

# OF ICE AND MEN

## BYRD ANTARCTIC EXPEDITIONS I-V



In 1925 Commander Richard E. Byrd led the naval party that accompanied the MacMillan Greenland expedition. His use of polar aviation returned valuable hydrographic, magnetic, and geographical information, including the possible discovery of new territory. His flights, which pioneered the use of the sun compass and shortwave aerial radio, covered more in one day's flight than a month of sledding. Denied permission to make a dash for the North Pole by the Navy he returned the following year with Floyd Bennett and made claim to the first flight over the top of the world. In 1927 he flew the first transatlantic airmail after losing out on the first nonstop New York to Paris flight to Charles Lindbergh.

Byrd ushered in the Mechanical Age of Antarctic exploration from 1928 until his death nearly 30 years later. The postal history of the Byrd Antarctic Expeditions is traced with particular attention to the aerial flights which brought him acclaim and success. Presented are Byrd Antarctic Expedition (1928-1930) [BAE-I], Byrd Antarctic Expedition (1933-1935) [BAE-II], US Antarctic Service Expedition (1939-1941) [BAE-III], US Navy Antarctic Development Project (1946-1947) [Operation Highjump, BAE-IV], and Operation Deep Freeze I (1955-1956) [BAE-V].

### REFERENCES

- |                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| Bertrand, Kenneth J. | <i>Americans in Antarctica 1775-1948</i> (1971)       |
| Byrd, Richard E.     | <i>Little America</i> (1930), <i>Discovery</i> (1935) |
| Dufek, George J.     | <i>Operation Deepfreeze</i> (1957)                    |

Having departed Norfolk with 300 tons of supplies on September 25, 1928 the *Eleanor Bolling* arrived at Dunedin November 18. The *City of New York* arrived on November 28, 1928. On December 2, the *Eleanor Bolling*, along with the *City of New York*, left for Antarctica.



24 Dec 1928  
Christchurch, NZ  
Receiver mark



After transferring 90 tons of coal to the *City of New York*, the *Bolling* steamed back to Dunedin, leaving the *New York* at the edge of the ice pack on December 11. The *Bolling* reached Dunedin on December 20. This letter, sent on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, was mailed as the cargo vessel was refitted with supplies for Little America which had been established in their absence.

Aerial operations began in January 1929. As part of the 414 balloons released from January 1929 to February 1930 to measure winds aloft meteorologist William Haines determined that November 28, although hazy, would be sufficient for an attempt to fly to the South Pole. The hour of takeoff was chosen when the sun would be on the beam both coming and going to facilitate reading the sun compass from the side window since the magnetic compass was useless. Cancelled on the day the *City of New York* left Antarctica the FLOWN envelope, one of about 200 carried on the first flight over the South Pole, was held by Byrd and later postmarked on the reverse during BAE II.



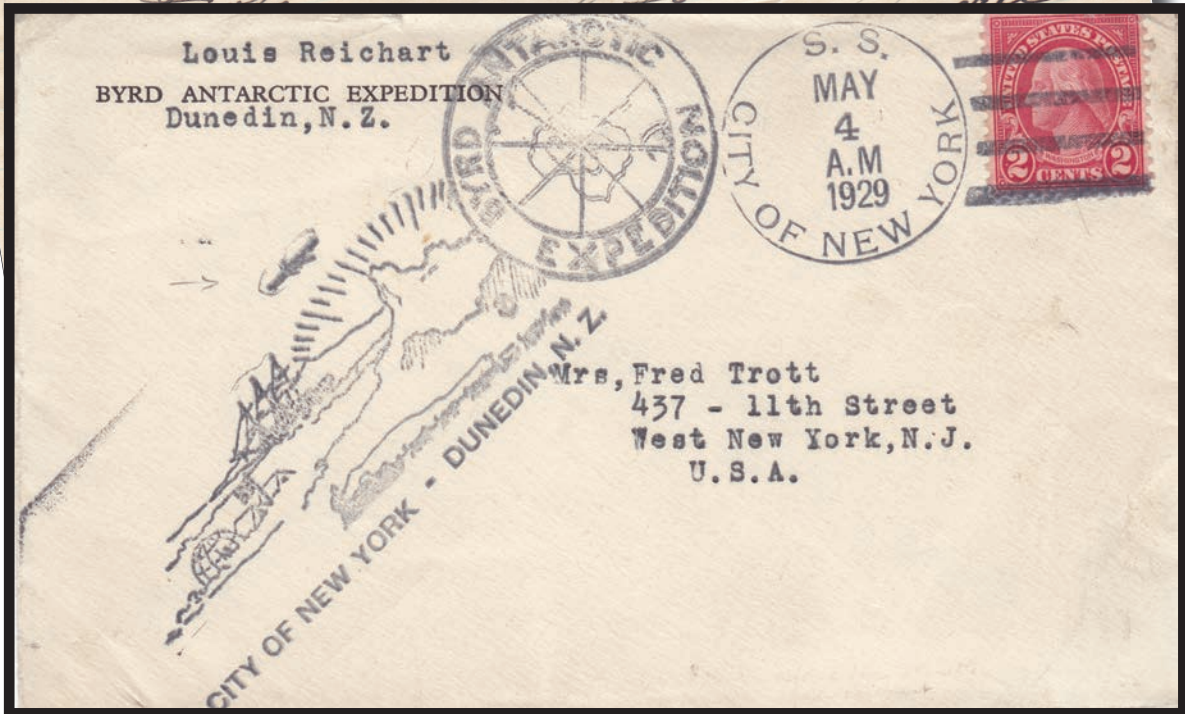


Addressed to a major sponsor this cover, FLOWN on the first flight over the South Pole, is annotated by pilot Bernt Balchen. Copilot Harold June, Admiral Byrd as navigator, and McKinley as aerial photographer rounded out the crew of the airplane *Floyd Bennett* for the 18-hour, 41-minute flight. Unlike the paucity of evidence presented for the 1926 North Pole flight, McKinley maintained an almost continuous series of photographs and log entries with the precise times, plane direction, and elevation of the aircraft.

