

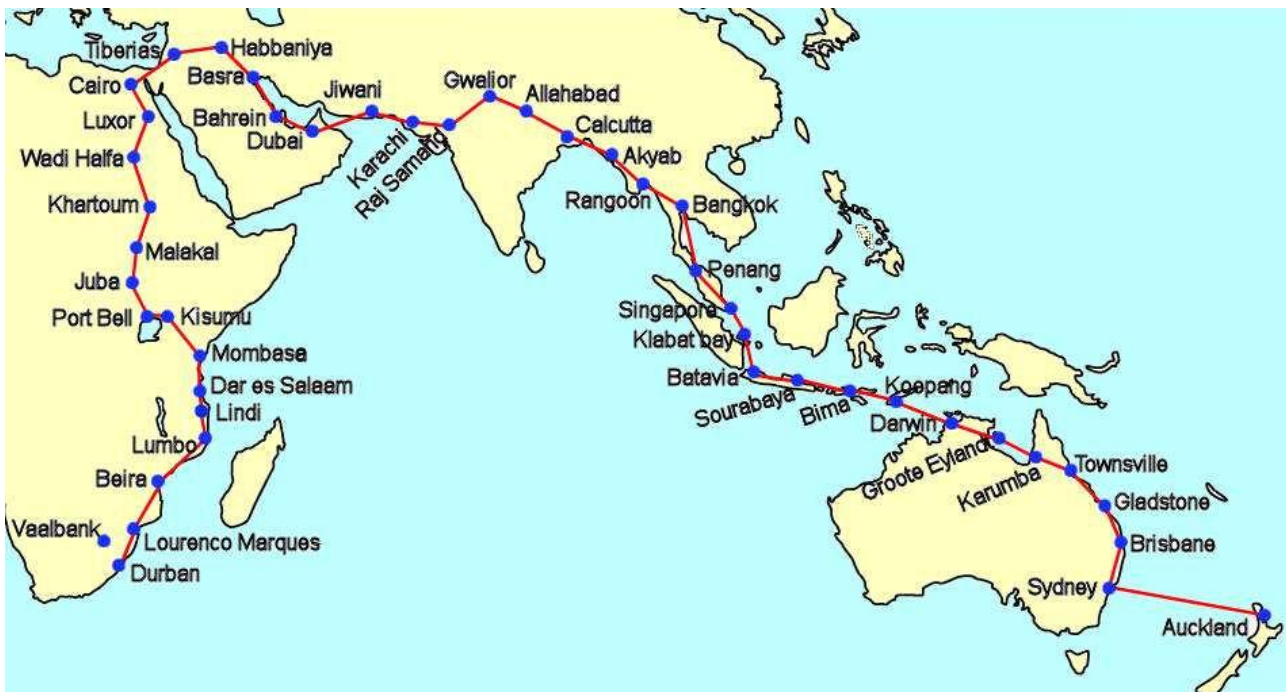
Chapter 5: First *Horseshoe* Services: 19th June 1940

5.1 Introduction

When Italy entered the Second World War on June 10th 1940, the airmail services between both Australia and Africa and the United Kingdom were cut as the route through the Mediterranean was no longer available for allied flights although axis flights continued after a brief pause. *Empire Air Services* were suspended on 11th June, but air mail that was already on route from the UK to Australia and South Africa completed its journey and the *trans-Tasman* airmail service between New Zealand and Australia continued. As described in Chapter 2, air mail en route from Australia and South Africa to UK and which had still to cross the Mediterranean was dumped at various intermediate and most continued their journey by surface.

Two replacement routes had been planned, a landplane service across the Sahara and the *Horseshoe Route* via South Africa. The land plane service via the Sahara lasted less than a fortnight until it was terminated as France no longer allowed British planes to fly over French territory after 28th June.

