

3.9 Examples of Cruise Ships' promotional covers

As souvenirs, covers were often provided for passengers that identified the name of the ship, with cachets giving the latitude and longitude of Niuafu'ou, sometimes with the date they were put into the sea, and the name of the ship's commander.

R.M.S. Franconia

This, however, is not a cover, but a 1939 souvenir postcard showing coconut palms leaning towards the sea, from R.M.S. Franconia's world cruise, which called at Niuafu'ou on 29th April 1939.



The reverse of the postcard (reduced) showing that it was written on 29th April 1939 but was held at Niuafu'ou for just over a month, the stamp having a postmark for 13th June 1939.



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M.V. (S.S.) Katoomba

This January 1938 cover is an exception to the rule, as it was produced by Walter Quensell, using his rubber stamping kit, for the Katoomba cruise passengers as a souvenir of its visit to Tin Can Island.



Reference 2

The S.S. Katoomba, a 9,424 ton steamer, was the only Australian-registered ship to call at Niuafu'ou. Chartered by the Methodist Missionary Society, it made two calls to Niuafu'ou in 1937 and 1938.

The two printed references to KATOOMBA are Reference 1, SM - 10a and SM - 12 both *Rarity D*



Passengers crowd to the rails as the ship approaches Niuafu'ou Island.

part of an original
report from
The Argus Weekly
Illustrated
8th February 1938

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M.V. (S.S.) Katoomba

An original report from the supplement to "THE ARGUS" 8th February 1938

The report describes Tin Can Mail as one of the most extraordinary mails in the world, and that more than 500,000 letters have passed through the "tin can" mail with the number increasing due to popular demand

14 Supplement to "THE ARGUS."

One of the Strangest Mails in the World

One of the most extraordinary mails in the world is the "tin-can" mail, which forms the method of communication with Niuafou Island, in the Tonga Group. There are about 1,200 natives on the island, and only one white man, Mr. W. G. Quensell, who settled on the island in 1919, and has conducted a store and post-office on it since. Already more than 500,000 letters have passed through the "tin-can" mail, and the number is increasing owing to the demand for the envelopes by philatelists. The photographs show the delivery of the last mail to the island on the Christmas cruise of the Katoomba.



As the Katoomba approaches the island, one of the engineers uses a blow torch and solder to seal the tin containing the mail.

The first officer takes charge of the tin and when outrigger canoes from the shore approach the ship he throws it overboard.

Photograph 1. An engineer using a blow torch to seal the tin containing the mail

Photograph 2. The first officer throwing the tin overboard

Tin Canner, January-February 1985 included an excerpt from the Katoomba newsletter that reported 710 letters were placed in a sealed tin and dropped by the first officer into one of the two waiting canoes.

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Cruise Steamer Marama

A September 1934 cover to Auckland, New Zealand



The words at the top read - This packet, enclosed in a watertight container, was put into the sea from the Cruise Steamer Marama off Niuafou, or "Tin Can Island" in the Tongan Group in Lat. 15° 33' South, Long. 175° 40' W G.B. MORGAN Commander

The Marama was built in 1907 as a passenger-cargo steamship for the Union Steamship Co. New Zealand.



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S. S. Mariposa

A July 1935 cover to Brisbane, Australia



The printed words read - TIN CAN MAIL put overboard in open sea from the Oceanic liner Mariposa off Tin Can (Niuafu'ou) Island of the Tongan Group, 15° 33' S. Lat., 175° 39' W. Long., while on regular run between California and Australia. Carried ashore by native swimmers, it bears Royal Tongan postage, and brings to you a faint touch of the romance of these South Seas through which we are passing.