Barque "City of New York"  
April 28<sup>th</sup> 1929  
Dunedin, N.Z.

Dear Mrs. Trott?

Thanks for your  
note which I received a  
few days ago. I will be here  
in Dunedin until the first  
of December, when we  
start for the Bay  
of America



Seaman Louis Reichart writes to a woman in New Jersey following the Little America resupply run completed February 22. The *City of New York*, formerly the *Samson* from Tromsø, Norway, had been recommended as a solid ship by Roald Amundsen. By January of the following year the ship would be underway to the Antarctic to help close BAE I.



NORTH POLE  
MAY 9TH, 1926

**LITTLE AMERICA**  
BYRD  
ANTARCTIC  
EXPEDITION  
1928-30

SOUTH POLE  
NOV. 29, 1929

**Warm Greeting**  
from a  
**Cold Country**

**MERRY CHRISTMAS**  
1929 and 1930  
**HAPPY NEW YEAR**

No matter when these  
you, Time and Distance  
manner diminishes  
and

It is with pleasure  
"GREETINGS"  
I am most  
southern  
"LITTLE AMERICA"  
mi

AUXILIARY BARQUE  
"CITY OF NEW YORK"

NORTH POLE  
MAY 9, 1926

**LITTLE AMERICA**  
BYRD  
ANTARCTIC  
EXPEDITION  
1928-30

SOUTH POLE  
NOV. 29, 1929

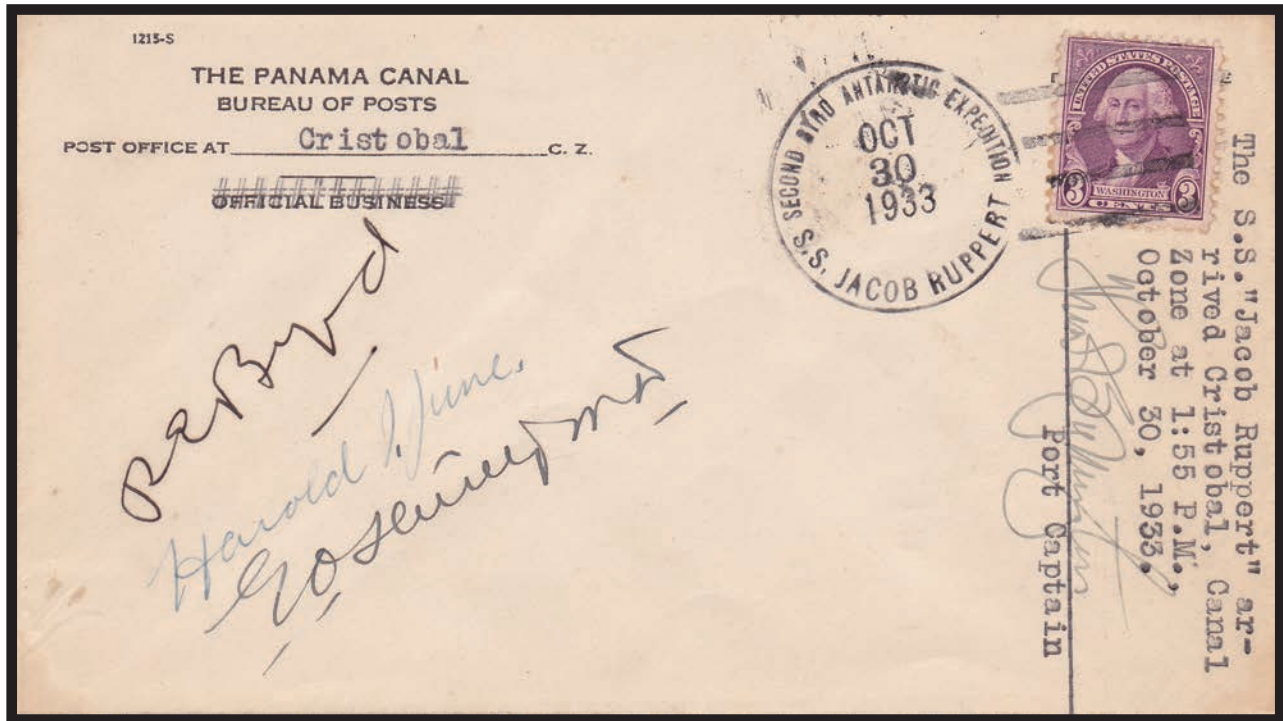
*R. Monte*  
Return Address  
Aux-Bark "City of New York"  
Byrd Antarctic Expedition!  
1451 E 17th St  
Brooklyn, NY

BYRD ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION

LITTLE AMERICA - ANTARCTICA

NEW YORK  
FEB 19  
AM 1930  
S. S. CITY OF NEW YORK

The *City of New York* left Dunedin for Little America on January 6, 1930. Fighting a fierce storm along the way, she made it to the edge of the ice pack on January 20 and rendezvoused with the whaler *Kosmos*. On February 6, it started her journey into the pack for Little America. Incredibly, it took 12 days to reach the men at the edge of the Bay of Whales due to a series of severe storms that blew them off course. The *City of New York* finally arrived at the Bay of Whales the evening of February 18. She was loaded at night and ready to cast off the following morning. February 19, 1930 marked the departure from Little America I and the date that flown flight covers were prepared. By March 10, she would be safe at Dunedin, NZ.



