

# THE DARDANUS INCIDENT AND THE PASIND 5 CACHET

By Piyush Khaitan

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## A Lucky Break

As a collector of Indian Airmails with a special interest in war-time mail, I was most excited to see what can be best described as the 'Dardanus PASIND 5' cover in a recent auction. Determined to try my luck, I put in a bid and was fortunate enough to win. Even more interestingly, along with the cover, I got an article written about the *Dardanus* incident, and another on this very cover, both from different issues of the *Australian Stamps Professional*<sup>1</sup>. The cover came mounted on a well written-up A4 display sheet with a map. This itself was fantastic, but I was determined to go a little deeper and connect some more of the dots to make the story complete.

## The Cover



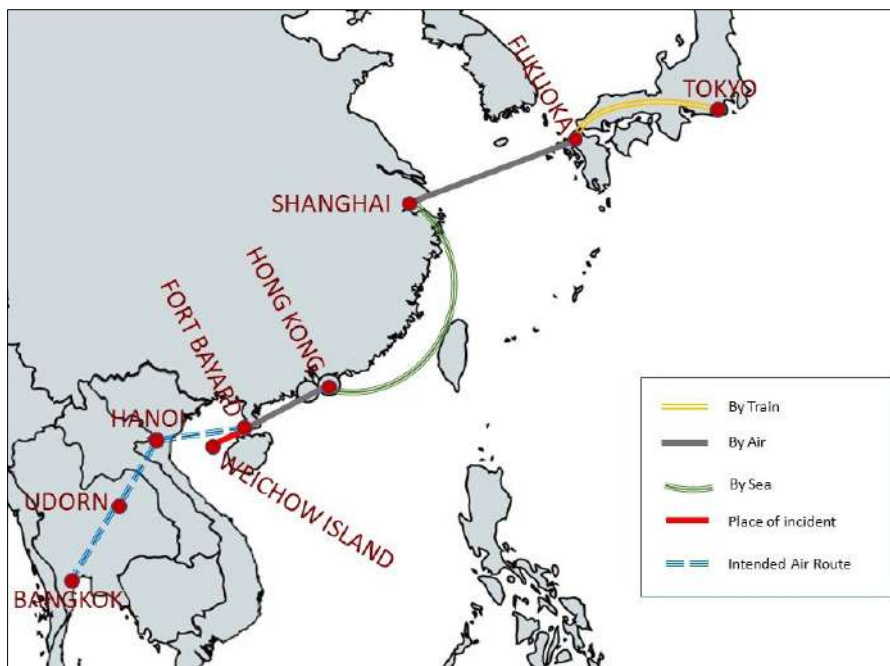
Franked 85 Sen and cancelled at Dogenzaka Branch of Shibuya Post Office 14.11.20 (Tokyo, 20<sup>th</sup> November 1939), the cover has a bi-lingual airmail label and is addressed to Dr G Matsugaki, Bombay. Censored and re-sealed with an "OPENED BY CENSOR" label tied with boxed rectangular cachet in violet "PASIND 5" on the front and reverse. Transit

handstamp on the reverse "VICTORIA / HONG KONG / 30 NO 39 / 7 PM" and "BOMBAY G.P.O. / DELY / 25 DEC 39 / 12.30 PM" delivery mark. The cover also has 航空便 (Kokubin = Airmail) in Japanese characters on the front and reverse.

I have not been able to deconstruct the postage paid but various books give the ordinary letter rate as 20 Sen and the airmail fee as 50 or 55 Sen.



## The journey from Japan to Hong Kong



The cover started its journey from Tokyo, possibly by rail, to Fukuoka at the south-western end of Japan. Boyle Jr writes that there were no non-Japanese airlines serving Japan or Japanese occupied territory during World War II. Dai Nippon (Greater Japan Air Lines) operated a direct flight Fukuoka to Shanghai, China. Mail from there was sent by surface to Hong Kong<sup>2</sup>. The “VICTORIA / HONG KONG / 30 NO 39 / 7 PM” transit mark on the reverse indicates that the cover followed this route, but 10 days for this leg seems a little longer than 6 days I have observed on another September 1939 cover from Tokyo in my collection.

## The Dardanus incident & detained mail



Image courtesy Ronald Wong, [www.ronaldtkwong.com](http://www.ronaldtkwong.com)

The DH86B *Dardanus* (G-ADUE) was one of the four aircraft of this type used by Imperial Airways on their twice-weekly feeder service from Hong Kong to Bangkok and back via Fort Bayard, Hanoi and Udorn. This would connect with the Imperial Airways England-Australia service at Bangkok and carry mail in both directions.

Brian Peace describes Flight HB-183 as having departed from Hong Kong's Kai Tak airport on the morning of 8<sup>th</sup> November and was scheduled to arrive at Bangkok the same evening. Just past Fort Bayard, the 'plane was under fire from three Japanese fighter aircraft for flying over Japanese airspace at Weichow Island (Weizhou), something the pilot denies, and riddled with bullets they were forced to land. The 3 passengers and crew were detained and, along with everything on board, sent to Canton where officers of the Imperial Japanese Navy questioned them. Finally, the passengers were transferred to an American naval vessel and reached Hong Kong on 10<sup>th</sup> November, the crew returning by steamer via Macao on 16<sup>th</sup> November. He adds that there was 199 kg of mail on board. The first batch of 99 kg was returned to Hong Kong on 13<sup>th</sup> November and the rest only on 24<sup>th</sup> November.

*Dardanus* underwent some patchy repairs at Weichow and the crew returned to fly her back to Fort Bayard for further repairs on 13<sup>th</sup> December, then to Hong Kong on 20<sup>th</sup> December. The *Dardanus* incident is described in fair detail by Edward B Proud in his *Intercontinental Air Mails, Vol 2* (pg 580-582).

