

Chapter 14: End of Service to / from Australia

14.1 February 1942 Flights from Durban to Calcutta

NE 161 on 31st January was the last through flight from Durban to Sydney. From NE 162 onwards, scheduled flights terminated in Calcutta. It appears that mail for destinations up to and including India on the January dispatches from London was flown from Durban.

This is supported by the cover in Figure 14.1 sent from the UK on 20th December 1941 that was delivered in Tehran on 6th March 1942. The next London dispatch was on 3rd January and was sent on the *Otranto* to Durban on 10th January – 13th February. The *Khandalla* sailed from Durban on 17th February and did not get to Bombay until 4th March which is too late to get to Tehran by 6th March. The cover must therefore have been flown from Durban.

Possibilities are NE 166, NE 167 or NE 168 leaving Durban respectively on 18th, 21st or 25th February and arriving in Cairo on 21st, 24th, 28th February. From 3rd November 1941, BOAC had flown a weekly service Cairo – Habbaniyeh – Tehran [Da1, Win] using *Lockheed Lodestar* aircraft. As there would still be pressure on the air mail services, it is likely that commercial mail would be delayed at Durban. A likely scenario is that this cover was flown on NE 168 and then from Cairo on 4th or 5th March.



Figure 14.1: UK to Teheran postmarked 20th December 1941. Flown Durban – Cairo & Cairo – Tehran, arrived 6th March 1942.

Details for the February air mail dispatches from Durban are in the following tables. One flight went on to Rangoon and one to Port Blair.

NE 162

Durban	dep	4 Feb	Ceres
Mozambique	o'n	4-5 Feb	Ceres
Port Bell	o'n	5-6 Feb	Ceres
Khartoum	o'n	6-7 Feb	Ceres
Cairo	o'n	7-8 Feb	Ceres
Basra	o'n	8-9 Feb	Ceres
Karachi	o'n	9-10 Feb	Ceres
Gwalior	o'n	10-11 Feb	Ceres
Allahabad	o'n	11-12 Feb	Ceres
Calcutta	arr	12 Feb	Ceres

NE 164

Durban	dep	11 Feb	Carpentaria
Mozambique	o'n	11-12 Feb	Carpentaria
Port Bell	o'n	12-13 Feb	Carpentaria
Juba	o'n	13-14 Feb	Carpentaria
Khartoum	arr	14 Feb	Carpentaria
Khartoum	dep	15 Feb	Coorong
Cairo	o'n	15-16 Feb	Coorong
Basra	o'n	16-17 Feb	Coorong
Karachi	o'n	17-19 Feb	Coorong
Calcutta	o'n	19-20 Feb	Coorong
Port Blair	arr	20 Feb	Coorong

NE 166

Durban	dep	18 Feb	Corsair
Mozambique	o'n	18-19 Feb	Corsair
Port Bell	o'n	19-20 Feb	Corsair
Khartoum	o'n	20-21 Feb	Corsair
Cairo	o'n	21-22 Feb	Corsair
Basra	o'n	22-23 Feb	Corsair
Karachi	o'n	23-24 Feb	Corsair
Calcutta	o'n	24 Feb	Corsair

NE 168

Durban	dep	25 Feb	Cameronian
Mozambique	o'n	26-27 Feb	Cameronian
Port Bell	o'n	26-27 Feb	Cameronian
Khartoum	o'n	27-28 Feb	Cameronian
Cairo	o'n	28/2-1/3	Cameronian
Habbaniyeh	o'n	1-2 Mar	Cameronian
Dubai	o'n	2-3 Mar	Cameronian
Karachi	o'n	3-4 Mar	Cameronian
Calcutta	o'n	4 Mar	Cameronian

NE 163

Durban	dep	7 Feb	Coorong
Mozambique	o'n	7-8 Feb	Coorong
Port Bell	o'n	8-9 Feb	Coorong
Khartoum	o'n	9-10 Feb	Coorong
Cairo	arr	10 Feb	Coorong
Cairo	dep	11 Feb	Cleopatra
Basra	o'n	11-12 Feb	Cleopatra
Karachi	o'n	12-13 Feb	Cleopatra
Calcutta	o'n	14-16 Feb	Cleopatra
Rangoon	arr	16 Feb	Cleopatra extra

NE 165

Durban	dep	14 Feb	Canopus
Mozambique	o'n	14-15 Feb	Coorong
Port Bell	o'n	15-16 Feb	Coorong
Khartoum	o'n	16-17 Feb	Coorong
Cairo	arr	17 Feb	Coorong
Cairo	dep	18 Feb	Carpentaria
Basra	o'n	18-19 Feb	Carpentaria
Karachi	o'n	19-20 Feb	Carpentaria
Calcutta	arr	20 Feb	Carpentaria