The US Shipping Board leased the *Pacific Fir*, a steel cargo vessel used to transport west coast lumber, to Byrd for \$1 a year. Reconditioned in Boston it was rechristened the Jacob Ruppert. Ten times the size of the aging *Bear of Oakland* it was none the less faster, departing Boston October 11, 1933. On October 30, the ship arrived at Cristobal, CZ. Signed by the Port Captain, Admiral Byrd, Chief airplane pilot, Harold June, and the original expedition Physician, Dr. Guy Shirey, who returned to New Zealand on the *Bear* in January 1934, suffering from alcoholism made worse at polar extremes.



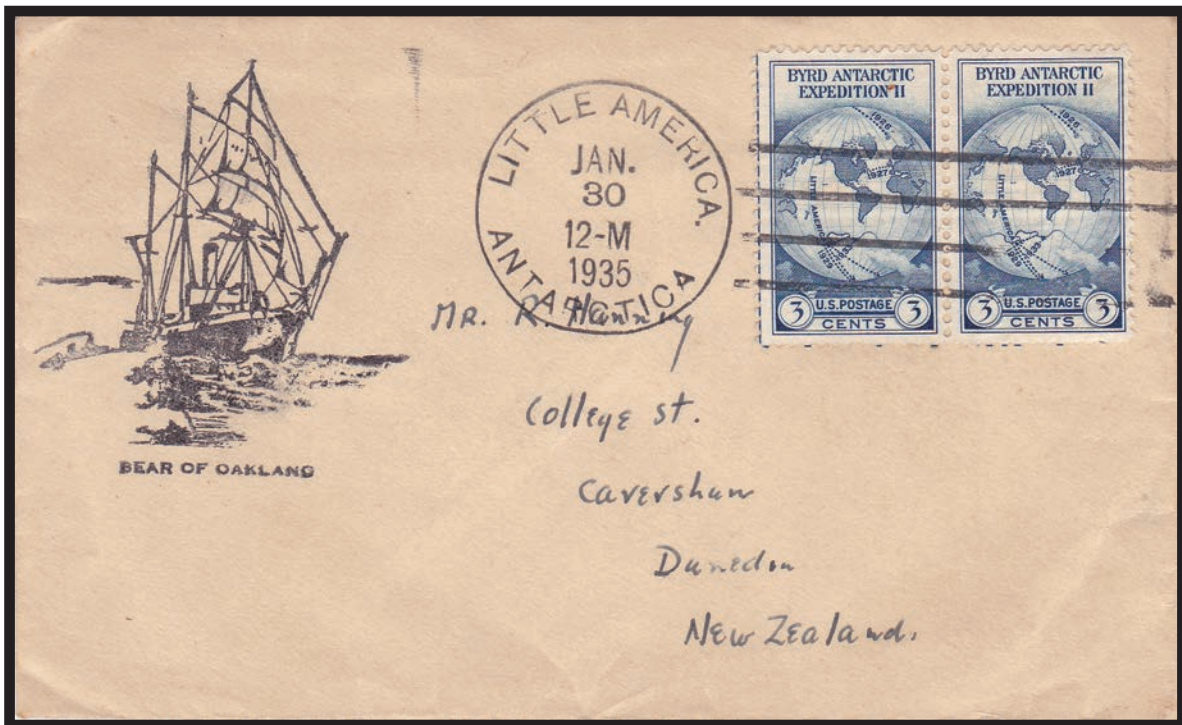
Cover carried from New Zealand to Little America by way of the R.R.S. *Discovery II* and *Bear of Oakland*, on the transfer of replacement medical doctor Dr. Louis H. Potakar to Little America. This mail was very small as notice was very short and virtually all originated from N.Z., hence the term "N.Z. dispatch". On arrival at Little America the Jan 31, 1934 hand cancel was used for much of this dispatch. The canceller was dropped, distorting the lower part of the date ring and shifting the lowest killer bar to the right.

The flying season was expected to begin November 1, 1934. Except for brief meteorological and test flights the weather did not cooperate until the 15<sup>th</sup>. On this date Byrd, with Harold June as pilot explored a triangular course beginning with the Queen Maud Mountains to the Ford Ranges and ending at the Rockefeller Mountains where they spotted the wreck of the Fokker plane abandoned in 1929.

