

CONTRACTORS
PACIFIC NAVAL AIR BASES
P. O. BOX 2459
HONOLULU, T. H.
Wake Island



V I A C L I P P E R

VIA AIR-MAIL

Officer in Charge
Contract NOy-4173
Administration Bldg.
Pearl Harbor, T. H.

Unpublished 15¢ per half ounce air mail rate, Wake Island to Hawaii, departed on *California Clipper* March 24, entered the mail at Honolulu March 25, 1941.

Wake Island in World War II

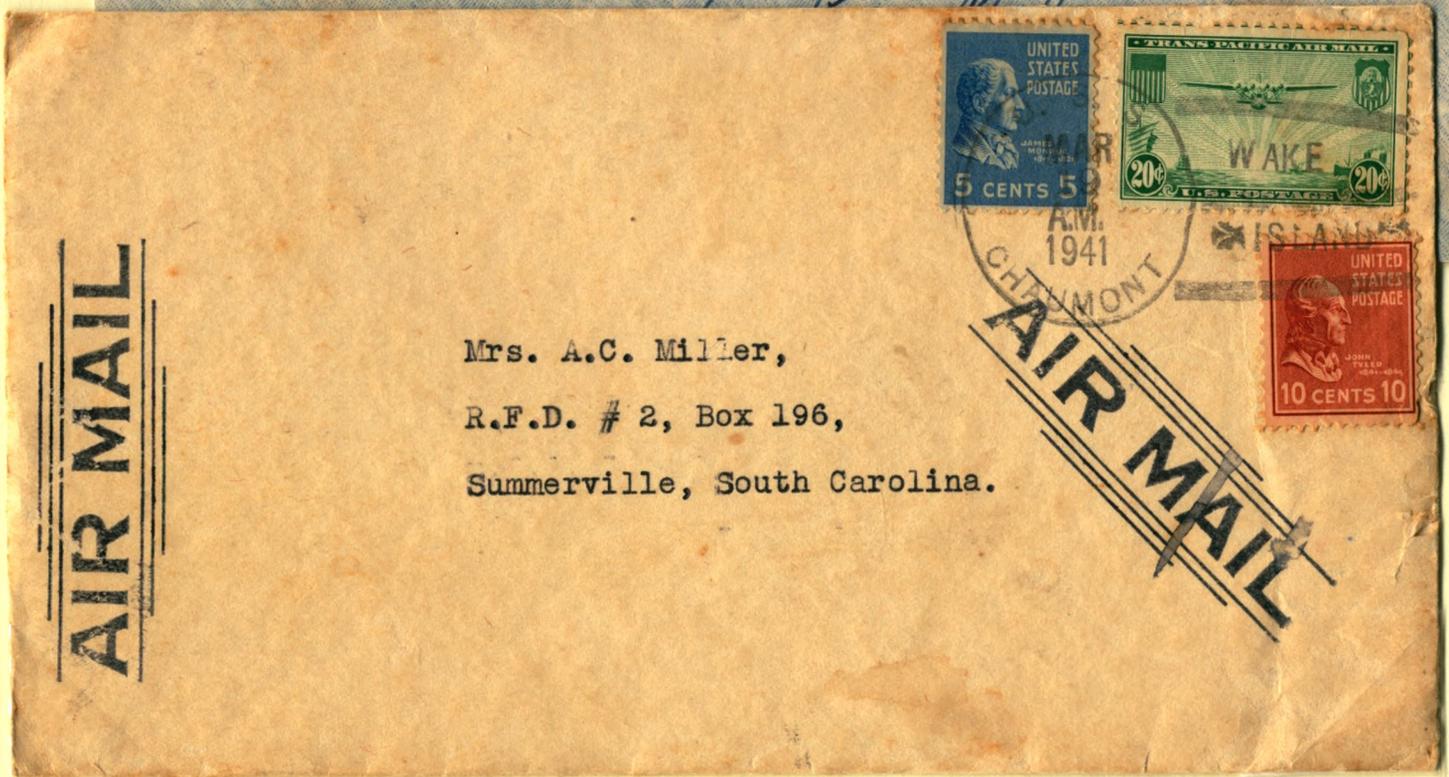
Wake Island is a coral atoll in the Pacific Ocean that consists of three islets — Peale, Wilkes, and Wake — surrounding a central lagoon, about 2,200 miles west of Hawaii, 1,500 miles east of Guam, and 2,000 miles southeast of Tokyo. Less than three square miles in area, it is one of the most isolated and remote locations in the world. On July 4, 1898, a U.S. Navy commander raised the flag there, and the United States formally claimed possession on January 17, 1899. The atoll was not suitable for settlement because it lacks a permanent source of fresh water or arable land.

Despite its inhospitality and the continual need for supply shipments to support transient residents and service aircraft, Wake Island became an essential steppingstone for Pan American Airways trans-Pacific mail flights (and later, passenger flights) between San Francisco and Manila in 1935, extended to Hong Kong and Macao in 1937, and to Singapore in 1941.

As American and Japanese interests clashed and tensions escalated in the Pacific, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered the Navy to fortify U.S. island possessions. A consortium of building construction and dredging companies called Contractors Pacific Naval Air Bases (CPNAB) was organized in August of 1939 to build the military infrastructures. Construction at Wake Island began in 1941.

Postal notes: Wake Island had no post office. Nearly all mail was collected at the Pan American Airways hotel. Outgoing air mail was given to Clipper pilots; surface mail to Navy ship mail clerks. Some mail was canceled aboard ships anchored at Wake; otherwise, westbound mail was deposited at Guam and eastbound mail at Hawaii. Uniform domestic surface mail rates applied. Unpublished air mail rates were 35¢ per half ounce between Wake and the United States; 15¢ per half ounce between Wake and Hawaii. No wartime mail to or from foreign countries is known except for Japanese occupation military mail from Wake Island to Japan.

