

ROUTING OF MAIL TO FAR EAST PRISONERS OF WAR

From "The Prisoner of War", October 1943:

'The following information has been supplied by the Post Office;

"As the normal postal services to and from Japan and Japanese-occupied territories are, of course, suspended, it was necessary to arrange for a neutral postal administration to reforward correspondence to and from prisoners of war in the Far East.

"The Russian Post Office undertook to do this, and since July last year such correspondence has been despatched from this country in mails addressed to the U.S.S.R.; these mails are at present routed via Persia.

"An assurance has been given by the Soviet Postal Authorities that correspondence received for prisoners of war in Japan and Japanese-occupied territories is reforwarded to Japan without delay. It must, however, be realised that owing to the great distances and transport difficulties involved letters invariably take some months to reach Japan.

"Most of the correspondence so far received in this country from prisoners of war in the Far East has come through Russia to Switzerland and Portugal, and in order to reduce the time of transmission as much as possible the G.P.O. has arranged for it to be brought here by air from Lisbon."

SUSPICIOUS 'ROYAL AIR FORCE' MARKINGS

by Nick Colley and Ken Sandford

Four covers have recently come to light, all from the same source, with Royal Air Force markings not recorded by the Forces Postal History Society, which we think (together with any other similar covers which may exist) should be viewed with suspicion.

The 'provenance' of the covers is as follows; all four were bought from a French dealer at STAMPEX in 1985. We understand that before this they were in the possession of a French collector, which may be significant in view of the 'Continental' numerals on the 1943 Gibraltar item.

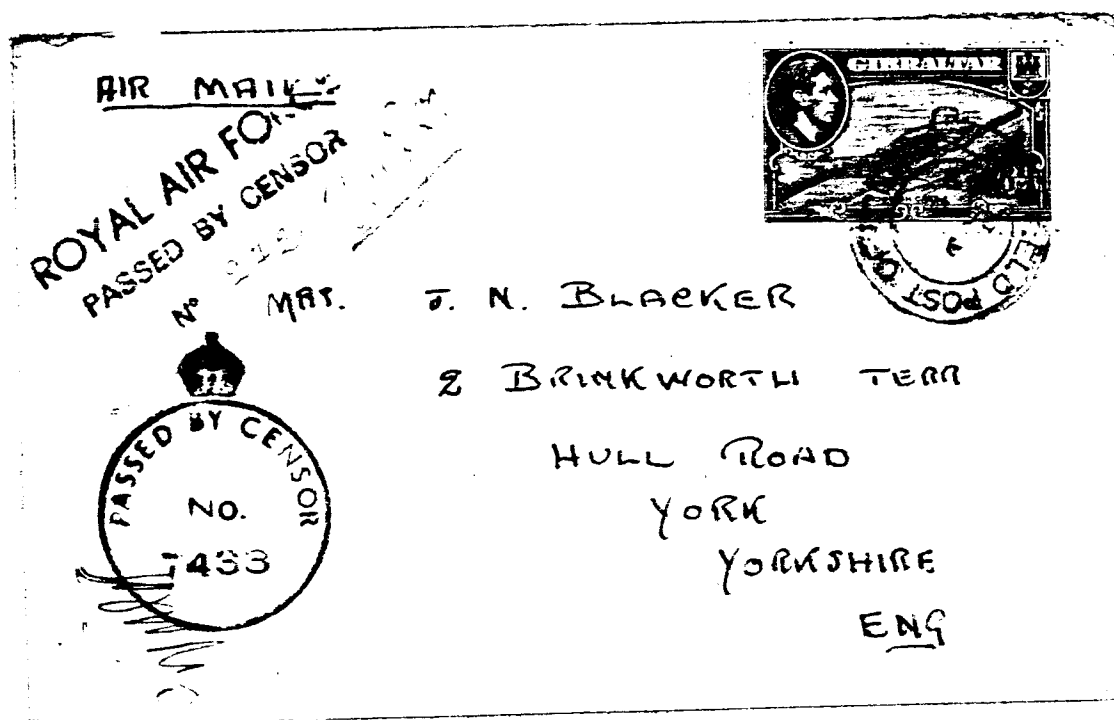
A brief description of the covers is as follows:

- 1) Air cover Gibraltar 16 January 1940 to the UK, with handstamp ROYAL AIR FORCE / PASSED BY CENSOR / No. in blue ink, as well as Royal Navy 'tombstone' censor mark.
- 2) Air cover Gibraltar to UK postmarked FPO 475 26 July 1943, with similar ROYAL AIR FORCE / PASSED BY CENSOR / No handstamp in magenta ink as well as type A500 Army censor no.7433. Censor number in 'Continental' style m.s.
- 3) Surface mail cover Freetown (Sierra Leone) 30 December 1939 to the UK, with ROYAL AIR FORCE of same dimensions as the Gibraltar items, though the PASSED BY CENSOR is slightly different. Similar blue ink to 1940 Gib. cover.
- 4) 1948 cover from Iraq to the UK postmarked FPO 171 (Habbaniya). ROYAL AIR FORCE only of same dimensions as in the 1940 Gibraltar mark, and the Sierra Leone mark, in blue ink similar to these.

