

## Back Issue of Military Postal History Society 'Bulletin': (Bulletin Oct 1989)

Back issues of the Military Postal History Society 'Bulletin' are now available. The issues available span the period from 1937 to 2022. The MPHS is a non-profit organization for philatelists and stamp collectors interested in the collecting and studying of the postal aspects of all wars and military actions of all countries, including soldiers' campaign covers, naval mail, occupation and internment covers, patriotics, propaganda, V-mail, censorship and similar related material.

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*Possibly Unique WW I POW Cover from the Kronprinz Wilhelm*

Rec'd Feb 1, 1990



# WAR COVER CLUB BULLETIN

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WAR COVER CLUB UNIT NO. 19 - American Philatelic Society

## FREE FRANKING MAIL BY US SERVICEMEN IN WWII

By Richard W. Helbock

The practice of permitting servicemen on active duty during wartime to mail letters without postage had obvious morale benefits for both the military and civil populations. To the military it meant that their country appreciated their sacrifice and was willing, as a token of this appreciation, to suspend the normal ways of doing business by allowing them to send their mail free. Similarly, civilian morale was improved because free franking meant that sons, brothers and fathers could stay in closer touch with their families.

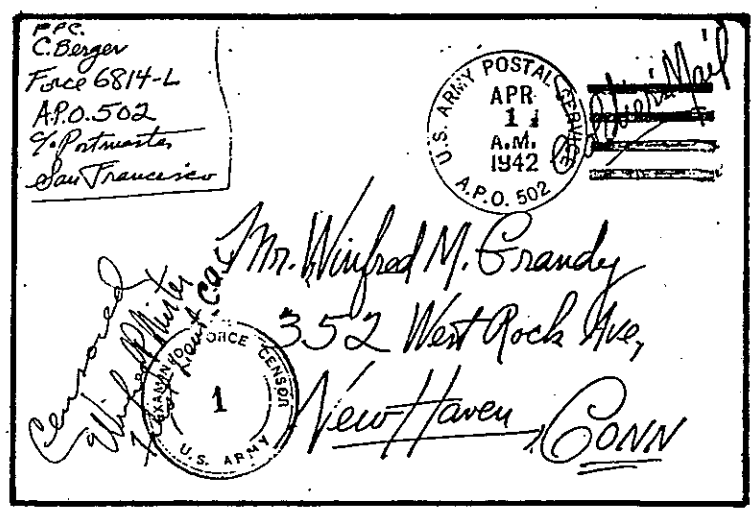


Figure 1. Despite the fact that this cover was postmarked on the first day that free franking by U.S. servicemen was permitted in World War II, it is not an example of a properly free franked cover.

Free franking during World War I was initiated in May 1914 by a postal regulation which permitted active duty military personnel to send mail without stamps within the United States as long as it was marked "soldier's mail" or the equivalent and was countersigned by an officer. Such mail was not really free franked, for the recipient had to pay single rate postage to receive it. Modifications of the military franking privilege continued until October 1917 when the War Department ruled that "soldiers, sailors and marines assigned to duty in foreign countries [were] entitled to mail letters free, provided such letters bear in the upper left hand corner the name of the sender and the organization or unit to which he belongs." Furthermore, such letters were to be marked "On Active Service" (or "OAS") and "Soldier's (Sailor's, Marine's) Mail."<sup>1</sup> The free franking privilege remained in effect until October 20, 1920.

<sup>1</sup>Theo Van Dam (ed.), *The Postal History of the AEF, 1917-1923*, p. 13-14.

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The free franking privilege was authorized for servicemen in World War II by an Act of Congress dated March 27, 1942 (sec. 901, Public No. 507, 77th Cong.) Authorization was published as Order #17352 in the *Postal Bulletin* of April 1, 1942:

*Any first class mail matter admissible to the mails as ordinary mail matter which is sent by a member of the military or naval forces of the United States (including United States Coast Guard), while on active duty or in the active military or naval service of the United States, to any person in the United States, including the Territories or possessions thereof, shall be transmitted in the mails free of postage, subject to such rules and regulations as the Postmaster General shall prescribe.*

This authorization was followed immediately by the specific rules and regulations prescribed:

*Letters sent by members of the military or naval forces of the United States, to be mailed free of postage under the conditions set forth in (the above) paragraph, shall bear in the upper right corner the word "FREE" and in the upper left corner the name of the sender together with his rank or rating and the designation of the service to which he belongs ... such letters shall be accepted when deposited in the mails of the United States or its possessions or at any place outside the continental United States where the United States mail service is in operation, including army and navy bases, naval vessels, etc. Messages on post cards may be accepted under this provision, but it shall not apply to packages or parcels or any matter other than messages in the form of ordinary letters or cards. This free mailing privilege does not apply to matter sent by airmail, nor to any matter sent to the members of the military or naval forces by persons who are not members thereof.*

The *Postal Bulletin* announcement carried no specific effective date for the authorization of free franking, so it must be assumed that the privilege became effective with its publication in the *Postal Bulletin*, i.e., April 1, 1942. As a practical matter, however, the free franking privilege only became effective when word of its authorization reached those who were permitted to use it -- active duty servicemen. Depending upon one's location with respect to Washington, DC, the news that free franking was authorized could have been received in as little as hours or as much as days.

## DOMESTIC IMPACT

On April 1, 1942, the total troop strength of the United States Army was a bit under 2.4 million, and of that number only 330,000 were deployed outside the continental United States. The overwhelming majority -- some 2.1 million -- were scattered around the nation training and being trained at various domestic bases. For these men, news of the authorization of free franking must have arrived quickly, and free franked covers with dates early in April 1942 are to be expected. The author has not seen a properly free franked cover dated April 1, 1942, but such a cover could well exist. Figures 2 and 3 illustrate a cover and post card respectively

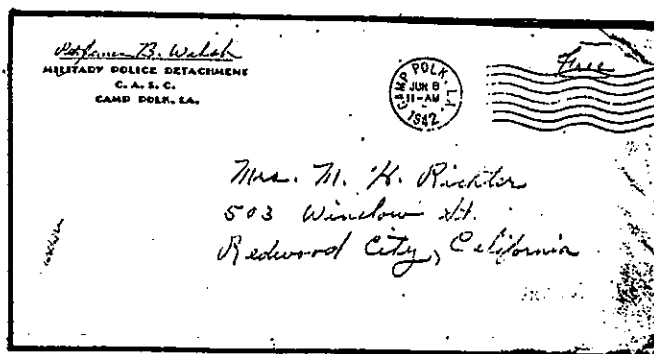


Figure 2. This cover, postmarked Camp Polk, Louisiana, Jun. 8, 1942, displays proper free franking procedure.

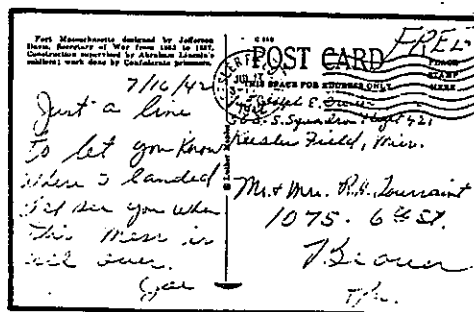


Figure 3. This post card, postmarked Keesler Field, Mississippi, Jul 17, 1942, also conforms to regulations.

dating from early summer 1942, and demonstrating the proper use of the free franking privilege.

That free franking gained rapid popularity among servicemen stationed at bases around the country is attested by the cover in Figure 4. This cover bears a partial printed return address from Keesler Field, Mississippi, and in large block letters the word "FREE" in a box in the upper right hand corner. Since the cover is postmarked July 19, 1942 -- only 3 1/2 months after the privilege was authorized -- it is obvious that free franking had gained sufficient popularity to encourage private stationery printers to exploit it.

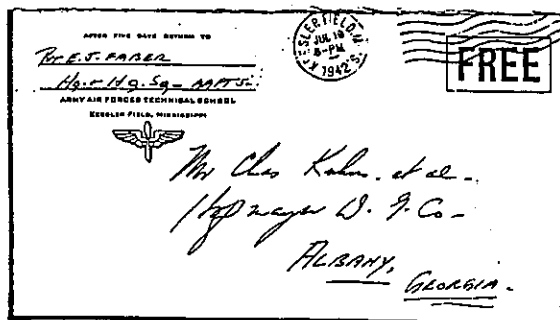


Figure 4. A privately printed cover with partial return address of Keesler Field and FREE franking posted at Keesler Field in July 1942.

