

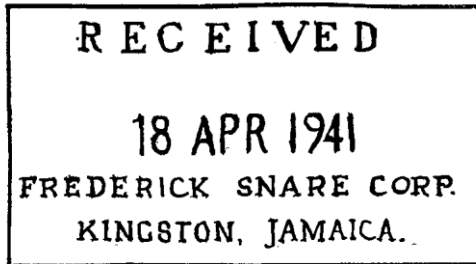
THE POSTAL HISTORY OF U.S. BASES IN JAMAICA 1939-45

By THOMAS FOSTER

As a result of interest aroused by the original article published under this title* and thanks to the many specialist collectors who wrote offering additional information and, dare I say it, corrections, I am now able to produce a recension which will bring the saga of this fascinating subject a stage nearer completion.

The U.S. Naval Facility, Portland Bight, St. Catherine Parish

The civilian contractors engaged in the erection of the base were the Frederick Snare Corporation, who also maintained a supervisory office in Kingston during and after the construction period, the address usually appearing on covers as 'P.O. Box 488, Kingston'. Incoming mail to the base, and to this office,



NOY 4162 (JA) KINGSTON
U. S. NAVY
M-USNU1

can be found carrying the receiving mark of the corporation, M-USNU1, struck in blue ink and seen between April 18th-June 17th, 1941. The two-lined inscription placed below this marking referred to the naval contract number and was hand-stamped separately.

Outgoing mail from the Kingston office was initially sent through the normal civilian channels, i.e., the Kingston G.P.O., and bears Jamaican postage stamps cancelled with G.P.O. postmarks. This mail usually carries the naval censor marking, M-USNC2, which was applied at the office, struck in blue ink and known used between June 24th- September 25th, 1941. The surface rate charged on these letters appears to have been 3d per ounce.

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CENSORED.

M-USNC2



Part of the facility erected at the bight included a Naval Air Station constructed on Little Goat Island, about two miles south-east of Old Harbour Bay and one of the says sheltering Galleon Harbour. Incoming letters to that station are known back-stamped with M-USNU2 in blue ink dated April 1941.

The date-stamp, M-USM1b, carrying the wording, 'BRITISH WEST INDIES' between the obliterating bars, is now known to have been used intermittently until at least June 18th, 1942, and the possibility must exist that the Marine post office concurrently used two date-stamps of this type, i.e., M-USM1a and M-USM1b, one of them being employed at the Kingston office which may have been a sub-unit of the Marine post office. In addition, incoming registered mail to the base was back-stamped with M-USMR1, struck in purple ink and known used between February-September 8th, 1942. Outgoing registered correspondence has not been recorded so far but it is doubtful whether U.S. postal regulations would have allowed this dater to have been utilised in cancelling adhesives. Favour strikes of M-USMR1 and M-USM1b exist, struck together in purple ink on blank cards and dated June 18th, 1942, and it must, therefore, be assumed that both markings were used at the same office; in this instance, the Marine post office at the Portland Bight base. If the possibility mentioned in the previous paragraph is correct, this would mean that M-USM1a was employed at the Kingston office of the corporation!

The U.S. Base, Vernam Field and Fort Simonds, in Clarendon Parish.

Colonel Fred F. Seifert, U.S.A.F., has pointed out that the correct name of the base was Vernam Field and not 'Vernham' as given by me. He visited it on several occasions during the time it was in operation and confirms the spelling through reference to travel papers and other material still in his possession. Although I believe his version to be correct, the fact remains that the given spelling is contained in other official and semi-official documentation.

During the construction period, the U.S. Army Engineers maintained an office at 2B North Street, Kingston, and until the U.S. A.P.O. 804 began operating at the base, mail from that office was censored and struck with the marking, M-USAC2 (which I am still unable to illustrate) and known on letters dated June 1941, before being mailed at the Kingston G.P.O. with Jamaican postage stamps and postal markings. This censor marking was superseded by M-USAC1, struck in red ink and numbered '100', which is known used between September 23rd—October 21st, 1941.

Left: M-USNU2
Right: M-USMR1



* See Stamp Collecting July 16th & 23rd 1970

U.S. Army Post Office 861.

Commercial mail also exists from personnel stationed at Fort Simonds, but posted at the Kingston G.P.O. with Jamaican stamps and postmarks for Mandeville addresses. These letters are struck on the obverse with M-USAC1 numbered '113' in purple ink and were mailed at the Kingston office of the unit, which by this time had become known as the Kingston Transportation Office.

Towards the middle of 1942, official instructions were given to all U.S. Army Postal Units, directing them to delete the A.P.O. number from their date-stamps, although still authorising the established practice of the writer giving his A.P.O. number in the return address. As a result, date-stamp, M-USA2a, was created by blocking out the number '861' with metal filling, thus giving the appearance of a short bar which did not appear on later strikes, probably because of the number being permanently erased. Some of the plugs in the centre of this dater can often be found transposed.

It is now known that date-stamp, M-USA2b, was only used until about November 18th, 1943, and that the metal filling bar, seldom, if ever, appeared. There is a strong possibility that it was used at the Transportation Office in Kingston, which apparently harboured a branch office of the A.P.O. about that time. The reason for the new state of the dater and its relatively short life was due to further official instructions circulated to all U.S. postal units in early 1943, requiring them to replace the A.P.O. number in their daters forthwith.

Because of this edict and the withdrawal of M-USA2b, a new date-stamp, M-USA3, was issued about early 1944 and is known used from that date until the office closed on December 6th, 1949. It existed in two distinct states, the illustration in my first article being the second state should now be renumbered to read, M-USA3a. The first state, illustrated herewith as M-USA3, had the office number '861' included in the centre with the plugs reading '861', 'month', 'day' and 'year' respectively. The latest known date of M-USA3 is August 1st, 1945, whilst the earliest known date of M-USA3a remains at October 11th, 1948.

Yarmouth Postal Agency.

For several years after the closing of the American base in Clarendon, philatelic covers franked with U.S. postage stamps continued to be sent by collectors in the U.S.A. and this country, seeking the A.P.O. markings used at the base. As the nearest post office to the old base, such mail was automatically returned from the Yarmouth agency and all examples seen have the stamps uncanceled, with the Yarmouth circular date-stamp struck on the cover instead— and full postage due charged!

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