

### Tongan Airmail

New Zealand's national airline, formed in 1939, was Tasman Empire Airways Ltd (TEAL). Its first aircraft was a Short S30 flying boat, ZK-AMA, and called "Aotearoa". This 'plane left London on 16<sup>th</sup> August, 1939 and arrived in Auckland 10 days later. A number of survey flights were undertaken throughout the Pacific region and official mails were carried. The second survey flight included Fiji and Tonga. 25 items of mail were carried between Suva, Fiji and Nuku'alofa, Tonga on 21<sup>st</sup> October, and about 250 items between Tonga and Auckland on 24<sup>th</sup> October.



This cover is one of the 25 carried on the first flight to Tonga. There is a Nuku'alofa receiver on the reverse for 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 1939.

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Pan American Airways conducted a survey flight across the Pacific Ocean in August/September, 1942. The aircraft was a Martin PBM-3R Mariner flying boat "Philippine Clipper", piloted by Captain John Tilton. It is thought that no mail was carried on the journey from California to Australia, but unofficial mail was carried on the return flight. The return journey was Sydney – Auckland – Suva – Nuku'alofa – Apia – Penrhyn Island - Palmyra Island – Hawaii - Oakland. The mail was organized by E A (Ernie) Crome, a well known aero-philatelist, based in Stanmore, a suburb of Sydney.



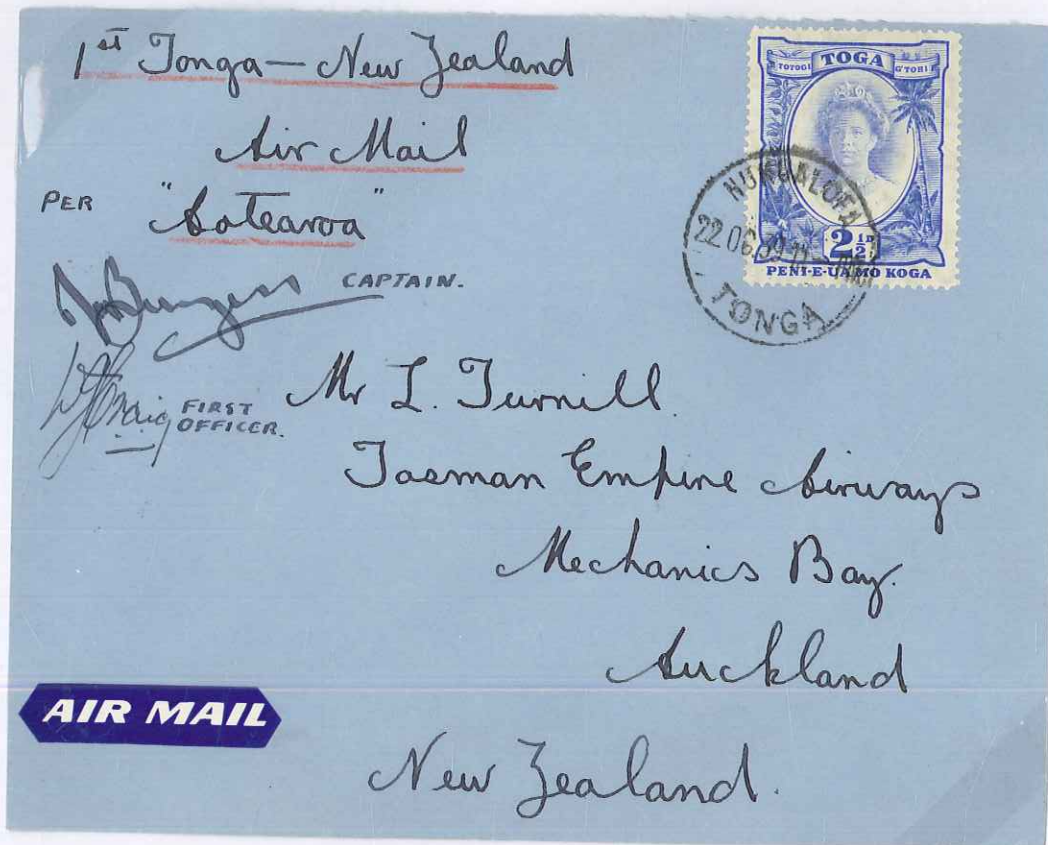
Each of the covers bears stamps of Australia and Tonga. Those going beyond Tonga also carry stamps suitable for return postage to Australia. This cover, one of six, arrived at Nuku'alofa on 7<sup>th</sup> September, 1942 and was back-stamped at Enmore, Sydney on the 20<sup>th</sup> September. 2½d paid the correct postage to Australia, at the time.

