

## WAKE ISLAND MAIL 1933 - 1945

Wake is a coral atoll with a reef surrounding its three islands (Wake, Peale and Wilkes) with a total land area of less than 3 square miles. Its isolated location in the Central Pacific is 2,300 miles west of Honolulu and 1,500 miles east of Guam. It was named after Captain William Wake of the British trading schooner *Prince William Henry*, who visited the island in 1796. The U.S. Exploring Expedition led by Commodore Charles Wilkes landed on and surveyed Wake in 1840, which eventually resulted in its annexation in 1899. Today, it is an unorganized territory administered by the Interior Department.

With no indigenous population, there is no ongoing pattern of mail service. Thus, it is not surprising that philatelic activity involving Wake is sparse. The first actual recognition came in 1933 when U.S.S. *Chaumont* visited the island twice, including on Christmas Day, the location being shown between the bars of the ship's postmark. In 1935, Pan Am began to use the island as a rest and refueling stop for its Trans-Pacific clipper seaplanes. Following a survey flight, regular passenger service continued up to Pearl Harbor.

Due to the increasing risks of war, the U.S. sent contractors to build defense installations in early 1941. However, when war started Wake was invaded by Japan and occupied from December 23 1941 until September 5, 1945. The Marines and civilians found there were sent to P.O.W. and internment camps.

The purpose of this exhibit is to show the various types of mail that were sent to and from Wake, including ship's letters, covers from the Pan Am flights, contractors' mail and military covers. Two of the very elusive pieces of Japanese occupation mail are shown, as well as examples of civilian internee and Marine POW items from the wartime period.



This cover was sent from U.S.S. *Chaumont* during its Christmas 1933 visit to Wake. The island is west of the International Date Line so it is always one day later there than in Honolulu. Note that the cover has an additional postmark applied when the ship crossed the line en route to Hawaii.



# EARLIEST SHIP CANCEL DESIGNATED "WAKE"

The first postmark indicating use  
on a ship located at Wake Island  
was in 1933.

## Earliest Recorded Use

U.S.S. Chaumont  
August 2, 1933



Following the Japanese occupation of Manchuria in 1931, the U.S. Navy began increased activity in the Central Pacific. *Chaumont* was assigned to this area and made two visits to Wake in 1933 – in August and December.

## EARLIEST FLIGHT COVER FROM WAKE ISLAND

An experimental flight was conducted around Wake on March 8, 1935 from *U.S.S. Nitro*. A special cachet made up on the ship was applied to the covers.

U.S.S. Nitro  
February 26, 1935







*U.S.S. Nitro* left Manila on February 26, 1935 carrying an OL-9 Leoning amphibian. At Wake, the aircraft was launched for a photographic survey of the island. The ship then proceeded to Honolulu, where the souvenir covers were backstamped at the Fleet Air Base at Pearl Harbor.



PAN-AM SURVEY FLIGHT

Honolulu, Hawaii  
August 13, 1935

PAN AMERICAN AIRWAYS, INC. Pacific Division San Francisco, California		
   		
From Airport Manager Pan American Airways, Inc. Honolulu, T. H.	To <i>From</i> Airport Manager Pan American Airways, Inc. Wake Island, Pacific Ocean	To Mr. J. T. Trippe, President Pan American Airways, Inc. 135 E. 42nd Street New York City, New York
<p>                         Arrive Midway Westbound <i>0130 August 14 1935</i> <i>NAL</i>                          Arrive Wake <i>0129 August 17, 1935 (Ricknew)</i>                          Depart Wake Eastbound <i>1914 August 20, 1935 (Ricknew)</i>                          Depart Midway Eastbound <i>1720 August 22 1935</i> <i>NAL</i> </p> <p>                         Captain <i>R.O.D. Sullivan</i> </p>		

In preparation for scheduled Trans-Pacific service, Pan American Airways conducted a series of survey flights during 1935, flying from San Francisco to Honolulu and then to Midway, Wake and Guam sequentially. The survey flight to Wake started on August 9 and arrived on the 17<sup>th</sup>. The return flight departed Wake on August 20 and arrived back in San Francisco on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Special covers were printed by Pan Am, addressed to President Juan Trippe in New York, on which the details of the flights could be recorded and signed by Captain R.O.D. Sullivan. They were postmarked at Honolulu on both outbound and inbound segments.