NE 167

Durban	dep	21 Feb	Cooe
Mozambique	o'n	21-22 Feb	Cooe
Port Bell	o'n	22-23 Feb	Cooe
Khartoum	o'n	23-24 Feb	Cooe
Cairo	o'n	24-26 Feb	Cooe
Tiberias	o'n	26-27 Feb	Cooe weather
Habbaniyeh	o'n	27-28 Feb	Cooe
Karachi	o'n	28/2-1/3	Cooe
Calcutta	arr	1 March	Cooe

A cover from the UK postmarked on 9th January 1942 is addressed to Bombay where it arrived on 7th April. It presumably left London on the dispatch of 14th January and went on the *Sagaing* which arrived in South Africa on 12th March. It is not clear if it was flown from Durban or was sent to Bombay by sea.

An airmail *Active Service* cover to Bombay postmarked *FPO No 22* on 4th February 1942 and franked with 8 annas in Indian stamps has manuscript on the back suggests that the FPO was in Iraq. It has a Bombay receiver on 26th February and so may have been flown on *NE 166*.

14.2 End of Australia and New Zealand Services

From 5th February 1942, the route from the UK to Australia and New Zealand was changed and it was across the Atlantic by air to USA, air within USA and then by sea [OMB42]. The rate remained at 1s 3d. There had been complaints about the air mail service between the UK and New Zealand being no better than the surface route [AMS, Cla2], but these were soon replaced by complaints about the new service via USA [Leg2].

The suspension of all external air mail except that to New Zealand was announced by the Australian Post Office on 2nd February and reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 4th February. Air mail for Britain would now go by sea to the USA and be flown from there at a rate of 2s 1d. Mail to the Netherlands East Indies and Singapore was officially re-instated on 6th February, no doubt due to complaints from the Australian Forces in Singapore, but despite the good intentions, there were no further mail flights to Singapore.

Although the suspension of external air mail services was announced by the Australian Post Office on 2nd February, a final report to that effect was not published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* until 20th February [Tro]. It announced that there was still an air mail service to the Netherlands East Indies, but that seems more like wishful thinking than reality.

Watt shows an air mail cover addressed to Singapore and postmarked in Sydney on 9th February 1942 with a *Not Transmissible / Service Suspended* cachet [Wat2].

In early February, there were two dispatches by sea from Singapore to Batavia and by air from there to Darwin. On 9th February, orders were received by the *A.I.F.* postal staff in Singapore to destroy all records. On 14th February, some postal staff were evacuated by boat with the remaining mails. After various problems, they arrived at Fremantle on 27th February and handed the mails to the *Perth Army Post Office*. A description of *A.I.F.* postal units in Malaya, together with information of the last mails from Singapore, is given by Wade [Wad].

A cover postmarked in Singapore on 6th February and addressed to Katoomba in New South Wales has *Recd 12 March* in manuscript. It was sent from Singapore on the 14th February evacuation and then delayed in Perth as the Editor's footnote in [Wad] refers to the book by General Gordon Bennet where he states that the mail reached Australia on 12th March which presumably refers to when it was delivered.

The first service from Sydney that did not fly all the way to Durban was *WS 161* which has already been shown. It proceeded as far as Broome. Two further services left Sydney, but did not proceed very far. Service *WS 162* left on 11th February, but only progressed as far as Darwin. A non-connecting flight with the same number flew Calcutta – Durban on 12th – 20th February. Service *WS 163* flew only as far as Brisbane on 16th February while the non-connecting service with the same number started from Calcutta on the 17th. *Cleopatra* had flown from Rangoon to Calcutta on 16th – 17th February, but that seems to have been a special flight.

A cover postmarked in Burma on 8th February was addressed to Devakotah (near Madras) with a receiving backstamp on 22nd February and a Madras (*D*) censor mark. It was either flown from Rangoon to Calcutta on 16th – 17th February or it went to India by sea.

