

DISASTER FOR KNILM AND KLM



KNILM (Royal Netherlands Indies' Airways 1928-1947) and KLM, a completely separate company, operated services to Australasia from the 1930s. Their reliability was impressive, partly due to their use of Douglas and Lockheed all-metal aircraft from the USA. KNILM were based in Batavia, Java, where the KLM service from Amsterdam terminated, and KNILM continued with a service to Sydney.

Following the demise of KNILM, their aircraft and assets were taken over by KLM which then operated through to Australia from Amsterdam.

Whilst the punctuality and safety record of both airlines was excellent, they were not immune from disaster and mail recovered from an accident suffered by each airline is shown.

Date of Accident	KNILM 22 January 1940	KLM 23 March 1952
Route	Batavia - Sydney	Amsterdam - Sydney
Location of accident	Bali, Dutch East Indies	Bangkok, Thailand
Aircraft type/registration	Lockheed 14/PK-AFO	Lockheed Constellation/PH-TFF
Aircraft Captain	Captain J J Schott	Commander Creel
Cause of damage to aircraft	Crashed into sea	Fire broke out in flight
Fatalities/Injuries	8/1	0/0
Mail recovered	35 lbs	Not known
Ordinary mail to Australasia	48* (Author's census)	25** (Author's census)
Survivors recorded		
Registered mail ditto	8 (Author's census)	None recorded

* Includes 5 to New Zealand and one to Fiji

** Includes 3 to Australia, 5 to Dutch New Guinea

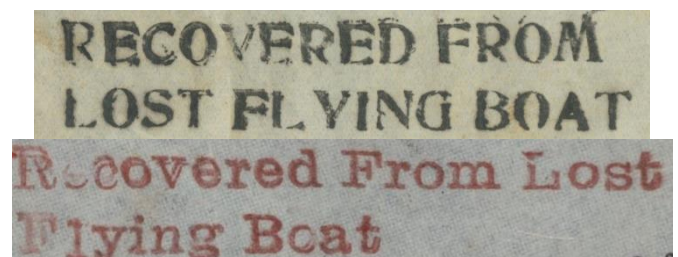
SHEETS 2 - 8: KNILM Crash off Bali

Includes 3 of 8 registered examples

Includes 2 of 5 recorded examples from USA

SHEETS 9 - 16: KLM Fire approaching Bangkok

Includes 8 examples from Nierinck collection



KNILM Lockheed 14 was not a flying boat

References:

Peace, Brian R: *Australasian Crash Mail and Mail from Other Incidents Vol 4 1940-1949*, Leeds, UK, 2022

Peace, Brian R: *Australasian Crash Mail and Mail from Other Incidents Vol 5 1950-2005*, Leeds, UK, 2023

1940 JANUARY 22
KNILM LOCKHEED 14 PK-AFO



Cancelled SEMARANG 20.1.40; back-stamped MELBOURNE 115P 25JA40

Both engines cut out shortly after the KNILM Lockheed PK-AFO took off from Denpasar aerodrome, Bali. The aircraft struck the sea about 70m from the shore and was destroyed. Three of the crew and all five passengers died. One crew member survived with a broken spine and other injuries



1940 JANUARY 22
KNILM LOCKHEED 14 PK-AFO

Per Luchtpost

J. H. WIGGERS
MAMPANGWEG 15 BATAVIA
TELF. WL. 5354

PER LUCHTPOST
PAR AVION



T We

*By Knilm
Lockheed PK-AFO*

den WelEd. Gestr. Heer A. Fransen van de Putte
Vertegenwoordiger Stichting Landverhuizing
NEDERLAND
c/o Netherlands Consulate
SYDNEY Australia

**RECOVERED FROM
LOST FLYING BOAT**

Cancelled BATAVIA
15.1.40

Prepaid 25c single
rate. Assessed as
double rate 35c, so
underpaid 10c,
hence Tax mark
and manuscript
20c

Cancelled MALFA -8.1.40
MESSINA back-stamped
MELBOURNE 25JA40 VIC

48 recorded examples
originated from:

