

# THE LIBERATION OF LABUAN AND NORTH BORNEO

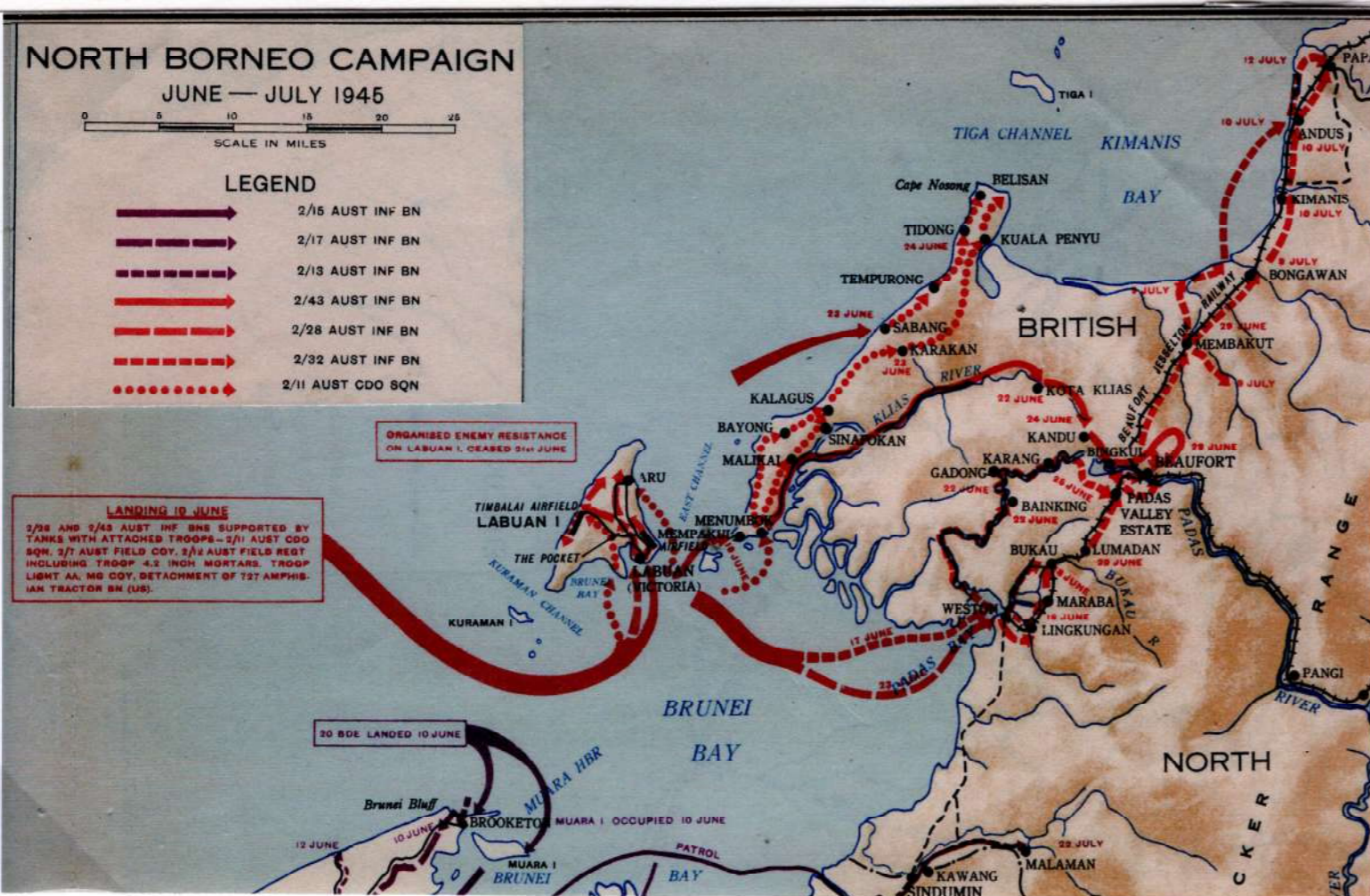
## Introduction

Oboe 6 the assault on the Island of Borneo was criticised as being unnecessary as the Japanese forces on Borneo were completely isolated but it was justified as securing air strips to extend air cover over the South China sea. The operation liberated the people of Borneo, P.O.W.'s and Internees two months earlier than the Japanese surrender which saved many lives as starvation was widespread and there was concern that internees and P.O.W.'s might be executed by the fleeing Japanese.

The island of Borneo had been occupied by the Japanese since early 1942. Because of its strategic position and superb harbour the Island of Labuan was the focus of the initial assault against the Japanese in Northern Borneo on the 10th June 1945 by the 2/28 & 2/43 Australian Infantry Brigades supported by the Australian Air Force and the United States Navy. On the same day the Australian infantry landed at Brooketon and Muara Island near to the Brunei oil fields. The assault on the coast of British North Borneo at Weston commenced on the 12th June. Organised Japanese resistance on Labuan ceased on June 21. Fighting in North Borneo continued until the local surrender by the Japanese on the 12 July.

This display show the range of postal material emanating from the Australian forces in Labuan and North Borneo. All mail from this area during and after liberation until the transfer of postal responsibilities to the British Military Administration on 17 December 1945 was handled by detachments of the Australian Forces P.O. using, when available, Australian stamps and postal stationery and up to the Japanese surrender on the 7 September 1945 bore the appropriate military censor cachet.

Map showing the disposition of the Australian Forces on Labuan and Northern Borneo 10 June to 12 July 1945



### Australian forces post offices in Labuan

- Australian Base Post Office No. 6C & 6D
- Field Post Office 037
- Army Post Office 239
- Unit Postal Station 441
- Air Force Post Office 234

### Dates operating in Labuan

- 1 July 1945 to 26 November 1945
- 12 June 1945 to 1 October 1945
- 18 June 1945 to 26 June 1946
- 3 August 1945 to 10 November 1945
- 12 June 1945 to April 1946

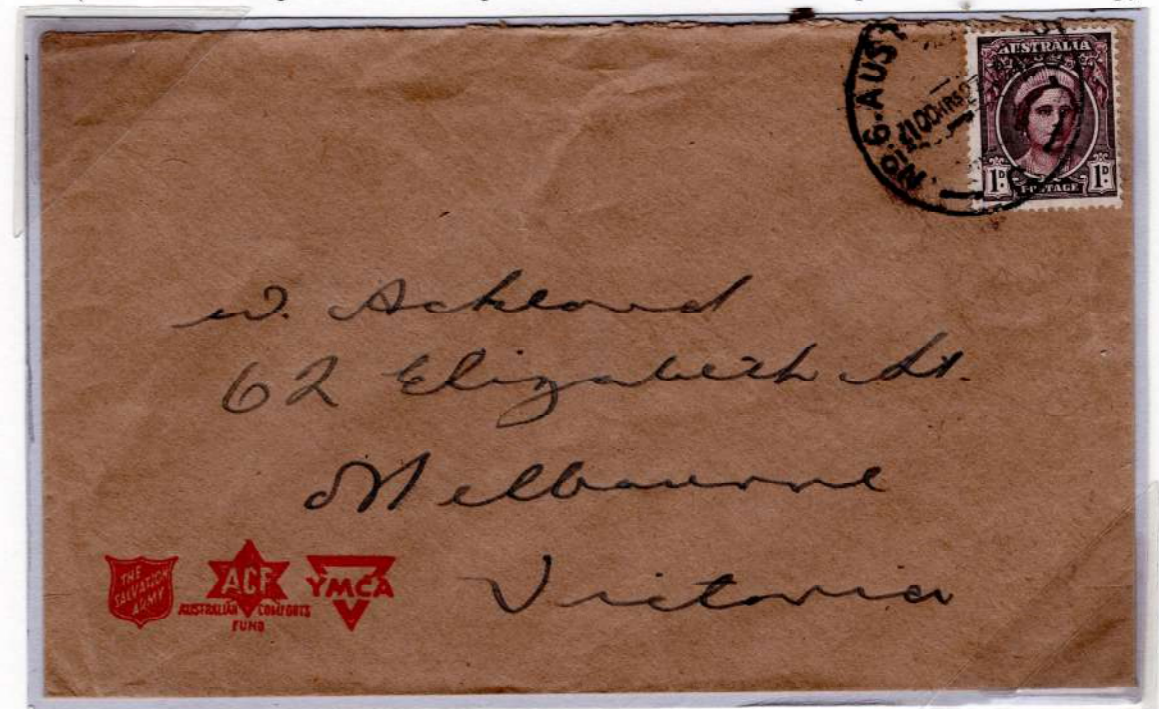
### References:

