

* Covers held in "Double Atlantic" file

"Double Atlantic" from Lebanon carried by Pan American.
The routes, the rates and the reasons
John Wilson and Bob Wilcsek

Introduction.

Some years ago as part of the research carried out by a group of experienced postal historians, at a time when the term "FAM-22" was being used carelessly and incorrectly to describe any and all wartime mail that travelled between West Africa and the United States, attention turned to some covers that had been sent from Lebanon on the first French service destined for Leopoldville via Brazzaville. That these arrived in Leopoldville was not in dispute, since they carried transit strikes of the Leopoldville postal authority. However, there was a long delay between their arrival in Leopoldville and arrival in the United States, raising further queries about the flights and routes from Leopoldville. In the published article [1], the matter of postal rates from Lebanon was not addressed because of the general lack of knowledge on the subject at the time, although Postal History is often defined as a study of "Routes and Rates".

It is hoped that this text can clear up both the question of the delay and also add to our knowledge of the postal rates.

First flight.

Following the publication of Bob Picirilli's superb study of French and Colonies airmail rates [2], together with the advances in knowledge of the Pan American Atlantic flights and a prompt from Peter Wingent about an inexplicable 1942 cover from Lebanon to Britain, it has been possible to extend the analysis. A typical cover from that first French service connection is shown here:



Fig. 1

The most obvious feature is the large "First Flight" cachet applied at Beirut and reading "Courrier Aerien-Damas-Lignes Aerielles de la France Libre-Pan American Airways-New York" with the dates 20-I-42 and 1-II-42 corresponding (presumably) to the departure from Beirut and projected arrival in New York. Frank Muller did record a first flight from Beirut on the 20th of January 1942 via "Damascus-Dakar-New York", the mail carrying a "Cachet Speciale". The reference to Dakar was clearly a mistake since Senegal was Vichy territory and the flight would never have taken that route. Robert Picirilli confirmed that the route Beirut to Brazzaville had actually been inaugurated in October 1941 under the auspices of Lignes Aerielles Militaire. The route was Damascus-Cairo-Khartoum-Fort Lamy-Bangui-Brazzaville. The back of the cover tells the route from Brazzaville – or does it?

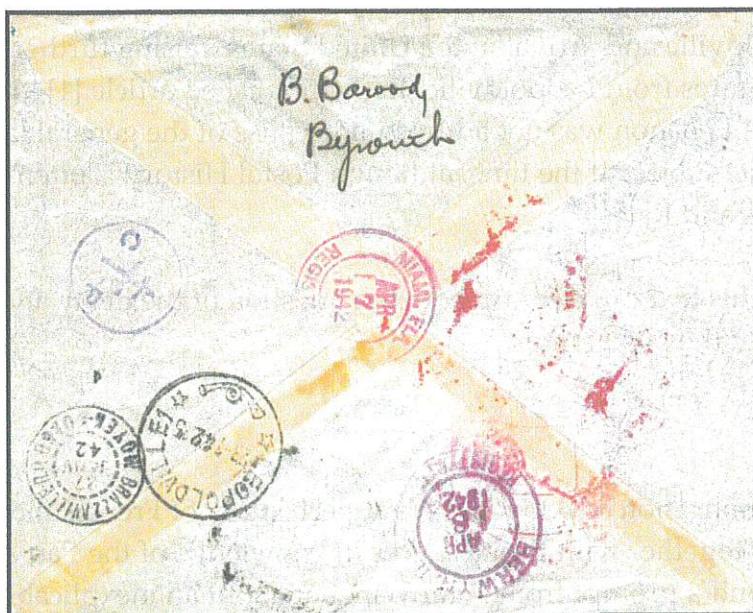


Fig. 2

The cover arrived in Brazzaville on 27 January 1942 and was shipped across the Congo River to Leopoldville, arriving there the next day. Then there is a huge delay before a transit mark of Miami for 7 April and arrival at Berwyn on 8 April. Other covers of this type also show the same arrival in Brazzaville on 27 January and transit Leopoldville on 28 or 29 January, followed by a long delay to America. Why?

The reasons.

We have to assume that the French and Belgian postal authorities believed the "FAM-22" service between Miami and Leopoldville was flown as described, a commercial, fortnightly mail carrying operation, rather than an entirely military affair using mail as a cover story for the "Special Missions" [3] [4]. On the same basis it would also be true to say that the same postal authorities expected the service to be operated to a timetable, although as we now know the so-called "timetable" was itself a fabrication bearing little resemblance to reality. It would seem that once the "first flight" covers from Beirut arrived in Leopoldville, there they sat until such time as a Pan American Boeing 314 appeared to carry them westward to America. What aircraft actually called at Leopoldville?

From Pan American records we find that "Capetown Clipper" NC-18612 under charter to the US Army Air Corps departed North Beach on 15 January 1942 destined for Karachi via Miami-Trinidad-Belem-Natal-Fisherman's Lake-Lagos-Leopoldville-Port Bell (Uganda)-Khartoum-Aden-Karachi. The cargo manifest shows that the aircraft was carrying over 2100 kilograms of "airplane spares" to be forwarded to General Brett, and almost 500 kilograms of supplies for the US African Mission in Cairo. "Capetown" landed at Leopoldville on 20 January, before the Lebanon covers arrived and of course was heading in the wrong direction to have carried them. On the return trip from Karachi, "Capetown" landed at Leopoldville on 30 January, but did not pick up any mail. The reason for this is unknown, but the aircraft seems to have been operating at close to maximum cabin load, carrying in addition to cargo, 26 passengers and crew including a deputation from the Chinese Foreign Office who came aboard in Karachi.

Whatever the explanation, no mail was taken aboard at Leopoldville so the Lebanon covers stayed right there. The next Special Mission #11 flew to Rio de Janeiro and not to Africa, whilst Missions 12, 13, 14 and 15 flew the shuttles between America and Lagos, not going to Leopoldville. So the next Special Mission to fly was #16 which was ordered to the Indian Ocean for a survey of the Cocos Islands as a possible trans-Indian Ocean route to Australia should the need arise. The Mission Order dated 20 February 1942 includes the following:

"Your flight from the United States to Leopoldville as well as your return from Leopoldville to the United States will operate as a Certificate Contract Flight."

