

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



VIA CLIPPER

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Unpublished 15¢ per half ounce air mail rate, Wake Island to Hawaii, departed on *California Clipper* March 24, entered the mail at Honolulu March 25, 1941.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

## Wake Island in World War II

Postal items document the Wake Island story from the arrival of defense construction crews in 1941 through the end of the Japanese occupation in 1945 and U.S. fighting men's return journey home from the war after the Japanese surrender. A small 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, Wake Island is one of the most isolated and remote locations in the world.

Despite its inhospitality (no permanent source of fresh water, no arable land), 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.

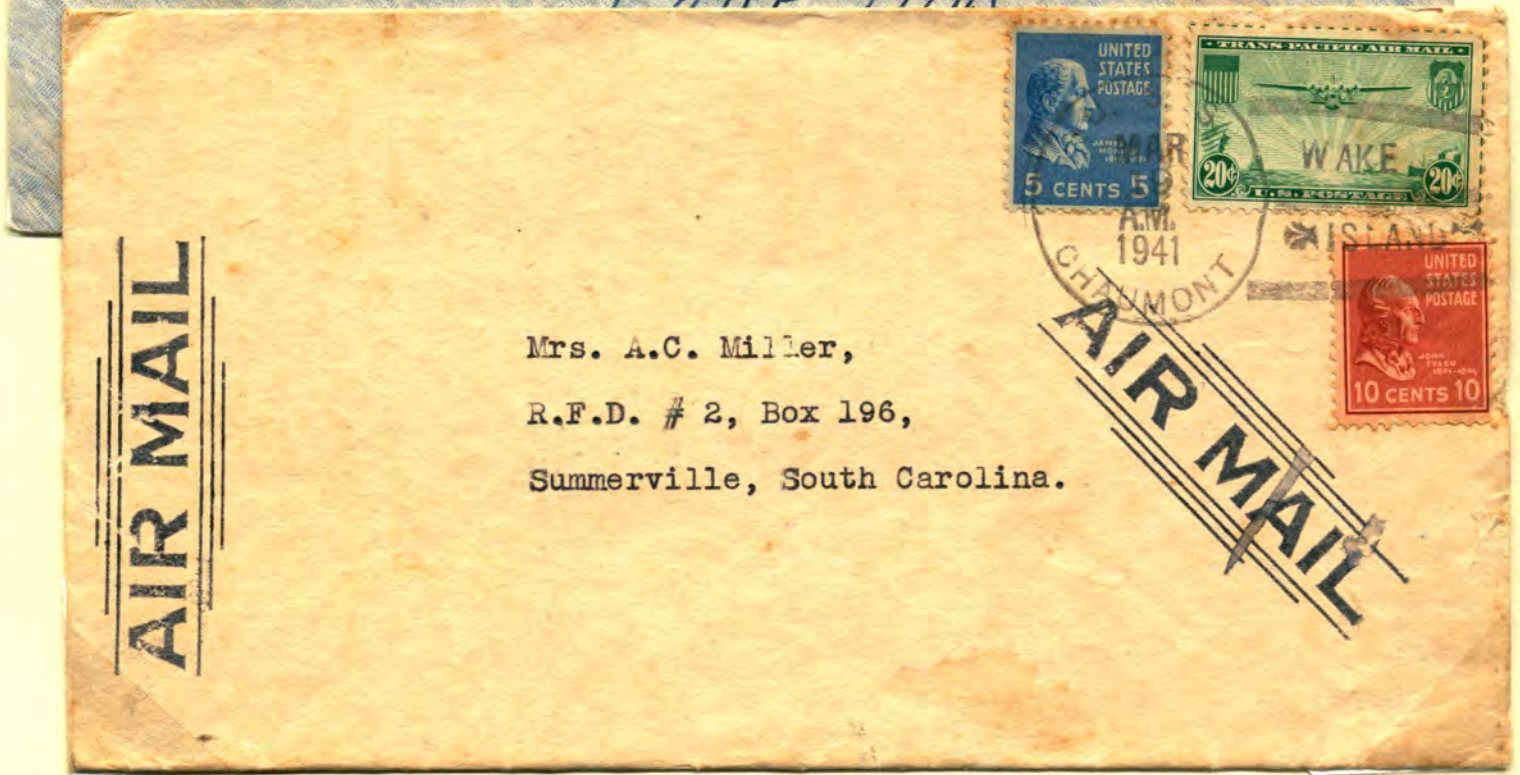
As American and Japanese interests clashed and tensions escalated in the Pacific, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered the Navy to fortify U.S. island possessions. A consortium of building construction and dredging companies called Contractors Pacific Naval Air Bases (CPNAB) was organized in August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

**This display narrates the history in boldface type**, describes the historical context of each mailpiece in medium type, takes note of each postal rate only once (on the occasion of its first appearance), and reports what is known about the Wake Island man who sent or received each item in *italic type*.