BOAC ground engineers with their equipment were already on their way to South Africa by sea when Italy declared war [HM]. Within eight days, the new service between Australia and the UK was set up and became known as the *Horseshoe Route*. Air mail from New Zealand and Australia was flown by the previous route via Singapore and India to Cairo and from there to Durban in South Africa. The route was then to Cape Town and from there to the UK by sea. The first *Horseshoe* services in each direction left Durban and Sydney on 19th June.



The full *Horseshoe* route (with overnight stops in bold) was Sydney (Rose Bay), Brisbane (Hamilton Reach), Gladstone, **Townsville**, Karumba, Grootte Eylandt, **Darwin**, Koepang, Bima, **Surabaya**, Batavia, Klabat Bay, **Singapore** (Kallang), Penang, Koh Samui, **Bangkok**, Rangoon, Akyab, **Calcutta** (Hoogly River), Allahabad (Junction of Jumna and Ganges Rivers), Gwalior, Raj Samand, **Karachi**, Jiwani, Dubai, Bahrein, **Basra**, Habbaniya, Tiberias, **Cairo**, Luxor, Wadi Halfa,

Khartoum, Kosti, Malakal, Juba, Port Bell, **Kisumu**, Mombasa, Dar es Salaam, Lindi, **Lumbo (Mozambique)**, Beira, Inhambane, Lourenco Marques, **Durban** (Congella) [Wil].

The airmail fee continued to be 1s 3d from the UK to all destinations on the route [Da1] and 1s 6d from Australia and New Zealand to the UK compared to 2d by surface. Other air mail rates are shown in Appendix 1.

Auckland – Sydney was flown by *Tasman Empire Airways (TEAL)*, Sydney – Singapore by *Qantas Empire Airways* and Singapore – Durban by *British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC)*. Eventually, around 300 staff were transferred from England to Durban to support the service [Fli].

5.2 Land Plane Flights via Sahara: 14th - 26th June

A secret internal *GPO* memo in May 1940 [AMS] refers to a letter that had been received from *BOAC* about setting up the *Horseshoe Route* in which *BOAC* had made the proposal:

“A land plane service would operate from the United Kingdom across the Sahara (perhaps to Kano in Nigeria) with branches to Khartoum and to West Africa. These services would not however be able to carry mails owing to the lack of accommodation and would take only official despatches, (i.e. bags from Government Departments) and a few official passengers. Flying boats would operate on a twice-weekly basis from Durban to Sydney via Egypt and these services would be available for mails.”

The plan was to replace the London Heston – Alexandria landplane service with a route across the Sahara using the same *Lockheed 14* aircraft. No commercial air mail would be carried and it would connect with the *Horseshoe Route* in Cairo [HM]. The aircraft were: *Livingstone G-AFGP*, *Lothair G-AFKE*, *Lafayette G-AFGR* and *Leander G-AFMR*.

The data from the *BOAC Aircraft Movement Charts* show the first flight *ES 1* leaving Heston on 14th June while another chart gives *ES 1* the number *AE 230*. *Lafayette* had arrived in Alexandria on *AE 228* on 8th June and had then flown to Cairo on 11th June before flying on *EN 1*.

ES 1				EN 1			
Whitchurch	dep	13 Jun	Leander	Cairo	dep	17 Jun	Lafayette
Heston	o'n	13-14 Jun	Leander	Khartoum	o'n	17-19 Jun	Lafayette
Lezignan	o'n	14-15 Jun	Leander	Kano	o'n	19-21 Jun	Lafayette
Aoulef	o'n	15-16 Jun	Leander	Gao	o'n	21-22 Jun	Lafayette
Gao	o'n	16-17 Jun	Leander	Oran	o'n	22-23 Jun	Lafayette
Fort Lamy	o'n	17-18 Jun	Leander	Lisbon	o'n	23-24 Jun	Lafayette
Khartoum	o'n	18-19 Jun	Leander	Exeter		24 Jun	Lafayette
Cairo	arr	19 Jun	Leander	Heston		24 Jun	Lafayette
				Whitchurch	arr	24 Jun	Lafayette

There is some variation in the routes and dates given in the literature. Most of the route was similar to the Sahara service set up by Air France and discussed in Chapter 4 where a map is shown. According to [HM], the first service left England on 15th June and entered North Africa at Oran (Algeria) and stopped at Gao (French West Africa, now Mali) and Fort Lamy (French Equatorial Africa, now Chad) before entering Sudan.

