

# DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSPACIFIC TRANSPORT ROUTES BY THE U.S. NAVY DURING WORLD WAR II

By

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## Introduction

As a Pan American Airways (PAA) mail collector, I was amazed at how little information was available in the philatelic literature on the carriage of airmail in the Pacific after December 7, 1941. Although PAA's transpacific services west of Hawaii were terminated, airmail service west of Hawaii clearly did continue as witnessed by the large number of airmail covers sent by U.S. servicemen from South Pacific islands and Australasia, by seemingly commercial airmail covers crossing the Pacific, and by publication during the war of new airmail postal rates to certain Pacific islands. What has not been well known is how both the US Army and Navy established airlines that carried airmail over established and evolving routes throughout the Pacific during the war. Boyle [1] gave a good overview of worldwide Army and Navy transport routes and airmail services, and Startup [2] covered South Pacific airmail services, from the perspective of New Zealand.

This paper describes establishment and operation of the Naval Air Transport Service (NATS) in the Pacific from 1942 to 1945, based in large part on unpublished narratives of the service [3-6]. These references document routes and schedules for transport from the U.S. West Coast to the South, Southwest and Central Pacific, and to Alaska. The focus of this paper is on route development throughout the Pacific theater in the context of prosecution of the war. The routes and service frequencies for transpacific transport routes are given in [Appendix I](#) and, for Alaskan routes, [Appendix II](#).

The need for rapid transpacific air cargo services grew rapidly after the entry of the United States into the war. The Japanese were expanding further into New Guinea, the Solomons, and other islands in the southwest Pacific, and they were threatening Australia. The United States was stepping up the delivery of war materials, fighting units, and support personnel into the Pacific. In response, both the United States Army and Navy created air transport services to carry urgent cargo, critical service personnel, and airmail to U.S. service personnel in the Pacific.

The huge influx of service personnel into the Pacific theater and the granting to them of low preferential airmail rates combined to create an unprecedented demand for transpacific airmail services. By April 1942, about 80,000 American personnel, many using airmail, were spread across the Pacific from Hawaii to Australia [2]. In response, the Army and Navy transport systems carried massive volumes of airmail throughout the war, the vast majority to and from service personnel, but also some commercial and civilian airmail.

The Army's Air Transport Command (ATC) was first to establish an air transport route from the U.S. mainland through the South Pacific to Australia using landplanes, followed by the Naval Air Transport Service (NATS) on an essentially parallel route using seaplanes. Both the ATC and the NATS operated intensive scheduled transport services over networks of continuously evolving routes throughout the

Pacific theater, connecting with intra-theater air transport routes and later with Royal New Zealand Air Force transport routes.

### Establishment of the NATS

Prior to WW-II, air transport in support of naval operations was supplied by widely dispersed local Navy utility squadrons. Clearly, this decentralized arrangement would not be adequate to meet the demands of war on air transport. In response, on 12 December 1941, five days after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Navy established the Naval Air Transport Service, reporting to the Chief of Naval Operations. The NATS's mission was to provide rapid air delivery of critical equipment, spare parts, and specialist personnel to naval activities and fleet forces worldwide.

Organization of the NATS, buildup of its facilities and equipment training of personnel, and acquisition of long range transport aircraft took much of 1942. The first Naval Air Transport Squadron, VR-1, was commissioned on 9 March 1942 at Norfolk with four land-based transports to operate along the Atlantic coast. The second squadron, VR-2, was commissioned on 1 April 1942 at Alameda with a single flying boat to provide transoceanic service from the Pacific coast to Honolulu. The NATS contracted with U.S. domestic airlines to provide aviator training. Air Transport Squadrons (Pacific) was established on 31 October, 1942, over NATS squadrons based in the Pacific and those on the west coast flying the Mainland – Hawaii route.

From the beginning, the Navy anticipated utilizing Pan American Airway's experience, personnel, facilities and aircraft to help develop and supplement their own transport operations. Contract work began by early June 1942 and was completed in mid-August. The south Pacific route was to be finalized following a survey flight conducted by PAA.

