

Naval Cover Fakes, Forgeries and Frauds, Part VI

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Frederick L. Karcher:

A Legacy of Fake and Fraudulent Naval Postmarks

The USCS *Log* articles by John Young concerning the 1976 International Naval Review (“INR”) and Operation Sail (“OPSAIL”) (*Log* July 2008) and by Bob Rawlins (*Log* June 2008) addressed only two parts of the Fred Karcher problem. No sponsor of naval covers created such an extensive and expansive stock of questionable postmarks as did Karcher from the late 1960s through his premature death in the early 1980s. While Bob Rawlins explored the authenticity of Karcher’s Vietnam ‘free mail’, this article considers postmarks that he created or altered for use on covers he sponsored. Karcher’s Vietnam ‘free mail’ covers are fairly easy to recognize: his covers bear similar handwritten notation of “Free” or “Free Combat Zone”, Karcher’s gaudy cachet with raised thermographic printing, were almost inevitably mailed to him. Taking Bob Rawlins’s thesis to its logical conclusion, those who believe that all philatelic “Free Mail” is *per se* fraudulent are on notice by merely looking at the face of the cover that the mail was not sent by a Sailor for personal use. Those who do not accept the *per se* rule still are on notice of the nature and origin of the cover even if the precise location of the ship within the war zone cannot be established without research. Importantly, this series of articles about fakes and frauds deals almost exclusively with covers created by sponsors for sale and resale at a profit not covers created by collectors for their personal collections.

Figure A is a Karcher “Combat Zone Free” frank postmarked on board USS WEDDERBURN (DD 684) Type 2(n+) dated 15 January 1968 with a “postage due 6 cents” rubber stamp and ink marking immediately below. The cover bears the typical raised ink thermo cachet, Karcher’s rubber stamp return address in Mount Top, PA and his hand written “Free Combat Zone” frank in lieu of postage. The ship was not in a combat zone on 15 January 1968. The *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships* (DANFS) discloses that: “WEDDERBURN reached San Diego on 6 October [1967] and began the normal post-deployment stand down. In mid-November, she resumed normal operations in the southern California operating area. That routine continued until she began repairs at Long Beach on 19 April 1968. She returned to San Diego on 24 May and resumed normal operations out of her home port. WEDDERBURN embarked upon the final western Pacific deployment of her career on 30 September....” Perhaps this is

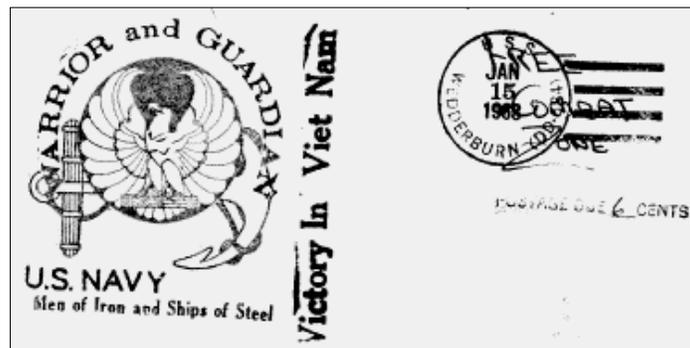


Figure A: USS WEDDERBURN (DD 684) cover.

as close to a legitimate Karcher cover as could exist. Did WEDDERBURN’s postal clerk properly add the “postage due” notation since he was aware that the ship was off southern California and not in the war zone on the date he postmarked Karcher’s covers?

During the early 1970s, Karcher moved to Millis, MA from which he routinely visited the Cruiser Destroyer Force ships homeported at Newport, RI. He had access to many post offices and many of the Atlantic Fleet ships, which had served off Vietnam. Thus, Karcher was able to get postmarks from these ships and often sponsored covers using their cancels for shipbuilding events.

There is substantial credible evidence that Karcher created his own postmarks for ships based upon proof provided by some of the four USCS members who purchased his estate. The estate contained nearly four dozen rubber stamp postmarks for U.S. naval ships during the period of the late 1960s through the time of Karcher’s death. Most of those postmarks were incomplete, bearing only the circular portion of the cancels, not the killer bars, and generally not having dates within the circles.

Dave Kent has reported: “Obviously Karcher had a ‘base’ cancel with just killer bars and the slots for a date, because many of the cancels I have are only the dial. Unfortunately, the killer bars are often an important part of a forgery, because they are usually irregular and show signs of retouching (usually caused by ‘erasing’ the stamp from a Xerox copy with Witeout) ... I believe the only complete cancel there was was the DALE forgery reproduced in the *Catalog*. ... I have never kept any of the forgeries myself, and I need to ask others what they can offer to help illustrate the article. ...”