- The Sarawak Journal; 71/2 pp 45-55.(Jeremy Dickson)
- The Postal History of the Australian Army during World War II ( P.Collas,1986);
- History of the Australian Military Postal Service 1914-1950 (E.B. Proud, 1991),
- Sarawak Specialists' Society Auction Catalogues 2019 and 2020 (from Revd. David Hubbard's Collection)

## Postal Rates to Australia

Surface Letter Rate: The concessionary letter rate for surface mail to Australia was 1d, but seldom seen. The vast majority of covers are franked at 3d the concessionary airmail rate for a letter up to 1oz, as the airmail service to Australia was very much quicker. The postage for Air Mail letter cards was also a 1d, but they are also scarce. To be eligible for the concessionary military rates covers had to bear appropriate markings, such as army or air force censor cachets or unit identifiers.

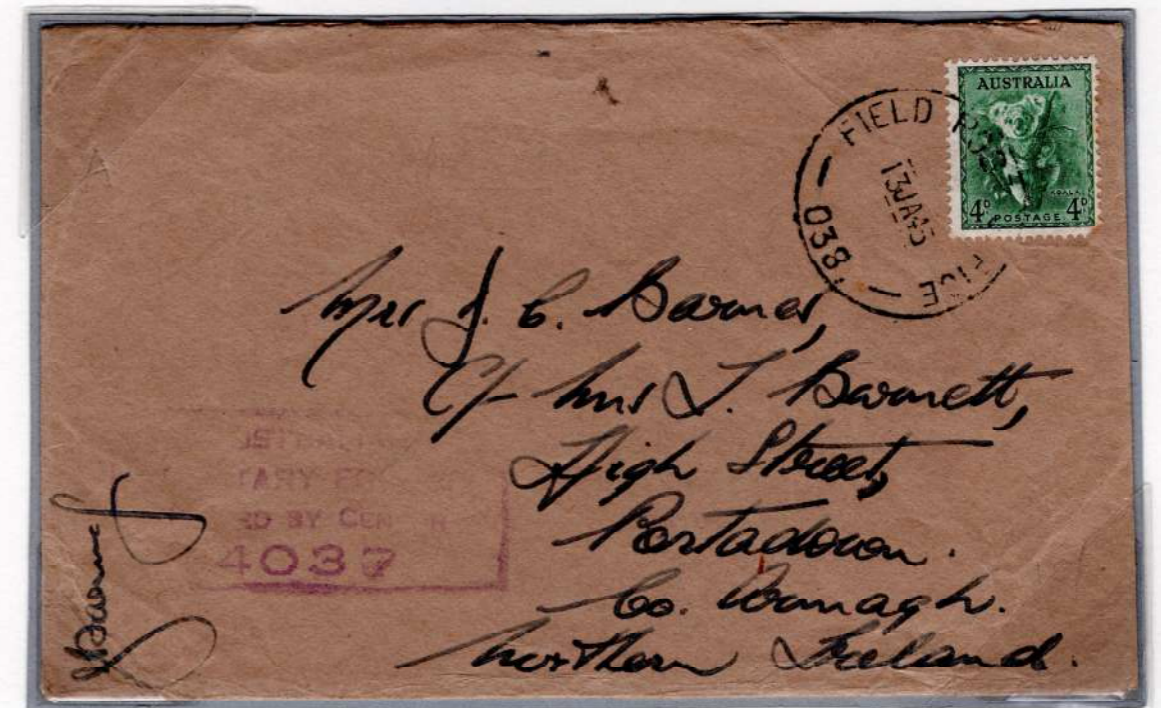
Surface rate comforts fund cover from No. 6 Australian Base Post Office 'C' (Labuan), dated 27 NOV 1945 to Melbourne, Australia  
(As the letter was posted after the Japanese surrender there was no requirement for censorship)



## Postal Rates to other countries

The Australian Forces Concessionary rates only applied to mail to Australia to other destinations the current Australian overseas letter rates were applied.

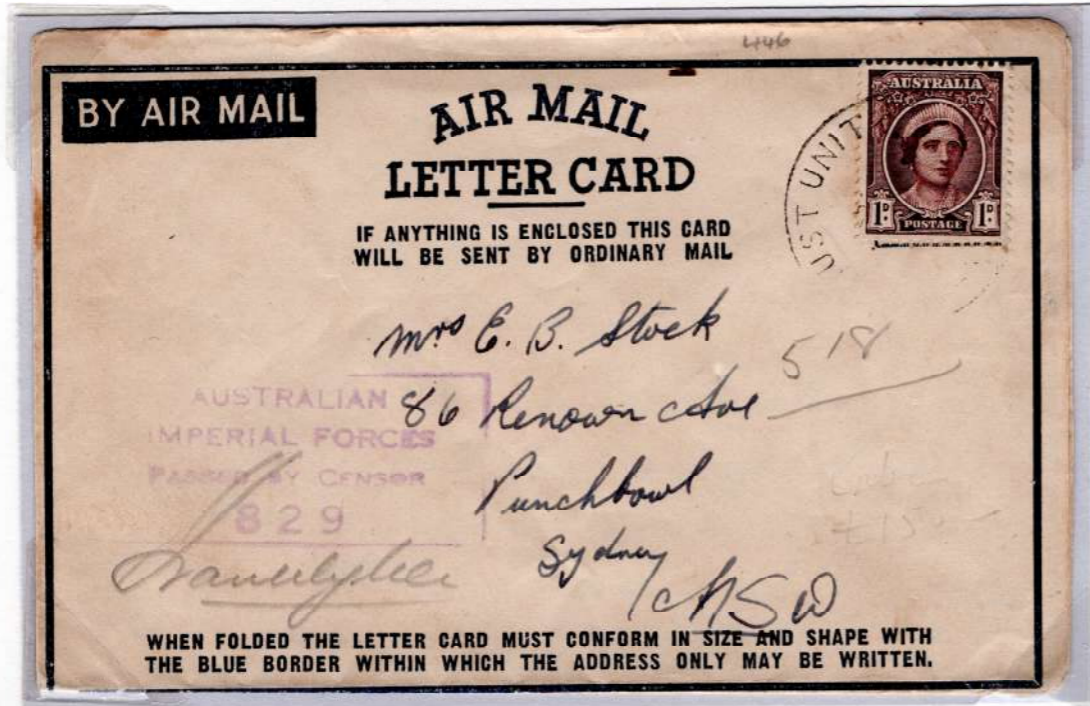
Censored cover from F.P.O. 038 dated 13 JA 45 to Northern Ireland franked at 4d, the current Australian letter rate to the U.K.



**Postal Rates to Australia (airmail)**

The rate was fixed at 3d per ounce, Air Mail Letter Cards franked at 1d were also available although seldom seen.

