

Did the BOAC Boeings carry commercial mail from West Africa to America?

In order to investigate whether or not mail was carried by BOAC from West Africa, it is necessary to find cover evidence. Although it has taken some time, there is now a group of representative covers dating from October to December 1942 that seem to confirm that they were, in fact, carried by BOAC Boeing 314 to America.

The initial covers triggering the study are commercial correspondence from Leopoldville to the Perkins-Goodwin Company in New York. The first cover (Fig. 1) is one of two sent on the same day, 23 October 1942, censored in Leopoldville and carrying a Fr.20 adhesive to pay the actual rate of Fr.3.50 surface and Fr.15.50/5g air surcharge for the Pan American Clipper service. The Fr.20 stamp was commonly used at this time to pay the actual rate of Fr.19. The last flight of the Route 6 (genuine FAM-22) service left Leopoldville on this day.

The term "Genuine FAM-22" is used since we are referring to airmail carried under the auspices of USPOD on the twelve numbered Route 6 flights and recorded in the official USPOD documents held at the National Archive. After flight 6024 from Leopoldville on 23 October 1942 the document series ends, and thereafter carriage of the mail was entirely in the hands of the US military who controlled the Pan American schedules. This is in direct contrast to FAM-18 which continued operating under USPOD as a normal airmail route albeit with the aircraft under licence from the US Navy. This is an important distinction.

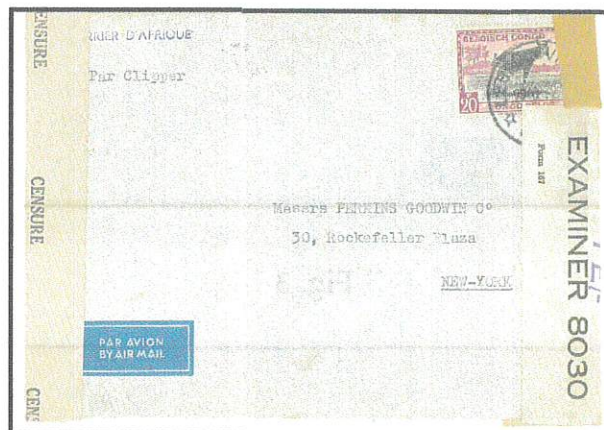


Fig.1

The cover was censored in Trinidad, as was the second cover (not illustrated), and by the same censor (8030). Although there is no indication of their arrival in New York, it is assumed that they did reach their destination.



Fig. 2

The third cover, shown in Fig.2 was sent on 20 November 1942 and carries adhesives to cover a single 20g surface rate and a double air surcharge for a letter weighing between 5 and 10g, i.e. Fr. 3.50 + 2 x Fr.15.50 = Fr.34.50, but it has been censored not in Trinidad as would have been the case had it travelled by Route 6 (genuine FAM-22), but in Bermuda (5406 IC). A fourth cover, Fig.3 was sent on 27 November, this time at the single air rate but was also censored in Bermuda (5406 IC), whilst a fifth cover, Fig.4 was sent on 14 December and was censored again in Bermuda (1276 IC).



Fig. 3

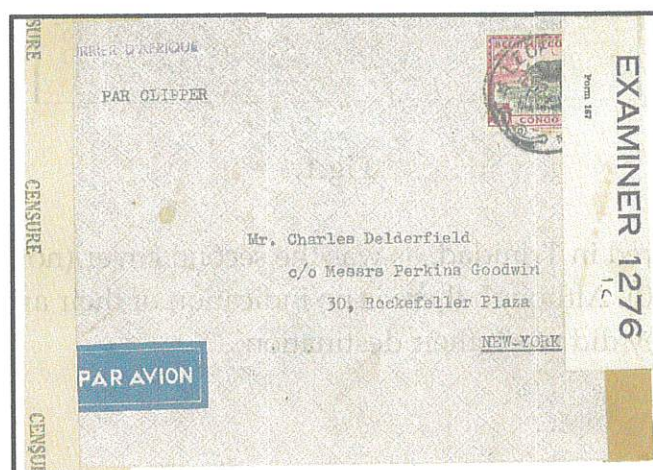


Fig. 4

The key point in this discussion is the change from censorship in Trinidad to censorship in Bermuda, and this should be borne in mind throughout.

How did they get to Bermuda?

In October 1942 there were six potential airmail routes across the South Atlantic from Leopoldville/West Africa to America:

- 1) By Pan American Route 6, the genuine FAM-22 service.
- 2) By American Export Airlines on its winter route.
- 3) By Air Transport Command from Accra, Gold Coast.
- 4) By Pan American FAM-18 winter service through Fisherman's Lake.
- 5) By Pan American Special Missions.
- 6) (Potentially) by BOAC from Lagos to Baltimore.

Taking each route in turn:

- 1) The last flight of Route 6 (flight 6024) departed Leopoldville on 23 October and could not have carried covers after this date. These flights, in any case, did not pass through Bermuda, and mail on Route 6 was intercepted and examined at Trinidad as in the case of Fig. 1 and previous mail. Out of consideration.
- 2) American Export Lines had been flying their VS-44 boats between America and Foynes, returning by the same route. Application was made to CAB to start their winter route from Foynes south to Bathurst and then across the South Atlantic but this was still not in use when NC-41880 'Excalibur' crashed at Botwood on 3 October 1942, reducing the fleet to two aircraft. The Augustinovic records of transit through Bermuda [1] show that AEA aircraft passed through Bermuda on 20 August, 14 November and 30 November but all coming from Foynes and not from West Africa. The next transits are on 17 January 1943 and 29 January 1943, both from Trinidad (i.e. from West Africa). None of these transits coincide with the period in question. Out of consideration.
- 3) Air Transport Command flights had only just begin, following the militarisation of Route 6 and army control. These flights, such as they were, flew from Accra, Gold Coast to Miami, Florida. They did not fly to or through Bermuda. Out of consideration.
- 4) Pan American flew the FAM-18/LATI substitute services from Lisbon to America on the winter route through Bolama-Fisherman's Lake-Natal-Trinidad-Belem-Trinidad-San Juan-Bermuda. Although using Fisherman's Lake as a refuelling stop the PanAm Trip Summary records show that they did not pick up mail there in this period apart from that from local sources. In any event, mail posted in Leopoldville would have had a tortuous journey of more than 2000 miles to access

Fisherman's Lake and would in any case have been connected at Lagos or Accra. Out of consideration.

5) The Pan American Special Mission program was running with shuttle flights between Fisherman's Lake and Natal, Brazil. Mail carried on these flights would be examined at Miami or Trinidad, and the flights did not transit Bermuda (confirmed by Augustinovic [2]). Out of consideration.

6) BOAC: the evidence.

Air mail from Leopoldville was regularly carried to Lagos by BOAC flights on the twice-weekly Cairo-Lagos flying boat route. On 26 October 1942 a second land plane service was opened by Sabena also flying Leopoldville-Lagos once weekly. The timing of this may or may not be coincidence with the topic but it is certainly worthy of consideration. Lagos was the primary mail exchange point in West Africa and even west-bound mail arriving from the Middle and Far East was handled at Lagos. It was from Lagos that the BOAC Boeings began their journey to Baltimore and it was logical to use these trips as passenger, cargo and mail carriage.

At this very moment the CAB issued Docket 801 authorising BOAC to carry mail into the United States:

"IT IS ORDERED, That the foreign air carrier permit held by British Overseas Airways Corporation be amended so as to authorise it to engage in foreign air transportation with respect to persons, property, foreign mail, and United States and foreign-transit mail (to the extent to which the Postmaster General shall from time to time tender such United States and foreign-transit mail to said British Overseas Airways Corporation) between a terminal point in the United States and a terminal point in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland via Canada, Newfoundland and Ireland, or via Bermuda, for a period of fifteen years from the first day of June 1936, or via Lisbon, points in West Africa, Trinidad, and Bermuda, from the effective date of this permit, as amended, to June 30, 1943, without prejudice, however, to the filing by British Overseas Airways Corporation of a future application for further transfer of said permit to any other company controlled by British Overseas Airways Corporation, as being in the public interest."

Note the wide-ranging inclusion of *"foreign mail and United States and foreign-transit mail.....or via Lisbon, points in West Africa, Trinidad and Bermuda..."*. This is the very authorisation that allowed BOAC to carry the mail across the South Atlantic. Despite the fact that BOAC had used the South Atlantic route in 1941, there was no CAB authorisation until November 1942 following the British government committee raising the issue in early 1942.

