

# WWI 100

## Philately Tells the Story of U.S. Centennial in the Great War

BY ED DUBIN AND AL KUGEL

*I have a rendezvous with Death  
At some disputed barricade,  
When Spring comes back with rustling shade  
And apple-blossoms fill the air –  
I have a rendezvous with Death  
When Spring brings back blue days and fair.*

— Excerpt from the war poem, “I Have a Rendezvous With Death” (published 1917), by Alan Seeger

Sadly, World War I did not become the war to end all wars, as many had hoped. The global conflict lasted a little more than four years — from July 28, 1914 when Austria invaded Serbia, to November 11, 1918 — and resulted in more than 18 million deaths, including 7 million civilians.

Remembrances across the world — white crosses on battleground burial grounds, memorials, markers, and statues — along with photographs, newsreels, diaries, books, and news stories help us understand a little of what happened.

Philatelic objects, of course, particularly items that went through the wartime mails, are a special category of remembrances that allow us to see and touch what the soldiers, their families, and people of that time held in their hands and read with their eyes.

Here, we will look at philatelic items linked to the United States’ involvement in World War I. They might not be as moving as the posthumously published poem “I Have a Rendezvous With Death” penned by Harvard-educated Alan

Seeger (1888–1916) — an American who joined the French Foreign Legion and died at the Battle of the Somme — but they certainly help us better understand that tumultuous era.

One hundred years have passed since the United States entered World War I on April 6, 1917, with a Congressional declaration of war on Germany.

At the start of the United States’ entry into WWI, the strength of the Army was 127,588 regulars supplemented by 181,620 National Guard officers and men. Eighteen months later, when the war ended at 11 a.m. on November 11, 1918, the Army had grown 12 times that size to about 4 million men, with almost 2 million serving in France with the American Expeditionary Force. The surviving covers and letters from this Army and supporting organizations offer a fascinating historical insight into the part the United States played in the tumultuous WWI era.

We are presenting a sample of United States-based covers and ephemera that could be included in a WWI postal

Charcoal drawing by W.T. Benda, circa 1918, of soldiers carrying rifles with fixed bayonets, advancing through barbed wire entanglements. Background image courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.





Figure 1. American Rene Phelizot carries the American flag to the train station in Paris in 1914, after the first contingent of American volunteers became part of the French Foreign Legion. Phelizot and Alan Seeger, shown here in his fighting gear, shared the flag-carrying honors. A card from an early enlistee had some early negative impressions of meals — “We live on soup, cold, boiled, tough beef and vegetables. It is the same each meal. Change is unknown.” — and comrades: “The regiment is composed of the scum of the earth ... they steal everything they can put their hands on ...”

history collection. For purpose of organization, we divided the collection into four main sections: Pre-War, Home Front in War Time, American Expeditionary Forces in France and Italy, and Post-War. In most cases each topic in this article is worth further study and a story in itself. At the end of this article is an extensive reference list that can assist the reader in further study. By choice, we are excluding the Allied Russian intervention story. It is a topic of numerous books and articles and does not need to be rehashed here.

## PRE-WAR Involvement Prior to April 6, 1917

American involvement in the early years of the war can broadly be grouped into two categories: those who volunteered to fight and humanitarian programs organized to assist in alleviating suffering or promoting peace.

### French Foreign Legion

On August 4, 1914, with a tangle of alliances and treaties across Europe, the continent erupted into a war involving essentially every country on the continent. At the start of hostilities, France was beseeched by thousands of foreigners wanting to fight for France. Within these volunteers was a group of 43 Americans. On August 25, the Americans and

other foreign volunteers took their oath of allegiance to the French Foreign Legion [Figure 1]. They hoisted up a large American flag and marched from the Hotel des Invalides to the Saint-Lazare train station for a trip to the Rouen training camp. Paul A. Rockwell, in his 1930 book, *American Fighters in the Foreign Legion 1914–1918*, states that the total number of American volunteers in the Legion was 90. Casualties were high as 38 were killed or died from their wounds and most of the survivors were wounded, some as many as four times.

### Lafayette Escadrille (Squadron N124)

The Lafayette Escadrille is likely the most recognizable American fighting unit of early WWI. At the end of 1914, future Escadrille pilot Norman Prince proposed to the French government the idea of an all-American squadron. After much lobbying by Prince and others, the French came to realize the concept's propaganda value and agreed to the proposal. Escadrille Americaine was formed and on April 20, 1916, placed on front-line duty near the Swiss border. In December



1916, after German protests to the U.S. government, the name was changed to Lafayette Escadrille.

The Escadrille pilots included James McConnell, who was injured when he wrote a letter on September 17, 1916 [Figure 2] to a woman in Paris. McConnell's back was injured a month earlier in a crash landing and he was recuperating at the French auxiliary hospital Vitrey-le-Francois. Though not completely recovered, McConnell returned to flying with greatly reduced head movement, but was killed in action on March 23, 1917.



Figure 2. James McConnell standing before his Nieuport fighter (right) and a cover (above) sent by McConnell to Paris in September 1916.



## Americans in the Canadian Expeditionary Force

Recent research at the University of Western Ontario indicates that as many as 100,000 U.S. citizens may have served in the Canadian army during WWI. This number would have included Americans living in Canada subject to the Canadian draft and cross-border volunteers. In early 1916, the number of Americans crossing the border was significant enough to form four American battalions (211th, 212th, 213th and 237th) that became known as the "The American Legion."

After reaching France, the American government protested that the name violated its neutrality. The Canadian "American Legion" was then disbanded and its members absorbed into other Canadian units.

The cover shown from Corporal Jack Morris [Figure 3] includes a letter in which he discusses a good time he had at a dinner with the remaining "Yanks" from the "American Legion." Somewhat wistfully he also wishes he could have volunteered for the Canadian contingent sent to North Russia. However, because of his leg wounds that was not possible.

## Representing Prisoners of War

As a neutral power during the first part of the war, the United States adopted the role of the protection and care of prisoners of war in Russia, Germany, Austria, France, and Great Britain [Figure 4]. In Germany, American Ambassador Gerard secured passes for 10 embassy personnel to visit and inspect the 100-plus main camps and numerous off-site work camps. Of the 10 inspectors, seven were doctors that had volunteered for the work. With time, the Americans were able to see improvements in prisoner care and at least in



Figure 3. Corporal Jack Morris was serving with the Canadian Expeditionary Force when he wrote a letter, possibly to his sister in New York, postmarked December 14, 1918. Also shown is an enhanced image of the handstamp on the cover.



Figure 4. This cover was sent from the American Berlin Embassy to a British officer in the Merseburg, Germany, prison camp.





Figure 5. A cover and letter from V.L. Kellogg, director of the Belgian office of the Commission for Relief in Belgium. With a German Brussels, Belgium censor handstamp on the back, the letter was apparently written in Brussels, censored, and then hand carried to Rotterdam to be mailed.

one case, see a camp commander replaced.

## Hoover and the Commission for Relief in Belgium

From 1914 to 1919, the Commission for Relief in Belgium directed an international food relief program for more than 9 million Belgian and French civilians that lived in German-occupied territories and were dependent for their survival on importation of food aid. The commission was formed in October of 1914 with American businessman Herbert Hoover at its head [Figure 5]. Hoover, the future U.S. president, was a mining engineer and financier living in London when the

war broke out. During its five years of existence the commission purchased almost \$1 billion of foodstuffs from worldwide sources. These funds enabled the commission to distribute an average of 100,000 tons of bulk foods per month. When the United States entered WWI, Hoover stepped aside and operation of the commission was taken over by Spanish and Dutch representatives.

## American Red Cross Mercy Ship

On September 12, 1914, American Red Cross medical units set sail from New York for Europe. Of the 10 units aboard, each consisting of three doctors and 12 nurses, two each were sent to Pau, France; Paignton, England; Kiev, Russia; and Gleiwitz, Germany; one each to Vienna, Austria and Budapest, Hungary [Figure 6]. An 11th unit sailed five days earlier for Belgrade, Serbia. In December, 1914, at the request of the Serbian king, two additional units were sent to Gevgelia, Serbia. In October 1915, money for the program ran out and the units began withdrawing.

In Russia, the Americans were given “free frank” privileges within Russia, but this privilege was not extended to the United States.

## American Hospital — Neuilly-sur-Seine

For some years before the war members of the American colony in Paris maintained a small semi-phil-



Figure 6. American doctors on a Red Cross mercy mission were given status as officers in the Russian Army while accompanying nurses received certificates as Russian Red Cross Sisters. In Kiev, the units set up a hospital on the outskirts of the city in a wing of the Polytechnic Institute. Although the Red Cross doctors had free frank privileges within Russia, such status was not granted for mail in the United States. This cover has a red circular Russian Red Cross handstamp, purple Russian censorship stamp, an indistinct town cancel, and a New York 10-cent due handstamp. The postage due was paid by two 5-cent Parcel Post Postage Due stamps canceled by what looks like a straight line “Atlanta.”







Figure 7. The first 10 ambulance vehicles of the American Hospital were donated by Mrs. William Vanderbilt. The hospital used the ambulances to pick up wounded from the front at the Paris train station. This cover of September 30, 1916 from the American Hospital was censored through the British Paris Military Post Office (APO 5).

anthropic hospital in the Paris suburb of Neuilly. At the outbreak of hostilities the hospital became the rallying center for the American colony to become involved in the French war effort [Figure 7]. The facility was turned into an “ambulance” (the French used “ambulance” to designate a military hospital) for *blessé* (wounded) French soldiers. In late August 1914, the French government offered the Americans the use of the larger Lycee Pasteur facility six blocks from the original location. The offer was accepted and by early October the hospital had 238 patients.

## Volunteer Ambulance Drivers With the French and Belgian Armies

The American Field Service, organized by A. Patt Andrew, was the first and largest of four volunteer ambulance units organized to be directly attached to the French or Belgian front line units [Figure 8]. The others were the Richard Norton American Volunteer Motor-Ambulance Corps, the Harjes Formation, and the Frances Colby American Field Ambulance that was attached to



Figure 8. An ambulance-driver cover postmarked September 20, 1917 is from Section Sanitaire (États-Unis) 18, then serving with the French 64th Division. The writer, George Penton, joined the American Red Cross in France after leaving the American Field Service.

the Belgium army. By the time the U.S. Army took over the volunteer organizations in October of 1917, more than 2,500 drivers had served in 43 volunteer ambulance sections.

In the spring of 1917, the field service was requested to help fill vacancies in the French Motor Transport Service [Figure 9]. Responding to the French request, the service provided more than 800 volunteers (14 truck sections) to carry ammunition and supplies to the front lines. Each section had

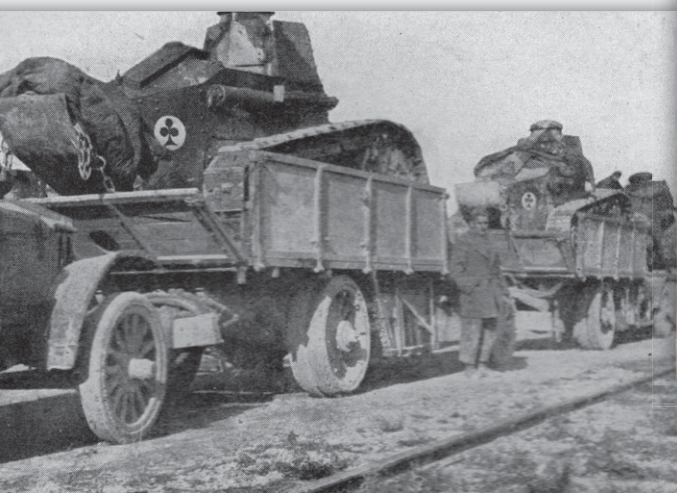


Figure 9. A convoy of five-ton trucks loaded with seven-ton tanks, part of the Réserve Mallet. A cover from T.M.U. 537, noted in return address, is franked with a 25-cent French stamp and carries a wide rectangular box marking it as “Réserve Mallet Centre Américain.”



a “TMU” number that stood for “Transport Material Unit.”

## The Henry Ford Peace Ship

As a known pacifist, Henry Ford was approached in November of 1915 to sponsor a conference of neutral nation pacifists to bring about a negotiated settlement to the war. Ford agreed to provide necessary financing to establish a conference at The Hague to implement peace proposals through continuous mediation.

On December, 4, 1915, the Henry Ford Peace Expedition set sail for Christiana, Norway on the S.S. *Oscar II* with Ford, 63 delegates, three newsreel operators, 34 reporters, and a staff of 20. At the dock at Hoboken, New Jersey, Ford announced to the gathered press, “We’re going to try to get the boys out of the trenches before Christmas.”

Needless to say, Ford’s announcement was greeted with skepticism. In Norway, Ford became sick with the flu and returned home. The remainder of the ship’s company continued on to The Hague and met with other neutral country pacifists [Figure 10]. The conference never successfully engaged the warring nations, and in early 1917, Ford, disappointed by the lack of progress, stopped the funding.

## German Espionage Activities in the U.S.

Prior to the U.S. entry into WWI, the German Embassy ran an extensive spy and sabotage network in the U.S. Starting in late 1914, German sailors on ships interned in New York City and Hoboken, New Jersey, were recruited to manufacture and distribute delayed action fire bombs.

