A Tale of Two Cities

William Kriebel

I attended CHICAGOPEX in November 2012, and an “item of interest” caught my eye, even though it was out of my exhibiting area of specialty, Brazil airmail prior to 1935. It was a PANAIR cover, or at least the envelope, with a collection of handstamps and two “Censor” stamps on the back. “Why?” I asked? Here's the story, as best as I can put it together.

A letter is posted in Rio de Janeiro, on 3 September 1936, using a PANAIR envelope, and presumably using their services, and addressed to “Olivos” in the “Pro. De Buenos Aires, Argentina.” This is a suburb/town to the northeast of the capital. Somehow, the city/town name is misread as “Obidos,” which is a city/town in the north of Brazil, on the Amazon in the State of Para.

The letter is received (backstamp) at “A.A.G.” in Para on 6 September. There it sat, until it apparently going on to Obidos on 26 September. It gets two Belem receiving postmarks on “2 X 36” when returned from Obidos. It gets marked again by “A.A.G” on 10 October, and another Belem “11.X.36” and, apparently, the violet, boxed “CENSURADA” stamp. The censorship operation may account for any delay involved.

It then seems it was returned to Rio (“DISTRICTO FEDERAL 25 NOV. 1936”) and forwarded to Buenos Aires (“28.11.1936” and “CENSURADO” with horizontal lines). A second Buenos Aires cancel runs off to the left. An additional BA cancel (upper left) is “NOV 29.”

I must presume that the letter, long delayed, was finally received by the addressee.

So, why was it censored not once, but twice, in 1936? Getulio Vargas (1882-1954) was in power in Brazil, and Pedro Justo Augustin (1876-1945) ruled Argentina, but World War II, the subject of much mail censorship, had not yet arrived. Both presidents/dictators-to-be, were leery of each other and communications between the two countries (soon extended to Uruguay) were suspect. Vargas, specifically, had problems with an attempted Communist revolt in 1935.

It is interesting, that despite all this, the envelope itself is in very good shape, having only been carefully slit open at the top.

The author would appreciate any information, comments and/or corrections to this analysis.

The author is the long-time editor of Bull’s Eyes, the quarterly journal of the Brazil Philatelic Association, and the former editor of “Correio Aéreo,” a column in the Jack Knight Air Log.