

THE AMERICAN INTERVENTION IN RUSSIA

In 1918, the new Bolshevik government in Russia took that country out of the war. In response, the allies adopted a policy of armed intervention. This initiative had 3 primary goals, the first 2 of which were supported by the US government: preventing the transfer to the Central Powers of war materiel previously supplied to the Russians; transporting Czech former-POWs in Russia to France; and inducing the Bolsheviks to return Russia to the war or, failing that, assisting "White" Russian forces to overthrow them.

US involvement in Russia prior to the armed Allied intervention consisted of relief agencies and the Russian Railway Service Corps (first sent in 1917 to help the Kerensky government move supplies from Vladivostok to European Russia). In the summer of 1918 this involvement escalated in 3 distinct theatres:

Siberia: an independent American Expeditionary Force of 9,000 U.S. Army troops, supported by the RRSC, US Army and Navy ships, a US Navy radio station, and various service organizations, engaged in the static defense of Vladivostok and the Trans-Siberian Railroad for 18 months.

North Russia: 5,500 US Army troops under local British command engaged in much more arduous offensive and defensive operations for 9 months, supported by a small US Navy force. (In each of these areas a considerably reduced US presence was maintained for a period following the withdrawal of the US Army combat troops.)

South Russia: US Army combat troops were not present, but a number of US Navy warships operated in the Black Sea, showing the flag and supporting diplomatic and relief efforts ashore.



Shoulder patch of the American Expeditionary Force Siberia.



Shoulder patch of the American Expeditionary Force North Russia.

This exhibit is a comprehensive showing of the postal history of the US intervention forces in Russia from the first attempt to land the RRSC at Vladivostok in late-1917 until the withdrawal of the last US Navy forces from Vladivostok in late-1922, organized as follows:

I. Siberia

- A. Russian Railway Service Corps
- B. Army Transports
- C. AEF Siberia
- D. Civilian Service Organizations
- E. US Navy

II. North Russia

- A. AEF North Russia

B. Civilian Service Organizations

- C. US Army Post-AEFNR
- D. US Navy

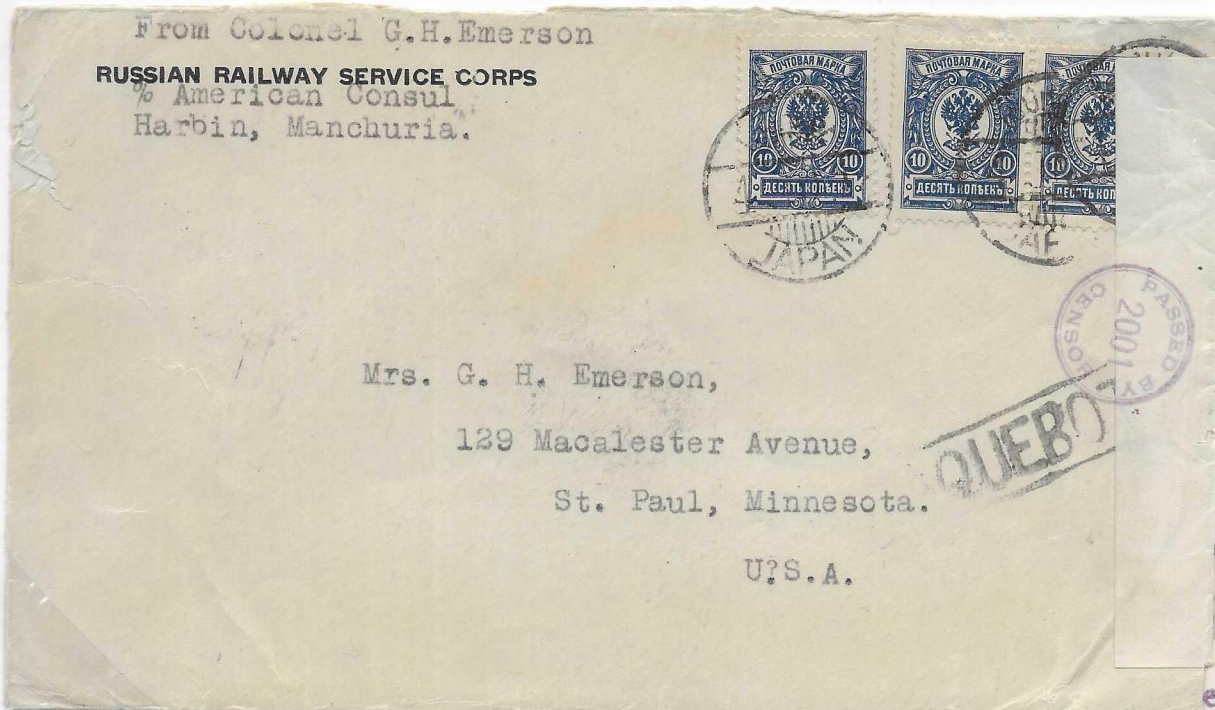
III. South Russia

- A. US Army
- B. Relief Agencies
- C. US Navy

SIBERIA

AMERICAN INTERVENTION

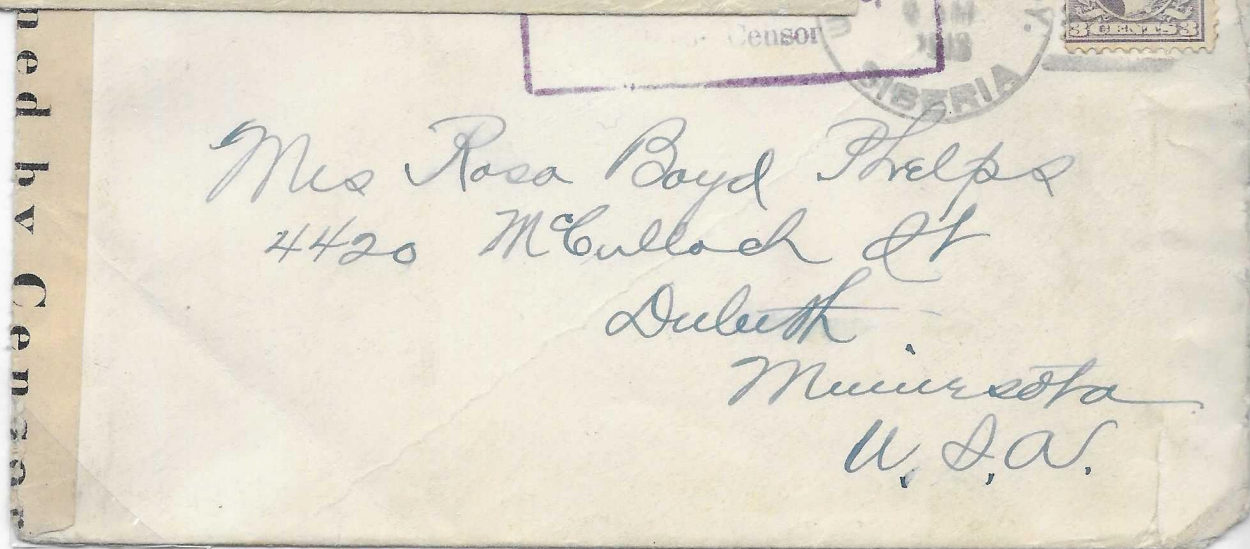
The first Americans to go to Siberia were in the Russian Railway Service Corps, recruited in the fall of 1917 to assist the Russian Provisional Government, which was an ally in the war against Germany and Austria-Hungary, in operating the Trans-Siberian and Chinese Eastern Railways. The RRSC consisted of 288 employees of the Great Northern and Northwestern Railroads and the Baldwin Engine Works who were commissioned by (but not inducted into) the U.S. Army. George Emerson, general manager of the GN, was appointed head of the RRSC.