Postal notes: Wake Island had no post office until after the war. 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 free military mail from Wake to Japan. No incoming war-dated mail that actually arrived at Wake Island has survived.



## 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 Greey 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. 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.



# USS *Enterprise* Delivered Fighter Aircraft to Wake Island Marines

NAVY DEPARTMENT

U. S. S. ENTERPRISE  
CARE POSTMASTER,  
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

OFFICIAL BUSINESS



PENALTY



AVOID  
PENALTY

COMMUNICATION OFFICE

Navy Department  
Washington D.C.

N D Hodson  
VF-6 San Diego



Federal Services Finance Corp  
718 Jackson Place, N.W.  
Washington, D.C.



Aircraft carrier USS *Enterprise* departed Pearl Harbor on November 28, 1941 to deliver Marine Fighter Squadron to Wake Island on December 4, and then returned to Hawaii. *Enterprise* had been scheduled to return to Pearl Harbor on December 6. Fortunately rough weather delayed her arrival for two days, so she was not in port during the Japanese attack. For her World War II service the carrier *Enterprise* was awarded a Presidential Unit Citation, a Navy Unit Commendation, and 20 battle stars, making her the most decorated United States ship in history.

Above: April 8, 1941, 6¢ per ounce domestic rate air mail cover from USS *Enterprise*, San Diego, to Navy Department, Washington, shows the prewar ship cancel without obliteration. Below: December 4, 1941, 3¢ per ounce domestic surface rate cover to Washington posted the day that *Enterprise* called at Wake Island to deliver the fighter squadron. The sender was Ensign Norman D. Hodson, a Navy aviator assigned to Fighter Squadron Six on the *Enterprise* (abbreviated VF-6 here). The letter was sent onward after the carrier docked at Pearl Harbor on December 8. Mail was subject to Navy censorship and name of ship in the cancellation dial was obliterated to accord with Navy wartime orders. Later in World War II, Lieutenant Hodson was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. During the Korean War he earned a second one, and a Gold Star in lieu of a third.



## 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 Kiawgan 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.



## Letter 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 December 2, 1941, air mail cover was transported to Hawaii on the last prewar flight of the Pan American Airways Boeing B-314A flying boat *Anzac Clipper*. She had originally departed San Francisco late on the afternoon of December 5, but experienced mechanical trouble 400 miles out and had to return for repairs. After being repaired she had been rescheduled to leave at two o'clock in the afternoon on December 6, but departure had been postponed so the pilot, Captain Harry Lanier Turner, could attend his daughter's first piano recital at Oakland. At eight o'clock the next morning *Anzac Clipper* was less than an hour away from Honolulu when her radio officer received a coded flash warning that Pearl Harbor was under Japanese air attack. The providentially late departure from San Francisco had delayed her approach just long enough to have kept the vulnerable aircraft out of harm's way. Pan Am's "Plan A" secret instructions in the event of war rerouted *Anzac Clipper* to Hilo, 220 miles southeast of the combat zone. *Anzac Clipper's* mail was forwarded to Honolulu on December 14. All commercial flights west of Hawaii were suspended for the duration of the war. This cover was held at the Navy Yard Pearl Harbor Branch post office until January 25, 1942, when it was marked MISSING IN ACTION and returned.

*The sender, Murray Crawford Williams, was the father of the addressee, Ensign Belmont Murray Williams of the United States Navy Civil Engineers Corps. Ensign Williams had arrived at Wake Island on October 14, 1941, as an administrator to oversee base-building construction. The Japanese held him at the Kiawgwan prisoner-of-war camp near Shanghai until the end of the war. He died in 1987.*



## Mail Service for American Civilians Captured at Wake Island



Only family members were entitled to correspond with internees and prisoners of war.

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.

The privilege of free surface mail for civilian internees was granted May 6. For practical purposes one can say that senders were required to pay at least surface-rate postage of 5¢ per ounce on letters to internees for just the first week that postal correspondence with captives was possible.