**PAN AM SURVEY FLIGHT**  
Honolulu, Hawaii  
August 23, 1935



In his book entitled *Pan American's Pacific Pioneers*, Jon Krupnick notes that private flight covers were strongly discouraged by Pan Am. Nevertheless, several cachets were carved from wood blocks by Midway station manager Karl Leuder and other employees, thus creating a handful of souvenir covers. All of these are very elusive, especially the one showing Wake to California.

PAN AM SURVEY FLIGHT  
Honolulu, Hawaii  
August 23, 1935



Mr. John C. Leslie,  
Pan American Airways, Inc.,  
ALAMEDA,  
California



The third of the private cachets mentions the first flight from Wake, but not Midway or California. Krupnick illustrates only three examples of this marking, which is very elusive. This cover sent to an employee at Pan Am's base in Alameda, California.



AIRMAIL SPECIAL DELIVERY COVER

Honolulu, Hawaii  
April 22, 1937

Only Recorded Example of Special Delivery Mail to Wake Island



Unusual usage of Airmail Special Delivery from New York State to Wake Island. It was sent on the first Pan Am clipper flight from Honolulu to China but was delivered at Wake Island en route. Backstamped at Cleveland, San Francisco and Honolulu.



**"MAILED AT WAKE ISLAND" CACHET**

Guam  
Mar. 22, 1937  
Aug. 8, 1939

Honolulu  
Oct 12, 1939

*Capt. J. M. Tillis*

MAILED AT  
WAKE ISLAND  
PACIFIC OCEAN



MAILED AT  
WAKE ISLAND  
PACIFIC OCEAN



*Mrs W. J. Hardy*

*672 Penn Ave*

*Seawick*

*New York  
U.S.A.*



MAILED AT  
WAKE ISLAND  
PACIFIC OCEAN

*Beach  
Calif.*

In the absence of a post office, stamps could be purchased at the Pan Am counter. A special cachet inscribed "Mailed at/Wake Island/Pacific Ocean" was applied to covers by airline staff in the period from October 15, 1936 through May 10, 1941. Examples are recorded struck in blue, green, magenta and violet ink, depending on which stamp pad was being used on a particular day. Two of the above covers were placed on westbound flights and cancelled on Guam; one went east to Honolulu.



**"MAILED AT WAKE ISLAND" CACHET  
IN PAN AMERICAN AIRWAYS CIRCLE**

Honolulu  
Oct. 3, 1939  
Dec. 8, 1940



A second cachet in circular format was also provided by Pan Am in order to designate the origin of covers. It is recorded as used from November 25, 1937 through October 8, 1941. It has been seen applied in blue, green and magenta ink. The above covers were mailed to the mainland and are franked at the appropriate rate of 35 cents per half ounce.



