

In Their Prime

Prime Recovery Ships for US Manned Spaceflight: 1961-1975



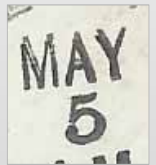
In Their Prime

Mercury MR-3

Mercury



Forty-four philatelic envelopes were reportedly cancelled for Alan Shepard's suborbital flight. About a dozen cancels (Type II) are found on ship stationary making them "Captain's covers". An unknown quantity of crew mail received the May 5th date. Type I, (left) with periods, was previously unknown before 1959.



Above is a FAKE created by Charles Riser, the greatest astrophilatelic forger of all time.. Note the characteristic defect on the "Y" in the word May. Riser duplicated most of the early postmarks with amazing detail.

In Their Prime

Mercury MR-4



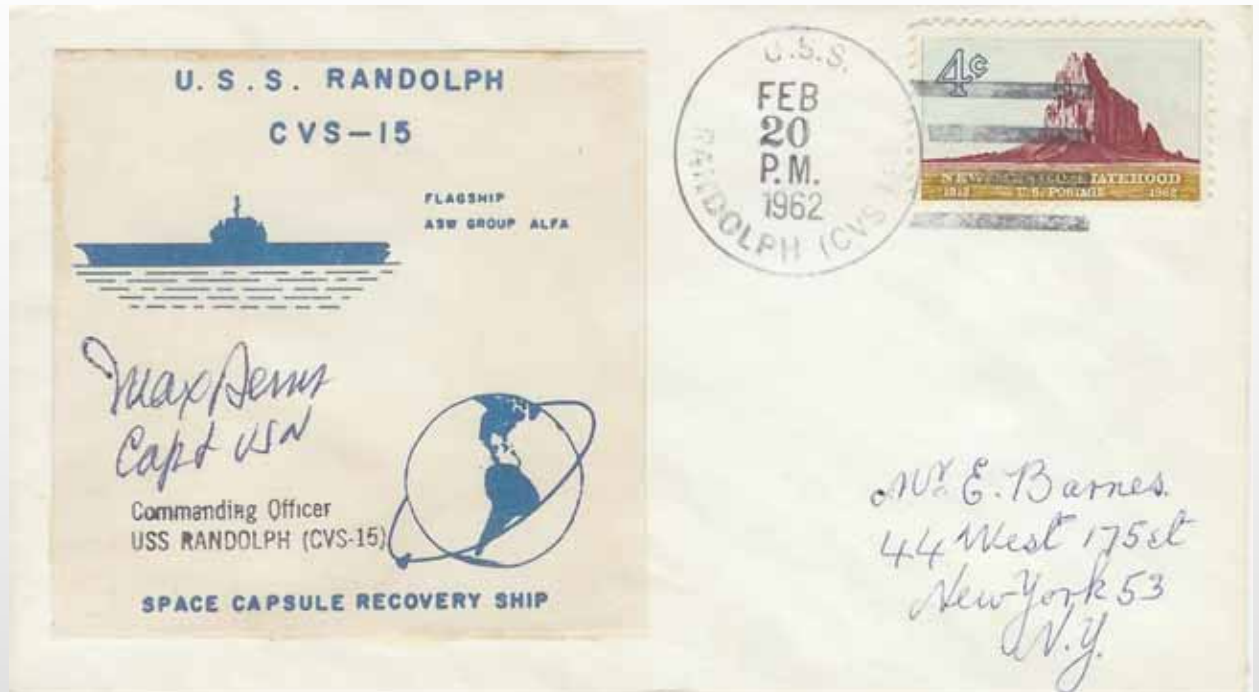
The above cover shows a Type I cancellation (USS Randolph at the top of the hub). This hand cancel is another Riser FAKE. The autographs, although very convincing, are assumed to be fraudulent as well. All Riser forgeries are on embossed envelopes and were created between 1969 and 1974.



In Their Prime

Mercury MA-6

Mercury



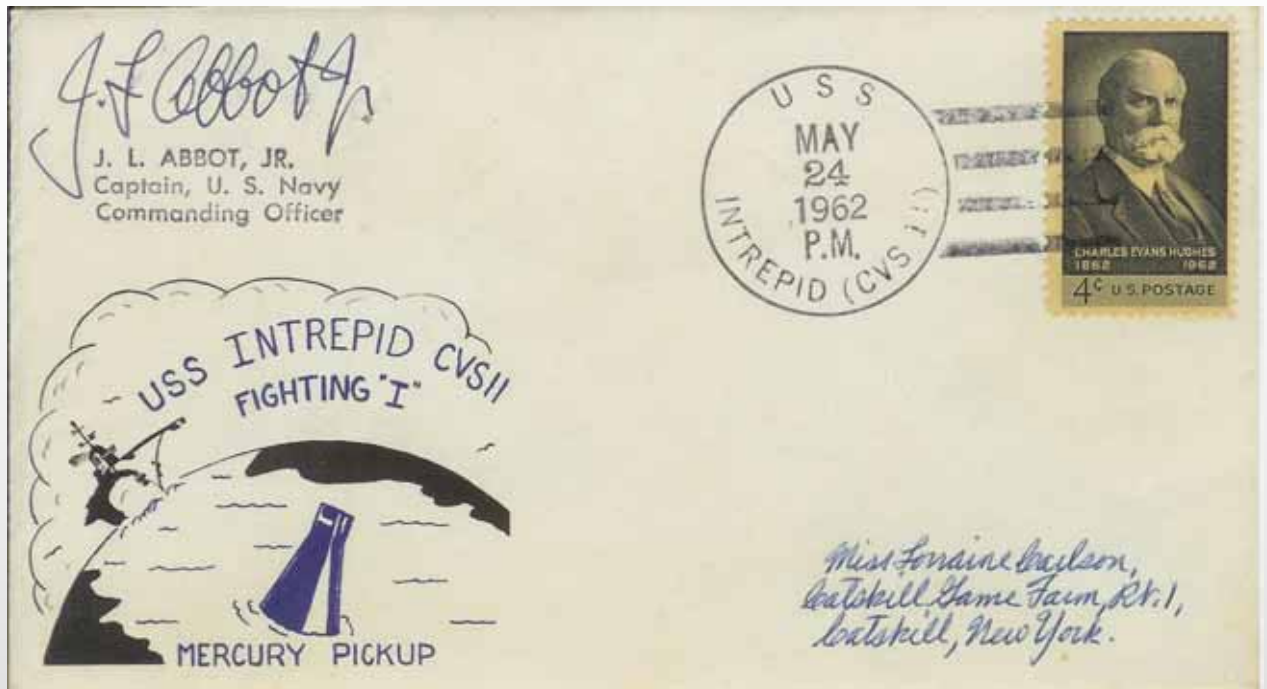
This Captain's Cover is from the USS Randolph which was the Prime Recovery Carrier for John Glenn, the first American to orbit the earth. The ship had recovered astronaut pilot Virgil Grissom 7 months before.



