

SARAWAK CENSORED MAIL 1939 TO 1941

Introduction:

For most of this period all foreign mail, other than from Limbang, was censored at the Kuching Head Post Office and several types of rectangular boxed cachets and resealing strips were in use, from mid 1941 censorship was also carried out at Miri. Excepting the rare marks associated with small military detachments within Sarawak the triangular cachets found on mail originating from Sarawak are now known to have been applied in Singapore. Unlike North Borneo war tax stamps were not issued in Sarawak, but private charity labels originating in Malaya can occasionally be found on Sarawak covers.

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References

1. Stamps and Postal History of Sarawak, Forester-Wood, pg. 434-4
2. Supplement to the 'Stamps and Postal History of Sarawak' Forester-Wood, pg. 64
- 2a. Sarawak Cancellations & Postal Rates, Batty-Smith et al, pg. 14
3. Sarawak Journal (S.J.): 41/122, B. Walker. 4. S. J. : 26/39-42, J. Dewey. 4a, S.J. 39/121, N. Watterson

Personal Research:

5. Sarawak Censored Mail: Re-sealing Labels; (S.J.) 73/47-9
6. Sarawak 1941 15c Registration Envelope in Blue; (S.J.) 72/71-3
7. Sarawak Censor Hand stamps, a reappraisal (S.J.);

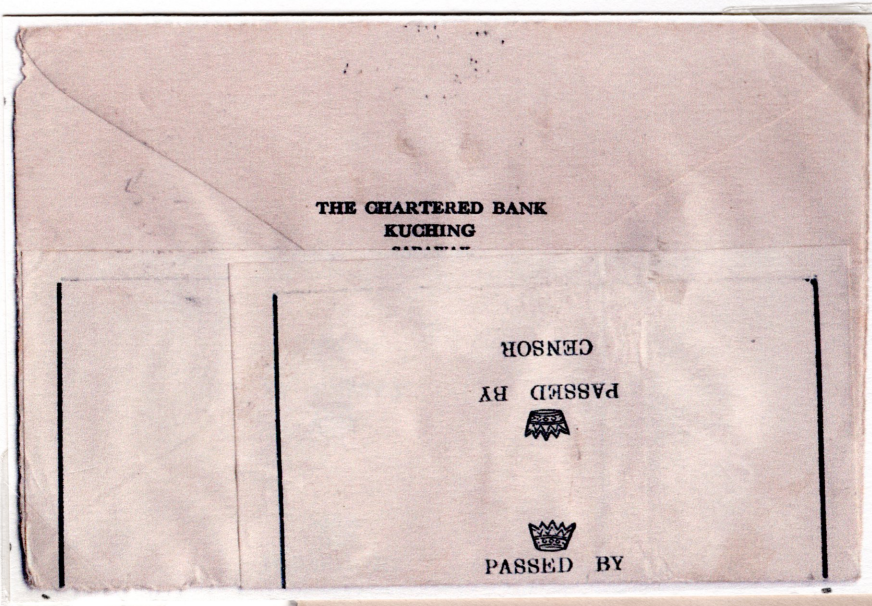
Importance:

Efficient postal censorship was essential for this vulnerable country with a strategically important oil field.