# WAKE ISLAND PRINTED CACHETS

Honolulu, Hawaii  
September 16, 1941  
October 9, 1941



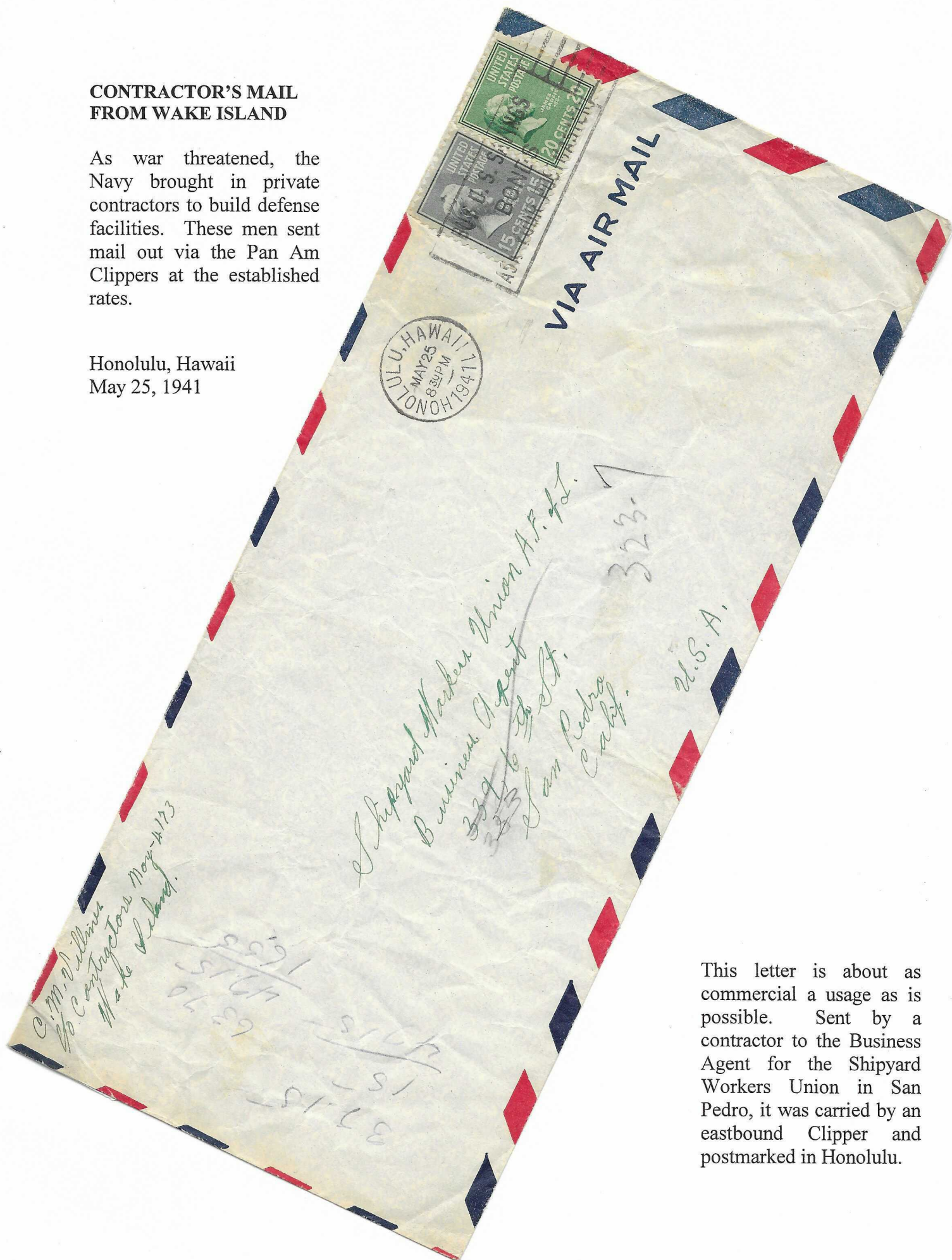
Decorative covers with private cachets showing the Trans-Pacific air route and a map of Wake. Both bearing 35 cents airmail postage to the mainland and cancelled at Honolulu. Upper example sent by George Dowling from the *Dredge Columbia*. Lower cover from Frank Schubert, Wake Island.



**CONTRACTOR'S MAIL  
FROM WAKE ISLAND**

As war threatened, the Navy brought in private contractors to build defense facilities. These men sent mail out via the Pan Am Clippers at the established rates.

