

Chapter 3: Alternatives to the *Horseshoe Route* in mid June 1940

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes air mail sent after Italy entered WW2 which may have been expected to be sent by the *Horseshoe Route*, but which was not.

3.2 Air mail sent by sea after 10th June

We have already discussed what happened to air mail that was already in transit and had yet to cross the Mediterranean. Alternative arrangements were also made for air mail that was posted in the UK after 10th June ‘*notwithstanding the notification of the suspension of the air mail service*’.

Mail for Nigeria and the Gold Coast was to be sent by the French air service. According to the *GPO Overseas Mail Branch Report (OMB) 40* of 15th June, all other mail was to be sent by surface [OMB 40]. However, the mail for India seems to have been held back and sent by air as shown by the cover in Figure 6.10 postmarked in Falmouth on 10th June with a Lahore backstamp on 16th July. A similar cover postmarked in Peebles, Scotland on 11th June has a Simla backstamp on 17th July. Both were sent on the first *Horseshoe* service from UK and so arrived before a surface mail cover to India postmarked in Peebles on 12th June that has an arrival datestamp on 1st August and so was likely carried on the *City of Venice* that left Liverpool on 15th June and arrived in Bombay on 27th July.



Figure 3.1: Cover to Singapore postmarked in UK on 11th June.

The cover to Singapore in Figure 3.1 was likely sent by sea. It is postmarked on 11th June 1940 and was likely carried on the *Ascanius* of the *Holt Line* which left Liverpool on 15th June and arrived in Singapore on 3rd August and Hong Kong on 10th August [CW]. (*OMB 40* reported that mail was sent to Malaya, Hong Kong and China that week by a ship of the *Holt Line*.) The Singapore press reported on 3rd August that surface mail from the UK was being delivered to boxholders on 4th August and that there would be a general delivery on Monday 5th August [SN].

A cover to Saigon that was postmarked in the UK on 14th June has a Hanoi transit on 26th August. It must therefore have been sent by sea, but its route is not clear although it may have been sent via Hong Kong on the *Ascanius* which had arrived there on 10th August. Another cover from UK to Saigon is shown in Figure 6.11. It is postmarked on 18th June and was sent on the first *Horseshoe* dispatch from UK and has a Hanoi transit on 20th July, more than a month before the earlier cover.

3.3 Mail to New Zealand and Australia sent via USA

According to *OMB 41* of 22nd June [OMB40]:

- on 15th June, air mail for Australia and New Zealand was dispatched to Lisbon and then via air mail to San Francisco,
- on 17th June, air mail for Australia was dispatched by surface,
- on 18th June, air mail for New Zealand, Australia, Hong Kong and China flown via the USA,
- first *Horseshoe* dispatch on 19th June,
- on 21st June, air mail for New Zealand and Fiji was dispatched by surface.

As the weekly *Horseshoe* service did not have the capacity to deal with the demand, such alternative arrangements continued after 19th June and a list is given at the end of Chapter 6. The first *Horseshoe* dispatch on 19th June was on the *Arundel Castle* which left Southampton on 20th June [CW].

Several covers sent by Francis Field from Birmingham on 14th June were backstamped at Carterton in New Zealand on 16th July. Such a cover is shown in Figure 3.2. Both Walker [Wal] and Boyle [Boy] show similar covers with the statement that they were carried on the first *Horseshoe* service from Britain. Another similar cover is shown by Legg [Leg1], but he demonstrates that it must have been sent via the USA as the first *Horseshoe* mail from the UK did not arrive in Sydney until 24th July.

OMB 40 on 15th June [OMB40] gives the details:

“air mail correspondence for Australia and New Zealand to be forwarded by the North Atlantic air service which is due to leave Lisbon on the 20th of June for onward conveyance from San Francisco by the *S.S. Monterey* which is due to leave San Francisco on the 25th June and to reach Auckland on the 12th July and Sydney on the 15th of July.”

However, the *Monterey* was delayed at San Francisco for 24 hours due to an industrial dispute with radio operators and arrived in Auckland on Saturday 13th July where it was further delayed due to an industrial dispute with dockers, not leaving until 11pm that day [EP].

OMB 41 on 22nd June stated:

“... such air mail correspondence on hand for Australia and New Zealand as could be accommodated on the London – Lisbon air service, was despatched via the Trans-Atlantic air service to New York and San Francisco, for onward conveyance by surface route across the Pacific.”

