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**Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter:  
August 5, 1944 – February 4, 1946**

by

Louis Fiset



The postcard shown here, from Bob Hohertz' collection, illustrates mail generated during a little known operation in the United States that occurred throughout the last year of World War II and beyond – the sheltering of displaced persons from Europe. It is postmarked Oswego, New York. Dated October 30, 1945, months after conclusion of the war, it bears no censorship markings. Properly franked with 10 cents postage paying the airmail letter rate to Cuba, the German language correspondence was addressed to what may have been a fellow refugee.

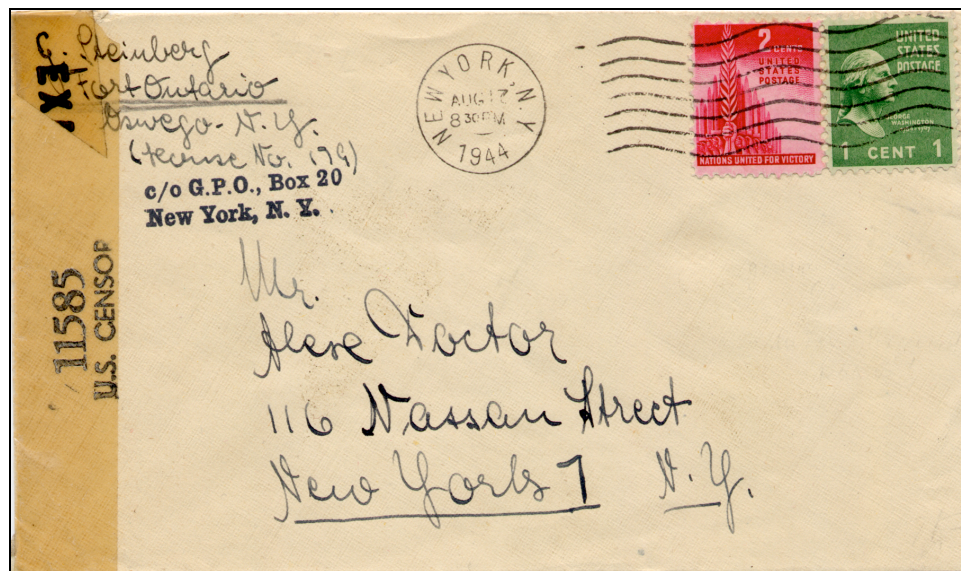
In early spring of 1944, the U.S. War Refugee Board was yet to make a concerted move in offering asylum to refugees. By now displaced persons were streaming through the Allied lines in Italy, seriously taxing supply lines. As a result, with approval of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, 982 refugees were selected in Italy by U.S. officials and designated for shelter in the U.S. They embarked on a troopship at Naples in mid-July. The group arrived in the U.S. during the first week of August. Their destination was Fort Ontario, at Oswego, New York, an army facility turned over to the War Refugee Board as an emergency shelter.

The 982 residents at the shelter were predominantly Jewish, with small contingents of Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, and Protestants. The group represented 18 nationalities, with 90 percent of them Yugoslavs, Austrians, Poles, and Germans. Ages ranged from an Austrian infant born two days before the ship sailed to America, to an 80-year old Spanish citizen. Nearly 100 had endured life at Dachau and Buchenwald.

The agency assigned to administer the shelter was the War Relocation Authority, the same organization then running the 10 relocation centers for Japanese Americans in the western states. The WRA attempted to make the lives of the refugees as comfortable as possible while living behind barbed wire. They permitted residents to maintain their own households, and most able bodied residents were employed in essential project duties at the rate of \$18 per month. The refugees staffed the mess halls and hospital and took responsibility for upkeep of the grounds and similar arduous tasks. They even elected an advisory council.

Nevertheless, under President Roosevelt's orders, the refugees were to remain "under appropriate security restrictions for the duration of the war." Because they were not actually living legally in the United States, the refugees were not permitted to live normal lives in the surrounding communities. In fact, liberty would elude them until nearly a half year beyond the end of the war.