In other words, the aircraft could carry mail to Leopoldville from the United States and return mail from Leopoldville, but not beyond the Belgian Congo. The actual trip record shows "Capetown" departing Leopoldville as flight 6006 on the return trip at 16:24 hours on 22 March 1942 and arriving in Miami at 02:30 in the morning of 26 March. You will recall that the Miami arrival mark on the cover shown is dated 7 April, so is this another query? Fortunately amongst the group of collectors we have other covers carried on the same flight from the Lebanon.

Two of these were opened and re-sealed by the British censors in Trinidad, and as was the case at this time, a censor applied a dated hand stamp of 27 March, which ties in with the arrival of "Capetown" in Trinidad on 25 March, so this cover and presumably all the other mail on the flight were off-loaded at Trinidad and not carried to Miami on "Capetown". No surprise here, because this was normal procedure for mail coming from Africa, and is confirmed by comments in the Pan American Mission Orders telling their crews to warn passengers not to carry mail because it would be examined in Trinidad and be contrary to regulations.



Fig. 3

And so the first question about "why the delay?" seems to be answered. Special Mission 10 did not pick up mail at Leopoldville, subsequent missions did not fly to Leopoldville, and it was Special Mission 16 that finally carried the mail – but only to Trinidad from where, after examination, it was transported to Miami by Pan American's South American regular services and not by the Clippers. Not all the mail was opened by the Trinidad censors and not all the mail carries a Miami transit mark, this being seemingly reserved for registered letters. Despite this, it is probable that all the mail from Trinidad was dropped at Miami and forwarded from there.

Rates.

That's the route; now what about the rates? Collectors over the years have struggled with the often incomprehensible structure of French airmail postage rates, but light has been shone on the subject by another group study led by Robert Picirilli [2]. This explains how the French postal system worked but there are/were still some gaps in knowledge, particularly in the rates charged for the "Double Atlantic" mail from Africa to the United Kingdom, carried twice across the ocean by Pan American Airways. The simple (?) rule is that the rate for mail not transiting France is made up of a "basic foreign" fee, which we can equate to the UPU or surface rate, plus an air fee together with registration and/or special delivery fees. Confusion is added where mail is carried from one French colony to another French colony, in which case the "basic foreign" fee is replaced by a "basic domestic" fee.

For mail from Lebanon, Picirilli shows a basic foreign fee of 15 Piastres, registration of 15 Piastres and air fee to the United States of 85 Piastres. The cover of Fig. 1 is carrying 115 Piastres made up as 15P basic + 15P registration + 85 Piastres. The cover of Fig. 3 carries 185 Piastres made up as 15P basic + two air fees of 85 Piastres. So far, so good. However, Picirilli has recorded no data for mail travelling to UK from Lebanon via the Atlantic and Peter Wingent queried a cover (Fig. 4) from Lebanon to UK dated 2 September 1942 carrying 235 Piastres which seemed inexplicable because there were no transit markings other than an endorsement "Via Palestine and

Portugal". This would seem to rule out carriage to Brazzaville/Leopoldville, but how did it travel?

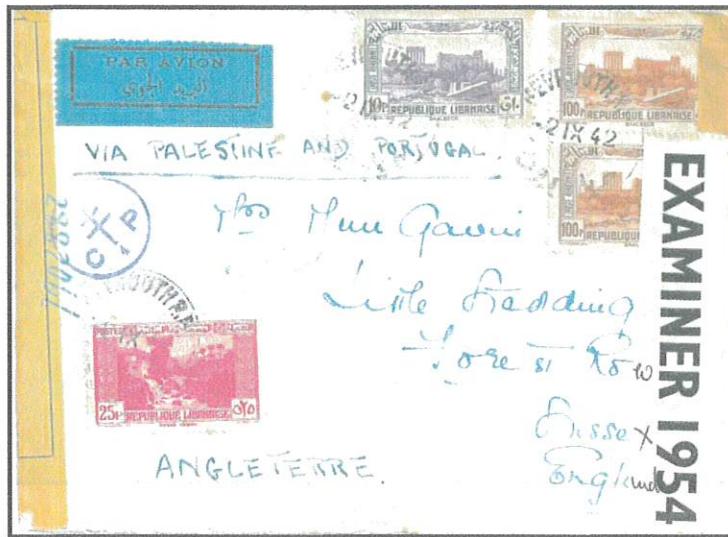


Fig. 4

Fortunately one of the authors has a cover also from Lebanon to UK dated 12 May 1942 (Figs. 5,6) which is registered and consequently offers an explanation of the route and the rate.

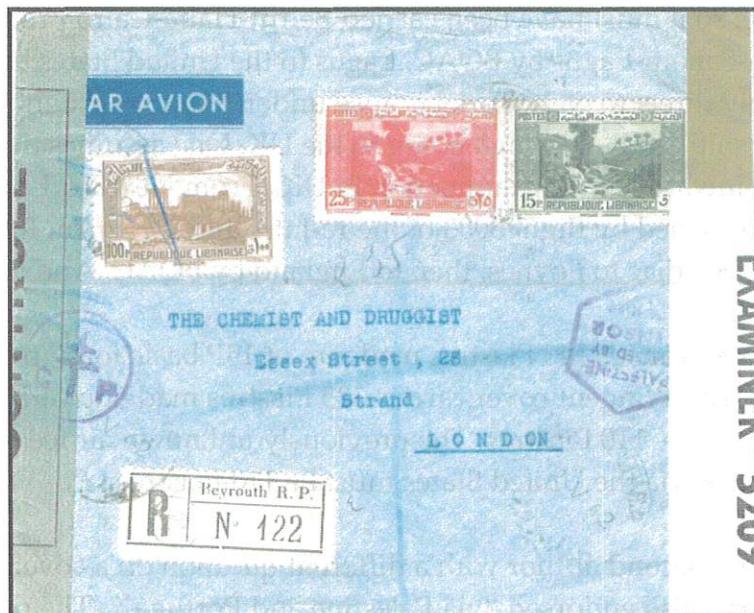


Fig. 5

This cover carries clear despatch and transit marks on the rear as shown here.