Censored letter card from A.A.P.O. 239 (Labuan) dated 21 JUN 1945 to Sydney. The message dated 19 June from Sapper W.H. Stock of the Royal Australian Engineers writes that he is 'very busy, sorry I cant write more often, but its just impossible'



This type of letter card with a flap bearing the instruction 'this flap may be gummed' was un-gummed as earlier types with gummed flaps became stuck together and unusable

Airmail cover franked at 3d from F.P.O. 37 (Labuan) dated 14 JUN 1945 to New South Wales (The postal unit moved to Labuan with the Australian forces and remained there until the end of 1945 when it moved to North Borneo)



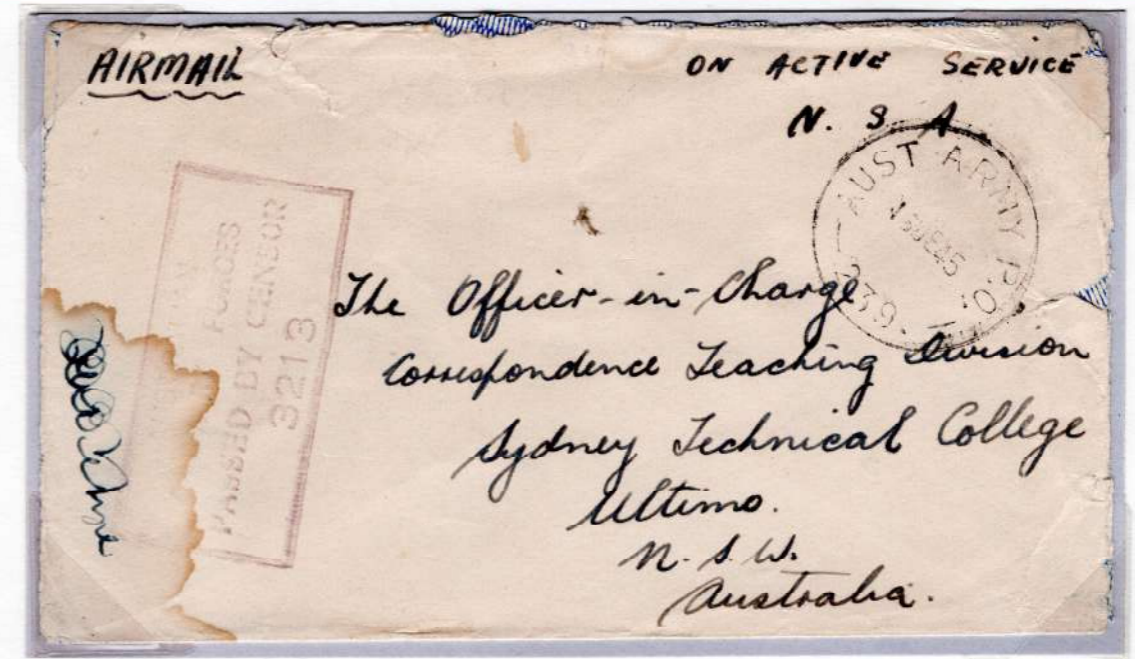
**Unfranked Mail**

It was accepted that letters up to 1 oz could be sent free of cost by front line troops. These two examples from Labuan are during the period of active engagement with the Japanese.

Field Service Card from Labuan to New South Wales, cancelled F.P.O. 37, dated 14 JE 45  
 Field service cards were not distributed to Australian servicemen, use of this British card is very unusual



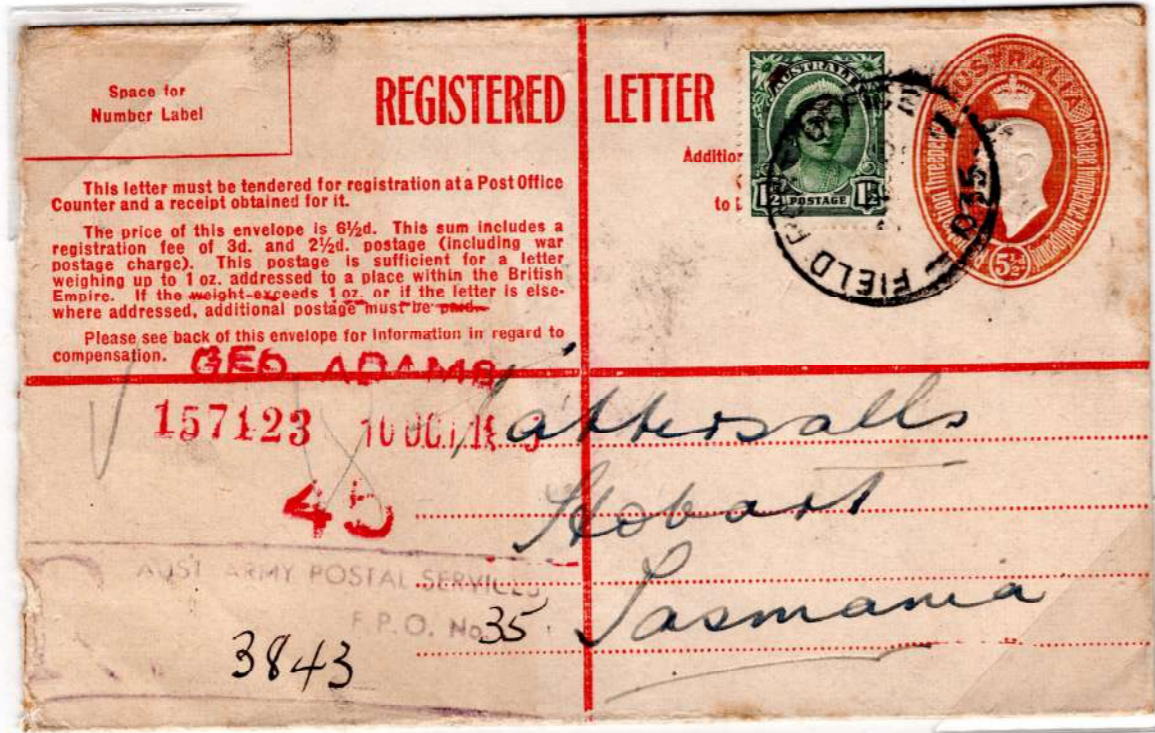
16 June 1945 un-franked airmail letter from Labuan to Australia bearing cachet 'ON ACTIVE SERVICE' / 'N.S.A.' (N.S.A. = No Stamp Available). Cover bearing A.A.P.O. 239 date-stamp (earliest recorded use in Labuan)



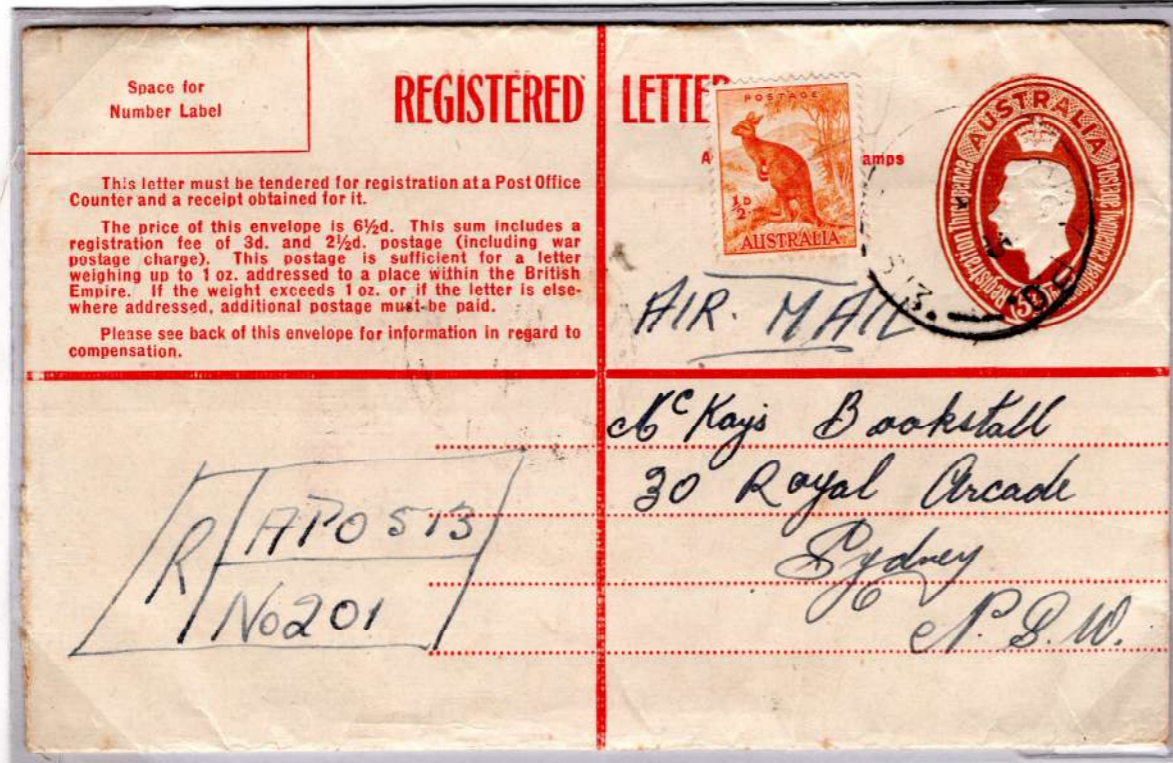
**Registered Mail**

Rate fixed at 3d per item, standard issue postal stationery registered envelopes were also available at 6½d, a penny more than the impressed stamp.