No Project Mercury stamps were carried on ships during the flight. This cover is BACKDATED and the autograph is printed. The ship returned to port on February 23rd which is the earliest possible legitimate cancellation date.

In Their Prime

Mercury MA-7



Produced at the direction of and distributed with the compliments of the Captain, this cover was cancelled on the recovery of Scott Carpenter. The astronaut overshot the target and spent three hours in his life raft without a radio.



While USS Intrepid was designated as the Prime Recovery Ship (PRS) the USS Farragut actually arrived first but did not have the equipment required for capsule recovery. USS Pierce recovered the capsule and returned to port on May 30th.

In Their Prime

Mercury MA-8

Mercury



After a textbook six orbit flight the USS Kearsarge collected Wally Schirra and his Sigma 7 spacecraft. The dominant cancellation was a machine cancel with ship produced artwork. This is a Type I (date above time).



Additional postage (overpaid by one cent) was added in order to send this envelope by airmail. The less common hand cancel is dated 20 years to the day following the first successful V-2, a milestone in spaceflight.

In Their Prime

Mercury MA-9

Mercury



After a day in orbit Gordo Cooper returned to the USS Kearsarge. This cachet was the first cancelled on a Prime Recovery Ship produced by Navy enthusiast Morris Beck for collectors and not just crew.



Less common was the hand cancel for this flight. Major Cooper flew the final Project Mercury mission, completing 22 orbits and was the last American to venture into space alone.

In Their Prime

Gemini III and IV



An airmail envelope sent from a crew member on the recovery of the first manned flight of Project Gemini. Originally called Mercury Mark II the updated vehicle supported two pilots



First in a series of recovery assignments for the USS Wasp this cover commemorates recovery of the first American to walk in space, Air Force Captain Edward White.

Gemini

In Their Prime

Gemini V and VI-A



After recovering America's first astronaut and the unmanned first flight of the Gemini Program the Champ collected the crew of Gemini 5 with the assistance of aircrew from the USS DuPont. The rubber stamps are Beck creations.

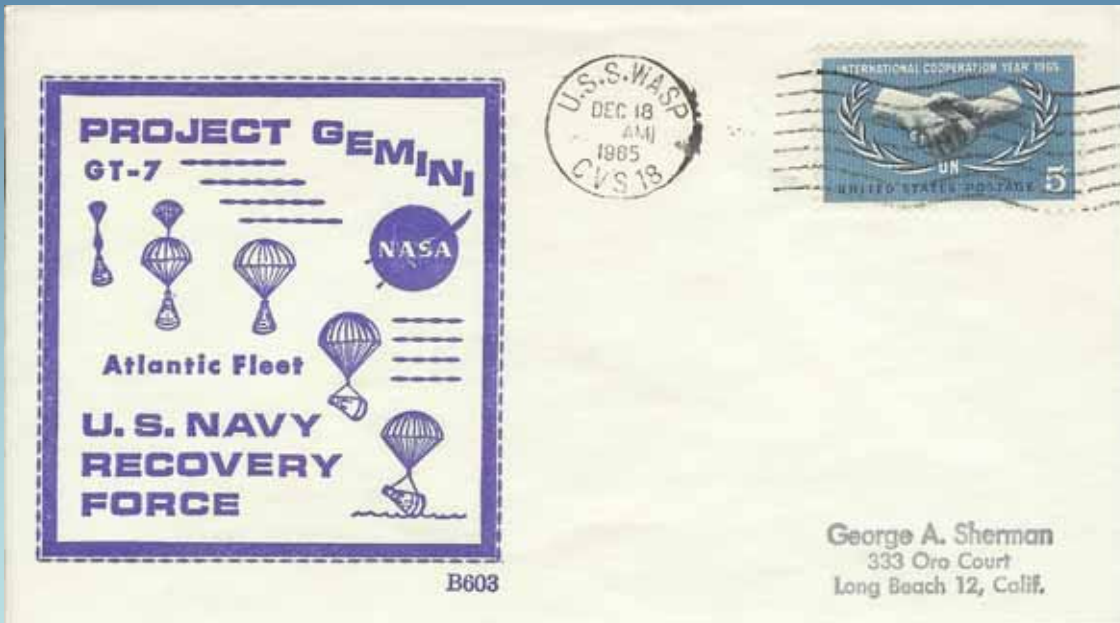


Destined to recover more spacecraft than any other navy ship Captain Hartley had this envelope made to celebrate the recovery of the crew of Gemini 6. The postmark is also known to exist as a hand cancel.

