

U.S. MILITARY POSTAL STATIONS IN CUBA

This is a study of the US markings and postal history generated during the Spanish-Cuban American War period and the years that followed until the independence of Cuba in 1902. The main areas covered are: a) interrupted mails to Cuba and Spain; b) soldier's mail from training camps in the US; c) mail from US military personnel during the invasion and occupation of the island; d) the markings and postal history of military postal stations; e) the provisional stamp issues of Puerto Principe on cover; f) mail from the military camps established after the closing of the military stations; g) official mail and postal documents; and h) second US military occupation of Cuba.

Most of the exhibit is devoted to the military stations that were created by order of President McKinley on May 3, 1898. All the stations were at some point transferred to civilian control but the markings from the "military" period continued to be used, often for many months or years. Some of the military station postmarks are only known after they were officially under civilian control and they are included in this exhibit. As P.M.G. Emory Smith defined it in December 30, 1898 : "The postal system of Cuba, while for convenience practically administered under the direction of the Post Office Department, is to be maintained by virtue of military authority and as part of the military government established by the US during the period of control."

A total of 39 stations were gradually created as they were needed. No items have been recorded from stations 2, 9, 14, 25, 36, and 39. Markings from stations 2, 14, 25, and 39 have been reported by Dr. Antonio Barreras, a prominent student of Cuban philately in an article published in 1902, but no examples have been seen since his original report. The population figures were obtained from the U.S. census of 1899. The post office class refers to the Spanish colonial period.

This exhibit is divided as follows:

- ♦ The Catalyst for War
- ♦ Suspended Mails
- ♦ Training Camps in the USA
- ♦ Embarkation of Troops
- ♦ Sailor's and Soldier's Mail
- ♦ Military Stations During the War
- ♦ Military Stations After the War
- ♦ Puerto Principe Provisional Stamp Issues on Cover
- ♦ U.S. Military Camps in Cuba
- ♦ Military Hospitals in Cuba
- ♦ Military Camp in USA
- ♦ Postal Department Official Mail and Documents
- ♦ Second US military occupation of Cuba

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The Catalyst for War

Following riots and rumors of a pro-Spanish and anti-American conspiracy in the Cuban capital, the U.S.S. Maine arrived at Havana on January 25, 1898 on a "friendly visit". It was destroyed by an explosion, under unclear circumstances, on the night of February 15 with the loss of 268 American lives.

A US Naval Court of Inquiry concluded that the explosion was due to a submerged mine and prowar sentiment grew.

Captain Charles Dwight Sigsbee commanded the late battleship and wrote this note:

" U.S.S. Texas,
Havana, Cuba.
February 6th, 1899.

My dear Sir:-

In response to
your inquiry you are
informed that the Maine
was at the berth, when she
[was] destroyed, continuously
from her arrival at Havana,
- from January 25th, 1898.
She was destroyed on Feb.
15th 1898. Hastily.

Very respectfully

Charles D. Sigsbee
Captain, US Navy "

Wreck of the U.S.S. Maine.

U. S. S. Texas,
Havana, Cuba.
February 6th, 1899.

My dear Sir:-

In response to
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Suspended Mails

Order number 161 of April 26, 1898 by Postmaster General Charles E. Smith suspended mails between the US and Spain and its Colonies. However, letters were being held since at least one week earlier.

The US naval blockade of Cuban ports started on April 22 and war was officially declared on the 25th.



