



The Prexie Era

The Newsletter of the USSS 1938 Presidential Era Study Group

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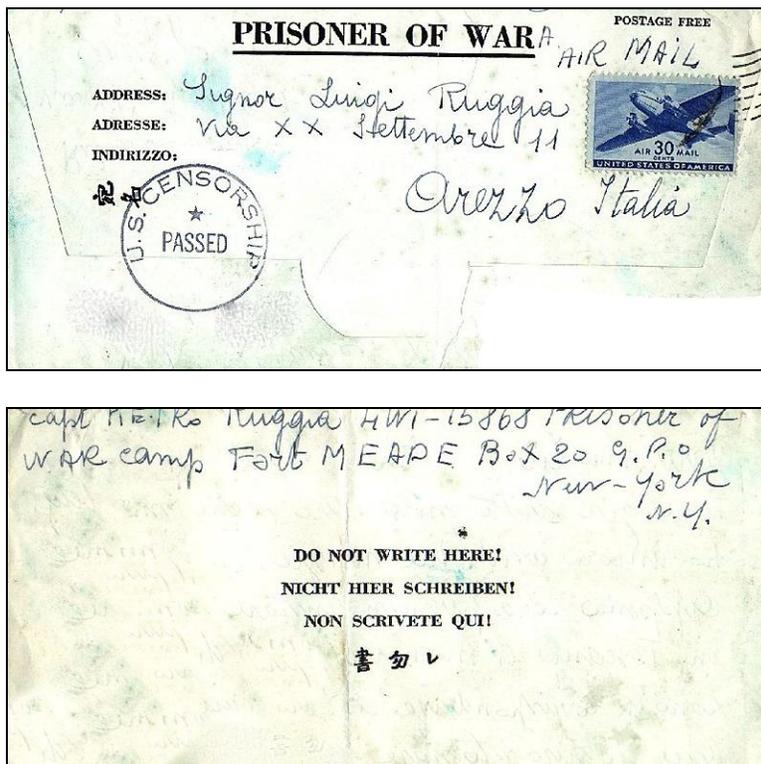
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POW Mail from the United States

by

Steve B. Davis

During World War II the United States housed over 400,000 Axis prisoners of war. This cover from my collection is an example of a “Prisoner of War” (POW) envelope as mandated by the “Geneva Convention” (Convention).



It is mail from an Italian POW Captain Ruggia addressed to Luigia Ruggia, presumably a relative, in Orezzo, Italy. Orezzo is a town located just northeast of Milan close to the Italian Alps. Unfortunately, I have not had the message translated yet, but it should make interesting reading. It is handwritten and difficult to decipher, and of course, written in Italian.

Mail from prisoners was and still is considered essential under the requirements of the Convention. The country holding the prisoners is required to allow mailing privileges and must use the envelope provided. Mail is to be transported “Free”. This can be seen from the marking on the cover just above the stamp. In this case, the envelope has had the valid airmail rate of 30c per ½ oz. to Europe affixed to provide for airmail service, otherwise the mail would have been transported free via surface mail taking much longer to be delivered. Similar to the use of an aerogram, the sender wrote the message inside and then folded the form to create the envelope for mailing. The reverse of the cover shows that the prisoner was being held at Fort Meade, Maryland and that return mail was to be directed to a post office box number in New York.

Fort Meade housed a number of German and Italian prisoners of war starting in September 1943, and until 1946 when all of them were repatriated back to their home countries. A large number of the prisoners did not want to return to their home countries, but were returned because the Convention required it.

Some prisoners died in captivity, primarily of natural causes; however, one German prisoner, Werner Henke, was shot while trying to escape from nearby Fort Hunt, Virginia, on June 15, 1944. Henke was one of the greatest German U-boat commanders. He is buried in the cemetery at Fort Meade. Captain Ruggia is not listed as being buried at Fort Meade, so it is likely he returned to Italy after the war.

