

MILITARY CENSORSHIP IN IMPERIAL RUSSIA, 1904-1917

Military censorship is primarily a counter-intelligence operation. It is designed to prevent an enemy from gaining critical information, e.g. military industrial output, troop strength, unit location, combat capability, and, of course, combat operation plans. Another task is to discover and help capture enemy spies attempting to communicate through the postal system, and in authoritarian countries like Imperial Russia, where political dissent could lead to arrest and incarceration, military censorship acted as a polling device and a watchful eye on morale within the ranks. Nicholas II's empire combined all of these mail surveillance aspects in its military censorship.

In little more than a decade, from early 1904 to late 1915, the Russian military censorship apparatus progressed from a small, amateurish operation at the far eastern end of the empire to a massive undertaking that encompassed the whole country. Before 1904, the Russians had done very little planning for military censorship; by 1915, the terrible social and military stresses of WWI had forced the Russian General Staff and the Main Post-and-Telegraph Administration to think and drastically re-think their approach to the problem. Theirs was a fast and steep learning curve, littered with false steps, stupidities, bureaucratic foul-ups and inefficiencies. And yet, despite all that, the military censorship apparatus worked.



This exhibit will trace the development of the censorship system, discuss the problems it faced and the approaches it took to solve them, and provide a representative sampling of the more elusive military censor marks from around the empire. (Extremely rare censor marks and usages are denoted by a blue dot at the upper left of the page.)

“Pis'mo na rodinu” (“A Letter to Home”), from the Russian State Military-Historical Archive. (Illustration from *“Voyenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal”* No. 9, Sept. 2004.)

Outline:

- I. Introduction.
- II. The Russo-Japanese War.
- III. WWI.
 - A. Military censorship structure, personnel, procedures, mail categories and problems.
 - B. Censorship of POW mail, distribution of POWs.
 - C. Censorship of military mail: Army, Navy.
 - D. Censorship in the rear areas of domestic and POW Mail.

II. Censorship in the Russo-Japanese War, 1904-1905



The battleship "Petrovsk" hits a mine and sinks with 680 men aboard, 31 March 1904. (http://home.onego.ru/~harm_pet/RJWar/2.html)

None of the wars that Russia fought prior to 1904 required the establishment of a military censorship apparatus, nor have any censor marks from those events been recorded. Illiteracy among the troops was so pervasive that mail volume was quite low, and the approach to preserving state secrets in correspondence was lackadaisical or non-existent.

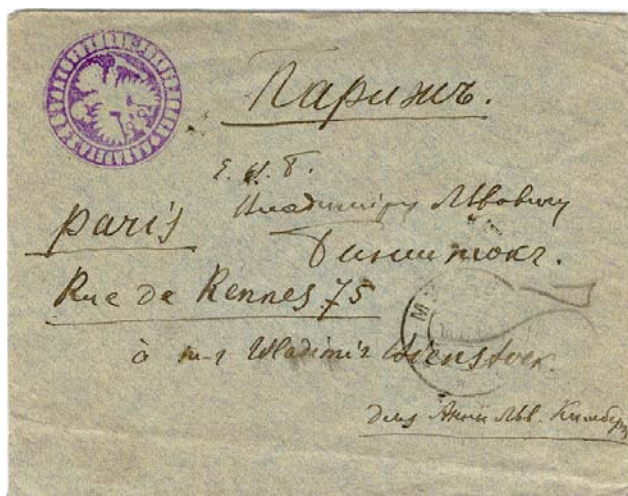
When war began with the Japanese attack on Russian ships at Port Arthur on the night of 27 January/9 February 1904, Russia's censorship apparatus was utterly unprepared. It took three days for censorship of telegrams to be instituted, and it was not until early April 1904, over a month after the commencement of hostilities, that censorship of correspondence was introduced. Even that was aimed primarily at Russian and foreign newspaper journalists. The censorship apparatus itself was a scattered, slapdash affair that was not unified until January 1905.



A picture postcard written on 17 March 1905 by a Montenegrin civilian and addressed to Montenegro. Violet circular "Censorship / Rear HQ of the Manchurian Armies" censor mark, applied at Kharbin.

The Russo-Japanese War

Some idea of how very far behind Russian censorship lagged the situation can be seen in the rectangular censor mark on the reverse: "Authorized / Colonel." This was Col. Pestich at the Viceroy's HQ at Mukden. Under him were two staff captains, and that was the extent of the censorship office: only three men, and all of them staff officers. The censor wrote in "za" ("for the") in front of "colonel," then added "Muk" (Mukden) and his signature, Termin.



