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A Letter that Missed the Boat -- Twice

by

Lawrence Sherman

The last days of August 1939 were the worst of times for Americans mailing letters to Europe, but the best of times for later collectors of World War II postal history. There was fear of war, talk of war, and diplomatic and military actions that soon brought war. On August 21, the German foreign ministry announced the imminent conclusion of a Soviet-German non-aggression pact. In Moscow on the 24th, Foreign Ministers Molotov and von Ribbentrop signed the pact, which contained a secret protocol dividing central Europe between the two totalitarian regimes. Poland was about to be crushed. On the day the pact was signed, British diplomats in Berlin began burning secret papers while Adolf Hitler issued orders for his army to prepare its Polish invasion. On September 1 Germany struck. Two days later, Britain and France declared war on Germany.



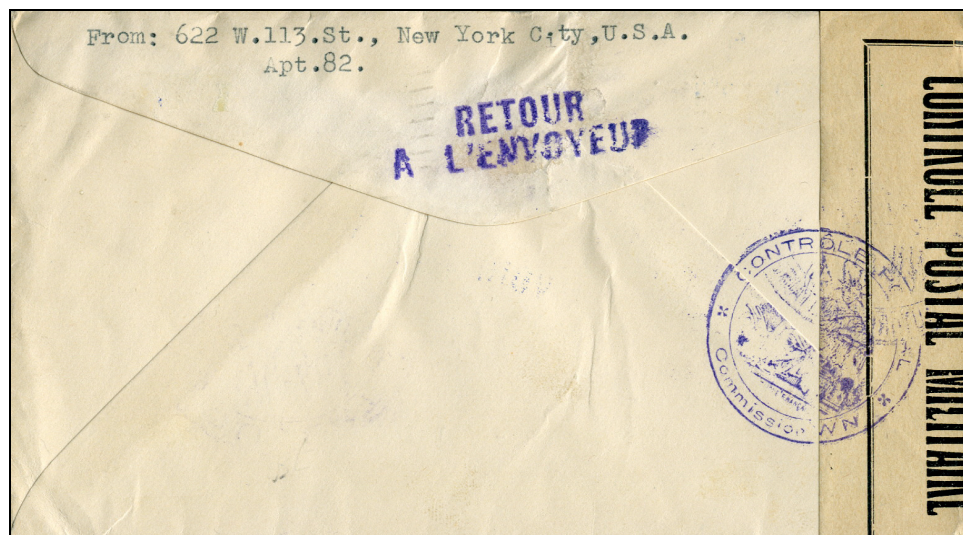
In New York City, a mailer on the Upper West Side of Manhattan sent a surface letter to Berlin postmarked August 29. A 2-cent Adams Prexie and 3-cent Panama Canal commemorative paid the UPU rate. The intended Berlin address was neatly typed in black on the cover. At the upper left, also neatly typed—but in red, and doubly underlined in red as well—was “Via s.s. BREMEN!” Four inked lines crossed off these words. Why? *Bremen*, pride of Norddeutscher Lloyd, the German steamship line (it had won the Blue Riband for fastest transatlantic liner speed when it entered service in 1929), had been ordered home. On August 30 the liner hurriedly left Pier 86 in New York City without passengers or mail. She sailed not for her home port, Bremerhaven, but for Murmansk, Russia, to avoid British cruisers patrolling somewhere on the high seas.

The mailer’s second choice of ship carriage—“Via s.s. *Normandie*!”—was neatly lettered in ink above the typed *Bremen* notation. National pride was at stake as swift transatlantic liners were developed in the twentieth century, and *Normandie* was the crown jewel of the French Line, Compagnie Générale Transatlantique. The ship claimed the prestigious Blue Riband transatlantic speed award upon entering service in 1935. On August 23, 1939, *Normandie* left Le Havre for New York City. She arrived on the 28th, was moored along Pier 88, and was scheduled to get

underway for return on the 30th. Fearing an encounter with German submarines, French authorities cancelled her departure that day. Booked passengers were transferred to Cunard-White Star's *Aquitania*, which left the evening of the 30th for Liverpool. *Normandie* was destined never to return to France.

