

MIDWAY ISLAND MAIL 1905-1945

Midway is a 2.4 square mile atoll consisting of two small islands, two islets and a ring-shaped barrier reef. Its name is derived from the fact that it is located roughly halfway between the North American mainland and Asia. It has no indigenous population, was discovered by an American sea captain in 1859 and annexed by the United States in 1867. The first activity on the island came when employees of the Commercial Pacific Cable Co. took up residence on Midway in 1903 to build and operate a facility to serve the Trans-Pacific telegraph cable. To handle their mail, the Post Office Department operated a post office on Midway from 1903 to 1918 -- the only civil postal service that ever served the island.

Following a dormant period, a new phase of activity started in 1932 when the U.S. Navy began to conduct surveys and maneuvers near Midway, during which more than 20 warships included the location in their postmarks. In addition, there were special flights of seaplanes from Honolulu to Midway and back. More significantly, Pan American Airways conducted a survey flight between Midway and Honolulu in June 1935 as part of a test of the feasibility of commercial Trans-Pacific flights. (The airline discouraged the carrying of mail on this flight, but the station manager carved a cachet to use on a few envelopes that were flown to Honolulu where the postage was cancelled and the covers placed in the mail stream. Examples are very elusive and, fortunately, one is shown in the exhibit.)

Pan Am did proceed to establish commercial air service across the Pacific in November 1935, with Midway serving as a refueling and rest stop between Honolulu and Wake Island en route to Guam and the Philippines. As there was no postal service on the island, Pan Am provided two special cachets for use on mail leaving Midway, which was then cancelled in Honolulu or Guam, depending on the direction of the flight. Military engineers followed and, as the risk of war increased, Marines were sent in late 1940, requiring the opening of postal service by the U.S. Navy. A variety of different postmarks was used through the end of the war. The material shown in this exhibit is arranged essentially chronologically.



This cover shows one of the 15 recorded examples of the steel duplex cancel used on Midway in the early 20th Century. Franking with a 2 cent parcel post stamp (valid for any use at this time) to pay the domestic letter rate is extra-ordinary and highly likely unique. This stamp was never sold on Midway so it must have been carried with or sent to the user.

MIDWAY ISLAND STEEL DUPLEX

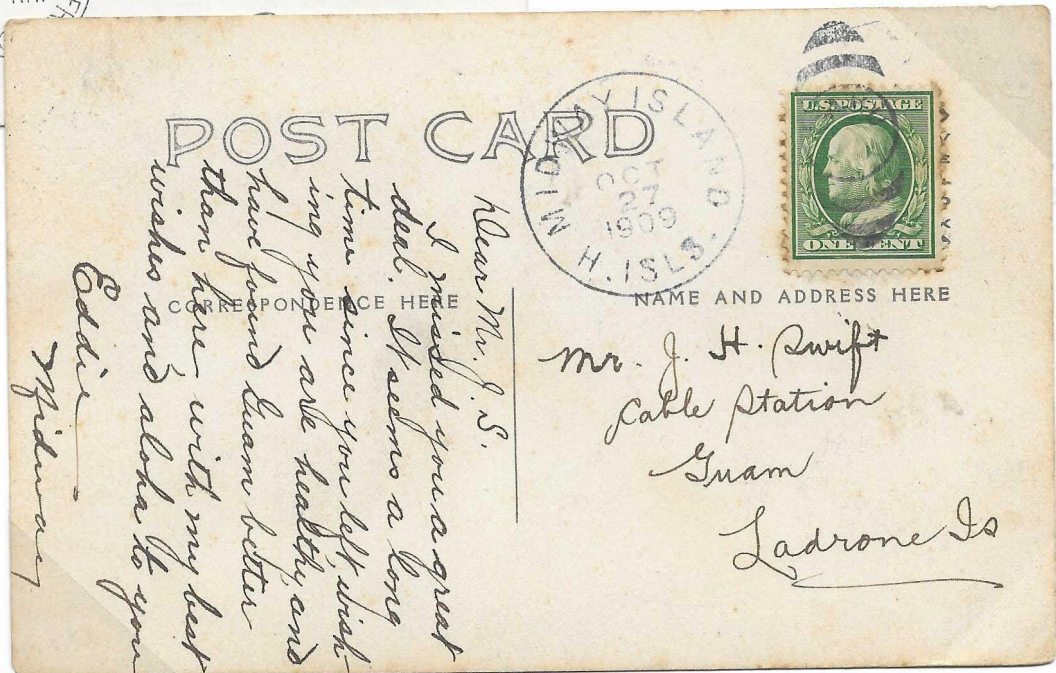
According to the U.S. Postal Guides, the Midway post office opened on June 13, 1903 and closed on June 30, 1918. Only 16 examples of its first postmark have been reported; three in the State of Hawaii archives. However, actual dates recorded are from October 24, 1904 to September 18, 1918.

Midway Island/H. Isls.