BOAC were free to carry mail from Lagos to Bermuda, and the fact that from late October 1942 until January 1943 no other means of air carriage passed through Bermuda indicates that the Congo airmail was in fact carried by BOAC. Although

this seems self-evident from the facts, can we prove the statement? Since the acquisition of the original correspondence, other covers have been located, all following the same pattern of censorship in transit in Bermuda. An example is shown in Figs. 5 and 6.



Fig. 6 Congo to New York November 1942

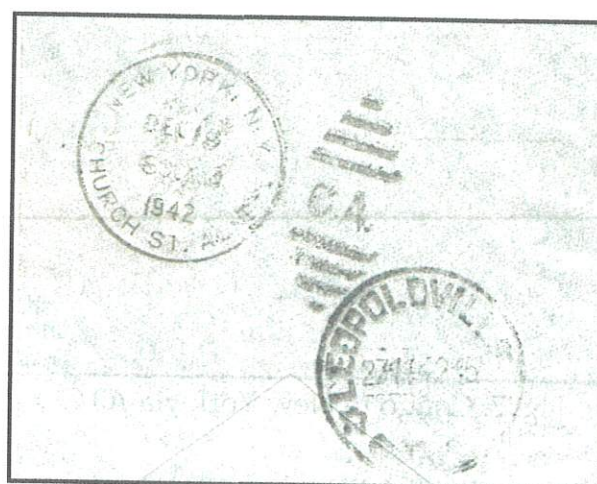


Fig. 6. Rear of Fig. 5

This cover was posted in Usumbura on 16 November 1942 and travelled by surface to Leopoldville from where it departed on 27 November. It was carried to Lagos by BOAC flight 1T106 and from Lagos by BOAC Boeing flight 5A3 departing 8 December. This flight arrived in Bermuda on 11 December [1] and dropped the mail for censorship. The cover arrived in New York (backstamp) on 18 December 1942. An article in the Civil Censorship Study Group Bulletin [2] analyses the typical censorship delays in Bermuda at 7 days, and this matches the delay between 5A3 dropping the mail and its eventual arrival 7 days later in New York. There can be no doubt at all that the cover was carried by BOAC Boeing 314 'Bristol', G-AGBZ.

Summary.

It seems clear that when the Route 6 (genuine FAM-22) flights ended on 23 October 1942 there was no service immediately available to carry the West African mail to America. None of the other services apart from the BOAC flights from Lagos could have been used, and as a possibly temporary measure the mail was collated at Lagos and placed aboard the BOAC aircraft to be taken to Bermuda. This procedure ended at some time in January 1943 when (presumably) mail began to be carried from Accra by the recently introduced ATC flights.

The sure marker for the BOAC covers would be the presence of a Bermuda censor label, and certainly from February 1943 covers begin to show US censorship at New York or Miami as in this example (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7. Congo to New York via ATC.

This cover departed Leopoldville on 2 February 1943 (backstamp) and was carried by BOAC/Sabena to Lagos or Accra where it connected with Air Transport Command flights to Miami. Mail addressed to New York was customarily bagged-through Miami to New York where the cover was examined by Examiner 7020. The last covers seen from the BOAC mail departed Leopoldville on 14 December 1942 but the next flight from Lagos was BOAC 5A5 departing on 27 December, so we have a rough idea of the BOAC operating window.

Not that this is the end of the story. A final cover (Figs. 8 and 9) departed Leopoldville on 29 May 1943, passed through Lagos, shown by a Lagos transit censor mark and transited Bermuda and not Miami or New York. All the previous remarks about unusable routes still applied so for some reason (unknown) this was probably

carried by BOAC flight 5A15 that had arrived in Lagos on 29 May but delayed until 5 June by engine trouble.

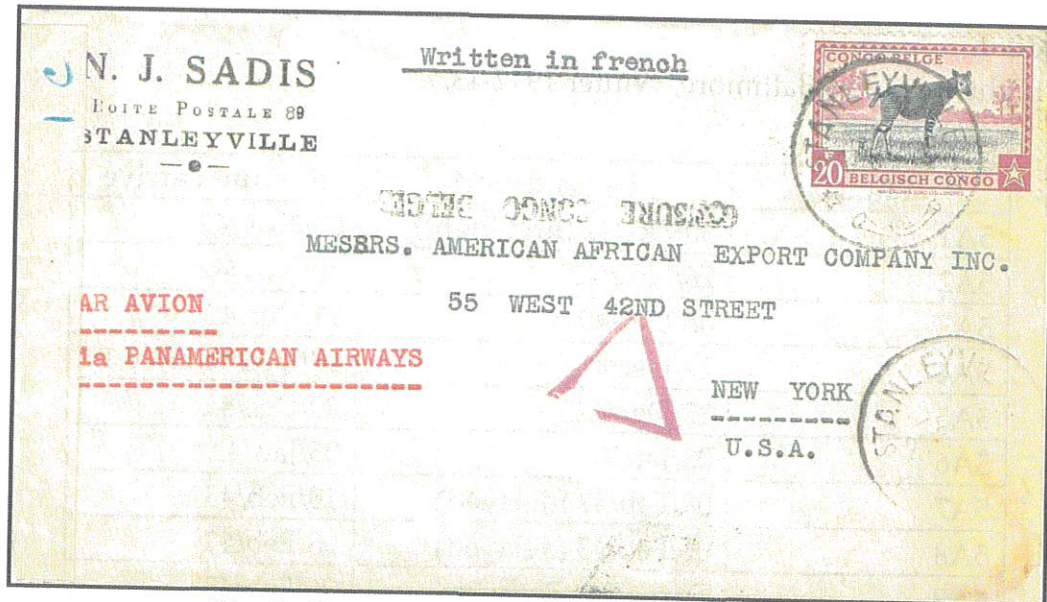


Fig. 8. Congo to US via BOAC and Bermuda.

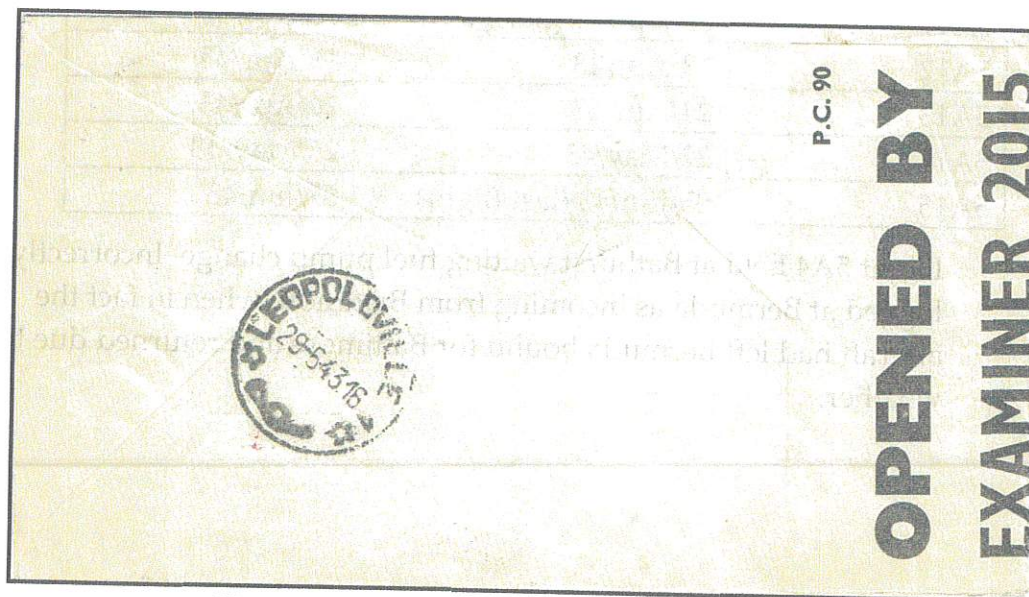


Fig. 9. Rear of Fig. 8. Bermuda censor label.

There is more to find, but one cannot escape the conclusion that the BOAC Boeing 314s did carry civil mail from West Africa to America across the South Atlantic after October 1942.

John Wilson
March 2022

References:

- [1] Augustinovic H. "Bermuda Harbormasters' Logs" private correspondence Augustinovic/Wilson and included in Flynn P.A. "Intercepted in Bermuda". Collectors Club of Chicago. 2006. ISBN 0916675-15-7.

- [2] Wilson J. "Censorship delays to Wartime airmails at Bermuda". Civil Censorship Study Group Bulletin 212. October 2021.

Appendix I.