PAA began service for NATS on 7 October 1942. Concurrently, the Naval Air Transport System – Pacific wing was created under the Commander in Chief, Pacific. The NATS – Pacific coordinated the operations of both the PAA – Transpacific Division and VR-2 for operations between the Mainland, Hawaii, and the Southwest Pacific. Later, on 1 March 1943, Air Transport Squadrons, West Coast (NATS West Coast Wing) was established at NAAS Oakland to control all NATS squadrons west of the Mississippi, except those servicing the Mainland – Honolulu route.

Three more squadrons became active in the Pacific Theater. VR-5 was established in June 1943 at Seattle to provide transport service to Alaska with landplanes. VR-11 based in Oakland was established in September 1943 for South Pacific service using landplanes. VR-11 eventually grew into the largest squadron. Finally, VR-13 was established in 1944 at Los Negros (Admiralty Islands) as a landplane squadron to supplement transport operations northwards from Australia. The NATS eventually developed four wings and thirteen squadrons operating over 429 aircraft with 26,000 personnel [7].

On 2 March 1945, the NATS was reorganized as a Fleet Command with headquarters at NAAS Oakland, under immediate direction of Commander in Chief and the Chief of Naval Operations. NATS rapidly shrank after the surrender of Japan, and by June 1948 it was combined with Army & Air Force transport organizations to form the Military Air Transport Service (MATC).

## Honolulu – Mainland Transport Service

Prior to the NATS transport squadrons becoming active, PAA continued FAM service between Honolulu and its Treasure Island terminal in San Francisco Bay. The first trip, only three days after the Pearl Harbor attack, was flown by the Boeing B-314 *American Clipper* (Figure 1) and carried medical supplies, government officials, and priority mail. The B-314 *South Atlantic Clipper* returned in early January to San Francisco, after its round-the-world flight, to help with the emergency aid flights.

On 12 December 1941, all of the PAA clippers were purchased by the military and allocated between the Army and the Navy. The Navy assigned the B-314 *Honolulu Clipper* and the Martin M-130 *Philippine Clipper* (Figure 2) to VR-2 for Honolulu – Mainland transport service, to be operated by PAA. The demand was rapidly increasing, and every day, another 1500 pounds of airmail was accumulating at San Francisco. [8] The available clippers together made an incredible (and unsustainable) fifty round trips in January 1943. Figure 3 shows an official mailgram cover carried by PAA from Honolulu to San Francisco in early March 1942.

Navy Transport Squadron 2 (VR-2) began operations in April 1942 with a prototype 4-engine Sikorsky XPBS-1 flying boat (Figure 4). VR-2 made its first flight to Honolulu on 15 May. NATS anticipated that VR-2 would make at least two round trips per week. However, VR-2's Sikorsky crashed in San Francisco Bay in late June.

PAA and VR-2 began receiving new seaplanes in the summer of 1942. They were 2-engine Martin PBM-3 Mariners (Figure 5) and 4-engine Consolidated PB2Y-3 Coronados (Figure 6). Both types had been conceived as patrol bombers and were now pressed into transport service. The first Mariners were transferred to PAA in early July and to VR-2 in August. PAA began receiving Coronados starting in September, and VR-2 began receipt in early November. By the end of 1942, PAA and VR-2 had twelve Mariners and three Coronados, in addition to the Martin M-130 *Philippine Clipper* and two Boeing B-314's. However, the *Philippine Clipper* was lost in a crash in California on 21 January 1943. Later, two more B-314's, *Dixie Clipper* and *California Clipper*, were added to PAA's Pacific inventory.

The establishment of the VR-11 squadron in Oakland in September 1943 brought 4-engine Douglas R5D (Figure 7) landplanes to the Honolulu – Mainland service. By the end of 1943, the PBM-3's were reassigned to squadrons west of Honolulu.

The pace of operations increased with added aircraft. Published schedules effective 25 November 1943 show 24 trips per week – seven by VR-11, 3 by VR-2 in PB2Y-3's, seven by PAA in PB2Y-3's and seven by PAA in B-314's. Figure 8 shows a registered cover sent from Brazil to a civilian contractor at a naval air base in Hawaii. It was carried by PAA or VR-2 from San Francisco to Honolulu in early December 1943.

