The Prexie Era

Newsletter of the USSS 1938 Presidential-Era Committee

No. 84 Winter 2019

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Provisional Canceler from Post Office Destroyed by Fire

by Albert "Chip" Briggs

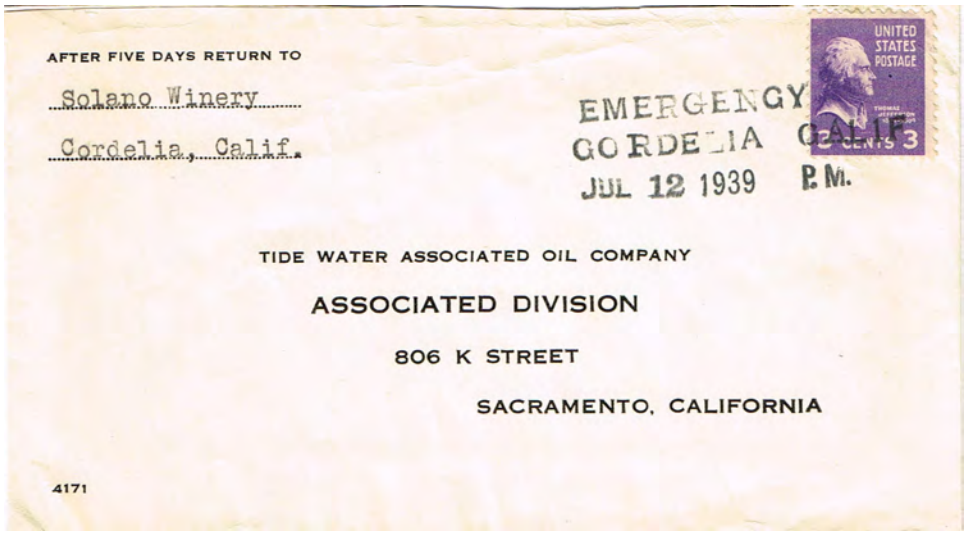


Figure 1: Cover and reverse-side advertising label from Solano Winery in Cordelia, California bearing a cancellation produced by a provisional device used after destruction of the town post office from fire.

Initially named Bridgeport in honor of the city in Connecticut, the town was renamed Cordelia in the early 1850's after the wife of clipper ship captain Robert Waterman. After Benicia, it is the second oldest town in Solano, California and is located just northeast of San Francisco. Grape growers and farmers were some of the earliest inhabitants. Today, Cordelia is practically a neighborhood of Fairfield.

On June 22, 1939, fire visited its wrath upon Cordelia. As reported in the *Santa Cruz Evening News* of that same day, the town's six principal buildings, including the post office, were destroyed in a blaze that began shortly

after 3:00 AM. Four rural fire departments were required to finally bring it under control.

The only business district structures to survive were a hardware store and a dance hall. No mention was made of any injuries. The June 23, 1939 issue of the *San Francisco Chronicle* estimated the damage at $50,000 and reported that citizens planned to rebuild immediately. The June 24, 1939 edition of the *Sacramento Bee* (Figure 2) reported that a temporary post office had been established in the Cordelia Fire House by Postmaster Aletha Erickson.

As part of her efforts to maintain mail service, Postmaster Erickson devised a temporary cancelling device to be used on mail from Cordelia until replaced by standard equipment. Figure 1 illustrates a first class cover mailed from the Solano Winery to an oil company in Sacramento bearing a cancellation from the provisional device. It shows a three line handstamp with EMERGENCY at top, CORDELIA CALIF in the second line, and date along with A.M. or P.M. in the bottom line. This example is dated almost 3 weeks after the fire.

How long this temporary cancellation was in use is currently not known. One would expect the canceling devices of the post office to be replaced well before rebuilding of the post office itself and the period of use of the temporary device to be fairly limited.

Thanks to Ken Lawrence and Len Piszkiewicz for assistance in locating newspaper resources.

Post Office Is Set Up After Cordelia Fire

CORDELIA (Solano Co.), June 24.—A temporary post office has been placed in the Cordelia Fire House by Postmaster Aletha Erickson until arrangements can be made to reestablish the permanent office destroyed in a fire which swept four other business buildings.

An issue of the Cordelia X-Ray, a weekly newspaper published in Cordelia in the early days, was found in a cornerstone of the John Dunker building, one of those burned. The cornerstone carried the dedication date of 1903.

A safe containing stamps and money belonging to the post office and securities of the Peter Siebe Company's general merchandise store went through the fire without damage to the contents.