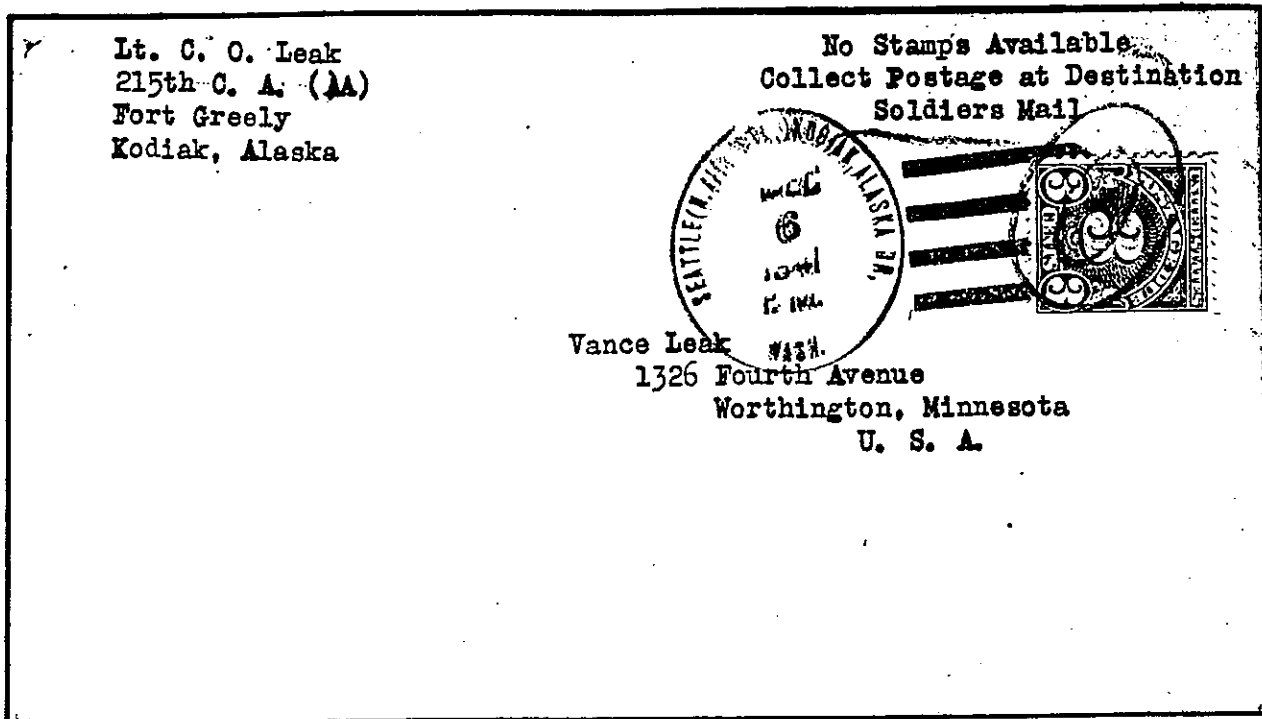


Figure 5. This cover was postmarked at the Kodiak, Alaska, Naval Air Station, on the day before the Pearl Harbor attack. The Naval Station postal branch was then serving the postal needs of the Army troops at Fort Greely, but apparently they had run out of stamps. Three cents postage due was apparently collected.

As a matter of fact, postal and military authorities were themselves sufficiently interested in the impact and use of the free franking privilege to conduct a survey of selected domestic military and naval units during the first week of July 1942. The survey found that a total of 1,819,533 pieces of free mail were being sent every day by Army personnel and approximately 640,110 by the Navy.<sup>2</sup> The number of U.S. Army personnel on duty at domestic bases was about 2.5 million during the time of the survey, yielding an average use of the free franking privilege of 0.73 letters per day per man. In other words, for every four Army troops stationed at domestic bases in early July 1942, there were three free-franked letters sent every day!

## OVERSEAS IMPACT

When the United States entered the war in December 1941 the number of Army personnel stationed outside the coterminous United States was less than two hundred thousand, and the majority of these were in five U.S. territories (possessions) -- Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, the Canal Zone and the Philippines. Throughout 1942 there was a continual increase in both the number of troops stationed overseas and the number of locations at which they were stationed. At year's end, we had over one

million Army personnel on active duty in over 80 foreign nations or territories. This rapid deployment severely taxed our governments' ability to provide logistic support, including the ability of the postal service to maintain channels of private communications between troops and their families. Although certainly not the prime intent of the legislation, the Act of Congress which authorized free franking for servicemen also helped the Post Office Department out of one of its problems in maintaining postal service for troops stationed overseas -- the provision of postage stamps to servicemen located in increasingly remote and unfriendly places.

Provision of postage stamps and supplies to servicemen stationed in Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and the Canal Zone was not a serious problem. After all, military units in these areas were served by U.S. civil post offices and branches until the establishment of Army Post Offices in 1942. There were, however, instances, such as that illustrated by the cover in Figure 5, where postal supplies were exhausted and it became necessary for troops to mail letters without postage.

The more serious and pervasive problems of inadequate postal supplies occurred when U.S. servicemen were deployed in foreign nations, and in early 1942 the largest such deployment was made to Australia in an effort to bolster the sagging defenses of the South Pacific against Japanese advances. During the first three months of 1942, six Army Post Offices were established to serve the growing

<sup>2</sup>U.S. Postmaster General, *A Wartime History of the Post Office Department*, p. 77.

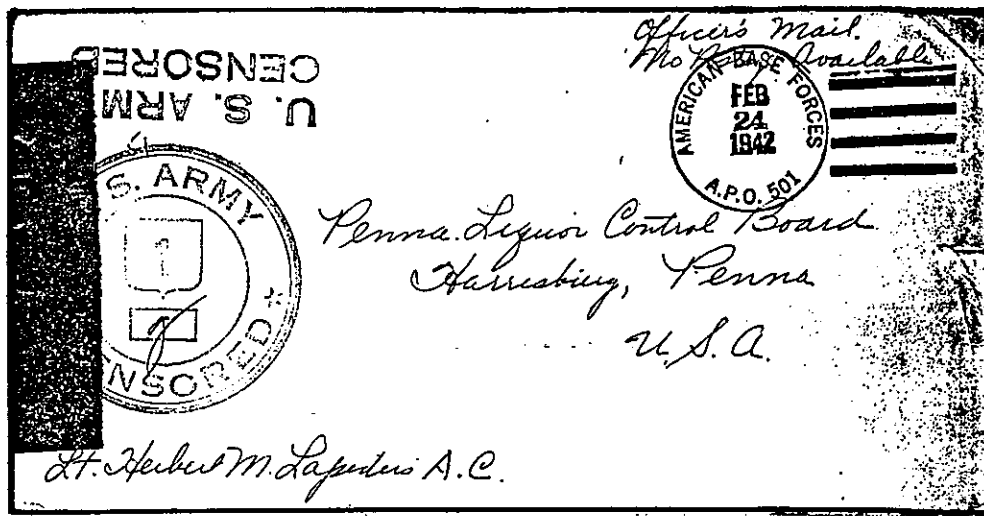


Figure 6. This cover was postmarked February 24, 1942, at APO 501 (Melbourne, Australia). Since no U.S. postage was available, the sender simply endorsed the cover accordingly and added the words "Officer's Mail" in the fashion used during WWI. Apparently no postage due was charged.

