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# *The Prexie Era*

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## H. M. S. Asbury

by

Albert Briggs

Would you believe a hotel? That's right. The Asbury was not a seagoing vessel at all and was certainly not the property of His Majesty. H.M.S. Asbury was the name given to two hotels located next to each other in Asbury Park, New Jersey. The resort hotels Monterey and Berkeley Carteret, separated by Sixth Avenue along the Asbury Park seafront, were converted for use by Royal Navy sailors temporarily stationed in the United States. They received their "official" name in a Naval Department memo dated September 8, 1942. The designation, His Majesty's Ship (H.M.S.), was applied in order for sailors to receive on-duty pay while located there. The complex can be seen in Figure 1.



Figure 1: The Berkeley Carteret Hotel on the left and the Monterey Hotel on the right with the Sunset Avenue Pavilion in the foreground.

The Carteret, containing 420 rooms and built in 1925, along with the neighboring Monterey Hotel were co-opted for use by the Navy. Specifically, Royal Navy personnel, awaiting completion of ship construction or repairs, were housed in these buildings. Between 5,000 and 7,500 men spent time at this location, mainly during 1943. The most famous of the British seamen was Alec Guinness, a well-known stage and screen actor. Guinness, reportedly bored with his assigned duty, was able to arrange appearances on Broadway during his stay in New Jersey.

The Monterey was used to house enlisted men while the Carteret was designated for officers. Enlisted men were bunked four to a room. The sailors would arrive at the North Asbury railroad station and march to the hotels. Sixth Avenue served as a site for morning drills. A fence was put up around the hotels to provide a secure perimeter. Cinema and "Dime-a-Dance" joints provided recreation. Frank Sinatra, from nearby Hoboken, was all the rage. A source of aggravation, however, was the fact that Royal Navy personnel could not use the beach. This regulation was enforced by MPs patrolling the beachfront.

In order to placate the beach-deprived sailors, the Navy also took over Seventh Avenue Pool and bathhouses, as reported in a local newspaper. See Figure 2.

**British Take Over Swimming Pool**  
 The U. S. government has taken over the Seventh Avenue swimming pool and bathhouses at Asbury Park for use of the British sailors quartered at H.M.S. Asbury, Royal navy, recruiting station. The pool will be used by the sailors in training.

Figure 2: From the *Red Bank Register*; Red Bank, New Jersey, May 27, 1943.

Special provisions were even made for British personnel to write home. The Post Office Department, in *Postal Bulletin* No. 18588, dated April 30, 1943, extended V-mail service both to Army and Navy personnel temporarily stationed in the United States and their relatives and friends in Great Britain. Postage required was the prevailing international rate of 5 cents, as shown in Figure 3. This postal provision remained in effect until October 30, 1945.

**INSTRUCTIONS OF  
 THIRD ASSISTANT POSTMASTER GENERAL**  
**EXTENSION OF V-MAIL SERVICE**  
 Arrangements have been made to extend the V-mail service to correspondence between members of the British Army and Navy personnel temporarily residing in the United States and relatives and friends in Great Britain.  
 Therefore, V-mail letters mailed by the personnel referred to, addressed to civilians in Great Britain may be accorded the V-mail service.  
 Postage on V-mail letters addressed to civilians in Great Britain should be prepaid at the international rate, that is, 5 cents, and the letters should be routed via the Army Postal Service, New York, N. Y.

Figure 3: From *PB* 18588 (April 30, 1943).



Figure 4: V-mail from an enlisted sailor quartered at the Monterey.

Figure 4 illustrates a cover sent from a sailor stationed at H.M.S. Asbury in July 1943. The V-mail letter sheet was examined by a civil censor at the New York censorship station and subsequently placed in the mail for dispatch by ship to London. Figure 5 shows the contents. A Royal Navy censor mark may be found in the upper left corner. The sailor misspelled his location (“Asprey”); in the body of the letter he mentions to his mother having sent an “ordinary letter” where he “will say a great deal more than I can in this “V” mail.”

