Soviet and American Drift Stations: 1937-1991

Purpose: Introduce viewers to Postal History from Soviet and US floating ice islands.

Scope: Contemporary postmarks from the first Soviet drift station until the evacuation of the last facility following the break up of the Soviet Union. Differentiate mail actually postmarked on the ice from covers cancelled at the Moscow Post Office. Show mail from the years Fletcher's Ice Island (T-3) was in operation. Display known Official stationary and cachets.

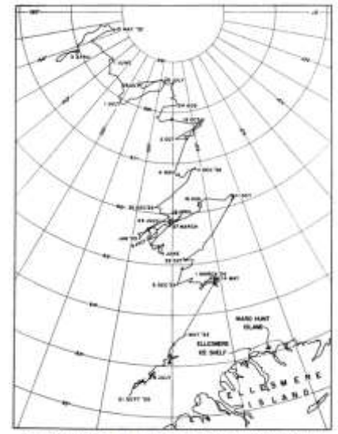
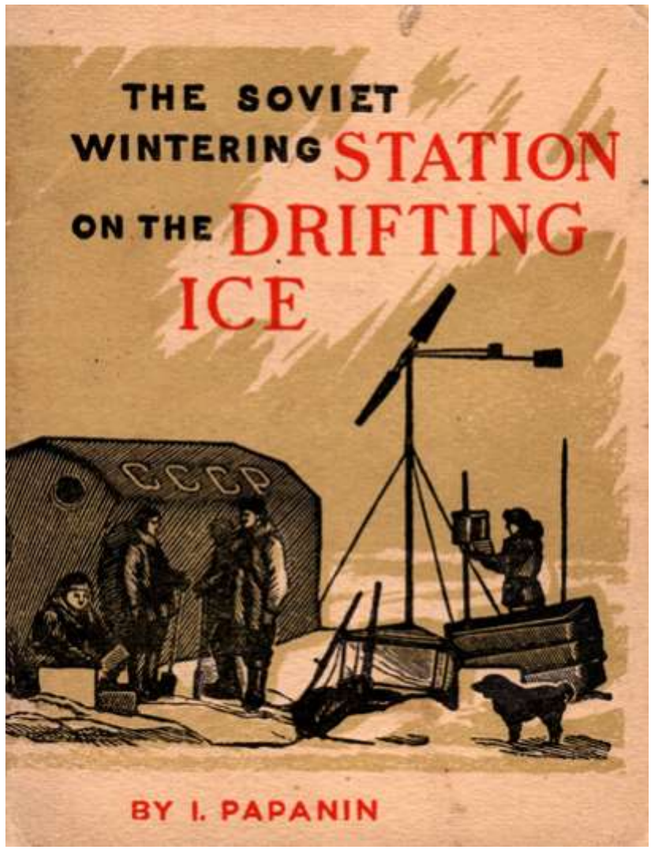


Exhibit Plan:

Soviet Drift Stations			
2-20	North Pole 1-31	21	TOROS-1
American Drift Stations			
22	USN Skijump II	26	Snow Goose/USS Skate
23	T-3 Period I	27-29	T-3 Period III
24	T-3 Period II	30-34	T-3 Period IV
25	Alpha/Alpha 2 (Charlie)	35-40	ARLIS I-VII



Building on the revolutionary idea that a object frozen in the Arctic Ocean can drift over the North Pole, Soviet scientists established North Pole-1 about 20km from the Pole. After 9 months on the ice with three fellow scientists, Papanin was rescued by a Soviet ice breaker. The four were awarded the title Hero of the Soviet Union and became famous. The following year he had the booklet published including a small number in English.

Important covers have red borders

NP-4.II 19 Apr 56 NP-4 BC.1

NP-4.II	Type I were cancelled on the ice. Type II postmarked in Moscow.
19 Apr 56	Date envelope entered the mail.
NP-4 BC.1	BS.1 is Official stationary Type I. BC.1 Special stationary Type I.

Thule Greenland 11 Nov 58 T-3 C 5a T-3 C Priv.

Thule Greenland	Where cover entered mail.
11 Nov 58	Date envelope postmarked.
T-3 C 5a	Cachet Type (5) & subtype (a).
T-3 C Priv.	Cachet privately produced.

To check Soviet activities at high latitudes, Alaska Air Command established a project in order to establish a weather station on a tabular iceberg and conduct geophysical and oceanographic research. Joseph O. Fletcher, Commanding Officer of a U.S. Air Force weather squadron stationed in the Arctic was placed in charge. In March 1952, Thule Air Base sent C-47 aircraft to T-3, and several research stations placed on T-3's flat surface.

NP-1

NP-1

In 1936 two aircraft piloted by Matokchin and Vodopianov flew more than 4,000 km over the islands of Franz Josef archipelago on the same day. In the following year Tchkalov performed the first non-stop flight from Moscow to Porland, followed by the flight from Moscow to California.

It was the Soviet achievements in extreme latitude aviation that made the concept of manning drift stations possible. Russians were capable of repeatedly landing heavy aircraft on ice floes. The Americans would not attempt landing at the Poles for another 20 years.

Leningrad 16 Mar 38 PN-1.BC.1

While there are no known NP-1 covers from the ice, this envelope represents the closest approximation. After 9 months on the ice the four scientists were rescued by sea. They arrived in Leningrad on 15 March on board the icebreaker Yermak.

Moscow 26 Mar 38 PN-1.BC.1

North Pole-1 was established on May 21, 1937 some 20 km from the North Pole by Otto Schmidt. "NP-1" operated for 9 months, during which the ice floe travelled 2,850 kilometers. On February 19, 1938, Soviet ice breaker Tamyr and Murman took off four polar explorers from the station, who immediately became famous in the USSR and were awarded titles Hero of the Soviet Union: hydrobiologist Pyotr Shirshov, geophysicist Yevgeny Fyodrov, radioman Ernst Krenkel and their leader Ivan Papanin.

There were no postal facilities for NP-1, NP-2 or NP-3. This envelope was postmarked in Moscow on February 23rd, 1938, the week the explorers were rescued.

Moscow 23 Feb 38 PN-1.BC.1

NP-2

The Sever (Russian for North) missions were reconnaissance and logistic support flights at extreme latitudes. S-5 was responsible for the establishment of NP-2 and NP-3. Depending on weather and sea conditions, resupply and evacuation were accomplished by air or icebreaker.

NP-2 was established April 1950 with a contingent of 17, ten tents, and a truck. Regular cargo resupply by air permitted the station to continue for more than a year. In late April, 1951 the ice floe split in two and an evacuation commenced.

The information on the launch and the drift of the station were classified and the details did not appear in the media until the 1990s. Research included depth measurements and studying chemical and biological properties of Arctic sea water. At the time the station investigated the possibility of creation such a base on floating ice with the support of cargo planes.

NP-3

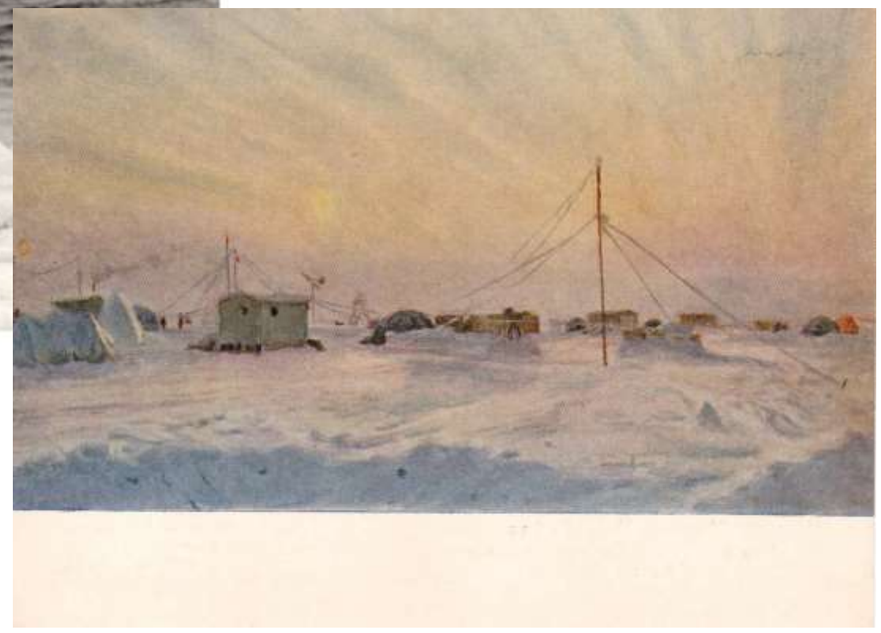
Despite the fact that NP-2 and NP-3 were occupied for more than a year, there exists no philatelic documentation. With a Cold War between the Soviets and the West heating up, it is unclear whether a focus on classified military work may have contributed to a lack of notoriety.

On July 7th a hungry bear went into the camp and attacked two researchers. It unavoidably required being put down. After the first episode polar bears were seen another eight times. On five occasions they were scared off and on three had to be killed.

This photograph of a polar bear was taken on the Soviet drift station, the film was developed, the print made, and the photographer’s autograph added as a favor.

The new stations were equipped with more comfortable living quarters, track-laying vehicles and helicopters. NP-3 even received a piano. Regular air service allowed specialists, who were not members of the expeditions, to come to NP-3 for short periods to perform observations pertaining to their fields.

Extensive examination of the Lomonosov Ridge took place on NP-3. The geological structure rises several hundred meters above the Arctic Ocean floor and divides the ocean into the Eurasian and American Basins. This architecture accounts for significant differences in how the currents behave as well as important implications for nuclear submarines expected to play important roles in any upcoming confrontations.



NP-4

Nearly 20 years after the first station, NP-4 was far more comfortable. Building construction was improved, crew complement was increased, and a helicopter was stationed on the floe. First mail cancelled on the ice.

NP-4.I

29 Dec 56

NP-4.I

NP-4.II

NP-5. I

NP-5. II

NP-4.II

19 Apr 56

NP-4 BC.1

Many philatelic requests were diverted to Moscow to keep postal activities on the ice to a minimum.

NP-5

Like many stations to come, NP-5 consisted of a 1st and 2nd shift. The first, lasting a year from April 1955 to April 1956 drifted 2650 km. When the second shift took over the crew was decreased from 22 to 10. It was abandoned after five months when it drifted towards a sandbank. The station was evacuated the day this cover was cancelled.

NP-5. I

08 Oct 56

Envelope cancelled on the ice floe and not International Book in Moscow.

NP-5. II

10 Mar 56

This cover, sent to the noted polar collector, Robert Schoendorf, bears the seldom used 1r airmail stamp.

Despite the Registration marking, this envelope was postmarked from the philatelic division.

After NP-6 Registration service was no longer available.

NP-6

NP-6.I

NP-6.II

NP-6.I

23 Nov 56

NP-6.I

2 Oct 56

NP-6 BS.2

Four dates for the first year (1956) have been recorded. This Official cover is a previously unreported date.

NP-6

Unlike previous stations which where constructed on ice floes, NP-6 was set up on an ice island (14km x 11km wide and between 9 and 12m thick) having originated from the coastal glaciers of Ellesmere. It would participate in the International Geophysical Year (IGY).