U.S. Navy Supply Ship and Construction Crew Air Mail

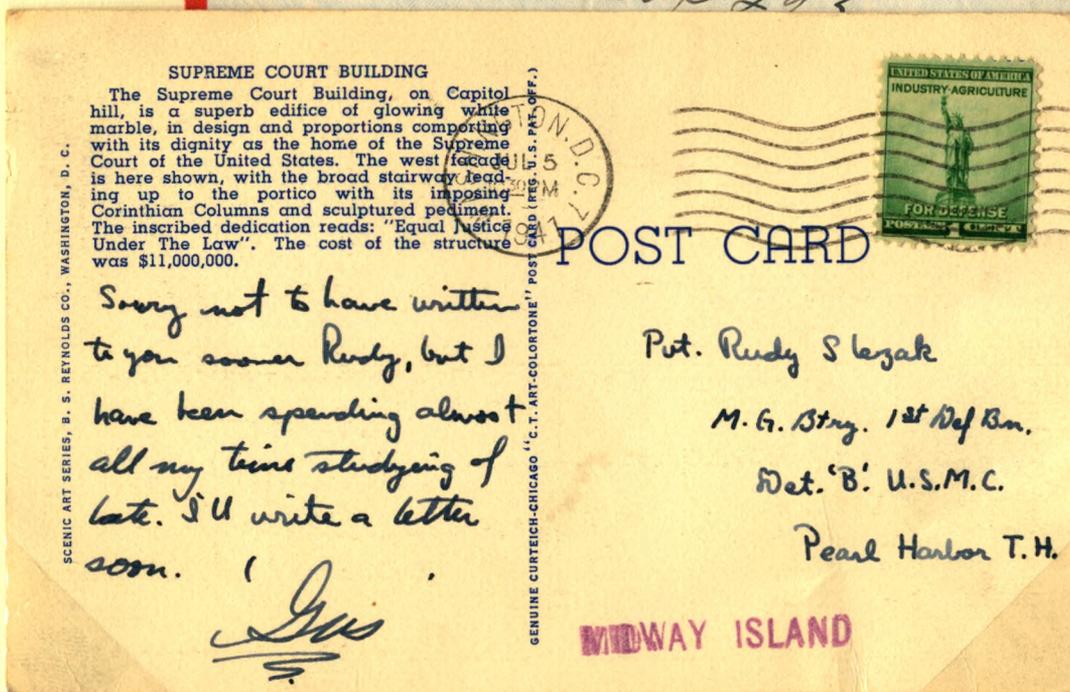


Lieutenant Harold W. Butzine, United States Navy Reserve, Civil Engineer Corps, supervised construction of fortifications at Wake Island, which began in January. Navy Lieutenant Commander Elmer Bloomfield Greedy relieved Butzine in October.

Above: Unpublished 35¢ per half ounce air mail rate, Wake Island to Lake Mills, Wisconsin, from Lieutenant Harold W. Butzine, resident officer in charge of construction. Departed Wake July 15 on *Honolulu Clipper*, deposited in the mail at Honolulu July 16, 1941. Pan American Airways hotel cachet.

Below: Navy transport *USS Chaumont*, laden with a cargo of gold bullion from Manila to San Francisco, stopped at Wake Island for 17 minutes on March 19, 1941, to transfer cargo and mail. Crew member Storekeeper Second Class Clarence "C.J." Miller posted this cover on that transfer for the March 24 *California Clipper* flight to San Francisco and domestic transcontinental air mail transport to South Carolina. The earliest Wake Island mail had been sent from *Chaumont* in 1933; for the 1941 call this cover is unique and unlisted. On December 7 Miller survived the Pearl Harbor attack aboard a different ship.

Mail of the First Defense Battalion, United States Marine Corps



Providing Wake Island with defense forces was challenging; accommodations were barely sufficient to meet the needs of CPNAB construction crews. Major James Patrick Sinnott Devereaux commanded 450 officers and enlisted men of the Marines' First Defense Battalion, which USS *Regulus* debarked at Wake Island on August 19. Navy Commander Winfield Scott Cunningham arrived November 29 on USS *Wright*, along with six other Army, Navy, and Marine officers and 114 enlisted men. Cunningham became the officer in charge of all U.S. forces at Wake Island.

Above: This air mail cover departed Wake November 25 on *Anzac Clipper's* last inbound flight to San Francisco before Pearl Harbor and entered the mails November 26. Marine Private Manton Leon Fleming of *Comanche, Oklahoma*, died in captivity at Osaka Main Camp Chikko in Japan. His death was reported to the International Committee of the Red Cross on February 26, 1944, his 23rd birthday.

Below: Marine Private Rudolph Mathew Slezak of the First Defense Battalion had been deployed from Hawaii to Midway Island in July, where he received this July 5, 1941, 1¢ surface rate post card from Washington, D.C., and to Wake Island in August. As a prisoner of war he was held captive at Hakodate No. 3 POW Camp on Hokkaido Island, Japan. Slezak was repatriated in September 1945; he died in 1998.

Last Air and Surface U.S. Mail from Wake Island



On December 3 *China Clipper* picked up the last air mail from Wake Island before the Japanese conquest. *USS Wright* had departed Wake on November 30 with the last surface mail; she was one day out from Hawaii on December 7 when her crew received word of the Japanese attack. With fighting men at their battle stations she steamed home without encountering enemy forces.

Above: *China Clipper's* pilot collected this air mail letter on December 3 and deposited it at the Pearl Harbor post office on December 5. The sender, civilian contractor Benjamin Rose, was held captive at the Kiawgwan POW Camp near Shanghai, China. He was repatriated in September 1945.

Below: Upon *Wright's* arrival at Pearl Harbor on December 8, this 3¢ single letter surface rate cover entered the mail with the rest of the bag from Wake Island. The sender, civilian contractor Julius L. Larson of Hailey, Idaho, died February 17, 1943, in captivity as a slave laborer at Fukuoka No. 18-B camp near Sasebo, Japan. His remains are buried at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific at Honolulu.

