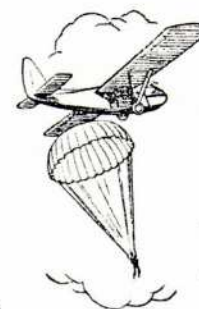


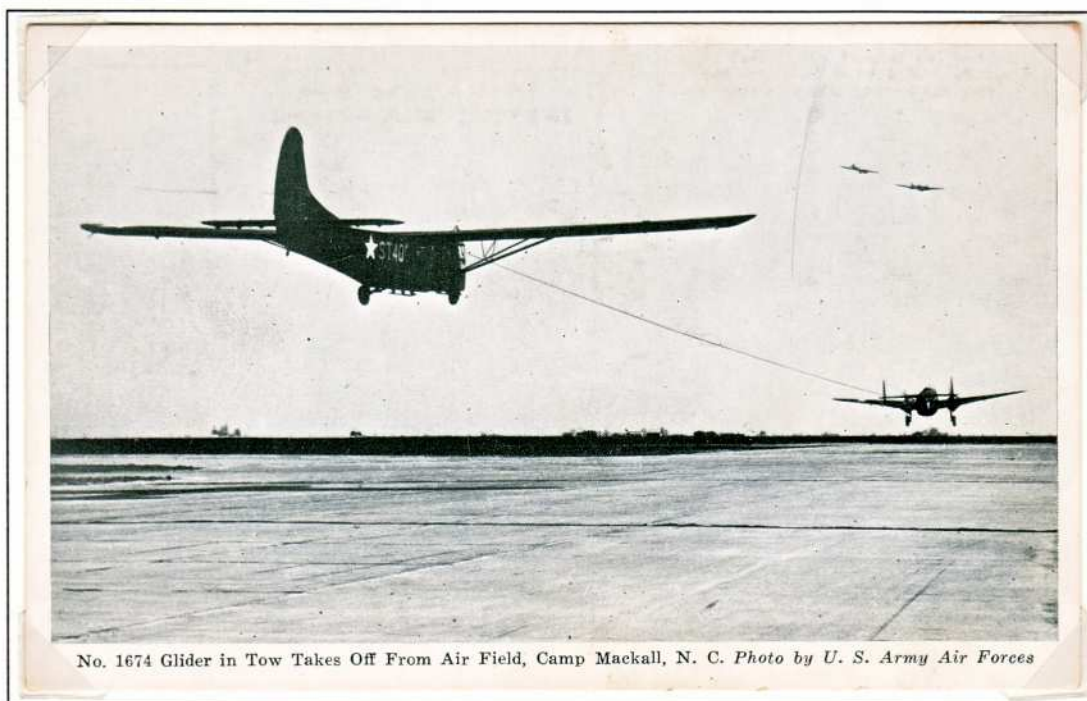
## The Flying Coffins of WW II

"Flying coffins" was the American soldiers' nickname for the large cargo and troop carrying gliders used during the Second World War. They were flimsily built, mainly of wood and canvas, had no offensive weapons to fight off enemy attacks and no reliable communication systems. These WW II combat gliders were plagued with crude steering arrangements and ineffective airbrakes, both of which contributed to a high rate of crash landings. The average glider trooper had less than a fifty-fifty chance of landing uninjured. Hence the glider's nickname.



A few nations built cargo/troop carrying gliders, but it was only Germany, Great Britain and USA who used them in battle. Germany had "DFS 230", "Me 321 Gigant" and "Gotha Go 242", Great Britain "Horsa" and "Hamilcar", while the American version was "WACO CG-4A", named "Hadrian" by the Brits.

This exhibit shows examples of mail from gliding training sites in Germany and USA, and from gliding regiments in Europe and Asia. Mail from a soldier at Hildesheim, while training for the glider borne EBEN EMAEL operation is shown on page three. We follow two American members of Glider Field Artillery Battalions during their training and posting overseas. Envelopes and postcards as well as V-mail and airgraphs are shown. Most of the correspondence is field post, as soldiers' mail was normally free of charge.



No. 1674 Glider in Tow Takes Off From Air Field, Camp Mackall, N. C. Photo by U. S. Army Air Forces

*Postcard showing a WACO CG-4A troop carrying glider being launched on a training flight at Camp Mackall in North Carolina, USA. The tow plane is either a Lockheed "Hudson" or "Lodestar", which were widely used for launching the gliders. Both glider pilots and glider borne fielded artillery units were trained here.*

### Plan

Mail from some of the many German Segelflug Ausbildung Schule (glider training school) is followed by mail to and from training sites in USA. The fates of private soldiers Denis Goodwin and Charles Rose are shown through letters they sent home. Mail from the Philippines and "somewhere in Europe" is followed by an airgraph from the British Glider Regiment "somewhere in Italy".

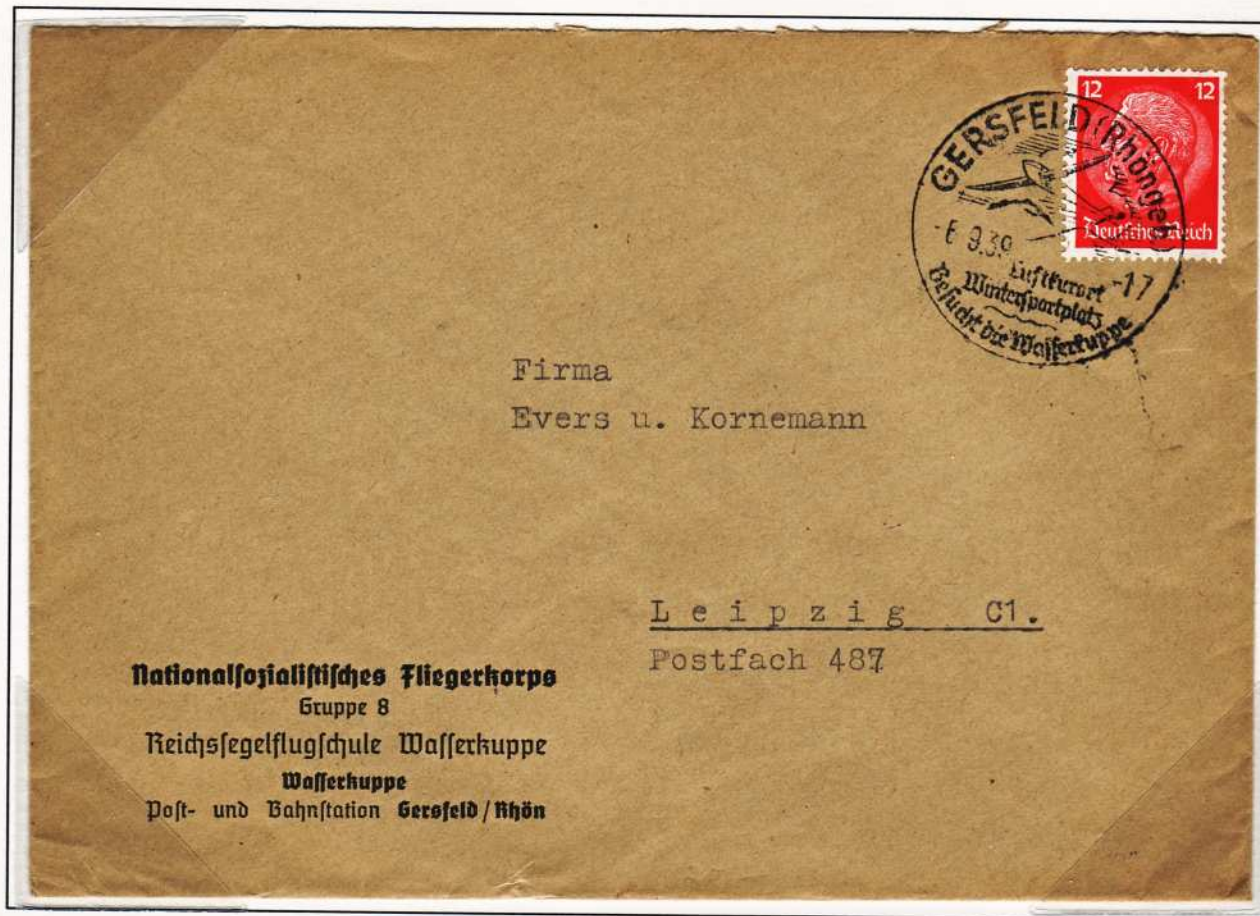
Page 1	Introduction and plan.
Page 2 - 4	Mail from glider training sites in Germany.
Page 5	Letters from German occupied Czechoslovakia and Luxembourg.
Page 6	USA glider infantry regiments.
Page 7 - 9	Private Denis Goodwin correspondence.
Page 10	"Somewhere in the Atlantic". Letter written en-route to England.
Page 11 - 13	Private Charles M. L. Rose correspondence.
Page 14	"Somewhere in the Philippines" and "somewhere in Europe".
Page 15	Great Britain. The 1st Glider Regiment.
Page 16	Epilogue. End of an era.