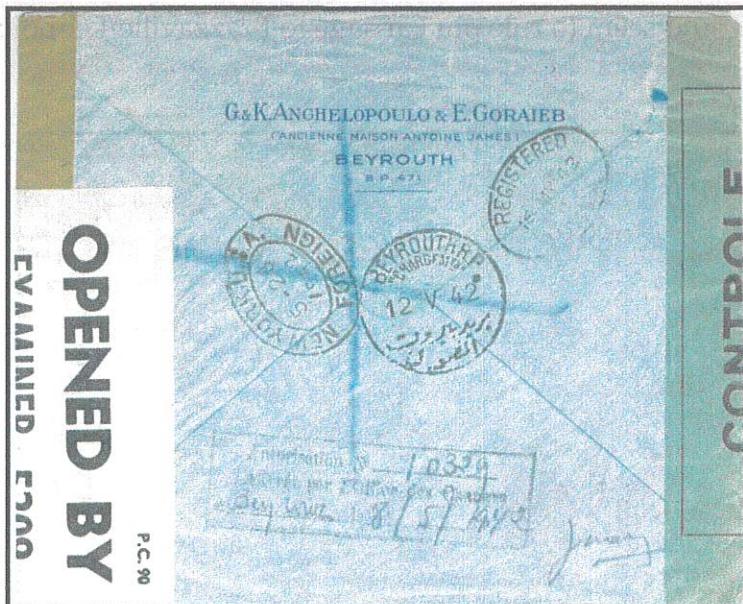


Fig. 6

Leaving Beirut on 12 May the cover travelled to Palestine, picking up a Haifa Censor mark (H17) and a Haifa transit mark for 16 May and then, remarkably, a New York transit on 28 May 1942. This confirms that the cover travelled from West Africa to the United States and then back to the UK by air. Did it go through Leopoldville? Highly unlikely since as a registered cover it would have been recorded in both Brazzaville and Leopoldville, so it must have been carried Beirut-Haifa-Cairo probably by MISR, Cairo-Khartoum-Sahara-Lagos by BOAC, Lagos to the United States by "Special Mission", possibly direct to New York because under standing orders [5] there was no transit censorship applied to mail going to the UK. One assumes that this is because of 100% inward censor examination in UK. From New York the cover would have been carried by flight 3003 of the re-introduced PanAm Route 3 service via Botwood and Shedia to Foynes, then to England by BOAC. And the rate?

The registered cover carries 140 Piastres made up of 15P basic foreign + 15P registration + (x). The Wingent cover carries 235 Piastres made up of 15P basic foreign + (2x) where x = 110 Piastres. The previously unknown air fee for airmail from Lebanon to UK via the United States must be 110 Piastres.

Then up came your second author with a different question on a cover (Fig.7) from Lebanon to Algeria, also endorsed "via Palestine and Portugal". The postage on this is 116 Piastres???



Fig. 7

Seemingly insoluble until one remembers the French rule that the “basic” fee between French colonies is less than the “foreign” fee, and in this case, Picirilli records that the “basic domestic” fee from Lebanon was 6 Piastres and not the 15 Piastre foreign rate. The Algeria cover therefore must have travelled “Double Atlantic” because it carries the 6P basic domestic fee + 110P Atlantic fee. Despite the absence of a transit mark of any American port of call, it has been intercepted and examined by the British censors in Bermuda (836 IC), so definitely travelled twice over the ocean. Unlike the previous cover, this would have been carried to Lisbon by a PanAm Route 8 flight (the LATI substitute). Note that the 6 Piastre domestic fee was an increase applied on 1 January 1942 necessitating overprinting the 7.50 Piastre stamp.

Was there another route?

Ironically, this waiting around in Leopoldville for the PanAm magic carpet to arrive did not apply to “regular”. i.e. non-philatelic mail, since BOAC were already running a weekly service from Leopoldville to Lagos, and the mail could have been placed aboard one of these flights and been transferred at Lagos to a PanAm “Special Mission” flight (#12, 13, 14 and 15) operating on a six day schedule to America. An example of this service to Lagos for regular mail is demonstrated by a cover posted in Bikfaya, Lebanon which transited Beirut on 16 January 1942, travelled on the same “French connection” as the philatelic mail and arrived in Brazzaville on 27 January. Because this was addressed to French Guinea, it was put on board a BOAC flight and went via Lagos as can be seen by the Nigerian re-sealing label and censor cachets.



Fig. 8

To complete the story, this cover carries 40 Piastres in current stamps but has had an additional 1930 issue 1 Piastre stamp added making 41 Piastres, because as in the previous cover example, the “basic domestic” fee between French colonies had increased from 5 to 6 Piastres on 1 January 1942, with an air fee of 35 Piastres [2].

Summary

The reason for the delay at Brazzaville/Leopoldville has been explained, as has the reason for the route from Lebanon not being used later in 1942 because of the irregular (and later discontinued in October 1942) flights to Leopoldville from America. A previously unknown “Double Atlantic” postage rate has been determined, and the alternative route for mail from Leopoldville has been demonstrated.

References:

- [1] Wilson, J. “FAM-22; Blockage at Brazzaville?”, (Cameo, Journal of the West Africa Study Circle, June 2009)
- [2] Picirilli Robert E., “Postal and Airmail Rates in France & Colonies 1920 – 1945”, (France & Colonies Philatelic Society, 2011, ISBN 0 9519601 6 4)
- [3] Wilson, J, “FAM-22: What was it all about?”, (“Air Post Journal”, January 2013)
- [4] Wilson, J. “Pan American, FAM-22, Special Missions, 1942 and 70 years of misunderstanding.” (APJ, Journal of the American Air Mail Society, December 2011, and “Cameo”, Journal of the West Africa Study Circle, January 2012).
- [5] ‘San Juan, Policy and Staff’ , (File held at the National Archive. Reference DEFE 1/197).

Trans-Atlantic Air mail

Lebanon to United States via Brazzaville first service 1942.