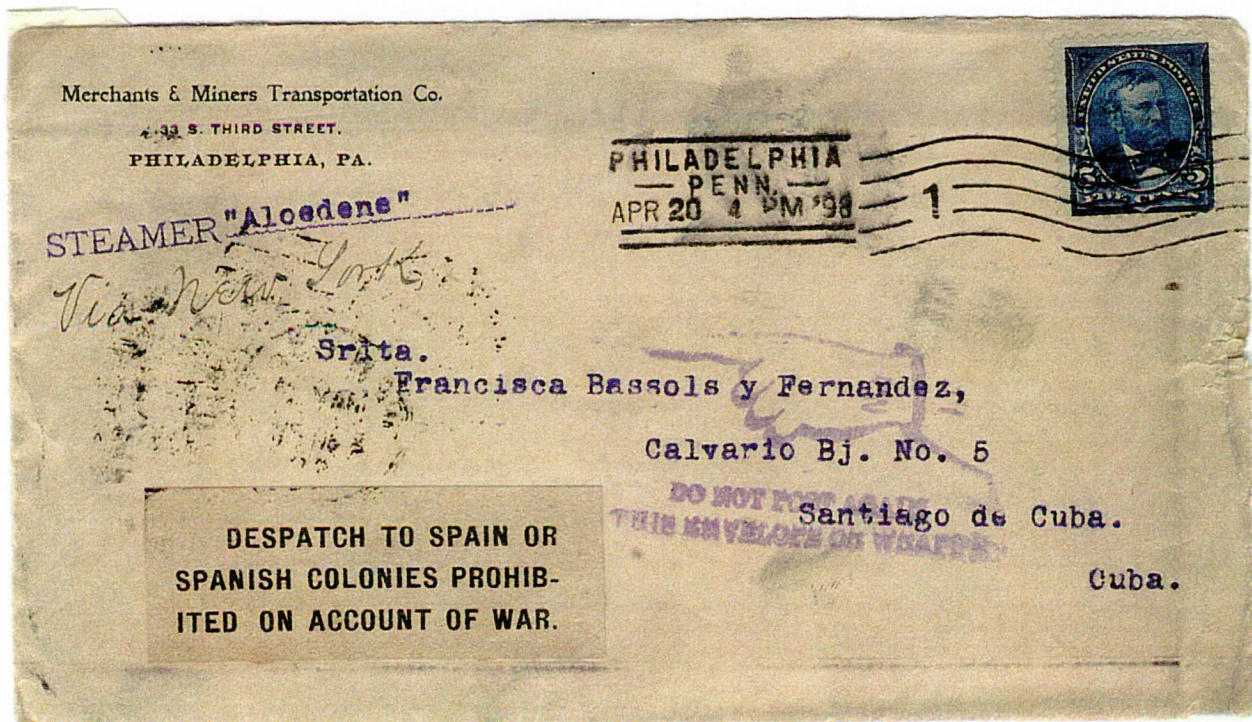
July 6, 1898. Coban, Guatemala to Madrid, Spain via New Orleans (July 23). There is one other recorded example of the marking "Unmailable during/Hostilities with Spain." from New Orleans. Most of the mails from the Caribbean, Central and South America during this period went through New Orleans.

The vast majority of mail to Cuba was dispatched from New York, which was the only other US city that used distinctive handstamps or labels on interrupted mail during the war.

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Suspended Mails

New York used two types of labels on suspended mail. The first one has the letter "D" of "DESPATCH" above the "N" of "SPANISH". Two examples of the early type of label on first class mail to Cuba are shown below. Some letters were delivered after the war while those with return address were sent back to the sender.



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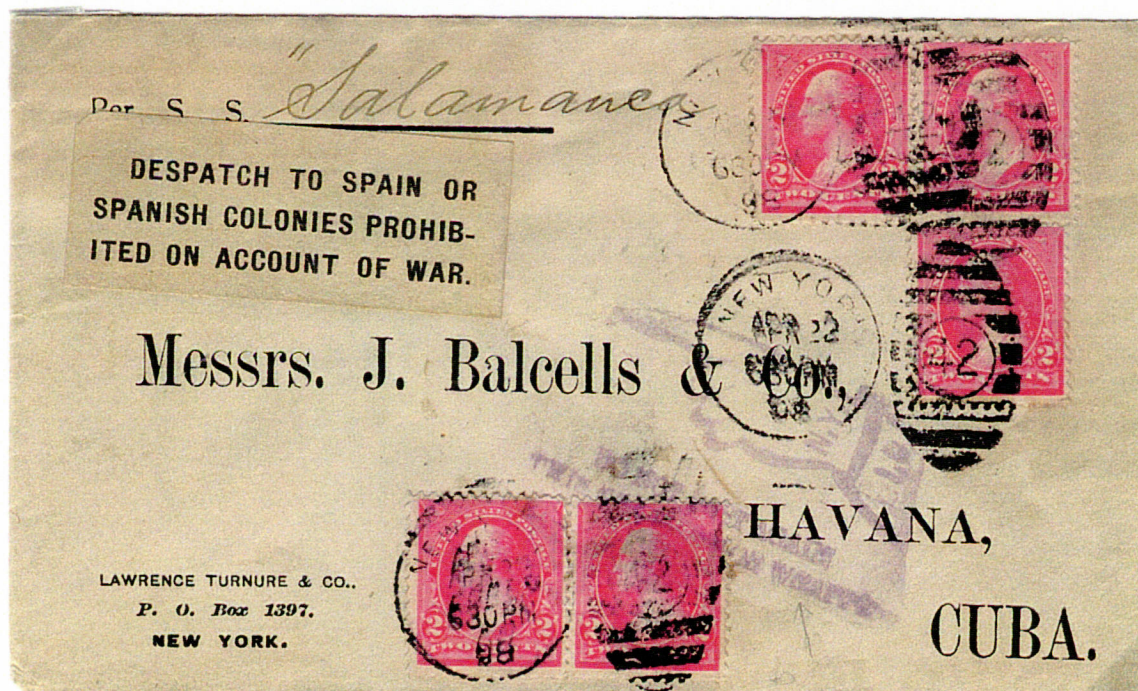
Suspended Mails

The two types of labels used at New York City. The first one on a cover held for insufficient postage. The second one, with the letter "D" of "DESPATCH" above the "A" of "SPANISH", on a first class letter that was returned to the sender.