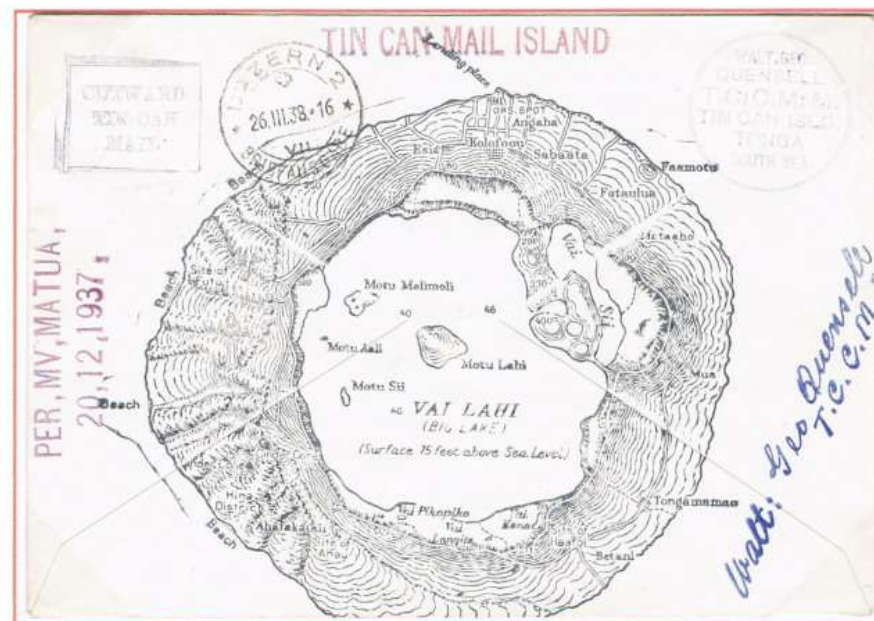
The Mariposa was a luxury ocean liner in the Matson Line "White Fleet" and launched in 1931



3.9 Examples of Cruise Ships' promotional covers

Motor Vessel (M.V.) Matua

The reverse of a 20th December 1937 cover to Lucerne Switzerland
This printed illustrated cover shows the rarer large map of Niuafu'ou Reference 1. C - 22 *Rarity DD*



The rubber hand stamp on the reverse PER MV MATUA 20.12.1937 is Reference 1. SM - 15 *Rarity D* and only known used on this day. There is a Lucerne receiving mark for 26th March 1938

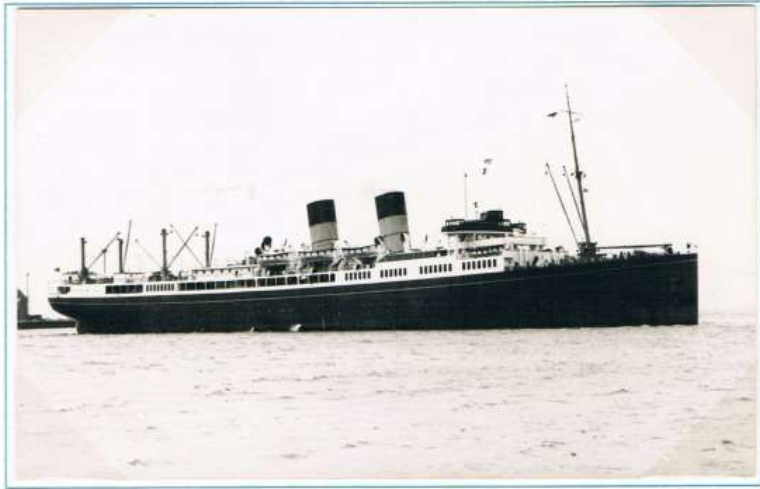
The obverse of the cover (reduced) is franked with the Tongan stamp for the postage, but also has a New Zealand 1937 Coronation Prussian Blue 2½d. stamp affixed, but not tied



3.9 Examples of Cruise Ships' promotional covers

Cruise Steamer Monowai

The Monowai was owned by the Union Steamship Company of New Zealand and launched 1924.