Tsuruga, Japan
Paquebot
4 October 1918

U.S. Postal Agency
Siberia
12 December 1918

ned by Censor

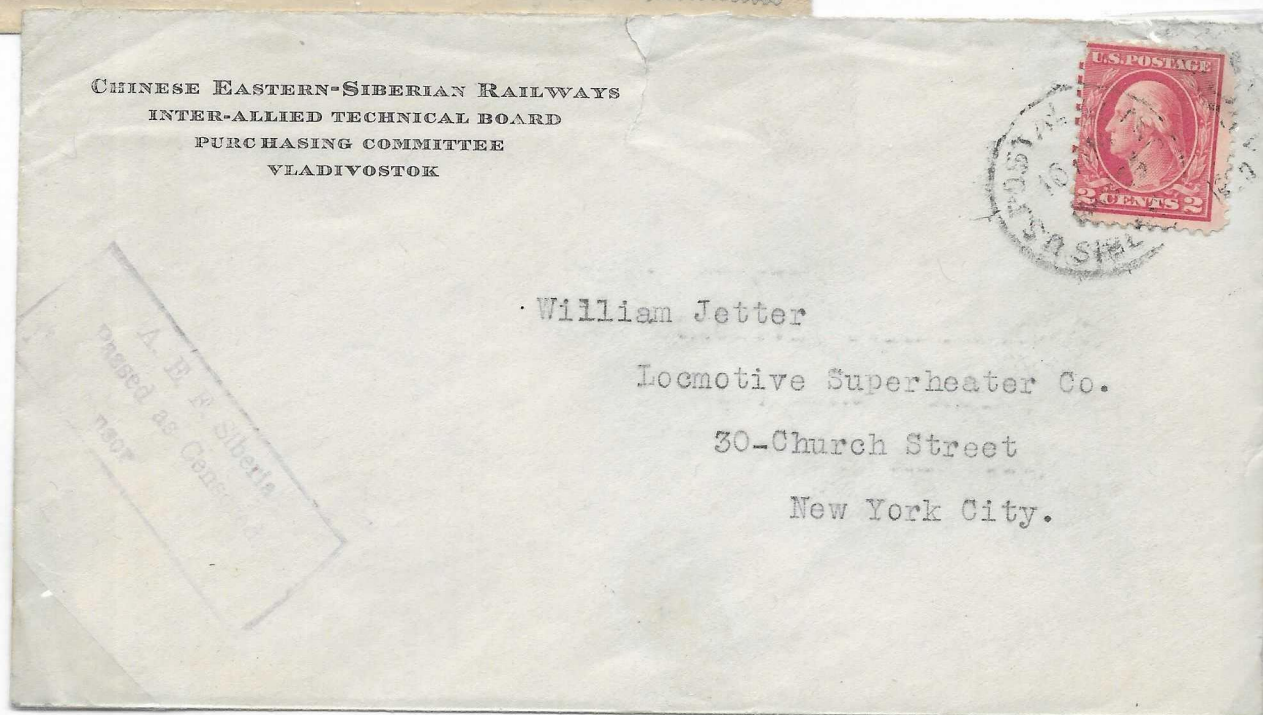
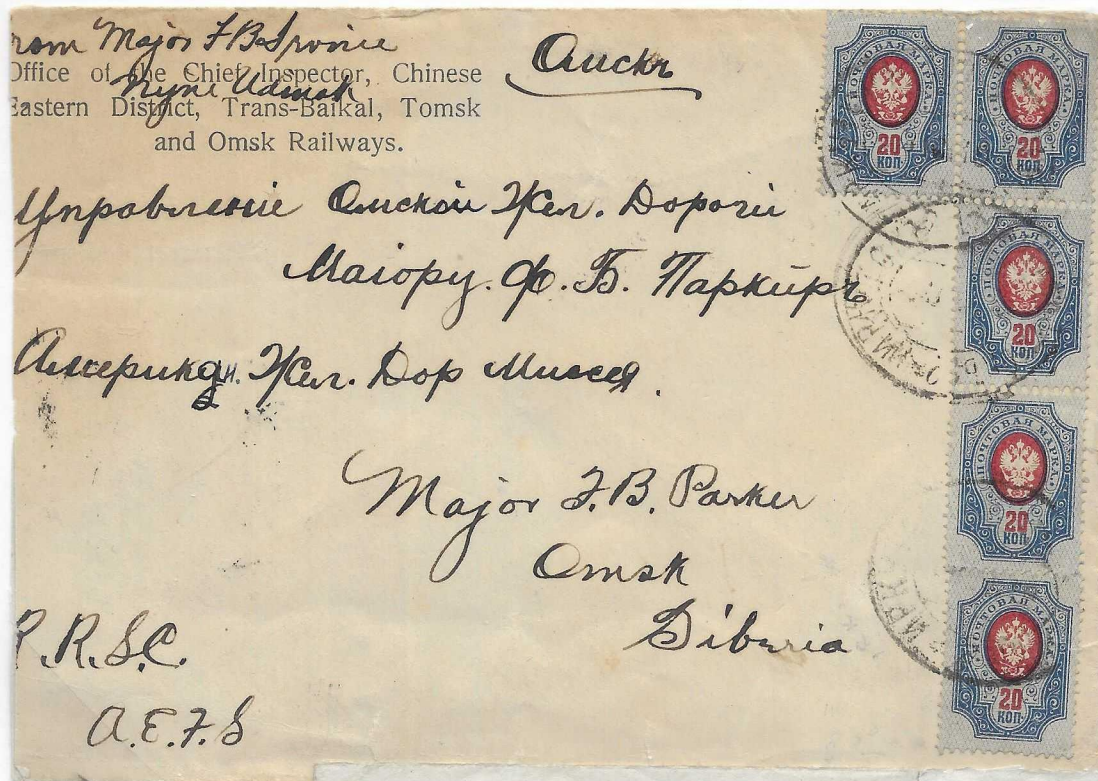


Although given officer ranks and uniforms, RRSC personnel were not entitled to free franking of their mail. However, they could send it through the U.S. Postal Agency in Vladivostok at domestic rates (3 cents for letters including the war tax from 2 November 1917 to 1 July 1919). Upper cover mailed by Col. Emerson from Manchuria via Japan to his wife.

AMERICAN INTERVENTION IN SIBERIA
Russian Railway Service Corps

Irkutsk-Krasnoyarsk TPO 198
8 October 1919

U.S. Postal Agency/Siberia
23 March 1920



Because of the nature of their work, RRSC personnel were spread out over Siberia (and Manchuria) more widely than members of the AEF. Outside Vladivostok and other cities served by the AEF's railway mail couriers, they had to rely on the Russian and Chinese postal services, especially the railway post offices.

