

END OF A DREAM: KINGSFORD SMITH'S 1935 TRANS-TASMAN FLIGHT PART 2

By Neil Donen and Peter Gilmour

In this second part of their examination of Sir Charles Kingsford Smith's ill-fated 1935 Trans-Tasman Jubilee flight, Neil Donen and Peter Gilmour shift the focus to mail originating in New Zealand. Drawing on contemporary newspapers, Australian archival material and surviving covers, they explore how New Zealand mail was prepared, routed, salvaged, redirected and, in some cases, returned, following the dramatic abandonment of the flight. The article also examines postage rates, cachets, rare 'Too Late' items, onward international airmail, and the ambitious first all-air service to the United Kingdom, before concluding with the fate of the *Southern Cross* and its celebrated crew.

In our previous article on the 1935 Trans-Tasman flight, we focused primarily on mail flown on the aborted flight from Australia. In this article we turn our attention to mail originating in New Zealand. We will also briefly discuss the aircrew and the final fate of the *Southern Cross*.

Unfortunately, archival records from New Zealand Post and Telegraph (NZP&T) were destroyed in a fire in 1961. Thus, there are no accurate records regarding numbers of New Zealand mail items associated either with the original flight or those to be flown on the return Trans-Tasman flight. Our sources are newspapers of the day, correspondence records of the Australian Post and Telegraph (AP&T) held by the National Archives of Australia and various articles. As we did in the first article, we plan to list only a few selected references.

To briefly summarise the story, in late April 1935, Sir Charles Kingsford Smith received permission from the Australian and New Zealand governments for a special bi-directional flight between the two countries, honouring the 1935 Silver Jubilee of King George V. Taking off from Sydney on 15 May, the flight had to be aborted due to a damaged propeller. Most of the 28,279 mail items were thrown into the sea to lighten the load. After landing safely back in Australia, it was discovered that some of the mail was still on board. They were in smaller bags pushed into voids of the airframe and had been missed when the larger tied-down mail bags on the main cabin



Fig 1 An advertisement that appeared in the *Auckland Star* newspaper (6 May 1935, page 14) providing details on the new airmail series of stamps, the planned Trans-Tasman Jubilee flight and the first all-air mail flight to the United Kingdom

floor were jettisoned. These 1277 items were transported by sea to New Zealand where a special relief receiving cancel was applied.

New Zealand originating mail scheduled to be flown from Australia

Unfortunately, we have been unable to uncover exactly how many mail items originating from New Zealand were carried on the aborted flight. These would have been transported to Australia aboard the SS *Wanganella* which arrived in Sydney on 12 May. Most articles quote the number at about 7000 covers. All of these covers were placed in the Sydney mail bags, which were thrown out of the *Southern Cross* into the Tasman Sea.

Soon after the announcement of the planned flight, notices began appearing in New Zealand newspapers advertising the flight and providing information regarding the posting of items (Fig 1). The arrangements including mailing letters 'under cover' (a specific mail item placed inside a second envelope labelled 'Postage Paid'), care of the General Post Office in Sydney. This out-of-country, postage-free mailing arrangement was another New Zealand philatelic first.

Airmail scheduled to be flown from New Zealand

As noted in our first article, 25,000 specially designed cachet covers were made available, beginning 11 May 1935, for free at major post offices throughout the country. They were transported to New Zealand on the SS *Wanganella*, making them available for the return Trans-Tasman flight.

Archival files reveal that approximately 13,000 mail items from New Zealand were scheduled to be flown on the return Trans-Tasman flight. This included mail scheduled to be flown beyond Australia. As the mail items had already been posted, NZP&T, in keeping with existing policy, decided to mail them. These were transported via the SS *Monowai* which departed from Wellington (carrying approximately 2000 items from

the South Island) and the SS *Monterey* with another estimated 11,000 mail items, departing from Auckland. Both vessels left New Zealand on 17 May and arrived in Sydney on 20 May within an hour of each other. Although no special receiving cancels, was used, all Australia-bound and international surface mail received the same Sydney machine cancel of 4p.m., 20 May (Fig 2). Based on our calculations (see below) we estimate that approximately 7000 covers were transported on the two vessels for either delivery in Australia or for return to New Zealand.