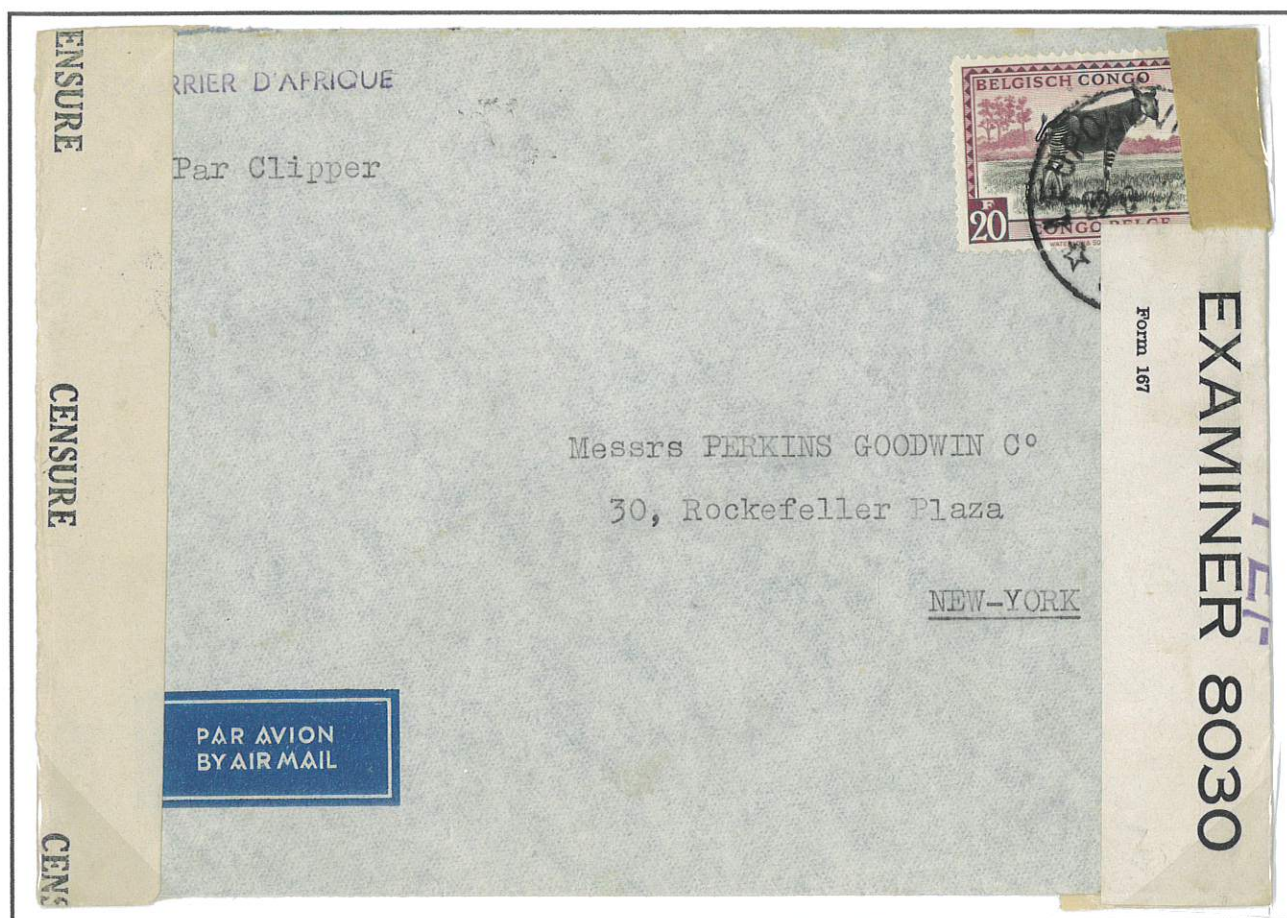
BOAC flights Lagos to Baltimore, Winter 1942-43.

Flight	Lagos depart	Bermuda arrive
5A1	30/Oct/42 (first flight)	03/Nov/42
5A2	26/Nov/42	30/Nov/42
5A3	08/Dec/42	11/Dec/42
5A4	12/Dec/42	20/Dec/42 Note 1
5A5	27/Dec/42	30/Dec/42
5A6	03/Jan/43	05/Jan/43
5A7	08/Feb/43 (delayed)	10/Feb/43
5A8	06/Feb/43 (delayed)	08/Feb/43
5A9	Turned at Bathurst	06/Feb/43
5A10	08/Mar/43	11/Mar/43
5A11	07/Apr/43 (delayed)	10/Apr/43
5A12	13/Apr/43	16/Apr/43
5A13	24/Apr/43	26/Apr/43
5A14	22/May/43	25/May/43
5A15	05/Jun/43 (last flight)	07/Jun/43

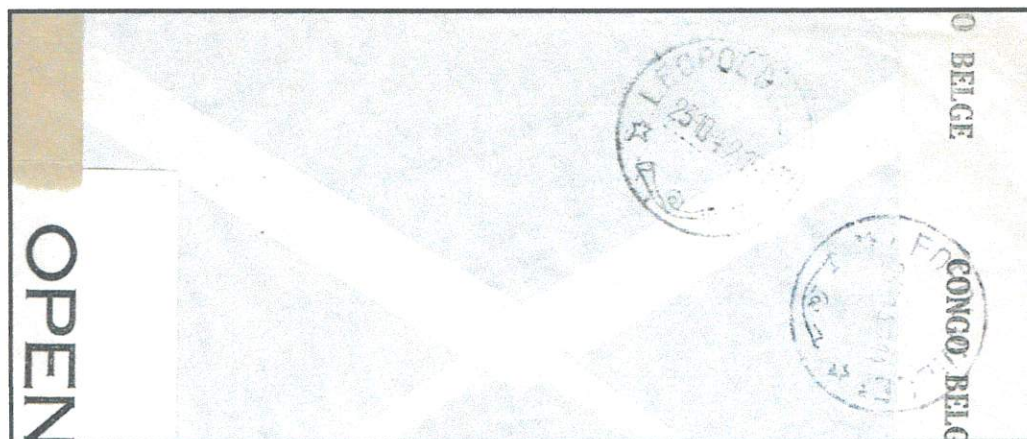
Note 1: Flight 5A4 held at Bathurst waiting fuel pump change. Incorrectly logged at Bermuda as incoming from Baltimore when in fact the aircraft had left Bermuda bound for Baltimore and returned due to bad weather.

Trans-Atlantic Air mail

BOAC emergency service from Belgian Congo to United States 1942.

