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1941 Airmail to China, 50-Cent Rate Explained

by Louis Fiset



Figure 1: FAM 14 mail paying 50 cents airmail to Manila, with onward dispatch to Shanghai by steamer. No Hong Kong censorship. Received November 10. Transit time: 27 days.

Three attributes of the October 17, 1941 cover from New York to Shanghai illustrated here drew attention and led to further study. First is the 50 cents postage paid for airmail service to China when the published rate was 70 cents. Second, missing is evidence of censor markings seen on most, if not all air mail from the U.S. to China after March 1940. And third is the Shanghai receiver on the back showing an arrival date of November 10, 1941, thus documenting a transit time of 27 days.

The first direct air mail service between the U.S. and China began with the inauguration

of FAM 14 from San Francisco on April 21, 1937. The *Hong Kong Clipper* arrived at Hong Kong on April 28th. A China National Aviation Corporation (CNAC) plane flew from Shanghai to connect with this flight on April 27th and returned to Shanghai two days later with mail having been transported on that transpacific flight from the West Coast.

This regular service continued uninterrupted until the Japanese attack on Shanghai caused CNAC to suspend its Hong Kong-to-Shanghai service on August 13, 1937. This all-air service from the U.S. mainland to Shanghai thus lasted

a little more than three months. Thereafter, air mail from the U.S. to north China was off loaded at Hong Kong and placed aboard a regularly scheduled Hong Kong-to-Shanghai steamer.

The airmail rate for letter mail to China was 70 cents per half ounce, effective from April 21, 1937 until the suspension of FAM 14 service on December 7, 1941. British censors examined all mail transiting Hong Kong, passing unopened much of it, but with a significant percentage opened, censored, and resealed. Thus, with few exceptions, all mail from the U.S. to China, including air mail, should bear evidence of censorship.

On May 27, 1941, Pan American Airways (PAA) inaugurated a biweekly extension of FAM 14 service from San Francisco to Singapore, via Manila, alternating with the established route via Manila to Hong Kong. At the same time the Hong Kong post office established regularly scheduled steamer service to carry airmail to Manila to meet the PAA flight from Singapore to the U.S. mainland on the weeks there were no flights leaving Hong Kong.

Similarly, on August 15, 1941 the Shanghai post office dispatched the first shipment of air mail on the cargo/passenger ship, S.S. *Santa Inez* destined for Manila to connect with the *Anzac Clipper* from Singapore that left on August 21st, and reached Manila later in the day. The ship, capable of 13 knots, completed the 1117 nautical mile voyage in a little more than 3.5 days making possible a round trip voyage in one week's time.

The 50-cent cover shown here was postmarked October 17, 1941, in time to meet the *China Clipper* departing from San Francisco on October 22. Bound for Singapore, not Hong Kong, it reached Manila on November 3 after delays at Midway and Wake Islands. There it was off loaded to await *Santa Inez's* scheduled

arrival, having been coordinated to meet next inbound PAA flight from Singapore, which arrived on November 5. The cover was placed aboard the steamer and carried to Shanghai on the return voyage. It received a Shanghai arrival backstamp on November 10.

The writer's "Via Manila, P.I." directive on the face of the cover makes sense, as it directs attention to a deviation from the long established route through Hong Kong.

Why, after nearly 70 years, have so few covers emerged paying the 50-cent airmail rate to the Philippines, with onward dispatch to Shanghai by steamer? Two significant reasons may exist. First, the published airmail rate to China transiting Hong Kong was 70 cents, a rate that had been in effect for nearly four years. However, neither the *Official Foreign Air Mail Guide* nor *The U.S. Postal Bulletin* ever published the 50-cent rate. Thus, most postal clerks, long accustomed to the 70-cent rate,