The air mail rate to Switzerland was 30¢ per half ounce. Letters for POWs and internees in enemy and enemy-occupied countries did not qualify for free air transport until late 1944.

Ruth King of Longview, Washington, sent this May 2, 1942, air mail cover to her brother, Melvin A. Austin, a Wake Island civilian held captive in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp at Shanghai, China. The letter missed Chicago but was examined by British Imperial Censorship at Bermuda 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 Will 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. Sincerely yours  
Please write me.

Mrs. R. E. Washburn  
2572 1/2 Cass Pl  
Huntington Park  
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, 1c 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-2163

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.**

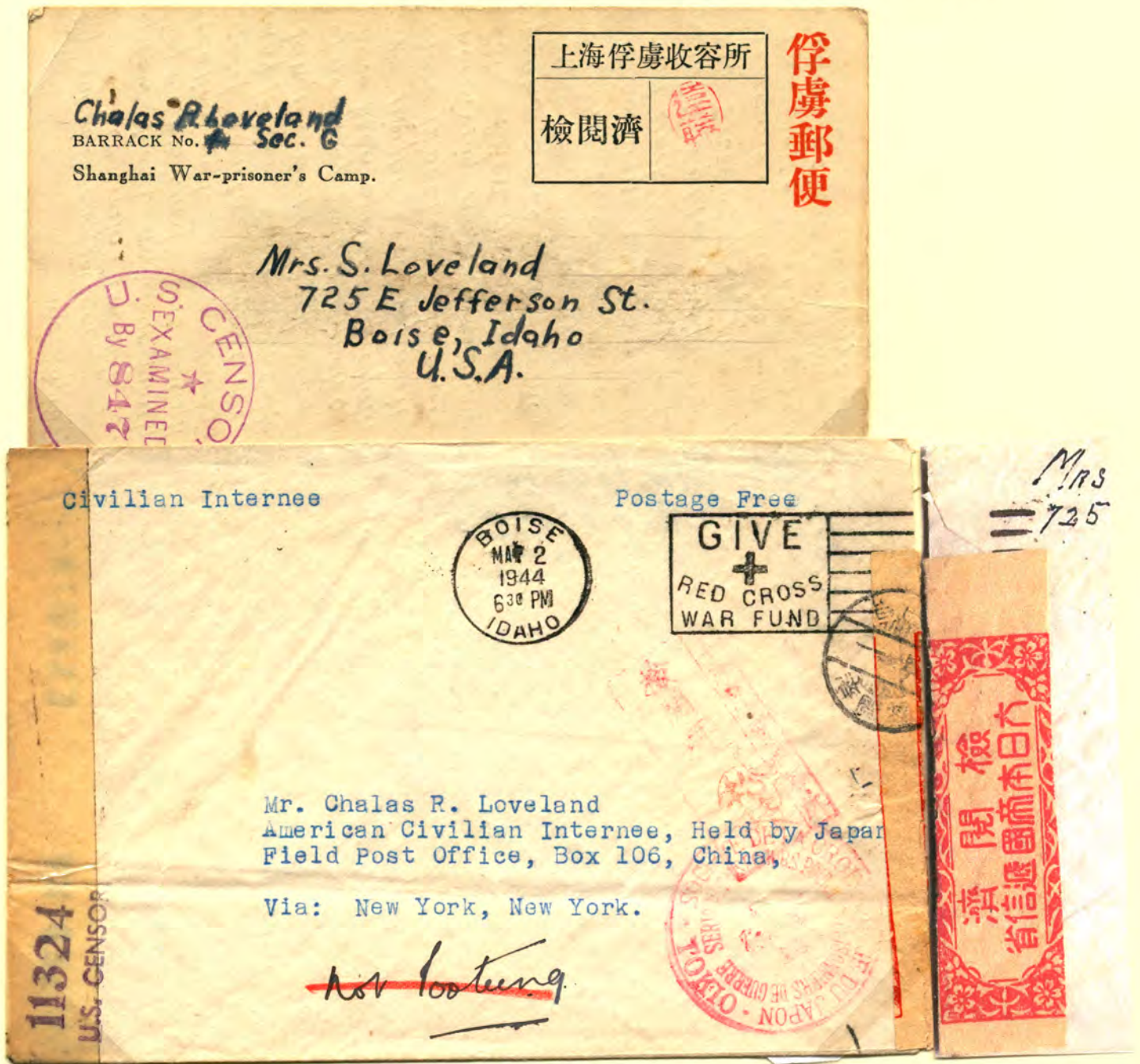
Howard Clarke Wilder, the addressee of these covers sent by a family member at Washington, D.C., had been a civilian construction worker at Wake Island, transported with other captives to a POW camp at Shanghai, then transferred to a POW camp at Osaka, Japan. *Wilder was repatriated in September 1945; 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 countermanding 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 an American Civilian Captured at Wake Island



Japan limited most American prisoners to mailing three cards per year to their loved ones at home.