Rarity: Less than 10 recorded *, Less than 5 recorded **, only one recorded ***

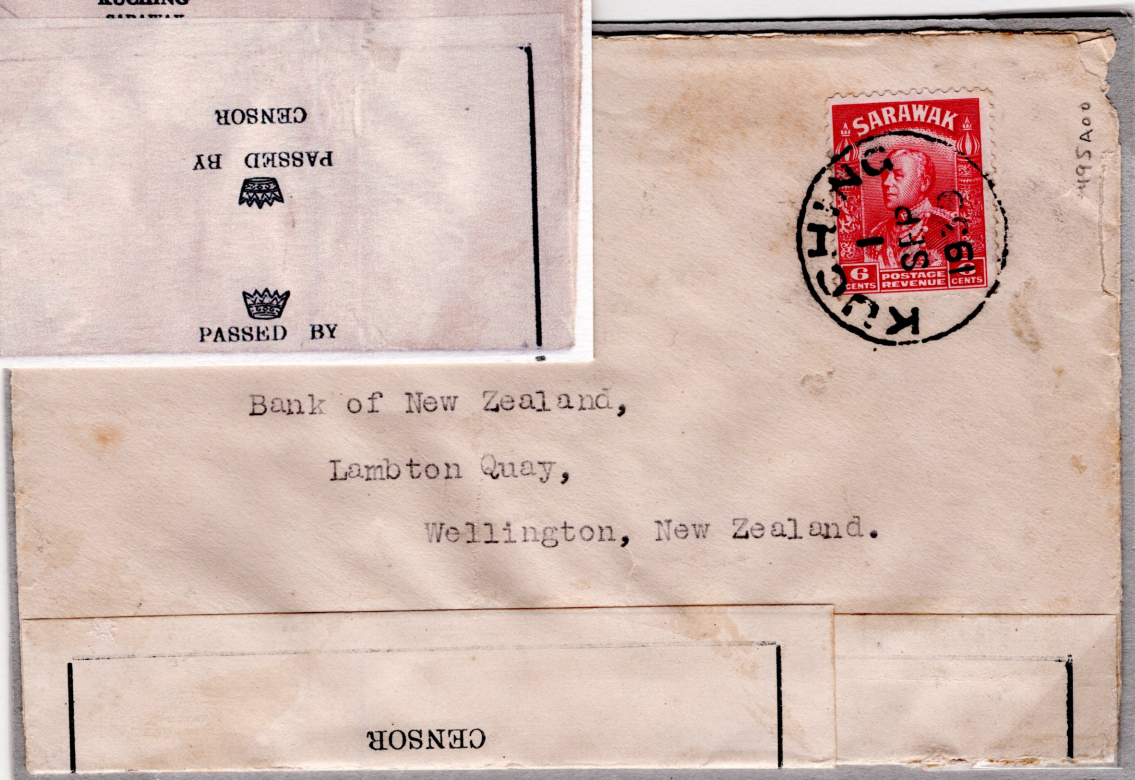
Earliest Recorded 'Passed By Censor' cover **

Censorship in Sarawak had started by the 1st September 1939 on the invasion of Poland by Germany, as both censors hand stamp (Ref: 3) and resealing strips (Ref. 5) are known used on covers from that date.



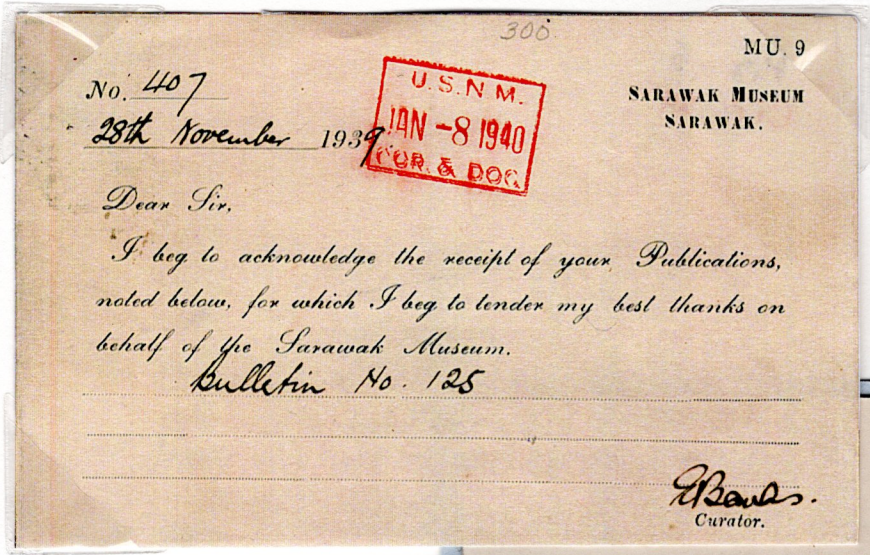
Reduced copy of the reverse, cover
resealed by two 'PASSED BY
CENSOR' labels