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SPANISH
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U.S. MILITARY POSTAL STATIONS IN CUBA

Suspended Mails

During May of 1898 the post office at New York City started using handstamps instead of labels.



April 16, 1898. New York to Havana. Only recorded example of the first type of handstamp dated May 6. This cover was previously held for insufficient postage.



May 28, 1898. New York to Havana. Last type of handstamp used on suspended mail at New York. It incorporates the words "RETURN TO SENDER." and has no date.

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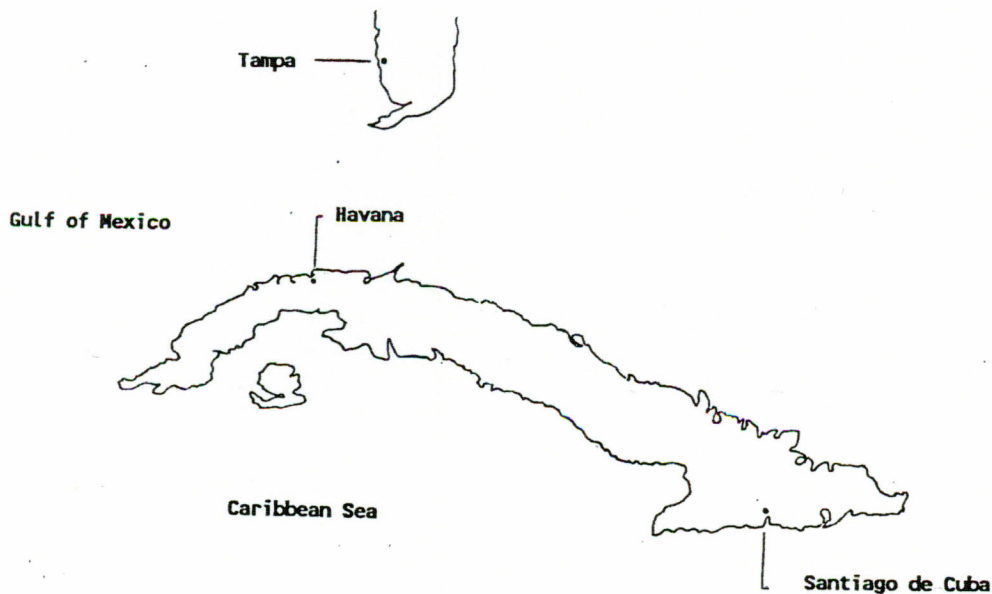
Embarkation of Troops

The US officially declared war on Spain on April 25, 1898 (but made it retroactive to the 21st). On April 22 the North Atlantic Squadron, commanded by Admiral Sampson, was assembled off Key West and steamed towards Cuba to blockade the major ports.

Tampa was the port of embarkation of US troops.



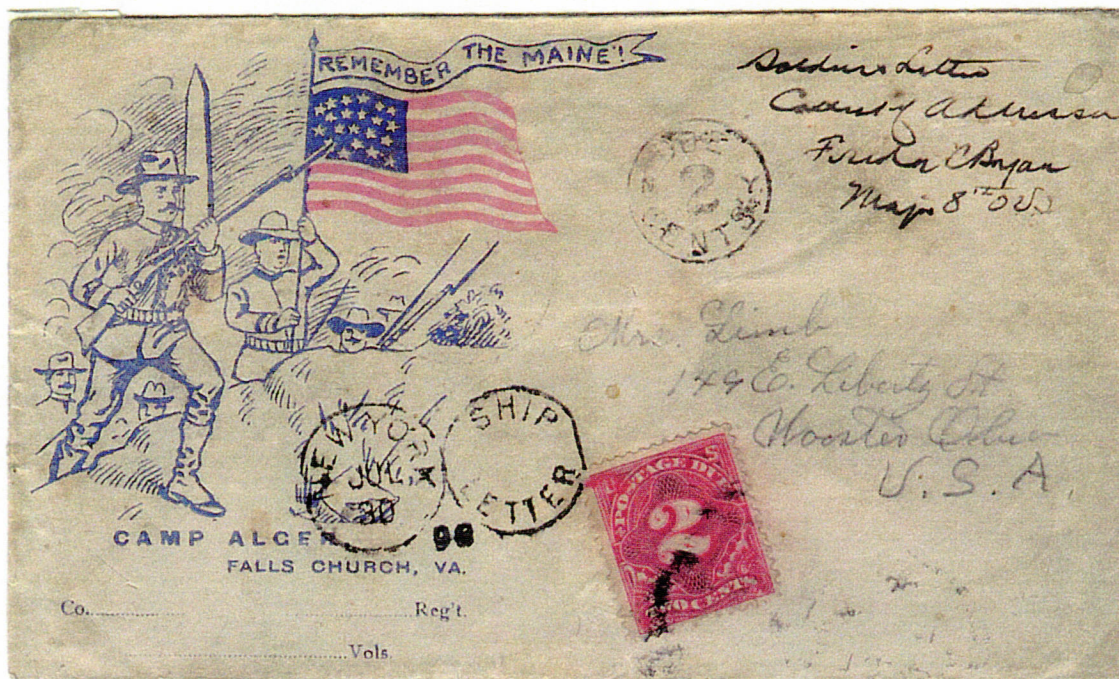
July 18, 1898. Tampa, Florida to Norwalk, OH. Soldier's patriotic cover mailed from "SUB STA. 4" (reportedly an embarkation canceller). The slogan "Remember the Maine" became the battle cry for US troops.