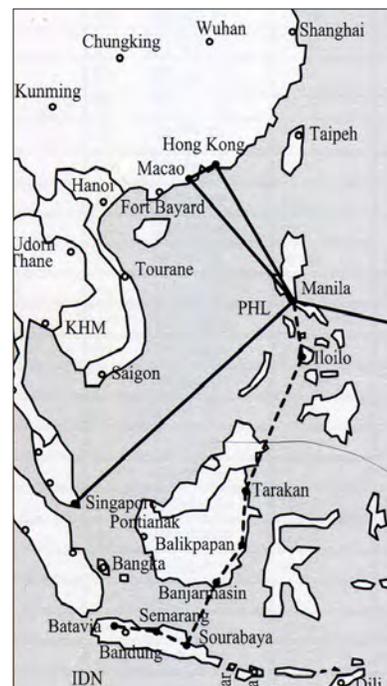


Figure 2. FAM 14 route from the U.S. after addition of the Singapore spur in May 1941.



Figure 3: Registered airmail to Shanghai paying the published 70-cent rate. No Hong Kong censorship. Thus, carried by ship from Manila to Shanghai. Transit time: 29 days.

may have been unaware of its existence and therefore could not advise postal patrons of this cheaper, but equally efficient routing.

In fact, the Manila-to-Shanghai route took approximately 24 hours longer than the Hong Kong-to-Shanghai route. But the absence of censorship at Manila may have evened out the transit time differences. The transit times from San Francisco via either route took approximately 27-30 days.

Second, opportunities to take advantage of this routing were limited. Between August 15 and November 29, 1941, Clipper ships made 10 flights from Singapore to Manila. However, the *Santa Inez* failed to complete the last three of these scheduled voyages. On November 16, 1941 the vessel ran aground on an island off the north China coast and was wrecked. Thus, only seven round trips between Shanghai and Manila could have occurred.

Finally, a note about the two correspondents on this cover. Many collectors eschew philatelically inspired mail, and avoid correspondence to or from a known stamp dealer. This mail appears to be legitimate commercial correspondence between two people with a common philatelic

interest. The cover is addressed to a Shanghai post office box likely at the main post office in the Shanghai International Settlement. This new steamer service was well publicized by the Shanghai post office, so the addressee likely informed his correspondent who was then able to take advantage of the reduced rate. How many other types of postal patrons would have been in the know?

70-CENT RATE, SAME ROUTING

The second example, shown in Figure 3, suggests a reality more complex than the first. This cover illustrates registered mail from New York to Shanghai, postmarked August 28, 1941 and transiting San Francisco the next day. A Shanghai receiver documents the cover's arrival on September 25, after a transit time of 29 days.

Unlike the first example, the full 70 cents airmail postage is affixed here, in addition to a 15-cent registry fee paid. Note the absence of Hong Kong censor markings, which suggests this cover, like the first one, went from Manila to Shanghai directly by ship rather than from Hong Kong.

But do the bookend dates, August 29 and

September 25, 1941 allow coordination of an outbound FAM 14 flight from San Francisco to Manila with an incoming flight to Manila from Singapore and the arrival of the *Santa Inez* from Shanghai?

The only scheduled Clipper flights that would avoid this registered cover from transiting Hong Kong and inevitable censorship are:

	<u>Lv. S.F.</u>	<u>Arr. Manila</u>
<i>China Clipper</i>	Sept 05	Sept 14
<i>Philippine Clipper</i>	Sept 10	Sept 15
	<u>Lv. Sing.</u>	<u>Arr. Manila</u>
<i>Philippine Clipper</i>	Sept 18	Sept 18

Given the September 25 Shanghai arrival date, these flights line up nicely.

Specialists of FAM 14 mail should check their holdings to and from North China during the August to October 1941 period and look for covers that bears no evidence of Hong Kong

ensorship. Surely more examples exist, and they should be reported.