### References

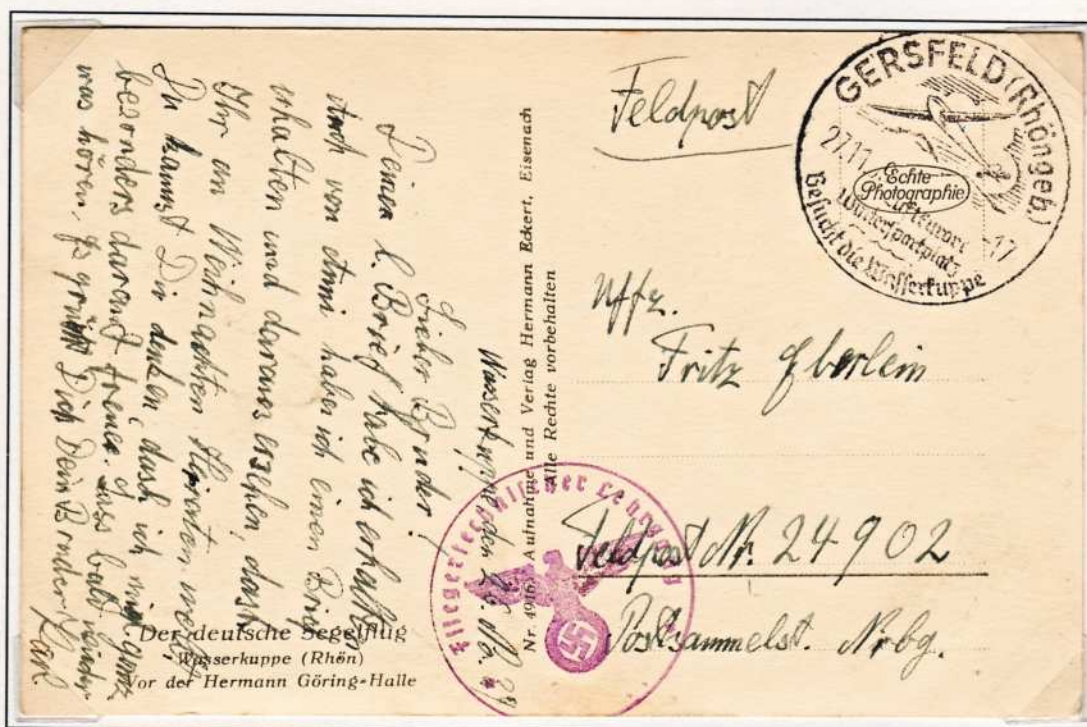
Simine Short: "Glider Mail", American Air Mail Society, USA 1987.  
J. Norman Grim: "To Fly the Gentle Giants". The training of U.S. WW II glider pilots. Author House, USA 2009.  
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Oscar Gonzales, Thomas Steinke, Ian Tannahill: "The Silent Attack". Pen & Sword Books Ltd., England 2015.  
C.E. Daniel: "A private collection of WW II aviation memorabilia", Internet site: [www.danielsww2.com](http://www.danielsww2.com)

## Wasserkuppe, 950 m above sea level

The national gliding and soaring centre at Wasserkuppe where "modern" gliding was initiated in 1920, was requisitioned by the Nazis in the late 1930s and made into a training ground for the Luftwaffe pilots.



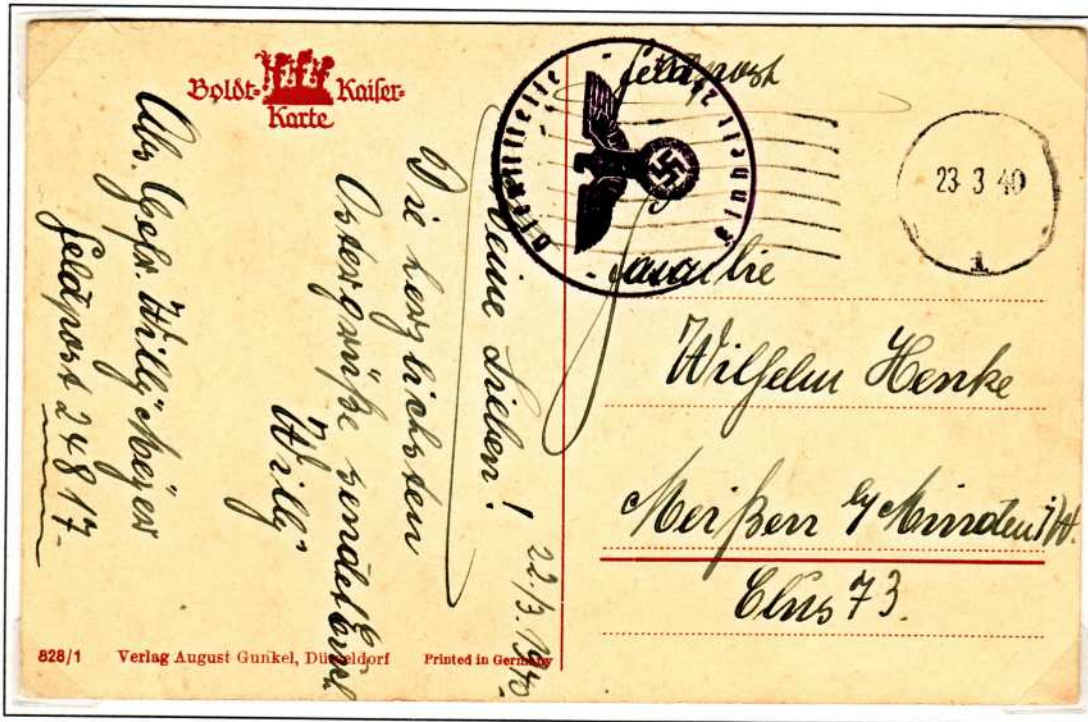
Letter sent from group 8 of the National Flying Corps at Wasserkuppe, posted at the town of Gersfeld on 6-9-1939. The 12 Pfg stamp was cancelled with the pictorial postmark depicting a glider over Wasserkuppe mountains.



The centre became a military base in the summer of 1939. The circular cachet on the above postcard is texted Fliegertechnischer Lehrgang (aviation technical course) and was posted at Gersfeld 27-11-1939. It is marked "feldpost", which was free of charge, and has the Gersfeld pictorial postmark.

## Hildesheim

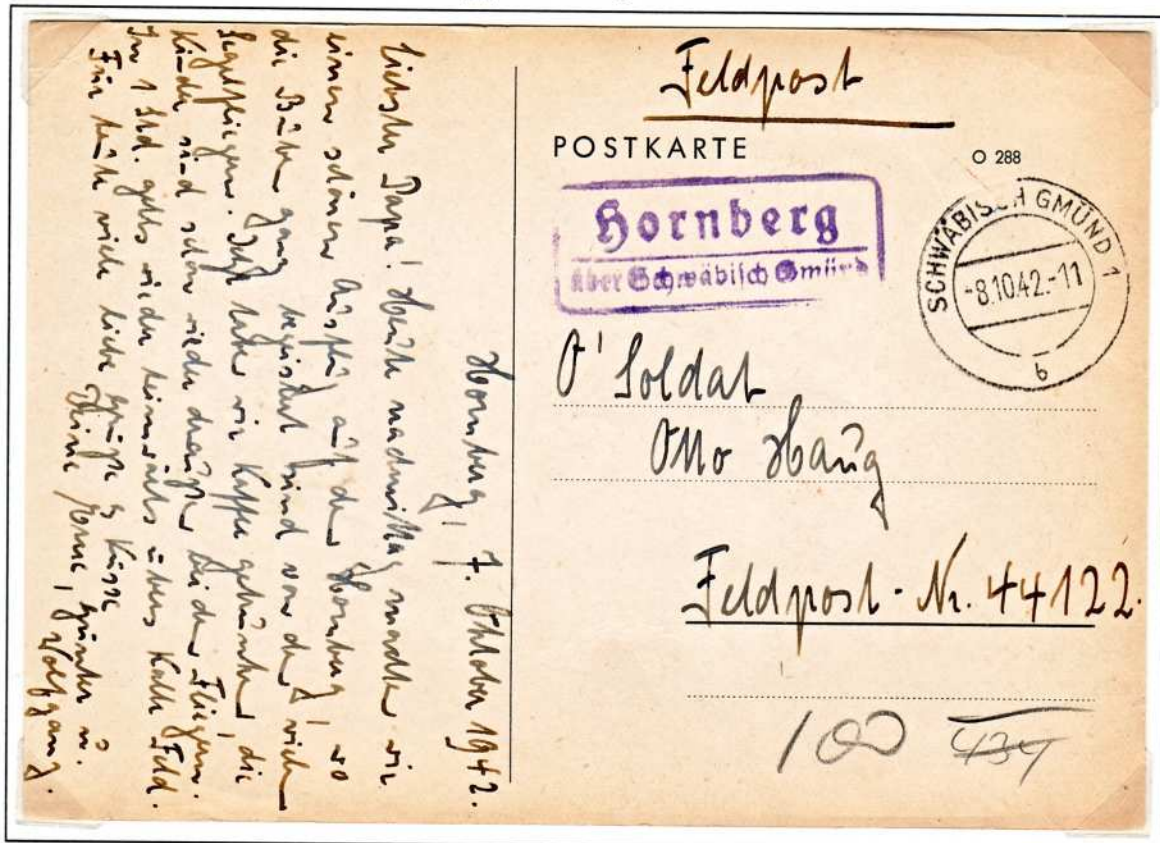
Established as a civilian landing ground in 1926, taken over by Luftwaffe in 1933. From 1939 to 1941, there was specialist training of the glider borne troops which attacked Belgium (Eben Emael) in 1940 and Crete in 1941.



Easter card sent from an Obergefreiter (corporal) Willy Meier at field post No. 24817 which was allocated Stab Infanterie-Batallion z.b.V.100 from 1st January 1940 to 19th July 1941. The "dumb" postmark is dated 23-3-40 which was during the battalion's training for the invasion of Belgium which took place on 10th May. All mail, in and out, was heavily censored.

