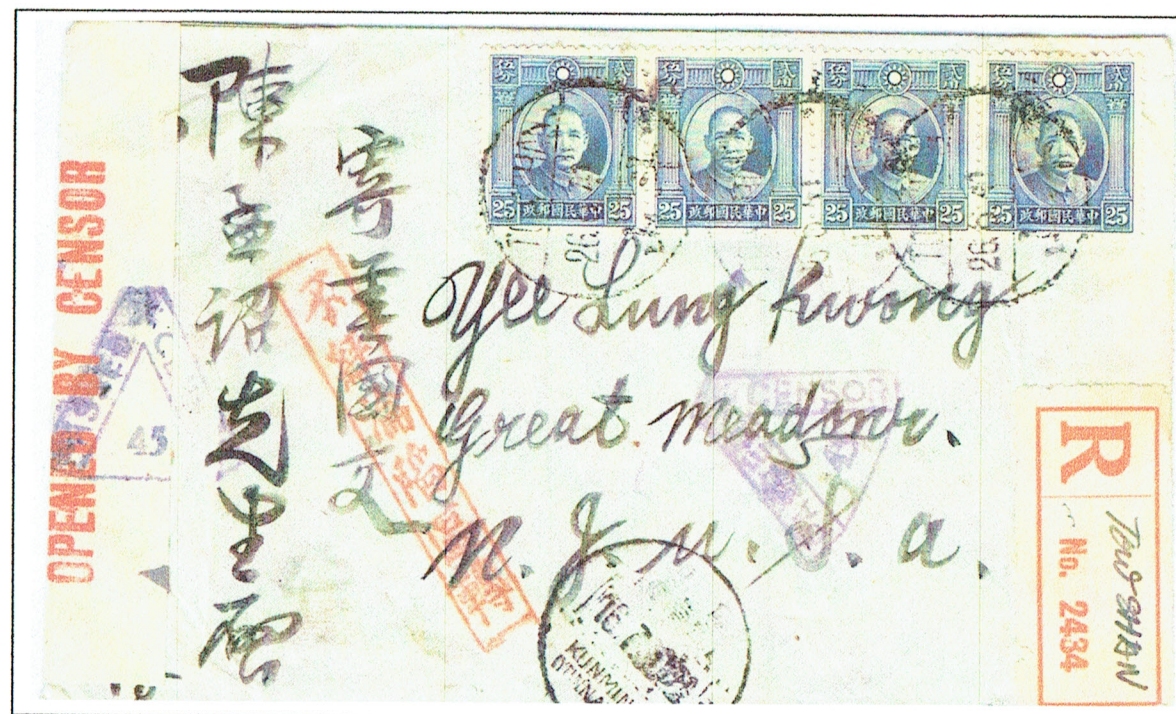
CENSORED FLYING TIGERS MAIL

Stationed at Mingaladon airport near Rangoon. Subject to civil censorship



Experimental P.O. R-21 ("The Flying Tigers") October 14, 1941
Back Stamps: Honolulu-November 5, 1942 and San Francisco-November 7, 1941
Qantas to Singapore. PAA Trans-Pacific Clipper California to San Francisco.

AVOIDING THE JAPANESE – CENSORED IN BURMA



Towshan, China-June 26, 1941 registered *surface mail*. Back stamped-New York-October 21, 1941
Red boxed Chinese mark translates "Not Transit via Enemy – occupied area." Censor hand stamp Rangoon. Although Towshan was in southeast China, surface route through Burma was used to avoid the Japanese.



Code letter Z used for Lashio. Hand stamp listed in violet. Censor numbers 1, 2, and 4 listed. CCSG says 4 or fewer examples known. Exhibitor has documented 24 examples. 🔍

MAILED IN LASHIO

← Lashio-December 1, 1941

Intended for PAA Trans-Pacific service. *Missed Nov 29 Qantas flight from Rangoon to connect with Nov 30, 1941 flight from Singapore - the last Trans-Pacific flight.* Re-examined and resealed in San Francisco.

Mailed by Arthur Morrill with U.S. Medical Mission attached to the Yunnan-Burma Railway project office in Lashio.



WRITTEN IN CHINA DECEMBER 7, 1941

Hei Chow, Yunnan, China-December 8, 1941 →

Routed CNAC to Hong Kong. Dec 8, 1941 Japanese invaded Hong Kong. Flew instead CNAC to Lashio and Z hand stamp applied. Opened in Rangoon and X hand stamp applied. Did not travel entirely by air to USA.

One of three known to the exhibitor showing full hand stamps from two different stations. 🔍