Total trips increased with every new schedule to a peak of 109 per week in January 1945, with the R5D's progressively taking on more of the load. The prototype Martin XPB2M-1R Mars transport (Figure 9) was also used from January 1944 to March 1945, making 78 round trips between San Francisco and Honolulu [7].

Airmail loads on the Mainland – Honolulu route are unknown. Of course, all airmail between the mainland and the Central and South Pacific went through Honolulu. During 1943, the three B-314's alone flew 1.3 million miles and 1.3 million mail-ton miles on the route.

### South Pacific Transport Routes

The extension of NATS services to Australia and New Zealand should have been straightforward. The NATS had long-range seaplanes that could easily fly the FAM-19 route opened by PAA in May 1941. The route skirted the area occupied or imminently under attack by Japan. Most of the facilities used by PAA were still there, although some had been already been expropriated by the Army. Further, the Army was already using nearly the same route, except where suitable runways were not yet available for large landplanes. However, NATS did not establish their South Pacific service until August 1942.

#### Early Honolulu – Sydney Service by VP-13

In May 1942, Navy Patrol Squadron 13 (VP-13) had begun an irregular transport service between Honolulu and Sydney via Canton Island and Fiji using PB2Y Coronados. This service became more regularized during the summer with ten days to two weeks between trips.

#### NATS South Pacific Survey Flight

NATS conducted a survey flight through the South Pacific from 2 August to 18 September 1942, preliminary to establishing regular service between San Francisco and Brisbane. A PAA PBM-3 Mariner piloted by Captain J. Tilton made the trip. Passengers included PAA, Army and Navy personnel. The objective was to choose bases, and confirm availability of facilities and support, and leave key operations personnel at stations along the way. The outbound route was Oakland - Honolulu – Palmyra Island – Canton Island – Suva (Fiji) – Noumea (New Caledonia) – Brisbane, and the return route was Auckland – Suva – Tongatabu (Tonga) – Upolu (Samoa) - Penrhyn Island – Palmyra Island – Honolulu – Oakland. One passenger, PAA Operations Manager William Mullahey, prepared a small number of philatelic covers and carried them from Australia on the return trip (Figure 10).

#### First Scheduled NATS South Pacific Route

Scheduled NATS transport service between Honolulu and Brisbane began in September 1942, operated by PAA and VR-2, initially using Mariners. Stops were made at Palmyra Island, Canton Island, Wallis Island (Samoa), Suva (Fiji) and Noumea (New Caledonia). See Figure 11. A modification of the route terminated in Auckland instead of Brisbane. Figure 12 shows a cover flown by a PBM-3 from Brisbane to San Francisco in late December 1942.

The first Hawaiian Islands – Australia – New Zealand schedule, published in the last days of 1942, shows four trips per week. The Auckland route was to be flown every third trip. Round trips flown by Coronados took six days, while Mariner trips took ten days. The NATS actually made 22 trips in the

period from 17 February to 30 March 1943, for an average of almost four trips per week. Mariner round trip times were reduced to 7 and 8 days, respectively, by April 1943.

#### NATS South Pacific Route via Espiritu Santo

A more northerly branch from the main South Pacific route proceeding from Canton Island to Noumea via Funafuti (Gilbert Islands) and Espiritu Santo (New Hebrides) was also established in at the end of 1942. Espiritu Santo was to become a major Allied base, vital to the support of the Guadalcanal, New Georgia and Bougainville campaigns. **Figure 13** shows a V-mail form letter mailed in early January 1943 by a Marine on Guadalcanal and carried to Espiritu Santo by the South Pacific Combat Air Transport (SCAT) service for connection to the South Pacific Route.

By June 1943, the main South Pacific route had shifted to the more northerly branch via Espiritu Santo. Flights were operated by PAA and VR-2 using a mixture of Coronados and Mariners and, by March 1944, the number of trips peaked at fourteen per week. In November 1943, Funafuti became the focus support of and transport of wounded from Tarawa. **Figure 14** shows a letter sent in late December from an officer on the battleship *USS Indiana* off Tarawa, carried by aircraft of the Central Pacific Combat Air Transport Service (CenCATS) to Funafuti and by NATS to San Francisco.