NP-6.I

5 Jul 57

NP-6 BS.1

Official covers, which first entered service with NP-4, were printed for the staff at the station. This example was from the scarce first printing (BS.1) while the blue-grey edition at left (BS.2) was more plentiful.

NP-7

NP-7

This envelope at right received hand back service. In addition to excessive postage the cover is unaddressed. International Book cancels, while not made on the ice, are collected as legitimate. The device was created by the government as an alternate (and more convenient) place to apply North Pole cancellations. All examples were struck by postal employees in the main branch of the Moscow post office.

NP-7.I 26 Mar 59

Incoming German mail postmarked on the ice and returned to sender.

NP-7.II 26 Mar 58

PN-7.I

PN-7.II

NP-7.I

28 Nov 58

NP-7.BS.1a

Unlike NP-1 which functioned with a compliment of only four, NP-7 had 22 men, 25 huts, 2 tractors, and a helicopter. It covered 3520 km over a span of 718 days. NP-7 had been set up not far from where NP-3 had been settled. NP-7 was supposed to follow the same course, so that scientists could compare data. Instead, this station drifted towards the limit of Canadian territorial water. The decision was made to evacuate the station.

NP-8

NP-8.II 25 Dec 59

NP-8.III 30 Mar 61 PN-8.BC.1

During the three years it operated NP-8 traveled 5976km. By the time the envelope was postmarked the station was over 2000km from the Soviet coasts requiring aircraft to refuel at NP-10 to reach the station. At the time the US Alpha station was only 60km away. Russians could see the American airstrip in the distance because a phosphorescent liquid was poured on the surface as an aid to pilots.

The commemorative artwork celebrates the launch of the ten thousandth radiosonde from the site.

NP-8.I

NP-8.II

NP-8.III

NP-8

NP-8.III 19 Mar 62 PN-8.BS.1c

CIA Operation Coldfeet

Two highly qualified investigators were selected by the CIA to study NP-8. Maj. James Smith, USAF, was an experienced paratrooper and Russian linguist who had served on US Drift Stations Alpha and Charlie. Lt. Leonard A. LeSchack, USNR, a former Antarctic geophysicist, had set up the surveillance system on T-3 in 1960. During the summer, the two men trained on the Fulton retrieval system, working in Maryland with an experienced P2V crew at Naval Air Test Center, Patuxent River.

Operation Coldfeet produced intelligence "of very great value." The CIA learned that the Soviet station was configured to permit extended periods of silent operation, confirming the importance that the Soviets attached to acoustical work. In addition, equipment and documents obtained from NP 8 showed that Soviet research in polar meteorology and oceanography was superior to US efforts. "In general," the after action report showed, "the remarkable Soviet accomplishments in their drift stations reflect their long experience in this field and the great importance that their government attaches to it."

NP-9

NP-9.I 07 Jun 60

NP-9.I

NP-9.II

From the start, fractures on the landing strip hampered air operations. By the end of March, 1961 the floe had been reduced to an area of just 200 x 130 meters.

This envelope is annotated "*doubtful if ever carried to ice island 9. Station established 14 Apr 1960!*" In addition to being outside the range of acceptable dates it is also the Moscow Kniga postmark listed in the *Soviet Catalogue of Cancels* as number 592 II.

NP-9.II 10 Dec 59 PN-9.IPC.1

NP-10

NP-10.I 14 Mar 62 NP-10.BS.1a

Unlike most previous postmarks, NP-10 did not have an International Book cancel. All cancels were made on the ice.

Note that there were two Official envelopes over the two and a half years the station drifted.

Launched a few weeks before NP-10 started, the atomic icebreaker Lenin both opened the station in October 1961 and evacuated it in April 1964 when the floe disintegrated.

NP-10.I 06 Nov 63 NP-10.BS.2

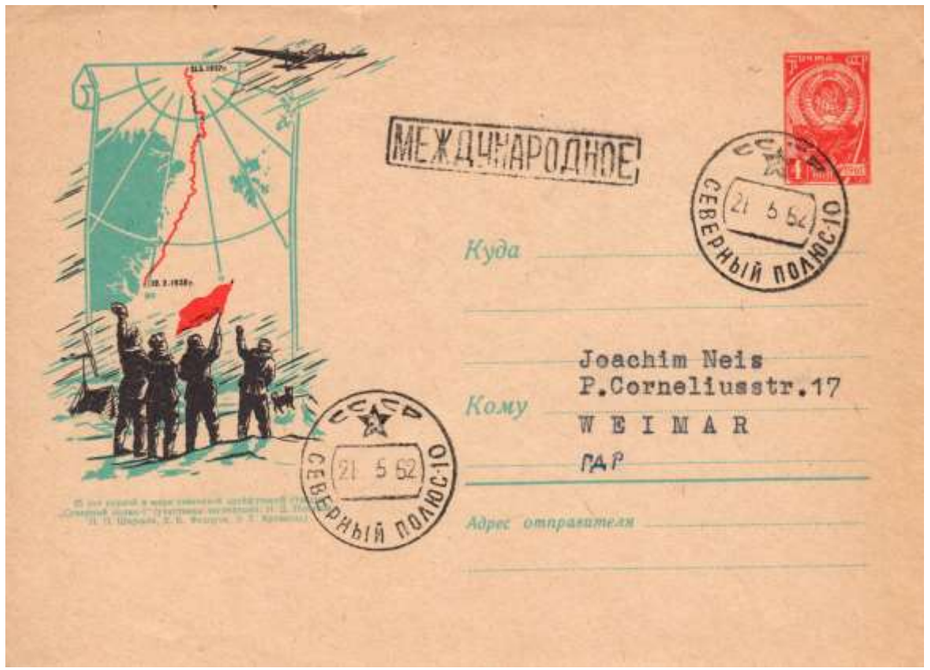
NP-10

NP-10.I 1 May 62 Arlis II—C3

A curious postal card which traveled from NP-10 to the American ARLIS-II station before arriving in West Germany.

All postmarks, both in black or purple were cancelled on the station.

NP-10.I 21 May 62



All previous drift stations had been opened in April. Inaugurated in October under winter conditions the Lenin was able to avoid the 500 flights that would have been necessary to support the station.

This station consisted of only one shift lasting 373 days. With the ice pack cracking frequently the crew was required to move the base frequently. When they were finally evacuated it was to NP-12.

NP-11

NP-11.I 10 Oct 62

NP-11.I 20 Apr 63

NP-12

NP-12.I

25 Apr 65

NP-12.BS.2

NP-12.BS.1

NP-12.I
25 APR 65
NP-12.BS.1

High latitude air expeditions, like the VX-6 American squadron, were handled by Sever. In this case, Sever 15. Dragged into the drift anticyclone area, NP-12 was to be evacuated by air. It was necessary to establish NP-14 as an intermediate stop in order to remove the base when it began to drift near the Canadian coast.

NP-13

NP-13.I

3 Apr 65

NP-13.BS.1a

Both postmarks shown here were struck near the North Pole where SP-13 drifted for months. A Moscow cancel exists but was only used on 7 Mar 64. All cancels are in violet.

Not all drift stations had Official Covers. Many had a second variety. For some reason SP-13 had three. Two are shown here. Both are clearly philatelic favors as they lack addresses.

NP-13.I

17 May 66

NP-13.BS.1b

As an ice floe, as opposed to a tabular iceberg, SP-13 was subject to numerous fractures. This required a number of moves to safeguard personnel and equipment.

This was the first drift station to have a branch location (NP-13.F)

NP-14

NP-14.I

NP-14.II

Early literature suggested that an identifying way to distinguish genuine ice island mail from International Book is that the “4” in “NP-14” appears open. This was based on a classification system originally published by Sashenkov in 1975 in which subsequent references use reproductions of an unclear cancel.

The work of Giardini, Garrou, and Masnari (1998), and the clear example seen here on Official stationary refute this. It underscores the need to reexamine previous assumptions in the light of new data.

NP-14.I 12 Mar 66 NP-14.BS.1b

Soon after another accident brought the station to an end: during a terrible storm, between the end of January and the beginning of February 1966, the station floe was driven several times against the rocky coasts of Henriette Island, DeLong archipelago. The men of NP-14 summoned up their last reserves of strength and dragged their equipment from floe to floe. No airplane could leave to help them, because of the storm that lasted three weeks. It was possible to pick up the men from the ice only when the storm had subsided. They were near their end and half-frozen. The poljarniki *were evacuated by a helicopter, which made 12 flights in the polar night, a remarkable and very risky venture, considering the air means of transport of the time.*

Diary of Station Leader J.B. Konstantinov

NP-15

NP-15.I 3 May 66 NP-15.BS.1a

These cancels are from SP-15. While Type II (Kniga) postmarks exist they are rare. The two Official Covers are illustrated. No stamps were available on the station and no postage is required.

On 04 Dec 67 the station was within 1.2 miles from the North Pole. The researchers walked there and a hoisted a flag. Then they left a message in a bottle inviting whoever found it to inform the Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute (AARI) in Leningrad.

NP-15.I

Unavailable

NP-15.II

NP-15.I 15 Apr 67 NP-15.BS.1b

NP-16

Type I postmarks are cancelled in the field while Type II are created for collectors in Moscow. Depending on the station, sometimes the field cancel is scarce. In this case the Kniga (Moscow) postmark is very rare.

NP-16.I 16 Oct 68

NP-16.I 21 Mar 72 NP-16.BS.1

NP-16.I

NP-16.II

NP-16 had four shifts from 1968 to 1972. In the summer of 1970 NP-16 passed through the relative Inaccessibily pole, in the central Arctic basin and, in January 1971, it was more than 2,000 km from the Soviet coasts. Then, towards the spring of 1972 it moved to an area never reached by the drift of the previous stations. To evacuate the station they had to organize an airlift of 5,000 km. In 1,444 days it drifted 5,981 km.

NP-17

While examples of dates from shortly after the opening of the station in April 1968 have been reported, they are not legitimate. Station personnel, upon receiving the postal cancelling device in the middle of May, back-dated on some of the correspondence in order to emphasize the beginning of their work.

Very few Official covers were produced. It remains unclear why but by the halfway point the mail officer reported he was compelled to send correspondence with envelopes created by himself.

NP-17.I 16 Oct 69 NP-17BS.1

Twenty days after the high latitude air expedition Sever 20 (the Soviet version of the American Antarctic VX-6) established NP-16, NP-17 was operational. Shown here is a rare Official Cover. For some reason only a very small number were produced. The cancel is the last known date in 1969. On this day the facility was abandoned as the floe approached the Straits of Fram. A total of 3310 km were covered in 536 days.

NP-18

Postmarked a little more than a year into a four year odyssey, the SP-18 story was actually on two ice floes (NP-18 and NP-18F). Using the ice-breaker Leningrad and diesel electric ship Anguema, the Soviets unloaded 930 tons of material onto the ice island.

While much of drift station work is related to meteorology, biology, and earth sciences, the military (particularly on NP-18F) conducted sonar surveillance as well as studies using frogmen and explosives to better understand the relief of submerged portions of the ice cap for exploitation by atomic submarines.

NP-18.I 19 Jun 69

NP-18.I 28 Jun 69

No Moscow (Kniga) cancel exists for this station. All postmarks were made on the floe. There are reports that some of the earliest dates (prior to 31Dec 68) are backdated.

