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The Prexie Era

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Scarce Upated Return Receipt (RR) Cards

by Daniel S. Pagter

Some Prexies usages are sought after for their extreme scarcity; some for their revered “solo” stamp use; and others for their destination or origination locations. Combinations of two of these reasons make for postal history that a serious student of the Prexie Series seeks if they don’t have an example. One that incorporates all three, scarcity, solo and good location are must have items, especially for the exhibitors.

When you don’t have one, you want one. When you have one you don’t need more. Of course you and your postal history buddies gather around to ooh and ahh over your one example. We do not often have the luxury to have more than one example, we have our “tree” and are happy. Others have their trees, similar but different from ours. We focus on what our “tree,” our Prexie goodie, has that makes it special and interesting to us. Others do the same for their example enjoying what their tree has.

However in this article, I will look closely at some difference between the six “trees” I discuss. But I also step back to take a look at the “forest” so to speak those six “trees” provide. From that vantage point the “forest” takes on a greater interest than the individual “trees” can provide and leads to new questions.

Interesting domestic locations can generally be broken down into locations ringed by water -- islands or ships, and territories neither ringed by water nor directly connected to the lower 48 states. In general, the lower 48 are the ho-hum locations. Finer divisions and specialized locations exist within all three groupings, but for purposes of this article, such detail is too fine. I am speaking broadly of forests and trees, not with a detail of branches, needles nor leaves regarding locations.

Solo is also a good descriptive term limited to a single stamp on the postal history item, and one that works well here even while avoiding the fine detail of branches, needles and leaves.

Having discussed location and solos, I am left with items of scarcity as the last of the three facets I am considering. Return Receipts (RR) uprated to be returned by airmail are scarce items by any measure used for determining scarcity. I illustrate four in this article and reference two other examples not illustrated because they are not Prexie usages. Rather, they are Liberty Series usages illustrated in Chapter 38 -- Return Receipt (RR) of Beecher and Wawrukiewicz’ *U.S. Domestic Postal Rates* (Figures 38-6 and 38-8 in the revised 2nd edition; Figures 38-7 and 38-9 in the 3rd edition.)

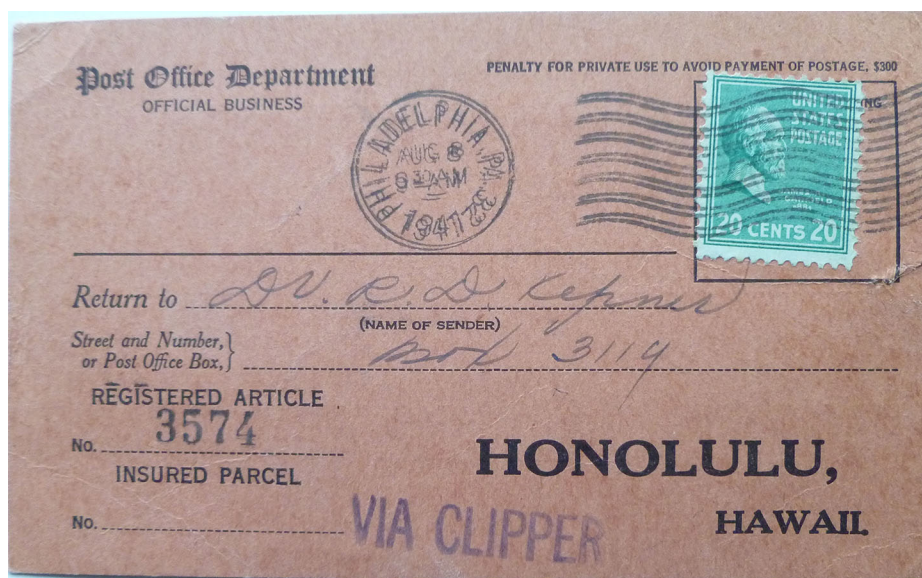


Figure 1. RR card updated to the 20-cent airmail rate from Honolulu to the mainland, acknowledging a registered letter to Hawaii.