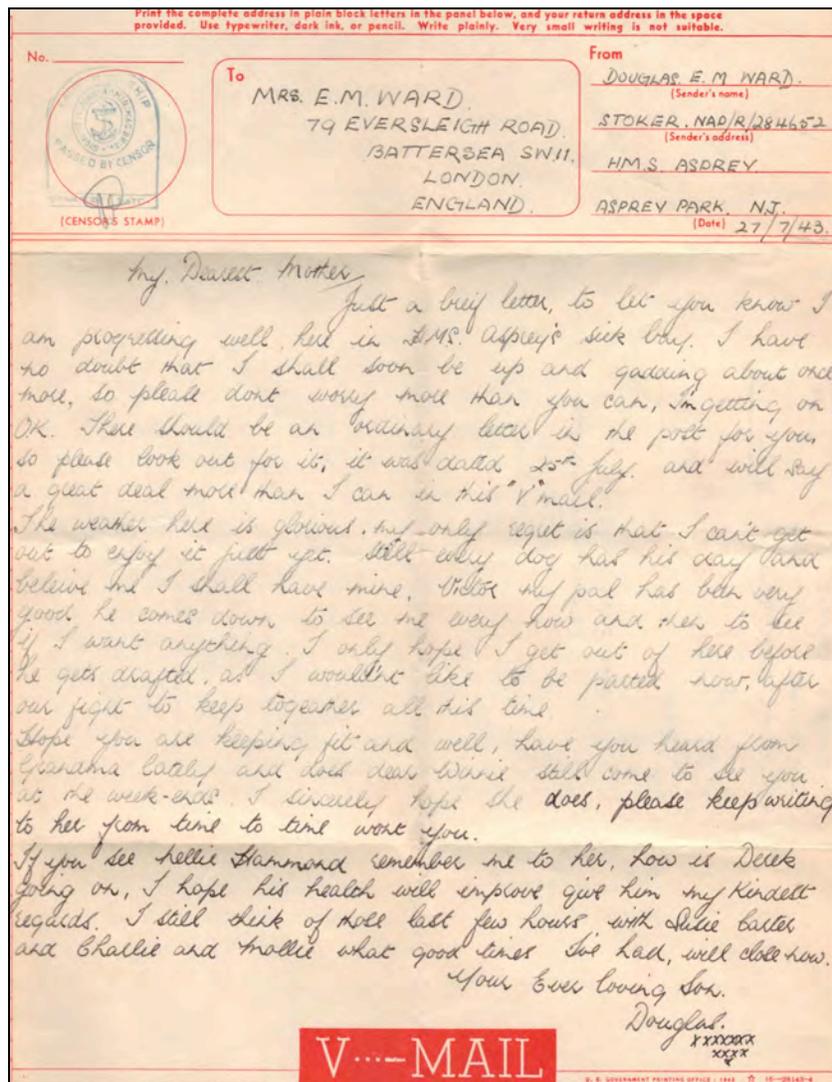
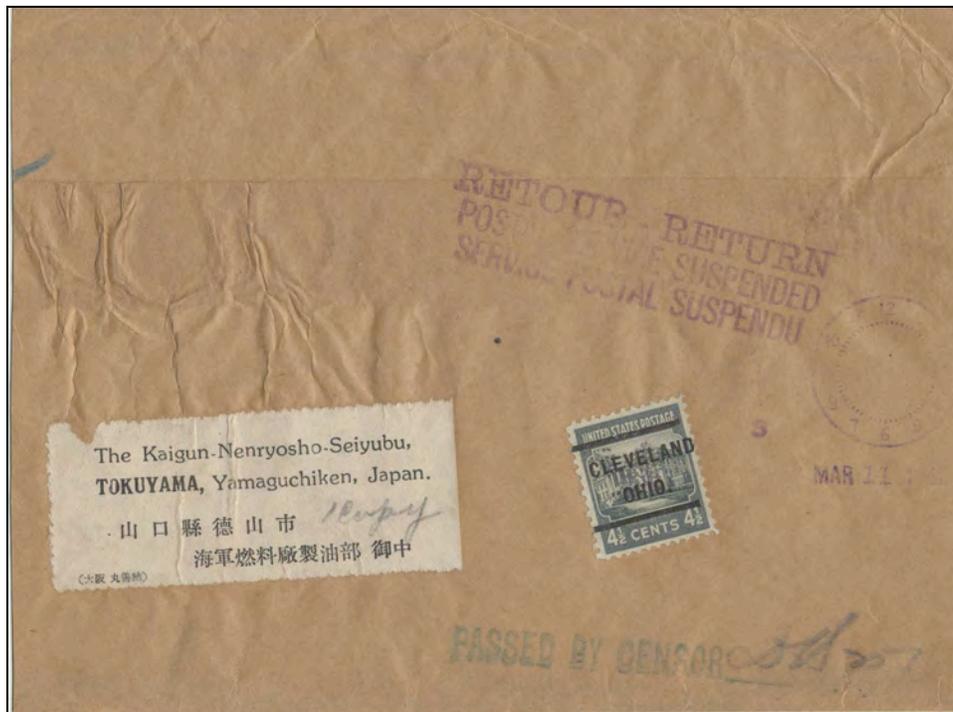