Among other restrictions imposed on the refugees was censorship of their mail, both domestic and international. The relevant domestic cover below shows a Fort Ontario, Owego, NY return address and bears a August 17, 1944 postmark. The contents were examined by a POW Unit censor at the New York field station. The **c/o G.P.O. BOX 20** rubber stamp marking indicates the mail was routed through POW channels. The censor placed the letter into the mail stream subsequent to examination, thus bearing a New York, NY postmark.



Sixty-nine from the original group voluntarily left the U.S. before the period of resettlement began in January 1946. Fourteen others died, while twenty-three were born at the shelter and automatically became U.S. citizens. This left more than 900 persons in need of resettlement.

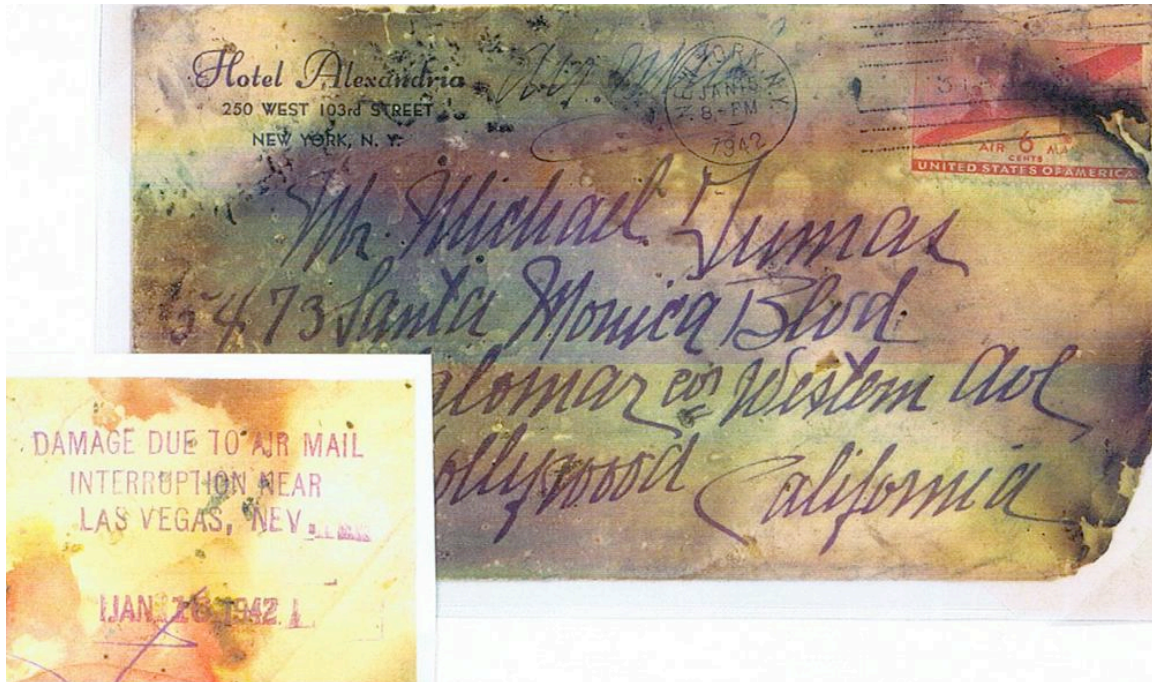
The first 100 refugees left the shelter for resettlement on January 17, 1946. The last refugee departed three weeks later, on February 4. Those admitted as permanent immigrants were dispersed to 20 states and the District of Columbia. The remainder either repatriated or emigrated to other countries. The fort was returned to the Army on February 28, 1946.

Because of the small number of refugees at Fort Ontario and the relatively brief time they were there, the opportunity to generate correspondence was limited. Nevertheless, the current scarcity of covers may be due, in part, to unfamiliarity with the historical event. The search may prove to be worthwhile.

### Carole Lombard Flight Crash Cover

By

Joseph Bock



On January 16, 1942 a TWA flight from New York to Los Angeles struck Spring Mountain in Wyoming, crashed, burned, and was totally demolished. Hollywood actress, Carole Lombard, was a passenger and was killed. She had boarded the plane at Winslow, Arizona. Pilot Wayne Williams also was killed.

As a result of her participation in an early World War II war bond drive, Lombard is regarded as the first American woman killed during World War II.

