

What was special about Special Mission 10?

There has been much discussion about carriage of civil airmails across the Atlantic during WW2 but in the early months of 1942 the actual records show that the "Special Mission" flights of the Pan American Clippers were responsible. Of course the primary function of these flights was transporting military stores and men to develop the war effort in the Middle and Far East. Civil airmail was very much a secondary function, although Juan Trippe, having fought tooth and nail to acquire the mail contracts and build Pan American Airways on them, was not going to relinquish control of the mail.

There has been confusion about the relationship between the special missions and the so-called FAM-22 service to Leopoldville that was set up as Pan American Route 6. There were only twelve round trip flights to Leopoldville using NC-18612 "Capetown Clipper" and at least in later months of 1942 these Route 6 flights were interleaved with the special missions. The special missions began with SM01 leaving New York on 4 July bound for Bolama but with an alternate destination of Bathurst. The flight did make the trip to Bathurst, Gambia as detailed in a secret report held at the Air Forces Historical Research Agency headed "*Special Observation Flight Over the Coast of Liberia By Pan American Airways*" dated 22 July 1941. The text tells the story:

"1. *This office, informed confidentially of the return to New York of Captain Harold Edwin Gray, Pan American Airway pilot who was charged with picking up a group of ten ferry pilots, ten co-pilots and two radio operators at Bathurst, British Gambia and returning them, via Natal, Brazil, to Miami, Florida.*

(a) *On arrival at Bathurst, British Gambia, Captain Gray was ordered to make a secret flight along the coast of Liberia for the purpose of observing possible sea plane and land plane landing sites...."*

This was the survey flight that determined the location of Fisherman's Lake as the staging point for the later Clipper flights to West Africa and beyond. Presumably the fact that America was not yet involved in the war meant that the presence of the ferry pilots who had delivered military aircraft to the British was actually illegal?

For the student of civil airmails and in the context of so-called FAM-22 mail, the PanAm flight documents for SM01 contain this instruction:

"No official mail will be carried on any portion of the flight, and you will exert every effort to advise all passengers, in both directions, that the carriage of mail for others will constitute not only a violation of Postal Regulations, but might expose them to severe difficulty with the censors at Trinidad"

Well, that's clear enough!

The next flight SM02 departed New York 25 July 1941 and flew to Bathurst, arriving back 2 August. The flight documents include the identical instruction to SM01 in that no mail was to be carried. Flight SM03 left New York on 8 August 1941 and carried out a detailed survey of the route to Bathurst, returning to New York on 31 August 1941. No mail carried.

Flight SM04 leaving New York on 27 September 1941 was carried out under charter to PAA (Africa) to carry their basic staff to Fisherman's Lake, Accra and Lagos. The aircraft made the first landing at Fisherman's Lake and then flew to Lagos, not landing at Accra. No mail carried.

Flight SM05 leaving New York for Bathurst on 23 October 1941 and using "Capetown Clipper" was the final route survey prior to the start of "FAM-22". The identical paragraph from SM01 regarding no carrying of mail was included in the flight schedule. The flight records also say that:

"3. The first official mail flight to Leopoldville will leave New York on or about November 29th presumably carrying no commercial passengers."

As we know, that flight was delayed and became flight 6001/6002 leaving New York on 6 December 1941. Then all hell broke out!

When the airmail route across the Pacific was closed in December 1941 by the attack on Pearl Harbor, any mail addressed to that route was unable to continue until a re-routing was established. This did not affect only mail that was in the United States but also mail en route from Europe for transit through the US intended for carriage trans-Pacific. For airmail eastbound to Africa, the Middle East and India the trans-Atlantic route had already been established by Postal Bulletin 18336 dated 2 December 1941 (so-called FAM-22) but this did not cover mail beyond India at this stage. However, in Postal Bulletin 18348 dated 17 December 1941 we see the instruction for airmail to the Far East to be added to the trans-Atlantic route via Miami.

SECOND ASSISTANT POSTMASTER GENERAL,
Washington, December 17, 1941.

