

United States to Iraq 1942.

Tracing how mail was carried across the South Atlantic in 1942 is not easy for the collector, but having even partial records in the Pan American archive at the Richter Library has revealed just how erratic such carriage could be. Here are two covers sent from America to Iraq at almost the same time and to the same address which appear to show two different routes, but which can be explained after a little research.



Fig. 1. Cheyenne to Basra 18 November 1942.



Fig. 2. Reverse of Fig. 1. New York 20 November 1942, Basra 31 December.

From New York on 20 November, the next transit mark is that of Cairo on what seems to be 25 December 1942 followed by Basra on 31 December 1942. The cover has not been examined in transit and was not even examined on arrival in Iraq, carrying the dual language "Not Examined"

stamp of the Iraq Censor. The journey time from New York to Cairo seems excessive, even by wartime standards, and a second cover to the same address brings up other issues.



Fig. 3. Denver to Basra 10 December 1942.



Fig. 4. Reverse of Fig. 3.

Posted in Denver on 10 December 1942 the cover travelled to Miami where it was examined and resealed by Examiner 1935. The next transit date is of Cairo on 28 December and then Basra on 1 January 1943. Why are two covers apparently treated differently? The answer may lie in the operation of the Pan American "Special Missions" carrying mail across the South Atlantic. By this time in 1942 the so-called "FAM-22" flights carried out by "Capetown Clipper" to Leopoldville had ended, and the aircraft returned to the regular special mission fleet. Fig. 5 shows the data provided by Berry [1] extracted from the PanAm Archive by the late Matt Rodina.

SM57	Nov 14 42	NC12	NAT - FSH - NAT. 5 Shuttle.
SM58	Nov 16 42	NC04	NBA-Gibraltar. Special Navy. Goodwyn*
SM59	Nov 19 42	NC11	NAT - FSH - NAT. 5 Shuttle.
SM60	Nov 26 42	NC06	NBA - NAT 5 Shuttle.
SM61	Dec 1 42	NC09	SPA - FSH 5 Shuttle. Hart.
SM62	Dec 5 42	NC12	NAT - BMR 5 Shuttle. Lodeesen.
SM63	Dec 10 42	NC12	NAT - FSH - NAT. 5 Shuttle. Fleming.
SM64	Dec 15 42	NC06	NAT - FSH - NAT. 5 Shuttle.

Fig. 5. Special Missions November-December 1942.

NBA = New York. SPA = Trinidad. NAT = Natal. FSH = Fisherman's Lake. BMR = Baltimore.

Special Mission (SM) 59 departed for Africa on 19 November 1942 and therefore could not have carried the cover dated 20 November. SM60 did not fly to Africa and SM61 flew from Trinidad (SPA). SM62 shuttled between Baltimore and Natal, Brazil and the first flight to resume the route to Africa was SM63 departing New York on 10 December 1942 followed by SM64 departing on 15 December from New York. By sheer good fortune we do have the complete records for these two missions and these suggest an explanation of the two covers and their different treatment.

The cover in Fig. 1 having missed SM59 appears to have been carried on SM62, despite the fact that it should have been forwarded to Miami. Lack of Miami censorship suggests that it remained in New York, and the mail manifest for SM63 shows that 42Kg (92lbs) of mail was carried from New York through to Fisherman's Lake, arriving there on 15 December.

The cover in Fig. 3, posted in Denver on 10 December appears to have missed SM63 but clearly arrived in Miami because it was censored there. The next flight from Miami was SM64 which departed on 16 December, arriving in Fisherman's Lake on 19 December, 4 days after SM63. Interestingly, and as demonstrated by earlier special mission reports, it was not normal for the flights to carry mail from New York, and this was the case with SM64 which carried no mail from New York but collected it at Miami (181Kg/398lbs).

Since the special missions turned round at Fisherman's Lake, the only method of transferring mail to the trans-Africa flights to Khartoum and Cairo was by the recently militarised Pan American (Africa) service operating from Benson Field using C-47 flights to Accra via Roberts Field (Monrovia) on Monday, Thursday and Saturday each week. The 15th of December was a Tuesday so the first cover would have been delayed until Thursday 17th. The 19th of December was a Saturday so the second cover would be forwarded four days after the first cover. The time difference between the two covers seems to have remained until arrival in Cairo, and possibly through to Basra, but it is almost impossible to know apart from the arrival dates in Basra.

These two covers demonstrate how it is impossible to apply fixed explanations to transatlantic mail, and how Pan American tried their best to keep the mail flowing. The transfer of mail at Fisherman's Lake from the Clipper at the dock by bush road to Benson Field did not help swift movement; nor did the various transfers at Accra and Cairo. Air Transport Command complained loud and long about civil mail being dropped at Fisherman's Lake and requested that it should be transferred to ATC aircraft at Natal, but PanAm steadfastly ignore these requests and even in late 1943 the eastbound mail was still being dropped at Fisherman's Lake by the Clippers; but that's another story.

John Wilson

Air Post Journal

Trans-Atlantic Air mail

Special Mission mail United States to Iraq 1942



Route: New York-Miami-Fisherman's Lake by Special Mission 63. Fisherman's Lake-Accra-Khartoum-Cairo-Basra by militarised PanAm (Africa).

Rate: 70c Foreign air rate.

Censor: No US censorship. Cairo transit examination. Iraq "Not Examined".

Features: Posted 18 November, New York 20 November, Cairo 25 December, Basra 31 December. Cover carried through to Fisherman's Lake by SM63. Mail loaded at New York and passed through Miami without examination en route. New York despatch delayed due to earlier missions being flown elsewhere.



Trans-Atlantic Air mail

Special Mission mail United States to Iraq 1942



Route: Miami-Fisherman's Lake by Special Mission 64. Fisherman's Lake-Accra-Khartoum-Cairo-Basra by militarised PanAm (Africa).

Rate: 70c Foreign air rate.

Censor: Miami Examiner 1935. Cairo transit examination. No Iraq examination.

Features: Posted 10 December, Cairo 28 December, Basra 1 January 1943. Cover sent to Miami as per standing instructions, censored there and carried through to Fisherman's Lake by SM64. Departed Miami 16 December, Fisherman's Lake 19 December.

