

Naval Cover Fakes, Forgeries and Frauds Part IV

*Frank M, Hoak III (H-6194)
59-541 Pueo Place
Kamuela, Hawaii 96743*



Naval Ship Cancels of December 7, 1941

This investigative report of December 7, 1941 U.S. Navy ship cancels is part of the USCS *Log's* 2008 continuing series on Fakes and Forgeries. This report will address each of the known Pearl Harbor ship cancels of December 7, 1941, however we will not discuss the shore stations or civilian postmarks of the period.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 is one of the most infamous dates in American history. Those of us who collect Navy cancels have long debated whether or not there was a naval cancel struck aboard any of the 95 ships in Pearl Harbor that morning with post offices aboard. There are of course ship cancels from ships that were indeed at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. However, the question has always been whether or not they were legitimate, meaning not necessarily the cancel itself but was it struck on that Sunday, December 7th or pre-dated or post dated or in some cases be an outright fake, this article will address these issues.

My interest in Pearl Harbor goes way back as I was actually at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, albeit only 4 years old, as my father was a Chief Radioman aboard USS PENNSYLVANIA (BB 38). PENNSYLVANIA was in drydock that morning and he was not aboard. The family remained at Pearl Harbor for the remainder of the war, my father was transferred to CINCPAC Staff and my mother took a job at the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard.

After searching a multitude of sources for this article both in the philatelic press and with other internet resources, it appears that this may be the first comprehensive study of December 7, 1941 Pearl Harbor U.S. Naval ship cancels ever presented in this manner.

Our focus of course is on the 101 US Navy vessels at Pearl Harbor on December 7 1941, of which only six lacked postal facilities. The Navy Department official list for ships at Pearl Harbor during the attack includes ships within 12 miles of the island of Oahu that were not actually within Pearl Harbor which was defined as the area inside the nets guarding the harbor entrance. An example using this criteria would be USS WARD (DD 139) which was credited with firing the first shot of World War II and the fleet tugs USS NAVAJO (AT 64) and USS KEOSANQUA (AT 38) which were near the entrance and USS VEGA (AK 17) which was at Honolulu.

Another list would be one that includes the 20 or so ships that were known to be en route Pearl Harbor or operating within the Hawaiian Islands. USS McFARLAND (AVD 14 ex-DD 237) mentioned later in this article would be an example from this list.

Collectors approach collecting Pearl Harbor covers from many diverging views, some are unconcerned with the date of their cover as long as the ship was at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, they consider dates from the mid-1930's to be acceptable. Others try to get dates as close to December 7, 1941 as possible, still others collect only postally used cancels rather than cancelled to order philatelic covers. It should be noted, that postally used cancels from the first week of December 1941 are considered quite scarce.

Some collect only December 7, 1941 naval cancels even though the ship may have been thousands of miles away, examples of the "not at Pearl Harbor December 7, 1941" group include USS WASHINGTON (BB 47), USS NORTH CAROLINA (BB 55), USS POTOMAC (AG 25), USS TUSCALOOSA (CA 37), USS MISSISSIPPI (BB 41), USS NEW YORK (BB 34), USS MONSSEN (DD 436) and others.

An important point should be made about the presence of a censor mark on any Pearl Harbor 1941 era cover. Navy censor marks are known to exist for at least one year before the attack on Pearl Harbor and were used with Atlantic convoy escort mail earlier in 1941.

Censorship at Pearl Harbor and in Hawaii was quite strict as battle damage information about the fleet was withheld even locally for days and weeks.

My own newspaper collection of the *Honolulu Star Bulletin* for the month of December 1941 reveals that it was not until after Navy Secretary Frank Knox's visit to Hawaii on 11 December, and his subsequent report to the nation on 15 December that any specific battle damage assessment was printed in the newspapers.

According to the US Office of Censorship Report issued at the end of the war, censorship of outgoing mail in Hawaii commenced on 13 December 1941.

This background on censorship is significant to our study as we know of cancelled covers dated 7 December to 12 December with censor marks. It seems reasonable to assume that mail with those dates may have been held for censorship and released after 13 December 1941.

