

Browsing the Web: The China Clippers, Part 2

by John F. Dunn

Continued from September 2, 2011 (use the Subject Index to access Part 1)

The Rate Change Stamps (C21-C22)

STAMPS Magazine of Feb. 13, 1937 carried this news:

“U.S. to China Airmail Will Start March 24, 1937

“Two new airmail stamps will be issued in the 20-cent and 50-cent denominations in connection with the new schedule of reduced postage rates for the trans-Pacific airmail service which are to become effective upon the extension of the present trans-Pacific route beyond Manila to Macao and Hong Kong, China. The first flight on the new through service from the United States to China will leave San Francisco on March 24, or soon thereafter....

“The British and Philippine postal administrations have not reported the airmail rates they will charge on matter carried from Manila to Macao and Hong Kong, nor from Macao to Hong Kong and from Macao and Hong Kong to the Philippines, the United States and other eastern points, These rates will be announced as soon as they

are determined by the two postal administrations concerned.



Anderson cachets on Feb. 15, 1937, Washington, D.C., FDCs for C21 (20¢) and C22 (50¢) issues. San Francisco was not a first day site for these stamps

“...The two new airmail stamps in the 20- and 50-cent denominations are being issued primarily for use on the trans-Pacific service when extended to China, but they will be valid for all airmail purposes. They will be first placed on sale at the Philatelic Agency, Post Office Department, Washington, D. C., on February 15, 1937, but the Agency will not prepare covers for mailing on that date.

“This advance sale of the stamps is being made for the accommodation of collectors who desire to forward covers on the first trans-Pacific flight.

“The new airmail stamps are identical, with the exception of the denomination numerals and the color, the 20-cent stamp being printed in green and the 50-cent stamp in carmine. These stamps are of the same size as the 25-cent trans-Pacific airmail stamp and conform thereto as to design, except for the elimination of the inscription reading: ‘November 1935’.”

Separate figures were not provided, but the Post Office Department reported that a total of 40,000 C21 and C22 FDCs were cancelled and sales of stamps on the first day totaled \$54,003.60.

Regarding plans for the extended route to China, an article in the February 24, 1936 *Mekeel's*, “Trans-Pacific Air Mail to China”, by D. H. Davenport, sheds some light on why that destination was not added to FAM 14 during this period. Discussing postponements of certain flights due to weather and mechanical problems, and the need to exercise special caution on “a hazardous service over 7,000 miles of water”, Davenport then stated:

“...But the stage has been set, and regular service between the United States and the Orient soon will be established. The only problem to be solved is the reluctance of the Chinese government to lift its ban on foreign airlines in China. This country has turned down every request of foreign companies for permission to enter Chinese territory by air, its most recent refusal being when Japan sought permission to establish a Tokio [sic] to Shanghai airline.

“Post Office Department, State Department and Pan-American Airways officials have been endeavoring to find

an arrangement that would be satisfactory to China. The probable outcome will be the acceptance of the offer of Portuguese authorities for use of the island of Macau, about 30 miles from Hongkong [sic], as a flight terminal, from where Chinese planes or ships would carry the mail and passengers to the mainland.

“While no definite information is available, postal officials—who prefer not to be quoted—are of the opinion that the first air mail flight across the entire Pacific will be made within sixty days.”

Given past foreign encroachments in China, it was understandable that the Chinese government was reluctant to open its door even a slight crack for a foreign airmail route. Likewise, given events that followed, it is understandable that postal officials did not want to be quoted on the timing, for the first flight that was to take place within sixty days from Feb. 24, 1936, actually took place just under 60 days and one year later, on April 21, 1937.



Oct. 7, 1936 San Francisco to Wake China Clipper pre-inaugural passenger flight cover autographed by the crew.

The announcement was carried in the March 15, 1937 *Mekeel's*, again in an article by Davenport, this one entitled “Extensions of Trans-Pacific Air Mail Service”.

“The long-awaited announcement of the continuation of trans-Pacific air mail service to Macao and Hong Kong was made last Monday. Service over the new routes will be inaugurated April 21 with the first eastbound flight scheduled to leave Hong Kong April 29....

“Philatelic treatment will be given covers carried by the first flight each way on the extended part of the route to and from Macao and Hong Kong.

There will be 17 point-to-point flights, Macao having been eliminated as an eastbound stop. No provision is made for carrying any cover both ways westbound and eastbound.

Cachets will be applied on covers dispatched from San Francisco, Honolulu, Guam, and Manila and backstamps will be applied at Macao and Hong Kong.