Indonesia	34
France	1
Hungary	3
Italy	5
USA	5

Malfa (population under
1,000) is a municipality
on one of Aeolian Islands
off Southern Italy. Many
of its inhabitants
emigrated to Australia



Provenance Nierinck

1940 JANUARY 22
KNILM LOCKHEED 14 PK-AFO



Five covers from the USA are recorded

Cancelled CHICAGO JAN 3 630PM 1940 AIR
MAIL FIELD and GPO SYDNEY D.R 9-
A25JA40

Back-stamped DELIVERY ROOM GPO 8-
A25JA40 SYDNEY and SYDNEY 11 AM 26
JAN 1940 POSTED IN CITY BOX

Taxed 50centimes at New York with 6d
Postage Dues attached at Sydney

Surface to New York, then by steamer to
connect with the KLM service which left
Amsterdam on 15 January

The addressee, Nancy-Bird Walton (1915-
2009) became a fully qualified pilot at 19,
so being the youngest Australian woman to
gain a pilot's licence. After a spell of
barnstorming, she set up a flying medical
service in 1935. Later she did promotional
work for KLM (1938-39) and founded the
Australian Women Pilots' Association in
1950

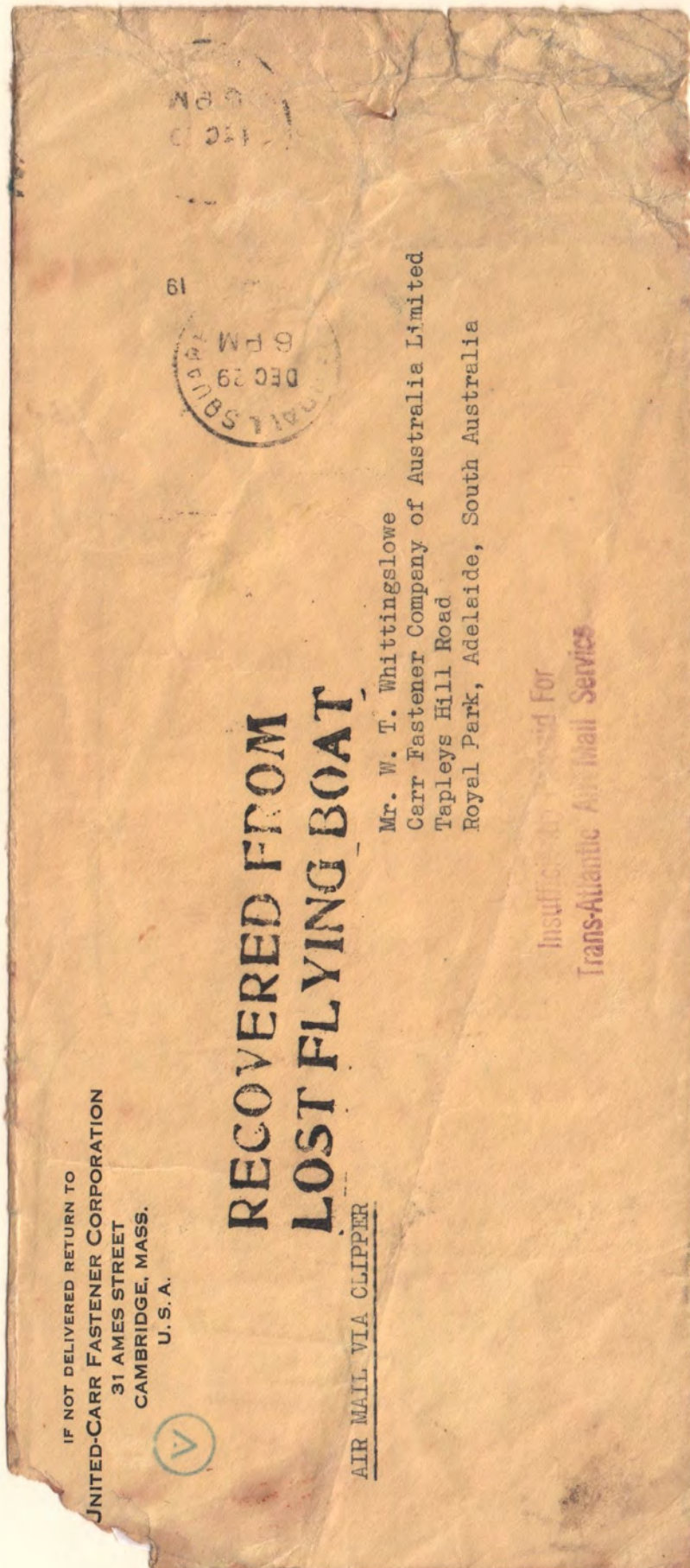
Note the manuscript endorsement *c/o F S
Walton & Co*, her husband's company in
Sydney



