

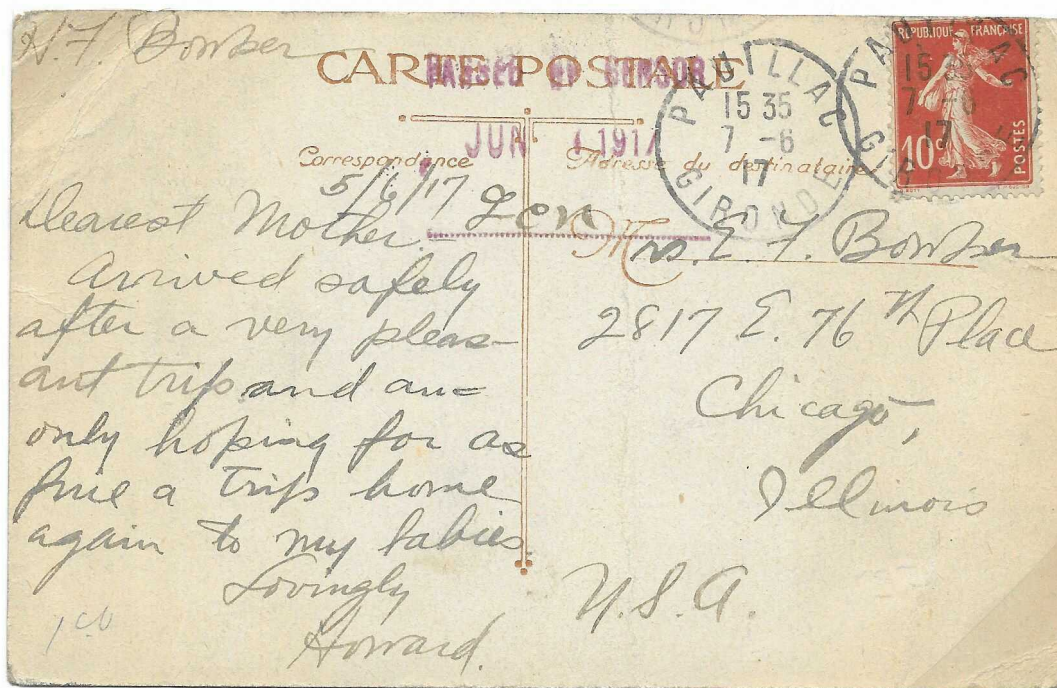
## U.S. NAVAL SHORE BASES IN EUROPE 1917-1919

Reflecting the enormous build-up of American forces in Europe after the U.S. entered World War I, the Navy opened a substantial number of onshore bases to support the warships and seaplanes that operated in the theater. Prior to the Armistice, at least, the availability of mail that can be identified as to origin is extremely limited, since most examples from both onboard and shore stations received a generic "U.S. Navy" postmark. After the end of the war, restrictions were loosened and specific postmarks were provided to some of the facilities, with most of such postmarks being recorded in quantities of five or fewer. In any event, such material is highly elusive and it has taken several decades of careful searching to assemble the modest collection of such examples shown in the exhibit.

Headquarters facilities were opened in London and Paris, both of which had special postmarks made available. The primary naval bases for warships were at Plymouth in England and Brest in France. Major seaplane assembly and repair bases were operated in Queenstown in Ireland, Eastleigh in England, Pauillac in France and Porto Corsini in Italy, each of which served the smaller bases in their respective territories. These all provided identifiable mail either before or after the Armistice.

Most, if not all, of the bases were numbered, with designations running as high as 29. However, there is no evidence that all of these numbers were used, and no comprehensive listing of the base locations in the literature. As a result, collectors must study their covers diligently, seeking to identify numbers with locations based on clues from cancels, censor markings, return addresses and contents of letters (where available). In the opinion of the exhibitor, the supply of such identifiable material is sufficiently limited that it is unlikely that this showing could be duplicated.

The presentation of the exhibit is geographic, essentially running from west to east, starting in the Azores and extending to Italy.



The first contingent of men from the 1st Naval Aeronautical Detachment arrived in Pauillac, France on the collier *U.S.S. Jupiter* on June 5, 1917. This picture postcard of Bordeaux was written on that date but censored and postmarked at the French civil post office on the 7th. It is not provable whether the sender was a crew member of the *Jupiter* or a member of the Detachment, but this is probably the earliest example of naval mail from Europe in World War I.



**AZORES**

Portugal declared war on Germany and thus became a member of the Allies on March 9, 1916. After the U.S. entered the war thirteen months later, a collier, *U.S.S. Orion*, was sent to the Azores in June 1917 to refuel ships passing through the mid-Atlantic with coal. Later, *Orion* was joined by other vessels, including destroyers, so Naval Base 13 was created at Ponta Delgada in September 1917. In addition to ships, the First Marine Aeronautic Company operated seaplanes on anti-submarine duty from the base, which closed in August 1919.



Soldiers &  
 Sailors Mail  
 March 1, 1919

U. S. N. Base 13  
 July 2, 1919



As with most of the other bases, mail sent from the Azores during wartime is rarely identifiable, since it received generic "U.S. Navy" postmarks. However, in 1919, a "Base 13" cancel was introduced, for which an example is shown on the lower card. The "Soldiers & Sailors Mail" marking on the upper card is very unusual and not seen otherwise by exhibitor.



## GIBRALTAR

This British colony was an ideal location for a patrol base and as a stopping place for ships entering/leaving the Mediterranean. As a result, it was designated as Base 9 and U.S. destroyers, sub-chasers, yachts and cutters were stationed there. For use on mail sent from the shore facilities or from vessels not having their own "U.S. Navy" postmarks, a special cds inscribed "U.S. Atlantic Patrol Forces" was employed. It is seen struck in black or blue in the summer and fall of 1918.

NAVY DEPARTMENT,  
OFFICIAL BUSINESS.  
Penalty for private use, \$300.00.

Captain E. J. Connelly, U.S. Navy  
U.S. Naval Port Officer  
Gibraltar, (Spain)

*Officers Mail*

*H. B. Bailey Esquire  
No. 76. Public Library  
Newport News  
Virginia  
U.S.A.*

Supply Department  
U.S. Naval Base Nine.