According to *Appendix B* in [Wil], between 14th and 26th June, a number of flights were made with *Lockheed 14* aircraft between Heston and Cairo. The route involved crossing the Sahara in order to avoid areas of the Mediterranean near Italy and *Appendix B* gives it as Heston – Bordeaux – Marseilles – Oran – Colomb Bechar – Aoulef Cherfa – Gao – Naimey – (Zinder) – Maiduguri – Fort Lamy – (Abecher) – El Geneina – El Fasher – (El Obeid) – Khartoum – Kareima – Wadi Halfa – Luxor – Cairo. The map in Boyle [Boy] does not include Maiduguri, Abecher, El Obeid or

Kareima. The main text in [Wil], describes the route between England and Khartoum as via Bordeaux, Lezignan (France), Oran, Gao and Fort Lamy.

CAIS 53 on 19th June also describes the start of the service on 14th June with *G-AFMR (Leander)* and adds that a flight between Khartoum and Heston was due to leave on 19th June with *G-AFGR (Lafayette)*. That fits with *EN 1* in the above table. *CAIS 53* also states that a second flight left the UK on 19th June with *G-AFKE (Lothair)* with the initial part of the route being Exeter – Lisbon direct [Win] which fits with *ES 2* below. The *BOAC Aircraft Movement Charts* show the following:

ES 2				ES 3			
Whitchurch	dep	18 Jun	Lothair	Whitchurch	dep	23 Jun	Livingstone
Heston	o'n	18-19 Jun	Lothair	Heston	o'n	23-24 Jun	Livingstone
Exeter	o'n	19 Jun	Lothair	Exeter	o'n	24 Jun	Livingstone
Lisbon	o'n	19-20 Jun	Lothair	Lisbon	o'n	24-25 Jun	Livingstone
Aoulef	o'n	20-21 Jun	Lothair	Colomb Bechar	o'n	25-26 Jun	Livingstone
Kano	o'n	21-22 Jun	Lothair	Niamey	o'n	26-27 Jun	Livingstone
El Fasher	o'n	22-23 Jun	Lothair	Kano	o'n	27-28 Jun	Livingstone
Cairo	arr	23 Jun	Lothair	Khartoum	o'n	28-29 Jun	Livingstone
				Cairo	arr	29 Jun	Livingstone

There was no service *EN 2*. The Franco – German Armistice was signed on 22nd June 1940 and came into force on 25th June. That ended the service. *Leander* on *EN 3* left Cairo on 26th June and arrived in Kano (Nigeria) on 27th June. On 28th June a ban was imposed on *BOAC* flying over French colonial territory and so *Leander* did not continue on its route to Heston. Instead it flew Kano – Bamako (Mali) on *RAF* instructions on 29th June and then to Dakar in Senegal on 30th June returning to Bamako later that day and then to Kano on 1st July.

5.3 Setting up the Horseshoe Service

A secret internal *GPO* memo in May 1940 [AMS] refers to a letter that had been received from *BOAC* about setting up the *Horseshoe Route* in which *BOAC* had made the proposal:

“Flying boats would operate on a twice-weekly basis from Durban to Sydney via Egypt and these services would be available for mails.

The effect of this scheme would be that there would be no airmail service to South Africa, and the British Overseas Airways Corporation suggestion is that all mails for South Africa would go by surface route and that air mail for East Africa, Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, India, Burma, Malaya, Australia and New Zealand would go by surface route to Cape Town and be transferred there to the air service to Australia via Egypt. British Overseas Airways Corporation suggest also that the air mail postage of 1/3 a half ounce should be increased.”