Saved mail from the aborted flight destined for Australia and beyond was carried back later to Australia on the SS *Wanganella*, arriving in Sydney on 27 May. Examples of the covers were shown in the first article.

a) Mail from New Zealand to Australia:

Postage for the flight from New Zealand to Australia was set at a flat rate of 7d. per half ounce (oz) by NZP&T. As noted in article 1, this differed from the Australian rates which included a supplementary Trans-Tasman airmail fee of 5d. per half oz, in addition to the surface rate of 2d. per oz. Figure 3 and Figure 4 are examples of New Zealand single and double rate usage on covers. The single rate cover from New Zealand to Australia is the commonest of all the 1935 Trans-Tasman covers seen.

Originally Kingsford Smith had planned to undertake the return flight to Australia on 20 May. A decision was reached by NZP&T and AP&T to instead transport this mail via sea to Australia, departing New Zealand on 17 May.

b) Mail scheduled to be flown to Australia and returned to New Zealand:

Rather than not carry the mail items already posted, NZP&T instead, offered to refund postage on any covers returned to them. While speculative, we believe this to be a prime reason for the relative difficulty in finding and acquiring Trans-Tasman airmail returned from Australia.

Return mail from Australia to New Zealand was charged 2d. per oz. It was agreed by the two postal authorities that New Zealand stamps could be used in lieu of Australian stamps to cover the postage costs. These items were carried back to New Zealand on the SS *Monowai*, arriving back in Wellington on 27 May. Figure 5 shows such an example. Note the single New Zealand cancel.



Fig 2 The Sydney receiving machine cancel of 4p.m., 20 May 1935. This was applied to mail leaving New Zealand on 17 May and carried on the SS *Monowai* and SS *Monterey*. It was not applied to those items which were to be forwarded by airmail beyond Sydney

Fig 3 A cover mailed from Auckland on 16 May 1935 to Manly, New South Wales, paying the special one-way Trans-Tasman postage rate of 7d. per ½ oz. It has a Sydney machine receiving cancel of 20 May on the reverse side



All covers shown reduced



Fig 4 A cover mailed from Springfield, New Zealand (South Island) to Fremantle, Western Australia, dated 14 May 1936. The sender paid the double mail rate 1s.2d. (base rate 7d. per ½ oz). There is no datestamp on the back cover



Fig 5 A 'boomerang' cover from Christchurch, dated 14 May 1935, paying the special 7d. per ½ oz New Zealand-Australia air rate and 2d. per oz surface rate from Australia to New Zealand. A Sydney 4p.m. 20 May machine receiving cancel was applied on the back

Figure 6 includes both New Zealand and Australian stamps. Attention is drawn to the cancellation marks which were applied by the respective postal authorities to their own stamps only. The cachet cover is also unusual and is the only such example we have seen.

c) Mail destined outside of Australia and New Zealand:

As part of its policy put in place for the 1935 Trans-Tasman flight, AP&T agreed to transport mail items to other countries. However, all airmail items had to connect with routings used by either the Brisbane-London or the Papua-New Guinea air services. Many New Zealanders were able to make use of this arrangement and covers to many destinations can be found. We have included two examples. The first is an airmail cover to Kodaikanal in South India (Fig 7). The cover to the United States of America was scheduled to be flown to Australia with subsequent transmission by sea (Fig 8). The back of the covers also reflected the policy of applying the Sydney receiving cancel to onward surface transmission, but not to out-of-country destinations using airmail.

First 'all-air' flight New Zealand to the United Kingdom

During the planning process of the proposed 1935 Trans-Tasman flight, NZP&T saw an opportunity to use the flight as part of the first all-air mail flight between New Zealand and the United Kingdom (UK). This was possible as, at this time, there were already regular weekly flights between Australia and the UK. Following agreement by AP&T, planning began almost immediately. It was also agreed that mail originating in Australia, that would be flown on the return flight and onward to the UK, could use Australian stamps. These covers were to be placed in special mail bags so that the Sydney GPO could forward them with airmail items destined for the UK.