5½d registered envelope up-rated by a 1½d to pay for airmail, from F.P.O. 035 North Borneo dated 4 OCT 1945 to Hobart, Tasmania via No6 Australian Base Post Office 'D' dated 4 OCT 1945



5½d registered envelope up-rated with a ½d stamp to pay for airmail from A.A.O.P. 513, dated 4 NOV 1945 via No.6 Advance Base Post Office "D" to Sydney arriving 8 NOV 1945  
 Manuscript registration cachet indicating that even at this late date a registration canceller is unavailable



Army P.O. 513 was established at 9th Division POW and Internees reception camp in Labuan from late July to November 1945.

**Registered Mail**

Rate fixed at 3d per item, standard issue postal stationery registered envelopes were also available at 6½d, a penny more than the impressed stamp. Although relatively expensive the additional security was valued, there is no record of any registered item having gone astray when in charge of the military postal staff.

Registered cover from A.A.O.P. 239 (Labuan) dated 23 JUN 1945 addressed to a member of the 8<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Battalion. Presumably sent by a stamp collector as it is franked with a very unusual combination of commemorative stamps totalling 6d, sufficient to ensure it went by air although there is no such instruction. Manuscript Registration cachet as at this early date the Army Post Office had not received its registration stamp



On the reverse this much travelled cover received the cancellations of various military P.O.'s in Morotai, Emirau Island and Papua New Guinea before going to Sydney and delivery to Bondi a suburb there on 25 JUL 1945

5½d Postal Stationery envelope from Air Force P.O. 234 in Labuan dated 19 JUL 1945 to Tattersalls, the much used turf accountants. The cover bears a rectangular A.F.P.O. 234 Registration cachet and the distinctive oval R.A.A.F. Censor mark.

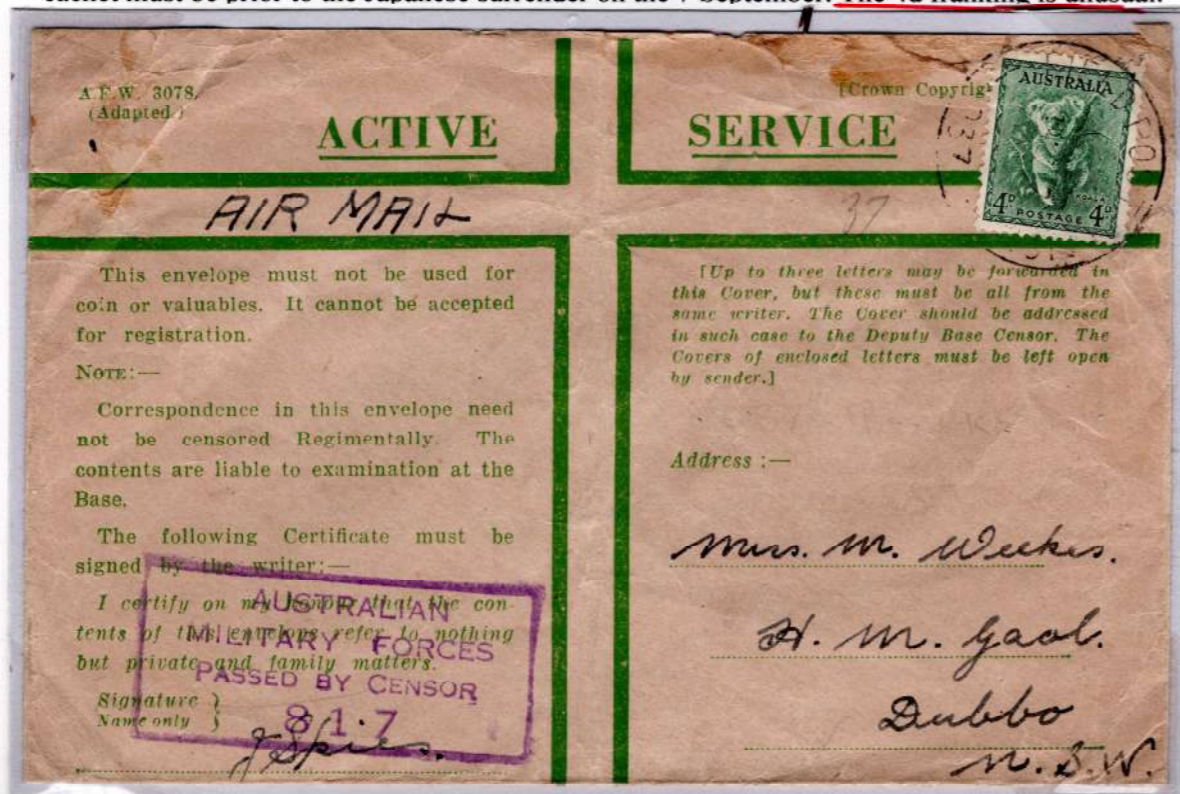


**Privilege or 'Honour' Envelopes**

The contents of these envelopes, which could be up to three letters from the same sender, were not subject to unit censorship but could be censored at the base. Use varied considerably according to supply but are generally uncommon. Two types are found used in the Borneo campaign.

Type 1: No inscription in cross.

Airmail cover from F.P.O.37 (Labuan) to N.S.W. date illegible but as it bears a 'Passed by Censor' cachet must be prior to the Japanese surrender on the 7 September. The 4d franking is unusual.



Type 2: Inscribed 'FOR USE ONLY BY MEMBERS OF THE AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES'

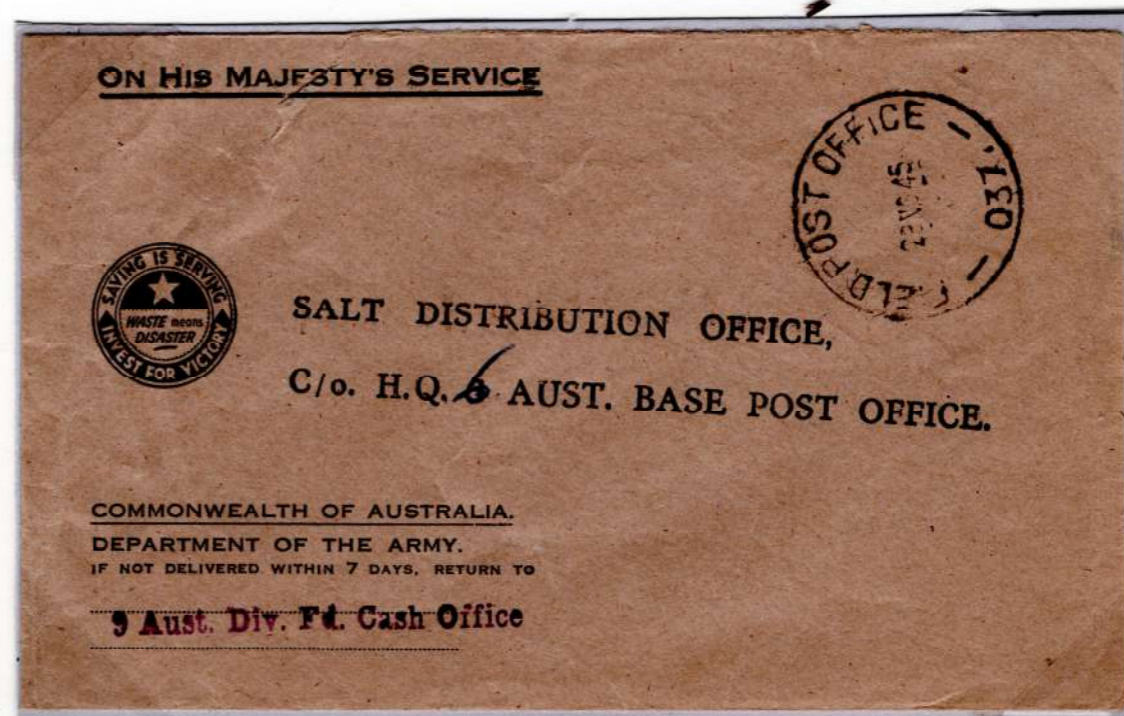
Airmail cover from A.U.P.S. 446 (Weston, North Borneo) to Sydney, dated 25 JUL 1945. Passed by the unit censor and also en-route but at some stage has been opened and resealed with official tape.