The machine shop on the S.S. *Friedrich der Grosse* was used to manufacture the bombs’ outer casings. The bombs were placed on cargo ships carrying munitions to France and England and timed to explode once the ships were well out to sea [Figure 11].

For 28 months starting in January 1915, many ships bound from U.S. ports to the Allied nations were sabotaged. The saboteurs’ work included the massive Black Tom explosion in New York harbor on July 30, 1916 that killed seven people and was heard as far away as Philadelphia. In May 1917, six interned crew members were convicted as saboteurs.

## HOME FRONT IN WAR TIME

### America’s March to War

During January 1917, the German government, at the urging of its Army, agreed to begin unrestricted submarine warfare around the British Isles and France. On January 31, 1917, the German ambassador to Washington informed Secretary of State Robert Lansing that beginning the next day German submarines would sink on sight and without warning all merchant ships, bound for Britain and France. On February 3, the United States broke off diplomatic relations with Germany.

When five U.S. vessels had been sunk by April, President Woodrow Wilson [Figure 12] decided that enough was enough, and on April 2 asked Congress for a declaration of war



Figure 10. This cover from the Henry Ford Peace Expedition was mailed from The Hague and censored by the British.



Figure 11. A fire that damaged this cover was likely the work of German saboteurs possibly led by German agent Robert Fay. The SS Rotterdam, coincidentally the ship that brought Fay to America four months earlier, departed New York on August 21, 1915 and arrived in Holland September 2 with fire in her hold. The letter was forwarded to La Haye, Holland. The handstamp translates as “damaged by fire on board SS Rotterdam.”



Figure 12. A photo postcard depicts President Woodrow Wilson before Congress declaring a state of war against Germany.



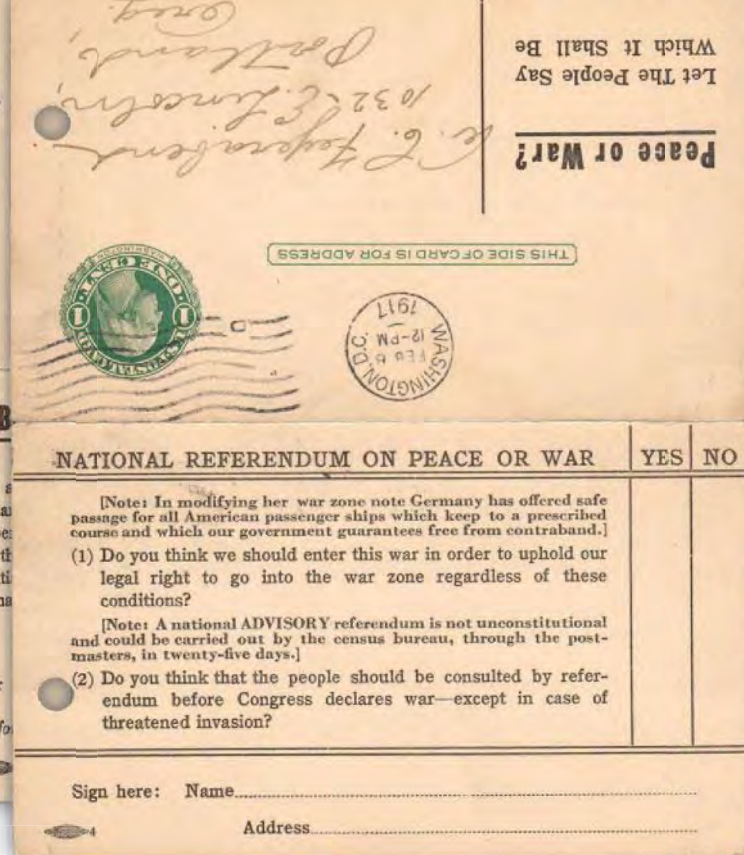
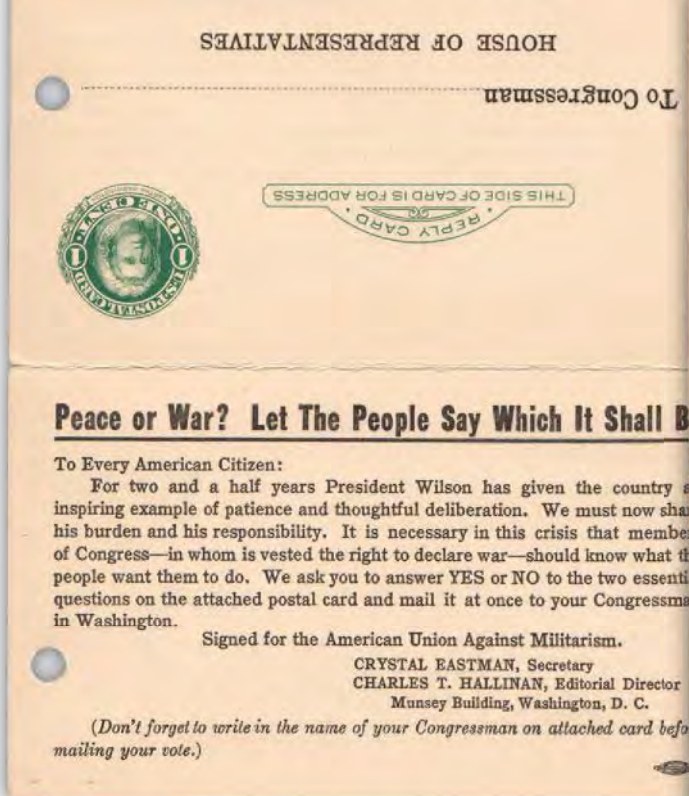


Figure 13. Peace organizations used the mail, including reply cards, to drum up support against a declaration of war.

against Germany, on the basis that “the world must be made safe for democracy.” The resolution was enacted on April 6. A photo postcard on the previous page depicts that day’s activity in Congress during the declaration of war.

## Peace Movement

A significant number of peace organizations — the Ford Peace Ship, for example — were active in the United States in years leading up to the declaration of war [Figure 13]. The American Union Against Militarism (as war with Germany became more likely) initiated a mass mailing on February 8, asking Americans to petition Congress for a national advisory referendum on war or peace before any declaration of war.

## Organizing for War

The National Defense Act of 1916, for the first time granted the federal government emergency wartime powers over industry and transportation. Along with the 1917 Espionage Act and the 1918 Sedition Act, President Wilson gained un-

precedented control over all aspects of commerce and life in America. A cover collection from the various boards and commissions created to put the country on a total warfare footing would look rather mundane. However, the story behind the covers and letters can be fascinating. Here are several examples.

The Committee on Public Information [Figure 14] was

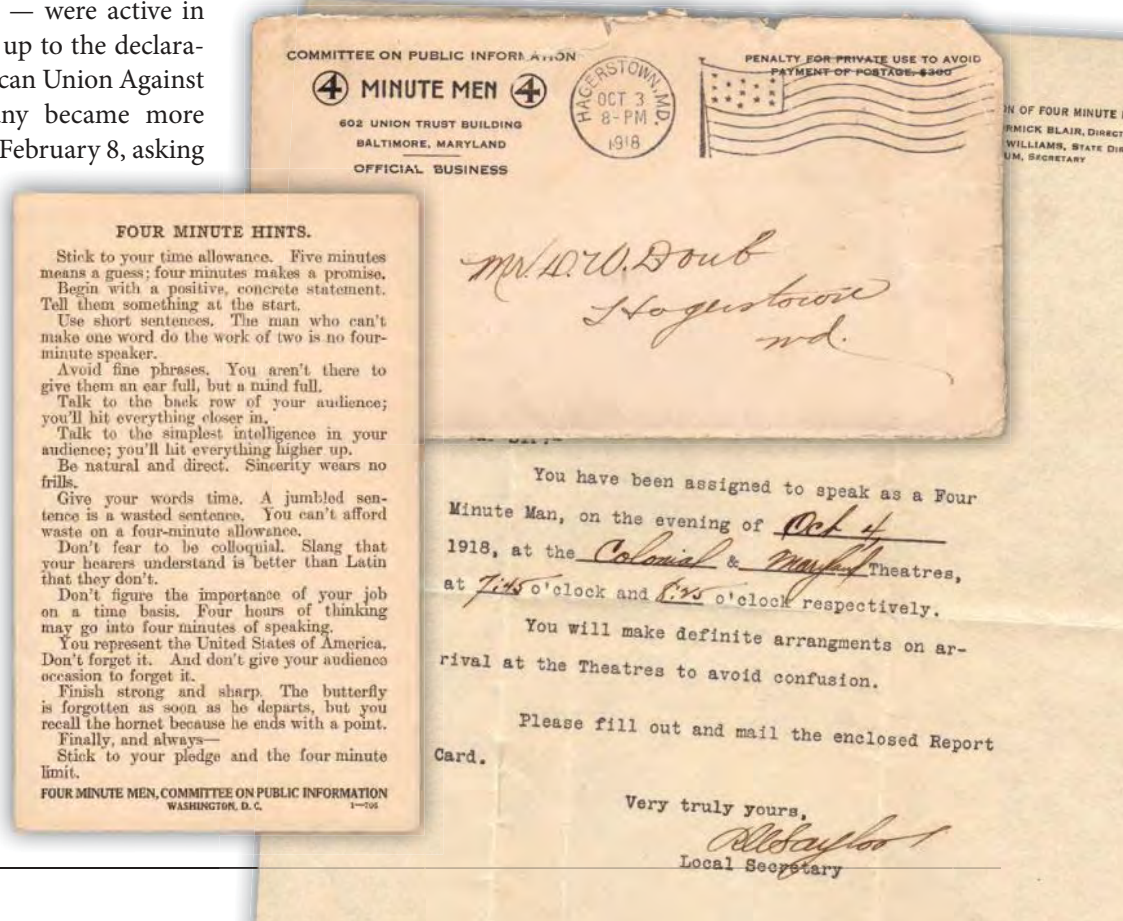


Figure 14. A notification letter to a speaker for an upcoming Four Minute Men event and speech guidelines. The letter was mailed October 3 for scheduled speeches on October 4. That is a lot of trust in the postal system.



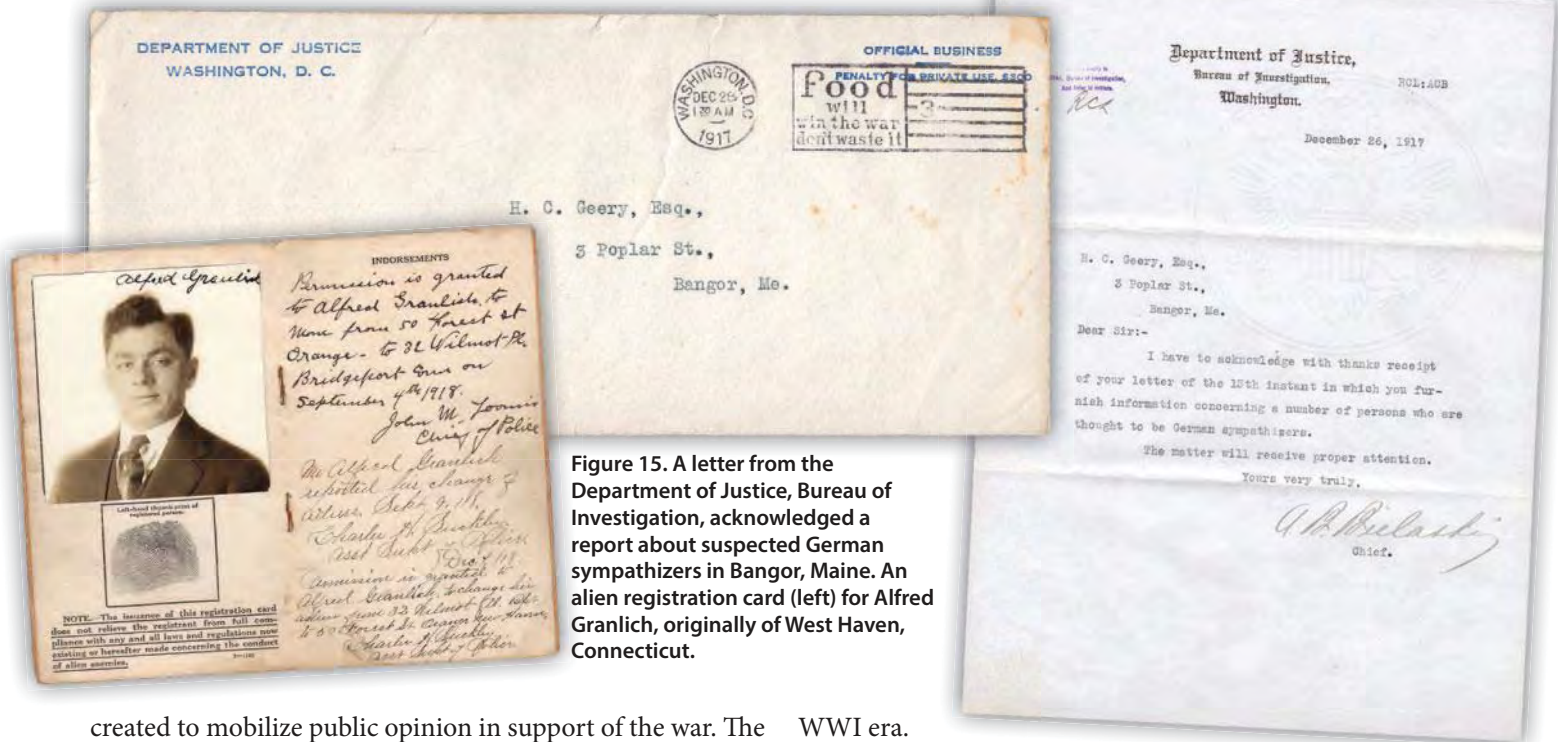


Figure 15. A letter from the Department of Justice, Bureau of Investigation, acknowledged a report about suspected German sympathizers in Bangor, Maine. An alien registration card (left) for Alfred Granlich, originally of West Haven, Connecticut.

created to mobilize public opinion in support of the war. The Speakers Division included some 75,000 volunteers called Four Minute Men who gave short patriotic speeches anywhere people gathered.