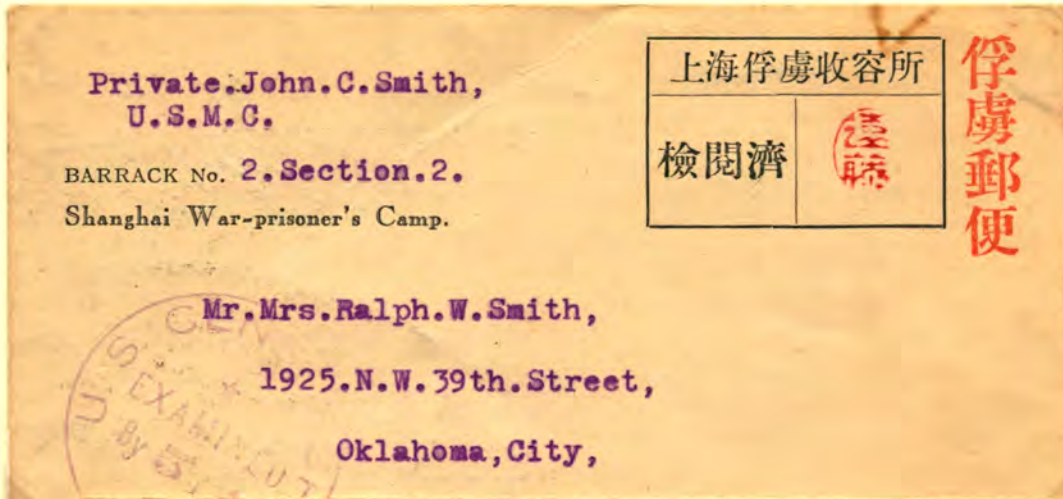
Chalas R. Loveland, a Wake Island civilian contractor employed by Morrison-Knudsen Construction Company, was held captive for the entire duration of the war. In 1981 the Navy recognized him and other Wake Island civilians as veterans, and gave them honorable discharges so they could qualify for veterans' benefits. Loveland died in February 2013 at age 92.

Above: Loveland sent this card dated June 24, 1943, from a POW camp at Shanghai, China, to his parents at Boise, Idaho. It was passed by a Japanese censor at Shanghai and a U.S. censor at New York. Loveland's message shows that the most recent word he had received from them was a January 10 cablegram, probably routed via the Red Cross after being approved by the U.S. Office of Censorship, dated more than five and a half months before he was able to send his reply.

Below: May 2, 1944, cover from Loveland's parents at Boise to him, censored at New York, transferred to Japan at Moscow, to the Red Cross at Shanghai, and passed by the Japanese camp censor at Shanghai.