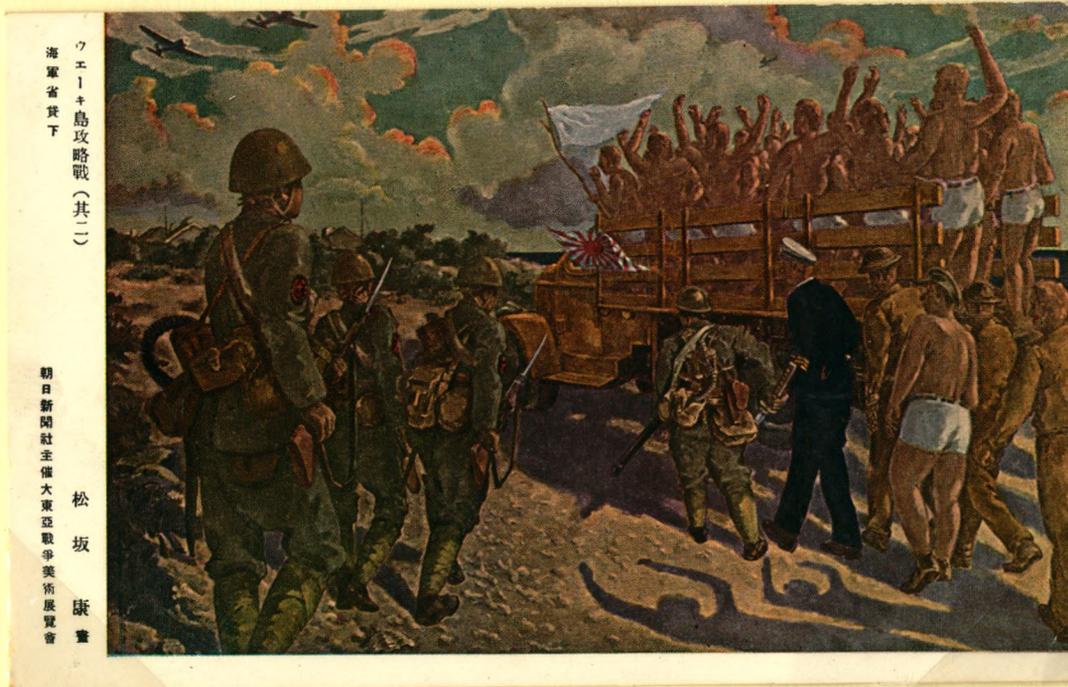
Parcel Mailed Too Late to Wake Island Returned to Sender



On the morning of December 8, which was still December 7 at Hawaii, war came to Wake Island. Outnumbered and outgunned U.S. Army, Navy, Marine, and civilian defenders sank two enemy destroyers and shot down an estimated 21 warplanes. American dead numbered 49 Marines, 3 Navy men, and about 70 civilians (including ten Chamorros). Japanese losses counted between 700 and 900 killed and at least 1,000 more wounded. Overwhelmed by superior force, the American survivors on Wake Island surrendered on December 23. Among the 1,621 men captured by the Japanese were 1,150 civilian contractors. Three weeks later, all but 360 civilians and 21 seriously wounded Marines were taken by ship to prisoner-of-war camps in Japan and China.

This undated large piece of a parcel wrapper was probably mailed in late November or early December 1941. Single 3¢ Jefferson and 4½¢ White House sheet stamps paid 7½¢ special fourth class book rate surface postage (five pounds at 1½¢ per pound) from California to Wake Island. It traveled no farther west than Hawaii before war erupted, which made it undeliverable. Return postage supplied by the sender, which consisted of 1¢, 2¢, and 3¢ National Defense and 1½¢ Martha Washington sheet stamps, paid the same special book rate. *The sender of the parcel, R. W. Parmele, was a leader of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church and a distributor of church publications. The intended recipient, John Herbert O'Neal, was a civilian employed by Morrison-Knudsen Company, one of eight CPNAB consortium members. On December 11 during a break in the fighting, lay minister O'Neal prayed at the burial of Americans who had been killed during the first several days of the battle. The Japanese kept O'Neal at Wake until September 30, 1942, as a slave laborer to construct Japanese defenses. After that he was one of 265 Wake Island civilians who were sent to Fukuoka Camp 18 at Sasebo, Japan, in October 1942 to build the Soto Dam. There 53 prisoners died of exhaustion, malnutrition, injuries from beatings, and disease. According to Japanese records, O'Neal died in captivity at Camp 18 on February 27, 1943, of "cardiac beriberi." After the war, his remains were buried at National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific at Honolulu.*

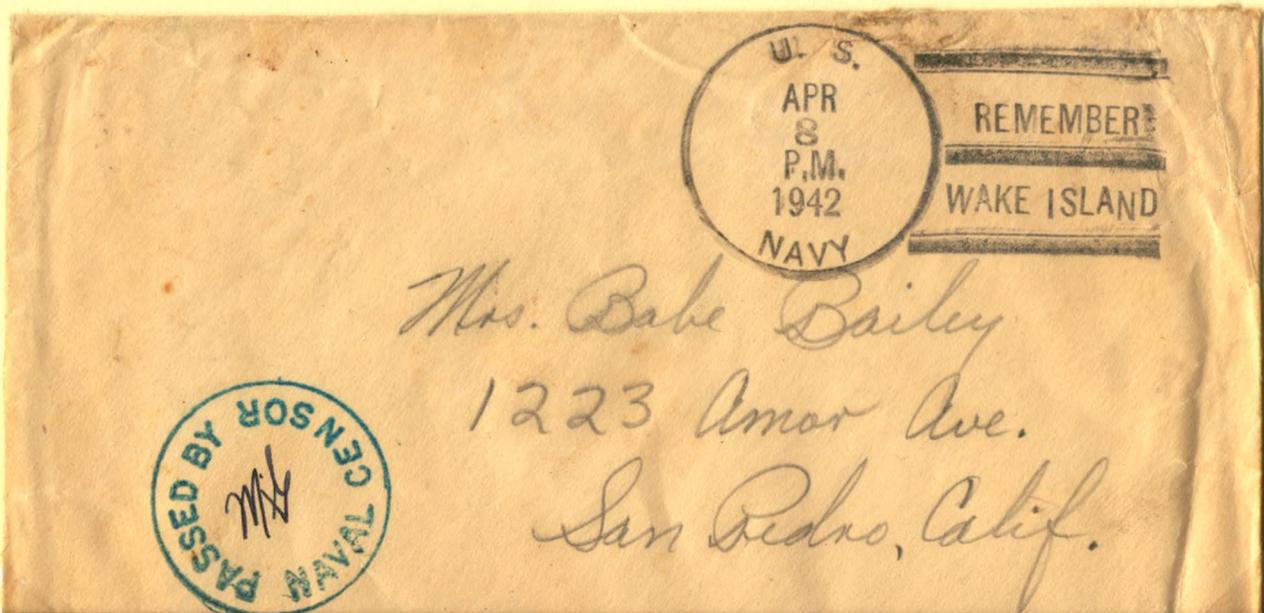
Japanese Capture of Wake Island



The second Japanese invasion attempt began on December 23, this time accompanied by two aircraft carriers. After a full night and morning of tough fighting, the defenders were defeated by the vastly superior arms and numbers of their attackers.