Honolulu, Hawaii  
May 25, 1941



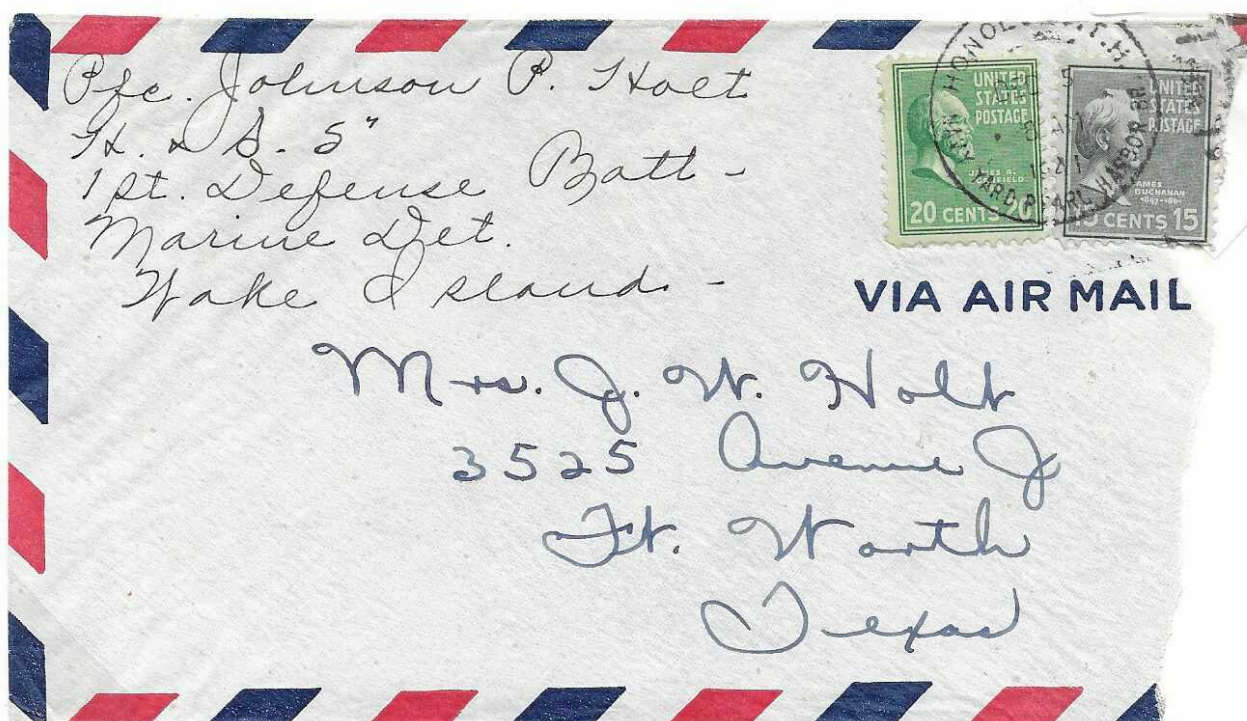
This letter is about as commercial a usage as is possible. Sent by a contractor to the Business Agent for the Shipyard Workers Union in San Pedro, it was carried by an eastbound Clipper and postmarked in Honolulu.