REFERENCES

- Aitink, Hans E. and Egbert Hovenkamp. *Bridging the Continents in Wartime: Important Airmail Routes 1939-1945.* (Netherlands, 2005.)
- Boyle, Thomas H., Jr. *Airmail Operations during World War II.* (American Airmail Society, 1998.)
- Sieh, Ping-wen and J. Lewis Blackburn. *Postage Rates of China, 1867-1980.* (Taiwan: The Directorate General of Posts, 1981.)
- Whittington, Richard A. "1941 Covers Sent by Sea to Manila to Connect with the Pan Am Trans-Pacific (Singapore to San Francisco) Air Mail Route." (Hong Kong Study Circle Journal, No. 378, July 2016.)

Special Air Mail Rates to Allied Armed Forces

by Dickson Preston



I always enjoy picking up a cover which shows a feature I do not understand. In this case my investigation led me into an area of World War II air mail rates I had not encountered before. The cover was addressed to the "C. M. F." in the United Kingdom and forwarded to Taranto, in southern Italy. The unusual feature is the 33-cent air mail rate.

The letter was mailed at the Jamaica Post Office in New York City and postmarked on February 19, 1946 (the date is visible under two of the 6-cent transport stamps). It was found to be short paid, probably at the Morgan Annex of the Main Post Office in New York, which handled foreign mail. Although the transatlantic rate to Europe was 30 cents per half ounce, this letter was rated at 33 cents per half ounce because it was addressed to the Central Mediterranean Force (CMF) of the British Army. Special air mail rates to Allied Army Forces were set in May 1943 (PB18591), but the 33-cent CMF rate first appeared in the February 22, 1944 Postal Bulletin (PB18695) and was reaffirmed in the July 27, 1945 Bulletin (PB18844).

The British Central Mediterranean Force was formed in North Africa in 1943 and participated in the invasions and subsequent occupations of Sicily, Italy, Greece, and the Balkans, as well as of Austria.

This double weight (one ounce) letter was originally franked with 30 cents paying the one half ounce rate to Europe, so the amount due was 36 cents ($36¢ = 33¢ \times 2 - 30¢$). Because the Jamaica Post Office is located within New York City, the letter was "Returned for Additional Postage" rather than forwarded as postage due or, more likely, surface mail since less than one air mail rate step was paid. When remailed with the additional postage on February 23, the second postmark was struck on the back of the envelope, probably in error, so the six 6-cent transport stamps received dummy oval cancels.

The 33-cent rate was equivalent to the 30-cent transatlantic air mail rate plus 3 cents surcharge for air dispatch from Europe to North African countries implemented in 1939. This likely provided the rationale for assigning this rate to the CMF. However, by the time this letter was mailed much of the CMF was in Southern Europe - in Italy, Greece, and other countries. The addressee was engaged in welfare work (CVWW = Council of Voluntary Welfare Work), "stationed at Taranto, Italy," as noted by the sender. Although the letter was flown to Europe, the CMF equivalent to the old North African rate still applied until 31 October 1946.

I would be happy to see other examples of special air mail rates to Allied Armed Forces associated with World War II.

