

A different look at Bermuda Air Mail

Horst Augustinovic

Bermuda's fascination with Aviation and a time when Air Mail still arrived by ship

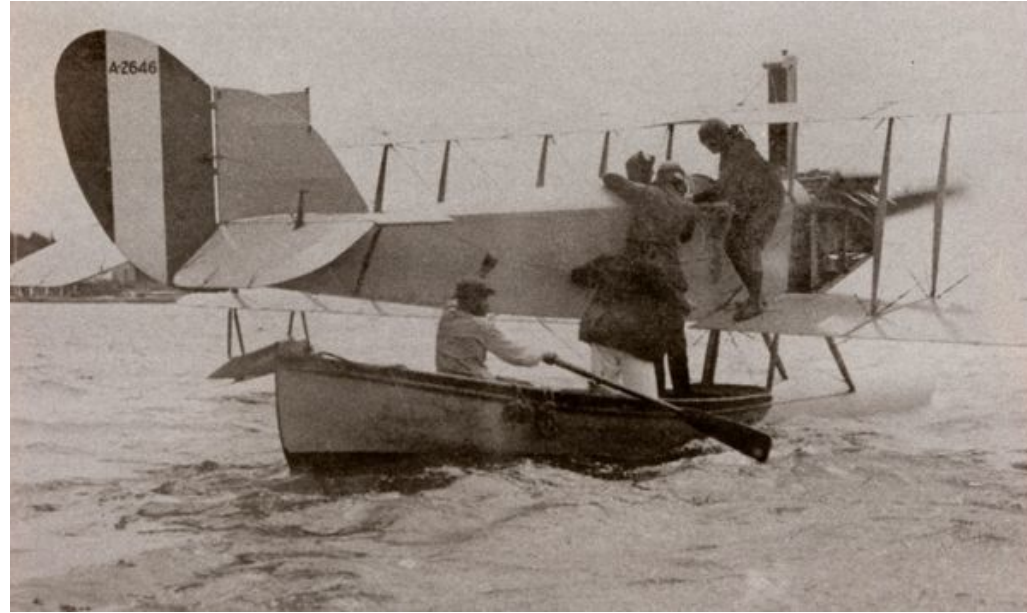
Living on one of the most isolated islands in the world, it is not surprising that Bermudians were excited when the first plane flew over the island in 1919, and welcomed all the innovations that followed so rapidly. As air routes were developed all over the world, Bermudians began to receive air mail in the early 1930s but had to wait until 1938 until air mail was finally flown from New York to Bermuda. And then there is the war-time air mail, all of which made for some interesting instructional markings, but also raises a number of questions.

GOVERNMENT HOUSE,
BERMUDA.

A Message of Goodwill
to the people of Bermuda from
General Willcocks, former - Com.
Mander-in-Chief and Vice Admiral
In and OVER (specially OVER)
these Islands.

from. Seaplane.
United States Navy.

22nd May 1919.



General Willcocks
climbing aboard the
Curtiss 'Jenny' in
Hamilton Harbour.

It was during May of 1919 that an American astronomical expedition, en route to the South Atlantic to observe a solar eclipse, was forced to call at Bermuda for engine repairs. On board the 'S.S. Elinor' was Professor David Todd of Amherst College, head of the expedition and friend of Bermuda's Governor, General Sir James Willcocks. When the two met, General Willcocks mentioned his ambition to be the first to take a birds-eye view of Bermuda. After all, his official title designated him 'Governor of and over the Somers Isles'.

The 'Message of Goodwill to the people of Bermuda' dropped by Governor Sir James Willcocks from the first plane to ever fly above Bermuda. I consider it Bermuda's first air letter.

*General Willcocks sends Best Wishes for
Christmas 1919 and the New Year from an
Aeroplane over
Bermuda*



To

Goodwin Goshing

*His Excellency the Governor
Bermuda*

This postcard shows the Curtiss 'Jenny' while flying over Bermuda. It was used by General Willcocks as his Christmas card in 1919.



In 1983 this first flight above Bermuda led to the design of the 12¢ stamp in the 'Bicentenary of Manned Flight' series.

It so happened that a seaplane formed part of the expedition's equipment, and it was quickly decided to make the Governor's wish come true. On the following day, Thursday, May 22nd, 1919, the Curtiss N-9H 'Jenny' was lowered from the 'S.S. Elinor', and amidst great excitement His Excellency the Governor was taken in a rowboat from the Royal Bermuda Yacht Club to the seaplane. General Willcocks then made history – he became the first person to see Bermuda from above.

630 PARK AVENUE

My dear Bernier.

I hope this will
give you the thrill of your
life time!

About ten minutes
ago I read that the "Los
Angeles" goes off this year
tomorrow morning for Ber-
muda & Carriacou Mail!