May 10, 1905

October 27, 1909

September 18, 1918



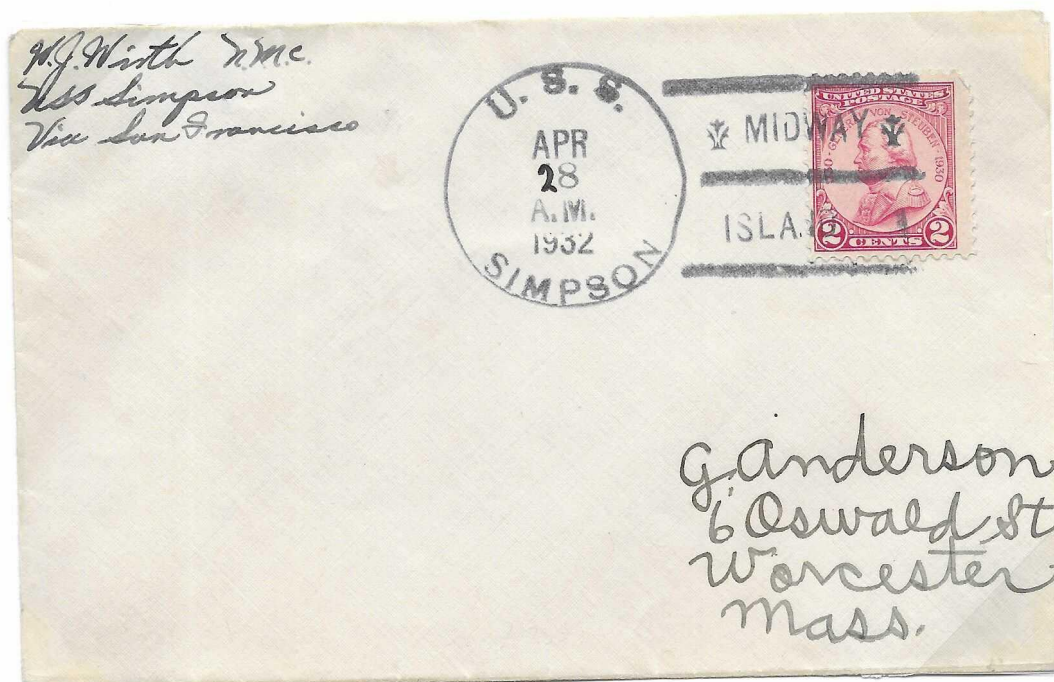
Latest Recorded
Date



Nearly all early examples of Midway Island mail was postcards, mostly sent by bored employees of the Commercial Pacific Cable Company which built and operated a cable station on the island, and sailors or passengers from passing ships. Many of the cards were supplied by the steamship companies (as the upper card here from *S.S. Manchuria* of the Pacific Mail S.S. Co.) Lower card was sent by an employee of the cable station on Midway to his counterpart on Guam; the only example of early Midway mail not addressed to the mainland.

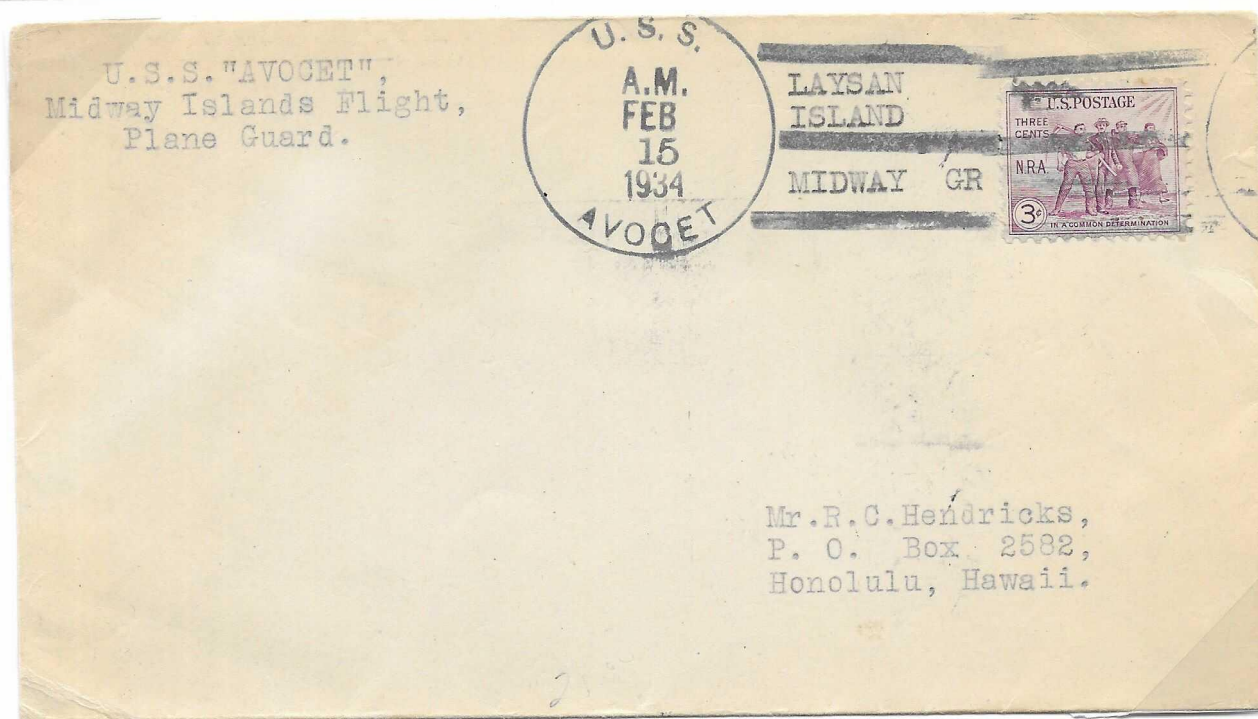
EARLIEST NAVAL POSTMARKS - 1932- 1934

The first U.S. Navy warship to designate this location in its postmark was the U.S.S. *Simpson* on April 28, 1932 when it was in the waters near Midway. The second was U.S.S. *Avocet*, which was at Laysan Island, for which the Gooney Birds were named, in the Midway Group on february 15, 1934.