#### Heyday of the South Pacific Routes

A two-day “Cannonball” service from Honolulu to Brisbane was initiated on 1 March 1944. The route passed through Palmyra, Canton, Funafuti, and Espiritu Santo. Only one overnight stop was taken, at Espiritu Santo. PB2Y-3 Coronado transports were used. The “Cannonball” ended with reversion to three-day flights in mid August 1944.

Sydney was added as a South Pacific route destination from May until October 1944. The frequency of flights to Brisbane, Sydney and Auckland peaked in June 1944 with, respectively, seven, ten and seven trips per week. Australia was becoming increasingly connected to Honolulu through northbound connections to the NATS Central Pacific routes.

Many variations on the South Pacific route continued until March 1, 1945, when Canton – Suva – Noumea – Auckland portion was discontinued. The war had moved northwards, and demand for transport service to Australia and New Zealand diminished. The entire South Pacific route was eliminated after 1 May 1945.

#### Fiji – Tonga – Samoa Shuttle Routes

In August 1942, VR-2 began operating weekly shuttles between several south Pacific islands surrounding Fiji using PBM-3 Mariners, concurrent with the start of the South Pacific route to Australia and New Zealand. The original Suva – Espiritu Santo – Noumea – Upolu (Western Samoa) – Suva route was completed in two days. **Figure 15** shows a V-mail form letter sent by a soldier on Tongatabu via the

NATS service. The original route was replaced in January 1943 by the circular Suva – Tongatabu (Tonga) – Upolu – Suva route, also completed in two days.

The VR-2 route was replaced on 17 April 1943 by a Suva – Espiritu – Efate (New Hebrides) – Espiritu Santo – Noumea – Efate – Espiritu Santo – Suva – Upolu – Tongatabu route flown week in Mariners by VR-10, originally a maintenance squadron based in Honolulu. See [Figure 16](#) for the route. The route took six days and was flown weekly. [Figure 17](#) shows a May 1943 letter from a soldier on Efate carried by NATS via Espiritu Santo or Noumea to San Francisco. This route was discontinued on 4 May 1944, after which South Pacific inter-island transport services were taken over by the Royal New Zealand Air Force.

### Central Pacific Transport Routes

As the war progressed, the fighting moved northwards and NATS routes were added accordingly. The Central Pacific routes, initiated in early 1943, grew rapidly during 1944 and 1945 to support the fast pace of island hopping across the Pacific, reaching the Solomons, New Guinea, the Marianas, the Carolines, The Philippines and Okinawa.

#### Midway & Palmyra

The NATS established regular routes Honolulu - Midway Island and Honolulu – Johnston Island by June 1943, initially operated by VR-10 using PBM-3 Mariners. Johnston Island was to become a very busy hub for westward extensions.

The Honolulu – Midway route was flown between two to four trips per day by PBM-3's from VR-10, VR-11, and finally VR-2. VR-11 R5D's replaced the Mariners in January 1945. [Figure 18](#) shows a letter sent in early January 1944 by a Marine on Midway to an APO address in England.

A Honolulu – Palmyra route was added after 25 November 1943, also serviced by Mariners. The Honolulu - Palmyra flights ended after 10 August 1944.

#### Extensions from Johnston Island

The Honolulu – Johnston route was extended by VR-11 R5D's in three directions starting 5 February 1944 ([Figure 19](#)). The northernmost branch was to Kwajalein (Marshall Islands). Kwajalein had been liberated by U.S. Marines on 3 February, just two days before scheduled transport flights began. Between May and July, Kwajalein was the terminus of daily R5D flights.

The central extension was to Majuro (Marshall Islands), which had been abandoned by the Japanese. VR-11 used both R5D and RY-2 (converted Army C-87 Liberator Express) transports on this branch. [Figure 20](#) shows a letter sent from the light cruiser *USS Mobile* at Majuro to a civilian in Auckland. It was most likely sent to Honolulu on the Central Pacific Route and then south to Auckland on the South Pacific and Southwest Pacific Shuttle Routes. Majuro flights ended after 10 August 1944 as Kwajalein became the local hub.