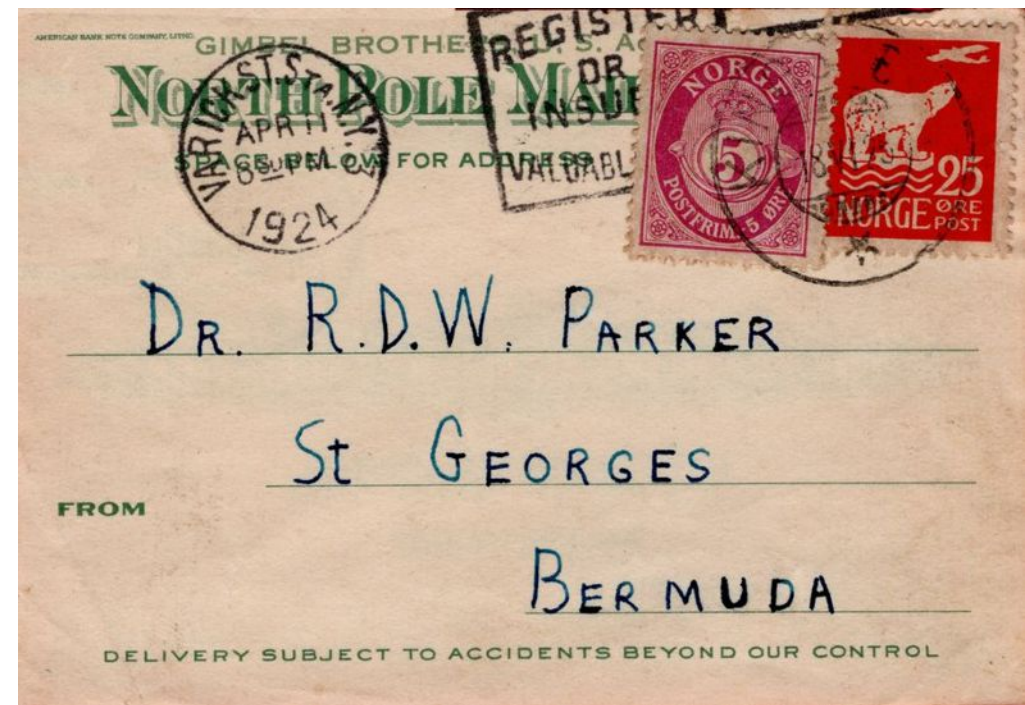
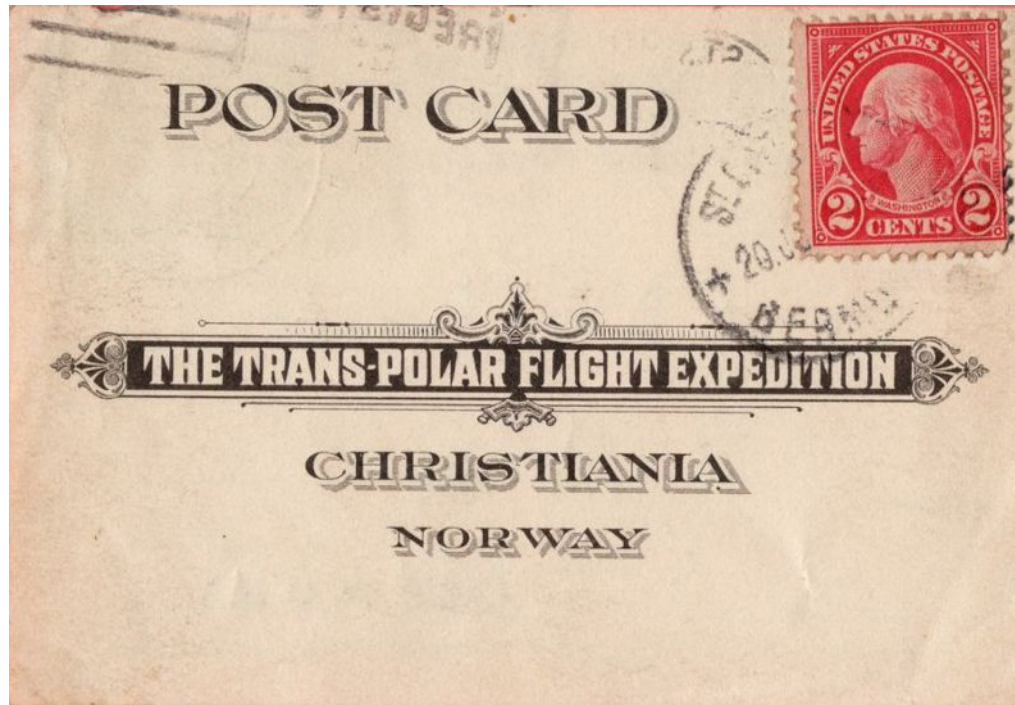
The first flight to Bermuda was made by the U.S. Navy airship ZR-3 'Los Angeles' on 21st February 1925. After a successful flight from Lakehurst, N.J., it was intended to moor the airship to the USS 'Patoka', however, this was impossible due to bad weather conditions. Before returning to Lakehurst, three mailbags were dropped overboard near the home of the Colonial Postmaster Mr. Cecil H. Tucker. Bernie Gosling's New York friend Major H.D. Collins expressed the excitement when he wrote 'I hope this will give you the thrill of your life time'.



The return flight of the 'Los Angeles' included the first air mail from Bermuda. The mail was either stamped with the three- line 'AIR MAIL / SERVICE / BERMUDA' or the two-line 'BERMUDA FIRST / OVERSEAS AIRMAIL' cachets. Sometimes both marks were used, this example showing the scarce error with the S and E reversed and the E of 'SERVICE' upside-down. It also shows the size of the handstamp – 70 x 55mm. Bernie Gosling created a great cover when he responded to his friend Major Collins.



An exchange of letters between Walfried Riihiluoma of Brighton, Massachusetts, and his future wife Idina Brown, daughter of the Postmaster of St. George's. Idina could not respond by air mail as the February flight did not carry mail on the return flight, however, she made up for it by sending Walfried a letter by 'Special Delivery' on the April flight, costing her an additional 10¢.

