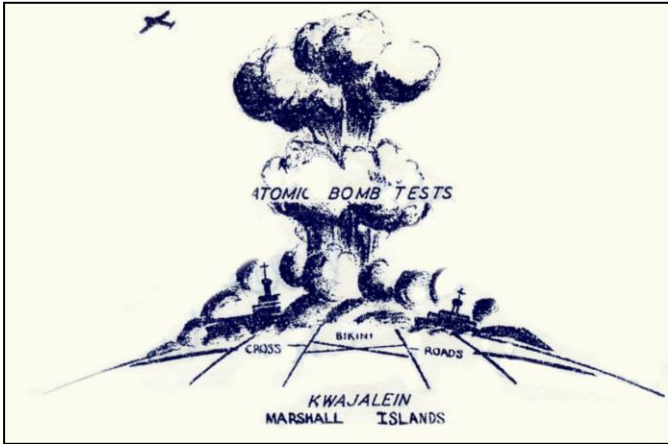


# Able Day, Bikini Atoll

By John Walter

Dave Gehringer shared a two-page letter obtained at a stamp show but, he can't remember when and where. He thought it was interesting especially with the logo on top of the page.



Wilber, the letter writer, is waiting for a test of the atomic bomb on "Able Day" at Bikini Atoll. The letter is not dated but doing some research on the A-bomb test, code name Able, did take place on July 1, 1946. According to the letter writer the cover had a "special cancellation" applied. Alas, there was no cover with the letter.

The scan of the two-page letter about Able Day is on the right with the letter typed below.

Dear Bob & Harriett, Able Day Bikini Atoll

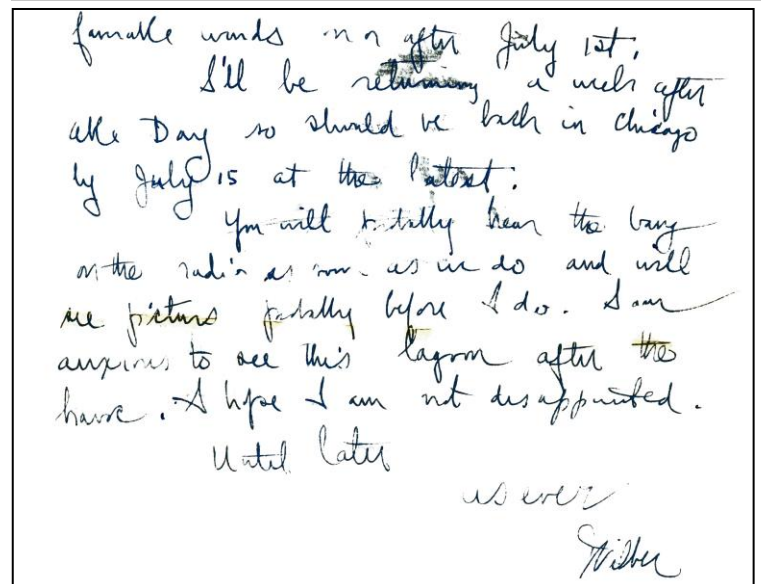
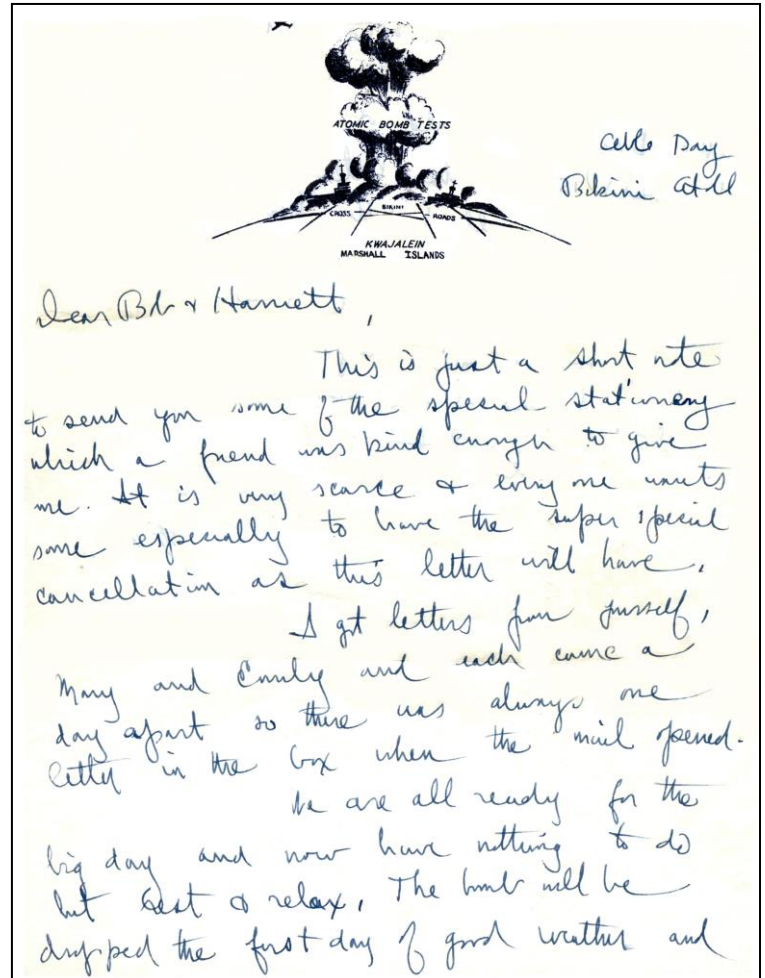
This is just a short note to send you some of the special stationery which a friend was kind enough to give me. It is very scarce & every one wants some especially to have the super special cancellation as this letter will have.