The American Protection League was a civilian volunteer organization of more than 250,000 that worked with the Justice Department as a loyalty watchdog reporting any suspicious activities to the U.S. Attorney General. Shown [Figure 15] is a reply from the Department of Justice's Bureau of Investigation, the precursor to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, to a Maine resident acknowledging his report of suspected German sympathizers in Bangor, Maine.

Resident aliens from the Central Power nations were required to register with their local police department. Unlike Great Britain, which interned all its resident aliens, the United States required only their registration and notification of any change of address. Alien registration certificates and cards while not postal in origin are important to tell the story of the

WWI era.

## Training Camps and Other Facilities

The need to house and train a fighting force of 4 million men required major new construction and expansion of existing Army and Naval facilities. The Army alone created or expanded 33 major cantonments that could each house between 24,000 and 58,000 personnel. Most domestic military covers are from one of these camps.

With an artistic flair in his handwriting, a soldier at Camp Devens, Massachusetts posted a letter within an ornate cover to a friend in which he references the girl with the "fox furs" [Figure 16]. In his letter, the soldier has fallen for this girl, apparently thinks about her often, and shares those feelings with his friend.

U.S. Army Air Service stations were generally located where there was a reasonable assurance of good flying weather. As a result they were clustered in the southeastern, southern, and

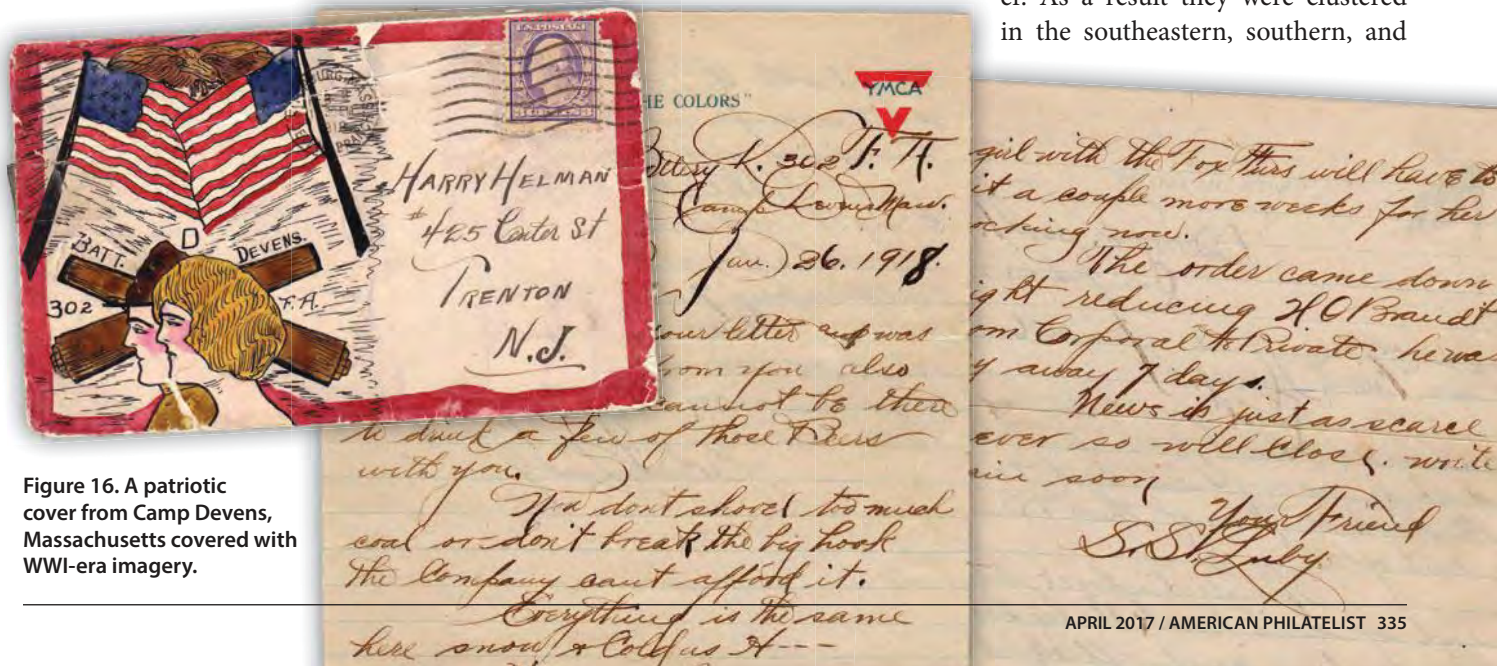


Figure 16. A patriotic cover from Camp Devens, Massachusetts covered with WWI-era imagery.



southwestern United States, such as at Fort Sill, Oklahoma [Figure 17].

Camp Colt, located on the Civil War battleground at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, was the Army's main tank corps training base [Figure 18]. The camp commander was Lt. Col. Dwight Eisenhower of latter WWII and presidential fame.

The Navy Air Station at Halifax, Nova Scotia, was a sea-plane base tasked with conducting anti-submarine patrols. The station commander was Lt. (later Admiral) Richard E. Byrd, of Arctic exploration fame [Figure 19].

## The WWI Manhattan Project — Secret Poison Gas Research Project

In 1918, the United States initiated a project that was just as secret as the atomic bomb of the 1940s. A secret facility was created in an abandoned automobile plant in Willoughby, Ohio, to manufacture a new more lethal poison gas called "Lewisite," named after the scientist who perfected the manufacturing process, Professor W. Lee Lewis [Figure 20].

The facility was an Army camp. All troops were sworn to maintain the utmost secrecy on the existence and function of the plant. All mail went through the Cleveland Post Office, not Willoughby, and a Cleveland "lock box" address, No. 426, was used. All enlisted incoming and outgoing mail was censored. For the first few weeks, enlisted men were not allowed to leave the grounds, but later were allowed to visit Willoughby, but not Cleveland.

## Black Soldiers

Overall, 400,000 black soldiers served in the war, which was about 10 percent of the fighting force. In 1917, the Army had four regular black regiments: the 9th and 10th Cavalry and 24th and 25th Infantry, and eight National Guard units. Augmenting this force were 370,000 draftees. In October of 1917, 639 black officers graduated from the Fort Des Moines Colored Officers Training Camp, and were assigned to the all-black 92nd Division. The four regular regiments had

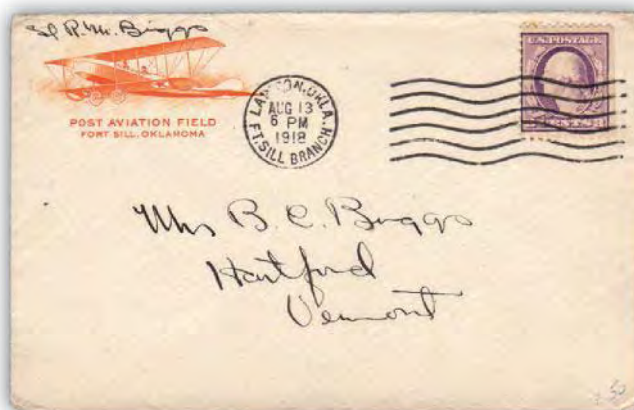


Figure 17. This cover was mailed from Fort Sill, Oklahoma, home of an aerial observers training school.

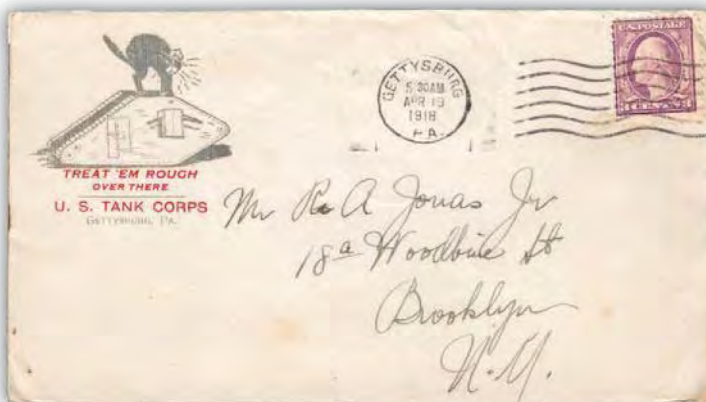


Figure 18. A cover from Camp Colt, the U.S. Tank Corps training ground in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. The Treat 'em Rough motif is one of at least 11 different on-cover versions of the same theme.



Figure 19. An unadorned cover from the Navy Air Station at Halifax, Nova Scotia, includes a three-line censor handstamp.



Figure 20. A discovery cover reflects the mailing and censorship situation at a secret facility called Lewisite. The cover is plain, with a Cleveland cancellation and a return address of Lock Box 426 with no military rank. Cover and background information courtesy of John Hardies and Bob Swanson.

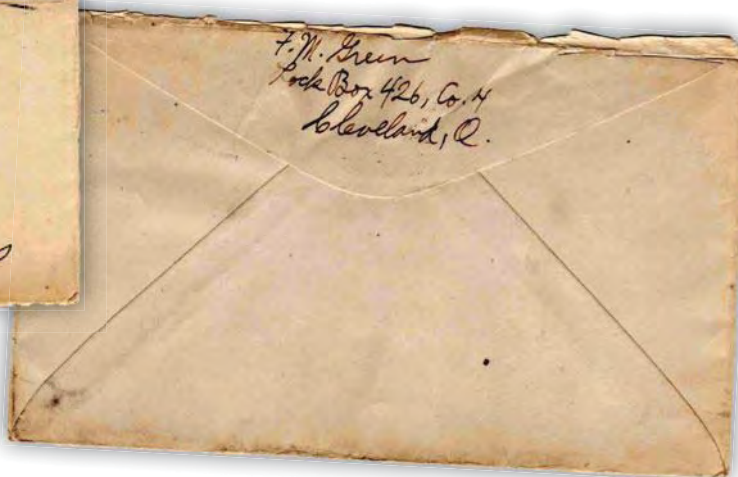






Figure 21. A cover (above) mailed from a member of the 24th Infantry on September 12, 1917, just after a Houston riot. Also, a cover (right) from a member of the 367th Infantry, 92nd Division stationed at Camp Upton, New York. The black 92nd Division trained at six different camps before deployment.

always been stationed in the western states or overseas. In the summer of 1917, the War Department unwisely sent the 3rd Battalion of the 24th Infantry to Camp Logan outside of Houston, Texas, to guard the camp during construction [Figure 21]. The abuse the soldiers received resulted in a violent confrontation on August 23 with the Houston police. Nineteen people were killed in the riot (two black soldiers and 17 white soldiers and citizens). After the Houston mutiny, the War Department cut short the training of the black 92nd and 93rd Divisions, and scattered them to various camps until deployed to France. Of the remaining blacks that served, 170,000 remained stateside as laborers and 160,000 served as laborers in uniform with the American Expeditionary Forces Services of Supply.

## Internment Camps

Relatively little has been reported or known about the imprisonment in the United States of interned crews of more than 100 enemy naval and merchant marine ships, plus enemy aliens, anti-war radicals, and conscientious objectors. Compared to the larger WWII prison and internment camp programs, the numbers of prisoners held are small, a bit more than 5,400 during WWI; there are estimates that 425,000

German POWs were held in the United States during WWII.

Early in the war, the internees and military POWs were held in scattered locations (one estimate is as many as 1,500) throughout the U.S. and its possessions. However, by early 1918, most captives were concentrated into the War Department-run prison camps at Fort Douglas, Utah, and Fort McPherson, and Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia. Confinement ended five-and-a-half years later, when the last prison camp was closed in the spring of 1920.

The Hot Springs, North Carolina Immigration Department Internment Station opened in June 1917 and housed interned merchant seaman. As civilians, the Immigration Department assumed responsibility for the seamen. In June 1918, the War Department took responsibility for all prisoners of war and civilians. In August, the Hot Springs internees were transferred to the Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia prison camp.

A POW postcard sponsored by the YMCA was mailed to Germany on July 8, 1918 [Figure 22]. The card has both a Hot Springs and New York (25) censor markings. The "Jun 28, 1918" stamp indicates the date the camp censor received the card. The card was held 10 days before mailing. The German circular handstamp was applied at Emmerich, Germany (point of entry into Germany from the Netherlands). Cen-



Figure 22. Two POW mailings, one sent to Germany (left) and the other from the Fort Oglethorpe POW camp to another POW camp at Fort Douglas. Censorship at both camps on the domestic card is indicated by separate three-line censor handstamps.





Figure 23. Underpaid cover with a postage due stamp affixed that is dated on the first day of the 3-cent first-class rate.

sorship also was used on correspondence between camps within the United States.

