

Naval Cover Fakes, Forgeries and Frauds, Part XIII

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Some Parting Thoughts

We thought we had finished with this series until I came across some odd covers while putting the finishing touches on the next volume of the *Catalog of United States Naval Postmarks*, which will cover receiving ships. Then I found still more covers that bothered me. I suppose there will always be a few covers that we don't truly understand, and whose status has to be considered questionable. Some, of course, are more obvious than others.

Consider, for example, these covers produced by a cachetmaker named D. R. Annis. The cancel (Figure 1) is little more than a crude drawing of the standard Type 3 cancel from the Brooklyn Receiving Ship.



Figure 1: Brooklyn Receiving Ship Type 3 on D.R. Annis covers. Note the 'E' in EXPLODES begins even with middle killer bar on front cancel, but begins with wingding on cancel on reverse side.

I've found three usages, all in April and May of 1937. Annis lived in Brooklyn, and getting genuine cancels on his covers was a simple matter of driving down to the Brooklyn Navy Yard, in the days when gas was a nickel a gallon. What's especially odd about the Hindenburg crash cover is that it has a genuine cancel on the back. In the 1930s, many cover sponsors gave fancy cancels to ships, but it would be hard to call this drawing "fancy." At the time, Brooklyn was home to many of the hobby's great cachetmakers, but Annis doesn't seem to have been part of the "in crowd," and I find no mention of him in journals of the time. I haven't seen this marking on any but his cachets.

Incidentally, collectors may suspect that commemorative Hindenburg crash covers are all backdated, but I believe that at least those from the Brooklyn Receiving Ship are genuine

and properly dated. The giant airship burned and crashed about 7:30 in the evening over in New Jersey, and the disaster was immediately reported on radio. Although I haven't been able to find it lately, I'm almost sure I've read contemporary reports from one of the cachetmakers about rushing down to the Yard and rousing the mail clerk from his evening routine to cancel covers, with cachets, of course, to be added later.

Another cancel that has always bothered me is this USS NEW YORK marking found on some event covers in the era around World War II. At first glance it looks like an ordinary type 3 cancel, but there's something about it that just doesn't look right. (One collector once asked me how you tell that something "doesn't look right," and my answer is that when you've looked at a couple of million covers; you develop a sixth sense about cancels.) I have or have seen half a dozen covers with this cancel. The earliest is a December 1939 cachet by George Sadworth, one of the famed Brooklyn group of cachetmakers (Figure 2). Another pair of cachets with this cancel (Figures 3 & 4) looks very much like those produced by John Von Losberg and Mike Sanders, two more of the Brooklyn cachetmakers who made covers under the name Stanlos Cachet Service. John Young chronicled their work in an article in the December 2003 *Log*. A fourth usage appears on this February 1941 cachet by William Spader, who produced many covers for the construction of submarines at Groton, Conn. (Figure 5).



Figure 2: USS NEW YORK Type 3 cancel on Sadworth cacheted cover.

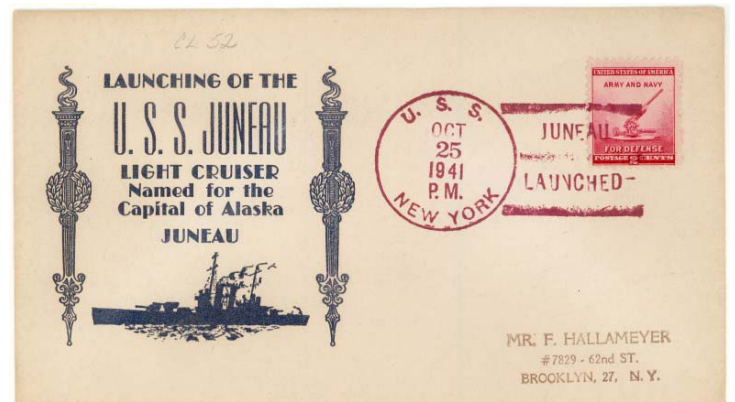


Figure 3: USS NEW YORK Type 3 cancel on John Von Losberg cacheted cover.



Figure 4: USS NEW YORK Type 3 cancel on Mike Sanders' cacheted cover for Atlantic Charter Conference.



Figure 5: USS NEW YORK Type 3 cancel on William Spaders' cacheted cover for USS GROWLER Keel Laying at Groton.