CENSORED  
U.S. NAVAL FOR

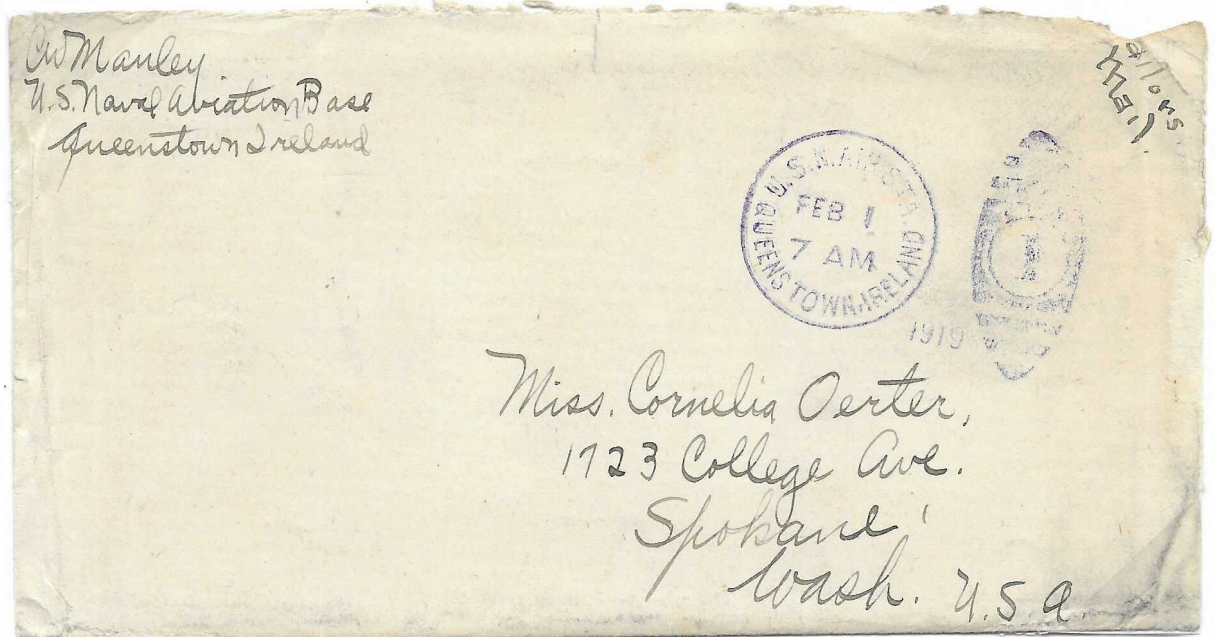
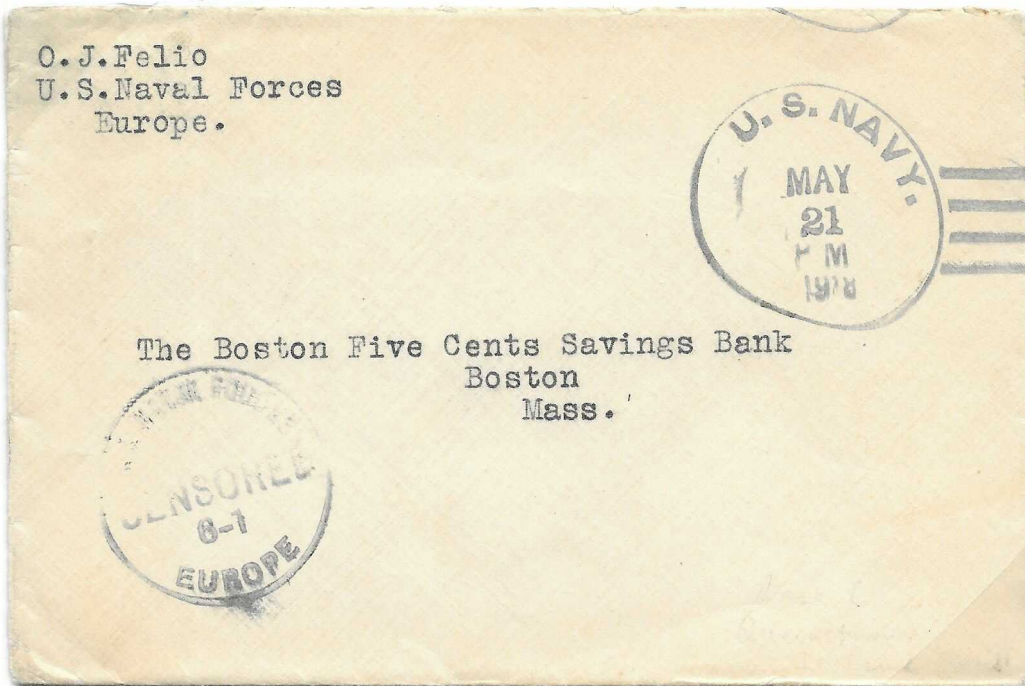
Smaller cover sent without postal markings but it has the return address of Capt. Connelly, U.S. Naval Port Officer, Gibraltar (Spain). Presumably the British would not have been too pleased at the geographic designation had they seen it.

**IRELAND**

Base 6 at Queenstown (now Cobh) was commissioned on February 22, 1918. It was an aviation assembly and repair facility as well as a supply base for ships on convoy duty in the North Atlantic. It was closed on April 10, 1919.

U.S. Navy  
May 21, 1918

U.S.N. Air Sta.  
Queenstown, Ireland  
February 1, 1919

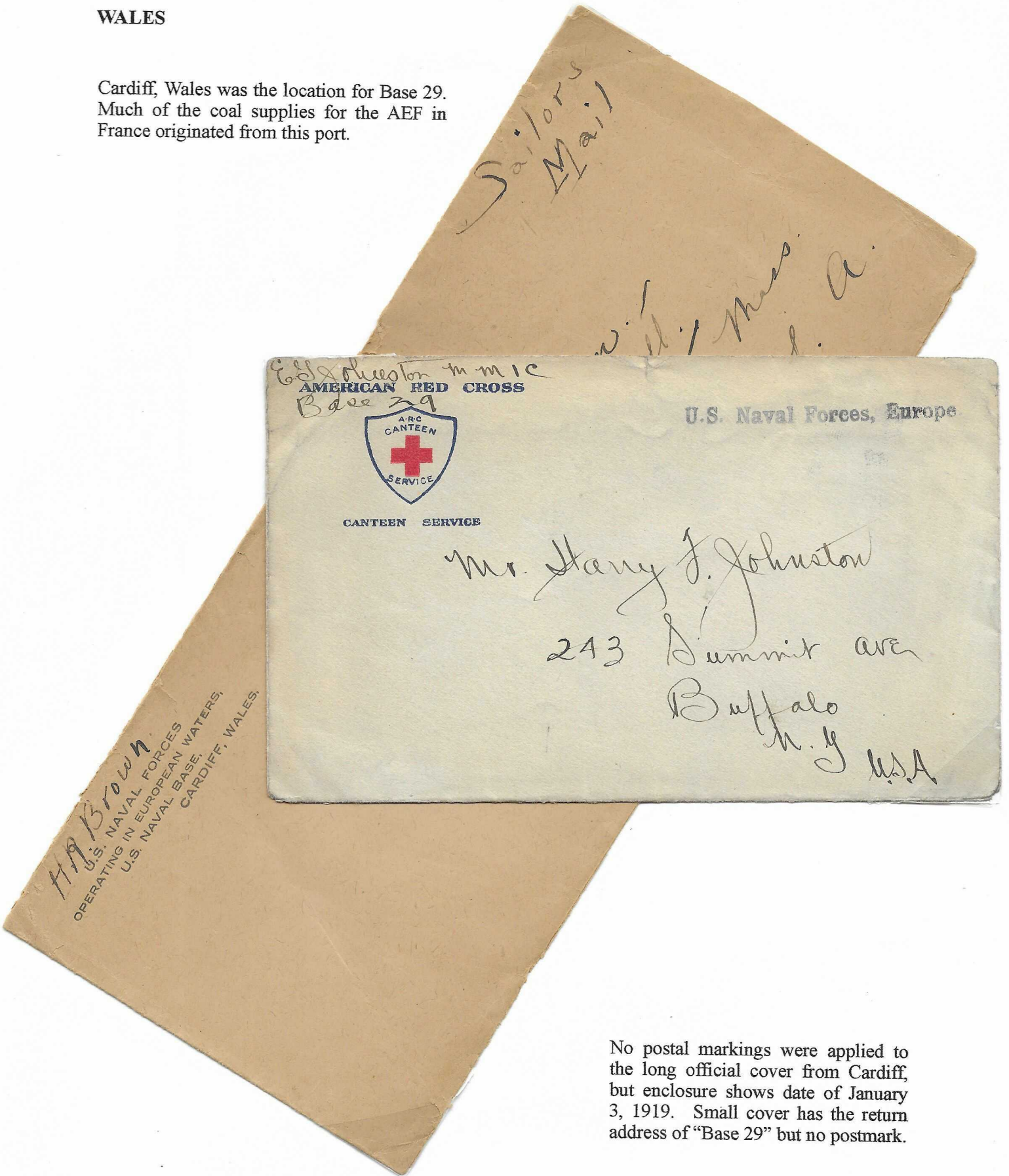


Identifiable mail from Queenstown is very elusive. Upper cover shows "6-1" in the censor mark meaning censor #1 at Base 6. After the end of the war, a new cds with the location was introduced. Only four examples have been recorded, all dated in 1919.