Gemini

In Their Prime

Gemini VII



After two grueling weeks in orbit the crew of Frank Borman and Jim Lovell came aboard the USS Wasp. This marked the third recovery for the World War II aircraft carrier.

This Captain's cover sports a beautiful and less frequently seen hand cancel. The Spirit of 7/6 successfully performed a rendezvous in space permitting station keeping in orbit.



Gemini

In Their Prime

Gemini VIII

An uncommon hand cancelled Prime Recovery Ship cover mailed by a crewmember.



The USS Boxer was designated as the Prime Recovery Ship. This envelope was postmarked at the premature completion of the mission flown by David Scott and Neil Armstrong.

Gemini

In Their Prime

Gemini VIII



After a successful docking with an Agena target vehicle a stuck thruster created an uncontrollable spacecraft and recovery by the USS Leonard Mason in the Pacific.



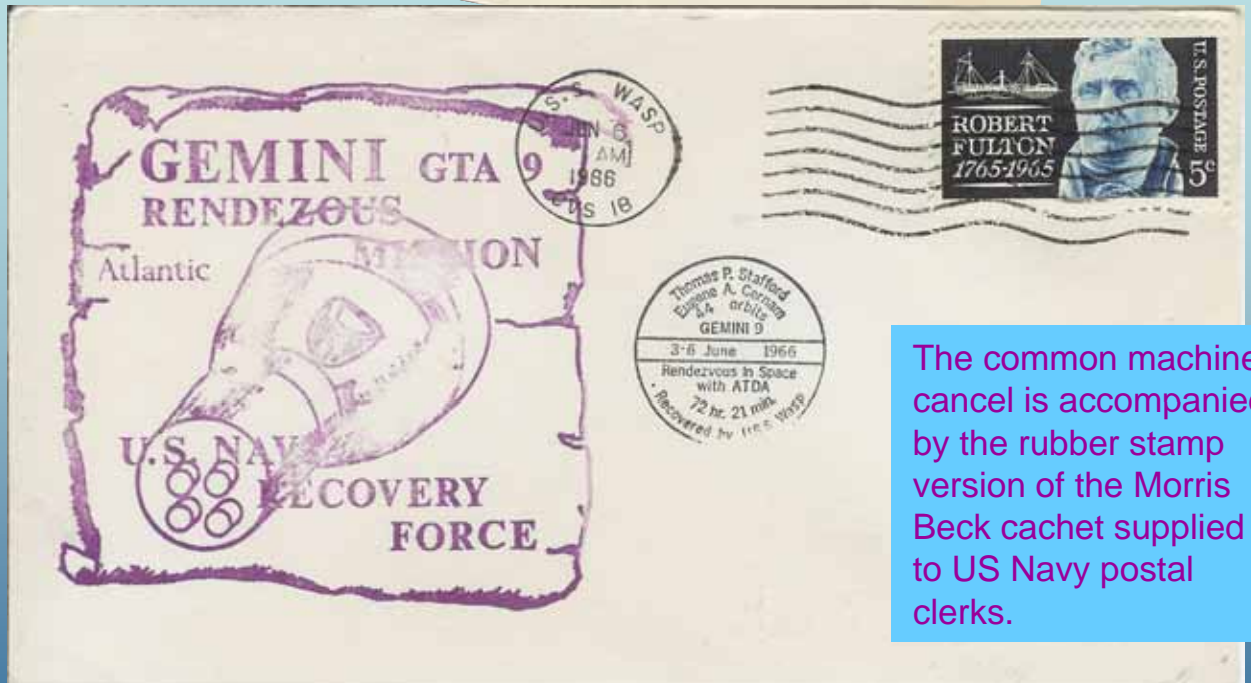
Gemini

Primary Recovery Ships for US Manned Spaceflight 1961-1975

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Gemini IX

The USS Wasp gathered astronauts Stafford and Cernan after their 3 day mission. The plan to dock with an Agena was foiled by panels that failed to release resulting in an "angry alligator".