NP-19

NP-19.I 1 Oct 70

After NP-18 was abandoned and work continued on NP-18F, the decision was made to reoccupy the original floe (NP-18) as NP-19. Shifts normally last about a year for the crew of 20-30. While the first shift lasted a normal 336 days the second extended a record setting 531. During that time the 30 men drifted 3270 km.

NP-19.I 11 Sep 71

A few weeks into the drift the floe ran aground on a shoal. During the night a storm struck. With no way to move the ice underwent tremendous pressure fracturing just underneath one of the prefabs despite being 30 meters thick. Provisions and mail sunk. Some articles eventually washed up on the coasts of Greenland. On June 21, 1975 young Eskimos of the school in Nanortalik near Farewell Cape found a small case with stamps and some official covers and sent them to Moscow.

NP-19

SOVIET DRIFT
NORTH-POLAR STATION

UPOL-19

88°45' 157°45'
OTH ... N. Lat, ... E. Long.

DEAR Pat
CFM OUR 14 MC QSO
2 WAY SSB CW
DATE 12. IV 19 72 GMT 0324
YOUR RST 599
REMARKS Good luck.

TO RADIO: K4HXI

PSE QSL TNX
QSL VIA Moscow, P.O.B. 88
73! fm UW3HY
VALERY BEGUNOV

On 28 Jun 72 NP-19 became the fist drift station to travel exactly over the Geographic North Pole. The radio reception acknowledgement (QSL card) was sent two weeks prior to attaining the Pole.

NP-20

NP-20.I 30 Mar 71

This drift station was one of the few to be evacuated, not because of danger during break up of the ice floe or beaching on the Canadian coast but because they had completed their assigned tasks.

NP-20.I 22 Apr 70 NP-20.BS.1

While the station was first occupied on 11 Apr 70, the opening ceremony was held on 22 Apr 70. Seen here on an Official Cover it may not have been marked on that day. The stationed continued to use the same date on the canceller for a few weeks.

NP-21

Despite having the program of scientific observations expanded past those originally planned, the researchers in glaciology and atmospheric studies on NP-21 finished before the ice island disintegrated. Working with Sever 26, bearings of 182 different Arctic areas were established an ten automatic radio weather mini-stations were set up capable of forecasting short and middle term weather. The detailed oceanographic mapping of the central polar basin included Siberia, Alaska, Greenland and the Canadian polar archipelagoes.

NP-21.I 19 Oct 72

The violet cancel (they also appear in black) was struck about six months into a three year mission. No International Book (Moscow) postmarks exist. Two Official Cover designs were produced.

NP-22.I 08 Apr 82 NP-22.BS.2b

This unsent cover was handback service by one of the researchers. The cachet says it is from the “Dreyfus Scientific Research Station North Pole 22”. It was sponsored by AARS, the Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute, in St Petersburg. The postage stamp shows the icebreaker Captain Behiser.

NP-22.I 1 Jun 80 NP-22.B.3

NP-22

With a thickness of 28 meters and an area of 10 square miles this stationed over 3000 miles around the North Pole during the eight years in operation.

Over the years 236 men served at the station. It was visited by numerous researchers. Over 5000 radiosondes were launch to broadcast data. For the first time the transmissions were not encrypted. In 1975-76 a satellite station, NP-22D, existed.

NP-23

NP-23.I

1 Nov 78

NP-23.I

7 Jan 78

NP-23.BS.1

NP-24

NP-24.I

10 Nov 79

NP-24.BS.2

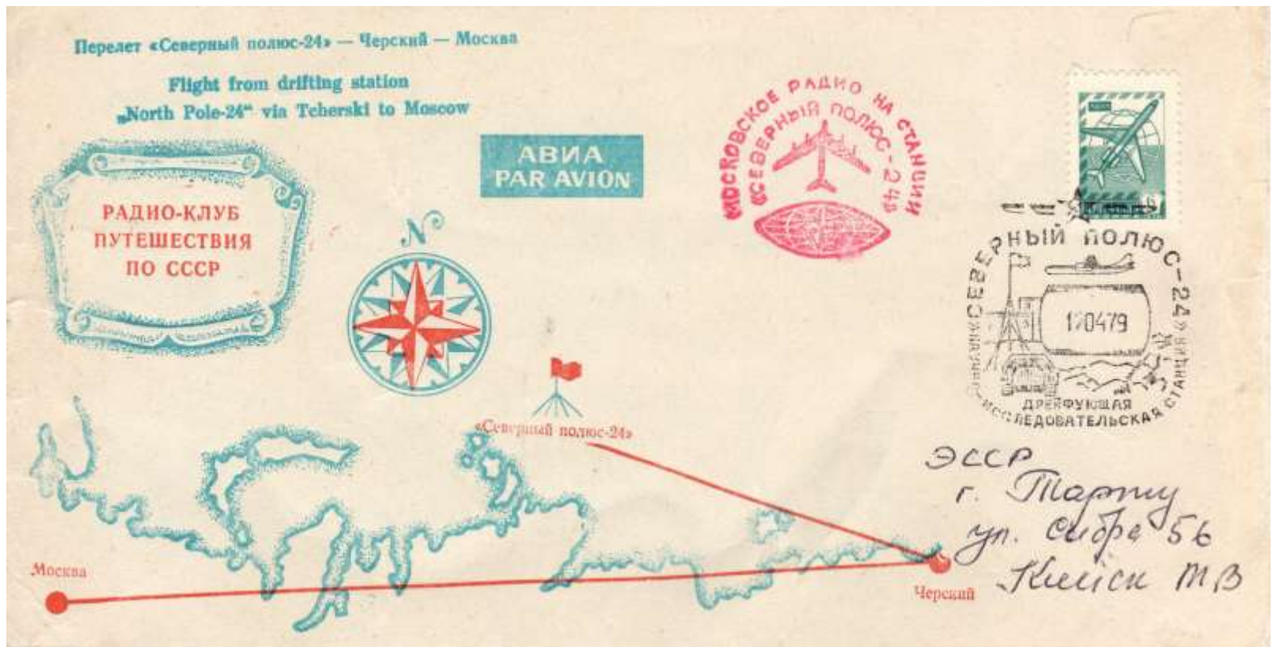
In December 1968 the station suddenly found itself on a collision course with Jeannette Island, DeLong archipelago. Evacuation aircraft were put on standby. For ten days the iceberg floated near the island before moving away.

Three envelopes, all dated 01 Jun 80, have been reported with suspicious postmarks. The windscreen of the vehicle is not divided by a vertical rod. The airplane fuselage is crossed by an oblique backward band, in full color, in the lower part between the wing and empennage. This may signify existence of a forged postmark.

NP-24.I

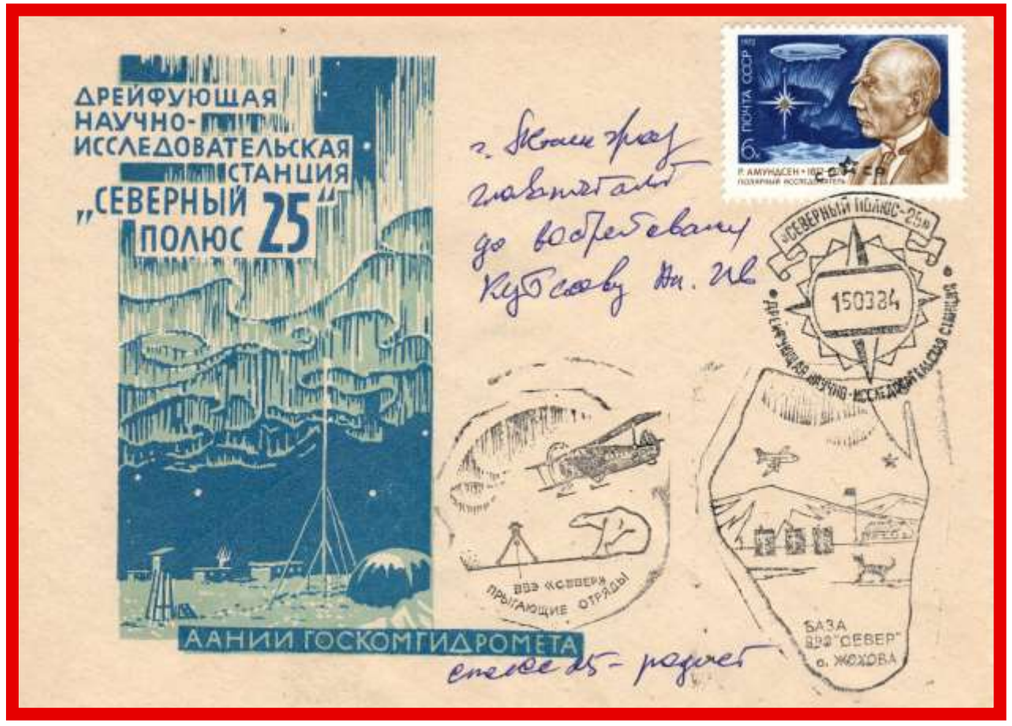
12 Apr 79

NP-24.BC.1



NP-25

NP-25.I 15 Mar 84 NP-25.BS.1



Led by the famous polar researcher Vasilij Sidorov, NP-25 spent three years drifting from Wrangel Island towards the North Pole, into the Canadian sector, and finally into the Beaufort Sea (US territorial waters). With an initial surface area of 90 sq km, a fractured airstrip required that the six tons of food and equipment be ferried by one of the two station helicopters. When it was time to evacuate several trips in small aircraft were required since the large transports were unable to land.

In addition to this Official Cover, the Committee for Hydro-meteorology and Environment Protection of Russia issued an envelope. While the one pictured is the only one released by the AARI, some consider the Committee favor official as well.

NP-26

NP-26.I 09 Apr 86

NP-26.I 16 Apr 85

Despite an area of only 5 sq km and a thickness of only 2-3 meters, this floe supported the 350 tons of scientific equipment, shelters, fuel and food brought to the island.

In January 1986, a team on skis travelled from the base to the Relative Inaccessibility Pole, which represents the farthest Arctic geographical point from piece of land.

NP-27

NP-27

By the 1980's a number of commemorative envelopes honoring Soviet drift station work were being produced for Russian stamp clubs. All known cancels are genuine and struck on the ice. No Official stationary is thought to exist.

NP-27.I

24 Apr 86

NP-27.I

27 Dec 85

NP-27.I

19 May 87

NP-28

NP-28.I 21 May 87 NP-28.BS.1

An Official Cover sent from NP-28. The research objective was to compare readings with those made on NP-22 concerning polar atmosphere surveys. Of particular interest were spectroscopic surveys of methane and carbon monoxide concentrations.

Specialist in the field of drift station philately will not only recognize the postmark (NP-28.I) and cachet (NP-28.BS.1) but also Administrative cancels used to provide supplemental information or commemorate events. Under the cachet is a Station cancel in three lines (NP-28.AMM.1), 50th anniversary of drift stations from 1937-87 with a bear and seal (NP-28.AMM.11), as well as cancel for coordinates on three lines (NP-28.AMM.4).

NP-29

NP-29.I 8 Oct 87

Unlike virtually every other reason for evacuation, after 436 days the station was abandoned with a simple entry in the station log, “End of works”.