U.S.S. Simpson
April 28, 1932

U.S.S. Avocet
February 15, 1934

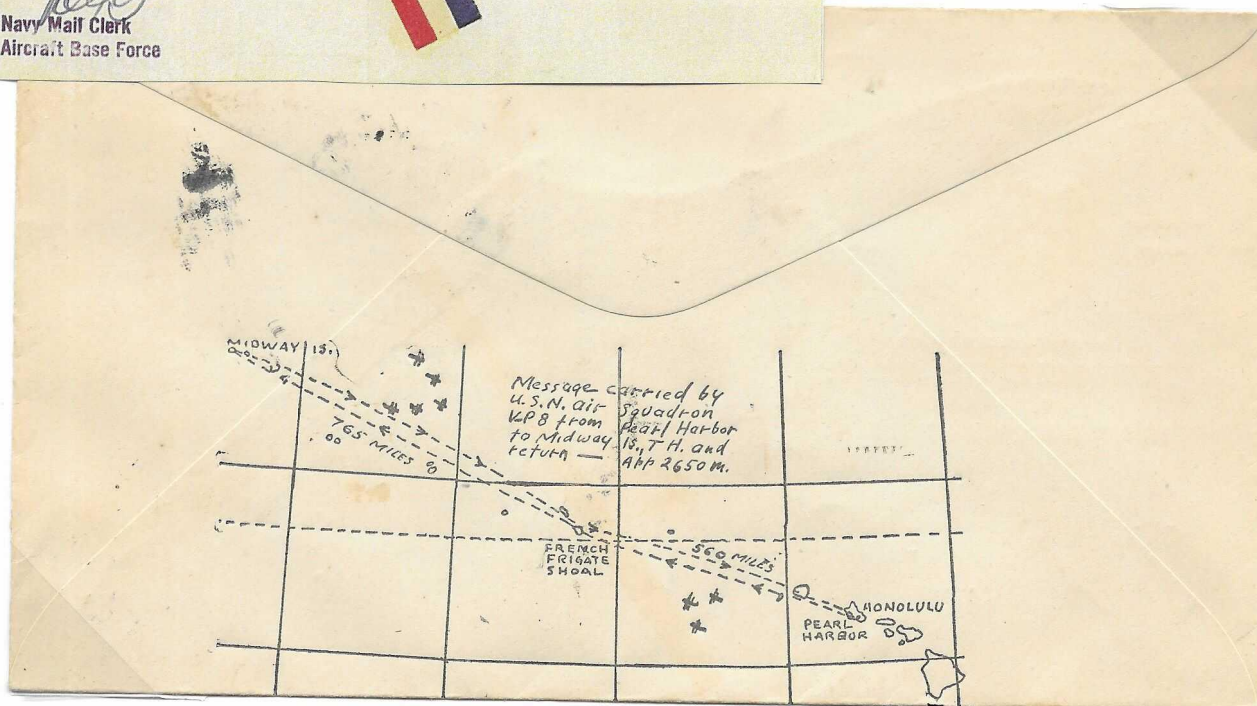


The upper cover was mailed without contents by the navy mail clerk on the *Simpson*, no doubt pursuant to a philatelic request, but nevertheless an historic piece. The lower example was mailed by a Navy Plane Guard.

NAVY FIRST FLIGHT -- 1934

In February 1934, a squadron of U.S. Navy seaplanes flew from Pearl Harbor to Midway, refueling en route at French Frigate Shoals. These were the first aircraft to visit the area and their flight covered approximately 2,650 miles (Honolulu to French Frigate Shoals = 560 miles + FFS to Midway = 765 miles and then return).

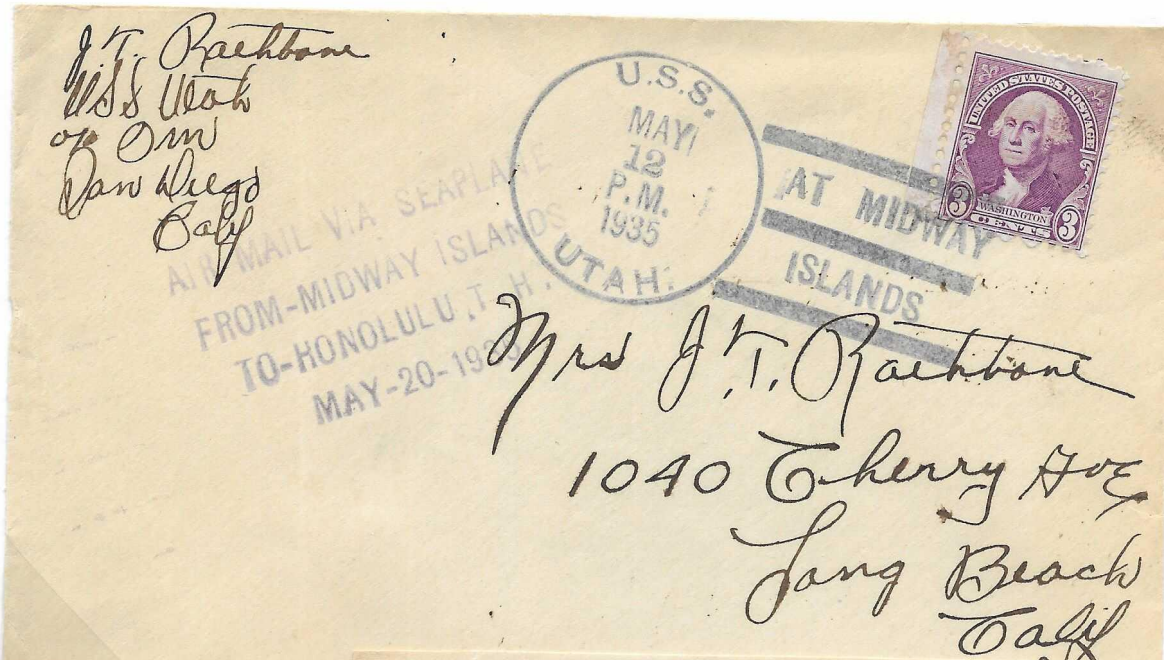
Fleet Air Base Pearl Harbor
February 13, 1934



This cover was carried on the first flight of Navy seaplane Squadron 8-F from Pearl Harbor to Midway and back. Although prepared philatelically, since there was no commercial mail service between Hawaii and Midway at the time, it was postmarked at the Fleet Air Base and endorsed by the Navy Mail Clerk at that location. Interestingly, a map of the route of the flight is reproduced on the back of the cover.

NAVAL MANEUVERS - 1935

In May 1935, the U.S. Navy conducted its annual maneuvers in a triangular area of the North Pacific bounded by Alaska, Hawaii and Midway. Postmarks from 25 ships that took part in the exercise included the location between the killer bars in their postmarks when they were in the waters near Midway.