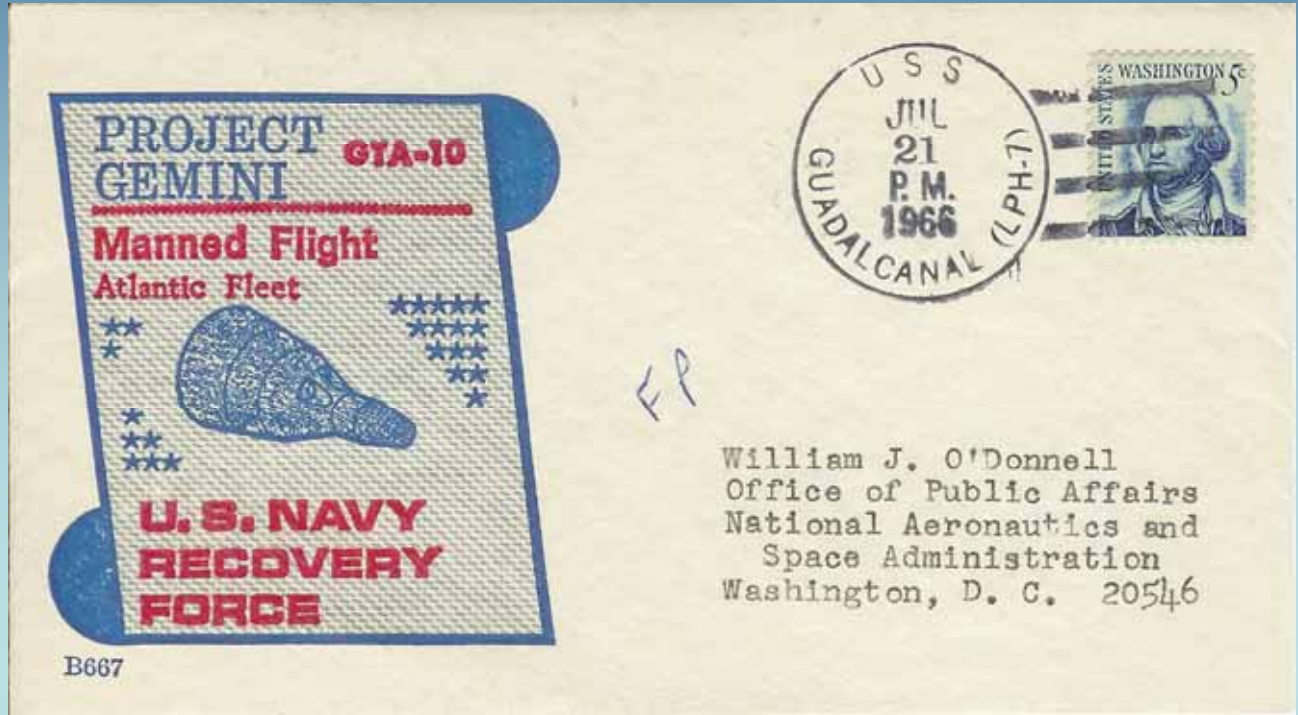


The common machine cancel is accompanied by the rubber stamp version of the Morris Beck cachet supplied to US Navy postal clerks.

Gemini

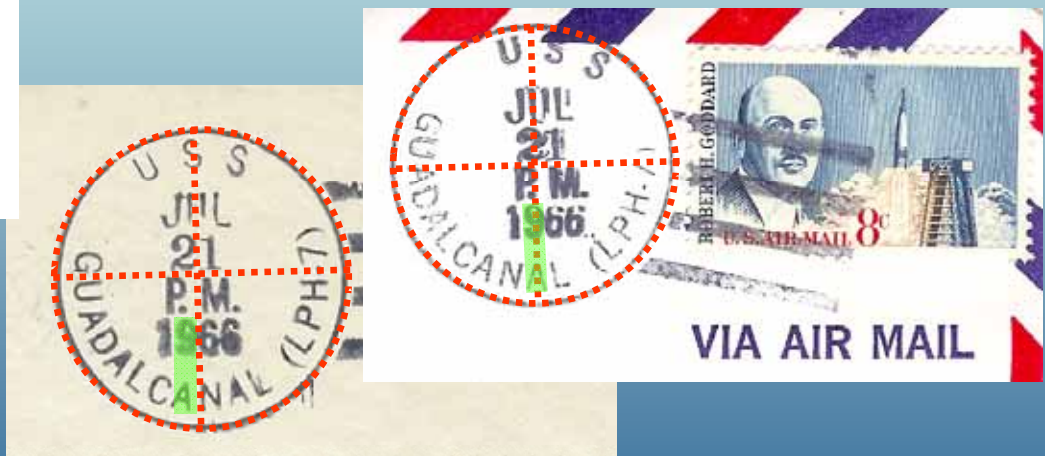
In Their Prime

Gemini X



Beck sent covers to key NASA personnel. Bill O'Donnell joined NASA in 1962 and served as Headquarters Public Affairs Officer until 1985. Following the installation of the moon rock in the National Cathedral in 1969, Neil Armstrong went out of his way to shake his daughter Anne's hand. In 1996 the author took her hand in marriage.

Does the alignment of portions of the postmark prove the existence of multiple canceling devices?



Gemini

Primary Recovery Ships for US Manned Spaceflight 1961-1975

In Their Prime

Gemini XI



Lift off occurred at 9:42:26.5, just half a second into the two second launch window. USS Guam personnel recovered the Gemini XI crew in 24 minutes, the quickest of all flights of Project Gemini.

This Captain's cover is a #10 envelope with a scarce hand cancel and printed autographs.

Gemini

In Their Prime

Gemini XII



A less common hand cancel is found on this Captain's cover distributed as a memento. Airmail rate postage is used here although the 5 cent First Class rate is more often seen.



Left over covers were BACKDATED. This stamp was issued in November 17th

Morris Beck produced this design cancelled aboard the USS Wasp on the final flight of the Gemini program. The dominant machine cancel is seen here.



Gemini



31 October 1968

Dear Buzz & Jeanette

Hello My Friend again I give you my heartiest of Congratulations on the birth of your new daughter. I do hope that everything is well at home for the both of you and your children. Buzz sorry you will miss this but anyhow you waited out the long wait. this letter is just so you will have this envelope keep it with my regards it is one of 18 printed and designed by me how do you like it well will see you when we get home

Your Buddy
Chet
Chet E. Randolph
1402 USN.