AMERICAN INTERVENTION IN SIBERIA
Incoming Mail to Russian Railway Service Corps

Altoona, Pa.
17 January 1918

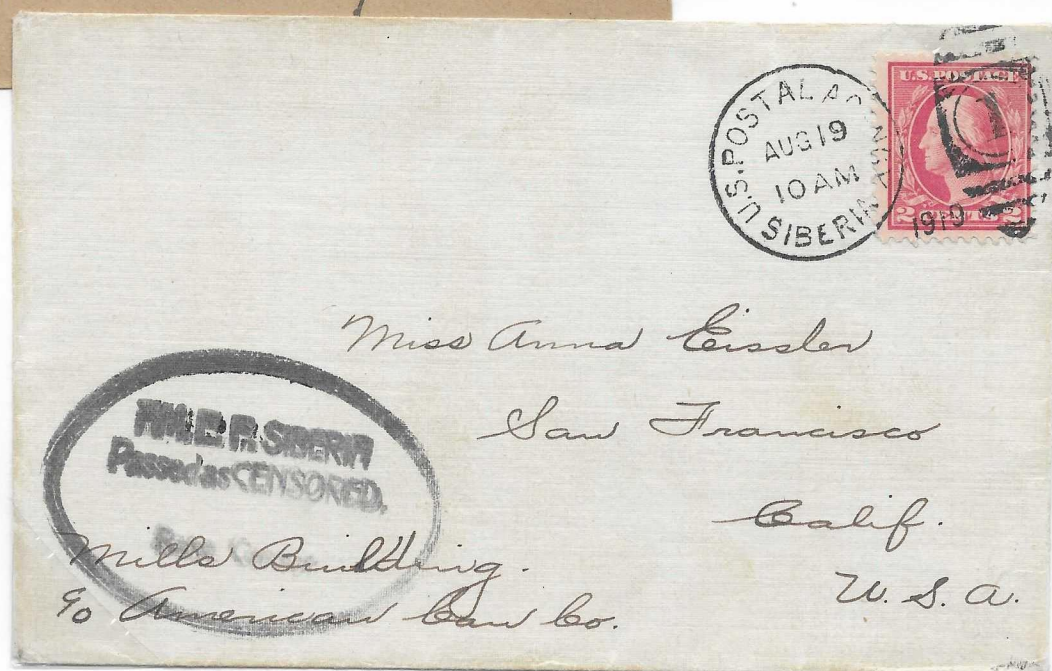
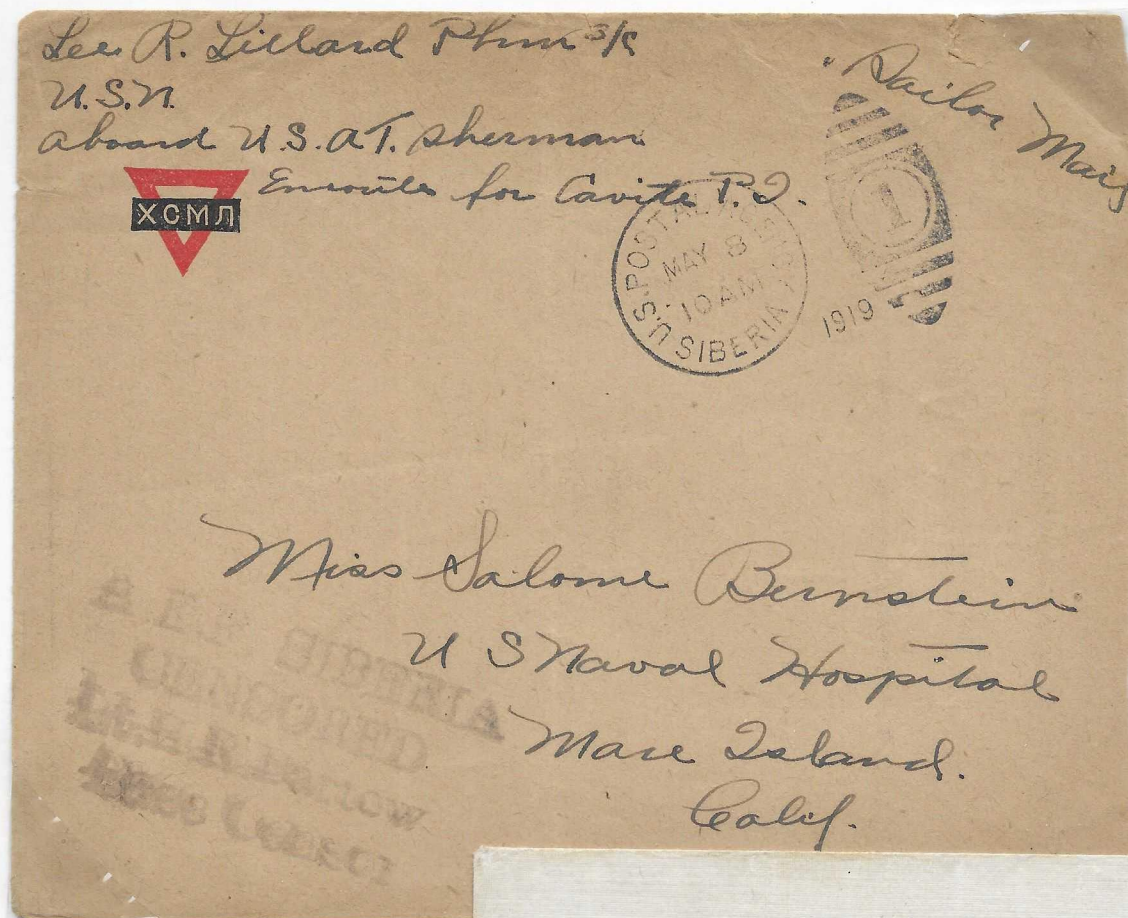
Nagasaki, Japan
1 March 1918



Incoming mail to the RRSC is not often seen. Upper example (to a member of the "Baldwin Contingent") was sent to a forwarding address in San Francisco and then to Vladivostok, where it was received on 18 February 1918. Lower cover from Japan is highly unusual.

AMERICAN INTERVENTION IN SIBERIA
AEF -- Troopships

U.S. Postal Agency/Siberia
8 May 1919
19 August 1919



From
Jack M. Smith
U.S.A.T. Sherman
Enroute P.I.