In view of the fact that the postal administrations of Hong Kong and Macao will not accept consignments of covers with remittances for postage stamps and have stamps affixed to covers, the Pan-American Airways Company has offered to accept at its offices at San Francisco consignments of covers to be serviced from these points. Their charges for transporting covers from the United States to Macao and Hong Kong, affixing proper postage stamps and posting are very reasonable, being approximately 20¢ per cover. Below is a summary of covers and postage rates, per one-half ounce:

San Francisco to Macao.....	.70
San Francisco to Hong Kong.....	.70
Honolulu to Macao .....	.50
Honolulu to Hong Kong .....	.50
Guam to Macao .....	.30
Guam to Hong Kong .....	.30
Manila to Macao .....	.26
Manila to Hong Kong .....	.26
Macao to Hong Kong.....	.11
Macao to Manila .....	.16
Macao to Guam .....	.31
Macao to Honolulu .....	.61
Macao to San Francisco.....	.93
Hong Kong to Manila .....	.11
Hong Kong to Guam .....	.25
Hong Kong to Honolulu .....	.55
Hong Kong to San Francisco.....	.85

The Macao authorities will apply cachets on covers, but the Hong Kong office will not. However, a receiving cachet will be placed on covers from Hong Kong when received at Guam, Honolulu and San Francisco.

On August 21, 1937, in the "Airmails" feature column of

STAMPS Magazine, Henri E. Ragot reported, as follows:

“...Believing that those who received covers from both the 1935 and the 1937 [first] flights will be interested in the comparative data, I am including in the table below, figures for both dates....at the time of the 1937 flight, many business houses, as well as individuals, were regularly using the Trans-Pacific mail service, so that the covers sent in 1937 cannot all be considered philatelic mail.

First Flight Covers

<u>WESTBOUND</u>	<u>1935</u>	<u>1937</u>
U.S.to Hawaii	46,750	9,998
U.S. to Guam	20,350	2,496
*U.S. to Manila	42,900	3,571
U.S. to Hong Kong		31,377
U.S. to Macao		12,488
Hawaii to Guam	6,430	1,716
Hawaii to Manila	6,968	1,927
Hawaii to Hong Kong		8,049
Hawaii to Macao		5,853
Guam to Manila	5,700	1,667
Guam to Hong Kong		7,645
Guam to Macao		7,023
Manila to Hong Kong		11,468
Manila to Macao		8,262
Macao to Hong Kong.....		7,189
* Including 2,573 round trip covers.		
<u>EASTBOUND</u>	<u>1935</u>	<u>1937</u>
Macao to Manila		6,933
Macao to Guam		6,232
Macao to Hawaii		5,785
Macao to U.S.....		21,293
Hong Kong to Guam		5,748
Hong Kong to Hawaii		5,810
Hong Kong to U.S.		20,287
Hong Kong to Manila		10,334
Manila to Guam	4,808	1,512
Manila to Hawaii	4,273	1,538
*Manila to U.S.	22,862	6,053
Guam to Hawaii	3,543	1,495
Guam to U.S.	6,476	1,723
Hawaii to U.S.	48,661	24,516
* Excluding 2,573 round trip covers.		

Separately from the table, Ragot also noted additional small quantities, such as 296 covers sent from Canada to Hong Kong and Macao in the first 1937 flight, as well as “four covers from Canton...that bear a first flight cachet.” These, however, passed through Hong Kong, and do not represent Canton as a leg on the China Clipper flights.



Pan Am clipper first flight San Francisco to Hong Kong hand stamped with dual United Airlines and Pan Am flight cachets. Postmarked San Francisco, Apr. 21, 1937, backstamped Victoria, Hong Kong, Apr. 28, 1937.



Crosby dual cachet on Clipper flight cover from Honolulu to Guam with Apr. 23, 1937 departure cancel, Apr. 26, 1937 receiver in Guam, also with Jun 4, 1937 receiver in San Francisco.



CNAC [China National]/Pan Am First Flight, China to Hong Kong to Hawaii, with China 50c and 60c airmail singles postmarked Shanghai, Apr. 26, 1937. Handstamped with CNAC circular and Pan American Hong Kong to Honolulu flight cachets, backstamped Honolulu, May 2, 1937.



Pan-Am Clipper first flight from Philippines to Hong Kong, with flight cachet, Manila Apr. 28, 1937 cancels and Victoria, Hong Kong April 28 backstamp.

Apr. 28, 1937, first flight from Macao to Philippines and returned to China. Cover bears the Macao airmail set 2a-15a, Scott C1-C6, plus extra singles of 6a and 30a, postmarked Macau, Apr. 28, 1937 printed map envelope for the flight. Handstamped on front with received cachet from Manila (upper right).



Backstamped Manila Post Office, Apr. 29, 1937, Canton, May, 11, 1937 and Macao, May 12, 1937.



Macao 1st airmail set complete, 2a-15a, Sc C1-C6, plus 2 pataca on Pan Ame first flight from Macau to San Francisco, Apr. 28, 1937 and Manila receiver cachet, also with San Francisco May 4 receiver on back.