As part of their planning NZP&T decided to design a special commemorative cover for the flight. This was available for free at most major post offices in the country (Fig 9). On 6 May an announcement appeared in various New Zealand newspapers providing details of the proposed all-air mail flight (see Fig 1). The details included the availability of the special souvenir envelopes, date of departure of the flight from New Zealand (17 May), postage cost (2s.1d. per ½oz, inclusive of the New Zealand-Australia Trans-Tasman flight) as well as the application of the blue airmail label affixed to the cover and the superscription of the name of the flight i.e., 'New Zealand-England air mail'.



Fig 6 An unusual cachet cover commemorating the return Trans-Tasman Silver Jubilee flight and the eighth crossing of the *Southern Cross*, paying the correct postage rate for the flight and return mail. Mailed from Carterton (near Wellington) 14 May. It has a Sydney receiving cancel of 4p.m. on 20 May on the reverse side of the cover. The front cover shows Australian stamps cancelled in Sydney at 5p.m. on 20 May with a different cancel. Note the cancellation application by the respective postal authorities to their own stamps only



Fig 7 A cover mailed from Christchurch on 14 May to Pernambut, South India, redirected to Kadaikanal. Postage paid covered the 7d. per ½ oz Trans-Tasman air fee plus the 1s.2d, New Zealand-India airmail rate. Note the airmail manuscript endorsement of the first 'All Air connection, New Zealand-India.' It has a transit postmarks of Calcutta and Pernambut on the back and a Kadaikanal receiving cancel of 1 June



Fig 8 A cover mailed from Napier on 13 May to Fort Wayne, Indiana, USA. It has a Sydney machine postmark of 4p.m. on 20 May on the reverse but no other marks. Postage includes 7d. for the Trans-Tasman fee plus 1d. surface rate to the USA (correct New Zealand surface rate). It was originally taxed 40 centimes as the twice deficiency of 2d. (the Australia surface rate to the USA was 3d). Subsequently cancelled

Subsequent articles appeared in New Zealand newspapers indicating that special arrangements had been made with the New Zealand High Commissioner in London. For an additional 2d. (prepaid in New Zealand stamps), any letters addressed to the High Commissioner's Office would be mailed back by ordinary mail to any address written on the back of the envelope (Fig 10). Because of the absence of any British postmarks,

we believe these items were placed in diplomatic mail pouches and returned to New Zealand for mailing. The usual routing for this mail from the UK to New Zealand was via North America (either via Vancouver to Wellington or via San Francisco to Auckland). Covers which also have the actual return receiving cancel date (5–8 August) are relatively scarce.

While the number of airmail items mailed for this first flight are unknown, we are able to make some rough estimates based on the number of items and their weight originally carried on the outward-bound flight of the *Southern Cross*. Our calculations also included the mail bag weight information provided by NZP&T to AP&T for airmail beyond Australia. The calculations would suggest that about 1000 mail items were mailed to intermediary countries and approximately another 5000 items to the UK!

‘Too Late’ Mail originating in New Zealand

New Zealand residents were offered the opportunity to have covers flown from Australia, i.e., the initial leg of the bi-directional flight. Newspaper clippings suggested two possible options. The first option was to mail the item under cover, ‘Postage Paid’ to the General Post Office in Sydney. This could be prepaid in either New Zealand or Australian stamps. The second option was for mail to be accepted at the local Post Office for inclusion in the planned flight. All the various arrangements indicated that the Australia-bound mail would be carried on the SS *Wanganella*, departing Wellington on 9 May, arriving at Sydney on 12 May, three days before the departure of Kingsford Smith’s flight.

To date we have identified five covers originating in New Zealand, three of which were from the North Island (Fig 11). In addition to the cachets, these five covers share additional common characteristics, i.e.:

1. Only New Zealand stamps are present on the cover.
2. A Sydney number 39 receiving cancel, with a 3p.m., 20 May 1935 date mark is present.
3. A New Zealand receiving cancel of 28 May at their respective destinations.
4. Application of the two purple cachets (‘RECEIVED TOO LATE FOR/JUBILEE AIR MAIL’ (85mm×13mm) and ‘DELIVER AS ADDRESSED BY/ORDINARY MAIL’ (93mm×13mm)) in Sydney.