Stamps from Cook Islands at Niue showing the Steamer Monowai



A 1st August 1935 cover to Canterbury, New Zealand. See newspaper report on the next sheet (sheet 72)

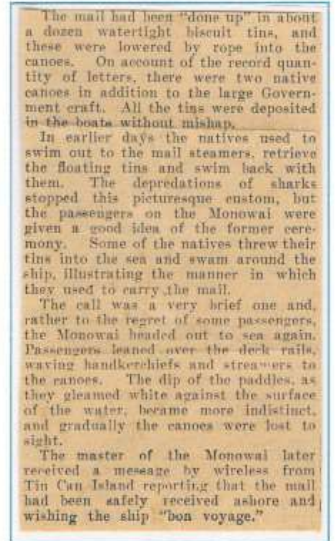


The words at the top read - This letter enclosed in a water-tight tin was put into the sea from the Cruise Steamer Monowai off Niuafo'ou or "Tin Can Island" in the Tongan Group - Lat. 15° 33' South, Long. 175° 39' West, on the 17th July 1935. A. H. Davey. Commander

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Cruise Steamer Monowai

An original article from an Auckland, New Zealand newspaper on the day the Monowai arrived in Auckland. It reported that 14,000 letters had been lowered into the waiting canoes in about a dozen watertight biscuit tins. The cover on the previous sheet (sheet 71) is one such example.

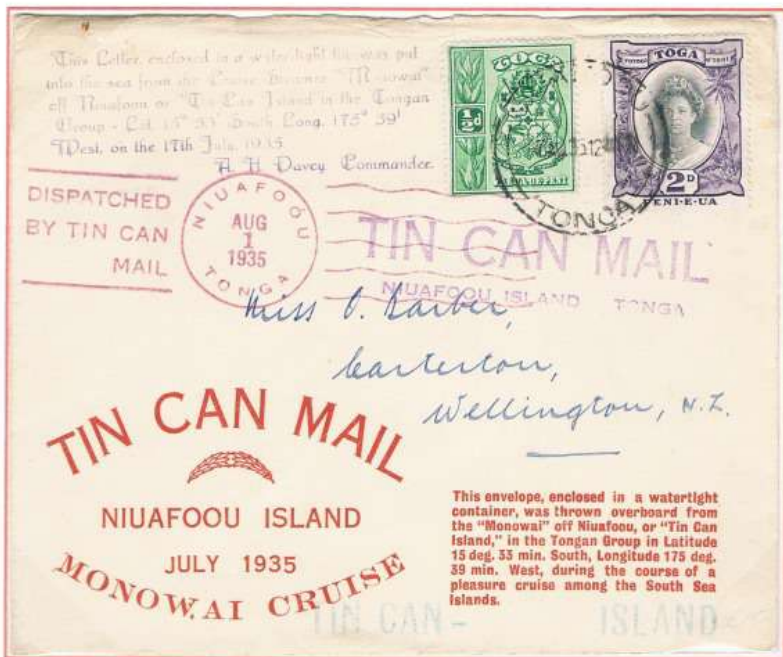


MAIL FOR TIN CAN ISLAND.—The Monowai dropped 14,000 letters, enclosed in watertight biscuit tins, into canoes and catamarans Niuafoou, or Tin Can Island. A wireless message was later received by the ship reporting safe delivery. (See letterpress below.)

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Cruise Steamer Monowai

A 1st August 1935 cover to Wellington, New Zealand



This cover not only has the standard wording at the top, with A. H. Davey Commander, but at the bottom there are also the words - This envelope enclosed in a watertight container was thrown overboard from the Monowai off Niuafu or Tin Can Island, in the Tongan Group in Latitude 15 deg. 33 min. South, Longitude 175 deg. 39 min. West, during the course of a pleasure cruise among the South Sea Islands.

In addition, this cover also has the **TIN CAN MAIL NIUAFOOU ISLANDS JULY 1935 MONOWAI CRUISE** cachet, Reference 1. SM - 29 *Rarity DD*. Only known used on 1st August 1935. Only one other such cover is known to the author and that is in Japan.

A modern reproduction (reduced in size) was made under license, the licensor living in Hawaii, where possibly this 1935 cruise held some significance for him.



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Cruise Steamer Maunganui

A 1937 cover addressed to Mr F Hargreaves in Australia which was posted on the Cruise Steamer Maunganui on 6th September 1937, which was passed on by Fred Hargreaves to his friend Cyril, see next sheet (sheet 76).