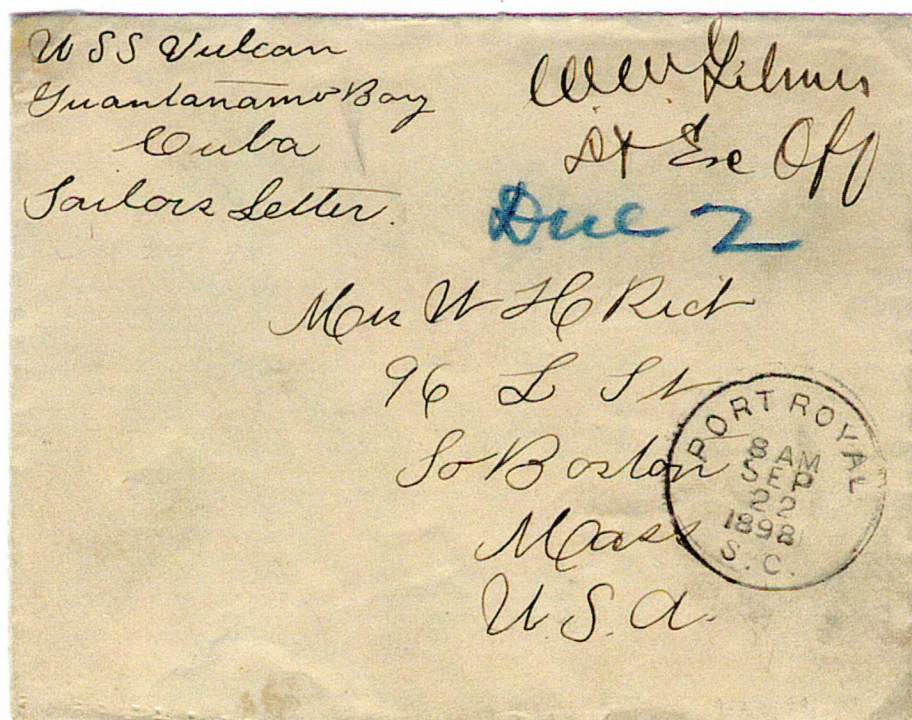
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Early Soldier's and Sailor's Mail

Most of the mail from US military personnel during the naval blockade of the major Cuban ports and early landing in the southeastern coast was sent collect. The Act of March 3, 1879 allowed mail from active US servicemen to be paid on delivery.



Jul. 1898. Soldier's patriotic envelope to Wooster, OH. Very early mail sent from Daiquiri or Siboney and received at New York on July 30.



Sep. 1898. Sailor's letter to Boston from the U.S.S. Vulcan guarding Guantanamo Bay, the site of the first landing of US troops in Cuba on June 10.

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Early Sailor's Mail



Oct. 1898. Letter from the U.S.S. Resolute to Cranford, NJ. It was probably carried on the U.S.S. Nashville into Key West.



Jan. 1899. Letter to an engineer aboard the U.S.S. Brooklyn at Havana. By the time it arrived to Cuba (Jan. 24) the addressee had been transferred to the U.S.S. Topeka at Washington, DC.

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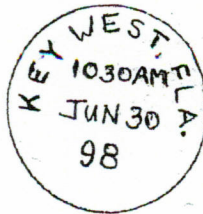
First Mail from Cuba

Lieutenant Omar Bundy, the sender of this letter, led one of the two initial assaults at Daiquiri on June 24 and later became a Brigadier General in the First World War. The addressee, his father, was a Colonel during the US Civil War.

This cover was sent on the first northbound mail that was dispatched on the U.S.S. Dolphin after calling at Daiquiri on June 26, 1898. It arrived at Key West on June 30.