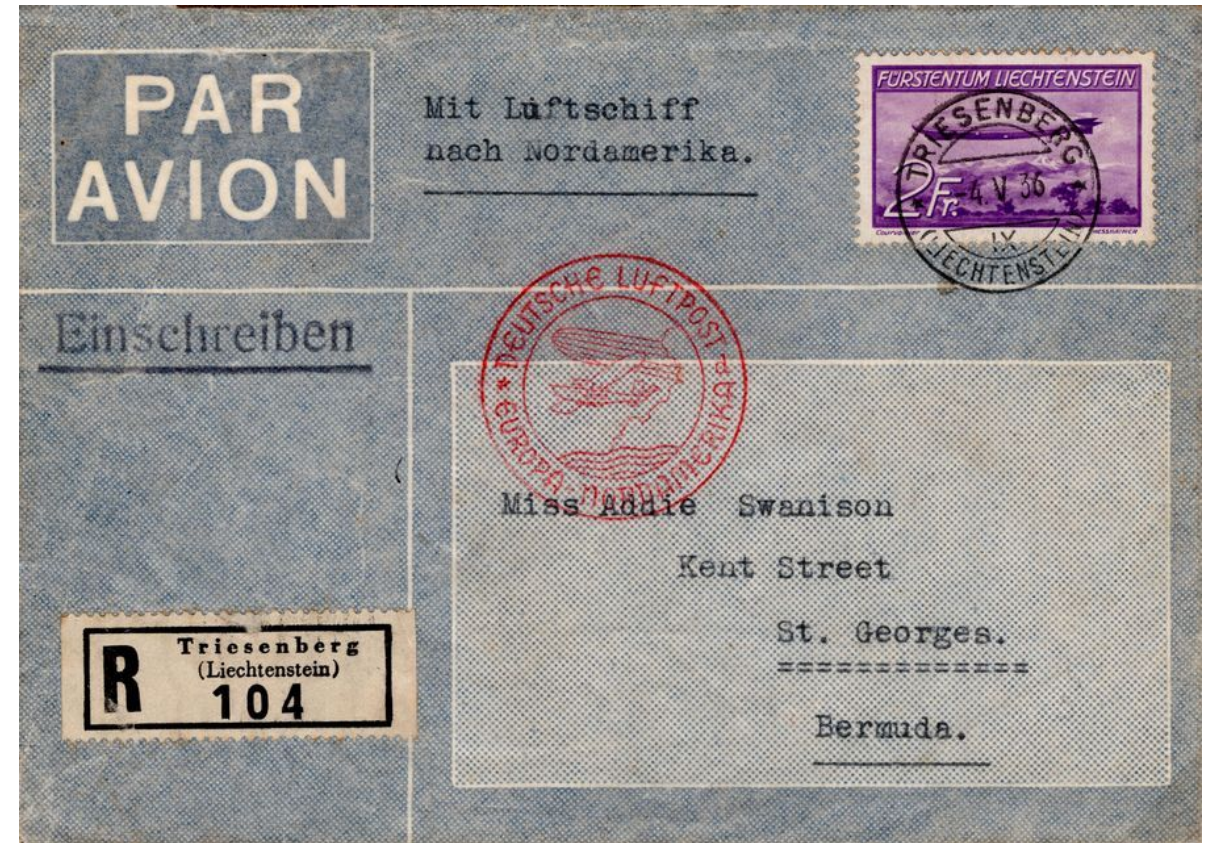


Bermuda's fascination with Aviation

In 1924 a Trans-Polar Flight Expedition was planned, and Gimbel Brothers organized the carriage of North Pole Mail on the Italian-built airship 'Norge'. This postcard was cancelled in New York on April 11th, 1924, on the wrong side of the card and sent to Norway. Norwegian stamps were applied on arrival and the card was cancelled in Kingsberg on May 18th, 1925. After numerous delays, the 'Norge' finally left Spitzbergen almost a year later, on May 11th, 1926, flew over the North Pole and reached Teller, Alaska, on May 14th. Doctor Parker finally got his postcard on June 20th, 1926, where it was backstamped in St. George's.



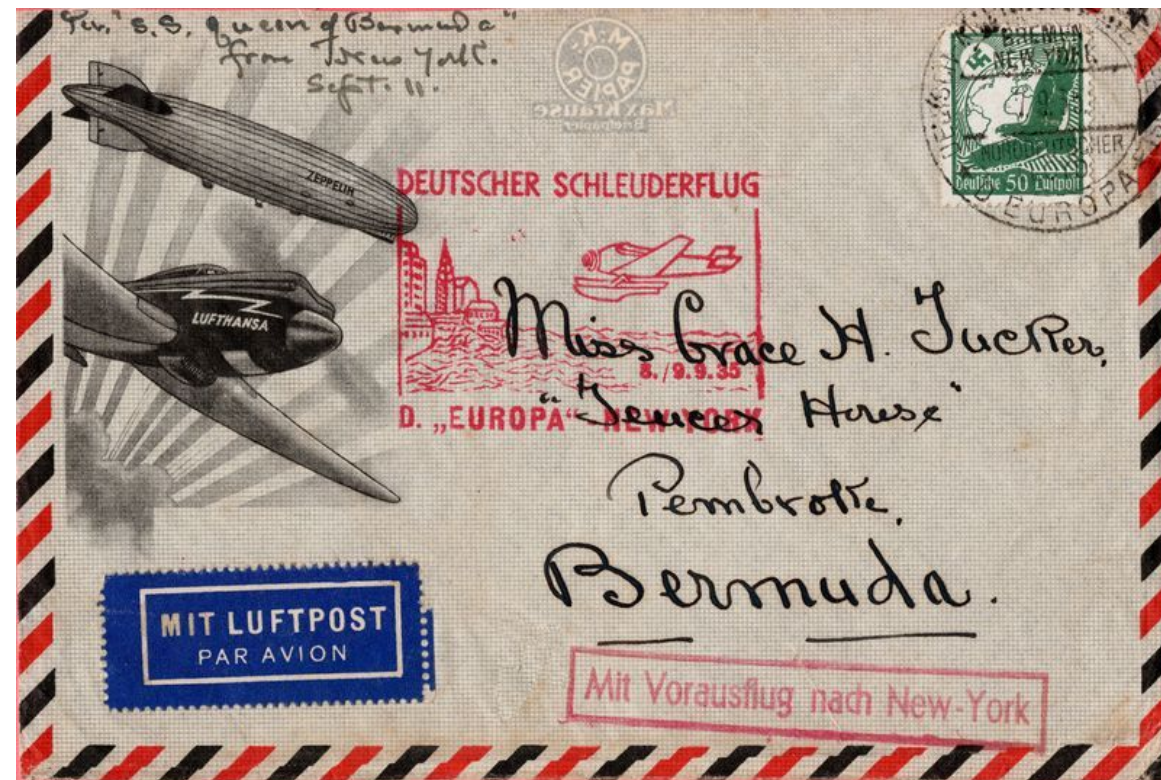
Another effort by Mrs. Booker – a postcard from the ‘First International Sail Gliding Camp’ held on the Jungfrauoch, Switzerland, 11,000 ft. above sea level, in September 1935. The event was planned for the 16th but had to be postponed to the 17th due to bad weather conditions.