Figure 5: Contents of the V-Mail letter shown above. The writer is recuperating in the H.M.S. Asbury sick bay.

### 4.5-Cent Prexie on Printed Matter to Japan, Returned To Sender

by

Jeffrey Shapiro



A 4.5-cent precanceled Prexie sheet stamp paid three times the 1.5 cents per two-ounce international printed matter rate on this censored wrapper from Cleveland to Japan and mailed early in 1942. It was returned to sender via Vancouver, B.C., where it was censored. The **RETURN TO SENDER** marking, in French and English, was applied in Canada. Mail service had been suspended since December 11, 1941 after the U.S. declared war against Japan.

While similar returned wrappers sent worldwide can be found, this example, addressed to an oil storage facility in Tokuyama, Yamaguchi Prefecture, contains postal history plus irony. The irony comes from the fact that many historians conclude Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 because of the US oil embargo put in place in July 1941 in retaliation for Japan's invasion of French Indochina and continuing expansion into China. Because of Japan's reliance on the US to supply 80 percent of its petroleum needs, the Japanese government considered the embargo to be a highly provocative act.

Tokuyama city, facing Tokuyama Bay in the Inland Sea, on Honshu Island, was a sleepy 'backwater' town until the 1896 completion of the Sanyo Railroad Line connecting Kobe and Hiroshima. Then, with the building of the main Japanese naval coaling station, the area saw major industrial growth becoming a leading center for petroleum refining and chemical production. This made the area a target for Allied bombing.

The City's industrial capabilities were wiped out in a series of air raids, including one on May 10, 1945 by 60 planes of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Wing sent to destroy the Tokuyama Naval Fuel Station. The raid was a success, and all crewmen returned to their base safely.

## Prexie Era Postage Stamp Vending Machines

by

Art Farnsworth

**"CHIEF"**

**- PAYS YOU 3-WAY PROFITS -**

Gentlemen:

NOW you can have a **NEW POSTAGE STAMP MACHINE** in YOUR STORE

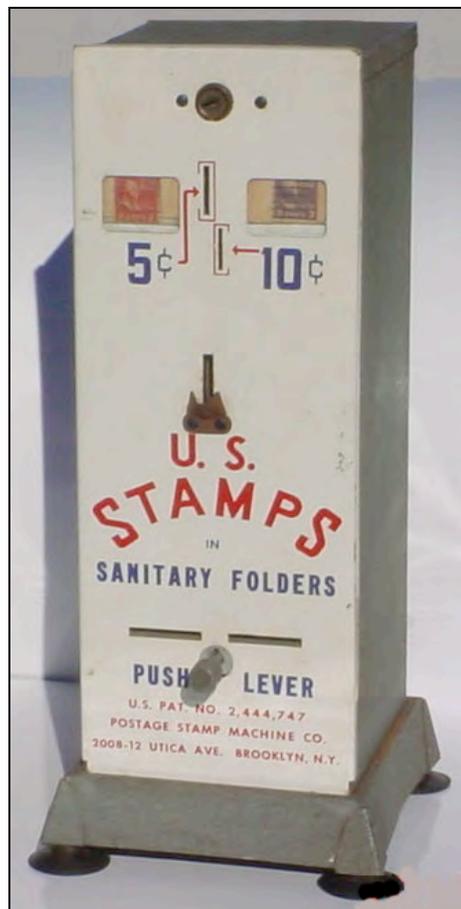
**IT PAYS**

1. **20% NET PROFIT** to YOU
2. **BUILDS YOUR BUSINESS**
3. **PLEASES YOUR CUSTOMERS** with a SERVICE THEY NEED DAILY

For full information, sign and mail attached postage **FREE** card **TODAY**.

Postage Stamp Machine Co.,  
33 West 60th Street  
New York 23, N. Y.