60%

A postal official has applied a circular
adhesive label to the reverse and
endorsed the obverse *In Box 3357
26/1/40*, a reference to the City Box

1940 JANUARY 22
KNILM LOCKHEED 14 PK-AFO



Five covers from the USA are recorded:

To Sydney 2
To Adelaide 2
To New Zealand 1

Cancelled CENTRAL SQUARE DEC 29 6 PM (Cambridge, MA)

Cachet applied in purple:

Insufficiently Prepaid For
Trans-Atlantic Air Mail Service

Surface to New York Post Office, then by steamer to connect with the KLM service which left Amsterdam on 15 January

There are no back-stamps



Captain J J Schott

1940 JANUARY 22
KNILM LOCKHEED 14 PK-AFO: REGISTERED MAIL

Covers from the registered mail bags, recovered from the sea and beach, were struck with a two-line cachet in red, size 80 x 13mm



Cancelled BUDAPEST 1940 JAN 12 E6. Back-stamped SYDNEY 24JA40A, REGISTERED MELBOURNE 130P25JA40 and 330P26JA40 and CARNEGIE S.E.9 27JA40 VIC



Eight registered examples have been recorded from:

Dutch East Indies	5
Hungary	1
Italy	2

Processed at the Sydney GPO, postal officials used cachets already prepared in case of an accident to an Empire flying boat. Hence the error

70%

Four examples recorded from Hungary, including one registered

1940 JANUARY 22
KNILM LOCKHEED 14 PK-AFO: REGISTERED MAIL



Cancelled NEDS INDIES (almost certainly Batavia). Back-stamped SYDNEY 24JA40 P

Reverse of cover showing KNILM routes from 1938

AANGETEKEND = Registered
VERTROUWELIJK = Confidential

On 1 August 1939 the service was downgraded to weekly. On 3 December 1939, departures from Batavia were changed to Sunday

The schedule included an overnight stop at Denpasar (Bali)

70%



This cover is addressed to Mr J H Mijnlief, the KNILM representative in Sydney. Tragically, his wife was a passenger on the aircraft which crashed, and she was killed.

The letter would have been delivered to the KNILM office in Sydney on Thursday 25 January. Having been informed of the death of his wife, Mr Mijnlief requested that her body be sent to Sydney.

Provenance Nierinck

1940 JANUARY 22
KNILM LOCKHEED 14 PK-AFO: REGISTERED MAIL



Water-stained cover from
Medan, Sumatra, cancelled
MEDAN 20.1.40

Back-stamped
SYDNEY RS 24JA40P

Franked 2gld 75c

One of five registered
examples recorded from the
Netherlands East Indies

Route:
Medan - Palembang - Batavia -
Surabaya - Bali



Locals viewing wreckage



PK-AFO at Denpasar (Bali)

1952 MARCH 23

KLM LOCKHEED CONSTELLATION VENLO PH-TFF

The aircraft, Amsterdam to Sydney, departed Karachi at 2111 on 22 March. When 54 km from Bangkok, the aircraft developed engine problems; then a propeller blade separated from the number 3 engine when 8 km from Bangkok. This caused a fire in the engine nacelle. The aircraft landed on runway 21/03, the right main gear collapsed, and a major fire broke out which destroyed the aircraft. The 10 crew and 34 passengers escaped.