The Postmarks

The postmark portion of this article will focus on three areas:

- I. A brief overview of previously written Pearl Harbor December 7, 1941 articles and first week of December 1941 cancels.
- II. The eight known December 7, 1941 US Navy ship cancels at Pearl Harbor, listed alphabetically and illustrated.
- III. Ships en route Pearl Harbor within the Hawaiian Island chain with December 7, 1941 cancels, also illustrated.

I. Overview:

There has not been an overabundance of information written about Navy cancels at Pearl Harbor in December 1941. The most pertinent article we could locate was in the *The American Philatelist* (the Journal of the American Philatelic Society) dated December 1991; in fact, it was the cover story for the 50th Anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor issue. It was a two page feature called "A Philatelist at Pearl" and centered around a LCDR Lester M. Merritt and a series of covers that were addressed to him and his family that were all dated December 7, 1941. The cover illustrated on the cover of the magazine was a Naval Air Station Pearl Harbor station cancel dated December 7, 1941.

That particular cover and cancel received a certificate from the Philatelic Foundation in 1991 confirming that it was of "genuine usage". The article of course did not address the issue of when the cancel may have been applied and it was hard to explain why Merritt might have mailed a handful of covers to be hand-stamped at 0700 on Sunday morning. An interesting development to keep in mind when one reviews the other LCDR Merritt covers from USS HULBERT and USS McFARLAND later in this article.

LCDR Merritt was stationed with COMSERVPAC (Commander Service Force, US Pacific Fleet) and was on Ford Island during the attack. LCDR Merritt, from Columbus, Ohio was an ardent philatelist, USCS member and active in many Ohio philatelic organizations.

Other individuals have written in *Linn's Stamp News* (December 1971), *Western Stamp Collector* (December 1975) and in the *USCS Log* over the years, often just listing the December 7, 1941 ships with known cancels without much comment about their authenticity or lack thereof. USCS member Captain Robert W. Murch, USNR did indicate in one of his contributions that "fake" covers exist from USS TENNESSEE dated December 7, 1941.

The first week of December 1941 produced several interesting cancels. A USS AYLWIN (DD 335) cancel dated 3 December 1941 on a large mailgram penalty envelope is shown as **Figure 1**.

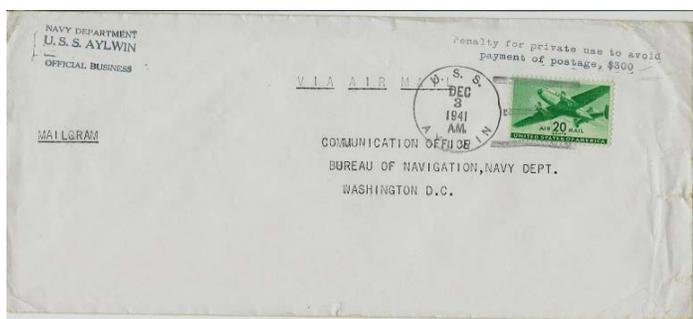


Figure 1: MAILGRAM Penalty envelope with USS AYLWIN corner card dated 3 December 1941. Frank Hoak collection.

This cover left Hawaii in the last Clipper mail, which departed on Friday, 5 December 1941. USS AYLWIN, berthed at buoy X-18 is famous in Pearl Harbor history as the ship that an Ensign with a total of eight months at sea took command as the most senior officer aboard that morning. Ensign S. Caplan, USNR had the ship open fire at 0758 with the main battery and with proper orders in hand, got underway at 0828 to conduct war operations for the next 36 hours.

The 6 December 1941 USS NEVADA (BB 36) cover shown as **Figure 2** was originally written about in the June 1967 *USCS Log* by the late well-known writer and exhibitor Don McPherson. It is addressed to USCS member Royal Hendricks who had indicated that the cover was salvaged and mailed on 9 February 1942; it was delivered to him the next day. There is only speculation as to why the cover did not leave the ship on 6 December.