FOREIGN AIR MAIL SERVICE

Air mails for Netherlands Indies, North Borneo, Sarawak, Straits Settlements, Malaya, Burma, unoccupied China and countries west thereof (including Turkey), which have heretofore been sent by the trans-Pacific route, shall be routed promptly via Miami, Fla. The total postage on articles for all these countries is 70 cents per half ounce.

Air mails for the countries listed in the POSTAL BULLETIN of December 2, 1941, under the heading "Foreign Air Mail Service To Africa," will of course also be sent via Miami, except any that are prepared to be carried by steamship to Africa thence by air.

Fig. 1. Re-routing of airmail to Far East and Turkey.

Attention having turned to wartime activity, the flights to West Africa were re-configured to transport vital military supplies to the Far East, starting with the next special mission, SM06 departing New York on 19 December 1941 destined for Calcutta. Although it may be coincidence that the flight took place two days after the re-routing of civil mail through Miami, the flight records show that no mail was carried on the outward journey but on the return flight 15Kg (3000 5g letters) was picked up at Leopoldville, a further 43Kg. at Lagos, 2Kg. was dropped at Natal, 14Kg dropped at Trinidad and 42Kg was carried through to New York. Note that all this mail was westbound from Africa, and no mail was carried eastbound from the United States.

The next special mission, SM07 also to Calcutta and leaving New York on 26 December 1941 did not operate as a Route 6 flight but did pick up 14Kg of mail at Lagos on the return trip and carried it to Trinidad for censorship. Once again no mail was carried eastbound from the United States. Similarly, SM08 leaving New York on 29 December 1941 bound for Calcutta did not take any mail from the United States and carried only 5Kg of mail on the return trip from Leopoldville to Trinidad for censorship. The small amount of mail carried, and a specific instruction in the documents of SM07 stating that "*No contract mail of any description is allowed aboard your trip*" suggests that civil (i.e. contract) mail was not permitted to be carried.

So far, therefore, since that first philatelic flight to Leopoldville until the completion of special mission 08, the Clippers had carried no mail eastbound out of America. The next mission, SM09 did not fly to Africa, instead carrying a US diplomatic delegation to a conference in Rio de Janeiro, although on the return trip, leaving the delegation in Rio, the Clipper picked up accumulated South American mail at Natal and flew it to Lisbon as flight 5001, the first of the "LATI substitute" service.

And so to special mission 10.

"Capetown Clipper", NC-18612 departed New York as SM10 on 15 January 1941 bound for Karachi via Lagos, Leopoldville and Khartoum. There is uncertainty about whether or not this was also designated as flight 6003/6004 since Berry [1] shows 6003 departing on 19 January but no confirming records have been located. Fortunately, we do have the complete flight documentation for SM10, and this shows that although no mail was flown from New York or Miami, 185Kg (407lbs.) of "P.O. Mail" was picked up at Trinidad and flown eastbound. This seems to be the first time any civil mail was carried eastward from the Americas, but the actual mail manifest is what makes SM10 special.

Of the 185Kg collected, 154Kg is identified as made up of 12 bags addressed to Calcutta, 11 bags addressed to "Batania", presumably Batavia, 10 bags addressed to Rangoon and 9 bags addressed to Singapore. All these bags are shown as being from "London" but I believe that since they must have been carried by FAM-18 from Lisbon it was an

accumulation of UK and European mail and all intended (obviously) for the Pacific route. Such mail would have been censored in Bermuda before being carried in sealed bags via New York and presumably Miami to Trinidad without further examination, for collection by SM10. Despite the different destinations, all the bags are routed to Karachi, the terminus of the SM10 flight. Here is a cover that may confirm the story.



Fig. 2. Switzerland to Batavia returned.