WALES

Cardiff, Wales was the location for Base 29. Much of the coal supplies for the AEF in France originated from this port.



No postal markings were applied to the long official cover from Cardiff, but enclosure shows date of January 3, 1919. Small cover has the return address of "Base 29" but no postmark.



ENGLAND

The headquarters of the U.S. Naval Forces in Europe was located at 30 Grosvenor Gardens, London S.W. This cover was sent registered to Naval Base 7 at Brest, France via the British postal service.



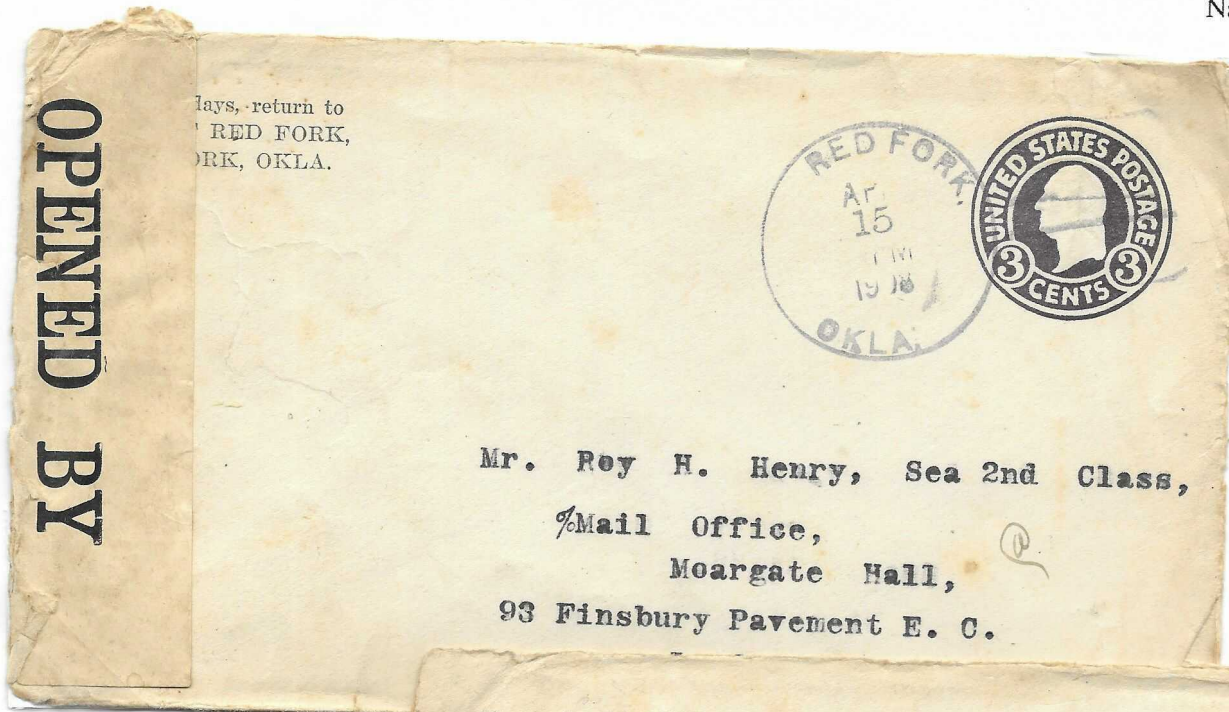
Cover was received in Brest on December 15, 1918, as attested by receiving mark of "U.S. Naval Base 7/Registered" on reverse. It was then forwarded to addressee at the Paullac Air Station.



ENGLAND

The U.S. Naval Air Service operated a mail distribution center at Moorgate Hall, 93 Finsbury Pavement, London E.C. Letters coming in to this office would be sorted and then forwarded to the addressees at various bases in England. A special backstamp inscribed "Naval Air Service Mail Service/London" was applied to letters passing through the office.

Naval Air Service  
Mail Office  
May 11, 1918



Front and back sides of covers from the same correspondence showing mailing address and backstamp. The sailor to whom the letters were addressed is known from other examples to have been stationed at the Naval Air Station at Killingholme in Lincolnshire.

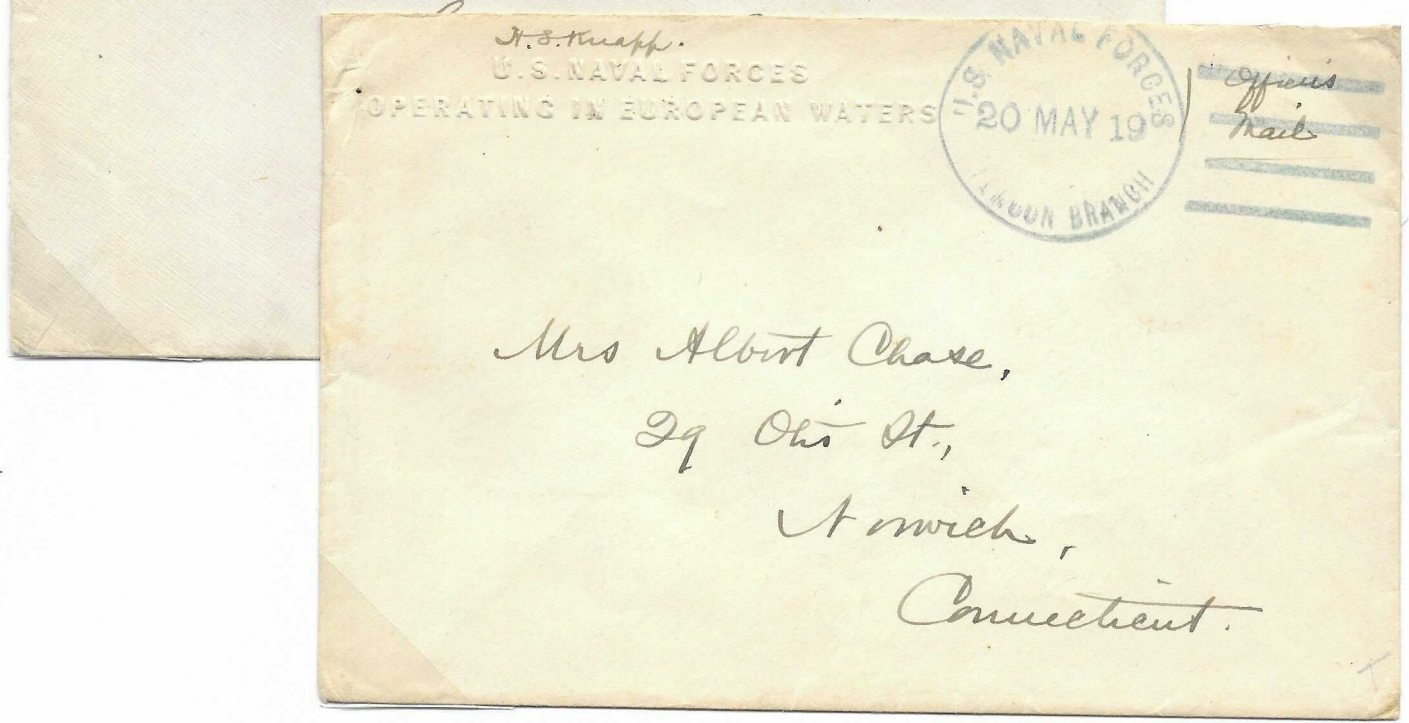


ENGLAND

In mid-1919, the Headquarters in London received a new postmark inscribed "U.S. Naval Forces/London Branch," with two different configurations for the date.