Miss Addie Swainson, another enthusiast in St. George's, meanwhile had an envelope sent to herself on the LZ129 ‘Hindenburg’, sister ship of the ‘Graf Zeppelin’, on the first flight to the USA in May 1936. It was mailed in Liechtenstein on May 4th, 1936.



While many of the 'destination covers' to Bermuda are of a philatelic nature, this commercial cover, mailed in August 1936 via airmail from Berlin to Bermuda, is an exception. On May 6th, 1937, while landing at the Lakehurst Naval Air Station, the 'Hindenburg' was consumed by fire, spelling the end of travel by airship.

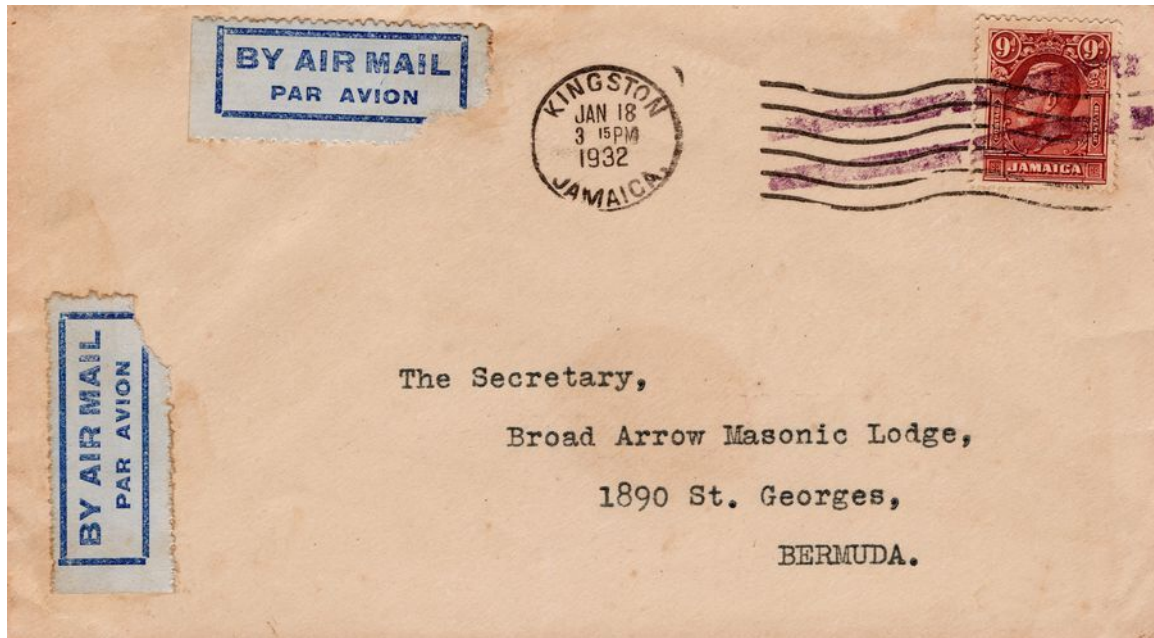


The idea of catapult mail was developed in the late 1920s to speed up trans-Atlantic mail service to America. Mail was carried by airplane on the final leg of each journey, reducing the delivery time by about one day, and it is not surprising that Bermudians wanted to be part of this new idea. The above cover was mailed on the 'Europa' on September 7th, 1935, and carried by seaplane to New York from where it was sent to Bermuda on the 'Queen of Bermuda'.



The Dornier Do X was the largest, heaviest, and most powerful flying boat in the world when it was produced by the Dornier company of Germany in 1929. On November 3rd, 1930, the Do X took off from Friedrichshafen for a transatlantic test flight to New York. The journey was interrupted several times and by June 5th, 1931, reached the Cape Verde islands, from where the Do X crossed the South Atlantic to Natal in Brazil. The flight continued north to the United States, reaching New York on August 27th, 1931, almost ten months after departing Friedrichshafen. I do not know if a cover addressed to Bermuda exists, however, the above cover, missent to Bermuda, qualifies for inclusion in a Bermuda collection as it was backstamped in Hamilton on July 7th, 1931, before being sent to the Bahamas where it arrived on July 13th.