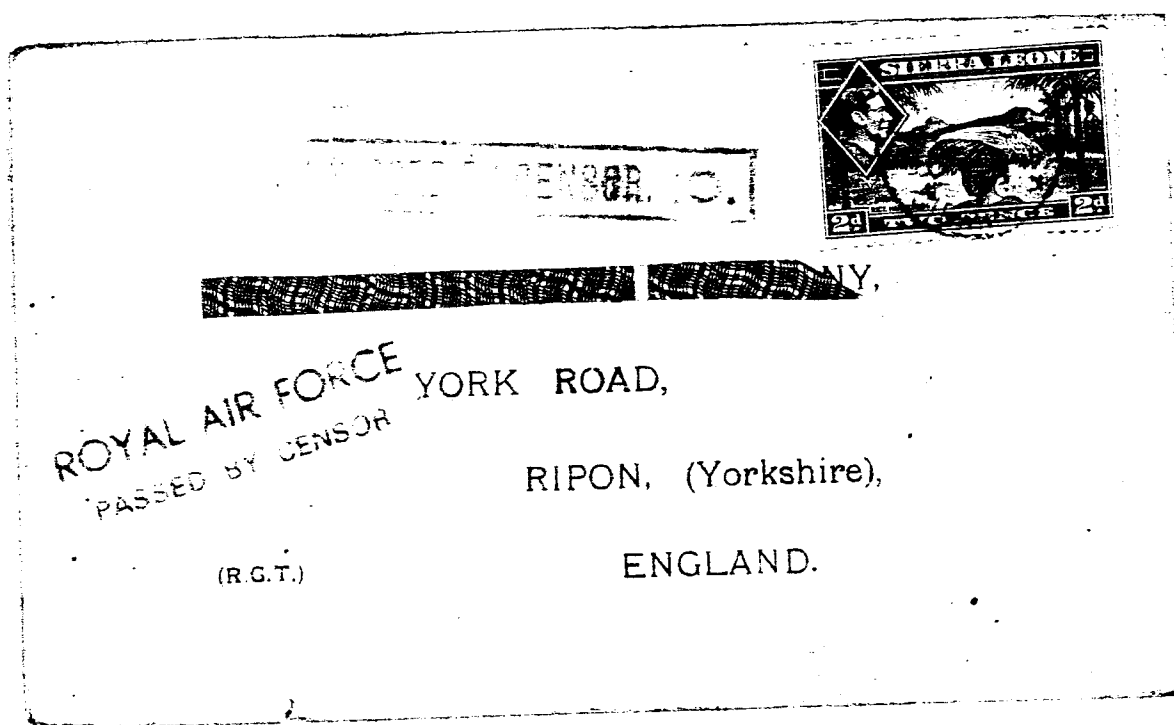
Points of note are why was it necessary for mail to be censored by both the Army or the Navy and the RAF? Such double inter-service censorship has not been seen by us. No RAF censor stamp in use in 1939-1940 is known still in use in 1943.



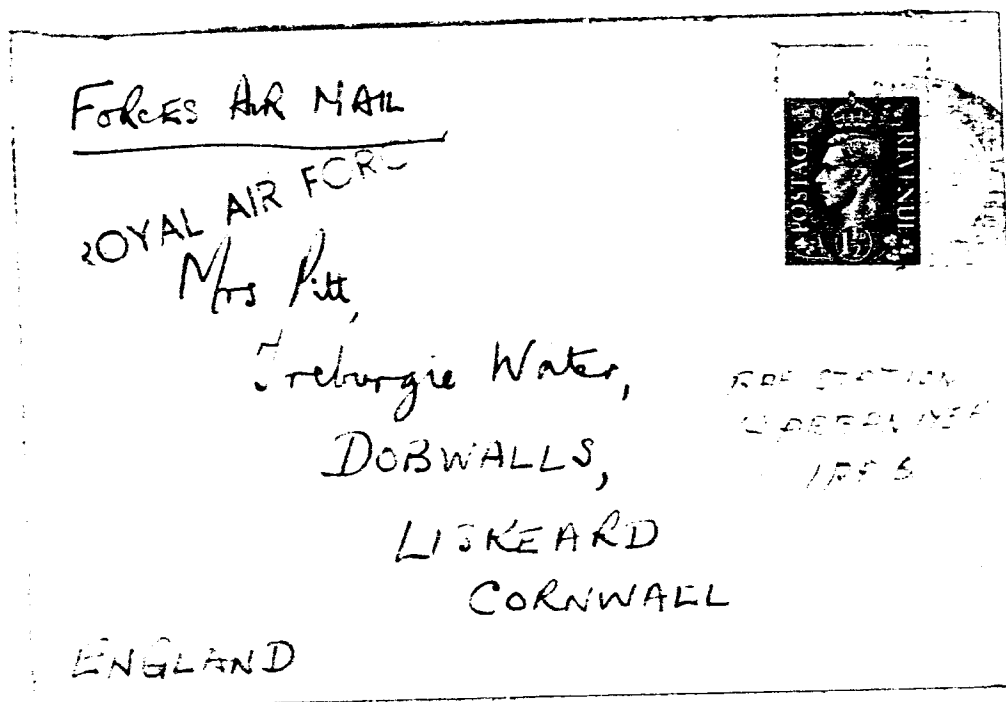
Cover 1



Cover 2



Cover 3



Cover 4

How is it that the ROYAL AIR FORCE handstamp used in Iraq in 1948 should be of identical dimensions to that of wartime censor handstamps, and is struck in similar blue ink to two of these ?

If anyone has any thoughts on these covers, or if anyone has any more examples of these RAF marks, PLEASE tell us; N.C. at 71 Victory Road, London, SW19, or K.S. at 67 Westfield Drive, Knutsford, Cheshire.