The *GPO* memo goes on to refer to a telephone conversation with *BOAC* in which the *GPO* representative had stated that:

“...the air mail service ... would be but little better than surface transmission ... the surface transmission to Australia (Fremantle) via the Cape in present conditions might be taken as about 30-40 days, whereas surface transmission to Capetown and air transmission from Durban to Australia (Sydney) would apparently occupy about 29-31 days.”

and that:

“... the authorities would be strongly averse from increasing the present air postage rate concurrently with such a drastic deterioration in the air mail service”.

The estimated air mail transit times were actually too optimistic. Although, the *Horseshoe* service initially often took 35 days or less between London and Sydney (compared with the previous 12 days) it deteriorated after September 1940 due to delays in the UK – Cape Town service as many ships travelled in convoy between Britain and Freetown in Sierra Leone [NA]. We are left to

conclude that the *Horseshoe Route* to and from Britain was largely a public relations exercise – it was necessary on grounds of public morale for there to be an air mail service between Britain and India, Malaya and Australia.

5.4 First flights between Durban and Sydney

The dates in the tables refer to flights shown in the *BOAC aircraft movement charts* [BA]; typically the mail will have closed the previous evening. Legg reproduced a letter dated 28th August 1940 from *BOAC* to the *GPO* giving, for the first six UK dispatches, the dates of dispatch, the ship and the flight connection at Durban [Leg1]. The trans-Tasman flight dates are taken from *The Sydney Morning Herald* [Tro] and the *Evening Post* of Wellington [EP].

The first *Horseshoe* flights in each direction left Durban and Sydney on Wednesday 19th June and arrived in Sydney and Durban on Monday 1st July. From Durban, mail could continue to Britain by surface. According to Legg [Leg1], the sea journey between Cape Town and the UK was scheduled to take 18 days while Durban to Cape Town could take 3 days. As Sydney – Durban took 12 days, that gave a total of 33 days. The first *Horseshoe* dispatch from the UK was also on 19th June and it connected with the 4th flight from Durban. It is discussed in Chapter 6.

NE 1				WS 1			
Durban	dep	19 Jun	Cleopatra	Sydney	dep	19 Jun	Carpentaria
Mozambique	o'n	19-20 Jun	Cleopatra	Townsville	o'n	19-20 Jun	Carpentaria
Kisumu	o'n	20-21 Jun	Cleopatra	Darwin	o'n	20-21 Jun	Carpentaria
Khartoum	o'n	21-22 Jun	Cleopatra	Sourabaya	o'n	21-22 Jun	Carpentaria
Luxor	o'n	22-23 Jun	Cleopatra	Singapore	o'n	22-23 Jun	Carpentaria
Cairo		23 Jun	Cleopatra	Bangkok	o'n	23-24 Jun	Carpentaria
Basra	o'n	23-24 Jun	Cleopatra	Calcutta	o'n	24-25 Jun	Carpentaria
Karachi	o'n	24-25 Jun	Cleopatra	Karachi	o'n	25-26 Jun	Carpentaria
Calcutta	o'n	25-26 Jun	Cleopatra	Basra	o'n	26-27 Jun	Carpentaria
Bangkok	o'n	26-27 Jun	Cleopatra	Tiberias	o'n	27-28 Jun	Carpentaria
Singapore	arr	27 Jun	Cleopatra	Cairo		28 Jun	Carpentaria
Singapore	dep	28 Jun	Corio	Khartoum	o'n	28-29 Jun	Carpentaria
Sourabaya	o'n	28-29 Jun	Corio	Kisumu	o'n	29-30 Jun	Carpentaria
Darwin	o'n	29-30 Jun	Corio	Mozambique	o'n	30/6-1/7	Carpentaria
Townsville	o'n	30/6-1/7	Corio	Durban	arr	1 Jul	Carpentaria
Sydney	arr	1 Jul	Corio	By sea to UK 5-21 Jul Winchester Castle			

trans-Tasman 4 Jul Awarua

Sources are not clear about the means of transport between Cape Town and Durban. *South African Airways* stopped their services between 24th May and December 1940 [Wil] and so there was no air service between Cape Town and Durban. However, a confidential coded telegram from the *Dominions Office* to the *UK High Commissioner in Australia* on 4th July 1940 [EAS] has the statement:

“Mail will be transmitted by sea route to Cape Town and thence be taken by air connection to Durban whence it will be automatically forwarded by air to Sydney.”