Registered mail brought with it the first RR on July 1, 1863. Then use expanded to include Insured mail January 1, 1913. A RR was free of cost when requested until April 15, 1925 when a fee started. Fees were then increased and expanded to include various types of restricted delivery. This is where the RR, USPOD Postal Form #3811, stood at the start of the Prexie era. Prior to the end of the era, Certified Mail arose June 7, 1955 and was included in RR use.

Surface mail return of the RR was provided when requesting and later purchasing the return receipt, as indicated by the “Official Business” and “Penalty For Private Use...” text. That worked well for 75 years until 1938 when RRs returned by airmail were allowed. But to have the RR returned faster by airmail required payment for the full airmail postage by affixing postage to the RR postal card. No postage amount was credited nor discounted for the “free” surface return, which was provided as part of the purchase of a RR.

The RRs have always been a “card” or postal card. At first, return by airmail required the prevailing airmail letter rate postage through December 31, 1948. Except for the August 15, 1929 post card rate for carriage on the Graf Zeppelin, there was no special rate for airmail

postal cards until January 1, 1949, when both postal cards and postcards were provided a special reduced airmail rate of 4 cents. The cost of postage for this service during both the Prexie era and Liberty period was equal to a face value of a single stamp, solo usages could pay the appropriate airmail fee. All shown or mentioned examples sport a “solo” stamp paying the cost except for one Liberty item for which the postage was six cents paid by a pair of three cent Liberties crowded on the card rather than a 6-cent solo. The other Liberty example had a 5-cent solo usage. Each item illustrated or discussed is a wonderful “tree” for a collector, together making a forest. Now for the forest observations.

Each example did not arise in the lower 48. Half returned to Islands, Hawaii, Puerto Rico as well as Guam and half to Alaska (including the two referenced Liberty Era cards), pre- and post statehood. Here we see the surprise outcome of looking at the entire group, the forest, to see that the cards are overwhelmingly and completely from the better originations/destinations rather than the “common” lower 48. Likewise the solo usage is the common one with the pair of threes paying six cents to Alaska the uncommon one.

Figure 1, courtesy of Jeff Shapiro, shows a Registered RR to Hawaii at the then 20-cent Clipper airmail letter rate in effect August 1941.

Figures 2a and b show a December 1953 usage to Puerto Rico at the airmail postal card rate of 4 cents with both Insured and Registered spaces having the same number. This suggests an Insured RR. The reverse provides a generic example of the second side of Form 3811.

The Alaska example, shown in Figure 3, again from the Shapiro collection, is a Registered RR used in January 1954, at the 4-cent airmail card rate to Alaska.

Lastly, Figure 4 shows a Registered RR used

in August 1956 that was returned to Guam at the 4 cent airmail card rate. This is a late Prexie usage, as the 4-cent Liberty (Lincoln) stamp was released November 19, 1954. Notice it is the latest version of the RR, Postal Form 3811, July 1955, with space for a Certified number for use with Certified Mail, a service which began June 7, 1955. This example is from the Robert Schlesinger Collection recently sold in the Scuyler Rumsey Auction (Sale 92). The two referenced Liberty items, both Registered RR, one used April 1959 and the second February 1963, were returned by airmail to the same P.O. Box in Ketchikan, AK.

In summary, while each individual card is a nice solo (save one), returning to a “good”

Figure 2a. Up-rated RR card sent at the airmail postal card rate to Puerto Rico, acknowledging an insured, registered item to San Juan.

Figure 2b..A generic RR card showing the back of Form 3811.

Figure 3. An RR card from Provo, Utah, to Anchorage acknowledging a registered article. Up rated to pay the 4-cent postal card airmail rate to Alaska.