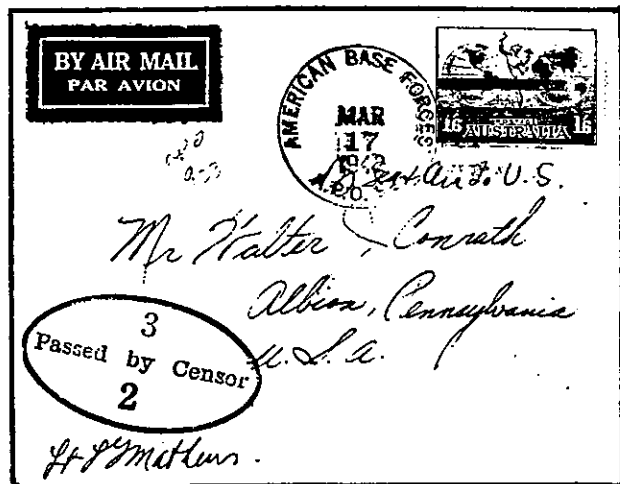
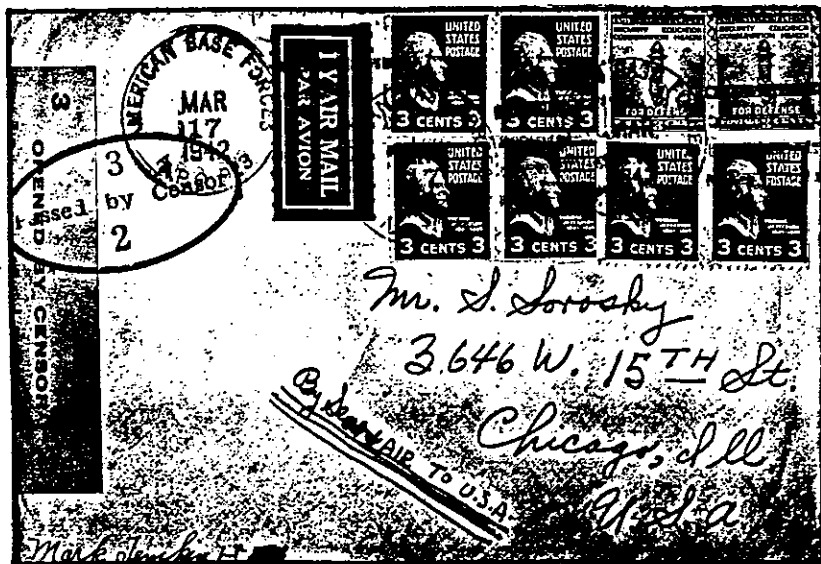


Figure 7. This cover was franked with the one shilling, six pence Australian air mail. Postmarked March 17, 1942, at APO 923 (Brisbane), the cover could have been mailed at any Australian post office.

Figure 8. This cover was also postmarked March 17, 1942, at APO 923. Franked with 24 cents in US postage, it bears an AIR MAIL label and the manuscript notation "By Sea & Air to U.S.A." indicating that the sender could only hope that he would receive air service in the confusion of the day.



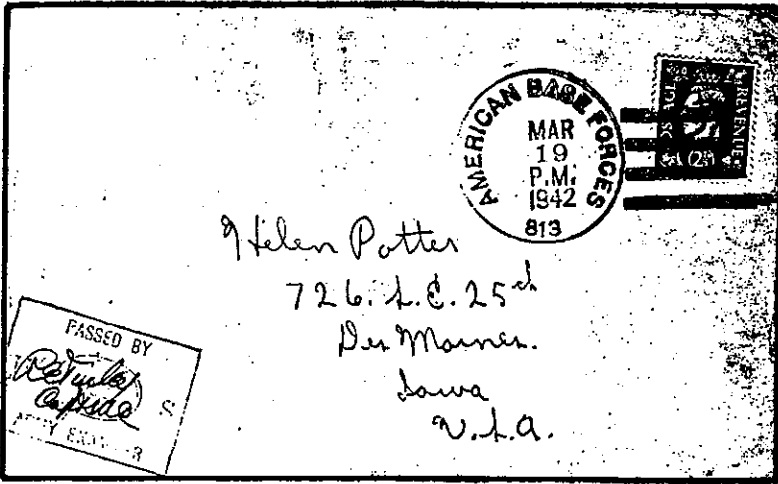


Figure 9. This cover was franked with a 2 1/2 pence British stamp and postmarked March 19, 1942 at APO 813, serving Victoria Barracks, Northern Ireland.

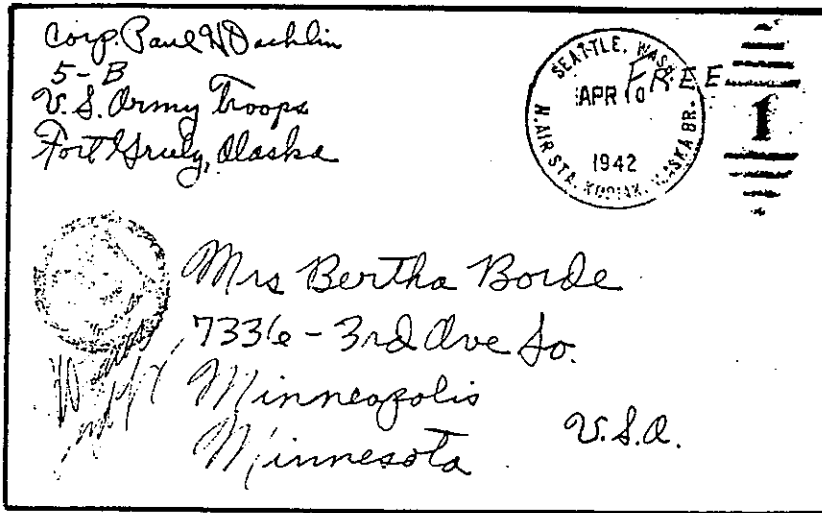
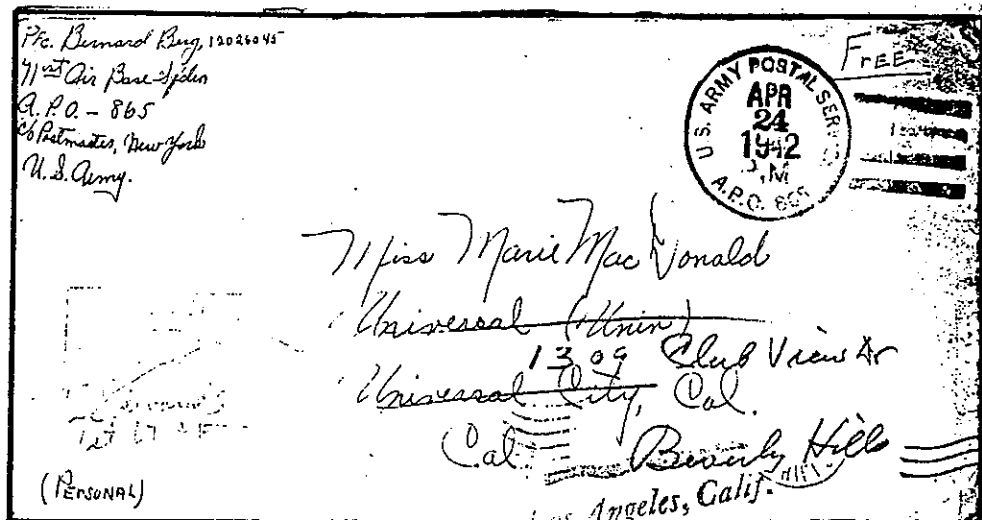


Figure 10. A properly free franked WWII cover dated April 10, 1942, and posted from Fort Greely, Alaska, through the Kodiak Naval Air Station branch.

Figure 11. A properly free franked WWII cover postmarked April 24, 1942, at APO 865 serving Gander, Newfoundland.



bers of the four women's military contingents when, on July 1, 1943, the officially became incorporated into the Armed Services by an act of Congress.

The authorization clearly states that the free franking privilege is limited to mail addressed to "any person in the United States..." This limitation was interpreted early on to apply to other servicemen who might be on active duty at overseas locations, but the realities of international cooperation in the war effort created some very grey areas. The cover in Figure 13 illustrates my point. The return address is that of a sergeant in the Royal Canadian Air Force. This sergeant was assigned to a bomb group attached to the United States Army Air Force operating out of Alexandria, Egypt. The sergeant originally franked his letter with a 6-cent blue Canadian

air mail stamp, but, apparently on advise of the U.S. postal clerks at APO 785, he was advised to cover the stamp with tape and inscribe the letter "Free". So, here we have a free franked cover from a Canadian serviceman which traveled through the U.S. postal service to Saskatchewan.