It is possible that this letter was written and mailed before the official opening of the first military post office at Daiquiri since it bears no postal markings from the station and most soldiers had provided themselves with postage stamps before leaving Tampa, in accordance to instructions from the high command. Order number 219 of June 7, 1898 fixed domestic rates and conditions for "mail matter for or from persons connected with the US forces at and near the islands of Cuba and Puerto Rico". First class letter rate was two cents per ounce.

Civilian mails could neither be sent to nor dispatched from the island.

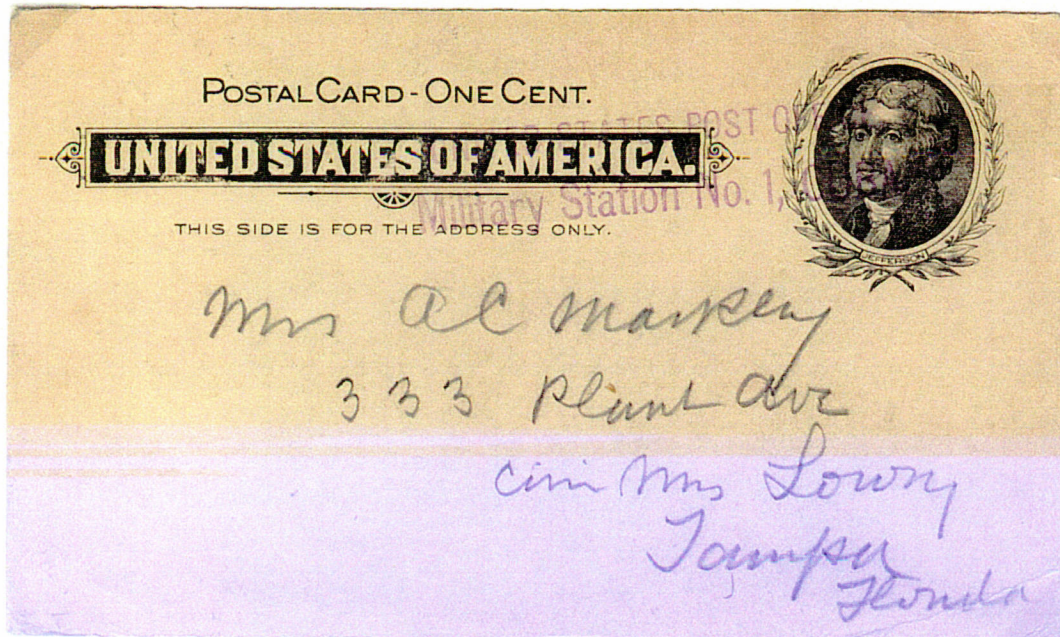


U.S. MILITARY POSTAL STATIONS IN CUBA

Station Number 1. Daiquiri

One day after the first troops landed in this town, "United States Post Office, Military Station No. 1" opened for business on June 23, 1898, although stamps were not available for sale until June 25 when the last US soldiers from the first transports went ashore.

The post office was set up in a small farmhouse and the Postmaster was Mr. Louis Kempner, from the New York Postal Service, who was also Assistant Postal Agent for Cuba.



June 27, 1898. Mailed from the field to Tampa, Florida. This is the earliest known usage of this two-line handstamp or of any other military station marking during the Spanish American War. It arrived to Tampa on June 30. Domestic postal card rate of one cent.

The contents of the postcard:

" 24 Inf 3d Brig 1st Div. 5th Corps

Near Santiago Cuba June 27/98

Dear Wife

I am well and all
right - but we live like privates
left (?) my valise on the ship -
write to you by dim moonlight
live on rations but am in fine
health. dont know any thing
but will write when I get an envelope

Alfred "

Station Number 1. Daquiri

A second military postal station, Number 2, officially opened at Daiquiri on December 1, 1898 and was transferred to civilian control on February 27, 1899. No items have been recorded from Military Station No. 2, but Barreras reported a straightline receiving handstamp.