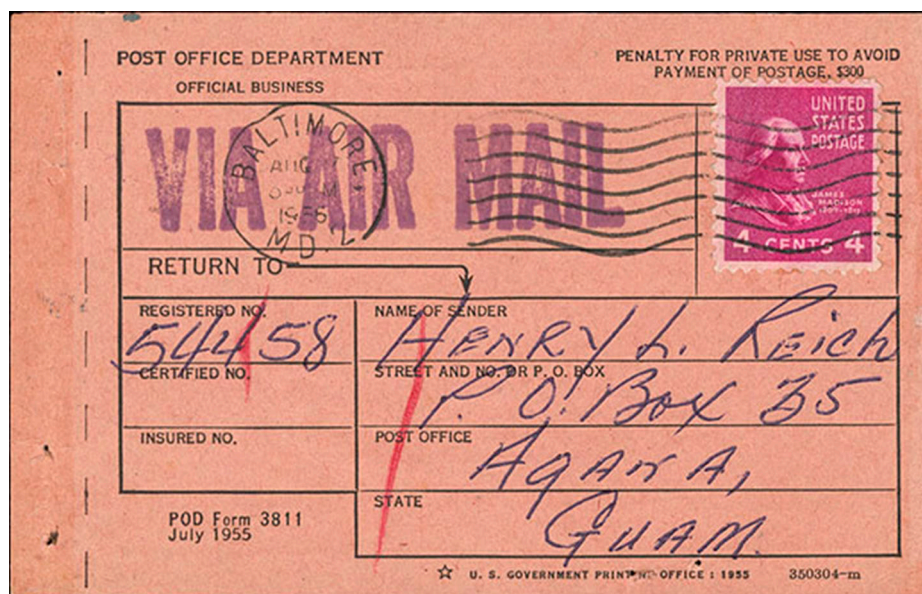


Figure 4. Registered RR card returned to Guam at the 4-cent airmail rate in effect in 1956.

destination and each is a scarce usage all of these uncommon items share the common attribute of not being from anywhere in the vast majority of the USA, that is, the lower 48 states. That is a surprise. This may be simply due to the fact surface return within the lower 48 was quick enough to satisfy most customers or a distance not serviced by airmail.

Can anyone report a RR with a different airmail postage rate during the Prexie era? There are more than a dozen other domestic airmail letter rates not shown; the 5 cent card airmail rate beginning August 1, 1958 paid by a Prexie or Prexies, a RR card returned to the lower 48 or to a different island?

Piece of String on A \$1 Prexie EFO Block

by Francis Ferguson



Figure. Presence of a string remnant producing an EFO on a \$1 Prexie block of four.

This article is about a very odd production anomaly that is rather unique in many ways – a wayward piece of string that was in the wrong place at the wrong time, causing an interesting looking piece. Random pieces of paper can block the printed image; even bugs can be found mashed into the paper, although I have been looking for a bug-piece for a long time with no success.

The three dollar values of the Prexie Series were printed by flat bed press throughout their whole production life. They were produced in two steps; first the purple, green or red frame, then the center black vignettes with a second pass through the press. This two-step process caused a lot of anomalies, as the registration of the central vignette often wandered greatly from the true center location. That's a whole other area of Prexie EFO collecting that has been well documented by other writers in

recent years.

The example shown here is a prime example of what can go wrong in the production process when stray foreign pieces enter the process. The purple frame lines can be seen totally intact on this block of four – no problem there. What appears to be a piece of string can be seen clearly affecting the upper left and right stamps, and less clearly the lower left one. Additionally, there appears to be a tiny affect on the lower right stamp to the left of the shoulder, showing as a thin white diagonal line progressing upward.

One must wonder how a piece of string could just appear on a press plate. But in the production process it appears anything can happen. We collectors of EFO material are all thankful for that!

Prexies on I.C.B.-Censored Mail of Hawaii, 1941-1942

by Lawrence Sherman

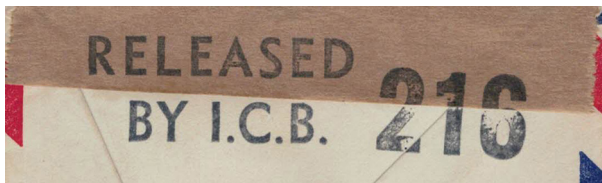


Figure 1. Typical Information Control Branch I.C.B. censor markings applied at Honolulu.