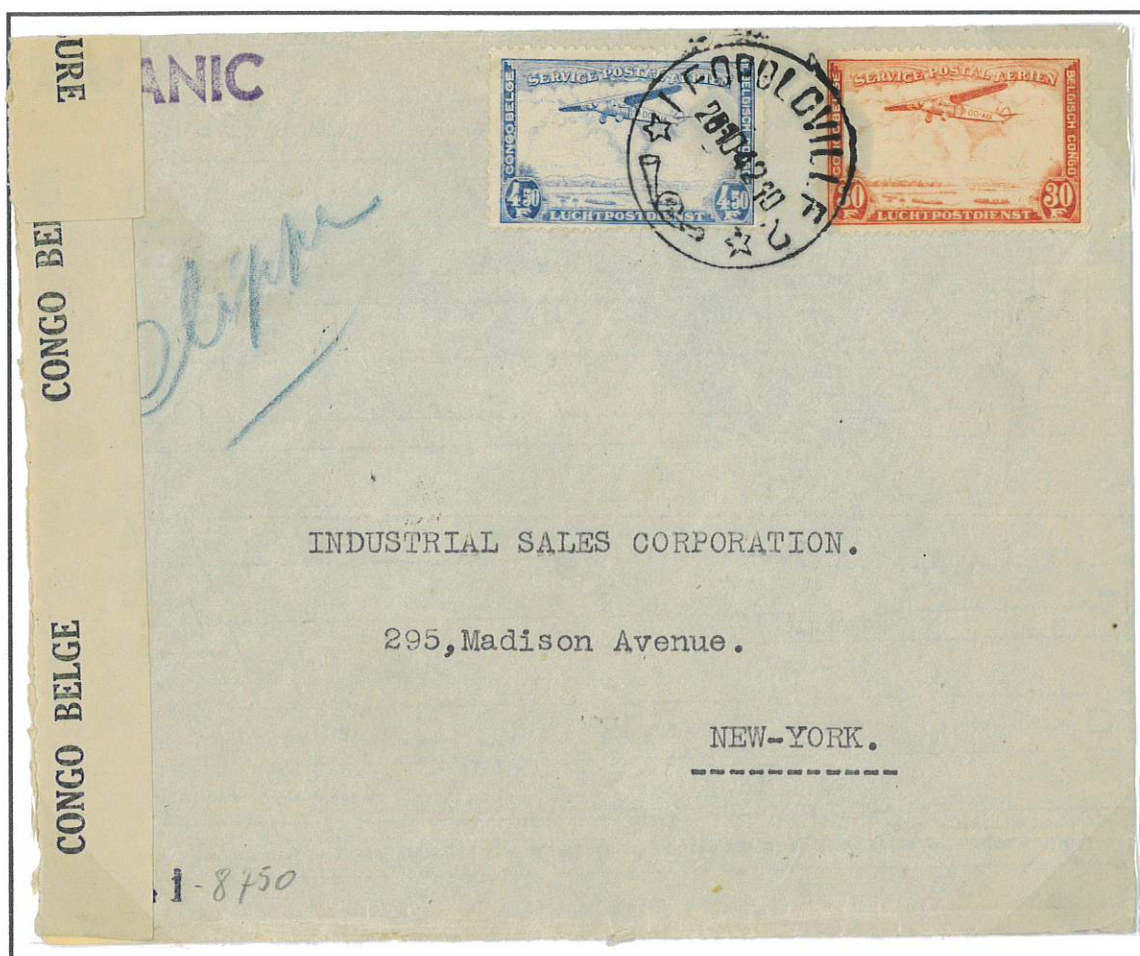


- Route: Leopoldville to New York via Pan American Route 6 flight 6024. Despatch Leopoldville 23 October 1942.
- Rate: Fr.3.50 surface; Fr. 15.50 air fee. Total 19 Fr. Cover actually carries Fr.20.
- Censor: Resealing label Leopoldville censor 31. Trinidad examiner 8030 (IE).
- Features: Last flight of Route 6 (flight 6024) departed Leopoldville 23 October 1942. This cover carried on that flight, censored in Trinidad as were all Route 6 flights, and then forwarded by FAM-6 to Miami. In November and December 1942 Congo airmail was carried from Lagos to Bermuda by BOAC Boeing aircraft returning to Baltimore for servicing.



Trans-Atlantic Air mail

BOAC emergency service from Belgian Congo to United States 1942.

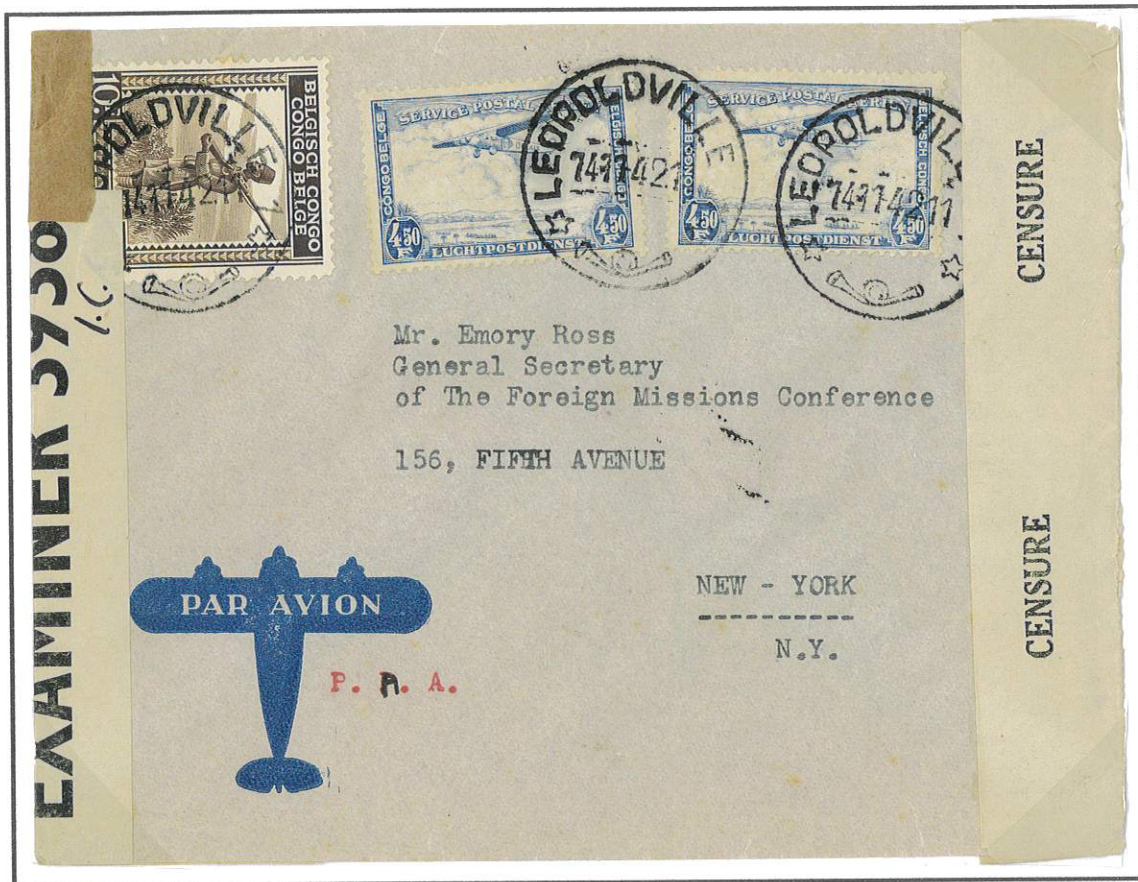


- Route: Leopoldville to New York via Lagos-Bermuda. Despatch Leopoldville 28 October 1942, 15:00.
- Rate: Fr.3.50 surface; 2 x Fr. 15.50 air fee. Total Fr. 34.50.
- Censor: Resealing label Leopoldville censor 37. No further transit examination.
- Features: Last PanAm Route 6 flight 6024 departed Leopoldville 23 October. Leopoldville to Lagos by BOAC flight 1T97 Cairo-Lagos service, leaving Leopoldville 29 October, arriving Lagos same day, then BOAC flight 5A1 leaving Lagos 30 October, 21:04 hrs

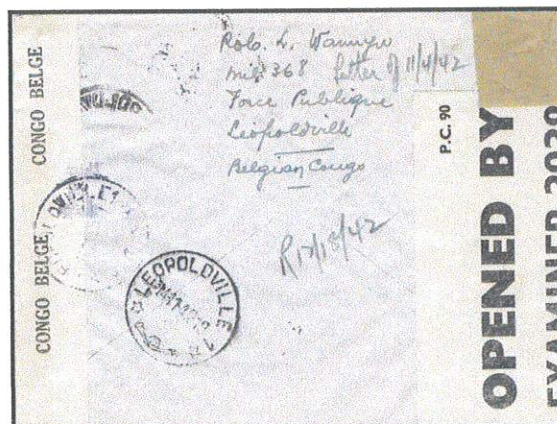


Trans-Atlantic Air mail

BOAC emergency service from Belgian Congo to United States 1942.

