

Puerto Principe American Occupation in Cuba Provisional Stamps (1898-1899)

Presented by Arden Simoni

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Highlights of Puerto Principe provisional stamps



- US provisional stamps, issued in the cities of Puerto Principe (present day Camagüey), Minas del Principe, Nuevitas and Santa Cruz del Sur during the American occupation of Cuba
- In circulation only 32 days, from 19 December 1898 – 20 January 1899
- Total of between 21,400 – 28,000 stamps, 5 separate printings, 44 Scott issued numbers, and 220 distinct stamps (varieties of the 44 Scott designated issues)
- Puerto Principe one of about 38 US military postal offices, but delayed with delivery of US postal stamps, requiring existing Spanish Cuban colonial stamps to be overprinted with the Spanish word “Habilitado” (“revalued”)

The Backdrop of the Spanish-American War



General Valeriano Weyler

General Valeriano Weyler was a Spanish general named as governor of Cuba charged with suppressing insurgents fighting for Cuban independence

- Implemented a “reconcentration” policy, wherein he separated civilians from the rebels into “camps” that became cesspools of hunger, disease, and starvation
- Sympathy of American public won by propaganda war waged by Cuban émigrés in the US
- The Spanish public did not wish to relinquish Cuba, a remaining jewel of the Spanish Empire that the Spanish thought God had rewarded them for their conquest of the Moors.

Insult of the Spanish Ambassador to the United State



Enrique Dupuy de Lôme

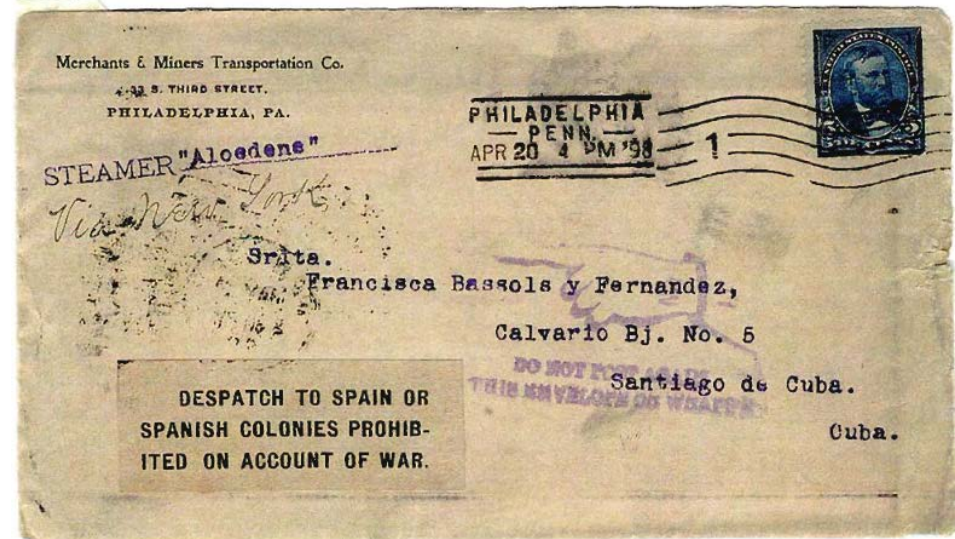
- President William McKinley was sympathetic to the Cuban independence struggle
- As a gesture of good will, McKinley proposed to send the brand-new battleship *Maine* on a courtesy visit to Havana
- Spanish Ambassador Enrique Dupuy de Lôme officially consented to the proposal
- Unofficially, Enrique Dupuy de Lôme, expressed that he was against the gesture in a letter, and that he thought further negotiations with the Cuban insurgents were futile
- The letter was intercepted and published in the *New York Journal*, owned by William Randolph Hearst, under the banner headline, “The Worst Insult to the United States in its History.”