WS 162

Sydney	dep	11 Feb	Circe	
Townsville	o'n	11-12 Feb	Circe	
Karumba	o'n	12-13 Feb	Circe	
Darwin	arr	13 Feb	Circe	end
Calcutta	dep	12 Feb	Ceres	nc
Karachi	o'n	12-14 Feb	Ceres	
Basra	o'n	14-15 Feb	Ceres	
Cairo	arr	15 Feb	Ceres	
Cairo	dep	16 Feb	Cameronian	
Khartoum	o'n	16-17 Feb	Cameronian	
Kisumu	o'n	17-18 Feb	Cameronian	
Mozambique	o'n	18-19 Feb	Cameronian	
Vaalbank	o'n	19-20 Feb	Cameronian	
Durban	o'n	20 Feb	Cameronian	

WS 163

Sydney	dep	16 Feb	Corinthian	
Brisbane	arr	16 Feb	Corinthian	end
Rangoon	dep	16 Feb	Cleopatra	nc
Akyab	o'n	16-17 Feb	Cleopatra	
Calcutta	o'n	17-18 Feb	Cleopatra	
Karachi	o'n	18-19 Feb	Cleopatra	
Basra	o'n	19-20 Feb	Cleopatra	
Cairo	arr	20 Feb	Cleopatra	
Cairo	dep	21 Feb	Canopus	
Khartoum	o'n	21-22 Feb	Canopus	
Kisumu	o'n	22-23 Feb	Canopus	
Mozambique	o'n	23-24 Feb	Canopus	
Vaalbank	o'n	24-25 Feb	Canopus	
Durban	o'n	25 Feb	Canopus	

Services now continued from Calcutta although there was also a flight from Port Blair.

WS 164

Calcutta	dep	21 Feb	Carpentaria
Karachi	o'n	21-22 Feb	Carpentaria
Basra	o'n	22-23 Feb	Carpentaria
Cairo	o'n	23-24 Feb	Carpentaria
Khartoum	o'n	24-25 Feb	Carpentaria
Kisumu	o'n	25-26 Feb	Carpentaria
Mozambique	o'n	26-27 Feb	Carpentaria
Vaalbank	o'n	27-28 Feb	Carpentaria
Durban	arr	28-29 Feb	Carpentaria

WS 165

Port Blair	dep	21 Feb	Coorong
Calcutta	o'n	21-22 Feb	Coorong
Karachi	o'n	22-23 Feb	Coorong
Basra	o'n	23-24 Feb	Coorong
Cairo	o'n	24-26 Feb	Coorong
Khartoum	o'n	26-27 Feb	Coorong
Kisumu	o'n	27-28 Feb	Coorong
Mozambique	o'n	28/2-1/3	Coorong
Vaalbank	o'n	1-2 Mar	Coorong
Durban	arr	2 Mar	Coorong

The final dispatch of air mail from New Zealand troops in Egypt was on 5th February and arrived in New Zealand on 25th February, which ties in with it being sent from Cairo by *NE 160* on 6th February or by *KLM* from Lydda on 12th February. It was 24th February before the troops were told that the airmail service to New Zealand had been suspended [Sta]. The *NZEF* cover in Figure 14.2 is postmarked on 11th February.

The *Auckland Star* on 28th March reported that no mail from the Middle East had arrived since 25th February and it is not clear when such air mail posted in Egypt after 5th February was eventually delivered.

There had been a concessionary airmail rate of 9d for airmail from New Zealand to servicemen in the Middle East, but this was removed on 6th February with the rate now being 5d as the mail was only flown from New Zealand to Australia [AS, EP, Sta]. The report in the *Auckland Star* on 6th February recommended the use of the 2d all surface route to troops in the Middle East as that would be as fast as the partial airmail 5d rate. A virtually identical report was published in the Wellington *Evening Post* of 26th February suggesting that a significant amount of mail was still being posted at the 9d rate [EP]. An example postmarked on 10th February 1942, franked with 9d and addressed to the Middle East is shown in Figure 14.3.



Figure 14.2: N.Z.E.F. – New Zealand postmarked 11th February 1942, missed last air mail.



Figure 14.3: New Zealand – N.Z.E.F. postmarked 10th February 1942, but still franked with 9d.

A cover from Dunedin, New Zealand postmarked 16th February 1942 addressed to a Pilot Officer at the Royal Air Force Station in Batavia and franked with 9d has a boxed cachet *Undeliverable as Addressed*, and a *Service Suspended / Return to Sender* cachet plus two other *Return to Sender* cachets within a hand with a pointing finger.

The surrender of Singapore was on 15th February and from *NE 162* onwards, the *Horseshoe* service terminated in Calcutta. There was a Tjilatjap – Broome shuttle until 28th February with the last flights being by *Circe* and *Coriolanus* when *Circe* was lost without trace. These shuttle flights were largely concerned with war supplies and the evacuation of women, children and the wounded from the Dutch East Indies rather than carrying commercial mail. Partial air mail services from New Zealand to the UK (via the Pacific) after February 1942 are described in [Cla3].

On 3rd March, 15 flying boats were anchored in Broome when it was attacked by the Japanese. All 15 were sunk. Most belonged to the *RAAF*, but the number included *Corinna*. *Corinthian* crashed shortly afterwards at Darwin on 22nd March [HM].