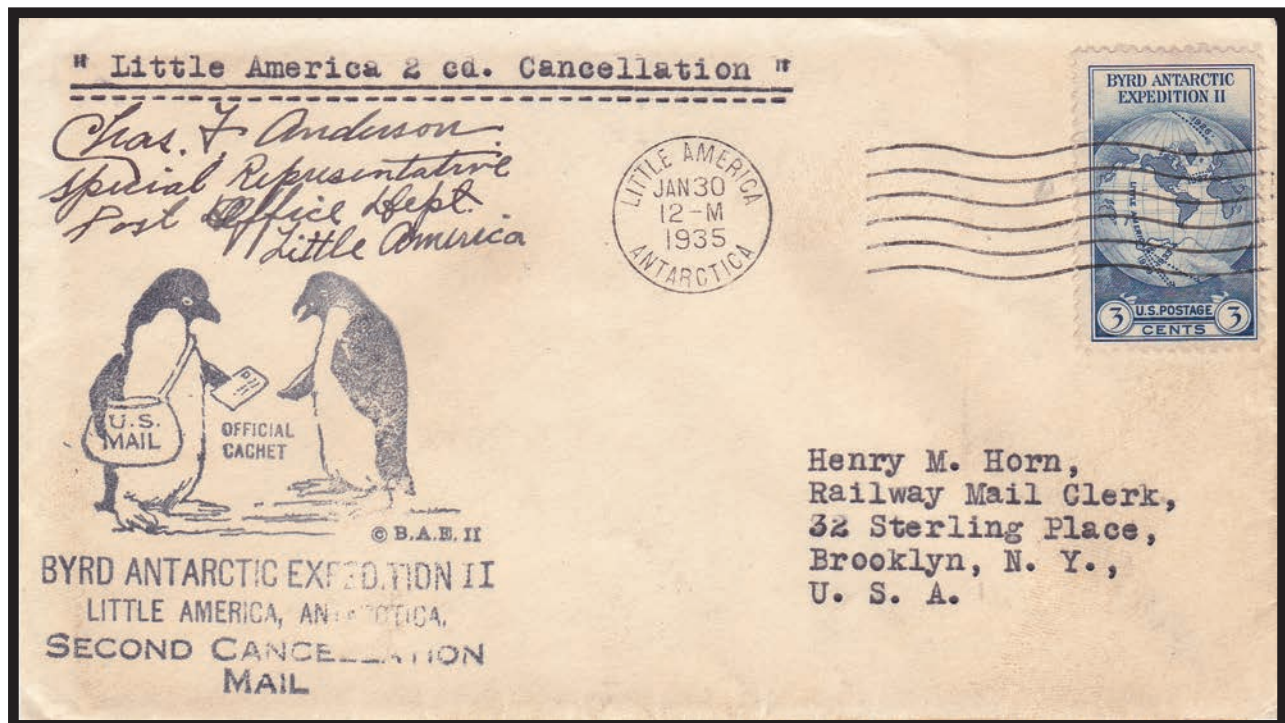


Philatelic documentation was carried on the William Horlick from November 15, 16, 18, 22 and 23. Although all bear Admiral Byrd's autograph he only flew on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>. This inaugural exploratory flight lasted 6 hours and 41 minutes.

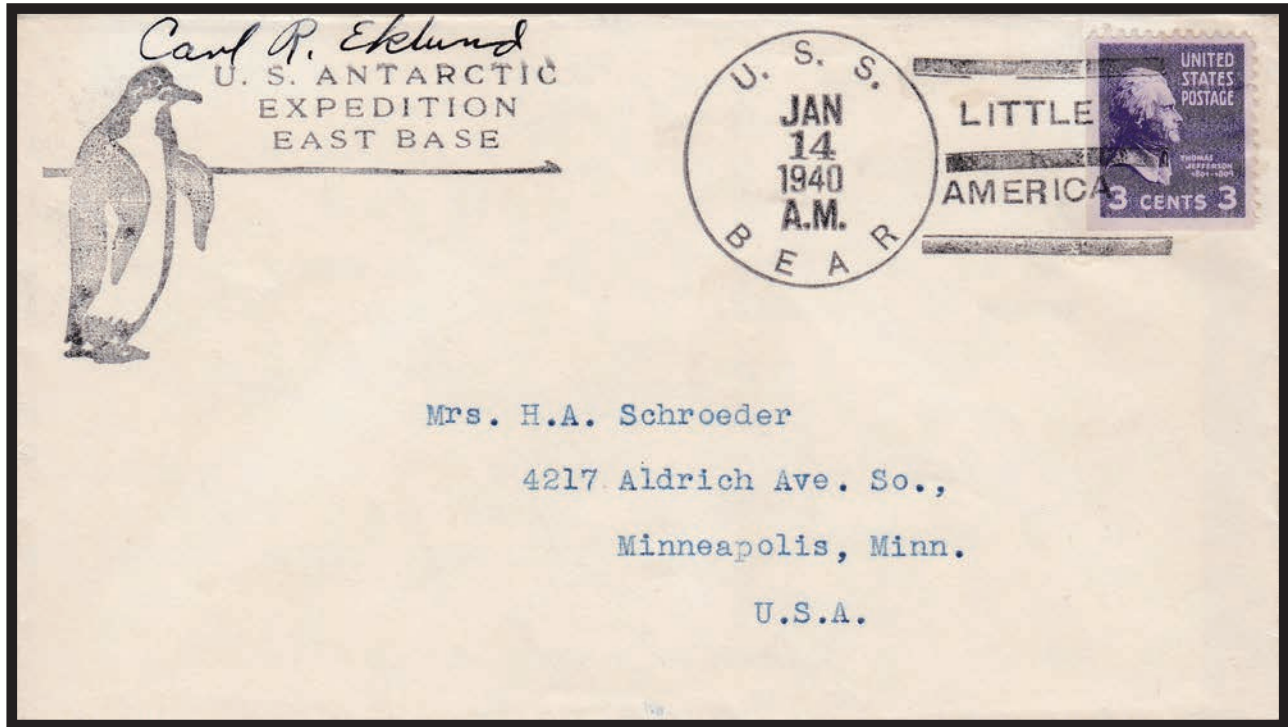




Originally named the 'Bear' the square-rigged wood barquentine was constructed in Scotland in 1874. After 10 years as a sealer the dual steam-powered and sailing ship built with six inch thick sides it was purchased by the Coast Guard to successfully rescue Greeley and the six other survivors at Cape Sabine, June 23, 1884. It also participated in relief efforts following the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906. Bought by the City of Oakland in 1928, she was re-christened *Bear of Oakland* for BAE II in 1933-35, and renamed USS *Bear* for his 1939-41 expedition.