### Postage Rates

In order to finance the war, postage rates were increased on November 1, 1917 [Figure 23]. The first class letter rate increased from 2 cents to 3 cents and postage for postcards increased from 1 cent to 2 cents. These rates remained in effect until July 1, 1919.

There are a number of ways to collect the rate change: last day, first day, double rate, short paid first day with postage due, and combinations with registered and special delivery. Most of these covers are legitimate usage and not made to order. With a keen eye, a collector could find most of these options at an affordable price.

In August or early fall of 1917, the Post Office Department, with the assistance of magazine publishers, initiated a program in which individuals could place a 1-cent stamp on a magazine, without address, and it would be forwarded to soldiers in France [Figure 24]. To support the project, publishers printed a notice of these instructions on the top front cover of their magazines. While the notice said the magazines were headed to France, I suspect U.S. military base libraries also benefited.

In another way to finance the war, a tax on parcel post packages became effective on December 1, 1917. A parcel post war tax was applied on packages at the rate of 1 cent for every 25 cents of postage or fraction thereof for amounts more than 25 cents. No tax was required on parcels with less than 25 cents in postage.

The parcel postage was to be paid with stamps and the tax with a revenue stamp. The 25-cent starting point was not clearly understood by all postal clerks and revenue stamps are found on parcel post packages with less than 25 cents postage [Figure 25]. The parcel post tax ended January 1, 1922.



Figure 24. Used magazines could be forwarded to military personnel by affixing a 1-cent stamp.



Figure 25. This parcel post tag is an example when a tax was incorrectly applied.

### Domestic Censorship

A domestic censorship collection can be grouped into two broad categories: civilian — letters to and from foreign countries; and domestic — military base censorship, primarily naval. A civil censorship collection would consist of the different styles of labels, enclosure forms and censor marks applied at the various ports of entry. Known varieties are extensive: 13 labels, nine enclosures, and more than 80 censor marks. This does not include the markings and labels of six other government organizations known to censor mail. The military censorship was done at ports of debarkation and naval bases. Censorship of mail of soldiers embarking for Europe was per-





Figure 26. A Port of Hoboken letter canceled with the "Eagle" cancel designed to conceal date and port of origin. Port of debarkation mail was not sent to the post office until the ship had arrived in France. Another piece was returned because mail was suspended to Germany.

formed primarily in Hoboken, New Jersey and Washington, D.C. [Figure 26].

In Washington, D.C., a large-scale examination of international mail took place before the U.S. civil censorship system was established. Shortly after the U.S. broke relations with Germany, mail destined for enemy countries was accumulated in Washington, D.C. Many letters (nearly all with clear return addresses) were opened and examined, and then returned to senders. After opening, U.S. Post Office Official Seals were used to seal them.

## Financing the War

There are many covers and cards under the category of financing the war other than by increasing postage rates. A multi-frame exhibit could be devoted to the philatelic story of how the four Liberty and Victory Loans and War Savings stamps were promoted. Various machine cancellations promoting the sale of Victory Loans were used in larger post offices. In smaller post offices, several varieties of handstamps were used on incoming mail to promote Victory Loans. The first line on one hand stamp begins with "Do Your Bit." On the second, the first line is "Back the Boys in the Trenches." Covers with these handstamps are common on domestic mail but not so on incoming AEF mail [Figure 27]. A postcard to Derry, New Hampshire, has a handstamp promoting the sale of War Saving Stamps by mail carriers. This handstamp was not issued by the Post Office Department, but was likely created by the Derry Post Office. It is known that postmasters were asked to report offices where the sale of War Saving Stamps "has not been pressed with sufficient vigor."

## Return to Sender Suspended Mail Delivery

Suspension and resumption of mail to enemy countries and overrun allies [Figure 28] offer a collecting challenge with so many different hand-



Figure 27. Incoming American Expeditionary Force cover with a "Back the Boys in the Trenches" handstamp promoting Liberty Loans. A postcard to Derry, New Hampshire, includes a handstamp that was most likely produced locally, not at Post Office Department headquarters.



Figure 28. Mail suspended between countries in Europe meant mail from the United States could not be delivered. This cover was returned to its sender with a notice from Second Assistant Postmaster General Otto Praeger.



stamps and labels available. A card to Russia was returned to sender with a label explaining that because Sweden had suspended mail service to Russia, mail service to Russia, Romania, and Northern Persia was no longer available as of February 21, 1918, two days before the cover shown was mailed.

## Patriotic Covers and Cards

Unlike the Civil War and World War II, covers with patriotic themes, other than flags, are not as common during WWI. However, they are out there. During WWI, the postcard was the preferred vehicle to express patriotism [Figure 29].

This list of home-front topics could go on for several more pages. The postal history of the home-front activities and fundraising by the Red Cross, United War Work Campaign, and other numerous smaller organizations could fill a binder. Another interesting story involves the Woman's Land Army and U.S. Boys Working Reserve organized to replace drafted farm laborers. The Navy's "Eyes for the Navy" was a program to rent binoculars from citizens for \$1. As an added bonus, a number of the thank-you letters were signed by the assistant secretary of the Navy, Franklin Roosevelt. The WWI home front is rich in postal history, some still waiting to be discovered.

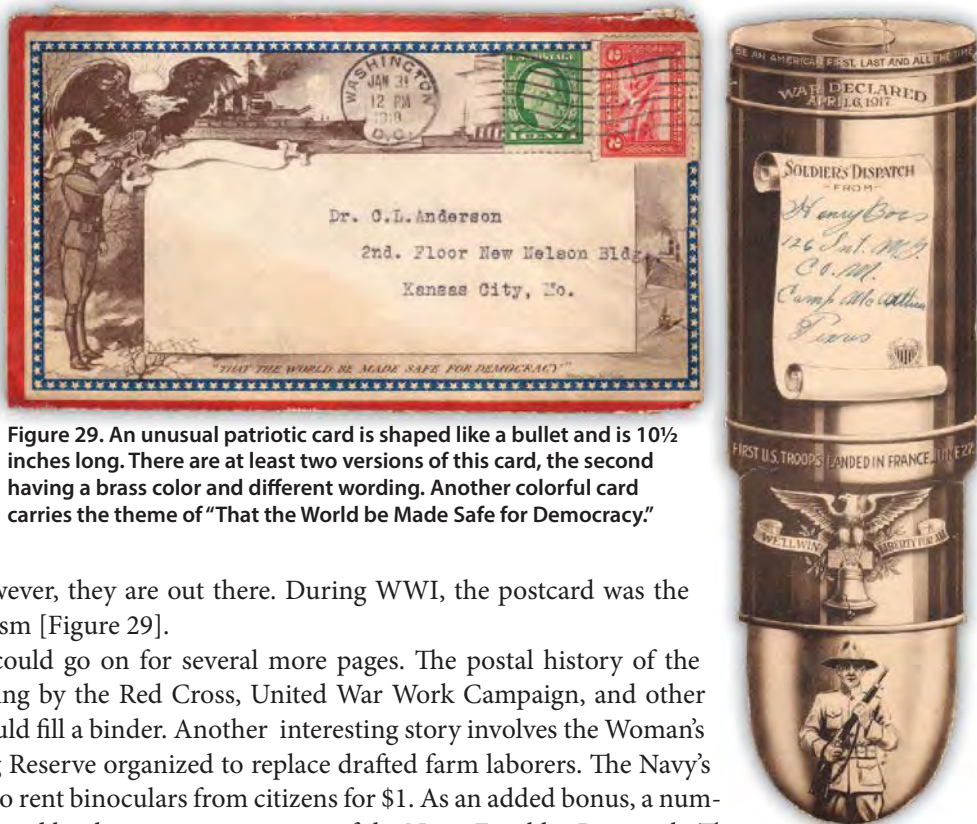


Figure 29. An unusual patriotic card is shaped like a bullet and is 10½ inches long. There are at least two versions of this card, the second having a brass color and different wording. Another colorful card carries the theme of "That the World be Made Safe for Democracy."

## AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCES IN FRANCE AND ITALY

The creation of the American Expeditionary Forces began with the appointment of Major General John J. Pershing to lead the American forces overseas. President Woodrow Wilson was impressed with Pershing based on his performance in recent Mexican border skirmishes and appointed him over a number of senior officers.

As reflected in General Orders No.1, Pershing assumed command on May 26, 1917 and immediately embarked for Europe, on SS *Baltic* on May 28. He arrived in London for consultations with British officials on June 9 and then continued on to Paris, where he arrived on June 13 [Figure 30].

General Orders No. 3 created a provisional headquarters for Pershing in the Hotel Crillon on June 26. A permanent headquarters for the AEF was established on September 1, 1917 at Chaumont, where it operated until July 11, 1919. On October 8, 1917 Pershing was promoted to a full general (four stars) that then put him on equal footing with the French and British commanders.

### Early AEF Mail

The first American military unit to go overseas was not a combat group, but Lakeside Base Hospital No. 4 from Cleveland, which left May 8, 1917 for England on the SS *Orduna*. The ship docked in Liverpool, England on May 17. The earliest recorded cover from a member of any



Figure 30. An image from a picture postcard (above) of Major General John J. Pershing and his staff as they arrive in France, likely saluting as the French and U.S. national anthems played. A 1918 cover from Pershing (note the return address) — APO 706, Chaumont, general headquarters of the AEF. The marking at bottom left shows that even Pershing's mail was censored. The censor stamp was a formality.



AEF unit overseas was postmarked the following day [Figure 31].

The next Americans to arrive were a group of naval aviators who disembarked June 8 in France. Unfortunately, no mail from this group has been reported.

The earliest ground combat troops, consisting of advance units of the 1st Infantry Division, sailed on June 10, 1917 from Hoboken, New Jersey in a convoy of 12 ships plus a protecting force of cruisers and destroyers. St. Nazaire, France was the port of debarkation.

The 16th and 28th Infantry disembarked on June 26 and the 26th Infantry on June 27 [Figure 32]. It took until late December for all the division support units to cross the Atlantic and assemble at its training base at Gondreourt-le-Château, in northeast France.

## Development of the Army Post Office (APO) System

To provide postal service for the arriving troops, a new Army Post Office system was created. The first office, known as APO No. 1, opened July 10 at St. Nazaire, with others opening in rapid succession as more troops arrived [Figure 33].

The first numbered postmarks were standard rubber handstamps with killer bars to the right. These exist for the first nine offices, although No. 8 is considered a rarity. There followed a set of permanent steel postmarks with the APO numbers at the bottom of the dial. These exist for offices 1 through 18, with numbers 17 and 18 being elusive and No. 4 being a distinct rarity.

Because of overlapping numbers, the low number of American APOs began causing confusion with the British and French military postal systems. Thus, it was decided that the U.S. offices would be renumbered as the 700 series, with No. 1 becoming No. 701, and so on. Later, as the 700 series filled up and more offices were required, APOs with numbers in the 800s and 900s came into operation in 1918 and 1919.

The Army Post Office system was at first managed by civilian postal employees.

In July 1918, the Army took over ownership of the APO system and changed the name to the Military Postal Express Service. In September 1918, the name was again changed to the Postal Express Service.

All these changes that occurred in the short period of 18 months produced a wealth of collectible cancellation types and variations.

There are eight basic AEF cancellation types for which to date we have identified 202 different col-

**Figure 32.** A postcard canceled June 27, 1917 on board the USS *Neptune* with the message "Arrived safe." The first commander of the 1st Infantry Division from June 8 to December 14, 1917, was Major General William Sibert. This cover postmarked July 18, 1917, was sent by Sibert through the French military postal system.



**Figure 31.** Earliest recorded cover from the American Expeditionary Forces, dated May 18, 1917, in Liverpool, England. The cover was canceled the day after the ship docked.



**Figure 33.** A cover with the earliest recorded example of an AEF post office postmark, July 28, 1917.





Figure 34. Varieties of AEF cancellations.



Figure 35. A cover sent May 28, 1917 from a member of Base Hospital No. 4 was incorrectly charged 4 cents postage due.

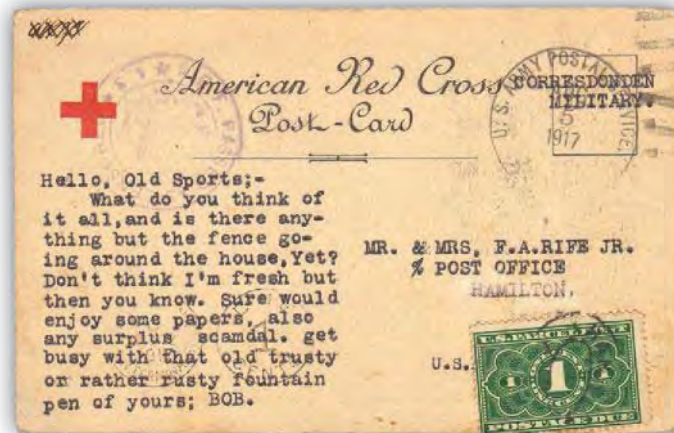


Figure 36. An August 1917 postcard correctly charged 1 cent postage due using a 1-cent Parcel Post Postage Due stamp.

lectible variations [Figure 34].

## Postage Rates

The Post Office Department opened the first Army Post Office on July 10, 1917 in Saint Nazaire, on France's east coast. First-class mail addressed to the U.S. and its possessions was handled at the domestic rates of 1 cent for postcards and 2 cents for letters. In cases where no stamps were available, envelopes could be endorsed "Soldier's Mail" and would be handled without prepayment, with postage due collected on delivery. The postage due rate was at the single rate only (for ordinary domestic mail the rate was double). However, covers are found, especially in the early summer of 1917, with double rate postage due required [Figure 35].