OMB 42 on 29th June reported that mails dispatched by the UK – Lisbon flight of 15th June were flown Lisbon – New York on 19th – 20th June while mails dispatched by the UK – Lisbon flight of 19th June were flown Lisbon – New York on 21st – 22nd June. The flight to Lisbon on 15th June was the fourth and last of the regular Heston – Bordeaux – Lisbon service by *DH 91 Albatross* landplanes. The flight to Lisbon on 19th June was Poole – Lisbon by flying boat.



Figure 3.2: Cover postmarked 14th June sent by Francis Field, backstamped Carterton on 16th July.

The postcard in Figure 3.3, addressed to Australia, is postmarked in UK on 11th June 1940 and would have been sent via USA on the same service as the cover to Carterton. The *Monterey* arrived in Sydney on 16th July. The date 17/7/40 is on the front in manuscript and is likely when it was delivered in Sydney.

The modified air mail service that was now available between UK and Australia/New Zealand was often no better than the service by surface. For example, a cover from Britain franked with 2½d for surface mail, postmarked in London on 11th June and redirected 41 days later in Perth on 22nd July is shown in [Wat3]. It therefore arrived in Perth before the first mail from the UK on the *Horseshoe* service as that did not arrive in Darwin until 22nd July. There was a dispatch of surface mail for Australia on 17th June. The *Empire Star* left Liverpool on 19th June and arrived in Fremantle on 22nd July [CW] and so likely carried this mail.

The cover in Figure 3.4 is postmarked in New Zealand on 15th June 1940. If it had been flown trans-Tasman on the flight of 17th June, it would have been flown on the first *Horseshoe* flight from Australia on 19th June. However, as New Zealand had decided to send air mail franked with 1s 6d to the UK by surface, it was likely sent by sea probably via the Pacific. Various alternative air mail services between New Zealand and the UK in June / July 1940 are described in [Cla1, Cla2].



Figure 3.3: Postcard postmarked 11th June sent to Australia via USA.



Figure 3.4: New Zealand to UK postmarked 15th June 1940, franked 1s 6d.

3.4 Forces Mail

The *Active Service Honour* envelope in Figure 3.5 is postmarked on 10th June at *Field Post Office 121* in Palestine and is franked with 25 mils, the air mail rate from Haifa to Rome by *Ala Littoria* or Lydda to Naples by *KLM [Boy]*. It has *By Air and Surface* in manuscript and so the intention would be for it to be flown to Italy and be sent from there to Britain by surface. As all air services were suspended on

10th June, it would be sent to Egypt. The mail from *Imperial Airways SW 246* was unloaded in Alexandria on 10th June and this cover likely went by the same route.



Figure 3.5: Cover from Palestine postmarked 10th June and franked with 25 mils. Intended for *Ala Littoria* or *KLM* to Italy and then by surface.

On 17th June, the Australian Press published a report from Gaza that the air mail service to and from Australia had been suspended and how this had disappointed *A.I.F.* troops. Surface mail remained very poor. As already described in the discussion on *SW 246*, the Red Sea was closed to shipping on 24th May and this had a major effect on surface mail to the troops. The first inward convoy *BN1* did not arrive in Suez until 12th July while *BN2* arrived on 5th August. The Australian press reported that the first sea mail for 2½ months arrived in Gaza on 11th August which ties in with it being carried on *BN2* and that it was the first sea mail since the closure of Red Sea to shipping on 24th May.

3.5 Mail from France

The cover in Figure 3.6 is postmarked in France on 18th June in the period between the fall of Paris on 14th June and the signing of the Armistice with Germany on 22nd June. It is addressed to Australia. The intention would be for it to be flown by *Imperial Airways* from Marseilles, but the last through service from there was on 9th June. As it has a Marseilles *Jusqu'a* cancellation, it was sent to Marseilles, but the journey to Australia would then be by surface, likely via Lisbon.



Figure 3.6: France to Australia, postmarked 18th June 1940, likely sent by surface mail.

3.6 Mail from India

The air mail cover in Figure 3.7 is postmarked in Bombay on 23rd June 1940 and is addressed to Suffolk. It would be expected to have been sent to Karachi to be flown on the first *Horseshoe* service that left there on 26th June with the mail arriving in the UK on 21st July, but it seems that the local post office was unaware that air mail services were being resumed as the *Received 26 Aug* in manuscript on the front suggests that it was sent to the UK by sea.

I have a registered letter postmarked in Calcutta on 19th June that was sent by surface mail to London and which has *Received 24.8.40* in manuscript on the front. That is consistent with the previous date and so they could have both been sent to the UK on the same ship, likely from Bombay. The *Largs Bay* left Bombay on 4th July and arrived in Cardiff on 21st August and so is a possible candidate.



Figure 3.7: Bombay to UK postmarked 23rd June 1940, likely sent by sea.