We believe all five covers missed the 9 May sailing of the SS *Wanganella* and were included in the mail sent to Australia on 17 May. Although both the SS *Monowai* and SS *Monterey* (departing Auckland) were also carrying mail originally destined for



Fig 9 A specially designed cover by New Zealand Post & Telegraph for the planned first all-air New Zealand-England mail. The design is in one colour only and the cover was heavier than the lightweight covers provided by Kingsford Smith. This cover was mailed at 10a.m. on 17 May, catching the 3p.m. departure of the SS *Monterey* to Sydney. Paying the correct postage (7d. for Trans-Tasman flight and 1s.6d. for airmail to England), the cover was transported on flight IW342, arriving in London on 3 June



Fig 10 A cover mailed airmail (2s.1d.) c/o New Zealand High Commissioner in London, which was to be returned to the sender. The back includes the additional 2d. required for the return of the item. Note the sender's address and the Carterton receiving cancel of 6 August



Fig 11 A ‘Too Late’ cover mailed from New Zealand with special Sydney cachets. Note the straight-line ‘disfiguring’ cancels and the Sydney transit cancel of 20 May, indicating the item missed the 9 May sailing of the SS *Wanganella*. The back cover has a Greenmeadows receiving cancel

the return Trans-Tasman flight and arrived in Sydney on 20 May, these five covers received a different Sydney cancellation in addition to the purple cachets.

The crew and the plane

a) *The Plane*: The *Southern Cross* is a Fokker F.VIIb/3m trimotor monoplane (see Fig 1 in our first article). Originally it was two planes used for Arctic exploration. Following crashes the parts were used as a rebuild for a single plane in 1928. It achieved international fame and recognition following the first successful Trans-Pacific flight to Australia later that year. Other successful first flights included the Trans-Tasman flight to New Zealand in 1928 and the completion of first East-West circumnavigation of the world through various flights. By 1935 it was probably the most famous and well-known plane in the world.

b) *The crew* (Fig 12): Charles Kingsford Smith was born in Australia in 1897. After seeing action at Gallipoli in World War I, he joined the Royal Flying Corps where he was awarded the Military Cross in 1917. After the war he continued working as a pilot. Apparently bored by the tedium of routine commercial flying, he embarked on many successful pioneering flights. In 1930, he and Charles Ulm, who had accompanied him on the first Trans-Tasman flight, formed the Australian National Airlines. In 1932 he was knighted for these flights.

Patrick Gordon ('Bill') Taylor was born in Australia in 1896. Like Kingsford Smith, he joined the Royal Flying Corps and was awarded the Military Cross in 1917. After working for various airline companies, he joined the Australian National Airlines. He worked closely with Kingsford Smith and became the second pilot and navigator on many of Kingsford Smith's pioneering flights.

John Stannage was born in South Africa in 1905. Trained as a wireless operator he joined Kingsford Smith in 1930, accompanying him on many of Smith's flights. In 1932 he married Kingsford Smith's niece.

Both well-known Australian aerophilatelists, Ernest Crome and Nelson Eustis, sought to capitalise on the Jubilee Trans-Tasman flight, extracting a fee for obtaining signatures of the crew members (Fig 13). One such example is shown in Figure 14.

Summary table and ships schedules

The number of different dates and vessel sailings often produces a confusing picture. The summary table has been included so as to permit the reader a dated guide to the events. It is recommended that this be