Postal charges remained in effect until personnel abroad were granted free postage by an Act of Congress effective October 4, 1917. This order generally remained effective until October 20, 1920, and applied even longer in certain militarily active areas.

In addition to servicemen, other senders were allowed the use of the APOs, but domestic postage rates applied. Those allowed the APO use included newspaper correspondents, civilian employees of the postal service, and workers for service organizations, including the Red Cross, YMCA, Knights of Columbus, Salvation Army, and others. With the imposition of the 1-cent war tax from November 2, 1917 through

June 30, 1919, postcards now needed 2 cents postage, letters 3 cents [Figure 36].

In order to make handling stamps more convenient for the APOs, some stamps were provided in special booklets of 10 panes of 30 stamps each [Figure 37 on next page]. These are the "AEF panes," listed by Scott as 498f and 499f. There were two shipments of these booklets — one arriving in August and the second in September of 1917. Examples are elusive because their intended first-class postage use on cards and letters sent by soldiers became obsolete when free franking was granted by Congress on October 4, 1917.

## Special Services

Although first-class mail from the troops was specifically exempted from postage on October 4, 1917, this did not apply to other services, including registration, special delivery, parcel post, and money orders, which continued to be charged at domestic rates. Because of the strong demand for registration of valuable mail, this was the primary special service in demand by the troops.

## AEF Registration Markings

Thirty-six distinctive markings have been identified as specifically applicable to registration. (Rhineland occupation varieties are included in this number). Twenty-three of these are circular dated postmarks and 15 are other markings, of





Figure 37. A postcard with a 1-cent AEF stamp that shows a very early use, being one of only two reported examples dated in that month. The stamp was certainly from the initial shipment of panes to France. Also, a June 2, 1918 registered 6-ounce cover with 11 1-cent stamps and seven 2-cent stamps from an AEF booklet pane. The 25-cent fee paid the 10-cent registration fee plus 15 cents for the 5 extra ounces. The cover was mailed by Lt. Col. Babcock to his stamp collecting friend in Detroit, Charles Heyerman. Heyerman was very active in organized philately; he served as APS president from 1922 to 1924.

which 10 emphasize registration and five relate to return receipts. A registered cover from Bordeaux (APO 705) shows a 10-cent stamp paid the registration fee and is cancelled with a Provisional Bordeaux APO 705 handstamp [Figure 38]. The back of the cover has three Military Postal Express Service APO 705 registered handstamps.

Another interesting cover in this category is one from Brigadier General Bandholtz, a known stamp collector, that was sent to Stanley Gibbons Inc. office in New York City.

## Official Register Markings

Official usage, generally involving communications sent by courier, included a registration service. For such letters, several different types of markings have been observed. One of these is a single-circle cancel inscribed "American Expeditionary Force/Official Register" with the date in the center; it has been reported used from November 23, 1918 to April 25, 1919. This marking was used in conjunction with a second type, which was rectangular and inscribed



Figure 38. A cover with a 10-cent stamp (above) paying the registration fee from Bordeaux. Also, a philatelic inspired cover with 34 cents in postage to cover the 20-cent registered/special delivery fee. The cover was mailed from Bordeaux by a known Army officer stamp collector.



"From APO 702/Official Register/No. \_\_\_\_" [Figure 39].

A third type, inscribed "Free Registered Mail/Urgent by Courier" with space for a number in the middle, also is known. Only one example of this type has been recorded; sent from APO 702 on December 4, 1918 (see more in the section on Motorcycle Dispatch Service mail).



Figure 39. The latest known official register cover, sent April 25, 1919.



Figure 40. This cover from September 6, 1918 shows a special delivery letter with the fee paid by a 10-cent Franklin adhesive.



Figure 41. A parcel post tag shows 60 cents in postage (for 5 pounds) plus a 10-cent insurance fee, covering value of \$25.01 to \$50.

## Special Delivery

Although it was clearly available, the special delivery service was rarely used by the soldiers. The saving of a day or two on a letter that might take up to a month from the front lines to an addressee at home was hardly worth paying the 10-cent fee. There is only one recorded "Special Delivery" marking on AEF mail. Special de-

livery covers exist with the fee paid with 10-cent Franklin stamps [Figure 40]. One cover, sent both registered and special delivery, exists with two 10-cent Franklins.

## Parcel Post Usage

Examples of parcel post or fourth-class mail sent by military personnel are not often seen, in part because it was infrequently sent

and partly because the wrappings were especially awkward to save. However, some pieces can still be found by alert collectors. Effective July 25, 1917, the Zone 8 Parcel Post rate (12 cents per pound) applied to packages to or from the expeditionary forces [Figure 41]. The Parcel Post "War Tax" did not apply on parcels shipped from members of the AEF.

## Money Orders (M.O.B.)

The APOs provided money order service, referred to as Money Order Business, which allowed the troops to send remittances safely to friends and relatives. Unfortunately, very few of the forms were saved for collectors [Figure 42] as the issuing post



Figure 42. A Money Order Business payment coupon for \$100 issued at APO 798.



office retained the left part and the payment coupon to the right was surrendered by the recipient when cashed in at the destination post office.

## Special Types of Mail

### 1918 Christmas Package Coupon

Each soldier was given one Christmas Package Coupon and mailing envelope [Figure 43]. He was instructed to send the coupon to his family, which could use it as an address label for his 1918 Christmas gift. The American Red Cross was put in charge of distribution of approved boxes. All packages (3 pounds maximum) had to be brought to a Red Cross office for inspection and final wrapping. Parcel Post postage was required to pay for mailing the package to the Hoboken, New Jersey, port of embarkation. Shipment of the package from Hoboken to France was free. Based on available wrappers, the Parcel Post “war tax” was not required. There are four known collectible coupon varieties and three known Red Cross inspection label varieties.

### Chaplain Sympathy Letters

On June 7, 1918, general headquarters directed that all letters of condolence from unit commanders, chaplains, Red Cross searchers, and others be sent unopened and marked with a small cross to the Casualty Section, Central Records Office [Figure 44]. After verification and examination by the Base Censor Office the letter was mailed.

### Mother's and Father's Day Letters

In 1918, the Military Postal Service and U.S. Post Office guaranteed mail marked “Mother's Letter” and posted before May 15 would be loaded on a special transport ship. Once in the U.S. the Post Office guaranteed expedited handling to assure delivery by Mother's Day [Figure 45]. With



Figure 43. This item originated in Osceola, Missouri, and was rated at 3 pounds in Zone 6. The Parcel Post rate charge was 9 cents for the first pound and 8 cents per pound for the two additional pounds.



Figure 44. This letter with the “Sympathy Letter Cross” from Chaplain Allgood bears the Base Censor mark 19. All letters of this class the authors have seen with base censor marks are numbered 19 and may have been exclusive to this class of mail. This item was sent to Texas.

the success of the 1918 program it was repeated in 1919.

Following the success of the Mother's Day program a similar Christmas mail program for fathers was organized. Mail



Figure 45. A Mother's Cover dated May 13, from APO 727 (St. Algan). Interestingly, the cancel is in rose red. Whether this was done deliberately for a Mother's Letter cannot be determined. A pre-printed YMCA “Father's Xmas Letter” mailed November 25, 1918 from APO 718 (Saumur, Maine-et-Loire).



identified as “Father’s Xmas Letter” and mailed before November 26, 1918 was guaranteed to arrive in time for Christmas.

## Election Ballots

Special Soldier’s Ballot envelopes were printed for the 1918 elections. The ballot envelopes required an officer’s signature to certify the soldier had voted in private [Figure 46]. Postage was not required, but in many cases was used. The stamps may have been applied by an election clerk unaware of the AEF free-franking privilege.

## King George V Welcome Letter

England was used as a way station for soldiers on their way to France. A little more than 1 million servicemen passed through British ports and rest camps on their way to France. Starting in April 1918, a letter from King George V was given to each AEF member arriving in the British Isles [Figure 47].

## Illustrated Covers

While most American Expeditionary Forces mail is visually the same, there are some covers from units with more creative stationery designs. Other than the cover illustrated [Figure 48] there are several more examples from the 20th Engineers (Forestry) and a highly ornate naval “Serving with the Grand Fleet.” Post-armistice illustrated covers became more numerous, especially from the Marine Corps side of the 2nd Division.

## Censorship

On July 13, 1917, General Orders No. 13 established a system in the American Expeditionary Forces of company, regimental and base censorship. The company commander was responsible for the initial review of his unit’s correspondence. After his review, the company commander signed his name in the left hand corner of the cover. The letter was then forwarded to the regimental level for review. The regimental officer reviewed and stamped the



Figure 46. An election ballot mailed November 1, 1918 from APO 727. Postage was unnecessary.

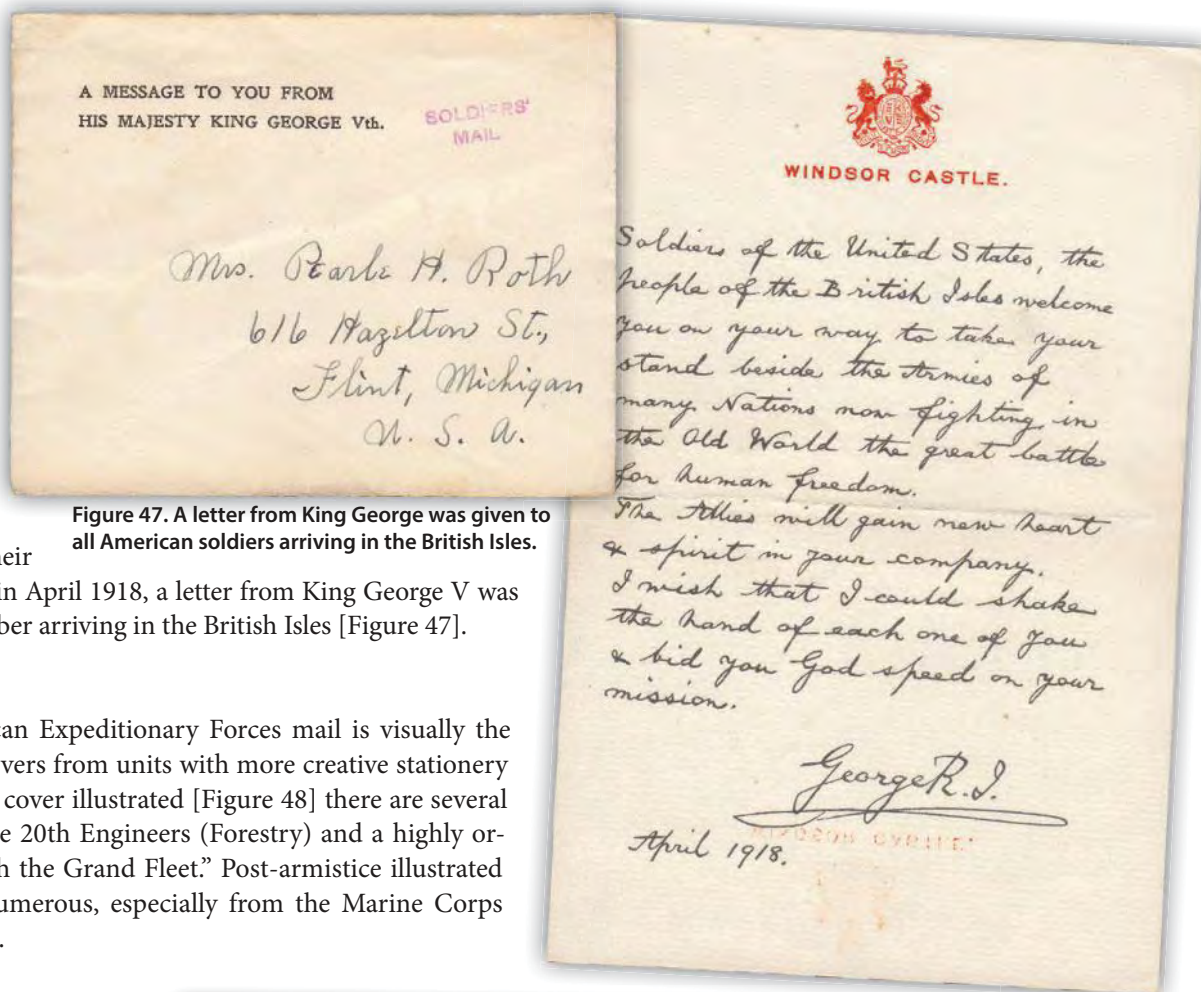


Figure 47. A letter from King George was given to all American soldiers arriving in the British Isles.



Figure 48. A cover from a member of the 107th Ammunition Train with an illustration of a truck at top of the corner card.





Figure 49. An early censored cover (top) only needed an officer's review and signature. Later censorship required a regimental review, indicated by the use of a censor handstamp No. 4 (middle). A December 1918 letter written in Yiddish and censored by the base censor (bottom).

