

First Transpacific Air Service via Fiji

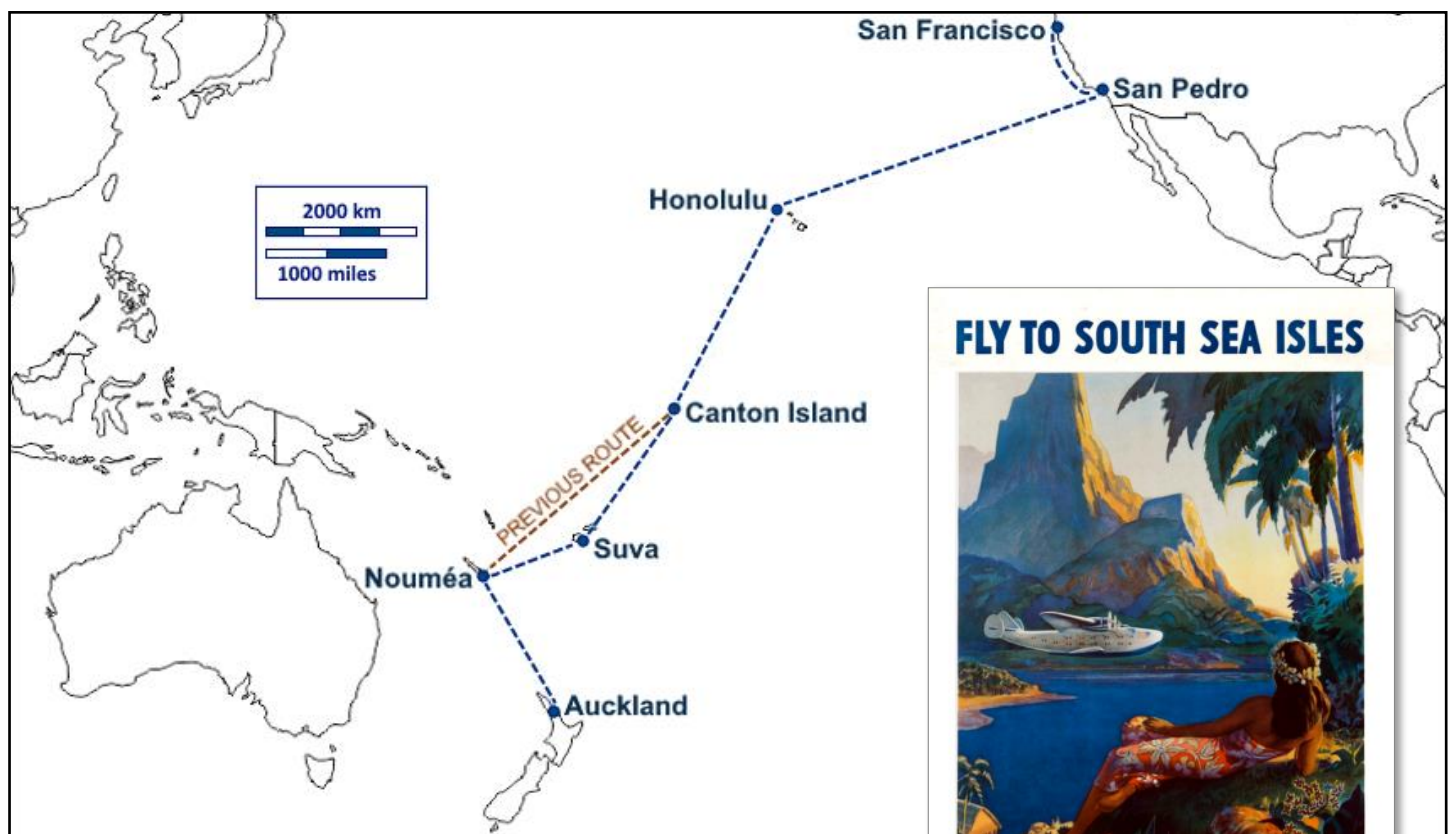
On 11 September 1941 Pan American Airways announced that Suva in Fiji would be added to the route of flight FAM 19 (Foreign Air Mail route 19) as a stop between Canton Island and Nouméa, New Caledonia.

The first flight over the new route with Captain John H. Tilton commanding set out from the U.S. on 5 November. The aircraft, NCI8602 *California Clipper*, a Boeing B-314A was rechristened *Pacific Clipper* for the flight.

Pacific Clipper arrived in Suva at 2.05 pm on 9 November after stops at San Pedro (for Los Angeles), Honolulu and Canton Island. The aircraft departed Suva on 10 November bound for Auckland via Nouméa.

The return flight departed Suva on 14 November 1941 bound for San Francisco via Canton Island, Honolulu and San Pedro for Los Angeles.

The Route



Map showing the route of Pan American Airways service FAM 19.

* throughout significant items have been outlined in bright blue.

Advertising poster (greatly reduced).

Major Sources

The Illustrated Aviation and Air Mail History of Fiji; B.A. Jones; Pacific Islands Study Circle, 2002.

The Postal History of Fiji; J.G. Roger, editor E.B. Proud; Postal History Publications, 1999.

Fiji Philatelics; D.W.F. Alford; Pacific Islands Study Circle, 2nd edition 2004.

Gibbons Stamp Monthly; B.A. Jones; Fiji Airmails... parts 1 & 2; September & November 2019.

Pacific Clipper: The Untold Story; Albert S.J. Tucker & Matthew W. Paxton; self published, 2001.

The Original Route



Boeing B-314A NCI8602 "California Clipper" before being renamed "Pacific Clipper"

The Boeing 314 was built to carry 74 passengers and 10 crew. On long transoceanic flights passenger numbers rarely exceeded 25 to 30, due to the extra weight of fuel required. Pan American Airways clipper service FAM19 from USA to New Zealand was introduced in 1940. Bypassing Fiji and other British territories en route in a dispute over reciprocal flying rights to the USA.



Cover from the 1940 inaugural FAM 19 flight before Fiji was added as a stopover. The cachet shows the route across the Pacific Ocean bypassing Fiji.

The following year the service was rerouted via Fiji. The first flight over the new route departed San Francisco on Sunday, 9 November, 1941 bound for New Zealand via Hawaii, Phoenix Islands, Fiji and New Caledonia. Previously the service had flown direct from Canton in the Phoenix Islands to New Caledonia. The aircraft used for the flight was a Boeing 314A (NCI8602), rechristened **Pacific Clipper** for the occasion, with Captain John H. Tilton in command.



Leaflet

Pan American Airways, Inc.

(PHILATELIC SECTION)

222 Stockton Street, San Francisco, California

September 11, 1941

Sept 5th
29.41

ADDITIONAL FIRST FLIGHT COVER SERVICE - SOUTH TRANSPACIFIC SERVICE

The Pan American Airways has applied to the United States Civil Aeronautics Board at Washington, D. C. for permission to include Suva, Fiji Islands as a regular port of call on the South Transpacific Service. The Fiji Islands is a British possession located in the South Pacific Ocean.

At present the South Transpacific Service is operated fortnightly from San Francisco, California to Auckland, New Zealand, via San Pedro, Calif. (serving Los Angeles, Calif.); Honolulu, Hawaii, Canton Island, Phoenix Group, and Noumea, New Caledonia. This service is operated as Foreign Air Mail #19 and was inaugurated on July 10, 1940 from San Francisco, California.

The inaugural flight to Suva, Fiji Islands will be made by the Company as soon as possible after the necessary authorization is obtained by the Company from the Civil Aeronautics Board.

Under the circumstances no specific date can be given at the present time regarding the inauguration of this service. However, in order that Philatelists and Collectors who may desire to obtain first flight covers on this extension may do so, this advance information is given to all concerned:

If you desire to secure first flight covers on this service, prepare and mail your covers immediately, as described below - if you delay you may be disappointed.

1. First Flight Cover Services Available:

(a) By the United States Postoffice Department.	(Postage Required)
San Francisco to Suva, Fiji	.40
Los Angeles to Suva, Fiji	.40
San Pedro to Suva, Fiji	.40
Honolulu to Suva, Fiji	.20
Canton Island to Suva, Fiji	.10

Covers for this service must be forwarded in a separate container to the Postmaster at point from which the covers are to be flown. The containers to the Postmaster must be endorsed in lower left hand corner "First Flight Covers for Suva - Please Hold." For further information on this service consult your local Postmaster with reference to Postal Bulletin dated September 10, 1941.

In connection with the Canton Island Covers, notice is hereby given that ordinary mail service from the mainland to Canton Island is very irregular. Regular fortnightly air mail service is maintained. (The air mail fee from the United States to Canton Island is 30¢ for each 1/2 ounce or fraction thereof).

(b) By the Pan American Airways.	Cost Per Cover
(*) San Francisco to Suva, Fiji	.45 per 1/2 ounce ✓
(*) Los Angeles to Suva, Fiji	.45 " ✓
(*) San Pedro to Suva, Fiji	.45 " ✓
(*) Honolulu to Suva, Fiji	.25 " ✓
(*) Canton Island to Suva, Fiji	.25 " ✓

Note: (*) These covers are a duplication of U.S. Postal service described under Paragraph (a) and are quoted here only in case Philatelists and Collectors desire the Company to handle same.

Noumea, N.C. - Suva, Fiji	.35 ✓
Auckland, N.Z. - Suva, Fiji	.35 ✓
Suva, Fiji - Noumea, N.C.	.32 ✓
Suva, Fiji - Auckland, N.Z.	.39 ✓
Suva, Fiji - Canton Island	.32 ✓
Suva, Fiji - Honolulu	.45 ✓
Suva, Fiji - San Pedro Calif.	.73 ✓
Suva, Fiji - Los Angeles, Calif.	.73 ✓
Suva, Fiji - San Francisco	.73 ✓

(Total cost of complete set of 14 covers described above \$6.34)

Mo. 8-14 USF.
16 covers

6.34
73
7.07

7.07 Suva
1.07 Britain
8.14

Front of Pan Am announcement to philatelists and collectors of first flight covers [shown reduced]

PAA (Pan American Airways) issued a statement that the different cachets used on this flight were made and supplied by the various postal authorities involved. This was a departure from previous practice where all the cachets would have been supplied by PAA.

Leaflet

First flight covers described under paragraph (b) must be forwarded to:

Pan American Airways
(Philatelic Section)
222 Stockton Street
San Francisco, Calif.

Each consignment of covers sent to Pan American Airways must be accompanied by a certified check or money order payable to Pan American Airways, Inc., San Francisco, Calif. for the exact amount of the service required. It is requested that all orders for covers be made on the attached order blank.

2. Preparation of First Flight Covers:

Philatelists and Collectors must prepare their own individual covers for this service. The Company will not forward covers on this service for sale to the public after the flight has been made, as was done on the recent extension of the Transatlantic Service to Bolama or the Trans-pacific Service to Singapore.