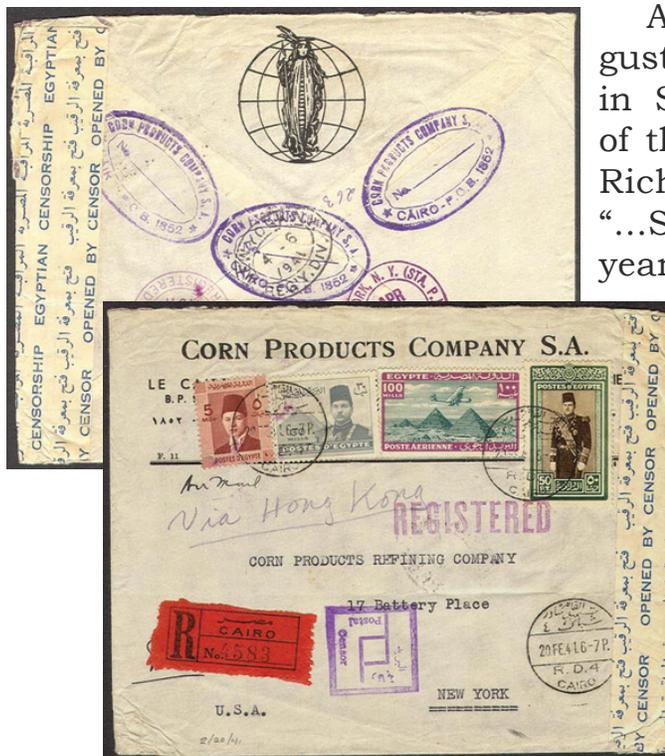
Pan Am Clipper first flight, Hong Kong to U.S., with Hong Kong stamps tied by Apr. 28, 1937 cancels, flight cachet and May 4, 1937, San Francisco receiver.





1937 Van Dusen Around the World, Brazil–Malaya–Netherlands–New York cover, starting from Apr. 19, 1937 cover. Duplex cancel ties U.S. C21-C22 to oversized legal cacheted FAM14 envelope first flight San Francisco to Hong Kong; also with Malaya 25c and 40c applied at Penang; forwarded by KLM to Netherlands with 12-1/2c, 15c, 75c, 1G applied at Amsterdam; put on Air France to Brazil with 100r, 1000r and 10,000r applied there; then carried by Panair back to the U.S.

“Canton” does come up as a leg in references to China Clipper flights during this era, but not as the city in China, but as “Canton Isl.,” a leg on the China Clipper FAM 19 South Pacific route from Los Angeles and San Francisco to New Caledonia and New Zealand.



As noted in an August 16, 1941 article in Stamps (“F.A.M.s of the Past Year”, by Richard L. Singley, “...Scarcely had the year begun when a giant clipper of the Pan American Airways roared out of San Francisco

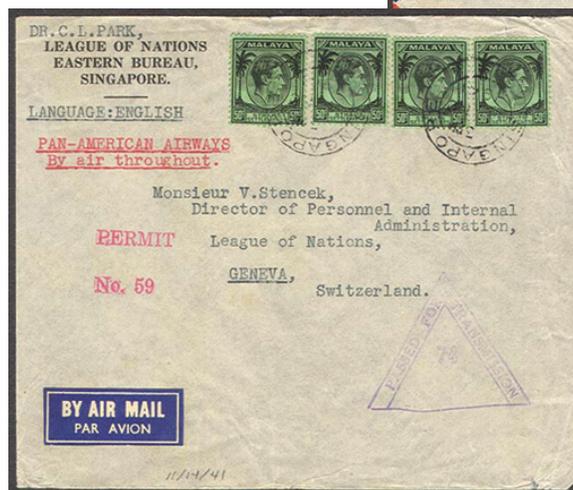
An April, 1941, censored cover from Cairo, Egypt to New York flown via the Clipper from New Zealand

to inaugurate the first air mail route to New Zealand. This route was in prospect since 1937 via Pago Pago, Samoa, but for various reasons was postponed until July 12, 1940.

Noumea, New Caledonia, was made a stop in place of Pago Pago and Los Angeles was added at the last minute....At this time a post office was established at Canton Island. This service provided a postal oddity unique in the annals of air mail in that the dispatch from Noumea to Canton Island was actually received before it was mailed. This is explained by the fact that the International date line lies between the two points and in traveling toward the United States a day is gained....”