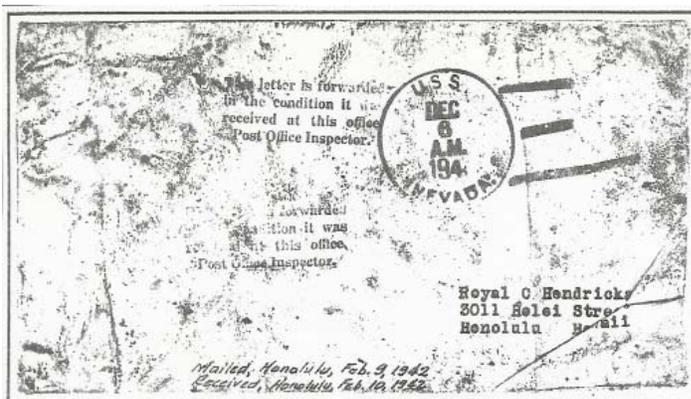


Figure 2: USS NEVADA cover forwarded to addressee in the condition it was received at Honolulu. Image provided by James Myerson.

USS OKLAHOMA (BB-37) was originally written about in the July 1965 *USCS Log* by the late Captain Herb Rommel, USN when he was the Commanding Officer of the Naval Station, Washington DC. It was during this time period, that he was able to visit the Smithsonian Institution and obtain two strikes of the recovered handstamp dated 6 December 1941. One of those examples with his signature is shown here as **Figure 3**.



Figure 3: One of two strikes made by Captain Herb Rommel from the recovered handstamps now in the Smithsonian. From the author's collection.

II. DECEMBER 7, 1941 Cancels

USS ARIZONA (BB 38)

The most famous of all the Pearl Harbor ships, USS ARIZONA on December 7, 1941 took hits from one torpedo and eight bombs, one of which penetrated a power magazine and the resultant explosion completely wrecked her with the loss of 1177 personnel. The United States Navy, in two hours and four minutes, has lost three times as many men (2113) as it had lost by enemy action in all of the Spanish-American War and World War I combined.

As noted previously, cancels from the first week of December 1941 are scarce, the ARIZONA type 6ep December 2, 1941 cancel is shown here as **Figure 4**.



Figure 4: USS ARIZONA cover with Type 6ep cancel dated 2 December 1941. Image provided by Curtis R. Kimes.(9714).



Figure 5

Shown as **Figure 5**, this illustrates the unskillful attempt at a fake, using a 1950's Type 2t(nu) type cancel as a guide to making a poor fake. The sharp eyes of Dave Kent noticed this fake on eBay recently and had it removed before a sale could be completed.

USS BREESE (DM 18)

BREESE was anchored in Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 and by 0757 had opened fire on Japanese planes; she received no material damage from the attack.

The late Don McPherson had two copies of this USS BREESE cancel on an exhibit page many years ago. One of these is shown as **Figure 6**. The current location of the BREESE cancels are unknown at this time. They were the product of Leslie Miller at Pearl Harbor; the comments written on the covers suggest that there were only two done. Mr. Miller awkwardly writes on one of the covers, "These two covers all that exist L- as of this date are last of ships regulation cancel", "Censor goes into effect tomorrow Leslie" and "keep these covers". The possibility of these cancels being struck that day is extremely remote but no specific information has been located.



Figure 6: Cover from USS BREESE with two strikes of the cancel on 7 December 1941.

USS HULBERT (AVD 6)

HULBERT was moored at the Sub Base that morning and in her Report of Battle dated 8 December 1941 noted that, "HULBERT is believed to the first ship in the fleet to open fire".

According to the 1 April 1941 **NAVY DIRECTORY**, USS HULBERT was under the Command of LCDR James M. Lane shown in the return address of **Figure 7**. The addressee is LCDR Lester Merritt who was mentioned earlier. It would appear that LCDR Merritt had a hand in this cancel and the USS McFARLAND (AVD 14) which will be reviewed later in this article.

The Naval Censor mark on this cover and the one on the McFARLAND cover show the identical initials "GF". The HULBERT cancel was used as an illustration in a **STAMPS** magazine article in the 1970s and was most probably postdated by LCDR Merritt.

USS PENNSYLVANIA (BB 38)

PENNSYLVANIA was in drydock with two destroyers on December 7, 1941.