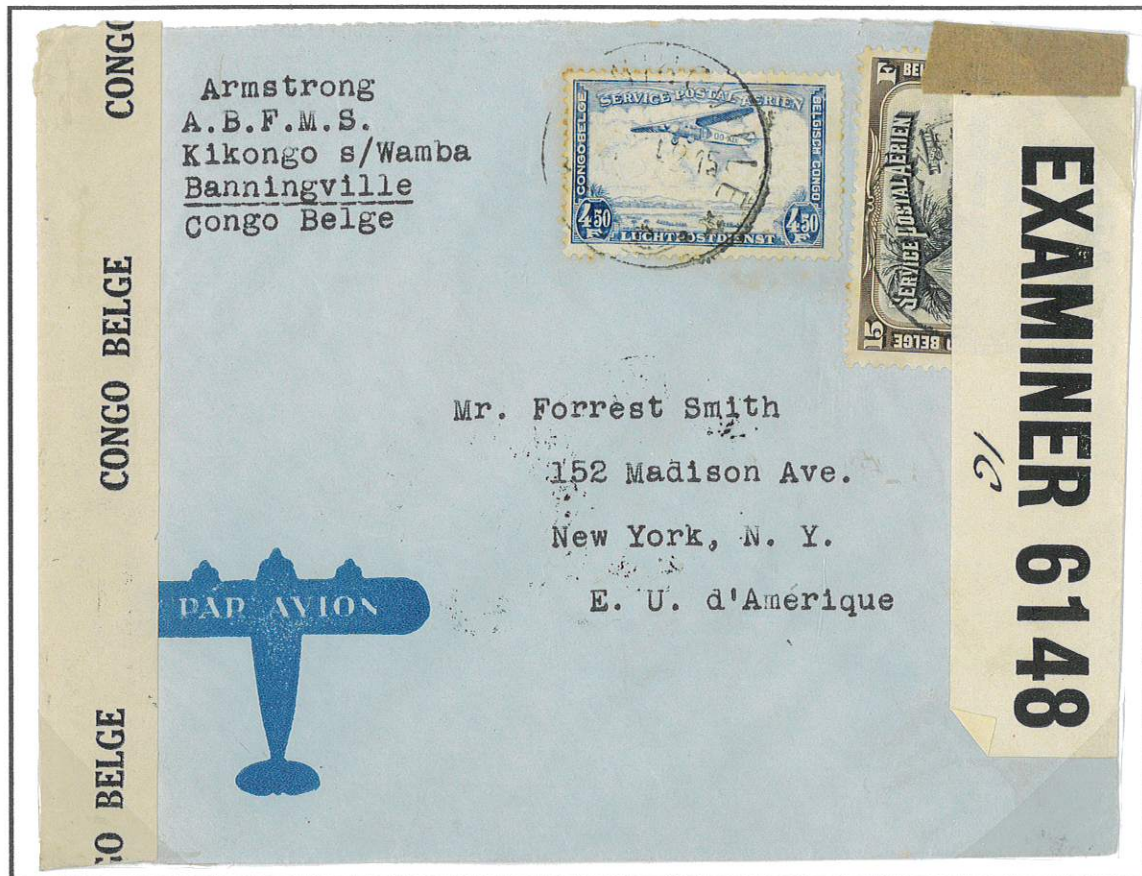


- Route: Leopoldville to New York via Lagos. Despatch Leopoldville 14 November 1942, 19:00. Carried Leopoldville-Lagos by BOAC Cairo-Lagos flight 1T102 then on BOAC flight 5A2 departing Lagos 26 November 1942.
- Rate: Fr.3.50 surface; Fr.15.50 air fee. Total Fr.19.
- Censor: Resealing label Leopoldville censor 14. Re-sealed Bermuda 3938 IC.
- Features: Last PanAm Route 6 flight 6024 departed Leopoldville 23 October. In November and December 1942 airmail was carried from Lagos to Bermuda by BOAC Boeing aircraft returning to Baltimore for servicing. This cover carried on flight 5A2, with mail off-loaded at Bermuda for censor examination and transfer to New York Pan American Route 1 shuttle.

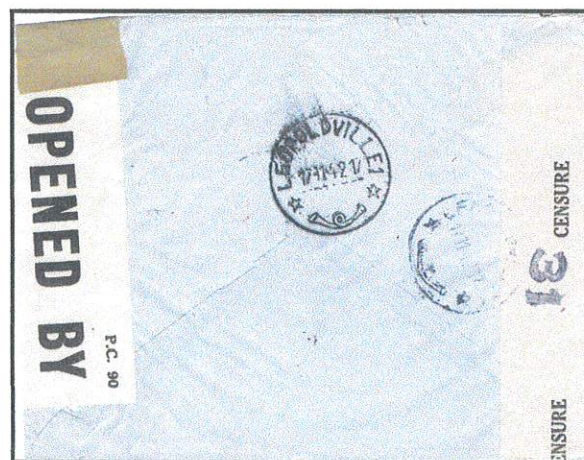


Trans-Atlantic Air mail

BOAC emergency service from Belgian Congo to United States 1942.

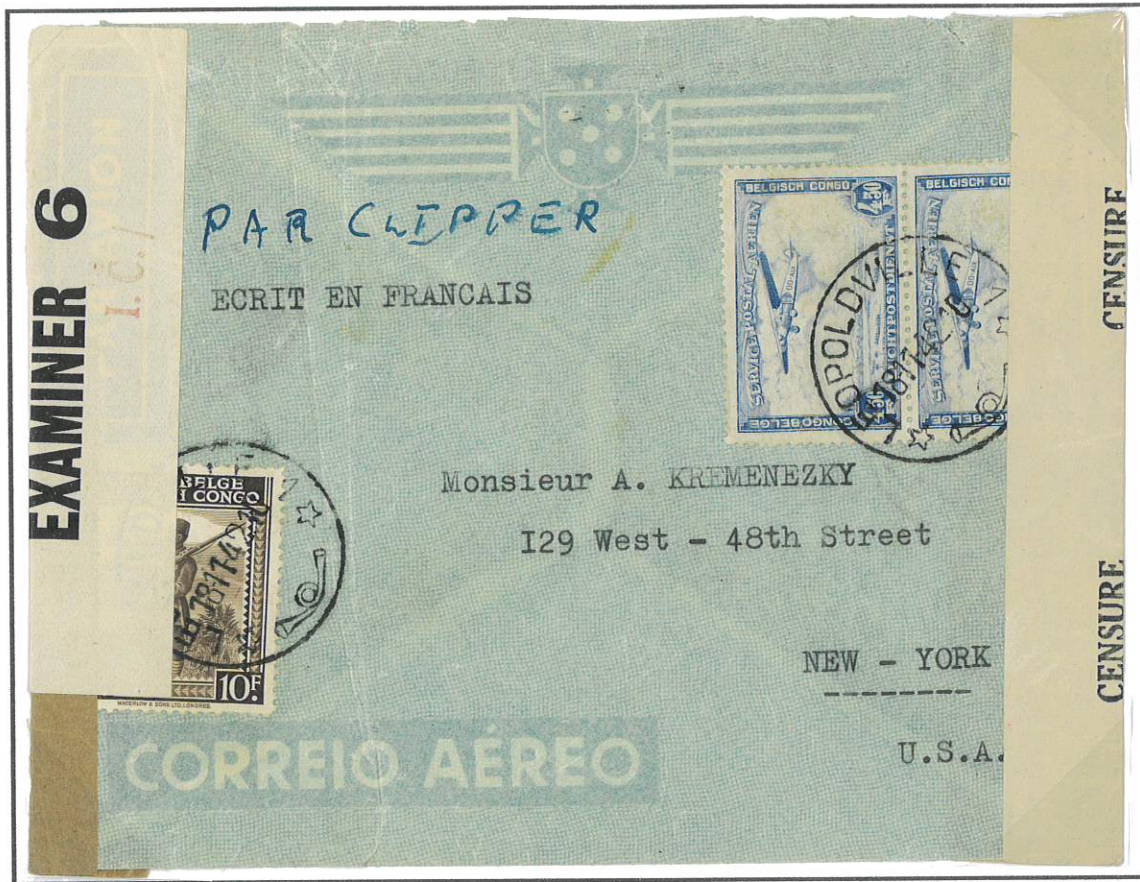


- Route: Leopoldville to New York via Lagos. Despatch Leopoldville 17 November 1942, 17:00. Carried Leopoldville-Lagos by BOAC Cairo-Lagos flight 1T103 then on BOAC flight 5A2 departing Lagos 26 November 1942.
- Rate: Fr.3.50 surface; Fr.15.50 air fee. Total Fr.19. Actually paid Fr.19.50
- Censor: Resealing label Leopoldville censor 31. Re-sealed Bermuda 6148 IC.
- Features: Last PanAm Route 6 flight 6024 departed Leopoldville 23 October. In November and December 1942 airmail was carried from Lagos to Bermuda by BOAC Boeing aircraft returning to Baltimore for servicing. This cover carried on flight 5A2, with mail off-loaded at Bermuda for censor examination and transfer to New York Pan American Route 1 shuttle.



Trans-Atlantic Air mail

BOAC emergency service from Belgian Congo to United States 1942.



- Route: Leopoldville to New York via Lagos. Despatch Leopoldville 18 November 1942, 17:00. Carried Leopoldville-Lagos by BOAC Cairo-Lagos flight 1T103 or 1T104 then on BOAC flight 5A2 departing Lagos 26 November 1942.
- Rate: Fr.3.50 surface; Fr.15.50 air fee. Total Fr.19.
- Censor: Resealing label Leopoldville. Re-sealed Bermuda 6 IC.
- Features: Last PanAm Route 6 flight 6024 departed Leopoldville 23 October. In November and December 1942 airmail was carried from Lagos to Bermuda by BOAC Boeing aircraft returning to Baltimore for servicing. This cover carried on flight 5A2, with mail off-loaded at Bermuda for censor examination and transfer to New York Pan American Route 1 shuttle.



Trans-Atlantic Air mail

BOAC emergency service from Belgian Congo to United States 1942.