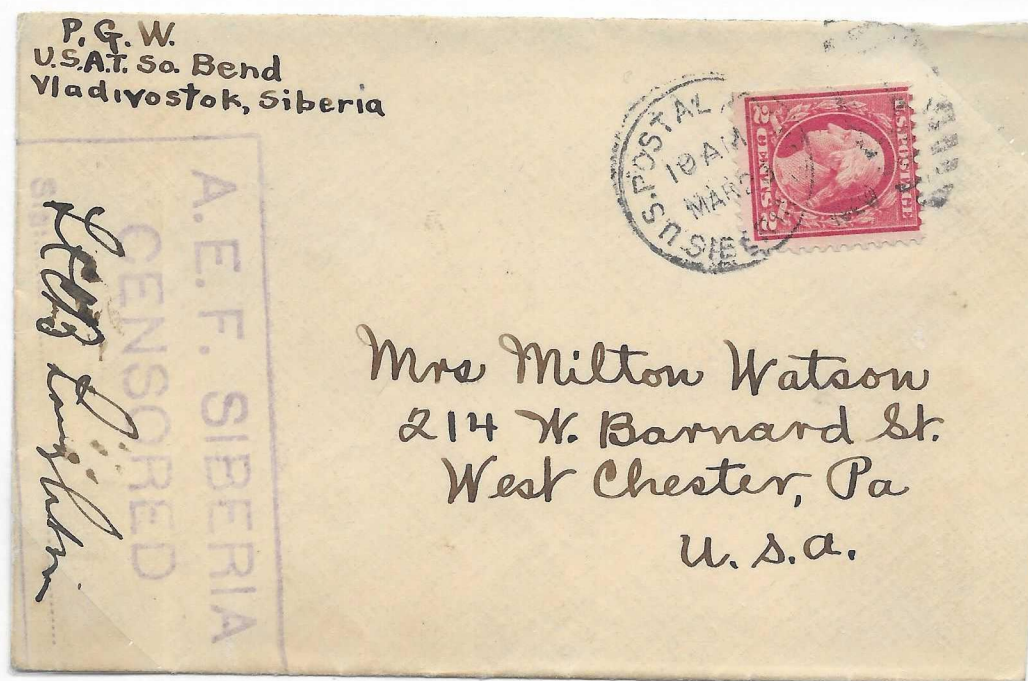
Return address on flap.

A series of Army transport ships were engaged in carrying soldiers and supplies to Siberia. At least twelve different vessels have been recorded as making at least one trip to Vladivostok during the intervention period. However, the USATs were not equipped with on-board post offices, so mail from them can only be identified by return addresses or contents. Examples are scarce with only two each known from *Sherman* and *Thomas*.

AMERICAN INTERVENTION IN SIBERIA
AEF -- Troopship

U.S. Postal Agency/Siberia
23 March 1920

Only Recorded Use from Siberia



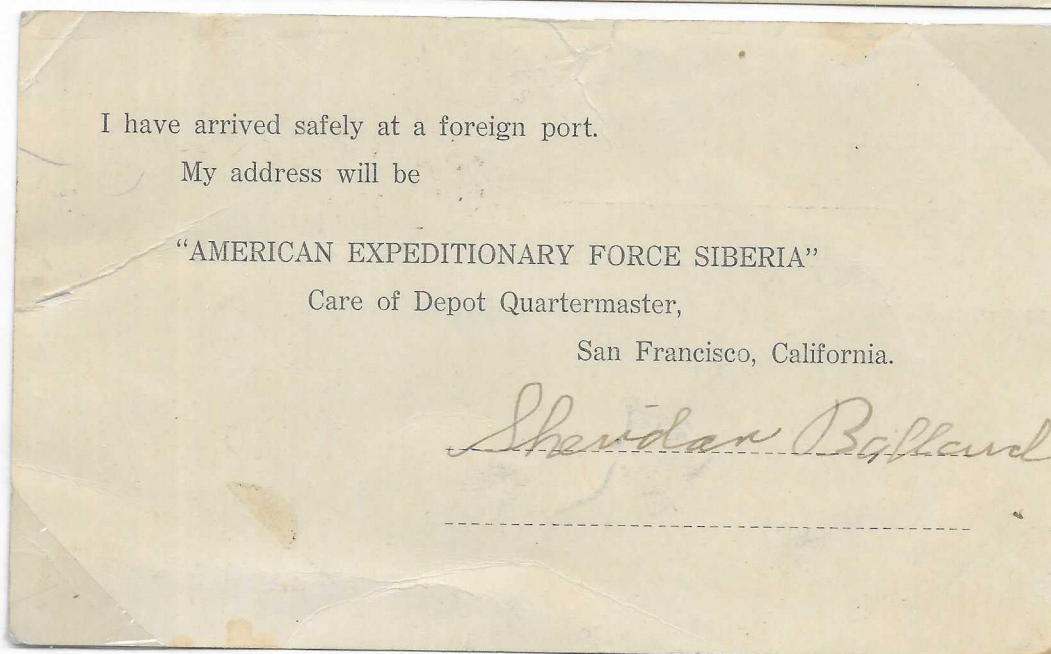
USAT South Bend made only a single trip to Siberia in order to evacuate the 31st Infantry. She arrived in Vladivostok on 20 March 1920 and departed on 31 March. This cover was postmarked on 23 March 1920, the second latest date for mail from the USPA Siberia.

AMERICAN INTERVENTION IN SIBERIA
AEF Siberia -- Troops in Transit

On 3 August 1918 President Wilson ordered an expeditionary force to be sent to Siberia, which eventually comprised 9,000 men. The first U.S. Army troops were about 2,800 officers and men from the 27th and 31st Infantry Regiments stationed in the Philippines. Other forces arrived from California shortly thereafter. The AEF Siberia was officially on station from 15 August 1918 until 1 April 1920.

San Francisco, Cal.
4 September 1918

First Contingent

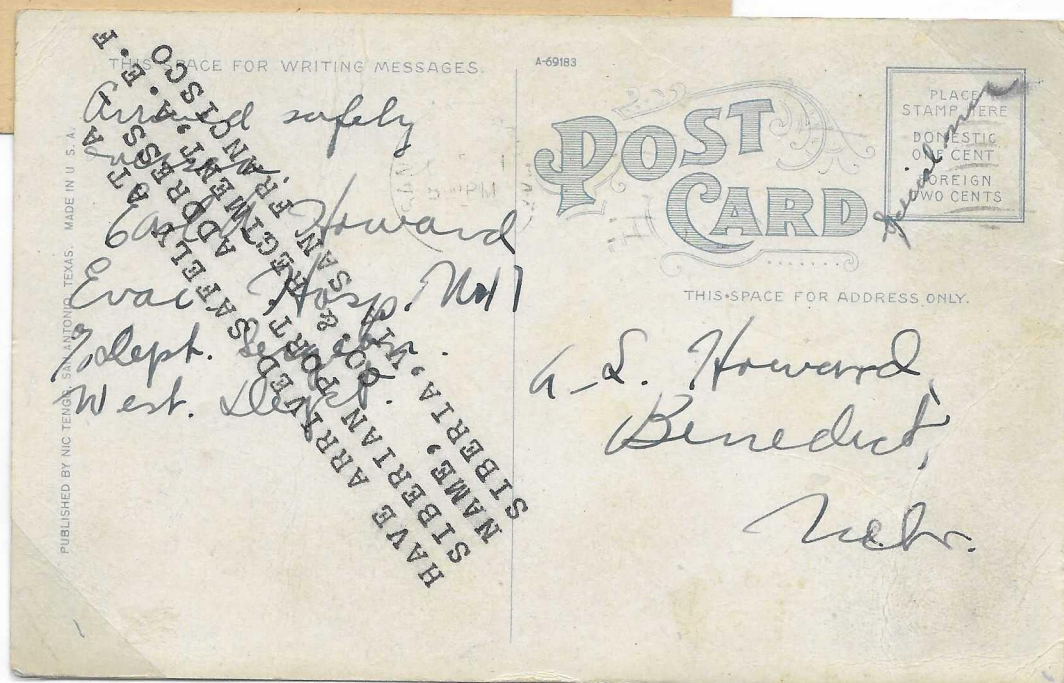
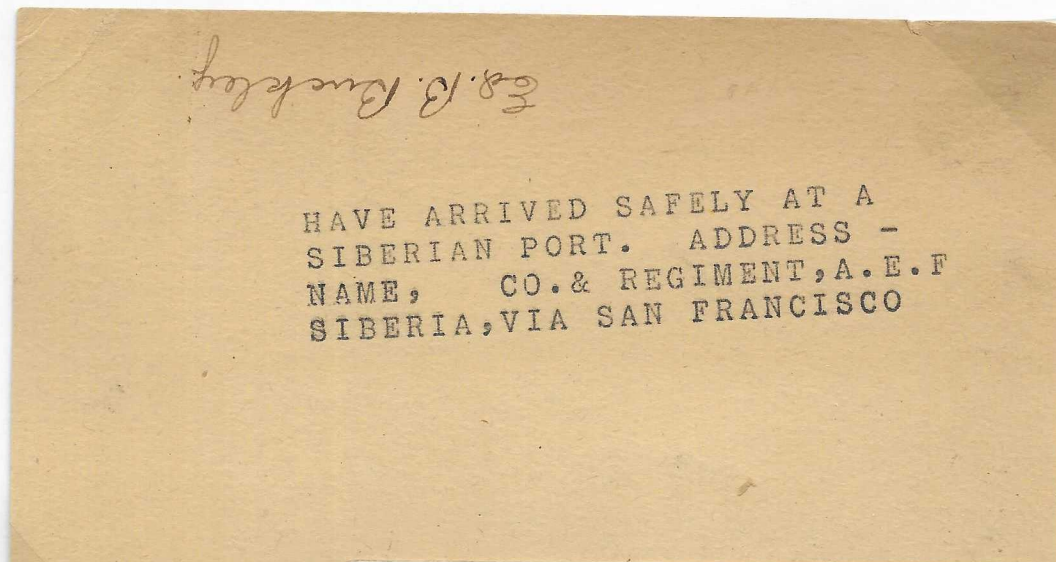