Japanese artist Yasushi Matsusaka entered "Battle to Capture Wake Island (I)" and "Capture of Wake Island (II)" at the Navy Department for the Greater East Asia War Art Exhibit sponsored by Asahi News. The newspaper reproduced his paintings on these unmailed propaganda post cards. *The tall man in the blue uniform is Navy Commander Cunningham. To his right wearing a helmet is Marine Major Devereaux. Enlisted men were stripped to their undershorts.*

"Remember Wake Island!"



\$10,000,000
Boston War Bond Premiere

WAKE ISLAND
(A Paramount Picture)

In Person **Dorothy Lamour**
MAURICE J. TOBIN, *Mayor*

War Activities Committee
Motion Picture Industry
(OVER)

Prices
\$100 Bond
and Up

\$5,000
Orchestra
B L 5

METROPOLITAN
THEATRE
268 Tremont Street
Boston Mass.
The 14th of September, 1942
at 8:30 promptly
Doors Open at 7:30

The heroic defense of Wake Island provided a rallying cry for the Marines and served as the inspiration for a Hollywood feature film (a fictional propaganda portrayal).

Above: In February 1942 the 7th Marine Defense Battalion post office at Tutuila, American Samoa, saluted the Wake warriors' valor by adding the slogan "REMEMBER WAKE ISLAND" to a cancellation device. When the battalion was transferred to Upolu, Western Samoa, a New Zealand mandate, on March 28, 1942, the slogan canceler stayed with the unit. The April 8 date on this cover represents an early example of the free mail privilege that Congress had granted to active-duty members of the U.S. armed forces effective April 1. *Marine Private O. R. Strong mailed this letter with his personal information penciled on the envelope flap; a Navy censor examined it, marked it, and initialed it.*

Below: This unmailed post card was a reserved seat ticket for the September 14, 1942, premiere screening of the *Wake Island* motion picture at Boston, a benefit to promote war bonds. Purchase of a \$5,000 bond was the price of this ticket.

Mail to and from American Civilians Captured at Wake Island



Postal communication to and from Wake Island civilian and military men held captive in Japanese prison camps formally began in late April 1942 when Japan provided the names of 120 American prisoners of war to the International Committee of the Red Cross, a small fraction of the number actually held captive. The special censorship office for POW mail at Chicago opened May 1.

Above: Chalas R. Loveland, a Wake Island civilian contractor employed by Morrison-Knudsen Company, sent this card dated June 24, 1943, to his parents at Boise, Idaho, from a POW camp at Shanghai, China. It was passed by a Japanese censor at Shanghai and a U.S. censor at New York. *Loveland was repatriated in September 1945; he died in 2013.*

Below: Ruth King of Longview, Washington, sent this May 2, 1942, cover to her brother, Melvin A. Austin, a Wake Island civilian held captive in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp at Shanghai, China. The privilege of free mail for civilian internees was not granted until May 6. Air mail postage to Switzerland was 30¢ per half ounce. The letter was examined by a special POW censor at Chicago before being dispatched to the International Committee of the Red Cross at Geneva. From Geneva it went next to the Red Cross office at Shanghai, received there August 4, for transfer to Japanese authorities. After examination by a Japanese censor it was delivered to Austin. *Austin was repatriated in September 1945; he died in 1954.*

News of Captive U.S. Marine by Shortwave Radio from Tokyo



Dear friends: - A short wave broadcast coming from Tokyo Japan & heard by me at 11-20 PM this date, gave a list of names of our boys who are prisoners, among the names was Robert Gordon Hundley alive & well. I hope this relieves your anxiety to a certain extent & you please notify me if this is your correct name & address as later on there will be personal messages via short wave from these boys. At least that has been the procedure up to now. This program is sponsored by South Gate American Legion Post-335 of South Gate Calif. Please write me.

Sincerely yours
Mrs. R. E. Washburn
2572 1/2 Cass Pl
Huntington Pk
Calif.

Shortwave radio propaganda broadcasts from Tokyo that brought news of individual prisoners were the only timely sources of information about their circumstances.

Los Angeles area members of the South Gate American Legion Post No. 335 monitored the broadcasts and passed along information about prisoners to their families. This July 17, 1942, 1¢ postal card reported news of Wake Island Marine Private First Class Robert Gordon Hundley to his family. Hundley survived his captivity and died in November 2001 at age 80.

International Red Cross Mail Scheme for POWs and Internees

SERVICE PRISONERS OF WAR.

IRCC No. LT-2463

PRISONER.
Name: Field
First Name: Harold G.
Matriculation No.
Rank:
Camp: Woosung
Nationality: American
Locality: Shanghai area

SENDER.
Name: Goolup
First Name: A.
Nationality:
Full Address: 1649 Rodney Drive
Los Angeles, Calif.
Relation to Prisoner:
(State whether wife, mother, friend etc.)

This envelope may be used by Prisoner for enclosing his reply to Sender.
This envelope must not be closed.

Received Nov 17, 1942

The seldom-seen Red Cross formular envelope used briefly in early 1942 brought a letter from home to the captive in Japan, and came back to Geneva with his reply letter to his correspondent at home. The sheer number of POWs overwhelmed the filing system that attempted to keep track of each individual.