Early Air Mail to Bermuda that needs more research



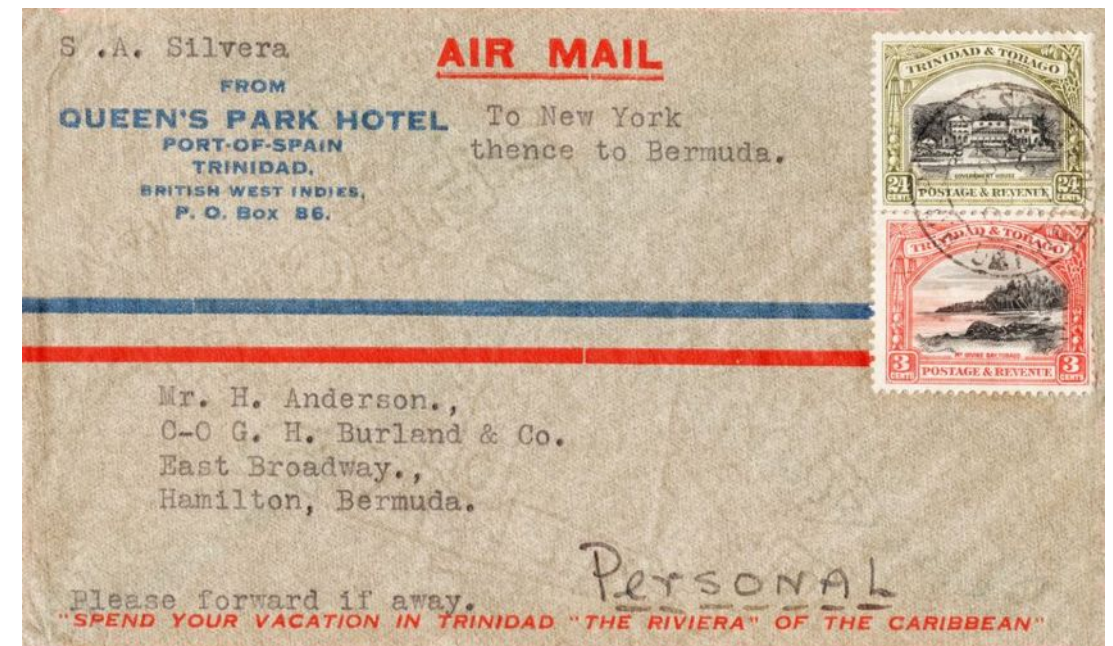
The first air mail from Jamaica to New York was flown by Pan American Airways on December 11th, 1930. Presumably there were regularly scheduled flights by January 1932 and the letter could have been flown as far as New York. The purple double bar Jusqu'a was probably applied in New York to indicate the end of its journey by air.



Finland is certainly a difficult one to figure out. The transport of air mail abroad was launched in 1923 between Helsinki and Tallinn, the capital of Estonia. Until 1936, when the first airports were completed, air traffic was mainly by float planes. So how far this 1934 letter travelled by air is anybody's guess.



Posted at Woriur, Trichinopoly, in the Tamil Nadu state of India on June 24th, 1934, this letter was routed 'By Air Mail India – England'. It is interesting that it was postmarked in Paris on July 2nd. The idea of an Empire Air Mail Scheme was conceived in 1933, but the scheme did not begin until June 1937. However, the London-Karachi route was extended to Calcutta in 1933, so this letter must have travelled on that route to England and to Bermuda by sea.



St. Lucia and Trinidad & Tobago were both included in the Pan American Airways network starting in 1929 and airmail service as far as New York would have been well established by 1934 when these letters were mailed to Bermuda. Researching an air mail letter sent in 1934 from Sao Paulo, Brazil, to Bermuda is definitely another story. Mala Aerea means 'Air Bag' is all I know so far.





Air Mail services from the Bahamas and Jamaica were also well established in 1936. On mail going beyond New York, to Bermuda for example, the Bahamas used the handstamp 'BY AIR MAIL / IN UNITED STATES ONLY'. The instruction for Air Mail from Jamaica was simply 'AIR MAIL TO NEW YORK'.

CHRYSLER CORPORATION
Export Division
P. O. Box 1688
DETROIT, MICHIGAN, U. S. A.

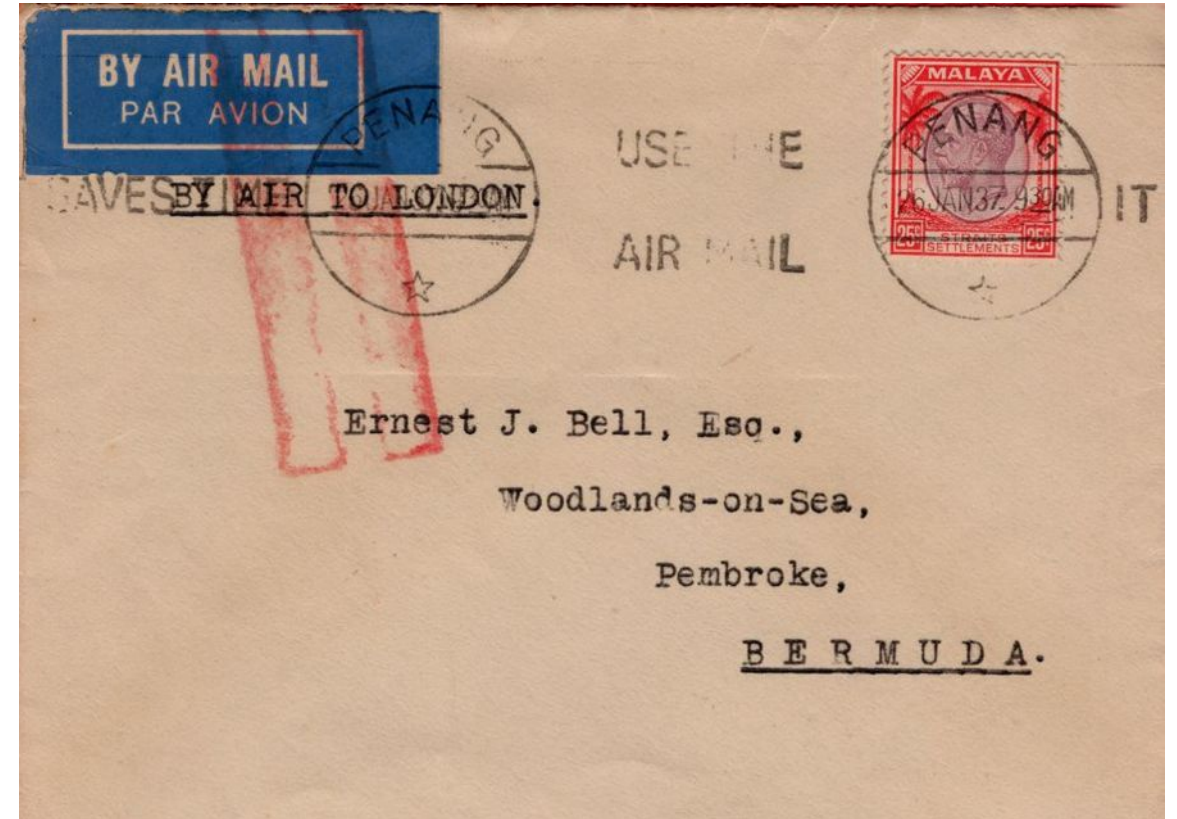


F.C. Outerbridge,
St George's, Bermuda.