Did *Aquitania* carry the letter? It is possible; the ship was often referred to as RMS (Royal Mail Ship) *Aquitania* for the large load of mail it carried on its transatlantic route. But there is no evidence the letter arrived at a British port or incurred English censorship, although *Aquitania* arrived a few days after the invasion of Poland.

In which ship, then, did the letter travel to Europe? Most likely, the carrier was a ship of the American Export Line (AEL), the largest U.S.-flag shipping company operating cargo services between the United States East Coast and Mediterranean ports from 1919 to 1977. AEL's four transatlantic vessels offered regularly scheduled passenger and cargo (including mail) service between New York and Lisbon and Mediterranean sites including Gibraltar, Marseille, and Genoa. Steamships *Excalibur*, *Exeter*, *Excambion*, and *Exochordia* were the quartet of alliteratively named ships of the Export Line. The Berlin-addressed cover likely traveled on one of these four ships, was removed (along with all Germany-bound mailbags) at Marseille when it arrived after September 1, and handed over to *Controle Postal Militaire*.



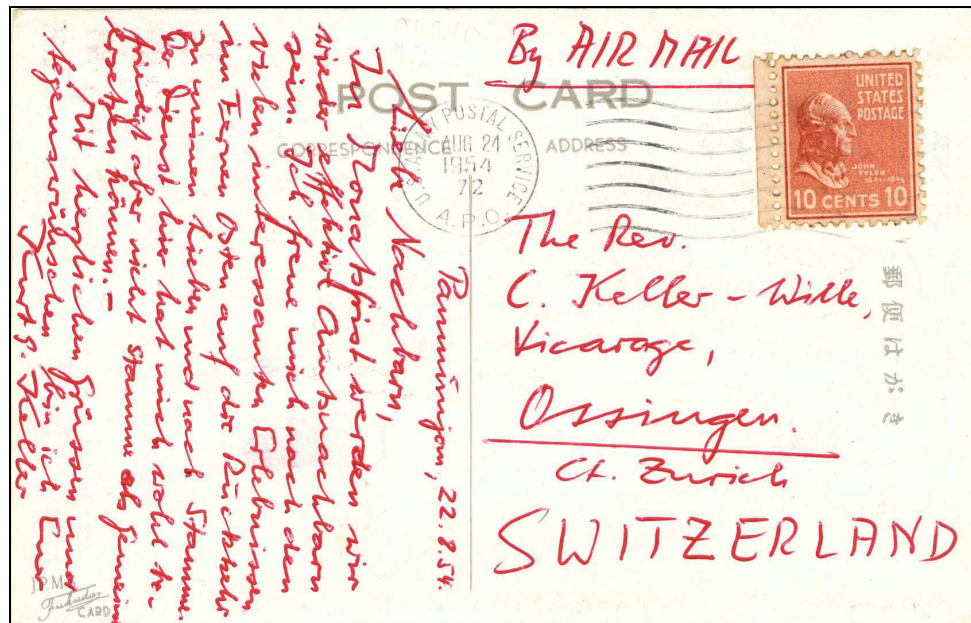
Opened by a military censor at Narbonne (WL452) and resealed, the cover was also handstamped on its front, "**VOIR AU DOS**" ("See back"), and on its back, "**RETOUR/A L'ENVOYEUR**," plus a circular cachet censorship handstamp, **CONTROLE POSTAL/COMMISSION WN**. [Ed. note: Michael Deery, in his book on "Return to Sender" devices lists 18 covers to Germany with the "**RETOUR**" device applied, 12 of which also have the "**VOIR AU DOS**" directive on the front. These devices have been reported in use on covers postmarked from July 29 through November 8, 1939.]

Finally, the letter was returned to the writer in the neutral United States just as it had traveled to Europe, on an unknown ship that likely had never been considered for the Blue Riband Award.

A Postcard from Korea

by

Jeffrey Shapiro



A 10-cent Prexie paid the international airmail post card rate (in effect June 1954 thru June 1961) on this picture post card mailed to Switzerland by the Army Postal Service in August 1954.

