

PHILATELIC BULLETIN



Sarasota Philatelic Club

2024

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Stamp Quiz

Congratulations to John Hamman for correctly guessing last month's stamp quiz. The stamp is Hungary Scott 1518, the 1.40 forint denomination from



Hungary's definitive issues of 1963-64 showing tourism, postal and telecommunications-related top-

ics. This stamp shows a mobile post office. Stay tuned for next month's Stamp Quiz.

Secret Writing Detector on WW II Cover to Buenos Aires

By Vincent Centonze

Figure 1 shows an airmail cover sent from New York to Buenos Aires during the closing months of WW II. The cover was postmarked on 3/9/45 with an International Postal Supply Company Red Cross slogan. The cover is franked with a 10¢ and 30¢ transport airmail stamp (Scott C27 and C30, respectively) which paid the 40¢ per ½ ounce rate to Argentina. The rate was in effect from 12/1/37 through 3/31/45; therefore, this cover was sent late in the rate period. The rate would change to 20¢ per half ounce in just a few days. An Argentine repeating machine cancel on the back shows that it arrived in Buenos Aires ten days later on 3/19/45. The machine cancel reads AVION/ATRASADO, which translates as *Plane/Late* so perhaps the flight was delayed past its expected arrival time. The cover was sent via air from New York to Miami where it was censored by examiner 8058 and sealed with clear censor tape. It then likely traveled from Miami to Canal Zone via Foreign Airmail Route (FAM) 5. From Canal Zone it would have connected to FAM 9 which flew south along the west coast of South America to Santiago, Chile, and then east to Buenos Aires.

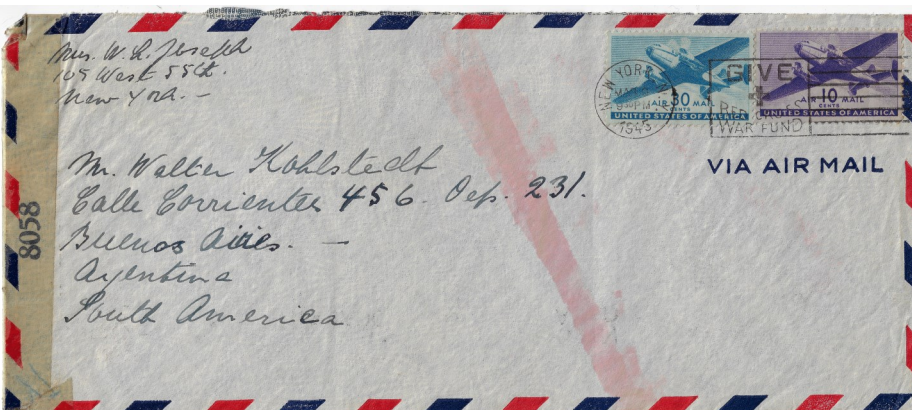


Figure 1. Cover postmarked 3/9/45 from New York to Buenos Aires, Argentina, with secret writing detector brush marks.

The cover is stained with a pink liquid which runs diagonally along the front and back. This liquid was a chemical used to detect secret writing, written in invisible ink. In the world of espionage, one of the methods intelligence operatives used was to write messages in invisible ink on envelopes and letters that appeared otherwise innocuous. The invisible ink was usually a liquid known as phenolphthalein. This is an acidic substance that can become visible when exposed to alkaline liquids such as ammonia or bicarbonate soda. Unfortunately, the letter is no longer included, but it was certainly brushed with the detecting liquid as well. The inside of the cover is stained with pink brushstrokes, which indicates that after the letter was brushed for testing, it was returned to the envelope while the detector was still wet. The detector then bled onto the interior of the cover. I have a few other examples of WW II covers brushed with secret writing detectors, but all were sent within Europe; they are not particularly scarce. Figure 2 shows one such item, the front and back of a postal card (Sweden H&G 59) with blue secret writing detector brush strokes. The card was sent from Sweden to Switzerland, two nations which were neutral in WW II, but which passed through Nazi-held territory; hence, the German censorship markings and the

Continued on next page



The Prez Sez ...

Dear Club members—

It looks like we have dodged the last (hopefully the last) two hurricanes. I can, therefore, wish you a happy Thanksgiving holiday.

Fourteen members attended the November meeting which featured a lively “Show and Tell” discussion. I’d like to say a “welcome back” to Gisela Weinland.

Our December gathering will be the Holiday Party at Liz Hisey’s house—invitation enclosed. Please let her know you are coming.

It’s not too early to be thinking about attending and or volunteering (contact John Hamman) at the national stamp show in January.

Although the Auditorium currently is being used as a FEMA information center, it will be available for the show January 17-19. Exhibits are full and the bourse is sold out with a waiting list. Hope to see you at the December Party.

Pat

Secret Writing Detector on WW II Cover to Buenos Aires (Continued)

secret writing detection brush strokes on both sides. However, it is much less common to find one to South America, although it is not surprising that one would be found on a cover sent to Argentina.

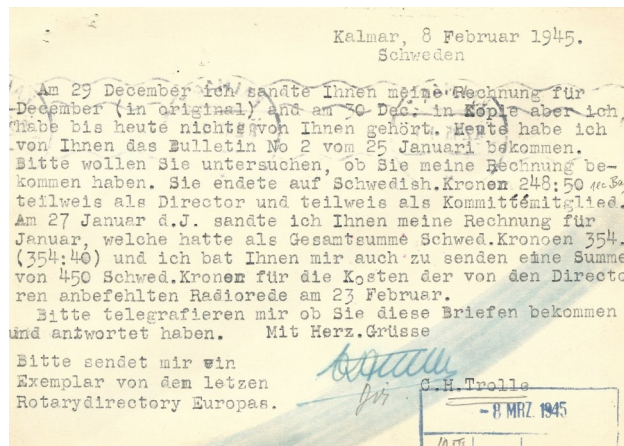


Figure 2. Postal card sent from Sweden to Switzerland with German applied censorship markings and secret writing detector brush strokes.

For most of the WWII, Argentina officially remained neutral but had good relations with Germany and was even pro-Nazi in many areas. Argentina had a large population of ethnic Germans and was friendly with Nazi Germany in the 1930s and during most of the war. The Argentine government only declared war on the axis on 3/27/45, very late in the conflict when it was all but certain that Germany would lose. That was less than three weeks after the cover in Figure 1 was sent. Therefore, many Nazi operatives were still in Argentina, and it was a difficult environment for members of the FBI's Special Intelligence Service (SIS) to operate. The cover was sent to an individual with a German name, Mr. Walter Kohlstedt, by a Mr. W.H. Joseph, in New York. Could Kohlstedt have been Nazi operative receiving information from Joseph in the U.S., or perhaps he was an American spy, and Joseph was his Case Office sending him instructions? I don't know whether the secret writing detector was applied in the U.S. or Argentina; if we knew that, it would indicate which government was suspicious. If anyone has more information on the use of the secret writing detection in South America or the U.S. and would like to weigh in, please send your comments to me at: centonzevincent@gmail.com.

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