The red, octagonal censor cachet was probably applied in Tonga.



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The flying-boat was captained by John Burgess. Here are two covers signed by him sent from Tonga to New Zealand on 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 1939. One is also signed by the First Officer, W. J. Craig, whilst the second is signed by Maurice Clarke, the co-pilot. The first is possibly unique, the second cover one of two known.



## Tongan Airmail

The postage to Australia and The Pacific Area from Great Britain was expensive at 1/3d per ½ ounce. In July, 1938, postage to Australia was reduced to 1½d, including airmail. These covers to Tonga were on the first flight upon which mail could be sent at the new rate. All mail to Tonga was sent via Sydney at that time. One letter was posted at Newport, Mon, on 23 July, the other at Liverpool on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Both have received a Nuku'alofa receiving cancel for August 29<sup>th</sup> which must be the date of arrival. The Tongan 2½d stamp (SG 43), is cancelled on September 22nd. Presumably, this was added by the sender since it had been superseded by a similar stamp bearing Queen Salote's bust in 1922. There is a private receiver on the reverse of the lower cover dated 28<sup>th</sup> October.

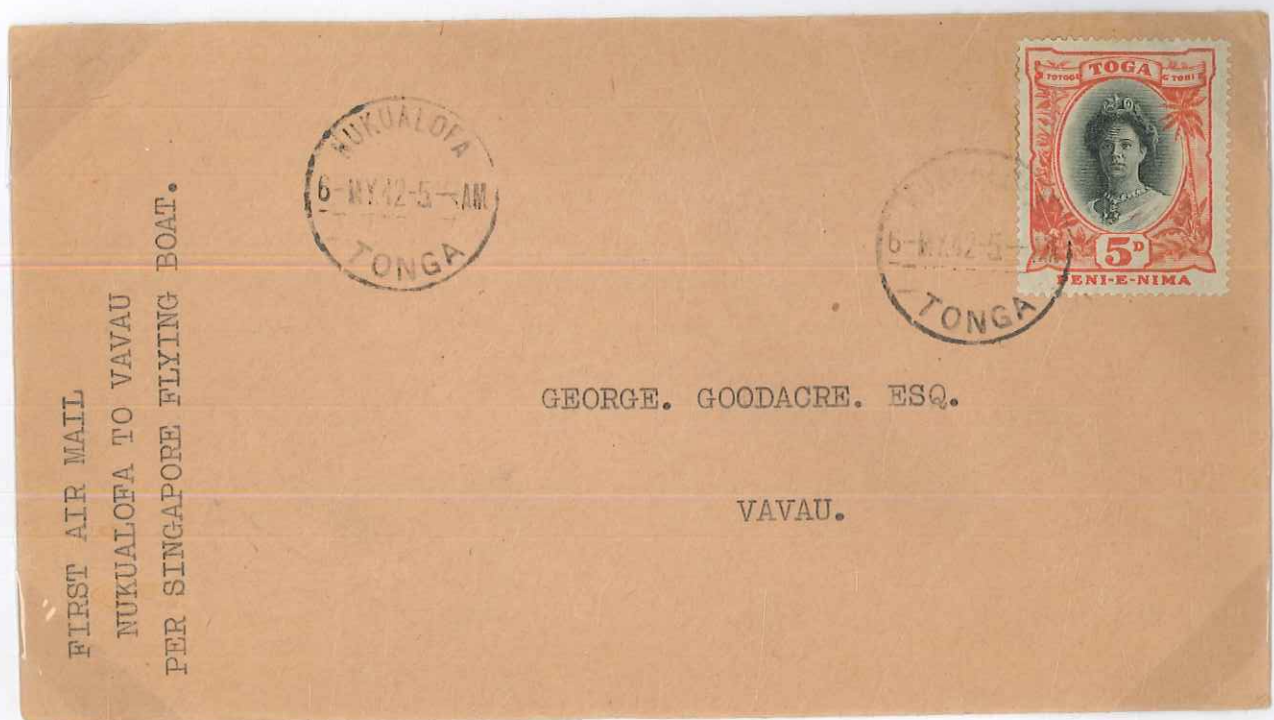




### Tongan Airmail

This cover was sent from Nuku'alofa to Vavau on 6<sup>th</sup> May, 1942, postmarked at 5 am! On the reverse is the Vavau double circle receiver timed at 10 50 the same day. It was carried in a Short S.19 Sunderland flying-boat belonging to the New Zealand air-force, based in Fiji.

A total of 4 RAF Short Singapores were flown from Singapore to Fiji for the use of 5 Squadron of the New Zealand air force. Regrettably, one crashed due to bad weather en route. The remaining 3 craft were only in service for a few months, from late 1941 to 27<sup>th</sup> November, 1942 and then again from 2<sup>nd</sup> March to 16<sup>th</sup> April, 1943. They were withdrawn and scuttled due to a shortage of spare parts and poor maintenance; however, a few days later, a ship from Britain arrived in Fiji with all the spare parts that were required!



### Tongan Airmail

This cover is one of six that were offloaded at Penrhyn Island in the Cook Island group. The stamp is SG32 of Cook Islands, 3d on 1½d black and purple, issued 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 1940, and cancelled on 10<sup>th</sup> September, 1942, at Penrhyn Island. It arrived back at Sydney on the 14<sup>th</sup> December, 1942.



Tongan Airmail

This cover was addressed to a member of the Pan American Airways staff at Honolulu, where it was cancelled on 19<sup>th</sup> September, when it was removed from the flight. It had also been cancelled in Nukualofa on September 7<sup>th</sup>. Between 4 and 6 covers were flown to Honolulu.





### Tongan Airmail

A cover sent on the first flight between Tonga and NZ by the flying boat "Aotearoa" on 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 1939. A total of 250 covers were carried, apparently. The appropriate large Auckland receiver for 23<sup>rd</sup> October at 4 PM is present on the back.



This cover is another flown between Tonga and Fiji on 17<sup>th</sup> March, 1941, and postmarked at Nuku'alofa the previous day. The appropriate receiver for Suva is on the back