Cancelled
LOMZA 17 3 52-7
(Poland)

BELOW:
Duplicated letter from
GPO Sydney dated 8
May 1952, 47 days
after the incident

All the Australasian
mail was delayed

At least two forms of
this letter exist: one
with the reference
PE.52/2760 on the left
(Type A) and one with
it on the right (Type B)

PE.52/2760

Dear Sir/Madam,

Forwarded herewith is an article addressed to you which was received at Sydney in its present condition. The damage was caused when an aircraft carrying mail crashed and was destroyed near Bangkok recently.

Yours faithfully,

W.A. Martin

(W.A. MARTIN)

Acting Superintendent, Mail Branch.

G.P.O., Sydney.

8/5/52.

1952 MARCH 23
KLM LOCKHEED CONSTELLATION VENLO PH-TFF

De Heer M. Nierinck
Chef: Kok. m. s. "Kokela"
P/a. Shell Company of Australia Ltd.
Shell House
Annasstreet
Brisbane
Queensland
Australia

Cancelled
ROTTERDAM
MATHENESSERLAAN
18.III.16.1952

BELOW:
Duplicated letter
from GPO Sydney
dated 8 May

Letters are 8¼" x
5½" being duplicated
two per 8¼" x 11"
sheet

The letter below is
Type B with the
reference
PE.52/2760 on the
right

Provenance Nierinck

PE.52/2760

Dear Sir/Madam,

Forwarded herewith is an article addressed
to you which was received at Sydney in its present condition.
The damage was caused when an aircraft carrying mail crashed
and was destroyed near Bangkok recently.

Yours faithfully,

W. A. Martin
(W.A. MARTIN)
Acting Superintendent, Mail Branch.
G.P.O., Sydney.
8/5/52.

1952 MARCH 23
KLM LOCKHEED CONSTELLATION VENLO PH-TFF

ON HIS MAJESTY'S SERVICE

RE-ENCLOSED LETTER

To facilitate the return of undelivered letters, without their being opened, business people and others concerned should endorse the covers of all correspondence posted by them with a special request for its return in the event of its remaining undelivered at the expiration of a specified period, which must not be less than seven days. In each case the name and full address of the sender should be appended to the request.

SYDNEY
7 6-PM 9 MAY 1952
N.S.W. AUST.

PLEASE POST EARLY
BEFORE LUNCH &
BEFORE FOUR O'CLOCK

De Heer M. Mieren
Chief Cook
M.S. Rotula
% Shell Co of Australia Ltd
Shell House
Anna Street

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
POSTMASTER-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT,
DEAD LETTER OFFICE, SYDNEY, N.S.W.

~~SINGAPORE~~

~~Brisbane Qld.~~

~~Canberra~~

Ambulance envelope, for cover on previous sheet, cancelled SYDNEY 6-PM 9 MAY 1952;
redirected and back-stamped RECEIVED SINGAPORE 22 MAY 1952



Smoke billows as flames drive back rescuers. In the centre
two men are dragging out the stewardess

Provenance Nierinck

1952 MARCH 23

KLM LOCKHEED CONSTELLATION VENLO PH-TFF



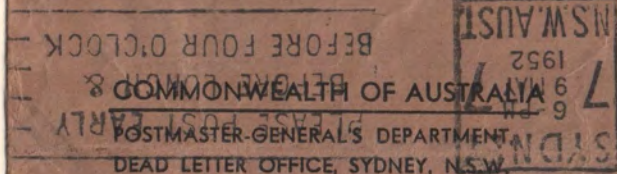
Cancelled AMSTERDAM -CENTR.STATION 20.III.1952 to Netherlands New Guinea

ON HIS MAJESTY'S SERVICE

RE-ENCLOSED LETTER

To facilitate the return of undelivered letters, without their being opened, business people and others concerned should endorse the covers of all correspondence posted by them with a special request for its return in the event of its remaining undelivered at the expiration of a specified period, which must not be less than seven days. In each case the name and full address of the sender should be appended to the request.