Obverse.

This is a letter from an officer at the 248th Zlatoust Infantry Regiment's Field Hospital in Mukden to Paris, France, posted on 18 November 1904. It first took a detour through the Censorship Commission at the Viceroy's Field HQ.

The man who censored this cover for the colonel – Staff Captain Termin – is shown at right in the picture below. He and his compatriot at left, Staff Captain Baron von Hofen, did most of the work.

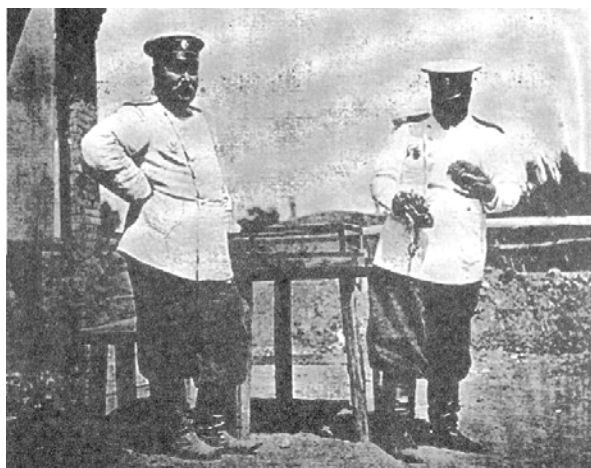


Photo from Story, *The Campaign with Kuropatkin*, 1904. Reproduced in Casey, *The China Shop – 2*, *British Journal of Russian Philately* No. 91, Aug. 2004.)

The Russo-Japanese War - Military Censorship's Infancy

Throughout the war and shortly after it, when military censorship was still in effect, letters or postcards sent by personnel at the front or in rear areas to places within the Russian empire were not required to be censored. However, after sensitive information leaked out to the press through this channel, the military learned its lesson. The mistake would not be repeated in WWI.



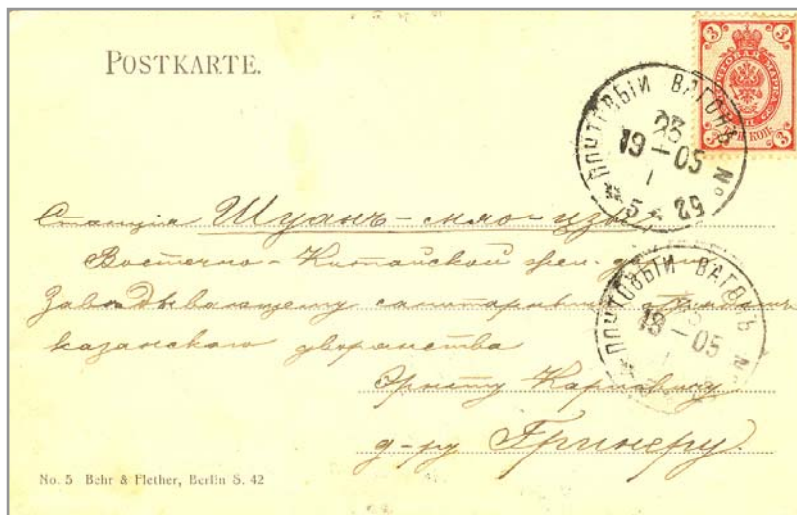
A recovering soldier in the 9th Eastern Siberian Rifle Regiment sent this formular thank-you card from Combined Field Hospital No. 2 at Kharbin via the Main FPO (serial "b") to St. Petersburg on 6 March 1905. No censorship.

A PPC written and posted at "Chingis Khan Station" (arrow) to Smolensk on 12 September 1905, this card bears the unit cachet of the "4th Koperskiy Infantry Regiment of His Majesty the King of Saxony / 2nd Battalion" and FPO No. 30's cancel of 14 September 1905. No censorship.