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NTS
CENT
CENTS
CENTS
CENTS
CENTS
CENTS
GENTS
GENTS

Postal Money Order Payable in the United States only

Military Station No. 1, New York, N. Y.
Cuba,

No. 6

Pay to the order of *Santiago, Cuba*
June 27 1898

Marie Genovar

THE PAYEE NAMED IN MY ADVICE OF SAME NUMBER AND DATE

One — Dollars Cents

THE SUM INDICATED BY FIGURES IN THE MARGIN HEREOF AND MY ADVICE

To the Postmaster at
St Augustine

Fla

C. Van Cott
POSTMASTER
L. Kempner

RECEIVED PAYMENT

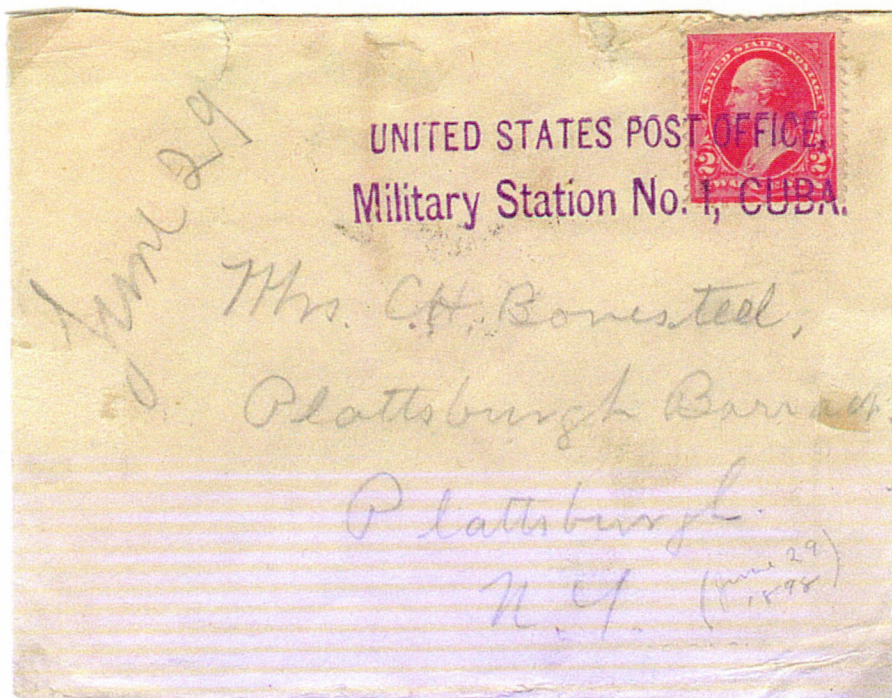
SEE SPACE ON THE BACK FOR ENDORSEMENT

Markings of the first 13 military stations generally made reference to the Post Office at New York which was in charge of administrating the entire Cuban postal system.

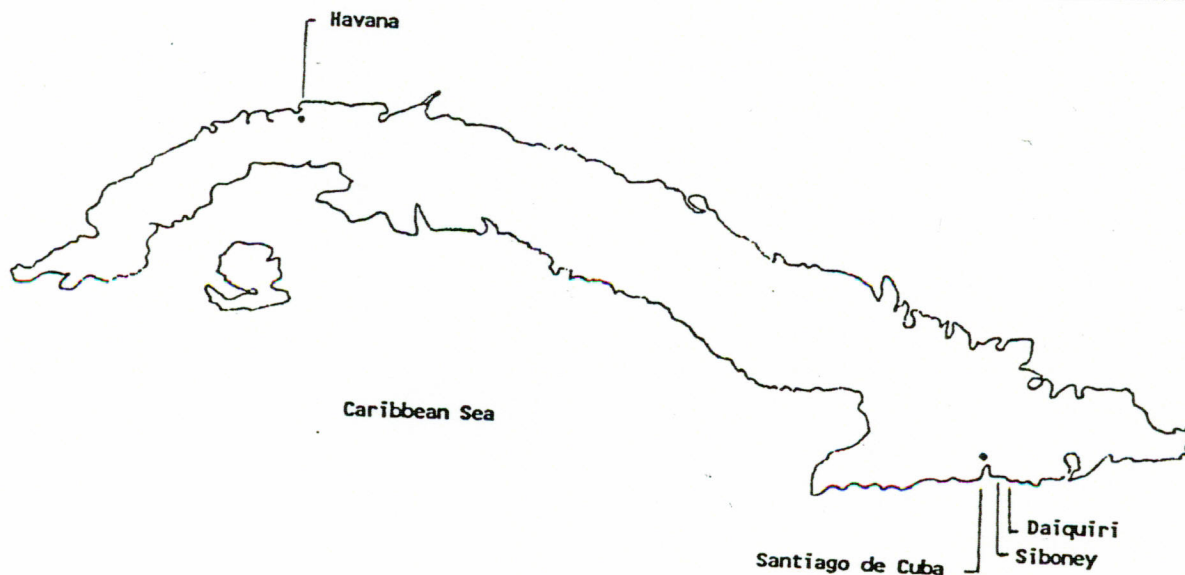
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Station Number 1. Daiquiri

There are very few "War Covers" from Cuba during the 26 day campaign that ended with the occupation of Santiago on July 17.



June 29, 1898. Daiquiri to Plattsburg, NY. There are two other covers recorded on this early date. Prepayment of letters during the first few weeks following the landing of troops is very unusual.



