

How Another WWII Undercover Address in Lisbon is “Uncovered”-

34 Rua Ernesto da Silva, R/C Alges Esq., Lisboa, Portugal!

By Ed Fraser

This story was first reported in the Autumn 2017 “Belgapost” quarterly of the Belgian Philatelic Study Circle in the U.K. As perhaps an instructive example of how after 75 years such an address can be identified in today’s partly-digitized world, and in hopes further information may be uncovered, here is a re-telling of it. The two covers, front and back, shown in Figures 1 and 2, are an interesting study in several ways. As examples of mail from German occupied Belgium to neutral Portugal, both have the routine Munich office censor tape, indicated by the “d” on the tape. That was the German censor office that mail to Portugal was typically censored at. However, on top of German censor tape or markings, and the Lisbon arrival cancel, is a British P.C. 90 censor tape. Those tapes have censor numbers on them believed to have been in the U.K.

Together, these two censorings together would really only likely occur on mail that was somehow “undercover”. No routing of ordinary mail from Occupied Belgium addressed to Lisbon would have gotten to British censorship anywhere after that, much less even somehow accidentally on 2 covers separated in time.

These 2 covers were annotated, apparently by the person selling them, as “undercover mail”, and sat in a U.K. collector’s collection that way, until so sold by his estate. Whatever additional detail was known, if any, had been lost.

P.C. 90.

PAR AVION

BEOPENET

BEOPENET

(a)



9851

349

Monsieur Gabriel Tejada

P.C. 90.

24. Rua Ernesto Da Silva

R/c Alges B.d

9851



Lisboa

P.C. 90.

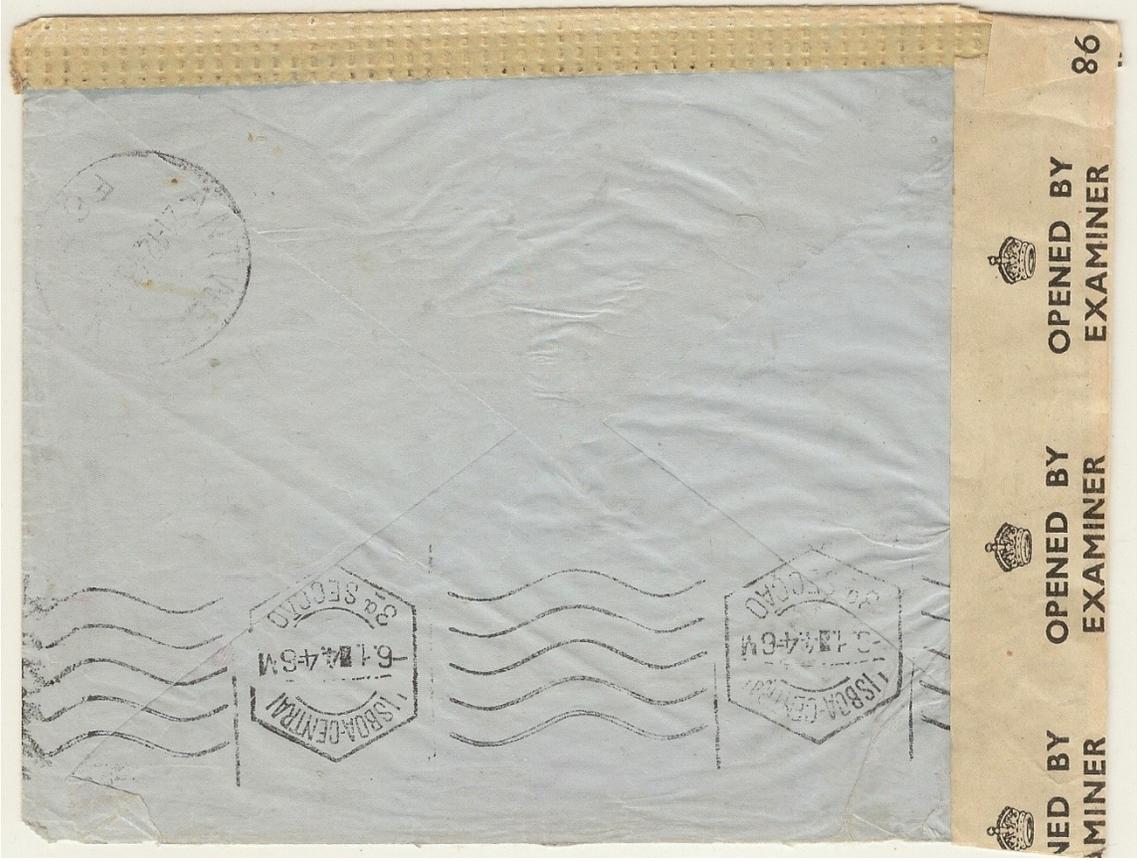
5/3514

9851



Figure 1

Two covers from Belgium to the same addressee, with German censorship, and British censorship after reaching Lisbon. Top cover stamps' date and place covered by German censor tape, but backstamped Antwerpen (the German for Antwerp) 21 Dec 1943 and Lisbon 6 Jan 1944. Bottom cover stamp canceled Antwerpen but date seems unclear - possibly 1 Feb 1944 (?), but backstamped (in Belgium?) 31 Jan 1944 and Lisbon 19 Feb 1944.