Special "Safe Arrival" cards were printed for the troops that accompanied General Graves from California. These were filled out by the men before departure, retained in San Francisco and mailed when word was received that the ship had arrived in Vladivostok safely. Six examples of this card have been recorded. Those above show the printing on the front and back.

AMERICAN INTERVENTION IN SIBERIA
AEF Siberia -- Troops in Transit

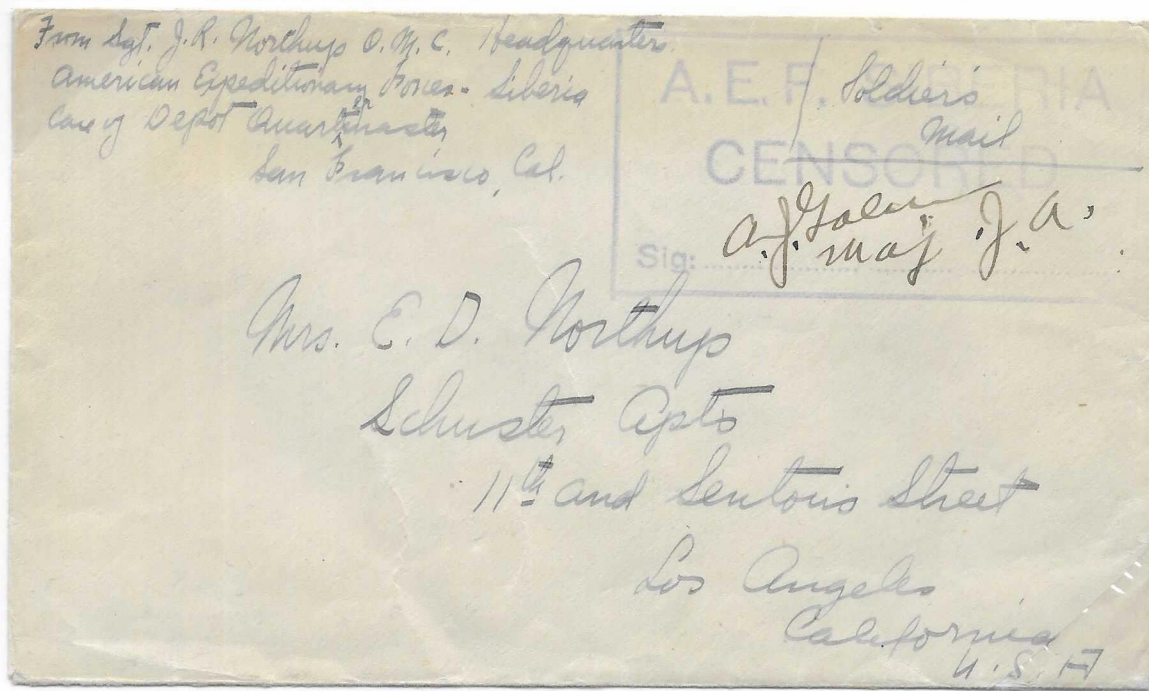
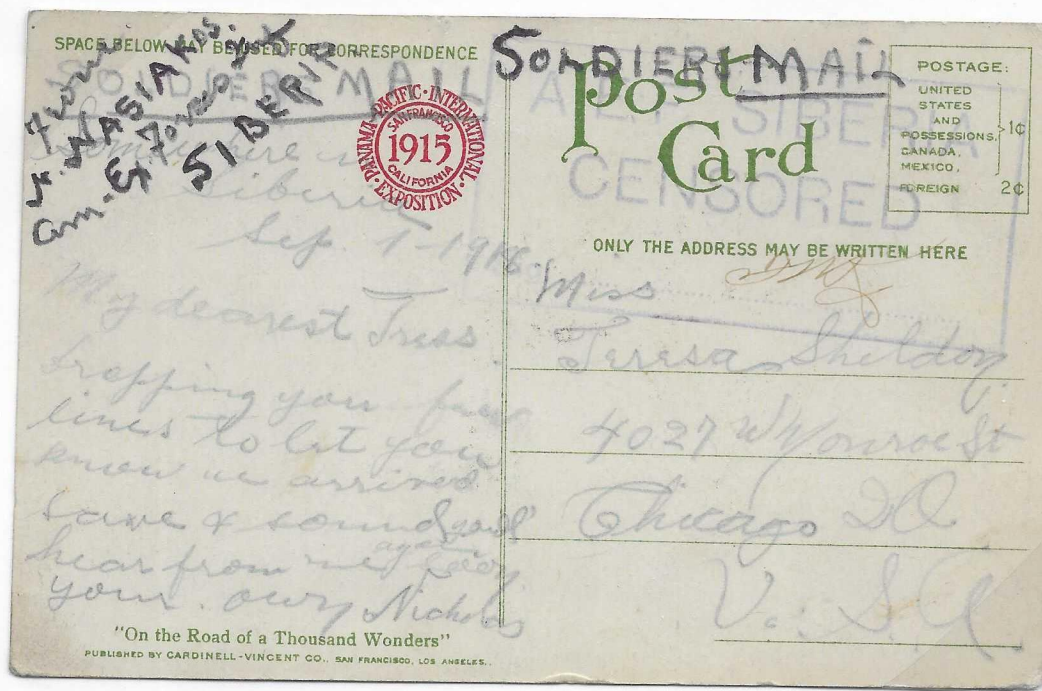
San Francisco, Cal.
1 October 1918

Second Contingent



The supply of special Safe Arrival cards was insufficient for the second group of men sent from Camp Freemont. So, picture postcards and other types of cards were overprinted with an Addressograph plate and given out to the men. These were postmarked on 1 October with about eight examples recorded.