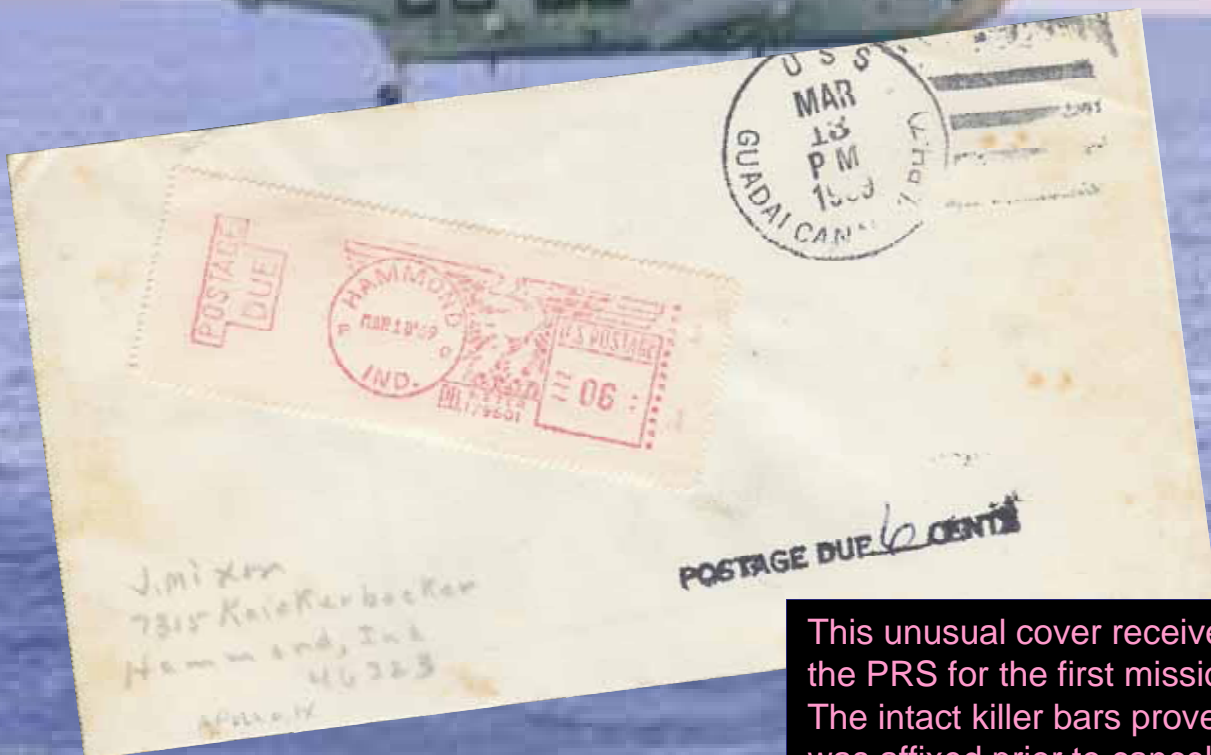
Dear Buzz
Congratulations
record day
here to
bless you

A crew created keepsake. The letter states that 18 were made. The oversized cover sports the Airmail rate, an embossed ships seal, and a superior hand cancel.

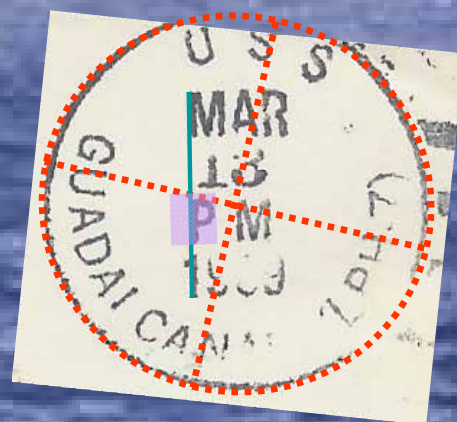
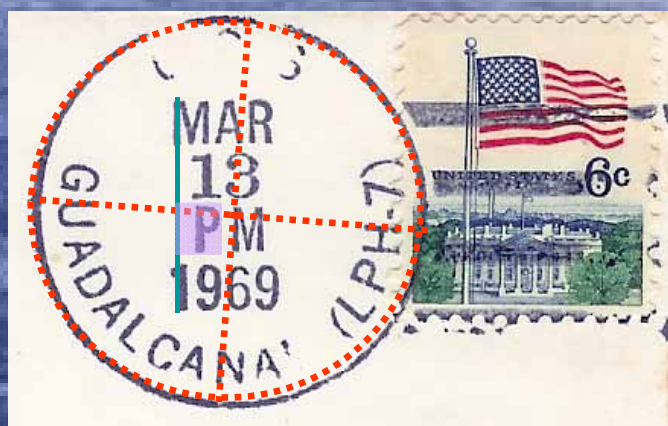


Crew from the USS Yorktown applied this machine cancel on the day men from Earth returned from the first flight around the Moon. The mission is memorable for the reading from the Bible on Christmas Eve and the stunning Earthrise photographs.

