

When "FAM-22" is not enough #2

Recent articles (not in APJ) have been working hard to promote the view that every wartime airmail cover to and from the United States via West Africa was "carried by FAM-22". The author of these articles has also pushed the concept that even mail to and from unoccupied China was "carried by FAM-22". Such brief descriptions do not even begin to show the background and history demonstrated by proper cover analysis, and here is a cover that illustrates what a compelling story can be told. Did this cover travel by "FAM-22"? Read on.



A cover like this can be a real puzzle to anyone unfamiliar with Chinese postal rates, and there are many pitfalls for the unwary. The indispensable reference work is that of the late

Lewis Blackburn, initially printed in the journal "China Clipper" and reprinted in book form by the Directorate General of the Taiwanese Post Office in 1981 [1]. Even with this information it is sometimes a lengthy trial and error business, and one must never forget the multi-part addition of separate surface fee, registration and express charges to the air surcharge in order to get to the correct rate. Incidentally you also have to know how to read Chinese dated cancellations....!

In the case of this cover we have a total franking of \$15.80 (Chinese dollars), and a despatch date of 13 February 1942 at Kung-lang. This is located close to the border between Burma and China and very remote. For those who want to know just how remote, look at US Military map NG 47-15 which also shows the Yunnan-Burma railway. The remoteness probably explains the use of part sheets of low value stamps to make up the \$15.80 rate.

From Kung-lang the cover took four days to get to Kunming on 17 February (230 miles). Yes, I know the Kunming cancel year is shown as 31 but that is the Chinese dating system and one has to add 11 to get the Western year; 1942. The surface basic fee was \$1, registration \$1 and express fee \$2, leaving the air fee as \$11.80. The air surcharge at this time to America was \$8.70 which does not fit, but the rate for Pan American trans-Pacific until December 1941 was \$5.90 which does fit for a cover weighing between 5 and 10 grams, and this is the only combination that matches the rate on the cover. In other words the sender applied the pre-Pearl Harbor Pacific rate and the postal clerk did not change it. So what was the route if the Pacific was closed? The Chinese characters read "America" and "India West Route".

A note in Blackburn's original article shows that on December 18 1941 the Chinese National Aviation Corporation (CNAC) opened the Chungking-Kunming-Calcutta air route and were charging a surcharge of \$2.25 per 5 grams on each letter. This does not show in the rate on this cover, but the same note tells us that the surcharge was removed on 23 January 1942. The note continues as shown here:

From January 21, 1942 through air service was resumed for mail to America and Europe. This was transmitted by CNAC to Calcutta, then by BOAC to Lagos, Nigeria and thence by Pan American to the destination. By this time an air route has been established across Africa through the Congo. The flying boats left the Horseshoe route at Malakal or Laropi and landed at Stanleyville, Coquilhatville, Libreville and Lagos. Pan American (FAM 22) had established the route from Leopoldville to Miami via Lagos, Bathurst (Gambia), Natal and Belem (Brazil), Port-of-Spain (Trinidad) and San Juan.

So "FAM-22" appears, but only for the trans-Atlantic hop. The major part of the route is flown by BOAC from Calcutta. A further route note on page 36 of the Sieh & Blackburn work [1] says:

"NAL to Calcutta, BOAC to Lagos, PAA to Miami via Brazil, Port of Spain and San Juan, thence air onward".

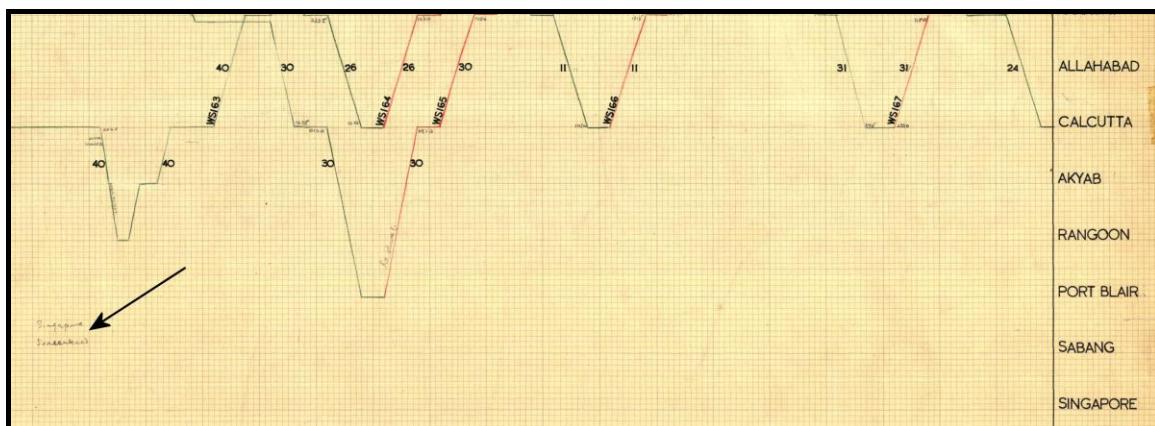
The CNAC flights from Kunming to Calcutta are detailed in the British CAA Report [2] [3], as shown below:

