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# *The Prexie Era*

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Louis Fiset, Editor/Publisher  
fiset@uw.edu

## **An Army Post Office at the Washington Monument, September 1943**

by Lawrence Sherman



*Figure 1:* National Archives photographs showing the actual APO open to the public during the show, and a separate display field APO tent.

“Back the Attack” was the slogan that the United States government gave to its Third War Loan, the war bond drive of September 9 to October 2, 1943. It was the year that, with hindsight, has been considered the turning point of the war. The German Sixth Army surrendered at Stalingrad (February), American and Australian forces solidified their hold on the Solomon Islands and advanced in New Guinea (January-June), and Italy withdrew from the war (September).

As part of its home front activities for the drive, the army mounted an exhibit on the grounds of the Washington Monument in Washington, DC.

The exhibit, presented from September 9 to 26, featured a complete Army Post Office field unit conducted by army personnel. This working APO gave American families an opportunity to see how the mail they exchanged with their loved ones overseas was handled.

Figure 1 illustrates two photographs from the National Archives showing first, the actual APO that was open to the public from noon to 10 PM for the 18 days of the show. The APO provided all postal services except postal savings and “duck” stamps. It was manned by two officers and 12 enlisted men from the Adjutant General’s Department. The second

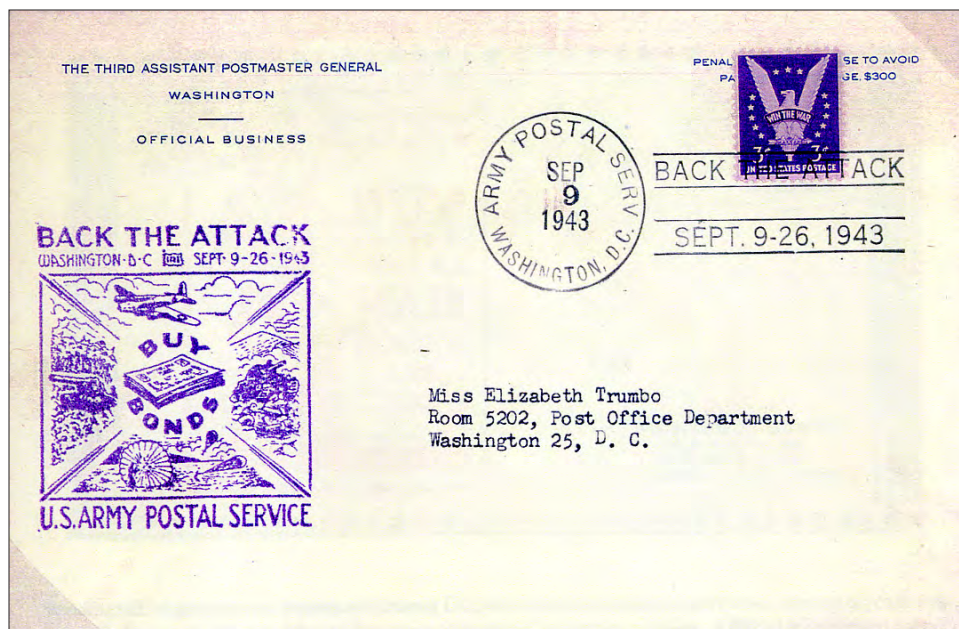


Figure 2: Hand canceled first day postmark with hand struck, “Back the Attack” cachet.

Figure 3: Machine cancel on cacheted cover self-addressed to cachet maker, Walter G. Crosby. Official cachet on back, not shown.



photograph shows a separate field APO tent containing equipment and layout of a “typical Army Post Office in the field.” The tent was erected for display, not active use, near the working APO.

The Post Office Department (POD), intimately involved with both delivering mail to the military and selling war bonds, had a special interest in the success of the APO exhibit. It enabled people to obtain a special postmark with slogan cancel and an army-produced patriotic cachet, on their mail from the APO. The hand-stamped and machine-stamped

varieties of postmark/slogan cancel were easily distinguishable. The cachet, struck in purple, featured sketches of battlefield armaments provided by funds from the sale of War Bonds. The words “Back the Attack,” “Buy Bonds,” and “U.S. Army Postal Service” spelled out the meaning.