Philatelically, only 67 of 632 pounds of mail were salvaged, all in bad condition. The cover shown here represents just one of five known covers in collectors' hands.

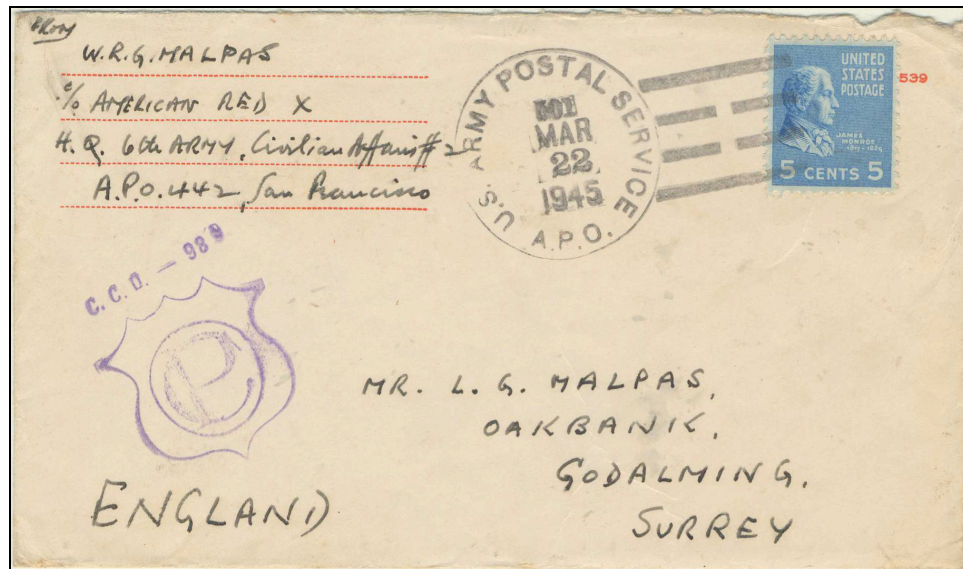
(Source: *American Air Mail Catalog*.)



## APO 442 Mail from A Liberated Santo Tomas Camp Internee

by

Jeffrey Shapiro



Following the successful January 1945 landing of the U.S. Sixth Army at the Lingayen Gulf in Luzon, General Douglas MacArthur became increasingly concerned over the Japanese military's reaction regarding the plight of the thousands of civilian internees and military prisoners of war held in and around Manila. As the Japanese war effort deteriorated, conditions in these camps also deteriorated, with disease and starvation rampant. Rumors also abounded that the Japanese would kill their hostages rather than have them liberated.

As a result, the General and his staff organized the "Flying Column," a small group of volunteers from the U.S. First Cavalry troops, to raid and rescue military and civilian prisoners held at four locations in Japanese occupied territory on the island of Luzon.

The first objective was to liberate 3,700 foreign civilians in "protective custody" by Japanese forces on the campus of the University of Santo Tomas, located on the northern outskirts of Manila. The majority of detainees were U.S. citizens. However, 1,275 others were citizens of the United Kingdom who had been living in pre-war Manila or arrived on ships that put into Manila Harbor in November 1941 to await the outcome of diplomatic efforts to allow entry into Australia.

With the help of Filipino nationals and their guerrilla army, and after three days of fierce hit and run combat, the "Flying Column" entered the Santo Tomas Camp on the evening of February 3, 1945. After several days of artillery and small arms fire, which resulted in the deaths of 17 internees and several First Cavalry troops, the Camp was liberated. The freed internees were transferred to the American Red Cross at the US Sixth Army Headquarters (APO 442).

The censored March 1945 cover shown here, franked with a 5-cent Prexie to pay the one ounce international surface rate, was sent through the Army Post Office system by a former Santo Tomas internee to a relative in England as he was being processed by the Red Cross for release. The letter was examined by an Allied censor assigned to the Civil Censorship Detachment

**Certificate of Mailing: First Day of Prexie Series Use**

by

Bob Hohertz

**Post Office Department**  
 Received from: S. Judkin

One piece of ordinary first class  
 mail addressed to—  
F.T. Pierpont  
Mt. Carmel, Conn.