Selected References

“Geneva Conventions: Section V. Relations of Prisoners of War With the Exterior”. Society of Professional Journalists webpage <www.globalissuesgroup.com/geneva/convention3.html>

Fort Meade Museum website: <www.ftmeade.army.mil/Museum>

Top U-boat Aces: <http://uboat.net/men/henke.htm>

MapQuest: www.mapquest.com

Author’s Note:

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A Prexie Crash Cover

by

Louis Fiset

Illustrated here is a Prexie airmail cover postmarked February 17, 1943 at Hingham, Massachusetts, addressed to England, and censored at New York (6657). It appears to have survived a near drowning as noted by the purple indicator located beneath the stamps, “DAMAGED BY SEA WATER.”



Notes taken from Peter Flynn’s new book on trans-Atlantic mail censored at Bermuda¹ provide the following story: On February 21, 1943, the Pan American World Airways flying boat *Yankee Clipper* departed New York for Lisbon, via Bermuda. This Boeing-314 clipper crash-landed in the Tagus River, at Lisbon, on February 22nd with 93 bags of mail salvaged in water soaked condition. Bermuda Customs made the following log entry: “Lost at Lisbon Feb 22, 43.”

A manuscript notation on the cover indicates the letter was received March 10, 1943. One might expect to find a Bermuda censor tape affixed. However, by this time Bermuda censors ignored U.S.-censored

¹ Peter A. Flynn, *Intercepted in Bermuda: The Censorship of Transatlantic Mail during the Second World War* (Collectors Club of Chicago, 2006).

mail destined for England, thereby lessening the work burden at the horse latitudes island. Of further note, this piece of mail, having made the February 21st flight, demonstrates only a brief delay occurred at the New York censor station.

In an appendix Flynn documents nearly 5,000 eastbound and westbound flights calling at Darrell’s Island, Bermuda from May 1939 through December 1945. The *Yankee Clipper*, one of twelve B-314/314A flying boats operating through Bermuda, represents the only loss during the war. As a result opportunities to collect crash covers on these trans-Atlantic routes remains small. Even so, with a 100 percent survival rate of the mail on board the *Yankee Clipper* with some diligent searching other examples of war era trans-Atlantic crash covers should be available.

A Redirected Civilian Conservation Corps Cover to Gibraltar

by

Richard W. Helbeck

President Roosevelt’s highly successful Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) put hundreds of thousands of unemployed young men to work reclaiming forests and improving environmental infrastructure beginning in 1933. The program reached its peak in 1936 when there were some 600,000 men enrolled and stationed at over 2,600 camps scattered across the country. Enrollments began to decline by 1939 as the economy kicked into higher gear due to production increases associated with pre-war military spending. Since the Presidential issue debuted in 1938, their use on CCC mail is less common than that of 4th Bureau denominations. Never-the-less, examples can be found, and the 5¢ Monroe depicted here paying the 1st class surface rate to Gibraltar represents an interesting case in point.



The sender was a young man serving in Company 4726 at the Chamberlain, South Dakota, CCC Camp.

He was writing to a Mr. Madden, who had authored an article that the sender had recently read, with a request to exchange stamps. The letter is still with the cover and is an interesting brief introduction to the writer and his collecting interests. He says regarding the Prexies: “Our new “Presidential Series” is becoming pretty well circulated and I should be able to have some good copies for you by the time I can expect a letter from you. The set is from ½ cent to 5 dollars. Of course the \$5.00 stamps, like your 1 Pound stamps, are pretty hard to obtain in used condition.”

Unfortunately, the address proved insufficient to carry the letter to its intended recipient, and after a long sea voyage, it received a Gibraltar receiving mark of September 15th before being redirected to the Army Post Office. Censorship is evidenced by a paper Gibraltar Postal Censor tape along the right edge. A Field Post Office handstamp—with only partially distinguishable number—dated September 30th appears on the reverse and several purple auxiliary marks argue that delivery was attempted before it was marked “Return to Sender” and dispatched from Gibraltar. A New York machine cancel dated November 2nd documents the cover’s return to the U.S.