Ultimately, we could uncover many more fraudulent cancels and backdated covers made by Karcher in addition to the known fraudulent cancels discussed in this article if we were to carefully examine the killer bars in other Karcher sponsored covers. Karcher was a regular user of rubber stamps to manufacture his printed cachets as well as the fraudulent postmarks discussed in this article. Additionally, genuine postal cancelling devices, with handles were found in his estate. At least one of these, the HALSEY Type 9 postmark, was improperly removed from the ship’s post office. Further research and information may disclose many other examples of fake or fraudulent postmarks manufactured or used by Karcher.

Moreover, Karcher created 170 sets of backdated, fraudulent ship postmarked covers for submarine events with dates starting in the 1950s. This is discussed in Part C. He used cancellations from 19 ships, only one of which, USS FULTON (AD 19), was reported to have fraudulent postmarks. **Figures 19 and 19a.**

We know the names of 12 of the 19 ships whose postmarks were fraudulently used by Karcher in creating this set of 170 event covers but the names of the remaining seven ships need to be uncovered and their postmarks analyzed. None of the 170 nuclear submarine covers are known outside the collections of the original purchasers of the Karcher estate.

There is the need for the study of Karcher event covers for surface ships as well to confirm the extent and nature of fraudulent postmarks.

Attached are illustrations of 43 fraudulent postmarks created by Karcher and three probably stolen cancels all found in his estate when it was purchased by four Nathan Hale chapter members a quarter century ago. What is most troubling about these postmarks is the fact that they span a broader era than the timeframe normally ascribed to Karcher's misdeeds. The DE and DLG cancels must pre-date 1 July 1975 when the ships' designations were changed to FF on one hand and on the other to CG or DDG. Some of the cancels concern events in the 1960s, particularly ships that were deployed to combat operations off Vietnam. If we were to add the additional 18 ships with postmarks Karcher used to cancel his nuclear submarine event covers then the total would reach about 60 ships with known fraudulent and backdated postmarks with dates reaching back to the 1950s. Karcher had forged or stolen postmarks from nearly 10% of all U.S. warships with post offices and the fleet's nadir during the Carter administration. Karcher distributed his covers with cachets marked "Old Ironsides Chapter," "FLK," or "Narragansett Naval Group." What is most confusing and troublesome is that legitimate postmarks and covers may exist with the same dates from the same ships. The evidence uncovered now implicates only covers bearing Karcher's cachets. Covers from the same ships or with base or tender postmarks by other sponsors and individuals are not considered suspect. This analysis is strictly limited to Karcher sponsored covers. Importantly, non-Karcher covers and postmarks from the same ship, even with the same dates, are not in issue.

Immediately following is a discussion of documented forged cancels created by Karcher for use on naval covers with dates ranging between the late 1960s and his death in 1982. Many of the fraudulent postmarks had no dates or could have dates installed; many also did not have killer bars but only the circular portion of the cancelling device. Since evidence of the fraudulent postmarks was discovered in the Karcher estate, we now know that the following 43 postmarks were created by Karcher and have been described by the *USCS Catalog of U.S. Naval Postmarks* (Kent, David A., editor in chief, 5th ed. 1997) (hereinafter "*Postmark Catalog*") as fraudulent cancels. The page references following each Figure refer to the pages in the *Postmark Catalog* where the fraudulent cancels are discussed.

Part A:

The Known Rubber Stamp Matrix of 43 Postmarks

Figure 1 is the undated Type 2t(n+) postmark for USS BOSTON (CA 69) which must have been between 1 May

1968, the date she was redesignated from CAG-1 to CA-69, and the disestablishment of her post office on 2 February 1970 and her decommissioning on 5 May 1970. *Postmark Catalog* p. B 16.



Figure 2 is the undated USS SHANGRI LA (CVA 38) Type 2(n+) postmark. *Postmark Catalog* p. S 19. This postmark should have pre-dated her redesignation as CVS-38 on 30 June 1969. Admittedly, some ships continued to use postmarks with their old designations after the change of designator.



Figure 3 is the USS NEW JERSEY (BB-62) postmark Type 2(n+) dated 6 April 1968, the date of her recommissioning for service in Vietnam which lasted barely one year. *Postmark Catalog* p. N 5.