NP-29.I 19 Aug 88

NP-30

NP-30.I

4 Apr 91

NP-30.BS.3

NP-30.I

4 Apr 91

NP-30.BS.2

Official cover with Administrative cancels including; Oval cancel of leader Sokolov (NP-30.AMM.11), and Cancel for coordinates on four lines with leader Ippolitov (NP-30.AMM.8). The violet rubber stamp with the aircraft taking off is unknown.

The ship Vitus Bering and icebreaker Yermak established the base. 53 men drifted for 500 days in the first of four shifts. When evacuation was needed due to proximity to Canadian territorial waters it required an aircraft to make 22 flights.

NP-30

NP-30.I

24 Apr 90

NP-30.BS.1

NP-30.1

11 Apr 88

NP-30.1

11 Apr 88

NP-31

NP-31.I 22 Dec 89

The Russians spent 29,726 days on the ice. A total of 8,885 researchers participated. They took 211,383 meteorological bearings, 47,070 measurements of ocean depth, and launched 32,859 radiosondes.

It was the last of the Soviet drift stations. Over the years the Soviet Union experienced global pressures caused cracks and fissures that were ultimately unsustainable. Like the disappearing ice floes, the USSR ultimately broke apart and disappeared.

Official Cover with numerous Administrative cancels. A second Official Cover was designed for the station.

After a hiatus of several years the Russian government again began inhabiting ice floes and ice islands.

NP-31.I 22 Dec 89 NP-31.BS.1

TOROS-1

TOROS-1 20 Mar 66

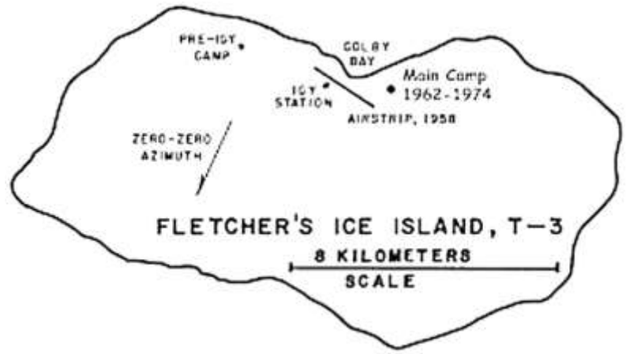
From 2-28 March 1966, Murmansk's Fishing Institute, set up a scientific drift station in the White Sea to study weather and the polar sea biology of seals. It underwent an emergency evacuation after only eight days of full activation after the ice disintegrated. March 20, 1966 is the only date found on envelopes from the station.

Skijump II

Barrow, AK 7 Mar 52

One of 16 envelopes carried on exploratory landing on T-3 by Col Fletcher and Lt Commander C. Kephart

Skijump II

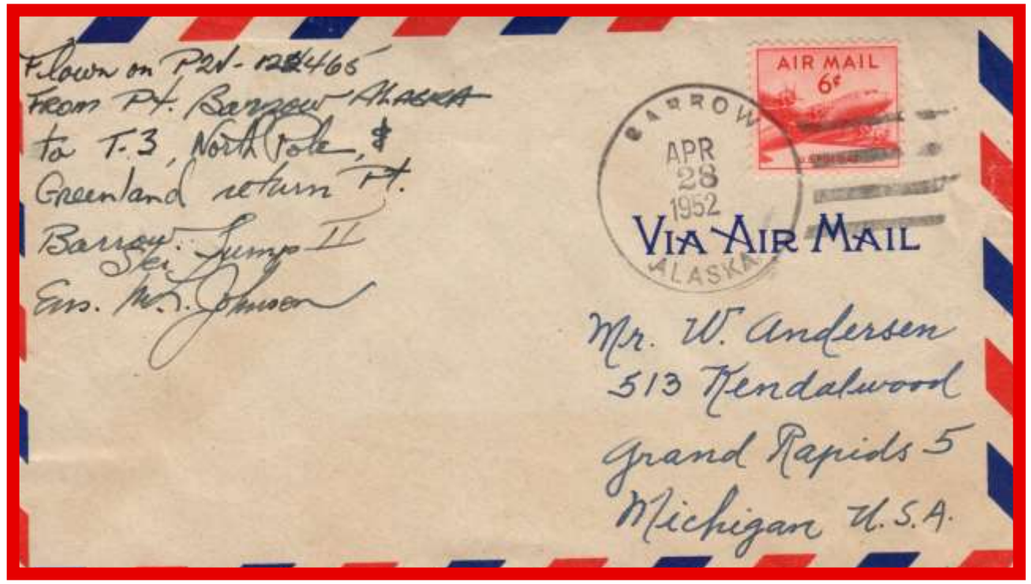


Ice Island T-3 iwas a large piece of very thick ice drifting in the Arctic Ocean. It iwas 10 miles long by 4.5 miles wide. The island was about 140-160 feet thick. It formed over a thousand years as part of a much larger ice shelf which extended out to sea north of Canada's Ellesmere Island. It broke off and became a floating island perhaps as recently as 1935.

Since the Island was positively identified in 1950, it meandered on a predictable course as it drifted with the ocean current, traveling in a clockwise direction at an average speed of 1.2 miles per day. The Island was first occupied by USAF Col. Joseph Fletcher, in March 1952, from whence it derived its original name, "Fletcher's Island".

The USAF established and maintained a scientific station on T-3. During Operation ICESKATE the station complement of 20 persons included 10 Air Force Support personnel and 10 scientists from the National Academy of Sciences, the Air Force Cambridge Research Center, and the US Weather Bureau.

Barrow, AK 28 Apr 52



Unique (unrecorded) memento carried by Ensign Johnson on landing on the tabular iceberg. Station now fully manned.

Period I

Thule AB, Greenland 25 Sep 52 (T-3) T-3 C1

Very early T-3 cancel from weather detachment personnel assigned to Ladd AFB (APO 731) in Anchorage, AK. Support, including mail services, provided through APO 23 (Thule AB, Greenland).

Thule AB, Greenland 14 Nov 53 (T-3) T-3 C1

Since support remained easier to provide from the west coast of Greenland, by 1953 the weather squadron assigned had become Det 6 8th Weather Sq from Thule.

Period I

Thule AB, Greenland 20 May 53 (T-3) T-3 C1

Gilbert Grosvenor of the National Geographic Society flew over Fletcher's Ice Island en route to duplicate the flag drop by Admiral Byrd in May 1926. Letters were sent to VIPs in the military and industry. NGS 6 cent perfins were used.

Eielson AFB, AK 26 Feb 54

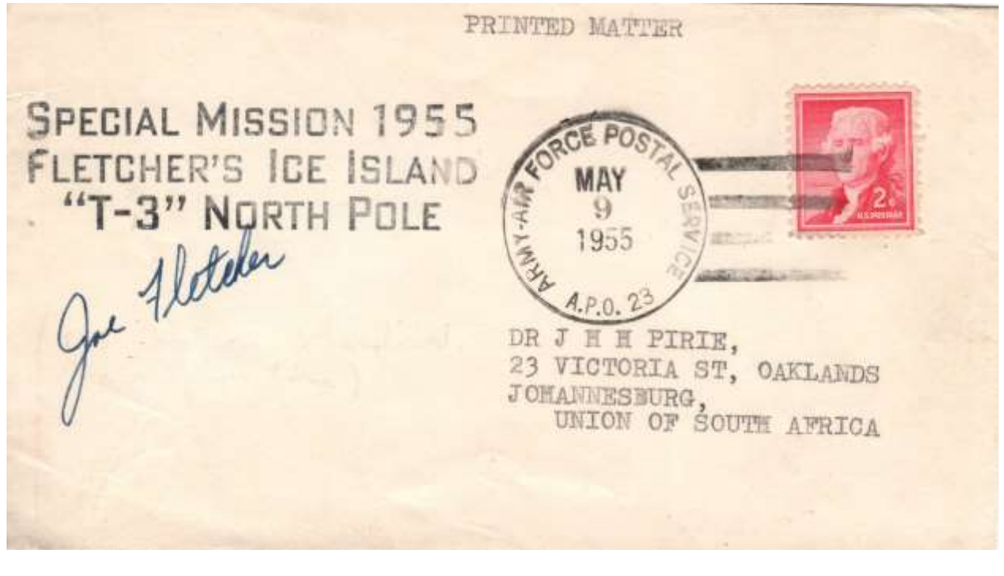
T-3 had originally been identified by radar during B-29 flights at extreme latitudes. The corridor flown between Ladd AFB, AK and the North Pole was designated "Ptarmigan". The term later became generic for polar reconnaissance missions.

Period II

Period II

Thule AB, Greenland 16 Apr 55 T-3 C2

Thule AB, Greenland 9 May 55 T-3 C2



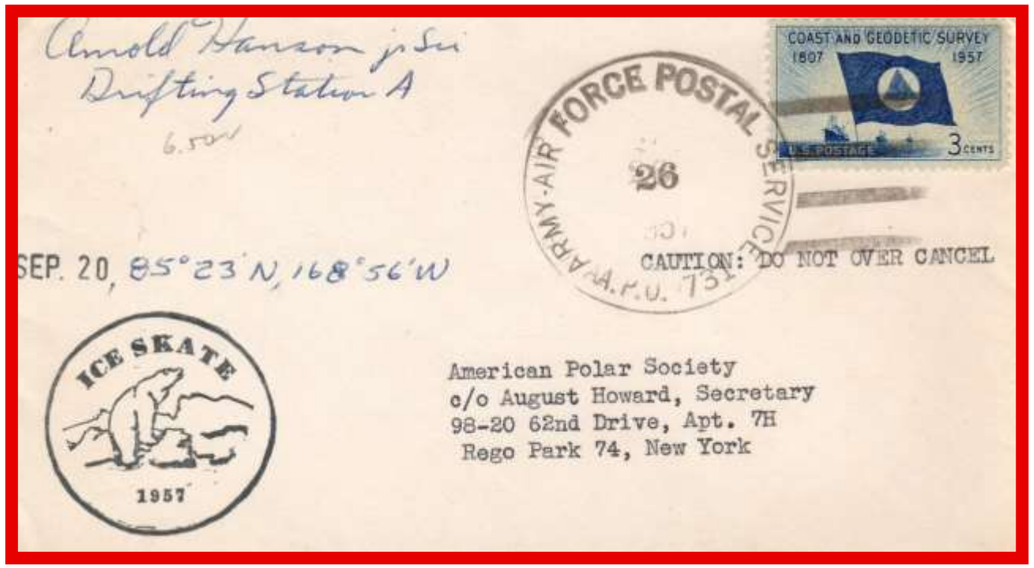
Unlike Period I which had a total of six commanders over more than a year of operation, Period III, which lasted four years and had 11 commanders, or Period IV which stretched more than a dozen years, Period II was quite brief. Consisting of a half dozen researchers under the direction of Sergeant Hazard Benedict, the station was occupied only four months.

Thule AB, Greenland 17 Apr 55 T-3 C2

Alpha

International Geophysical Year (IGY) Scientific Investigator Arnold Hanson conducted research on ice floe ALPHA. The rare cachet was applied on the ice while the postmark was applied at Ladd AFB (APO 731), Alaska. Unlike Soviet stations, American ice stations did not cancel mail.