Heavy Package, Heavy Postage

by

Leonard Piszkiwicz

This wrapper is from a package sent by airmail from the Chicago Tribune to San Francisco. It is postmarked July 12, 1945. The postage was paid by the application of 28 copies of the 50¢ Prexie issue stamp plus one 8¢ stamp. Total postage for the package was \$14.08. This paid for 176 airmail rates of 8¢/oz for exactly 83 lbs. All stamps show the “CT” perfin.



The AIR MAIL four-bar is the latest reported use of this type of four-bar postmark recorded thus far from Chicago².



² Editor’s Note: see Piszkiwicz, *Chicago Postal Markings and Postal History* (Cary, IL 2006) p.207.

Status of Study Group's Survey of \$2.00 & \$5.00 Prexie Covers

by

Steven M. Roth

The database I have created currently holds 40 records contributed by 11 subscribers. Of these records, 27 indicate covers with the \$2.00 Prexie, 10 covers with the \$5.00 Prexie, and 3 additional covers (not included in the numbers just given) reflect covers having at least one \$2.00 and at least one \$5.00 Prexie on the same cover.

We will distribute copies of the database once we are satisfied we have captured the known \$2.00 and \$5.00 covers. If you have not yet contributed covers in your holdings, please do so. For instructions on how to submit your information, see Prexie Era Newsletter, Whole No. 36, p.3.

The Various "Routes" of the Horseshoe Route

By

Steven M. Roth

In several short articles or notes that have appeared in the Prexie Era Newsletter in the past, I have referred to the Reverse Horseshoe Route sometimes used by people in the United States after Italy entered the Second World War on June 10, 1940, to send mail to Europe, Asia, Africa and the Middle East in lieu of using the more costly, but quicker, trans-Pacific Route.³

When I examine a cover going abroad from the United States during the relevant period, I have found it useful to determine if any routing markings on the cover suggest that the letter traveled via the Reverse Horseshoe Route. To aid me in making this determination, I have cobbled together a flow chart showing the changing ports of which the Horseshoe Route consisted from time-to-time to reflect the vicissitudes of the War.

I present the flow chart I use below. It is a work-in-progress, so I would appreciate knowing any corrections or additions that should be made to it. I will publish all changes in the Prexie Era Newsletter.

Phase I [June 19, 1940 → June 27, 1940]

England to Durban, South Africa by sea → Durban → Portuguese East Africa → Tanganyika, Kenya → Mombasa, Uganda → Khartoum, Sudan → Cairo, Egypt → Palestine → Syria → Baghdad, Iraq → Basra, Iraq → Persian Gulf to India → Burma → Siam (Thailand) → Penang → Singapore → Netherlands East Indies → Darwin, Australia → Sydney, Australia.

Phase II [June 28, 1940 → October 1940]

With the Fall of France on June 22, 1940, GB no longer could fly over French territory in Africa. As of June 28, this eliminated much of the Sahara Desert between Palestine and Syria. It also eliminated Syria.

England to Durban, South Africa by sea → Durban → Portuguese East Africa → Tanganyika, Kenya → Mombasa, Uganda → west now to Leopoldville → Lagos → east to Khartoum → Cairo, Egypt → Tiberius → Basra → Karachi, India → Burma → Siam (Thailand) → Penang → Singapore → Netherlands East Indies → Darwin, Australia → Sydney, Australia.

Phase III [October 1940 → February 1942]

³ See, Prexie Era Newsletter Whole Nos. 26, 27, 33, 35, and 36

England → Lagos by air → Belgian Congo → Cairo → Tiberius → Basra → Karachi, India → Burma → Siam (Thailand) → Penang → Singapore → Netherlands East Indies → Darwin, Australia → Sydney, Australia.

Route interrupted in May 1941 when rebellion erupted in Iraq.

Japan enters war on December 7, 1941.