## Hornberg aviator camp

Situated 50 km east of Stuttgart. A well known gliding site since the early 1930s. From 1933, mail posted at the camp was marked with a rectangular rubber stamp texted: *Hornberg über Schwäbisch Gmünd* which was the nearest post office. Nationalsozialistisches Fliegerkorps (NSFK) requisitioned the site in 1935 and it became a training facility for glider pilots as well as ordinary pilots during the war.



Fieldpost card posted at Hornberg gliding camp. This type of rectangular Hornberg marking was introduced in 1940. The card was written by a trainee pilot to his father at a military establishment with fieldpost No. 44122, date stamped Schwäbisch Gmünd on 8-10-1942.



## Sandweiler, Luxembourg

Airports in German occupied countries were also used for glider pilot training. Situated 5 km east of the city of Luxembourg, the airport at Sandweiler is one such. It was not tarmacked, just a 1000 m long grass runway.



Letter sent from Segelflug Gruppe II at Sandweiler on 14-1-1944

## Brno - Median, Czechoslovakia

Brünn - Median as it was called in German, was used for glider training during WW II.



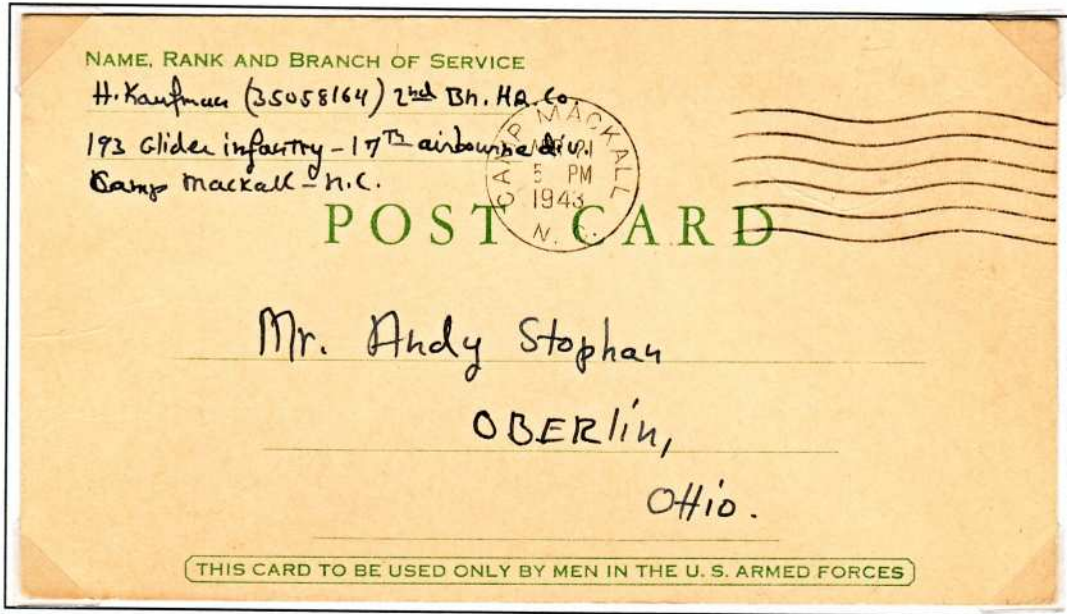
Letter postmarked Brünn on 13-11-1944. It has a fieldpost cachet with the text: Flugleitung (flight management) Brünn - Median. The sender is giving his address as Segelflugschule at the airfield.

## USA glider infantry regiments

The US army had several airborne glider infantry regiments. They were trained at a number of camps at various locations. The soldiers were given free postage for surface mail and only had to pay a concessionary 6 cents for airmail from anywhere in the world.

### Camp Mackall, NC

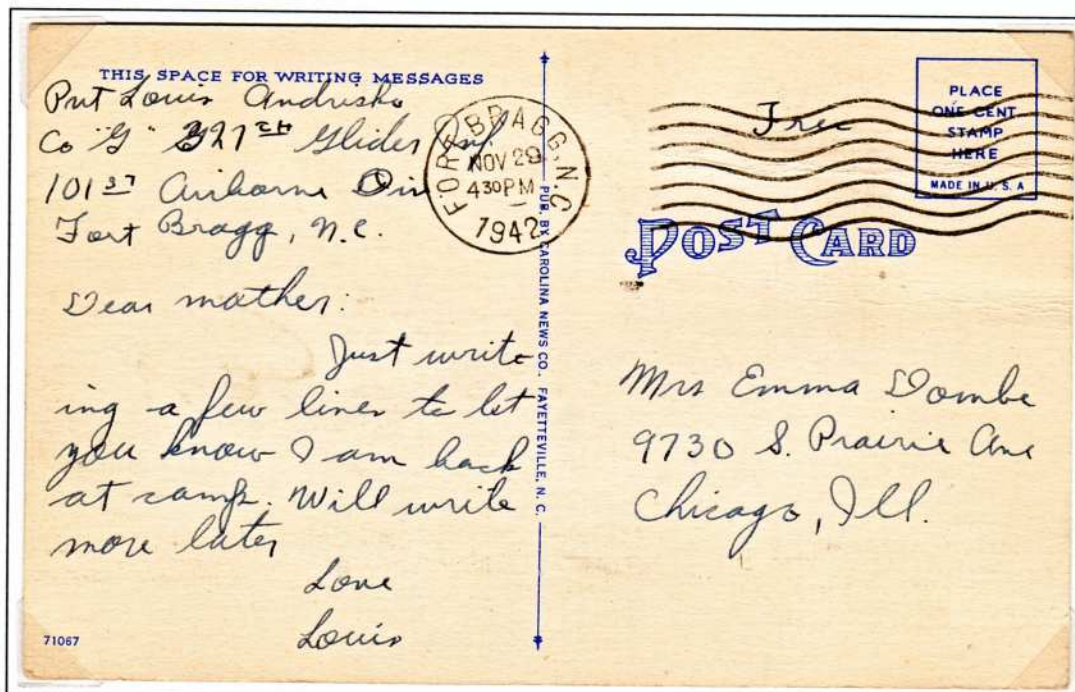
Primary training camp for US Army airborne troops during WW II. The military installation was constructed hastily as part of the mobilization effort during the war.



Card sent from private soldier H. Kaufman of the 193rd Glider Infantry in the 17th Airborne Division. His return address is Army Post Office (APO) No. 452 at Camp Mackall. The card was sent free of charge and was cancelled with a machine cancel dated April 21st 1943, just four days after the establishment of the 193rd Glider Infantry Regiment.

### Fort Bragg, NC

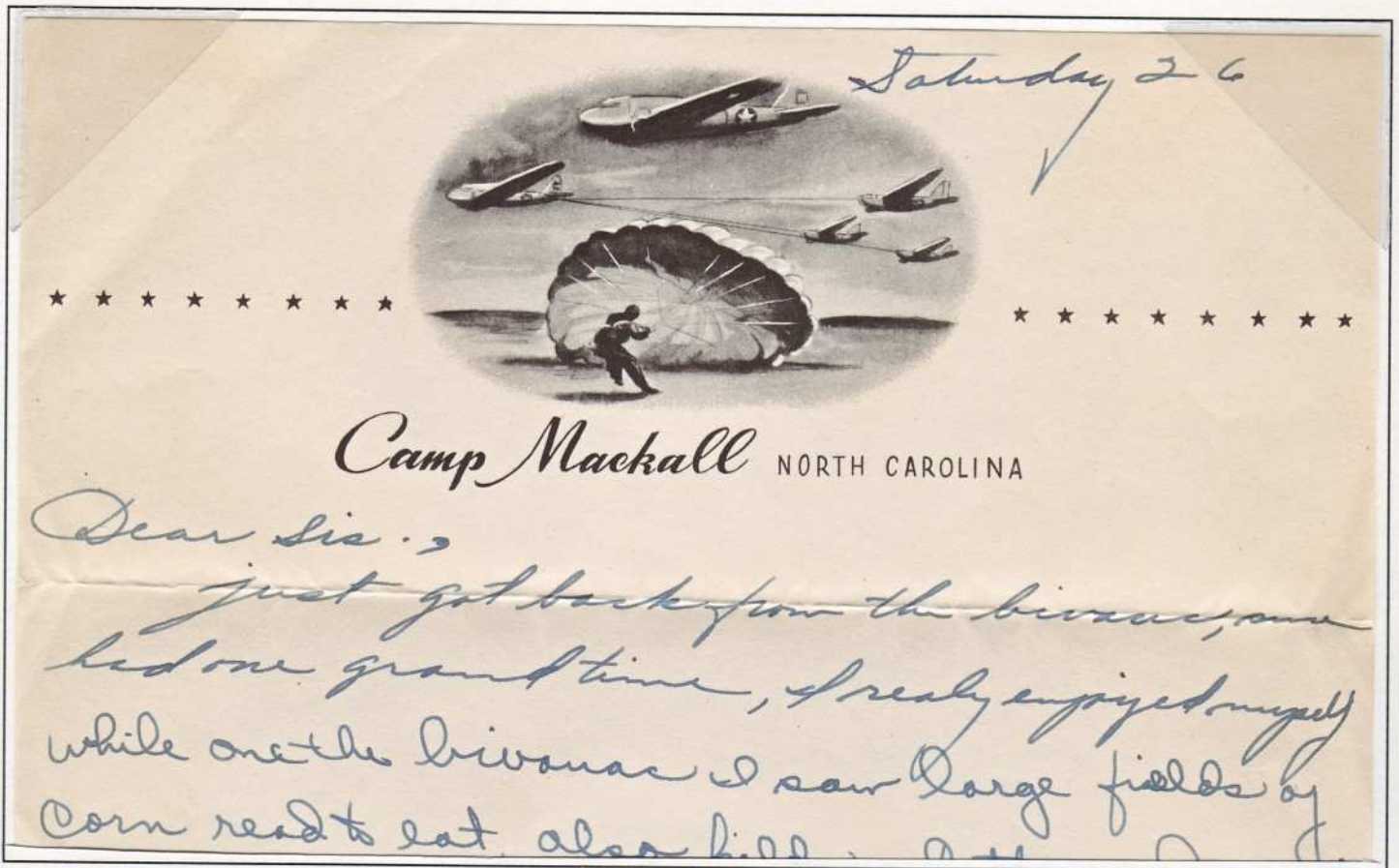
Originally established in 1918 as an artillery training ground named Camp Bragg, it was renamed Fort Bragg on 30th September 1922. Various units trained here during WW II, among them 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions with their glider regiments. The population rose from 5,000 in 1940 to 67,000 in 1941.