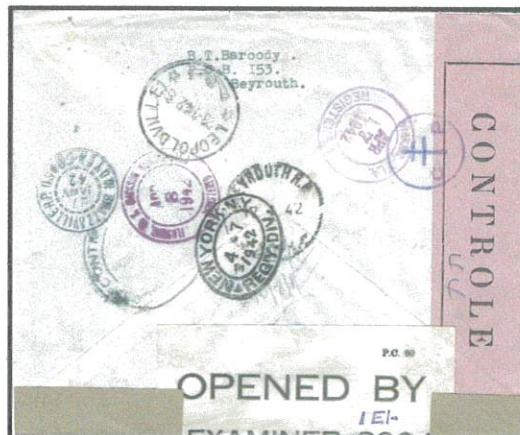


Route: Damascus - Cairo - Khartoum - Fort Lamy - Bangui - Brazzaville by L.A.M. Brazzaville
27 January 1942 then Special Mission 16 via Trinidad to Miami.

Rate: 115 Piastres made up as 15P Foreign basic 15P registration, 85P air fee. (Picirilli)

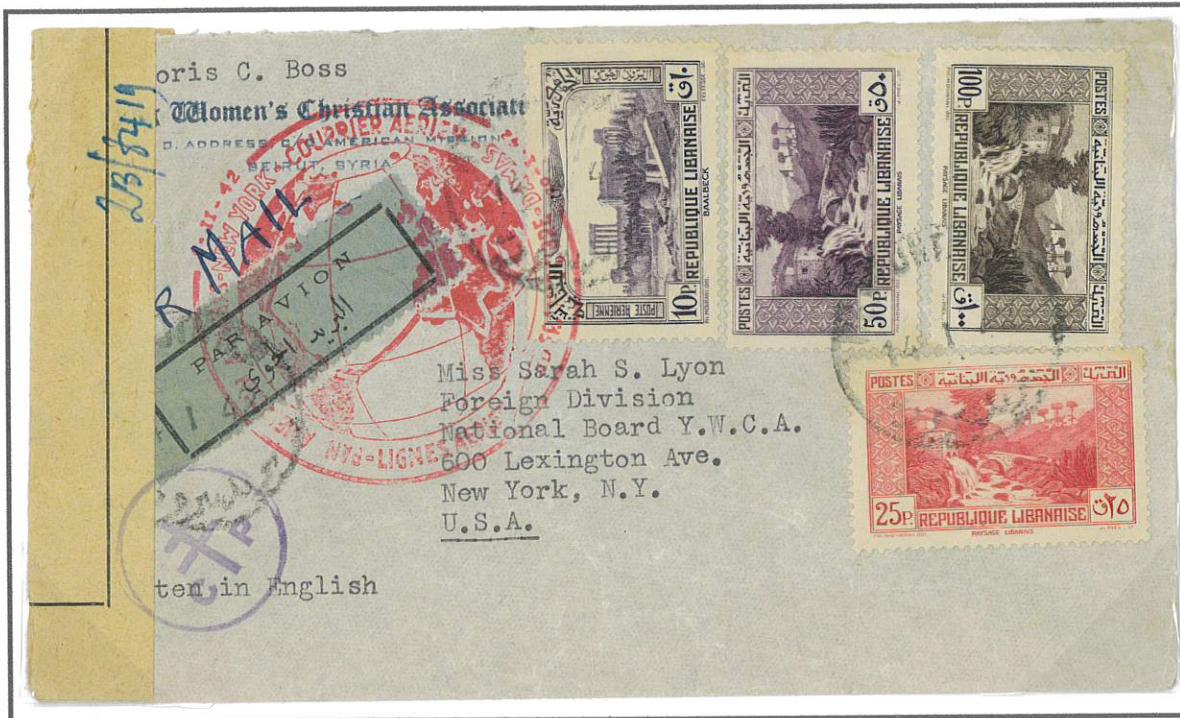
Censor: Opened and re-sealed in Beirut by French. Trinidad Examiner 8004.

Features: Cover off-loaded at Trinidad for censorship then carried to Miami by FAM-6, arriving 7 April 1942. Fabulous cover. See Air Post Journal February 2015.



Trans-Atlantic Air mail

Lebanon to United States via Brazzaville first service 1942.



Route: Damascus - Cairo - Khartoum - Fort Lamy - Bangui - Brazzaville by L.A.M. Brazzaville
27 January 1942 then PanAm Special Mission 16 from Leopoldville.

Rate: 185 Piastres made up as 15P Foreign, 2 x 85P air fee. (Picirilli)

Censor: Opened and re-sealed in Beirut by French (CP). No transit censorship.

Features: No evidence of transit or arrival but all these first despatch covers from Beirut were carried from Leopoldville by PanAm Special Mission 16.



Trans-Atlantic Air mail

Lebanon to United States via Brazzaville first service 1942.



Route: Damascus - Cairo - Khartoum - Fort Lamy - Bangui - Brazzaville by L.A.M. Brazzaville
27 January 1942 then PanAm Special Mission 16 from Leopoldville.

Rate: 115 Piastres made up as 15P Foreign basic 15P registration, 85P air fee. (Picirilli)