Ladd AFB, AK — 20 Sept 57 (T-3) — Alpha—C1



Alpha 2 (Charlie)

Ladd AFB, AK — 6 Oct 59 — Charlie—C1

During the IGY Alpha was an auxiliary base of T-3 (Bravo). When it broke up after 18 months of service a new ice floe (Charlie) was established. Alpha 2 would also last about 18 months. Unlike the massive T-3 ice island (the size of Manhattan), ice floes like Alpha and Charlie were small, thin and fragile.

Elmendorf AFB, AK — 28 Jan 58 — Alpha—C3

Official correspondence between the Principal Scientist of the Air Force Project Ice Skate and leadership of the US contribution to the International Geophysical Year.

Ladd AFB, AK — 5 Oct 59 — Charlie—C1

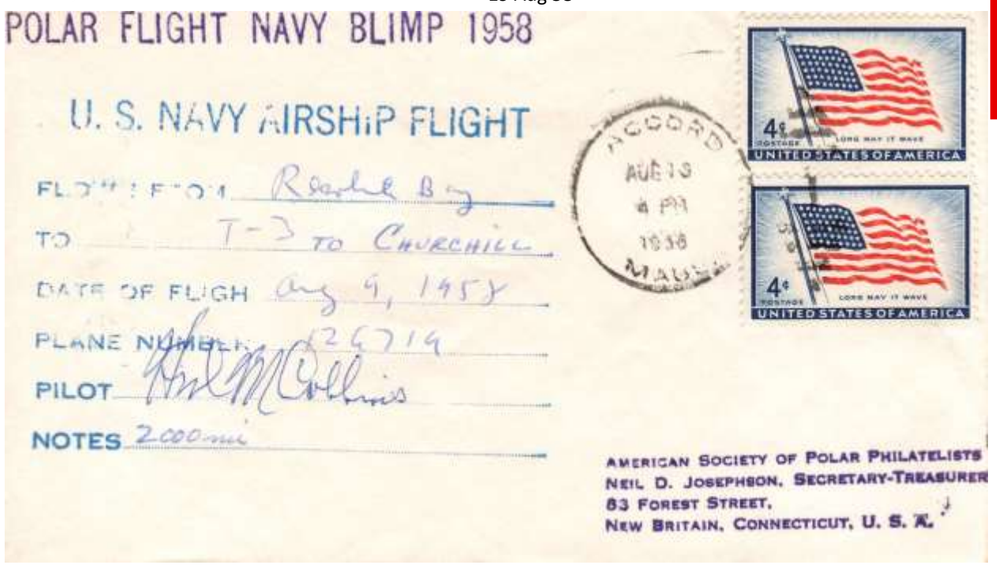
IGY cachet and stamps used at Alpha 2 and forwarded to the National Academy of Sciences.

Snow Goose

South Weymouth, MA 18 Aug 58

Norge and *Italia* would dispute the claim that the *Snow Goose* was the first lighter than air craft in the Polar regions.

Accord, MA 19 Aug 58

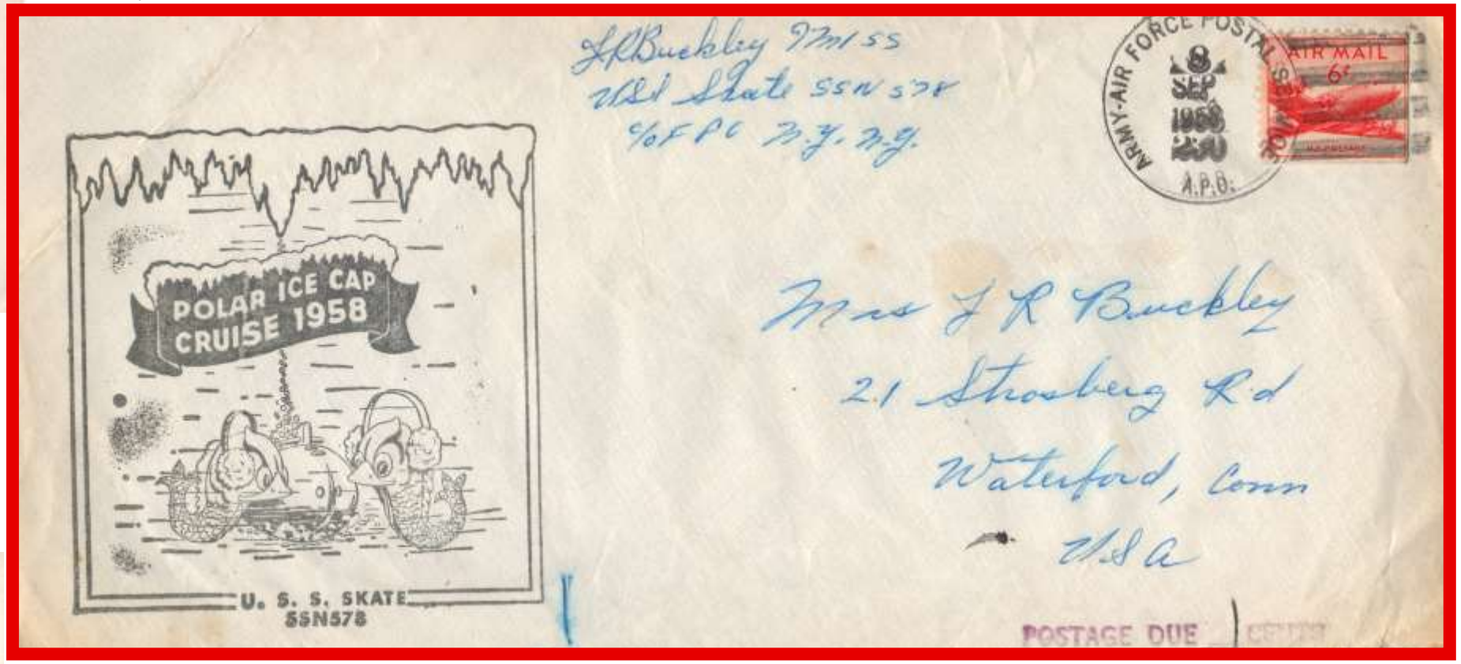


USS Skate

Airmail rate increased on 1 August 1958. Since the US Embassy in Paris is US soil, the domestic airmail rate applies. Letter underpaid by 1 cent.

Crew mail to wife during epic cruise under the North Pole. Following the visit to Ice Island Alpha she sailed to Bergen, Norway on 23 August. It then made port calls in the Netherlands, Belgium, and France before returning to New London on 25 September 1958. The letter entered the mail stream at APO 230 in Paris, France.

US Embassy Paris, France 8 Sep 58



"A decision was made not to attempt a drop of supplies to T-3. Packaging was not adequate far a high, fast delivery, and the low visibility conditions that prevailed introduced an unacceptable risk to the T-3 personnel for either a free drop or a line drop. With such poor visibility we could have easily have dropped the equipment on the huts or the staff."

Under Top Secret orders from the White House *USS Skate* arrived under the North Pole a week after its sister boat, the *USS Nautilus*, on 11 August 1958. Skate surfaced then flooded down nine times within the Arctic pack, using the boat's inertia to break through the ice. During the third surfacing Calvert logged rendezvous with Alpha, a floe-rafted IGY drifting station. On 14 August Skate surfaced within 50 yards of the main building with its tiny cluster of 29 personnel.

"Slowly the periscope came out of the water. We were surrounded by Arctic civilization. Small brown huts dotted the ice. A high radio antenna rose over them. The squat silo shape of a radar dome lay farther astern. Near it stood a tall pole with the American flag."

Period III

Amundsen-Scott Station, Antarctica
Thule AB, Greenland

26 Oct 57
12 Oct 57

T-3 C 5a

G.J. Raymond had a long career as an Air Force intelligence officer, polar trailblazer, and stamp collector. Here he was able to get matching envelopes postmarked and the top and bottom of the world.

In the 1980's he received permission from the Canadian government to officially cancel mail at the North Pole.

Period III

Ladd AFB, AK

22 Sep 59

T-3 C5b

With the conclusion of the International Geophysical Year the line with IGY was carved out. Instead, here the Scientific Leader has signed his name.

Little America, Antarctica
Thule AB, Greenland

3 Dec 57
12 Oct 57

T-3 C 5a

Ladd AFB, AK

29 Oct 59

T-3 C5b
T-3 C6

Period III

With periods of down time with little to do, this privately produced cachet of a polar bear on drift ice is occasionally found.

Thule AB, Greenland — 11 Nov 58 — T-3 C 5a, T-3 C Priv.

Thule AB, Greenland — 11 Nov 58 — T-3 C 5a

Period III

Thule AB, Greenland — 6 May 58 — T-3 C 5a

Seldom seen postage due on card mailed from Fletcher's Ice Island, postmarked in Greenland, and addressed to Belgium.

Thule AB, Greenland — 10 Dec 59 — Charlie—C2

Period III

Anchorage, AK — 15 Apr 61 — T-3 C8b, T-3 C9, T-3 C5b

Drift Station Commander autographs an unusual preprinted envelope addressed to a founding member of the American Society of Polar Philatelists.

Following application of the machine cancel a hand cancel was required in order to void the lower stamp. Fairbanks, AK is the home of Eielson AFB.

Fairbanks, AK — 29 Jan 60 — T-3 C7b

Elmendorf AFB, AK — 1 Apr 60 — T-3 C8a

Personal correspondence from Anchorage Airman routed through Elmendorf AFB.

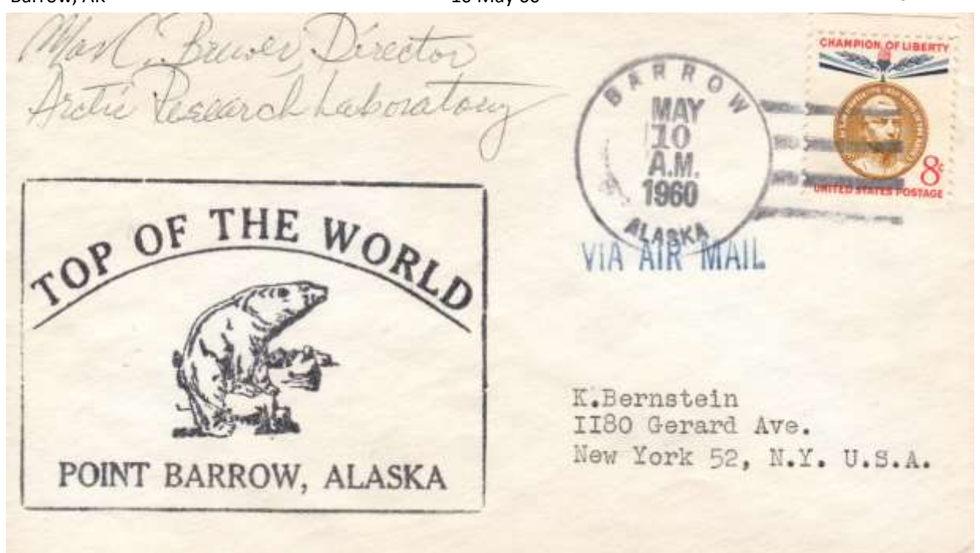
Ladd AFB, AK — 23 Mar 60 — T-3 C7b

By March the station had a new commander. W. E. Cohagan would serve from March to Oct 1960.