Eventually these realities of international cooperation caused free franking regulations to be relaxed. Early in 1944 a directive was issued in the North African Theater of Operations which permitted U.S. servicemen serving in North Africa to send free franked letters to civilian addresses in the United Kingdom. On May 4, 1944, the Second Assistant Postmaster General authorized a similar extension to U.S. troops who were about to be deployed in continental Europe. He also granted permission for British troops serving on the continent to mail letters free that were intended for delivery in the United States (provided that such letters did not bear the postmark of a U.S. APO). On August 11, 1944, this reciprocal free mailing privilege was extended to all theaters of operation in which American troops were engaged.<sup>3</sup>

The free franking privilege was terminated December 31, 1947, according to the provisions of Public Law 190, 79th Congress.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

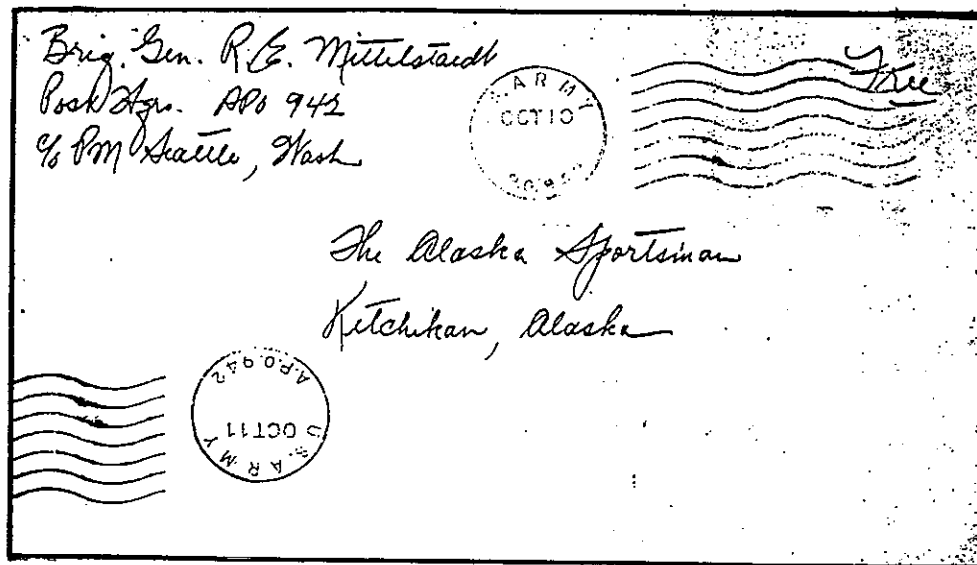


Figure 12. Free franked cover from Brigadier General R. E. Mittelstaedt postmarked APO 942 (Anchorage, Alaska) in October 1944.

number of U.S. servicemen in Australia. In addition, other APOs were established at New Caledonia, Fiji, and several other islands of the South Pacific.

Faced with a lack of U.S. postage stamps and no set procedure for mailing letters home without stamps. Some of the early troops assigned to Australia simply endorsed their mail "Soldier's Mail" (Figure 1), or Officer's Mail in the fashion of WWI A.E.F. troops and added "No Stamps Available" (Figure 6). Others used locally available foreign postage (Figure 7), and still others used U.S. postage which they had probably procured through private means (Figure 8). By the way, derivation of the amount of 24 cents postage on the cover in Figure 8 is a mystery to this author.

While the majority of troops deployed to the United Kingdom were transported after the free franking privilege had gone into effect, the early vanguard had begun to arrive before April. These men, too, were faced with postage problems similar to those in Australia, and it appears that their solutions were similar (Figure 9).

Properly free franked covers from servicemen stationed overseas are known with April 1942 dates. The earliest of record in my collection appears in Figure 10. It is dated April 10th and bears a Kodiak Naval Air Station postmark. Figure 11 shows another properly free franked cover from April 1942. This one is from APO 865 (Gander, Newfoundland).

Free franking was widely used by servicemen of all branches and ranks. Figure 12 illustrates a cover that proves that not even generals were above saving a few cents in postage. The free franking privilege was extended to mem-

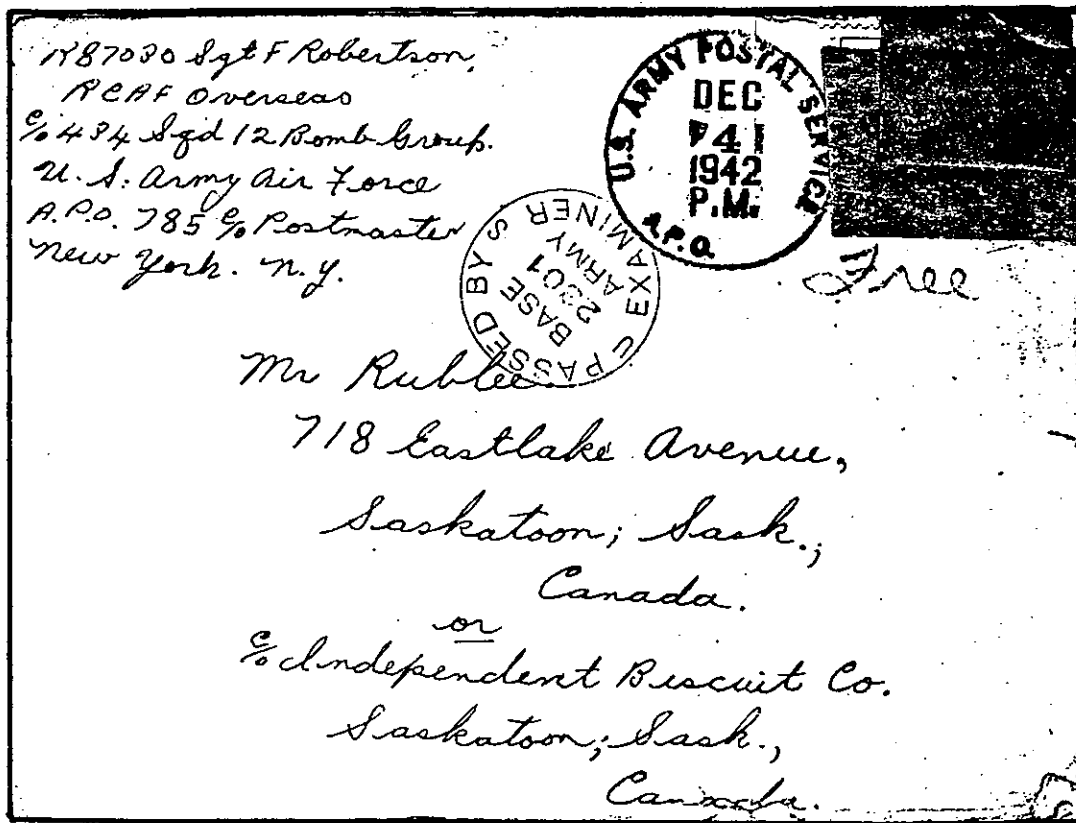


Figure 13. This cover was posted by a sergeant in the RCAF attached to an American Army Air Force unit. Mailed through APO 785 (Alexandria, Egypt) the cover displays an unusual free franking by a Canadian to Canada through the U.S. postal system.

### ATTENTION TO ORDERS...

This issue of the *BULLETIN* kicks off a new Volume - Number 29 -- and concludes 1989. It is the seventh issue produced under my editorship, and, unless there are some major changes, it may be my last!

When I agreed to serve as editor of the *Bulletin*, I did so on the provision that I would not be required to write original articles to keep the pages filled. Don't get me wrong, I love to write, but if I choose to publish I prefer to do it in my own journal, *LA POSTA*. "No problem," I was told, "there is a backlog of articles to be published, and our members send in new material all the time."

So I became editor. The backlog of material to be published turned out to be a box full of correspondence -- largely consisting of tear-sheets and photocopies of material published elsewhere -- which had been sent to the previous *BULLETIN* editor who managed to produce no issues of content during his tenure. The greatest asset available to me in terms of content was Theo. Van Dam's AEF Book Updates, and that material has continued to provide a major share of our pages ever since I took over.