Card written at Fort Bragg by a private soldier in the "G" company of the 321st Glider Infantry Regiment in the 101st Airborne Division. Posted at the camp's post office on November 29th 1942 and sent to Chicago IL.

**Camp Mackall, N.C.**

Private Denis R. Goodwin served in company E in the 194th Glider Infantry Regiment of the 17th Airborne Division, based at Camp Mackall in North Carolina. He was from Galeton, a small town in Northern Pennsylvania, unmarried, worked as a lumberjack and was drafted in March 1943.



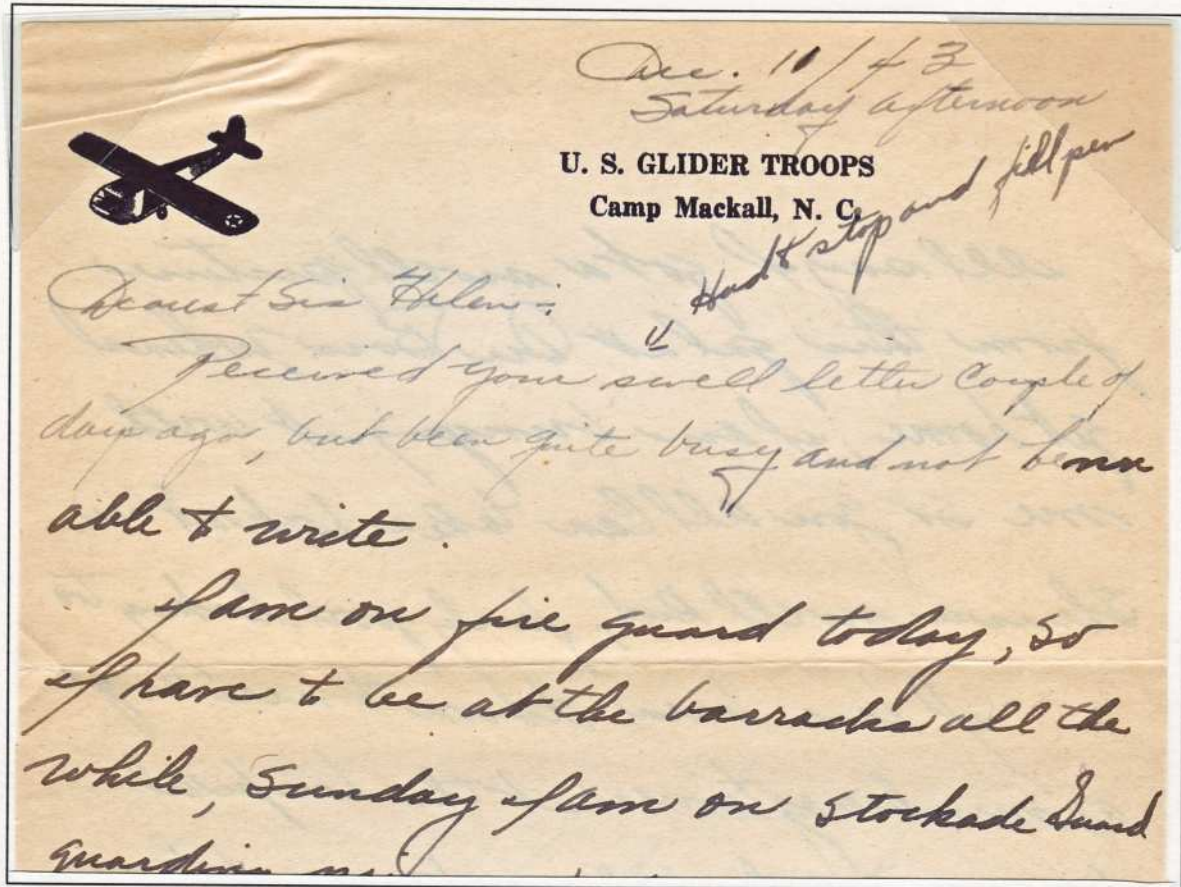
The headed paper depicts a C-47, the military version of Douglas DC-3 Dakota, towing three WACO CG-4 troop/cargo military gliders, and a parachutist who had just landed.



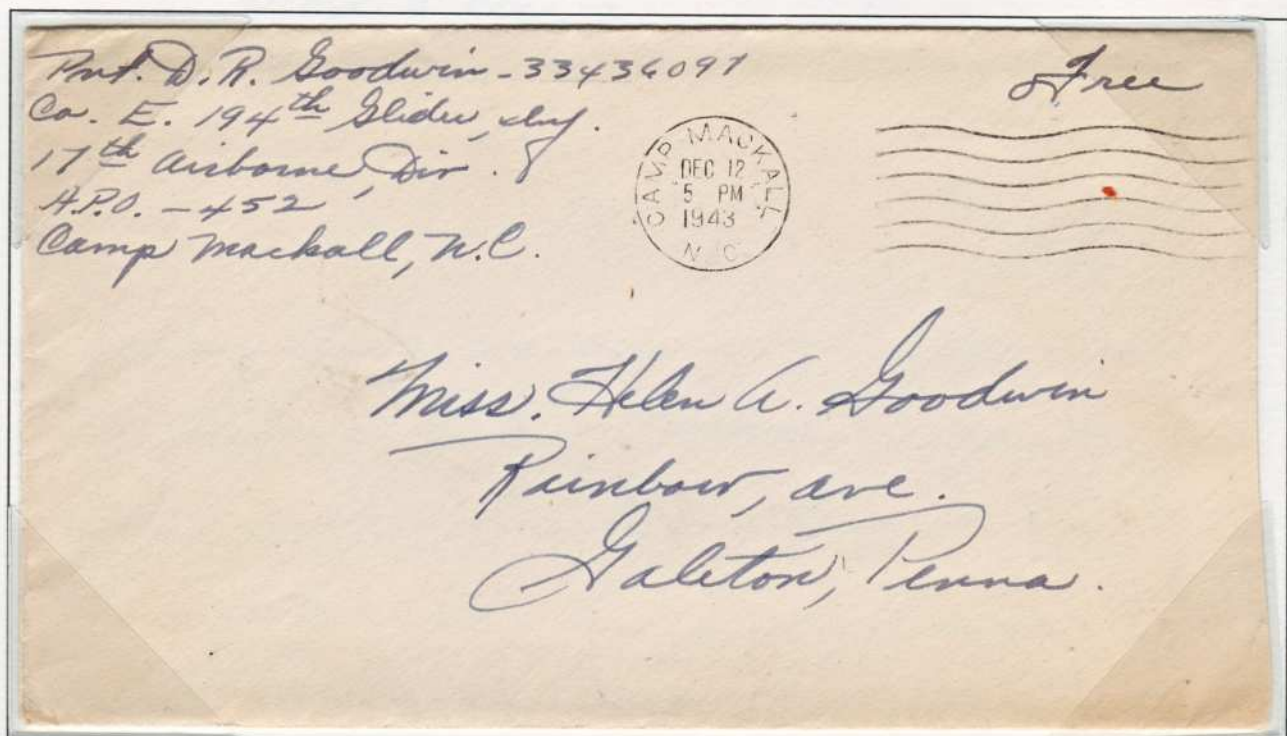
Private Goodwin sent several letters to his sister, Helen, back home in Galeton. This one was posted at the camp's post office on 27th June 1943, cancelled with a machined canceller. No stamps were needed, soldiers' mail was free of charge.

## Camp Mackall, N.C.

Construction of this training facility started on 8th November 1942 and was originally called Camp Hoffman, named after a nearby town, but was renamed Camp Mackall on 8th February 1943 in honour of Private John T. Mackall who was the first US paratrooper killed in action in North Africa. The camp was described as a "marvel of wartime construction", having been converted from 62,000 acres of wilderness to a complete all weather airfield with three 5,000 foot runways in just four months.