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



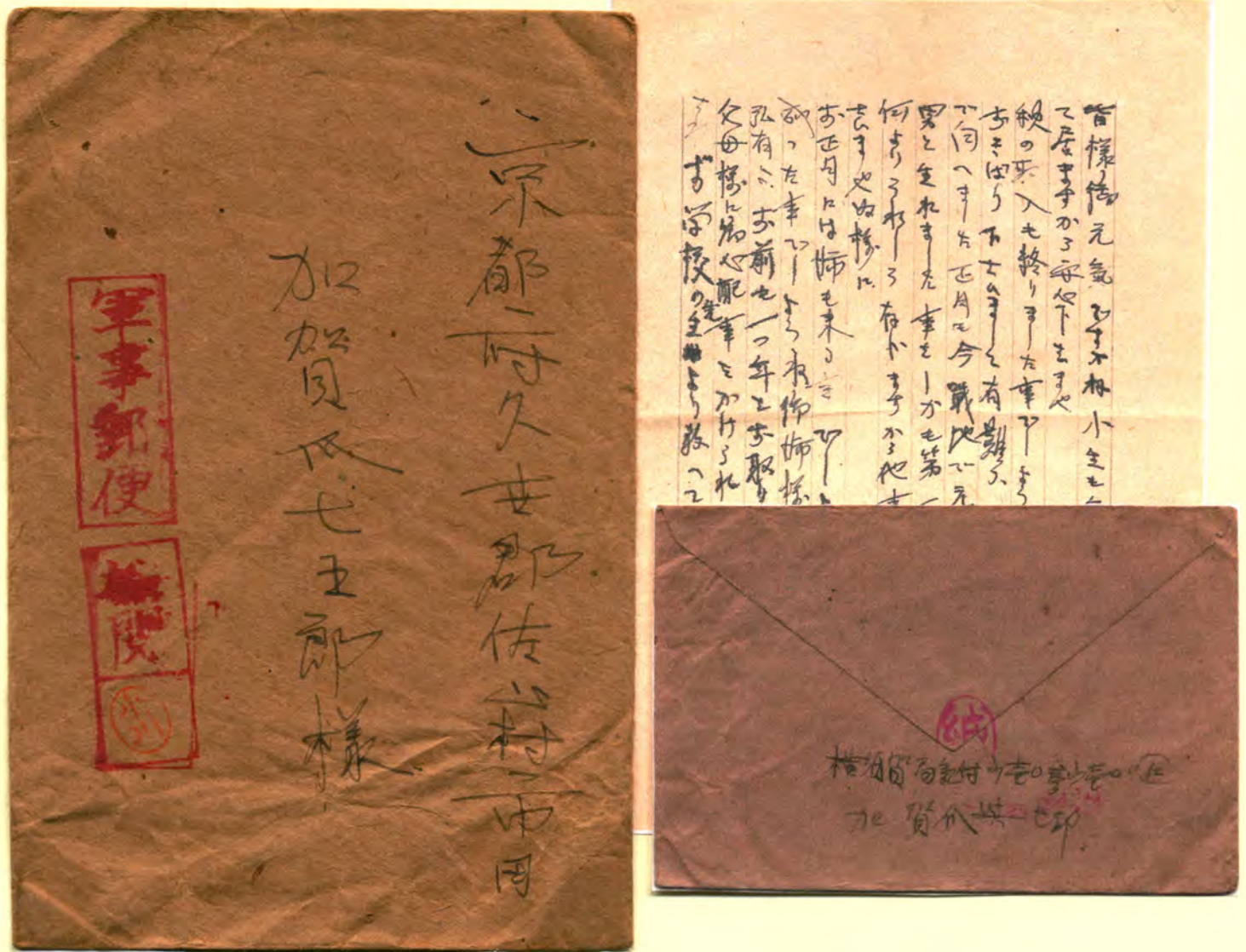
Mail to and from Wake Island Marine prisoners of war is seldom seen. They were greatly outnumbered by civilian internees captured at Wake. An Associated Press dispatch of February 19, 1942, reported the Navy's list of presumed prisoners from Oklahoma held by Japan. "John Clarence Smith, Oklahoma City"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