**MARINE MAIL FROM WAKE**

Honolulu. T.H. Navy Yard Pearl Harbor Br.  
December 5, 1941

**Letter from Marine on Wake sent on last Pan Am outbound flight**

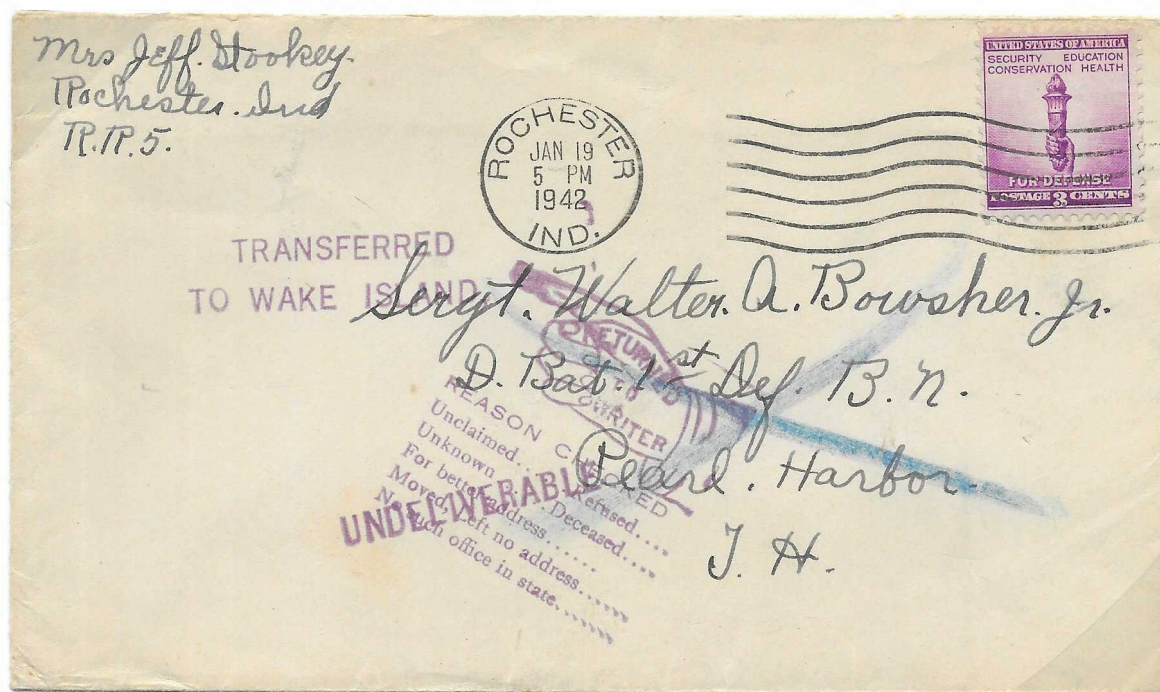


Pfc. Holt was a member of the garrison on Wake and was taken prisoner at the time of the Japanese invasion. He spent the rest of the war in a POW camp near Shanghai but survived. His mother apparently provided him with a supply of self-addressed envelopes to encourage him to write home. This one went out on December 4 on the last eastbound flight. It was properly franked with 35 cents postage for airmail and was postmarked at the Pearl Harbor Navy Yard Branch on the following day. Marine mail from Wake is highly elusive, with not more than ten pieces having been recorded.



MARINE MAIL

Rochester, Ind.  
January 19, 1942



In the latter half of 1941, as the situation in the Pacific heated up, approximately 400 Marines were detached from the 1st Defense Battalion at Pearl Harbor and sent to Wake. The addressee of the above cover, Sgt. Bowsher, was in the group that arrived in August and was eventually taken prisoner by the Japanese. It was sent by his mother to Hawaii in early 1942, where it received a marking inscribed "Transferred to Wake Island." Of course, by that time it could not be forwarded so was recognized as undeliverable and returned to the sender. Any Marine mail from this period has to be regarded as extremely elusive.



INTERNEE & PRISONER OF WAR MAIL

Shanghai  
December 23, 1943  
October 6, 1944

EXAMINED BY

Prisoner of War Correspondence.



Mr. Charles Ray Loveland  
Formerly of Wake Island  
Shanghai China  
C/o Japanese Red Cross  
Tokyo Japan  
Via Chicago Illinois



John C. Smith  
Pvt. U.S.M.C.

BARRACK No. I Section No. I  
Shanghai War-prisoner's Camp.