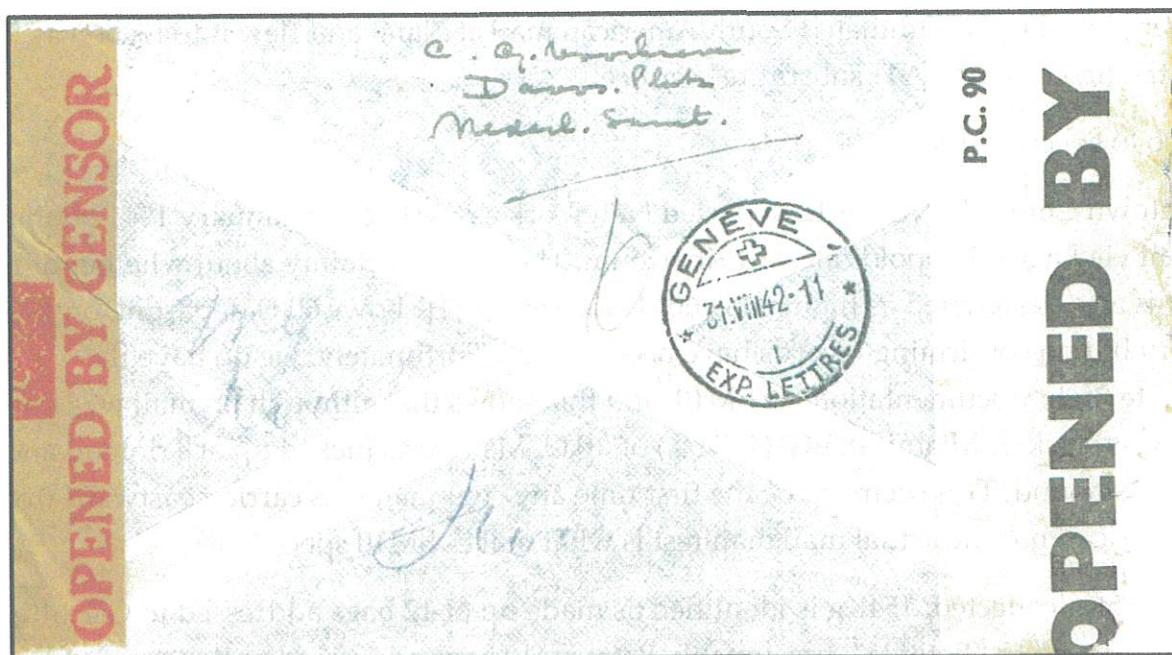


Fig. 3. Reverse side of Fig. 2.

Posted in Davos on 1 December 1941 and franked correctly for carriage by FAM-18 to New York and then trans-Pacific from San Francisco, the cover was carried by Swissair Zurich-Stuttgart-Berlin then by Lufthansa Berlin-Barcelona-Lisbon (LaBlonde) [2]. German censorship was introduced on 7 December 1941 (LaBlonde) so the cover managed to avoid this. Arriving in Lisbon it was then flown on FAM-18 to Bermuda where it was off loaded for censorship then to New York. LaBlonde shows an airmail cover (p.24) from Berne to North Carolina posted on 1 December 1941 that travelled the same route and arrived in North Carolina on 5 January 1942, so one can reasonably assume that the cover from Davos arrived in New York in early January 1942, well after Pearl Harbor. From New York, following the instruction of 17 December, the cover was sent to Miami and on to Trinidad by Pan American FAM-6 in sealed bag.

SM10 arrived in Karachi on 24 January 1942 and the mail was offloaded for forwarding by BOAC to Calcutta, but the service beyond Calcutta had been suspended on 12 February 1942 after the Japanese advances into Burma. We know that the cover arrived in Calcutta because it carries the distinctive "Service Suspended" stamp identified by Michael Deery [3] together with the Indian censor label and triangular code "A" cancel of Calcutta [4]. This triangular style of censor stamp was replaced in March 1942 by an octagonal boxed style and the censor code changed from "A" to "DHA" [4] which confirms arrival in Calcutta before the change.

We cannot know how long the cover was held in Calcutta but it was returned to sender by surface, arriving back in Geneva on 31 August 1942. This is the only cover I have seen or recorded that travelled from Europe to India via the diverted route and on the first special mission flight after Pearl Harbor. There may be others, so collectors should look carefully.

BUT – the question about SM10 also being Route 6 flight 6003/6004 remains. Berry [1] lists SM10 as departing on 15 January, agreeing with the PanAm documents. He then lists 6003 departing on 19 January carrying B24 spares to General Brett in Australia so it suggests that there was a second flight that was not SM10 (but see later). If that flight was designated a Route 6 trip then it means it was allowed to carry mail but no documentary records of the flight have been found so we cannot know what mail, if any, was carried, and in which direction. Here is a cover that may point to a second flight.