- Route: Leopoldville to New York via Lagos. Despatch Leopoldville 20 November 1942. Carried Leopoldville-Lagos by BOAC Cairo-Lagos flight 1T103 or 1T104 then on BOAC flight 5A2 departing Lagos 26 November 1942.
- Rate: Fr.3.50 surface; Fr.15.50 air fee. Total Fr.19.
- Censor: No Leopoldville censor. Consular mail. Re-sealed Bermuda 1538 IC.
- Features: Last PanAm Route 6 flight 6024 departed Leopoldville 23 October. In November and December 1942 airmail was carried from Lagos to Bermuda by BOAC Boeing aircraft returning to Baltimore for servicing. This cover carried on flight 5A2, with mail off-loaded at Bermuda for censor examination and transfer to New York Pan American Route 1 shuttle.



Trans-Atlantic Air mail

BOAC emergency service from Belgian Congo to United States 1942.

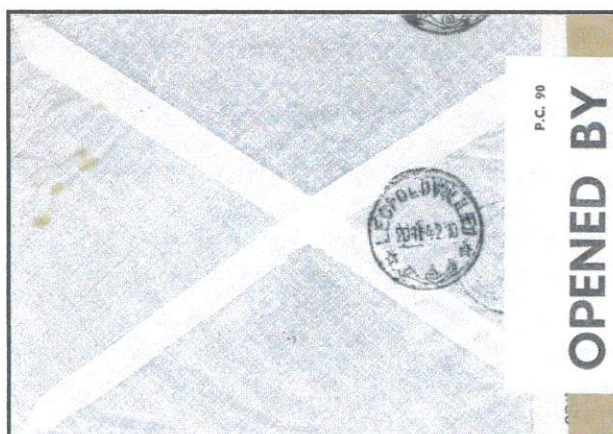


Route: Leopoldville to New York via Lagos. Despatch Leopoldville 20 November 1942, 10:00. Carried Leopoldville-Lagos by BOAC Cairo-Lagos flight 1T104 then on BOAC flight 5A2 departing Lagos 26 November 1942.

Rate: Fr.3.50 surface; 2 x Fr.15.50 air fee. Total Fr.34.50.

Censor: No censorship at Leopoldville. Re-sealed Bermuda 5406 IC.

Features: Last PanAm Route 6 flight 6024 departed Leopoldville 23 October. In November and December 1942 airmail was carried from Lagos to Bermuda by BOAC Boeing aircraft returning to Baltimore for servicing. This cover carried on flight 5A2, with mail off-loaded at Bermuda for censor examination and transfer to New York Pan American Route 1 shuttle.

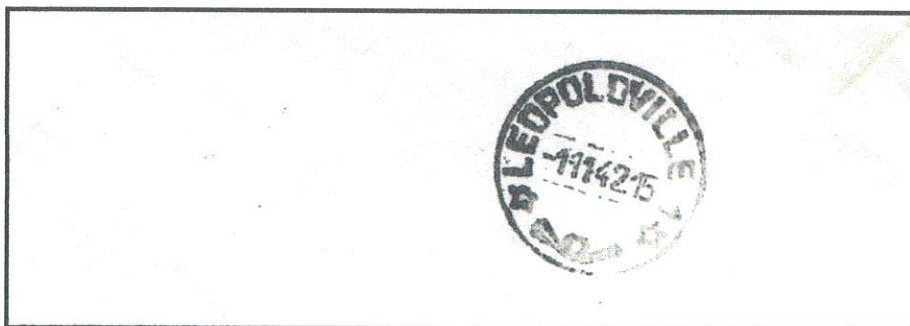


Trans-Atlantic Air mail

BOAC emergency service from Congo-United States November 1942

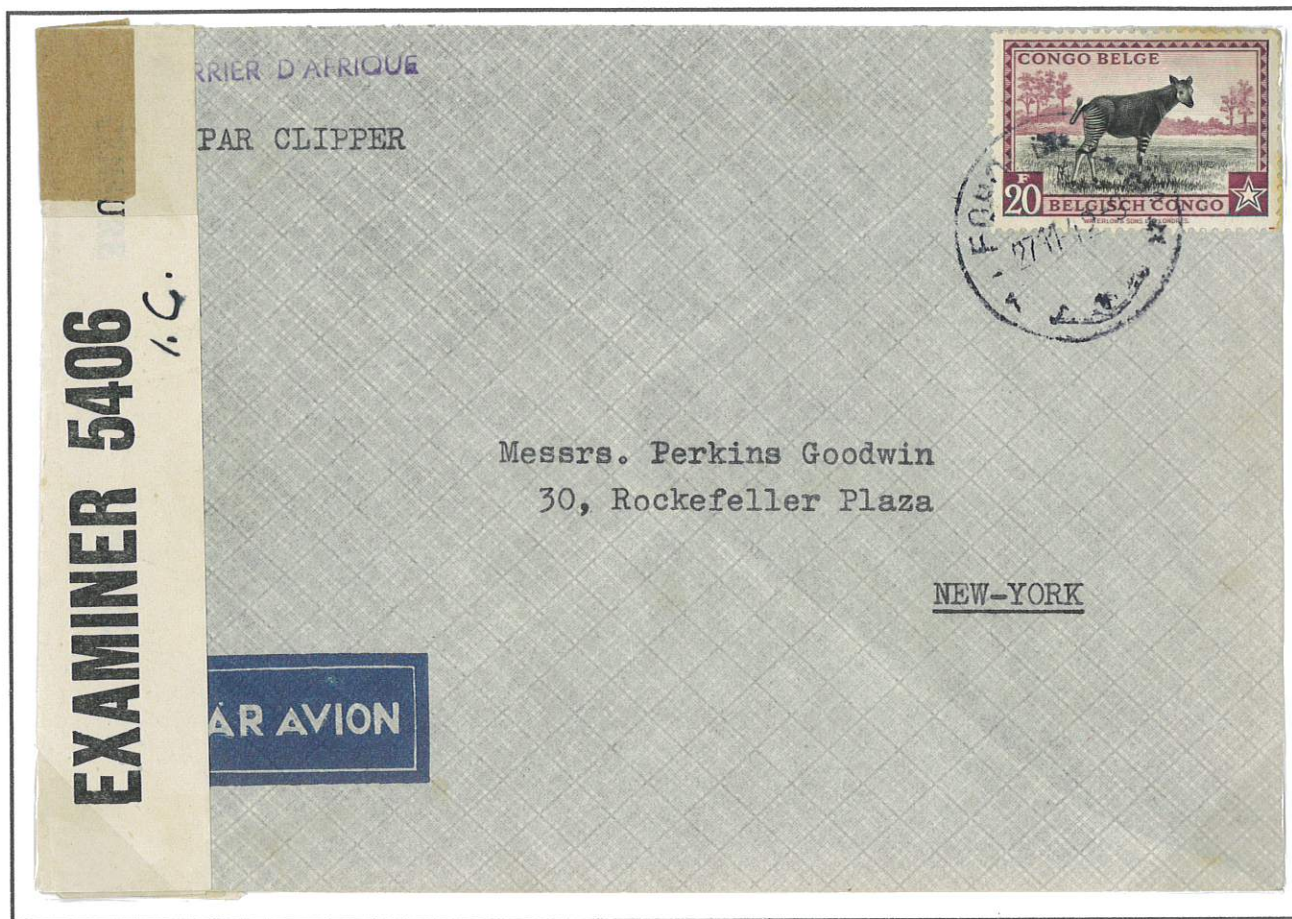


- Route: Leopoldville-Lagos by Sabena. Lagos-Bermuda by BOAC flight 5A2 en route to Baltimore. Posted 31 October, despatched Leopoldville 1 November 1942, Lagos 26 November.
- Rate: 3.50Fr. surface. 4 x 15.50Fr. air fee. Total 65.50Fr.
- Censor: Treated as diplomatic mail. No censorship.
- Features: Diplomatic mail passed without examination confirmed by other mail to Belgian Information Centre being passed unexamined. Unusual.

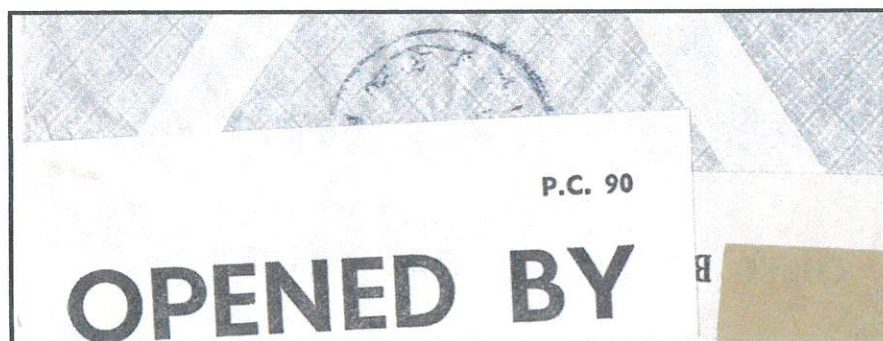


Trans-Atlantic Air mail

BOAC emergency service from Belgian Congo to United States 1942.