上海俘虜收容所

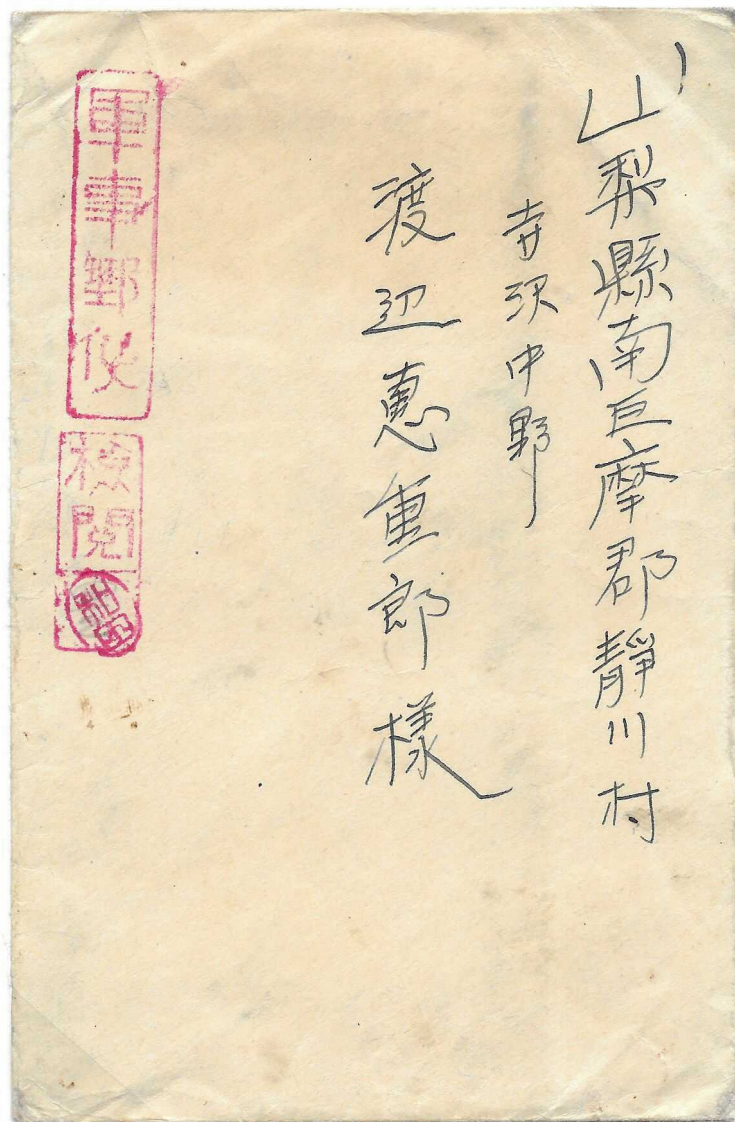
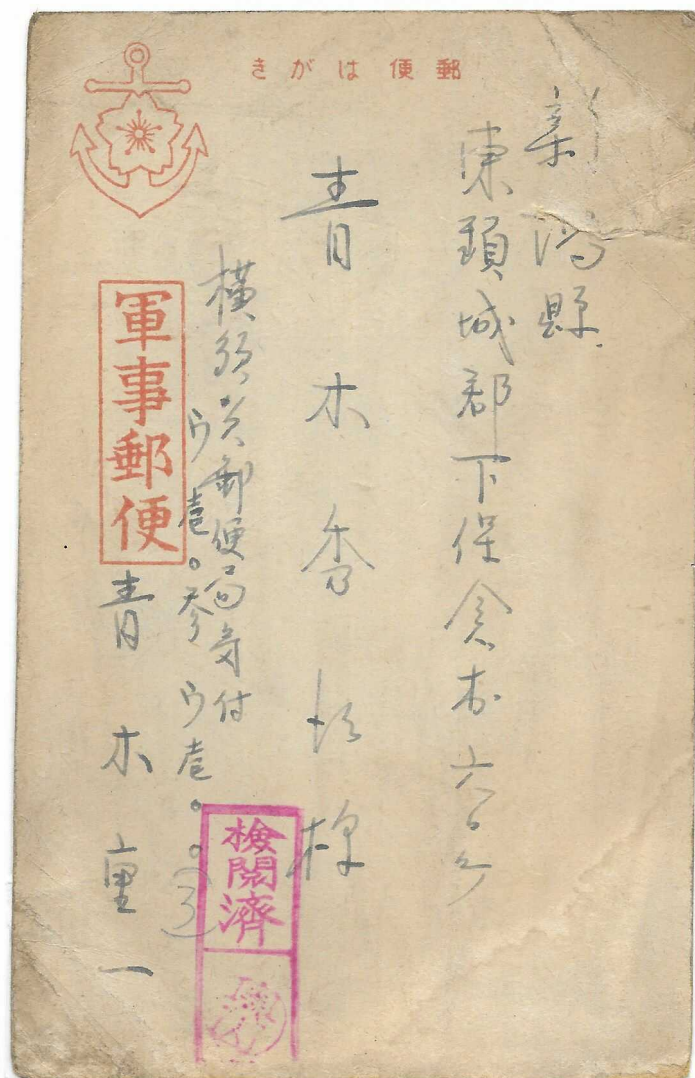
檢閱濟

俘虜郵便

MR. & MRS. RALPH W. SMITH  
1925 N. W. 39TH STREET  
OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA  
U.S.A.

After the invasion, the Japanese removed approximately 400 Marines and 1,200 civilians, mostly employees of the contractors, to internment and POW camps. Upper cover inbound in 1943 to Mr. Loveland, a civilian internee in Shanghai. Lower POW card outbound from Pvt. Smith in Shanghai to his parents in 1944. Smith was one of the Marines assigned to Wake and is listed on the roster.