These covers may be addressed to the senders themselves or to other persons in the United States or elsewhere. They must be marked in the upper left hand corner (in pencil if desired) to show the points between which carriage by air is desired. Due to censorship restrictions no written matter should be included with the envelopes, only a light weight filler to cushion the cachet and cancellation mark should be inserted in the cover. The covers should not be sealed against inspection but forwarded unsealed, with the sealing flap of the envelope tucked into the envelope. In the past, many first flight covers have been returned to the Company by the postal service because of defective addresses on the covers and it is therefore suggested that the name and address of sender be placed in pencil on the back of the cover.

3. General Information:

(a) Postal Administrations concerned have advised that Philatelic treatment will be given to all mails handled on the first flight to and from Suva.

(b) After the flight has been completed the covers will be returned to the addressee by ordinary mail. In some cases this will probably be from six weeks to two months after the flight, due to restricted steamship schedules between these countries.

(c) In view of the fact that many Philatelists and Collectors specialize in certain denomination or serial postage stamps, the Company will accept first flight covers with the required postage stamps affixed by the sender. The Company handling charge on such covers will be 5¢ per cover from San Francisco, Los Angeles or San Pedro, and 15¢ per cover on all other covers.

(d) The following covers will not be serviced by the Company:

- 1 - Round the world covers.
- 2 - Covers to be cancelled at successive points along the route. (only separate individual covers from one point to another will be serviced).
- 3 - Covers to be forwarded by Registered Mail or other special services maintained by the Postal Services.

(e) Under ordinary circumstances, covers posted in Suva and destined to Canton Island will be backstamped by the Canton Island Postoffice as arriving there (Canton Island) one calendar day before the date they were posted in Suva. This peculiarity is due to the crossing of the 180th Meridian (international date line) during the flight between these two points.

4. Additional first flight cover service by the Fiji Islands Postal Administration:

The Fiji Islands Postal Administration advises the Company that the following services are also available:

	<u>Cost per cover, 1/2 oz.</u>
Suva to Australia	.43
Suva to Canada	.73
Suva to Great Britain	1.07

These covers will be carried as follows, from best information available to the Company, but not guaranteed:

Australia

Pan American Airways from Suva to Auckland; Tasmania Airways from Auckland to Australia.

Canada

Pan American Airways from Suva to United States; U.S. Domestic Airlines to Vancouver B. C., Trans/Canada and U.S. Domestic routes to final destination.

Great Britain

Pan American Airways from Suva to Los Angeles or San Francisco; U.S. Domestic lines to Atlantic Seaboard, Pan American Airways Transatlantic Service to European landing port, thence by connecting European Carrier to Great Britain.

The Pan American Airways will accept, transport and deliver such covers to the Suva Postoffice, but will assume no further responsibility for such covers. The covers destined to Australia and Great Britain should be addressed for delivery to an address in Australia or Great Britain, and not elsewhere. Pan American Airways does not maintain offices in either of these countries. Only covers to be posted in Suva, destined to Australia, Canada and Great Britain will be accepted by the Company.

Back of leaflet [shown reduced]

Analysis of the Cancels used on First Flight covers

Five different Fiji Post Office cancellers were used together with the Suva registration datestamp and the special canceller supplied by Pan Am. Types 1 to 5 were also all used as arrival marks. This large number of cancellers allowed several postal clerks to work simultaneously in clearing the large volumes of mail in the limited time available.

According to the *Fiji Times* of 10 November the outgoing flight to Nouméa took “15,196 letters weighing 24lb 3oz.”

THE SUVA CANCELLERS



Jones type 1 (Proud D15)

Large 9 with square tail. Month denoted by three letters.
Narrow letters in month. Introduced in 1937.
Found on roughly one third of covers.

Jones type 2 (Proud D18)

Similar to type 1, but with wider letters for month,
most noticeable in the “O” of “NOV”.
Found on roughly one third of covers.



Jones type 3 (Proud D17)

Large 9 with sloping tail.
Month denoted by two letters.
Less than 5% of covers have this postmark.

Jones type 4 (Proud D14)

Smaller circumference circular datestamp. Two letter month.
Last recorded use 14 November 1941.
Roughly 15% of covers carry this postmark.



Jones type 5 (Proud D16)

Small circular date stamp in occasional use between 1931 and 1961.
Around 10% of outward flight covers carry this postmark.

Registered Datestamp (Proud R4)

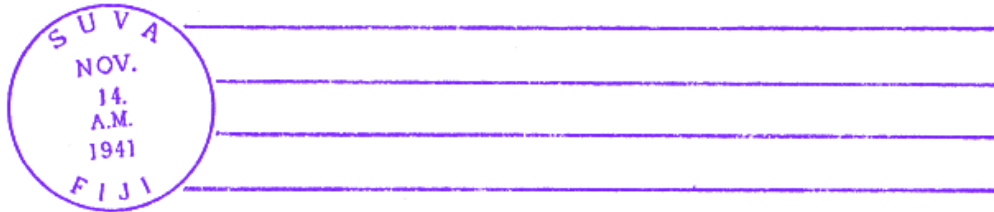
Datestamp for registered mail.
In use between 1929 and 1949.
About 7% of covers appear to have been registered.



The newspaper also reported that the “incoming flight brought 1,702 letters for delivery in Fiji plus approximately 14,000 First Flight covers weighing 200lb for arrival cancellations to be applied and returned by surface mail.”

Pan Am Four-Bar Cancellor (Proud AMI)

US style four-bar canceller with fixed date carried onboard *Pacific Clipper* by PAA employee Fred Laidlaw. The canceller was only used in violet on mail processed by Pan Am and destined for Canton Island, Hawaii or the US mainland.



The Fijian Head Cachet (Proud AM5—AM9)

The *Fijian Head* first appeared as part of a printed cachet on first day covers for the King George VI definitives issued on 5 April 1938. It was reused on the handstamped cachets applied to Pan Am first flight covers sent from Fiji to various destinations.

The cachet can be found struck either in black or violet. Those in black (probably less than 5% of covers) were prepared in advance through the Suva G.P.O., mostly by a local dealer, Alfred Herrick. Both black and violet cachets can be found for all destinations.



First flight cover from Suva to Honolulu with the Fijian Head cachet struck in black indicating that the cover was prepared in advance and Pan Am Suva 4 bar datestamp.

SAN FRANCISCO — SUVA

9 November, 1941.

First Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Southbound.

Rate: 40¢.

Number of covers flown: 4,182.



Cover postmarked San Francisco, 5 November 1941.

Cachet in blue-black shows the flight number FAM 19 with the Pacific Clipper over the Golden Gate Bridge.

The 40 cent rate paid postage to Fiji. The cover is overpaid by one cent.

Pan Am were based at Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay. It was home to the 1939–40 *Golden Gate International Exposition* (World's Fair) and included two large hangers used by the *Clipper* flying boats which formed one of the fair's star attractions.



The backstamp (type 3) showing arrival at Suva on 9 November 1941.

Less than 5% of covers carry this postmark.



Passengers boarding a Pan Am Clipper at Treasure Island, San Francisco.

LOS ANGELES — SUVA

9 November, 1941.

First Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Southbound.

Rate: 40¢.

Number of covers flown: 2,705.

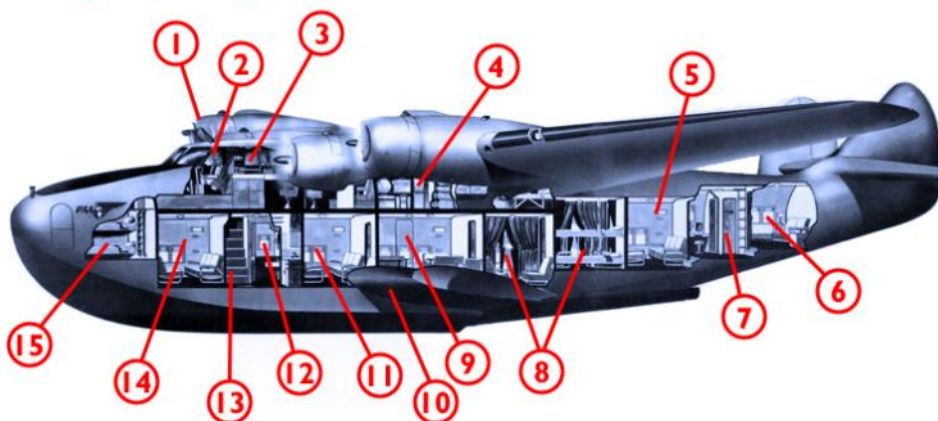


Cover postmarked Los Angeles, 5 November 1941.
 The cachet in purple shows the flight number FAM 19 with the Pacific Clipper taking off.
 The 40¢ rate paid postage to Fiji.

Suva backstamp type 4 for 9 November 1941. ▶



Boeing B-314 Clipper



- KEY**
1. 1,600hp Wright double cyclone engine.
 2. Cockpit.
 3. Radio Officer's station.
 4. Baggage compartment.
 5. Lounge
 6. Deluxe suite.
 7. Women's dressing room.
 8. Cabins laid out for sleeping.
 9. Dining room / Lounge.
 10. Stabiliser / Fuel tank.
 11. Lounge.
 12. Dressing room.
 13. Staircase to Flight deck, Bar and Galley.
 14. Passenger lounge.
 15. Crew's day cabin.

LOS ANGELES — SUVA

9 November, 1941.

First Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Southbound.

Rate: 40¢.

Number of covers flown: 2,705.



Cover postmarked Los Angeles, 5 November 1941.
The cachet in purple shows the flight number FAM 19 with the Pacific Clipper taking off.
The 40¢ rate paid postage to Fiji. The cover is overpaid by 1¢.



◀ Suva backstamp type 5 for 9 November 1941.
This is the least common of the Suva backstamps with only 10% of covers carrying this mark.

In the bow of the Boeing 314 was the anchor and gear room, which also held a mooring post. From this room, a gangway led up to the flight deck. Here, two pilots handled the controls that operated the plane. At the back of the flight deck was the navigation and radio room, the directive brain of the seaplane. Behind that was the cargo hold, which usually contained mail.

Below the flight deck were the galley, dining lounge and seven passenger compartments stretched along the length of the flying boat.



SAN PEDRO — SUVA

9 November, 1941.

First Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Southbound.

Rate: 40¢.

Number of covers flown: 2,895.



Cover postmarked San Pedro, 5 November 1941.

The cachet in green shows the flight number FAM 19 with the Pacific Clipper over San Pedro.

The 40 cent rate paid postage to Fiji.

Now a part of Los Angeles, in 1941 San Pedro was a town to the south of the city. It was the location of the Pan Am flying boat base serving Los Angeles.