PENNSYLVANIA cancels in **Figure 8** are grouped with other cancels dated in 1943 and 1944; the cover is from USS ABSD-2 (Advance Base Sectional Dock) which



Figure 7: USS HULBERT cover with 7 December 1941 cancel from the Frank Hoak III collection.

seems to confirm the postdating of the December 7, 1941 cancels. Three varieties of the Type 9 cancel and a Type 7d cancel from PENNSYLVANIA are shown. Postdated examples from PENNSYLVANIA are more unusual than the relatively common example from USS SHAW and USS SCHLEY.



Figure 8: USS ABCD 2 corner card on cover with a variety of USS PENNSYLVANIA cancels. Contributed by Dave Green.

USS RALEIGH (CL 7)

RALEIGH was moored at berth F-12, on the east side of the North Channel at Pearl Harbor when the Japanese made their attack and took the first torpedo of the attack at 0755. RALEIGH sustained significant damage and was in danger of capsizing at one point during the attack.

Two examples of the December 7, 1941 RALEIGH type 6ep postmark have been studied and neither of the two have censor marks. One featured in the February 2004 *Log* (Figure 9) has been verified by RALEIGH crewman A.F. Partch in a 1995 letter to USCS Member Steve Henderson in which Mr. Partch indicates that he mailed the letter on Saturday, 6 December 1941 with the understanding that it was to be dated the next day (December 7th) then sacked to be taken ashore on Sunday. He received the letter back a few days later from the Naval Mail Clerk.

The other known RALEIGH cancel was illustrated in USCS Member Larry Wendell’s Pearl Harbor Study Group

newsletter in the late 1980s. It was hand addressed to Napa, California and the return address was “S.L.S. Box C, USS RALEIGH c/o Fleet PO Pearl Harbor”. The cancel appears legitimate and we would conclude that it was in the same category as Mr. Partch’s and both were pre-dated for Sunday, December 7, 1941.



Figure 9: USS RALEIGH (CL 7) cover believed to have been pre-dated for 7 December 1941. Contributed by Steve Henderson.

USS SCHLEY (DD 103)

SCHLEY was moored in nest undergoing overhaul in Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The SCHLEY cancel Figure 10 was most likely the work of the ships Naval Mail Clerk, Albert Bellanance, SM1c whose name appears on a 9 February 1941 letter to a USCS member in Massachusetts and on this example of the December 7, 1941 cancelled cover. Another SCHLEY cover dated December 7, 1941 was noted by a well-known USCS member in Connecticut that it was received “under cover” on 1 December 1945. Additional examples researched for this article show other well-known USCS members were recipients of this SCHLEY backdated cancel.



Figure 10: USS SCHLEY 7 December 1941 cover is one of several known back-dated examples. From the author’s collection.

USS SHAW (DD 373)

SHAW was in drydock YFD-2 at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 and took three direct bomb hits causing fire throughout the ship. At 0925 the order to abandon ship was given.

In a copy of a letter dated 24 January 1981, Alan C. Hawkins, the Navy Mail Clerk aboard SHAW on December 7, 1941 stated that he did not cancel any mail that day as the post office was destroyed in the attack. Mr. Hawkins also stated in his letter that the post office was not re-opened until January 1942 when he was released from the hospital.

All of the dozen or so known SHAW covers (**Figure 11**) have two things in common, one is that all the cancel strikes are directly on the stamp with red ink and the other is the name William R. Welch of Seattle, Washington is stamped on the reverse side of each cover. USCS records indicate that he was a member at about this time.

Deanne Bartley, a very well known collector of his day had the habit of noting his "received date" on the covers reverse side, his copy of the SHAW cancel indicated it was received in March 1942.



Figure 11: Common among the USS SHAW cancellations is the red ink and the cancel directly on the stamp. From the author's collection.