This POW envelope carried a letter from Los Angeles, probably mailed in May or June 1942 via the International Red Cross Committee at Geneva to Harold G. Field at Woosung camp near Shanghai, China. After examination by a Japanese censor it was delivered to Field and docketed November 17. On September 12 the Associated Press had distributed photographs of six American POWs that had been provided by the Japanese government. Three of the six had been captured at Wake Island — John R. Pace, a civilian; Devereaux, the Marine commander; and Field. Identified in the caption as a journalist, Field was pictured with a wide smile and a cigarette in his hand, dressed in an overcoat and a fedora.

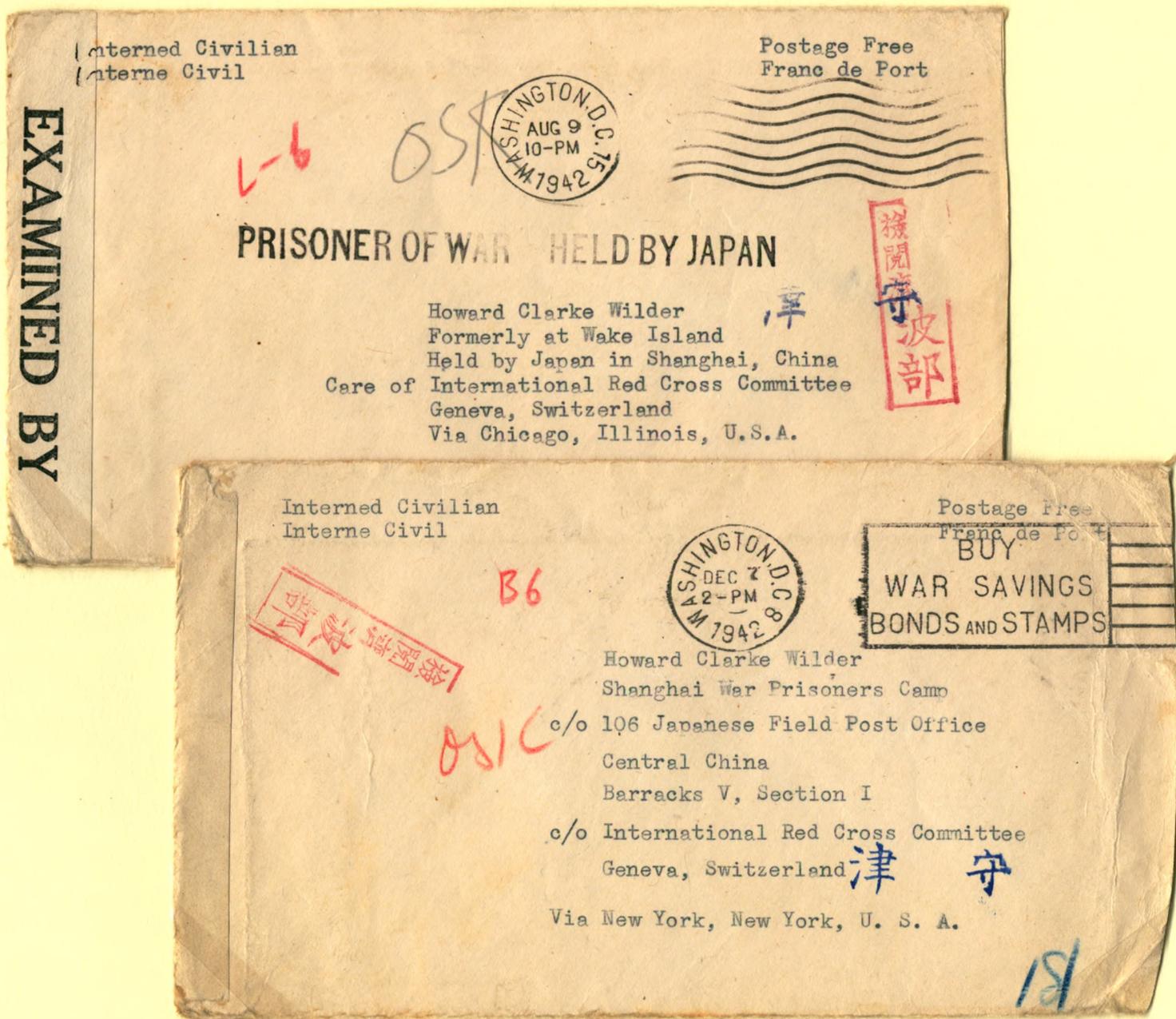
Woosung camp, where both Field and Devereaux were held, was one of the few Japanese POW camps visited by Red Cross representatives during the war. Their August 1943 report stated:

As far as is known, conditions in this camp are tolerable. The prisoners suffered severely from cold last winter, but the activities of the International Red Cross Committee delegate in Shanghai in providing stoves and fuel has improved the situation. Parcels, medicine, warm clothes and other necessities are sent into the camp under his direction twice a month.

Work is mainly agricultural and not heavy. Medical attention was not satisfactory at first but some improvements have been effected. Prisoners do their own cooking. With the help of parcels sent into the camp and the rations provided they are able to produce satisfactory results.

After the war, some men who had been imprisoned at Woosung accused the Red Cross reporters of having been "extremely biased in favor of the Japanese," but conditions were worse at other locations. Robert E. Winslow, a Marine private at Wake Island who died in 2008, wrote in his memoir that after being transferred to other POW camps he had looked back on his Woosung captivity as "the good old days."

Status and Censorship Location Changes for Mail to American Captives



The special POW censorship office that had opened May 1, 1942, at Chicago relocated to New York on September 7 and remained there for the duration.

Howard Clarke Wilder, the addressee of these covers sent by a family member at Washington, D.C., had been a civilian construction worker at Wake Island, transported with other captives to a POW camp at Shanghai, then transferred to a POW camp at Osaka, Japan. *Wilder was repatriated in September 1945; he died at Gold Beach, Oregon, in May 2000.*

Above: August 9, 1942, cover endorsed "Interned Civilian" and directed "via Chicago, Illinois," for censorship. Somewhere between Washington and Geneva it was struck with the countermanning designation "PRISONER OF WAR HELD BY JAPAN" marking in black ink, evidently reclassifying him as a military captive. Forwarded to Osaka and marked by a Japanese censor on arrival.