This flight was the only occasion when Pan Am produced souvenir covers with a San Pedro cachet. The result of intense lobbying by the town's mayor.



Pan Am Ticket Office, San Pedro.



Map showing location of the Pan Am Ticket Office.

SAN PEDRO — SUVA

9 November, 1941.

First Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Southbound.

Rate: 40¢.

Number of covers flown: 2,895.

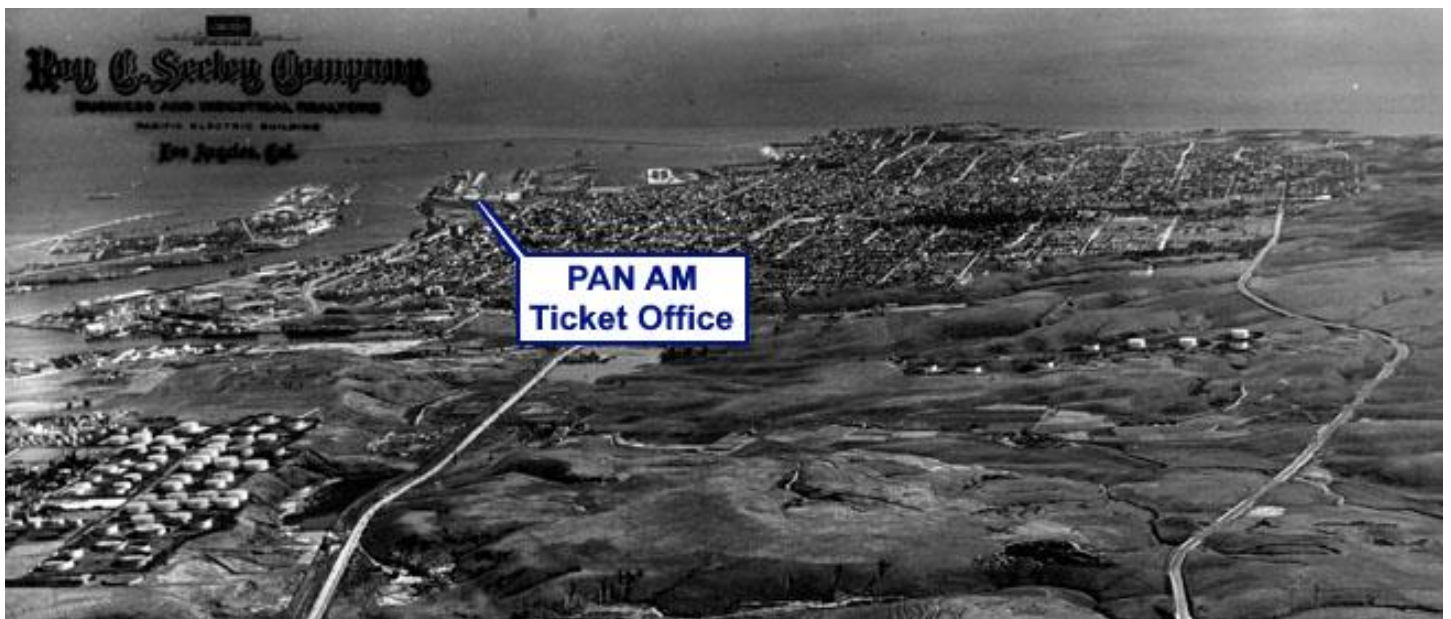


Cover postmarked San Pedro, 5 November 1941.

The cachet in green shows the flight number FAM 19 with the Pacific Clipper over San Pedro.

The 40 cent rate paid postage to Fiji. The cover is overpaid by one cent.

In 1941 San Pedro was a small town serving Los Angeles Harbour and was home to the Pan Am “Clipper” flying boats.



Aerial view of San Pedro in 1941.

HONOLULU — SUVA

9 November, 1941.

First Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Southbound.

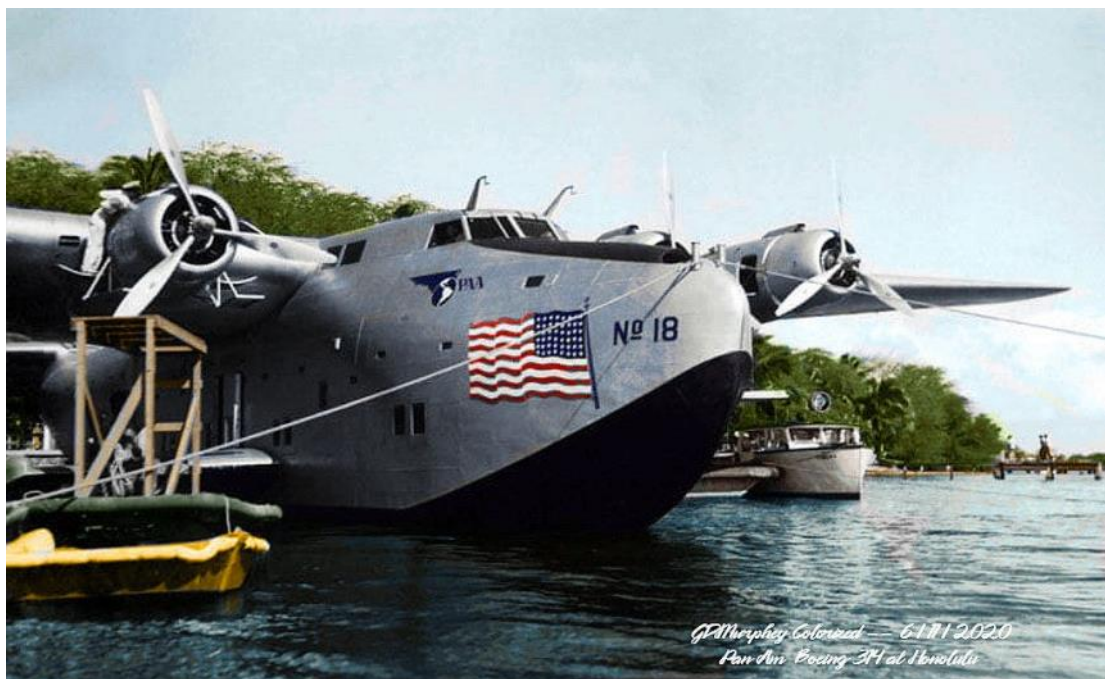
Rate: 20¢.

Number of covers flown: 3,467.



*Cover postmarked 4.00 am, 7 November, 1941 with Honolulu, Hawaii machine cancel.
The 20¢ rate paid postage to Fiji.*

Mail carried on the flight from Honolulu to Fiji received either the standard four bar duplex cancel or a machine cancel in equal proportions.



Pacific Clipper at Honolulu [monochrome image coloured by G.D. Murphey]

HONOLULU (registered mail) — SUVA

9 November, 1941.

First Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Southbound.

Rate: 20¢ + 45¢ registration fee.

Number of covers flown: unknown number within total of 3,467.



*Cover with stamps obliterated by registry dumb cancel.
20¢ paid airmail postage to Fiji with an additional 25¢ registration/special delivery fee.*

The cover was registered in Honolulu on 6 November 1941, the day before the flight. The Suva registered datestamp shows that it arrived on 9 November. Return was by surface via San Francisco (2 December) to the addressee in Cincinnati (3 December). Roughly 7% of mail on the flights was registered.



Scan showing Honolulu, Suva, San Francisco and Cincinnati registration marks confirming that cover went on the flight [central area shown full size]

CANTON ISLAND — SUVA

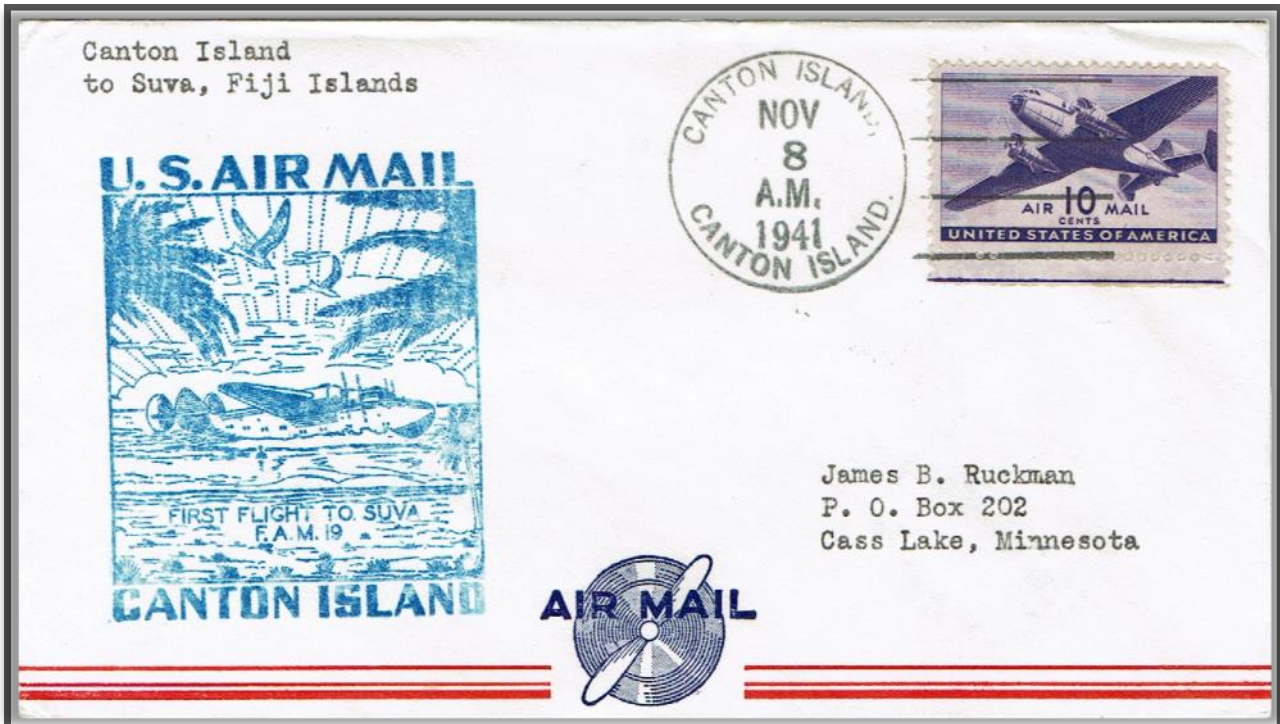
9 November, 1941.

First Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Southbound.

Rate: 10¢.

Number of covers flown: 3,326.



Cover with Canton Island US style four (narrow) bar cancellation for 8 November 1941.



Suva type 1 arrival stamp on back

Pan Am arrived on Canton Island on 18 May 1939, to build facilities for their planned New Zealand flying boat service. Service commenced on 12 July 1940 with the Boeing 314 Clipper. The final Pan Am service departed the island in November 1965.