- Route: Leopoldville to New York via Lagos. Despatch Leopoldville 27 November 1942, 10:00. Carried Leopoldville-Lagos by BOAC Cairo-Lagos flight 1T106 then on BOAC flight 5A3 departing Lagos 8 December 1942.
- Rate: Fr.3.50 surface; Fr.15.50 air fee. Total Fr.19. Actually paid Fr.20 (A common usage0
- Censor: Leopoldville censor label over-taped by Bermuda 5406 IC label.
- Features: Last PanAm Route 6 flight 6024 departed Leopoldville 23 October. In November and December 1942 airmail was carried from Lagos to Bermuda by BOAC Boeing aircraft returning to Baltimore for servicing. This cover carried on flight 5A3, with mail off-loaded at Bermuda for censor examination and transfer to New York Pan American Route 1 shuttle.



Trans-Atlantic Air mail

BOAC emergency service from Belgian Congo to United States 1942.



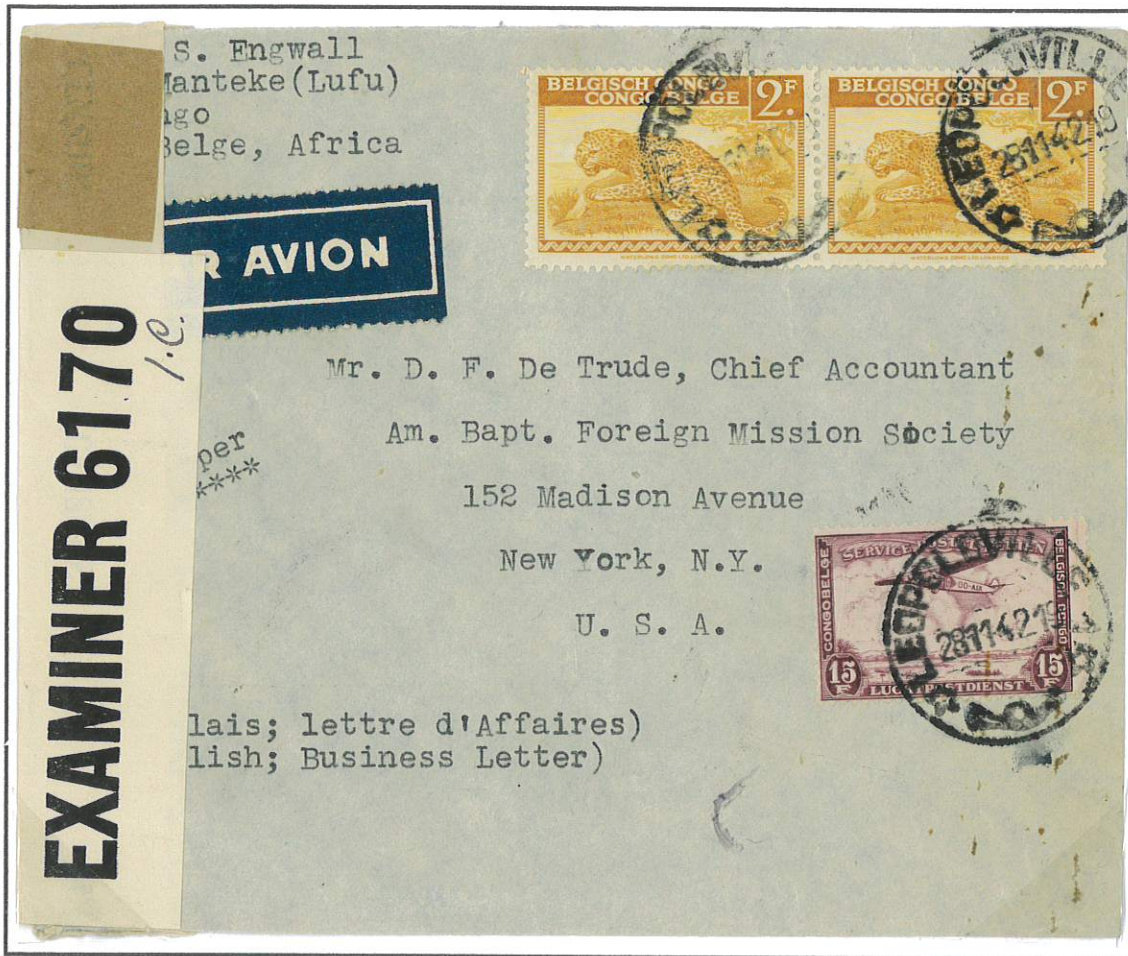
- Route: Leopoldville to New York via Lagos. Despatch Leopoldville 27 November 1942, 15:00. Carried Leopoldville-Lagos by BOAC Cairo-Lagos flight 1T106 then on BOAC flight 5A3 departing Lagos 8 December 1942.
- Rate: Fr.3.50 surface; Fr.15.50 air fee. Total Fr.19.
- Censor: Leopoldville censor label. Re-sealed by Bermuda 714 IC label.
- Features: Last PanAm Route 6 flight 6024 departed Leopoldville 23 October. In November and December 1942 airmail was carried from Lagos to Bermuda by BOAC Boeing aircraft returning to Baltimore for servicing. This cover carried on flight 5A3, with mail off-loaded at Bermuda for censor examination and transfer to New York Pan American Route 1 shuttle after censorship.



Key item due
to New York
dated arrival

Trans-Atlantic Air mail

BOAC emergency service from Belgian Congo to United States 1942.