Sld. Kuipers N. J. N.
Lgnr. 310929201
Det. C. T. Sorong
med. Nieuw Guinea
Gen. Van Galenkamp
Kaimana



Ambulance envelope cancelled SYDNEY 6-PM 9 MAY 1952 Provenance Nierinck

1952 MARCH 23

KLM LOCKHEED CONSTELLATION VENLO PH-TFF

The Lockheed Constellation L749 PH-TFF Venlo left Amsterdam on 21 March carrying mail for Australasia from Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Eastern Germany, Finland, Holland, Norway, Poland, Sweden and the USSR.

Apart from Australasia, destinations for the mail included Hong Kong, Japan, Thailand, Malaya and Indonesia



Cancelled GRAVENHAGE OOST 20.III.15 1952



70%

Cancelled HOLLANDIA 26.5.52 & 29.5.52; endorsed: Ex phtff/bangkok Provenance Nierinck

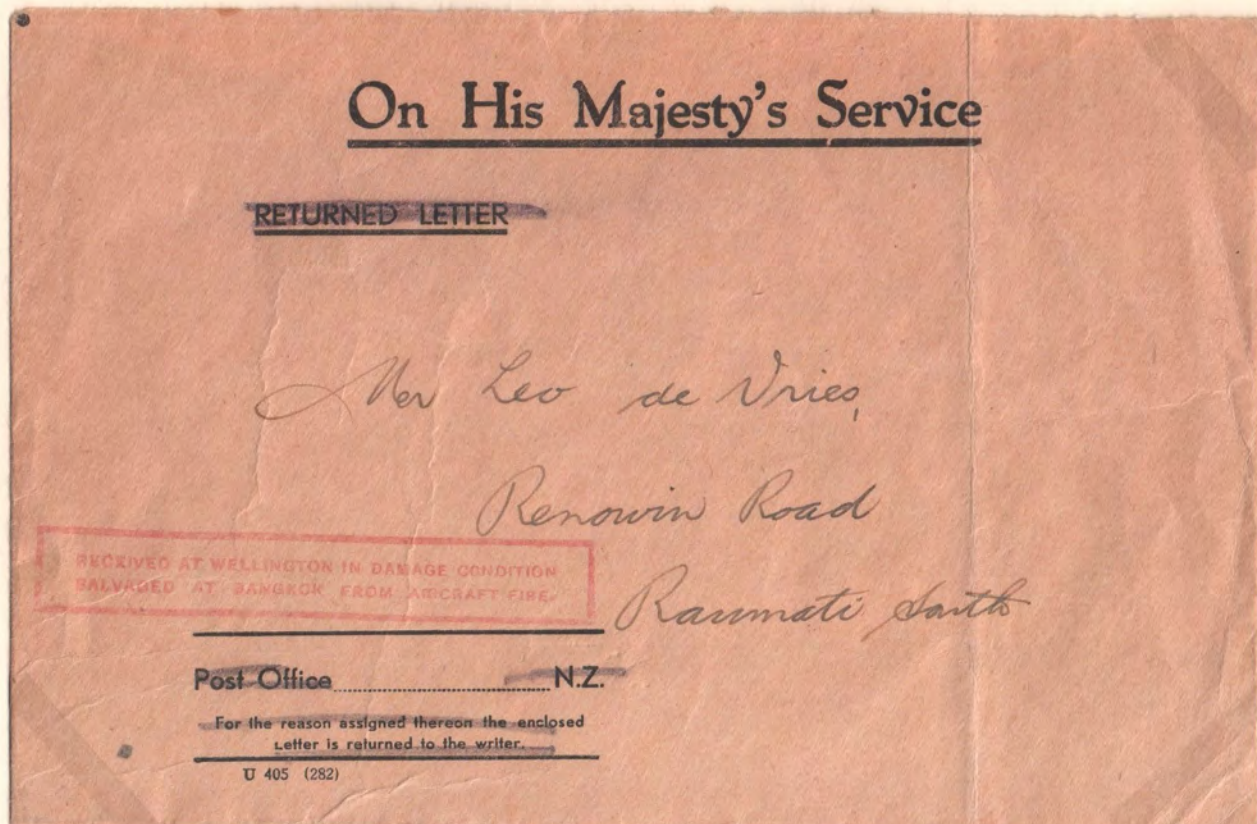
1952 MARCH 23

KLM LOCKHEED CONSTELLATION VENLO PH-TFF

There was a substantial delay of over five weeks between the incident and salvaged mail being delivered to the Australasian mail centres for processing. Most of the mail was returned to Amsterdam before re-forwarding, its fragile state requiring careful treatment



Cancelled AMSTERDAM
CENTRAAL STATION 19.III.-9
1952 and bearing cachet in
red



RECEIVED AT WELLINGTON IN DAMAGE CONDITION
SALVAGED AT BANGKOK FROM AIRCRAFT FIRE.

Provenance Nierinck

1952 MARCH 23
KLM LOCKHEED CONSTELLATION VENLO PH-TFF

The various explanatory labels attached to mail in Amsterdam were typed and duplicated. The process involved typing the message several times onto a stencil, duplicating and cutting a strip for each label, apparently with scissors, between 10 and 20 per sheet.