U.S. Naval Forces/  
London Branch  
April 18, 1919  
May 12, 1919  
May 20, 1919



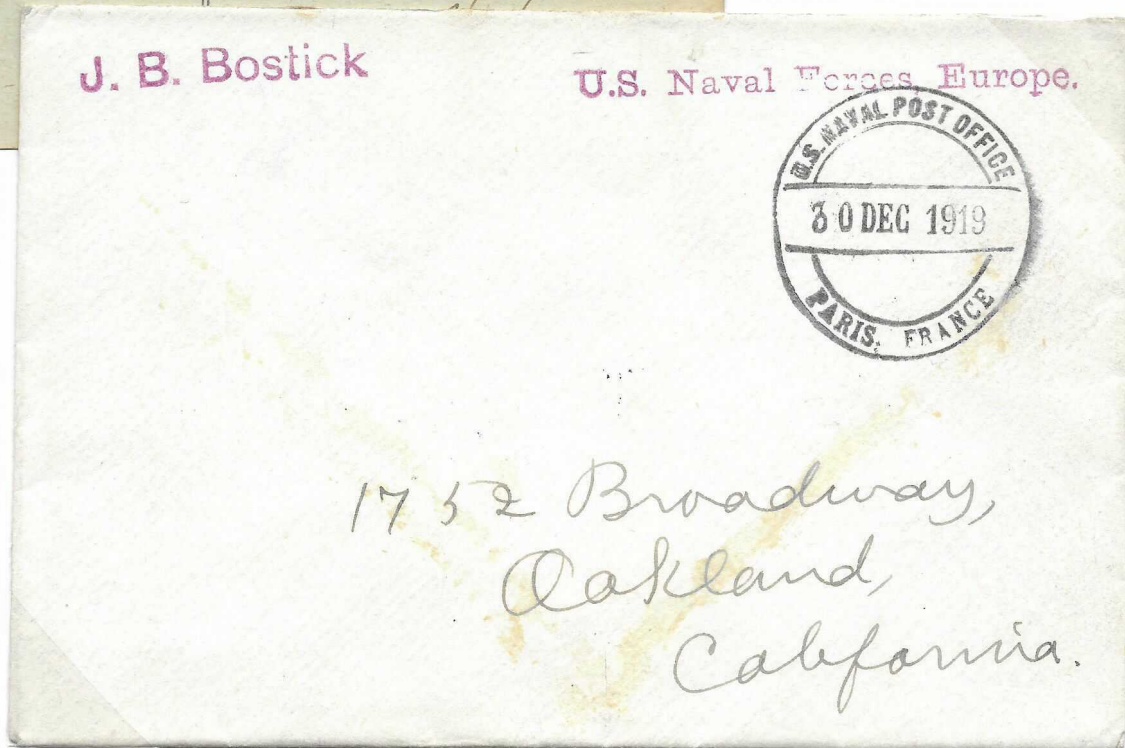
The London Branch postmark is known struck in various colors during 1919.



FRANCE

The U.S. Naval Headquarters was moved from London to Paris after the Armistice. A special postmark for its mail inscribed "U.S. Naval Post Office/Paris, France" was introduced in December 1918 and is known to have been used for about a year.

U.S. Naval Post Office/Paris, France  
March 11, 1919  
December 30, 1919

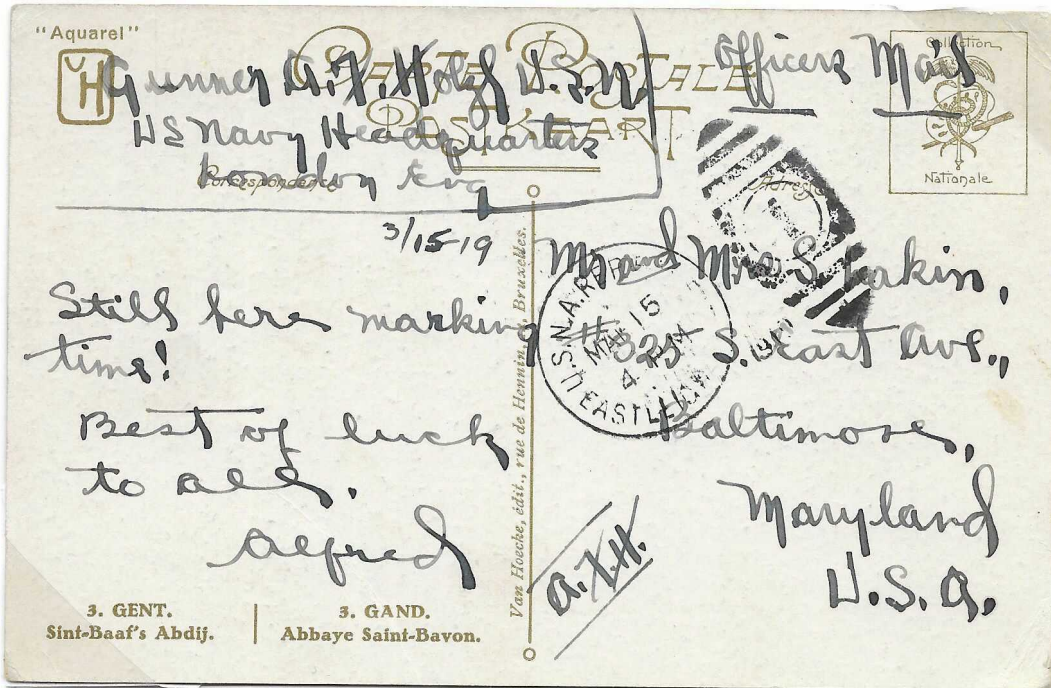


Picture postcard of Paris was sent via the naval post office to the base at Eastleigh, England. Lower cover shows the latest recorded use of this postmark on a highly unusual usage. Return address on reverse from Dr. Bostick, Ex-Austrian Battleship Zrinyi, U.S. Naval Force Eastern Mediterranean." This cover was sent by pouch from Pola to the naval office in Paris, where it entered the mail stream.



ENGLAND

The British turned over the RAF base at Eastleigh to the Americans on July 20, 1918. It then served as the primary assembly, repair and supply base for the Naval Air Service until it was closed down on April 10, 1920. There is no mention of a U.S. Receiving Ship operating at Liverpool in the literature.



U.S.N.A. Rep. Base/  
Eastleigh, Eng.  
March 15, 1919

U.S. Receiving Ship  
Liverpool, England  
May 8, 1919



Following the end of the war, new postmarks were provided for some of the more active locations, including Eastleigh and Liverpool. Only two examples of the former and this one example of the latter have been recorded.



**ENGLAND**

Plymouth, Devonshire was the location for Base 27. It had a special cancel with the base number in late 1918 and early 1919.