Surprisingly, I also found an example of this cancel backdated to 1933 on eBay, the Internet auction site. The seller there described the cancel as "fake," although I don't know who the seller was and I'm not certain how he decided it is a fake. This cover (Figure 6) appears to be listed in the 1986 *Nobel's Cacheted Presidential Inaugural Covers* catalog, but it is not illustrated and is not described as a fake there. Perhaps the seller assumed the cancel is a fake because he knows that Sanders didn't start using this style of cachet until several years after the date on the cover.



Figure 6: Backdated Sanders' cachet with USS NEW YORK cancel showing 1933 date.

The status of these covers might be clearer if we knew just where the battleship NEW YORK was when these covers were canceled. Unfortunately, the ship's official history is rather vague on her homeport after she returned to the Atlantic Fleet around 1937, although I suspect it was more likely Norfolk than Brooklyn. Her history does say that by mid-1941 she was assigned to the Atlantic Neutrality Patrol, and she sailed to Iceland in July. After that she became the station ship at Argentia, Newfoundland.

The Atlantic Charter meeting mentioned on the 9 August cover (Figure 4) did indeed take place off Argentia, but whether she was there at the time is not clear. The meeting between Roosevelt and Churchill was top secret, however, so this would have to be an "add-on" cachet, added to the cover later. However, I just can't believe that the mail clerk would dare to cancel even blank covers for such a secret event.

An unusual characteristic of Type 3 cancels of this period is a small thin line above or below the thick killer bars. On this cancel I can see a thin line above the top and bottom killers, but the center bar is always too poorly struck to show any detail. The last prewar cancel we list for NEW YORK is a 3(A-TBT), which may be this cancel. However, by the summer of 1941 all ships in the Atlantic were using 3z or Fz cancels, just "U.S. NAVY" without the ship's name. It was very difficult to make really good forged postmarks in those days, and despite the fact that these covers look suspicious, the cancels look pretty good. What might have happened is that someone among the Brooklyn cachetmakers acquired the genuine cancel from the ship and used it on covers. The Spader cover for USS GROWLER (Figure 5) presents a question: why did he use a cancel from a ship many miles away on this cover when most of his other covers in that period were postmarked either in Groton, or on a ship at the Groton submarine base? One possibility is that he missed the event, keel layings tending to be poorly publicized. However, he had a friend in Brooklyn who had a suitable postmark so when he found out the date, he sent his covers to the friend and requested this specific date for the cancel. The cover is unaddressed and was obviously not mailed.

Another problem with this cancel is that it is invariably struck in color -- various shades of red blue and light violet. The only colors of stamp pads used in post offices in that era were black and a distinctive shade of bright magenta. I do realize that there were many colored cancels during the 1930s, the results of collectors providing colored stamp pads to mail clerks. However, by the summer of 1941, there was just no opportunity for a collector to bring a colored stamp pad aboard the battleship.

It gets murkier. NEW YORK spent the last part of the war in the Pacific but returned to her namesake city for the gala Navy Day 1945 celebrations. I have covers from her there with a type 3 cancel but it's not this cancel. It's the 3(A-BBT) cancel that we say was first issued in 1938 (many mail clerks found prewar cancels in the backs of drawers when the war ended). Yet, I have a first day cover of the Merchant Marine stamp (26 February 1946) with our old suspect cancel.



Figure 7: USS NEW YORK cancellation 27 October 1945 with Navy Day 1945 cachet.

Figure 8: Bikini atom bomb test with Smartcraft cachet and suspect NEW YORK cancel. Scan courtesy of John Young.

Even more suspicious is a Smartcraft cachet (Figure 8) for the Bikini atom bomb tests with this cancel dated 30 June 1946. NEW YORK was there as a target ship but her crew, by then, was back at Kwajalein with their equipment. Our records say her last day covers have the standard postwar 2(n) cancel not this old one. Smartcraft cachets were the product of Ludwig Staehle and Staehle used Alex Hesse as his printer -- Alex was more than a great cachetmaker, he was also a professional printer. That puts the cover back in Brooklyn where we believe our cancel resided.

All of the people involved with these covers are long gone, so I suppose we will never know the whole answer.

This series has been intended to help you identify fakes and Frauds, but as this discussion shows, the lines are not always that clearly drawn. What we really hope is that we've helped you develop that sixth sense about covers that will help you avoid disappointment in your collecting odyssey.

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