1 SEP 1939, resealed
envelope; inter bank
mail from Kuching to
New Zealand,



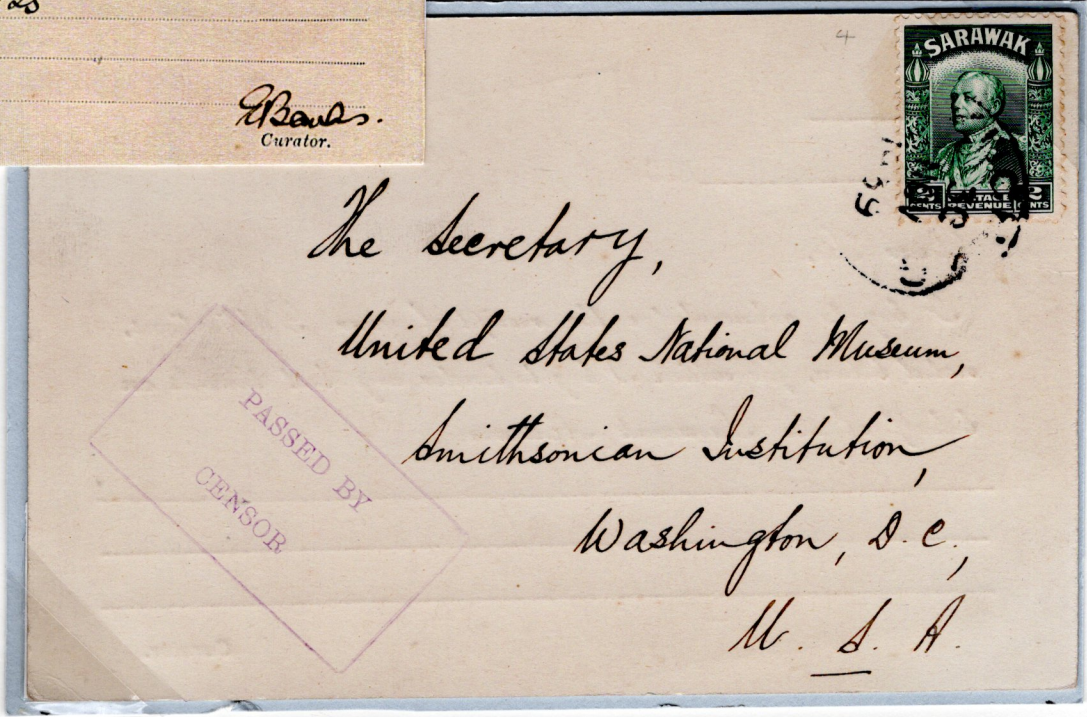
It is believed (Ref. 1 & 4) that until mid 1941 all foreign mail from Sarawak was censored in Kuching.

1a) Large boxed cachet (45.5 mm x 25 mm): in use from early September 1939 (Ref. 3)



30 NOV 1939, censored card from the Sarawak Museum, Kuching to the U.S.A. franked at 2c the printed paper rate. Censored cards are unusual *

Reduced copy of the reverse of the card



19 JUL 1940, cover from Ha Buey Hon, Kuching to Barbados, B.W.I. (Ha Buey Hon was a local stamp dealer active from the early 1900's)



Kuching 'PASSED BY / CENSOR' cachets

1b) Large boxed cachet (46 mm x 25.5 mm), a new discovery, Ref. 7.

Also distinguished by a hollow 'H' shape often but not always visible, it is probably due to spacers that depending on the pressure applied protruded and printed. Dewey (Ref.3) believed it was due to wear of 1a, but as it occurs from September 1939 this is untenable. It is also very unlikely that the Kuching P.O. that dealt with all foreign mail would have only one censor chop.

Early usage: 30 SEP 1939 from Kuching to the U.K.



3 APL 1940 to the U.K. Unsealed and franked at 2c for second class mail. Overinking has led to a very clear example of the 'H' mark.



Late usage: 14 JUN 1941, letter to the U.K. Franked at 8c the imperial letter rate. Only partial traces of the 'H' due to underinking.