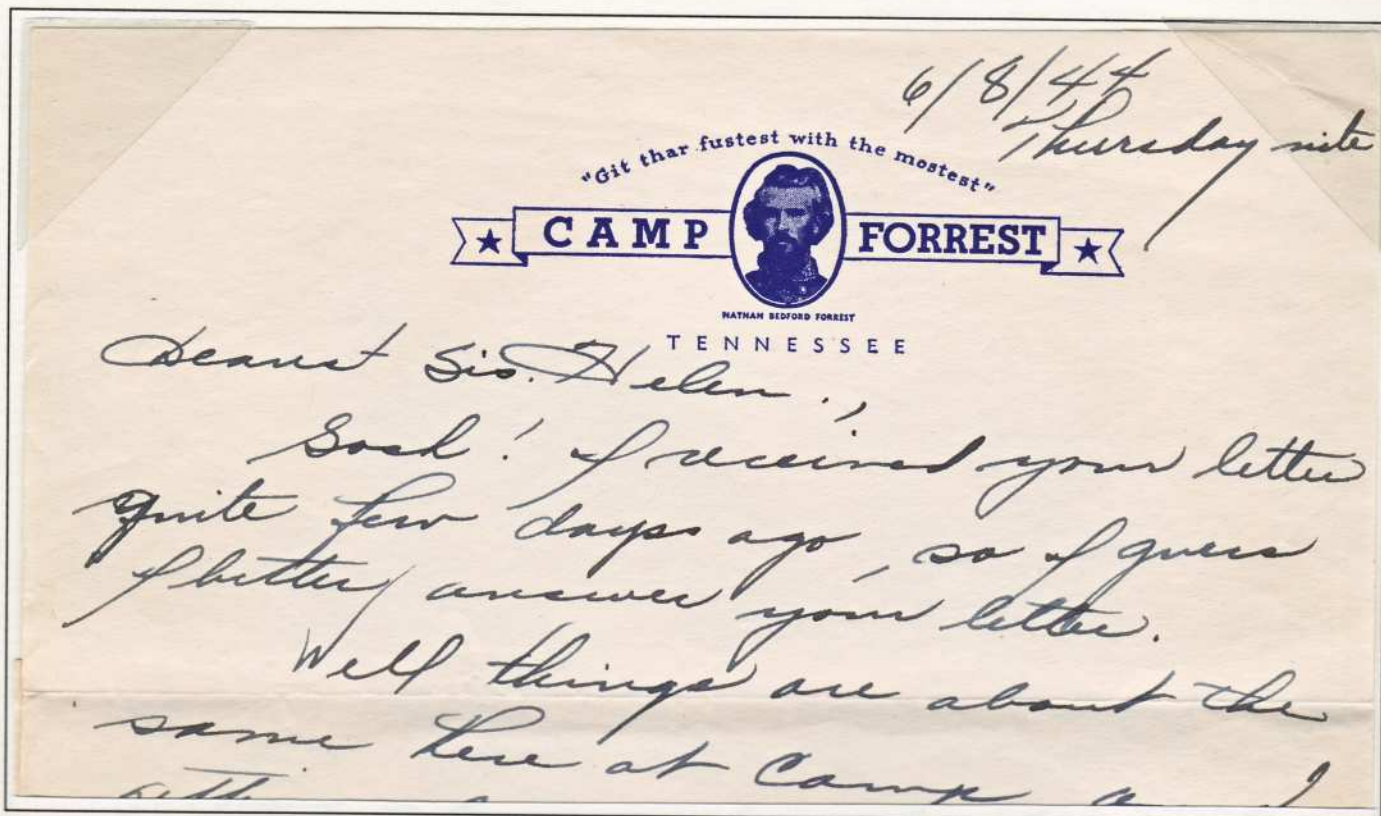
The headed paper used by Goodwin just before Christmas 1943 has a crude appearance, probably produced at the camp's printing facilities for the glider troops. It has a stylistic drawing of a WACO CG-4 glider at top left.



Letter posted by private Goodwin at one of the 16 post offices at the camp. Dated 12th December 1943. The APO number 452 was dedicated to the 194th Glider Infantry, regardless of their whereabouts.

## Camp Forrest, Tennessee

Large manoeuvres took place here prior to the soldiers' transfer to Europe. As one of the largest training facilities in USA, not only did Camp Forrest train c. 250,000 soldiers, it was also a prisoner of war camp. In total, 24,000 POWs, mainly German, were interned here from late 1942 to early 1943. The camp became "surplus to the requirements" in September 1945 and closed in February 1946.



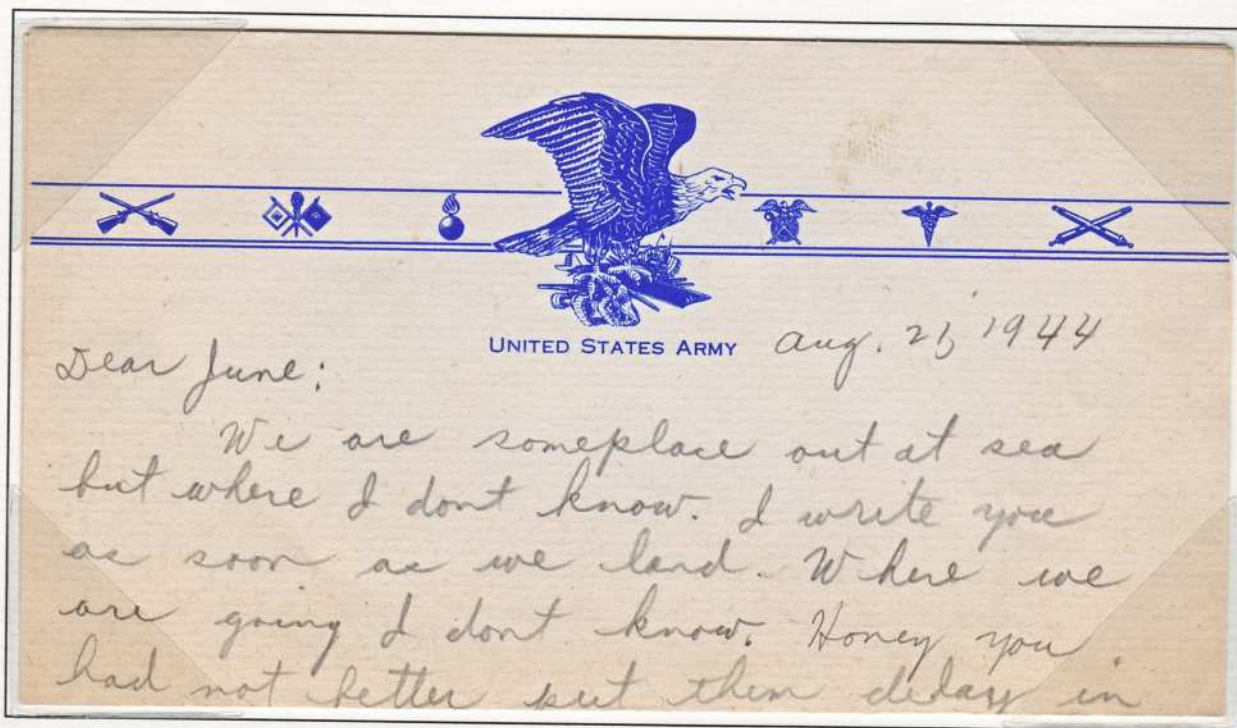
Letter from private Goodwin of the 194th Glider infantry at Camp Forrest while on manoeuvres before being sent to Europe. Headed paper showing portrait of the Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest after whom the camp was named. Postmarked 9th June 1944 at the camp's post office.

The 194th Glider infantry of the 17th Airborne Division sailed from Boston on 20th August 1944 and arrived in England on the 28th. They saw action on the crossing of the Rhine operation, code named "Varsity" on 24th March 1945. Private Denis R. Goodwin was injured and later died of his wounds.

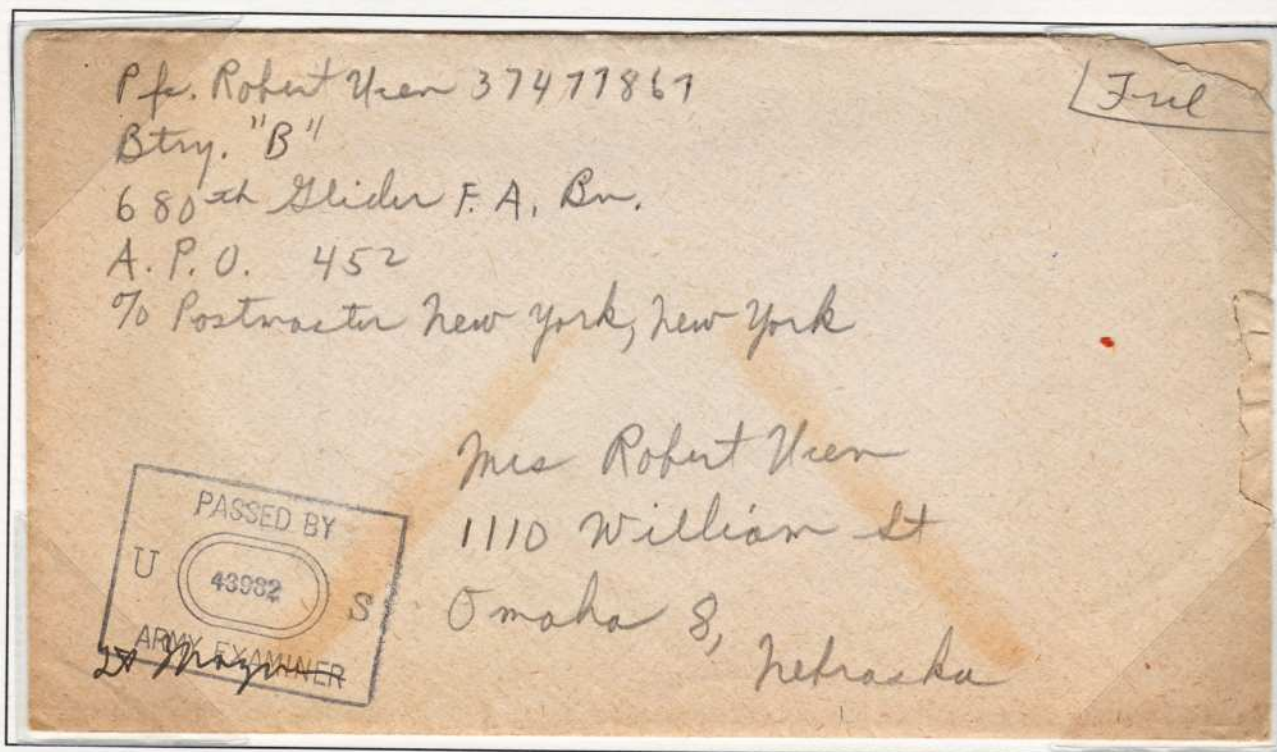
## Somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean

The 680th Glider Field Artillery Battalion (GFAB) was established on 15th April 1943 at Camp Mackall, North Carolina under the command of General William H. Miley, assigned to the 17th Airborne Division. After basic training and field exercises at Camp Forrest, Tennessee, the unit was transferred to Europe in August 1944. Their major engagement was in the operation "Varsity", the crossing of the Rhine river on 24th March 1945. The 680th GFAB was armed with 75mm howitzers.

