

Walter G. Crosby Cachet Cover – U.S.S. Wright

By John Walter

Being a member of the Universal Ship Cover Society I've seen and read about unique cachet covers made by Walter Crosby. While browsing through a cover box at the Great American Stamp Show, I found some Crosby covers.

I previously dealt with this particular dealer from Queens, NY when he came to my home in Reno, NV and bought my P.R. China collection in 2022. On the first day of the show, I asked if he had U.S. aerogrammes sent to overseas destinations. He told me he did not bring that material, but he would go home that evening (about 2½ hour drive) and have it the next day. When talking with him the next day he told me the two U.S. cover boxes "have not seen the light of day in many years."

I found many interesting covers (about 50) which I only touched on at the stamp club presentation on Sept. 28. I wanted to write about some of the covers and will start with the *U.S.S. Wright* cover.

Walter Gaylord Crosby, (1881-1947) was a pioneering cachetmaker starting in the late 1920s until his death. His unique cachets, often adorned with thermographic printing and small black and white photographs, set him apart and made his work easily recognizable. Crosby's cachets are highly regarded by collectors, and he was voted the top cachetmaker of the 1930s by members of the American First Day Cover Society.



This cover is from the *U.S.S. Wright* with a 15¢ Statue of Liberty stamp issued Nov. 11, 1922. The cachet has thermographic printing and a B/W photo. It shows a Clipper plane with a map of Panama and the Panama Canal. The cancel is a Locy Type 3 with the right-side location cancel smudged.

The cover was sent by B.E. Foulke, U.S.S. Wright, San Diego, Cal (crew member) to (probably his wife) Mrs. B.E. Foulke in San Diego where the ship was based.

I was interested in more history about the ship. Originally named *USAT Somme*, she was named "Wright" on April 20, 1920, and launched on April 28. A little over two months later, the Navy signed a contract to convert the ship to a unique type of auxiliary vessel, a "combined lighter-than-air/heavier-than-air aviation tender." On July 17, 1920, the ship received that classification and was designated AZ-1. *USS Wright* was commissioned at the New York Navy Yard on December 16, 1921.

On Dec. 2, 1926, she was reclassified as AV-1, Aircraft Tender. Her initial assignments were spent on the West Coast sailing from San Diego to Alaska.



Here is a larger photo of the U.S.S. Wright AV-1.

At the time of this cover Jan. 16, 1939, the tender departed San Diego on January 2, 1939 to participate in winter maneuvers in the Caribbean with her aviation units and took part in Fleet Problem XX.

Fleet Problem XX took place in February 1939 in the Caribbean and Atlantic, and observed in person by President Franklin Roosevelt. The exercise simulated the defense of the East Coast of the United States and Latin America. Participating in the maneuvers were 134 ships, 600 planes, and over 52,000 officers and men.

The seaplane tender returned to the West Coast soon thereafter, as part of the general movement of the fleet from Atlantic to Pacific. She was back at San Diego on May 16, 1939.

USS Wright operated out of that port until September 10, 1939, when she sailed for the Hawaiian Islands to become flagship for PatWing 2, based at Pearl Harbor. Arriving there on 19 September (less than three weeks after the outbreak of war in Europe).

I was going to stop the cover story at this point. Then I found more interesting information, so I continued the research.

Early World War II

USS Wright spent 1939 to 1941 supporting the establishment of aviation bases on Midway, Canton, Johnston, Palmyra, and Wake Islands. She transported Marines and aviation personnel, as well as construction workers and contractors, between those bases, time and again landing cargo that ranged from construction materials to gasoline and ordnance supplies and other advance base gear. In September 1941, *USS Wright* was selected as the flagship of PatWing 1, Aircraft, Scouting Force.

USS Wright departed Pearl Harbor on November 20, 1941, bound for Wake Island, arriving at that advanced base on the 28th, and landed Comdr. Winfield S. Cunningham, who took command of the naval activities on the island.

Other passengers who went ashore from the seaplane tender included asphalt technicians, other construction workers, and Marine Corps officers. The ship also delivered 63,000 gallons of gasoline to Wake's storage tanks before setting course for Midway. There, she delivered a cargo that included ammunition and disembarked passengers that included men reporting for duty at the Naval Air Station and with other Marine Corps ground units. Then, with military and civilian passengers embarked, *USS Wright* departed Midway on December 4, 1941, and headed for Pearl Harbor.

During the night of December 6/7, 1941, while sailing toward Pearl Harbor at night, the crew spotted an aircraft carrier that overtook it as it sailed toward Hawaii. Whether *USS Wright* radioed a report of the sighting or not is unclear, but even if they had, the report was not recognized for what it was—an actual sighting of one of the Japanese aircraft carriers just hours prior to the attack, and the only such sighting made by an American Naval asset.

The sighting was recalled by a former member of the crew serving on *USS Wright* named Sherwin Callander. As an elderly gentleman in 2019, while being interviewed for a video, unexpectedly he recalled, "A carrier passed us, going in the same direction. We were headin' back to Pearl and they were headin' towards Pearl too. And we knew it was a carrier -- it was at night -- but we didn't know what nationality it was. Then the next morning, we heard over the news broadcast that they attacked Pearl Harbor. When we pulled into Pearl Harbor, I'd never seen such a mess in my life. I even had to pull bodies out of the water."

The following morning, while on route to Pearl Harbor, the electrifying news was received that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor that morning December 7, 1941. Word of the attack arrived shortly after 0800 that day, and *USS Wright* cleared for action and manned her battle stations. Fortunately for her, she did not cross the path of the returning Japanese strike force. After reaching Pearl Harbor the day after the Japanese attack, *USS Wright* got underway on December 19 to transport 126 Marines of the 4th Defense Battalion, with their gear, to Midway. She returned to Pearl Harbor on the day after Christmas with 205 civilians.

She survived WWII, earning two battle stars and was decommissioned in 1946.

Sometimes you never know where the story of a cover will take you.

- References:
https://www.navalcovermuseum.org/wiki/Cachet_Maker_Walter_G_Crosby_Page_5 - This cover is not listed in the Crosby covers for 1939.
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Wright_%28AV-1%29
- <https://uscs.org/crosby-walter-g/> - Nice bio on Walter Crosby.

John Walter collects U.S. used postal stationery, U.S. naval covers from hospital ships, and Japan.

Live club auction on Sept. 12, 2024



These 12 donated albums made for a very lively auction. A total of \$993.00 went to the club just from the donated items.

On the right is **Gary Atkinson** holding a steamer trunk which eventually went to **Will Eubanks** after many bids.