Figure 2 shows a hand-canceled September 9 first day postmark with its “Back the Attack” slogan cancel and official cachet on a cover mailed within the POD. The cover, bearing a 3-cent Win the War stamp, was mailed from the office of the Third Assistant Postmaster General



to an employee in the Washington POD office. Note the large size of the hand-struck postmark and the configuration of the slogan cancel.

A machine-canceled cover featuring a Crosby cachet on a cover mailed to San Pedro, CA, on September 18 to cachet maker Walter G. Crosby himself, is shown in Figure 3. Note the smaller size of the machine-struck postmark and the different configuration of the slogan cancel. Also, because of space constraints, the official purple “Back the Attack” cachet is located on the back (not shown). Sometimes the official army cachet could be artfully handstamped on the front of a previously cacheted cover to make a pleasing combination, as shown in Figure

4. Here the original multicolored cachet was printed by Jacques Minkus. Note the 2-cent in-city rate for a piece mailed within Washington, DC.

Nearly all mail sent from the Washington Monument APO was sent to domestic addresses. These are, in the main, easy to find at stamp dealers’ booths or in online auctions. Foreign destination mail from the APO is an entirely different story. Among the few examples I have found, the one shown in Figure 5 is pre-eminent. Paying the 5-cent international surface rate, it was mailed on September 11 to Brazzaville, French Equatorial Africa (now Republic of the Congo). It received the handstamped APO



Figure 4: Jacques Minkus printed cachet with official “Back the Attack” hand cachet.

Figure 5: Foreign destination, to French Equatorial Africa, ultimately returned to sender. Foreign destination examples are scarce.



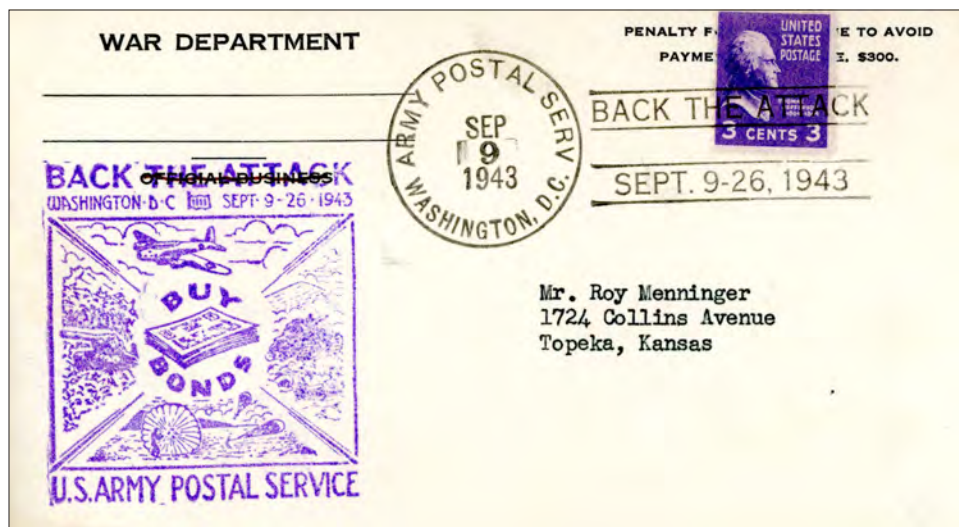


Figure 6: First day use, with official cachet, to Mr. Roy Menninger, future physician as well as President and CEO of the Menninger Foundation.

postmark/slogan cancel with official purple handstamp cachet on the back and was on its way to Africa. Upon arrival in Brazzaville it was censored (*Contrôle Postal*), marked “*inconnu*” front and back, received a lightly struck, 13 Nov Congo received marking, and presumably was returned to sender.

Although not as difficult as finding foreign destination mail from the Washington Monument APO, encountering a Prexie used on such mail is no easy task, either. But examples can be found. Figure 6 shows a September 9 cover sent from the War Department to Topeka, Kansas. It bears the handstamp Army Postal Service postmark and slogan cancel, official cachet, and a 3-cent Jefferson Prexie paying the first class rate. Most APO exhibit covers used the Win the War stamp or a combination of other wartime-themed stamps to pay the first class rate, so the use of the Jefferson Prexie is an uncommon use of a common stamp.