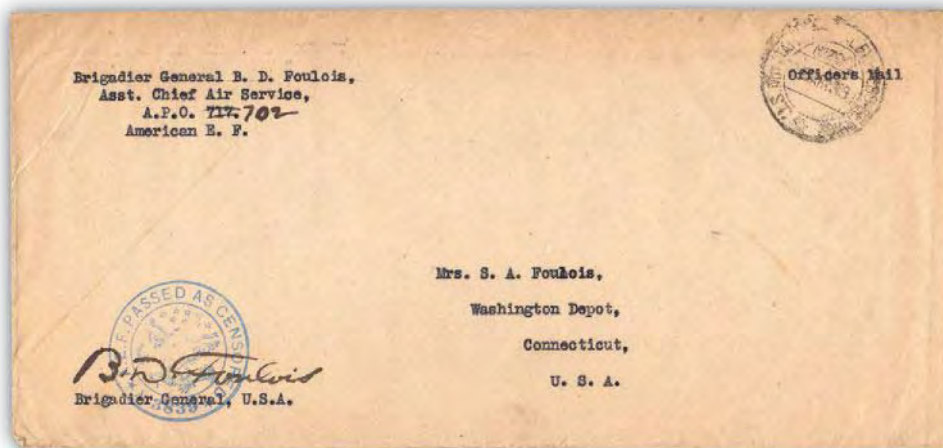


Figure 51. A cover from Brigadier General B.D. Foulois, assistant chief of the Air Service.



Figure 50. A cover from Captain Robert Rockwell to England.

letter with his censor handstamp. Before July 13, 1917, only an officer's review and signature was required. Thereafter, a regimental review was needed. The Base Censor Office was responsible for censoring all non-English letters [Figure 49]. The Foreign Language Section could translate 49 languages.

## Specialized Units

Veterans of the Civil War and Spanish American War would not have recognized the Army of 1917. Warfare had changed forever with technological advances in communication, aviation, transportation, armored vehicles (tanks), poison gas, artillery, and in the deadly power of the machine gun. Any WWI postal history collection should include the story of the technology changes in warfare.

## Aviation

In April 1917, the U.S. Army Aviation Section was part of the Signal Corps as its prime missions were those of courier and reconnaissance. The 1917 force consisted of 1,200 personnel, a handful of obsolete airplanes, and fewer than 50 trained pilots. At the armistice, the Army Air Service (now a separate organization) had grown to 150,000 members and 33 effective operational squadrons.

Among the pilots was Captain Robert Rockwell, who flew with the Lafayette L' Escadrille until January, 1918 when he transferred to the U.S. Air Service [Figure 50]. Along with six other former Lafayette L' Escadrille pilots, Rockwell was assigned to the 103rd Pursuit Squadron. In July, 1918 he was promoted to commander of the 103rd.

An additional 10 squadrons were declared operational in the last few weeks of the war but likely never saw action. In addition to the fixed wing squadrons, 35 balloon companies were assigned to the air service. The Naval aviation force grew from 300 to 40,000 officers and men.

Among the important WWI aviation leaders was Brigadier General B.D. Foulois [Figure 51],





Figure 52. The American Renault FT light tanks, a cover from a member of the 301st Battalion, which served exclusively with the BEF in North France, and a cover from a member of the light tank 329th Battalion, which was in training when the war ended.



assistant chief of the Air Service. Foulois was a much-decorated serviceman who was taught how to fly by the Wright Brothers and achieved several military aviation "firsts," including first U.S. military pilot. He clashed often with Brigadier General Billy Mitchell.

## Tank Corps

The Tank Corps was established in March of 1918. Equipment came from the British (Mark V heavy tank) and French (Renault FT light tank). Only one heavy (301st) and three light battalions (331st, 344th, and 345th) saw action before the armistice [Figure 52]. Lt. Col. George Patton was in charge of organizing and training the light tank battalions. While leading the two tank battalions during the St. Mihiel offense, Patton was wounded and saw no further action in the war.

## Chemical Warfare Service

The AEF Chemical Warfare Service was organized into offensive and defensive operations [Figure 53]. The 1st Gas Regiment was created in January of 1918 from the 30th Engineering Regiment. After training with the British on June 22, the regiment returned to the American forces. Defensive Gas officers or NCOs were appointed down to the company level. These soldiers' training took place at the AEF Gas Defense School or corps gas schools.

## Motorcycle Dispatch Service

The Motorcycle Dispatch Service was established as part of the Signal Corps on September 15, 1917 to deliver official correspondence [Figure 54] that could not



Figure 53. A cover from a member of the 1st Gas Regiment.

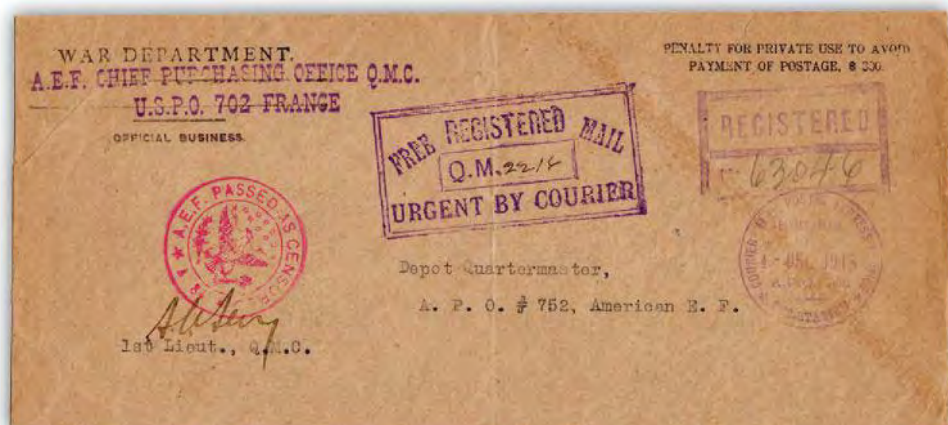


Figure 54. This large War Department cover was handled by both APO 702 and the Motor Dispatch Service courier services.





Figure 55. Correspondence from women who helped the war effort through many groups include a Red Cross YMCA card and a card to a family member. A bilingual telephone operator may have sent a letter to her language teacher at the University of Washington. The mail of British women serving in an auxiliary service attached to the American Expeditionary Forces traveled through the U.S. Army Post Office.

easily be handled by telegraph. After the AEF took over postal operations the Military Postal Express Service took over the Motorcycle Dispatch Service and changed the name to Motor Dispatch Service. Other courier services operating within France were the Central Records Office and Overseas Courier Services. The YMCA was also known to operate its own services between its Paris headquarters and several of its larger support locations.

## Women Do Their Bit

Participation by women in the war effort was ubiquitous. In France, female volunteers and workers were anywhere there was a need for organizing care and comfort. These included the American Red Cross and Army nurses, the YMCA and YWCA canteen workers, the Salvation Army doughnut girls, the reconstruction and refugee workers of the Quaker Friends and the Smith College Relief Unit.

A note on a card [Figure 55] likely was written by a YMCA canteen worker at the Paris train station greeting troop and casualty trains as they arrived. The note dated June 10 has a location of Paris and reads:

*Yesterday I saw your son Chauncey on his way to a hospital - he has a slight wound in his right arm and can't write himself for a few days. He is getting on very well and sent his love. — An American Girl.*

On March 1, 1918, the first of 233 bilingual female telephone operators sailed for Europe. Overseas, the telephone

operators — nicknamed Hello Girls — were assigned to U.S. Army offices in Paris, American Expeditionary Forces headquarters at Chaumont, and to the Supply of Services at Tours. Later, they served in 75 other towns in England and France.

During the St. Mihiel and Argonne battles, a group of operators worked at First Army headquarters and periodically came under fire. At the war's end, the Hello Girls operated the switchboards for the American Peace Commission in Paris.

Shown is a cover dated February 1919, from Helen Hill to possibly her University of Washington language instructor. In her letter she recounts her days with the 1st Army during the St. Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne offensives. Now stationed at Neufchateau, Vosges, she misses the excitement of the war. She is envious of her friends now in Paris supporting the American peace conference representatives.

## British Queen Mary's Auxiliary Army Corps Serving in the AEF

Approximately 600 women from the British Auxiliary Army Corps, known as QMAAC, were attached to the American forces in France. Of the 600, 460 were assigned to the Central Records Office or Central Post Office in Bourges, and 100 with the headquarters of the Supply of Services in Tours (APO 717) to provide clerical and administrative support. Their mail to and from the British Isles was processed through the British military post office in Paris (APO 5).

## The Black Soldier: Laborers in Uniform

The approximately 200,000 black soldiers in America's armed forces represented 10 percent of the force. The Army used 160,000, or 80 percent, of the deployed black soldiers



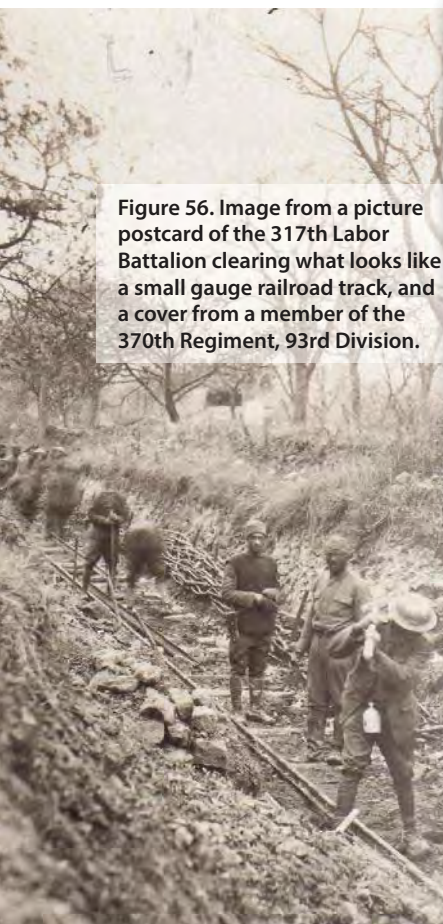


Figure 56. Image from a picture postcard of the 317th Labor Battalion clearing what looks like a small gauge railroad track, and a cover from a member of the 370th Regiment, 93rd Division.



as laborers assigned to Labor Battalions, Stevedore Regiments, Engineering Service Battalions, and Pioneer Infantry Battalions [Figure 56]. The two combat divisions, the 92nd and 93rd took different paths after deployment. The four regiments of the 93rd were turned over to the French and assigned to different French Divisions. The 92nd remained intact and fought as a unit.

### Forces in Italy

Early in 1918, the few American forces in Italy consisted mainly of U.S. Ambulance Service units with the Italian Army, American aviators in training and in the Italian Air Service [Figure 57], and several doctors assigned to British hospitals. The military men used the U.S. Navy, Italian, and British military postal systems.

In July of 1918, General Pershing, in response to Italian pleas for support, sent the 332nd Infantry Regiment to Italy. The MPHS now expanded its service to cover American forces in Italy. APO 911 in Milan became the Central Post Office with 12 sub-stations throughout Italy.



Figure 57. A cover (above) from Lt. Allen Bevin, who flew with the Italian Air Service 13 Squadron. A key item in any collection of U.S. WWI military forces in Italy is a cover (below) with a large double circle "U.S.A.P.O. No. 901" cancel. This was a provisional canceller that was bought locally in September of 1918. Full strikes on cover, because of the canceler's size, are tough to come by.

### AEF German Prisoner of War Camps in France

After their interrogation, German prisoners were sent to the St. Pierre de Corps Central Prisoners of War Enclosure or the Auxiliary Enclosure at Souilly. Enlisted prisoners were sent to work camps, officers to a Richelieu chateau.

When the war ended, the American forces held 48,198 German prisoners (883 officers and 47,315 enlisted men) spread over 92 enclosures.

The armistice was signed November 11, 1918 and the Treaty of Versailles was signed June 28, 1919, but prisoners were held until ratification of the Peace Treaty on January 10, 1920, and then released.

German prisoners were required to use [Figure 58] only

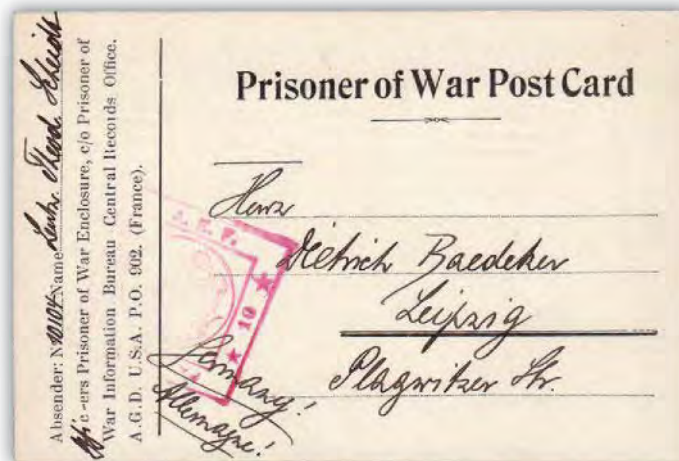


Figure 58. A prisoner of war postcard sent through American AEF mail on April 23, 1919 to Germany.



issued stationery for their correspondence.

## American Prisoners in Germany

Relatively few American soldiers became prisoners of war in the hands of the Germans. The numbers vary depending on the source. The 1919 War Department book, *The War with Germany, a Statistical Summary*, put the number at 4,435. What is not clear is if this number is only inclusive of U.S. Army personnel.