Below: December 7, 1942, cover endorsed "Interned Civilian" and directed "via New York, New York," for censorship. Evidently he was by then known to be a civilian. Forwarded to Osaka and marked by a Japanese censor on arrival.

Mail to and from U.S. Marine Corps Prisoners of War

Private John C. Smith,
U.S.M.C.
BARRACK No. 2. Section. 2.
Shanghai War-prisoner's Camp.

上海俘虜收容所
檢閱濟

俘虜郵便

Mr. Mrs. Ralph W. Smith,
1925 N.W. 39th Street,
Oklahoma, City,

EXAMINED
By 5

Prisoner of War
Prisonier de Guerre
E 8

Postage free

LAWTON
OCT 23
11:30 AM
1942
OKLA.

波部

Pfc. Jack Russell Williamson
U.S. Marine Corps
Formerly of Wake Island
American Prisoner of War in Shanghai China
Japanese field Post office # 106 Barracks #1
% International Red Cross Committee
Geneva,
Switzerland

Postage free
Franc de Port

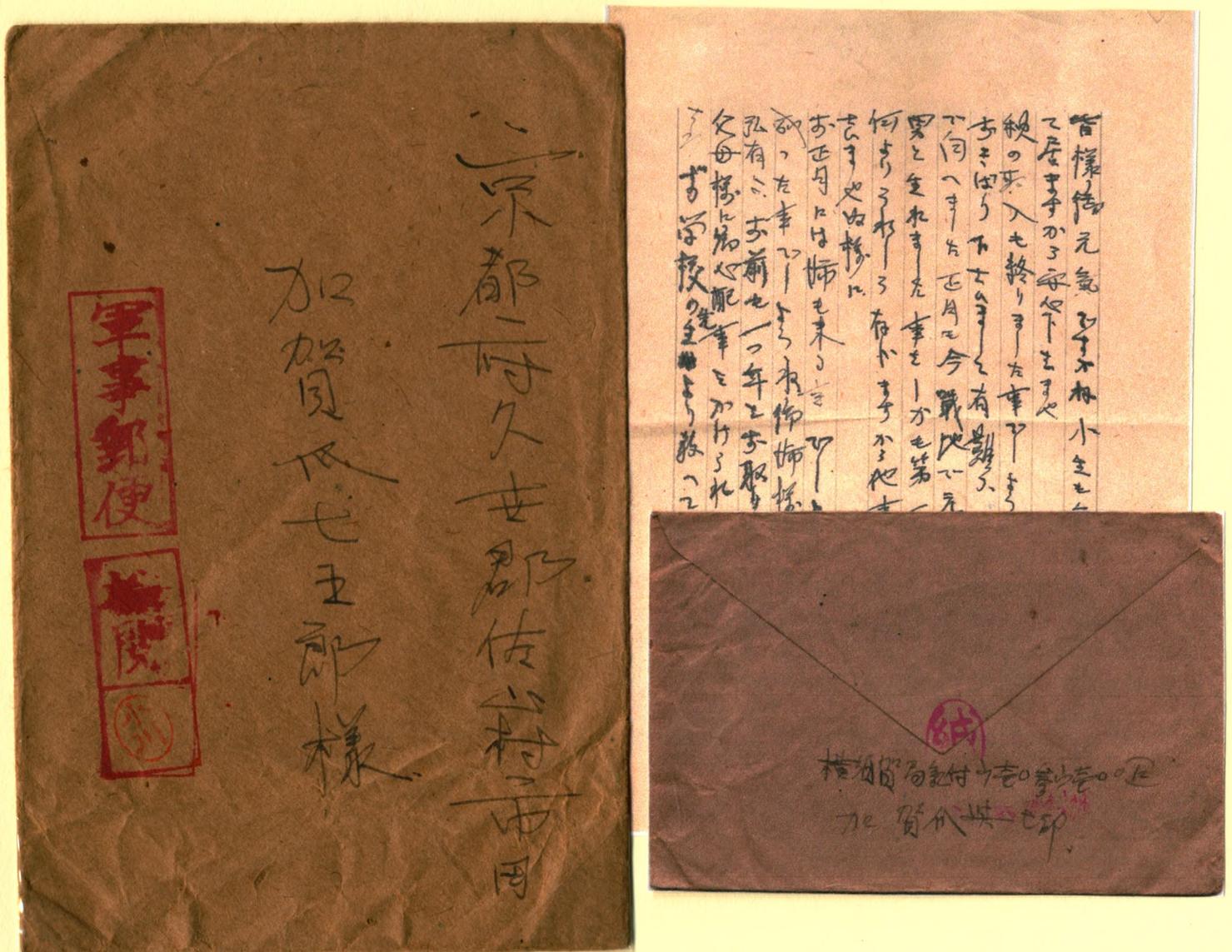
Tsumori 55

Mail to and from Wake Island Marine prisoners of war is seldom seen. They were greatly outnumbered by civilian internees captured at Wake. An Associated Press dispatch of February 19, 1942, reported the Navy's list of presumed prisoners from Oklahoma held by Japan. "John C. Smith, Oklahoma City" and "Jack R. Williamson, Lawton" were named as "Marine Corps personnel serving at Wake Island."

Above: Japanese formular POW card dated June 23, 1943, from Wake Island Marine Private John C. Smith at the Shanghai POW camp to his parents in Oklahoma City, marked and released by the camp censor. The special New York POW censor mark is evidence that this arrived in the United States and was delivered before the end of the war.

Below: October 23, 1942, cover to Marine Private Jack R. Williamson endorsed "Prisoner of War" went to the New York Office of Censorship for examination before it was sent to the Red Cross at Geneva. By the time it was forwarded to Japanese authorities for censorship and delivery, Williamson had been moved from a POW camp at Shanghai to the Tsumori POW camp at Osaka, Japan. That transfer had occurred in late August of 1943, so the letter evidently took at least ten months to reach him.