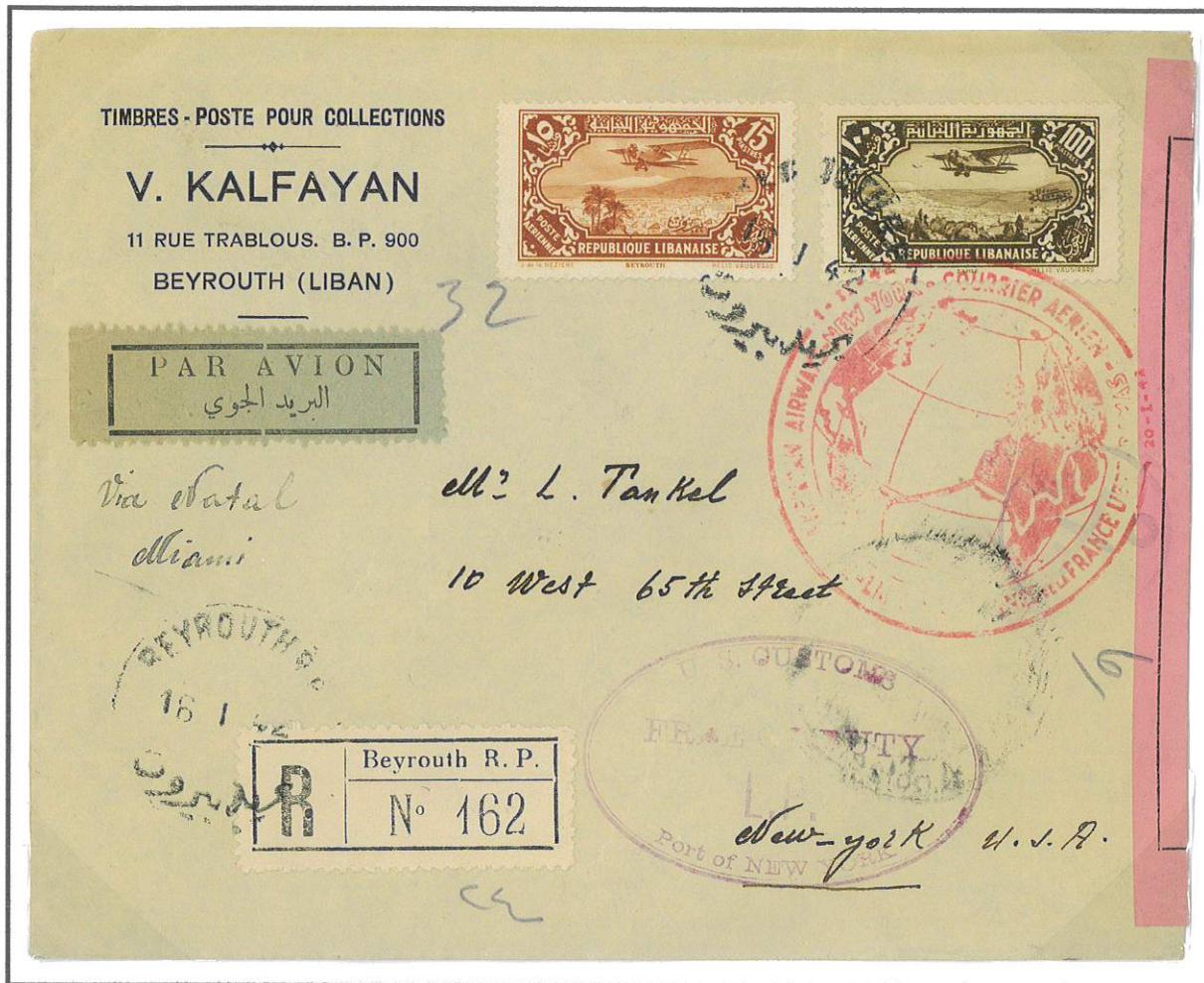
Censor: Examined in Beirut by French (CP). No transit censorship.

Features: Arrive New York 12 April, held then returned. Arrive back in Beirut 7 July 1942.



Trans-Atlantic Air mail

Lebanon to United States via Brazzaville first service 1942.



Route: Damascus - Cairo - Khartoum - Fort Lamy - Bangui - Brazzaville by L.A.M. Brazzaville
27 January 1942 then Special Mission 16 from Leopoldville.

Rate: 115 Piastres made up as 15P Foreign basic 15P registration, 85P air fee. (Picirilli)

Censor: Opened and re-sealed in Beirut by French. No transit censorship.

Features: Cover carried by passenger or crew on SM 16 since arrived in New York and examined as "Travellers censorship" by New York Customs. See Air Post Journal February 2015 for route detail.



World War 2 Air Mail

Lebanon to French Guinea via Brazzaville first service 1942.



Route: Beirut-Cairo by MISR. Cairo-Brazzaville by first French service leaving Beirut 20 January 1942, Brazzaville 27 January. Transferred to BOAC flying boat service to Lagos then held. Arrival Kouroussa 25 April.

Rate: 41 Piastres made up as 6P inter-French "Domestic Basic" + 35P air fee for route. Basic fee increased from 5P to 6P on 1 January 1942.

Censor: Opened and re-sealed in Beirut by French. Opened and re-sealed in Nigeria, examiner 12.

Features: Carried from Beirut by first French service to connect with PanAmerica trans-Atlantic flight from Leopoldville but correctly transferred to BOAC northbound to Lagos. Delay in transit possibly because Lebanon was Free French and Guinea was still Vichy.

Trans-Atlantic Air mail

Lebanon to United States via Brazzaville 1942.

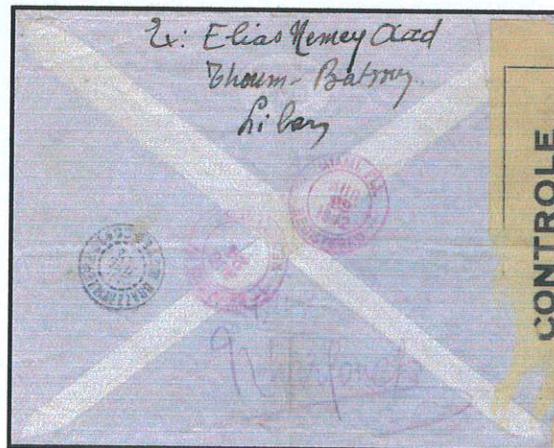


Route: Damascus - Cairo - Khartoum - Fort Lamy - Bangui - Brazzaville by L.A.M. Brazzaville 27 July 1942 then Sabena to Lagos to connect with Pan Am "Special Mission" service.

Rate: Should be 15P Foreign basic 15P registration and 85P air fee to US. However, there is no immediate explanation for the addition of a 1.50P charge, but it seems a deliberate act?

Censor: Opened and re-sealed in Beirut by French. No other censorship.

Features: Intended for the Leopoldville to Miami Pan American service but absence of Leopoldville transit marks suggests forwarding by Sabena to Lagos to connect with a "Special Mission" flight. Leopoldville flights normally dropped mail at Trinidad for examination.



Miami 28 August?

Trans-Atlantic Air mail
Lebanon to UK via Durban March 1942



Route: Damascus – Cairo – Khartoum – Durban (?) by BOAC then by sea to UK. Despatch 30 March 1942.