Figure 2: Sacramento Bee, June 24, 1939.

Airmail Return Receipts

by Bob Hohertz

Until recently few examples of airmail return receipts bearing Prexie postage have been reported. Tony Wawrukiewicz wrote in his U.S. Domestic Postal Rates book: "At present I'm aware of five examples for the 1954 Liberty series, but only one example for the 1938 Presidential series." Here I show two examples of the latter.

The return receipt in Figure 1 was mailed prior to the initiation of the airmail postcard rate on January 1, 1949 so required airmail letter rate postage. Not only that, but the original registered letter with return receipt requested was sent from Los Angeles to Hawaii, so the airmail return receipt postage required a full 20 cents.

The registered letter was mailed from Los Angeles. But we don't know when it was mailed and therefore can't tell if it traveled by air or sea. It was delivered on December 18, 1941, and the airmail return receipt entered the mail stream via the provisional Information Control Board (I.C.B.) censorship unit next day. Examiners would have seen at a glance what it was and passed it quickly. If censorship ran it through quickly, it might have gone on

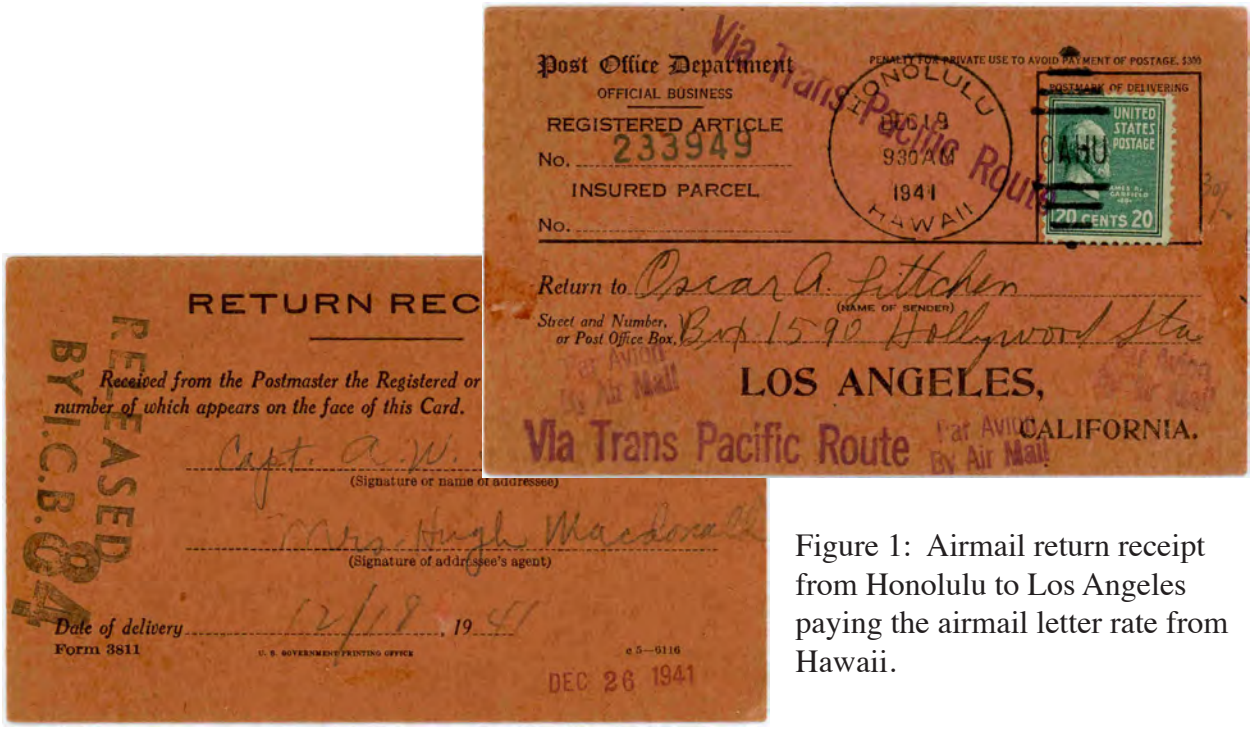


Figure 1: Airmail return receipt from Honolulu to Los Angeles paying the airmail letter rate from Hawaii.

