

Naval Cover Fakes, Forgeries and Frauds, Part XI

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Back Dates

The postal service has always prohibited backdating mail by which I mean applying an earlier than the current date on a postmark. Backdating opens the door on all sorts of frauds, small and large, so the practice has correctly been prohibited. Still, the facts clearly indicate that backdating has taken place in our hobby. I think this was more prevalent in the 1930s timeframe when many mail clerks were members of the USCS, the ANCS or both and worked closely with naval cover sponsors. It's not something of which we can be proud but is certainly something which we want to highlight in this series.

Figure 1 is a cover in memory of aviatrix Amelia Earhart who, along with her navigator, Fred Noonan, were lost at sea in the southwest Pacific as she was completing her attempt as the first female pilot to fly around the world. The US Navy sent a number of vessels to search in the vicinity of Howland Island for a life raft or debris indicating a crash. None was found. The cover has a nicely printed cachet of Earhart and a blue type 3 (AC-TBT) postmark from USS SNAPPER (SS 185) dated 2 July 1937. The only problem is that SNAPPER's post office was not established until 15 December 1937 and she would not have received her postal materials until shortly before then, certainly not five months in advance. The postmark is clearly backdated. The cover sponsor is unidentified but Scott Goatley, USCS 1510, was the mail clerk in the submarine. Doubtless, he was working with someone else to create this attractive but fraudulent cover.



Figure 1: Printed cover with memorial cachet for Aviatrix Amelia Earhart, lost at sea in July 1937 while attempting a round-the-world flight. The cover bears a fine blue type 3(AC-TBT) postmark from USS SNAPPER (SS 185). Since SNAPPER's post office was not established until 15 December 1937, it is clear that the postmark was added well after the fact.

One of the most egregious cases of backdating took place in connection with the USS SQUALUS (SS 192) disaster. The story of SQUALUS has been well documented. The ship was commissioned 1 March 1939 at the Portsmouth (NH) Naval Shipyard and sailed on the morning of 23 May for the 19th in a series of sea trial tests near the Isle of Shoals. Unfortunately, the main induction valve was fouled and did not shut fully, the after portion of the ship flooded and SQUALUS sank to the bottom in 40 fathoms (240 feet) of water. Thirty-three survivors were rescued in the first use of the McCann diving bell and, after months of difficult salvage operations, SQUALUS was lifted to the surface, towed to port and dry docked on 15 September 1939. After the ship was dewatered, a shipyard worker reportedly found the ship's cancelling device in the Yeoman's office and used it to create backdated covers. **Figure 2** is dated 23 May, the date the ship sailed on sea trials, **Figure 3** is dated 13 September the day the ship was drydocked. The yard worker made a mistake not uncommon in such cases. Both covers bear the 3¢ Panama Canal 25th Anniversary stamp issued 15 August 1939. Clearly that stamp would not have been available to the SQUALUS postal clerk on May 23rd. Even had the ship not sunk, the fabrication was exposed by the selection of this stamp.



Figure 2: An uncached cover with a USS SQUALUS (SS 192) postmark of 23 May 1939, the day on which she sank in an accident. The stamp issued for the 25th anniversary of the opening of the Panama Canal was not issued until 15 August 1939 providing a clear indication that the postmark was backdated.

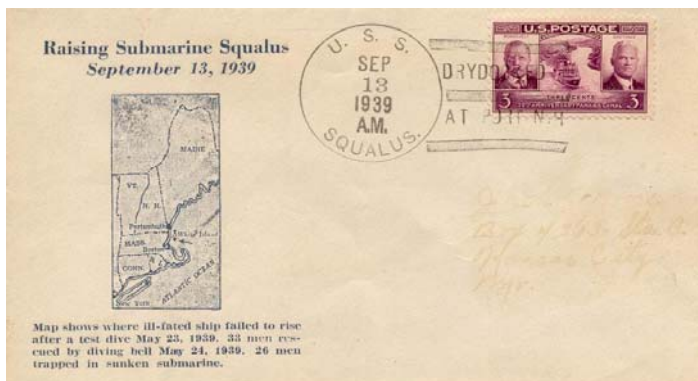


Figure 3: Cover with printed cachet and SQUALUS postmark of 13 September 1939 both noting drydocking of USS SQUALUS after months of salvage effort. The ship was not dewatered until several days later, so it is clear that the cancel was backdated. This cover apparently traveled through the mails to an address in Kansas City, Missouri.

It is not known if the yard worker sold the covers or gave them away. However, **Figure 3** bears a faint address to a post office box in Kansas City, Missouri, which could support either hypothesis. Whichever the case, the theft was apparently discovered and the cancel device recovered. The quantity of covers circulated is unknown, but has to have been small for neither date can readily be found in dealer's boxes. And I have never seen either one advertised on eBay. My guess is that not more than ten or so of each cover exists today.

SQUALUS was decommissioned, refurbished and renamed SAILFISH. A backdated cover adds yet another chapter to this tale. **Figure 4**, a cover with thermograph cachet by Walter Czubay, NCS 1, USCS 997, ANCS 707, was prepared for commissioning of USS CARDINAL (AM 67), a mine sweeper conversion, on 1 November 1940. However, the cover bears a common type 3r (A-BTT) red postmark of USS SAILFISH (SS 192) dated 8 December 1941 with killer bar notation "TAPS FOR/THE JAPS." December 8, 1941 happens to be the date, Manila, Philippine Islands time, when the Japanese attacked the Cavite Naval Station with devastating effects. Can you see the mail clerk cancelling covers with the crew at battle stations while bombs were falling from the sky?




Figure 4: Walter Czubay cacheted cover for commissioning of USS CARDINAL (AM 67) on 2 November 1940. The USS SAILFISH (SS 192) postmark of 8 December 1941 with killer bar notation TAPS FOR/THE JAPS marks the date of the Japanese attack on Manila, Philippine Islands at which time, SAILFISH was proceeding to her war patrol station. This postmark has been seen on other Czubay cacheted covers prepared earlier and unrelated to the start of World War II. That this postmark is backdated is not in question.

In mid 1941, several divisions of more modern submarines were transferred from San Diego and Pearl Harbor to the Philippines and based at Manila, P. I. to strengthen the Asiatic Fleet. SAILFISH, LCDR Morton Mumma, a unit of Submarine Division 22, arrived mid-1941. On 8 December, she was underway to her assigned patrol station when Japanese forces attacked. It is not known when E.C. McQuary, ANCS, the postal clerk, received a stash of CARDINAL FDC covers or cancelled them, but it had to be

quite some time later. Mail for the P.I. was cut off at the start of the war. Most likely McQuary received a package of covers from Czubay after the ship's third war patrol which ended in Australia. As a matter of fact, I have seen this postmark on other covers with different Czubay cachets. We can speculate that, as war began, Czubay gathered together whatever cover blanks he had on hand and sent them post haste to McQuary. It being war time, what did it matter if some covers were backdated with a patriotic slogan? There was a war on. Experienced collectors should not be fooled by this cover, but novices or non-naval cover collectors might be flummoxed by this fakery.

Surely, other backdated covers exist. The problem is obtaining evidence of the misdeed. If a reader has a story to tell, contact the author to add that information to this series.



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