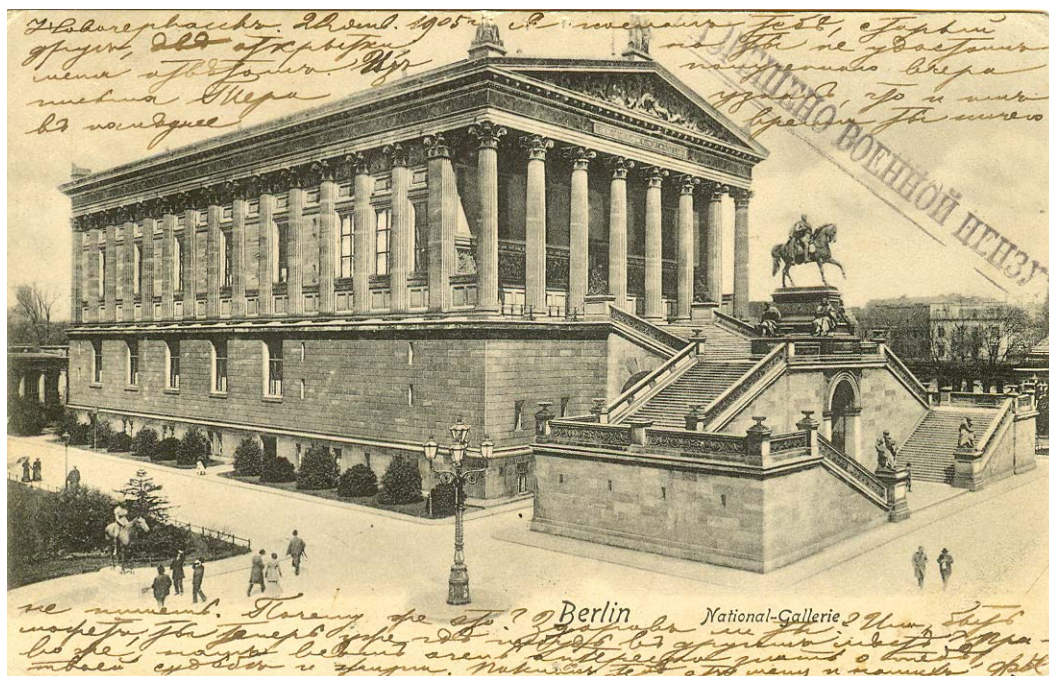
The Russo-Japanese War: Censorship and the Fluid Situation at the Front

At right: obverse. A German picture postcard written at Novochoerkassk and sent aboard Railroad Mail Car No. 52 (Rostov-to-Voronezh) on 23 January 1905. It is addressed to the Chief of the Kazan' Nobility's Medical Detachment at Shuan-Myao-Tszy Station on the Chinese Eastern Railroad, which at the time lay in no-man's-land between the Russian and Japanese front lines. The railroads were choked with military traffic, and mail to the front was therefore very slow, often taking over a month to arrive.



РАЗРЕШЕНО ВОЕННОЙ ЦЕНЗУРОЙ

"Permitted by Military Censorship" (Only recorded example.)



This card would have arrived in Gunchulin after the Russian retreat from Mukden began on 24 Feb. 1905 and sat there for weeks, finally being censored ca. Apr. 1905.

A small number of censors, shuttled around in the retreat, was confronted with huge piles of mail stacking up and no certainty that it would reach its destinations.

The Russo-Japanese War: Efforts to Cope with Mail Volume

As the few individuals assigned to censor mail fell further behind in this and other duties, the time spent re-sealing correspondence after perusal became too great. The use of resealing tape by Russian censorship offices during this conflict represented an innovation that was not adopted for all mail categories until the next war – WWI – and then not until 1916.



Mailed at the Kharbin Railroad Terminal Postal Branch Office to Florence, Italy on 29 July 1905, this cover was forwarded to Gunchulin for examination. The tape reads *Censorship Commission of the Manchurian Armies' Rear HQ* and is tied on by the commission's violet censor mark.

Obverse.

Page at right: Part of a packet sent on 21 June 1904 by the agent of a Russian society in Kharbin via the Main Field Post Office (FPO) to Hamburg, Germany. Since it was addressed to a foreign country, the circular HQ of *Kwantung Oblast'* cachet above the tape doubled as a censor mark. The initials on the censorship resealing tape, *K.O.Sh.V.O.U.M.A.* stand for "*Kwantung Oblast', Military District HQ, Manchurian Armies Directorate.*" →

The Russo-Japanese War



The Russo-Japanese War: Postwar Military Censorship

The Russo-Japanese War officially ended on 23 August/5 September 1905 in a Russian defeat. The situation, even after the Treaty of Portsmouth, was still unsettled enough (withdrawal of some Russian forces, evacuation of southern Sakhalin and the subsequent re-location of its hard-labor prisoners and exiles to the mainland) to warrant a continued watch on mail and telegrams.