As far as continuing submissions by the WCC membership, I have been very disappointed. A handful of members have submitted original work, but most of it frankly has been more in the nature of filler -- short, one to two-page pieces describing a cover or passing along an anecdote. Granted, this is very important material for an editor to have, and I have greatly appreciated these submissions, but they are filler -- not substance!

Frankly, the vast majority of what has been sent in for publication in the *BULLETIN* has been photocopies and tear-sheets of articles published elsewhere. In other words, the same kind of thing that filled the box of "backlog" stuff I was sent. Well, WCC members, I've got news for you. If you want the official publication of your society to be primarily a venue for reprinting articles relating to military postal history, which have already appeared in other publications, then you've got the wrong guy as editor. We have a membership numbering in excess of 600, and, if we can't do any better in the way of original research, then I want no part of it!

Mark my words well. This is no scare tactic attempted by a desperate editor to shake up the membership. I mean it! If there is not an immediate improvement in the quantity



and quality of material submitted for publication in the *BULLETIN*, then I will resign as editor effective with the conclusion of the current volume.

As long as I'm on the soapbox, there are some other specific changes which need to be made:

1) Each issue of the *BULLETIN* ought to contain a Message from the President. This could be anywhere from a paragraph to a page, but there should be some official communication on a quarterly basis from the highest elected officer in the club.

2) The Secretary should publish a Report of Membership, including Address Changes, News Members, etc. in each and every issue of the *BULLETIN*. It doesn't matter if there are no changes to report (highly unlikely), a quarterly Membership Report is an absolute must.

3) An annual Treasurer's Report should be published in the *BULLETIN*. This is an organization for which dues are charged, it is unthinkable that no published annual accounting is made.

4) If the Secretary is unwilling or unable to maintain an up to date WCC MEMBER mailing list, he should request to be relieved of that job. I have received far too many letters during the past 18 months which contain complaints stating, "I paid my dues to the War Cover Club some time ago and have heard nothing..." There should be a set procedure that dispatches an immediate letter of welcome to each new member telling them about the WCC and explaining when they may expect the next issue of the *BULLETIN*.

5) If elected officers continue to fail to perform their duties they should be relieved of those duties by the Board of Directors. In short, let's start running the WCC like an organization or find some new people who will!

All right WCC members, I've had my say and now it's up to you. If you want me to continue as *BULLETIN* editor I expect your help right now! First of all, get off your butt and take on a writing project that will lead to the publication of an original article in the *BULLETIN*. Next, write a letter or make a call to one of those guys listed as officers of this society. Tell 'em they'd better get their act together, or start packing. Don't write me. I don't want sympathy. I want results!

Richard W. Helbock



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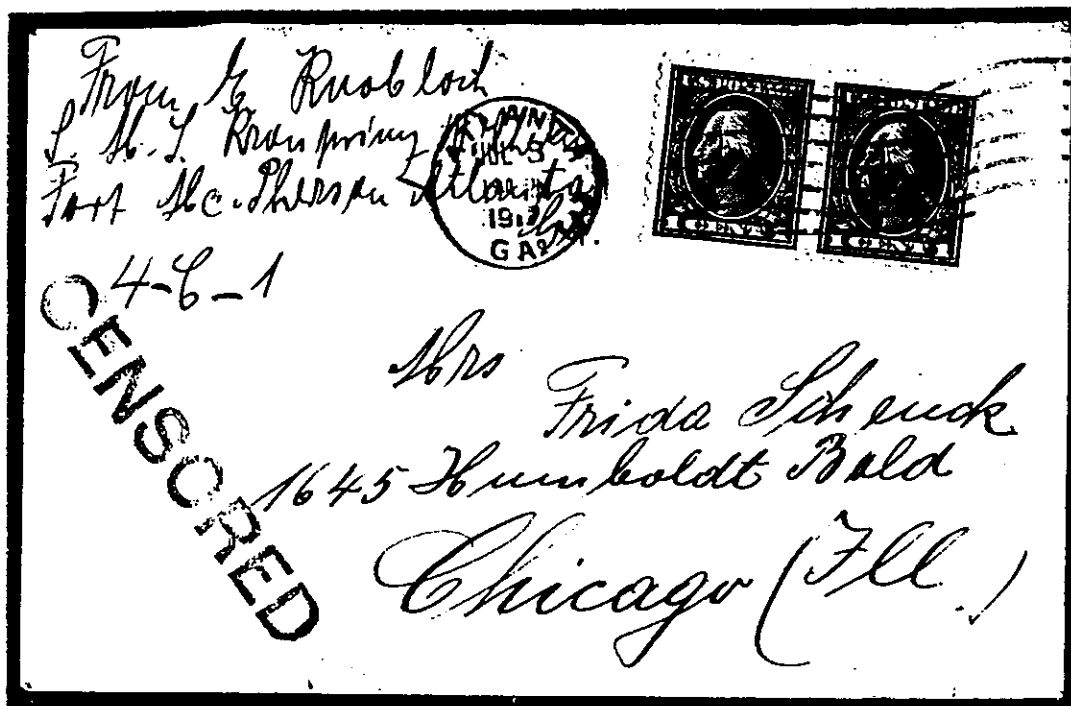
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## A POSSIBLY UNIQUE WORLD WAR I POW COVER: THE "KRONPRINZ WILHELM" COVER

By Steven M. Roth

In April 1915, before the entry of the United States into the War against Imperial Germany and her allies, the former luxury liner turned commerce raider, SMS *Kronprinz Wilhelm*, was dry docked in the harbor at Norfolk, Virginia, undergoing desperately needed repairs. Although Commander Thierfelder had requested three weeks to put his vessel into first class running condition and to make it fit for combat, the United States refused to grant him this much time, alleging that the ship was sea worthy. Out beyond the three mile limit, however, there waited British warships, only too eager to encounter a partially impaired *Kronprinz Wilhelm*. Thus it was that Commander Thierfelder made his decision to have his ship and crew safely interned with the neutral United States for the duration of the war.

The *Kronprinz Wilhelm* had not always been a crippled vessel, subject to the mercy of "neutral" powers. For 251 days at sea this former North German Lloyd Lines luxury passenger ship had been the scourge of the South Atlantic. Fitted out as a commerce raider shortly after the outbreak of World War I, *Kronprinz Wilhelm* was perfectly suited for its role as a raider. She was fast, comparable to a large cruiser in tonnage, and she had the most modern machinery then devised. Her only drawback was that she consumed more than 500 tons of coal a day at her top speed (23 knots). Her coal reserves, however, were only 5,000 tons.

During the recently completed 251-day cruise, the *Kronprinz Wilhelm* and her crew had performed admirably. The ship had traveled 37,000 miles and captured 58,201 tons of British, French and Norwegian shipping, all without causing the death of a single enemy crewman or passenger.

The United States entered the war on April 6, 1917. The crew of *Kronprinz Wilhelm* were thereupon declared prisoners of war, and the ship was seized as a prize of war. In June 1917, the *Kronprinz Wilhelm* was commissioned into the United States Navy and renamed the USS *Von Steuben*.

The cover illustrated above appears to have been mailed by one of the members of the crew of the *Kronprinz Wilhelm*, although the author has not yet been able to locate a listing of the officers and crew members of the ship to verify this theory.

Postmarked Atlanta, GA., on July 3 (or July 8), 1917, the cover is addressed to a woman in Chicago, Illinois. The return address in the upper left hand corner reads as follows: "Franz G. Roubloch/ S.M.S. *Kronprinz Wilhelm*/ FORT McPherson Atlanta Ga/ 4-6-1". While the "Wilhelm" and "Atlanta Ga" are partially obscured by the postmark, they appear quite legible on the original cover.

The author would appreciate hearing from anyone with additional or corrective information about the *Kronprinz Wilhelm* or the cover. Please write him direct at Suite 800, 123 20th Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036.