Tongan Airmail

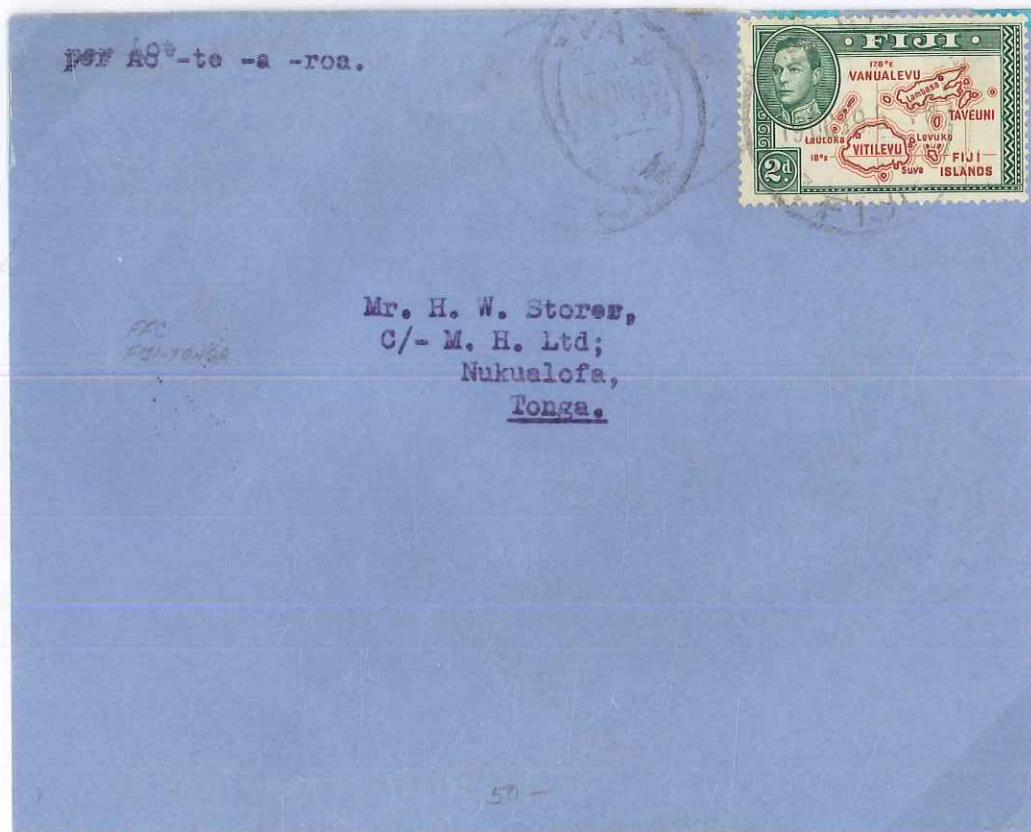
This cover was also on the flight from Tonga to New Zealand, but addressed to Cockfosters, Barnet, Herts. It is a letter-card, used as a Christmas card. There are no British postal markings.



### Tongan Airmail

A second, non-philatelic cover, flown on the same flight, showing the Suva cancel for 20<sup>th</sup> October, 1942 and the Nuku'alofa receiver for 22<sup>nd</sup> October on the reverse.