There was one other leg added to FAM 14 during this period. As announced in *STAMPS*, May 31, 1941:

“Airmail service on F.A.M. route 14, which has heretofore been operated weekly from San Francisco...to Hong Kong, is changed so as to operate beyond Manila each second week only to Macao and Hong Kong, with operation the alternate week to Singapore, Straits Settlements....The flight that left San Francisco May 2 will operate to Singapore.” Mails for Singapore on the Hong Kong flight and vice versa, were sent the rest of



Top, a cover from Malaya to Canada, carried May 5, 1941, on the first Clipper flight from Singapore; Bottom, a cover from the League of Nations office in Singapore to their office in Switzerland, carried Nov. 14, 1941, on the last Clipper flight from Singapore as war had broken out in the Pacific.

the way by steamer, there being sufficient sailings and arrival times that they would get to their destinations faster than by waiting a week for the alternate flight.

The postage rates for the Singapore extension were the same as those for the Hong Kong extension.

Finally, although it is not relevant to this report on the extensions of F.A.M. 14, I should note that U.S. First Day Cover collectors will find an unusual variety of the October 18, 1937 FDC for the Hawaii stamp, Scott 799. It is a cover with a China Clipper stamp, but no indication of why the stamp is affixed.

Here's the explanation, from the December 11, 1937 edition of *STAMPS*.

Clipper Service

As others, no doubt, have received covers from Hawaii, with 20 cents postage affixed, to be carried by the Clipper and no indicia of such service, the following letter has been submitted by Mr. Miller for publication in *STAMPS*:

“November 9, 1937.

“Mr. Michael Miller, Baltimore, Maryland:

“My Dear Sir:

“Your letter of October 28 to the Second Assistant Postmaster General, Division of Air Mail Service, making inquiry concerning the two accompanying first-day covers of the Hawaii commemorative stamp, each bearing 20 cents in postage for complete air mail service, has been referred to this Office.

“These covers were unquestionably carried by the Clipper Ship, but unfortunately the departure of the plane from Honolulu was delayed by adverse weather conditions from October 18 to October 25. No provision is made for the back-stamping of air mail letters, including those carried on the Trans-Pacific service. Because of complications, it was deemed impracticable to make an exception with respect to the backstamping of the Honolulu first-day covers.

“In this connection, you are advised that, in order to distinguish air mail covers transported by Clipper Ship from those bearing 6-cent stamps and receiving air mail

service after reaching the mainland, the latter were rubber-stamped to read: 'Via Air Mail from San Francisco.' The fact that your submitted covers which are returned herewith, do not bear this inscription can be accepted as prima facie evidence that they were transported by Clipper Ship from Honolulu to San Francisco.

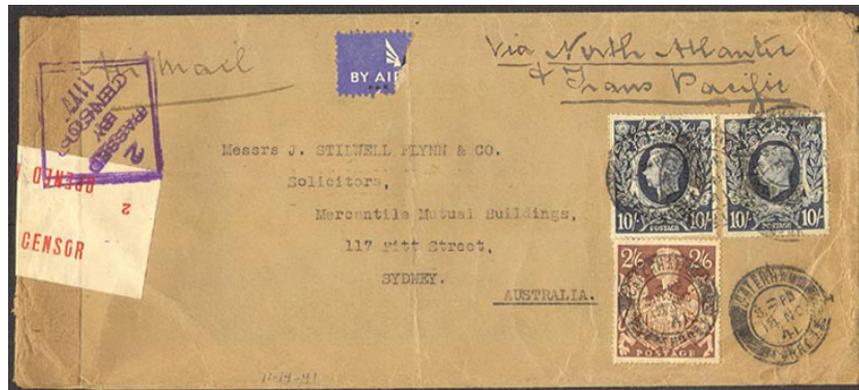


An October 18, 1937 First Day Cover for the Hawaii Territory stamp, Sc. 799, also with C21 Clipper stamp; carried on the Clipper from Honolulu to San Francisco.

“Very truly yours,

“Roy M North

“Acting Third Assistant Postmaster General.”



Another “last flight cover,” from Great Britain to Australia, carried Nov. 14, 1944 on the Clipper from San Francisco to New Zealand.



To conclude this study we feature two other covers. First, to the left, is a cover that started its journey, per the cachet, “car-

ried in a caraboa-drawn cart, Beetle Nut Express...flown via Wake, Midway & Hawaii to Alameda, California..."

Finally, from our original *USSN* article, this cover was flown on the October 20, 1937 China Clipper flight cover, bearing three different denominations of China stamps, plus an oval "Postage Stamp Missing on Arrival at New York" handstamp where the second stamp from the left had been.



Most noteworthy, and not mentioned in the auction lot description from which this photo was taken, is the fact that the cover was addressed to "Mrs. C. L. Chennault"—raising the possibility that it was written by Claire Chennault, who served as Chiang Kai-shek's air advisor in China, and organized the Flying Tigers during World War II. It was addressed to Louisiana, then forwarded to Michigan and Springfield, Mass.