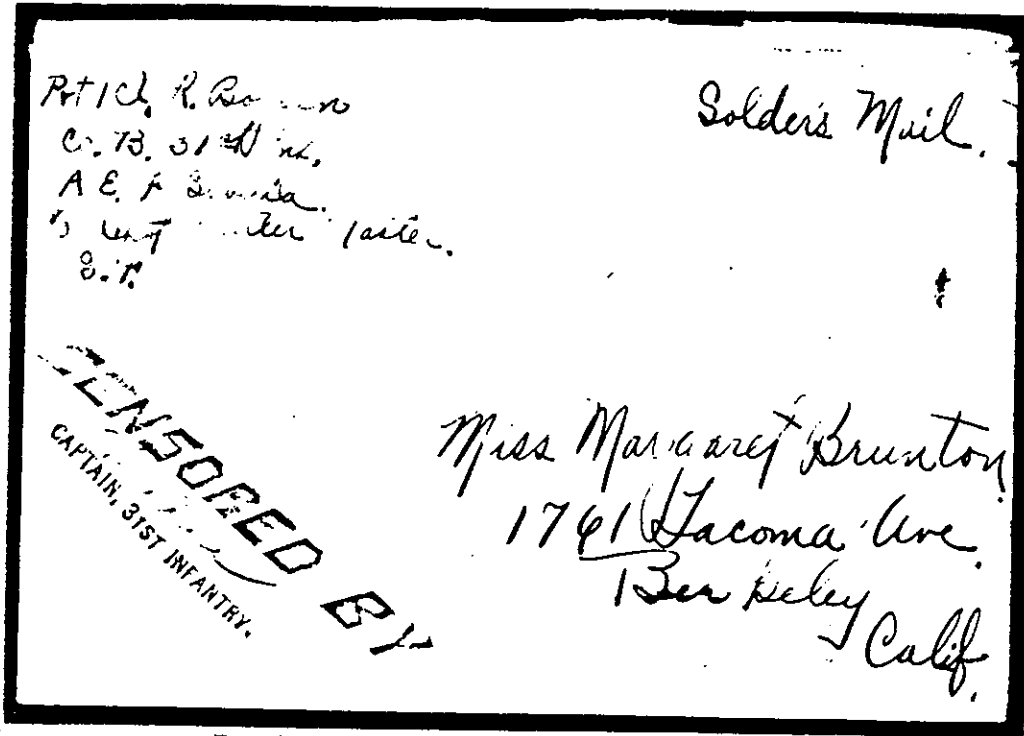
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# A.E.F. UPDATE - Additions & Corrections to the "POSTAL HISTORY OF THE A.E.F., 1917-1923"

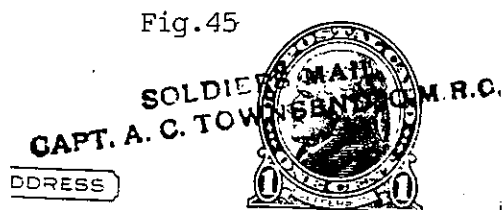
## Edited By Theo. Van Dam

This is the eighth installment in the series of UPdates and continues information published in the July-September 1989 edition of the *BULLETIN*. Since publication of a revised, second edition of the AEF book is expected in the near future, this will be the final installment of UPdates to the first edition.

**Chapter 6: Postal Censorship During World War I** (see also Naval Markings)

Hoboken, New Jersey: page 113

1.3a NEW Two-line Soldiers Mail/Capt. A.C. Townsend, OM, AC on Safe Arrival Card; no date (Fig. 45) [L. Bussey]



### Unlisted:

Red oval, 50x27mm., Passed by Censor/ April -- 1918 (Navy?, British?) on picture card, franked with two 5 cent. "Semeuses" postmarked machine pmk. A7003.9. 11-21-1918 (!) Gray straight-line handstamp RELEASED BY CENSOR (reason card was held was probably that the picture side of the card "Porte Militaire be Brest" shows ships in the harbor). (Fig. 46) [J. Hardies]

Unit Censor Violet straight line handstamp: CENSORED/ 371 ST. AERO SQUA(DRON) on YMCA picture card postmarked British circular date stamp Calne 8-23-1918. (Fig. 47) [J. Hardies]

Private Censor Handstamp Circular O.K./1st.Lieut.Inf./A.E.F. with Unit Censor (number unclear) and Base Censor Mo. 15 on Knights of Columbus env. unclear postmark A2000 type date 11-?-1918. (Fig. 48) [J. Hardies]

**Chapter 9 - Occupation of the Rhineland, 1918-1923:**  
page 151

### Picture cards:

"Advance General Headquarters, American Expeditionary Forces/ Government Building, Treves, Germany" (Fig. 49).

"Aboard Steamer "Frauenlob"/ON THE RHINE/ AMERICAN ARMY OF OCCUPATION/Compliments of/LOYAL ORDER OF MOOSE/Distributed by the Y.M.C.A." (Fig. 50)

"Entry of American Troops in Luxembourg 11-21-1918" (Fig. 51)

Knights of Columbus Easter Card from APO 746 (4th Division) 4-8-1919 (Fig. 52) [Major Sanftleben]

And again these mysterious red stars [See *BULLETIN* Vol. 28/No. 4 for explanation] Picture card with French 10 cent. "semeuses" unclear postmarks - note insulting message! (Fig. 53) [J. Hardies]

**Addendum: Special Corner Cards:** page 31

American Officers Hotel/ Hotel du Louvre/ Paris on envelope postmarked APO 702 (A7002.1) 11-2-1918 (Fig. 54) [J. Hardies]

### Unlisted

Diplomatic Mail env. with two GREEK 5 lepta and one 15 lepta stamps, postmarked Washington, DC 8-3-1919, on corner card H.W. Gray, 2Lt. A.W.C. (Army War College?) handstamp EMBASSY OF THE/ UNITED STATES OF AMERICA and straight line handstamp CENSORED (Fig. 55) [J. Hardies]

**Two interesting World War I cover not directly related to the A.E.F.:**

Envelope from APO 715 (42nd Division) postmarked type A3001.3 (no year) with French multicolor label (translation: "Think of the Wounded/ Red Cross/ Union of French Women") (Fig. 56) [L. Bussey]

