

The Development of the Intercontinental Air Mail Route Network until the End of WWII

Continents are understood to be large, continuous, discrete masses of land, ideally separated by expanses of water.

In this story, the continents are Eurasia, Africa, North America, South America and Oceania.



Based on the literature, I have identified 161 route/phase combinations according to the topic of the exhibit (see www.vakavasti.fi/intercontinental/). This collection presents all the routes and 140 of the mentioned combinations.

Introduction – The first flights were conducted with slow, still quite rudimentary, unstable planes or lighter-than-air equipment. Flight legs and trips as a whole were quite short.

The first intercontinental flight that carried mail was conducted from Toulouse to Rabat on 1 October 1919. It was conducted by a plane owned by the French company. The second opened route was between Seville and Larache. It was opened on 15 October 1921 and operated by a Spanish company.

The first Atlantic crossing by the Zeppelin was made in 1918, but this was across the North Atlantic and did not carry any mail. The first Atlantic crossing carrying mail was made in May 1930. The flight departed from Germany and the destination was Rio de Janeiro via Pernambuco.

The mail-carrying flight operations really began in the first half of 1930s. The British Imperial Airways Services began to create its own air routes to South-Africa step by step. Nearly at the same time the French were building their own route through Western Africa to French Congo.

When Italy joined the war in June 1940 the Mediterranean routes were closed. This meant that alternative routes had to be established.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor both Siam and Malaya were attacked by the Japanese on 8 December 1941. There was no room for flight routes between Australia and India, because Japan controlled the air space.

The war continued and the forces of the Allies proceeded. The areas of the Axis powers decreased. The old routes could be restored to operation.

World War II ended when Japan surrendered on February 9, 1945.

The most important references – American Air Mail Catalogue, Sixth Edition, Volume Three, 2004. • Boule, T., Air-mails Operations During World War II, 1998. • Proud, E., Intercontinental Airmails, Volume One: Transatlantic and Pacific, 2008; Volume Two: Asia and Australasia, 2009; Volume Three: Africa, 2010.

The exhibit presents how the **route network** of the **intercontinental civil airmail routes** developed until Japan surrendered and WWII ended.

1. THE FIRST INTERCONTINENTAL ROUTES

- 1.1. The first operations by the French, Spanish and Portuguese were directed to Africa 2-4
- 1.2. The first German operations were directed to South America 5-7
- 1.3. The Germans were the first to cross the North Atlantic 8-9

2. THE WORLD IS SHRINKING - A SEASON OF EVOLVING AVIATION

- 2.1. The north-south line of British Imperial Airways through Africa 10-15
- 2.2. The French and the Belgians proceeded through French territories to Central Africa 16-20
- 2.3. Short-distance connections to Africa by the Italians, Spaniards and Portuguese 21-23
- 2.4. The Middle East was located on two continents 24-25
- 2.5. The French continue from Africa to South America 26-28
- 2.6. Lufthansa expands its connections to South America 29-30
- 2.7. Italy opened connections to South America just before World War II 31-32
- 2.8. The first intercontinental connections of the USA were directed to South America 33-35
- 2.9. The British long route in Eurasia expands into Oceania 36-37
- 2.10. Connections across the Pacific are created and expanded 38-48
- 2.11. The Americans and the British begin mail flights across the North Atlantic 49-50
- 2.12. Dutch service to Southeast Asia 51-53

3. THE WAR CAUSE CHANGES IN ROUTES

- 3.1. The endpoints of the North Atlantic flights were moved to neutral countries 54-55
- 3.2. The military action in the Mediterranean and in South-East Asia cut connections 56-61
- 3.3. From Asia to Europe via North America 62-66
- 3.4. An alternative route between South America and Africa was established 67-68
- 3.5. Vichy France's connections to African territories 69-72
- 3.6. The Dutch Service between Batavia and Australia 73

4. THE ALLIES WERE STARTING TO GET THEIR ACT TOGETHER AGAIN

- 4.1. Several routes from Europe to North America – even the weather had an impact 74-85
- 4.2. The connection from Eurasia to Australia back in operation 86-87
- 4.3. It is possible to fly above the Mediterranean again 88-92
- 4.4. The PAA provides a connection from Eurasia to South America 93-95
- 4.5. KLM's Short-haul connections between the Americas 96