Blowing up of the *Maine* and the declaration of war between the US and Spain



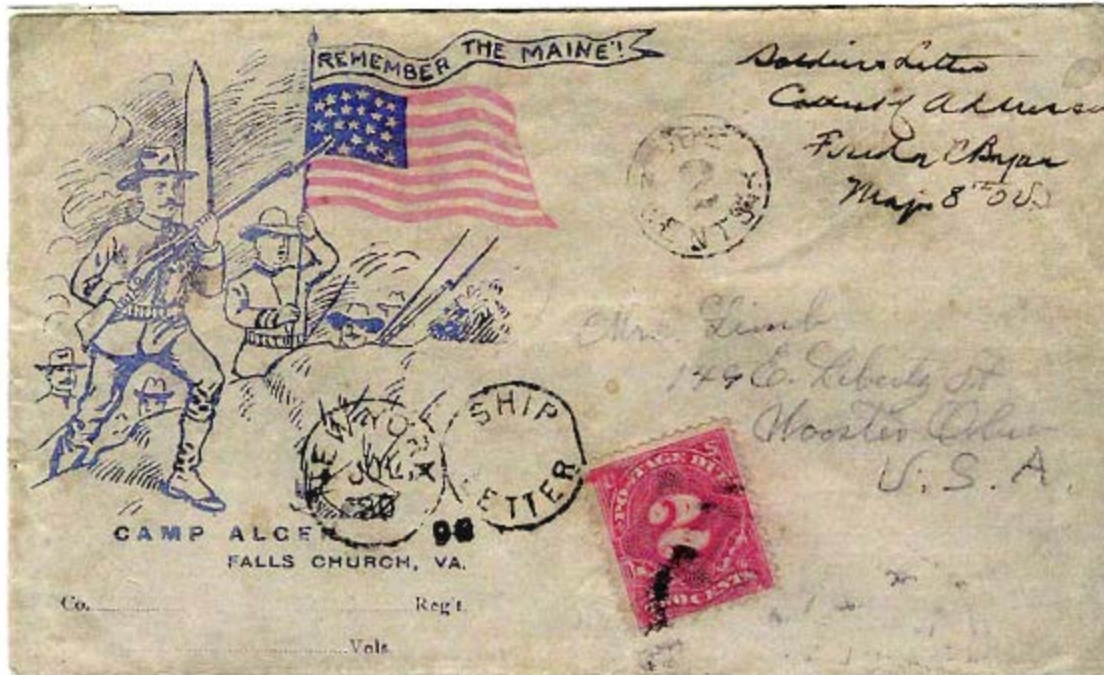
- On February 15, 1898, a few days after Spanish Ambassador Enrique Dupuy de Lôme's infamous letter was published, the US battleship *Maine* mysteriously exploded in Havana harbor.
- Death of 266 sailors
- A Spanish investigation concluded an internal explosion destroyed the *Maine*
- A US investigation concluded that an external source destroyed the *Maine*
- A reluctant President McKinley was forced to demand Spain grant independence to Cuba which Spain refused
- The US declared war on Spain on April 21, 1898, and a blockage of Havana harbor commenced

Suspension of mail between the US and Spain and its colonies



- Order number 161 of April 26, 1898 by Postmaster General Charles E. Smith

Military postal stations open in Cuba



Very early letter sent from one of the first landings in Cuba, received in New York July 30, 1898

- Stamps were not available in the first military post stations.
- Initially, soldiers either used stamps brought with them from the US, or through the Postal Act of 1879 could send letters to be paid on delivery (assessed postage due)
- Rate was 2 cents per ounce for soldiers sending mail domestically to the US

Spain sues for peace



One of the few surviving letters sent by Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Roosevelt of the First U. S. Volunteer Cavalry (Rough Riders), just five weeks after the famous battle of San Juan Hill

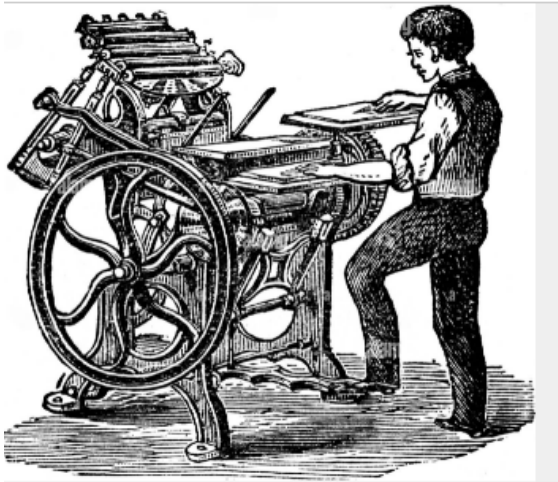
- Spain sued for peace with the US on 17 July, 1898
- On August 12, 1898, Spain signed a protocol of peace relinquishing Cuba
- On December 10, 1898, the US and Spain signed the Treaty of Paris, officially recognizing US occupation of Cuba
- The US occupied Cuba until May 20, 1902