**UNITED STATES POSTAGE**  
**1 CENT 1**

**APR 25 1938**

**THIS RECEIPT DOES NOT PROVIDE FOR INDEMNIFICATION**

**Form 3817.** U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1929 **5-10325** **POSTMASTER.**

This certificate of mailing, Form 3817, was used to record the sending of a piece of first class mail on April 25, 1938 from the Benjamin Franklin Station in Washington, D.C. to Mount Carmel, Connecticut. A one-cent Prexie was used to pay the fee. Since that date was the first day of use for the one-cent Prexie - actually the first day of use for any of the Prexies - the certificate is an unofficial first day cover for the entire series.

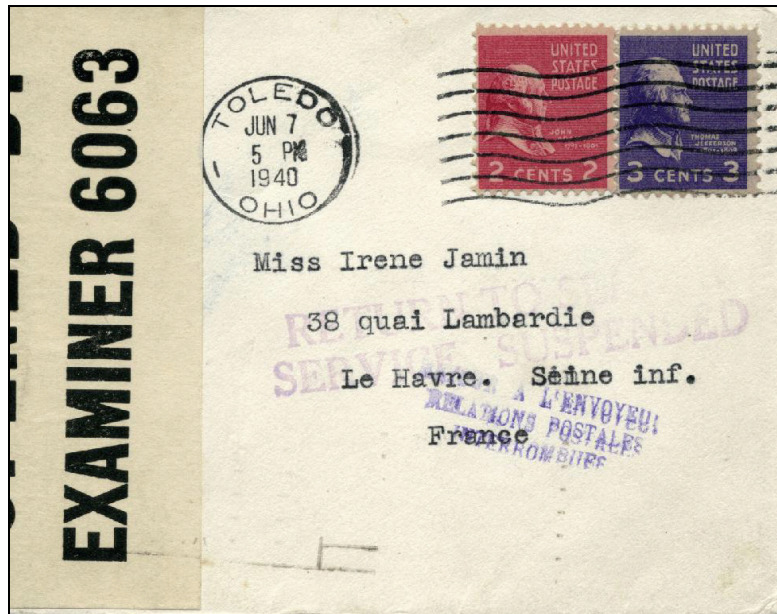
Interestingly, most small certificates of mailing currently in collectors' hands are Form 3817, Rev. 9-37. The one shown here is the original 1929 version.

This item was purchased at Stampshow 2011 out of the wonderful collection of the late Larry Paige. Many of us who collect Prexie covers had gone through Larry's material once or twice before, undoubtedly looking at this certificate without really noticing it. Larry certainly knew what it was, as he had clearly labeled it as "First Day of use of the First Prexie or Presidential Issued during 1938."

## World War II Adventures of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson: A Thwarted Mission to France

by

Lawrence Sherman



In August 1784 Thomas Jefferson, newly appointed minister plenipotentiary to France, arrived in Le Havre, then traveled to Paris to join John Adams and Benjamin Franklin. Their mission: to negotiate treaties of amity and commerce with European nations. More than a century and a half later, as Prexies paying the 5-cent international surface mail rate from the United States, Adams and Jefferson were re-united on another mission: to carry a letter to Le Havre. The time was not propitious. On June 7, 1940, the date of mailing, the invading German army was at Rouen, only 20 miles from the Seine river. Two weeks later, on June 22, France signed armistice terms demanded by Germany. Early in August France was officially divided into occupied and unoccupied zones.

As one historian noted, the meandering course of the line of demarcation between the zones “marked a frontier as absolute as any dividing foreign countries: a major barrier to the movement of people, the ordinary business of communication and the operations of commerce . . . . Indeed, in the early days after the armistice was signed it amounted to a virtually impenetrable barrier.”<sup>1</sup> For personal mail from the U.S. to Occupied France, the barrier became literally impenetrable.



By August 1940 both surface letters and airmail addressed to the occupied zone, upon reaching Marseille, were marked with a three line cachet “RETOUR A L’ENVOYEUR / RELATIONS POSTALES / INTERROMPUES” or similarly phrased markings, and returned to the sender. This was the first nail in the coffin of U.S. postal relations with Occupied France.

Although no mail from the U.S. was deliverable (except via the International Red Cross), this fact was not published in Post Office Department Postal Bulletins until Germany officially suspended mail between the U.S. and Occupied France in September 1941, one year later.

Albert Goldman, Postmaster of the New York, NY Post Office during the war, later recalled that as a result of the September 9, 1941 official suspension of mail service by the occupation (German army) authorities, “this office had to return to senders approximately 180,000 letters, 250 sacks of prints, and 1,500 registered articles. They were endorsed ‘Return to Sender’ — ‘Service Suspended.’”<sup>2</sup>

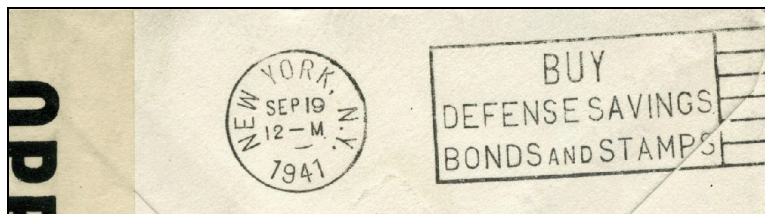
Mail from the U.S. to the occupied zone had been undeliverable since June 1940; it could not cross the frontier between “zone O” and “zone Nono,” as the French had facetiously labeled their disarticulated country. But now mail was officially suspended. News first appeared in *The Postal Bulletin* No. 18278, September 9, 1941, under the heading, “Suspension of Mail Service to Occupied France.” The entry carefully noted that the action was “by order of the occupation authorities.” Since postal relations with occupied France were now suspended, “postmasters will decline to accept for mailing, effective immediately and until further notice, mail articles addressed for delivery in the occupied zone of France, except when addressed to civilian internees.” This was the second nail in the postal relations coffin.

Postal patrons in the U.S. were shocked by the news. It was a page one story in at least one philatelic newspaper, *Western Stamp Collector*, which headlined the story, “Mail to Occupied France Returned to U.S. Senders.”

Letters mailed to persons in the occupied zone of France as long ago as last November, some by air mail at a cost of 30 cents, have been received back by the senders the last few days stamped “Retour a l’Envoyeur, Relations Postales Interrompues,” and, in English, “Return to Sender, Postal Service Suspended.”

According to New York postal officials, 100,000 letters had been returned a few days ago by the postal authorities of France. They apparently had been held there in the hope there would be lifting of the German restrictions.

Some of the letters sent by clipper had been opened by the French censor and resealed with the notation “Controle.” [“Mail to Occupied France returned to U.S. senders.”]<sup>3</sup>



The formal suspension caused the New York, NY, Post Office to be flooded with mail that had been addressed to the occupied zone, processed in Marseille, then held by Vichy postal authorities. Many of the approximately 100,000 [or, depending on the source, 180,000] letters returned to sender, both surface and airmail, were backstamped with machine-cancelled receiving postmarks dated between September 17 and October 2, 1941. Illustrated here is one example, showing the backstamp on the Adams-Jefferson Prexie cover illustrated above.



Before September 1941, postal relations between neutral U.S. and Occupied France were simply impossible to implement; now they were formally suspended. Why? What had tried Germany's patience sufficiently to cause their army to take this official step? Perhaps issuance of the Atlantic Charter on August 12 was the precipitant. This joint declaration of President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill promulgated at sea (Placentia Bay, Newfoundland), spoke of the "common principles" of the two countries, and offered hope for a peaceful world after "the final destruction of the Nazi tyranny."

A possible immediate precipitant was "the *Greer* incident." On September 4, 1941 the destroyer USS *Greer*, steaming independently toward Iceland, was involved in an unfriendly encounter with German submarine *U-652*. After an exchange of depth charges and torpedoes, all missing their targets, the ships broke off the encounter. The incident enabled President Roosevelt to order U.S. warships to "shoot on sight" in waters "the protection of which is necessary for American defense."

Germany and Italy eagerly joined Japan against the United States, declaring war on December 11, 1941 four days after the attack on Pearl Harbor. The U.S. Post Office Department had mail suspension plans already in place. "On the very date of our declaration of war on Germany and Italy," wrote the Postmaster General in a post-war report, "all mail service whatsoever was discontinued to those nations and places under their control, which included all of continental Europe except Gibraltar, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Russia, and unoccupied France."<sup>4</sup> Now the already suspended mail service to Occupied France was "discontinued" because that unhappy land was an enemy-occupied country. Labels attached by U.S. censors to the back of returned-to-sender mail posted after December 11, 1941, made that clear. This was the third nail in the coffin of deceased U.S.-Occupied France postal relations.

In 1940 the French authorities had said, your mail *may not* cross the border into Occupied France; in September 1941 Germany had said, your mail *will not* cross the border; in December 1941 the U.S. government said, your mail *must not* cross that border into enemy-occupied territory. Not until September 1944, three tempestuous years after the United States entered the war, did limited mail service from the United States resume to liberated areas of once-occupied France. Postcard mail service to Normandy began on September 4, 1944, and on September 23 service resumed to Le Havre and Paris. By then the missive carried by Prexies Adams and Jefferson had long since been returned to the keep of its sender in Toledo, Ohio.

<sup>1</sup>Ian Ousby. *Occupation: The Ordeal of France 1940-1944*. (London: John Murray, 1997), pp. 68-69.

<sup>2</sup>Albert Goldman. *The New York, N.Y. Post Office During the War Years 1941 – 1945*. (New York: Albert Goldman, 1949), p. 350.

<sup>3</sup>*Western Stamp Collector*, Vol. XVI (Whole #1075, Oct 1, 1941), p. 1.

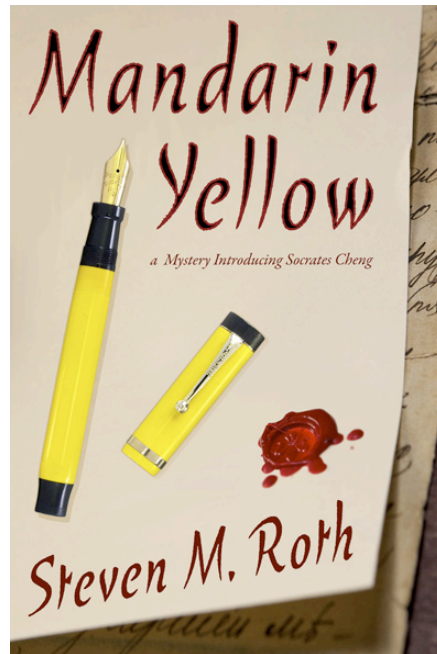
<sup>4</sup>The Postmaster General (J.M. Donaldson). *A Wartime History of the Post Office Department: World War II 1939-1945*. (Washington, DC: United States Post Office Department, 1951), p. 41.

***Mandarin Yellow: A Novel***

by

Steve Roth

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[*Editor's Note:* Steve Roth is the former editor/publisher of the Prexie Era Newsletter.]

I am pleased to let you know that my new mystery novel, *MANDARIN YELLOW*, is now available online as an eBook (at \$2.99) and as a trade paperback (at \$14.95), from Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Smashwords, and Apple's iTunes. You can search for it under: **Roth Mandarin Yellow**.

Set in a suspenseful and idiosyncratic environment, *Mandarin Yellow* involves ethnic and cultural conflict, twisted history, and the immutable law of unintended consequences. *Mandarin Yellow* will appeal to readers of modern noir and sleuth mysteries, to people interested in China's art and its vintage collectibles (such as historic fountain pens), and to readers interested in the history of early twentieth century China and in the Chinese experience in America, all as shown by my series character, Socrates Cheng.

I currently am at work on the sequel to *Mandarin Yellow*, a mystery (tentatively titled *The Mourning Woman*) also set in Washington, DC. In this book Socrates explores the Greek side of his heritage as he investigates a series of crimes that occur in Washington's Greek community, all as predicted by an elderly immigrant woman reputed to be the descendant of the ancient Oracle at Delphi.

Feel free to contact me at the email address noted above as I would love to hear your thoughts about my book. You also can reach me at PO Box 57160, Washington, DC 20037- 0160.