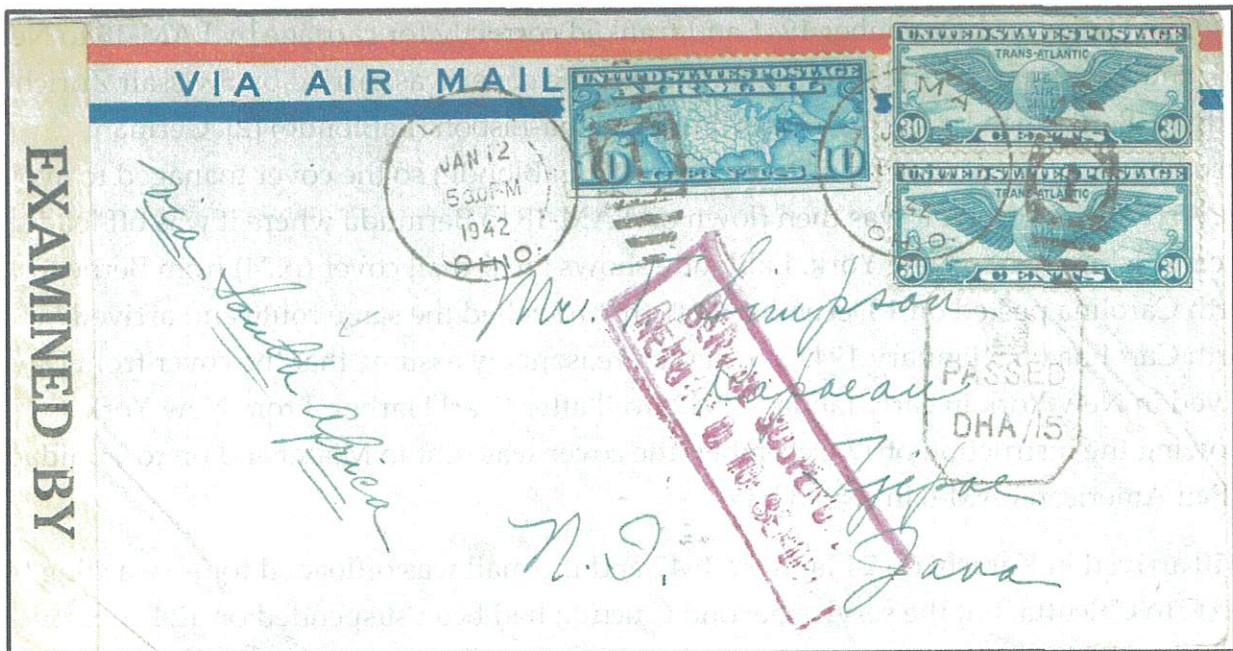


Fig. 4. Lima, Ohio, to Java 12 January 1942.