Period III

Fairbanks, AK 1 May 60 T-3 C8b

Barrow, AK 10 May 60 T-3—EV2B



Period IV

Fairbanks, AK 17 Apr 62 T-3 C6

Barrow, AK
8 May 63
T-3 C13a

Occasionally legendary figures visited the island. Seen above the autograph of Norwegian born Bernt Balchen who flew for Amundsen, Byrd and the US Air Force.

Barrow, AK
6 Jun 63
T-3 C 13a

Period IV

Barrow, AK

31 Oct 61

T-3 C8d

Establishment, logistic support, and evacuation in the Arctic would not be possible without aircraft.

Over the years T-3 was occupied a variety of aircraft were required. The Lockheed 18 (left), first built before WWII, could carry either 18 passengers or two tons of cargo.

The envelope below flew on a Navy version of the DC-3. Known in Air Force circles as the C-47 Skytrain, the DC-3 was arguably the most useful transport aircraft ever built. In recent years it was supplanted by the C-130, C-141 and the C-17.

Barrow, AK

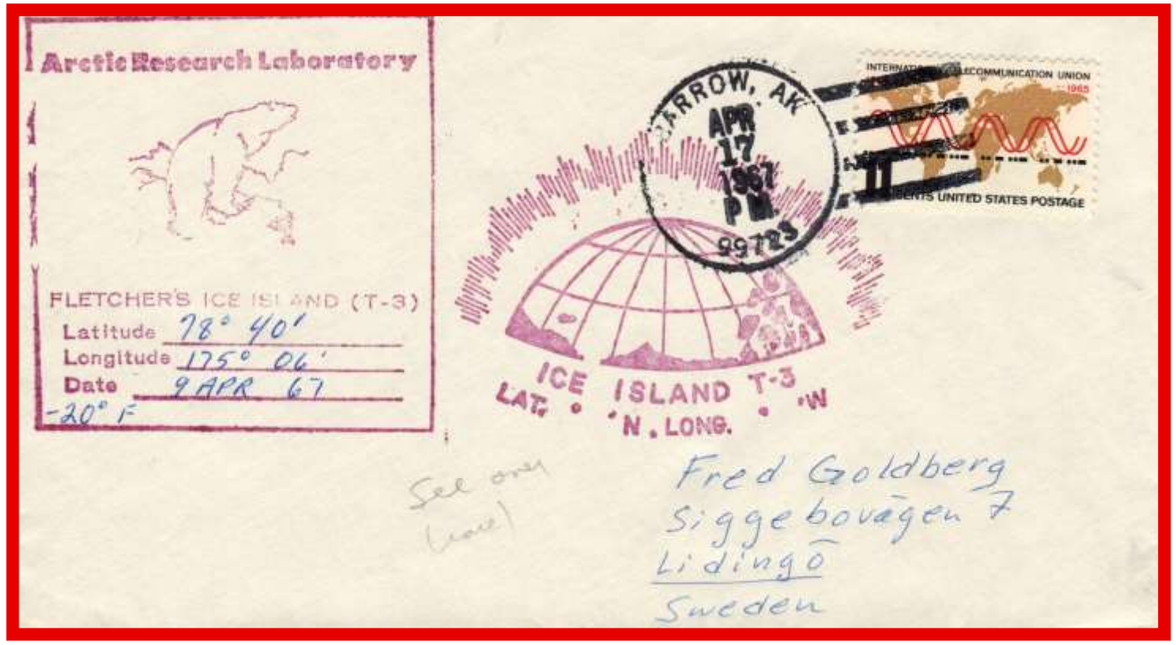
7 Apr 67

T-3 C13a
Narl 3

Barrow, AK

17 Apr 67

T-3 C8a
T-3 C13c



Bell Aircraft won the Department of Defense competition in the production of a simple and reliable helicopter for medical evacuation. By the mid 1960s a stretch version of the Huey UH-1 with a more powerful power plant was available.

Fred Goldberg was a climate analyst. He published in more than 12 languages on those topics as well as on polar history and exploration. In 1966, he participated in the Stockholm University Svalbard Expedition. As both an active polar scientist and philatelist he was able to exact favors from flight crews. The unassuming envelope seen above (with the US Army cachet on the reverse) was on the first flight of Huey support in the Arctic.

Far less robust rotary wing transports have operated at high latitudes in the past. As part of Operation HIGHJUMP in 1946-47 the extensive use of helicopters resulted in an unofficial name which stuck—Operation Windmill.

Period IV

Monzino

The New York Times

Technician Charged in Slaying On Ice Island in Arctic Ocean

BY RICHARD HALLORAN JULY 31, 1970

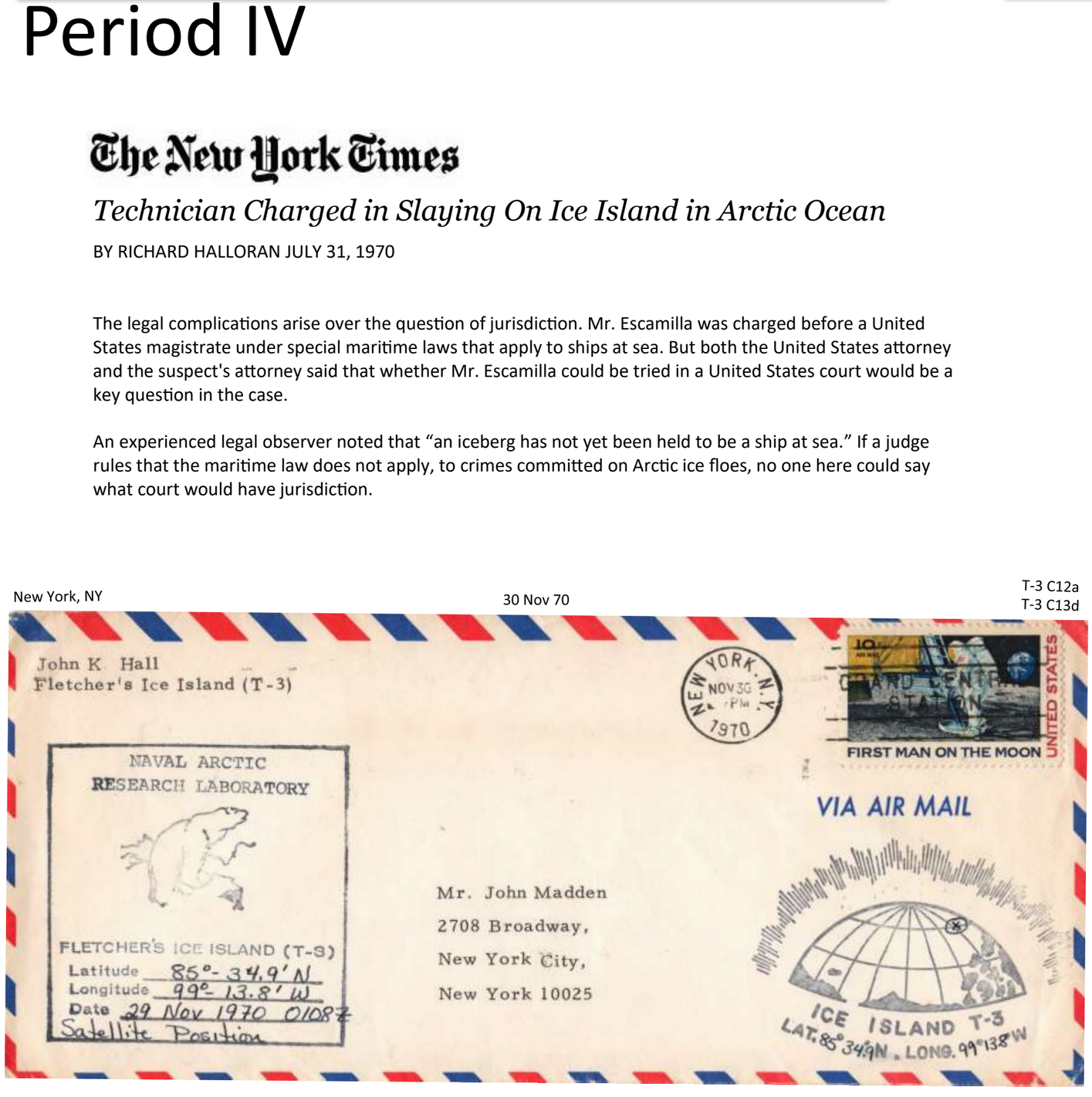
The legal complications arise over the question of jurisdiction. Mr. Escamilla was charged before a United States magistrate under special maritime laws that apply to ships at sea. But both the United States attorney and the suspect's attorney said that whether Mr. Escamilla could be tried in a United States court would be a key question in the case.

An experienced legal observer noted that “an iceberg has not yet been held to be a ship at sea.” If a judge rules that the maritime law does not apply, to crimes committed on Arctic ice floes, no one here could say what court would have jurisdiction.

New York, NY

30 Nov 70

T-3 C12a
T-3 C13d



19 May 71 (flight)

28 May 71 (Alert AB, NWT Canada)

Recreating the 1909 North Pole attainment of Peary using dogs, Italian Guido Monzino, with 23 dog teams and 31 people from five countries, left Cape Columbia on April 2, arrived at North Pole on May 19 via Fletcher’s Ice Island (April 27-May 2). Interior Airways Twin Otter and Turbo Beaver provided logistical support and navigation confirmation. Famed polar navigator Einar Pedersen was loaned to the expedition by Scandinavian Airlines for management of air support and navigation.

Period IV

Barrow, AK 26 Jan 71 T-3 C13d

I was an undergraduate geology major in 1966, just going into my junior year at Temple. My job that summer on T-3 was to do grunt work to help with ocean-floor coring and heat-flow programs run by Art Lachenbruch in Menlo Park. My boss that summer was Paul Twichell. At issue was whether heat-flow studies could indicate the origin of the Canada Basin.

When I graduated in 1969, my wife and I, and our year-old son, moved to NARL in Pt. Barrow. We left after a year and returned to Philadelphia, where I earned an M.A. in geology, specializing in sedimentology and stratigraphy. I then spent 3 ½ years as an officer in the Army Engineer Corps, working on the hydrodynamics and sediment transport in tidal inlets. The GI Bill paid for me to earn a PhD at the University of South Carolina, where I split my dissertation between modern depositional processes of barrier island systems and their Carboniferous counterparts. It was great fun.

After that I went to work for Royal Dutch/Shell in exploration and production. Spent 24 years with them before retiring in 2003. Now I am a full-time philatelist.