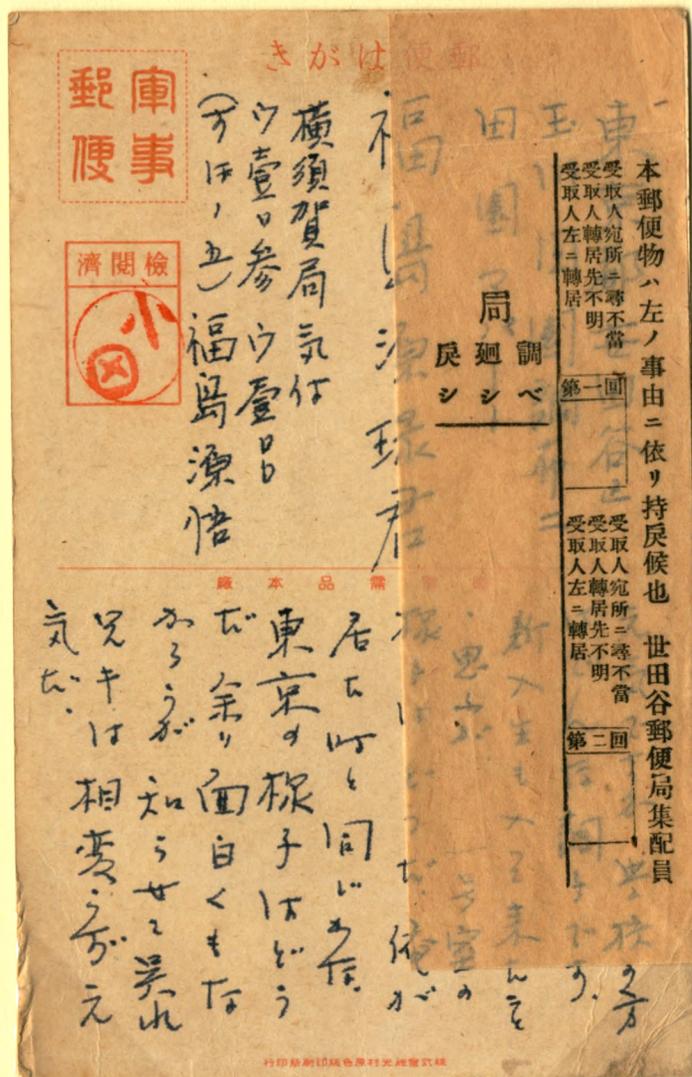
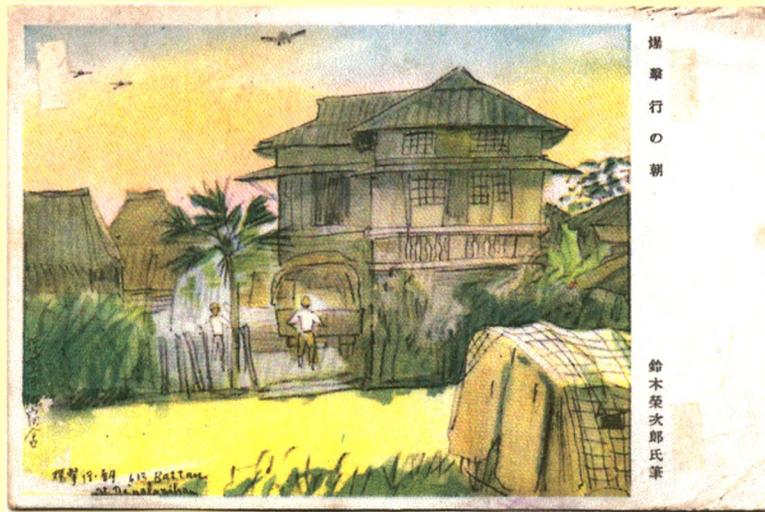
Blockade-Run Letter to Japan from Member of Japanese Occupation Force



The United States made no attempt to recapture Wake Island, but heavily bombed Japanese positions from carrier-based aircraft and prevented reinforcements and supplies from being delivered to the occupying force by blockading the atoll with submarine patrols. As a consequence, mail that originated from Wake Island (called Ōtori-jima by Japan) during the Japanese occupation is scarce. At first the Japanese Navy attempted to run the blockade with surface supply ships, but those were bombed or torpedoed and sunk. For the rest of the war Japan transported men, supplies, and mail to and from Wake by submarines, which had very limited capacity. In the coded address on letters and cards from the Imperial Japanese Navy's 65th Guard Force that occupied Wake Island — Yokosuka PO U 103 U 100 — Yokosuka Naval District was the gateway post office for the region, U 103 denoted the location, and U 100 denoted the naval unit.

Undated letter from Japanese Navy man named Kagatsume at Wake Island to Kyoto says, "I'm fine and happy to be here (front line) to have New Year here. Please don't worry about me. I live for this as a man." The red boxed markings indicate Military Mail and Censored.

Undeliverable Military Post Card from Member of Japanese Occupation Force



As the fortunes of war turned against Japan, some mail became undeliverable — in this instance, a blockade-run military picture post card that reproduced a propaganda painting by Eijuro Suzuki titled “Morning of the Bombing” (of Bataan).

The sender was Gengo Fukushima at Wake Island to his younger brother, Genroku Fukushima, at Setagaya-ku, Tokyo, marked by the military censor at Wake. Attached is a printed slip of the Setagaya post office that says, “This mail has been returned for the reason stated at the left,” but no reason is given.

Air Mail Lettercard to Highest Ranking American Civilian Captured at Wake

PRISONER OF WAR POST
KRIEGSGEFANGENENPOST
SERVICE DES PRISONNIERS DE GUERRE

BY AIR MAIL
PAR AVION

CHINA AUG 10 1944

AIR 6 CENTS MAIL
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

RANK AND NAME MR. HERMAN P. HEVENOR, U.S. CIVILIAN INTERNEE
(CAPITAL LETTERS) UNITED STATES PRISONER OF WAR.

PRISONER OF WAR No. _____
(SEE NOTE ON FLAP)

CAMP NAME AND No. ZENTSUJI WAR PRISON CAMP

SUBSIDIARY CAMP No. _____

COUNTRY SHIKOKU, JAPAN

VIA NEW YORK, N. Y.