Many of the fraudulent postmarks from Karcher pre-date 1970 and involved ships that deployed to Vietnam. Other Karcher-made postmarks seem to be from Bicentennial International Naval Review and Operation Sail in 1976. On 4 July 1976 President Gerald R. Ford, the last of four consecutive World War II naval reserve officers to serve as Commander-in-Chief, reviewed the fleets of the world and tall ships in New York. Karcher's postmarks for USS DALE (CG 19) (**Figure 4**), USS CONSTITUTION (**Figures 5, 5a and 5b**) USS SAVANNAH (AOR 4) (**Figure 6**), and USS MOUNT WHITNEY (LCC 20) (**Figure 7**) all suggest use on the bicentennial date. The *Postmark Catalog* p. D 1 indicates by illustration, that a forged Type 2(n+) is known to exist with the 4 July 1976 date for DALE. The same authoritative source indicates that two of the postmarks for the Boston-based USS CONSTITUTION are of questionable lineage implying that they were limited to Karcher sponsored covers. Page C 24. The USS SAVANNAH July 4th Type 2(nu) postmark also is listed in the *Postmark Catalog* p. S 14 as a forgery. The MOUNT WHITNEY 4 July 1976 Type 2(n) postmark is listed as a forgery in the *Postmark Catalog* p. M 25.

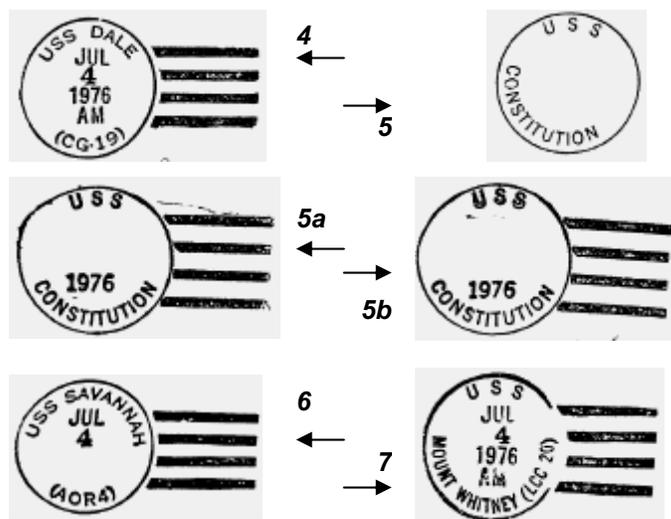


Figure 1 is the undated Type 2t(n+) postmark for USS BOSTON (CA 69) which must have been between 1 May

Figure 8 is the 31 October 1972 Type 2(n) last day postal service cancel from USS ARCTURUS (AF 52). *Postmark Catalog* p. A 15.



Figure 9 is the undated USS AUSTIN (LPD 4) Type 2(n) error postmark. *N.B.* The opening parenthesis is missing before the designator and hull number at the lower right of the dial (the 5-4 o'clock position). In addition, the "L" in the designator in the dial appears to be higher and thicker than the other two letters "PD." *Postmark Catalog* p. A 23.



Figure 10 is the Type 2(n+) USS ALYWIN (DE 1081) undated postmark. This postmark would have been in use between her first day postal service on 18 September 1971 and her redesignation as a FF on 1 July 1975. *Postmark Catalog* pp. A22-24.



Figure 11 is the Type 2(n+) USS BLAKELY (DE 1072) undated postmark. This postmark would have been in use between her first day postal service 18 July 1970 and her redesignation as a FF on 1 July 1975. *Postmark Catalog* p. B.



Figure 12 is the Type 2(n+) USS BREWTON (DE 1086) undated postmark. This postmark would have been in use between her first day postal service 8 July 1972 and her redesignation as a FF on 1 July 1975. *Postmark Catalog* p. B 19.



Figure 13 is the undated USS CHARLES H. ROAN (DD 853) Type 2 (n+) postmark. Two Type 2(n+) postmarks were used by the ship between 1962 and her decommissioning in September 1973. *Postmark Catalog* p. C 11.



Figure 14 is the undated USS CHILTON (LPA 38) Type 2 (n+) postmark. Two Type 2(n+) postmarks were used by the ship between 1969, when her designator was changed from APA to LPA, until her decommissioning in July 1972. *Postmark Catalog* p. C 16.



Figure 15 is the USS DAHLGREN (DLG 12) Type 2(n) postmark dated 4 February 1972, the date of the initial disestablishment of her post office prior to decommissioning for modernization. A legitimate Type 2(n+) postmark was used by the ship on her LDPS. *Postmark Catalog* p. D1.



Figure 16 is the undated USS FARRAGUT (DDG 37) Type 2(n+) postmark. Her designator was changed from DLG 6 to DDG 37 on 1 July 1975 and she served under that designation until her



decommissioning in October 1989. *Postmark Catalog* p. F 2.