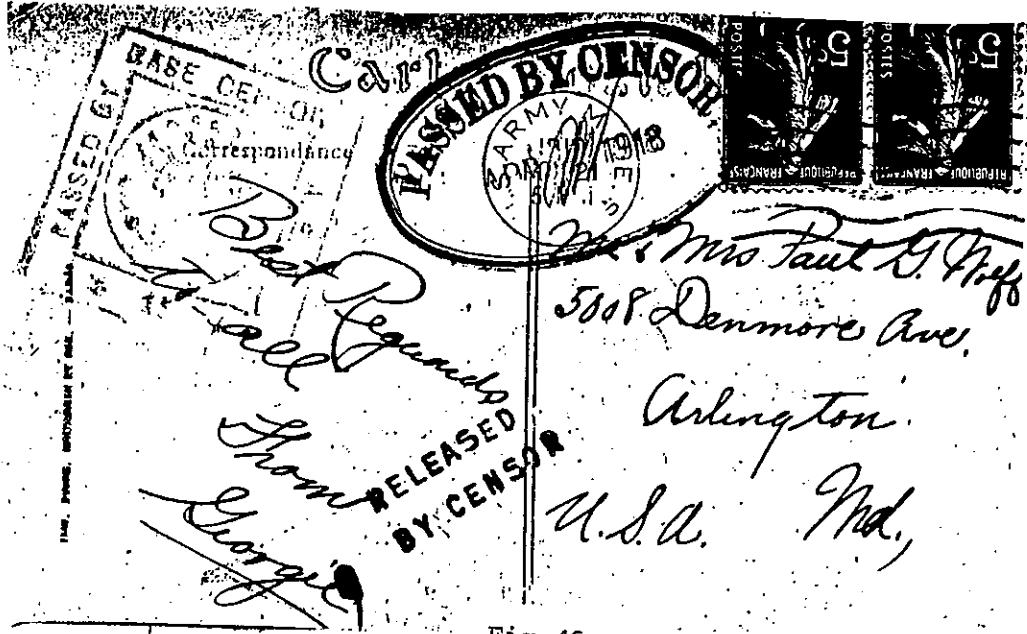


Fig. 46

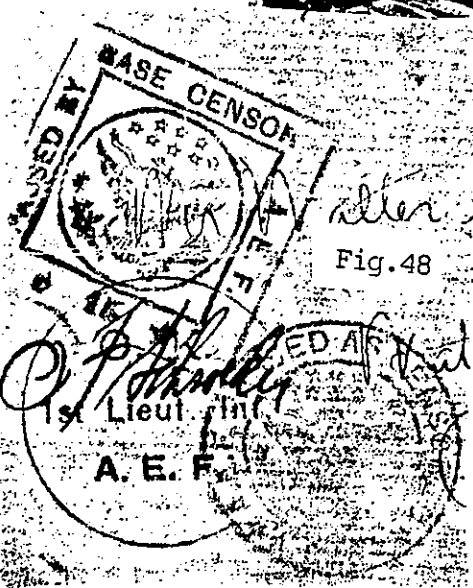
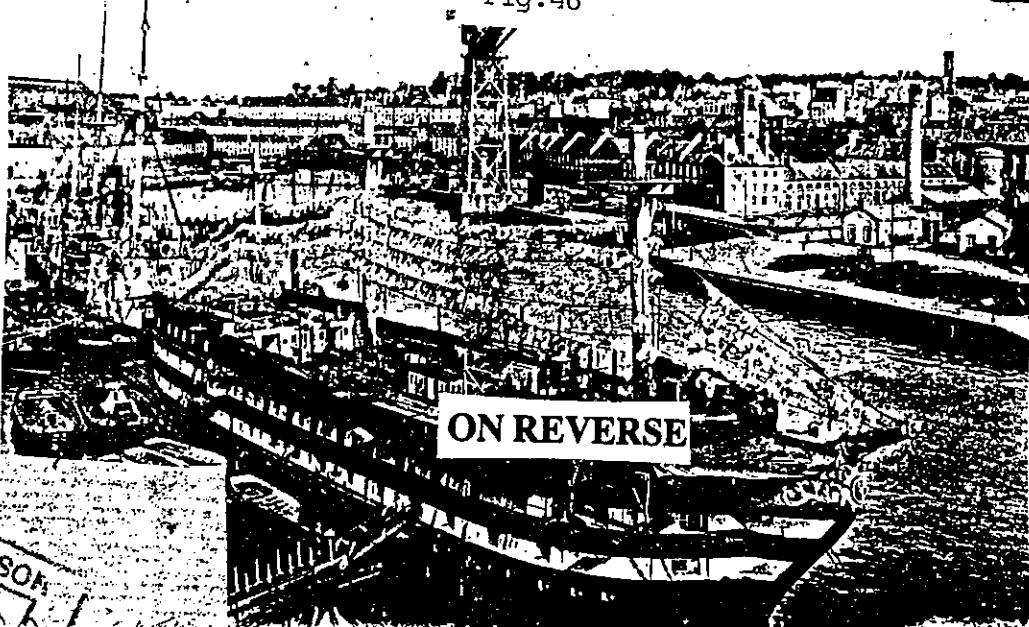


Fig. 48

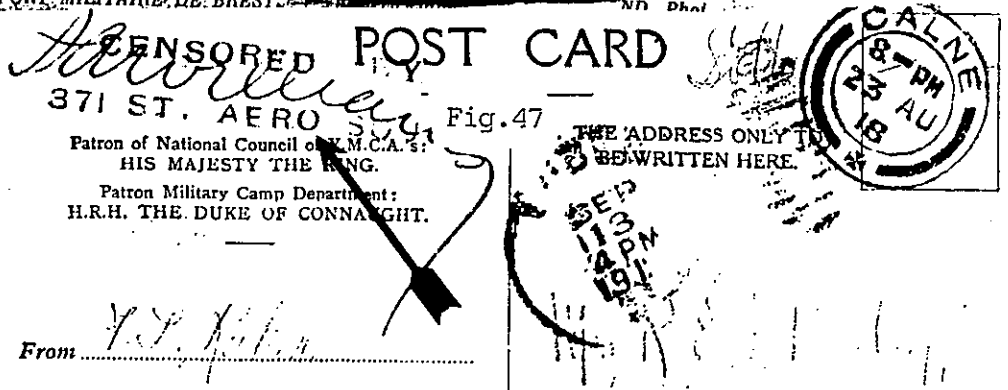
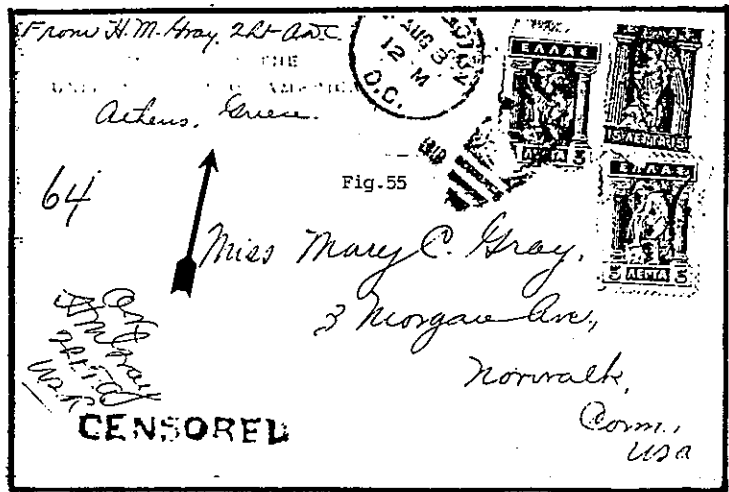
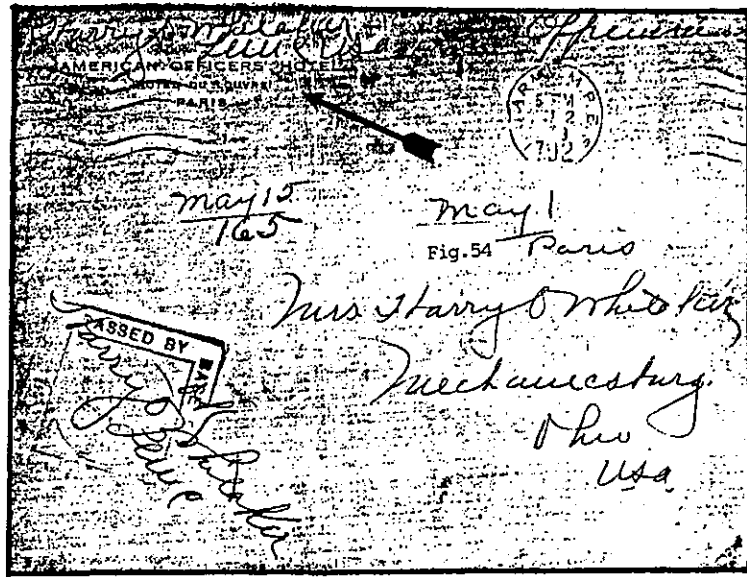
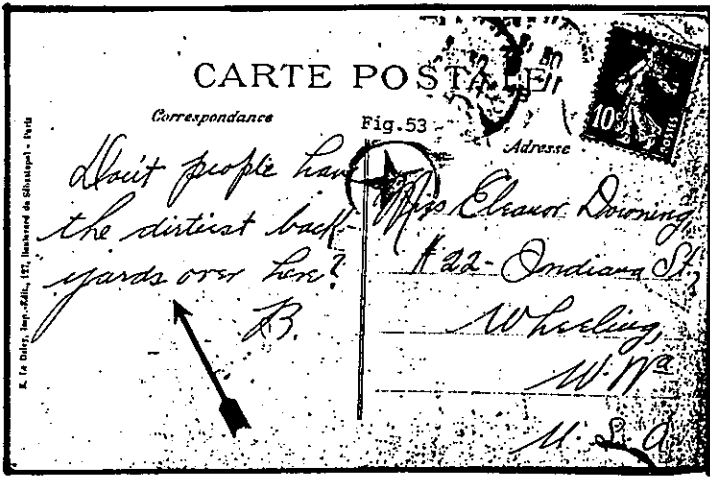
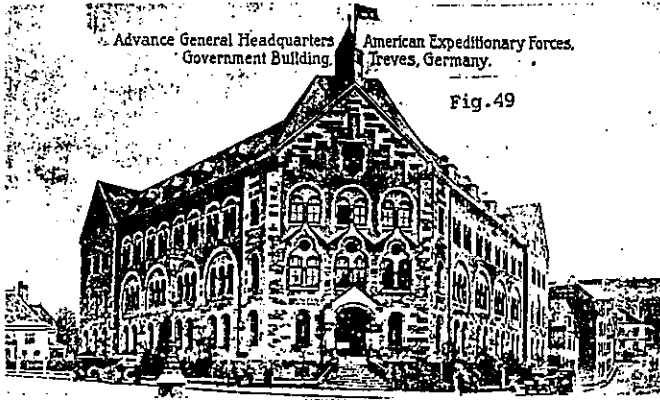