Airletter cancelled THE HAGUE 19 11 13. 1952



THIS LETTER WAS DAMAGED BY FIRE IN A PLANE CRASH AT BANGKOK

Duplicated explanatory label size 190 (approx.) x 16mm attached in Amsterdam

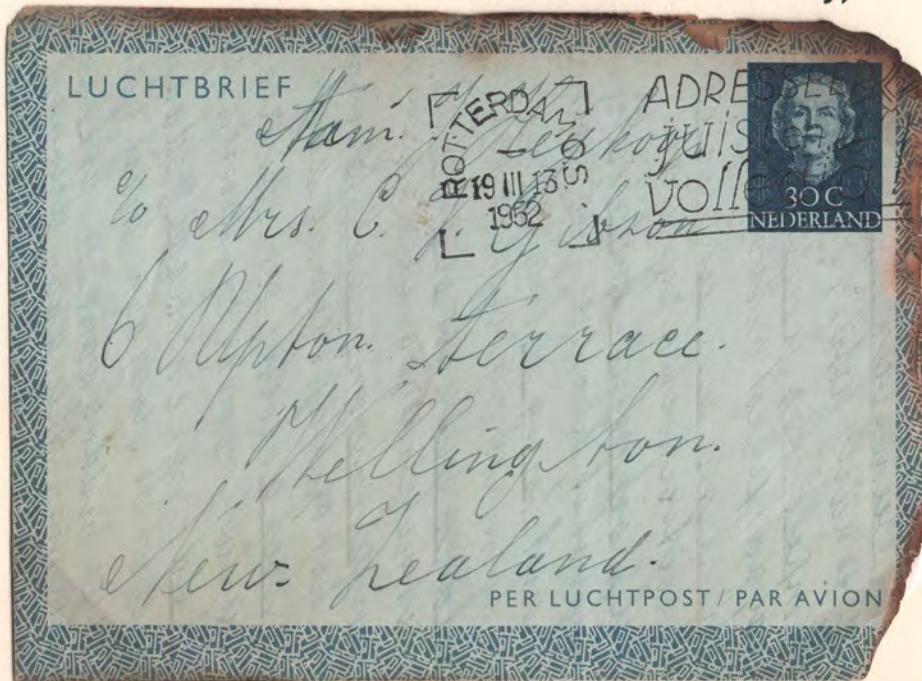


Provenance Nierinck

1952 MARCH 23

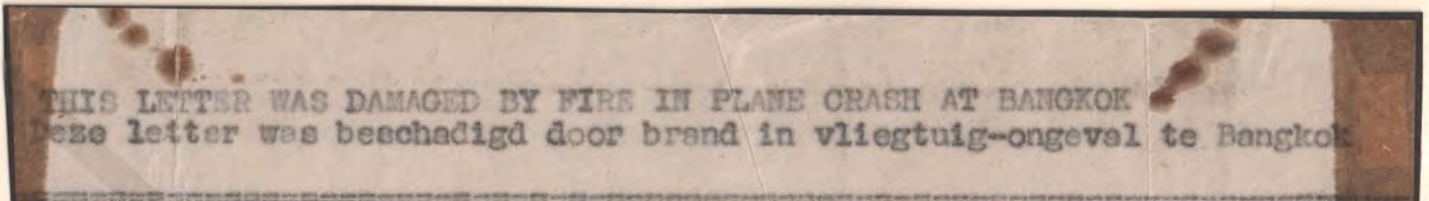
KLM LOCKHEED CONSTELLATION VENLO PH-TFF

The probable cause was the failure of the propeller-blade during flight shortly before landing at Don Muang Airport. This caused the loss of No 3 engine and fire to break out in the engine nacelle which could not be extinguished. When landing, the right main landing gears collapsed as a consequence of the fire (World Airline Accident Summary CAP479, UK Civil Aviation Authority)