A cutting from an original Australian newspaper, The Age, for Tuesday 13th July 1937. It reports that Australian philatelists who would like to add a Tongan stamp to their collection will have an opportunity to do so when the mail for Niuafu will leave Sydney on 27th August.

Fred Hargreaves was one such philatelist.



A photograph of canoes picking up the mail from the Maunganui

Tin-Can Mail.

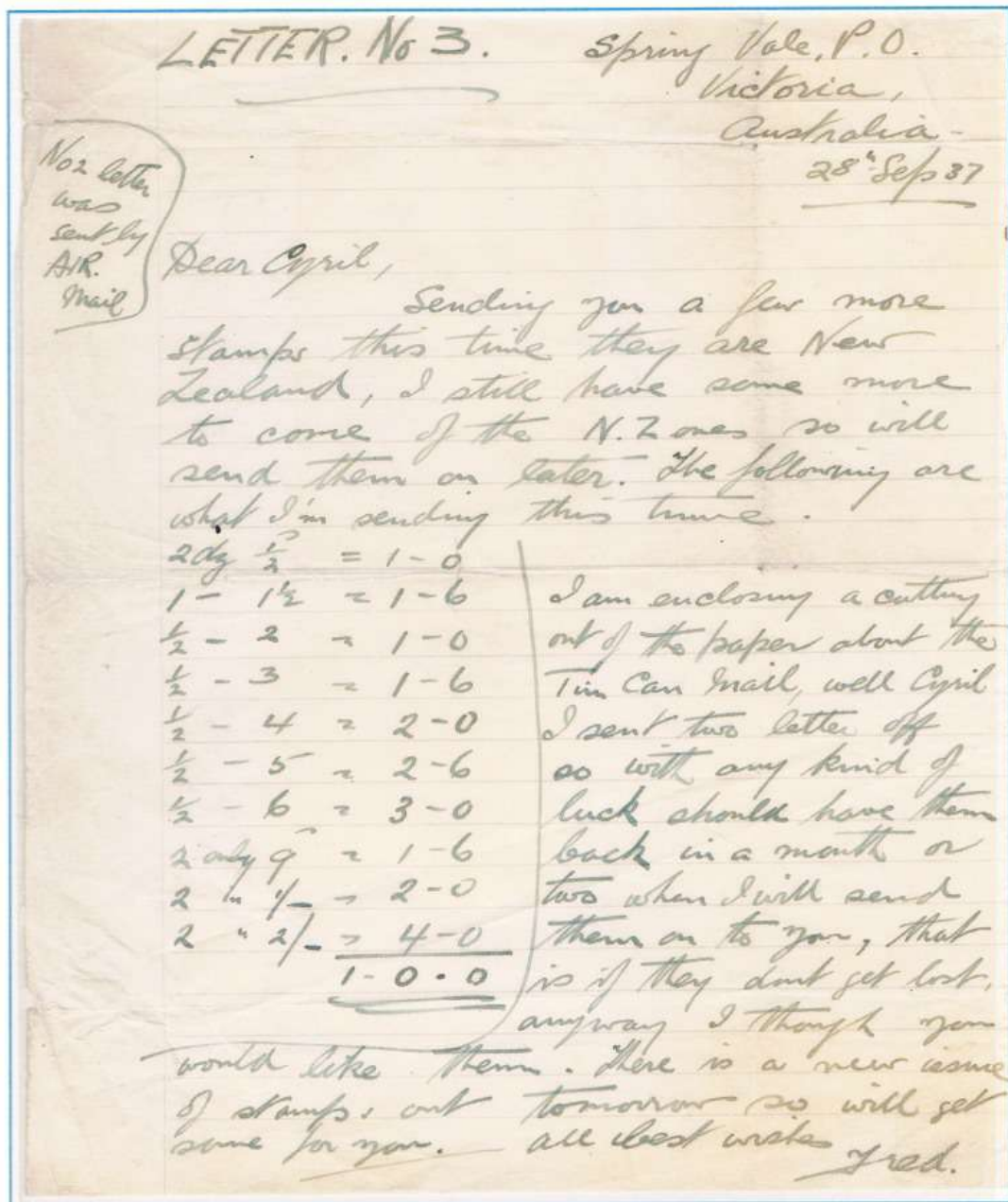
Philatelists all over Australia who desire to add a Tongan stamp cancelled with the picturesque word Niuafu, to their collection will shortly have an opportunity to do so, for on 27th August the mail for this island will leave Sydney. The interest centreing around such postmarked stamps arises not from the monetary value, but from the peculiar method used to deliver and collect the mail. Niuafu is a small volcanic island in the Tongan group, outside the regular tracks of shipping. The island offers few landing places, and there are usually steep seas running off shore, so the mail is delivered in watertight drums, and is therefore known as "the tin-can mail." On 27th August the Union S.S. Co.'s steamer Maunganui will leave Sydney on a special cruise to the South Sea Islands, and will visit the island to deliver the mail. Persons desirous of receiving a letter from the island are requested to send a letter to the Union S.S. Co., Sydney, before 10th August, enclosing an addressed envelope and sixpence worth of loose Australian stamps. This amount will cover the cost of the Tongan stamp, and will also pay the islanders for handling the mail. After the letters are dropped by the Maunganui, it may be several months