February – March 1942: Flights stopped along route except for Durban → Calcutta.

Phase IV [March 3, 1942 → April, 1942]

January 1942: Link broken to Dutch East Indies in both directions. This meant that the route from India to DEI was no longer flown (i.e., DEI → Singapore → Penang → Siam → India; also, true in opposite direction)

West Link of Route: England to Durban, South Africa by sea → Durban → Portuguese East Africa → Tanganyika, Kenya → Mombasa, Uganda → west now to Leopoldville → Lagos → east to Khartoum → Cairo, Egypt → Tiberius → Basra → Karachi, India → Calcutta, India

East Link of Route: Not operating from Australia.

To replace this lost link, Britain created another route 卍 the “HUMP”: England → Lagos by air → Belgian Congo → Cairo → Tiberius → Basra → Karachi, India → over the “HUMP” → Unoccupied China

Phase V [June 18, 1943 - end of War]

Broken link re-established from Perth, Australia → Ceylon → Karachi, India.

3¢ Prexies Paying an Australian Air-Sea Postage Rate

by

Richard W. Helbock

Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor, the Philippines and Southeast Asia brought Pan-American Airways trans-Pacific Clipper service to an abrupt end, and thus cut the last airmail link connecting Australia to Europe and North America. Australia Post introduced a combine sea-air postage rate of one shilling six pence (1/6) that provided sea transport to the U.S. and air service beyond the port of entry to its destination for a letter up to one-half ounce.

The 208th Coast Artillery Regiment—a Connecticut National Guard outfit—arrived in Brisbane March 9, 1942, on board USAT *Matsonia*. These men, along with their sister regiment—the 197th Coast Artillery Regiment (New Hampshire National Guard)—were among the first major U.S. Army units to arrive in Australia. The 208th was quickly loaded on a train and transported some 1,200 miles north to Townsville. They arrived in Townsville March 18th and became the first major American Army unit to be stationed in the city. Townsville was the largest urban center in northern Queensland and eventually became home to an important air installation guarding the northern approaches to Australia.

The cover shown below is believed to have been mailed by a member of the 208th Coast Artillery, and possibly written on the long train trip from Brisbane to Townsville. There is no return address to identify the sender or his unit.

The postmark is dated March 17, 1942, and reads “A.P.O. 923.” This APO was established March 16th in Brisbane according to the records. The oval handstamp censor is known only on mail from the Brisbane area in March and April 1942.

Most interesting from a Prexie collector’s perspective, however, is the use of a booklet pane of six 3¢ Jeffersons with a pair of 3¢ Defense to makeup twenty-four cents postage. Now 24-cents represents four times the concession air rate of 6¢ per half ounce, and thus pays air postage for a piece weighing between 1½ and 2 ounces. Judging by the size and condition of the envelope, it seems rather unlikely that it ever contained that much weight.



In March 1942 there was literally no way of sending an airmail letter from Australia to the United States. It would be another six months before the Naval Air Transport Service (NATS) began federalized service of the Pan-Am Clippers to Brisbane via Honolulu and the islands of the South Pacific. The best that could be hoped for in the way of expeditious service was transport by ship from one of the Australia ports and air onward from Los Angeles or San Francisco. That’s where the Australian rate of 1/6 per half ounce applied, and it is this writer’s opinion that the 24 cents applied to this cover was an effort to pay that 1/6 rate in U. S. postage stamps.

I can almost hear the skeptics saying, Where is your evidence? What was the prevailing exchange rate?

According to the Economic History Services website [<http://eh.net/hmit/exchangerates/exchange.answer.php>]

“in the year 1942, it took 0.31 Australian pound to buy one U.S. dollar.” In other words, 24 US cents would be almost exactly equivalent to 18 Australian pence, or one shilling six pence. The 24 cents used by the sender was equivalent to the required Australian postage rate, but was that his intent?