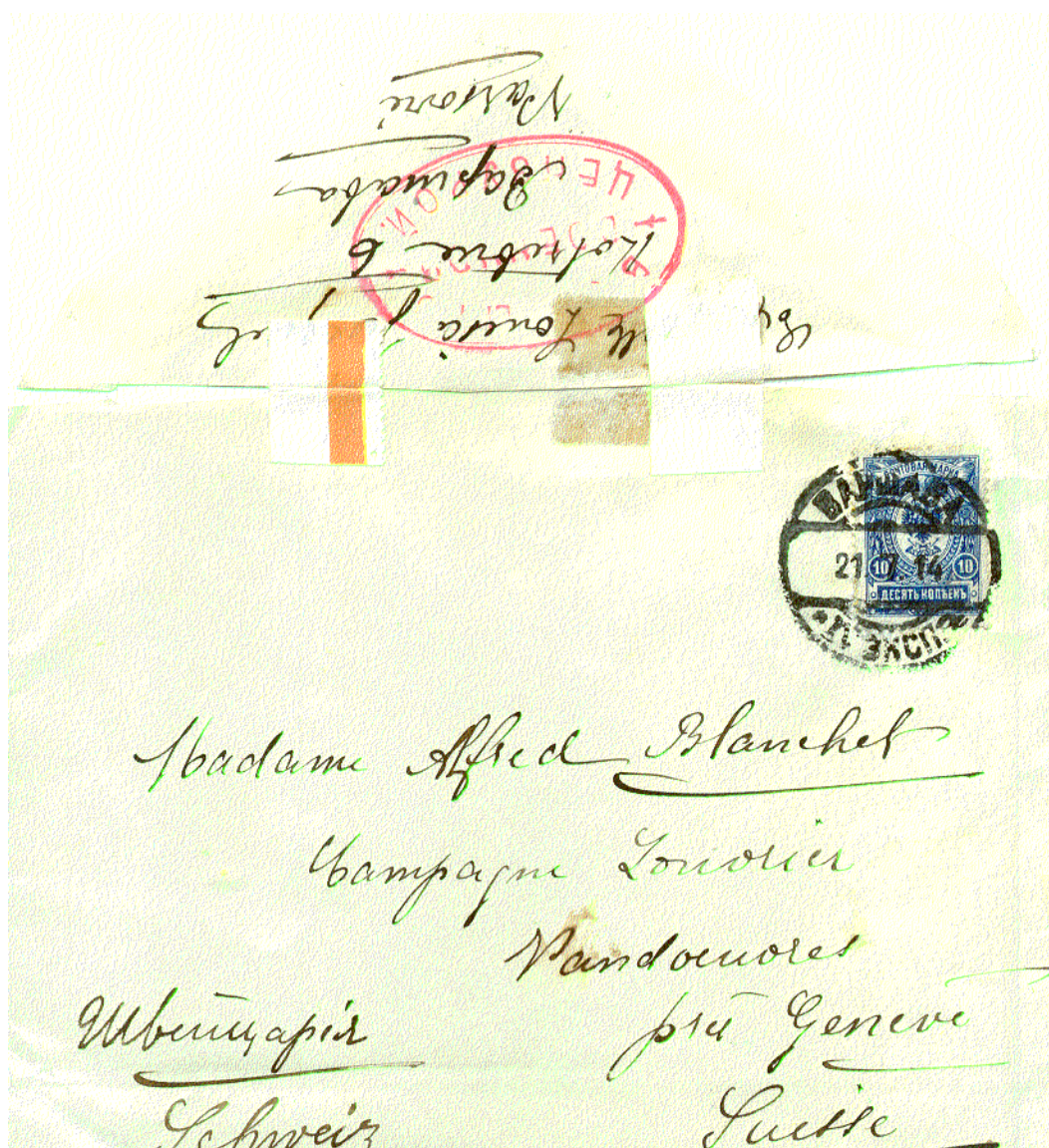
A postcard to Cracow from the 287th Tarussa Infantry Regiment in Manchuria, mailed through the 6th Siberian Corps' FPO on 4 October 1905. The war was over, but military censorship remained unchanged and still in force. Hence, the unit's cachet doubled as a censor mark, because the postcard was mailed to a foreign country. The card transited Moscow on 21 November 1905.

III. Military Censorship in World War I

In 1906, Russian military planners did a very thorough analysis of what went wrong in the Russo-Japanese War, and drew the necessary conclusions. Censorship regulations were drawn up so that Russia would not be caught flat-footed in the next war. They planned, though, for another war much like the preceding one: relatively localized, involving no more than a few million troops. They did not envision a conflict over the entire western and much of the southern borders of the empire, involving over 15,000,000 troops, millions of POWs on either side, tens of thousands of interned civilians, horrendous casualties and large numbers of civilians fleeing the war zones or being evacuated. