

BOAC AIR MAIL FROM WEST AFRICA AUGUST 1940 – MAY 1942.

In August 1940 BOAC started flying between Poole and Lagos. Because of the demands made on the available space ordinary civilian Air Mail was not permitted in either direction. There were however a number of exceptions to this rule.

Official Mail was permitted.

25th October 1940. OHMS from the Air Ministry, Freetown to the UK. Rate 1/-6d. Carried on the inaugural flight of the 10 day service by the Flying Boat *Clyde* (Flight WAN 1). Passed by Censor.



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Official mail from the Free French forces in Cameroun and French Equatorial Africa was also carried.

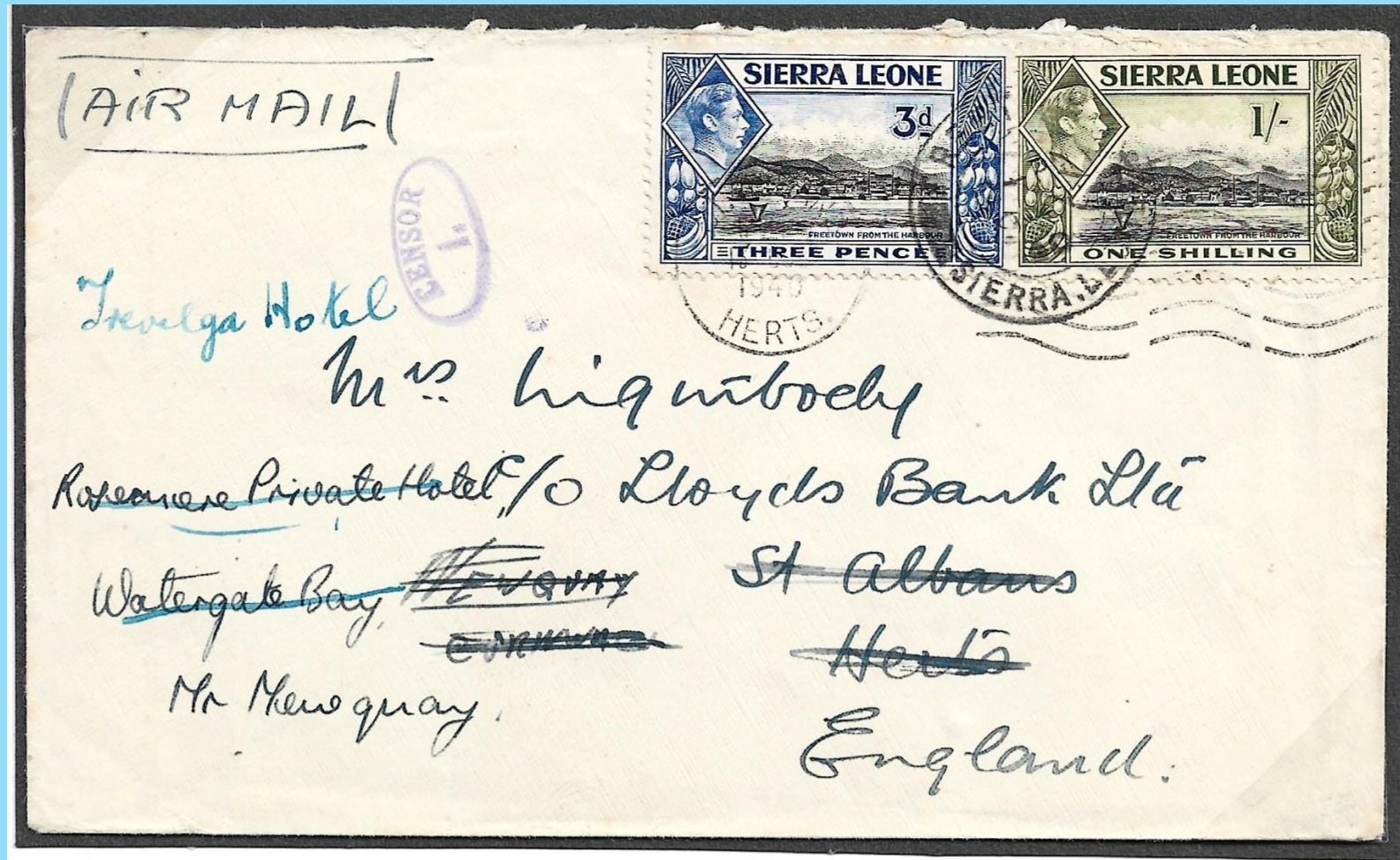
10th June 1941. From the Intendant Militaire in Yaounde to his opposite number in London. Rate (at least) 37 Francs, 25 Centimes. The cover is claiming Franchise Militaire so all of the postage is Air Mail Surcharge. Probably carried on either Flight WAN 24 leaving Lagos on 17th June, flown by *Guba* arriving at Poole on 20th June or on Flight WAN 23 leaving Lagos on 18th June, flown by *Cathay* and arriving at Poole on 21st June. Passed by Lagos Censor.



All mails sent to United Kingdom from Freetown since inception of service have been official and since May have been despatched from Secretariat as diplomatic mail. Included in this Government's mail has been official correspondence of Franck Mission, Free French Forces, and Censorship, etc.

23rd October 1941. Copy extract from a telegram from the Governor of Sierra Leone to the Secretary of State for the Colonies confirming that Official Free French mail was carried by air.

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In this period some private mail appears to have been sent by air even though this was not supposed to happen!
9th October 1940. Freetown to St Albans and forwarded to Newquay. Carried on the first returning flight of the *Clare* leaving Freetown on 12th October and arriving at Poole on 14th October.

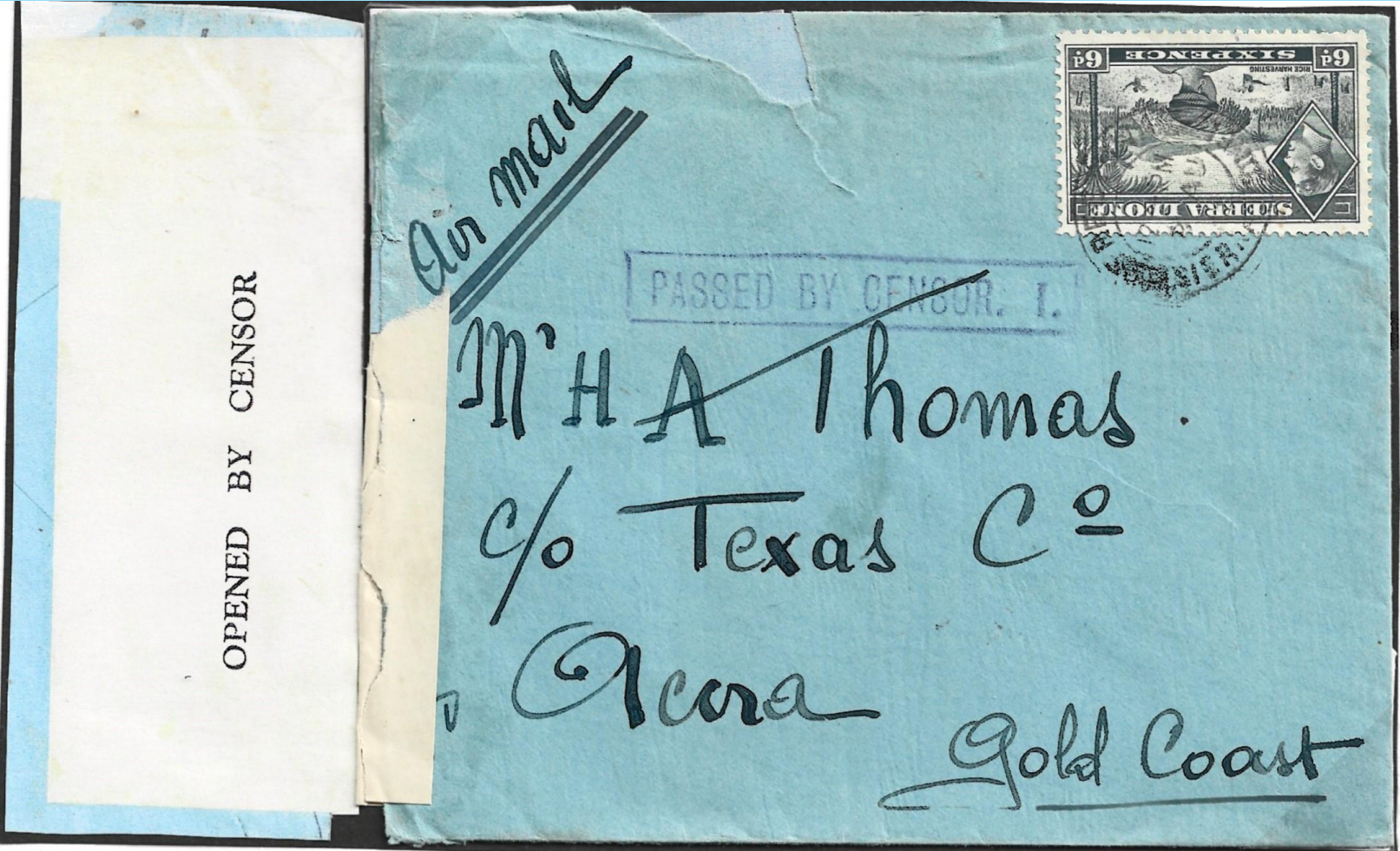
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Although we understand that the flying-boat service is not normally available for the conveyance of postal ^{air} mails we have ^{in fact} received a few ~~small quantities~~ ^{bulk mails} of air mail correspondence from Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Gambia, ~~by this service~~ as indicated below: -

<u>Origin</u>	<u>Despatched</u>	<u>Arrived UK</u>	<u>Weight</u>
Freetown	11 Oct	15 Oct	2.282 lbs
- do -	25 Oct	29 Oct	5.329 "
- do -	7 Nov	11 Nov	5.750 "
Lagos	10 Oct	15 Oct	1.190 "
Bathurst	25 Oct	29 Oct	3.400 "
- do -	8 Nov	11 Nov	3.300 "
			unrecorded

16th November 1940. Extract from a copy of a draft letter from the Post Office to the Air Ministry confirming that the *Clare* flight of 11th/12th October had unauthorised mail on board.

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On occasions during this period BOAC did carry mail between the West African Colonies.

9th August 1941. Freetown to Accra. Rate 6d. Probably carried on Flight WAS 36, leaving Freetown on 16th August and arriving at Lagos on the same day. The cover would then have been flown from Lagos to Accra on the Trans-African service as the Flying Boats did not stop at Accra. Opened by Sierra Leone Censor (1).

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On 28 April 1941 the situation was explained as follows:-

Provisional arrangements have been made for the operation of an Air Mail service between the British West African Colonies. The service is not guaranteed. The times of closing mails will not be announced but members of the public are advised to post Air Mail correspondence not later than midday Tuesday of each week.

This service gives direct connection with Air Mail services operating in Africa and other countries to the East.

The rate of postage for Gold Coast, Nigeria and the Gambia is 6d. per half ounce. Rates for other destinations may be obtained at the Post Office counter.

There is no Air Mail service to Great Britain.

28th April 1941. Copy of the Notice in the *Sierra Leone Gazette* announcing the introduction of the inter-colonial Rate.

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TELEGRAM SAVING.

FROM GOVERNOR GAMBIA

TO SECRETARY OF STATE

No. 15. SECRET.

9th May, 1941.

Your telegram No. 12 Saving Secret. Air Mail. Bathurst being last West African stop on homeward flying boat route spare space if and when available has been utilized for carriage of private mails in belief that no repeat no inconvenience could be caused. If difficulties anticipated from Lisbon onwards private mail could be bagged separately and, if necessary, delayed in Lisbon. Average weight of total air mail has been under nine kilograms of which only ten pounds has been private mail. It is estimated that seven eighths of private mail is from Service personnel.

Ocean mail communication with Gambia is exceptionally difficult, for example package posted in London on 8th March arrived only last mail on 29th April. Homeward ocean mail believed equally difficult as direct sailings very rare and mails usually routed via Freetown. Gambia is worst served of all West African Colonies as regards ocean mail.

Homeward air mail has been of greatest value to business men and Service personnel and private persons alike, and it is difficult to understand why this convenience should be taken away when space for private mail is available in interests of all concerned I most earnestly urge reconsideration and grant of permission to send private air mail when space available.

GOVERNOR OF GAMBIA.

*895/6498

Saving.

From the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

To the Officer Administering the Government of Gambia
Colonial Office Reference No. 3332/6/41

Date 19th June, 1941. With the compliments of the U. K. Government

No. 19 Saving. Colonial Office

Date 19.6.41

SECRET.

Reference _____

Your telegram No. 15 Secret Saving.

In view of difficulties arising in connection with ocean mail communication with Bathurst it has been agreed, as an exceptional measure, that the Gambia Government should have discretion to send limited quantities of surcharged unofficial mail on each homeward bound flying boat whenever space is available for the purpose. No guarantee can be given that space will be available on each or any particular flying boat, and it is regretted that it is not possible to afford similar facilities on the outward bound service.

Unofficial mail despatched in this manner should be surcharged at the air mail rate of 1/3d per half ounce, should be separately bagged and should be consigned through normal postal channels. The carriage of unofficial air mail by this service will be charged for at the rate of 45/- per lb.

In view of the extreme pressure upon the limited capacity available on the flying boat service it is not possible at this stage to agree to the carriage of unofficial mail to and from the other West African dependencies, though it is hoped that this will be possible later in the year when larger flying boats are brought into operation.

May/June 1941. Copy exchange of telegrams between the Governor of the Gambia and the Secretary of State for the Colonies resulting in the Gambia being allowed to send Air Mail to the UK.

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12th August 1941. From Lady Southorn the Governor's wife at Bathurst to the UK. Probably sent on Flight WAN 35 leaving Bathurst on 12th August, flown by *Catalina* and arriving at Poole on the 15th August. Rate 1/-3d. Passed by Bathurst Censor.

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Usual. 6.12.40.

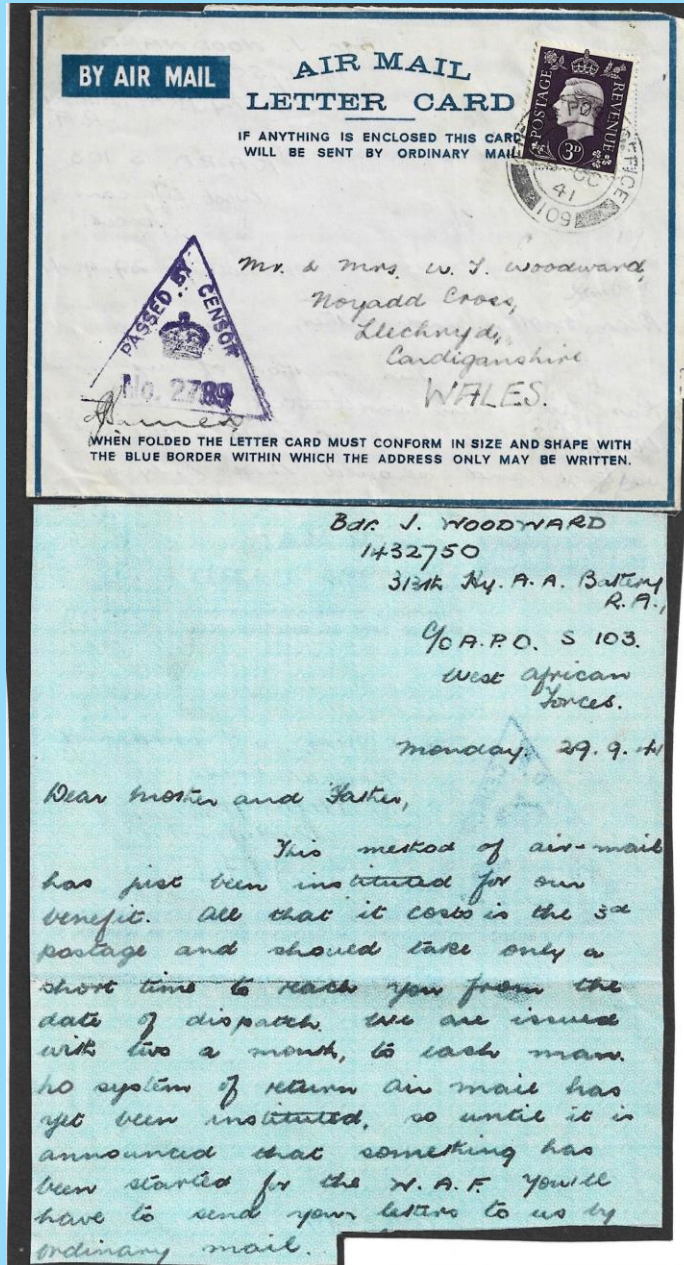
My dear Mother,

I am writing this as we have been told that it will reach England before Xmas. First of all thanks a lot for the cablegram

As I am only allowed one page I must close now,
the very best for Xmas & the New Year
Your ever loving son

6th December 1940. From the Gold Coast to the UK. Apparently sent free. The letter may well have been carried by BOAC-Flight WAN 6 flown by *Clare* left Lagos/Freetown on the 18th December arriving in Poole on 21st December. However it is also possible that the letter was flown by the RAF.

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Air Mail Letter Cards were first issued to military personnel in West Africa in late September 1941.

8th October 1941. FPO 109 Gambia to the UK (Letter written 29th September). Almost certainly the first despatch from Gambia. Possibly carried on Flight WAN 26, flown by *Cathay*, leaving Bathurst on 17th October and arriving at Poole on the 20th October. However the cover may also have been carried by the RAF.