

## PHILIPPINE PLANE CRASH – A DENMARK CONNECTION

By Frederick A. Brofos



Figure 1.

In browsing through my collections, I come across a disaster cover (Figure 1) from time to time that is something of a mystery to me. In this case, I wonder why and where the plane crashed, was everyone killed, and what was a Philippine plane doing in Denmark, anyway?

This is how I acquired this cover many years ago. After asking for any oddities in a little Copenhagen stamp shop, the proprietor produced a wrapper sent from Hong Kong to Copenhagen in 1954. The crumpled brown paper appeared to have been water-soaked at one time, but the address label, airmail sticker, and four Hong Kong stamps were still attached. It was all contained in a transparent plastic envelope, stapled shut at the top.

A little doubtful at first, I soon decided to buy it after noticing the official Danish Post Office explanatory label affixed to the back (Figure 2). Translated from Danish, it reads

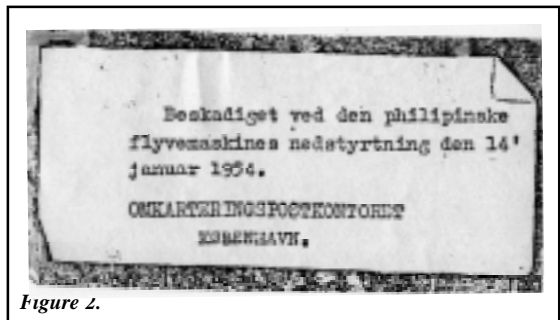


Figure 2.



starkly, “Damaged by the Philippine flying plane’s crash on the 14<sup>th</sup> of January 1954. The Distribution Post Office, Copenhagen.” That a special label was produced would indicate that more than one piece of mail was salvaged.

After submitting this note to *The Posthorn*, our editor, Paul Albright, informed me that he “spent an interesting couple of hours looking at microfilm at the University of Colorado Library” in Boulder. He was able to track down several newspaper articles that clear up the mystery of this cover.

Apparently, the plane didn’t crash in Denmark at all, but in Italy. The disaster mail was salvaged by the Italian Post Office and forwarded to London, the flight’s destination. The UK’s Postmaster General announced that the salvaged mail had arrived in London four days after the crash. From there, mail was re-distributed to other countries, including Denmark. This, of course, greatly cuts down the number of crash covers with the Danish label. However, there must have been a few to warrant such an explanatory label being produced at all. The plane carried mail from Manila, Hong Kong, and probably Tokyo.

Under the headline reproduced here (Figure 3), the

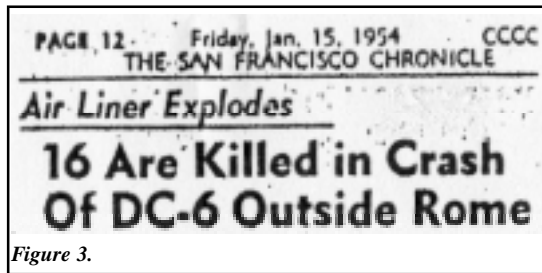


Figure 3.

*San Francisco Chronicle* of January 15, 1954 reported: “An American pilot swerved his crippled Philippine Air Lines plane away from a crowded apartment village, possibly saving a thousand lives, but killing all aboard, including himself. The Manila-Beirut-Rome-Zurich-London luxury transport, with 2 of 4 engines dead, crashed with a violent explosion in a field during a drenching rain storm.”

About 2 ½ months after the crash, it was reported that long-range overseas flights of the Philippine Air Lines were suspended in order to conserve funds. I have not seen any indication that safety considerations were a major factor in this decision. Regional flights in Southeast Asia continued to operate, but those to Japan were discontinued.