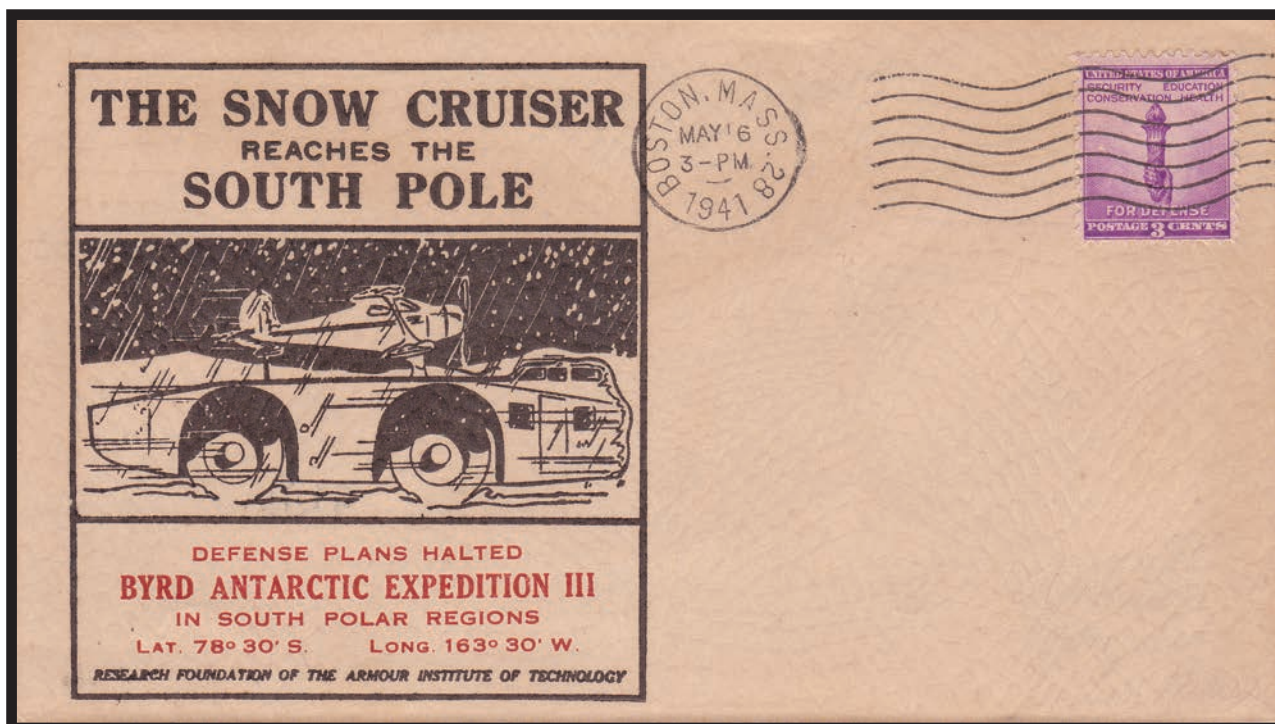
Only a third of the first batch of mail was cancelled before the *Bear of Oakland* departed early in 1934. On her return on January 19, 1935 the ship brought a Post Office Department expert to take over postmarking envelopes. In total 120,960 covers were serviced. Contributing more than \$60,000 to the expedition.



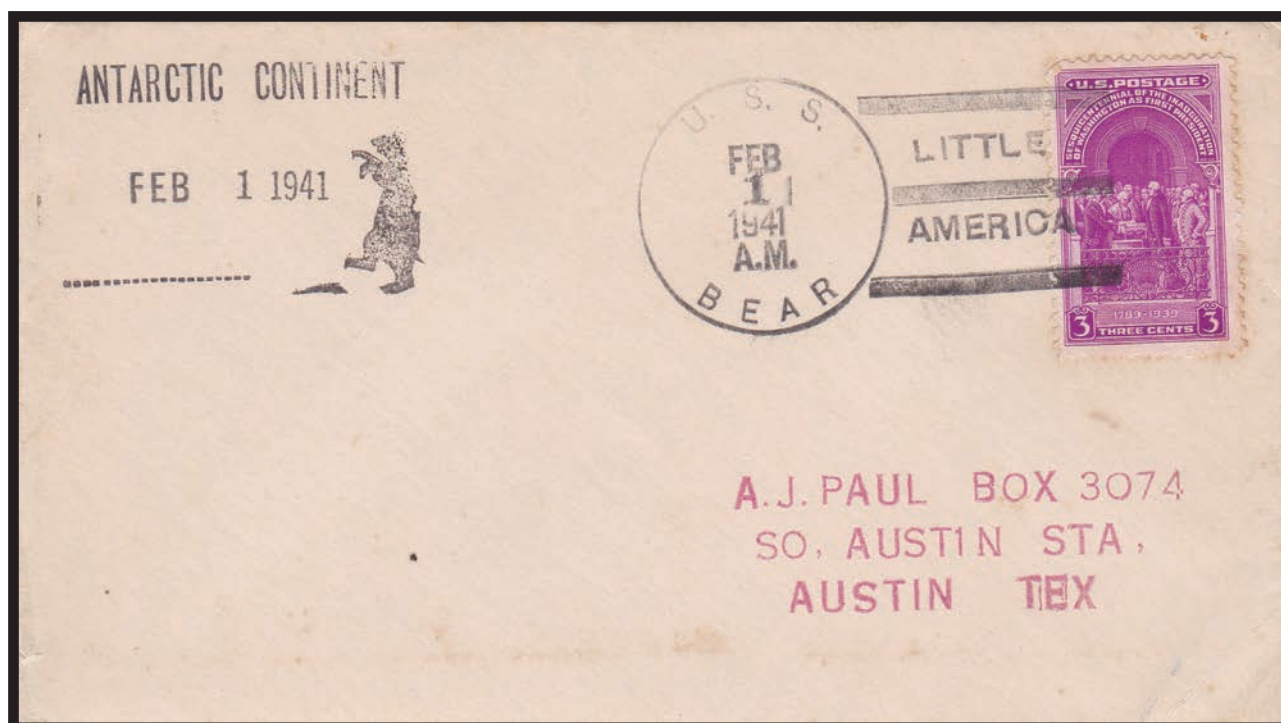
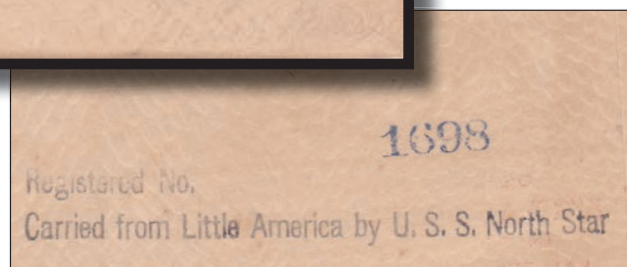
Establishment of East Base on this date on envelope posted by expedition scientist Carl Eklund.