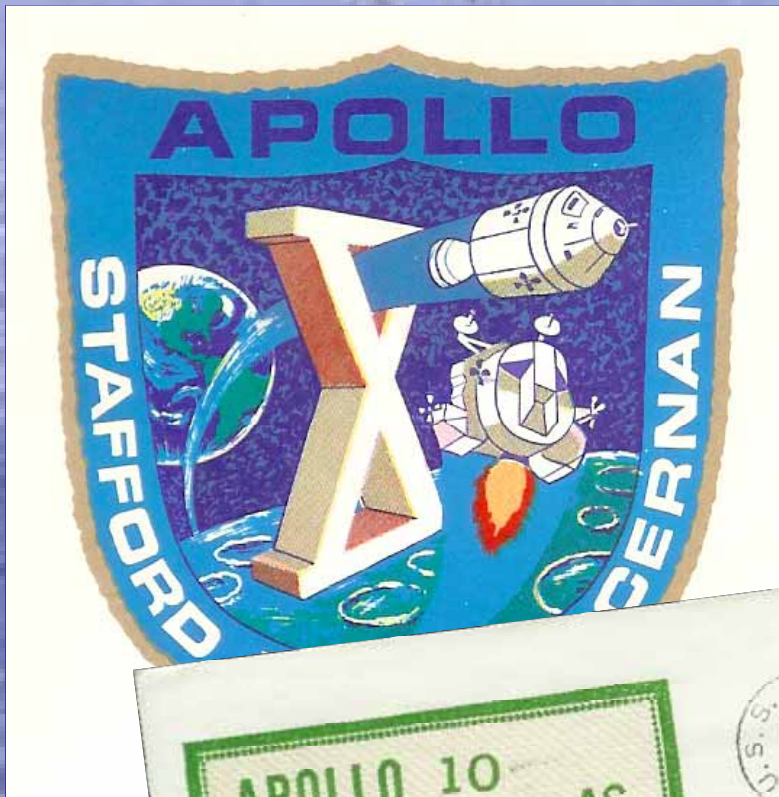




This unusual cover received a postmark on the PRS for the first mission to pilot the LEM. The intact killer bars prove that no stamp was affixed prior to cancellation. The envelope was posted to Indiana where postage due was paid by meter.



More than one hand cancel was apparently used. A line drawn between the "M" in March and the "1" in 1969 reveals differing "PM" placement in the postmark slug.

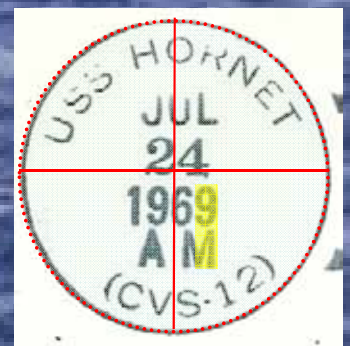
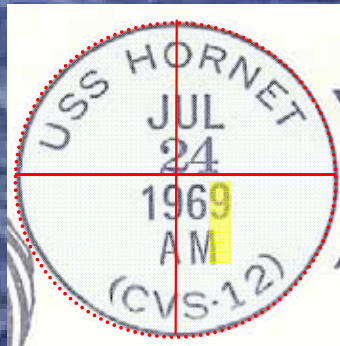


Crew from the USS Princeton welcome back astronauts of Apollo 10, the dress rehearsal for the first lunar landing. The Leif Erikson stamp commemorates the 11th century Norse explorer. He is remembered as the first European to set foot on the American continent.

Rear Admiral Carl J. Seiberlich took command of the USS Hornet at the end of May 1969. A week later the carrier was designated to host President Nixon and recover the first men on the moon. He directed that each crewmember would receive two Captain's covers of the 6000 produced. This was postally used from an enlisted Radarman to family friends.



After examining a large number of hand cancels they appear in one of two varieties. In one the "AM" is narrow and closely centered under the year. In the second instance (the cover above for example), shows the "AM" spaced farther apart. The 'M' is seen directly below the "9".





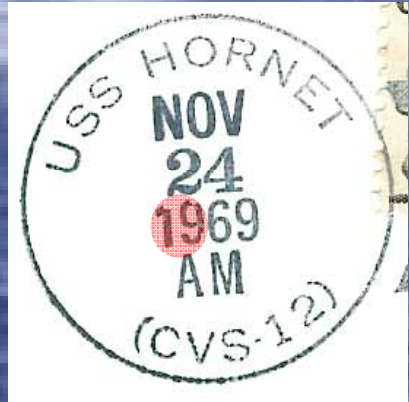
Type I machine cancel had been aboard since Apollo 3. The 23mm hub is accompanied by wide wavy lines. The Type II seen below has the "AM" centered under the date, is 21mm across and has lines somewhat closer together.



The Captain's cover is known with either hand or machine cancel postmarks. The second cover illustrates the missing "AM". The last is the common Type II machine example introduced on the previous mission.



Hand cancels missing the "AM" designation come in at least two varieties. The fat number variety extends to the left past the "N" in November. The "V" in "CVS-12" straddles the first "9" and "6" in "1969". This differs from the thin number variety where the first "9" in "1969" drops neatly into the "V" in "CVS-12".



All examined hand cancels with AM appear to have a characteristic "nibbled 19". The "1" is slightly low with a nick in the upper right-hand corner. The "9" always has an upper and lower nibble.





In the most suspenseful mission of the Space Age the Apollo 13 crew survived an in-flight explosion by clinging to life in the Lunar Module, the dominant image in the Beck rubber stamp cachet. Cancels are known in both upper and lower versions. Multiple canceling devices are suspected.