Through the German Red Cross and Geneva International Red Cross, the American Red Cross office in Berne, Switzerland received lists of all American prisoners in Germany. The Red Cross prisoner count was 3,602 (3,446 Army, 12 Navy and 144 civilians) scattered in 70 German camps. As soon as a prisoner was located, he was sent a food package every week. A system of return postcards showed 85 percent of the packages were received by the addressees [Figure 59].

The American YMCA through their War Prisoner Aid program was active in trying to meet the prisoners' educational, recreational, and religious needs. The Germans allowed Conrad Hoffman, the American-German War Prisoner Aid representative, to operate out of Berlin and periodically make camp visits.

Here is a letter from Louis Byers, of Philadelphia, with an upbeat message on the good work of the YMCA and Red Cross:

Dear Folks,

It has been a red letter day for us. ... The Y.M.C.A. representative in Germany visited the Camp. He is a red blooded American and has put new life into all of us. Religious services were held in the morning after which he gave us an excellent talk – straight from the shoulder – how to employ our time – not to stagnate to keep from falling into a rut, etc. It was just what was needed and made a big impression on everyone. The Y.M.C.A. is doing a great deal for our welfare in providing literature, educational and technical books of all descriptions, musical instruments, a cook house in which to prepare the food we receive from the American Red Cross, athletic goods, and in stimulating course of study, sports, concerts, lectures etc. The American Red Cross is also deserving of the highest praise for the work it has done in providing food and clothing for the prisoners. Without the aid of these two organizations we would indeed have a hard time of it. As editor of the camp newspaper and member of the Y.M.C.A. committee I find my time completely taken up. I am also on(e) of a committee of three men appointed to draw up a constitution for camp government. So you will see that we are gradually becoming organized and forming a miniature community where as we were formally [sic] but a conglomerate mass of prisoners. I am not in need of very much, but would appreciate, butter, condensed milk, sugar...etc. Address all packages plainly American Prisoner, Ukrainerlager etc. — as there are other prisoners in the same camp — Russians & French & two other camps for prisoners in Rastatt.

Love from Les

## End of the War — 11/11/1918

An end to hostilities, took effect with the signing of the armistice at 11 a.m. November 11, 1918 [Figure 60]. Leaders signed the document in the private rail car used by Marshal Ferdinand Foch, Supreme Allied commander.

Every World War I collection should have an end-of-the-



Figure 59. An example of an American Red Cross package receipt that showed the prisoner received his package. And a cover from American POW Louis Byers, of Philadelphia.



Figure 60. Members of the 27th New York National Guard Division celebrate the war's end.



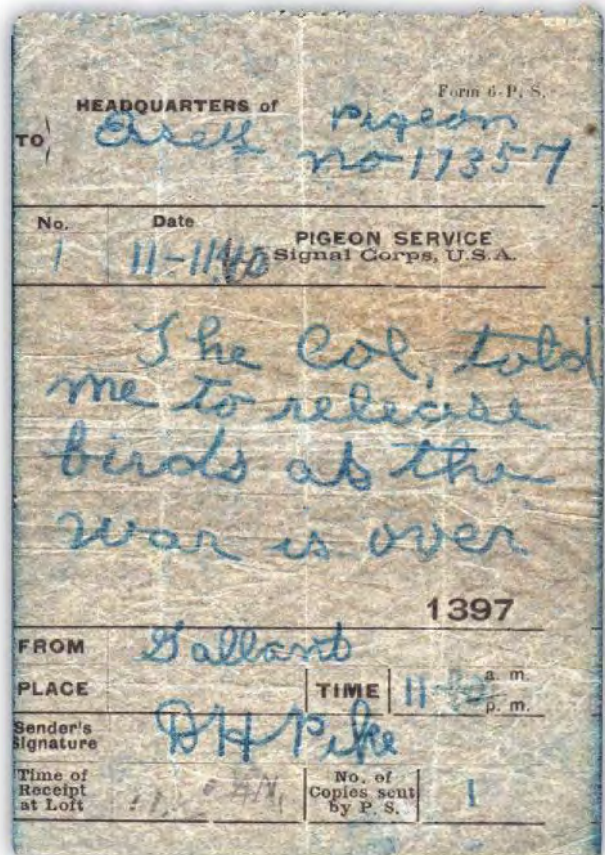


Figure 61. A cover (above) mailed on November 11, 1918 from a medical corps officer to his mother or wife. And a Pigeon Service message dated November 11 with the pigeon apparently released at 11 a.m.

war cover dated 11/11/1918 [Figure 61]. They are not that common, but are attainable. What is not so common is the illustrated Pigeon Service message, in which the handler wrote, “The Col. told me to release birds as the war is over.”

## POST-WAR

### Third Army

On November 17, 1918, the U.S. Third Army's II and IV Corps began their march toward Germany. The advance moved in slow daily stages to permit the German army to retreat without making contact with Allied armies. Moving through Luxembourg [Figure 62], the lead units reached the German border on November 23 and rested there until December 1. On December 1, lead elements of all Allies crossed into Germany. On December 7, elements of the Third Army crossed the Rhine to occupy the Rhine bridgehead at Coblenz, which served as headquarters for the Third Army [Figure 63]. By December 17, the U.S. advance into Germany was complete.

### American Forces Germany

Germany signed the peace treaty on June 28. On July 2, 1919, the Third

Figure 62. Detail from a postcard showing American troops, on November 21, 1918, traveling through Luxembourg. A map shows the Army's unit locations on December 21 in the American Army of Occupation Zone.

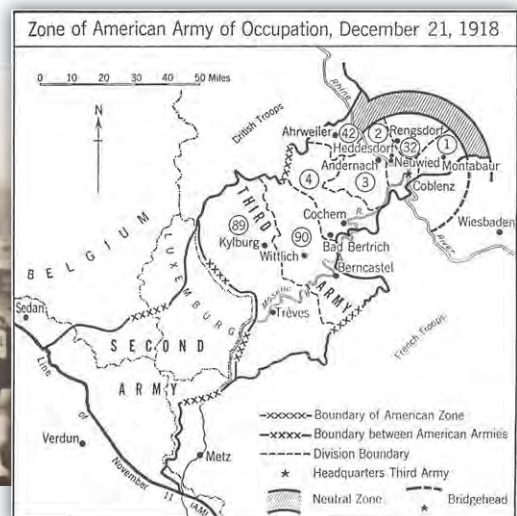


Figure 63. Major General Dickman, Third Army Commander, sent this letter through Coblenz, APO 927, the Third Army Headquarters.



Army was disbanded and a new headquarters, American Forces Germany, assumed control on July 3. The AFG force remained in Germany for more than three years. Major General Henry Allen assumed command of the force [Figure 64].

On August 25, 1921, the U.S. and Germany signed a separate peace treaty that was ratified by the U.S. Senate in October. With the signing of the peace treaty, the U.S. troop strength of around 13,000 began a steady reduction of forces. On January 24, 1923, the American flag was lowered and the AFG headquarters left Coblenz. The Coblenz APO 927 was officially closed on January 27, but several covers are known after that date. The canceler was left with remaining military personnel that may have been working out of the American Coblenz Consulate during that time. The last known cover was an April 23, 1923 parcel post wrapper [Figure 65].

## Occupation Postmarks

Some the most elusive collectible postmarks are in the occupation period [Figure 66]. The Third Army Bridge cancel variant reading "3rd Army" was used in Luxembourg City (APO 951) only during July, 1919. Two slogan machine cancels are not common and good strikes are hard to find.

The duplex cancel with AFG in the barrel was only used in the last few months of the occupation and there are only a handful known.

The "Mailing Division" cancel with two known examples and the "Insured" cancel with four examples known are the scarcest of the occupation cancels.

## German Civilian Censorship

Soon after U.S. military control was established over the Rhineland, postal censorship of civilian mail was established [Figure 67]. During the summer of 1919, cen-



Figure 66. Elusive collectible postmarks from the occupation period include the Third Army Bridge cancel reading "3rd Army" (APO 951), two slogan machine cancels, a duplex cancel with AFG in the barrel, a "Mailing Division" cancel, and the "Insured" cancel.



Figure 64. A postcard dated February 18, 1919 from Brigadier General Henry Allen to his wife, with a message that he expected to arrive in Coblenz the next day.

Figure 65. A parcel post wrapper with an April 23, 1923 Mailing Division cancel. This is the last known date of use of the postal canceler for Coblenz APO 927.



Figure 67. An April 22, 1919 censored postal card with a Coblenz No. 372 censor handstamp.





Figure 68. The cover with the 166th Aero Squadron label (left) was mailed through APO 930 at Trier; a 2nd Division cover from a member of the Sixth Marines.

sorship was increasingly relaxed and performed on a spot basis. Although officially ended on January 10, 1920, markings have only been found through late 1919. Numbers 371 and 373 were assigned to Trier. Number 372 was assigned to Coblenz.

## Third Army and AFG Material

### Labels and Illustrated Stationary

While the Third Army was in existence, unit stationary and various labels were used by the troops to identify their units. Copies of the 166th Aero Squadron label are difficult to find [Figure 68]. The cover was mailed through APO 930 at Trier.

The 2nd Division was a split division with two Marine regiments (5th and 6th) and two Army regiments (9th and 28th). The 2nd Division had the most variety of labels and illustrated stationery in the Third Army.

### Newspapers

The *AMAROC News*, (an acronym for American Army of Occupation), as the successor to the American Expeditionary Forces' *Stars and Stripes*, was a daily newspaper of the AFG [Figure 69]. The *AMAROC* published its first issue on April 21, 1919, and last on January 24, 1923, the day the American flag was lowered. Compared to *The Stars and Stripes*, the *AMAROC*'s editorial policy was more lively and outspoken.

*The Indian* was the newspaper of the 2nd Division [Figure 70]. The newspaper was one of several division newspapers that sprung up after the armistice. The First Division produced *The Bridgehead*, the 3rd Division produced *The Watch on the Rhine*. Other smaller units also began publishing newspapers. The 9th Infantry's paper bore the proud title *The Cooties*.

### Handstamps

The most controversial markings of this period were a series of handstamps from two 83rd Division units [Figure 71]. These were the 158th Artillery Brigade and the 308th Engineer Regiment. Each handstamp asked for return of the units to the United



Figure 69. A cover from the *AMAROC News*, mailed May 25, 1921, from APO 927.



Figure 70. A mailing wrapper with an attached Indian head label from *The Indian* newspaper, dated May 11, 1919 at APO 710. The wrapper was first-class mail with no postage required.



Figure 71. May 8, 1919 cover back, shown cropped, with a 308th Engineers handstamp and annotated message to get the 308th home.



States. Examples include “Ohio — Have you Forgotten Us” and “Ohio What’s Wrong? Get the 308th Engineers Home.” The handstamps resulted in disciplinary action against one or more of the senior officers of the units involved.

## Commemorative Cards

Several divisions (1st, 4th, and 90th) issued postcards carrying their individual unit’s insignia on the reverse with some listing battle credits and other accomplishments. The Third Army distributed at least two such items, the most interesting carrying colored replicas of the insignias of the Third Army and of the corps and divisions assigned to it [Figure 72]. These cards represent some of the more beautiful occupation postal items. In another type of commemorative, the Knights of Columbus added the Third Army insignia to the regular multicolored 1919 Easter card distributed throughout the American Expeditionary Forces.

## Negotiate the Peace

At the end of the fighting, special facilities were established for the use of American personnel, the American Commission to Negotiate Peace, involved with political arrangements that were adopted in the postwar period [Figure 73]. One of these related to the convening of the Congress of Versailles to deal with a peace agreement between the Allied and Associated Powers and Germany. The other was the establishment of a military mission in Berlin to supervise the German compliance with the terms of the peace treaty.

As to the treaty, member nations of the victorious Allies met in the Chateau of Versailles outside of Paris. President Wilson, who headed the U.S. delegation, on December 13 sailed for Europe on the S.S. *George Washington*. After visits in France and Britain, he returned to Paris for a preliminary session of the Supreme War Council on January 12, 1919. The first plenary meeting of the Congress was held on January 18. Although representatives of 32 Allies were invited, it soon became clear that the Big Four — Wilson, and prime ministers Georges Clemenceau, of France, David Lloyd George, of Great Britain, and Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, of Italy — would make most of the decisions.

There were long negotiations on a host of details, including boundary disputes, war reparations, colonies, plebiscites, future German armaments, etc. Finally, a draft was completed and given to the Germans on May 7. There were to be no negotiations, but the German representatives could comment on it, and in the end had to accept it more or less as originally written. The formal signing ceremony took place June 28, 1919, in the Hall of Mirrors in the chateau.

## European Officer Courier Service

To handle the mail [Figure 74] of the American peace conference participants, a new APO 975 was opened in December 1918. American missions had been established



Figure 72. A postcard with illustrated Third Army division insignias and a Knights of Columbus Easter card, with the holiday greeting obliterated by the censor's cancel.



Figure 73. A couple of Peace Commission objects: A cover to the U.S. via the Overseas Courier Service deposited in the mail in Washington, D.C.; also, a Peace Commission temporary pass for Sgt. Major George Cordwell.



Figure 74. An April 1, 1919 cover from the U.S. Food Administration Mission in Prague was carried to Paris and posted via APO 975.





Figure 75. An Official Registered April 28, 1919 cover (left) from the American Berlin Mission to the American Paris Peace Commission. It was carried by courier to Coblenz and then to APO 702. And an August 15, 1919, APO 946 registered cover (right) from Berlin. This is one of the few known covers from APO 946.

in Berlin and Vienna to support the American peace delegation. The European Officer Courier Service was inaugurated in November 1918 to deliver mail between Paris and the two support missions. On April 30, 1919, service was expanded to include other official and semi-official organizations throughout Europe. Most mail when brought to Paris was posted at APO 975 or Paris APO 702.