**Official Mail**

Mail could be sent free of postage using O.H.M.S. envelopes, but as there was much abuse of the system it was generally necessary that they carried either the stamp of the originating department or a signed 'certified official' stamp but because of their destinations neither was necessary.

Cover from F.P.O. 037 dated 23 NOV 1945, from the No. 9 Australian Field Cash Office at Labuan to the SALT DISTRIBUTION OFFICE at the No. 6 Australian Base P.O., at Moratai, New Guinea. SALT was the official Journal of the Army Education service, and was issued free, one to every three soldiers.



Money Order Advice from Air Force P.O. 234 dated 11 OC 45 to the Postmaster to Tamworth, N.S.W.

A secure way of transferring money, but very seldom seen from Labuan



Enlarged copy of slogan on back flap

### Australian Comforts Funds Envelopes

There were three national organisations distributing writing materials and other items to the Australian forces, the Salvation Army, Australian Comforts Fund (A.C.F) and the YMCA initially acting alone, but they quickly combined forces. The most common comfort fund envelopes are those bearing the Logos of all three organisations, there are several examples in this display. The two examples below are far scarcer.

#### A.C.F. In conjunction with YMCA

30 June 1945 from Labuan to the U.S.A. presumably by surface mail but franked at 3d  
Handled by F.P.O. O37 (Australian Forces Mail) and the U.S. Army Postal Service 4th BPO Phillipines  
(A very unusual routing)



Also scarce are envelopes distributed by local organizations for residents away at war. Kogarah is a suburb on the south side of Sydney. Etiquette **'KOGARAH MUNICIPAL WELFARE & COMFORTS FUND'**

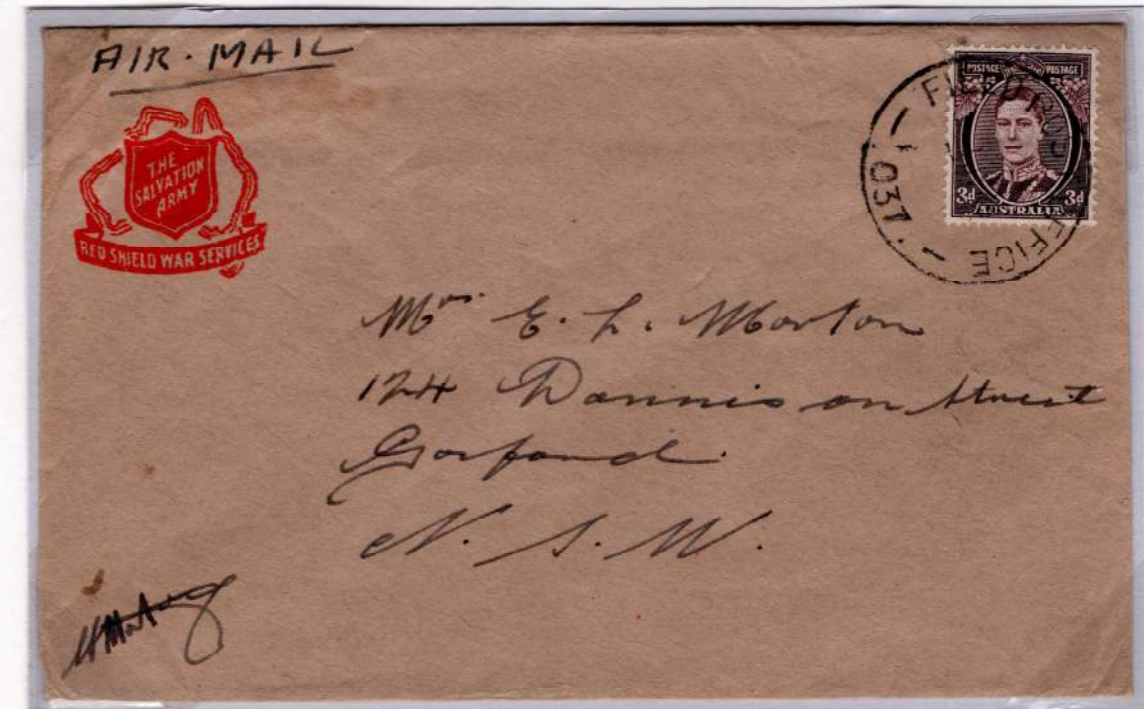
8 OCT 1945 registered cover from A.A.P.O. 239, correctly franked at 6d, the concessionary rate for registered letters to Australia by air mail  
Not censored as posted after censorship ceased on September 7 1945



### Envelopes distributed by the Salvation Army

The Salvation Army held its first meeting in Australia in 1880 and grew quickly becoming well known for its charitable work which during WWII included distributing envelopes and writing materials to serving military personnel. These envelopes featured a shield and scroll on a map of Australia and Tasmania, later simplified by omitting the map, they also distributed pre-printed Air Mail envelopes, these are seldom seen.

The two covers below are via F.P.O. 37 recorded in Labuan from 12th. June to 1st. October 1945  
1 JY 1945, First type of Salvation Army Envelope, manuscript 'AIR-MAIL'  
Unusually no censor cachet although signed



6 JY 1945, Salvation Army air-mail envelope with printed 'By Air Mail / Par Avion' etiquette passed by censor cachet and signed  
Map of Australia omitted, but below the scroll there has been added  
**"The army that serves on every front"**



The Royal Australian Air Force

Air Force Post Office 234 operated on Labuan from 12 June 1945 to April 1946. Because all buildings in the vicinity of the landing strip had been destroyed during the allied bombardment before and during the initial assault, temporary accommodation was utilised as shown by the original photos below,

Reverse: View of camp Labuan Island, note Tannoy speakers just at the end of our tent



Reverse: Labuan Island, a view of our Dining Hall & cook house



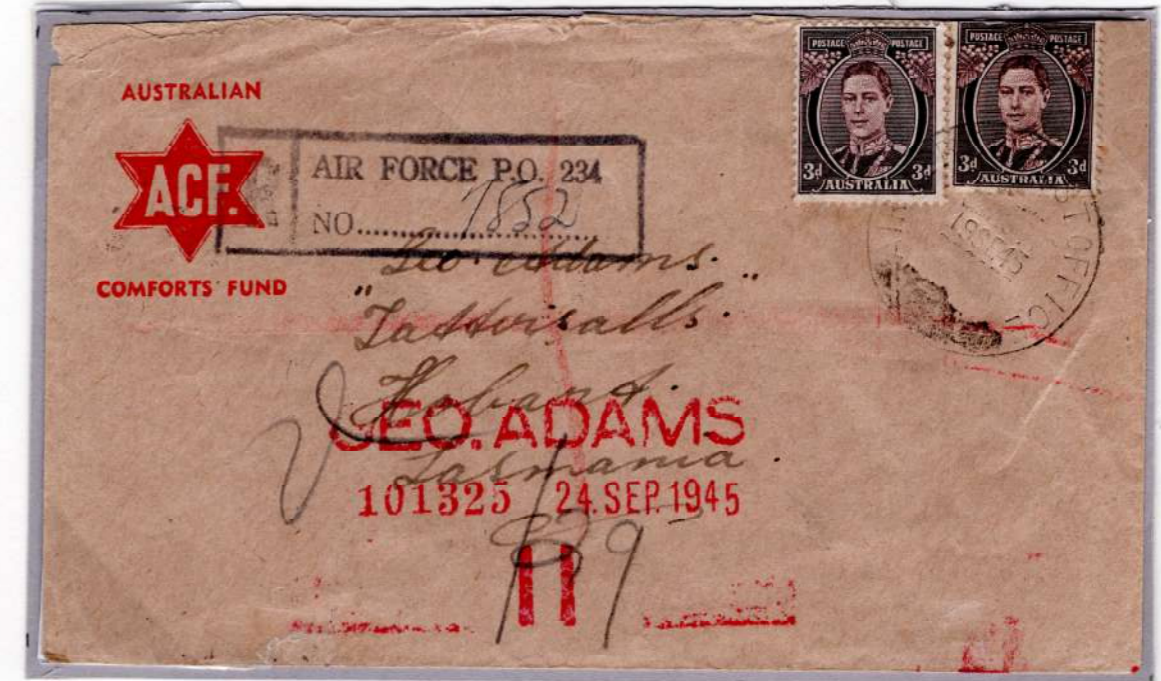
Members of the R.A.A.F. postal unit sorting letters outside their tented post office  
Contemporary photo from the Australian Department of Air dated on the reverse 3 July 1945