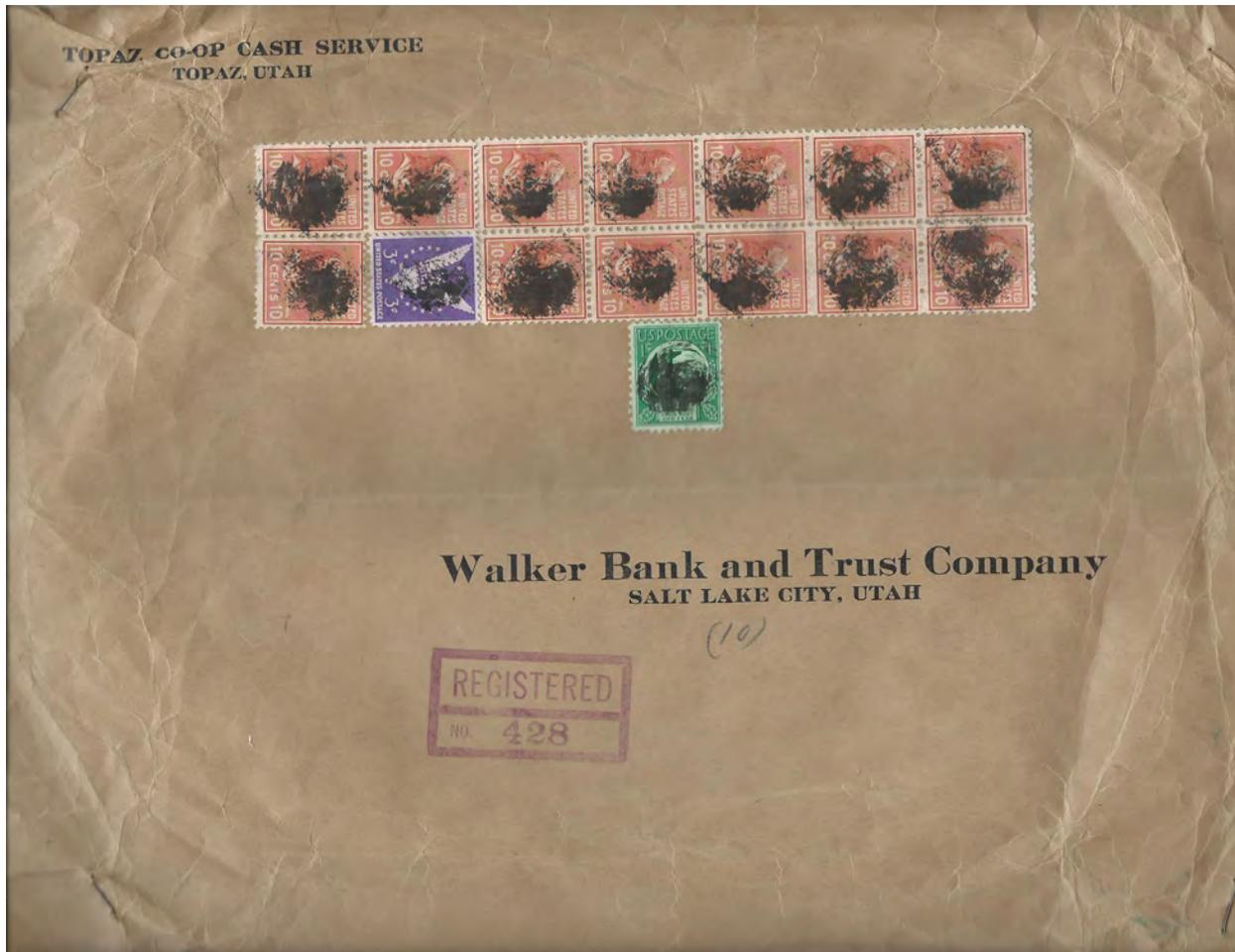
The following rates are fixed for air-mail articles addressed as indicated:	
Articles for—	Rates
Middle East Force (except V-mail), Paforce (except V-mail), India Command and Ceylon Command.	70 cents per half ounce.
East African Force	60 cents per half ounce.
West African Force	50 cents per half ounce.
British or French North African Force and Central Mediterranean Force.	33 cents per half ounce.

The above instructions supersede those published in the Postal Bulletin of May 7, 1943.

PB 18695 (February 22, 1944).

Unusual Registration Use from a World War II Japanese American Relocation Center -- A Recent Discovery

by Bob Akaki



The registered cover illustrated here is a recent discovery of mail originating from a War Relocation Authority Relocation Center that held Japanese Americans during World War II. What makes this cover particularly remarkable is its origin -- **TOPAZ CO-OP CASH SERVICE/ TOPAZ, UTAH.**

This 9" x 12" registered envelope has affixed \$1.34 postage to pay for first class letter service and registration fee. The stamps are cancelled with a non-distinct mute black killer as required on registered mail. The back of the envelope bears several strikes of the magenta double circle **DELTA UTAH/TOPAZ BR** canceler, dated

July 25, 1945 near the end of the war. The possible postage breakdowns are as follows:

- \$.09 (.03 x 3) first class postage + \$1.25 registry fee (\$800.01-\$900.00 indemnity)
- \$.39 (.03 x 13) first class postage + \$.95 registry fee (\$400.01-\$500.00 indemnity)
- \$.54 postage (.03 x 18) first class postage + \$.80 registry fee (\$300.01-\$400.00 indemnity).