Figure 17 is the undated USS FORRESTAL (CV 59) Type 2(n+) postmark. Her designator was changed from CVA 59 to CV 59 on 1 July 1975 and she served under that designation until her redesignation as AVT 59 4 February 1992. *Postmark Catalog* p. F 7.



Figure 18 and 18a are the undated USS FORT SNELLING (LSD 30) Type 2(n+) and 2(n+u) postmarks. *Postmark Catalog* p. F 7.



Figures 19 and 19a are the undated USS FULTON (AS 11) type 2(n+) and 2(n+u) postmarks. *Postmark Catalog* pp. F 10-11.



19

19a



Figure 20 is the undated USS FURSE (DD 882) Type 9ft postmark. *Postmark Catalog* p. F 11.



Figure 21 is the undated USS GRAHAM COUNTY (AGP 1136) Type 2t(nu) postmark. Her designator was changed from LST 1136 to AGP 1136 on 1 August 1972 and she served under that designation until her decommissioning in February 1977. *Postmark Catalog* p. G 11.



Figure 22 is the undated USS GRANT COUNTY (LST 1174) Type 2(n) postmark. She used that style of postmark from 1972 until her decommissioning in January 1973. *Postmark Catalog* p. G 11.



Figures 23 and 23a are two undated USS HALSEY (DLG 23) Type 2(n+) postmarks. Her designator was changed from DLG 23 to CG 23 on 1 July 1975 and she served under the DLG 23 designation from her initial commissioning on 20 July 1963 and her recommissioning on 16 December 1972 at Bath, Maine until her redesignation. *Postmark Catalog* p. H 2. In addition, it is known that Karcher attended the recommissioning ceremony and that the XO of HALSEY reported missing postal equipment and that a USPS investigation was conducted of the individuals who were present in the ship's post office that day. See following discussion concerning the ship's Type 9 postmark illustrated below as **Figure 38**.



Figure 24 is the undated USS JOSEPHUS DANIELS (DLG 27) Type 2(n+) postmark. Her designator was changed from DLG 23 to CG 23 on 1 July 1975. The closing parenthesis is either weak or missing. *Postmark Catalog* p. J 7



Figure 25 is the Type 2(n+) USS KIRK (DE 1087) undated postmark. This postmark would have been in use between her first day postal service 9 September 1972 and her redesignation as FF on 1 July 1975. *Postmark Catalog* p. K 6.



Figure 26 is the undated USS LA SALLE (LPD 3) Type 2t(n+u) postmark. *N.B.* The “P” is missing in the designator “LPD.” The ship used the designation LPD 3 between her commissioning on 22 February 1964 and her redesignation on 1 July 1972. *Postmark Catalog* p. L 1.



Figure 27 is the Type 2(n+) USS LOCKWOOD (DE 1064) undated postmark. This postmark would have been in use between her first day postal service 5 December 1970 and her redesignation as FF on 1 July 1975. *Postmark Catalog* p. L 11.



Figure 28 is the Type 2(nu) USS MEYERKORD (DE 1058) undated postmark. This postmark would have been in use between her first day postal service 28 November 1968 and her redesignation as an FF on 1 July 1975. *Postmark Catalog* pp. M 15-16.



Figure 29 is the undated USS MISSISSINEWA (AO 144) Type 9ef postmark. *Postmark Catalog* p. M 18.



Figure 30 is the undated USS NASHVILLE (LPD 13) Type 2(n) postmark. *Postmark Catalog* pp. N 1-2.



Figure 31 is the Type 2(n) USS OUELLET (DE 1077) undated postmark. This postmark would have been in use between her first day postal service 17 December 1972 and her redesignation as an FF on 1 July 1975. *Postmark Catalog* pp. O 7-8.



Figure 32 is the Type 2(n) USS ROARKE (DE 1053) undated postmark. This postmark would have been in use between her first day postal service 22 November 1969 and her redesignation as an FF on 1 July 1975. *Postmark Catalog* p. R 11.



Figure 33 is the undated USS SAN BERNARDINO (LST 1189) Type 2(n+) postmark. She used that style of postmark from her commissioning on 27 March 1971. *Postmark Catalog* pp. S 7-8.



Figure 34 is the 10 June 1972 USS SIMON LAKE (AS 33) Type 2t(n+u) postmark. This coincided with the launch date of TUNNY. She used that style of postmark from 1969 onward. *Postmark Catalog* p. S 22.



Figure 35 is the undated USS VALCOUR (AGF 1) Type 2(n) postmark. She was redesignated as AGF 1 on 15 December 1965 and decommissioned on 15 January 1973. *Postmark Catalog* p. V 1.