Staff meteorologist writes from West Base in March 1940 about his membership in the Harvard Mountaineering Club. By May the crew mail reached Cambridge, MA. Three weeks later the ship was docked at the Philadelphia Naval Ship Yard.



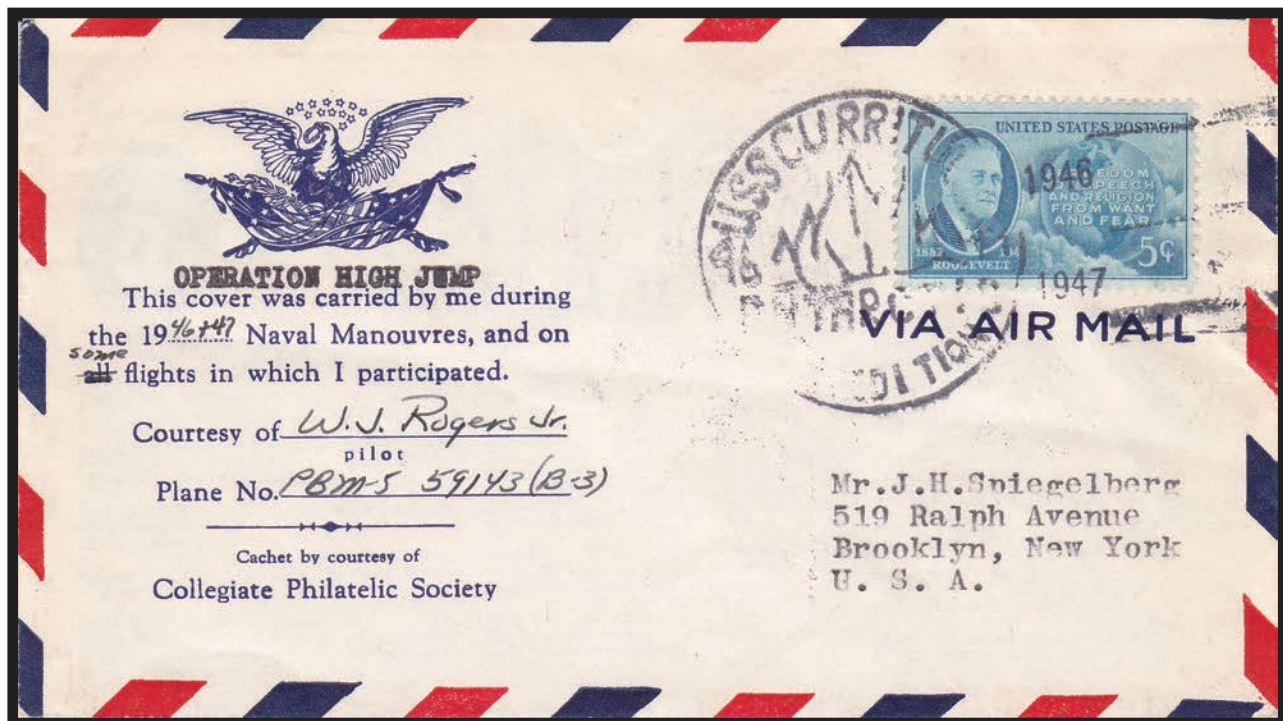
Between five and 10,000 envelopes were loaded in the Snow Cruiser. With tires 10 feet tall and enough fuel to travel 5,000 miles, the mammoth vehicle failed to travel past Little America. Rescued and returned from Antarctica on the USS *North Star* the majority were postmarked in Boston 6 months before America entered WWII.