Kuching 'PASSED BY / CENSOR' cachets

1c) Small boxed cachet (36 mm x 18 mm)

In use in Kuching from August 1941; from mid 1941 mail in transit from Sarawak is frequently additionally examined in Singapore.

Earliest recorded use of the small boxed cachet (Ref. 7)

18 AUG 1941 cover from Kuching to Scotland; although passed by the Kuching censor subsequently opened and then resealed with blank tape tied front and back by the Singapore censor cachet 'PASSED BY / CENSOR 279 / 'A'



22 SEP 1941 cover from Kuching to U.S.A. franked at 15 cents (foreign rate from February 1941)
The cover also bears the double circle cachet of the Posts and Telegraphs Dept. Kuching plus a triangular 'PASSED FOR / TRANSMISSION' cachet applied in Singapore.



Mail from outside Kuching

Until late 1941 foreign mail was only censored in Kuching, therefore mail from other towns was sent there and usually carries a Kuching transit c.d.s. Senders of foreign mail were required to place their name and address on the cover.

28 DEC 1939 from Sarikei to the U.K. Kuching 'Passed by Censor' cachet 1a)
Reverse: Kuching c.d.s. dated 29 DEC 1939



8 FEB 1940, air mail cover from Rejang to the U.K., Kuching 'Passed by Censor' cachet 1b)
Reverse: Kuching c.d.s. dated 9 FEB 1940



Miri was the second largest town in Sarawak with considerable foreign correspondence arising from the exploitation of the nearby oil fields, but until August 1941 mail was forwarded to Kuching for censorship.

a) Kuching Censorship: Covers bearing the large boxed 'PASSED BY / CENSOR' cachet used in Kuching from September 1939 to August 1941.

February 1940, Air Mail Cover to the UK correctly franked at 55c



March 1940 Registered cover to Canada, via San Francisco (wartime trans pacific)

Opened and resealed with the large 'Passed by Censor' label.

Franked at 36c the correct rate for a letter over 1oz to the U.S.A. (15c first oz, 6c second, 15c registration)

Front: large blue cachet of 'Revenue Postal Dept./ APR 22 1940 / Duty Free'

Back: Singapore 18 MR 1940, San Francisco APR 18 1940, Toronto AP 22 40



b) Censorship at Miri: From May 1941 a small rectangular cachet (31 x 21 mm) is found on mail originating from Miri only, indicating a censorship office has been opened there.

8 MAY 1941, from Miri to the UK, bearing the small boxed 'PASSED BY / CENSOR' cachet



3 JUL 1941 Airmail cover to the U.S.A. franked at \$1.40 for the PanAm trans pacific service from Singapore to San Francisco. Additionally censored at Singapore, resealed and the 'PASSED BY CENSOR / 292 / A' cachet applied



Foreign Mail from Limbang

Limbang, the administrative centre of the 5th Division (district of Sarawak), is the exception in that mail was not censored in Sarawak. It is very close to the Brunei border and foreign mail was normally sent down river to Brunei town for onward transmission, usually via Labuan and Singapore.

7 FEB 1940 from Limbang to Australia via Labuan (8 FE 1940, reverse) and Singapore
Censor Marks: Singapore 'PASSED BY / 25 / CENSOR' and
Australia 'PASSED BY CENSOR / V99' where it was opened & resealed (red sealing tape)



4 JUN 1940 from Limbasng to the U.S.A via Labuan and Singapore franked at 12c the foreign letter rate, reverse Labuan 4 JU 1940. Censored in Singapore



Censored postal stationery

Very few postal stationery registered envelopes used in this period are known, possibly they were unpopular as the envelope itself was fairly heavy and would attract additional postage. It is believed that the new issue of registered envelopes with the blue value indicia were put on sale in June 1941 (Ref. 6) giving a period of use of only six months prior to the Japanese invasion, which might explain why the example below is the only known copy used or unused (Ref. 6). A specimen copy of this and larger 'H' sized envelope are known, but there are no recorded copies of this Sarawak 'H' sized envelope used or unused.