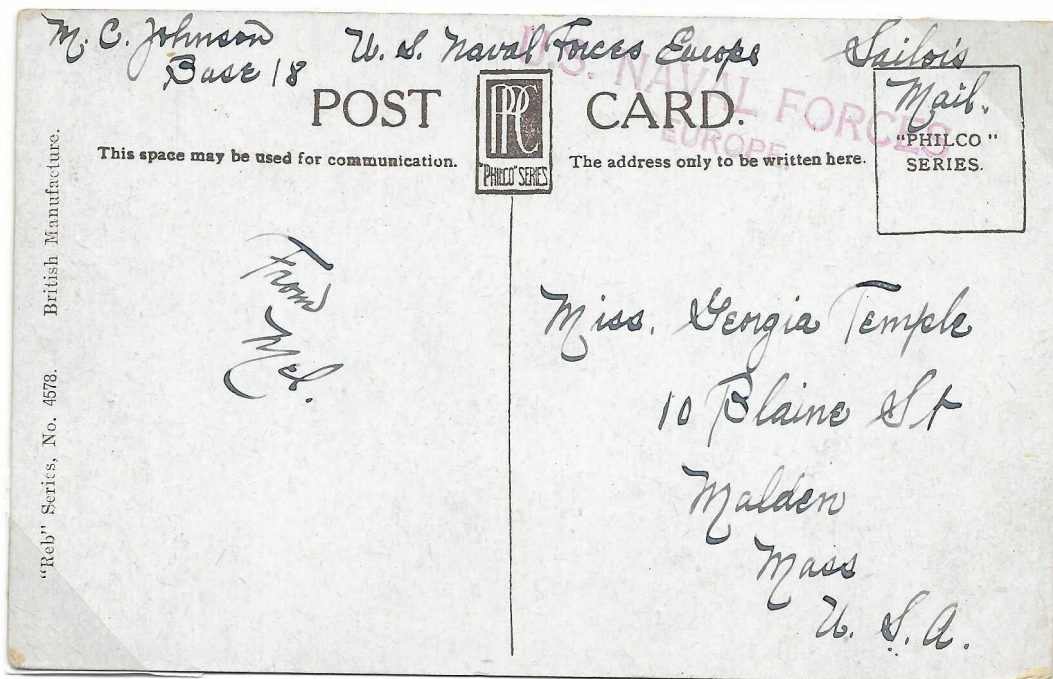
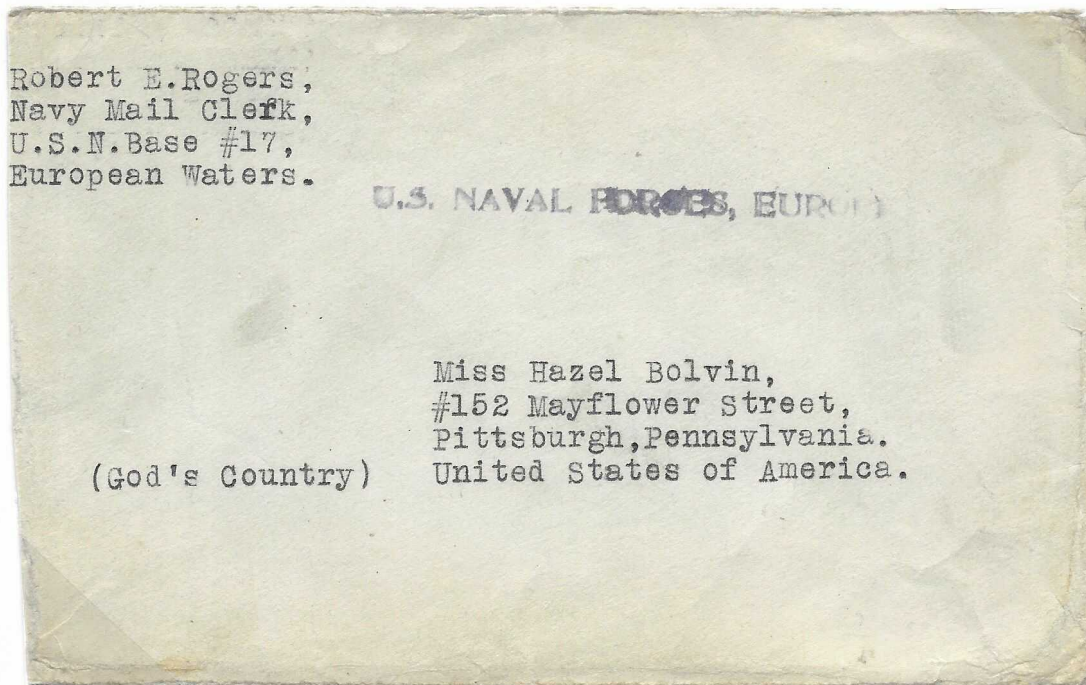


Inbound cover addressed care of "Commander of American Naval Forces Operating in European Waters" was forwarded to the base at Plymouth and delivered to the addressee on Sub Chaser 40.



## SCOTLAND

The U.S. Naval bases in Scotland were primarily concerned with patrolling the North Sea approaches. Base 17 was located at Invergordon and was the home base for a fleet of minelayers during the hostilities and of minesweepers after the Armistice. Base 18 was at Inverness and conducted similar activities.

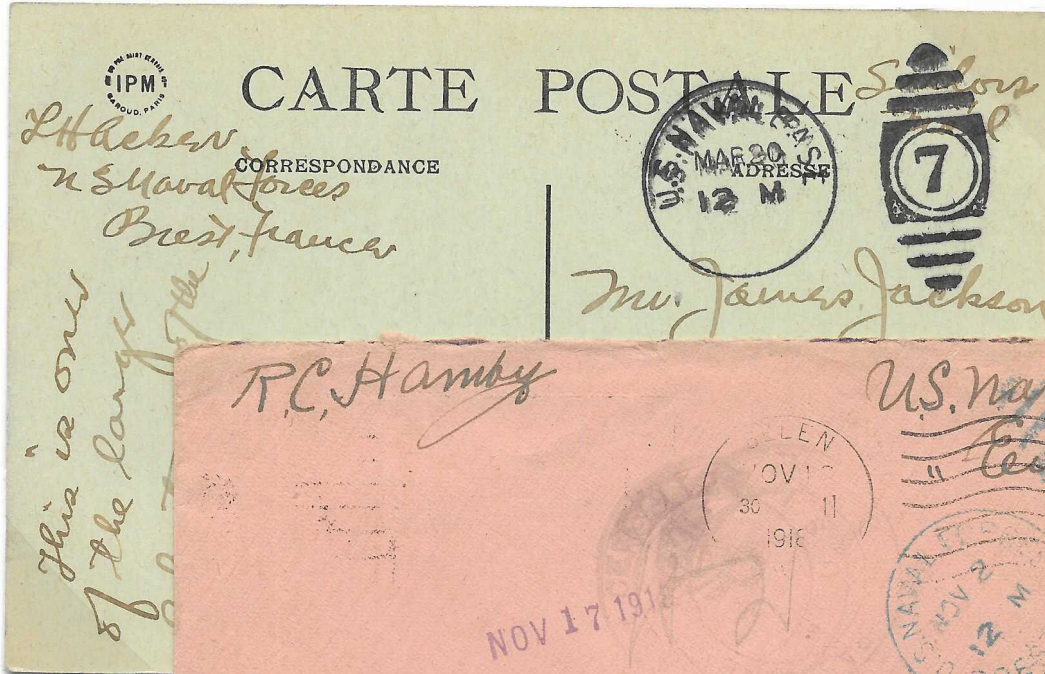


Identifiable mail from Scotland is very elusive. In fact, these undated examples with no postal markings could not be identified at all except for the base numbers shown in the return addresses.