Judging from the size of the envelope and likely



value of the contents, I'm guessing the total weight was either 13 or 18 ounces. Outgoing registered mail from the Relocation Centers is uncommon, especially larger and valuable items such as this. As a result, the double circle magenta marking from the centers is also seldom seen.

Topaz, which took its name from a nearby mountain, was officially known as the Central Utah Relocation Center. It became one of 10 relocation centers set up and administered by the War Relocation Authority (WRA) to confine Japanese Americans for the duration of the war. Like all WRA centers Topaz had its own on-site branch post office, run by civil servant employees and staffed mostly by inmates. The post office at the town of Delta, located about 16 miles away, served as the Topaz Branch parent post office. At its peak, the branch served 8,130 patrons, most of them from the San Francisco Bay area.

The first inmates started arriving in August 1942. The Topaz post office was officially opened September 1, 1942 and offered the same range of postal services as the parent post office. It received its distinctive cancelling devices around November 1, 1942. Mail processed before that time bears Delta, Utah postmarks. The post office closed down on November 30, 1945.

Since the centers had no available retail outlets, all centers had co-ops run for and by the inmates, offering the residents a number of useful sundries. Inmates wanting clothing, small appliances (like a radio - initially not allowed in the centers) and other items had to resort to mail order houses, such as Sears

Roebuck and Montgomery Ward, or take a bus into a nearby town. Complicating matters was the absence of banks at the centers.

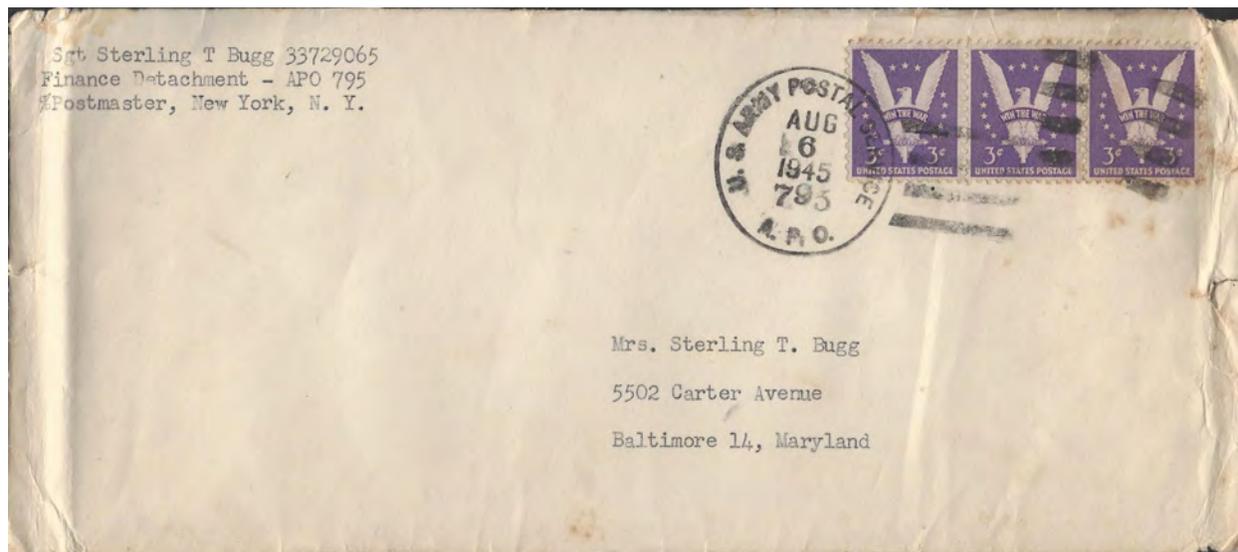
The Topaz Co-Op, established in October 1942, offered a Cash Service subsidiary to allow inmates to cash checks (including paychecks from jobs in the center or from jobs in Delta or the surrounding area) and purchase money orders. With the nearest bank 16 miles away in Delta and not easily accessible this service quickly became a huge convenience. Both the Topaz post office and Topaz Co-Op made brisk sales of money orders for mail order purchases. Purchasing money orders from the Co-Op was encouraged so members could share in the profits from their sale. According to Co-Op records, at its peak Cash Service moved over \$1,000 per day.