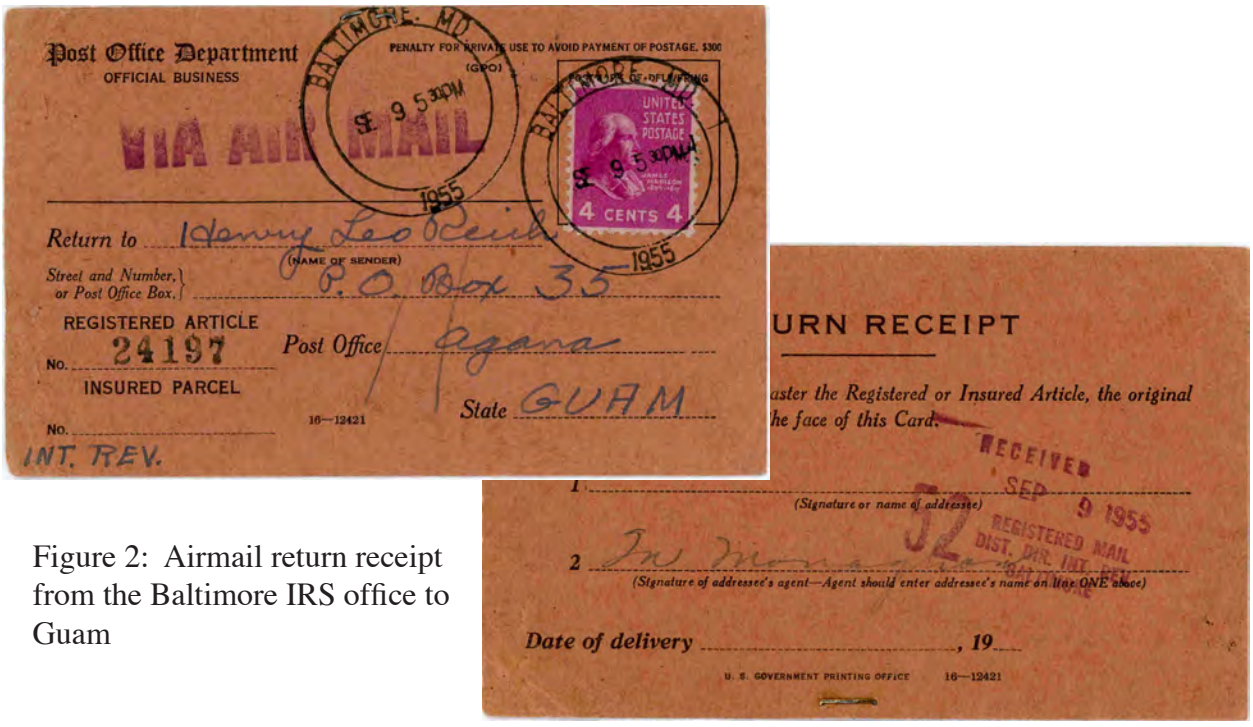


Figure 2: Airmail return receipt from the Baltimore IRS office to Guam

one of the first regular eastbound flights from Hawaii after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The stamped date of DEC 26 1941 on the reverse side likely means it was back in Los Angeles by then.

The more benign return receipt illustrated in Figure 2 acknowledges a registered letter sent to the I.R.S. from Guam in September 1955. It bears the 4-cent airmail postcard rate.

These two items add to the number of Prexie airmailed return receipts. Surely others exist worthy of sharing with *Prexie Era* readers.