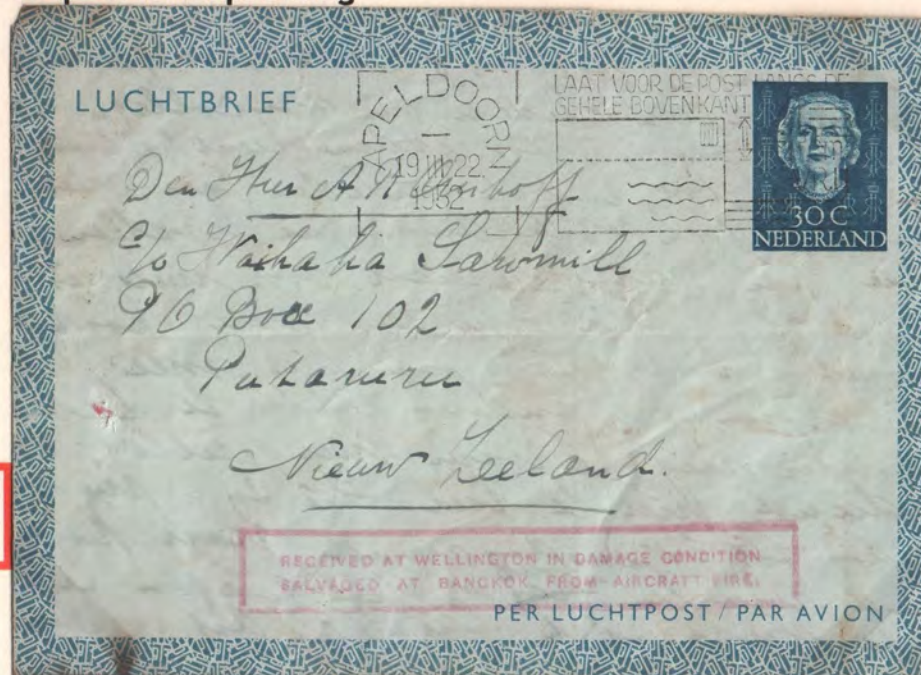
Airletter cancelled
ROTTERDAM OS 19 111 13
1952

Bi-lingual duplicated label
size 185 x 25mm attached
in Amsterdam



This label was typed on a master at Amsterdam, probably at least ten per sheet, and cut into strips after duplicating

Airletter cancelled APELDORN 19 III
22. 1952 bearing pink cachet applied
at Wellington



RECEIVED AT WELLINGTON IN DAMAGE CONDITION
SALVAGED AT BANGKOK FROM AIRCRAFT FIRE.

RECEIVED AT WELLINGTON IN DAMAGE CONDITION
SALVAGED AT BANGKOK FROM AIRCRAFT FIRE.

PER LUCHTPOST / PAR AVION

Provenance Nierinck