The southernmost extension from Johnston Island reached Tarawa (Gilbert Islands) and was extended on 1 March 1944 to Guadalcanal. Tarawa had been liberated by the Marines in November 1943. By May 1944, Tarawa became the northern terminus of the Samoa – Ellice – Gilberts – Marshalls Shuttle route. [Figure 21](#) shows a cover sent in early June 1944 to the mainland by a sailor on Tarawa.

#### Extensions to New Guinea and the Admiralties

Further extensions were made by VR-11 and VR-2 from Guadalcanal to Milne Bay, on the eastern tip of New Guinea, on 1 May 1944 and to Manus (Admiralty Islands) on 15 June. Milne Bay had been secured in September 1942 and developed into a major support base for the New Guinea campaign. Manus had been liberated on mid May 1944 by U.S. Army forces. Manus became the connection point between the Central Pacific and the Australia – New Guinea – Philippines transport routes, with the pace of service reaching seventeen weekly flights from Honolulu in October. With the Manus connection consolidated, Milne Bay was dropped from the Central Pacific route structure by August 1944. [Figure 22](#) shows a letter from a Naval Construction Battalion on Pavuvu (Russell Islands) in June 1944 that was carried by a Marines aircraft to Guadalcanal for connection to the NATS route.

#### Extensions to the Marianas, the Carolines, Guam, and the Ryukyus

VR-2 began PB2Y-3 Coronado service to Eniwetok Atoll (Mariana Islands) on 15 June 1944. Eniwetok had been liberated by U.S. Marines in late February, and was to become a major fleet anchorage. VR-11 R5D service from Eniwetok to Saipan (Mariana Islands) began after 7 July, just as Army and Marine forces completed its liberation. Eniwetok received weekly or more frequent service until direct Kwajalein – Saipan service began in October 1944, after which flights to Eniwetok fell to two or three per week. [Figure 23](#) shows a letter sent in August from the battleship *USS Iowa* at Eniwetok, which took seven days to reach its destination on the mainland. NATS service to Eniwetok ended in January 1945. An airmail letter mailed by a Marine on Saipan in August 1944 is shown in [Figure 24](#).

VR-11 began R5D service to Guam (Northern Mariana Islands) and Peleliu (Western Caroline Islands) after 20 October 1944. U.S. Army and Marines forces had secured Guam only ten days before. Guam was also service by R5D's from Manus until March 1945. Guam became a major base averaging as many as 36 flights per week from Honolulu. [Figure 25](#) shows a letter posted by a Marine on Guam. Flights to Peleliu began before the island had been completely liberated. The Honolulu – Peleliu connection ended in January 1945, when Peleliu became a stop on the transport route from Australia to the Philippines.

Ulithi atoll in the Caroline Islands was serviced from Saipan by VR-2 Coronado's three times per week from 20 October to 1 November 1944. Ulithi had been ignored by the Japanese, but became a major Navy staging area for the allied invasion of the Philippines. [Figure 26](#) shows the routes as of mid November 1944.

Okinawa, the southernmost of the Ryukyu Islands, began receiving NATS R5D transports from Guam by May 1945 ([Figure 27](#)), before the last remnants of Japanese forces were defeated. Iwo Jima, which fell

on 27 March, was also serviced by transports from Guam and Saipan. The available route schedules do not extend past March, so the operators, equipment and service frequency are not known. However, it is most likely that VR-11 R5D service was extended from Guam to the Japanese home islands after Japan surrendered. [Figure 28](#) shows a cover sent by a sailor on the battleship *USS North Carolina* in Tokyo Bay at the time of the formal surrender ceremony.

#### Samoa – Ellice – Gilbert – Marshall Shuttle Routes

Two shuttle services connecting American Samoa and Tarawa (Gilbert Islands) to the South Pacific and Central Pacific Routes were initiated after 4 May 1944. See [Figure 19](#). The first route from Tarawa to Funafuti (Ellice Islands) via Apamama (Gilbert Islands), Nanomea (Ellice Islands) and Nukufetau (Ellice Islands) took one day each way. The second route extending from Funafuti to Wallis Island, Upolu (Western Samoa) and Tutuila (American Samoa) took two days each way. Both were flown weekly by VR-11 R4D transports. The NATS flew several variations on these routes until November 1944.