In the Summer 2020 issue, Albert “Chip” Briggs skillfully reviewed the Robert Schlesinger Sale of Prexie Post History in June’s Schuyler Rumsey Auction No. 92. So compelling was his coverage that I was inspired to review Prexie usages in my collection of I.C.B.-censored civilian mail originating in or passing through the Territory of Hawaii in the first months after the December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor.

Readers may recall that all civilian mail in the Territory of Hawaii was subject to censorship, formally beginning on December 13, 1941. The Information Control Branch (I.C.B.) of the army’s Military Intelligence Division (G-2) was charged with implementing censorship. Soon two censor handstamps appeared together

on Hawaiian mail: “Released by I.C.B.” and a number from 1 to 240 indicating the censor who handled each piece of mail. The handstamps were usually placed on the back of the cover, overlapping the tan sealing tape placed at the right or left edge of the envelope. Figure 1 shows an example of this arrangement.

The I.C.B. handstamps were in universal use until about the end of February 1942, when they were replaced by censor-numbered resealing tapes. Occasional use of I.C.B. handstamps, especially on postcards and postal cards, lingered into summer 1942. Prexie usages appeared during this short-lived period of I.C.B.-censored mail. Among these are the Prexie-only covers illustrated here. Figure 2 shows a reply postcard paid by a 1-cent Washington perfin, initialed “T.H.” The card, postmarked June 22, 1942, was mailed from the Territorial Tax Office in Honolulu, accounting for use of the Territory of Hawaii perfin.

To pay the prevalent 3-cent domestic surface rate from Hawaii before issuance of the Win the

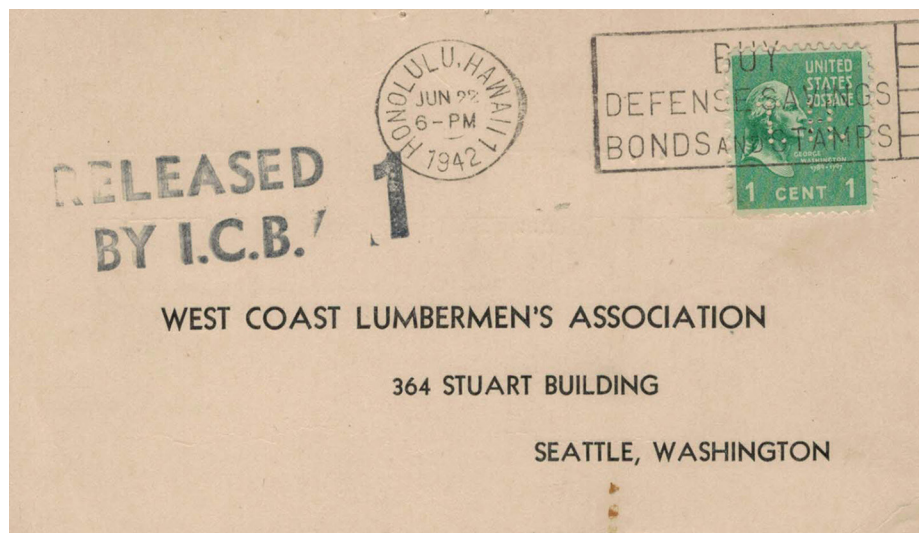


Figure 2. Reply postcard paid with “T.H.” perfin Prexie, showing the I.C.B. censor markings, applied separately.