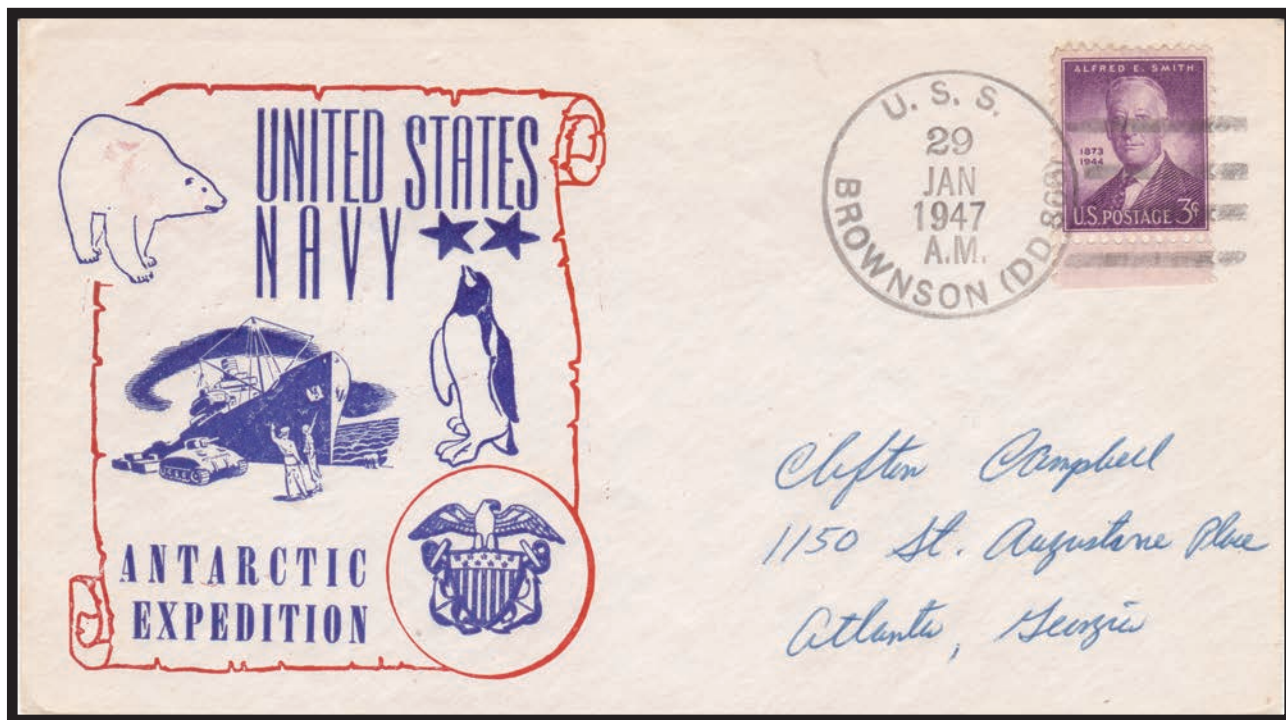
With international tensions rising, it was considered advisable to evacuate the two bases instead of replacing them with fresh crews. On this date, the *North Star* and *Bear* evacuated West Base.



As lead vessel of Sub-Task Group 1 with a mandate to explore and photograph as much of the Antarctic continent as possible the USS *Currituck* (Seaplane Tender) was accompanied by USS *Henderson* (Destroyer) and USS *Cacapon* (Fleet Oiler). Within a span of minutes *Currituck*, using a massive crane, could place aircraft and retrieve it from the sea.



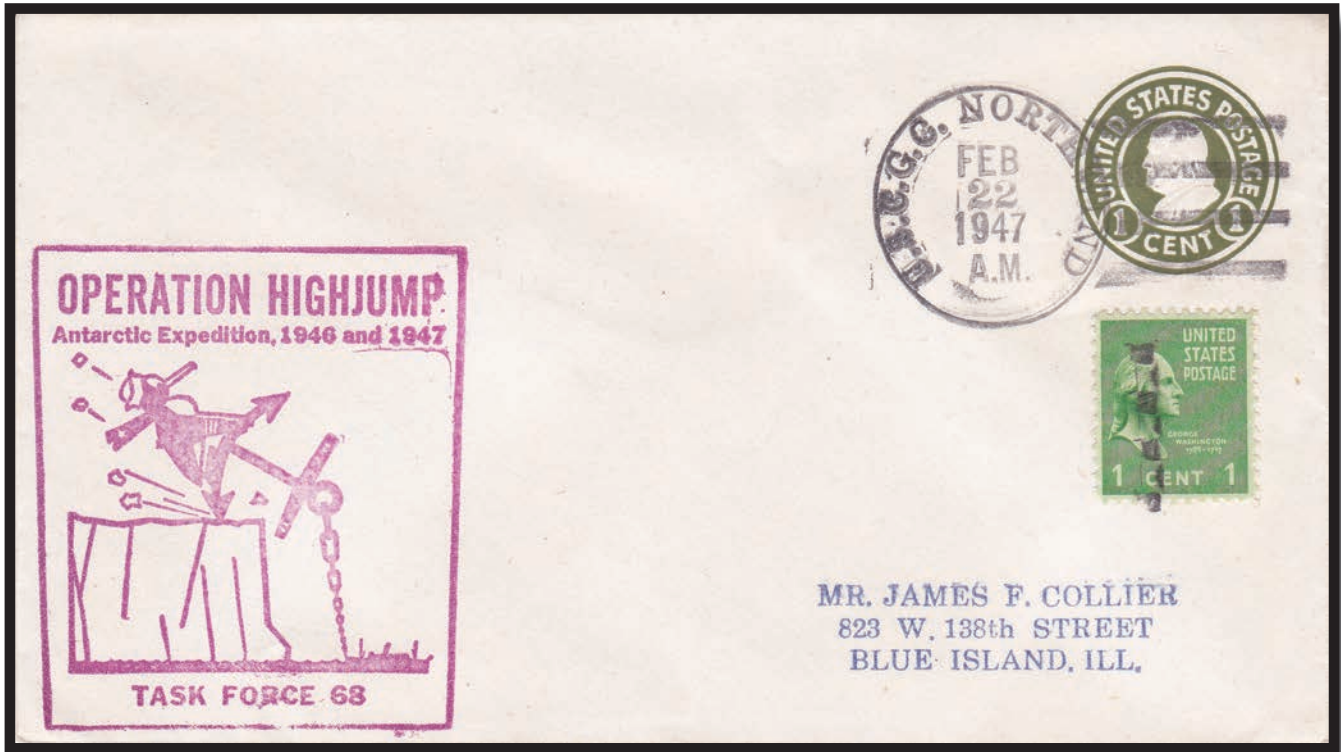
USS *Currituck* was assigned 3 PBM-5 Mariner seaplanes which flew from December 1946 to March 1947. During 36 missions a total of 19 claims of sovereignty were claimed covering 405,378 square miles. This rare FLOWN envelope was carried by Crew #1 aircraft commander William Rogers. Claim of sovereignty was used as leverage by President Eisenhower to establish the Polar Treaty of 1959.



