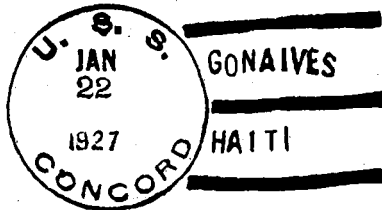


## Battleship Cancellations.

WILLIAM EVANS.

Of late there seems to have arisen considerable interest in "Battleship Cancellations" and quite a good deal of guessing is going on regarding them.

There has been much speculation as to when the ships first began to use their cancellations. We have to thank Mr. Harry M. Konwiser for the research necessary to find out the facts definitely. The results ascertained by him are given below.



In the report of the First Assistant Postmaster General for 1908 he found this passage, "The Post Office appropriation act of

May 27, 1908, authorizing the Postmaster General to designate as Navy Mail Clerks, and Assistant Navy Mail Clerks enlisted men selected by the Secretary of the Navy, and provided that such clerks should make deliveries of all mail addressed to Navy vessels, receive and dispatch mail, receipt for registered mail, keep for sale an adequate supply of postage stamps, and perform such other postal duties as might be authorized by the Post Master General."

It was further provided that such employees should give bond, etc.

The Secretary of the Navy was authorized to appoint sixty four clerks and twenty-nine assistants for service aboard vessels. Instructions for their guidance have been promulgated and they have been supplied with post-marking stamps and with postage stamps and stamped envelopes.

In the same year the Third Assistant Postmaster General in his report refers to instructions having been issued to Navy Mail Clerks and Assistant Navy Mail Clerks in the handling of registered mail and he considered the introduction of postal mail service on board naval vessels "a decided improvement."

As these reports were filed as of June 30, 1908, it would seem that we may safely conclude that the first cancellations from the naval vessels occurred in June, 1908, since the reports mention the subject of the designation of the Mail Clerks and Assistant Mail Clerks as accomplished, and as the law was passed on May 27, 1908, it seems fair to surmise that a few days were required to perform the acts necessary to make it effective.

In the report of the First Assistant Postmaster General for 1909 he repeats the fact that services began as of the act of May 27, 1908 and says that Navy Mail Clerks have been designated for duty on board one hundred and five vessels, and Assistant Mail Clerks on forty vessels, and that a pamphlet of instructions was prepared and copies forwarded to all clerks and assistants, as well as post-marking outfits, etc.

He also says "The Services of forty-two Clerks and Assistant Clerks have been discontinued principally by reason of the transfer of such clerks to other vessels, or the termination of their periods of enlistment in the Navy."

The Postal Guide for 1926 lists sixty-five vessels as branches of the New York Post Office, but there are a great many more on which there are mail clerks, who distribute and dispatch mail. These are unlisted.

A few of the postmarks and cancellers are described below: I have a cover postmarked U. S. S. Minnesota February 6, 1909, back stamped Norfolk Virginia February 19, 1909. The postmark is a circle 30 mm. in diameter with the name of the ship at the top and below this in four lines Feb. 6 5 A. M. 1909. At the right of it are four parallel bars, heavy ones 1 mm. wide and spaced 2 1/2 mm.

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The next date I have is May 16, 1913. This is from the Lebanon and the post mark is 30 mm. in diameter but this time the letter is different arranged. It is "U. S. S." at the top, "Lebanon" at the bottom, with May 16, P. M. 1913 in four lines in the center. The canceller is four heavy bars  $1\frac{1}{4}$  mm. thick, spaced 4 mm. The top and bottom bars are 23 mm. long, and the center ones 22 mm.

The next date I have is September 1914. This is from the Wyoming. The circle of this postmark is 32 mm. and the arrangement of the lettering is the same as in the last mentioned one. The canceller has been changed to three heavy bars. The left end of these almost touches the top and bottom of the postmark. They are 36 mm. long. The center bar is 31 mm. long. This one is horizontal and the ones above and below it slant a little so that they are closer to it at the right than at the left. By this time the practice of designating the location of the ship had come into use. This was accomplished by setting up the required type in the spaces between the bars. This one shows that the ship was off Fortress Monroe, Virginia. This type of postmark and canceller is still in use on some of the ships, and I am told is the one which the Government regulations require. Some of the mail clerks have, however, secured other forms and there are several of these in use. Part of the Battleships ("Battle-wagons"), Dreadnaughts, have postmarks which look like those of the electric machines used in the large post offices. A few ships use an elliptical grid attached to the postmark. One of the Battleships was using in 1924 the regulation postmark with four short heavy bars. The Orion—gone now—had the regular postmark with three short bars with the words Navy Mail in the spaces and to the right of these two small stars.

Occasionally one finds a letter cancelled by the M. O. B. or Registered postmark, or one of the same type with the name of the ship above.

When the mail clerk takes the trouble to insert the location the covers are often very interesting. Here is one from the Billingsby cancelled July 4, 1924, at Cherbourg, France. This clerk used blue ink on that day and the cover is a success from any angle. One from the Converse shows that the ship was in "European Waters," from the Curlew that she was at Coco Solo, Canal Zone, one from the Hulbert at Tsing Tan, China, and one mail clerk took the trouble to write Chefor, China, between the lines. Perhaps his type was not in good shape.

Most of the clerks use black ink, but a few have an eye for colors, and we have blue, green, red, and purple occasionally.

One fellow was patriotic. In the spaces of his canceller he has used the words "Join the Navy." Probably other slogans were in use at various times. The training station at Hampton Roads (now discontinued as a Post Office) had "Enlist in the Navy." That of course isn't exactly a Battleship.

So few of the covers of the earlier days, 1908 to 1914, have come into the hands of collectors that practically nothing can be said about them. Perhaps some one will find some sometime but the chances are that most of them have been destroyed. We await the revelations of a find.

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