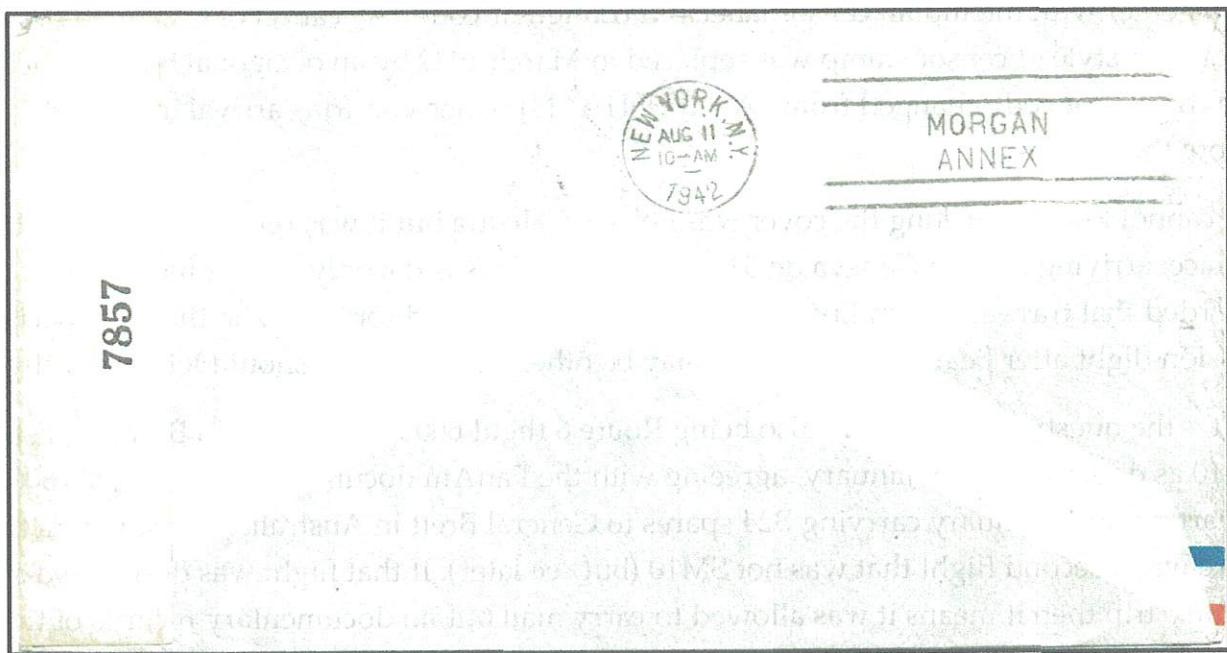


Fig. 5. Rear of Fig. 4. New York return 11 August 1942.

At first glance one might think that this cover from Ohio must have travelled on the same SM10 flight as the cover from Switzerland, but there are (possibly) significant differences. Posted at 5.30p.m. on 12 January in Lima, the cover travelled to New York where it was opened and re-sealed before being sent to Miami as per the 17 December instruction. Since SM10 did not load any mail at New York but only at Trinidad, the Lima cover must have been forwarded from Miami to Trinidad if it was to connect with SM10. We cannot know if this happened but it was possible. The endorsement "Via South Africa" was written in accordance with the general instruction at the time applying to mail to the Middle East, but

any mail travelling via South Africa then went on the BOAC Horseshoe service to Cairo and all mail seen on this route shows evidence of examination in Egypt. There is no such evidence on this cover which convinces me that it did not travel "Via South Africa".

There is no doubt that it arrived in Calcutta since it has the same boxed "Service Suspended" stamp as the cover from Switzerland, but here is a difference. The Indian Censor cachet is the boxed octagon DHA variety that Virk [4] states "*In March 1942, it was decided to prefix the Imperial Censorship Code letters for India 'DH' to the Station Code letter.*" (p.13) Could it have travelled on a slightly later flight than SM10 (6003)?

Since Brigadier Virk was the Officer Commanding the Indian Censorship operations, this statement carries much weight, which probably means that the cover from Lima arrived in Calcutta in March, and after the Swiss cover that carries the earlier triangular censor stamp. As can be seen from the reverse of the cover, it arrived safely back in New York on 11 August 1942.

In addition to General Brett we also have "General Confusion" caused to some extent by Crotty's book "Atlantic Wartime Operations Catalog" in which he writes on page 235:

"Route 6 trips 6003-6004 aka S3-S4 are documented by one handwritten page showing the basic trip data including passengers and cargo, Table 9. That sheet was accompanied by one sheet showing only the dates and times for the trip between New York and Leopoldville, Table 10. The rest of the journey to Calcutta and back was not found."

His Table 9 is headed thus (actual image):

<p style="text-align: center;">Table 9 Trips 6003-6004 (aka S3 and S4) with Charter 10 Data provided by handwritten page as with Charters 7 and 8 Clipper NC18612 <i>Capetown Clipper</i>, Captain Masland</p>
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Fig. 6. Table 9 heading, Crotty page 235.

This text shows that Crotty concluded (on the basis of incomplete evidence) that 6003/S3,S4 and Charter (Special Mission) 10 were one and the same flight, but this is not so. He shows his combined trip (Table 9) leaving New York on 15 January 1942 but in his next table (Table 10) shows the same flight leaving New York on 18 January 1942. The truth is that he is referring to two different flights, neither of which flew to Calcutta. There is much more to say on these errors but let me try to resolve the confusion.