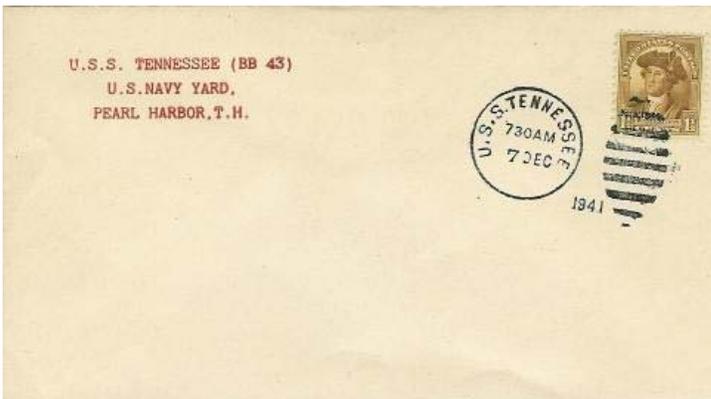
USS TENNESSEE (BB 43)

Figure 12: USS TENNESSEE (BB 43) Type 6 duplex fake cancel is attributed to Glenn Dye.

TENNESSEE was moored starboard side to a pair of concrete mooring quays near Ford Island and only was hit by two bombs and with emergency repairs departed on 20 December 1941 for Puget Sound Naval Shipyard. Then **Log** Editor Bob Rawlins wrote about the TENNESSEE fake cancel in the February 1995 **Log**.

It is now well established that the fake TENNESSEE Type 6 duplex postmark **Figure 12** was the creative work of Glenn Dye of New Jersey, Dye featured a TENNESSEE Type 6 cancel dated December 7, 1941 for sale in his 1948 sales publication. Later this year in the **Log**, more information will be written about Glenn Dye.

III. Ships En route Pearl Harbor or within the Hawaiian Island Chain on December 7, 1941.

USS McFARLAND (AVD 14 ex-DD 237) **Figure 13** was operating out of Pearl Harbor and conducting anti-submarine maneuvers off the island of Maui. The cover from McFARLAND is addressed to LCDR Merritt of whom we mentioned previously, the return address "Lt. Comdr. J.L. Kane" coincides with the **1941 NAVY DIRECTORY** listing for the Commanding Officer USS McFARLAND a "Joseph L. Kane".

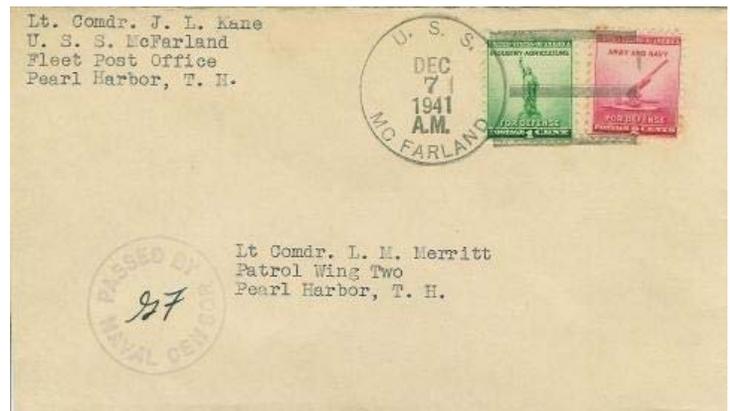


Figure 13: USS McFARLAND cover has same addressee as the USS HULBERT cover. Note the same Censor initials on both covers.

USS CHESTER (CA 27) **Figure 14** was returning from Wake Island with Vice Admiral Halsey in ENTERPRISE as part of special Task Force 8 that was about 215 miles west of Hawaii. The Task Force was scheduled to arrive in Pearl Harbor on December 6th but was delayed due to poor weather en route. There was much griping among her crew at the loss of a Saturday night liberty in Hawaii.

This postally used cover has a hand written return address of "Ensign J. Scatchard USS CHESTER, Pearl Harbor T.H.", his duty assignment could not be established.



Figure 14: USS CHESTER was returning from Wake Island and was delayed by poor weather.

USS ENTERPRISE (CV 6) was also in Task Force 8 and launched 18 Dauntless scout bombers on December 7th for Pearl Harbor, of these, four were shot down. ENTERPRISE was the most decorated ship of World War II earning 20 battle stars.