Y. JULY 13, 1937.

before another vessel calls to collect the return mail, so it may not be until Christmas that the letters are returned.

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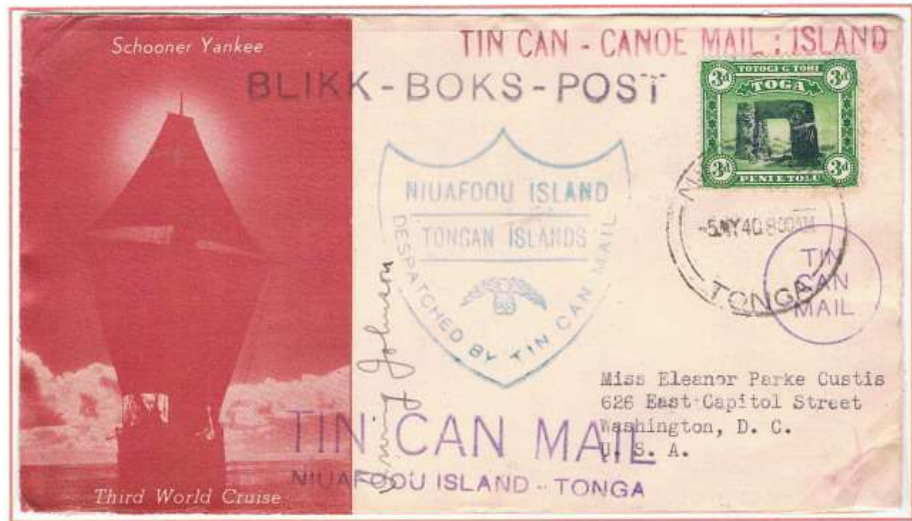
A letter dated 28th September 1937 written by Fred Hargreaves, see previous sheet (sheet 75) to his friend Cyril, in which he records that he sent two letters off, and with any luck will have them back in a month or two, when he will send them on to him.



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Schooner Yankee

A 5th May 1940 cover to Washington D.C., U.S.A.



This illustrated cover was posted on board the Schooner Yankee on its third world cruise

The cover is signed on the front by Captain Irving Johnson, and American sailor, pioneer and adventurer. He ran seven round-the-world cruises from 1933, each taking about 18 months.

The illustrated cover is Reference 1. SM - 22 Rarity DD



The reverse of the cover (reduced)

3.10 Queen Salote commemorative Jubilee covers

Tin Can Mail was further popularised to commemorate the 20th and 25th (Silver) Jubilees of Her Majesty Queen Salote

A 1937 (year suspect) and 1938 First and Last Day Jubilee covers to commemorate the 20th anniversary of Queen Salote's coronation on 11th October 1938

A typical example of an unaddressed philatelic so-called First Day Jubilee cover 11th October 1937



This illustrated cover (with Walter Quensell on the right) is Reference 1. PC - 1 Rarity D

The red cachets for First Day and Last Day Jubilee Cover on both covers have the error of spelling "Judilee" for "Jubilee", and the mauve cachets for Jubilee-Cover Niuafou Island Tonga, on both covers have the error of spelling of "Jland" for "Island"

Walter Quensell had been, and still was aware of imitations of Tin Can Mail covers. The top is specifically worded ORIGINAL TIN-CAN CANOE MAIL: ISLAND COVER. The top cover also has, on the reverse, the words BEWARE OF IMITATIONS.