U.S.S. Utah
May 12, 1935

U.S.S. Northampton
May 22, 1935

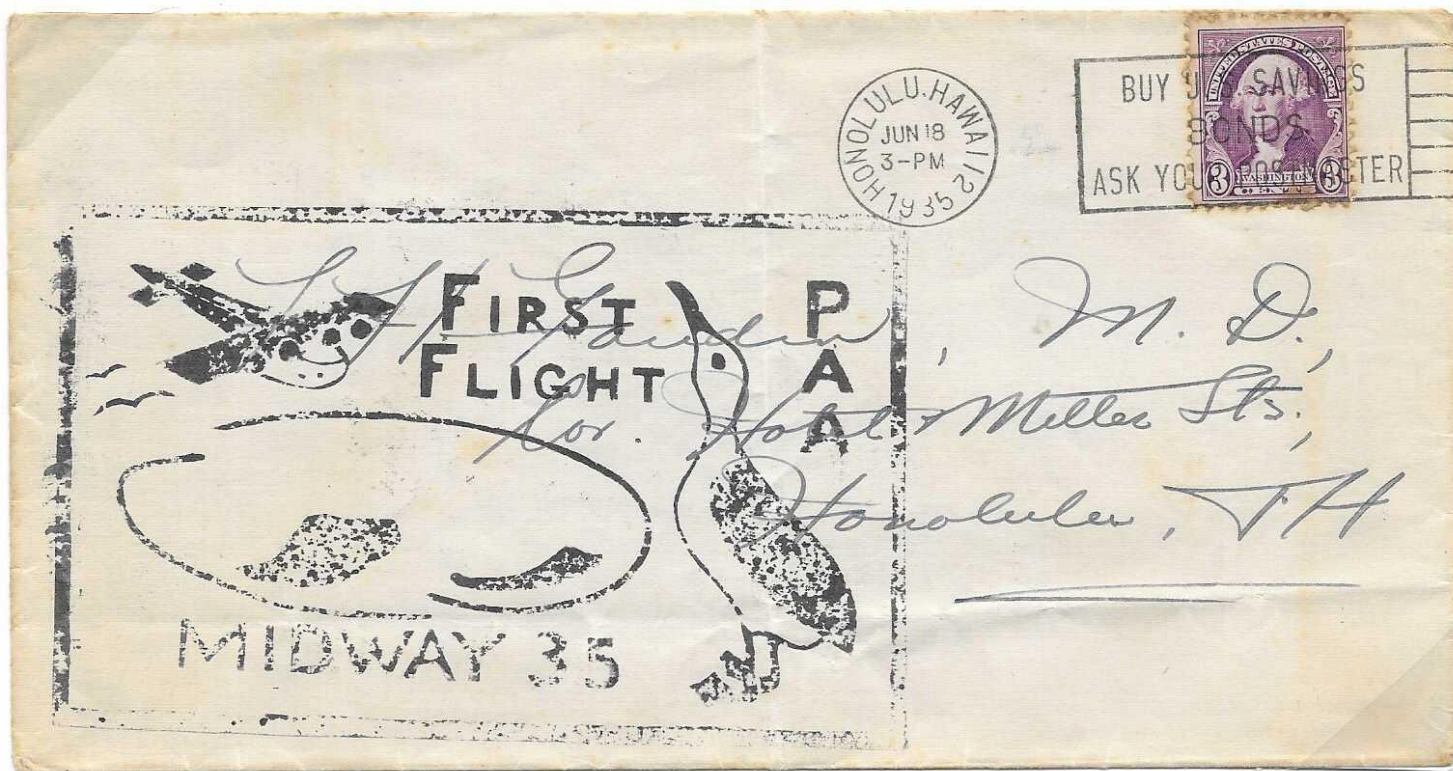


The mail clerks on the various ships made up their own versions of the location, which resulted in "At Midway Islands" and "Midway Islands" on the examples above, but variously "Midway Is. T.H.," "Off Midway I.," "Off Midway Islands" and "Midway Is. Area" on others. The dates in the cancels that have been recorded range from May 11 to 29. The upper cover indicates that it was to be flown from Midway to Honolulu on May 20; however, whether this happened is unknown as it was not backstamped in Hawaii but at Long Beach on May 31.

PAN AM SURVEY FLIGHT -- 1935

By mid-June, Pan Am was ready for a survey flight as far as Midway. A Sikorsky S-42 left San Francisco on June 12 and, after a layover in Honolulu, departed for Midway on the 15th. The return leg to Hawaii was flown on the 17th. Although the company did not encourage mail to be carried on this aircraft, the station agent on Midway -- being aware of the high interest on the part of collectors for flight covers from the Pan Am routes in the Caribbean -- hand carved a cachet that was then applied to such mail, which was carried on behalf of the station members and crew. Murphy reports that approximately 30 covers exist.

Honolulu, Hawaii
June 18, 1935



This cover from the staff doctor on Midway to his brother, a doctor in Honolulu, was sent on the June 17 survey flight from Midway to Hawaii. It was postmarked in Honolulu the next day. Note the large cachet showing a seaplane, a goony bird and a map of the island.

PAN AM SURVEY FLIGHT -- 1935
Midway to Wake

In August, Pan Am prepared a survey flight for the next leg across the Pacific, which would take it from Midway to Wake Island. A Sikorsky S-42 left Honolulu on August 13 and landed for refueling at Midway on the 14th. It arrived at Wake on August 17. The return leg left Wake on the 20th, arriving at Midway on the 22nd and in Hawaii in the evening on the same day. Several unofficial cachets and one official one were applied to mail carried on this flight.