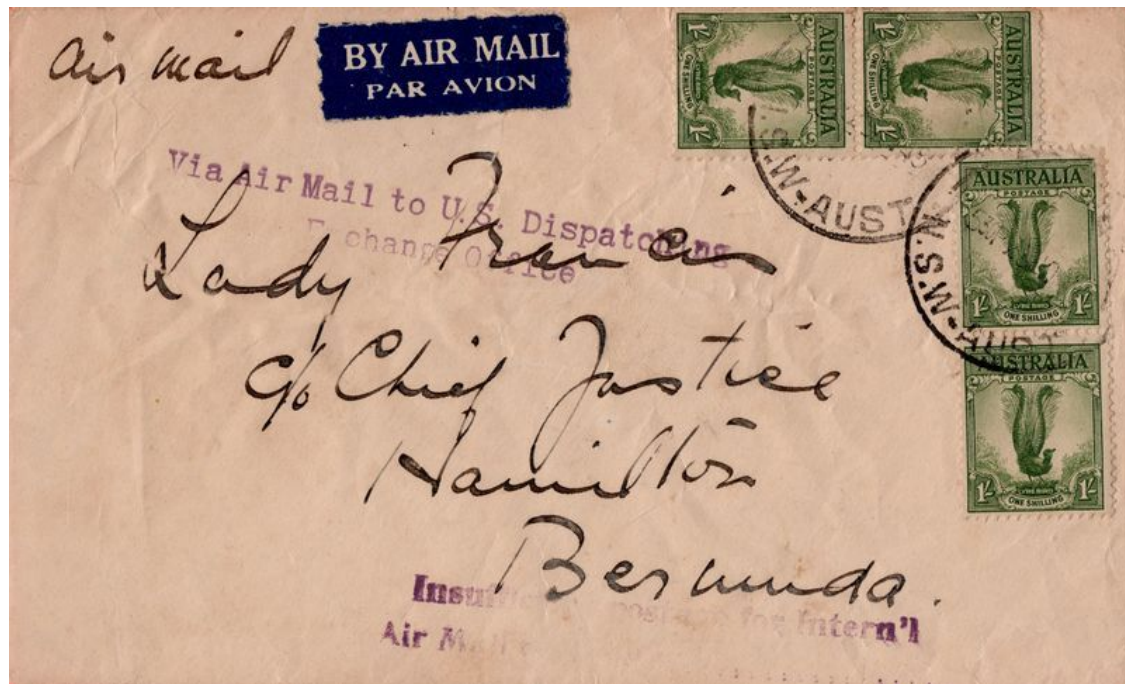
AIRMAIL IN U.S.A.

AIR MAIL

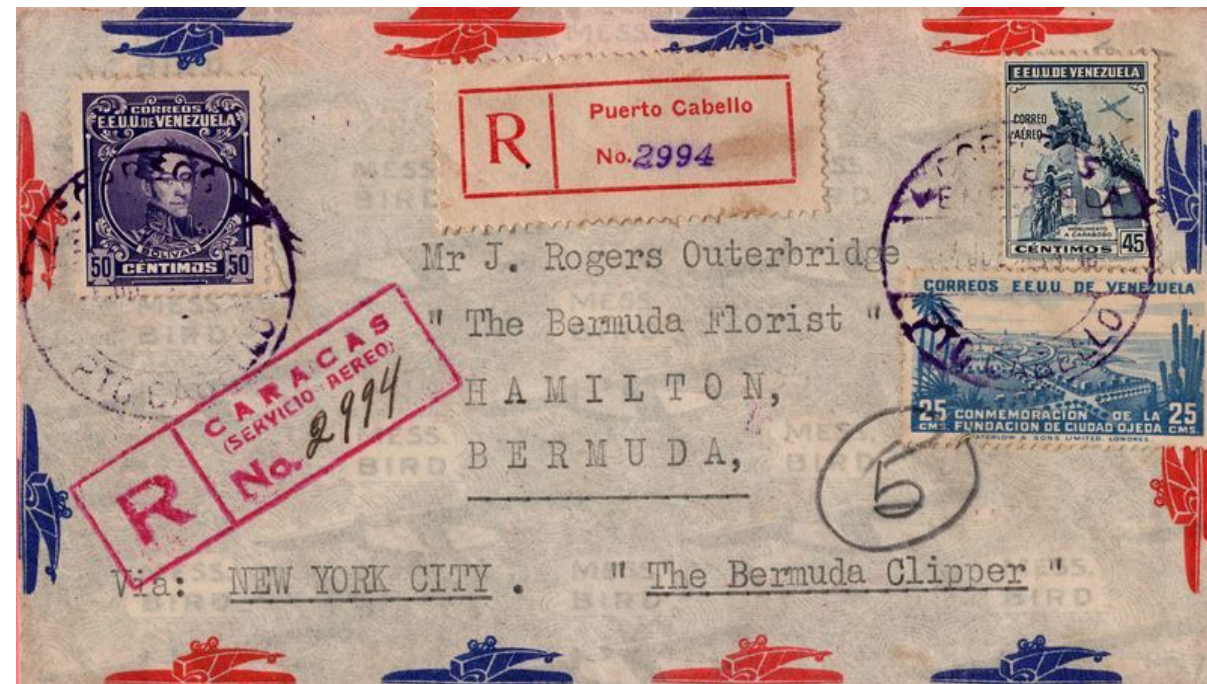
A rather interesting cover with a U.S. postage meter label. Air Mail was obviously quite standard by 1936, but not yet to Bermuda and the instruction was simply 'AIRMAIL IN U.S.A.' F.C. Outerbridge was a shoe shop. If they were trying to import automobiles in 1936, they were 10 years ahead of the time!