First: I have the complete ten-page flight records for Special (Charter) Mission 10 (not some handwritten page as used by Crotty) so there is no doubt that the flight was undertaken by

"Capetown Clipper" NC-18612, leaving New York on 15 January and flying to Karachi (not Calcutta) and returning to New York on 8 February 1942.

I also have the document used by Crotty as his Table 10 and this is indeed headed "S3". It is NOT headed 6003 and Crotty has not shown the entire document in his text which is here:

NC 18606 - S 3 and 4				
3/18/42 - 3/24/42 NC 18606 ATL Open Mgr to R.G. Ferguson, F.D.A.				
3-1				
1/18/42	North Beach Airport	Miami	8:40	1106
1/19/42	Miami	San Juan	8:00	1034
1/20/42	San Juan	Port of Spain	4:30	619
1/20/42	Pt. of Spain	Belém	9:40	1227
1/21/42	Belém	Natal	7:50	965
1/21-22/42	Natal	Fisherman Lake	14:04	1426
1/23/42	Fisherman Lake	Lagos	7:24	1007
1/24/42	Lagos	Leopoldville	9:05	1120
3-4 3/18/42 NC 18606 ATL Open Mgr to R.G. Ferguson, F.D.A.				
3-4				
1/25/42	Leopoldville	Lagos	6:24	1120
1/26/42	Lagos	Fisherman Lake	7:16	1007
1/26-27/42	Fisherman Lake	Natal	14:14	1426
1/27/42	Natal	Belém	9:51	965
1/28/42	Belém	Pt. of Spain	7:32	1227
1/29/42	Pt. of Spain	San Juan	4:58	619
1/29-30/42	San Juan	North Beach	14:56	1426

Fig. 7. Original document used as Table 10.

As can be seen, this was a straight flight to Leopoldville and back and never went to Karachi or Calcutta and also shows that it was flown not by "Capetown" but by NC-18606. "Capetown" was already engaged on Special Mission 10 and on the 18 January was in Belem en route to Leopoldville and Karachi.

Crotty was not alone in the confusion. Berry also made errors in listing 6003 as leaving on 19 January carrying spares for General Brett in Australia. In fact, those spares appear in the cargo manifest of Special Mission 10 that departed on 15 January (and he got the date wrong as well).

Summary:

I believe that Special Mission 10 was also designated as flight 6003, following established practice within PanAm who used "Capetown Clipper" for the Route 6 flights to Africa. The second flight leaving on 18 January 1942 was carried out by NC-18006 and was a straightforward trip to Leopoldville and back to New York. This flight was designated S3/S4. We do not know whether this carried civil mail because no documentary evidence has yet been found. However, SM10 was really special since it carried the first eastbound

mail to West Africa and beyond, and this is proved by the actual mail manifest from the Pan American records.

In the period between the departure of flight 6001 on 6 December 1941 and the departure of SM10 on 15 January 1942, no airmail was carried eastbound by Pan American. It is entirely possible that airmails held in the system could have been sent by sea to South Africa in the interim, but there is no official instruction to this effect, other than the USPOD Bulletin instructions relating to airmail at the 70c rate (Fig. 1) in the paragraph "*...except any that are prepared to be carried by steamship to Africa thence by air*", and notation in the "Foreign Air Mail Guide" showing carriage to Middle East and India by air at "70c (SA)".

More research is needed on airmail from the United States that may have been carried by sea to South Africa in early 1942, despite having paid the full 70c rate in force.