24 OCT 1941, registered postal stationery envelope (1941 issue) from Kuching to the U.K. ***

Franked at \$1.00 to pay airmail postage to the U.K. (2 x 50c) for a letter between ½ and 1oz.

Bears the small Kuching 'PASSED BY CENSOR' hand stamp and the Singapore 'PASSED BY / CENSOR / 209 / A' stamp over brown resealing tape

Reverse: Singapore 27.10.41 (B.P.A. Certificate 39,056)



Sarawak did not issue postal stationery envelopes, censored postal stationery cards are very scarce.

1 NOV 1939, flown business reply card from Kuching to McGraw-Hill, New York

Received 24 NOV 1939. Kuching large 'PASSED BY CENSOR' hand stamp

Franked at 95c, flown postcard rate via BOAC from Singapore to Hong Kong and

Pan Am trans pacific 'Clipper' to San Francisco *



a) Large labels: approximately 110 x 79 mm, inscribed twice (one inverted) within a rectangle 'PASSED BY CENSOR' under a crown. One Crown has a gap of 1mm between its base and the inscription the other a 1.5 mm gap. Used from the 1st September 1939, but soon replaced by the more convenient small labels (Ref. 6).

28 SEP 1939 from Miri to the U.K., reverse of cover plus copy of part of the front to show complete label

Reduced copy of the obverse of the cover



Large label cut in half

25 JUL 1941, Sibü to Switzerland via Kuching, over franked by 1c at 22c (15c first oz, 6c second oz)
Open and resealed using half of the large label, plus Singapore 'PASSED FOR / TRANSMISSION / 5'



Photocopy of part of the reverse of the cover to show full label

b) Small labels: Approximately 110 x 58 mm, inscribed 'PASSED BY CENSOR' under a crown. In use by January 1940. These appear to have been derived from the original large label as the inscription is identical. There are two slightly different labels, one with gap of 1.5 mm between bottom of crown and inscription the other with a 1.0 mm gap, also the crowns are different. This is a new observation (Ref 6).

Small label b1): 1.5 mm gap between inscription and a wide crown which is different to that on the large label.

20 NOV 1940, Registered cover from Kuching to the U.S.A. franked at 27c (15c registration, 12c foreign letter), additional cachet A.R. in circle (advice of receipt, Proud A.R. 5*)

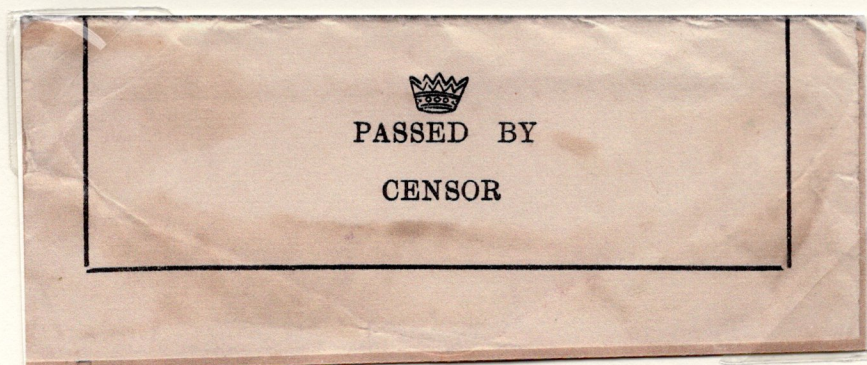


Photocopy of the part of label on the back of cover



Small label b2*): 1.0 mm gap between inscription and a narrow crown identical to that on the large label.

I have only one example which is resealing the 1940 cover to the U.S.A. bearing the large 1c Malay Patriotic Fund label, below is a photocopy of the part of the label on the back of the cover.