Rate: 60 Piastres made up as 15P foreign basic fee and 45P air fee to Durban.

Censor: French (CP) in Beirut. Palestine transit examiner.

Features: Although the French "Tarif AV" shows route via Durban, involving carriage on the BOAC "Horseshoe" service, it is entirely possible that the mail was transferred at Cairo or Khartoum on to the trans-Saharan route to Lagos, from where it was a shorter sea journey to Liverpool rather than the route around the Cape.

Trans-Atlantic Air mail

Lebanon to United States by Special Mission September 1942



Route: Damascus – Cairo – Khartoum – Lagos by BOAC then PanAm Special Mission to Trinidad. Then by FAM-6 to Miami. Despatch 7 September 1942.

Rate: 102 Piastres made up as Domestic basic (incorrect) fee and 85P air fee.

Censor: French (CP) in Beirut. No transit censorship. Probably "bagged through" as censored mail.

Features: Picirilli reports 20P foreign basic from 1 January 1943 but this and other covers indicate that the increase was earlier. Later cover from same sender indicates confusion over correct basic rate and sender appears to have used the "Domestic" rate that applied to mail within France and Colonies.
Route from Trinidad may have been FAM-6 to Miami but possibly FAM-18 to New York via Bermuda. "Bagged through" as censored mail.

Trans-Atlantic Air mail

Lebanon to United States by Special Mission October 1942



Route: Damascus – Cairo – Khartoum – Lagos by BOAC then PanAm Special Mission to Trinidad. Then by FAM-6 to Miami. Despatch 10 October 1942.

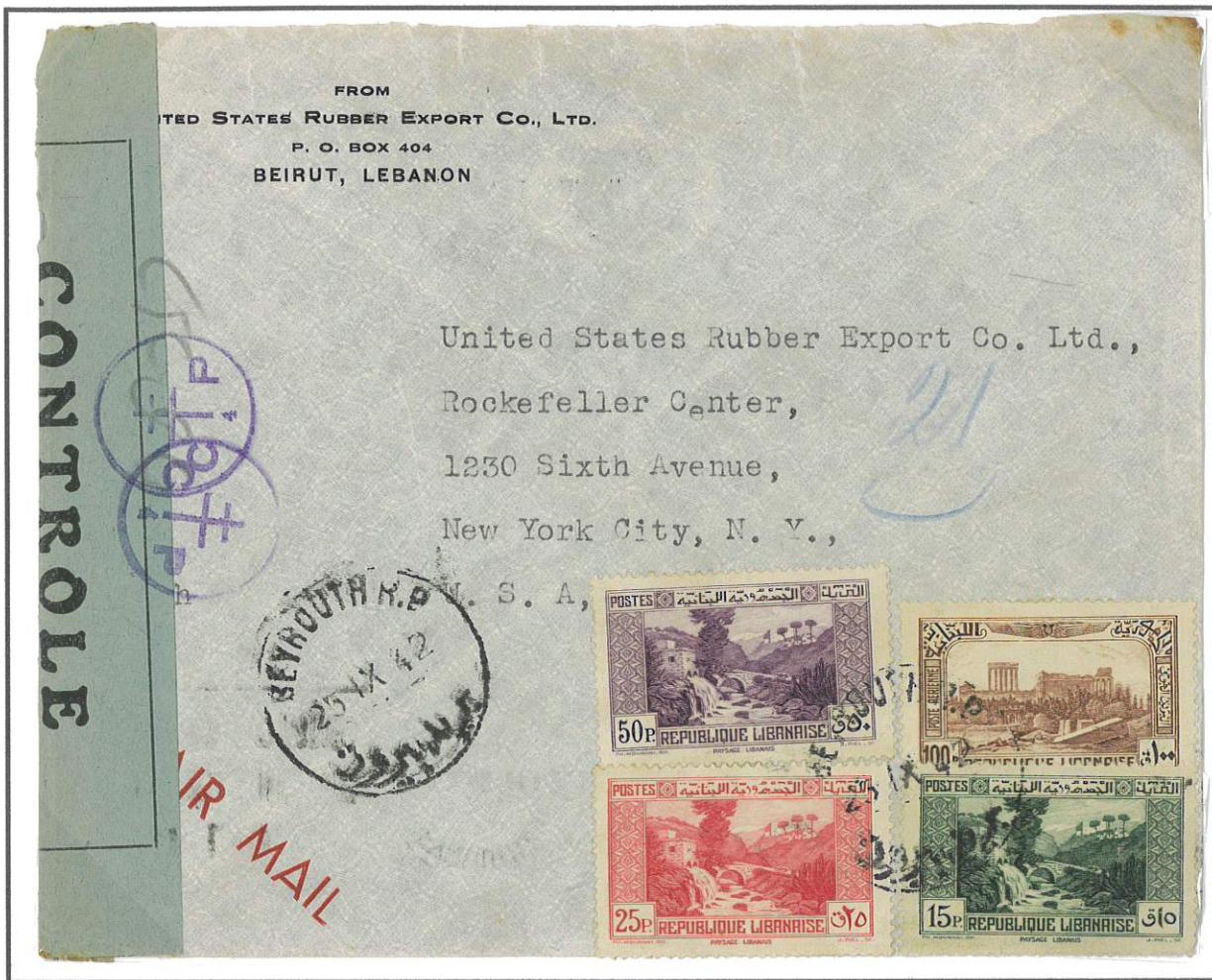
Rate: 190 Piastres made up as 20P Foreign and 2 x 85P air fee.

Censor: French (CP) in Beirut. No transit censorship. Probably "bagged through" as censored mail.

Features: Picirilli reports 20P foreign basic from 1 January 1943 but this and other covers indicate that the increase was earlier. Earlier cover from same sender indicates confusion over correct basic rate. Route from Trinidad may have been FAM-6 to Miami but possibly FAM-18 to New York via Bermuda. "Bagged through" as censored mail.

Trans-Atlantic Air mail

Lebanon to United States by Special Mission September 1942



Route: Damascus - Cairo - Khartoum - Lagos by BOAC then PanAm Special Mission to Trinidad. Then by FAM-6 to Miami. Despatch 25 September 1942. Beirut despatch after examination 1 October.