12323
U.S. CENSOR

IMPORTANT: FOR PRISONERS IN GERMAN HANDS THE PRISONER OF WAR NUMBER SHOULD BE CLEARLY INDICATED IF KNOWN. IT MUST NOT BE CONFUSED WITH THE ARMY SERIAL NUMBER.

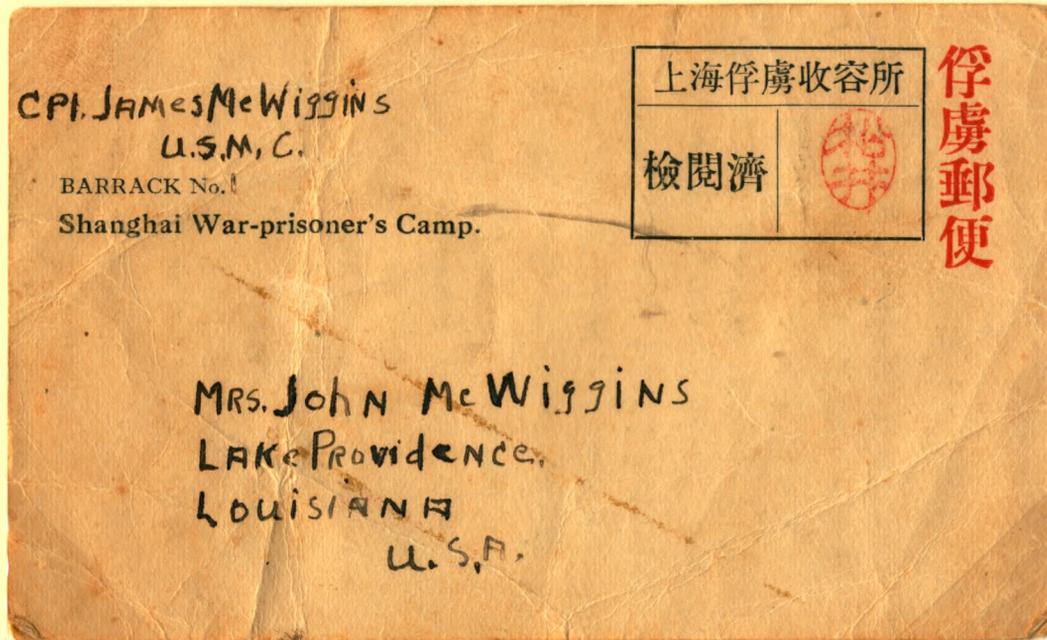
W. D., P. M. G. Form No. 111
April 1944

16-39042-1

On March 13, 1944, the air mail rate for letters and post cards to American prisoners of war and civilians detained or interned in enemy or enemy-occupied countries became 6¢ per half ounce, the same concessionary rate that had existed for active-duty members of the armed forces since Christmas Day of 1941. By this time, mail to and from captives held by Japan was exchanged between U.S. and Japanese embassies at Moscow instead of through the Red Cross at Geneva.

Washington, D.C., August 10, 1944, formular lettercard to Herman P. Hevenor, Wake Island civilian internee at the Zentsuji POW camp, examined and passed by the Office of Censorship at New York and by a Japanese censor on arrival. Hevenor was a high-ranking government auditor who had been sent to Wake Island to evaluate the Navy's base construction program, but missed *Philippine Clipper's* December 8, 1941, departure. *Hevenor had been chief engineer for construction of the Southern Railway station at Greensboro, North Carolina, in the late 1920s and had served on the engineering commission that oversaw construction of Washington National Airport in the late 1930s. As a New Deal administrator he had been chief engineer of the Public Works Administration in Washington before moving up to the Executive Office. His experience managing large and complex construction projects had qualified him as an examiner to evaluate financial records at Pacific island naval bases, the duty that had brought him to Wake Island at the worst possible moment. By missing the evacuation flight departure from Wake, he had cut short a promising career that probably would have propelled him to a high office in the government. Hevenor died in 1971.*

Postwar Delivery of Mail from an American Prisoner of War



Prisoner of war mail continued to arrive long after the war had ended and the POWs had returned to their homes. It can be identified by the absence of an American examiner's censor mark.

Wake Island Marine Corporal James C. McWiggins sent this card dated June 9, 1944, from the Kiawgan camp near Shanghai to his mother at Lake Providence, Louisiana. It was passed by a Japanese censor, but must have taken more than a year to reach his mother, evident from the absence of an American censorship marking. *McWiggins survived his ordeal and returned home after the war. He died in 1992.*

Epilogue:

On October 7, 1943, Japanese commander Admiral Shigematsu Sakaibara had ordered his men to execute 98 American civilians who had been kept as laborers at Wake Island to operate heavy construction equipment for the occupiers. The prisoners were blindfolded with their hands and feet bound, seated next to a ditch that had been bulldozed as a mass grave for them, shot to death by machine-gun and rifle fire, and their bodies dumped into the ditch and covered. One American had escaped the massacre. When he was recaptured, Sakaibara himself beheaded the man.

On September 4, 1945, Sakaibara formally surrendered the Japanese garrison at Wake Island to U.S. Marine Brigadier General Lawson H. M. Sanderson aboard the destroyer escort USS Levy. After parties had signed the instrument of surrender, Americans set foot on the island for the first time since the last prisoners had been executed two years earlier. A Marine color guard raised the Stars and Stripes shortly after 1:30 in the afternoon as a bugle sounded "To the Colors." As the flag reached the top of the pole, the Levy fired a twenty-one gun salute. For the first time in almost four years, Americans had free access to the forlorn island possession in the central Pacific Ocean.

After the war Sakaibara was tried as a war criminal, convicted, and hanged. By the time the war ended in September 1945 about 600 members of the Japanese occupying force had been killed by bombs, about 1,300 had died from disease and starvation, and approximately 2,200 remained alive.

A shore-based U.S. Navy post office was established at Wake Island in December 1945. Cleanup and reconstruction of facilities at Wake began in 1946, in preparation for the restoration of civilian trans-Pacific passenger and mail flights. By then domestic air mail rates had been made uniform; there were no more unpublished rates. A civilian post office finally opened at Wake Island on May 1, 1951.