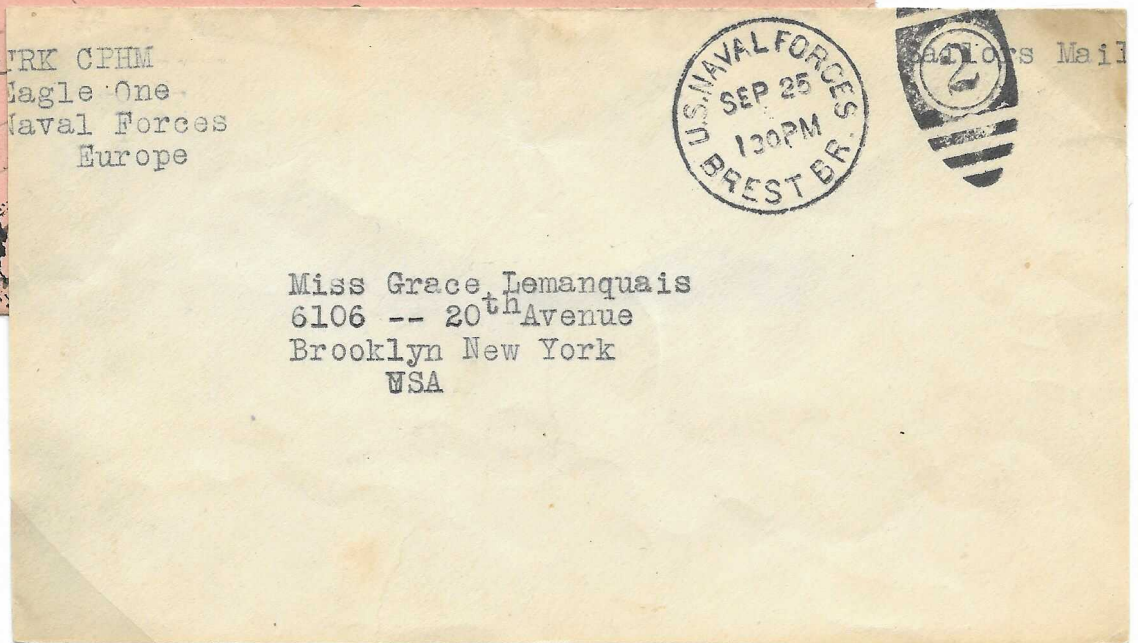
**FRANCE**

The most active naval facility in France was at Brest, which included seaplane and kite balloon bases, a major supply depot and, from early 1919, was the principal port of embarkation for American troops returning home. Three different handstamps were provided, the earliest identifying the location as Base 7 and used from mid-1918. The others were hammer 1 and 2 with Brest spelled out and used in late 1918.



U.S. Naval Base 7  
March 20 (1919)

U.S. Naval  
Forces/Brest Br.  
November 2, 1918  
September 25 (1918)

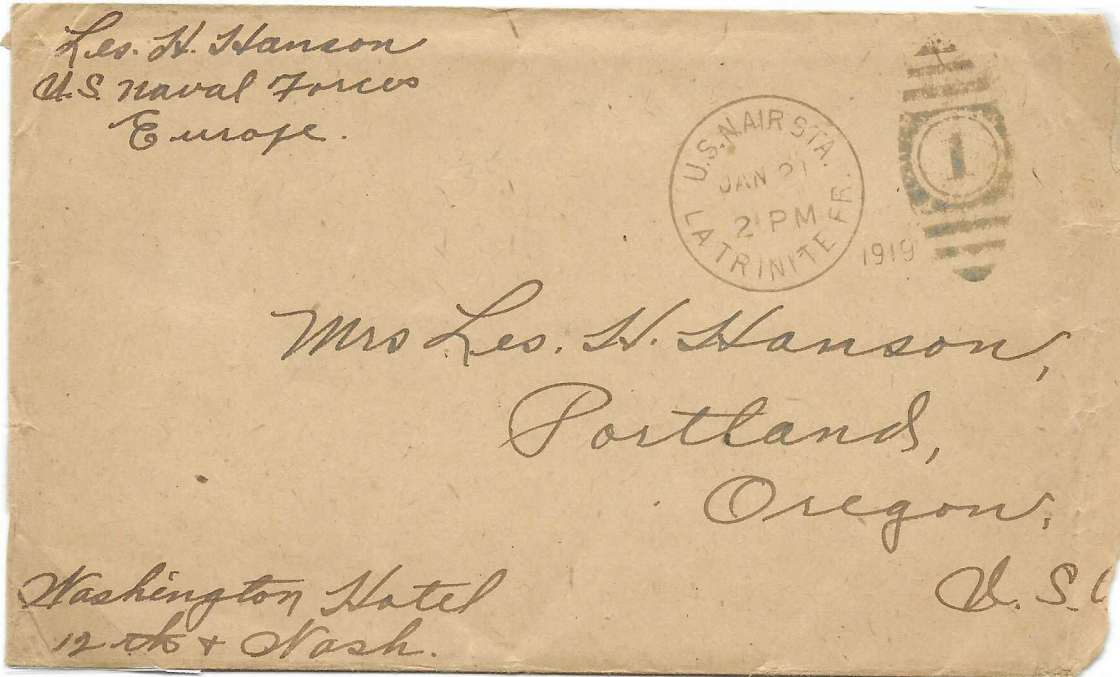


Reflecting the high level of activity at the port, the Brest postmarks were the most widely used of all the naval markings of the era.



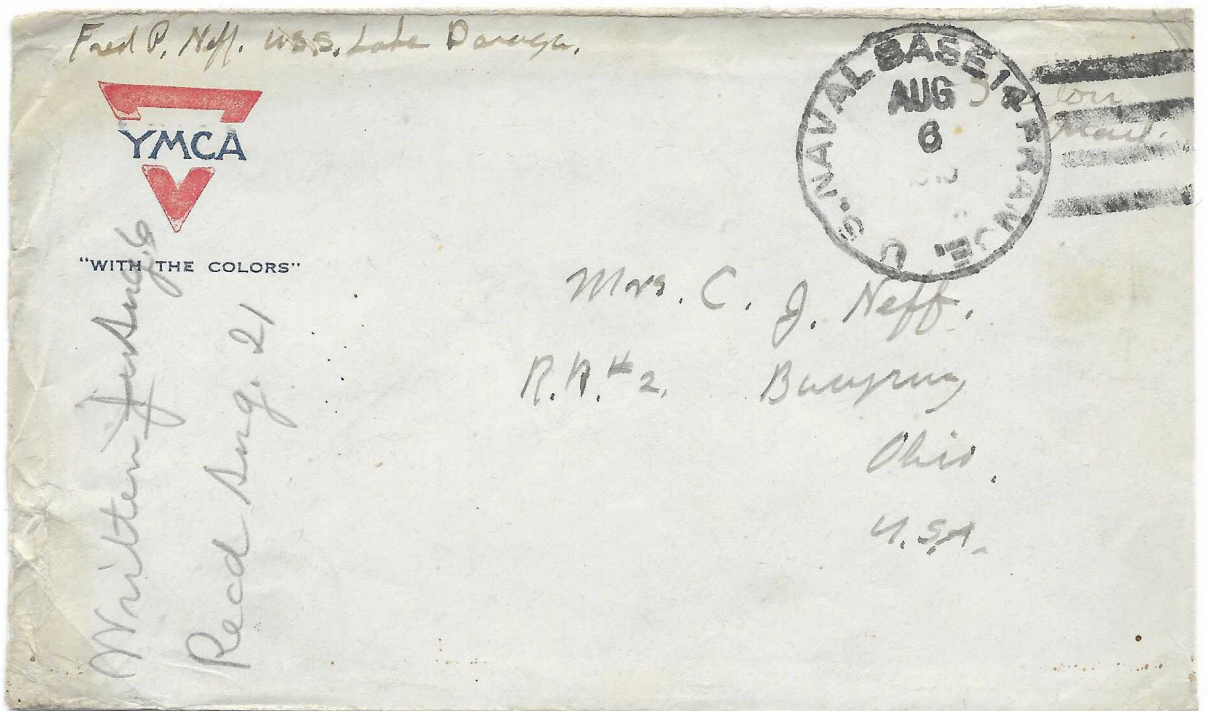
FRANCE

The U.S. Naval Air Station at La Trinite operated kite balloons for observation purposes. It used a special postmark briefly in 1919 until the facility was closed down on February 5. Base 14 was located at Bordeaux, France.