That said, this envelope and ones like it must have been sent as often as daily and at least, weekly. According to sources at the Topaz Museum, the envelopes may have been printed at the office of the local Delta newspaper. The Topaz Co-Op Cash Service handled these transactions for over 30 months so potentially there could have been well over 100 of these envelopes.

July 25, 1945 occurred on a Wednesday. Given this late date, with the center population at about half its peak, daily transaction volume had declined significantly by now. Cash Service mailings might still have gone out daily or several times a week. At any rate the example shown here appears to be the only one reported in collectors' hands. It is amazing what one finds some 70+ years after the fact.

Obscene World War II Military Mail, Some Privileged, Some Not

by Ken Lawrence



Most World War II first-class surface mail covers posted at U.S. military post offices were transported postage free under the concessionary privilege granted April 1, 1942. The illustrated 6 August 1945 cover posted at APO 795 (Khorramshahr, Iran) is an exception. It is franked with 9 cents postage for up to three ounces of mail.

Postmaster General's Order No. 17352, placed these restrictions on the free mail privilege: "Messages on post cards may be accepted under this provision but it shall not apply to packages or parcels or any matter other than messages in the form of ordinary letters or cards." In practice, certain enclosures, such as snapshots and money orders were also accepted within the meaning of "ordinary letters."

The contents of this cover was not an ordinary letter, so it did not qualify. In his spare time the sender, Sgt. Sterling T. Bugg, fancied himself a writer of fiction — pornographic fiction that included explicit narrative descriptions of seduction, submission, sadism, and pedophilia. This envelope enclosed a copy of parts of his manuscript, thus it had no intrinsic value that needed to be declared. It was therefore not a

letter, but also not qualified to be mailed as other than first class. But the salacious content added a twist. Being an Army accountant, the sender was a stickler for rules, but also an expert in complying with them in ways probably not intended by the lawyers and bureaucrats who crafted them.

The manuscript would not have been permissible as mailable matter in the United States, which banned obscenity (contemporaneous examples included Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn*), but the Army's Judge Advocate General had ruled that censorship of morals was not the examiner's job and that "no action will be taken in case of obscene matter mentioned or found in the mail, unless the case brings the U.S. or Allied armed forces into disrepute." Once legally accepted as mail, it was sealed against inspection when it entered the United States mails.

Three days earlier Sgt. Bugg had used the free mail privilege to send his wife a letter that enclosed two snapshots, one of a Persian belly dancer at an NCO club, the other of a fellow soldier engaging in sexual congress with a

local woman, his staff at full salute, tall and upright at the center, she with customary head scarf in place, dress hiked up to her waist, bare rump facing the camera, mounting him. I have seen and collected several salacious V-Mails,

but for World War II military correspondence the contents of Sgt. Bugg's covers are the most extreme examples I have encountered, all mailed according to regulations.

A Beautiful Ebay Hit and Miss

by Daniel S. Pagter



The illustrated eye candy wrapper to Finland was clearly a hit as it sold for \$2,177.00 plus \$3.95 shipping on April 7, 2018. Examination shows what it is -- and what it is not.