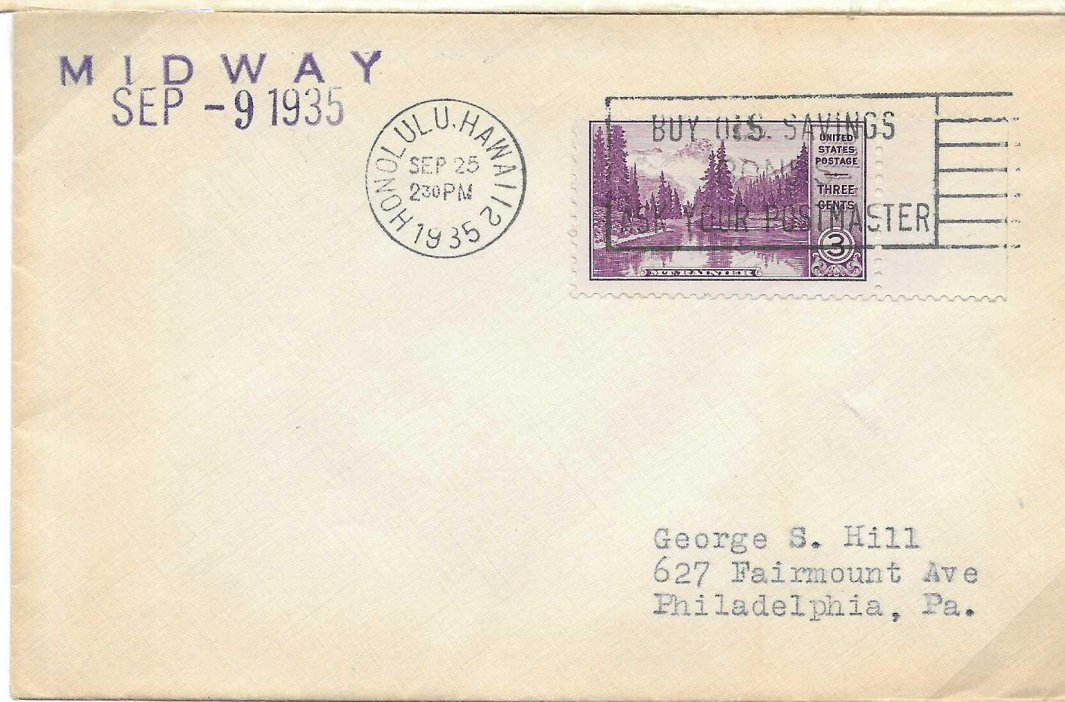
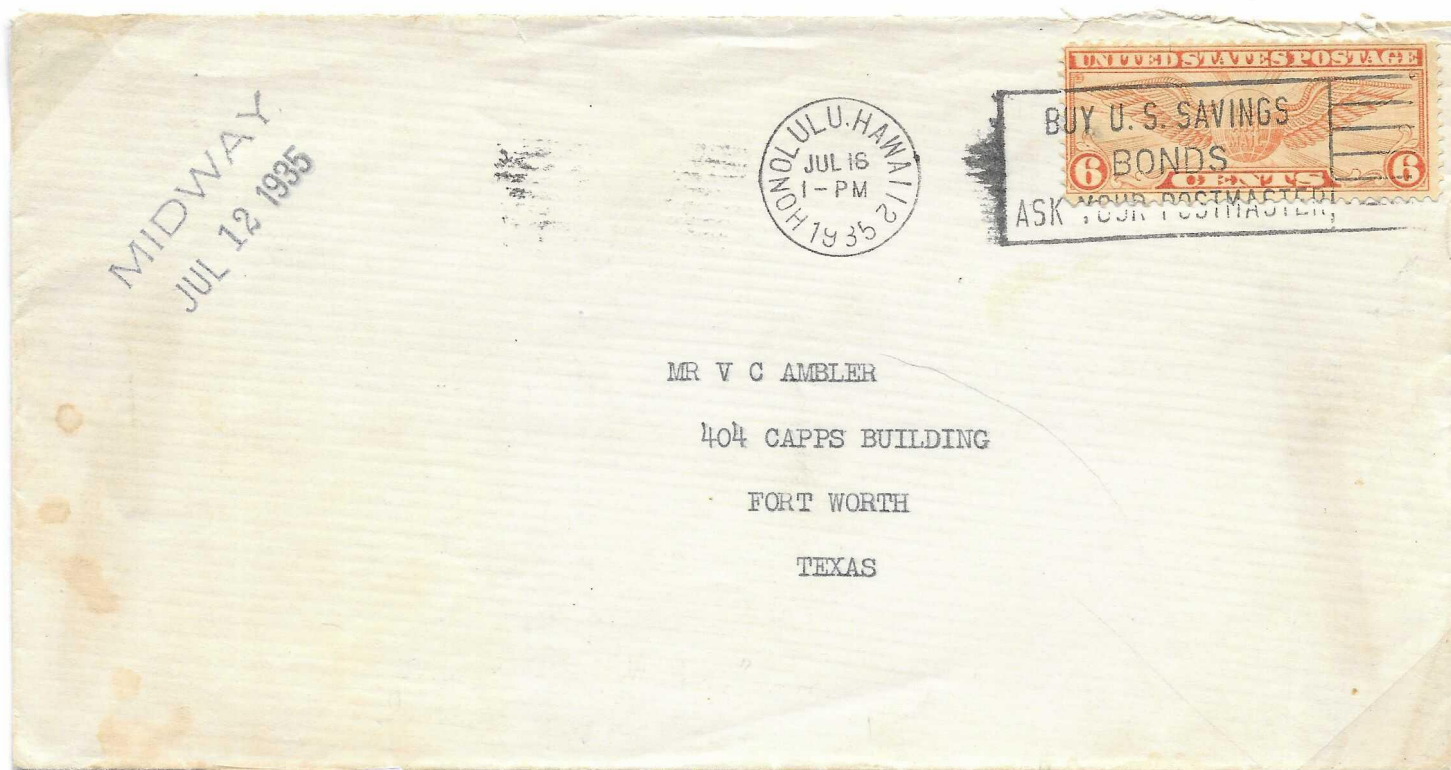
Honolulu, Hawaii
 August 13, 1935

PAN AMERICAN AIRWAYS, INC. Pacific Division San Francisco, California					
From Airport Manager Pan American Airways, Inc. Honolulu, T. H.	To FROM 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			
		Arrive Midway Westbound 0130 August 14, 1935 (H.P.) Arrive Wake 0129 August 17, 1935 (Bicknell) Depart Wake Eastbound 1914 August 20, 1935 (Bicknell) Depart Midway Eastbound 1720 August 22, 1935 (H.P.)			