UP TO **\$12.00 NET PROFIT** WHEN EMPTIED



**"THE LEADER"**

U.S. STAMPS IN SANITARY FOLDERS

PUSH LEVER

NEW YORK N.Y.

Sec. 34.66, P.L. & R.  
U. S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
Permit 11742

E. C. Smith Gen'l Store  
Kent,  
Oregon

UP TO **\$4.50 NET PROFIT** WHEN EMPTIED

Postage stamp vending machines were introduced to postal patrons by the Brinkerhoff Company in 1906. They dispensed privately perforated coil stamps made from strips of imperforate sheet stamps glued together. Stamp vending machines have been with us ever since. The illustrations accompanying this article highlight machines in use during the Prexie era.

Patent 2,444,747 was issued to the Postage Stamp Machine Company of New York on July 6, 1948 for improvements to a machine that, among other attributes, provided “an efficient and simple indicia” for indicating when the machine was empty and a means to lock it in place.

The photograph of the machine known as “The Leader,” clearly shows 2-cent and 3-cent Prexie stamps in the windows above the numerals. The 2-cent first class postcard rate that went into effect on January 1, 1952 helps date the photograph to the latter years of the Prexie series. In this machine, two 2-cent Prexie stamps contained in sanitary folders were dispensed for a nickel, while the push lever dispensed three 3-cent stamps for the cost of a dime. Various combinations of stamps could be dispensed as the need arose. The advertising card promotes the machines as a way of providing a service to customers while offering a modest profit for the business.

Vintage postage stamp vending machines appear occasionally on eBay, and several period models may currently be found in the collection of the National Postal Museum.

## Matches Sent Through the Mail

by

Dickson Preston

Although the transmission of inflammable substances was, in general, prohibited in the U.S. mails during the Prexie era, there were certain exceptions. Paragraphs 2(e) and 2(h) in Section 588 of the 1940 Postal Laws and Regulations give the details. Paragraph 2(e) allows substances having a flash point between 80 and 20 degrees weighing 4 ounces or less to be sent under certain conditions when "contained in tightly closed metal boxes or cans and packed in strong papier-mâché tubes or in boxes made of good quality double-faced corrugated pasteboard." Paragraph 2(h) allows safety matches to be sent when packed in asbestos or tightly closed metal containers.

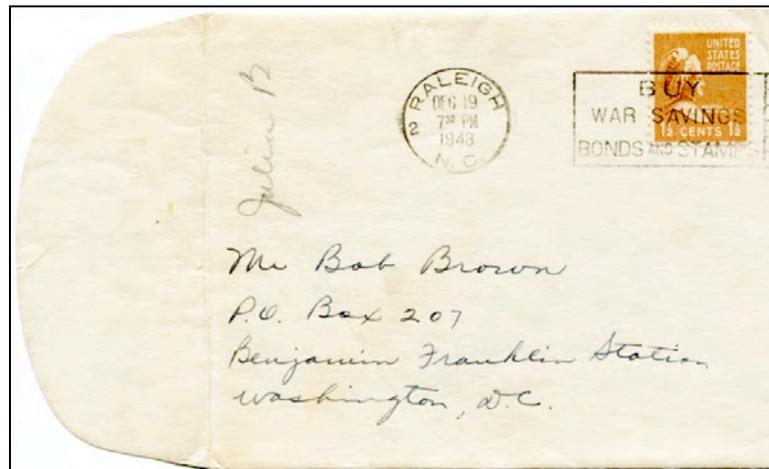


Figure: Front and back of a foil lined envelope for sending a book of matches through the postal system.

A special envelope sent during the Christmas season of 1943 was designed to send matches as a holiday gift or advertisement (Figure 1). The interior of the envelope is lined with metal foil, and an inscription on the reverse references section 588 of the P.L.& R.

**This envelope contains one book of safety matches packed in Foil Lined Container in accordance with Section 588, Paragraph 2-E United States Postal Laws and Regulations.**

The claim made is a bit of a dodge, since Paragraph 2 (e) makes no reference to foil lining as being sufficient protection. Paragraph 2(h), which addressed matches specifically, was ignored most likely because of its even more restrictive packing conditions. Nevertheless, the envelope was accepted as single piece third class mail at the Raleigh, N. C. post office, perhaps because a broad interpretation of the rules for sending matches was applied in this tobacco-growing region.