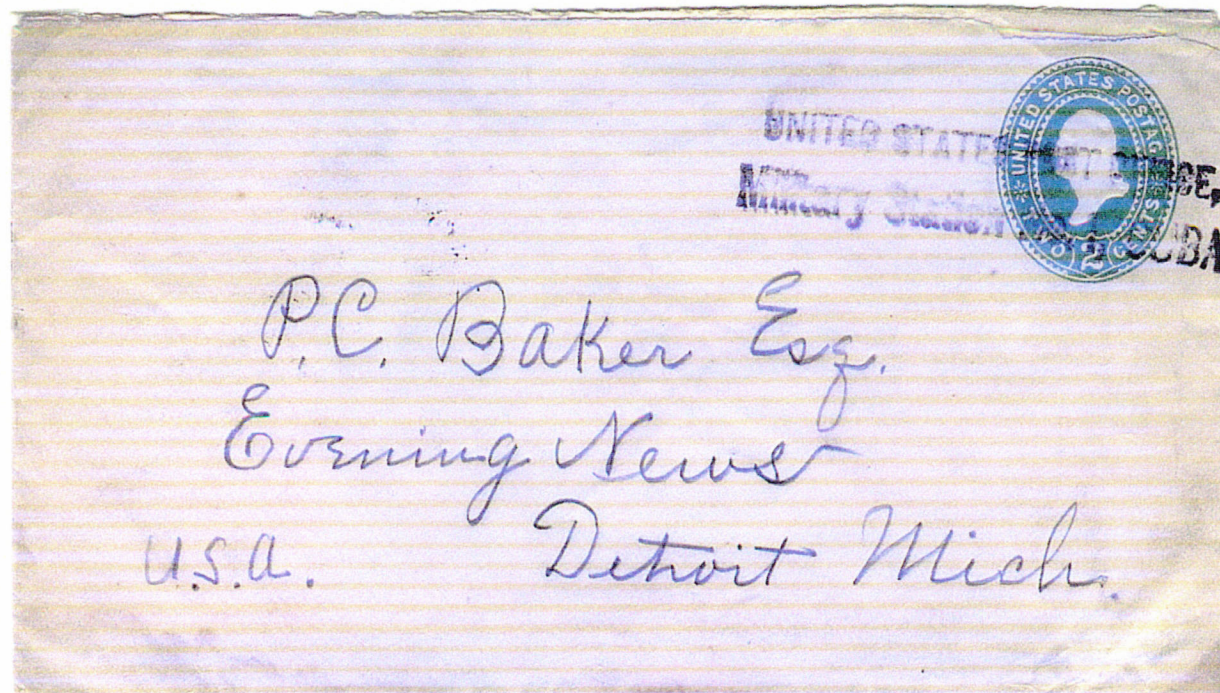
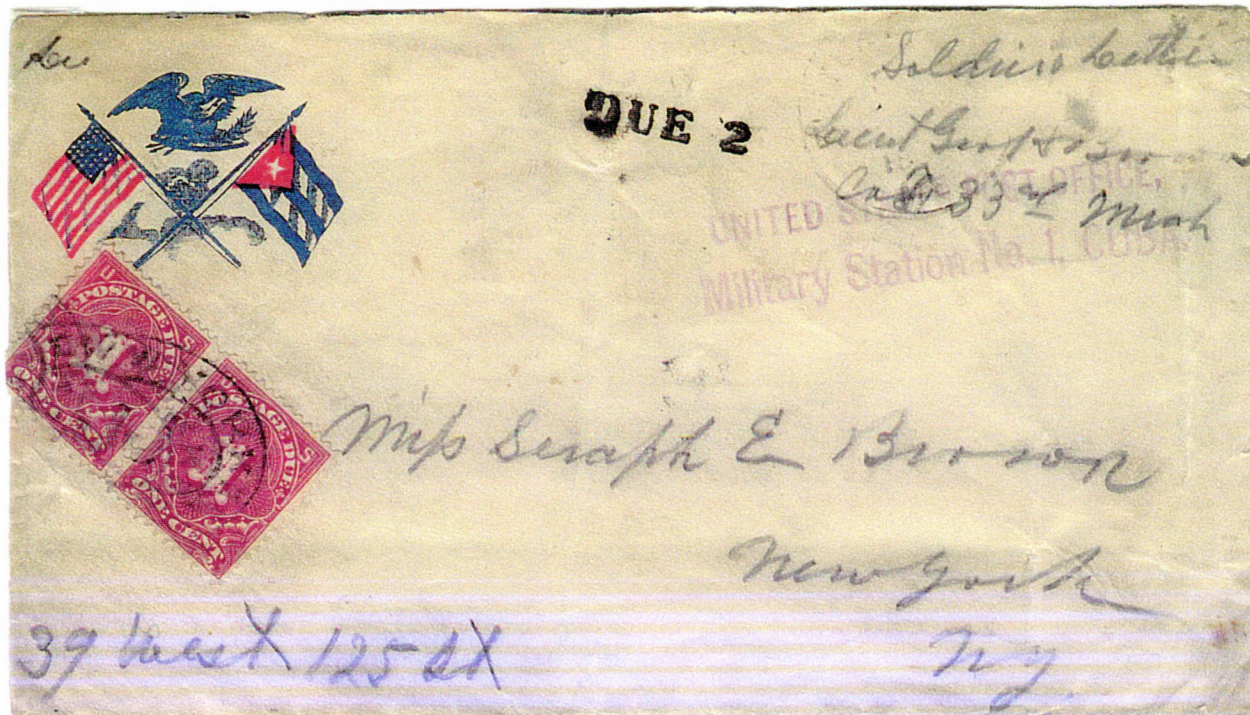
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Station Number 1. Siboney