Civilian Public Service Camp Mail: a Follow-Up

by Stephen L. Suffet

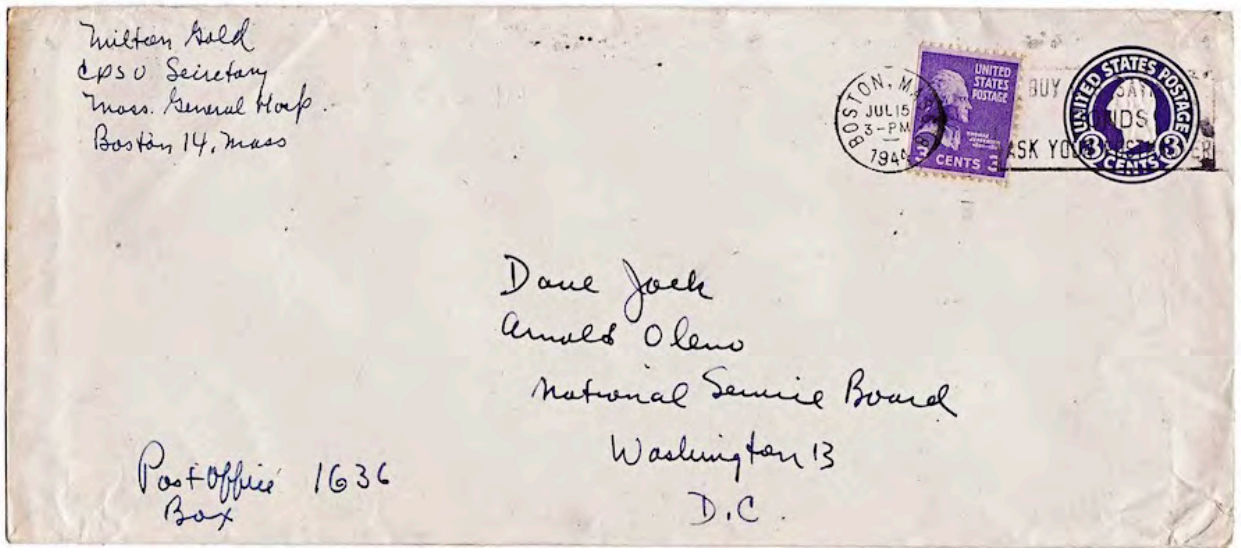


Figure 1: From the Secretary of the Civilian Public Service Unit ("CPSU") at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. July 15, 1944. Although not indicated in the return address, this hospital was one of thirty-seven sites of CPS Unit No. 115 scattered throughout the country. Men who volunteered for this detached unit, administered by the Brethren Service Committee, participated in various medical and nutritional research studies. Addressed to the National Service Board [for Religious Objectors] in Washington, D.C. 6 cents postage = double 3 cents per ounce letter rate.

In Issue No. 83 of *The Prexie Era* I showed a cover mailed from Civilian Public Service Camp No. 8 for conscientious objectors, located near Marietta, Ohio. I wrote that during the period from 1941 to 1947, in lieu of military service, "local Selective Service boards granted nearly 12,000 men the opportunity to do 'work of national importance under civilian direction.' Of these, approximately 2,000 worked as attendants or aides in mental hospitals, while the remaining 10,000 were assigned to one of the 152 Civilian Public Service camps scattered throughout the USA and Puerto Rico."

That statement is not entirely accurate. In reality, all of the nearly 12,000 men who served in the Civilian Public Service program were initially assigned to work camps, where they were not paid but had to provide for their own maintenance. Of that number, approximately 2,000 were later given the opportunity to voluntarily leave the camps and work in public institutions that were severely understaffed. Most of the 2,000 went to work in state mental hospitals, but some volunteered to work in state training schools for the mentally retarded, state reformatories for youthful offenders, veterans hospitals, or other institutions. A small number served as human subjects for medical or nutritional research studies conducted in university or hospital settings.

While no longer confined to camps, those 2,000 men were housed in so-called CPS detached units within the institutions where they worked. Each detached unit was administered by a religious organization, almost always affiliated with one of the historic peace churches such as

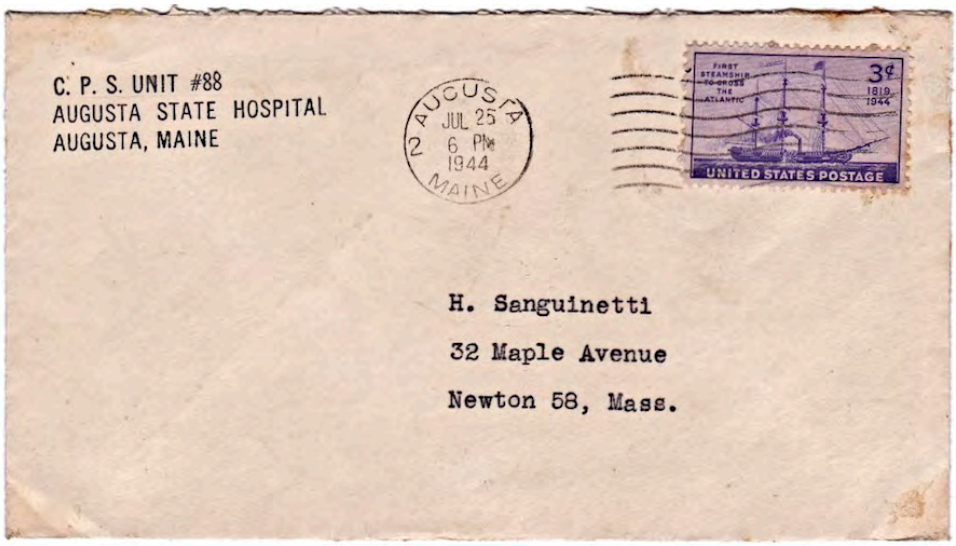


Figure 2: From CPS Unit No. 88 at Augusta State Hospital in Maine. July 25, 1944. The Brethren Service Committee administered the detached unit in this state mental hospital.