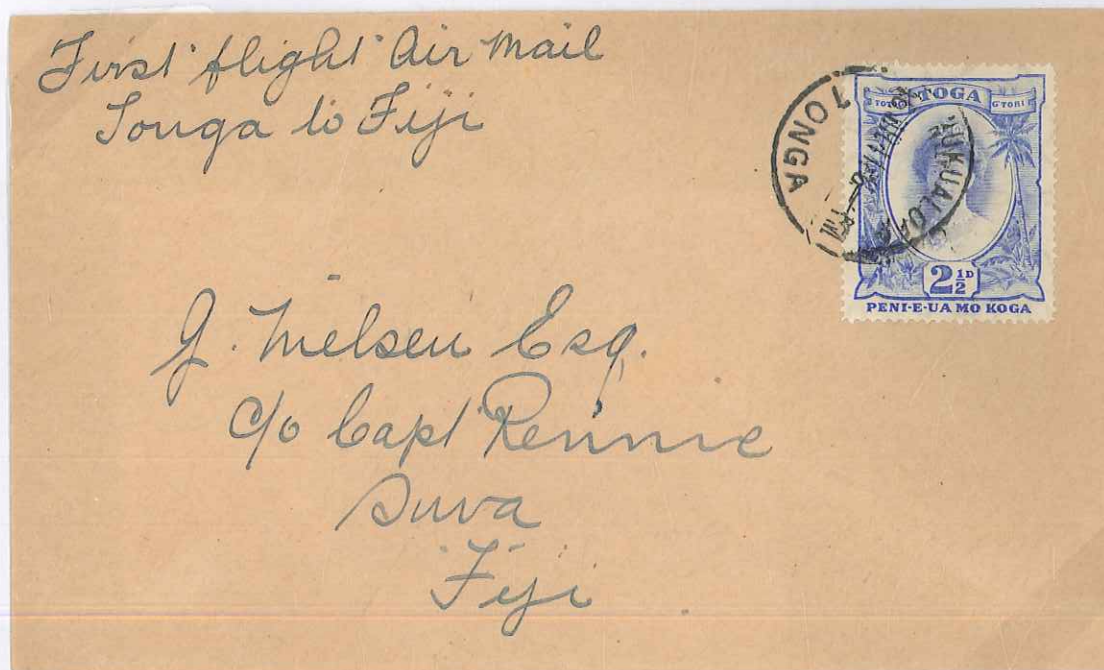
1939





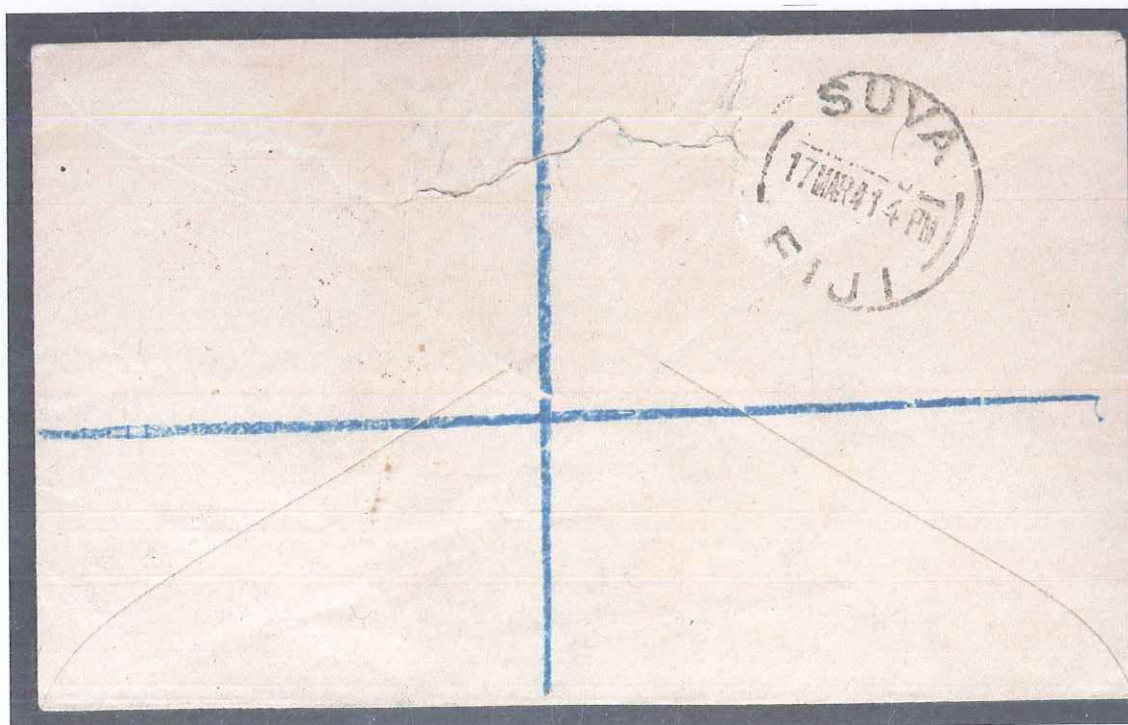