Canton Island Post Office opened on 25 January 1941 and closed 6 February 1968.



Contemporary map of the island.

CANTON ISLAND — SUVA

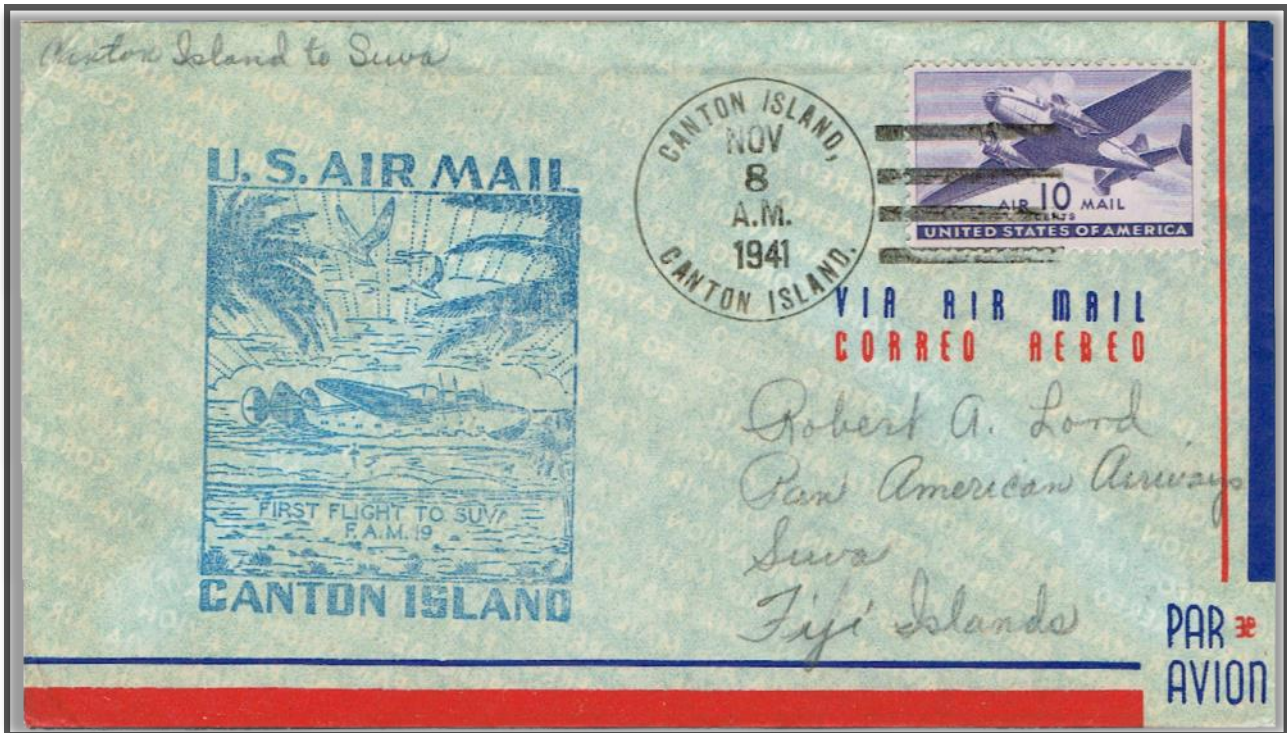
9 November, 1941.

First Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Southbound.

Rate: 10¢.

Number of covers flown: 3,326.



Cover with Canton Island US style four (broad) bar cancellation for 8 November 1941.

The British laid claim to Canton Island during the 1850s. The official British claim was formally reasserted on 6 August 1936, and an order in council issued in March 1937 included Canton and other Phoenix Islands in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony. On 8 June 1937, Canton was the site of a total solar eclipse. During this time, the American expedition party claimed the island for the United States. Both Britain and the US continued to press their competing claims until 6 April 1939, when it was agreed to hold Canton under joint control for the next fifty years. Today the atoll is known as Abariringa and is part of Kiribati.



Suva type 4 arrival stamp on back

Insert card shown reduced.

SUVA — NOUMÉA

9 November, 1941.

First Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

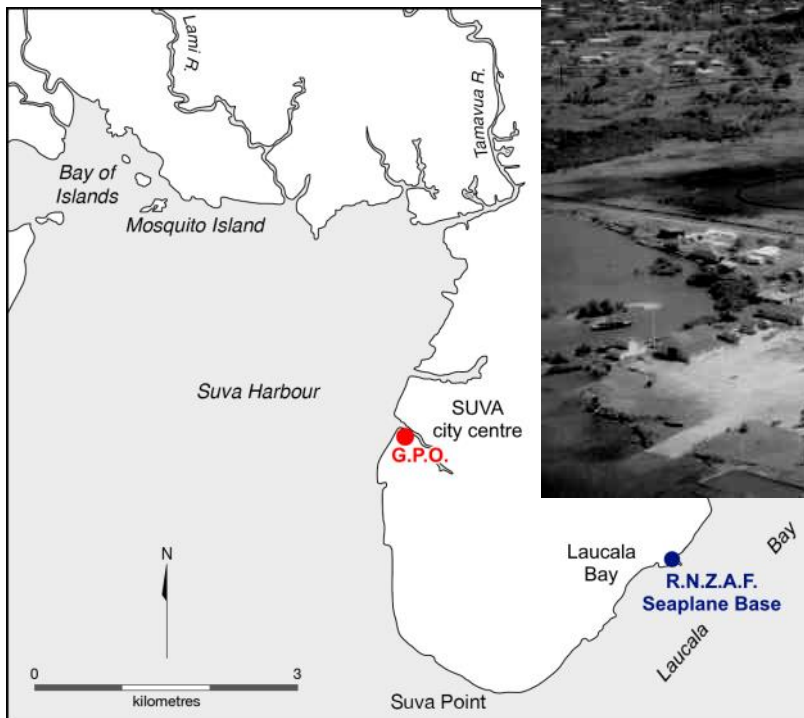
Southbound.

Rate: 9½d.

Number of covers flown: 3,091.



Cover postmarked Suva, 4.00 pm, 9 November, 1941.
The 9½d rate paid postage to New Caledonia.



R.N.Z.A.F. Sunderland flying boat over the seaplane base at Laucala Bay and map showing location of the base.

Pan Am used the R.N.Z.A.F. seaplane base at Laucala Bay for their “Clipper” service through Fiji. Situated on the opposite side of the peninsula from Suva Harbour it was only 2½ miles by road from the city centre.

SUVA — NOUMÉA

9 November, 1941.

First Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Southbound.

Rate: 9½d.

Number of covers flown: 3,091.



Cover postmarked Suva, type 3, for 4.00 pm, 9 November, 1941.
The 9½d rate paid postage to New Caledonia.



Backstamp of Nouméa, New Caledonia.
Dated 10 November, 1941
with the month "NOV" in italics.



Australian civil censorship mark.

Civil censorship was applied in Australia during return by surface to the addressee in the United States. The cover is unsealed and therefore did not require a resealing label.

SUVA — NOUMÉA

9 November, 1941.

First Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Southbound.

Rate: 9½d.

Number of covers flown: 3,091.



Uncensored cover postmarked Suva, type 3, for 4.00 pm, 9 November, 1941.
The 9½d rate paid postage to New Caledonia.

Censorship was not uniformly applied to every cover from this flight.

This philatelic cover was left unsealed with no contents. Consequently civil censorship was unnecessary on arrival in Australia during return by surface to the addressee in the United States.



Backstamp of Nouméa, New Caledonia.
Dated 10 November, 1941
with the month "NOV" in italics.

Back of cover showing the flap with full undisturbed gum
indicating that it was never sealed.
[image reduced to 67%]

SUVA — AUCKLAND

9 November, 1941.

First Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Southbound.

Rate: 1s.2d.

Number of covers flown: 9,533 (including destinations beyond New Zealand and NZ Forces mail).



Cover postmarked Suva, 9.00 am, 9 November, 1941.
The 1s 2d rate paid postage to Auckland and no further.



Lest we regret
DON'T TALK

Machine cancel arrival mark of Auckland
for Armistice Day, 11 November, 1941
struck on the back.

Harold Gatty (pictured left), the pioneer aeronautical navigator, acted as Pan American Airways agent in Auckland and chief organiser in Fiji, where he would settle after the war.

The 1s 2d rate covered postage by airmail only as far as Auckland. For addresses in New Zealand outside Auckland an additional penny was charged giving a rate of 1s 3d.

Of the 12,624 letters despatched from Suva on the southbound flight 9,533 were bound for New Zealand or beyond.

SUVA — AUCKLAND (damaged in the post)

9 November, 1941.

First Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Southbound.

Rate: 1s.2d., overpaid at 1s. 5d.

Number of covers flown: 9,533 (including destinations beyond New Zealand and NZ Forces mail).



Cover postmarked Suva, 9.00 am, 9 November, 1941.

A number of creases are visible on the front of the cover.

Damage caused by the Auckland cancelling machine.

The 1s 2d rate paid postage to Auckland, this cover has been overpaid at 1s. 5d.



Lest we regret
DON'T TALK

The slogan postmark as it should appear.

◀ *The back of the cover as it would have appeared on being extracted from the automatic feed mechanism of the cancelling machine. [Image reduced to 75%]*

This thin airmail envelope, having no contents to stiffen it, was not sturdy enough to pass through the automatic cancelling machine at Auckland and became jammed in the mechanism.

SUVA (from NZ Forces in Fiji) — NEW ZEALAND

9 November, 1941.

First Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Southbound.

Rates: 1s.2d. or 1s.3d.

Number of covers flown: 3,905 (within total for Auckland).



“On Active Service” cover postmarked Suva, 9 November, 1941. Additionally a circular N.Z.E.F. (New Zealand Expeditionary Force) field post office and rectangular military censor mark have been applied in violet. The 1s 3d rate paid postage to Fielding, Manawatu, New Zealand.

The cover was sent by Private 43686 W.E.R. Beyer. Military personnel did not receive a concessionary rate for using this air mail service.



Machine slogan cancel arrival mark of Auckland for 11 November, 1941 struck on the back. One of two slogan cancels that were used.

The 8th Brigade of the New Zealand army had been stationed in Fiji since October 1940 while the R.N.Z.A.F. had set up a seaplane base at Laucala Bay.

The revised route of FAM 19 taking in Fiji gave the service personnel an unexpected opportunity to send messages home. It was an opportunity they seized sending 3,905 items of mail on the flight.

SUVA (from NZ Forces in Fiji) — NEW ZEALAND

9 November, 1941.

First Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Southbound.

Rates: 1s.2d. or 1s.3d.

Number of covers flown: 3,905 (within total for Auckland).



Y.M.C.A. "On Active Service" cover postmarked Suva, 9 November, 1941.
 No N.Z.E.F. (New Zealand Expeditionary Force) field post office
 or rectangular military censor mark have been applied.
 At 1s 2d the cover is underpaid by 1d. for an address outside Auckland.



Lest we regret
 DON'T TALK

Arrival machine cancellation of Auckland, 11 November, 1941.

The cover is endorsed on the back as being sent by Warrant Officer 47477 F.R. Andrews of No 3 platoon (battalion and regiment not disclosed).

The correct rate to an address in Wellington was 1s. 3d. The cover is therefore underpaid by 1d. but has not been surcharged. The recipient has noted on the front that it was received on 13 November, two days after its arrival in Auckland.

fiji



SUVA —
AUSTRALIA (Melbourne)
via AUCKLAND

9 November, 1941.

First Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight
through Suva.

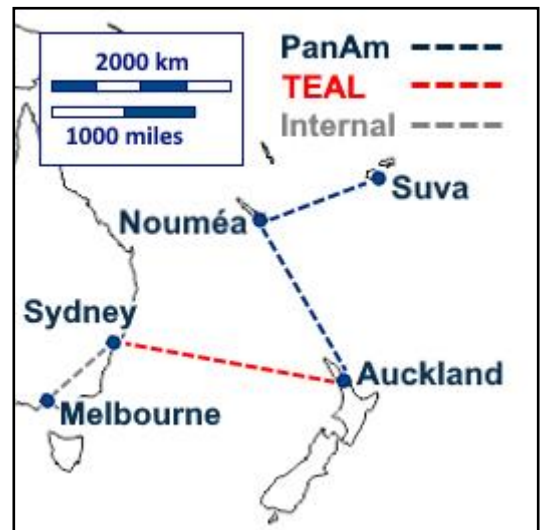
Southbound.

Rate: 1s.8d.

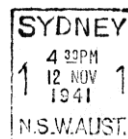
Number of covers flown: 2,552
(within total for Auckland)

Air mail for Australia went from
Auckland by the TEAL (Tasman Empire
Airways Ltd) service to Sydney.

◀ Cover postmarked Suva,
9.00 am, 9 November, 1941.
The 1s 2d rate paid postage to
Auckland with an additional 4d to
Australia and a further 2d to
Melbourne, Victoria.



Map of route



Sydney G.P.O. Air Mail Section backstamp
[shown 75% actual size]
also partly offset on front.
No Auckland transit mark applied.



*Miss Catherine Costello
of midy Oldham
15 WEA
Needle & Thread Co
Auckland*

FIRST TRANSPACIFIC AIR MAIL
Suva, Fiji to Auckland, N. Z.

*Fiji, New Zealand, Australia.
18 Day Leaves
Pan American*



BY AIR MAIL
PAR AVION



fiji



**SUVA (registered mail) —
AUSTRALIA (Maryborough)
via AUCKLAND**

9 November, 1941.

First Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight
through Suva.
Southbound.

Rate: 2s.*

Number of covers flown: 2,552
(within total for Auckland)

◀ Cover with Suva registered datestamp
for 9 November, 1941. The Suva
registration cachet (Proud type R16)
with numeral 17198 has been applied
along with the "Fijian Head" cachet. In
Australia a civil censorship mark has
been added.

* The 2s rate comprises 1s 2d postage
to Auckland plus 3d registration fee,
then 4d airmail to Sydney, New South
Wales and 3d internal air mail to
Brisbane, Queensland. It has been
estimated that only 7% of the mail was
registered.



Arrival marks from back
[shown actual size]

SUVA — AUSTRALIA (Sydney) via AUCKLAND

9 November, 1941.

First Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Southbound.

Rate: 1s.6d.

Number of covers flown: 2,552 (within total for Auckland).

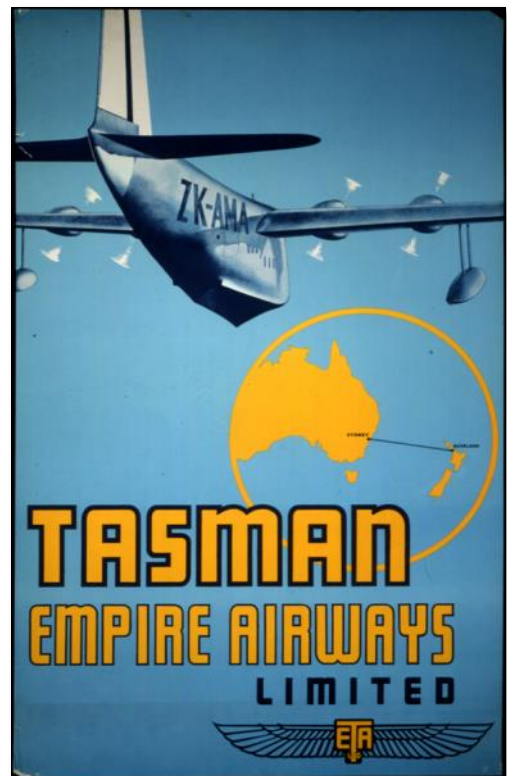


Cover postmarked Suva, 9.00 am, 9 November, 1941.
The 1s 2d rate paid postage to Auckland with an additional 4d to Australia.



Backstamp of G.P.O. Air Mail Section, Sydney.
No Auckland transit mark applied.

The inaugural TEAL service from Auckland to Sydney on 30 April 1940 was flown by ZK-AMA *Aotearoa*, one of its two Short S.30 Empire flying boats. The first four months of operation saw a weekly return service between Auckland and Sydney. This was expanded to thrice fortnightly with connections to San Francisco using Pan Am flights from Auckland (Pan Am was not flying into Australia at the time). The connection to San Francisco ended in December 1941 when Japan entered the war closing off the transpacific air route to civilian traffic.



TEAL poster (greatly reduced)

AUKLAND — SUVA

14 November, 1941.

First return Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Northbound.

Rate: 1s. 3d.

Number of covers flown: 6,856



Cover with Auckland circular datestamp for 11 November, 1941, roughly 16% of covers have this cancel. The 1s. 3d. rate paid postage to Fiji.

Pan Am's original published schedule indicated that the service would commence in October 1941. Based on this information the cachet was created with "OCT 1941" as the bottom line. Few impressions of the cachet exist with "OCT" obliterated, most have the offending letters deleted.



Cachet with month "OCT" deleted due to delayed inaugural flight.



Suva arrival mark type 5 for 13 November stamped on back of cover.

The total number of covers sent from Auckland is not recorded. A total of 10,238 were received at Suva of which 3,382 are known to have been loaded at Nouméa. By process of deduction this gives a figure for Auckland of 6,856 covers despatched.

AUKLAND — SUVA

14 November, 1941.

First return Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Northbound.

Rate: 1s. 3d.

Number of covers flown: 6,856



Cover addressed to Suva with Auckland machine cancellation for Armistice Day, 11 November 1941 and "Lest we regret DON'T TALK" slogan. The 1s. 3d. rate paid postage to Fiji.



Suva backstamp type 2 for 13 November 1941. This datestamp was used on approximately 57% of covers arriving in Suva on the return flight.



Pan Am Clipper at Auckland Harbour

AUKLAND — SUVA

14 November, 1941.

First return Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Northbound.

Rate: 1s. 3d.

Number of covers flown: 6,856



*Cover with Auckland circular datestamp for 11 November, 1941,
roughly 16% of covers have this cancel.
The 1s. 3d. rate paid postage to Fiji.*



*Suva backstamp type 2 for 13 November 1941.
This datestamp was used on approximately 57%
of covers arriving in Suva on the return flight.*

The American artist Henry Day Lowry (1891-1976) of Richmond, Virginia produced a number of illustrated commemorative covers during his career including the general purpose air mail design shown above.

The stamps used on the cover are the 1935 New Zealand Air set (1d., 3d. and 6d.) with an additional 5d. from the 1940 *Proclamation of British Sovereignty Centenary* set. These make up the 1s. 3d. air mail rate to Fiji.

NEW PLYMOUTH via AUKLAND — SUVA (N.Z. Forces concessionary rate)

14 November, 1941.

First return Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Northbound.

Rate: 9d.

Number of covers flown: less than 350, only 4 examples have been recorded.



Cover postmarked New Plymouth, 10 November 1941, addressed to the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force in Fiji and stamped at the 9d concessionary rate for personnel on active service.



Suva type 3 backstamp for 13 November 1941.
This datestamp was used on less than 5% of covers.

The 9d concessionary rate to members of N.Z. Forces on active service in Fiji was made available from 5 November and only available for the two return flights before the service was suspended following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. The rate notified in a G.P.O. circular (T.1941/526) was poorly publicised with the result that 5% or less of the total covers despatched from New Zealand to Fiji were at the concessionary rate. The service lasted for two flights only over a period of a fortnight.

NOUMÉA — SUVA

13 November, 1941.

First return Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Northbound.

Rate: 5.50Fr.

Number of covers flown: 3,382.



Cover postmarked Nouméa, New Caledonia 13 November, 1941 with “NOV” in italics.



Upright month
Nouméa datestamps.

Suva arrival datestamp, type 4
struck on reverse.

Two very similar circular datestamps were used to cancel covers from Nouméa. They differ in the typeface used for the date and in particular the month; one upright sans serif letters, the other italic serifs and slightly larger.

The 3,382 mail items loaded at Nouméa weighed almost 20kg.

In June 1940 New Caledonia became the first French colony to reject Vichy control and “rally” to the Free French. A change explained to a degree by the colony’s reliance on nearby Australia and New Zealand as a source of provisions. Siding with the Free French allowed flights into and out of the British Empire. In this instance Fiji and New Zealand.

NOUMÉA — SUVA (signed by pilot)

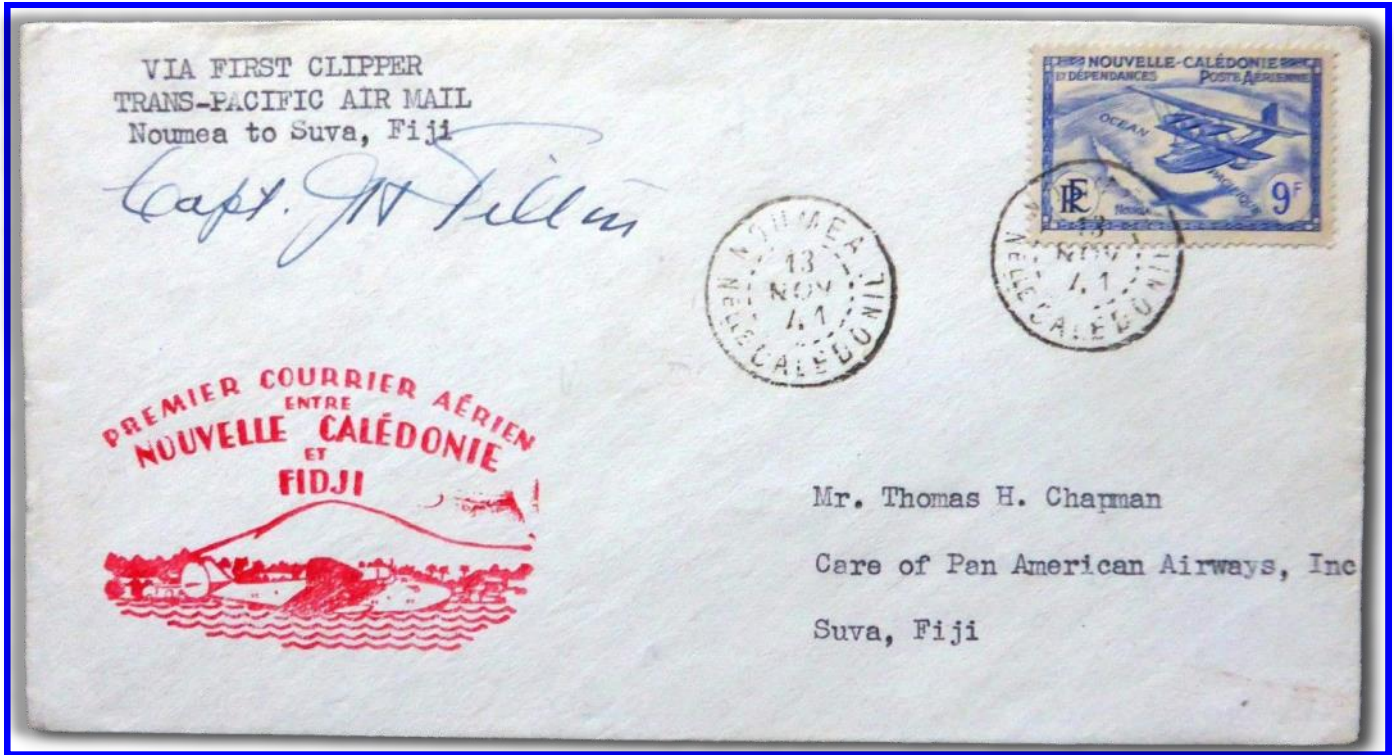
13 November, 1941.

First return Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Northbound.

Rate: 5.50Fr but overpaid at 9.00Fr presumably for the autograph.

Number of covers known: 1.



Cover postmarked 13 November, 1941 with Nouméa, New Caledonia handstamp.

The cover is one of very few recorded examples* from the entire trip signed by the pilot, Captain John H. Tilton.



Pan Am Clipper flying boat at Nouméa, 1941.



Capt. John H. Tilton, jr.
(1893 – 1982)

Known autographed covers:

Leg

- San Pedro—Suva
- Nouméa—Suva*
- Suva—Canada

Signed by

- Pilot and crew
- Pilot
- Pilot



◀ Suva arrival datestamp for 13 November 1941, type 2. This datestamp was used on roughly 57% of covers arriving in Suva from the return flight.

NOUMÉA (registered mail) — SUVA (forwarding delayed)

13 November, 1941.

First return Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Northbound.

Rate: 5.50Fr.

Number of registered covers flown: 130.



Registered cover postmarked 26 October, 1941 with Nouméa, New Caledonia handstamp. Flown on Pan Am service FAM19 to Fiji, arriving 13 November 1941. The cover was then delayed by a year before being forwarded by surface mail to the addressee.

The protracted sequence of events are as follows (estimated dates are shown in *italics*):

- 26/10/41** registered and posted Nouméa.
- 26/10/41* New Caledonian censorship applied.
- 13/11/41** flown to Fiji, Suva CDS arrival applied to back.
- 12/11/42** Sydney CDS arrival applied to back, 364 days after arrival in Fiji.
- 12/11/42** Sydney registered oval handstamp applied to front.
- 12/11/42** endorsed on front "Received without contents" and initialled.
- 12/11/42* "any" added after "without" and initialled.
- 12/11/42* checked and initialled.
- 12/11/42* Australian censorship applied. No resealing label confirms lack of contents.
- 28/12/42** arrived San Francisco.
- 01/01/43** delivered Norfolk, VA.



Postal markings from back of cover ►
[reproduced full size]

SUVA — CANTON ISLAND

14 November, 1941.

First return Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Northbound.

Rate: 9½d.

Number of covers flown: 3,450.



Cover postmarked Suva type 4, 14 November, 1941.

It is estimated that less than 5% of covers have the 'Fijian Head' cachet in black.

It has been estimated that roughly 10% of covers have the 'Fijian Head' cachet stamped in black. These covers were ordered well in advance from Alfred Herrick, a stamp dealer in Suva. All other covers on the flight received a violet cachet.



Canton Island four (narrow) bar backstamp, dated 13 November, 1941.

En route from Suva to Canton Island Pacific Clipper crossed the International Date Line hence the arrival datestamp shows a day earlier than that for departure.

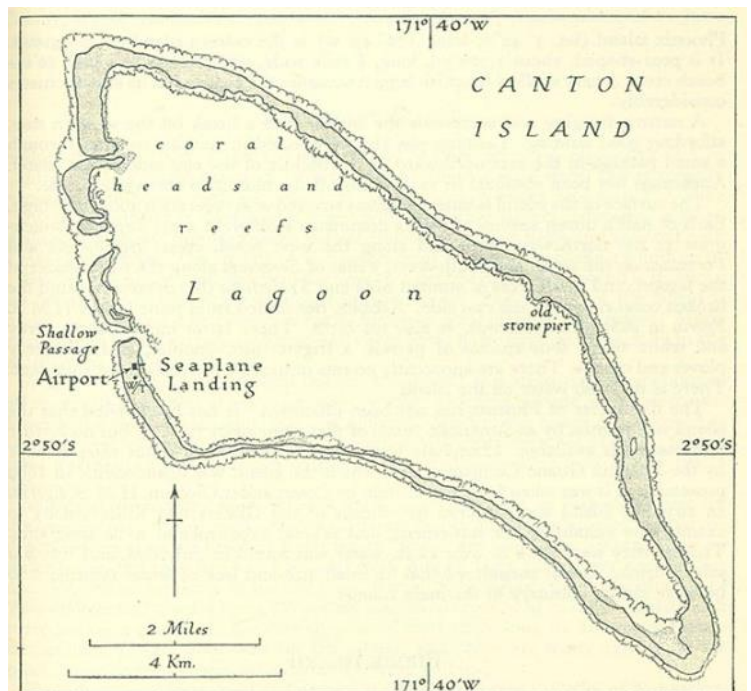


Fig. 154. Canton

Much of the southern part of the lagoon is also cumbered by coral. Based on: (1) Admiralty chart no. 184; (2) E. H. Bryan Jr., *American Polynesia*, p. 52 (Honolulu, 1941).

SUVA — CANTON ISLAND

14 November, 1941.

First return Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Northbound.

Rate: 9½d.

Number of covers flown: 3,450.



Cover postmarked Suva type 4, 14 November, 1941.
 'Fijian Head' cachet in violet.

Date line cover from Suva to Canton Island showing an arrival datestamp for a day earlier than that of departure. Two arrival handstamps were used at Canton Island the main difference between the two being the width of the four cancelling bars at right.



Pan Am terminal Canton Island.



Canton Island four (broad) bar backstamp,
 dated 13 November, 1941.

All covers despatched from Suva received a violet cachet apart from those prepared in advance by a local stamp dealer, Alfred Herrick, which were stamped in black.

SUVA — HONOLULU

14 November, 1941.

First return Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Northbound.

Rate: 1s. 6d.

Number of covers flown: 3,056.



Cover postmarked Suva 14 November, 1941 with the US style four-bar canceller. The 1s 6d rate paid postage to Hawaii.

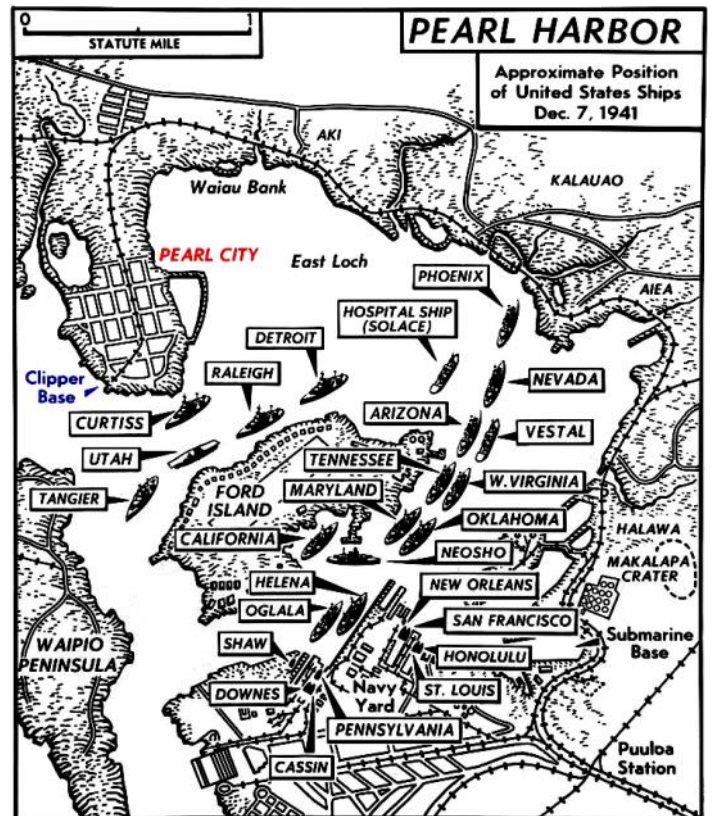


Arrival backstamp of Honolulu, Hawaii for 15 November, 1941.

A total of 17,153 letters were despatched from Suva on the flight of which 3,056 were destined for Hawaii at the 1s 6d rate.

The US style four-bar canceller with fixed date was carried onboard *Pacific Clipper* by PAA employee Fred Laidlaw. The canceller was only used in violet on mail processed by Pan Am and destined for Canton Island, Hawaii or the U.S. mainland.

Map showing the location of the Pan Am Clipper Base ► at Pearl City Peninsula, Pearl Harbour.



SUVA — SAN PEDRO

14 November, 1941.

First return Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Northbound.

Rate: 2s. 10d.

Number of covers flown: 2,154.



Cover postmarked 14 November, 1941 with U.S. style four-bar cancel for Suva. The 2s 10d rate paid postage to the U.S.A.



San Pedro Post Office, built 1935 and arrival backstamp.

SUVA — LOS ANGELES

14 November, 1941.

First return Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Northbound.

Rate: 2s.10d.

Number of covers flown: 2,655.



Cover postmarked 14 November, 1941 with Suva four-bar cancel.
The 2s 10d rate paid postage to any U.S. mainland address.