Airmail from Malaya to Bermuda seems to have been problematic in 1936 and 1937. Mailed in Singapore on July 8th, 1936, the first letter was meant to be carried by Imperial Airways, but diverted to K.L.M., the Royal Dutch Airline. Both Imperial Airways and the K.L.M. forerunner K.N.I.L.M. operated flights to the Far East in 1936. The second letter, mailed in Penang on January 26th, 1937, was probably flown by Imperial Airways. The red double bar Jusqu'a on both letters was likely applied in London as the onward journey to Bermuda was by sea.



Unfortunately the cancellation date on this cover from Australia is unreadable. The stamps were issued in 1932, but could of course have been used later. The cover has two instructional markings 'Via Air Mail to U.S. Dispatching Exchange Office' and 'Insufficient Postage for Intern'l Air Mail'. More research is needed.



No readable date in the cancellation on this registered letter sent from Puerto Cabello, Venezuela, to Bermuda. As Pan American Airways, operators of the 'Bermuda Clipper', were not awarded a mail contract until March 16th, 1938, the letter must have been mailed after that date.



Airmail from British Guiana would have been available all the way to Bermuda when this letter was mailed on August 25th, 1938, but it was endorsed 'By Air / From British Guiana / To New York'. Was there no contract in place with Bermuda?



The same question applies to the Bahamas who were still applying the 'BY AIR MAIL / IN UNITED STATES ONLY' instruction when this letter was mailed in Nassau on June 13th, 1938.

URGENT

BY AIR MAIL VIA NEW YORK.



Major A.G. Smith,
c/o G. Boyle Esq.,
"Melrose,"
St George's
Bermuda.

Pan American Airways were awarded a mail contract on their Bermuda route on March 16th, 1938. As air mail between the U.K. and U.S. was not introduced until 1939, this letter to Bermuda, mailed in England on March 28th, 1938, must have gone to New York by sea, and then by air on the 'Bermuda Clipper' to Bermuda where it was backstamped in St. George's on April 7th.



Mailed in Batavia, now Jakarta, on March 22nd, 1939, this letter to Bermuda was endorsed 'Via Amsterdam', presumably by K.L.M. Airlines. It would have crossed the Atlantic by sea and come to Bermuda by air, as indicated by the 'VIA U.S.A. / AIRMAIL SERVICE'.



A letter sent 'By air up to U.S.A.' on February 12th, 1940 from Woriur, Trichinopoly, in Tamil Nadu, India 'Via United States of America' to Bermuda. Trichinopoly was famous for its cigar manufacturing and 'Trichies' were Winston Churchill's favourite cigars, although considered rough by aficionados.



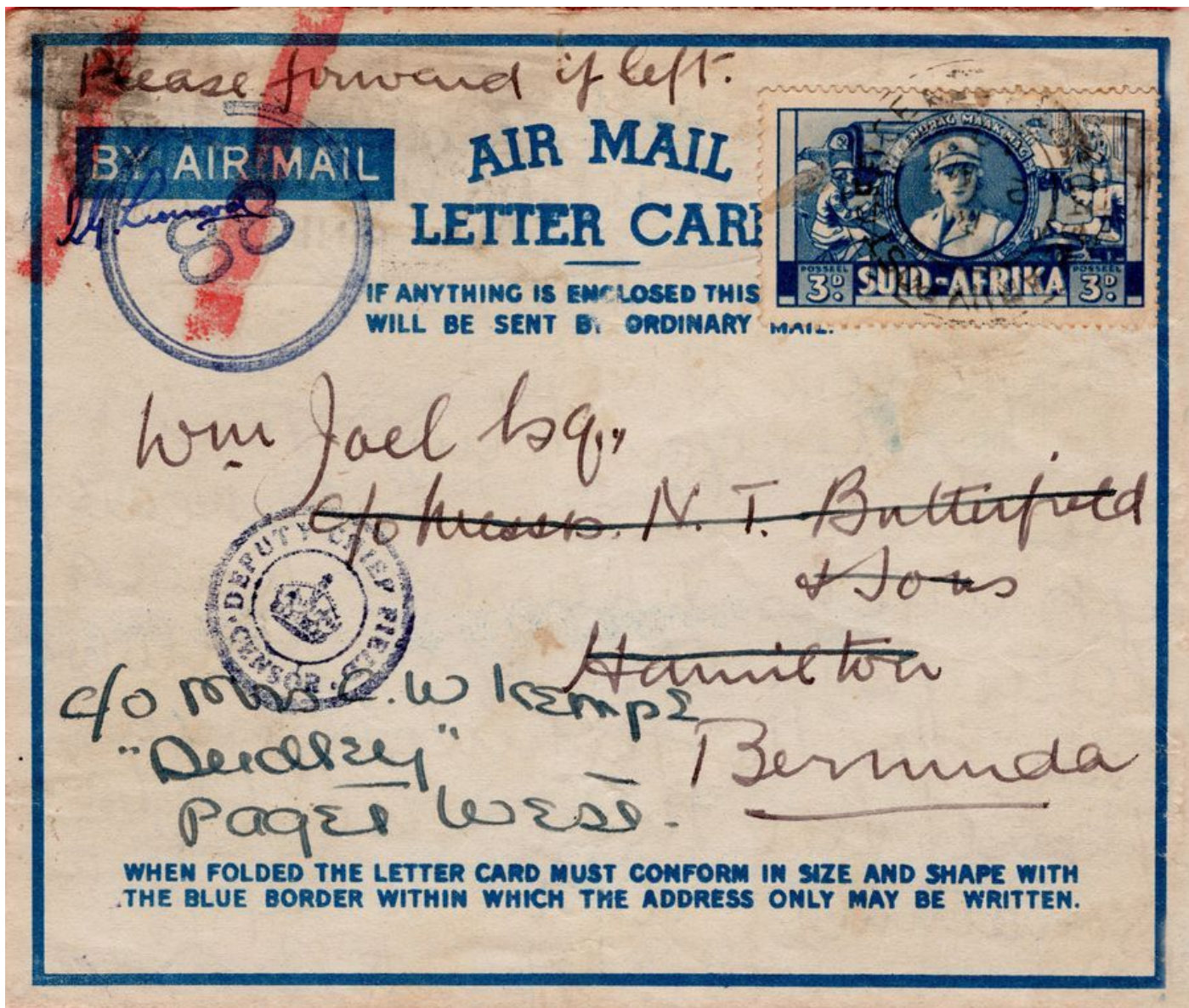
This letter, mailed from Cawnpore – now Kanpur – India to Bermuda on September 23rd 1941, has a lot going for it. Endorsed 'INDIA – AUCKLAND – U.S.A.', the routing had to be changed to Chungking – now Chongqing – China. It is not clear if this change in routing increased the postage fee, but it was taxed 136 centimes which translated to 1s/5d in Bermuda, applied with two DUE 1 handstamps. Addressed to a Censorette at Imperial Censorship, the letter was not censored in Bermuda as it had already been censored in India. Where should this cover go? The Censorship, Postage Due or Air Mail collection?