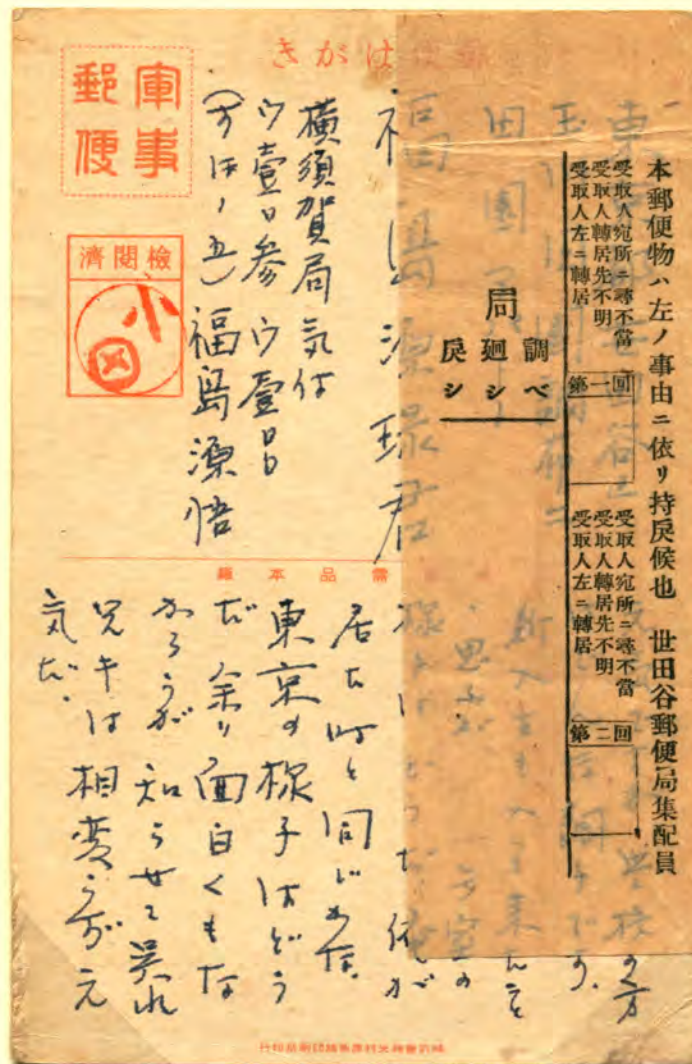


The United States made no attempt to recapture Wake Island, but heavily bombed Japanese positions from carrier-based aircraft and prevented reinforcements and supplies from being delivered to the occupying force by blockading the atoll with submarine patrols. As a consequence, mail that originated from 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 MAIL  
CENTS  
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

12323  
U.S. CENSOR

SUBSIDIARY CAMP No. \_\_\_\_\_

COUNTRY SHIKOKU, JAPAN

VIA NEW YORK, N. Y.

**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

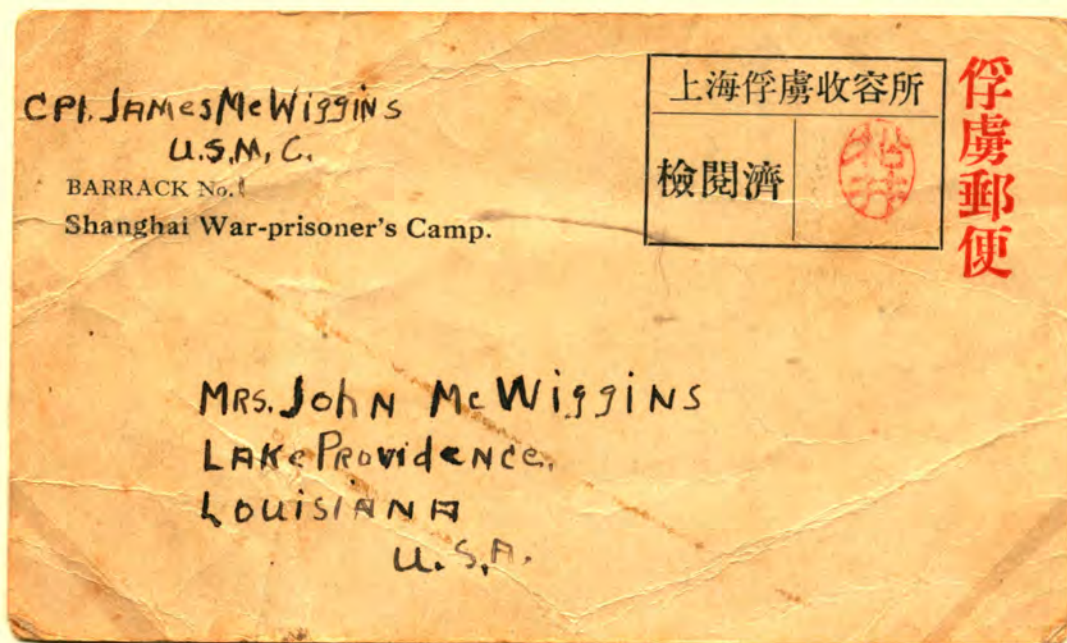
16-39042-1

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 POW; Naval Air Station Post Office



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 Kiawgwan 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.*

NAVY DEPARTMENT

U.S.S. LCI(G) 751  
c/o FLEET POST OFFICE,  
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

Commander Western Sea Frontier  
c/o FLEET POST OFFICE,  
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.

PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE TO AVOID  
PAYMENT OF POSTAGE, \$300



Shore-based U.S. Naval Air Station 13764 Branch post office was established at Wake Island in December 1945. March 29, 1946, postage free official mail cover from Navy ship USS *LCI(G) 751* — Landing Craft Infantry (Guns) — transporting fighting men home from the Pacific war, posted en route at Wake Island. Probably flown to San Francisco by the Naval Air Transport Service; civilian trans-Pacific passenger and mail flights did not resume calls at Wake Island until the fall of 1947.