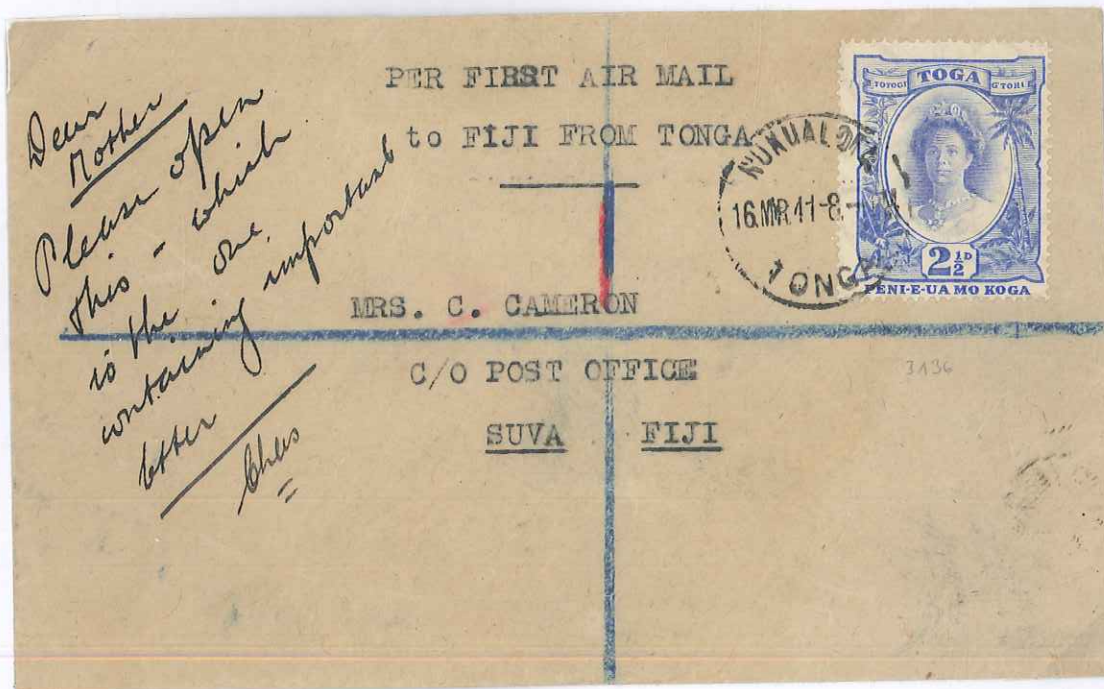
Tongan Airmail