Military Station No. 11, Puerto Principe (present-day Camagüey)



- American troops gradually replaced Spanish troops in Cuba, from summer 1898 to December 10, 1898, establishing 39 military postal stations
- American troops arrived in Puerto Principe November 24, 1898, city of about 46,000 inhabitants. US military station No. 11 was opened in Puerto Principe November 24, 1898, but US postage stamps were due to be delivered weeks later
- Although the use of Spanish colonial stamps had been banned by the Postmaster General, these stamps continued to be used in Puerto Principe. Money from the Spanish stamps continued to fill the Spanish Treasury.
- An item, dated December 15, 1898, has been seen with the Spanish cancel on colonial stamps
- The press alerted the public of this situation and demanded the defect be remedied.

Decision to issue provisional stamps



- Señor Lope Recio, Director of Posts and Governor of the province, proposed to American commandant, General Carpenter, that Spanish colonial stamps be surcharged with values to be used as provisional stamps, who authorized the issue.
- Idea to use india rubber stamps was rejected, printing type used instead, to overlay strips of five colonial stamps at a time. The press of the newspaper *Las Dos Republicas* was used, in the nighttime, for security purposes

Puerto Principe varieties



One numeral in a stamp of strips of five for 2c, 3c and 5c stamps has a different font type and is assigned a unique Scott catalog number



Inverted
overlay



Inverted
overlay
& broken "1"



"e" instead
of "c" in "cents"



Numeral on
selvage

Puerto Principe printings

- **1st printing: 19 December 1898**
Scott Cuba 176, 178-181, 188-189.
- **2nd printing: 24 December 1898**
Scott Cuba 179F, 179G, 182-191
- **3rd printing: 24 December 1898**
Scott Cuba 177, 177a, 179B, 179D, 189C, 192-193
- **4th printing: 27 December 1898**
Scott Cuba 196-200a
- **5th printing: 11 January 1899**
Scott Cuba 201-206, 211-220



Scott catalog values from \$60 to \$3250 (Scott catalog reverses the designations for 3rd and 4th printings, which can confuse one when referencing Scott numbers to expertization charts)

Denominations: 1¢, 2¢, 3¢, 5¢, 10¢

Only around 34 covers with Puerto Principe stamps survive



10c on 1c, Scott 200 and 5c on 4m Scott 218. One of only two covers with Scott 200. Sold for \$6,500 at a Robert Siegel auction on June 19, 2010



This is the only recorded cover with all five positions of the 2c value of the 1st printing, and only recorded cover to Germany. Sold for \$4,500 at a Robert Siegel auction on June 19, 2010

Counterfeits galore!

Counterfeits of Puerto Principe Surcharges.

The extreme rarity of many of the varieties of these interesting stamps has, as was expected, tempted the forgers, and quite a liberal supply of counterfeits of these stamps is now on the market. The difference between the genuine and the counterfeit is more in the character of the impression than in the surcharge itself and accurate knowledge of the genuine varieties is required in order to distinguish the real from the false. The counterfeits are in some cases supplied with genuine cancellations and in others with forged ones. We can only advise collectors to be extremely careful in buying these stamps as but few dealers have seen any large number of them and hence but few are able to tell the genuine from the counterfeit.