A letter written on board USS "Wakefield" en route to Europe is shown below.



Headed paper for general use issued by United States Army, depicting a bald eagle (USA's National bird) and emblems representing some of the sections of the army.

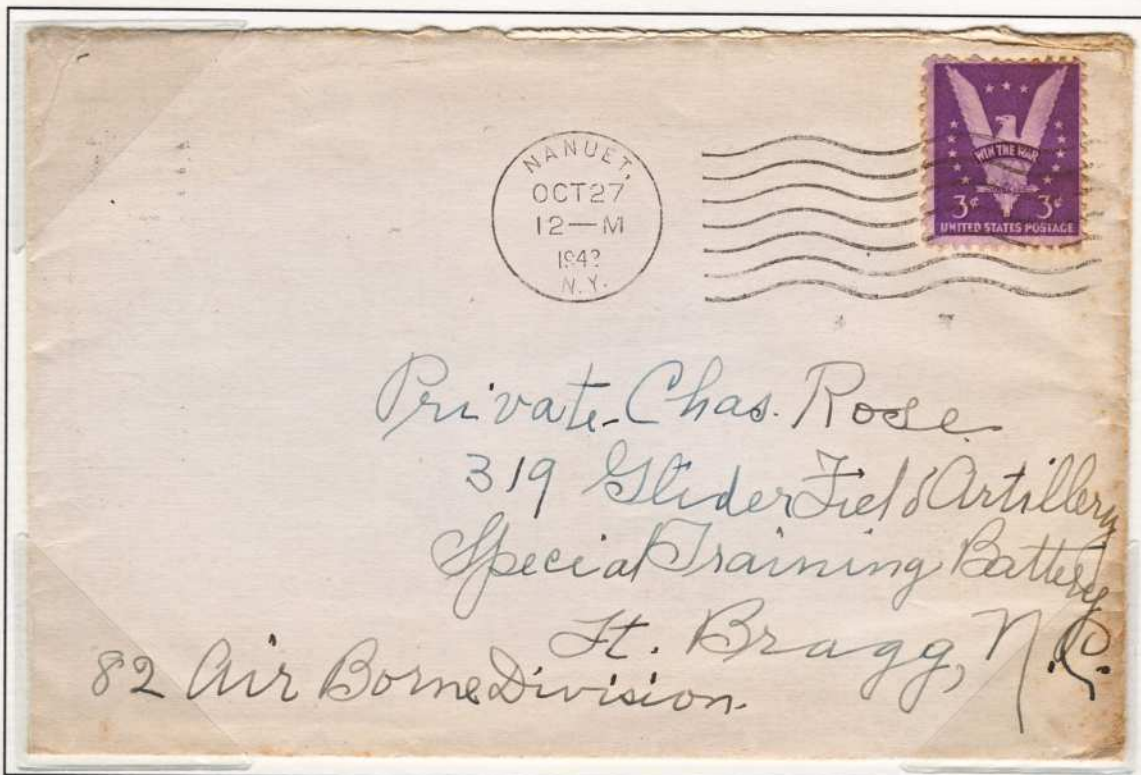


The letter which is dated 21st August 1944, must have been posted after arrival in England. It was written by Private Robert Ucen of Battery "B", 680th GFAB, APO 542, c/o Postmaster New York. Passed by examiner 43982.

The battalion was transferred to Europe with USS "Wakefield". She sailed from Boston, Massachusetts on 20th August and arrived in Liverpool on the 28th August 1944. They were shuttled to the 17th Airborne's staging area at Camp Chisledon, near Swindon, the following day.

## Fort Bragg, N.C.

Private Charles M.L. Rose was a farmer's boy born in 1911 at Spring Valley, Rockland county in the state of New York. He was enlisted in the U.S. Army on 21st September 1942 and reported to the 82nd Airborne Division as a private, service number 32508564, in the 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion (GFAB). His training took place at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The 319th was allocated four six-inch howitzers.



Letter posted at Nanuet, the nearest post office to Spring Valley, dated 27th October 1942. Addressed to Private Chas Rose at the 319th Glider Field Artillery Special Training Battery at Fort Bragg. Domestic letter rate was 3c at that time.

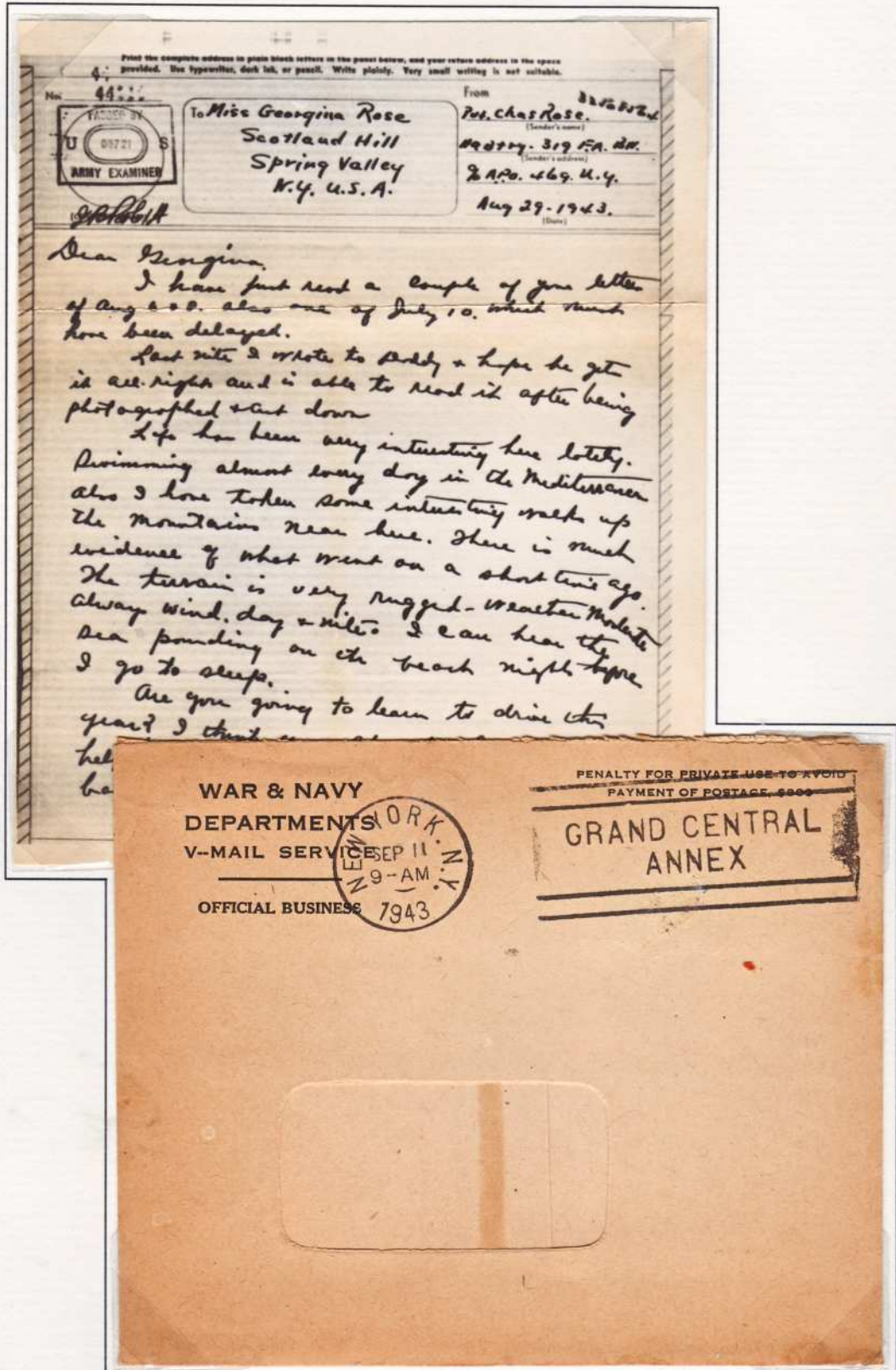


Letter from home, posted Spring Valley 9th February 1943. The incomplete address has caused delivery problems. It is marked "Not 143" at top left, but we can assume that it was successfully delivered after APO 439 and 82 AB Div. were added.

## Kairouan, Tunisia

The 319th GFAB sailed from New York on the 29th April 1943 with SS "Santa Rosa" and arrived at Casablanca on 10th May. They travelled through Quidja to Kairouan where preparations for the invasion of Europe took place. After being transported to Maiori near Naples (by ship!), the 319th GFAB became the first American glider artillery unit ever to open fire under actual combat conditions.