Postmark: A circular stamp containing the text "FBI LABORATORY" and "WASHINGTON, D.C.".

Postage stamp: A hexagonal stamp with wavy cancellation lines. The text includes "3c. SECTIO", "6-17-45M", and "FBI LABORATORY".

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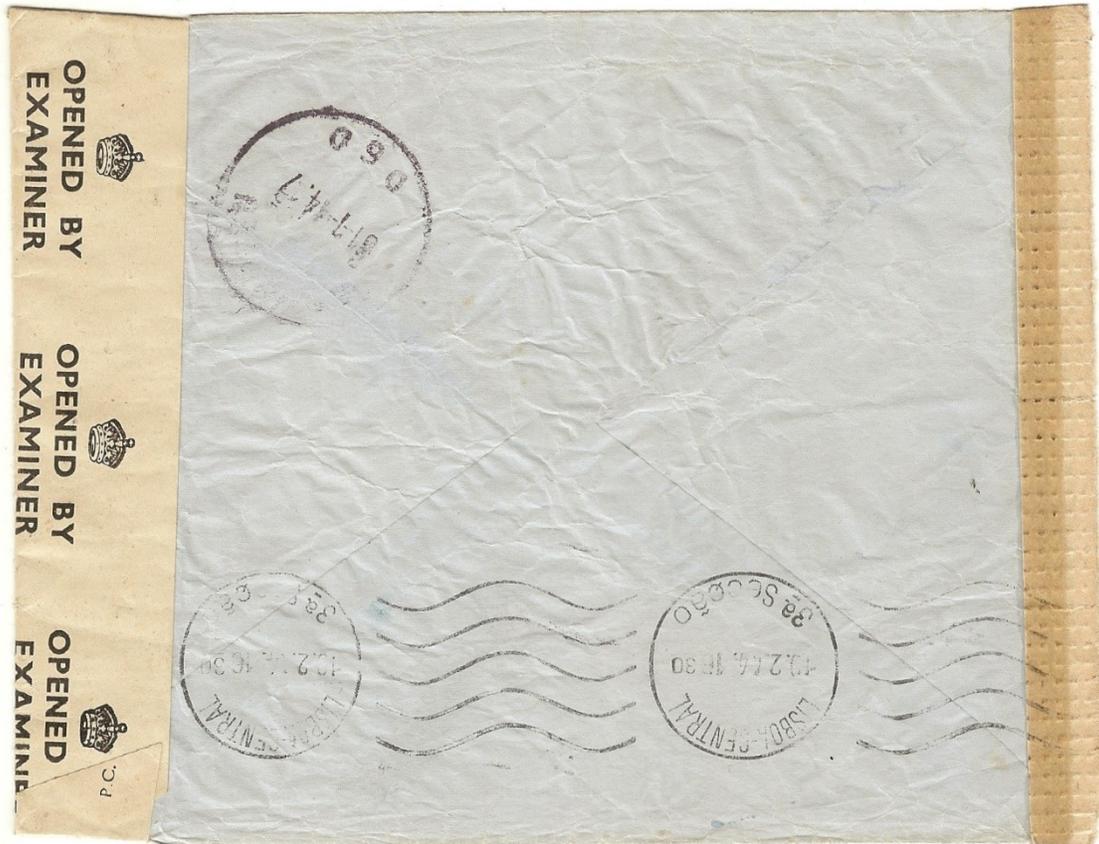


Figure 2

The backs of the 2 covers in Figure 1. No sender or return address indicated.

Might this have been some private arrangement with a friend in Portugal to forward correspondence between Belgium and the U.K.? The clues to that are pretty good. There is no listing for the address 34 Rua Ernesto da Silva in a Lisbon suburb in the reference "Undercover Addresses of WWII - Third Edition" by Charles Entwistle, and he confirmed that in a recent e-mail. There is nothing unusual about the building currently at that address which appears to possibly be the home and location of a plumbing and electrical service person, without any signage in Google map/street photos.

And then there is a bit of "education" in European penmanship here. What is the addressee's name? First noting between the 2 covers, apparently by the same hand, the "L" in Lisbon. It is very suggestive of a name Gabriel "Leydel". The "a" and "d" in "da Silva" of the address explain the "odd looking" letter "d" in "Leydel" - not the penmanship strokes used in the U.S, but consistent and neat in any case...and a European style sometimes seen elsewhere. However, while a common enough name in a Google search, but not with clear Belgian ties, that went nowhere. Trying again, and looking at the strokes of that "L" of "Lisbon" seemed quite convincing that it was not exactly a match to the name, but rather to the "S" in the street

name "da Silva". The amazing result was, via Google, the Belgian ties of one quite noteworthy WWII RAF pilot, one Gabriel "Seydel".

One thing I liked about these two covers was that the name was underlined - for example in red, and also in red was an added number "349", and the "349" was on both covers. This had suggested to me a strong possibility of the forwarder in Portugal working off a card file or notebook of addresses for mail forwarding, and this addressee was number "349". Recently I had written an article for the Scandinavian Collectors Club "Posthorn" magazine (May 2016, cover and pages 13-19) about such a card file used by the Norwegian Embassy in Lisbon for mail routing between Occupied Norway and many escaped Norwegians especially one's tied to the Government in Exile - and the Embassy person who oversaw this effort frequently used various residential addresses in hopes of not attracting German censorship attention. Maybe the Belgians did something similar? That was the thought.

Anyway, back to our addressee Gabriel Seydel. The first result was 100% in French, and with a lot of military abbreviations that meant nothing to me. It was clear there might be a link, though. Refining that search now produced a fascinating biography, and even a photo! That information is shown below. And the key item - the greatest key assuming it was put on the cover at the time of its original handling - is that number 349, and being on both covers! That turns out to apparently have been used to direct the addressee's mail to his RAF Squadron of Belgian Volunteers, Squadron 349! As an aside, our addressee bounced between Squadron 350 and 349 during the war years, but the mail sorter here had it right for the time of these letter mailings.

'Gaby' Seydel Gabriel M. (RAF n° 116541)

Distinguished Flying Cross, Belgian Croix de Guerre 1940 with Palm, Knight in the Order of the Crown with Palm, Knight in the Order of Léopold, Croix de Guerre 1940 with 2 Palm, Croix des Evadés, 1939 - 1943 Star, 1939 - 1945 Star, France and Germany Star, Atlantic Star, Defence Medal, Croix de Guerre 1940 Grand - Duché de Luxembourg, ...



(Collection)

Born at Ixelles, 05 April 1920. Was a pupil at the Flying School of the Aé Mil when War broke out. Transferred to France and Morocco, he escaped to Great Britain, where he arrived on 5 August 1940. He was sent to Training Command to complete his training. P/O Seydel was posted in from 58 OTU to 131 Sqn for flying duties on 26 November 1941. He joined the newly formed 350 (Belgian) Squadron on 17 November 1941. Transferred to 349 Squadron in July 1943, he returned to 350 Squadron in November 1944 and finally rejoined 349 Squadron with whom he finished the War. A DFC was awarded for his actions on 4 December 1945. After war he joined Colonial Service (1946-1947) that he left for the English Electric Co in 1949. He became British citizen on February 1951. He died on 10 January 1991.

DFC citation of 4 December 1945:

" As Flight Commander on his third operational tour, Flight Lieutenant Seydel has inflicted severe damage to the enemy, both in the air and on the ground destroying at least 1 aircraft and damaging 3 others as well as destroying transport of all kind. Throughout his 242 operational sorties, he has always displayed initiative and courage and has been an inspiration to all pilots under his command."

(source: Guy De Win)

His claims are :

| | | |
|------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| 19/08/1942 | 1/2 FW-190 Damaged | Dieppe (Operation Jubilé) |
| 19/08/1942 | 1 FW-190 Damaged | Dieppe (Operation Jubilé) |
| 06/06/1944 | 1/2 Ju-88 Damaged | (349 Sqn) |
| 07/06/1944 | 1 FW-190 Damaged | (349 Sqn) |
| 08/06/1944 | 1/2 FW-190 | (349 Sqn) |

Figure 4

A biographical piece about Gabriel Seydel from the website <http://www.350sqn.be/biography/Seydel%20Gabriel.htm> The website is dedicated to information about RAF Squadron 350 and those who served in it at any time during the war - which he did for a time.

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So, as a likely hypothesis, it would seem there is a good case for this address in Lisbon being one for mail handling between Belgian RAF military and Belgium - or perhaps elsewhere in Occupied Europe as well.

Any further information or detail greatly appreciated. My collecting focus is on undercover mail, including that involving the Thomas Cook & Son wartime civilian undercover mail scheme. edfraser@gmail.com