Siboney was a very small town that had no postal facilities during the Spanish administration. As the troops moved towards Santiago, the first military postal station was moved four miles west to Siboney which was closer to Cuba's second largest city. It operated from July 6 to about July 21 when it was transferred to the outskirts of Santiago.

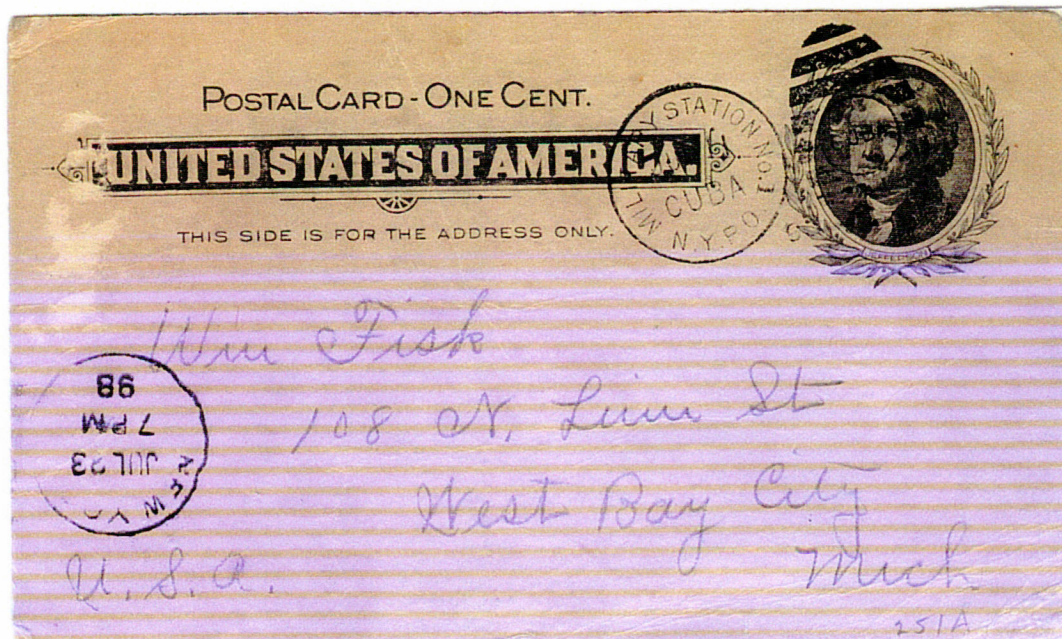
Due to a "yellow fever" epidemic which forced the closing of this station, no mail was handled here from July 10 to July 20. During the second week of July, all the buildings in the village had to be burnt and the station moved to a near by location, probably an improvised "fever hospital".

Below are two items most likely mailed at Siboney. The first one, with the purple marking, was sent unpaid to New York and was received on July 17. The second one, with the black handstamp, was prepaid to Michigan and received in transit at New York on July 23.



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Station Number 1. Siboney



Siboney, July 10, 1898. This postcard, addressed to West Bay City, Michigan, was written on the day when mail delivery from this station was first suspended because of the fever epidemic. It was postmarked the following day, probably on the outskirts of Santiago.

It has the earliest example of this handstamp (two other known), the first type of duplex canceler used by the US Military Stations in Cuba. The New York City transit marking is dated July 23, same as the previous cover with the straightline marking from this station.

U.S. MILITARY POSTAL STATIONS IN CUBA

Station Number 1. Siboney

This is the only recorded letter mailed from Military Station No. 1 at Siboney while it operated from a "fever hospital". It was written two days before the station was transferred to the outskirts of Santiago. This is also the earliest use of the first type of crude oval canceller which was later used in Santiago de Cuba.

There were three different types of crude oval killers which were probably sent to all 39 military postal stations although they only have been recorded in less than half.