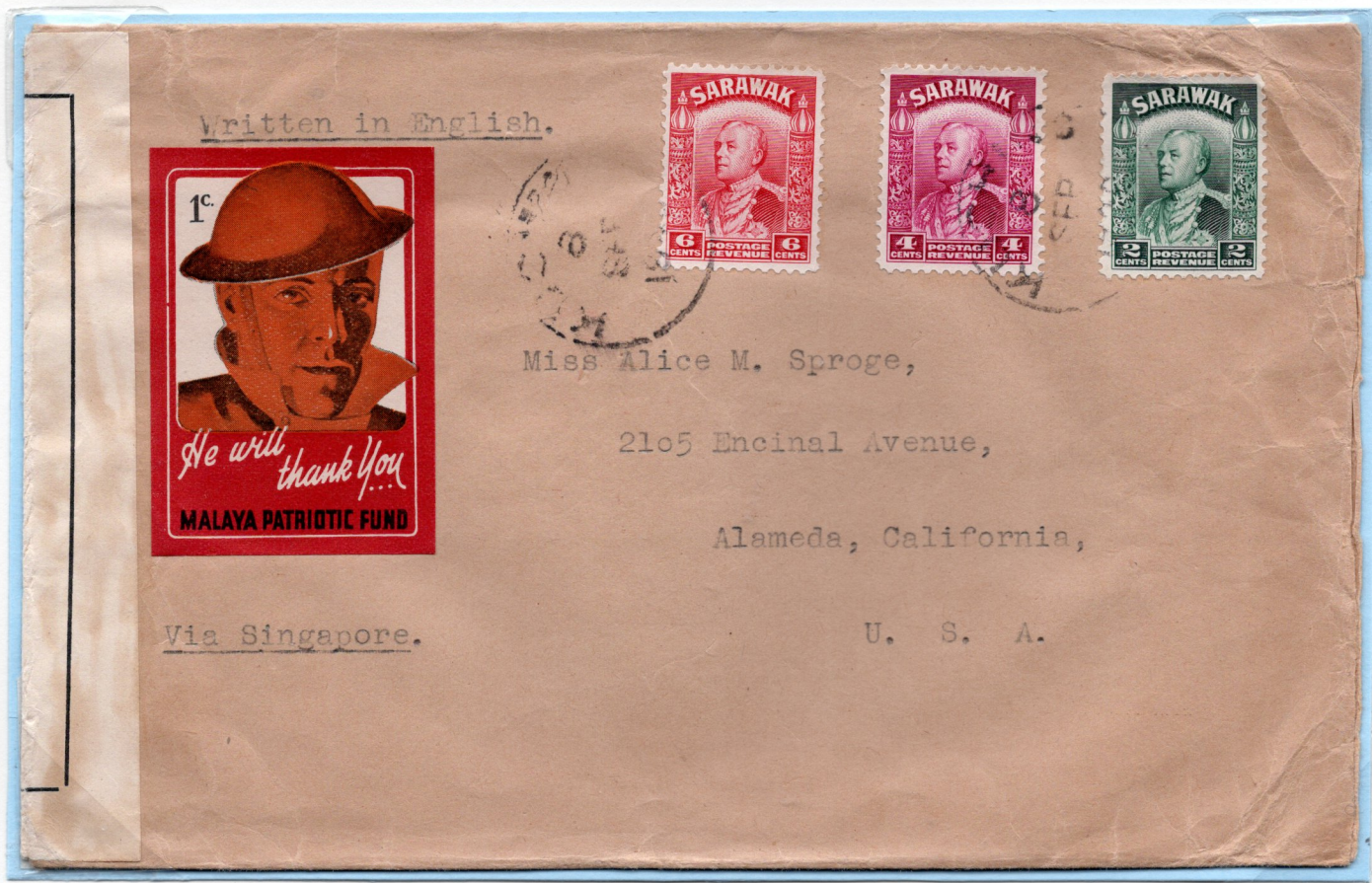
Malay Patriotic Fund Labels.

Unlike the neighbouring territory of North Borneo there were no official War Tax stamps issued in Sarawak to raise funds for the War effort. Instead patriotic fund labels originating in peninsular Malaya are occasionally found on wartime Sarawak covers. Several different types of labels are known, all are scarce on mail from Sarawak.*

Large 1 cent Label (imperf)

8 SEP 1940 from Kuching to U.S.A.

The cover also bears (on the back) the only example I have of the small resealing label with 1mm gap between crown and text (photocopy on the previous sheet)



Small 1 cent Label (rouleted)

1940 cover from Rejang (unusual origin) to U.S.A.