Figure 36 is the undated USS WAINWRIGHT (CG 28) Type 2(n) postmark. Her designator was changed from DLG 28 to CG 28 on 1 July 1975. *Postmark Catalog* p. W 2.



Part B:

The “Genuine Cancels Attached to Handles”

Figure 37 is the 22 February 1964 First Day in commission Type 2(n+) cancel from USS LA SALLE (LPD 3) with killer bars attached.

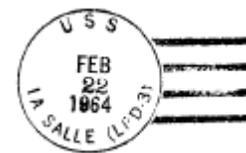


Figure 38 is the Type 9 postmark from USS HALSEY (DLG 23) with only the date “16” in the circle. See discussion of Figures 23 and 23a above. Karcher and America Chapter member Larry Briend attended the recommissioning of HALSEY at Bath, Maine on 16 December 1972. The ship’s executive officer, LCDR R.A.K. Taylor, USN, became involved in the investigation of the loss of one or more of the ship’s postmarks. In turn, US Postal Inspectors commenced an investigation and attempted to discover which person who had access to the ship’s postmark on the recommissioning date took the postmark. Briend credibly denied involvement in the theft. The recovery of the Type 9 postmark in Karcher’s estate, a decade after the incident, conclusively implicates him in its removal from the ship.

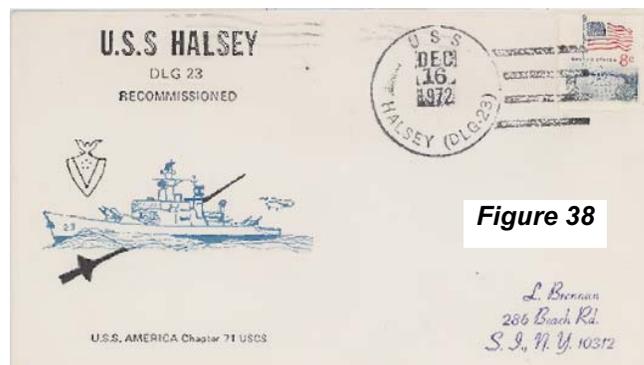


Figure 38

Figures 39 and 39a are Type 9 cancels from the Groton post office. Figure 39 is a cancellation device with the handle still attached dated 16 January 1977. The date coincides with the death of Rear Admiral Daniel V. Gallery, U.S. Navy (Ret.). Figure 39a is an undated type 9 for the Groton, CT Submarine Base Station "USPO" which was reported as one of the copies of cancels in Karcher's rubber stamp matrix.



Figure 39
Figure 39a



Part C:

Known Fraudulent Backdated Submarine Covers

One of the most knowledgeable scholars of naval postmarks is David A. Kent long-serving president of Nathan Hale Chapter. He is the editor of the *Postmark Catalog*. Dave was one of the four chapter members who purchased the covers from the Karcher estate. Following is his description of a third and largest known aspect of the Karcher fakes and fraudulent covers, expanding the scope of the fraudulent postmark dates on Karcher's covers back to the 1950s.

"[T]he main reason for all these forged cancels wasn't to make covers from those ships, but rather to make fake 'event' covers -- keel layings, launching, and so on. One of the first things Frank Hoak found when he first looked at the accumulation was thousands of obvious fakes. Of course, we destroyed most of them, but we kept a few sets as evidence. I will attach a scan of just three of them. I dug out what I have and counted 170 different nuclear submarine 'events' covers of his, all obvious fakes. They have 'postmarks' from 19 different ships, FULTON (AS 11) being the most common (53). Others include CHARLES H. ROAN (DD 853), BARRY (DD 933), DIAMOND HEAD (AE 19), VOGELGESANG (DD 862), CADMUS (AR 14), JOHN WILLS (DE 1027), JOHN R. PIERCE (DD 755), EDWARD MCDONNELL (DE/FF 1043), DYESS (DD 880) and GLOVER (AG 163/AGDE 1/AGFF 1/FF 1098). The covers as we found them were in bundles of generally 35 each, neatly wrapped in plastic and obviously being stored for the future. I know that Karcher once told someone that after we all died he would really go into business. Although our own personal interests were in submarines, I believe Karcher also made fake event covers for a number of surface ships. I don't have any of those, just the submarines, and although we destroyed all the submarine covers, it is possible that Jack Howland let some of the fake surface events get into circulation. Incidentally, the 'FAKE/BACKDATED' rubber stamp obviously was not on the original covers. Stan Honeyman added it to all of the examples we kept just in case any got out. I still have the rubber stamp if you ever need one.