\* \* \* \*

### A Prewar Prexie Cover to the U.S.S. *Edsall*

by

Jeffrey Shapiro

Ten 5-cent Prexies paid the 50 cents per half ounce airmail rate (in effect April 1937 thru June 1946) to mail this 1940 correspondence from the U.S. mainland to the Philippines. The letter, between spouses, is addressed to Lt Commander E. M. Crouch then serving on the destroyer U.S.S. *Edsall* (DD 219) and stationed at Manila.



Figure: 1940 family correspondence between Hollywood, California and Manila. Four 5-cent Prexies on the back help pay the half-ounce airmail rate to the Philippines.

Edward Crouch was transferred from the *Edsall* early in 1942. Just weeks later, on March 1, 1942, the ship was lost south of Borneo in the Indian Ocean after being crippled by the Japanese battle cruiser *Chikuma* and subsequently sunk by air strikes from an estimated 26 dive bombers. Crouch was eventually promoted to Commander of the Pacific Destroyer Division #57.

Records indicate that Commander Crouch perished while a passenger aboard the U.S.S. *Indianapolis* three and a half years later. The *Indianapolis* was torpedoed and sunk by the Japanese submarine I-58 on July 30, 1945 after delivering vital parts for the first atomic bomb to the U.S. Air Base at Tinian a few days earlier. This bomb, code named "Little Boy", was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945.

## *Servizio Sospeso* June 1940

by

Louis Fiset

Mussolini's June 1940 offensive into southeast France along the Franco-Italian border brought Italy into World War II. This soon resulted in closure of Mediterranean airspace, requiring new airmail routes for mail transiting the region for destinations in the Middle East, Africa, and parts of Asia. Prior to this, the Italian airline, Ala Littoria, carried significant volumes of transatlantic airmail from Lisbon to Rome for onward transport.

With the fall of France Italian censors began to delay transit mail or suspended it altogether. The three covers shown here illustrate several treatments of interrupted mail at Rome during this June 1940 transition period.



Figure 1: Airmail to Palestine, returned to sender.

Figure 1 shows business mail addressed to Palestine postmarked 5 June 1940 prior to Italy's incursion into France. However, by the time the letter reached Rome, Italy was in the war against Great Britain, and censors condemned this letter addressed to Jerusalem. Since the censor's tape completely covers the address and no other transit marks or evidence of Allied censorship appear, likely the letter was returned to New York.

The 3 June 1940 letter in Figure 2, intended for onward dispatch from Europe to Beirut, also in the Middle East, was also condemned by Italian censors and returned to the U.S. In this case, the Italian *Al mittente* tape was ripped off and the letter transported to the west coast for onward transmission on the FAM 14 route to Hong Kong and subsequent connection with the British Horseshoe Route at Singapore. The letter was received at Victoria (Hong Kong) on 19 Feb 1941 where a "transit by air required" marking (A.V.2.) was placed. This circular marking may be seen tying a 3-cent Prexie at the left. The letter was passed unopened by Singapore censorship (G 24 censorship sorter signature). The *jusq'a* "BY AIR TO Baghdad ONLY" marking, seen at the lower left, was also applied at Singapore. The letter was received at Baghdad on 12 Mar 1941, and at Beirut five days later. The indistinct purple circle at the lower left is a Vichy censor marking applied at Beirut. The addressee has annotated receipt of the letter on 18 Mar 1941, documenting

a total transit time of nine and a half months. [Ed. note: A similar cover may be seen in Figure 3 of Steve Suffet’s article in the No. 60-Winter 2012 issue.]



Figure 2: Airmail to Lebanon, condemned and returned to the U.S. Dispatched by transpacific route to its ultimate destination via Hong Kong, Singapore, and Baghdad.

Finally, the letter to India, shown in Figure 3, also shows only a remnant of the censor’s *Al mittente* tape, which shows the letter was held, but ultimately released. The two-ounce letter (airmail rate to India, 50 cents x 4) reached its intended destination in Bombay where it was censored and subsequently redirected, to New Delhi.



Figure 3: Airmail to India, interrupted, but eventually released and sent on.

Italy capitulated in September 1943. However, for a short time Axis forces continued to control the region, and surface and airmail routes through the Mediterranean remained cut off. Routing across the Mediterranean resumed early in 1944 as Allied forces advanced up the Italian peninsula after North Africa was pacified.