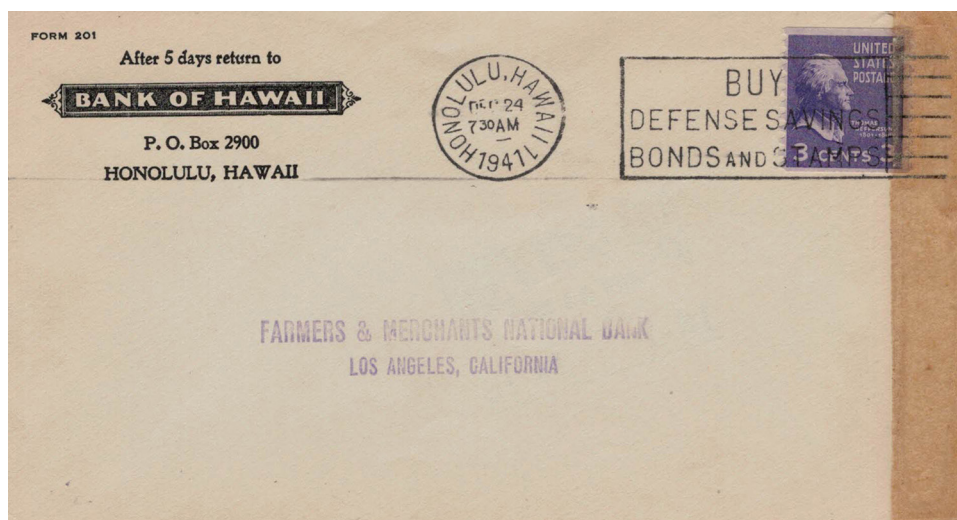


Figure 3. Surface mail to the mainland, showing brown resealing tape as part of I.C.B. censorship.

War stamp (July 4, 1942), the 3-cent National Defense Issue stamp was most frequently used. Occasionally a 3-cent Prexie can be found. The cover shown in Figure 3 features a 3-cent coil stamp perforated vertically paying the surface rate to the mainland.

The cover in Figure 4, mailed in April 1942, features an uncommon Hawaiian town cancel; Pepeekeo, on the island of Hawaii. Pepeekeo was then an unincorporated village in the South Hilo District, population approximately 700. Three copies of the 2¢ Adams paid the one ounce airmail rate from the west coast to the New England Mutual Life Ins. Co. in Boston. But before traveling onward to its final

destination, mail from Pepeekeo and all other localities in the territory, no matter how remote, traveled first to the censorship office in the Federal Building in Honolulu to be examined. The brown resealing tape can be seen on the left side of the cover.

An example of Prexie use on mail from Hawaii to a foreign destination is shown in Figure 5. Here, on a cover sent from Waialua, Oahu, to Basingstoke, England, a 5-cent Prexie paid the UPU letter rate. The letter was examined twice; at Honolulu and Liverpool (Examiner 9100). Although a US-UK agreement was in effect to avoid double censorship, occasionally a British censor did not trust or recognize the American