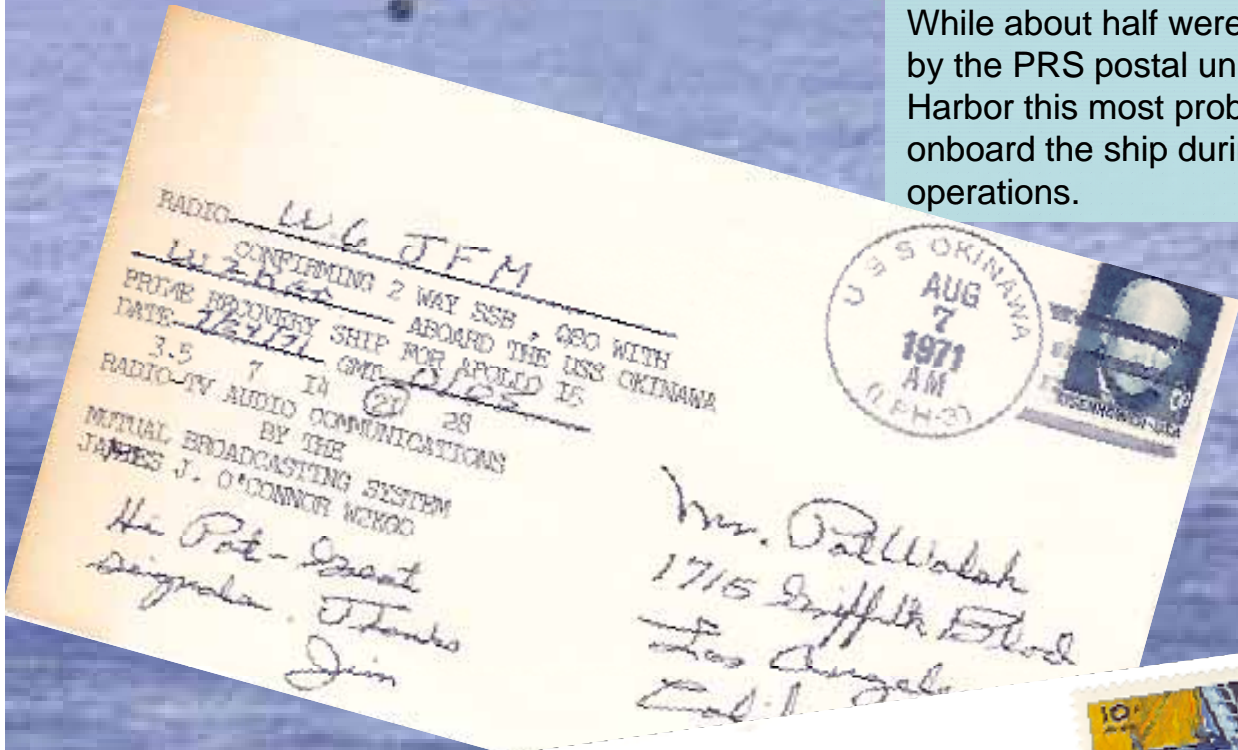




The first of four Primary Recovery Ship assignments for the USS New Orleans. On this date America's first astronaut returned from his exploration of the Fra Maura highlands of the Moon.



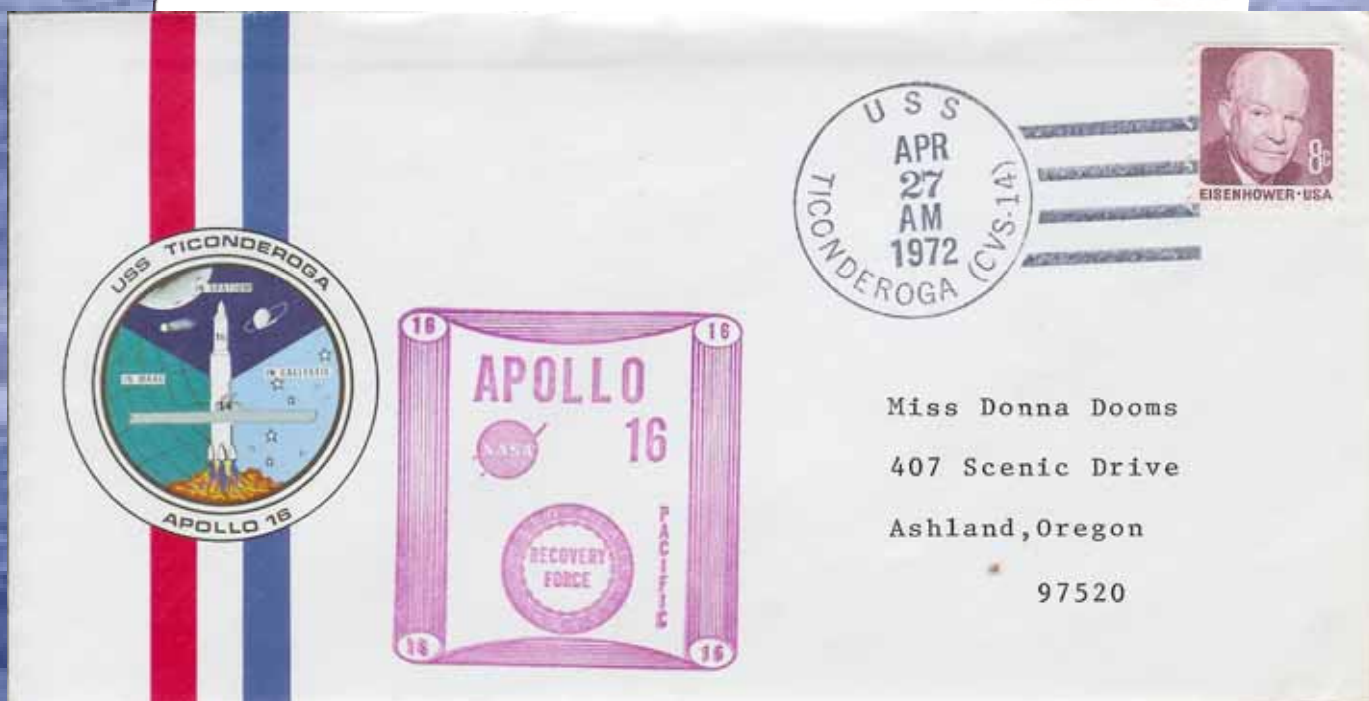
An unusual Amateur Radio signal confirmation card sent during the Apollo 15 mission. While about half were cancelled by the PRS postal unit at Pearl Harbor this most probably was onboard the ship during recovery operations.