Figure 3: From CPS Unit No. 151 at the U.S. Veterans Hospital in Roseburg, Oregon. May 16, 1946. This detached unit, administered by the Mennonite Central Committee, opened in January 1946, well after the war ended. Nevertheless, both the military draft and the CPS program remained in effect through March 1947.

the Mennonites, the Brethren, or the Religious Society of Friends. To leave the unit when off-duty, a conscientious objector had to obtain a pass from the unit administrator, just as a CPS camp assignee had to so when he wanted to leave camp. The "152 Civilian Public Service camps" stated above represent the total number of both camps and detached units.

My own recent research shows that oft-cited total of 152 is incorrect. The Selective Service System did in fact assign the CPS camps and units numbers 1 through 151, and it also assigned one of the very first camps the letter A,

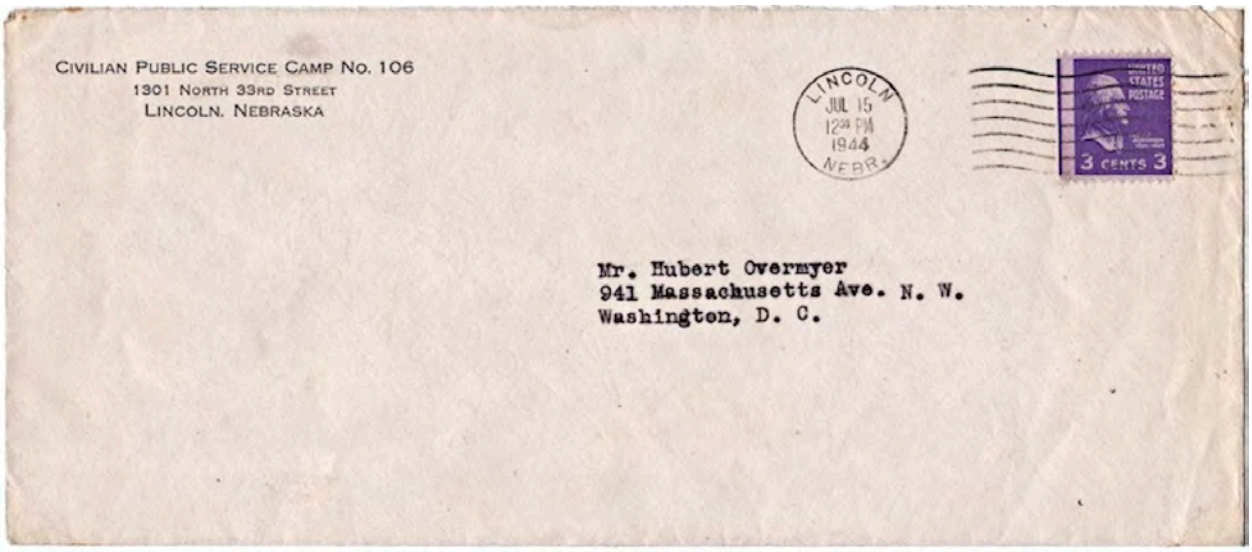


Figure 4: From CPS Unit No. 106 at the University of Nebraska Agriculture Experiment Station in Lincoln. July 15, 1944. Although the return address says "Civilian Public Service Camp No. 106," this was actually a detached unit administered by the Mennonite Central Committee. It was not a camp.

so the total appears to add up to 152. However, six of those camps or units (Nos. 38, 65, 96, 99, 101, and 145) never became operational, so that brings the total down to 146. Even that number is not accurate, since a few of the camps and many of the detached units had multiple sites. CPS Unit No. 115, for example, had thirty-seven sites scattered throughout the country. It was the unit that provided CPS volunteers for medical and nutritional research studies. Should it be counted as one unit or as thirty-seven? You can see the problem.

It will take further study to find the true number of CPS camps and units, but my best estimate is that it will prove to be somewhere around 220. Until then, for the record we can say that 146 CPS camps and units became operational, with the understanding that some camps and many detached units had multiple sites.

One major benefit of working in a detached unit rather than a camp was that the employing institution generally paid for the conscientious objector's maintenance expenses. Any additional wages, however, ultimately went to the United States Treasury. In a few units, however, the men were each allowed a small stipend ranging from $2.50 to $15 per month.

