

# Trading with the Enemy

John Wilson

Illustrated is the front and back of a cover sent from Switzerland to the United States in July 1941 by Pan American Airways via Lisbon and Horta. So what? Well, as you can see, it was intercepted in Bermuda by British censors and after examination by Censor 5472 was sent back to London for further examination. UK Examiner 8053 condemned it and it was held in the UK until the end of the war, being returned to the United States in 1946.



Now as a Brit, I know all about the objections of the United States and Pan American Airways to the trans-Atlantic mail censorship at Bermuda, but let's investigate this cover a little further. Note that the sender's business name is given as "H. S.-Sch. & Co." and they are located in Basel. A little digging reveals that this is the acronym for a Swiss bank called "Hans Seligman-Schürch & Company" and further digging shows that, at least during World War II, they had a somewhat shady reputation. A memorandum from the U.S. Legation in Bern dated October 28, 1942 addressed to the Secretary of State in Washington is headed:



"Ransom Procedure as now practiced by the German Government" and contains the following:

*My British colleague has brought to my attention an astonishing communication which the British Consulate General at Basel has received under date of October 14, 1942, from Messrs. Hans Seligman-Schürch and Company, bankers at Basel. This company is listed in the Proclaimed List.*

*The letter states that a gentleman has arrived in Switzerland from Holland who has proposed, with German approval, that 250 Jews now in Holland be permitted to leave Holland for overseas destinations against a payment of 5,000,000 Swiss Francs. The contract must be assured by a Swiss bank and payment is due when the 250 hostages involved have reported to the Swiss Consulate in Lisbon. One of the provisions of the proposal is that the 5,000,000 Swiss Francs shall remain on deposit in Switzerland until the end of the war.*

*The letter goes on to suggest that, for practical purposes, it is clear that such sums of money can only be obtained from relatives of the emigrants who, for the most part, reside in the United States. The writer admits that it is now a practical impossibility to transfer money from the United States for such purposes and therefore proposes a means whereby the American control might be circumvented. He suggests that the sum in question be deposited to the bank's account either in the United States or in England, and that an equivalent of*

*the amount in pounds at a rate of \$4.40 to one pound sterling could be credited in England.*

*The letter naively, or stupidly, suggests that since transfer to the Germans is not required until the end of the war, it is certain that the original donors would be able to recover the money deposited by them.*

*Needless to say, my British colleague has ignored this proposal as "preposterous" and has filed the letter only for information purposes."*

And you thought that the Swiss were neutral? The more I learn through the study of postal history, the more cynical I become. This is rather like the quote from *The Godfather*: "Nothing personal; just business" which is fine so long as you are not someone needing to escape from the Nazis and placing your trust in a "neutral" country. I'm rather proud of the British censors in Bermuda.