Period IV

Barrow, AK 8 Jun 72 T-3 C13d

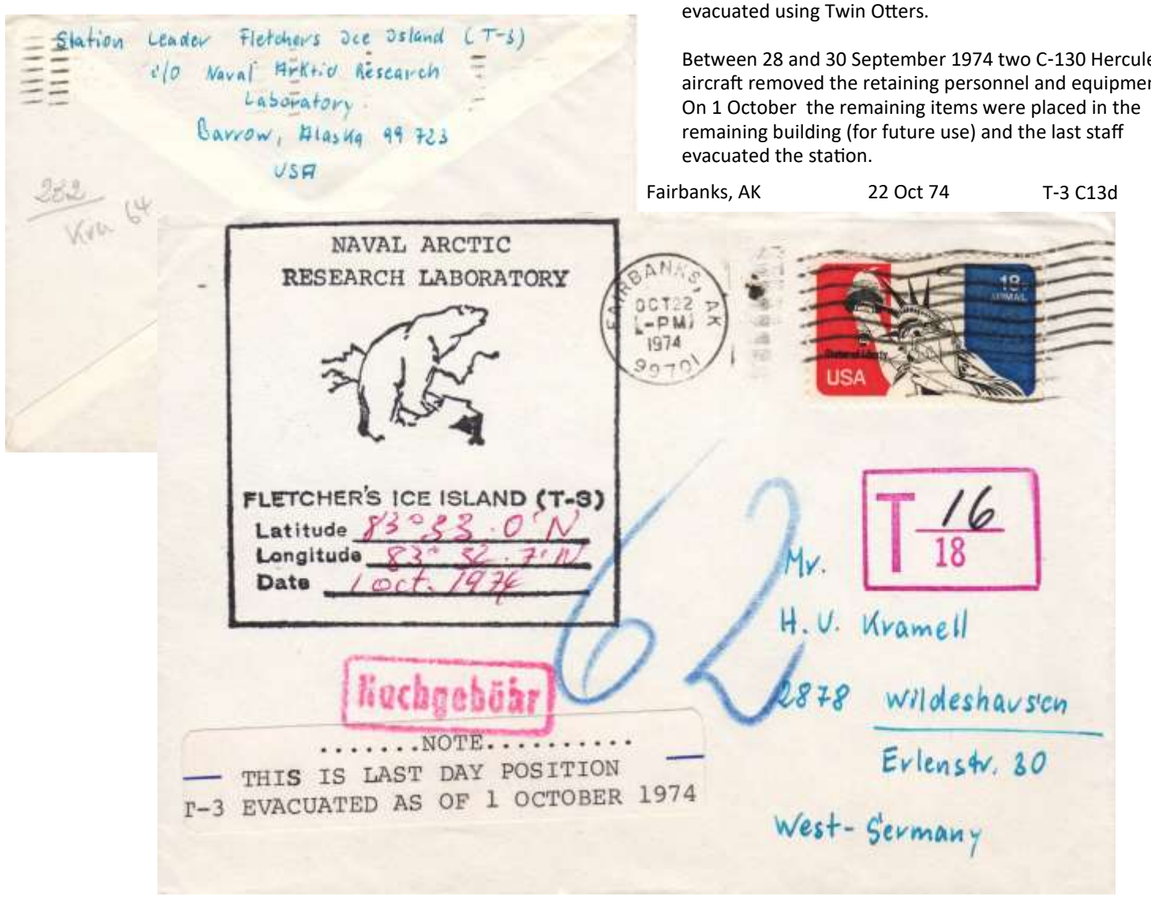
Barrow, AK 21 Oct 73 T-3 C16

Period IV

From 1971 to 1974 T-3 was still adrift in the region of stagnant ice. Therefore it was decided to abandon it after 12 years of drifting. In the spring of 1974 the T-3 strip was in bad condition. When the fuel stock came to an end 24 of the 30 men making up the station were evacuated using Twin Otters.

Between 28 and 30 September 1974 two C-130 Hercules aircraft removed the retaining personnel and equipment. On 1 October the remaining items were placed in the remaining building (for future use) and the last staff evacuated the station.

Fairbanks, AK 22 Oct 74 T-3 C13d



Even after the definitive evacuation of the base , T-3 was used for occasional activities. In the spring of 1976 an automated weather station was installed on the island. A buoy gave satellite position tracking of T-3. In the winter of 1976/77 the buoy stopped working because of extreme cold. In April 1978 a new unmanned environmental research station was installed. By winter it failed again due to low temperatures.

The middle cover at right commemorates a short reoccupation for automated weather station equipment The bottom envelope shows the end of the stay. While the island would be visited a few times its days were numbered.

The island kept being monitored over the following years. It was in the news a few times in 1982. The gigantic island, in its unrelenting drift far from the heart of the Arctic Ocean, started breaking and melting more and more rapidly. According to a press release T-3 melted in the Atlantic and disappeared by the autumn of 1984.

Period IV

Barrow, AK

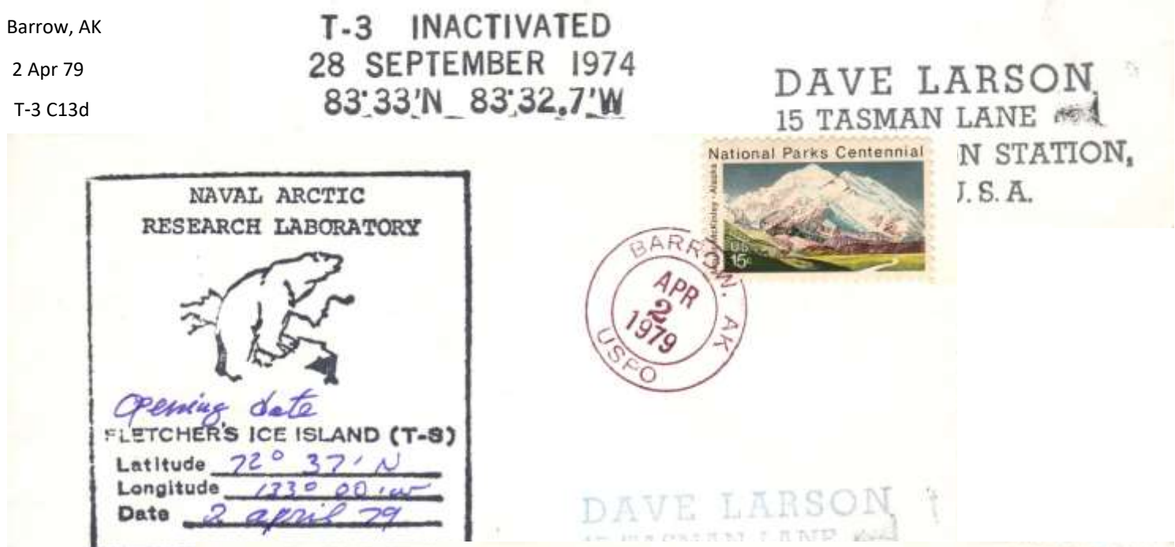
17 Dec 74

T-3 C19

Barrow, AK

2 Apr 79

T-3 C13d



Barrow, AK

16 Jul 79

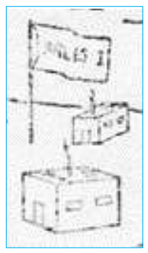
T-3 C13d

Arlis I

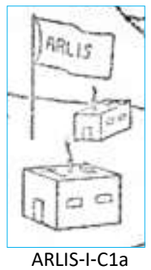
Arlis I

Fairbanks, AK 5 Apr 61 ARLIS-I-C1

Barrow, AK 20 Jun 61 ARLIS-I-C1a



ARLIS-I-C1



ARLIS-I-C1a

Fairbanks, AK 5 Apr 61 ARLIS-I-C2

It became clear the massive tracked vehicles employed to prepare landing strips and runways on a stable structure like T-3 represented a potential hazard on smaller and far more dynamic ice floes. The emergency evacuation of drift station Alpha 2 (Charlie) due to the breakup of the floe convinced the Arctic Research Laboratory based at Point Barrow to come up with another approach.

Under Dr.Bennington as Director, a team of 8 technicians and 10 huts were offloaded by the *USCGC Burton Island*. This was the first time (and the last) that a US station would be established from the sea.

With components so lightweight and compact that they could be moved in a Cessna 180, the first ARLIS commenced in September 1960. Winter storms in March of the following year destroyed the base. All of the equipment and personnel were rescued with only the huts abandoned.

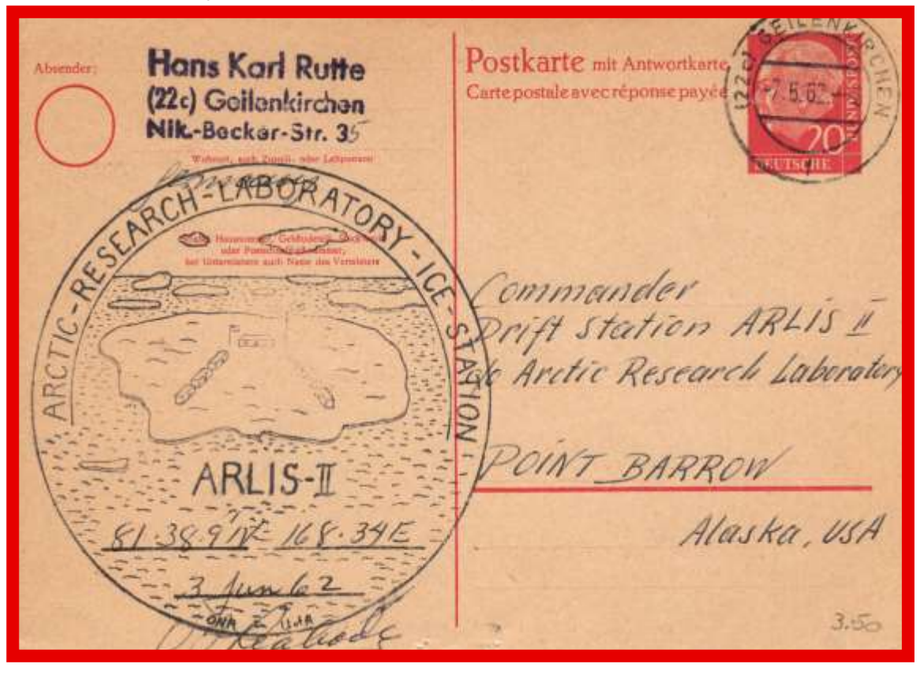
Arlis II

A geologist from Columbia University sent a camera on a steel cable down 7,500 feet to the sea floor. There it took photos which showed great quantities of rock pieces like those seen on ARLIS II and on the northern coast of Ellesmere Island. This led to the conclusion that ice islands like T-3 and ARLIS II originated from the glaciers of Ellesmere Island.

Barrow, AK 10 Oct 61 ARLIS-II-C1

Anchorage, AK 22 Sep 61 ARLIS-II-C1

Geilenkirchen, Germany 7 May 62 ARLIS-II-C1



Incoming mail to ARLIS II.

During the four years of operation more than 100 scientists visited the ice floe to conduct research. Wisconsin University did geology of the ocean floor, geomagnetism, as well as the study of underwater acoustics; Washington University dealt with geophysics of the Arctic basin in addition to micrometeorology, seismology, geothermal currents, and physics of underwater ice in cooperation with the University of Hokkaido.