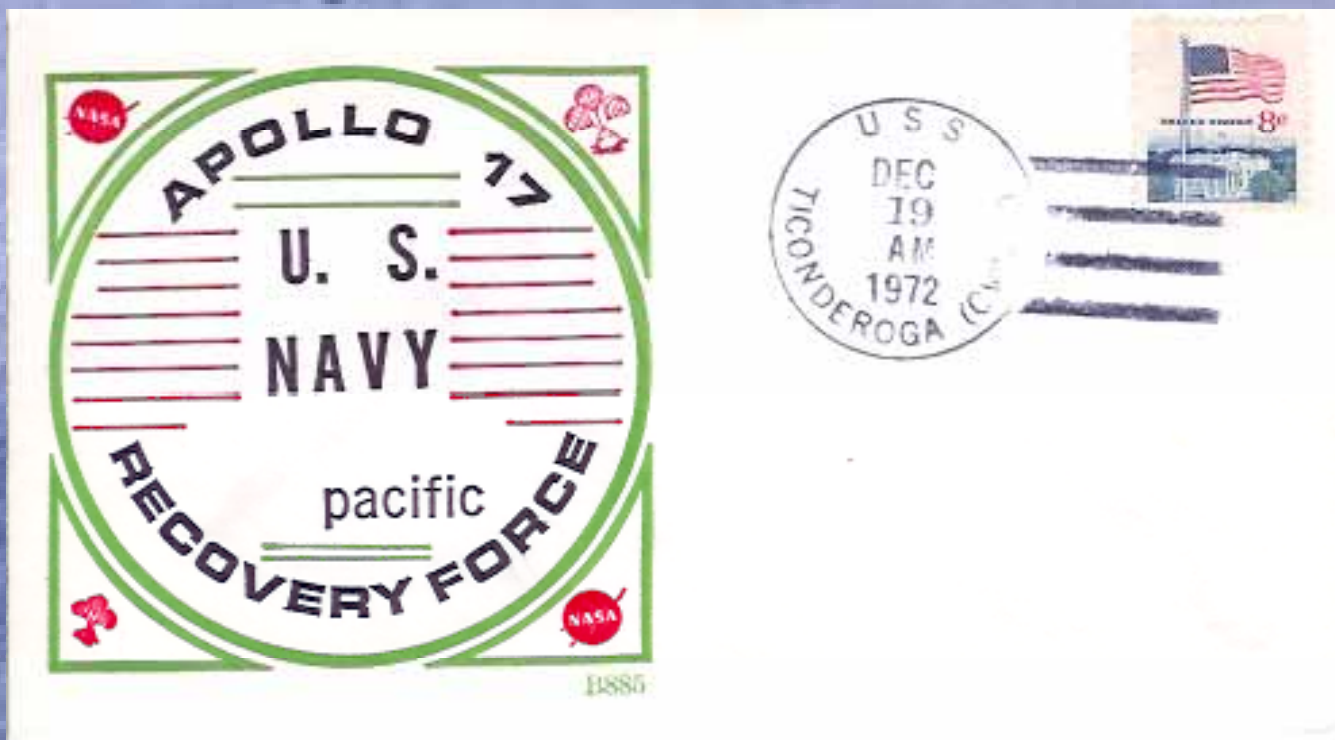
A Type I (Okinawa on bottom) hand cancel with Airmail rate. No machine cancels are known for this recovery.



U.S.S. TICONDEROGA (CVS-14)



This Captain's cover was mailed from the last ship to greet astronauts from the Moon. The shipboard postal unit was closed to the public on this date but was available to the crew. Most Ticonderoga mail with this date was actually cancelled in Hawaii.



Last moonwalk of the century ends less than three years after it began. The postmarks were applied not shipboard but in the postal facility at Pearl Harbor.



When the variation in postmarks is slight does it still suggest multiple canceling devices?



While machine canceling devices remained onboard this hand cancel with reduced Navy rubber stamp cachet for the first manned Skylab crew recovery was struck in Pearl Harbor. Skylab 1 was the unmanned orbiting laboratory.





The above recovery date for the second Skylab crew was actually postmarked on shore in Hawaii. The day after date below was onboard and cancelled when the postal unit reopened the day after recovery.





The final Skylab crew returned on February 8th. With the postal unit closed onboard the PRS the Type II (wavy lines instead of killer bars) received service on shore. The uncommon envelope below is dated the next day when the ship mail facility had reopened.





U.S.S. NEW ORLEANS

The final recovery at sea was full of contradiction. Deke Slayton, the only unflown Mercury astronaut finally flew, 16 years after being selected, on the final Apollo mission. The space race had begun to compete with the Russians. The final flight would be the first cooperative mission with them. Most of the covers postmarked USS New Orleans would again be serviced ashore while a few that were postmarked in San Francisco were actually on board the ship. The Captain's covers that have the ASTP stamp, which are usually a good bet as genuine, are all backdated. While some Beck covers were onboard this one is probably a landlubber.