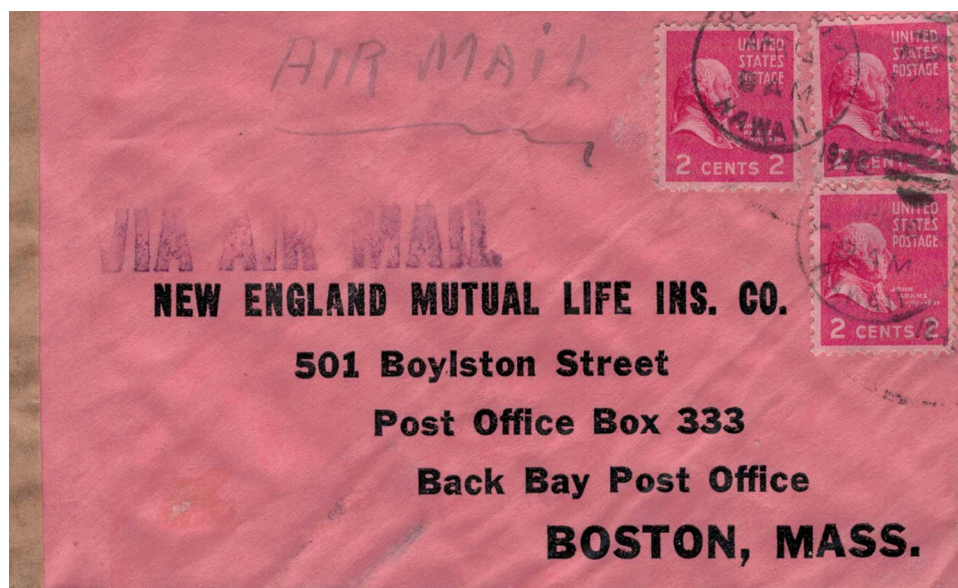


Figure 4. By surface to the west coast and onward by air to Boston. Brown I.C.B. resealing tape may be seen at left.



Figure 5. Double-censored, 5-cent UPU surface mail from Hawaii to England with I.C.B. and Liverpool (9100) censorship evident.



Figure 6. A 20-cent Prexie pays the half-ounce airmail rate to the mainland. “English” alerts the I.C.B. censor, who applied brown resealing tape after examination.

source, as in this case, apparently.

Airmail from Hawaii to the mainland was carried in the belly of Pan Am’s transpacific Clipper seaplanes at 20 cents per half ounce. Though usually paid by a 20-cent Transport Series stamp, Prexies also found their way onto mainland-bound airmail. In Figure 6, a 20-cent Garfield graces a cover featuring an uncommon Hawaiian town cancel: Honokaa, also on the

island of Hawaii. In February 1942 Honokaa, with a population 1132 recorded in the 1940 census, was an unincorporated village in the Hamakua district of the island. Note the lightly inscribed word, “English,” near the sealing tape at left, which indicated the language of the enclosed letter. Foreign language letters were to be noted on the front of the envelope to help direct the letter to a censor conversant with the language. English language letters did not



Figure 7. A February 6, 1942 airmail letter “Written in Japanese.” Brown resealing tape.

require any notation.

“Written in Japanese,” proclaims the cover shown in Figure 7, which also illustrates another way Prexies were used to pay the 20-cent airmail rate. A block of four of the 5-cent Monroe paid the rate on a cover from the Fukuda Seed Store in Honolulu to the Hollister Seed Co. in Hollister CA. This was the “mother store” for many farmers and gardeners in Hawaii. Since airmail stationery was not used, the “Via Clipper” handstamp called attention to the requested airmail service.

In Postal Bulletin 18354 (December 26, 1941), an airmail concession rate of 6 cents per half ounce was established for members of the US armed forces stationed outside the continental United States. As the Postmaster General wrote in his 1951 report, “A Wartime History of the Post Office Department”,

This beneficial reduction in air mail cost definitely helped morale overseas, awakened the general public to the possibilities of air mail service, and proved to be the principal source of postal revenues from servicemen throughout the war years.

Figure 8 shows that on December 27, just one day after the concession rate’s promulgation, an Army corporal missed an opportunity to use

the new rate but found a way to combine seven 3-cent Prexies to overpay the 20-cent civilian rate by one cent.

On February 20, 1942, a PFC at Hickham Field paid the armed services concession air mail rate with two 3-cent Prexies, carefully writing at the top of the cover, “Via Clipper/Soldier’s Mail.” This is shown in Figure 9. The I.C.B. censorship incurred signifies that the letter was likely not mailed from the airfield but carried to a US post office or dropped in an off-post mailbox, allowing it to be handled by civilian, not military, censors.

The association of Prexie usage with I.C.B. censorship reaches its apotheosis (at least in my collection) in the legal-size registered airmail cover shown in Figure 10. Registry handstamps tied to the flap indicate the mail left Honolulu on August 7 and arrived at Los Angeles on August 10, 1942. A profusion of Prexies overpaid the 35-cent airmail + registry fee by one cent. Evidence of I.C.B. censorship on the cover has nearly vanished; only the number “10” remains. This cover is one of two reported with only the censor number attesting to I.C.B. censorship.