Starting in November 1944, the routes were simplified and extended northwards to Kwajalein (Marshall Islands). Roi (Marshall Islands), Majuro and Makin (Gilbert Islands) were also included in the several route variations ([Figure 26](#)). Traffic was heavy with fifteen trips through Kwajalein shown in the February and March route schedules. The route was reduced to Roi – Kwajalein – Majuro – Tarawa by May 1945. [Figure 29](#) shows a cover sent in early January 1945 by a Marine from Roi to Kwajalein for connection to the NATS Central Pacific Route.

#### Australia – New Guinea – Philippines Routes

From the latter half of 1944 these routes supported the push of Allied forces northwards from Australia to the Moluccas, The Philippines and Japan. The service was flown exclusively by VR-13 using R4D and, on a limited basis, RY-2 transports.

The first route Brisbane – Townsville (Australia) – Milne Bay – Finschhafen – Manus was initiated on 5 August 1944. The round trip took two days and was completed seven times per week. Slightly modified routes connecting at Manus with the NATS Central Pacific route and at Brisbane with the South Pacific route were flown 17 times weekly by 12 September.

Sydney and Hollandia (Dutch New Guinea) were included in the route by 12 October 1944. [Figure 30](#) shows a cover sent by a Marine from Hollandia on the Central Pacific Route to San Francisco. The routes were extended to Owi Island (near Biak Is., Dutch New Guinea) and Peleliu by 17 November. Peleliu became the second point of connection to the Central Pacific routes. By this time, Manus, Hollandia and Peleliu were termini for, respectively, fourteen, twelve, and three trips per week. [Figure 31](#) shows a cover mailed by a sailor on Eil Malk Island in Palau, which was carried by NATS via Biak and Hollandia to Australia.

By 1 December 1944, Leyte in the central Philippines was reached from Manus. [Figure 32](#) shows a cover from the engine repair ship *USS Culebra Isle* in Leyte Gulf, sent in early January 1945 via Peleliu, Biak and Hollandia to connect with the Central Pacific Route. The route schedule for 17 January 1945 shows



three flights per day to Leyte. Further extension of NATS routes in the Philippines continued through May 1945.

#### West Coast – Alaska Transport Services

Pacific Alaska Airways, a subsidiary of Pan American Airways, carried airmail over their Foreign Airmail Route 20 between Seattle and Juneau via Ketchikan beginning in June 1940. The FAM 20 service initially used a Sikorsky S-42 flying boat, and it connected with Pacific Alaska's FAM 15 route from Juneau to Fairbanks, which used Lockheed Electra landplanes. By early 1941, Lockheed Lodestar landplanes replaced the flying boat.

Pacific Alaska Airways became the Alaska Division of Pan American Airways in May 1941. Several local airlines provided feeder services to the Pan Am route. Alaska Airways (Alaska Star Airways before December 1942) carried mail from Fairbanks to Nome and Bethel, and between Fairbanks and, from November 1943, Anchorage. [Figure 33](#) shows a commercial cover flown by PAA from Fairbanks to Seattle in December 1942.

Japanese forces attacked the U.S. Aleutian Islands, shelling Dutch Harbor on 3 June 1942 and occupying Attu and Sitka Islands on 6 June. The Aleutian Islands campaign was on. See [Figure 34](#) for the NATS Alaska route map.

NATS Transport Squadron VR-2 began flying boat service between the Seattle Naval Air Station and Alaska the same month as the Japanese attack [9]. [Figure 35](#) shows a cover sent by a sailor at Dutch Harbor that was carried on the seaplane route to Seattle in June 1942. VR-2 was succeeded by VR-5, which was established at Seattle on 24 June 1943. VR-5 used Douglas R4D ([Figure 36](#)) and R5D aircraft on the route from Seattle to the Aleutian Islands, Fairbanks and Point Barrow. The NATS routes carried exclusively military mail throughout the war. [Figure 37](#) shows a cover carried by VR-5 R4D transports between Naval Air Stations on Sitka Island and Seattle in December.