Look again at the name of the addressee and the city where he lived. Roy Menninger was a third generation member of the family that founded the Menninger Foundation in Topeka in 1925. He became a physician specializing in psychiatry and eventually succeeded his

father, Charles, as President and CEO of the Menninger Foundation. Born in 1927, Roy was 16 years old at the time of the APO exhibit at the Washington Monument; hence, he was Mr. (not Dr.) Roy Menninger at the time, as the cover attests.

Another use of a Prexie on mail from the Washington Monument APO is found on the September 26 postcard shown in Figure 7. The postcard is franked, appropriately enough, with the 1-cent Washington. In addition to the machine postmark and cancel, the green card has a vivid boxed “Last Day” in green ink on the front, along with a cachet picturing a portly “Postmaster.” The official purple “Back the Attack” cachet is on the back (not shown).

The Third War Loan was a success. Americans backed the attack by oversubscribing the expected \$15 billion dollars in War Bond purchases. The APO exhibit at the Washington monument was a success, too. Public attendance at the field Army Post Office was high and covers for servicing arrived at the APO from all corners of the United States. By the end of the show more than 52,000 covers had been cancelled, one-third of them on the first day. For present day collectors, finding 36

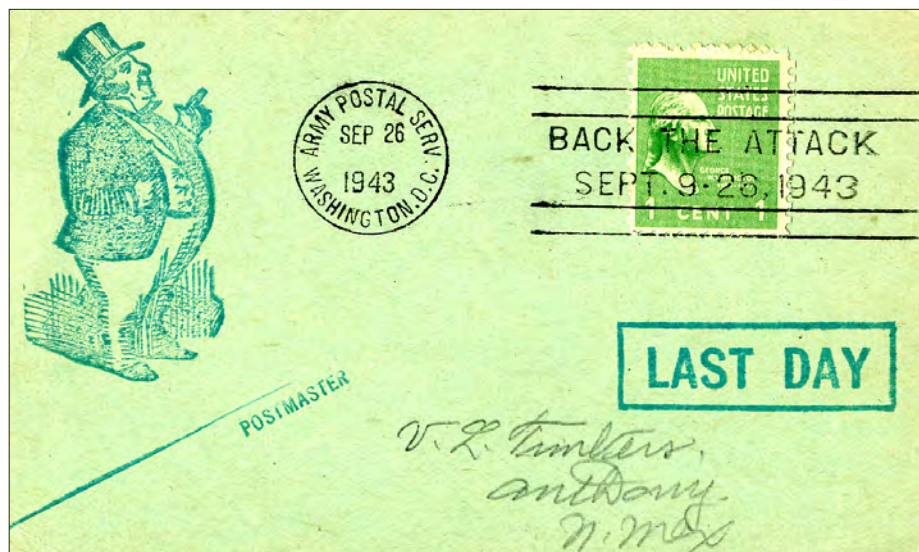


Figure 7: Last day of use postcard with the official purple “Back the Attack” cachet on back.

of those covers –one with hand cancel and one with machine cancel from each of the 18 days of the exhibit– makes for an inexpensive but worthy challenge.

In June 1943 the Postmaster General had written that all other postal problems were subordinated to expeditious handling of official

armed forces mail and “seeing to it that our men and women in the armed forces have rapid and uninterrupted postal communications with their families and friends.” Three months later the working APO on the grounds of the Washington Monument did its best to make that point to the American public.

### Prexie Era Subscription Renewals Now Due

It is time to renew your annual subscription to *The Prexie Era*. The cost is \$10 for the print version and \$5 for the electronic version. These modest fees barely pay the cost of reproducing and mailing out a year’s subscription.

If you no longer wish to receive the newsletter, please let Jeff or me know. If you appreciate the newsletter and wish to see it continue, please contact Jeff Shapiro to make payment. You can pay via PayPal (using the address below), but add a 50 cents surcharge if you select that option.

Jeff can be reached at: [dirtyoldcovers@aol.com](mailto:dirtyoldcovers@aol.com)



## When Did FAM 22 End?

by Ken Lawrence



Figure: Registered air mail to India, postmarked May 9, 1946. 90¢ postage pays 70¢ air + 20¢ registry fee. Received Kankanady, India May 26, 1946. No Miami transit marking; therefore, not FAM 22. [Stephen L. Suffet collection]

In a 2006 *London Philatelist* article Robert May posed the following question: “When did FAM 22 end?” Until now my answer to the question has been July 1, 1946.

