Figure 1: A mixed-franking prisoner-of-war cover bearing two 1857 one-cent stamps (Scott 24) that had been demonetized almost two years before posting, used in conjunction with a valid 1861 one-cent stamp (Scott 63).

A Mixed Franking that Includes Demonetized U.S. One-Cent Stamps on a Prisoner-of-War Cover

By Patricia A. Kaufmann

While the title of this column is Confederate Postal History, there are many areas that are far more Union, but nonetheless mightily pursued by Confederate collectors. The subject of this column is one of those.

It is no secret that collectors treasure prisoner-of-war mail from both sides of the conflict. They collect Union prisons because the poor souls incarcerated in the North were generally Confederate prisoners-of-war, although civilian political prisoners were also arrested and detained in Northern prisons.

Thousands of dollars of U.S. postage remained in the South at the inception of the war. In August 1861, the federal government demonetized all 1851-1860 stamps and all but two stamped envelopes (postal stationery), rendering them invalid. The U.S. Post Office Department issued new stamps and stamped envelopes to prevent the Confederacy from using U.S. postage to financially aid the rebellion. Receipt of the new 1861 stamps was advertised in local newspapers after receipt of the new stamps and a six-day exchange period was initiated during which old stamps could be exchanged for new. After the exchange period expired, which varied widely among post offices, the old stamps could no longer be exchanged or used to pay for postage.

The Figure 1 cover bears the classic "prison-bar grid" cancels of Columbus, Ohio, which tie two demonetized 1857 one-cent blue Benjamin Franklin stamps (Scott 24) and one 1861 one-cent blue Benjamin Franklin (Scott 63) stamp on a prisoner-of-war cover. The Columbus double-circle postmark is dated May 23 (1863).

This is a rare mixed franking of U.S. one-cent stamps. The demonetized stamps were apparently accepted, although the 1857 issues had been invalid for postage for nearly two years. Sometimes postmasters turned a blind eye to this August 1861 mandate.

This mix of one-cent stamps was used to pay the "DUE 3" per the manuscript notation. Who and when the "DUE 3" was written on the envelope is anyone's

guess. If the stamps had already been affixed by the prisoner and accepted by the postmaster, there would be no reason to write "DUE 3."

At that time, the postmaster also had the opportunity to write or handstamp "Old Stamps Not Recognized," "Held for Postage," or similar wording, but he did not. Perhaps the postmaster wrote "DUE 3" and awaited the stamps to pay for the postage. Maybe he felt sorry for the prisoner and let the invalid stamps slide when they were presented. This is obviously conjecture, but there is none when it comes to the basic facts. Where this Confederate soldier obtained the U.S. stamps is also speculation. Prisoners often bought stamps from guards.

The subject envelope was addressed to Selma C. Gawthrop, Bridgeport Harrison Co(unty West) Virginia. At the bottom is the boldly inked Camp Chase examined marking: "Exmd E.L. Webber Major Comdg Post."

Edwin L. Webber was lieutenant colonel of the 85th (1862) and 88th Ohio Volunteer Infantry (1863-65), both organized at Camp Chase. In his prisoners' mail opus, Galen Harrison notes the Webber censor markings were in use from January 30 until October 20, 1863.[1]

The enclosed original letter, shown in Figure 2, is datelined Camp Chase Prison No. 2, May 22, 1863, from prisoner Albert Proctor.

The letter transcription reads as follows (punctuation added for clarity):

Camp Chase Prison No 2
May 22/63

Dear Friend,
I have no doubt you will be surprised to receive a letter from me postmarked Camp Chase. Nevertheless it is true. I was arrested on the 20th of last month. I have not heard from home since though I have written several times. I am very anxious to hear from my friends. You must write to me as soon as you get this and tell all my friends to write. I would be glad to hear from them often. Give my kind regard to Mr. and Mrs. C. Clay, Olive and all inquiring friends and receive the well wishes of your friend
Albert Proctor

On the back of the one-page letter is also a brief note:

Tell Burrel to send me ten or fifteen dollars if convenient by the last of next week as I stand in kneed (sic) of money.
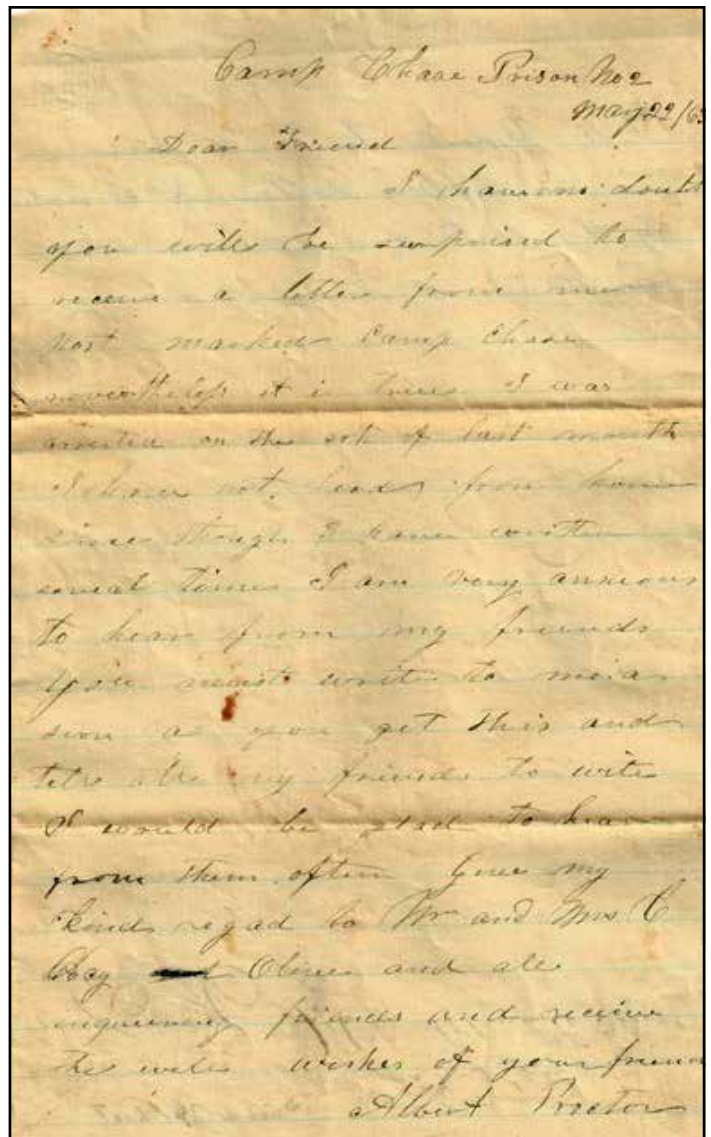

Figure 2: Proctor's letter from Camp Chase Prison No. 2.

Albert Proctor served as a private in Company F of the Virginia 20th Cavalry, Jackson's Brigade, Department of Western Virginia and East Tennessee, later the Army of Northern Virginia. Proctor signed a three-year commitment on May 10, 1863, at Bulltown, (West) Virginia (Braxton County-now extinct), with Capt. Asbury Lewis' Company.

A note in Proctor's military records states, "This is a new company of North Western Virginians raised by me under authority of the Secretary of War. Wm. L. Jackson, Col., Inspector and Mustering Officer."

Multiple records show the regiment was raised in August 1863, but this is in conflict with the Proctor enlistment records. An adjoining record shows Proctor enlisted July 11, 1863, at Camp Clover Lick (Pocohantas County, West Virginia), signed up by Ashby Lewis, although this is after records show he was captured.

Yet another citation (not in the military records I saw) supposedly cites him as enlisting January 10,

1863, at Bulltown. Further records show Proctor was captured May 13, 1863, only days after enlisting, if May 10 is the correct date, although his own letter indicates he was "arrested on the 20th." Such is the often-conflicting information in military records that makes our heads spin.