### Berlin Military Mission

As to the supervision of the terms of the treaty, several key Allies — America, Britain, Belgium and France — established military missions in the German capital, Berlin, and some had subsidiary offices in other cities to deal with disarmament and other aspects of the peace agreement.

Although APO 946 was opened in Berlin in May 1919 [Figure 75], it apparently saw little use as most of the mail went by courier to Coblenz, the headquarters of the American occupation zone in the Rhineland, and then on to Paris for delivery to the APO there for processing. Covers from APO 946 are the scarcest of any post-WWI APOs.



Figure 76. A cover from Private G. Husted, an American guard at the Parchim Russian prisoner of war camp, includes a letter with very interesting content on camp life and Bolshevik agitators.

### Russian Prison Camps in Germany

On January 13, an inter-Allied agreement created a commission for the control of Russian prisoners in Germany. The British and Americans on the commission were chosen to administer the 30 or 40 camps. The U.S. Army provided 20 detachments of four officers and 25 unarmed soldiers. The British provided a like number. On April 10, 1919, the Supreme Allied War Council gave the German government complete freedom in repatriating Russian prisoners of war. From available correspondence, the detachments were still in place until at least June, 1919.

A cover from Private G. Husted [Figure 76], an American guard at the Parchim Russian prisoner of war camp, includes a letter with very interesting content on camp life and Bolshevik agitators. The letter says in part:

... By my address you would almost think I was a prisoner. Our detachment is here for the purpose of bettering the conditions of the Russians, and to see that they are not cheated out of their rights. Each of us have a group or platoon of men of about six or seven hundred. Ever Sunday the Russians have sports of all kinds including running, football, jumping, bag racing ... The other week they had an uprising. The German soldiers fired into them killing seven and wounding fourteen. A squad of Americans attended the funeral. I was ... very sad. ... The uprising was caused by B's [Bolsheviks] in Russia you understand what kind of animal they are.

If peace is signed I might come home too sweet. Let's hope it is. The Germans are all worked up over the terms. They say they will not sign. They do not think of the damage they done. Where a few days ago they worshiped us today it is all reversed. They blame everything on President Wilson ...

### Draw Down of Forces in France

Repatriation of the nearly 1.8 million members of the AEF not part of the occupation in Germany and Luxembourg could not start until February 1919. The French had



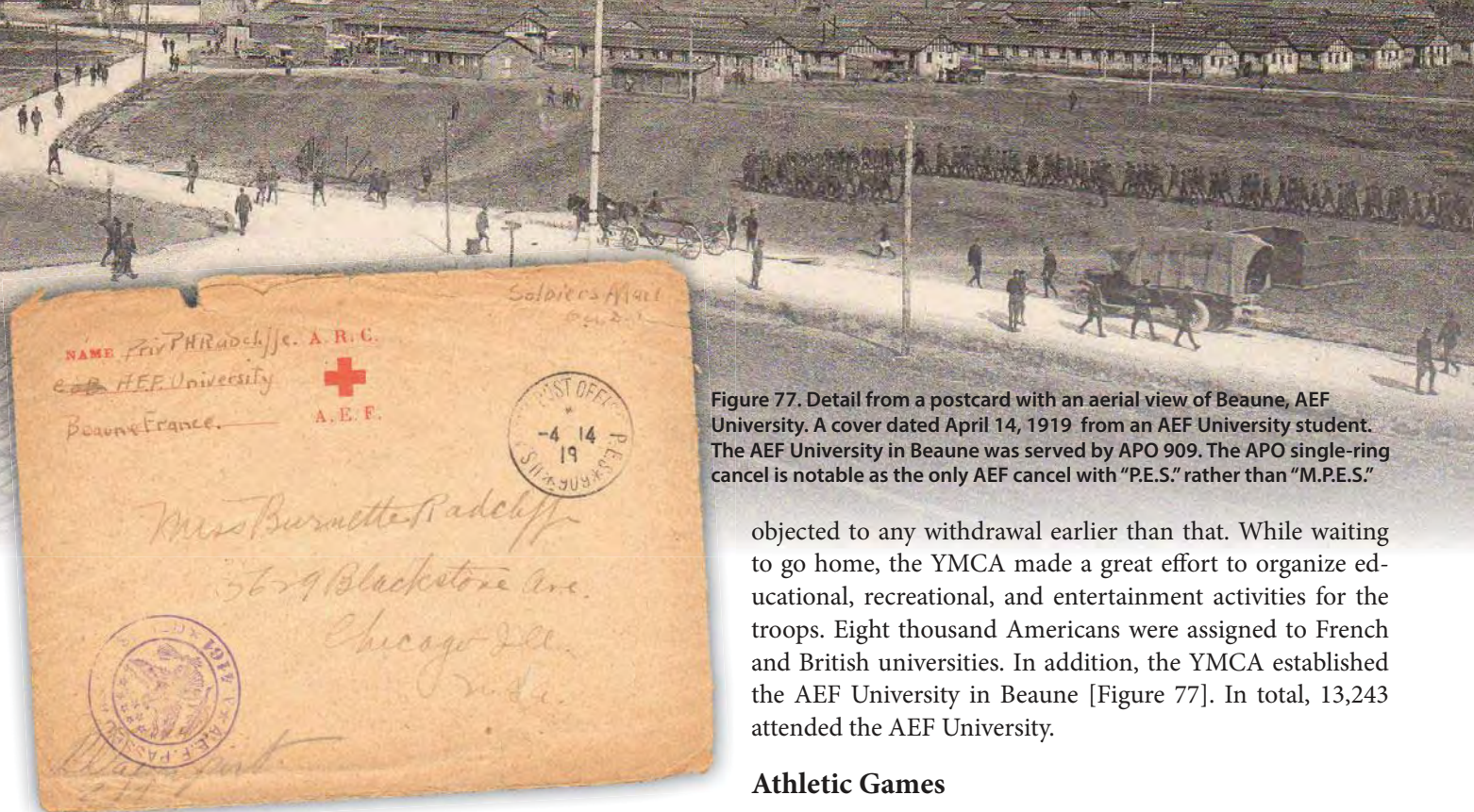


Figure 77. Detail from a postcard with an aerial view of Beaune, AEF University. A cover dated April 14, 1919 from an AEF University student. The AEF University in Beaune was served by APO 909. The APO single-ring cancel is notable as the only AEF cancel with "P.E.S." rather than "M.P.E.S."

objected to any withdrawal earlier than that. While waiting to go home, the YMCA made a great effort to organize educational, recreational, and entertainment activities for the troops. Eight thousand Americans were assigned to French and British universities. In addition, the YMCA established the AEF University in Beaune [Figure 77]. In total, 13,243 attended the AEF University.

### Athletic Games

The YMCA, with the Army's help, built a 25,000-seat stadium to hold the Inter-Allied Games from June 22 to July 6, 1919 [Figure 78]. The stadium was named Pershing Stadium. Fifteen nations participated in the two-week event. As a sign of the times, one event was hand-grenade throwing for distance and accuracy.

### Welcome Home Cards

Beginning in March 1919, the troops of the AEF began their trip home at the rate of 100,000 to 200,000 per



Figure 78. The U.S. team makes its entrance for the Inter-Allied Games Opening Day Ceremony (below). The Games were promoted by a multi-colored postcard (right). A postcard mailed from Paris APO 702 with information about the games (above).

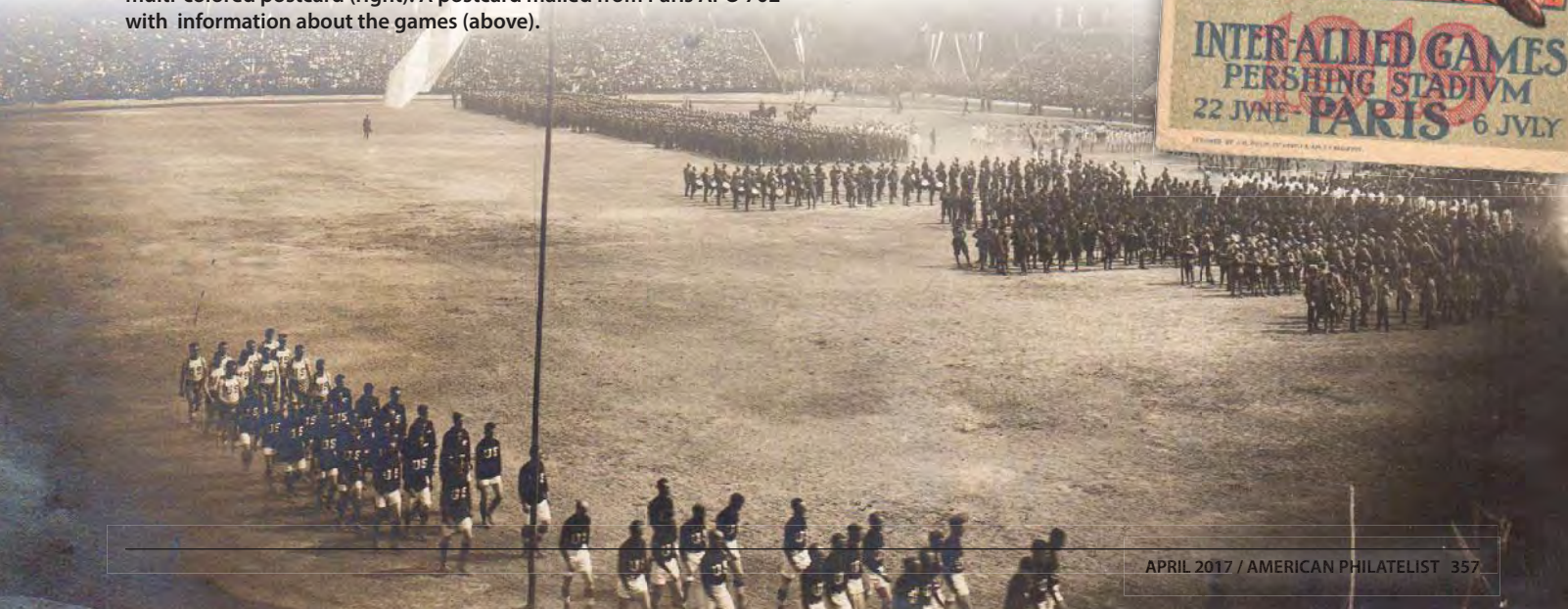






Figure 79. Welcome home cards from the Knights of Columbus, YMCA, and USS Antigone.



Figure 80. A registered APO 702 cover mailed May 11, 1923. The cover was sent by an embassy courier to Washington, D.C.



Figure 81. (Clockwise) An American Red Cross packet sent to families whose deceased relatives remained buried overseas included the envelope the package was mailed in, a Red Cross cover letter, a grave marker photograph, a remembrance card, and a formal Red Cross sympathy note.

month aboard a wide variety of commercial and U.S. Navy vessels (including battleships). Welcome home cards [Figure 79] were provided by numerous organizations and they can make a relatively inexpensive eclectic collection.

## Last AEF APO Postmarked Cover

In September 1919, all remaining AEF personnel in Europe (approximately 50,000 men) not part of the American Forces in Germany were assigned to a new command, American Forces in France. By January 1, 1920, all but 46 men had been repatriated and these 46 were assigned to U.S. embassies in Paris and London.

Post office records show that APO 702 (Paris) closed on October 22, 1919 [Figure 80]. APO 702 mail after this date is scarce, but available. The cancels were evidently left with the remaining Army personnel.

## Those Who Did Not Come Home

At the end of the war, families of deceased soldiers were given an option of leaving soldiers' remains in Europe or having the remains shipped back to the United States for final burial.

Eight cemeteries in Europe contain the graves of 32,902 known and unknown WWI soldiers. As a service to families with loved ones buried in France, the American Red Cross took pictures of each grave marker and mailed the pictures to the next of kin. The package [Figure 81] consisted of three pictures of the grave marker, a cover letter, remembrance card, and a short engraved sympathy note.



thy note from the American Red Cross.

## 'It Was Our Duty'

On July 10, 1919, President Woodrow Wilson presented the 264-page Treaty of Paris to the U.S. Senate for ratification. He accompanied the delivery with a 4,782-word speech, known sometimes as the "Hand of God" speech, urging participation in the League of Nations, which he saw as the tool to avoid another great war.

Wilson reviewed the importance of America's involvement in World War I, referring to the U.S. as "a great moral force" and its military men as carrying "the great ideals of a free people at their hearts and with that vision were unconquerable. Their very presence brought reassurance; their fighting made victory certain."

The president went on to further praise the American Expeditionary Force: "... Finer men never went into battle; and their officers were worthy of them. ... They were free men under arms, not forgetting their ideals of duty in the midst of tasks of violence. I am proud to have had the privilege of being associated with them and of calling myself their leader.

"... It was our duty to do everything that it was within our power to do to make the triumph of freedom and of right a lasting triumph in the assurance of which men might everywhere live without fear."

Saving these philatelic items, postal history, and ephem-

era is one small way on the 100th anniversary of our entry into WWI to acknowledge and remember the United States' participation during this difficult time in history.

## The Authors

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