My thanks to “Chip” Briggs for helping me discover this convergence of postal history interests within my collection.

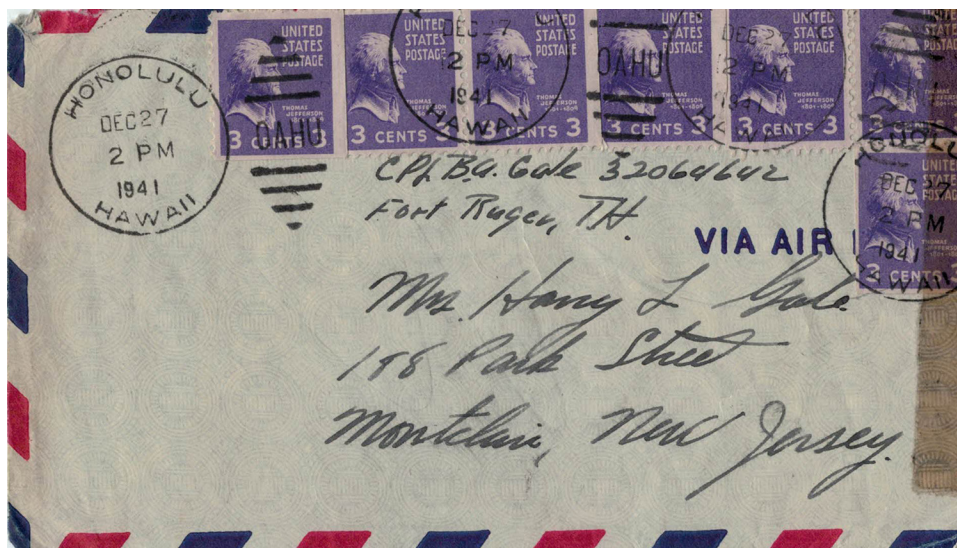


Figure 8. Army corporal unaware of the 6-cent airmail concession rate for military personnel stationed overseas, overpays the 20-cent civilian airmail rate.

Figure 9. Army PFC at Hickham Field pays the 6-cent airmail concession rate.

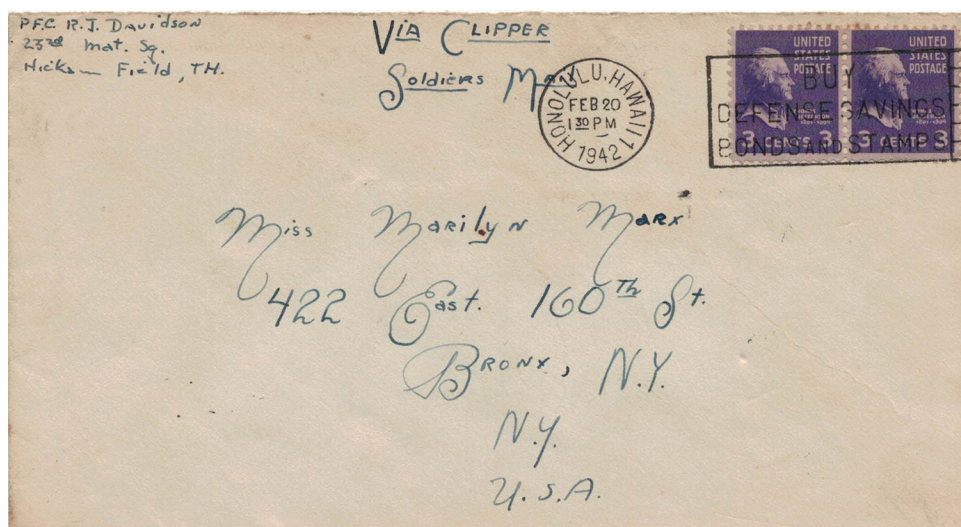


Figure 10. Registered letter receives I.C.B. censorship, but only the censor's ID number (10) is visible.