The Royal Australian Air Force

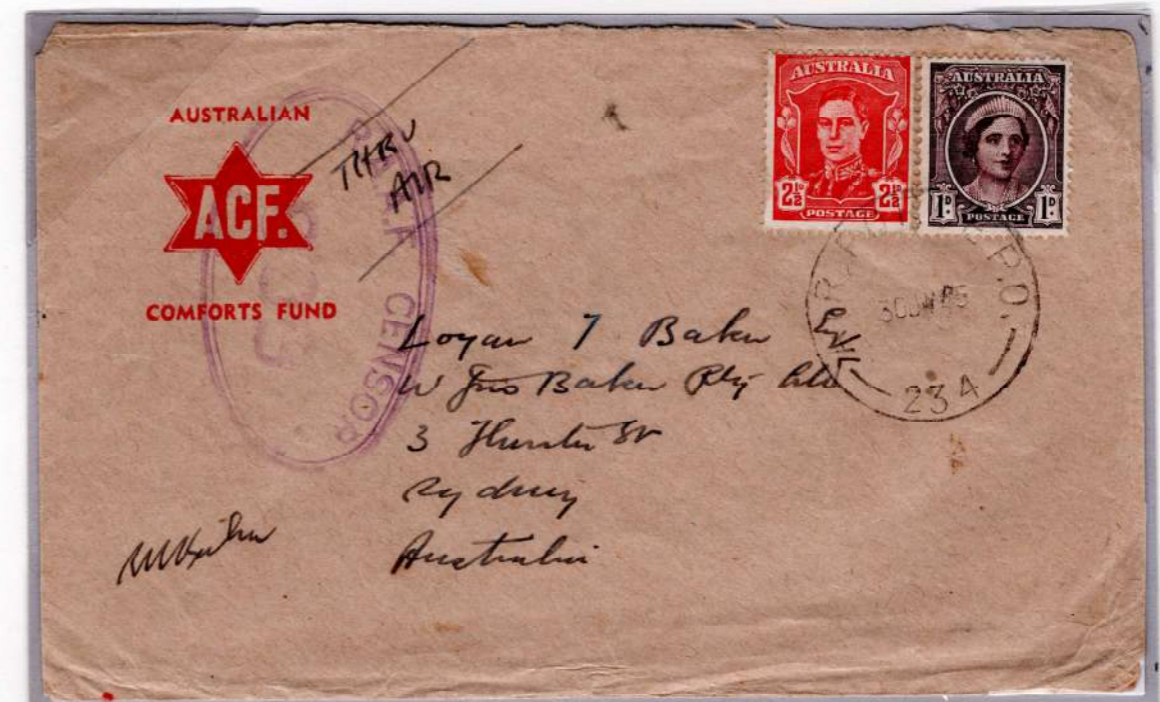
The initial objective of the Australian forces was the repair and the extension of the runway built by the Japanese so that Labuan could become the hub of air operations in Northern Borneo. Air Force Post Office 234 was active in Labuan from 12 June 1945.

Registered cover correctly franked at 6d to "Tattersalls" Hobart, Tasmania from A.F.P.O. 234 dated 19 SE 1945, bearing the scarce boxed 'Air Force P.O. 234' registration cachet  
Cover distributed by the Australian Comforts Fund (ACF.), flap inscribed  
**ALL COMFORTS SUPPLIED / FREE TO THE FIGHTING / SERVICES**



The letter would have contained payment for tickets for the lottery operated by "Tattersall's Consultations" On receipt overstamped **GEO. ADAMS** with file number and date. The Tasmanian Government on 1 June 1897 granted George Adams on payment of £10,000 the exclusive License to conduct lotteries

Air Mail cover addressed to Sydney from A.F.P.O. 234 dated 30 JUL 1945,  
Censored with the double oval R.A.A.F. CENSOR / 908  
(The cover over-franked at 3 1/2d including the rarely seen 2 1/2d value)

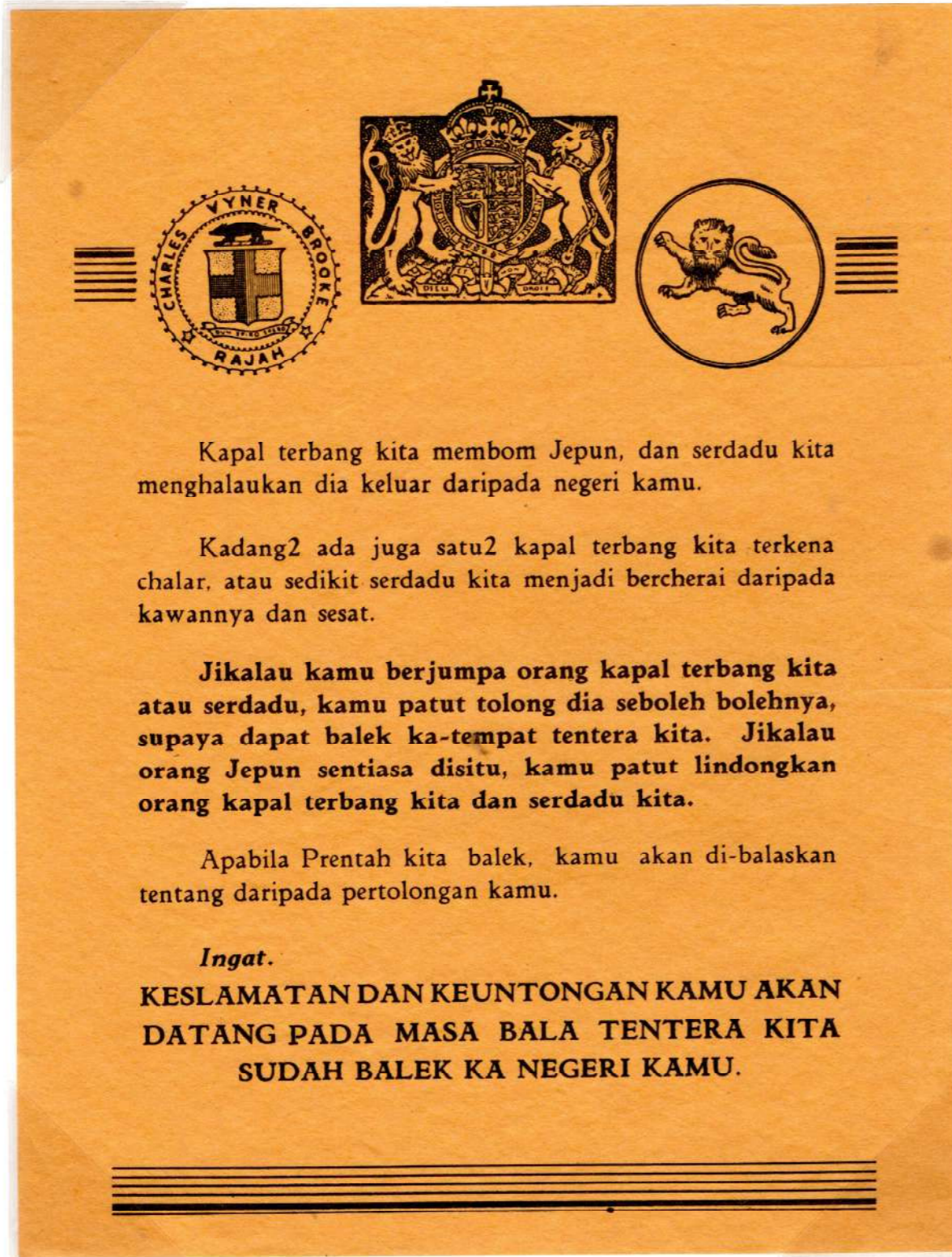


### Allies Propaganda Leaflets

In preparation for the liberation of Northern Borneo leaflets in the various native languages were dropped by aircraft to warn the inhabitants to stay away from port areas and airfields but also, as in this case, to request assistance for any injured or lost allied pilots or soldiers.