A cover from a CPS detached unit can usually be identified as such because it has a CPS unit number rather than a camp number in the return address. Sometimes, however, it simply has a CPS number with neither the word "Camp" nor "Unit." A handful of detached units, nevertheless, used the word "Camp" in their return addresses. Fortunately, the return address from a detached unit nearly always included the name of the institution. Figures 1 through 3 are all examples. Figure 4, however, is an exception. Although the return address says "Civilian Public Service Camp No. 106," and although no institution is indicated, the cover was actually from the CPS detached unit based at the University of Nebraska Agriculture Experiment Station in Lincoln, NE.

For philatelists interested in Civilian Public Service mail, information about the CPS camps and units can be found on-line at http://civilianpublicservice.org/camps/ and at several other websites.

Special Delivery Stamps during the Early Prexie Era

by Louis Fiset

Figure 1: Letter for a British POW held in Malaya, posted in California on 24 August 1943, and sent via air mail special delivery in order to reach the *Gripsholm* prior to its departure from New York Harbor on 3 September.

In considering stamps of the Prexie Era, often overlooked are two workhorse adhesives that came into being prior to the beginning of the Era, but received heavy use throughout the first six years of the Prexie series, including most of World War II. The 10-cent rotary special delivery stamp appeared 17 November 1927 and remained in use until the 13-cent value replaced it on 30 October 1944 when the special delivery fee for first class matter went up the next day.

Similarly, the bicolored air post special delivery stamp, issued 10 February 1936, saw continued use until 6 March 1944 when the one ounce airmail rate for first class mail went from six to eight cents. Unlike the special delivery stamp, this definitive was not replaced.

This article illustrates two unusual World War II uses of these stamps. Both involve prisoner of war mail and the diplomatic exchange ship, M.S. *Gripsholm*.

The Swedish cruise ship, *Gripsholm*, was in service to the U.S. State Department as a repatriation ship from 1942 to 1946, returning to the motherland interned civilians and wounded POWs in exchange for equal numbers held in enemy hands.

The ship completed two exchanges with Japan, rendezvousing with Japanese ships at neutral Portuguese ports. Large volumes of bagged mail for POWs and repatriating civilians were transported on the second voyage, which left New York harbor on 3 September 1943 and returned there on 3 December.

The letter in Figure 1 was carried to the exchange site at Mormugao, Goa on the outbound trip, and the postcard in Figure 2 on the return voyage.

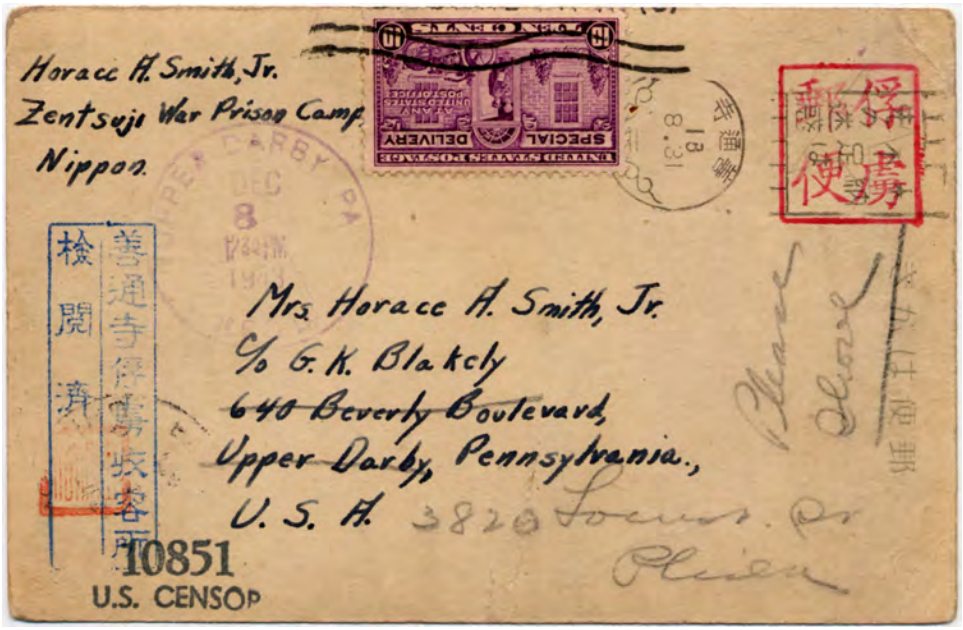


Figure 2: Postcard from a U.S. POW held in Japan to his wife in the U.S. Postmarked 31 August 1943. Transferred from a Japanese exhange ship to *Gripsholm* at Mormugao, Goa, at the start of the return voyage to New York. Remailed to the addressee at Philadelphia by special delivery.