Proctor was confined to Camp Chase, where he later died. More than 2,000 Confederate soldiers died at Camp Chase, victims of malnutrition, exposure, and disease.

Harrison County, West Virginia, furnished about 800 soldiers for the United States Army and about 350 for the Southern cause. It was a county of split allegiances. Although there were many important dates and bills leading up to it, President Lincoln declared that West Virginia would officially be recognized as a state on June 20, 1863, about a month after Proctor mailed his letter from Camp Chase.

Camp Chase Prison No. 2, where Proctor hung his hat, was added to the first prison stockade in November 1861 to relieve the critical housing shortage caused by incoming prisoners. They comprised three 100-by-15-foot barracks and were added on land contiguous with the first stockade.

As the war dragged on, a three-acre unit designated Prison No. 3 was built in March 1862.

In summer of 1864, the huts of Prison No. 3 were demolished to make way for seventeen new barracks. Volunteer prison labor built the barracks with old lumber from the previously demolished site.

By war's end, Camp Chase held 26,000 of all 36,000 Confederate prisoners of war in Ohio military prisons. In all, 2,250 soldiers are said to have died at Camp Chase by July 5, 1865, when the camp officially closed. Prisoners had been incarcerated there for almost exactly four years; the first prisoner arrived at Camp Chase June 29, 1861.[2]

Among the interesting statistics on the Camp Chase Confederate Cemetery website are that at least six Union soldiers are buried among the Confederate dead. Four blacks and one native American died at Camp Chase. The 1864-65 winter was one of the worst in Ohio's history. Almost twenty-five percent of all Confederate deaths occurred in February 1865 while nearly fifty percent of all Confederate deaths occurred in 1865.[3]

Figure 3 shows the arch and boulder monuments at Camp Chase Confederate Cemetery. On the 32,000-pound boulder is inscribed, "2260 Confederate Soldiers of the war 1861-1865 buried in this enclosure," although this number is at odds with the estimate of 2,168 remains in 2,122 gravesites reported by U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The monuments as they looked in 1902-1910 is shown in a photograph in the Library of Congress in Figure 4.

Figure 3: The boulder and arch memorials at the Camp Chase Confederate Cemetery showing a statue of a faceless Confederate soldier before it was decapitated by vandals in 2017.

Figure 4: A photograph of the Camp Chase memorials taken between 1900-1910. *(Library of Congress)*

Part of the monument is a bronze statue of a faceless Confederate soldier at rest overlooking the final resting place of so many.[4]

In August 2017, in a dynamic too common in our current political climate, vandals knocked the statue off the monument and absconded with the head, desecrating that sentinel of the graveyard. A federal agency repaired and reinstalled it in May 2019.[5]

Led by William H. Knauss, a wounded Union veteran, an 1890s movement succeeded in bringing together Union and Confederate veterans organizations to pay tribute to those interred in the Camp Chase cemetery. Atop the arch is inscribed the single word "AMERICANS." That one mighty word says it all.

Endnotes

1   Galen D. Harrison, *Prisoners' Mail From the American Civil War*, (Dexter Mich.: Thompson-Shore, 1997), pp. 179-183.
2   National Register of Historic Places nomination form for Camp Chase site November 10, 1972, United States Department of the Interior National Park Service. *http://npshistory.com/publications/cuva/nr-camp-chase-site.pdf*
3   Dennis Ranney, Facts About Camp Chase, Camp Chase Confederate Cemetery, *https://www.campchase.us/campchase/story/facts-about-camp-chase*
4   National Cemetery Administration, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. *https://www.cem.va.gov/cems/lots/campchase.asp#gi*
5   Gabe Rosenberg, WOSU 89.7 NPR News, Public Media, "Confederate Soldier Statue Defaced at Camp Chase Cemetery." *https://news.wosu.org/news/2017-08-22/confederate-soldier-statue-defaced-at-camp-chase-cemetery#*

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