#### Air Drop Leaflet

File copy headed by the royal coat of arms with on the left the State Crest of Sarawak and on the right the arms of North Borneo. The leaflet in Malay freely translates as: *Our aircraft are bombing Japan and our soldiers are driving them out of our state. Our aircraft may crash or some of our soldiers get separated from their colleagues. If you come across our air crew or soldiers you should help them to the best of your ability so they may return to their camp. If there are any Japanese you must protect our air crew or soldiers. When our government returns you will be rewarded for your help. Remember (Ingat) After our military has returned to your state your security and benefit will follow in due course.*



Kapal terbang kita membom Jepun, dan serdadu kita menghalaukan dia keluar daripada negeri kamu.

Kadang2 ada juga satu2 kapal terbang kita terkena chalar, atau sedikit serdadu kita menjadi bercherai daripada kawannya dan sesat.

Jikalau kamu berjumpa orang kapal terbang kita atau serdadu, kamu patut tolong dia seboleh bolehnya, supaya dapat balek ka-tempat tentera kita. Jikalau orang Jepun sentiasa disitu, kamu patut lindungi orang kapal terbang kita dan serdadu kita.

Apabila Prentah kita balek, kamu akan di-balaskan tentang daripada pertolongan kamu.

**Ingat.**

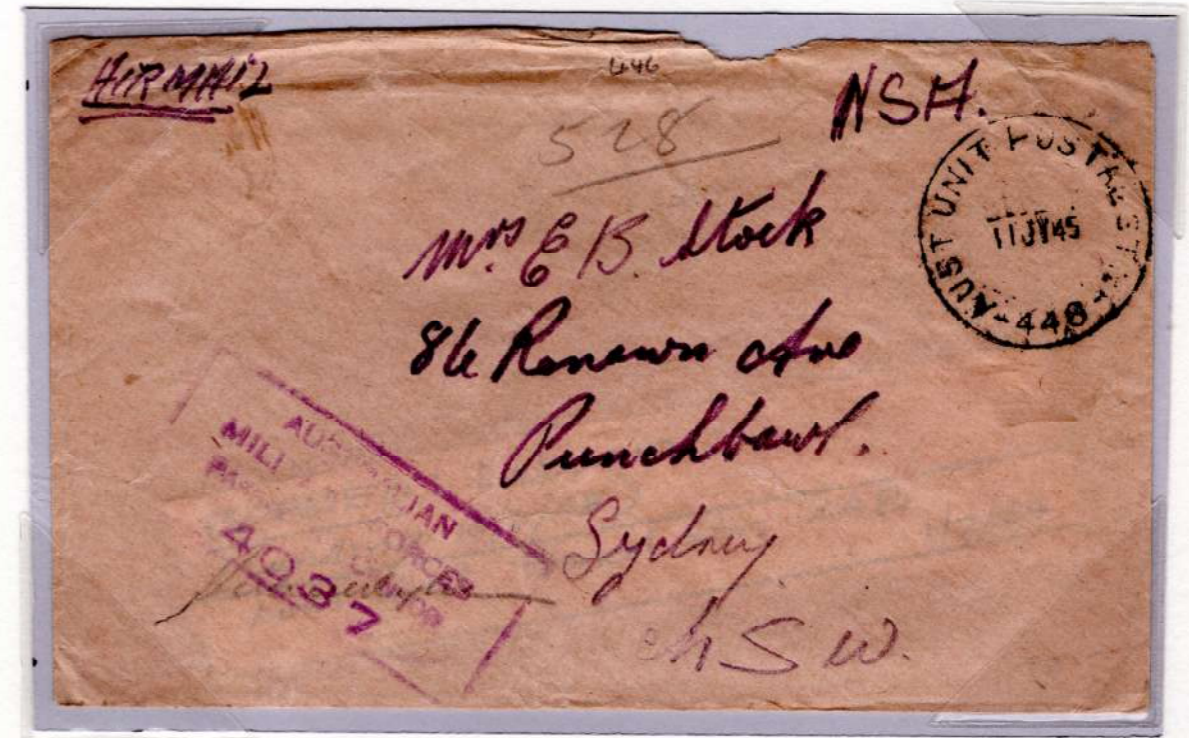
**KESLAMATAN DAN KEUNTONGAN KAMU AKAN DATANG PADA MASA BALA TENTERA KITA SUDAH BALEK KA NEGERI KAMU.**

### Assault on mainland North Borneo

The other main landing was at Weston in the NE part of Brunei Bay on the 16<sup>th</sup> June by the 2/32 Battalion. There was little opposition and after securing Weston patrols pushed onto Beaufort 14 miles inland. Strategically important junction of the railways to Weston and from the capital Jesselton on the coast to Tenom in the interior. Heavily defended by the Japanese the area was not secured until 12<sup>th</sup> July. Detachments then rapidly advanced up the coast entered Papar on the 19<sup>th</sup> July after which organised opposition ceased.

Mail from Weston; Field P.O. 446; Weston, from 25.06.45 to 14.08.45

Airmail cover to Sydney dated 11 JY 45  
Inscribed N.S.A. (No Stamps Available) and passed by the unit censor



Airmail cover to Sydney dated 31 JY 45, franked at 3d and passed by the unit censor



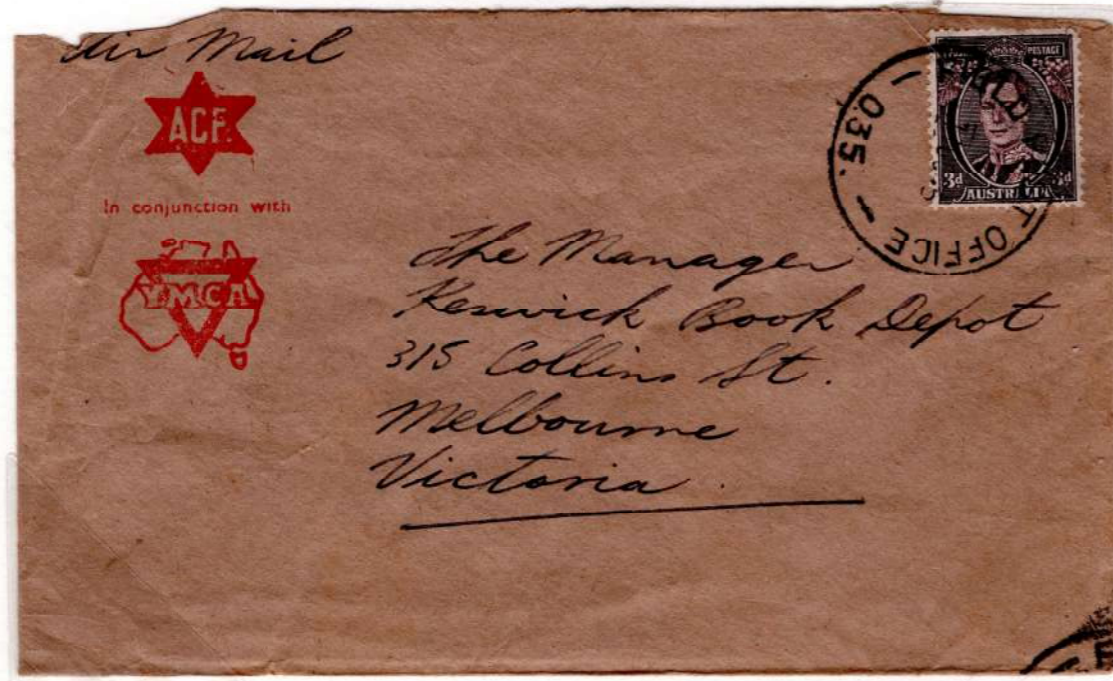
**Assault on mainland North Borneo**

Australian Forces Mail from North Borneo appears to be much scarcer than mail from Labuan