A very upbeat statement by Hudson Fysh of *Qantas* was reported in the Australian press on Tuesday 18th June about the new service [Tro]. It was to begin from Rose Bay the following morning and:

“Except for the service once a week instead of twice a week, the service will operate on exactly the same basis as before... passengers, mail and freight to any point along the Sydney-Cairo-Durban route would be accepted, though the flight would take 12 days.”

In Singapore, this announcement given in *The Straits Times* of 20th June [SN].

The connecting mailship for mail to the UK was the *Winchester Castle* which left Cape Town on 5th July and arrived in the Clyde on 21st July [CW]. Proud lists the arrival date as 24th July [Pr], but that seems to have been when the mail was dealt with in London.

WS 1

An airmail cover postmarked in Sydney on 14th June is shown in Figure 5.1 and was likely flown on *WS 1*. An airmail cover from Palestine with a *Field Post Office 121* postmark on 22nd June and a *Passed By Censor* handstamp is shown in Figure 5.2. It was redirected in Edinburgh on 25th July and so it must have been flown on *WS 1* from either Tiberias or Cairo on 28th June. Another cover from Palestine is shown in Figure 5.3 and is franked at the double rate of 120 mils.



Figure 5.1: Airmail cover from Australia to London postmarked on 14th June 1940. Flown on *WS 1*.