The Navy contracted with PAA effective 1 September 1942 to operate its Alaskan facilities for the Navy and to carry out special services for the military. Under contract terms, PAA kept its commercial airmail service and was required to extend the route from Seattle to Kodiak via Anchorage upon delivery of R4D aircraft. PAA began irregular R4D service began by late September over both a coastal route and an inland route.

The Seattle – Kodiak route was extended to Dutch Harbor and Adak in the Aleutian Islands in April 1943, with fourteen daily flights. [Figure 38](#) shows a cover mailed from the light cruiser *USS Detroit* on station in the Aleutian Islands, and carried in May 1944 by PAA R-5D transports from Adak to Seattle. By December 1943, PAA was operating fourteen flights weekly between Seattle and Kodiak and seven flights per week to Adak [10].

PAA contract services were terminated 21 July 1944, and VR-5 assumed remaining routes as Aleutian operations wound down. In July 1945, before Japan's surrender, PAA resumed its commercial FAM-20 services from Seattle using DC-3 aircraft [11].

## NATS Connections to Other Pacific Transport Systems

### Air Transport Command

The NATS and the ATC operated with almost complete independence during the early part of the war, even though Army and Navy post offices operated side by side at many locations where Army and Navy forces were stationed. More cooperation and coordination of activities began in 1944. Airmail sent by Army or Navy personnel later in the war may have been carried by either the NATS or the ATC transport services.

### Royal New Zealand Air Force

The Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) also operated a dedicated air transport system that interfaced with NATS (and the ATC) in the South Pacific. Before NATS was up and running, the RNZAF was providing irregular airmail service between Auckland and the locations of New Zealand forces stationed in the Pacific [2].

By mid 1943, the RNZAF was equipped with C-47 transports and was conducting scheduled transport services which eventually stretched to New Caledonia, Espiritu Santo, Guadalcanal, Los Negros, Fiji, Tarawa, Tonga, and Samoa, all points of interface with NATS or ATC routes. [Figure 39](#) shows a cover posted in June 1945 from the attack transport *USS Ormsby* on station in the Alaska area. The cover was most likely carried by NATS to Guadalcanal and by the RNZAF to New Zealand.

### South Pacific Combat Air Transport Command

The extension of NATS transport routes necessarily followed movements of the fighting fronts, in most cases by weeks or months. Freight, personnel, and airmail carried to the front from NATS trunk routes required other means of transport. In many cases, intra-theater air transport was provided by utility squadrons attached to fighting commands.

The prototype example was the South Pacific Combat Air Transport Command (SCAT), which was an amalgamation of Marine and Army transport squadrons flying R4D and C-47 transports. SCAT got its start during the Guadalcanal campaign flying fuel and ammunition, critical equipment and personnel, evacuees, and mail. NATS (and the ATC) initially connected with SCAT on Espiritu Santo and New Caledonia. [Figure 13](#) shows a cover from Guadalcanal carried by SCAT to connect with the NATS route at Espiritu Santo.

SCAT handled 1,141 tons of mail at New Caledonia between November 1942 and November 1943 [12]. SCAT moved with the fronts up through the Solomons to New Georgia and Bougainville, leading the extension of NATS and ATC routes.

### Central Pacific Combat Air Transport Service

Similar to SCAT, the Central Pacific Combat Air Transport Service (CenPAC) provided service to forward combat units fighting at Tarawa. CenPAC was established at Tutuila in early November 1943 and had accessed Tarawa via Funafuti by late November [2]. It further moved to support the consolidation of Kwajalein in early February 1944. CenPAC routes intersected with NATS routes at all of these points.

#### HOW MUCH AIRMAIL DID NATS CARRY?

A few statistics are known, but in the South Pacific NATS carried the following amounts of mail [2]:

Period	Pounds of Airmail
July 1943	13,0000
February 1944	202,000
February 1945	545,000
June 1945	1,350,000

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