Summary of Events: 1935 Trans-Tasman Flight			
6 April (Saturday) Proposal submitted for Trans-Tasman Jubilee flight	24 April Wednesday Australia and New Zealand Post & Telegraph approve plan. Formal announcement 29 April	30 April (Tuesday) SS <i>Maunganui</i> (A) leaves Wellington with New Zealand airmail stamps.	4 May (Saturday) SS <i>Maunganui</i> (A) arrived in Sydney. SS <i>Wanganella</i> (B) leaves Sydney with Jubilee flight envelopes
8 May (Wednesday) SS <i>Wanganella</i> (B) arrives Wellington TTM: 16.00 Auckland mail closes. Train to Wellington departs 19.00	9 May (Thursday) TTM: Mail from Auckland arrives 09.40. SS <i>Wanganella</i> (C) departs Wellington 12.45 with New Zealand mail for originating flight	12 May (Sunday) TTM: SS <i>Wanganella</i> (C) arrived Sydney	13 May (Monday) New Zealand PMG: All NZ mail reaching Auckland by 18th to be accepted for return Trans-Tasman flight (planned for 20 May).
13 May (Monday) Special flight Melbourne to Sydney. Carries Hobart and late Melbourne mail Sydney mail closes 16.45. TTM mail transferred (14 bags) to RAAF Richmond.	14 May (Tuesday) Storm in Tasman Sea. Flight delayed till 15/5. Additional 7 mailbags received	15 May (Wednesday) 00.20: Depart Richmond 07.00: Starboard prop damaged ~12.20: Taylor's heroics × 6 ~12.50: mail jettisoned 16.10: Land at Mascot	17 May (Friday) NZM: SS <i>Monowai</i> (D) departs Wellington (~2000 items from South Island). Also, original 'Too Late' mail NZM: SS <i>Monterey</i> (D) departs Auckland (~11,000 items from North Island) 3p.m. (Both carry mail scheduled for return flight to Australia)
18 May (Saturday) TTM: SS <i>Wanganella</i> (E) departs Sydney with saved mail from aborted flight	20 May (Monday) NZM: SS <i>Monowai</i> (D) arrives in Sydney 15.00 NZM: SS <i>Monterey</i> (D) arrives in Sydney 16.00 Special receiving cancel applied (not applied to 'Too Late' mail)	21 May (Tuesday) OCM: Train Sydney to Cootamundra Note: Through airmail did not receive special Sydney cancel. Similar to onward airmail in Australia	22 May (Wednesday) OCM: Butler Airways Cootamundra to Charleville (IA: <i>IW341</i>) TTM: SS <i>Wanganella</i> (E) arrives Auckland. 06.30 15.00: Railway Express Auckland-Wellington
23 May (Thursday) TTM: Railway Express arrives in Wellington Special receiving cancel applied.	24 May (Friday) TTM: SS <i>Wanganella</i> (F) departs Auckland (carries saved mail scheduled to be flown on return flight) SS <i>Monowai</i> (G) departs Sydney with return mail to NZ.) includes 'Too Late' mail	OCM – IW342 22 May: Departs Brisbane 29 May: Arrives Karachi 31 May: Arrives Alexandria 3 June: Arrives London	27 May (Monday) TTM: SS <i>Wanganella</i> (F) arrives Sydney SS <i>Monowai</i> (G) arrives Wellington
28 May (Tuesday) OCM: Train Sydney to Cootamundra Note: Through airmail does not receive special Sydney cancel. Final New Zealand delivery of original New Zealand 'Too Late' mail	OCM – IW344 29 May: Departs Brisbane 5 June: Arrives Karachi 7 June: Arrives Alexandria 10 June: Arrives London		

Abbreviations: TTM: Australia-New Zealand airmail; NZM: New Zealand-Australia airmail, IA: Imperial Air (IW: Aus-GB) , CBM: Closed Bag mail. Sent per NZM, OCM: Out of Country (Aus) airmail. Sent per NZM

referred to regularly when reading the two articles. We have also included a schematic showing the dates of departures and arrivals of the various vessels (Fig 15). It should be viewed when using the summary table. As with the summary, its regular viewing is recommended.



Charles Kingsford Smith Patrick Gordon Taylor John Stannage

Fig 12 The three air crew members of the ill-fated *Southern Cross* flight

End of a dream

Recognising its flying days were over, Kingsford Smith negotiated the sale of the *Southern Cross* to the Australian government. On 18 July Kingsford Smith, Taylor, Stannage and three others flew in the *Southern Cross* for the last time from Sydney Mascot aerodrome (renamed in 1936 to Kingsford Smith International airport) to Richmond (a Royal Australian Airforce base situated just north-west of Sydney) (Fig 16). Today the *Southern Cross* is housed in a special hangar near Brisbane International Airport.