A letter from Gibraltar, sent on December 2nd, 1942, shows the 'PAR AVION / JUSQU'A NEW YORK.' mark, indicating that the letter was to go by air to New York. Why not all the way to Bermuda? The letter was censored in Gibraltar and sealed with a P.C. 90 A/6006 tape.



Sent from Malta to Bermuda on November 6th, 1946, this air mail letter shows the 'PAR AVION / JUSQU'A' mark, with New York added in manuscript, indicating that the letter was to go by air to New York. Again, why not all the way to Bermuda?



Written by Private 297419 Olga Joel
of Unit 3 W.A.A.S HQ U.D.F.
MEForces on April 28th, 1942, to
her uncle in Bermuda, this Air Mail
Letter Card was backstamped by the
Base Army Post Office on May 1st ,
Hamilton, Bermuda on July 2nd and
finally Paget on July 4th, 1942. It
shows the double bar Jusqu'a as air
mail was not available on part of the
journey to Bermuda.



This letter, mailed on January 22nd, 1943, from Kisumu, Kenya, to Bermuda, was carried by Pan Am on their South Atlantic route. It was backstamped in Khartoum, Sudan, on January 25th, Lagos, Nigeria on February 5th, Trinidad on February 9th and finally Warwick, Bermuda on March 1st, 1943. Fortunately we know this because the letter was sent by registered mail. Now if I only knew the origin of the red postal marking.



Colombia was more specific with 'PAR AVION / CORREO AEREO / TRANSOCEANICO', Guatemala with 'AFFRANCHI PAR AVION JUSQUA / NEW YORK' and Cuba with 'VIA / TRANSATLANTIC / CLIPPER / AIR MAIL'. It is fortunate that Bernie Gosling of Butterfield Bank decided not to throw out these envelopes!



Sent from Cannes, France, to Bermuda on June 30, 1941, this letter was intended for the TransAtlantic route from Lisbon to New York, with stops in the Azores and Bermuda. It was backstamped at Somerset Bridge on July 11th.



I have often wondered if air mail from the Azores to Bermuda, or from Bermuda to the Azores, was dispatched directly to the destination, or first forwarded to Lisbon or New York respectively. My only registered example from Bermuda to the Azores was only backstamped at Horta, so not flown to Lisbon. Mail from the Azores to Bermuda, on the other hand, tends to be backstamped at Lisbon.



Mailed in Tel Aviv, then Palestine, on April 22nd, 1945, this letter seems to have travelled all the way by air. It was backstamped in Miami on May 7th and New York on May 8th. Butterfield Bank required a second notice to finally collect it from the Post Office.



Also sent by registered mail, this letter, mailed in Cairo, Egypt, on November 27th, 1945, came to Bermuda via Pan Am's South Atlantic route. It was backstamped in Trinidad on January 7th, 1946.



Sent by registered air mail from Hong Kong to Bermuda on January 25th, 1946, this letter was endorsed 'BY AIR TO LONDON ONLY' although air mail all the way to Bermuda was available by then. I guess more research is needed on this one.



Mailed in Iraq on August 5th, 1946, this letter to Bermuda was endorsed 'By T.W.A. Air Services'. Trans World Airways led the expansion of air traffic serving Europe, the Middle East and Asia after World War II, making it the second flag carrier of the United States after Pan Am.



Another letter with all sorts of things going on. Mailed in Denpasar, the capital of Bali, Indonesia, on September 25th, 1947, it was endorsed 'AIR MAIL VIA ENGLAND' and 'Batavia – Amsterdam and onward air transmission'. The letter was taxed 100 centimes postage due, charged as 1s/8d in Bermuda. It was sent to Mr. & Mrs. Harry Parker, Gabriele being the German wife of a Bermudian Customs Officer, interned part of the war at Huntley Towers.



Postage rates are also an interesting part of an Air Mail collection. This letter, sent on December 13th, 1941, from Bermuda to South Africa, was routed 'VIA TRANS-PACIFIC' due to the war in North Africa, however, Pan American had just started the FAM22 route via the South Atlantic on December 6th, 1941, which included stops at San Juan, Trinidad, Belem, Natal, Bathurst, Monrovia, Liberia, Lagos and Leopoldville, where this cover was backstamped on January 14th, 1942. Of all the war-time postage rates from Bermuda, the Trans-Pacific rate to South Africa was the most expensive – 7s/3d for a single-weight letter. A 1/2d stamp on the back of the letter completes the postage rate of 7s/3d.