Rate: 190 Piastres made up as 20P Foreign and 2 x 85P air fee.

Censor: French (CP) in Beirut. No transit censorship. Probably "bagged through" as censored mail.

Features: Picirilli reports 20P foreign basic from 1 January 1943 but this and other covers indicate that the increase was earlier.

Route from Trinidad may have been FAM-6 to Miami but possibly FAM-18 to New York via Bermuda. "Bagged through" as censored mail.



Trans-Atlantic Air mail

Lebanon to United States via Dakar October 1944



Route: Beirut-Damascus-Dakar by L.A.M./ Air France then ATC (?) to New York. Despatch 12 October 1944. No arrival date.

Rate: 85 Piastres made up as 25P Foreign, and 60P air fee. (Picirilli)

Censor: French (CP) in Beirut. New York examiner 5715.

Features: Foreign basic fee raised to 25P from 1 July 1944. Air fee of 60P existed from May to October 1944 only.

Trans-Atlantic Air mail

Lebanon to United States via Dakar April 1944



Route: Beirut-Damascus-Dakar by L.A.M./Air France then ATC(?) to New York. Despatch 3 April 1944.

Rate: 75 Piastres being 15P Foreign (incorrect?), 60P air fee.

Censor: Opened and re-sealed by French (CP) in Beirut. New York examiner 8235.

Features: Sender appears to have used 15P foreign basic rate but should have been 20P. No charge raised. Picirilli speculates air fee was reduced to 60P in May 1944 based on cover evidence but this cover pre-dates this by one month.

Trans-Atlantic Air mail

Lebanon to United States by Air Transport Command November 1943



Route: Beirut-Damascus-Dakar by L.A.M./Air France then ATC to Miami. Despatch 25 November 1943. No arrival date.

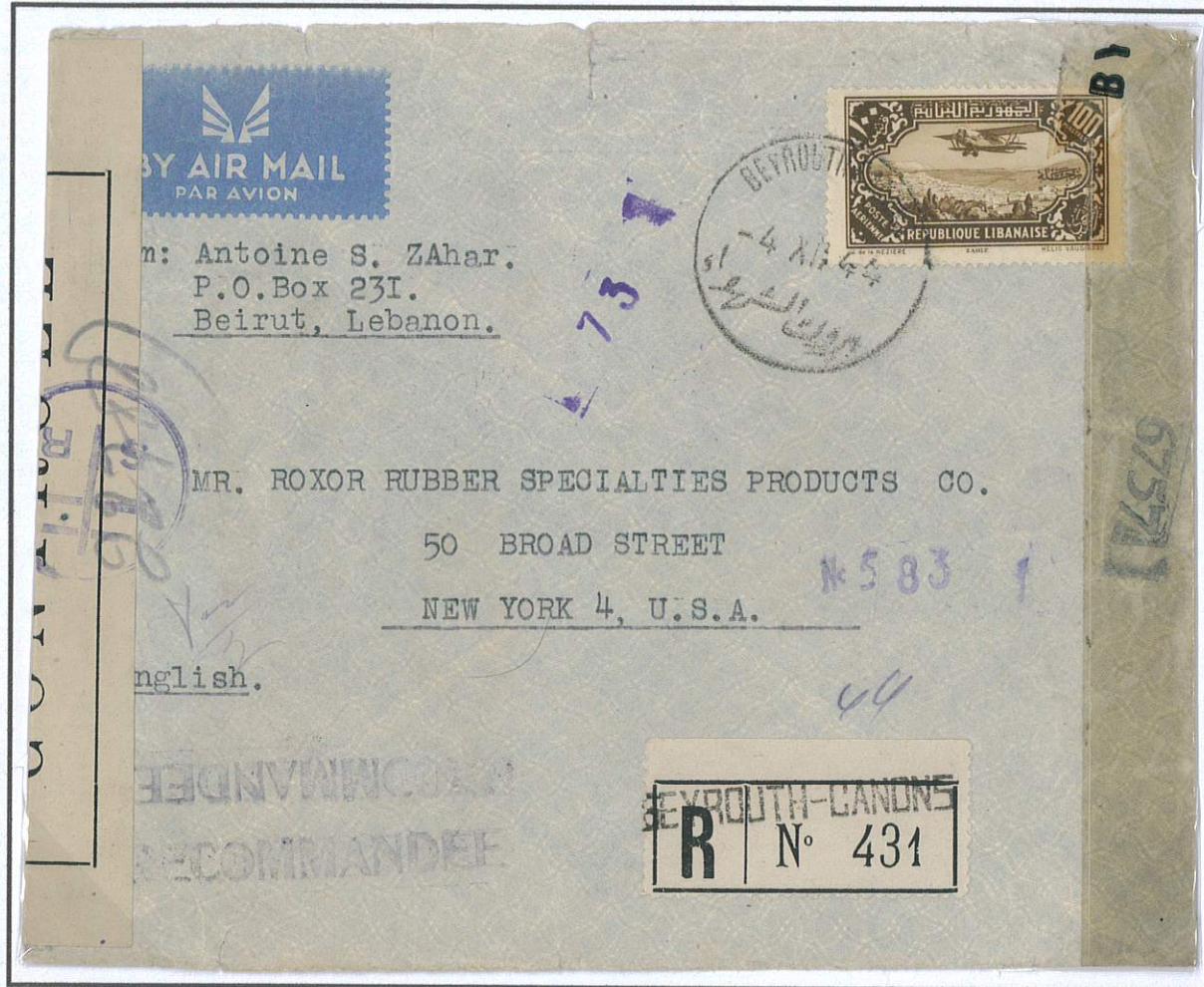
Rate: 105 Piastres made up as 20P Foreign (1 January 1943), and 85P air fee. (Picirilli)

Censor: French (CP) in Beirut. Miami examiner 4739.

Features: Miami "Double blue tick" censor mark. Foreign basic rate raised from 15P to 20P 1 January 1943.