Even though the card was mailed from Asia, regulations allowed mail sent from APOs anywhere in the world to be franked as if mailed in the United States.

Beginning in June 1950, two years of back and forth exchange of battle-won territory on the Korean Peninsula stalemated around the 38th Parallel. Starting in July 1951 armistice negotiations dragged on, between the Democratic Peoples Republic (North Korea) and its allies, China and Russia, and the Republic of Korea (South Korea) supported by the United States and the United Nations.

With a compromise offered by India accepted, an armistice was signed in July 1954, resulting in a demilitarized zone established that same month along the 38th Parallel. The Neutral Supervisory Commission, composed of members of the Swiss and Swedish Armies, was established at the same time to monitor reparation activities between the combatant nations.

This post card was mailed by a member of the newly created Neutral Supervisory Commission at Chunchon, Korea (APO 72) located northeast of Seoul. He was writing to a family member in Switzerland.

While the armistice remains in effect today, a formal peace treaty has never been signed.

5-cent Airmail Rate within Australia Only

by

Louis Fiset

The 70-cent transpacific airmail rate to Australia via Honolulu and Auckland went into effect on July 12, 1940, significantly reducing the transit time to that country from the West Coast of the United States. This rate included dispatch by airmail within Australia, as well. However, postal patrons retained the option of paying for transpacific carriage by ship and airmail within Australia. The cover shown here, from Hawaii to New Guinea, provides one such example.



Postmarked Honolulu April 18, 1941, the 15 cents franking on this one-ounce letter, paid the 5-cents per one ounce UPU rate plus 10 cents for twice the 5-cent per half-ounce airmail rate within Australia only. Airmail beyond Australia to New Guinea was covered by the within-Australia rate. Although the cover is interesting for paying a rate not commonly seen after the advent of transpacific airmail service, its real story may be found in the details.

The letter was addressed to a Mr. R.D. Winne at Bulolo, New Guinea, via Salamaua. A search on the *Ancestry* database reveals that Ralla D. Winne was an American mining engineer known to have worked in Belgian Congo and Angola as early as 1921. Twenty years later he was working as a civilian in a gold mining region in the mountains of New Guinea, near Bulolo, 150 air miles north of the country's capital, Port Moresby.

Transported by ship from Honolulu to Sydney, this cover was off loaded then censored by Australia censors at the Sydney field station. The resealing tape partially covers a manuscript directive, "Airmail via Sydney, Australia only." W.R. Carpenter Airlines then flew the letter from Sydney to Salamaua, via Cooktown, Australia and Port Moresby. It was then flown to Bulolo by a Carpenter subsidiary, Mandated Airlines. A Bulolo receiver, dated 30 May 41, may be found on the back.

By this time the addressee had departed New Guinea to return to his home in Adrian, Michigan. So, the letter began to retrace its steps. A Salamaua receiver, dated 21 Aug 1941, shows the letter having passed through on its way back by air to Port Moresby and Sydney. From Sydney the letter began its slow, sea going journey to the U.S. mainland, eventually arriving at Adrian by rail some time in November 1941.

The letter, however, had not yet completed its journey, for a second forwarding address may be seen, “Army Navy Club Manila, P.I.” The cover received an Adrian, Mich., November 12, 1941 postmark, less than a month prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor. It was awaiting transpacific passage by ship from the west coast to the Philippines when the U.S. entered World War II. This explains the **RETURN TO SENDER/SERVICE SUSPENDED** marking.

The letter subsequently made its way back to Honolulu where it was docketed on May 26, 1942. Alas, the writer was now gone, as indicated by the penciled forwarding address to Los Angeles. Its journey likely ended on the mainland some time in June or July 1942, after more than 14 months in transit – and 15 cents postage paid.

Interestingly, this is one of the few pieces of post-December 7, 1941 mail I have seen passing through Honolulu that does not bear Honolulu censorship markings. Since the correspondence originated in April 1941, eight months before the country entered the war, its contents, if intercepted, likely would have provided little useful information to U.S. censors or the enemy.