The same "Fijian Head" cachet was used on covers to the U.S. mainland regardless of destination: San Pedro, Los Angeles or San Francisco.



Backstamp of Los Angeles, California, 5.30 pm, 17 November, 1941.

Pan Am flying boats operated from the Port of Los Angeles located south of the city at San Pedro.



SUVA — LOS ANGELES

14 November, 1941.

First return Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

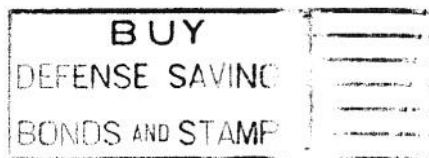
Northbound.

Rate: 2s.10d.

Number of covers flown: 2,655.



Cover postmarked 14 November, 1941 with Suva four-bar cancel.
The 2s 10d rate paid postage to any U.S. mainland address.



Arrival machine cancellation of Los Angeles, California, 5.30 pm, 17 November, 1941.
90 minutes after San Pedro mail was processed.



The Boeing 314 had a wingspan of 152 ft and length of 106 ft. It cruised at 170 m.p.h. with a top speed of 190 m.p.h. Normal range was 3,100 statute miles. It could accommodate 74 day passengers or 40 overnight passengers, plus a crew of ten. The wings were deep enough for mechanics to crawl through a tunnel to service engines in flight. The four engines were Wright GR-2600 radials delivering 1,500 horsepower each. Six of these aircraft were built between 1938 and 1939.

In 1941 six B314A aircraft were built with more powerful engines and increased fuel capacity. Before these were built earlier models were upgraded with more powerful engines and larger fuel tanks.

SUVA — SAN FRANCISCO

14 November, 1941.

First return Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Northbound.

Rate: 2s. 10d.

Number of covers flown: 4,130.



Cover postmarked 14 November, 1941 with Suva four-bar special canceller.
The 2s. 10d. rate paid postage to any U.S. mainland destination.



Pacific Clipper at Treasure Island, San Francisco and inset the slogan cancel arrival mark from back of cover.

SUVA — SAN FRANCISCO

14 November, 1941.

First return Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

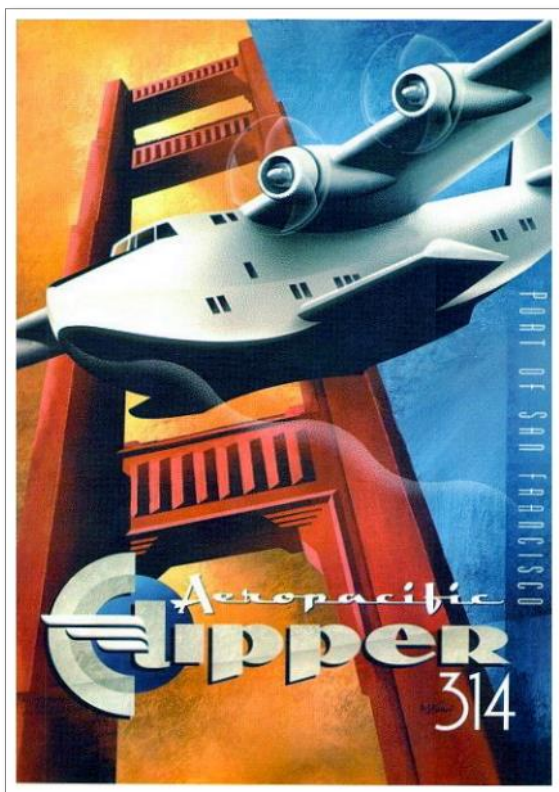
Northbound.

Rate: 2s.10d.

Number of covers flown: 4,130.



Cover franked 2s.10d. for the rate to the U.S.A.
 The cover is postmarked 14 November with the Pan Am four-bar special canceller.
 The artwork for the illustrated cover was created by Ludwig Staehle of New York, a noted philatelic designer known as the “King of Cachets”.



San Francisco slogan backstamp.

Ludwig Wolfgang Staehle was born in Württemberg, Germany in 1893. He went on to work as an apprentice designer in interior decoration and then studied design at college before being drafted in World War I. When he returned home after spending seven years as a prisoner of war, life had changed dramatically, and opportunity was limited. In 1927, he emigrated to the U.S. with his wife, two sons and a daughter. He had relatives there and he soon found work as an interior designer in New York City and, later, in commercial arts.

◀ Advertising poster (greatly reduced) showing a Pan American Clipper against a backdrop of the Golden Gate Bridge.

SUVA — SAN FRANCISCO

14 November, 1941.

First return Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Northbound.

Rate: 2s.10d.

Number of covers flown: 4,130.



Cover franked 2s.10d. for the rate to the U.S.A.

The franking is made up of 5×6d. and 1×½d. impressions on the front plus 1×1½d. and 1×2d. impressions on the reverse, applied by Universal Midget franking machine M2 of Morris Hedstrom Ltd., dated 13 November 1941.

The cover is postmarked 14 November with the Pan Am four bar special canceller.

This is the only recorded item of meter mail from the flight.



Back of envelope (reduced to 67%) showing Morris, Hedstrom 1½d. and 2d. meter marks obliterated by bars from Pan Am Suva canceller.

San Francisco arrival machine cancellation superimposed and Morris, Hedstrom cachet below.

SUVA — SAN FRANCISCO (Local Delivery)

14 November, 1941.

First return Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

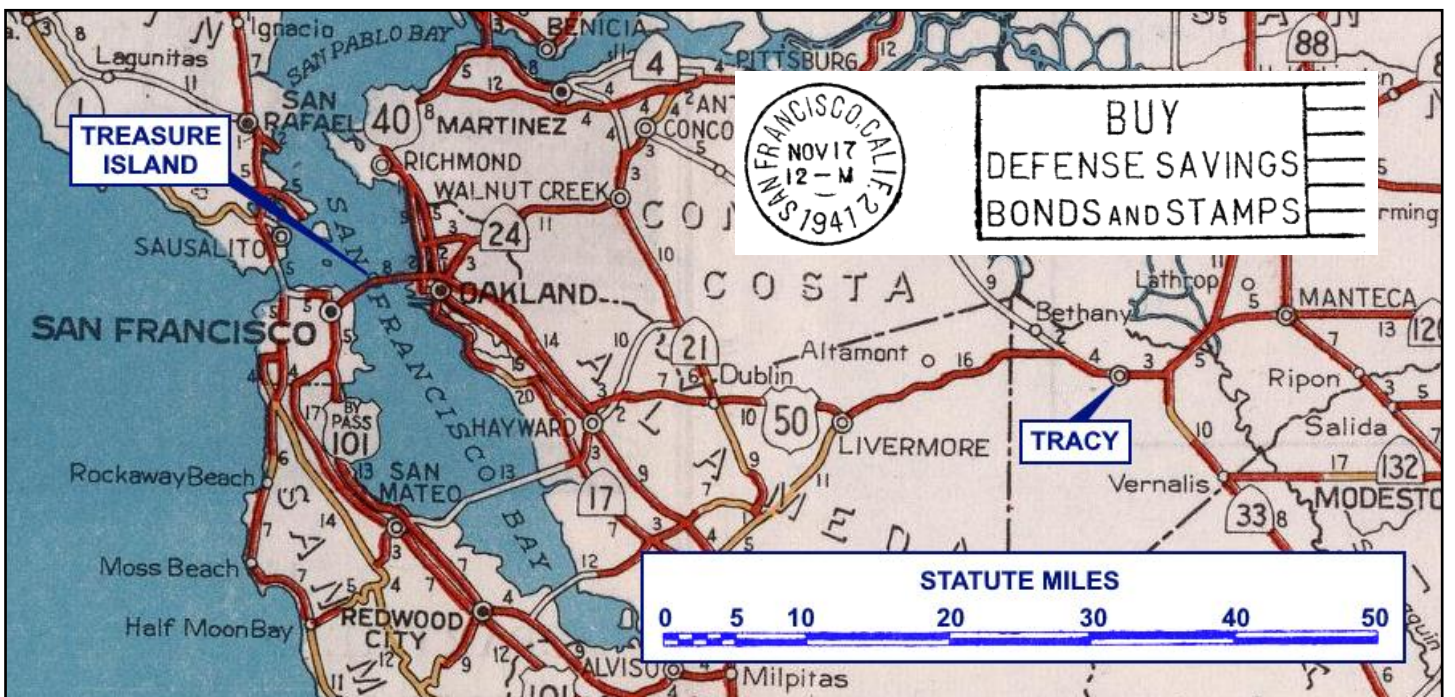
Northbound.

Rate: 2s.10d.

Number of covers flown: 4,130.



Cover postmarked 14 November, 1941 with Suva four-bar special canceller and addressed to Tracy, California. The 2s. 10d. rate paid postage to any U.S. mainland destination.



1940 road map of San Francisco area showing Tracy. Slogan cancel arrival mark from back of cover inset.

SUVA — SAN FRANCISCO for CANADA

14 November, 1941.

First return Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Northbound.

Rate: 2s. 10d.

Number of covers flown: 4,130.



Philatelic cover postmarked 14 November, 1941 with Suva four-bar special canceller. The 2s. 10d. rate paid postage to any U.S. mainland destination.



San Francisco machine cancellation arrival mark from back of cover.

This philatelic First Flight cover has been sent at the 2s. 10d. air mail rate to San Francisco and then forwarded by surface mail to the addressee in Canada.

If the cover had been prepaid at the air mail rate to Canada via San Francisco the charge would have been 2s. 9½d. Neither the four-bar U.S. style cancellation nor San Francisco arrival mark would then have been applied. Instead the stamps would have been cancelled by the Suva circular date stamp type 5.

SUVA — CANADA via SAN FRANCISCO

14 November, 1941.

First return Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Northbound.

Rate: 2s.9½d. per half ounce.

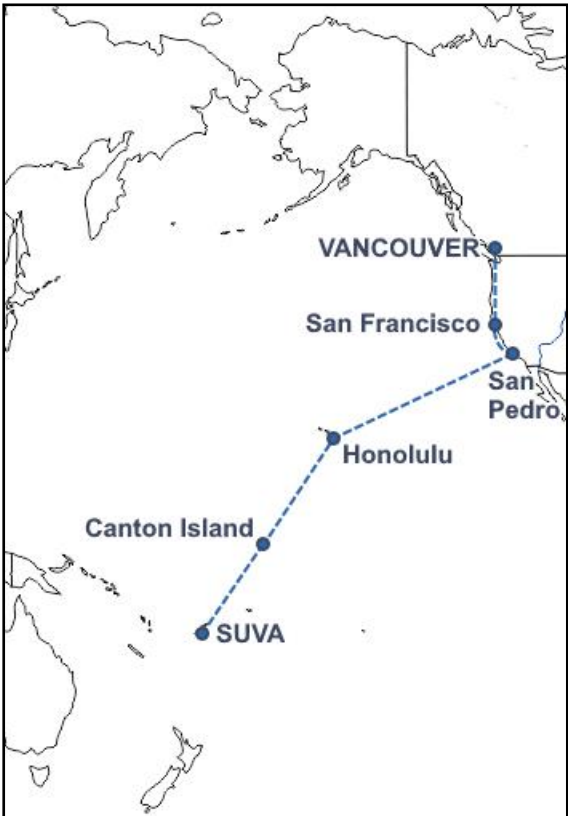
Number of covers flown: 592.