Stephen Dowd adds "*following the Japanese attack on the Dardanus, and its subsequent detention, along with that of its crew and three passengers, British authorities in Hong Kong refused to process Japanese mail until a satisfactory outcome, which included the return of the Dardanus, was reached. Everything about this cover suggests it was an item of mail from Japan that was 'punished' by being so detained*".

There are some obvious errors in Dowd's article that I am also correcting here. The cover was addressed to Bombay (not Calcutta) and the Bombay Delivery cachet was for 25<sup>th</sup> December 1939 (not 29<sup>th</sup> December 1939).

### **Detained Mail & the Hong Kong to Bombay Journey**

Had this incident not occurred, the cover would have flown westwards from Hong Kong to Bangkok via HB 190 on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1939. However, this was not to be. Having reached Hong Kong on 30<sup>th</sup> November, the cover was detained there for 20 days. Only after the return of *Dardanus* to Imperial Airways on 13<sup>th</sup> December, did the cover finally leave by HB 195 (*Denebola*) on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1939 reaching Bangkok the same day. The onward journey was on the Australia-England Empire route flight SW 198 leaving Bangkok on 21<sup>st</sup> December and reaching Karachi on 22<sup>nd</sup> December before continuing onward to Bombay on the Tata Air Lines south-bound service on 23<sup>rd</sup> December. The letter was then censored at Bombay, and this accounts for the one-day delay reflected in the "**BOMBAY G.P.O. / DELY / 25 DEC 39 / 12.30 PM**" delivery.

### **Confusion Regarding Schedules**

All timetables and schedules referred to above are from Aitink & Hovenkamp<sup>5</sup>. There is a one-day difference in some cases when I compare this with information published in Postal Notices in India. I hope readers will help resolve this contradiction, including share copies/references of relevant Postal Notices as some may be missing in my collection. None of these contradictions materially alter the structure of this story in terms of the flights taken and journey of the cover.



## Censorship at Bombay and Use of the PASIND 5 Cachet.



Wartime censorship was instituted in India by early September 1939, immediately after the start of World War 2. This letter was censored at Bombay and resealed with an “**OPENED BY CENSOR**” label printed in red on cream paper (KM 6A4<sup>3</sup>). Among other stations, this 6A4 label is recorded to have been used at Calcutta (Date ?), GHQ Delhi (June 1940-March 1943) and Bombay (October 1939-March 1941). This label is not recorded as used in Karachi. It is use of this label that provides a clue as to where the cover was censored, and thus where the extremely rare “**PASIND 5**” handstamp was applied. Going purely by the date ranges provided, it is obvious that this cover was censored at Bombay, which is also logical.

The “PASIND” cachet is also recorded by Brigadier Virk<sup>4</sup> as Fig. 24 where he writes, “*Pasind mark shown in Fig 24. Is recorded by philatelists to have been used on some covers originating in Nepal for Bombay. Apparently, the covers were diverted to Delhi where they were censored or re-censored in the Office of the Chief Censor and posted in the nearby Delhi Gymkhana Club Post Office. (it may be mentioned that the only international post office functioning in Nepal was a branch of the Indian Postal Department located at the British Indian Embassy at Kathmandu. This post office may have been ordered at the beginning of the war to send all or a specified portion of its foreign mail to Delhi for examination by Army HQ).*”

Morenweiser records this cachet as KM17A and has two censor numbers listed for it, 1 & 5, both in violet and used between October 1939–February 1940. He adds, “*The handstamp type 17A was found on eight covers, three of them with return address Kathmandu but posted at Gymkhana Club Post Office Delhi (two registered and one registration label applied over type 17A # 5 handstamp). Two covers from outside India (Egypt and Netherlands East India) with type 17A # 1. One cover from Colombo to Rangoon 02 Feb 40 on label 6A.? 07 Dec 39 on a cover from a German female at Malabar Hill/Bombay (internee on parole) with 17A # 5 on label 6A4. Is this too much speculation to assume travelling censors?*”

It is this last reference to the “**PASIND 5**” cachet by Morenweiser that ties in most closely with my cover and leads me to conclude that while the “**PASIND 1**” cachet may have been used at Delhi, we now have recorded two covers with the “**PASIND 5**” cachet that were used with label 6A4 in Bombay in December 1939.

### Conclusion

This cover is a wonderful addition to my wartime airmails collection and is the only recorded example of detained mail to India as a consequence of the shooting down of *Dardanus* by Japanese fighter planes. The same cover also throws more light on use of the very rare “**PASIND 5**” cachet. My own wish is that as more evidence emerges, the mystery of this enigmatic cachet also gets decisively resolved. I have tried to be as factually based as can be and avoided speculation wherever possible. Though I have quoted published sources for my information, it is still possible that errors may have crept in for which I am solely responsible and I request readers to share feedback with me at [pk@khaitan.in](mailto:pk@khaitan.in).



**Cover from Cairo (September 1939) to Vetapalem P.O. in Madras Presidency with a "PASIND 1" cachet tying the resealing label with the cover. Given the Cairo origin and Vetapalem destination it too may have been censored at Bombay or some other station in South India.**

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## References:

1. *Australian Stamps Professional*, Vol.14, Issue 2 by Brian Peace and Vol.14, Issue 3 by Stephen Dowd.
2. *Airmail Operations During World War II* by Thomas H Boyle Jr, pg 802-812.
3. *British Empire Censorship Devices, World War II, British Asia* by Konrad Morenweiser.
4. *Postal Censorship in India 1939-1945* by Brigadier D S Virk
5. Imperial Airways flight schedules in this article are from *Bridging the Continents in Wartime* by Hans E Aitink and Egbert Hovenkamp.