AMERICAN INTERVENTION IN SIBERIA
AEF Siberia -- Forerunners



The AEF Siberia was organized with such haste that though troops began arriving in Siberia on 15 August 1918, no postal agency was established until 12 September and, even then, no cancel was provided until 25 September. During the interim, free franked mail was accepted for shipment on the returning Army transport ships. However, dating of forerunner mail, unless included in the sender's message on postcards, is unusual. Forerunner mail is usually, but not always, censored in the upper right corner (rather than the more normal lower left).

AMERICAN INTERVENTION IN SIBERIA
AEF Siberia -- Forerunner

Vladivostok-Tsuruga Steamship
7 September 1918



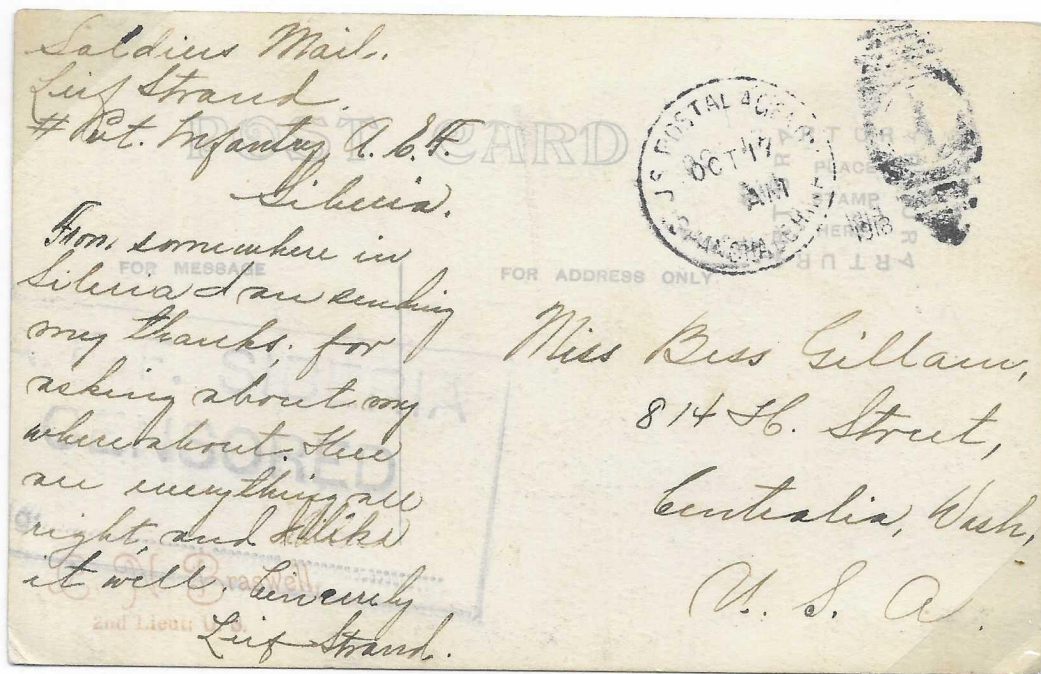
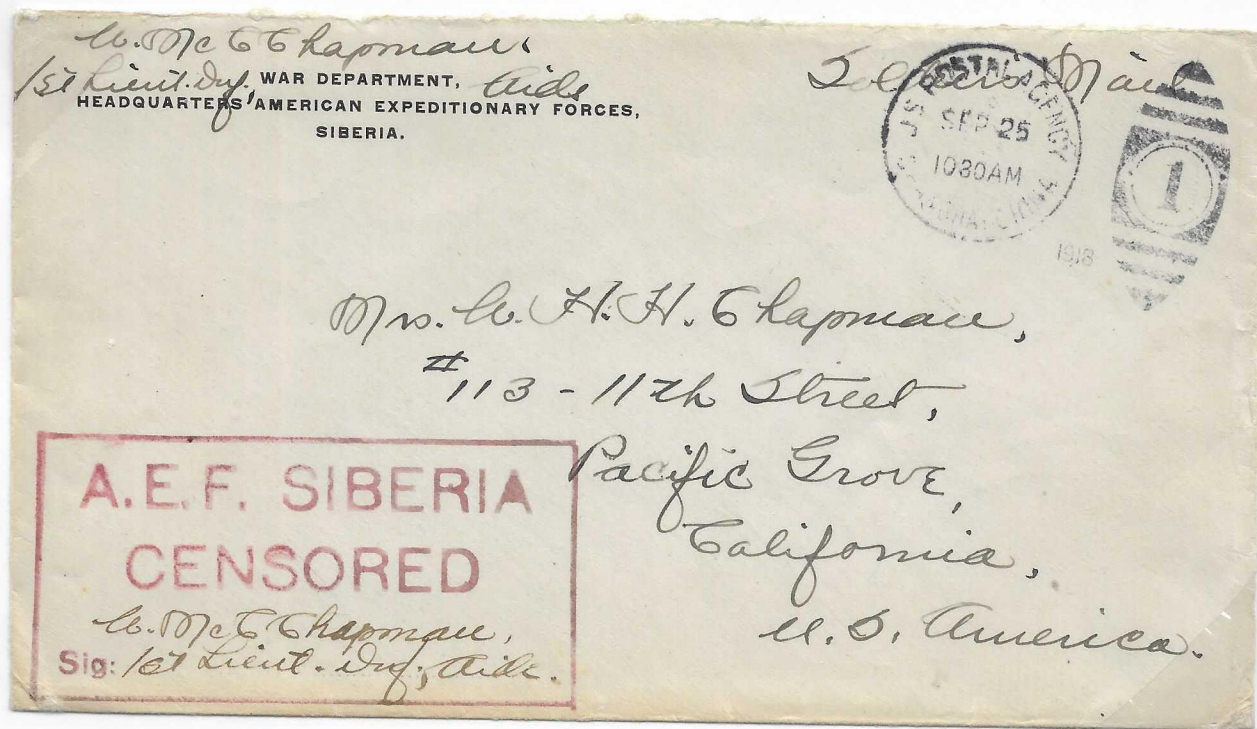
During the forerunner period, the arrival of supply ships was uncertain, so that using the free frank had the cost of slow service. However, regular mail service between Vladivostok and Japan and from Japan to the rest of the world was available to those willing to pay for it. (As shown above, 30 kopeks to the U.S.)

The Vladivostok-Tsuruga Steamship postmark was used by ships of the Russian Volunteer Fleet and the Chinese Eastern Railway Maritime Company. It is one of the scarcest postmarks on AEF Siberia mail, with only four examples recorded.

AMERICAN INTERVENTION IN SIBERIA
AEF Siberia -- Shanghai Postmarks

U.S. Postal Agency/Shanghai, China
25 September 1918
17 October 1918

Earliest and Latest Dates of Use of Postmark



The first official postmark used of AEF Siberia mail was a reserve cancel borrowed from the USPA in Shanghai, China and used for three weeks. Approximately 60 examples are recorded, mostly with poor to barely-legible strikes. Through 2 October this postmark appears with "1030AM" in the time slot. After that date only "AM" was retained, without the hour being indicated.