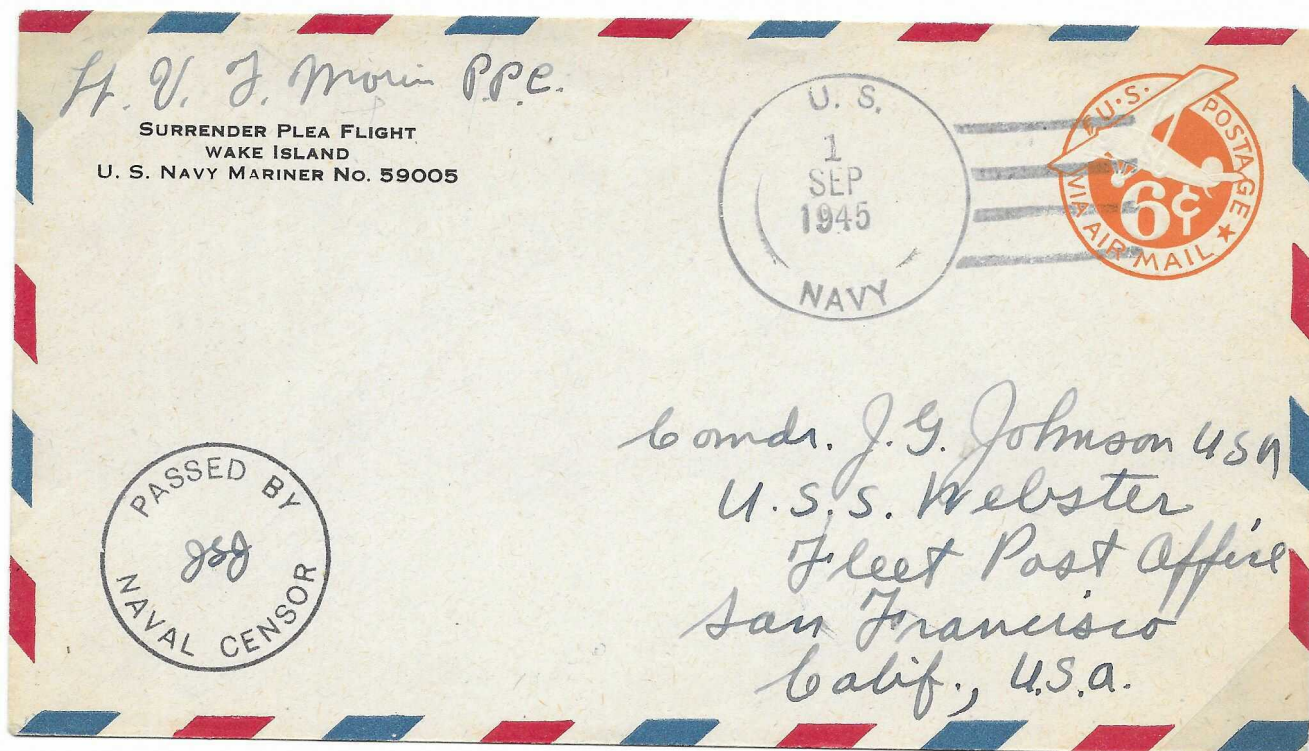


On December 23, 1941, a Japanese force successfully took over Wake after the U.S. Marines had driven off an earlier invasion attempt. Small units remained in occupation until surrendering at the end of the war. Examples of naval fieldpost mail are shown, which are identified by the return address coded U103 for Wake, which was called Otori-Shima or Bird Island by the Japanese. Cover on the left was sent to Niigata, Japan by a member of the 65<sup>th</sup> Guard Unit. Its censor chop reads "Okuyama," who was an officer with the Guards. Cover on the right was sent to Yamanshi Prefecture by a member of the 4<sup>th</sup> Naval Equipment Corps and its censor chop reads "Wada." Wartime mail from Wake is extremely scarce, with fewer than ten pieces recorded.



**SURRENDER PLEA FLIGHT**

U.S. Navy  
September 1, 1945



To inform the Japanese troops on Wake that Japan had surrendered and the Emperor had ordered Imperial Japanese forces to lay down their arms, Naval aircraft flew over the island with leaflets. This effort had the desired effect, leading to an unopposed American take over on September 4.