"Karcher needed lots of stamps to make these fakes, and we found hundreds and hundreds of 3, 4 and 5-cent commemoratives in his estate as well. Most people use ordinary definitive stamps on Navy covers, but it's hard to find old mint definitives -- few people save them, but many

people save commemoratives. That's why he generally used commemoratives instead.

"By the way, there were four of us in the partnership that acquired his estate -- Frank, Jack, Stan Honeyman and me. We needed that many partners both to finance the purchase, and to provide the manpower to sort out and dispose of the material. Because there was so much stuff (it filled a 24-foot U-haul truck), it is possible that in the process we missed getting some more of the fake cancels, or that we accidentally discarded some of them in all of the flotsam and jetsam that we handled. The same goes for accidentally letting some of the fakes get out."

At a bare minimum there must have been about 6,000 submarine event covers (170 x 35) but it is highly likely that there were many times that number with Karcher bundling his covers in small groups for efficient sub packaging. Again, we have been told that there were about one million covers in Karcher's estate and presumably a significant number were the obvious fakes and frauds which were "thrown in the garbage" literally and figuratively. Few, if any of the submarine event covers Dave Kent discussed have been seen regularly in dealers' stock, on eBay, in the *Log Auctions*, or otherwise available for sale.

Of the 19 different ships with postmarks involved in the "mother lode" of 170 nuclear submarine events, we now have identified 12 ships (11 in the narrative quoted above and a 12th in the accompanying illustrations) with questionable postmarks but seven ships have yet to be named. Of this group of 19 ships with postmarks, only a single ship is reported to have fraudulent postmarks according to the *Postmark Catalog*. Thus, there was no readily available public source for collectors or scholars to help determine the legitimacy of postmarks on the covers sponsored by Karcher for nuclear submarine events. Dave Kent recalled specifically that they uncovered 10,269 cacheted and stamped envelopes ready to be postmarked with fake and backdated cancels. The number of cacheted and canceled fraudulent covers in Karcher's estate remains unknown.

Following is a discussion of the postmarks of the 12 identified ships used by Karcher for postmarking his 170 nuclear submarine events. Additional ships and further details should be made available by individuals who have access or records relating to the Karcher estate.

1. USS FULTON (AS 11) discussed in Figures 19 and 19a above was known to have two fraudulent postmarks, Type 2(n+) and 2(n+u). *Postmark Catalog* pp. F 10-11. See discussion of Figures 19 and 19a above.
2. USS CHARLES H. ROAN (DD 853) POD 12 SEP 973 and LDC 21 SEP 1973. *Postmark Catalog* p. C 11.
3. USS BARRY (DD 933) POD 1982 and LDC 5 NOV 1982. *Postmark Catalog* p. B 5.
4. USS DIAMOND HEAD (AE 19) POD FEB 1973 and LDC 10 MAR 1973. *Postmark Catalog* p. D 7.
5. USS VOGELGSANG (DD 862) POD unknown and LDC 21 FEB 1982. *Postmark Catalog* p. V 5.
6. USS CADMUS (AR 14) POD 30 SEP 1970 and LDC 14 SEP 1971. *Postmark Catalog* pp. C 1-2.

7. USS JOHN WILLS (DE 1027) POD 30 JUN 1972 and LDC 14 JUL 1972. *Postmark Catalog* p. J 6.

8. USS JOHN R. PIERCE (DD 753) POD 31 MAR 1973 and LDC 2 JUL 1973. *Postmark Catalog* p. J 5.

9. USS EDWARD MCDONNELL (DE/FF 1043) POD 15 AUG 1988 and LDC 30 SEP 1988. *Postmark Catalog* p. E 3.

10. USS DYESS (DD 880) POD 31 MAR 1971 and LDC 27 FEB 1981. *Postmark Catalog* p. D 13.

11. USS GLOVER (AG 163/AGDE 1/AGFF 1/FF 1098) POD 25 MAY 1990 LDC 11 JUL 1990. *Postmark Catalog* p. G 9.

12. USS GRAND CANYON (AD 28/AR 28) POD 5 AUG 1978 and LDC 1 SEP 1978. Her designation was changed to AR 28 on 12 March 1971. *Postmark Catalog* p. G 11.

Dave Kent also has commented that the cancels used by Karcher on the 170 nuclear submarine events found in the estate do not necessarily appear to be fraudulent but rather seem of higher quality and clarity suggesting that they may have been genuine postmarks. At least three known legitimate USPS postmarks were found in Karcher's estate. Dave Kent concluded that it is probable that the cancels used on these sets were either, "very high quality forgeries" or made by "stolen" postmarks. The third possible option is that Karcher had the cooperation of Postal Clerks on board the ships to apply their then-legitimate cancels to his event covers with the requested dates, with or without cachet, and hand them back. This third possibility would have required either a clerk entrusting his cancels to Karcher or a postal clerk willing to insert 'dates' and 'years' decades before the date and cancel old stamps not of the current first class postage rates.