The cover also bears the large rectangular 'PASSED BY / CENSOR' cachet in use in Kuching from September 1939.



Kuching 'Stamp Under Label' cachet

Large boxed cachet (46 mm x 25 mm) inscribed 'STAMP UNDER / LABEL / / Asst. Censor.'

Presumably introduced because the original large label could cover some of the franking leading to the cover being erroneously taxed. Scarce as probably seldom used and soon made obsolete by the introduction of the smaller sealing strip in late 1939.

Only recorded example of the cachet *** (Ref 6)

1 Oct 1939 registered air mail cover from Kuching to the U.K. resealed with two large sealing strips partially obscuring one stamp. Faint 'Stamp under label' cachet partially obscured by an airmail etiquette.

Cachet has been scored through with red ink, therefore probably applied in error.

Large boxed cachets 'Passed by Censor' front and back.



Cover correctly franked at 70c (55c airmail to the UK + 15c registration)

Enlarged photocopy of the cachet



Military Mail

The only military censor marks on mail from Sarawak are on mail from the 11/15 Punjab regiment stationed in Sarawak from early 1941. A forces concessionary air mail rate of 25 cents for letters not exceeding ½ oz sent via BOAC was introduced in February 1941.

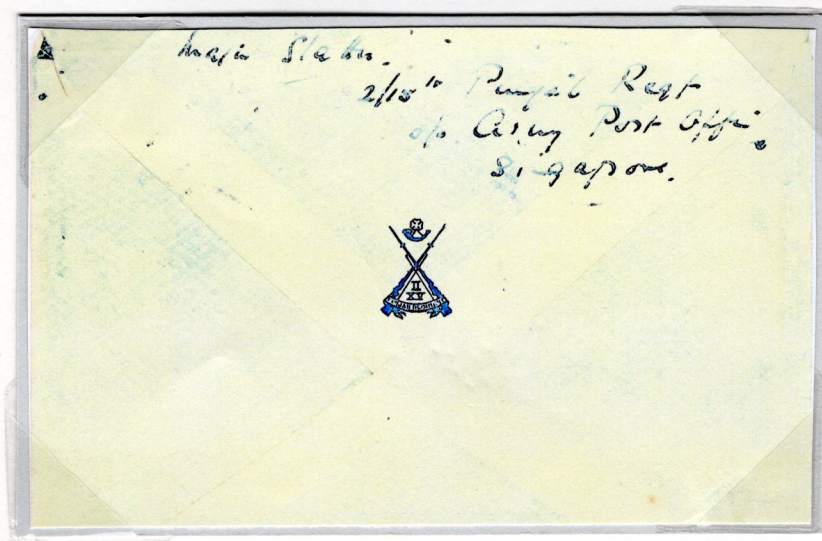
Unit censor mark No. 305 of "Miri Force" formed to protect the Miri oilfields.

4 DEC 1941, 25c concessionary airmail cover to Southern Rhodesia cancelled at Miri **
Very scarce as concessionary rate letters are usually handled by the regimental F.P.O.



Probably the last acceptance from Sarawak for a BOAC flight west from Singapore prior to the Japanese invasion

Reduced photocopy of the reverse of the envelope with the insignia of the II / XV of the Punjab regiment
Inscribed 'Major Slatter, 2/15th Punjab Regt c/o Army Post Office Singapore'



The letter is from Major Slatter to his wife. He was killed manning a Bren gun on M.V. Lipis while attempting to evacuate his Company after demolition of the Miri oilfields

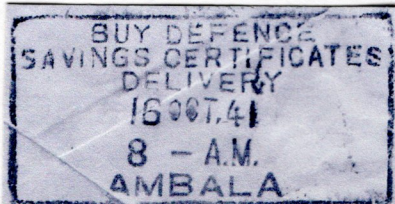
Indian F.P.O. 50C was established in Sarawak in June 1941 to handle mail from the II/XV Punjab Regiment while it was stationed in Sarawak, initially in Kuching (Ref. 4a). The majority of recorded covers are to the Ambala cantonment in India, the home base of the regiment.