R.D. Winne, ca. 1941

* * * *

Two Oversize Postcards

by

Bob Hohertz

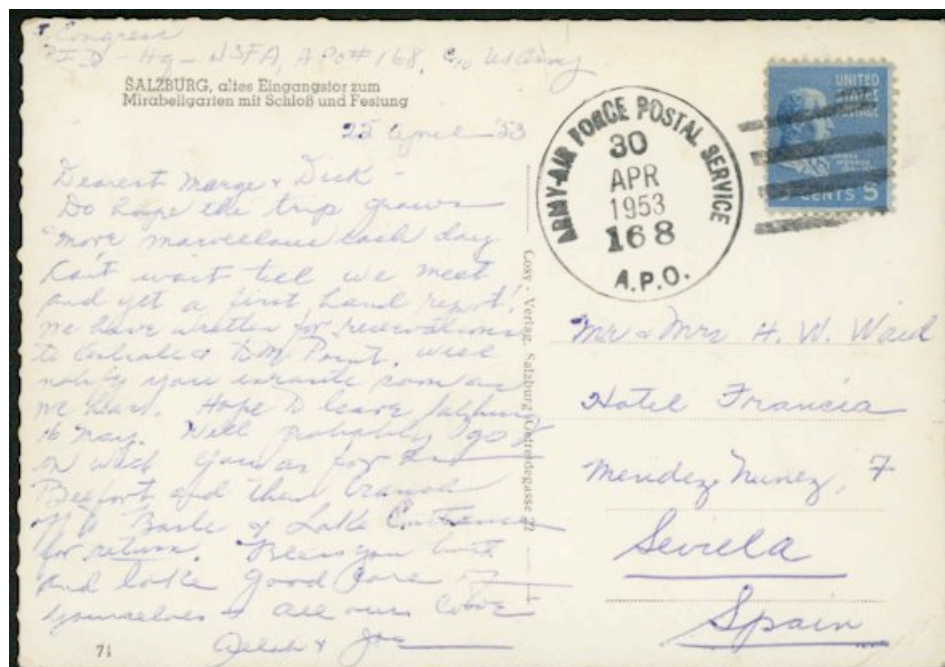
When post cards were authorized in 1898 limits were put on the sizes permitted to be mailed at rates less than those for first class letters. The sizes for domestic mailings often were different from those permitted by UPU standards, which was the case from July 1, 1928 until August 1, 1958. During this period the U.S. post card maximum size was 3 9/16" by 5 9/16" while the UPU standard was 4 1/4" x 6".

The two postcards discussed here are European size – 4 1/4" x 6". The first was mailed in 1941 with one-and-one-half cents postage for some unknown reason, since a normal-sized postcard would have gone for one cent. The size difference was noticed by the post office, perhaps due to the odd franking, and the card was rated one-and-one-half cents due to bring the postage to the first class letter rate of three cents.



The second card was mailed in 1953 from A.P.O. 168, Salzburg, Austria to Seville, Spain. The APO would have been operating under domestic postal rules, so the card was deemed to have been oversize and the full international surface rate of five cents was charged.

So far, so good, but postcards and letters to the countries in the Postal Union of the Americas and Spain (PUAS) could be sent at reduced rates until November 1, 1953, roughly five months after this card was mailed. The PUAS postcard rate was two cents, but this oversized card required letter postage. The sender could have saved two cents by paying the 3-cent PUAS letter rate instead of the 5-cent UPU letter rate that he did pay.



A Small Tragedy of War

by

Jeffrey Shapiro



Six 10-cent Prexies paid twice the 30 cents per half-ounce airmail rate to Europe (in effect May 1939 -- October 1946) on this December 1, 1941 business correspondence from New York City to Berlin. While the letter was in transit, Germany declared war against the U.S. The cover was seized at the Bermuda censor station and returned to the sender after an eight month delay.

RADIOGRAMA			
CORPORACION			
INALAMBRICA			
CUBANA			
OFICINA PRINCIPAL:			
EDIFICIO "LA METROPOLITANA" - SAN JUAN DE DIOS 111 - TELÉF. M-9826 - M-9827 - M-9828 - M-9829			
ESTE MENSAJE SERA ENVIADO RAPIDO A MENOS QUE SE INDICAR LO CONTRARIO.	CLAVE (CDE)	CHECK	NUMERO
	DIFERIDO (LC)		ORIGEN
	CARTAS RADIO (NLT)		INALAMBRICA
	MENSAJES A BARCOS		HORA
LEGACION CUBA		HABANA.	
<p>11012 VISE PASAPORTE O DOCUMENTOS IDENTIDAD CUBANA AUSTRIA ELSE (ELSA) WOLFF Y GERTRUD (TRUDE) WOLFF NATURALES ALEMANIA PUNTO REQUISITOS LEGALES TODOS CUMPLIDOS INMIGRACION ESTA PUNTO AVISELES DIRECCION TREISINGERSTR 8 BERLIN-SCHOENBERG ALEMANIA PUNTO * * * * *</p>			
TRANSMITASE:		CORTINA	
L. R. MIRANDA		MINISTRO ESTADO	
SUBSECRETARIO DE ASUNTOS EXTERIORES		COPIA	
NOMBRE Y DIRECCION DEL REMITENTE (QUE NO SE TRANSMITE)		TELEFONO	

While the cover provides an interesting example of early World War II postal history, the envelope contains an example of a small tragedy of war. Addressed to two Jewish women in Berlin, the enclosure is a copy of an exit visa allowing the women (sisters?) to emigrate from Germany to Cuba, via Lisbon. Unfortunately, the documents never arrived at its destination. It may be surmised that by the end of January 1942 the women joined 10,000 other Jewish Berliners deported to the ghettos of Eastern Europe, including Lodz, Poland and Riga, Latvia. These ghettos were eventually emptied and their occupants sent to Nazi death camps. If not then, by the end of April 1943 the remaining 80,000 Jewish Berliners had been transported directly to extermination camps throughout Nazi-occupied Europe.

* * * *

Patience is a Virtue

by

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1 October 1946 saw a major revision of U.S. domestic airmail rates, including reductions in all domestic rates. Postage for airmail letters and postcards sent within the U.S. (also to Canada and Mexico) was reduced from the wartime airmail rate of 8 cents to 5 cents per ounce. This airmail rate was the only one of the "temporary" increases implemented in 1944 to support the war effort, which was actually rescinded. In addition the separate, higher airmail rates to and from U.S. possessions were replaced by the new domestic airmail rate of 5 cents per ounce. As well as being higher, the old possession rates had been calculated per half ounce.



Figure 1. Airmail within the U.S., 30 September 1946.

One month later, on 1 November, the hodge-podge of separate airmail rates for different countries was replaced by composite rates, which divided the world into three zones, 10 cents for airmail to the Americas, 15 cents for airmail to Europe and North Africa, and 25 cents for airmail to the rest of the world.

Shown here are two letters sent by non-opportunists who managed to pay the old higher domestic rates on the last possible day. Figure 1 shows a letter paying the old 8-cent rate for airmail within the U.S. on 30 September 1946. The USPOD had issued a stamped envelope for the new airmail rate on 25 September 1946, six days before the 5-cent rate came into effect (Scott UC14). In order to use the new envelope to pay the old rate, Lt. Snodgrass added a 3-cent Prexie to uprate the envelope. This is a most unusual procedure, since, in most cases, senders add postage to uprate old stamped envelopes to new, higher postage rates.



Figure 2. Airmail to Hawaii, 30 September 1946.

The sender of the letter in Figure 2 paid a steeper price for not waiting one day for the new rate. He or she paid 15 cents per half ounce for airmail to Hawaii on 30 September. On the next day the same service would have cost 5 cents.

If anyone can show an airmail letter sent to a foreign destination paying an old international airmail rate on 30 October 1946, the author would be delighted to see it.

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Constant Variety on 50-Cent Taft Discovered!



A constant variety on the 50-cent Taft definitive was reported at the 2013 SESCAL meeting this past October. An illustration is provided here. Discovery of multiple copies and speculation on why they took more than a half century to appear created quite a stir at the awards banquet. Collectors should be on the lookout for additional examples. Please report new findings to your tablemates at the next awards banquet you attend.