Dave Kent "studied the postmarks on the 170 nuclear submarine event covers" which were backdated. He concluded that these covers, found in the Karcher estate, "all look very good. None of the obviously touched-up killer bars that you usually see on forgeries, and the impressions are sharp and clear rather than the usual fuzzy appearance of forgeries (given that he was using a mediocre quality rubber stamp pad). I would therefore assume that the cancels were either stolen or happen to be very high quality forgeries. I don't have the time to check all of them right now against the forgeries that I have, but the FULTON [it's a 2(n+)] looks very close to the forgery, except that the forgery is only the dial, no killer bars."

It may never be possible to determine if Karcher had genuine postmarks for 18 of the 19 ships whose postmarks were found on submarine event covers or if he had "very high forgeries." Dave Kent noted: "The problem with the forgeries/stolen cancels is that Stan Honeyman took them, and when Stan died they became mixed up with the hundreds of molds and matrixes for the rubber stamp cachets that Stan made to donate to ships. Bill Everett ended up with all that material, and I'm not sure he ever thoroughly researched all the boxes of material for any stray cancels that might be hiding in the bottom of the boxes."

Figure 40 is part of a cover marking the launching of SKIPJACK (SSN 585) postmarked on board USS BARRY

(DD 933) dated 26 May 1958 with a Type 2(n+) cancel, the date of the actual event.



Figure 41 is part of a cover marking the launching of SEADRAGON (SSN 584) postmarked on board USS GRAND CANYON (AD 28) with a Type 2t(n+) cancel dated 16 August 1958, the date of the actual event.

Figure 42 is a cover marking the launching of SWORDFISH (SSN 579) postmarked on board USS BARRY (DD 933) with a Type 2(+) cancel dated 27 August 1957, the date of the actual event.¹

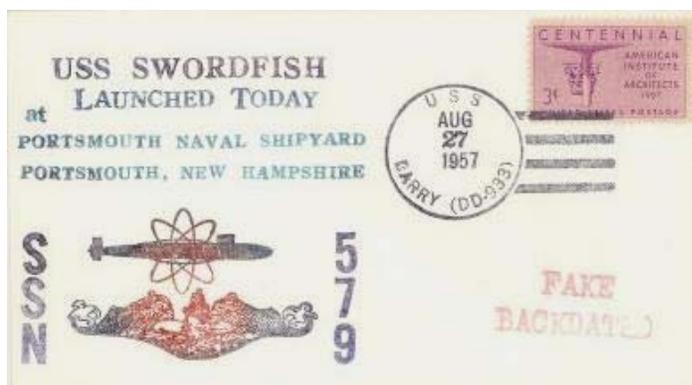


Figure 42: USS SWORDFISH Launching cover by Karcher. Compare with Barry cancel in Figure 40.

While the two BARRY postmarks are nine months apart in both postmarks the day, month, and years are "two blocked to the left" but the "date, month, year" orders are different. She used that type of postmark between her initial commissioning in 1956 and initial decommissioning in 1967 and again from 1978 to her final decommissioning. BARRY is currently a museum ship at the Washington Navy Yard.

We now have established that Karcher had access to at least 62 different postmarks to use on his covers (43 known frauds, one misappropriated USS HALSEY, plus the additional 18 cancels used for his nuclear submarine events). Fifty-six of the ships' postmarks used by Karcher for his fake and fraudulent covers are discussed in this article; six more ships need to be named in public from the list of 19 ships used by Karcher to obtain postmarks for his nuclear submarine event covers. The period of Karcher covers with fake or fraudulent postmark dates spans more than two and a half decades from the mid to late 1950s to the early 1980s. While this newly disclosed evidence of the expansive extent and nature of the Karcher fakes and frauds and the apparent motive for these covers has come to light it does not preclude, but in fact compels, the probability that there are further abuses to be found by study of Karcher cancels. Dave Kent's

¹ Figures 40 through 42 courtesy of David A. Kent.

warning about the probability that Karcher made covers for surface ships is worth considering carefully and mandates that further study and investigative reporting. Moreover, this evidence leads to the conclusion that all Karcher covers bearing hand stamp postmarks (Type 2) should be considered questionable.

