

Suez Canal with their maritime headquarters at Bremen. The other German shipping companies that served the Pacific were the Hamburg America Line (HAPAG) and the Deutsche Handel-und Plantagen-Gesellschaft (DHPG) lines. DHPG, in particular, served the island of Yap in the Carolines chain, but it did not call at Angaur itself. Yap had direct sea routes to Manila and Hong Kong. Present day Hapag-Lloyd is a major global container shipping company and it arose from the union of HAPAG and NDL in 1970 with its base at Hamburg.

With old postcards and letters, there is usually considerable difficulty in reading the message. Recently, I came across an online facility for deciphering old German script called Transkribus ai, which was used to transcribe the message on this card. After doing so, I used Google to translate from German to English. The message on this card is as follows:

Dear Mr Mandel

Below you see the first stamp with the Eastern postmark from here. I hope it brings you pleasure. We landed here after a very stormy journey on the second of May. I tell you, that was a damned rough journey from Hong Kong. It's usually very nice here, just terribly hot. Today we have 46 degrees Celsius, a real treat for drinking Graz. Please write to and send greetings to all your friends. Sincerely

References:

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PENTOTHAL POSTCARDS OF SINGAPORE AND MALAYSIA

by Tom Anderson

The drug sodium thiopental was discovered in the 1930s and manufactured by Abbott Laboratories, which had headquarters in Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A. It was sold under the brand name Pentothal and was the “undisputed king of anaesthetics” during much of the twentieth century [Ref.1]. Abbott initiated a vigorous marketing programme in the 1950s to promote their product. Picture postcards advertising Pentothal were sent from 70 countries between 1954 and 1968, capturing the imagination of their intended recipients by featuring cultural or exotic scenes from the country of origin [Ref.2]. The plan was to send many thousands of cards from overseas back home to doctors in North America (the U.S.A. and Canada), as well as, less commonly, clients in other countries. Local teams were enlisted to prepare each batch, using local stamps and mailing labels that were sent out from the U.S.A. Abbott released one Pentothal card design each for Singapore and Malaysia. Here I present these cards, starting with the former (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Pentothal advertising postcard sent “printed matter” to the U.S.A., SINGAPORE 12 JUN 62

The card in Fig. 1 shows a photo of the Riverfront in Downtown Singapore and was sent to a doctor stationed in Lockport, Louisiana, U.S.A. Given mass mailings, the cheapest mailing option, i.e., surface mail, was

selected. In this case, postage was paid at the printed matter rate of 10c. using attractive one 6c. and two 2c. definitive stamps of 1962 that were cancelled “SINGAPORE 12 JUN 62”. “PENTOTHAL® (Thiopental Abbott)” is printed vertically up the central divide, which has a small “A” at the base (I believe this identifies the batch). Written messages of a personal nature with more than six words were not permitted to travel as printed matter. In fact, there is no handwriting on this card at all! While appearing hand-written, the message is printed. It starts “Dear Doctor: ...”. As such, the Pentothal cards, along with many others issued by other companies for a range of medical products, became known as “Dear Doctor” cards and constitute a speciality in its own right for deltiologists [Ref.2]. Although only a single Singapore card design was issued by Abbott, there are many variants to lure the avid collector [Ref.3]. Circular date stamps are seen between June 6 and July 20, variants A-E are seen at the base of the central divide and, as a special delight for collectors, batches of cards were also sent to doctors in France and Spain with the message printed in French or Spanish (these cards being uncommon).



Figure 2. Pentothal advertising postcard sent to Canada, KUALA LUMPUR 2 DEC 1964

Pentothal advertising cards were sent to doctors in Canada and the U.S.A. from Malaysia in 1964, showing the Jamek Mosque in Kuala Lumpur (Fig. 2). Postage was again paid at the 10c. rate for printed matter, using 8c. and 2c. stamps of the 1961 Selangor definitive issue depicting an inset portrait of Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah. Using attractive stamps was all part of the advertising package. These stamps were chosen despite the Federation of Malaysia having been formed the previous year, although noting that the first definitive issue for Malaysia (birds) was not released until 9 September 1965. The “Dear Doctor” message is again printed, recommending Pentothal for its “speed of induction, absence of delirium, ease of control, and rapid emergence”. Unlike the Singapore cards, it appears that only a single batch was released in Kuala Lumpur, with CDS only known for 2 and 3 December.

The Dear Doctor postcards were an advertising phenomenon. Beautiful cards from exotic locations that included not only Singapore and Malaysia, but also the likes of Gibraltar, Swaziland, New Caledonia and Greenland, all with beautiful stamps and fine CDS. In reality, however, the Dear Doctor cards are an early example of “junk mail”. Well, I can think of a lot worse junk than this that comes through my letterbox and many of the recipient doctors were surely captivated.

References

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2. Lai, C.D. (2005). *Pentothal Postcards*. Mark Betty Publ., New York, 190 pp.
3. See checklists provided at the Dear Doctor postcards website: <http://www.deardoctorphostcards.com/#checklists>