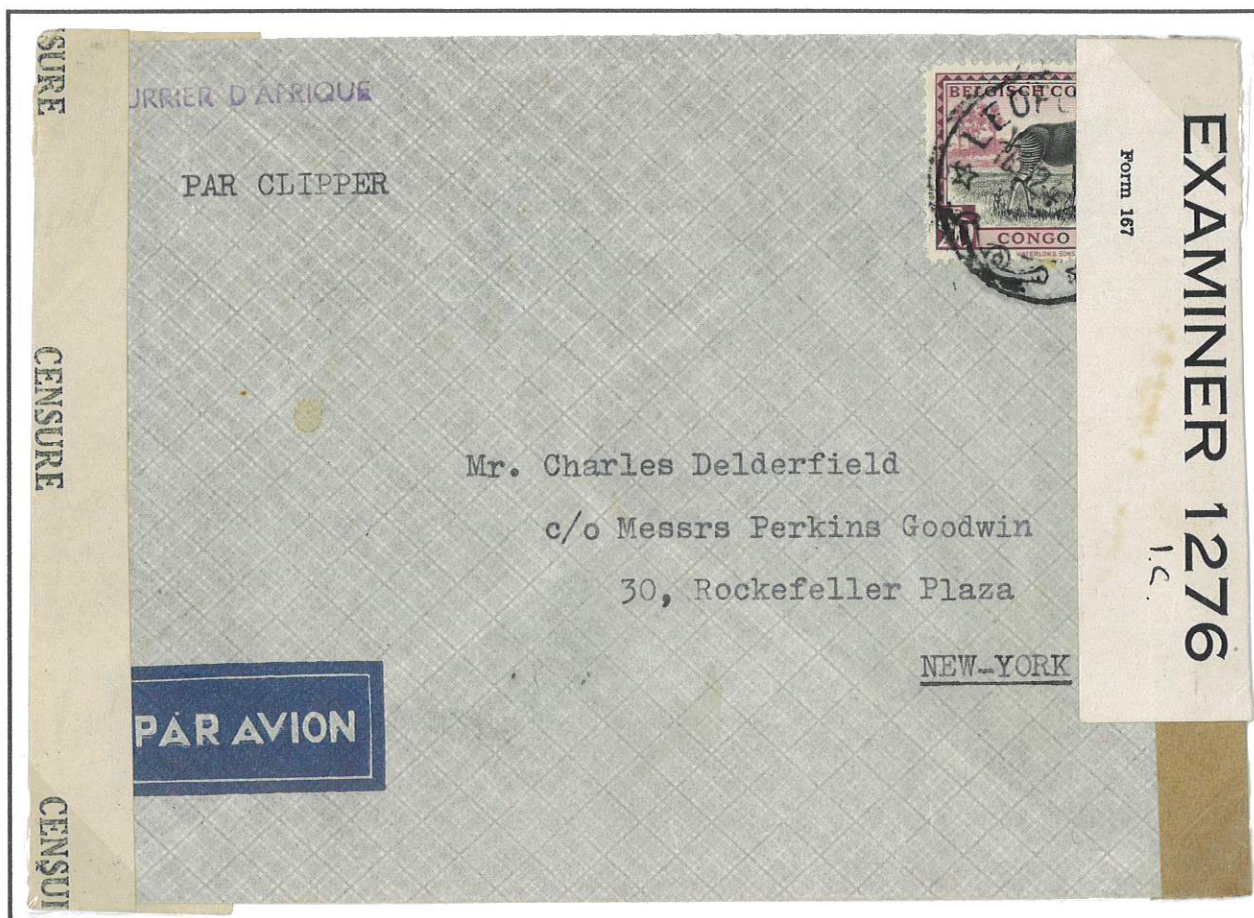


- Route: Leopoldville to New York via Lagos. Despatch Leopoldville 30 November 1942, 11:00. Carried Leopoldville-Lagos by BOAC Cairo-Lagos flight 1T107 then on BOAC flight 5A3 departing Lagos 8 December 1942.
- Rate: Fr.3.50 surface; Fr.15.50 air fee. Total Fr.19.
- Censor: Leopoldville censor label over-taped by Bermuda 6170 IC label.
- Features: Last PanAm Route 6 flight 6024 departed Leopoldville 23 October. In November and December 1942 airmail was carried from Lagos to Bermuda by BOAC Boeing aircraft returning to Baltimore for servicing. This cover carried on flight 5A3, with mail off-loaded at Bermuda for censor examination and transfer to New York Pan American Route 1 shuttle after censorship.

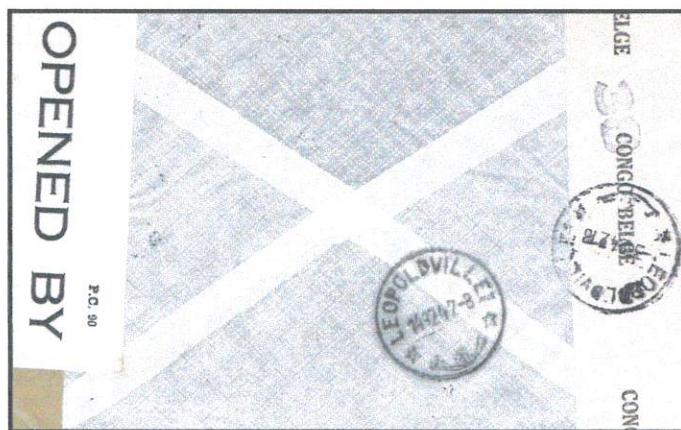


Trans-Atlantic Air mail

BOAC emergency service from Belgian Congo to United States 1942.



- Route: Leopoldville to New York via Lagos. Despatch Leopoldville 14 December 1942, 08:00. Carried Leopoldville-Lagos by BOAC Cairo-Lagos flight 1T111 then on BOAC flight 5A5 departing Lagos 27 December 1942.
- Rate: Fr.3.50 surface; Fr.15.50 air fee. Total Fr.19. Actually paid Fr.20 (A common usage)
- Censor: Leopoldville censor 38. Re-sealed by Bermuda 1276 IC label.
- Features: Last PanAm Route 6 flight 6024 departed Leopoldville 23 October. In November and December 1942 airmail was carried from Lagos to Bermuda by BOAC Boeing aircraft returning to Baltimore for servicing. This cover carried on flight 5A5, with mail off-loaded at Bermuda for censor examination and transfer to New York Pan American Route 1 shuttle after censorship.



Trans-Atlantic Air mail

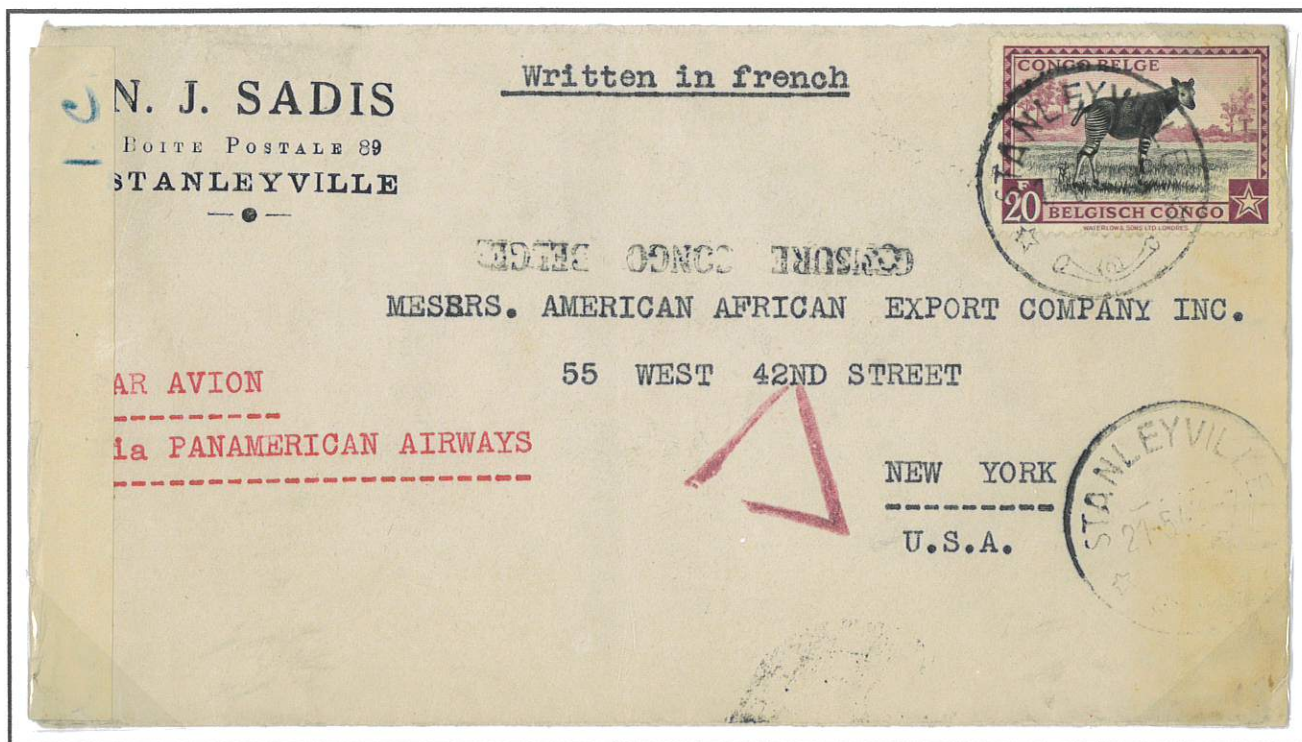
BOAC emergency service from Belgian Congo to United States 1942.



- Route: Leopoldville to New York via Lagos and Bermuda. Despatch Leopoldville 14 December 1942. Carried Leopoldville-Lagos by BOAC Cairo-Lagos flight 1T111 then on BOAC flight 5A5 departing Lagos 27 December 1942.
- Rate: Fr.3.50 surface; 2 x Fr. 15.50 air fee. Total Fr. 34.50.
- Censor: Resealing label Leopoldville covered by PC-90 label of Bermuda examiner 1478 IC.
- Features: Last PanAm Route 6 flight 6024 departed Leopoldville 23 October. In November and December 1942 airmail was carried from Lagos to Bermuda by BOAC Boeing aircraft returning to Baltimore for servicing. This cover carried on flight 5A5, with mail off-loaded at Bermuda for censor examination and transfer to New York Pan American Route 1 shuttle after censorship.

Trans-Atlantic Air mail

BOAC emergency service from Belgian Congo to United States 1943.



Route: Stanleyville to New York via Leopoldville, Lagos and Bermuda. Despatch Stanleyville 21 May 1943, transit Leopoldville 29 May 1943.

Rate: Fr.3.50 surface; Fr. 15.50 air fee. Total 19 Fr. Cover actually carries Fr.20.

Censor: Transit censor in Nigeria (triangle). Bermuda resealing PC-90 2015 IC.

Features: Last PanAm Route 6 flight 6024 departed Leopoldville 23 October 1942. In November and December 1942 airmail was carried from Lagos to Bermuda by BOAC Boeing 314s. In January, flights reverted to Air Transport Command but for no obvious reason this cover was examined in Bermuda, meaning that it had been carried by a BOAC flight 5A15 en route to Baltimore for maintenance. 5A55 arrived in Bermuda on 7 June 1943.