China National Aviation Corporation

Chungking (Free China) - Kunming - Lashio (Burma) - Calcutta (India): Until mid-March, twice weekly; mid-March - mid-July, irregularly; after mid-July, three times weekly.

Note.— After mid-March, the stop at Lashic was omitted; after mid-July, a stop was made at Dijnung (India).

From Calcutta the mail was carried on the BOAC "Horseshoe" flying boat service to Cairo and then transferred to the Cairo-Lagos service. [2] [3]. A pencil note on the BOAC movement charts for February 1942 shows that the route was curtailed by the British surrender of Singapore on 15 February, with the last flight from Port Blair on 21 February, all following flights starting from Calcutta.



It is interesting that the BOAC Cairo-Lagos flights called at Leopoldville and yet Leopoldville is not mentioned in either of the Chinese definitive route descriptions. Why should this be so? My suggestion is that the Pan American flights from Leopoldville were (despite what some still think) a military operation, part of the "Special Missions" and intermittent in nature. [4] The flights from Lagos by Pan American were operating on a nominal six-day schedule and were therefore much more reliable. Whatever the reason, the mail seems to have been carried through from Cairo to Lagos for transfer to the "Special Mission" flights across the Atlantic. But which Special Mission carried this cover?

We turn to the Miami transit mark of 26 March for a clue. From the records held at the University of Miami we find the schedule for Special Mission 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. On its return from the Indian Ocean the mission was designated flight 6006 and was allowed to carry mail from West Africa onward, including Lagos. This flight arrived in Miami on 26 March 1942 having departed Lagos on 23 March, and I believe that this is the flight that carried the cover from China via Calcutta and Cairo. Why did this cover remain on the aircraft when it was customary for mail to be off loaded at Trinidad for mail examination and consequent delay?

Censorship.

More properly described as "Examination" rather than "Censorship" it has to be remembered that the objective of such interception was to ensure that, if possible, all mail was examined for intelligence purposes and to ensure that information useful to an enemy was removed. Once a letter had been examined at an Allied censor station and passed, there was no requirement for it to be re-examined at subsequent stations along its route (although this sometimes occurred). At a major censor station such as Calcutta, mail that had passed examination would be placed in sealed bags and sent to destination without further interception. That is why the overwhelming majority of mail from India to the United States carries no evidence of opening and re-sealing except the original Indian censor/examiner label. Similarly, covers from unoccupied China carry no further interception after Indian examination, suggesting that such sealed mail remained with the aircraft and was not subject to delay.

This practice is confirmed by a cover from Palestine, addressed to Uruguay that arrived in Miami on the same date (and presumably on the same flight from Lagos) as our cover from China. Examined and re-sealed in Haifa, the cover travelled without further interception.



Now I know that some sharp-eyed weasel will comment that in a previous article [5] I showed a cover carried on Special Mission 16 that was off-loaded and delayed at Trinidad even though it had been opened and re-sealed in Leopoldville. Surely, a cover that had been examined would pass through without further interception, but there were special conditions applying to mail from the Congo, as explained in memoranda from files held in the UK National Archive [6]. Letter 3391 reads:

“...I took the opportunity of discussing the matter with Major Fox during his last visit here.....Until shortly before he left Lagos, Leopoldville mails carried on the Pan American Line had not been intercepted there (i.e. at Lagos, JW) in accordance with instructions, but a little before leaving, on learning that censorship in the Belgian Congo was weak, he had arranged for outward mails to be over-labelled for Trinidad.”

The following letter in the file (3391A) dated 6 July 1942 carries on:

“The attached report from Fox on his visit to the Belgian Congo tends to confirm the views we have always held about the Belgian Congo Censorship.....We must I think instruct our Overseas Station to re-examine any letters which have gone through the Belgian Congo Censorship”.

