

PRISONERS OF WAR MAIL - FORT DELAWARE 1862 - 1865

Chapter 1

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this exhibit is to highlight the important role played by the mail during the Civil War by both systems and the routes used to get the mail to its destination. The United States Civil War began on April 12, 1861. Until the end of April 1861, the USA Post Office handled all the states' mail (including those seceded). Effective May 31, 1861, the USA Post Office order suspended all mail service in the seceded states. On June 1, 1861, the Confederate States of America (CSA) inaugurated its own postal system.

BACKGROUND

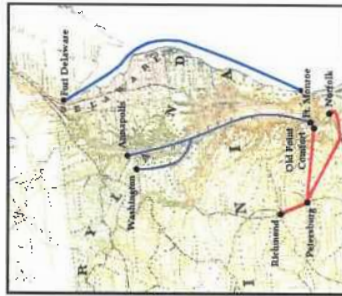
Fort Delaware was completed in 1859 on the marshy island known as Pea Patch Island. Originally built to protect the ports of Wilmington and Philadelphia, it became a Union prison camp during the Civil War. The first prisoner arrived on July 11, 1861; by July 1863 there were more than 13,600 prisoners on the island and by war's end it had held almost 33,000 men. About 2,500 prisoners died on Fort Delaware. General Albin F. Schoepf, known as "General Terror" and headed by the Confederates was Commandant of the prison. According to Oaten Harrison, the census of known covers from Federal Prisons tallied 1976. Only 244 covers are known from Fort Delaware, 36 of which are in this exhibit, sent to 10 of the 15 states of the Confederacy.

ORGANIZATION

The exhibit is organized in six chapters: Flag of Truce, Mail to the Southern States, Mail to the Border States, Mail to the Northern States, Incoming Mail and Epilogue.

FLAG-OF-TRUCE MAIL

General instructions for Flag of Truce mail were that letters were limited to one page, personal matters only. Envelopes were to be enclosed in an outer envelope and were to be addressed to the commander at the exchange point. The outer envelope was then to be discarded.



Map of the Norfolk-Purtoresc Monroe exchange point in Southeastern Virginia.

Thick red lines indicate railroad connections and blue lines indicate water connections

FLAG OF TRUCE



To Washington, VA
Sept. 25, 1864
18c oval (80 mm) and 3c rose tied by circular gum cancel with matching DELAWARE CITY DEL SEP 25 (25mm) tie prepay both the Union and Confederate postage on North to South POW cover from Fort Delaware.



To Fishersville, VA
Jan 31, 1865

18c tied Richmond, VA, Feb. 10 cds (Powell Type 6mm) and 3c rose tied by target cancel (26 mm) and DELAWARE CITY DEL JAN 31 cds (24mm).

"Care of Comdg. Officer, Fortress Monroe, by Flag of Truce" in manuscript at lower left.

Sent by Lt. John A. Douglas (Co. E, 30th VA, Detachment) to his wife in Fishersville, VA. Examiner's markings were discontinued in Nov. 1864



To Raleigh, NC
Oct. 18, 1864

Fort Delaware POW cover sent to Raleigh, NC by Capt. Seaton Garos (Cox's Siago) to his wife. Endorsed "Via Fortress Monroe per Flag of Truce"

Examiner's marking, U.S. postage paid by 8c Rose tied by target cancel, DELAWARE CITY, DE, OCT 18, (1864) cds and Durham, VA cds. (80mm) Marked "DUE TO" handstamp for Confederate postage.

30 mm



Only one type handstamp examined marking is known used on prisoner's mail from Fort Delaware. The earliest date of use recorded is April 12, 1864 and the latest date of use recorded is October 25, 1864.

The Southeastern Virginia coastal region offered one of the best connections for the Flag of Truce exchange. CSA controlled Norfolk had good connections to Richmond, and was just across Chesapeake Bay from the USA controlled Fortress Monroe. Next to Fortress Monroe was the Old Point Comfort, Virginia Post Office, which had good access by water to Washington D.C. Accordingly, the connection by steamship up the Chesapeake Bay evolved into the principal Flag of Truce route.

Fort Delaware Prisoner of War - Single Frame Exhibit – 1862 to 1865

Purpose of the exhibit: To acquaint the reader with the chronicle of the fascinating/significant period of the U.S./Confederate postal systems from 1862 to 1865 involving **Fort Delaware POW prison** near Delaware City DE. This is the largest display ever assembled showing the Fort Delaware POW postal history uses. For your information, the earliest known cover from Fort Delaware is shown on Chapter III, Page 6.

Why now? It has taken a long-time to feel skillful enough as a U.S. postal historian to tell this fairly multifarious philatelic/postal history tale effectively. As an exhibitor of many years, I only recently became comfortable in presenting this subject in an accurate & concise manner.

Plan of the exhibit: The four chapters portray the distinctive rates/routes/ and markings from (or to) the prison. Each chapter *begins* with a heading indicating the subject destinations such as “To Southern States”.

Condition & Rarity: Items of importance are **outlined in red**. Please keep in mind that most covers in the exhibit exceed 153 years of age; condition, while usually very attractive, age and wartime mail handling does play a factor in their appearance. Also, every attempt has been made to utilize small-town destinations/originations.

Difficulty of acquisition: Fort Delaware POW covers total census is 244. The exhibit shows an astounding 34 covers or 15% of the known covers in the census.

Importance: This is possibly the 1st exhibit attempt (in memory) to present this difficult to acquire and historically epic Civil War’s Fort Delaware POW covers. The story of Civil War POW mail is historically important and profoundly philatelically significant.

Philatelic Knowledge: The exhibitor has tried to study as many publications as available on the subject as well as asking the key people in the Civil War/POW field of postal history the appropriate questions. I have contacted or read the following notable philatelists: Patricia Kaufmann, Robert Swed, Galen Harrison, Scott Trepel, Charles Shreve, Mark Schwartz, William Schultz, Phil Bansner, Don Tocher, Abner Doubleday, and many others including the Fort Delaware Society Director.

Organization:

Chapter I – Mail to the Southern States
Chapter II - Mail to the Border States
Chapter III - Mail to the Northern States
Chapter IV - Incoming Mail to Fort Delaware
Epilogue

Note: On August 20, 1864 a chosen group of 600 Confederate Officers (“The Immortal Six Hundred”) were transferred from Fort Delaware to Morris Island in Charleston Harbor to be held in open barracks as “human shields”. None of the covers in the exhibit are from “The Immortal 600” Confederate Prisoners, according to a listing in the book “The Immortal Six Hundred” by Major J. Ogden Murray (One of the Six Hundred) The Eddy Press Corporation, 1905.

References:

“Confederate States of America – Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History” Kaufmann, Crown, Palazolo, The Confederate Stamp Alliance, Inc. 2012
“Special Mail Routes of the American Civil War: A Guide to Across-the-Lines Postal History”, Walske, Trepel The Confederate Stamp Alliance, Inc. 2008
“The Union Prison at Fort Delaware: A perfect Hell on Earth”, Brian Temple, McFarland & Company. Inc. Publishers, 2003
“The Immortal Six Hundred”, Major J. Ogden Murray (One of the Six Hundred) The Eddy Press Corporation, 1905.