The three crew members never flew together again. John Stannage moved to Auckland in 1937 where he managed his own radio broadcasting service. He died in 1970. 'Bill' Taylor continued to undertake numerous ground-breaking flights. In 1954 he was knighted for his services to aviation. Taylor died in 1966.

Although Kingsford Smith indicated he was prepared to fly the saved mail to Australia, the Australian government declined the offer and the mail was transported by sea to New Zealand. In July 1935 Kingsford Smith and Taylor submitted a proposal for a Trans-Tasman airmail and passenger service. Four months later, on 8 November, Kingsford Smith died in plane crash off the coast of Burma.

The failure of the 1935 Trans-Tasman flight and his untimely death effectively ended Kingsford Smith's dream of Australian control over airmail services between the two countries. It took another five years for airmail services between the two countries to become a reality. The failed flight provided the impetus for New Zealand, not Australia, to pioneer and take charge of the route.

Selected References

1. National Archive of Australia (<https://naa.gov.au>) *Australia to New Zealand – Jubilee Air Mail*. NAA: MP273/1, 1935/8581. Item ID: 10458184. Melbourne. (Use advance search and enter the item ID.)
2. Trove - National Libraries of Australia (<https://trove.nla.gov.au>) – dates between 29 April and 28 May, 1935. Major sources: *Adelaide Advertiser*; *Courier Mail* (Brisbane); *The Argus* (Melbourne); *Sydney Morning Herald*; *Daily Commercial and Shipping List* (Sydney).
3. National Libraries of New Zealand (<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers>) – dates between 29 April and 25 May 1935. Major sources: *Auckland Star*; *New Zealand Herald* (Auckland); *Evening Post* (Wellington); *Northern Advocate* (Whangarei).



Fig 13 Advertisements by aerophilatelists Ernest Crome and Nelson Eustis in *The Australian Stamp Monthly* offering covers signed by the three air crew members



Fig 14 An example of a cover signed by Kingsford Smith, Taylor and Stannage. Note the special Wellington relief receiving cancels applied to the New Zealand stamps

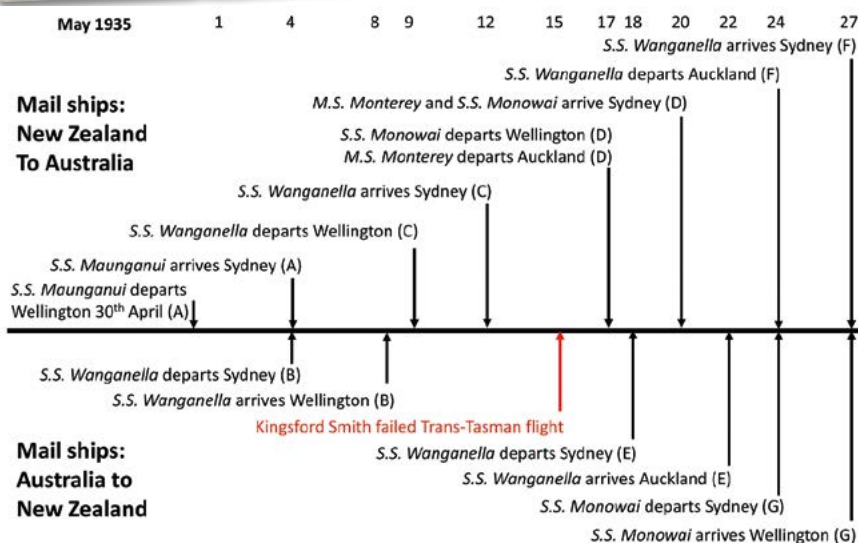


Fig 15 A schematic diagram of the movement of relevant vessels between Australia and New Zealand and vice versa during the period covered by the article. The capital letters in the brackets match with the bracketed letters in the Summary Table. It is recommended that this diagram be used at the same time when viewing the summary table

Below: Fig 16 A special cover commemorating the last flight of the *Southern Cross*. Signed by all people on board the flight. The label in the top left corner was specially designed for the flight by Ernest Crome. The total number of covers is unknown