Trans-Atlantic Air mail
Lebanon to United States via Dakar 1944



Route: Beirut-Damascus-Dakar by L.A.M./Air France then ATC(?) to New York. Despatch 4 December 1944. Arrive New York 11 January 1945.

Rate: 125 Piastres being 25P Foreign, 25P registration, 100P air fee. Rates increased October 1944.

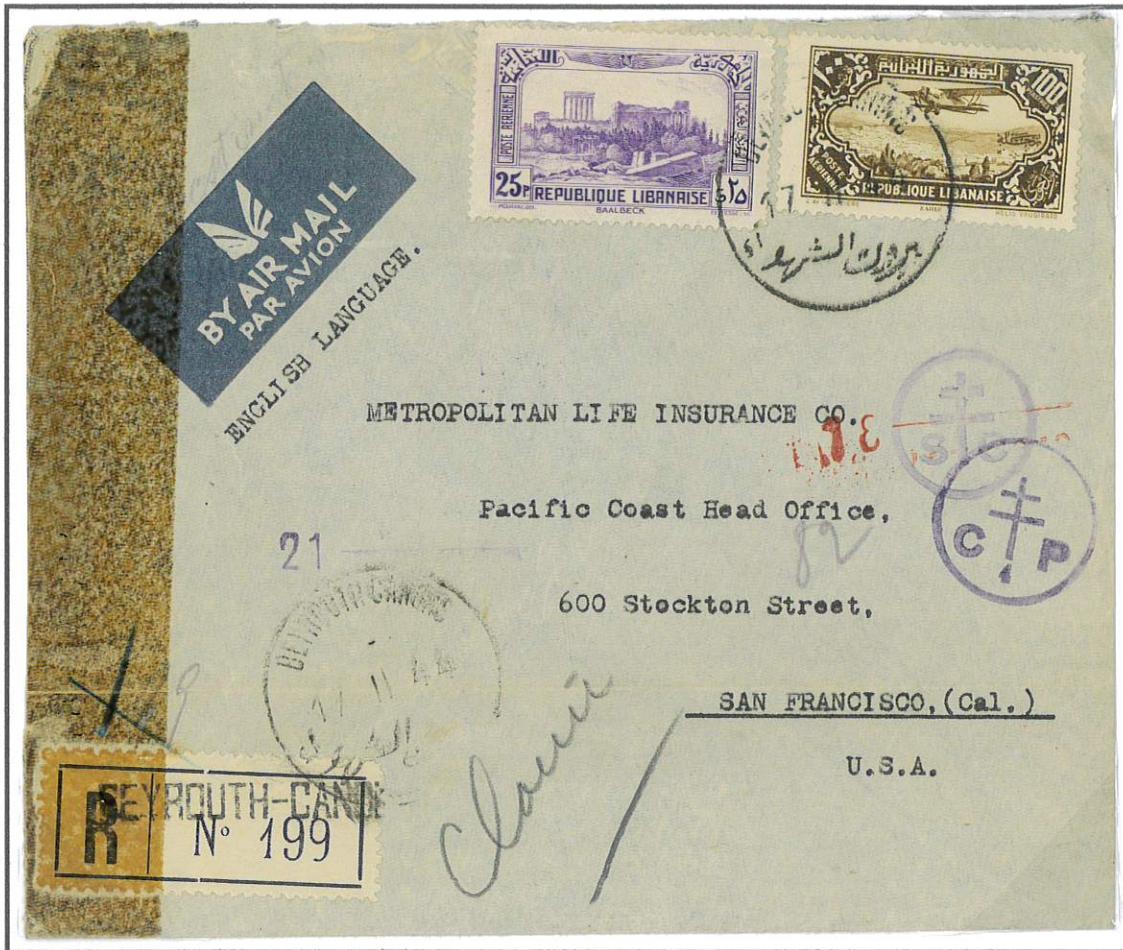
Censor: Opened and re-sealed by French (CP) in Beirut. New York examiner 6757.

Features: Foreign basic rate increased from 20 to 25P in July 1944 and air fee raised from 60P to 100P in December 1944. Air services direct Dakar-New York are reported to have started in February 1945 but this cover seems to pre-date this.



Trans-Atlantic Air mail

Lebanon to United States by Air Transport Command via Dakar 1944

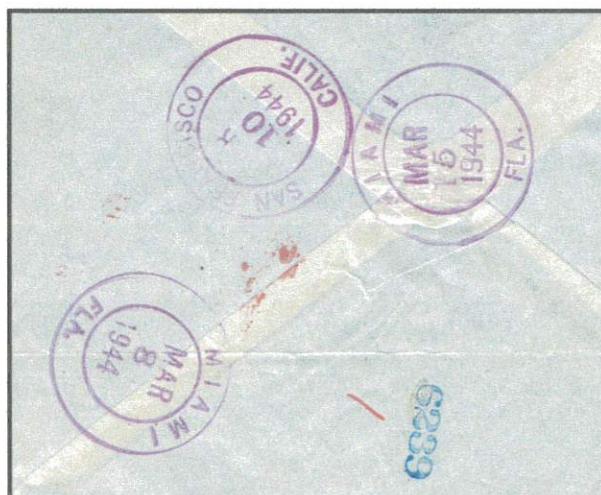


Route: Beirut-Damascus-Dakar by L.A.M./Air France then ATC to Miami. Despatch 17 February 1944, Miami arrival 5 March, San Francisco 10 March.

Rate: 125 Piastres made up as 20P Foreign, 20p and 85P air fee. (Picirilli)

Censor: French (CP) in Beirut. Miami examiner 30388.

Features: Miami 6239 and red '1' trackers. Air fee raised to 90P immediately after this cover despatched.



Trans-Atlantic Air mail

Lebanon to United States by Air Transport Command via Dakar 1945



Route: Beirut-Damascus-Dakar by L.A.M./ Air France then ATC to Miami. Despatch 3 February 1945. No arrival date.

Rate: 125 Piastres made up as 25P Foreign, 100P air fee. (Picirilli) Rates increased October 1944.

Censor: Opened and re-sealed by French (CP) in Beirut.

Features: Foreign basic rate increased from 20 to 25P in July 1944 and air fee raised from 60P to 100P in December 1944.