This September 1948 usage with unclear day of month cancel is a partial wrapper from a Special Delivery Air Letter sent from New York to Helsinki, Finland.

Here is what it is not; insured, registered or sent as International Air Parcel Post, a service started six months prior. Nor was it an under eight ounce small letter packet, since Finland was not a country which accepted such matter.

Finland did accept Parcel Post and Air Parcel Post to 44 pounds. It was one of the original 23 countries participating in International Air Parcel Post service. However, the wrapper lacks the required forms and markings to designate the package a parcel or, specifically, an air parcel item.¹

Special delivery (EXPRES) to Finland cost 20 cents regardless of weight, but with the restriction that the service was only provided in cities. This wrapper has both a 20-cent Special Delivery stamp and the required Form 2977. Air carriage required Form 2978, which is also affixed. The air letter rate was 15 cents per half

ounce to the 4 lb. 6 oz. (70 ounce) maximum.

The contents is noted “medicine”, which can only be shipped with pre-approval for one of two types; regular pharmacy formularies, or compounds, which may be considered as a poison. Such medicines were treated as merchandise when approved. Finland allowed merchandise, dutiable or not, to be sent in letter matter, which included air letters. Such matter in a letter then required Form 2976 (C 1) to be attached. And again, it is here.

Noting the Customs (Douane) 2976 (C 1) Form, this air letter was examined by Finnish customs and subsequently marked, FREE (TULLI) DUTY (VANPAA) and FREE (TULLI) TOLL (FRITT) in two bold straight-line hand stamps in violet, shown inverted in the illustration.

Postage as affixed to this wrapper totals \$3.50 which pays for 23 half ounces or 11.5 ounces total. But there remains a 5 cent over payment.

Now for the “miss.” Look to the upper right of the stamped portion of the wrapper and you will see an area that looks as if a stamp is missing. The cancellations, multiple at that, do not extend to the area where a stamp likely was. Examination of the edge shows the wrapper was not folded there at an edge for the cancellation device to miss the paper, twice.

I believe a 10-, 25-, 40-cent or \$1.00 stamp is missing, likely a Prexie, that paid an additional one, two, three or seven half ounces respectively. No single stamp of any other denomination would provide for exact airmail letter rate postage on this wrapper.

New Website Includes Prexie Covers to Sweden

The Swedish Postal History Society (SSPD) has developed an excellent set of reference web pages. Included is a complete listing of Prexie frankings known to Sweden as well as mail quantities between USA and Sweden by year.

As a bidder, I sent the seller a message stating I believed a stamp was missing. The auction closed, however, before it could appear in the description. Twenty-six minutes after the auction closed the seller wrote me the following message:

Thanks for the message. Can you show me how it is calculated because I have no clues about usa (sic) postal history. I just take picture and list the item.

I explained my thoughts and the rating breakdown in a reply sent about one and a half hours later. The seller, in Finland, advised me the next day that he and the buyer agreed to cancel the sale.

¹ For clarity, in addition to the 20-cent special delivery fee, International Air Parcel Post (IAPP) rates for Finland (four ounce increments) were \$3.43 for 24 ounces, \$3.94 for 28 ounces, \$4.45 for 32 ounces and \$4.96 for 36 ounces. None of these rates could be exactly reached with one additional stamp should this package have been sent as IAPP, which it was not.

REFERENCES

- *United States Official Postal Guide*, July 1948 Part II, International Postal Service, Table 1, page 3; Section 16, page 16; Section 18, page 17; Section 19, page 18; Finland in the alphabetical country listing, pages 159-162.
- Also reviewed for changes (none found) were the July and October 1948 Quarterly Supplements for Part I and II of the *United States Official Postal Guide*, which modify the July 1948 “annual” guide.

Collectors wishing to make a contribution to the site with additional cover scans are invited.

Swedish language: <http://sspd.se/>

English language: <http://sspd.se/in-english/>