A further letter in the file says:

“Treatment of Belgian Congo correspondence at Overseas stations was carefully reviewed.....Laxities on part of Belgian Congo Censorship had frequently been noticed. It was then decided...that close liaison and co-operation with Belgian Congo would not produce satisfactory results. It was considered preferable to regard Belgian Congo mails as neutral mails and to make use of our Overseas Censorship ring surrounding the Belgian Congo to examine as much of this transit correspondence as possible.”

This shows that as far as British Censorship was concerned, mail that had been examined in the Congo was to be treated as unexamined and would be intercepted at Trinidad. Mail that had been examined at a reliable British censor station such as Calcutta or Haifa would not be re-examined, and that is why bags containing mail from India and Palestine had been passed through without delay at Trinidad.

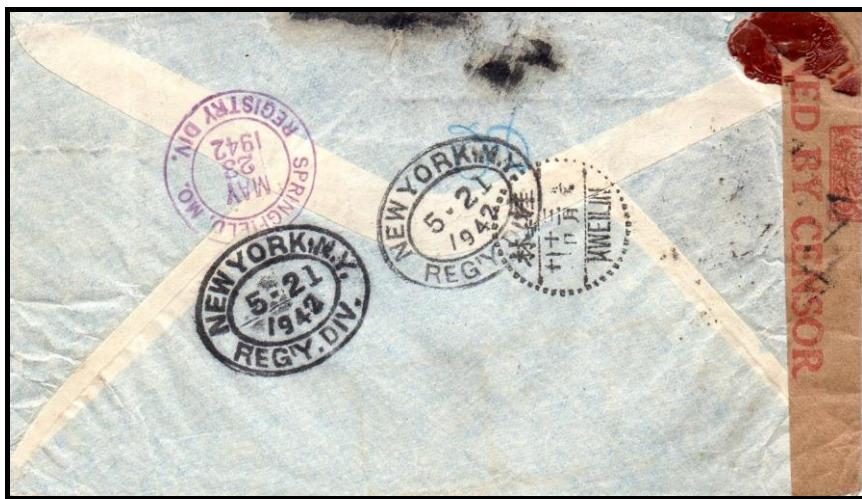
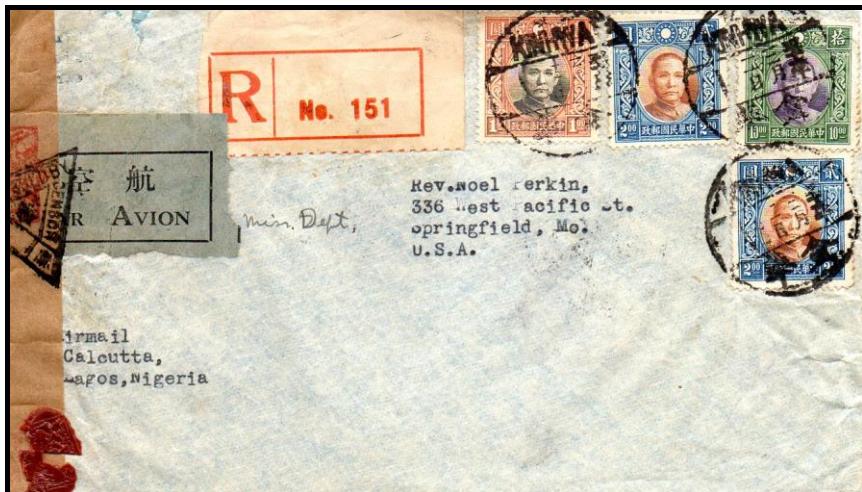
So we have a rate and a route for this cover from rural China to Detroit; by CNAC from Kunming over “The Hump” to Calcutta; there opened and re-sealed by Indian Censor; carried by BOAC flying boat on the “Horseshoe” route to Cairo; transferred to another flying boat on the Cairo-Lagos stage; transferred at Lagos on to NC-18612 “Capetown Clipper” returning from Special Mission 16 and flown to Miami as PanAm flight 6006. This latter stage can indeed be called “FAM-22” since it adhered to the USPOD and CAB requirements, but to call the entire flight as “By FAM-22” is a nonsense. Also open to question is the suggestion made in an article in another philatelic journal [7]:

“I suspect that Cannonball relieved much of BOAC’s burden after November 1942....”

Putting aside the fact that the "Cannonball" title did not exist before March 1944, as confirmed by documentary history in the Pan American Archive, the actual records reproduced in [1] show that airmail from China (and hence India) was conveyed by BOAC via Cairo on every listed route from December 1941 until 1945. If any civil mail was carried from Calcutta by USATC it was certainly not scheduled. Did mail from China to the United States always travel by Pan American? No; for short periods at various times airmail from China would be carried to Durban in South Africa and then onward by sea, and in one very short period between 5 February 1942 and 2 March 1942 a route existed, described in [1] as:

"NAL to Calcutta, BOAC to Lagos, thence surface to destination".