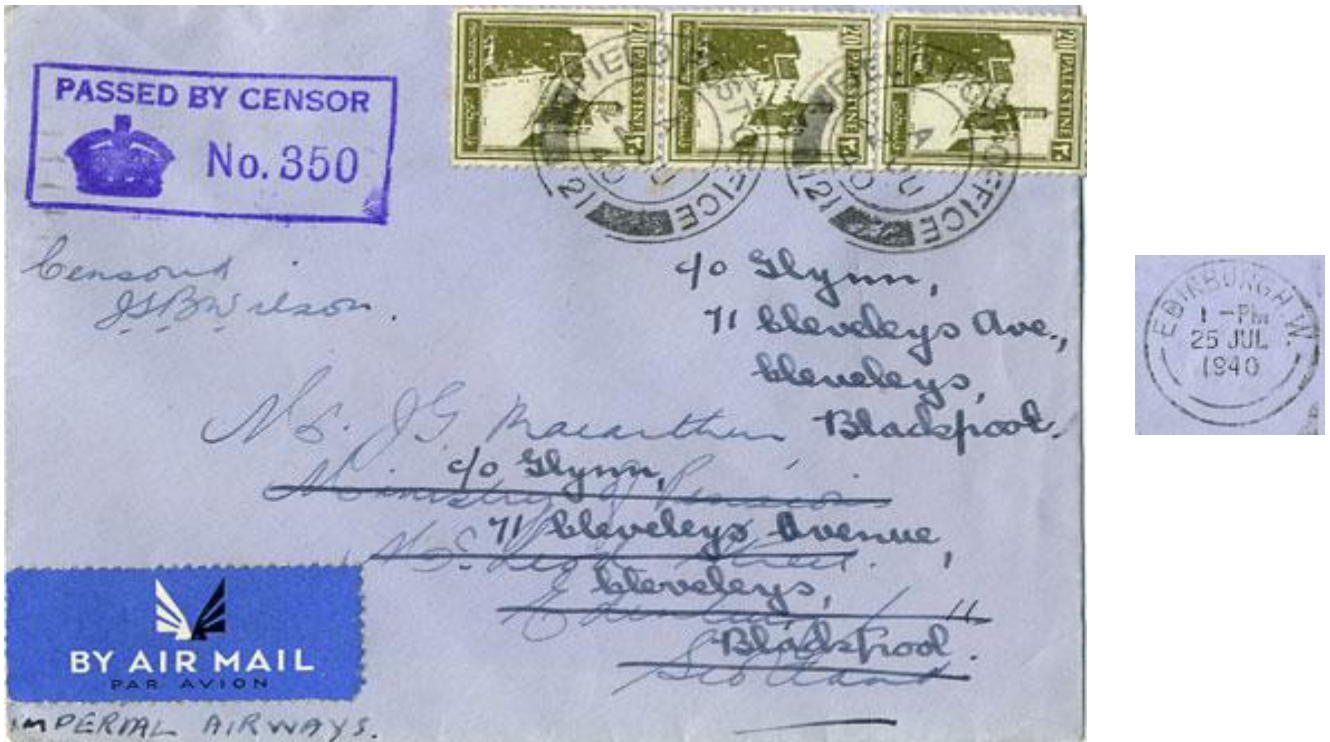


Figure 5.2: Airmail cover from Palestine postmarked on 22nd June 1940 and redirected in Edinburgh on 25th July. Flown on *WS 1*.



Figure 5.3: Airmail cover from Palestine postmarked on 22nd June 1940 Franked at double rate of 120 mils. Flown on *WS 1*.



Figure 5.4: Postmarked in Egypt on 23rd June 1940, flown on *WS 1* and sent to USA via UK.

A cover is shown in [AMN2] postmarked in New Zealand on 14th June and backstamped in Calcutta on 25th June and these dates fit with it being flown trans-Tasman to Sydney on 17th June and then on *WS 1*. Hence, although New Zealand did not accept mail for the *Horseshoe Route* to UK until late July [Wal, Cla2] they accepted air mail for intermediate destinations.

The cover in Figure 5.4 is postmarked in Egypt on 23rd June and is addressed to the USA. The air mail etiquette was cancelled in London with two red lines and so, after being flown to Durban on *WS 1* on 28th June – 1st July, it went by sea from Cape Town to the UK before being sent from there to the USA by sea.

NE 1

The cover in Figure 5.5 is postmarked in Palestine on 13th June. It was likely flown on *NE 1* on 23rd June.



Figure 5.5: Postmarked in Palestine on 13th June 1940, likely flown on *NE 1* on 23rd June.

The cover to Australia in Figure 5.6 is postmarked in Rangoon on 25th June 1940. It is franked with 14 annas, the rate from India and Burma [Br], and was likely flown on *NE 1* from Rangoon on 26th June. It would be off-loaded in Darwin on 29th June and flown from there to Adelaide by *Guinea Airways* on 30th June and from Adelaide to Melbourne on 1st July. It was opened by the censors in Melbourne as shown by the 3 red dots.



Figure 5.6: Postmarked in Rangoon on 25th June 1940, flown on *NE 1* on 26th June.

Hong Kong Connections

The Hong Kong – Bangkok service from June until October 1940 is listed in Appendix 4. Crewe and Halewood show covers with London and Brechin, Scotland redirection marks on 24th and 25th July respectively that have a Hong Kong postmark of 11th June [Cre4, Hal]. They would be held in Hong Kong and flown to Bangkok on *HB 248* on 23rd June to connect with *WS 1*.

Mail from Sydney addressed to Hong Kong on *WS 1* would be sent from Bangkok on 24th June on *BH 247*. Mail for Sydney sent from Hong Kong to Bangkok on 26th June on *HB 249* would connect there with *NE 1*. Incoming mail for Hong Kong from Durban arriving in Bangkok on *NE 1* on 26th June would be sent on *BH 248* on 27th June.

A cover postmarked in Calcutta on 21st June and addressed to Dran Haut-Donnai in Indo China has a Saigon transit on 3rd July and Hue on 4th July. It would have been flown Calcutta – Bangkok on 26th June on *NE 1*. There were *BOAC* flights from Bangkok to Hong Kong via Hanoi: *BH 248* on 27th June and *BH 249* on 1st July. *NE 1* would connect with *BH 248*, but the Saigon transit date suggests that the cover may have been flown on *BH 249*.