At the risk of saying something in defense of systemic illegal activity, it must be appreciated that Karcher was interested in providing ships' postmarks for his covers. He could have used fraudulent backdated generic shore side postmarks. Alternatively, he could have sponsored pictorial postmarks, although that fad would arise after Karcher's death. Perversely, if he had avoided backdated covers, then he could have had legitimate shore side pictorial postmarks and the postal service would have paid for the rubber stamp postmarks.

Part D: The Theft of Other Chapter's Artwork

Thirty plus years ago, the limited action by the USCS Board to preclude Karcher from advertising covers as a USCS member or chapter had little effect, if any, on deterring his activities. There are literally hundreds of thousands of Karcher covers still in existence. Some collectors attempt to divine the "chaff" from the "wheat." A more simplistic approach is to presume that all Karcher covers are suspect and thus devoid of collecting value. The ancient Roman legal maxim, "false in one, false in all," applies.

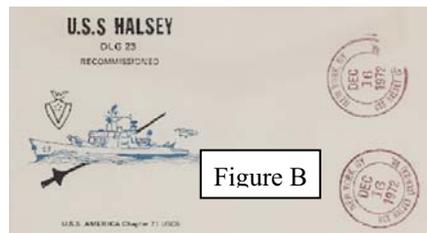
The cachets on the face of many Karcher covers were the result of his theft of artwork, not merely recycling old cuts and designs of earlier sponsors, Karcher literally converted the artwork of another USCS chapter and incorporated it into his cachet designs.

Unlike most collectors, Karcher had a profit motive in the hobby. It is hard to understand how anyone could imagine earning substantial money from creating covers that sold for between a quarter and half a dollar in the late 1960s and 1970s, even when postage was less than a dime. Nevertheless, it is clear that Karcher was in the volume business and created more than a million covers. He also understood that a cachet was necessary to the production and sale of his product. His cachets were self-printed using raised ink print and a series of colors. Rather than paying for a professional printer and art work, Karcher cobbled together his cachets and printed them using a rubber stamp impression instead of a steel plate as would have been used by most lithographers or a block cut used in letter press. To save expense, he would include numerous cuts on the same plate and then literally cut each piece out of the rubber. It would be similar to the practice he probably employed to create his rubber stamp cancels. Then he would arrange the rubber stamp "pieces of the puzzle" to create a cachet to be printed on the covers.

In 1970 or 1971, I first encountered Karcher at a major stamp show in New York City. America Chapter of USCS had just been formed and was in the process of creating its first covers. Karcher suggested an easy fix to the chapter's problems. He already was established and was willing to personalize covers for the chapter, including adding the

sponsor's tag line on the bottom face. Initially, he provided a limited number of covers for some early KNOX-class DE commissionings in Boston or Newport. The relationship developed and we discussed how to expand it. The chapter agreed to work with Karcher, allowed him to print our future covers, and entrusted our artwork to him for use in chapter cachets. Together we attended a number of DE commissionings in the Boston area and occasionally met in Providence to visit ships in Newport, then the home of Cruiser Destroyer Force Atlantic. The relationship inevitably soured when Karcher breached his agreement and failed to print chapter covers with cachets incorporating the artwork provided. He was full of words and excuses but failed to deliver. America Chapter returned to local commercial printers, some better than others.

The relationship further fell apart when Karcher and America Chapter member Larry Briend attended the recommissioning of USS HALSEY (DLG-23) at Bath, Maine. The two serviced covers in the ship's post office and the accommodating postal clerk allowed them to apply their own cancellations. Subsequently, Postal Inspectors interviewed Briend in connection with allegations that the ship's cancelling devices disappeared during the time he and Karcher were in the post office on HALSEY's recommissioning day. Briend vehemently denied removing the cancels but believed that Karcher may have placed them in his brief case. No charges were brought against Briend. Despite his many other human failings, Larry Briend would not likely have taken the postmark and he was thoroughly frightened by the interrogation. In any event, the Type 9 from HALSEY was found in Karcher's Estate. **[Figure B.]**



Not only did Karcher fail to deliver the agreed printed cachets incorporating the chapter's art work but he refused to return the original drawings. Complaints

were ignored. Ultimately, Karcher returned the original artwork in damaged condition but kept one or more rubber stamp matrixes from which he cut America Chapter drawings to incorporate into his garish cachets. He used the commissioning pennant with the hand printed wording "Commissioning" below in many of his FDC covers. Likewise, he used a bow on sketch of a nuclear attack boat in a building dock for some of his SSN launch covers. **[Figure C].** →

In the long history of navophilately there have been many noble and honorable sponsors and collectors but there have been occasional aberrations as documented by this series of articles. In the case of Karcher sponsored covers, as the Romans aptly said, "Buyer beware" – "*Caveat Emptor*".