So far I have seen only one cover that can be shown to have travelled by this route, and here it is, courtesy of Bob Wilcsek:



Notice the route endorsement ends at Lagos and does not include any reference to PAA as is seen in most covers coming out of China. Posted in Kinhwa on 2 March, and transiting Kweilin on 10 March, the cover arrived in New York on 21 May, 1942. A 70 day transit surely denotes surface travel, and the fact that it arrived in New York and not Miami confirms trans-Atlantic crossing by sea. The rate for this route from 1 March was \$4.25/5 grams and the cover should have carried \$1 surface + \$1 registration + 3 x \$4.25 air fee

making a total of \$14.75. The cover actually carries a convenience franking of \$15 (Chinese dollars).

In the case of this cover we can confidently say that "FAM-22" had absolutely no relevance, and it represents airmail that was NOT carried by "FAM-22" and NOT carried by Pan American and was NOT carried by USATC. Sweeping generalisations as used by some authors [7] are wilfully misleading.

So what was the purpose of this long article? Simply to show that covers are all too often dismissed by collectors unwilling to put in the effort needed to properly analyse them. By using off-hand descriptions such as "by FAM-22" they are missing the real significance, both in postal history and real history terms. The first cover I illustrated here carries a historical story in that it was sent to his wife by an American engineer engaged in building, or trying to build the Yunnan-Burma railroad, which was intended to work alongside the famed "Burma Road" from Lashio to Kunming, carrying supplies to support Chinese forces fighting the Japanese. In the end the terrain defeated the engineers and the railroad was never completed, but in late 1941/early 1942 it was a valiant attempt at heroic engineering, and part of the forgotten story of the men who were sent from the United States as part of the war to defeat the Japanese. More than just a cover? It certainly is.

John Wilson

References:

- [1] Blackburn J. Lewis & Pingwen Sieh, "Postage Rates of China 1867-1980" (Directorate General of Posts, Taipei, Taiwan, 1981).
- [2] Ministry of Civil Aviation. "Report on the progress of Civil Aviation 1939-45". Ref. DS.43225/1. Appendix C. Original document.
- [3] <http://www.wasc.org.uk/NewFiles/CAA%20report%20complete.pdf> . Free to download transcript of CAA Report.
- [4] Wilson John, "Pan American, FAM-22, Special Missions, 1942 and 70 years of misunderstanding." (Air Post Journal, December 2011, and "Cameo", Journal of the West Africa Study Circle, January 2012).
- [5] Wilson John, "Double Atlantic from Lebanon", (Air Post Journal, February 2015).
- [6] File DEFE 1/266, "Belgian Congo Censorship", National Archives, Kew, London.
- [7] "FAM 22, Trans-Atlantic Air Mail" (American Philatelist, February 2014).

Trans-Atlantic Air mail

Pan American "Special Mission" flight. China to United States via Lagos 1942.



A most interesting cover from China to Detroit in early 1942. Sender's address given as: "Arthur Morrill, c/o Yunnan-Burma Railway, Kung-Lang". Presumably Morrill was one of the American engineers engaged in the construction of the strategic rail link started in late 1941. See article on rear.

Route: Despatched 13 February 1942 at Kung-Lang on the Burma-China border. Transit Kunming 17 Feb. Kunming-Calcutta "Over the Hump" then Calcutta-Cairo-Khartoum-Lagos by BOAC to pick up the PanAm "Special Mission" flights to Miami via Fisherman's Lake and Natal. Miami transit 26 March 1942, Detroit 27 March. Censored in India, traces of Chinese "AR" label on top edge of cover and Indian OBE label at left. Pan Am Special Mission 16 is recorded arriving Miami on 26 March 1942.

Rate: Typically complex rate applied. Only combination possible is International surface fee \$1; Air fee 2 x \$5.90 applied in November 1941 for the NAL to Hong Kong - PAA trans-Pacific route, plus a combined \$1.50 Registration and \$1.50 AR fee, making the cover total of \$15.80. (Blackburn "China Clipper", Sep. 1972, and Maxwell "China Clipper" Jan. 2015)

Features: The Pan American trans-Pacific route closed after Pearl Harbour, and the new westbound route using the Kunming-Calcutta CNAC link did not open until 21 January 1942. This cover must have been one of the first to travel the new route, and pre-dates the handwritten route endorsements seen on later covers. The five Chinese characters beside the registration label read "China India West Route"