Immediately above is a second cover from the same sender to the same addressee. In this case the sender has used a 1/6 Australian air mail stamp to frank his “By sea & air to the U.S.A.” cover to Chicago. The same stationery has been used and, once again, the cover shows no evidence of being stuffed with a multiple page letter. The postmark is dated March 23, 1942, and identifies the APO as number 922. APO 922 opened in Townsville March 18th according to official records.

One last piece of evidence connects both of these covers with the 208th Coast Artillery. On the reverse of this cover is a boxed oval censor handstamp impression with number 16007. The author has another cover in his collection bearing the same censor number. It is postmarked April 13, 1942, and has a return address of a captain assigned to 2nd Battalion Headquarters, 208th C. A. (AA) Regiment.

The author has no knowledge of either U.S. Army or Australian Post Office regulations that would have authorized American troops to use U. S. postage to pay Australian postal rates. As in the United Kingdom, U.S. forces were apparently authorized to use Australian postage to frank their mail sent through APOs to the United States for a few months in early 1942, but this is the only example seen by this writer of an effort to use US postage of equivalent value to pay an Australian postage rate.

The writer would be delighted to hear from other Prexie buffs concerning his theory. Contact helbock@la-posta.com.

Trans-Atlantic Route via Hawaii

by

Louis Fiset

The cover illustrated in this article comes from the extensive Luther Fowle correspondence recently appearing on Ebay. A careful study of this correspondence will ultimately shed new light on how mail from the United States reached Turkey in the weeks surrounding entry of the United States into World War II.

This cover appears to be a “Wrong way Corrigan.” Postmarked at New York, December 3, 1941, the directive indicates routing via trans-Atlantic clipper, likely FAM 18 (FAM 22 service had not yet begun). Yet the backside of the cover clearly indicates a Honolulu censor marking suggesting an intended FAM 14/19 routing. The misrouting of this cover makes for an interesting piece of postal history, for the following reason.



With the December 3rd postmark and no United States censorship to delay its transmission, the letter likely reached the west coast in time for the departure of the *Anzac Clipper* from San Francisco on December 5th or 6th.

The air boat took off for Honolulu on the 5th, but developed engine trouble and had to turn back. Departing again on the 6th, she was on the approach to Honolulu when Japanese naval forces attacked Pearl Harbor. The clipper diverted to a river landing at Hilo, there off-loading the mail and her 32 passengers.

Mail from the *Anzac Clipper* was taken to Honolulu where it remained in bags until censorship began sometime after December 12th. The first mail leaving the islands flew out on December 19th.

Unfortunately, no back stamps exist to document how the letter ultimately reached Turkey, leaving us to speculate on its ultimate routing. Did the letter travel from Honolulu via ship to Australia and follow the Reverse Horseshoe air route? Or was the letter returned to the mainland for dispatch from the east coast where it originated? If the latter, did it go on a FAM 18 flight to Lisbon? FAM 22 remains another possibility since that route, having started upon the United States entry into the war, likely carried civilian mail on its first six eastbound flights, through February 14, 1942.

Because this letter was found among the vast correspondence of the addressee, we know of its ultimate delivery via Palestine where it received British censorship. But can anyone offer with any certainty the routing between Honolulu and Istanbul?

Mystery Cover

by

Robert Hohertz



This cover was mailed September 12, 1941. The address was removed – presumably for military security. As a guess, Alexandria, Egypt. Handstamps on front include “Received from H.M. Ships,” “Via Air Mail” and “G... (Foreign Se... New York N.Y.”

Stamp missing? (Proper rate through Singapore would have been seventy cents.) But where was it? Various cancels and handstamps overlap most of the logical places. Probably upper right, but before the “Received From H.M. Ships” marking.

Reverse has a postmark in Arabic and English, the English name ending in “andria.” (Alexandria?) Also, reverse images of an Egyptian (?) censor marking. Front has part of a cancel reading “consta...” (Constantinople?) January 23, 1942 Navy cancel on back.

Is there any way to tell where and how this traveled?