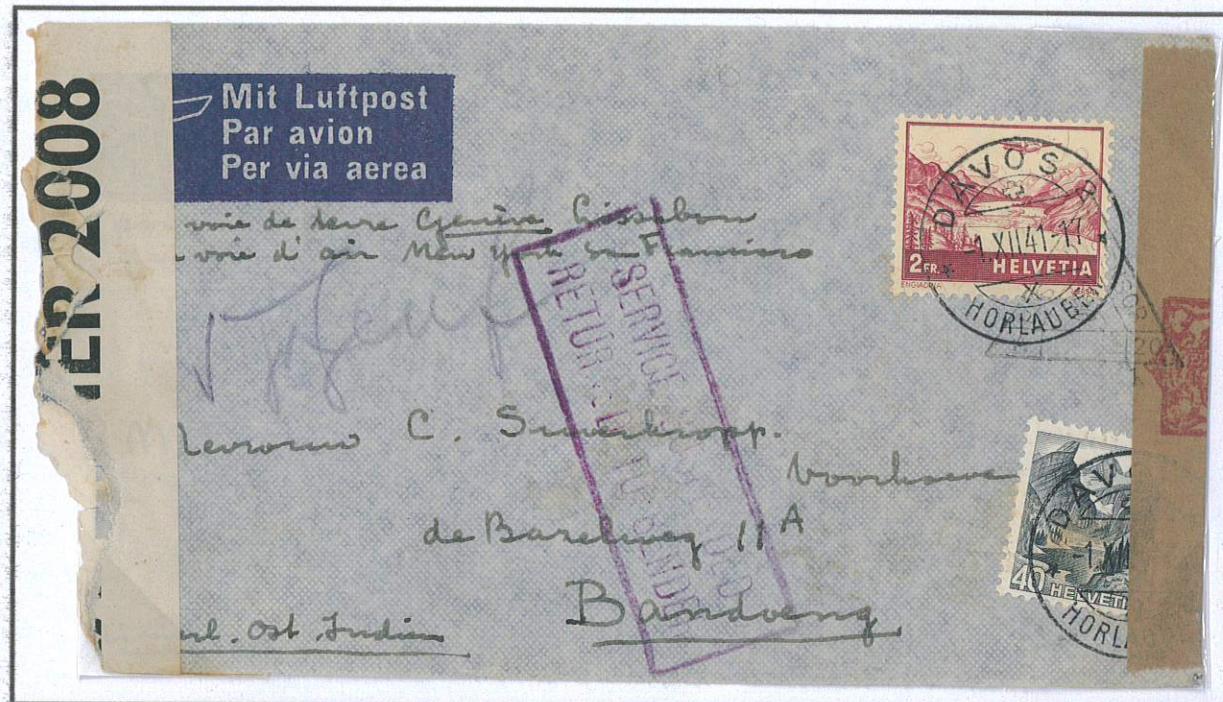
John Wilson

References:

- [1] Berry Peter, M.R.Ae.S. "*The Boeing 314 Trans-Ocean Flying Boats*". (Privately published 1998).
- [2] LaBlonde, Charles. "*World War II Mail from Switzerland to Great Britain, Canada & the United States*", (Am Helvetia Philatelic Soc 2003). ISBN-10: 0974261904
- [3] Deery, Michael B. "*Return to Sender. Devices used to identify Service Suspended mails during WWII*". (Privately produced by author. Canada 2015) ISBN 978-0-9869145-1-5. Available as digital download as digital download michderr@kent.net .
- [4] Virk, Brig. V.S. "*Postal Censorship in India 1939-1945*". (Philatelic Congress of India, New Delhi, 1983).

Trans-Atlantic Air mail

Switzerland to Batavia service suspended December 1941



Route: Zurich-Stuttgart by Swissair. Stuttgart-Barcelona-Madrid-Lisbon by Lufthansa. Lisbon-Bolama-Bermuda by FAM-18. Diverted at New York by closure of Pacific route. Transferred to Special Mission 10 flight Miami-Trinidad-Belem-Natal-Fisherman's Lake-Lagos-Leopoldville-Port Bell-Khartoum-Aden-Karachi. Then Karachi-Calcutta by BOAC. Service suspended at Calcutta. Cover returned by surface, arriving back in Geneva 31 August 1942.

Rate: 30c. surface, 210c. air fee. Total 240c.

Censor: Bermuda 2008. India A20 Calcutta. "Service Suspended" cachet Calcutta (Deery HS-IN-B1.2)

Features: A remarkable cover showing rapid rearrangement of "Double Atlantic" carriage following closure of trans-Pacific route. Special Mission 10 was first Clipper flight to Leopoldville and beyond which carried Post Office mail, in this case 154kg of diverted mail ex Europe intended for the Pacific route to Calcutta, Batavia, Rangoon and Singapore. (From PanAm records archive). Exceptional cover.