This second voyage was well publicized in the print media, although the sailing date wasn't determined until the last minute. Therefore, writers wishing to communicate with loved ones were encouraged to send letters to New York as soon as possible. The cover in Figure 1 was sent from LaJolla, California. Taking no chances of missing the sailing, the writer sent the letter via airmail, paying an additional fee for special delivery service to the ship berthed at New York. Censor markings indicating censorship at the New York (POW Unit #143) censor station, and again, by Japanese censors in Asia, confirm the letter reached the ship on time.

Only two covers involving *Gripsholm* mail are known to the writer bearing the air mail special delivery stamp. The other resided for years in Hideo Yokota's stellar Air Mail Special Delivery exhibit.

The postcard in Figure 2 was postmarked 31 August 1943 (Showa 18), in time to reach the Japanese exchange ship at Yokohama, which sailed on 14 September and rendezvoused with *Gripsholm* at Mormugao. There, repatriates and mail were exchanged. The postcard was off loaded at New York on 3 December, censored, and delivered to Upper Darby, Pennsylvania on 8 December.

By now the addressee, the POW's wife, had relocated to Philadelphia. The card was then remailed with special delivery service demanded and received at Philadelphia the same day. A manuscript marking in pencil reads, "Please share."

During World War II mail to and from POWs and their loved ones occurred infrequently, if at all. These two pieces of POW mail illustrate the sense of urgency to communicate when opportunities arose.

Reference

Louis Fiset. *Detained, Interned, Incarcerated: U.S. Enemy Noncombatant Mail in World War II*. (Chicago: Collectors Club of Chicago, 2010), Chapter 6 - "M.S. Gripsholm and the Diplomatic Exchanges with Japan."

Solo Prexie to Belgium during the Phoney War

by Art Farnsworth

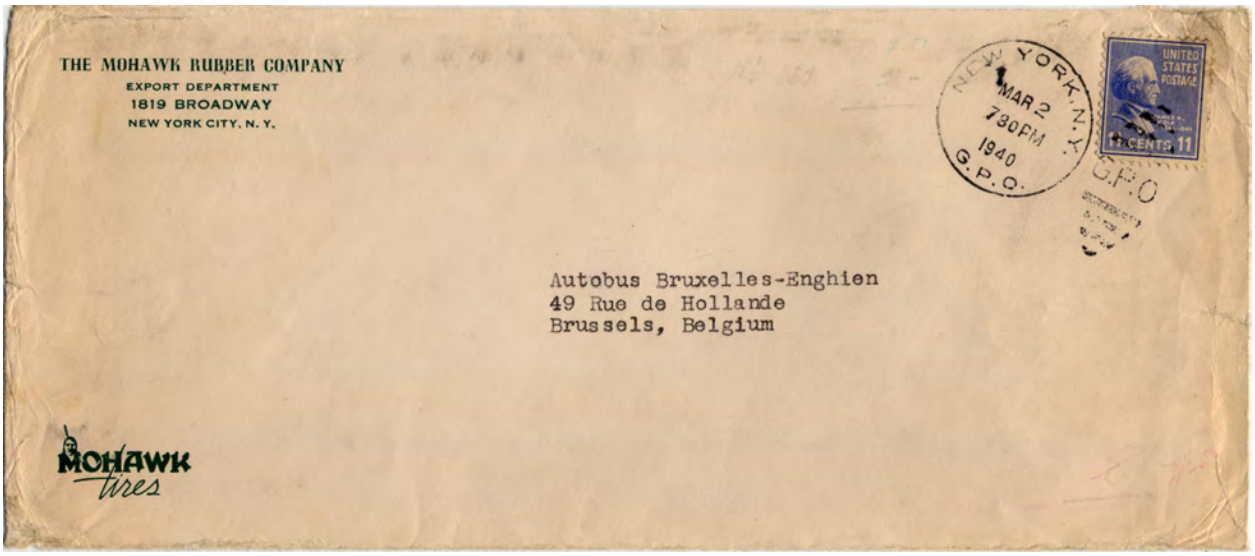


Figure: Business correspondence weighing three ounces and paid with a solo 11-cent Prexie.