Mail from Beaufort; Field P.O. 035: from 11.08.45 to 06.11.45

Beaufort is the junction of the railway line from Weston, the line up the Padas gorge to Tenom and the West Coast line to Jesselton

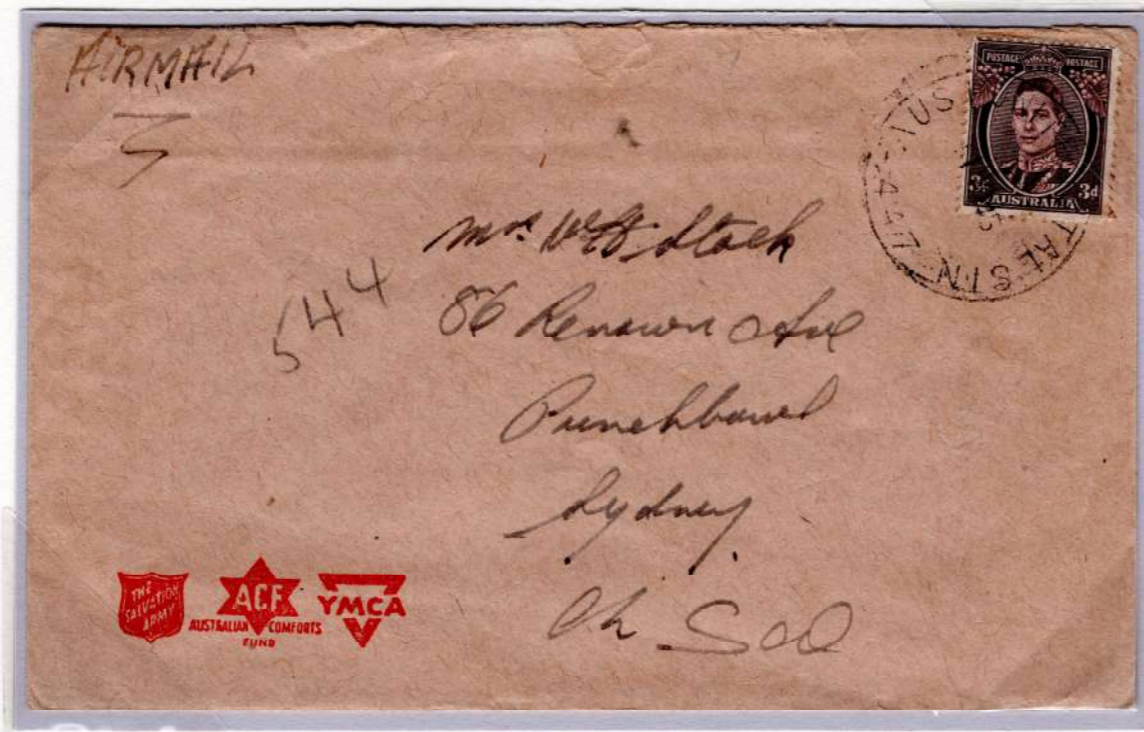
11 OC 45 air mail cover to Melbourne, not censored as posted after Japanese surrender 7 September  
A type of Comforts Fund envelope seldom seen with the logos of the ACF and the YMCA reading vertically separated by 'in conjunction with'



Mail from Jesselton Field P.O. 447: from 25.09.45 to 01.01.45

Jesselton was the capital of British North Borneo and the terminus of the West Coast railway line

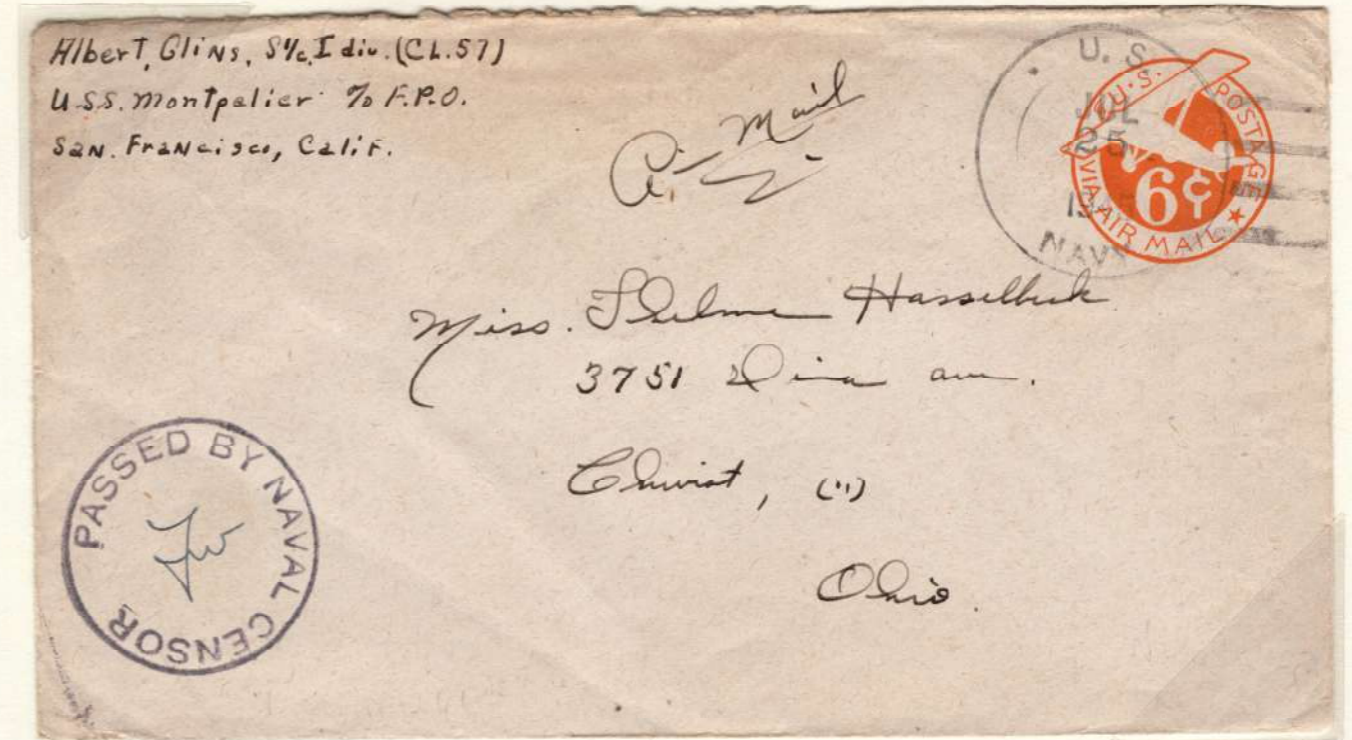
26 SEP air mail cover to Sydney, posted on the second day of the operation of the F.P.O  
The most commonly seen comforts fund envelope bearing the logos of all three of the National providers



**United States Navy Mail**

The assault on Northern Borneo was a joint operation between the Australian Army and the U.S. Navy, but the source of mail from the U.S. Navy can only be identified by the letter if present or as in this case if the ship is known to have been involved in the operation on the date sent.

6c Air mail stationery envelope cancelled 'U.S. / NAVY (JUL 25 1945)' sent by a sailor on board the U.S.S. Montpelier to Ohio, U.S.A. at Jesselton, North Borneo



The U.S.S. Montpelier, a 10,000 tonne cruiser built 1942, armed with twelve 6" guns, twelve 5" guns and 3 aircraft, she could sail at 32 knots