U.S.N. Air Sta./  
La Trinite, Fr.  
January 21, 1919

U.S. Naval Base  
14 France  
August 6, (1919)



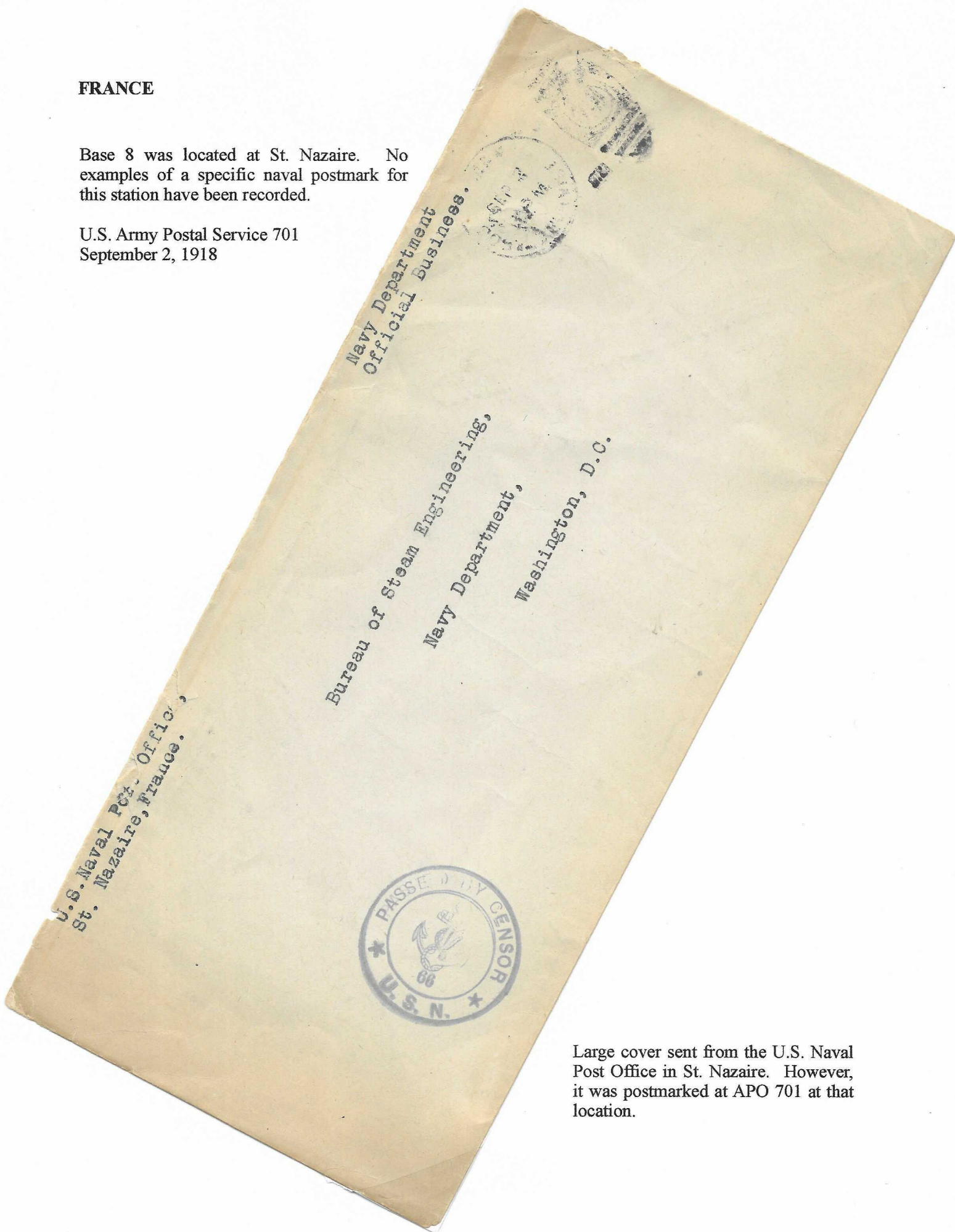
Examples of mail from identified post offices in France are highly elusive. Lower cover sent by a sailor on U.S.S. Lake Daraga to Ohio.



FRANCE

Base 8 was located at St. Nazaire. No examples of a specific naval postmark for this station have been recorded.

U.S. Army Postal Service 701  
September 2, 1918



Large cover sent from the U.S. Naval Post Office in St. Nazaire. However, it was postmarked at APO 701 at that location.



**FRANCE**

In order to maintain close contact with its shore bases and ships in European waters, the Navy constructed a high power radio transmission station at Croix-d'Hins near Bordeaux. It was later named for Lafayette.

Bordeaux, Fr./Lafayette Radio Sta.  
September 5, 1919

NAVY DEPARTMENT  
OFFICIAL BUSINESS  
PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE \$300



U.S. Navy High Power Radio Detachment  
Croix - d'Hins, France



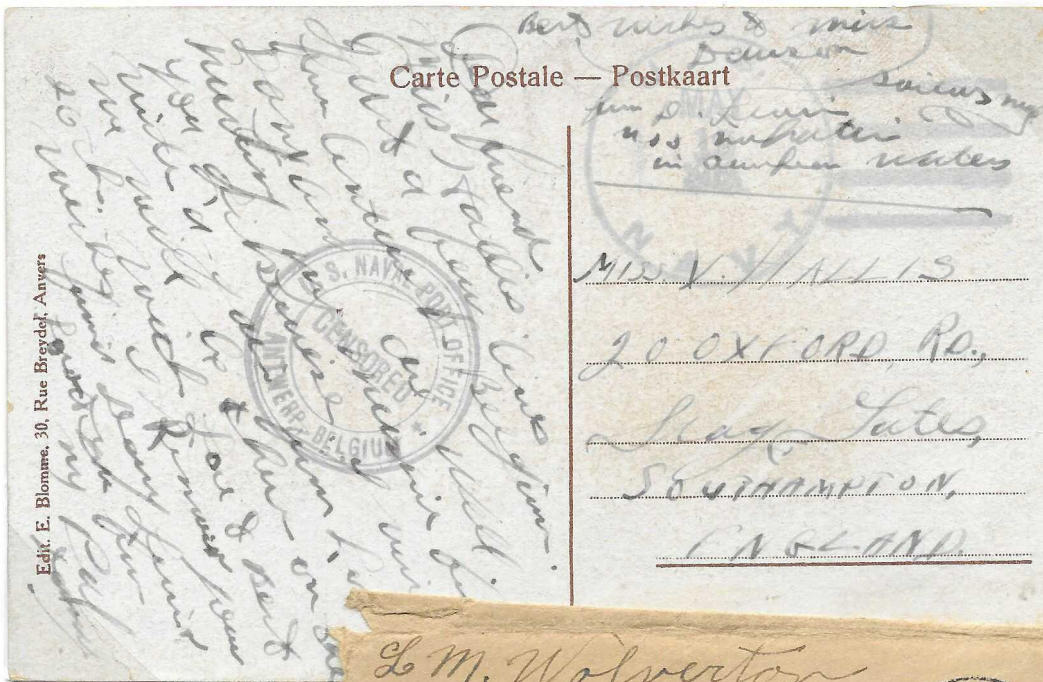
Large cover sent from the radio detachment but has no postal markings. Smaller cover has postmark of Bordeaux/Lafayette Radio Station in 1919.



**BELGIUM**

Following the withdrawal of the Germans pursuant to the Armistice agreement, the Navy opened an office in Antwerp, which was the most convenient port for supplying the American occupation forces in the Rhineland. A special cachet was used at this location.