Printed envelope cancelled USS *Brownson*, January 29, 1947. Cancel marks the rendezvous of USS *Brownson* and USS *Philippine Sea* which *Brownson* delivered air crash survivors to *Philippine Sea* for expedited return to the United States.



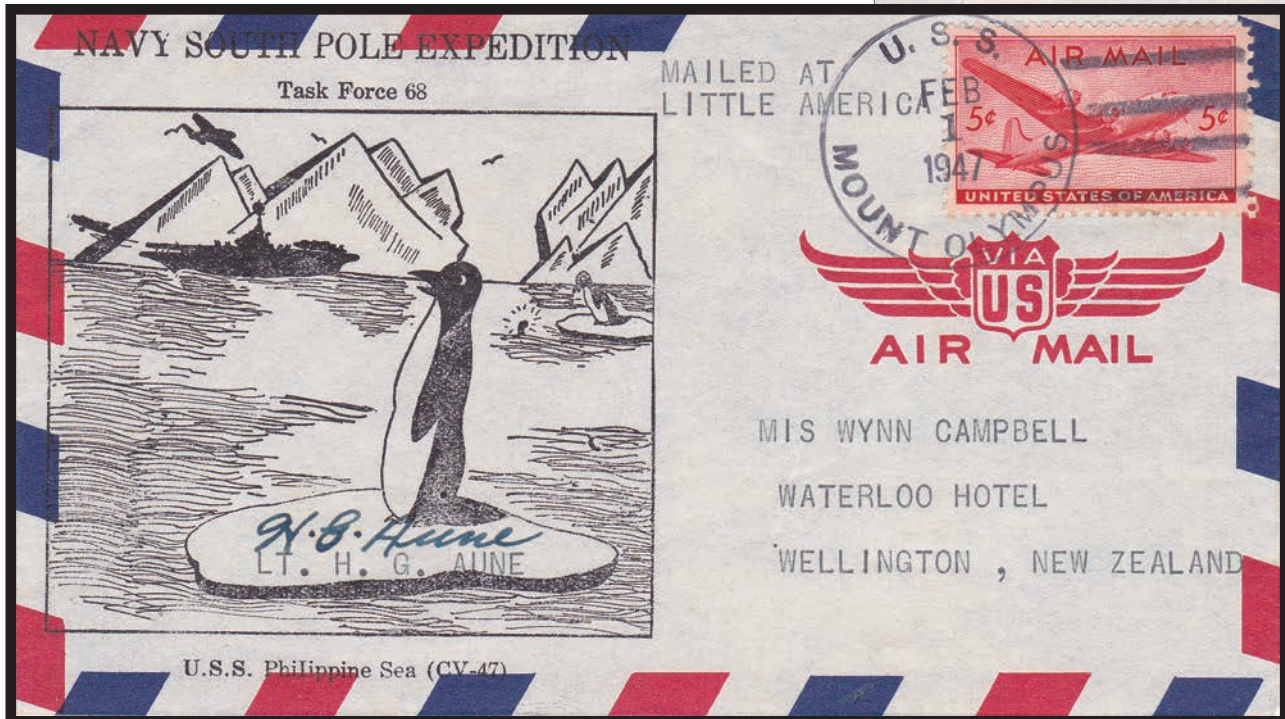
Commanded by Capt George Dufek the USS *Pine Island* was Seaplane Tender for the East Group (Sub-Task Group 2). Working with USS *Brownson* (Destroyer) and USS *Canisteo* (Tanker) it was from *Pine Island* that Mariner George One was lost resulting in the death of three airmen. Posted the day before departure from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on return to the States.



Coast Guard Icebreaker USCGC *Northwind*, a part of the Central Sub-Task Group 3 along with fellow icebreaker USS *Burton Island*, arrives at Port Chalmers, NZ with USS *Merrick* and USS *Yancey* in tow.

Posted on USS *Mount Olympus*, communications ship for the Central Sub-Task Group 4, this envelope was FLOWN from USS *Philippine Sea* to Little America and then on to New Zealand. Byrd took advantage of multiengine aircraft and pioneered the use of Jet Assisted Take Off (JATO) to explore the Antarctic interior and make a second trip to the South Pole.

*This letter was  
 flown on Jan 30  
 1947 from the  
 USS-Philippine Sea  
 to Little America  
 H.G. Aune*



Serving as the afloat headquarters for the Commander, Third Amphibious Force at the Battle of Letye Gulf in 1943, the USS *Mount Olympus* went to serve with distinction as Flagship CTF 68. Posted on the date of departure from Antarctica to return to Norfolk.





Rear Admiral Dufek first served under Admiral Byrd in 1939 onboard the USS *Bear* during BAE III. For Operation Highjump (Byrd IV) he commanded the East Group. For Operation Deepfreeze I (Byrd V) Dufek would have operational command while Byrd served as scientific leader. A massive icebreaker, USS *Glacier* arrives in Antarctica to construct an airfield at McMurdo Sound.



LCDR Henry Jorda was one of four VX-6 pilots to fly the first non-stop flight from New Zealand to Antarctica. This FLOWN envelope arrived December 20, 1955, and wintered over to await the first day of postal operations at South Pole Station, Antarctica, December 15, 1956. It was Jorda who flew Byrd to the South Pole for Byrd's third and final time.