

Postal History Symposium  
*Development of Transoceanic Air Mail Service*

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**Development of WWII Transpacific Airmail Service by the U.S. Army**

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Abstract

The proposed paper will document the development by the U.S. Army of transpacific and coastal Alaska transport routes, and accompanying airmail service, during and immediately after WW-II. The evolution of transport routes will be placed in the context of prosecution of the war. Route maps will be shown along with representative examples of military and civilian airmail carried on each route.

Subject Importance

Prompt delivery of mail was considered critical to maintain the morale of personnel serving overseas during WW-II, and carriage of airmail by the transport services was given high priority. The large number of personnel serving in the Pacific theater combined with the granting of the 6-cents per ½ ounce airmail rate led to huge increases in demand, with airmail volumes far surpassing pre-war levels.

Importance of the Publication

The topic of WW-II transpacific airmail has been only incompletely documented. APO covers from the Pacific are very plentiful and collected largely as military history. The histories of the transport services and the locations of military units are well known. The proposed paper will be the first to tell the story of the Army's first efforts to carry transpacific airmail from a postal history perspective.

Background

Immediately after the entry of the United States into WW-II, both the U.S. Army and the U.S. Navy organized air transport services to carry critical war materials and personnel, and airmail, in the Pacific theater of operations.

The Army had created the Air Corps Ferrying Command (ACFC) in May 1941 to deliver lend-lease aircraft across the North Atlantic to England. The ACFC contracted with CONSAIRWAYS in early 1942 to fly large land-based warplanes and transports across the Pacific to Australia. The ACFC carried some airmail to and from Army personnel in the South Pacific. The ACFC's route paralleled the pre-war FAM-19 route to the extent that suitable airfields were available on islands along the route.

The Army organized the Air Transport Command (ATC) in June 1942 from the ACFC and other Army assets. The ATC was charged with ferrying army aircraft worldwide, operating air facilities outside of the U.S., and transporting personnel, materiel and mail for all War Department agencies. The ATC used landplane transports, and its initial South Pacific route

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followed that of the ACFC. The ATC also began regular transport service along the west coast to Alaska in support of the Aleutian Islands campaign.

The ATC's transport routes to large measure paralleled those flown by the Naval Air Transport Service (NATS), which used seaplanes. As the war progressed, the fighting moved northwards from the southwest to the central Pacific. As a result the ATC routes shifted accordingly. Coordination with NATS increased as the war progressed. After the end of the war, the ATC provided commercial transpacific passenger and airmail service until Pan American Airlines services were restored in early 1946.