Queen Salote ascended to the throne on 5th April 1918, her coronation being on 11th October 1918. It is believed that the set of three commemorative stamps were issued on 12th October 1938, with Quensell covers produced with First and Last Day hand stamps dated 11th October 1937 and 12th October 1938, to celebrate the 20th anniversary of her coronation, not accession. Covers dated 1937, with the 11th October 1937 postmarks must have been contrived with the collusion of the Postmaster.

Part of the third paragraph of a letter written on 12th December 1957 by Walter Quensell's grandson, D.G Quensell. Although this gives a reason why the cachet is dated 1937 and not 1938, as Walter Quensell was not the postmaster, the letter does not offer an explanation as to why the postmarks are also dated 1937. Possible contrivance by the Postmaster?

The "Jubilee Cover" you mention in your letter that it was issued on the 11th of October 1937 is wrong, I think my grandfather miss printed it. The right date for the cover was on the 11th of October 1938 not 1937. If anything your son wants from the Tongan Island all he has to do is to let me know.

In any case, to have a First Day cover for 11th October 1937, and a Last Day cover for the 12th October 1938 is a mystery.

A typical example of a philatelic so-called Last Day Jubilee cover. The stamps are cancelled for 12th October 1938, being the first day of issue of the stamps.



G. S. Russell, Esq.,
P. O. Box 467,
Auckland,
NEW ZEALAND.

3.10 Queen Salote commemorative Jubilee covers

Tin Can Mail was further popularised to commemorate the 20th and 25th (Silver) Jubilees of Her Majesty Queen Salote

Two 25th January 1944 cacheted First Day Covers to commemorate the 25th (Silver Jubilee) anniversary of Queen Salote's coronation on 11th October 1943



The cover to the left -
is unaddressed and franked with the complete set of five stamps issued to commemorate Queen Salote's Silver Jubilee. However, the stamps are cancelled with Niuafou postmarks for 11th October 1943, the actual date of 25th anniversary of Queen Salote's coronation.

It is however believed that the stamps were issued on 25th January 1944, in which case the postmark date of 11th October 1943, three and a half months earlier, is suspect.

The cover below -
is registered, and sent to New Zealand, to a firm of philatelists in Auckland C.1 (City 1 - being an early form of postcode) and again, is franked with the complete set of five stamps issued to commemorate Queen Salote's Silver Jubilee.

The OUTWARD TIN CAN MAIL cachet is *Reference 1. ML - 15 Rarity D.*

The Niuafou postmarks are dated 12th January 1944 - the earliest recorded date used in conjunction with both the OUTWARD TIN CAN MAIL cachet, and the FIRST - DAY - COVER cachet (*Reference 1. J - 6*)

The stamps were ordered by the Crown Agents (Requisition 816/1) on 19th July 1943, for delivery by the end of September. On 27th September, the Crown Agents increased the quantities required, which could have delayed delivery.

Unfortunately the right hand folios of the De La Rue Colonial Stamps Books for the period September onwards are devoid of the packing details and dispatch dates, and the Private Day Books are missing. It is therefore not known a) when the stamps were actually dispatched and b) if their arrival in Tonga, and actual date of issue was delayed because of the war.

On both covers, the stamps were either available earlier than the date it is believed they were issued (according to Stanley Gibbons catalogue, this was on 25th January 1944) or the earlier 11th October 1943 and 12th January 1944 postmarks were applied with the collusion of the postmaster.

So when were the stamps actually issued -
11th October 1943, 12th January 1944 or 25th January 1944?