Warning of counterfeits in the May, 1899 *American Journal of Philately*

- Majority of “Puerto Principe” stamps listed on eBay are forgeries
- “Puerto Principe” stamps even from respected dealers are suspect unless certified (APEX, Philatelic Foundation)
- The large number of inverted surcharges leads one to suspect that some unscrupulous dealers were involved in the creation of some of them

Guide to expertizing Puerto Principe surcharges

1. Check a catalog to confirm that a surcharge value exists as a legitimate value on a Cuban colonial stamp, and determine its purported catalog number.
2. Find the number of the printing of the catalog issue (see previous chart)
3. Establish that vertical reference lines correspond to charts (that follow)
4. If vertical reference lines check, then measure the dimensions of the surcharge (height of the word “HABILITADO” to the bottom of the word “cent” or “cents” measures 17.5 mm for the 1st & 2nd printings, and 19.5 mm for the 3rd through 5th printings)
5. Verify that the appropriate ink has been used on the surcharge
6. Compare the “patient” with the database of known examples

After all these steps, the “patient” stamp should be sent in for certification!

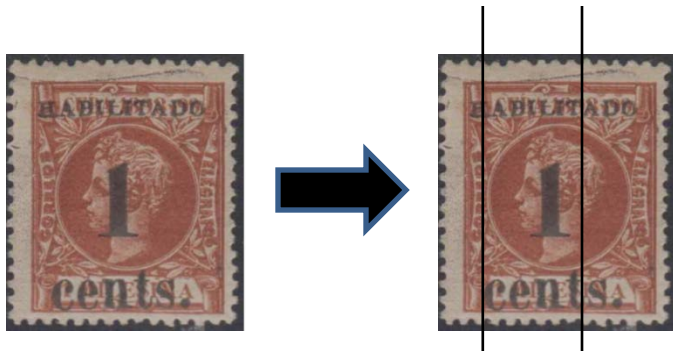
Example: Examining a forged Scott 177 vs an authentic one

Third Printing - Tercera Impresión

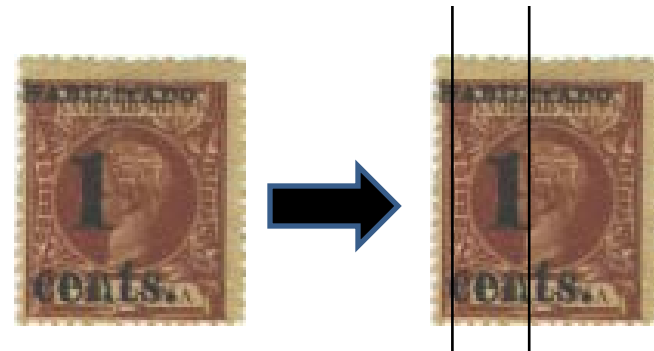
Position 1	Position 2	Position 3	Position 4	Position 5
Surcharge Height = 19½ mm				
HABILITADO	HABILITADO	HABILITADO	HABILITADO	HABILITADO
1	1	1	1	1
cents.	cents.	cents.	cents.	cents.

Vertical reference lines for 1c cents 3rd printing

(can be accessed at: <http://www.philat.com/FIL/Pto-Principe/V-V-Lines.html#1stPrinting>)



Conclusion: 2nd line does not match any vertical reference line, Stamp is FORGERY



Conclusion: lines consistent with position 4 vertical reference lines, authentic candidate

**Fake stamp: 2nd line, on top, is a little left to the “T”
in “HABILITADO”, doesn’t match any of the 5 positions**

Third Printing - Tercera Impresión

Position 1

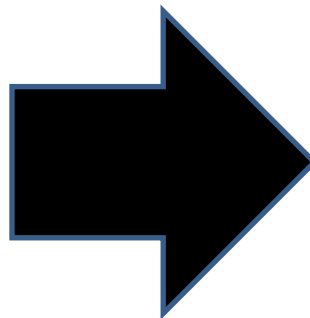
Position 2

Position 3

Position 4

Position 5

Surcharge Height = 19½ mm



New provisional stamp overprints on US stamps issued in Havana January 2, 1899



- Outlying areas from Havana received these stamps later, superseding the Puerto Principe provisionals on January 20, 1899
- Director General of Posts of Cuba, Estes Rathbone, was convicted of embezzling nearly \$411,000 of these stamps by not destroying them as ordered, and sentenced to ten years in prison.



- A series of six stamps were printed for Cuba later in 1899 (which, thanks to Director Estes, were sold concurrently with the previous issue of provisionals)
- US rule of Cuba ended May 20, 1902