Victory mail, also called V-mail, was safer and quicker than the traditional type of mail. The letter was microfilmed, sent to the home country and printed out there. It was claimed that 1,600 letters on film weighed only 5 oz, while 1,600 ordinary letters weighed 50 lbs! The British version was called airgraph.



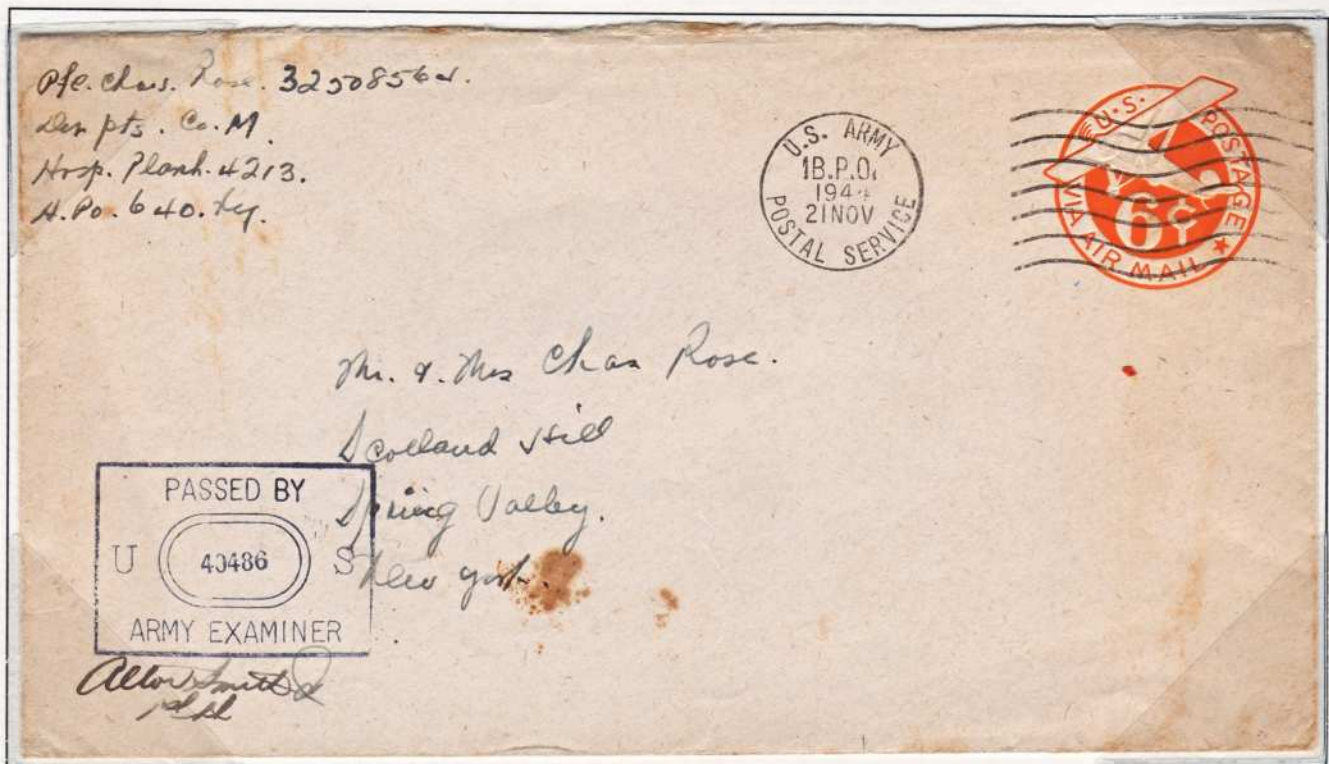
V-mail written on 29th August by Private Rose while his battalion was stationed in Tunisia preparing for the invasion of Italy. The letter was printed out and sent from Grand Central Annex post office in New York City on 11th September 1943. The letter was folded to show the address in the window on the envelope, which was printed for the V-mail service. The notice on top right warns of a penalty for private use of this post-free envelope.

## Somewhere in England

The 319th GFAB participated in the operation "Neptune", the airborne invasion of Europe on D-day. As part of mission "Elmira", their 40 "Horsa" gliders were towed from Membury airfield at 9.30pm on 6th June 1944. The battalion suffered heavy losses on landing and from German gunfire. 15 were killed and 58 critically injured. Private Charles M.L Rose was seriously injured, hospitalised and evacuated to England.



Charles wrote a letter to his sister, Georgina, on 7th July 1944, giving his address as US Army Hospital Plant 4173, APO 121 NY. This was the postal address for a hospital at Thatcham near Reading. He had been promoted to Private First Class (Pfc). The 6c stamp was cancelled by US Army APO 121. The letter was censored by US Army examiner No. 04866.

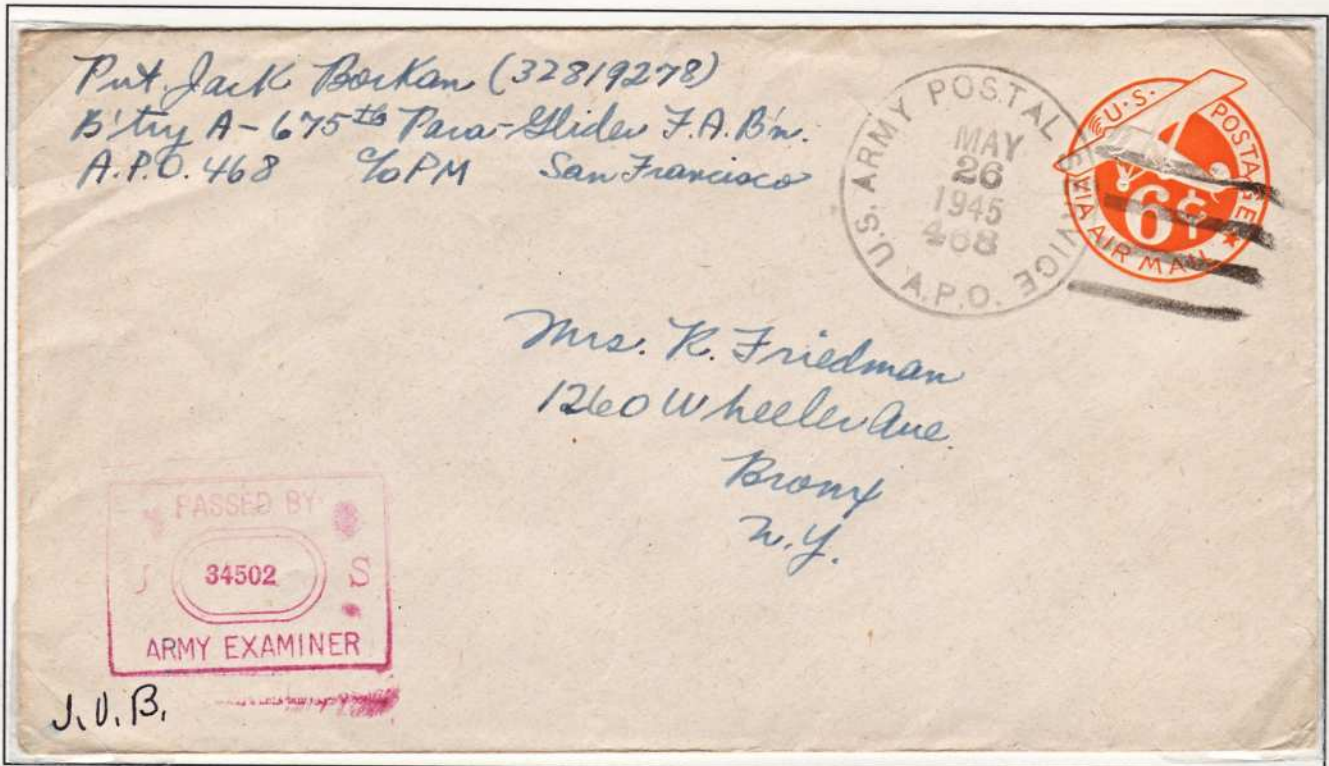


Still somewhere in England, he had a long recovery period, Charles wrote to his parents while in a convalescent hospital with address APO 640 New York. The 6c airmail stationery envelope was postmarked US Army Postal Service machine canceller on 21st November 1944 and censored in the usual manner.

Private First Class Charles M.L. Rose returned to duty in the spring of 1945, but was given administrative duties. He became part of the clearing up unit in Germany after the capitulation.