The cover illustrated here contained business correspondence to Brussels and bears a solo 11-cent Prexie paying the three ounce international letter rate of 11 cents (5¢ + 3¢ + 3¢).

The item was postmarked March 2, 1940. At this time World War II was seven months old, but German forces had not yet undertaken additional land invasions since it conquered Poland at the outbreak of the war. The period between September 1939 and May 1940 is known as "The Phoney War."

The next day, March 3, Hitler finalized the date for the invasion of Norway and Denmark. On that same day Soviet Union troops began attacks on Finland's second city, and eight days later concluded an armistice between the two countries.

Despite the war going on, this cover bears no evidence of censorship. At this time the regular route of ordinary mail to Belgium went through Great Britain or France. Both countries were censoring mail at that time, although not at a 100 percent rate.

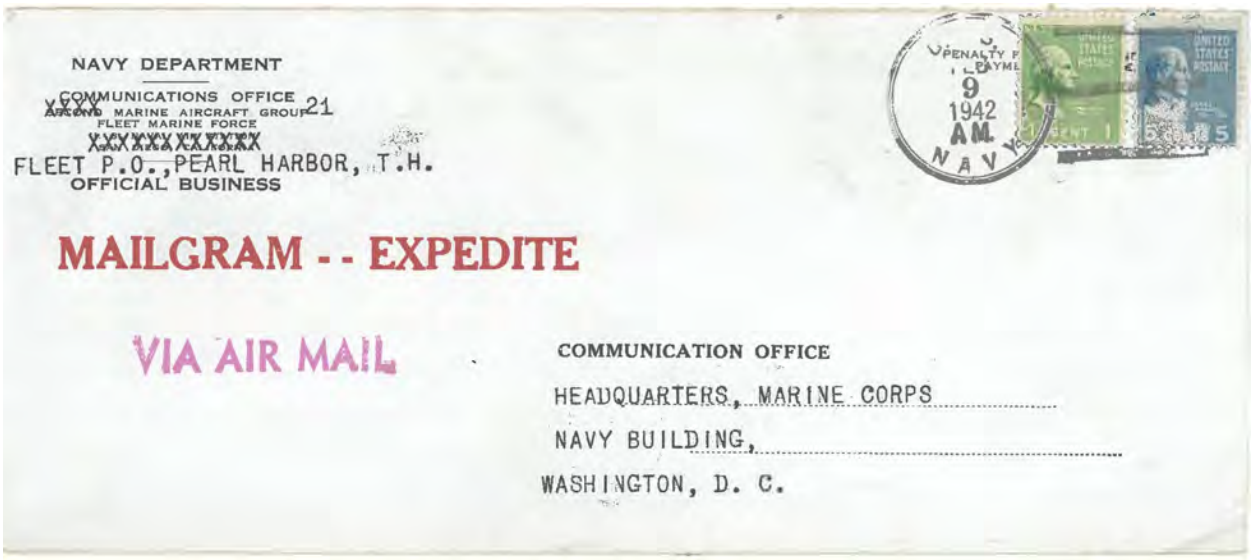
More, in mid-January 1940 British censorship established a Bermuda censor station to examine air and surface transatlantic mail. However, censorship activity was sporadic until mid-1941 and during that time examiners focused primarily on air mail. Thus, it is not surprising this early war cover escaped examination.

German armies invaded the low countries on May 10, 1940 bringing an end to the so-called Phoney War. For a brief time mail from the U.S. to Belgium was suspended, but then resumed until Germany declared war on the U.S. on December 11, 1941.

The Belgian government returned to power on September 8, 1944 after the liberation of Brussels by Allied troops four days earlier. Resumption of mail (postal card) service to Belgium began on November 23, 1944.

Marine Aircraft Squadron Losses at Pearl Harbor

by Jeffrey Shapiro



During the December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor the Marine Aircraft Group 21 suffered seventeen deaths and the loss of all 21 of their aircraft. Two months after this devastation, the letter shown here was sent from the Communications Office of Group 21 at Pearl Harbor to Marine Corps headquarters, Washington, D.C. By then the 6-cent airmail concession rate for the military had been in effect for six weeks.

After Group 21's devastating losses, the rebuilt Squadron went on to fight at the Battles of Wake Island, Midway and Guadalcanal. By June 1943 the Squadron was fighting Japanese forces in the Solomon Islands, before moving on to Efate, a military base in Vanuatu.

At the end of the War, the Squadron was relocated to the Marine Corps Air Station in Miramar, California. There it was deactivated in April 1947.

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