Figure 15 illustrates a creatively prepared ENTERPRISE cover from a crewman to his family back home.

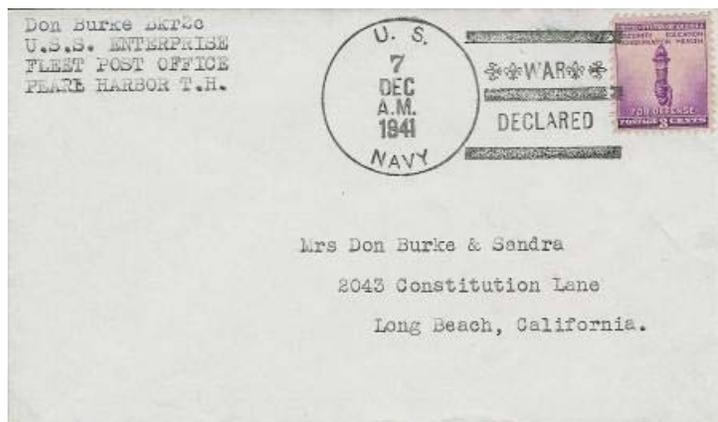


Figure 15: USS ENTERPRISE cover with WAR/DECLARED in the Killer Bars.

Summary

While it is certainly possible that other Pearl Harbor ship cancels from December 7, 1941 will surface in the future, at this time we can conclude that there were no ship cancels legitimately struck on December 7, 1941. It does appear that the USS RALEIGH cancels shown were legitimate but pre-dated and the other ship illustrations shown in this article dated December 7, 1941 were post dated. Some may have used the actual ship's cancel as in

the case of the SCHLEY, HULBERT, CHESTER, ENTERPRISE and McFARLAND while others such as the ARIZONA and TENNESSEE were outright fakes.

Authenticity of the cancels for BREESE, PENNSYLVANIA, and SHAW can not be conclusively established, nevertheless they all were back dated.

While the vast majority of the December 7, 1941 cancels from the Pearl Harbor ships were creatively inspired, they were produced in small numbers and still attract strong interest from Pearl Harbor collectors around the world.

Special thanks to these USCS members for their contributions of research information for this article. Dave Green, Paul Helman, Steve Henderson, Dave Kent, Randy Kimes, Bob Rawlins, Jim Myerson and Larry Wendell, Founder of the USCS Pearl Harbor Study Group.

**Addendum to Hobby Shop Fakes
Article USCS Log 2008**

Pete Dillon (11,906)

Here is a small addendum to the excellent article by Bob Rawlins covering the Hobby Shop fakes in the USCS **Log** April 2008. I always thought it was interesting and another clue a Hobby Shop cover might be a fake if they couldn't even spell the ship's name correctly in the cachet.

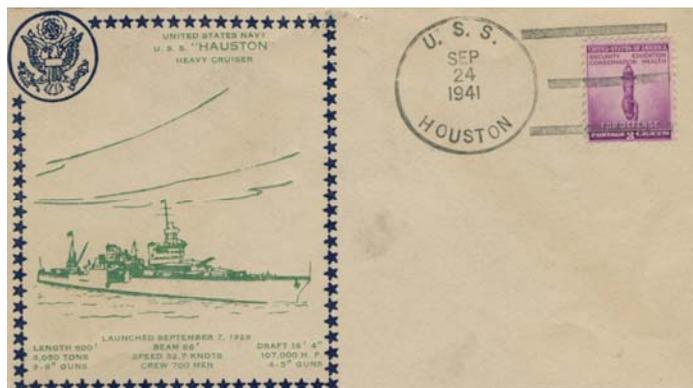
Please note the attached JPEG file.

Here's one I have of USS HOUSTON clearly spelled 'HAUSTON' in the cachet. This raises some interesting questions, which I haven't seen addressed before.

Did all the fake Hobby Shop 'HOUSTON' cachets contain the error or was it corrected at some point?

Are there similar errors in other cachets?

Perhaps other USCS members can provide some answers.



**Hobby Shop cover with HAUSTON error in cachet.
Does any member have a corrected cachet?**