That answer was never entirely satisfactory because it was based on a deduction. Foreign Air Mail route No. 22 (FAM 22), with service from the United States dispatched through a newly established exchange office gateway at Miami, to West Africa and connecting service

to countries throughout sub-Saharan Africa, the Near East, and Asia as far as India, had been inaugurated on December 6, 1941, one day before the United States became a World War II belligerent.

The attack on Pearl Harbor abruptly suspended trans-Pacific civilian flights west of Pearl Harbor. On December 13, 1941, Pan American Airlines and the War Department concluded a secret contract that extended the FAM 22

route eastward from the Belgian Congo to Singapore, and on December 17 the Second Assistant Postmaster General had ordered “Air mails for Netherlands Indies, North Borneo, Sarawak, Straits Settlements, Malaya, Burma, unoccupied China and countries west thereof (including Turkey), which have heretofore been sent by the trans-Pacific route, shall be routed promptly via Miami, Fla.”

The Civil Aeronautics Board certified the FAM 22 extension on December 23, and approved a December 20 New York to Calcutta Special Mission flight by a memorandum order. For the duration of the war and most of the following year, the POD published no revision to that order. Finally, on July 1, 1946, a new edition of Part II of the *Official Postal Guide* abolished the Miami gateway for air mail to trans-Atlantic destinations, thus effectively ending FAM 22 service.

Recently, while browsing 1946 issues of *The Official Foreign Air Mail Guide (OFAMG)*, I verified the May issue listing of the following countries served by the South Atlantic service departing from Miami: Aden, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, Angola, Bahrain, Baluchistan, Belgian Congo, Borneo, Brunei, Burma, Cameroons, Ceylon, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, French Equatorial Africa, French Somaliland, Gambia, Gold Coast Colony, India, Iraq, Italian Somaliland, Kenya, Lebanon, Libya, Madagascar, Malay States, Malta via Egypt, Mauritius, Nigeria, Nyasaland, Palestine, Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique), Reunion, Rhodesia (Northern and Southern), Saudi Arabia, Siam, Sierra Leone, Southwest Africa, Spanish Guinea, Straits Settlements, Syria, Tanganyika Territory, Transjordan, Turkey, Uganda, Union of South Africa, Yemen, and Zanzibar.

That list did not include some countries previously served by FAM 22, such as Liberia, which had become a FAM 18 call, and several

Francophone countries in Africa and the Middle East that were served by FAM 18 to Lisbon and Dakar, transferring to French carriers.

But the June 1946 *OFAMG* carried this notice: “Planes carrying mail via the Trans-Atlantic routes no longer depart from Miami. Therefore, the marking of mail (M) ‘Via Miami’ is not required, and the ‘(M)’ previously shown in the last column of Part 2 of the *Guide* has been eliminated.”

The *OFAMG* closed during the last week of each month and reached subscribers during the first week of the cover date. Therefore, some time in May 1946 FAM 22 ceased. Steve Suffet’s registered cover to India postmarked May 9, 1946 and lacking a Miami transit marking, provides evidence of a late April or early termination date.

This information applies to outbound civilian air mail. Military air mail was dispatched from and to the postal embarkation center assigned to the specific APO, FPO, or ship. Some trans-Atlantic APOs were served by New York, others by Miami, and some switched from New York to Miami (including the APO for Ascension Island, which was a FAM 22 flag stop). Official mail departed Washington by the never-announced TWA FAM 23 route via the South Atlantic to Egypt and India, or by the parallel Air Transit Command Washington-Cairo-Karachi route. Inbound mail came on FAM 22 ATC flights to Miami or FAM 18 Navy flights to New York or FAM 23 ATC flights to Washington depending on the connection.

To my knowledge no one has studied or exhibited postwar transoceanic air mail with attention to these details, except to record that the PAA Cannonball route carried mail as late as November 1945, and that some trans-Pacific service to and from China occurred via 1946 UNRRA flights. Otherwise it’s virgin territory awaiting a dedicated student.