This cover was printed by Pan Am and addressed to Juan Trippe in New York. It provides flight details and was struck with the official company cachet after the flight, presumably at the office in Alameda. In this case, the cachet was applied in black ink instead of the normal purple and is reported to be the only such example. It is signed by Captain Sullivan.

STRAIGHT-LINE MARKINGS

Midway
July 12, 1935
Sep. 9. 1935



Between the Pan Am Survey Flight on June 17, 1935 and the start of scheduled service in November, Pan Am employees were stationed on the hitherto uninhabited island to prepare facilities for future flights. There being no postal facilities, their mail was struck with a straight-line marking with the place and date. It would then go out on the next ship bound for Honolulu. Transit time was 4 days and 16 days, respectively, on the two covers shown. The upper cover has the return address of K. C. Ambler, Pan American Airways, Midway, T.H. on the reverse.

PRIVATE CACHETS

Midway
March 1938
February 1940
April 1940

MAILED AT
MIDWAY ISLAND
PACIFIC OCEAN

MIDWAY ISLANDS

PACIFIC OCEAN

Theron E. Griffin.

Only at Lat. 28°13' N. Long. 177°22' W. (Pacific Ocean), on Midway Island, are these strange birds, the gonies. (Laysan Albatross) to be seen out of captivity. Tame, dark, fuzzy-feathered baby gonies cluster by the thousands on the sands of this coral island, unique stopping point on Pan American Airways 9,000-mile transpacific airline.



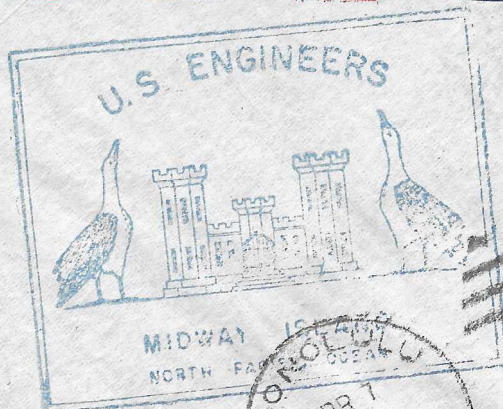
835411

ADDRESS 1938

Midway Island, H. A. Reynolds
March 1938.

Palace Hotel

Midway Island
Pan American Airways System
"Gonies" are the
idea for the
Island Cakes
yours J



VIA AIR MAIL

Mr + Mrs. Bodor
300 Southern Blvd.
Bronx
N.Y.C.

Although there were no postmarks to identify Midway mail during this period, there were private cachets. Pan Am provided two different markings to designate mail sent from the island by its passengers and staff. In addition, the U.S. Engineers on the island had their own cachet. The correct rate for Clipper mail was 30 cents to the mainland, so the postcard was overpaid by 10 cents. The mail was carried by Clipper to Honolulu where it was offloaded, cancelled and forwarded to the destinations.

U. S. ENGINEERS

Honolulu, Hawaii
November 10, 1938
November 28, 1939



WAR DEPARTMENT
U. S. ENGINEER OFFICE
HONOLULU, T. H.
Midway Island
OFFICIAL BUSINESS
Lt Wm J. Ely

With Pan Am now using Midway as a refueling stop on its Trans-Pacific route, the U.S. government decided to make some improvements in the area, involving dredging of the lagoon in particular. A group of engineers was sent to conduct this operation, including Lt. Ely and J.W. McCormick (who served on the U.S. Dredge *Sacramento*). There was no postal facility on the Island at this time, either civil or military, so mail was sent by pouch to Hawaii, where it was postmarked and placed in the mail stream. The rate for airmail was 30 cents from Midway to the mainland (20 cents from Hawaii).

3rd DEFENSE BATTALION

As relations between the U.S. and Japan deteriorated during 1940 and 1941, a decision was made to fortify Midway as a defensive move. As a result, the 3rd Defense Battalion of Marines was sent to the island to assist and protect civilian contractors constructing a Naval base, including air and submarine facilities. A special postmark was provided, with the one used on November 1, 1940 being inscribed "First Day Cancellation" and subsequent use having "Midway Islands" between the killer bars.

Midway Det.
Fleet Mar. Force
November 1, 1940
December 9, 1940
February 7, 1941



Examples of 3rd Defense Battalion mail. Upper cover franked with 10 cents, which paid for a letter sent by air to Hawaii and then by surface to the Continental U.S. Middle cover franked with 30 cents which covered airmail from Midway to the mainland. Lower westbound cover was flown to Guam, for which the postal rate was 20 cents; note Gooney Bird cachet.

3rd DEFENSE BATTALION

Midway Det.
Fleet Mar. Force
April 18, 1941
May, 1941
Sept. 2, 1941



W.W. DEAN RM2/C
MIDWAY ISLAND
N.P.O.

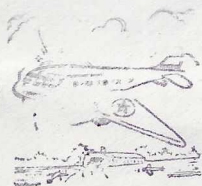
- AIRMAIL- AIRMAIL
-AIRMAIL-



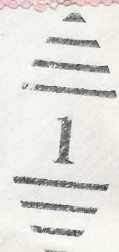
MRS. EARL .WARREN DEAN

Fee claimed 3104 NORTH 58 STREET .
Omaha, Neb.
OMAHA, NEBRASKA.