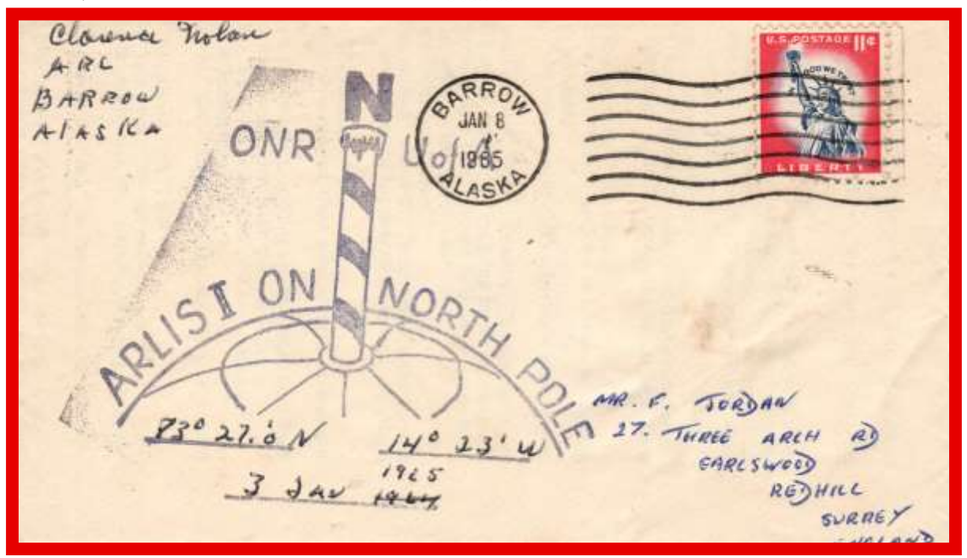
One of the most important studies involved research about planktonic organisms according to season and depth. They are not only influenced by water temperature, currents, light penetration, salinity and the presence of other chemical variables, but they contribute to the physical characteristics of the water directly, through heat absorption and preservation, light diffusion and chemical substances produced by their metabolism.

Arlis II

Arlis II

Barrow, AK 8 Jan 64 ARLIS-I-C2

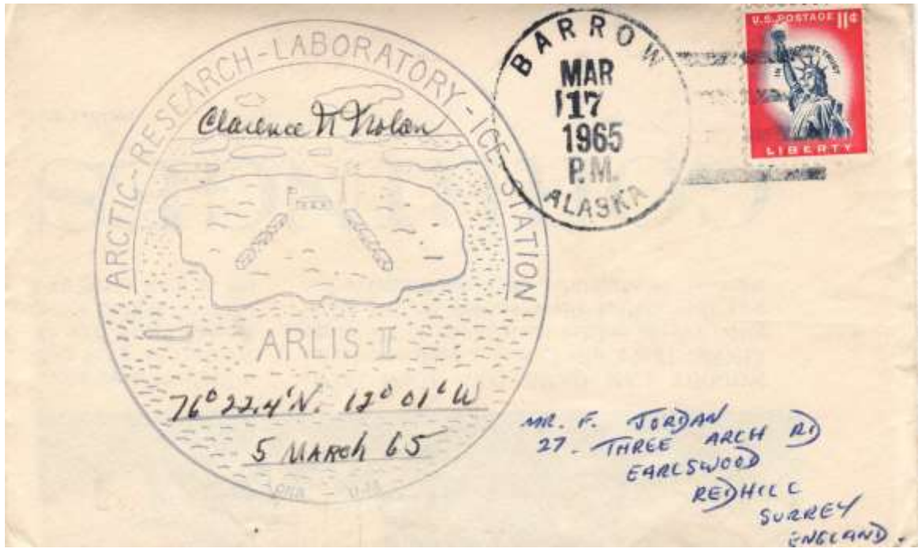
Barrow, AK 8 Jan 65 ARLIS-II-C4



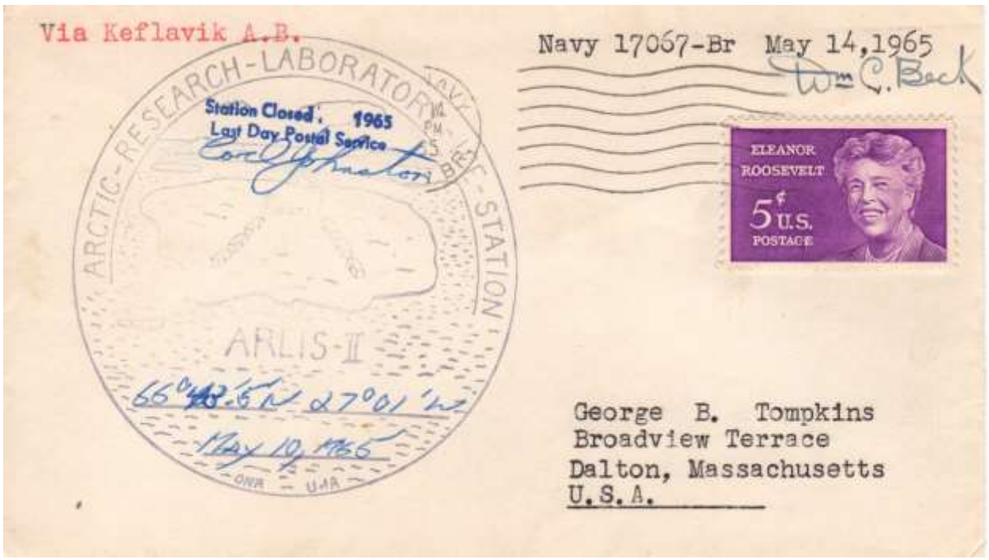
Polar philatelist Michael Von Meyeren created this cachet when it appeared that ARLIS I might reach the North Pole. The Arctic Research Lab sent the artwork to ARLIS II in hopes it might reach 90 degrees north. A rare example of its use on cover.

Arlis II

Barrow, AK 17 Mar 65 ARLIS-II-C1



NAS Keflavik,Iceland 14 May 65 ARLIS-II-C5a



Carl Johnson, in addition to being the cook, was the "postmaster" on the ice. Unlike the Russians, who sent official cancelling devices to the ice islands and floes, the Americans used stateside post offices and overseas military installations to postmark mail.

Personnel during the original occupation of Fletchers Ice Island were specifically enjoined from using their circle date stamp for cancelling postage stamps.

Arlis II

USS Edisto

11 May 65

ARLIS-II-C6

Seattle, WA

22 Jun 65

ARLIS-II-C5a
ARLIS-II-C6

On the final day of mail the majority were sent through NAS Keflavik in Iceland. This is one of the few pieces to enter the mail stream in Seattle.

Arlis III

Barrow, AK

8 May 64

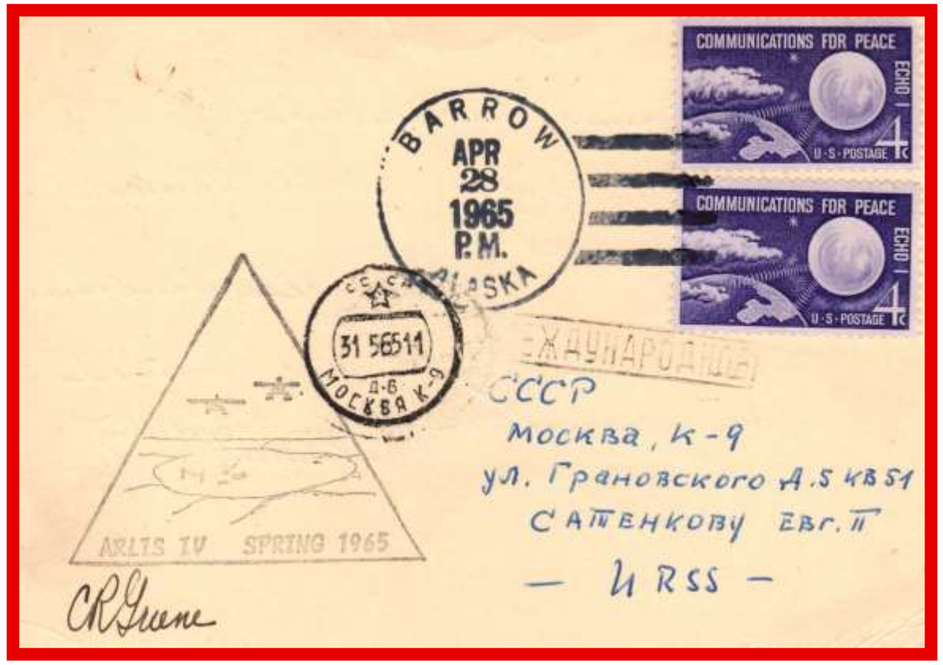
ARLIS-III-C1

ARLIS III mail is scarce. In operation at the same time as ARLIS II, it had little notoriety and functioned for only 3 months. By the time the cover above received a postmark, the station would only be in operation for another week.

This 9 foot thick ice floe supported work by Alaska University, Washington University, and the Navy Oceanographic Office. Studies included telluric currents, geomagnetism, and the aurora borealis.

Arlis IV

Barrow, AK 28 Apr 65 ARLIS-IV-C1



Barrow, AK 26 Apr 65 ARLIS-IV-C1

The life of ARLIS IV was also very short. In operation at the same time as ARLIS II and III, it was initially occupied by two Cessna 180s which were able to prepare the surface of the one by two mile ice floe for landing of the R4D.

The station consisted of 4 prefabricated 12 x 16ft hut and smaller structures for generators. The walls had a framework 2-3 inches thick of rock wool and 1/4" plywood. Each structure was wrapped in a strong plastic film and then packed with snow.

Despite military classified work done on many drift stations, American and Russian scientists were not antagonistic. On rare occasions, personnel visited another's station.

Barrow, AK 17 May 65 ARLIS-IV-C1

Under the direction of Dr. Victor Hessler, the station was used for observations on geomagnetism, telluric currents and the aurora borealis. Unlike ice islands like T-3 which were more than 200 feet thick, ice floes were easier to do research in which holes were drilled in the surface.

Arlis V

Barrow, AK 18 May 70 ARLIS-V-C1

1970 the Arctic Research Laboratory set up two small contingents on ice floes. With only 3-5 personnel per station and only in operation for two months, these facilities were created to permit AC Electronics to conduct classified underwater acoustic testing to support the US Navy.

With virtually identical cachets (only the station name is different), few are known from either facility and most were applied for collectors. The envelope to the right was from the day the contingent left (29 May), barely two months after opening the site. Once the cover received the on ice cachet it was carried by air to the public post office in Barrow and forwarded to the addressee.

Barrow, AK 1 Jun 70 ARLIS-VI-C1

ARLIS VII? This curious cover came from the extensive holdings of polar collector J.E. Hogan. It has a position report for late April 1978 with the annotation, “Disestablished” underlined. It is common for the stateside post office dates to be off a week or so due to weather difficulties picking up mail from drift stations. In this case the cancel is delayed five months.

Consultation with Giardini has failed to shed light. He has no reason to doubt what is on the envelope but is unaware of an ARLIS VII or any

Arlis VI

In conclusion, the age of the manned ice island is becoming history. When the Soviets occupied NP-1 in 1937 there was a need to transmit reports on high latitude polar weather. Navigation by air was still in its infancy. Science concerning the oceans, the atmosphere, acoustics, physics, and a dozen other disciplines were well served by drift stations.

High altitude aircraft, satellites, buoys, and research vessels now continue the quest for knowledge. In the brief period that Soviets and Americans lived on the ice, global warming has charged at a suicidal pace.

Old ice islands don’t die, they just fade away.

Barrow, AK 14 Sep 78 T-3-EV3