U.S. Naval Port Office/  
Antwerp, Belgium  
May 13, 1919

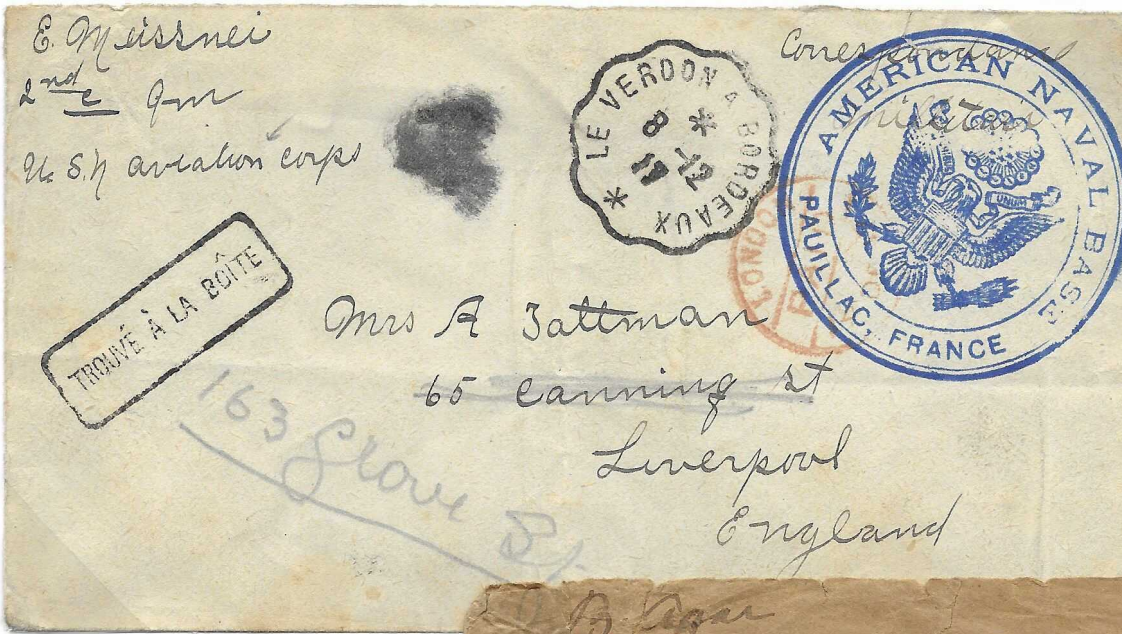


Postcard above shows the Antwerp Port Office cachet. Cover was sent by a member of the U.S.N. Belgium Relief Commission. It was processed through the post office at Base 7 in Brest, France.



FRANCE

Pauillac was the principal seaplane assembly and repair base for France. It was commissioned on December 1, 1917 and remained in operation until February 15, 1919.



Le Verdon a Bordeaux  
 December 8, 1917

Pauillac/Gironde  
 December 24, 1917



These covers are very early examples of Naval Air Service use. They were sent by naval personnel from Pauillac to England and New York State, respectively. Postmark of the French railway post office and the civil post office at Pauillac.

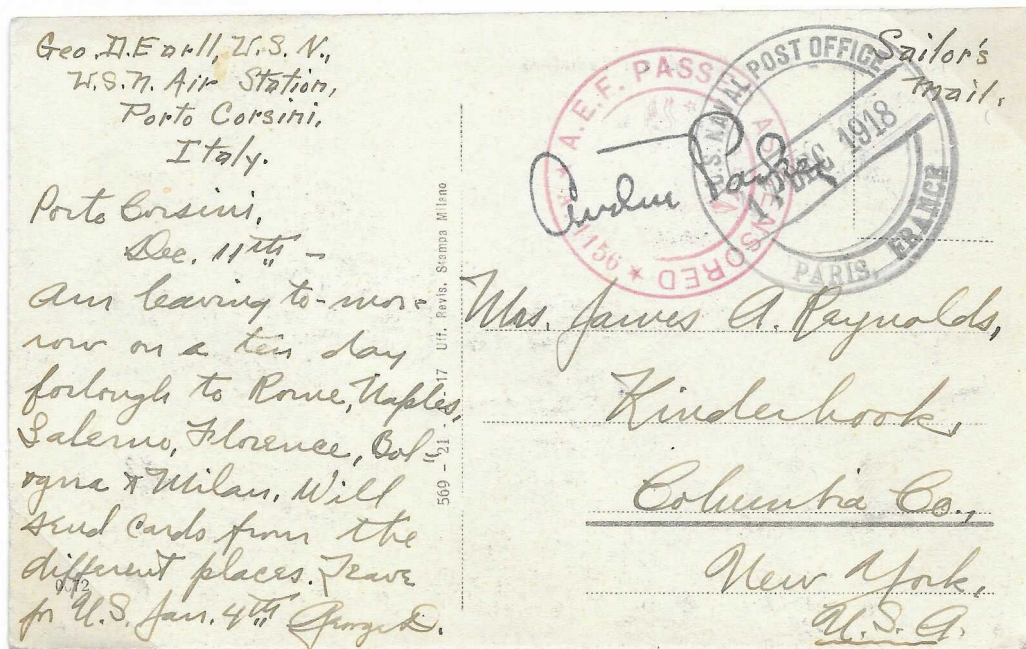
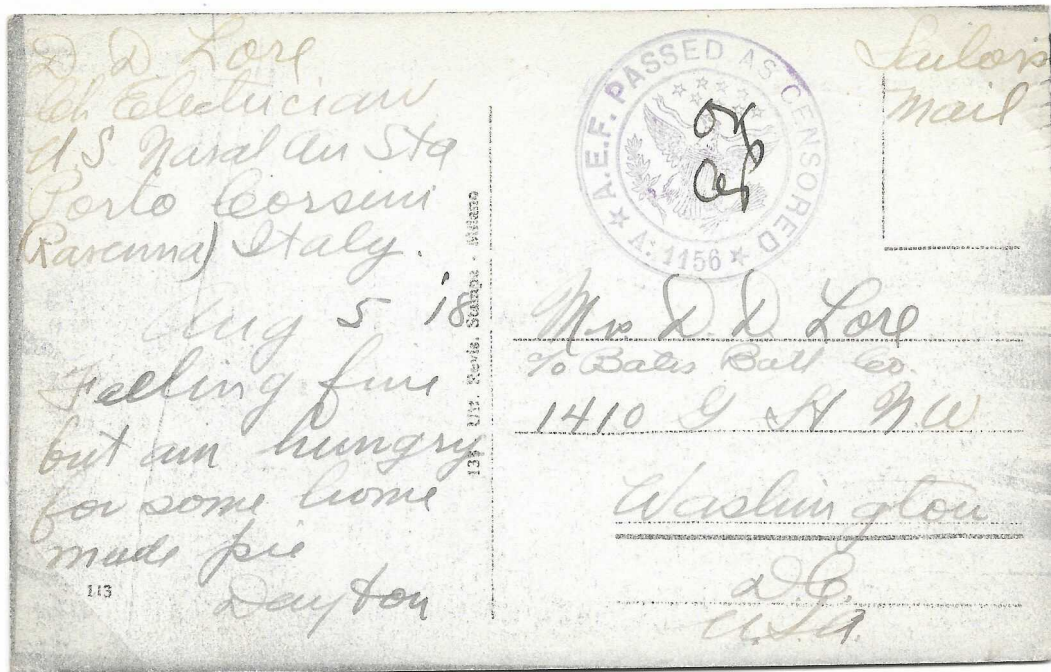


**ITALY**

The only U.S. naval facility in Italy was the seaplane patrol station located at Porto Corsini near Ravenna. It did not have any special markings, but mail can be identified from return addresses.

Porto Corsini  
August 5, 1918

U.S. Naval Post  
Office/Paris, France  
December 17, 1918




Above picture postcards of Ravenna were mailed by members of the Naval Air Service based at Porto Corsini in 1918. The lower example was sent to Paris by pouch and entered the mail stream at the naval post office there.



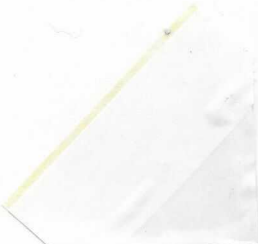


## DANZIG

Prior to the establishment of the Free City, U.S. ships used Danzig as one of the principal ports through which relief supplies were sent to Germany and Poland. A small naval office was established in the port area to coordinate these activities.



U. S./Navy  
March 27, 1919

U.S. Navy Port Office,  
Danzig, Germany  
May 26, 1919



Upper card can be identified as originating in Danzig based on the message, although the postmark is a generic "U.S. Navy" type. The "U.S. Navy Port Office" marking for Danzig is mentioned in the literature, but the lower card bears the only example that has been recorded. This postcard was sent via the Berlin courier to Paris where it entered the mail stream at APO #702.