SPECIAL DELIVERY



NAVAL AIR BASE
COMMISSIONED



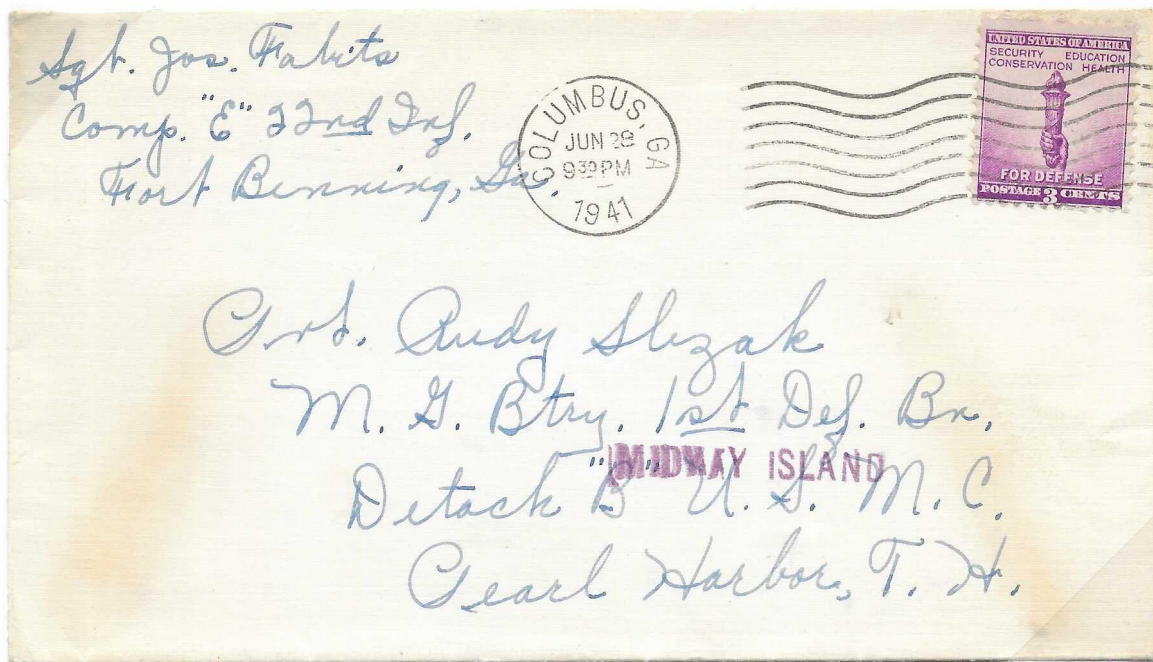
Mr. Ernest H. Garbe
531 3rd Street
Brooklyn
N. Y. City

Three other postmarks were used by the 3rd Marine Battalion on Midway. The special marking for registered mail is shown on the upper cover -- recorded used from January 8 to May 5, 1941. The postage on the special delivery letter was cancelled with an oval killer with Honolulu/Hawaii around the outside and "M" in the middle, used from May 1 to August 27, 1941. Below is an example of a duplex metal cds with the same wording as in the rubber postmark used earlier; recorded used from May 26 to September 2, 1941.

1st DEFENSE BATTALION

As a part of the build-up of garrisons on the Pacific Islands, the 1st Marine Defense Battalion was sent to Pearl Harbor in February 1941. A portion of these men was later deployed elsewhere in the Pacific, including Johnson, Palmyra and Wake Islands. In addition, in mid-summer a group of the men was sent to Midway as temporary relief for the 3rd Defense Battalion. Subsequently, these men were transferred to Wake, being replaced in turn on Midway by the 6th Battalion in September 1941.

Columbus, Ga.
June 28, 1941



This cover was sent to Private Slezak of the Machine Gun Battery of the First Defense Battalion. The letter was addressed to Pearl Harbor, but he was one of the men who had been sent temporarily to Midway. The Navy Mail Clerk in Hawaii applied a forwarding handstamp inscribed "Midway Island" and sent it on. Slezak was later assigned to Wake, where he was captured during the Japanese invasion and held as a POW on Hokkaido until his release at the end of the war.

SIXTH DEFENSE BATTALION

Sixth Def. Bat.
Fleet Mar. Force
Sept. 23, 1941
Dec. 6, 1941
Dec. 1, 1941

Midway Island, Pacific Ocean

At Lat. 28°13' N. Long. 177°22' W. (Pacific Ocean) you dine just as you would in the smartest restaurants and hotels of New York and Paris. A corner of the main dining room of the Pan American Airways Inn, Midway Island.

Sept. 22, 1941

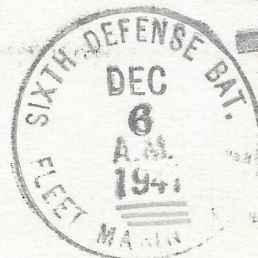
Dear Jerry old bean:

Just found a card you might like to have for your scrap-book so here it is in addition to the letter. Also sent a card to Bertha L. now at 912 S. Los Robles - is right and she gets surely hope you are fortably settled by now. It's still a bit early. Love

POST CARD



Mrs. Daniel S. Kleinpell
675 S. Euclid Ave.
Pasadena



Mrs. Mildred Violet

P.F.C. Melgin, 6-I-DB, U.S.M.C.
To Postmaster
San Francisco, Calif.



The next military group was the Sixth Defense Battalion, which arrived in late 1941. They utilized a standard postmark inscribed with the unit designation and "Midway Islands" between the killer bars. This marking is recorded as used between September 17 and December 6, 1941, with the LRD shown above. Lower cover shows a cover with the LRD of the Sixth Defense registration marking -- which is known used from September 25 to December 1, 1941.

GENERIC MARINE POSTMARK

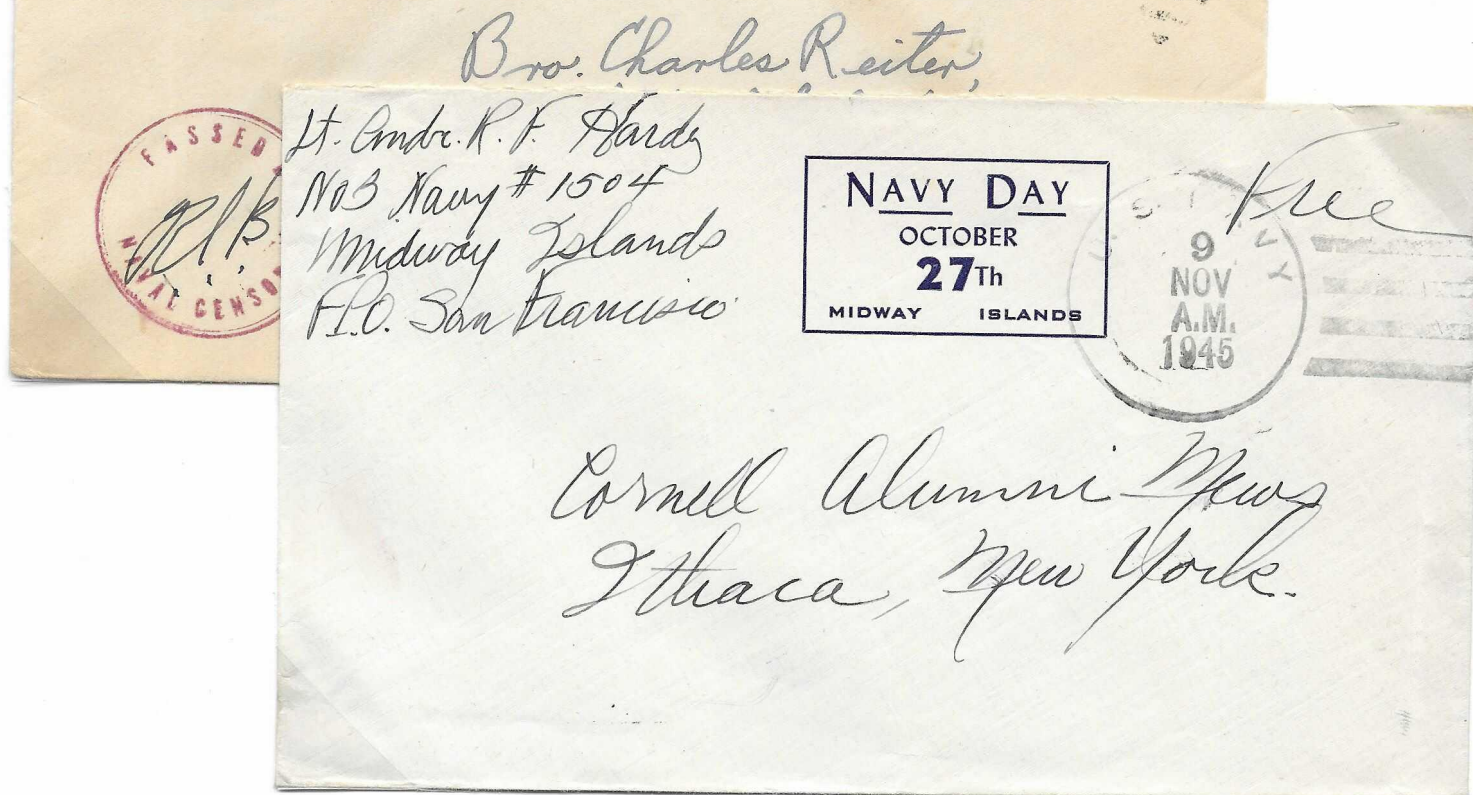
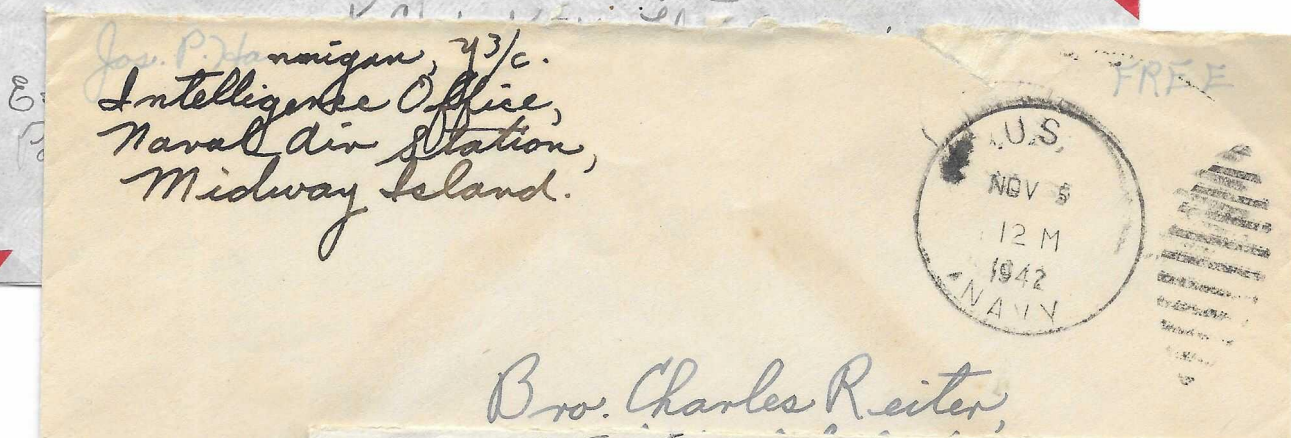
U. S. Marine Corps
March 22, 1942
April 14, 1942
April 29, 1942



In the spring of 1942 a new postmark was introduced, which was generic to the Marines since it did not designate a particular unit. the EKV was March 22, 1942 (shown above) and it was used until mid-April. At that point, the "Midway Islands" location was removed from the killer bars; this altered cancel was then used until January 1945.

NAVAL POSTMARKS

U. S. Navy
Mar. 23, 1942
Nov. 9, 1942
Nov. 9, 1945



For the remainder of the war, mail from Midway was postmarked with some form of cancel inscribed "U.S. Navy" as was the case with other naval installations around the world. However, these examples are particularly interesting since they all show the location of the sender in the return addresses, which would have been unusual elsewhere.