

Berlin special attention censorship of Swiss mail.

Sometimes you see a cover that shouts at you "Buy me" and you don't know why. This battered cover said that to me, and although far from being an exhibition piece it did eventually tell an interesting story. As you can see, it was posted in Zurich on November 30, 1942 addressed to Sydney, Australia. Intended to take the combined air – sea route from Lisbon to New York by Pan American Airways from Lisbon, then air across America to the West coast, then sea across the Pacific, it carried the correct franking of 30c surface + 70c fee for the combined route (Kohl confirms).

The cover carries a "Zuruck" return to sender cachet which has been struck out, but the cover did eventually make the journey as can be seen from the Australian censor label. However; what a journey, and what treatment at the hands of the various censor stations. What story does it tell?



A secret report held at the National Archive in File DEFE 1/19 "Instructions to overseas examiners" provides the answers.

Extract from DEFE 1/19 "Instructions to Overseas Examiners".

*"Swiss Postal Censorship and Recent German Censorship of Swiss Mail.*

*It has been observed in this section, during the last few weeks, that the mail from Switzerland posted after the occupation of the whole of France by Germany has not only all been censored by the Germans but has received a quite abnormal amount of attention in the German Censorship.*

*The large batch of air mail now being examined at P.C.B. & S.E. Holborn, was de-routed to Berlin (Auslandsbriefprüfstelle 'b') and there subjected to major testing, a number of different tests being applied in each case. Every enclosure was tested and also every cover, the inside of the cover having sometimes a separate test.....*

*The mail in question bears dates varying from November 1942 to the last week in January 1943. The earlier mail all appears to be stamped in French and German "Postal Service Suspended", and it appears that this mail was either held by the Swiss Postal Authorities, or returned to sender and afterwards re-posted.....*

*It therefore appears that most of the mail from Switzerland is not being routed direct via the Lufthansa Line via Stuttgart, nor is it being examined by the German Censorship in Frankfurt and Munich, as has usually been the case with any mail seen here that has been sent by that line. It was no doubt diverted for the purpose of special scrutiny."*

As can clearly be seen from inspection of the cover, it has definitely been subjected to "special scrutiny". The cover has obviously been opened out fully, checked for secret writing using chemical washes and then re-assembled incorrectly. The upper and lower flaps on the back of the cover are in reverse order and both overlap the blue chemical stain, showing that the stain was applied to a fully opened envelope. The blue stain on the front of the cover extends under the left-hand adhesive, indicating that the stamp has been lifted and replaced.

As for the journey to Australia it seems reasonable to assume that the mail was "de-routed" (I like that expression) via Berlin before forwarding to Lisbon to connect with the Pan American service to New York. At this time of year the Pan American clippers were flying the winter combined FAM-18 / "LATI substitute" route from Lisbon to Bolama, then Fisherman's Lake-Natal-Belem-Trinidad-San Juan-Bermuda. At Bermuda the mail was off-loaded for examination and the cover bears the PC-90 of Examiner 3706. After examination the mail was re-loaded, although not necessarily on the same aircraft and conveyed to New York. Since Pan American had no domestic US route allocations, mail for the West coast would be carried by either TWA or United Air Lines to California, from where carriage across the Pacific would be by surface.

Not content with the censor examination at Berlin and Bermuda, the Australians opened and re-sealed the cover over the OKW label. Infuriatingly, although there is a faint Australian New South Wales c.d.s. the date is unreadable, so it is not possible to determine the journey time – but at least it arrived, and the report in DEFE 1/19 clarifies the exceptional amount of attention this mail received.

John Wilson  
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# Trans-Atlantic Air mail

Switzerland to Australia via USA air/sea route 1942



- Route:** Zurich diverted to Berlin then Lisbon-Bolama-Natal-Belem-Trinidad-San Juan-Bermuda-New York by Pan American. New York-California by TWA. California to Australia by sea.
- Rate:** 30c surface. 70c air fee to California. Total 1 Rp.
- Censor:** Subjected to special scrutiny in Berlin. Off loaded at Bermuda, Examiner 3706. Again examined on arrival in Australia, Censor S169 in Sydney.
- Features:** In November and December 1942, following Operation Torch and German occupation of the whole of France, mail from Switzerland was diverted for "special attention" in Berlin, where covers were opened out for detailed checks by the OKW as evidenced in this cover being re-assembled incorrectly. Back flaps of envelope inside-out and on top of chemical stain. Stamps lifted and replaced overlapping chemical stain on front of cover.