I get letters from yourself, Mary and Emily and each came a day apart so there was always one letter in the box when the mail is opened.

We are all ready for the big day and now have nothing to do but rest & relax. The bomb will be dropped the first day of good weather and favorable winds on or after July 1st.

I'll be returning a week after Able Day so should be back in Chicago by July 15 at the latest.

You will probably hear the bang on the radio as soon as we do and will see pictures probably before I do. I am anxious to see this lagoon after the havoc. I hope I am not disappointed. Until later, as ever, Wilber



## The rest of the story about Able Day:

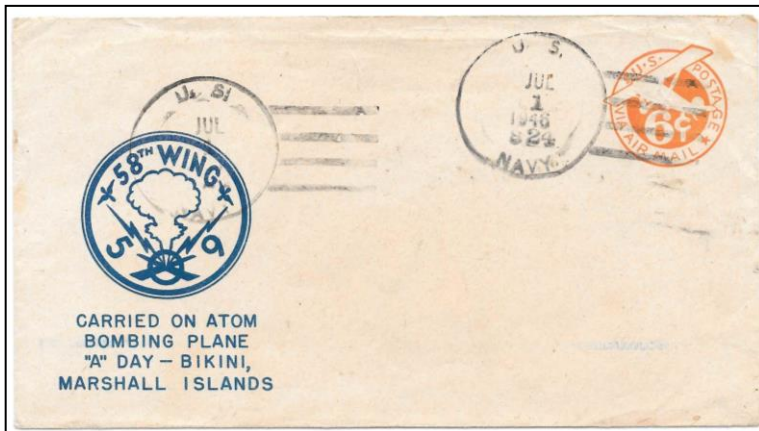
Operation Crossroads was the code name given to a series of nuclear tests on Bikini Atoll in 1946. It was well publicized with more than 42,000 people participating and observing the operation to “study the effects of nuclear weapons on ships, equipment, and material.”<sup>1</sup> The exercise was open to news media coverage, invited guests, scientists and foreign military observers. The “targets” were 78 vessels assembled in Bikini lagoon. The ships were mostly American vessels including the carriers USS Independence and USS Saratoga, battleships USS Arkansas, USS Nevada, USS New York, and USS Pennsylvania. A few captured German and Japanese ships were included.<sup>2</sup>

Test Able was conducted on July 1, 1946. It was the first of three planned tests. Only Able (air detonation) and Baker (underwater) tests were conducted. The Able bomb (23 kiloton, Gilda) was dropped from a B-29 of the 509th Bomb Group. The bomb detonated 520 feet above the ships missing the target vessel, USS Nevada, by 750 yards.<sup>2</sup>

Test Able was the first nuclear test after Hiroshima and Nagasaki.



Able's cloud boiled up to a height of 11 kilometers.<sup>3</sup>



509<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group cover



Fleet Post Office cancel July 1, 1946 (eBay image)

The Fleet Post Office received “sacks of mail ... from the philatelic community, all over the world, asking for cancellations of stamps with the atom bomb test cancellation cachet. Each collector sent 20-30 stamped envelopes to be hand cancelled. Sailors were assigned to “hand cancel” these letters with special hand cancels in lieu of the machine cancellation.”<sup>4</sup> A sailor later recalled “There must have been thousands of these letters. I recall no limit to the outside (non-participants) number of requests ...”<sup>4</sup> Samples of these covers are shown above.

“Operation Crossroads has a large philatelic footprint. Covers were made for most, if not all, of the target vessels as well as many of the support ships.”<sup>2</sup> The support ships were about 20 miles from the detonation.

References:

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/archives.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://numismaticnotebook.com/2019/06/23/operation-crossroads-welcoming-in-the-atomic-age/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ctbto.org/specials/testing-times/1-july-1946-test-able-bikini-atoll/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://marshall.csu.edu.au/Marshalls/html/Stamps/BikiniTestCovers/BikiniTestCovers.html>

*John Walter is the Post Boy editor and NSSS Secretary and he collects U.S. used postal stationery, Japan, People's Republic of China, some U.S. stamps & covers.*