Cover postmarked 14 November, 1941. Fijian Head cachet in violet.
 The 2/9½d rate paid postage to Canada via San Francisco, this cover is overpaid by a halfpenny.
 Vancouver arrival slogan machine cancellation offset on front.

Mail sent to destinations beyond the United States did not receive the U.S. style four-bar cancel or a U.S. transit mark. A Suva circular date stamp was used to cancel the stamps.

Covers despatched to Canada at the rate of 2s 9½d per half ounce arrived in San Francisco on 17 November and Vancouver, British Columbia the following day. Local services were used from San Francisco to Vancouver.



Vancouver arrival slogan machine cancellation from back of cover.

SUVA — UNITED KINGDOM (Liverpool) via SAN FRANCISCO

14 November, 1941.

First return Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

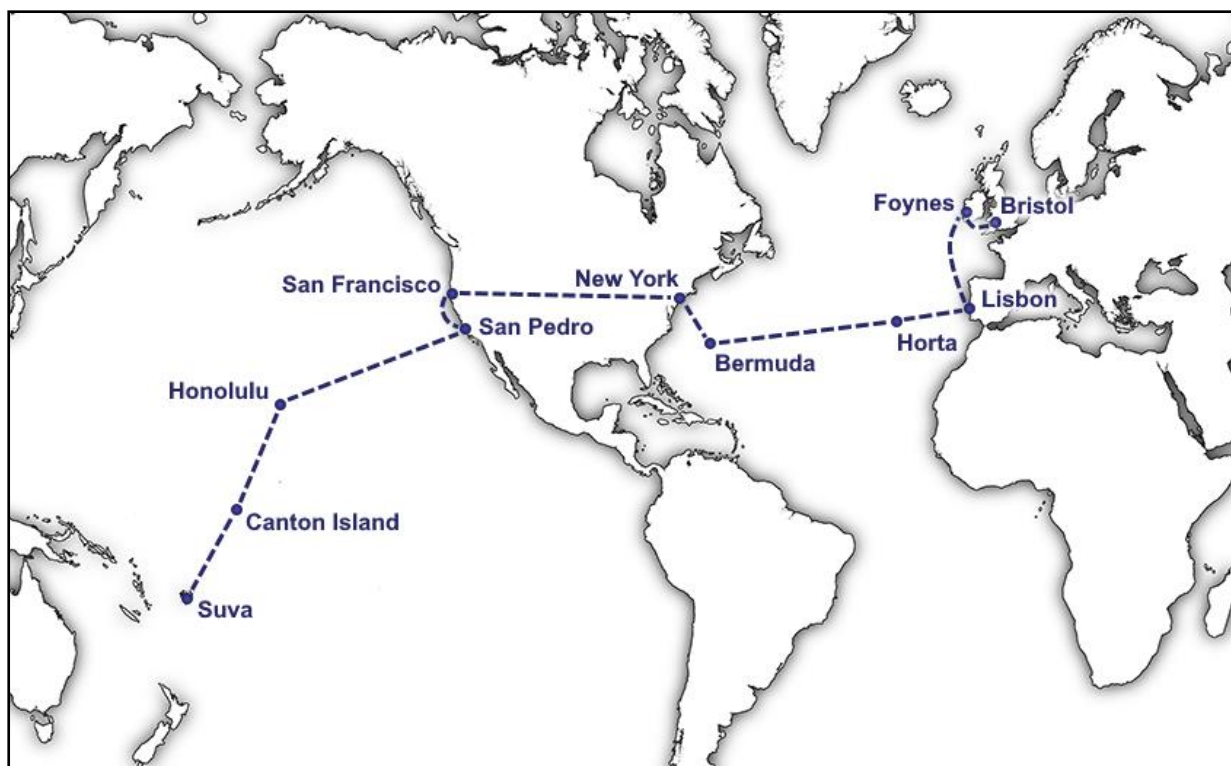
Northbound.

Rate: 4s.6d.

Number of covers flown: 811.



Cover postmarked Suva type 5 for 14 November, 1941 with Fijian Head cachet in purple. There are no arrival marks on the back of this cover.



From San Francisco the cover went to New York then via the Transatlantic Southern Route to Lisbon thence to Whitchurch, Bristol.

SUVA — UNITED KINGDOM (London) via SAN FRANCISCO

14 November, 1941.

First Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Northbound.

Rate: 4s.6d.

Num-

ber of



Cover postmarked Suva, type 5, for 14 November, 1941 with Fijian Head cachet in violet.

There are no postal markings on the back of the envelope.

A commercial datestamp has been applied showing receipt on 1 December, 1941.

Mail sent to destinations beyond the United States did not receive the U.S. style four-bar cancel, a Suva circular date stamp being used to cancel the stamps.



Backstamped with United States Lines, London cachet in violet showing the date of receipt, 1 December 1941.

The cover travelled halfway around the world in 17 days. From San Francisco the cover went to New York then via the Transatlantic Southern Route to Lisbon and onwards to Whitchurch, Bristol for delivery in London on Monday, 1 December 1941. It is unusual to find covers destined for the U.K. with arrival marks, either official or unofficial.

SUVA — UNITED KINGDOM (Grimsby) via SAN FRANCISCO

14 November, 1941.

First Pan-American Trans-Pacific flight through Suva.

Northbound.

Rate: 4s.6d.

Num-

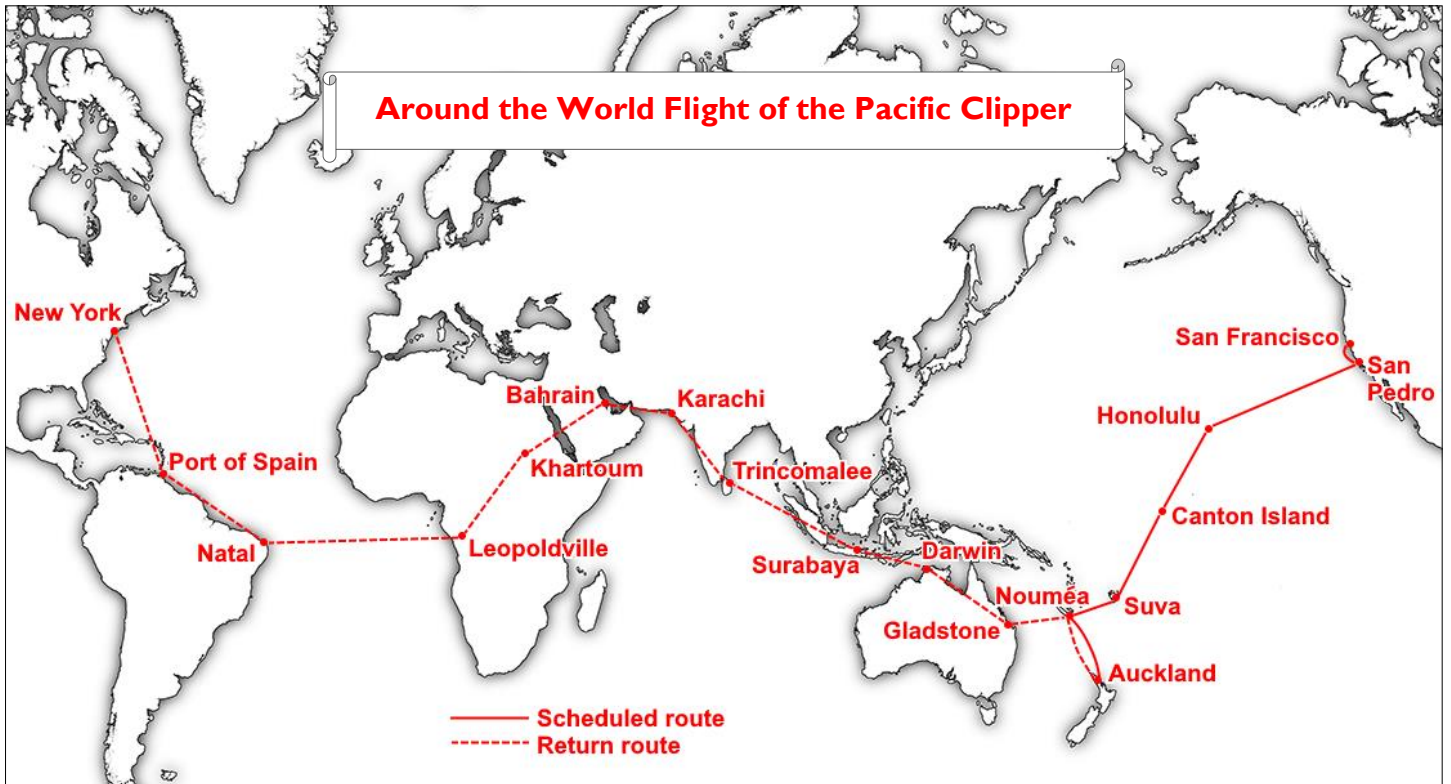
ber of



*Cover postmarked Suva, type 5, for 14 November, 1941 with Fijian Head cachet in violet.
There are no postal markings on the back of the envelope.*

Mail sent to destinations beyond the United States did not receive the U.S. style four-bar cancel, a Suva circular date stamp being used to cancel the stamps. No arrival marks were applied in the U.S. or U.K.

Third Flight



The around the world flight of Pacific Clipper

The third flight routed via Suva departed Honolulu with Captain Robert Ford in command on the morning of Thursday 4 December 1941. Three days later the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour.



*Pacific Clipper at anchor, floating dock, Marine Air Terminal, La Guardia Airport, New York.
Inset: Captain Robert Ford (1906 – 1994).*

Pacific Clipper was on the final leg to Auckland when the crew learned of the attack. Cut off from the United States by the bombing, Ford was directed by Pan Am to strip the aircraft of all company markings, registration and insignia and proceed in secret to the Marine Terminal, La Guardia Field, New York. Departing Auckland on December 8, 1941, Ford and his crew successfully flew over 31,500 miles to return home.

At Surabaya, Captain Ford could only obtain automobile grade fuel for the next leg to Ceylon. He thought it a better option than abandoning his aircraft to the Japanese. On the way from Surabaya to Trincomalee they were confronted by a Japanese submarine and Captain Ford had to quickly climb away to get out of range of the submarine's guns.

No mail was carried on this record breaking return flight to the US.