Unit censor mark No. 3099 plus the double black triangle of the Calcutta censor

12 SP 41, 25c concessionary air mail cover from Sarawak to Ambala, India. cancelled F.P.O. 50C *
Manuscript 'O.A.S.' and 'in Urdu'. Reverse: Ambala 24 SEP 41



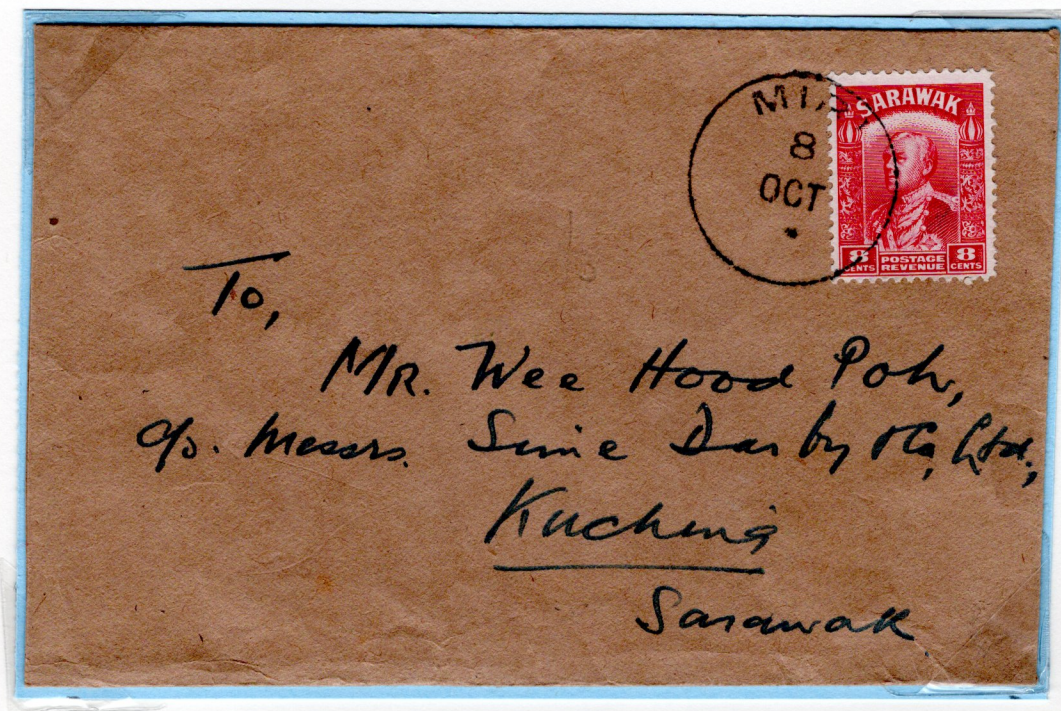
3 OC 1941, 25c concessionary airmail cover from Sarawak to Ambala, cancelled F.P.O. 50C *
Manuscript: 'on active service' and 'in Urdu' Reverse: Ambala arrival 16 OCT 1941



Photocopy of Ambala arrival postmark on the back of the cover

Internal mail from this period is surprisingly scarce, the few examples I have seen have not been censored. A typical example is shown below.

8 OCT (1941) from Miri to Kuching franked with 8c carmine issued 1st March 1941
The omission of the the year date has not been previously recorded



Overseas Mail: It is very unusual to find a cover from Sarawak sent during this period without a censor chop or a re-sealing label either applied in Kuching or in transit. I have only the one example shown below, it is probably significant that it originated from the Kuching Post Office.

19 MAY 1941 (with small year date), registered cover from Kuching to U.S.A
No censor mark, but carries the double circle cachet of the Posts and Telegraphs Dept. Kuching.



This cover extends the latest known date of use of the cancel by six weeks (Ref 2a)
Over franked by 1 cent at 31 cents (15c foreign letter rate + 15c registration)
Reverse: Singapore transit dated 22 MY 1941 and US arrival marks JUN 19 and JUN 23 1941.