AMERICAN INTERVENTION IN SIBERIA
AEF Siberia -- Shanghai
Registration Postmark

U.S. Postal Agency/Shanghai, China
2 October 1918

**Only Recorded Use
of This Postmark**



Postage was free, but the 10 cent registration fee had to be paid. Cover backstamped in San Francisco on 4 November 1918 so that the transit time was 33 days.

AMERICAN INTERVENTION IN SIBERIA
AEF -- U.S. Postal Agency Rubber Postmark

U.S. Postal Agency/Siberia
18 October 1918
18 December 1918

Soldier's Mail



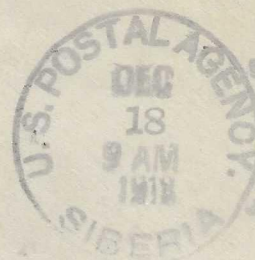
Earliest and Latest
Recorded Use of
This Postmark

Cover below self-censored
by General Graves.

Soldiers Mail
WAR DEPARTMENT,
HEADQUARTERS AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCES,
SIBERIA.

A.E.F. SIBERIA
CENSORED

Mrs. J. Graves
Mayer Guil. U.S.A.



Mrs. Norman C Streit,

Mrs. Mrs. J. Graves
The Westmoreland
#2122 California St.
Washington, D.C.

Lieut. N C Streit,
A E F Siberia,

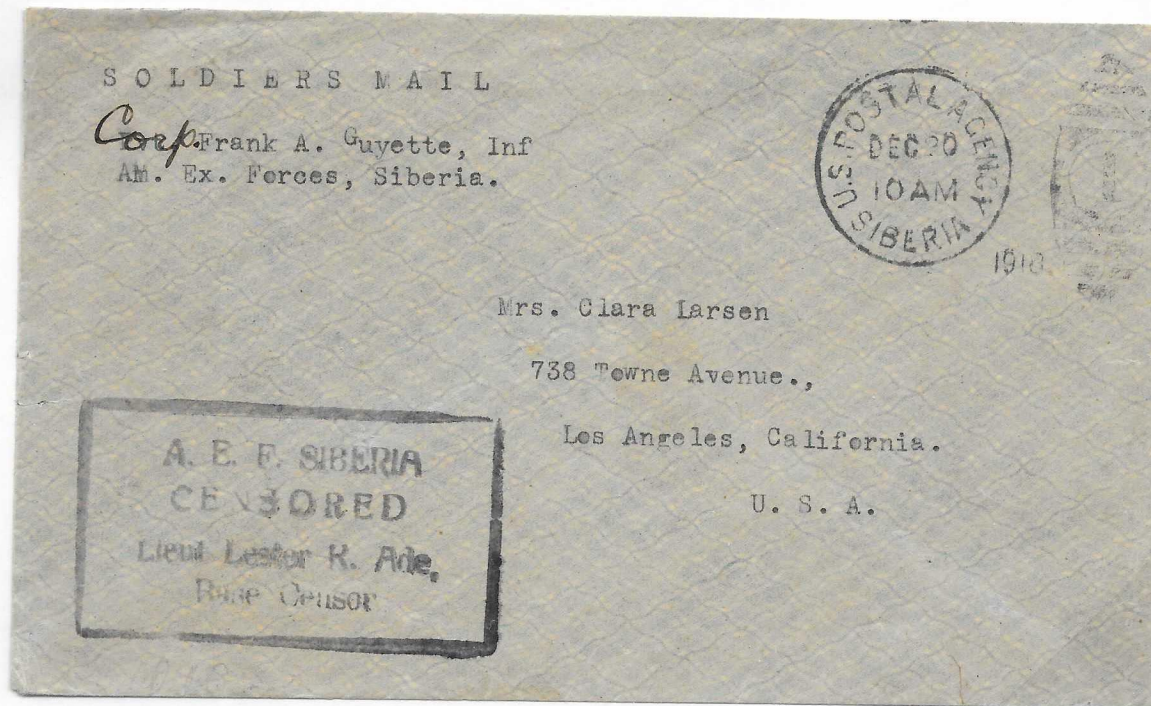
A.E.F. SIBERIA
CENSORED
Lt. N. C. Streit, Inf.

The first USPA Siberia cancel was brought to Vladivostok on 17 October 1918 by Postal Agent Stephen Cisler and put into use the next day, thus retiring the Shanghai marking. The time shown in the dial is always "9AM."