On 17<sup>th</sup> March, 1941 mail was carried from Tonga to Fiji on a survey flight by De Havilland DH39 Dragon Rapide of RNZAF. The flight from Nausori, Fiji was arranged to test the new airfield at Fua'amotu, Tonga. About 20 identified covers such as these were flown from Tonga to Fiji, along with an unknown quantity of accumulated mail. As usual, no additional charge was made for airmail.



## My Favourite Stamps

The 2½d stamp on this cover addressed to Fiji was insufficient to pay for transmission outside the Kingdom (3d should have been paid) and registration was another 3d. Luckily for the sender, the letter was allowed through on the first flight from Tonga to Fiji. Airmail rates had not been introduced to Tonga in 1941 – that came in 1945. The note on the front states “Dear Mother. Please open this – which is the one containing important letter. Chas”. The Tongan cancel is for 16<sup>th</sup> March 1941 at 8 AM whilst the Suva cancel on the back is for 17th March at 4 PM.





### Tongan Airmail

A cover addressed to the same member of the Pan American Airways staff at Pearl City, Hawaii that went all the way to Oakland where an American 2c stamp was cancelled on September 18<sup>th</sup>. It is numbered #4, and just 4 covers were flown. It, too, was postmarked in-transit at Nukualofa. It bears an American censor cancel on the reverse.



### Tongan Airmail

#### A MYSTERY COVER!

Sent "Per 'SEA - PLANE XX-L' Favour of Pilot E. Wickes" from Vavau to Nuku'alofa on 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 1943 and with a receiving cancel of the same date. Unrecorded in any reference book, so far. The American Air force was on Nuku'alofa at the time, so perhaps this cover was sent in one of their Catalina flying boats.





## Tongan Airmail

To commemorate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the inaugural flight from Fiji to Tonga, Fiji Airways flew Souvenir covers in both directions. The plane left Suva airport on 24<sup>th</sup> October, captained by A. G. Shearer and returned on the 28<sup>th</sup>, captained by Neil Crawley. About 1800 covers were flown in each direction.