WRITTEN IN CHINA, MAILED IN LASHIO

← Lashio-March 2, 1942

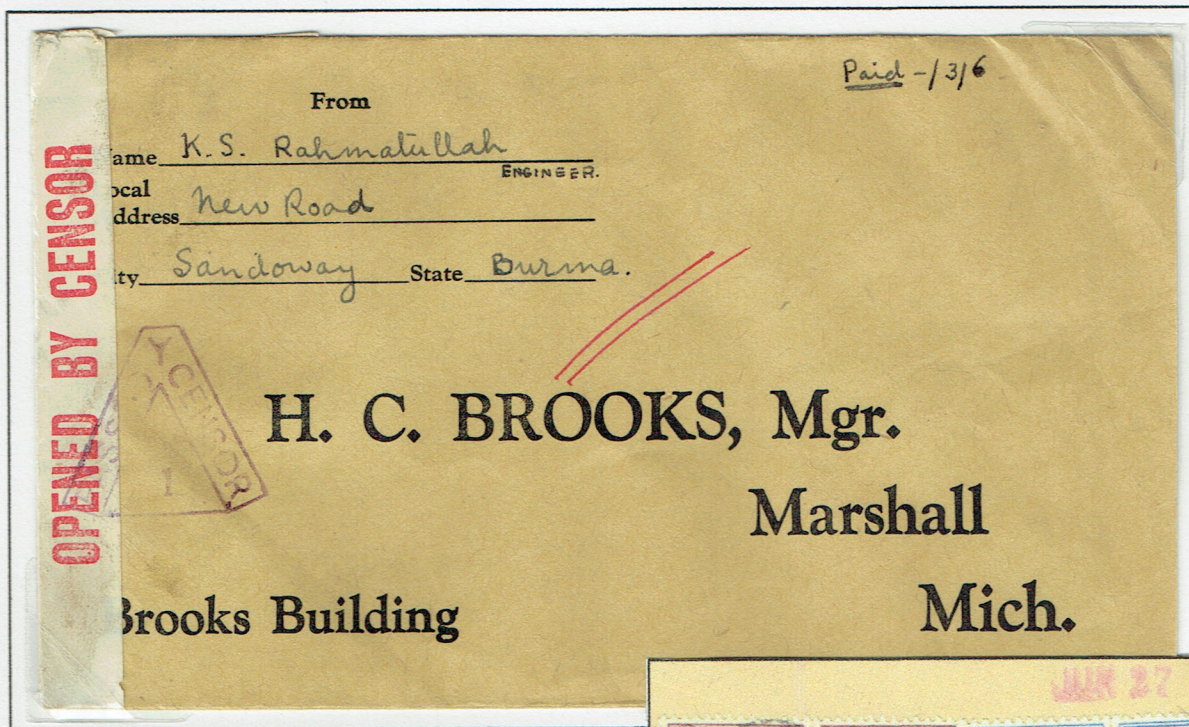
Letter written at Yun Hsien, Yunnan, China Feb 20, 1942 (contents) by a malaria control official with Yunnan-Burma railway project. Carried outside mails to Lashio where censored.

Flown CNAC to Calcutta where censored again by Calcutta Far East Translation office. Flown BOAC to Durban, South Africa for surface mail to the USA.

Code letter Y was used for Akyab. Listed in violet, with censor number 1. CCSG estimates four or fewer exist.
 Eight examples documented by the exhibitor. 🔍



Kyankkyi-March 2, 1941. New EKU. 🔍
 The sender, Msgr. Newman, became a Japanese POW and later a Bishop at the Mission after the war.



Sandoway-May 4, 1942. Received Jun 27, 1942. Opened and hand stamp applied at Akyab. Flown to Akyab from an airfield at Sandoway. The British evacuated Akyab on May 4, 1942.

🔍 New LKU.

Franking on reverse→



DOUBLE LINE TRIANGLE HAND STAMP

The Rangoon X hand stamps were eventually used at three other locations because of the Japanese military advances.

→ Takaw-February 23, 1942
Rangoon X-73 hand stamp and resealing tape applied Mandalay.

🔍 Rangoon X-73 censor hand stamp not listed.

Addressed to:
Kolar Gold Fields, South India
Back stamps: Oorgaam-
April 5, 1942
Marikuppam-
April 6, 1942

Takaw to Mandalay then to
Lashio for CNAC flight to Calcutta.
DHA censor hand stamp – Calcutta

After Rangoon fell all mail
to India had to go by air.

USED AT MANDALAY

Final civilian evacuation of Rangoon ordered for Feb 20, 1942. Censor station and staff transferred Mandalay. British Army evacuated Rangoon March 7. The Japanese entered March 9.



USED AT FALAM IN THE CHIN HILLS



RANGOON X HAND STAMPS AFTER RANGOON WAS EVACUATED

USED AT LASHIO

Mandalay severely bombed on April 3, 1942. Censorship staff left shortly thereafter. Censorship continued 200 miles away at Lashio.



↑ From reverse. Written in Mandalay but post office no longer functioning. Mailed 40 miles away at Maymyo-April 11, 1942. Opened and resealed at Lashio. CNAC to Calcutta and Horseshoe Route air mail via Durban, South Africa.

Lashio was code Z but Rangoon X-24 arrived from Mandalay and was used.

CCSG lists Rangoon X used at Lashio but shows dash for censor number.

Five examples of X-24 used at Lashio recorded by exhibitor. 🔍

The Censorship staff left on April 22, 1942. On April 29, 1942 the Japanese entered.

CONCLUSION

THE LAST CIVIL CENSOR STATION IN BURMA

Nearly all Burma was under Japanese control by the end of May 1942. One area still under British control was the Chin Hills district in extreme western Burma on the Indian border. In Oct 1942 the capital city of Falam began to censor mail with Rangoon hand stamp X-27.

An emergency postal service was established between Falam and Aijal. The 170-mile distance was covered by runners in relays. The runners slept in 14 camps established along the extremely mountainous route.

← Falam-May 28, 1943 to Aijal in the Lushai Hills of India
Back stamped Aijal June 3, 1943

Falam ran out of Burma stamps at the end of 1942 and used India stamps until the Japanese took the city in November 1943. The exhibitor has documented five censored covers from Falam in 1943 with India stamps. 🔍

EPILOGUE

In 1945 the British ended the Japanese occupation. Civil censorship was again established by the Military Administration. By 1946 when the British Civil Administration took over civil censorship had ceased.