AMERICAN INTERVENTION IN SIBERIA
AEF -- U.S. Postal Agency Steel Postmarks

U.S. Postal Agency/Siberia
20 December 1918
14 April 1920

Earliest and Latest Dates of Use of Postmark

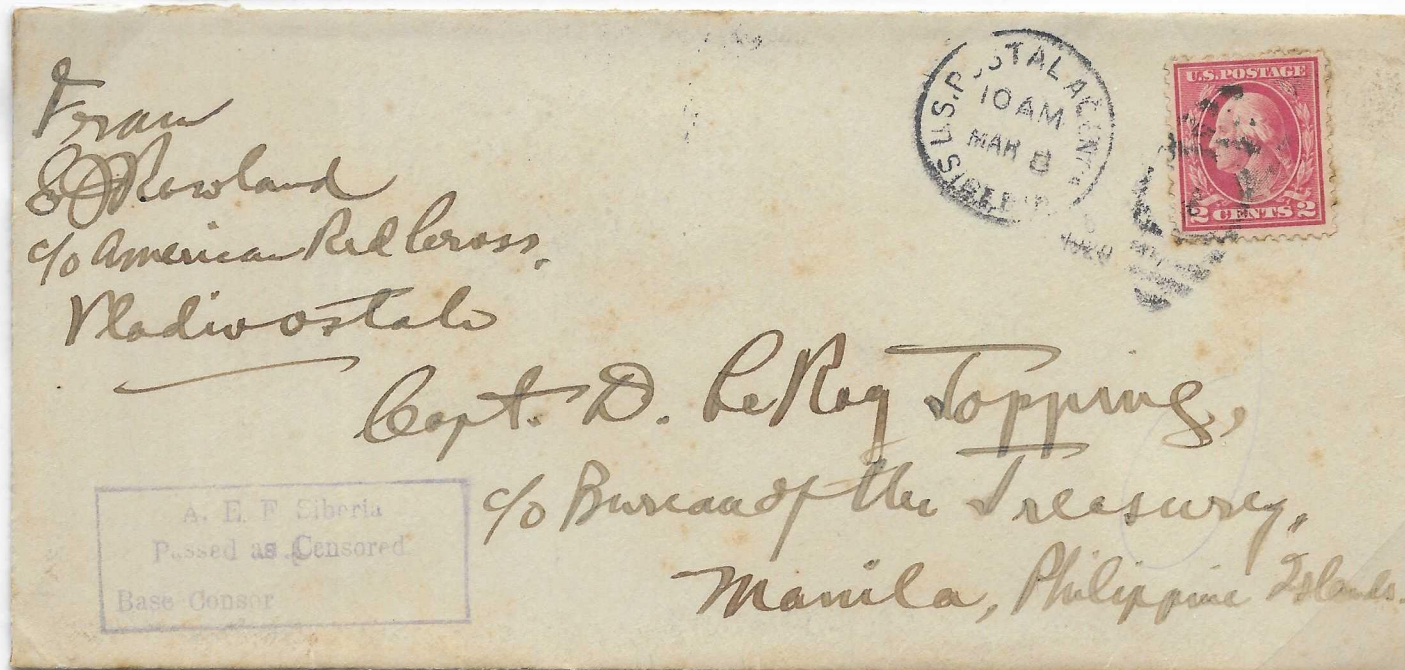
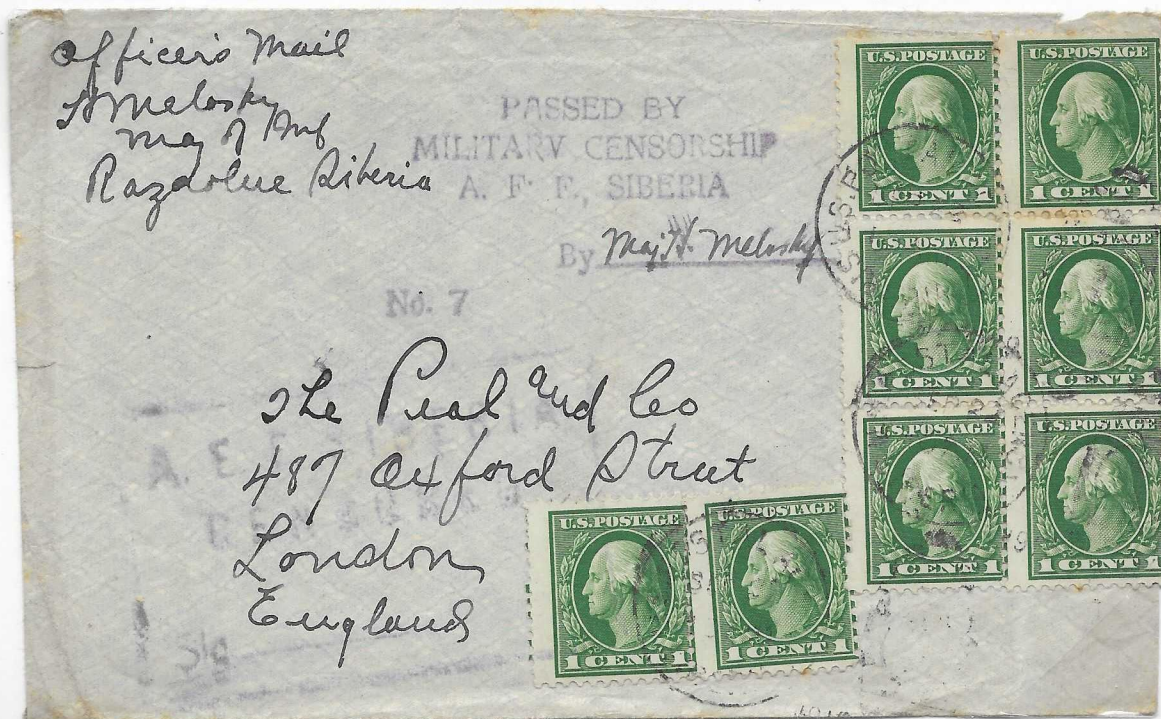


The most common postmark of the USPA Siberia is the small steel duplex first used on 20 December 1918. The latest recorded date, also shown above, is 14 April 1920.

AMERICAN INTERVENTION IN SIBERIA
AEF -- U.S. Postal Agency Steel Postmark
Mail to Non-U.S. Destinations

U.S. Postal Agency/Siberia
21 September 1919
March 8, 1920

Only Recorded Example of Double-Weight Letter to Foreign Address

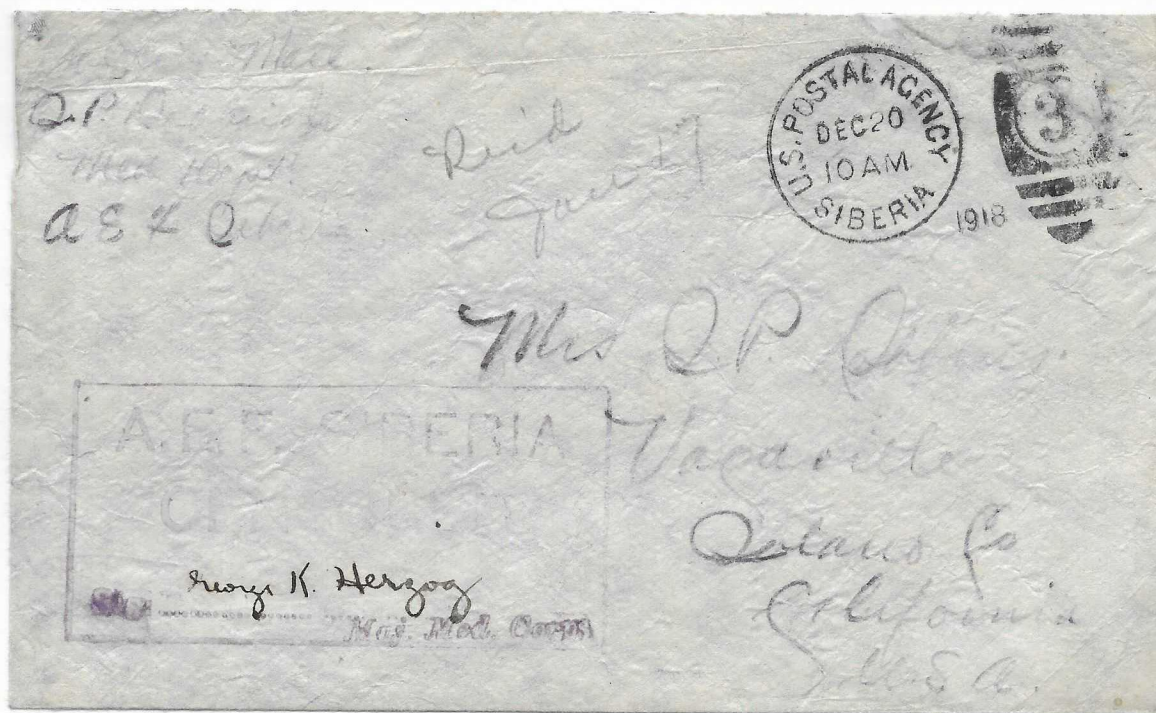


Mail from Siberia to non-U.S. destinations is unusual, with fewer than a half dozen examples recorded. Upper cover with two different censor marks was double weight and sent to England by an Infantry major. Although soldier's mail was generally free of postage, this did not apply to foreign destinations. Thus, postage was properly paid at 5 cents for the first ounce and 3 cents for the additional increment. Lower cover to the Philippines was sent by a Red Cross worker and, thus, required 2 cents postage (war tax no longer in effect). Very late use.

AMERICAN INTERVENTION IN SIBERIA
AEF -- U.S. Postal Agency Steel Postmark

U.S. Postal Agency/Siberia
20 December 1918

Only Recorded Example of This Postmark



This cover with a USPA Siberia duplex steel postmark and the #3 in the barrel is one of the highlights of an Intervention collection. Even after more than 80 years, only this one example has been found. It was used on the first day that the steel cancels were introduced but apparently not afterwards. One avenue of speculation is that the device was damaged at the top right of the killer, causing it to be retired.