## Somewhere in the Philippines

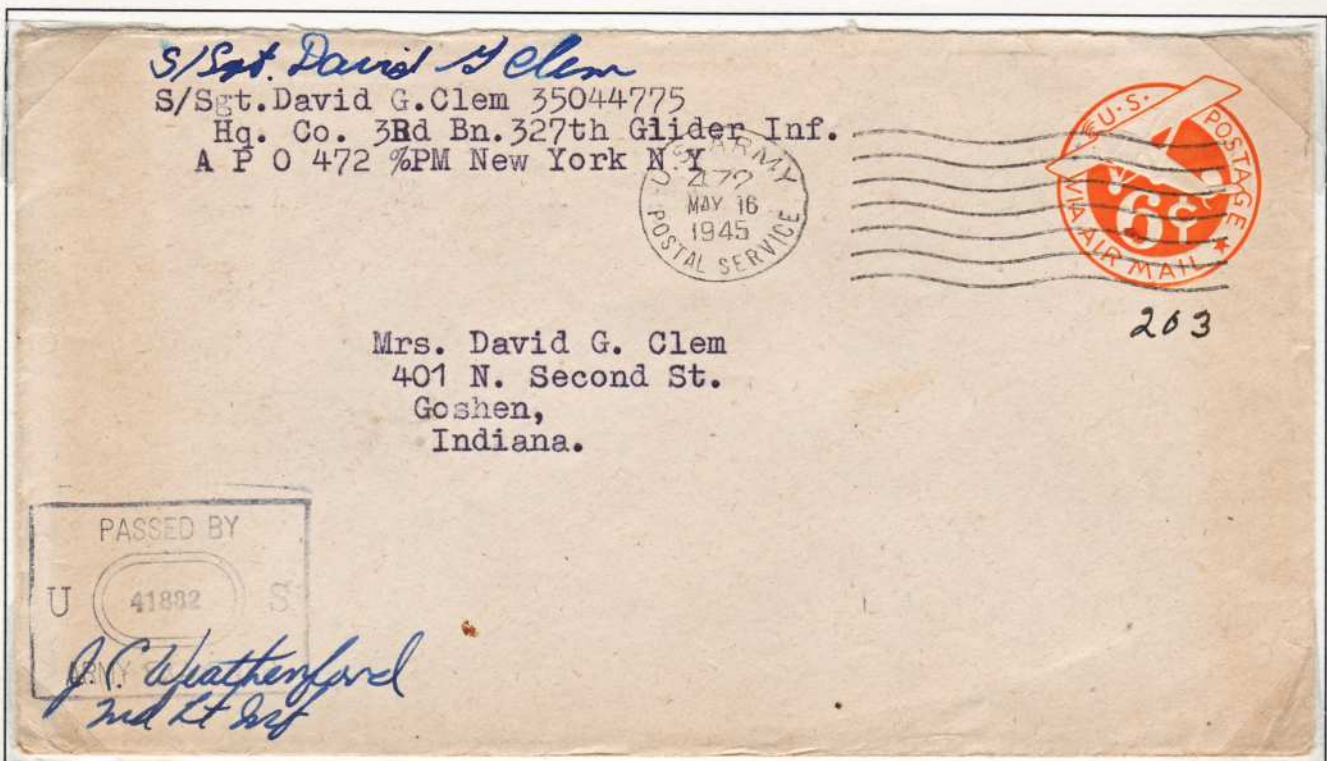
The 675th Para-Glider Field Artillery Battalion of 11th Airborne Division landed in the Philippine Islands on 18th November 1944. After several successful battles, they started preparations for operation "Olympic", the invasion of the Japanese home islands. The atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki brought Japan to an unconditional surrender on 15th August 1945 and operation "Olympic" was cancelled.



Letter sent from Private Jack Borkan of Battery "A", 675th Para-Glider FAB at APO 468. Dated 26th May 1945 at which time his unit was at Batangas in the Philippines. 6C airmail envelope postmarked APO 468 and censored.

## Somewhere in Europe

The 327th Glider Infantry Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division saw action in Normandy and Arnhem as well as the Battle of the Bulge, before they were given the task of finding Nazi leaders in hiding towards the end of the war. The division was deactivated on the 30th November 1945.



Letter from Staff Sergeant David G. Clem to his wife in Goshen, Indiana. He belonged to the 327th Glider Infantry Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division. Postmarked 16th May 1945 at APO 472, the same day as the battalion arrived at its base in the newly captured Nazi stronghold Berchtesgaden, near Hitler's "Eagle's Nest".

## Great Britain

The 1st Glider Pilot Regiment was established on 24th February 1942. A glider capable of carrying eight fully equipped troopers was built by General Aviation Ltd, the GAL.48 "Hotspur". It was not large enough for active service, only used for training. The larger Airspeed "Horsa", first flown in September 1941, became the operational troop carrier during the war. The even larger " Hamilcar" was capable of carrying a small tank. The first operation, "Freshman" was towards the heavy water plant at Vemork in Telemark, Norway.



*After basic gliding training and a six week "Horsa" course at the heavy Glider Conversion Unit, the glider pilot's "wings" were awarded.*

*Shown here is replica wings made after the war.*



*A 1943 Christmas greeting in the shape of a humorous airgraph sent by a soldier in No. 2 Squadron of the 1st Glider Pilot Regiment, C.M. Forces. It has been examined and passed by censor no. 7444. The circular date stamp of Field Post Office No. No. 520 is dated 14th November 1943, which was "somewhere in Italy" at that time.*

The Glider Regiment was present in almost all airborne operations in Europe, and was also in active service in Asia. The regiment suffered heavy losses in the ill fated "Market Garden" operation at Arnhem in The Netherlands in September 1944, and was never up to full strength afterwards. Recruiting was a major problem because of the low survival rate of glider pilots in active service.

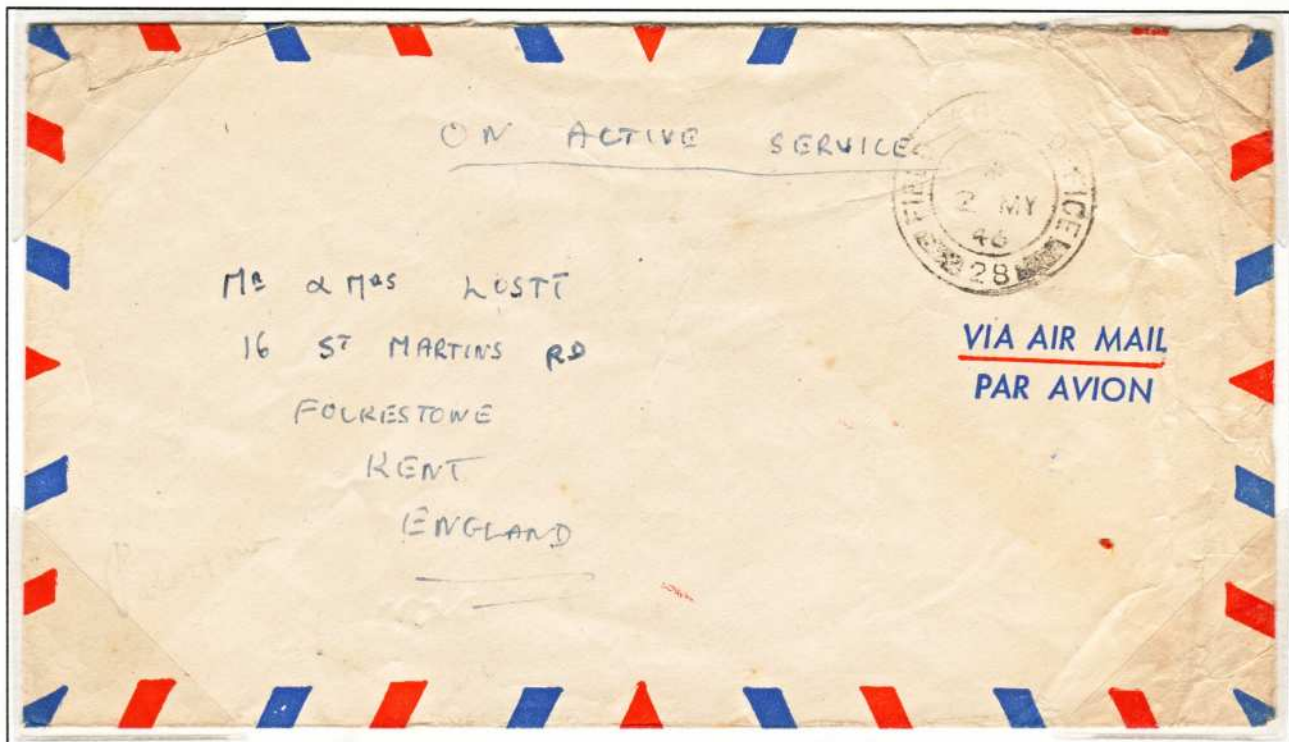
## Epilogue

The cargo carrying gliders were specific to WW II, never used in other wars. The German gliders, especially the "Gigant", were used extensively for supplying the Eastern front during the ill fated attack on Russia, but their usage came to an end with the German capitulation in May 1945. The American glider units were gradually deactivated and/or integrated with the airborne divisions. The British Glider Regiment was part of the peace keeping force in Palestine from 1946 to 1948. The regiment was formerly disbanded by Royal Warrant given by HM The Queen on 12 July 1957.

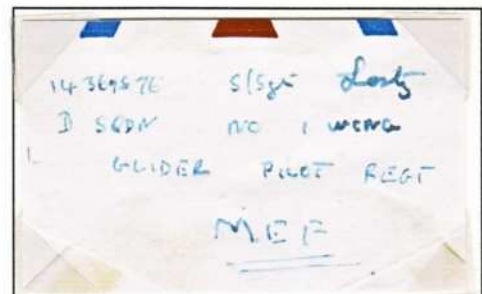
Although the glider regiments were disbanded, the memories live on.



Membership card for the 17th Airborne Division Association. The card was valid until August 13 1971, issued to Private Robert Ucen who served in Battery "B", 680th Glider Field Artillery Battalion, which was part of the 17th Airborne Division.



Letter sent from "D" Squadron of Glider Pilot Regiment, MEF (Middle East Forces), commanded by Major A. Murcock, which was based at RAF Agir, Palestine. Postmarked field post office No. 28 on 2nd May 1946. Field post was free of charge for men in active service, hence no stamps were needed. Scan of the sender's address is shown at right.



Trials to use cargo gliders commercially took place in USA from 1947 to early 1950s, but deemed unsuccessful and abandoned. Helicopters replaced the gliders in later conflicts. They were not only more versatile, but could also be equipped with weaponry and were not just sitting targets like the "Flying Coffins" of WW II.