## Early Cover from the German Occupation of Denmark

by Jeffrey Shapiro



Figure: Combined domestic air/surface mail to Denmark, postmarked March 20, 1940. Received "9 APR 1940" the day German forces entered Denmark. UK (Liverpool) and German (Frankfurt - "402") censorship. Addressee moved (*déménagé*), so on April 22, 1940 the letter was returned. [Louis Fiset collection]

German armed forces invaded Denmark's Jutland Peninsula by land, sea, and the air just after midnight on April 9, 1940. Lasting approximately six hours, the operation against the small independent Kingdom proved to be one of the shortest conquests in recorded military history.

The German High Command was not particularly interested in Denmark, but viewed the country as a stepping stone to Norway with its vital iron ore resources and strategic location.

During the six hour operation, German forces



suffered an estimated 26 killed and 23 wounded. The Danes confirmed their military casualties at 16 dead and 20 wounded. Civilian resistance was listed as 10 dead and 3 wounded.

King Christian X realized the overwhelming superiority of the Nazi aggressors and capitulated at 6:00 the same morning, thus saving lives on both sides. With the Danes having surrendered so quickly, the Germans proceeded with a lenient occupation, content to leave the Aryan Danes to manage themselves.

The cover shown here was posted on March 20, 1940 prior to the occupation, and docketed

in green ink, “9 APR 1940,” the day German forces entered Denmark. The contents were censored at Liverpool (4167) before subsequent transport by surface to the continent. The letter was next intercepted and examined by a German censor, per the “402” pencil notation on the front of the cover. This likely occurred at Frankfurt because German censorship operations in Denmark did not begin until July 15, 1940.

The letter was not condemned by the censors, but returned to the U.S. from Copenhagen on April 22, 1940 because the addressee had moved (*déménagé*).

## PrexieEraPex 2 Update

Jeff Shapiro has provided an update to **PrexieEraPex 2**, to be held in conjunction with Philatelic Show 2018, at Boxborough, MA, May 4-6, 2018.

CANEJ has approved the following jury for the show:

James P. Gough, California, Chief Judge  
Anthony Dewey, Connecticut  
Peter McCann, Florida  
Paul Phillips, California  
Stephen Suffett, New York  
David Ball, Massachusetts, apprentice

The title of Ken Lawrence’s two-day APS on-the-road course will be; “Postal History of World War II in the Pacific Ocean from the American

Perspective.” Jeff Shapiro will accompany him with a talk about collecting Pearl Harbor Navy ship covers. This program will take place on Wednesday May 2 and Thursday May 3, prior to the opening of the show.

Doug Clark, Exhibits Chairman, reports that the complement of frames reserved for us are not yet completely filled. Therefore, time still exists to enter the competition.

Full information regarding Philatelic Show 2018, including an exhibit prospectus and entry form, can be found on the Northeastern Federation of Stamp Clubs website, at [nefed.org](http://nefed.org)

## Third Class, Insured Special Delivery Mail

by Louis Fiset



This wrapper, posted July 12, 1941, provides a nice example of insured, special delivery mail for non-first class matter weighing two pounds or less. The faint, pencil notations at the upper right,  $5+15=20+5$ , provide a guide to determining the contents of the package.

The minimum insurance fee available cost 5 cents for indemnity of \$5.00 or less. Next, the 15-cent special delivery stamp paid the special delivery rate for non-first class mail. This leaves the remaining 5 cents postage to help determine what the package actually contained.

The lowest Parcel Post rate at the time began at nine cents for zone 1, except for a Bound Printed Matter rate that would have required an endorsement, or "Sec. 34.77 PL&R"

somewhere on the package. Absent, this package was thus limited to third class mail.

Basic third class mail had a rate of 1.5 cents per two ounces, making an exact, 5-cent combination impossible. Books, catalogs, and material for planting, however, were rated in 1-cent increments, making a 5-cent rate possible. The latter, however, rated out at 1 cent per 2 ounces, making 5 cents pay for 10 ounces, too heavy for third class mail. This leaves only books and catalogues of 24 pages or more as possibilities. Likely, the package contained a book weighing 5 ounces, since catalogues usually went uninsured.

*Thanks to Dan Pagter for help diagnosing this interesting Prexie era wrapper.*