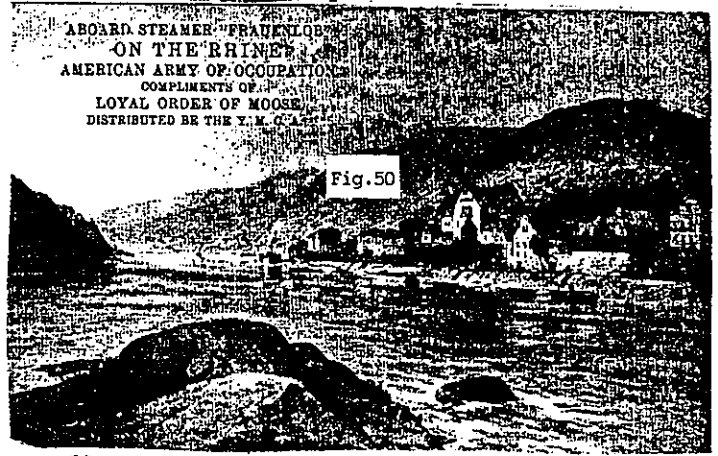
Fig. 47





Advance General Headquarters Government Building, American Expeditionary Forces, Treves, Germany.

Fig. 49



ABOARD STEAMER "FRANZ LOB" ON THE RHINE. AMERICAN ARMY OF OCCUPATION. COMPLIMENTS OF LOYAL ORDER OF MOOSE. DISTRIBUTED BY THE U.S. G.P.O.

Fig. 50

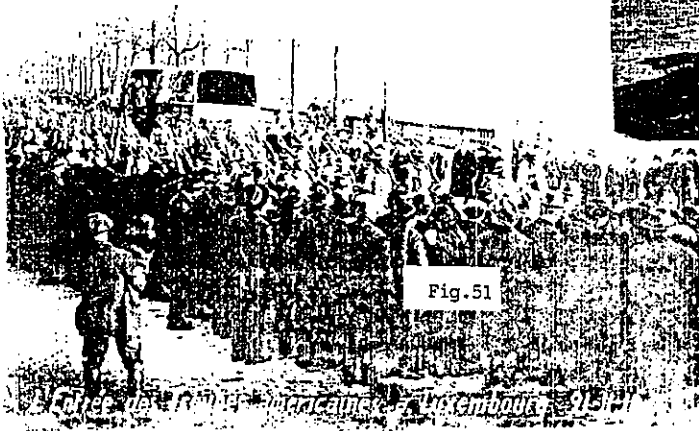


Fig. 51

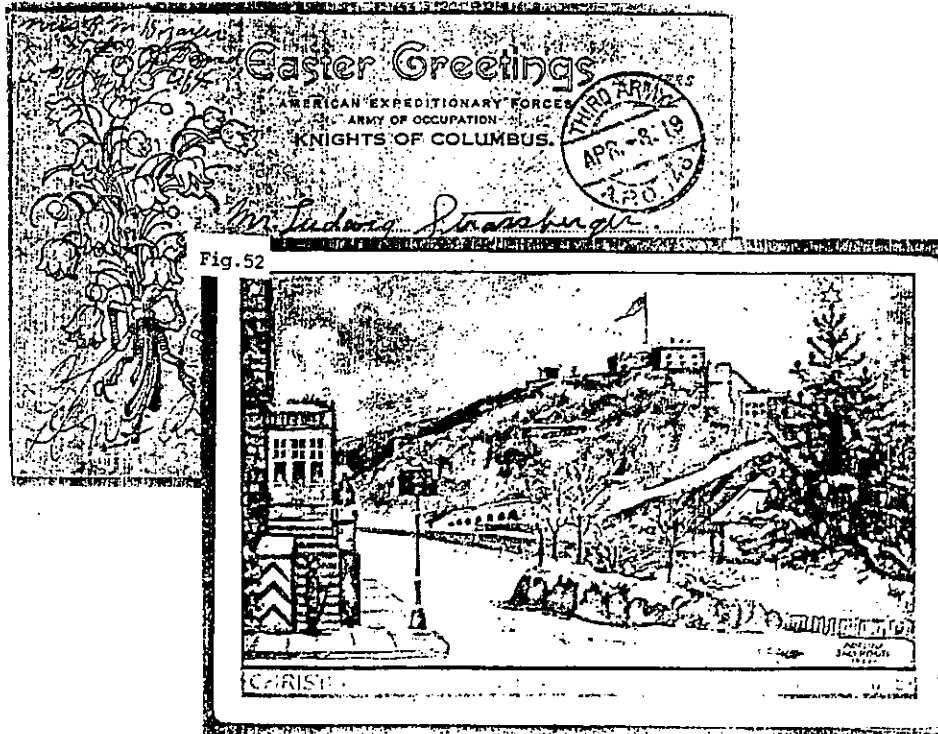


Fig. 52

CHRISTMAS

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In order to include material in a particular issue, it must be received by the Editor by the deadline listed above.



YMCA envelope overprinted for elections - Vote of the Refugees (Fig. 57) [L. Bussey]

### Additions to the Bibliography

Collins, Peter. "Some Problems Experienced by US Postal Service During World War I", *Stamps and Printed Matters* (GB), Feb. 1989 [Courtesy of Herman Herst]

Elder, Jack. "World War I Patriotic Seals", *War Cover Club, Bear Flag Post*, 15th Anniversary Issue, 1983.

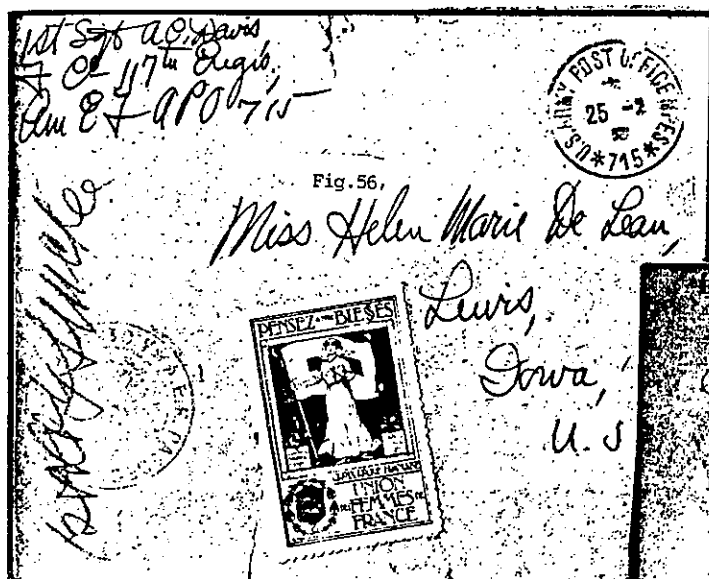
Erle, Everett. "The 1918 Polar Bear Cover Give Insight Into Postal Markings," *Stamp Collector*, December 31, 1988.

Laurence, Michael. "WWI Magazine Forwarding," *Linn's Stamp News*, July 11, 1988.

Sackett, Richard W. "The "800" A.E.F. Postmarks: An Update", *War Cover Club Bulletin*, V.27, N.4 (July-Sep. 1988).

### Non-Philatelic

Coffman, Edward M. *The War to End All Wars*, Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1986.



LECTIONS (A)  
NOTE DES RÉFUGIÉS  
(CANA 18 octobre 1918)  
SOLDIER'S MAIL  
RF  
Nom: *Morice Sackett*  
Prénoms: *Richard W.*  
Date et lieu de naissance: *...*  
Liste électorale sur laquelle l'Electeur est inscrit.  
Commune d: *...* Département d: *...*  
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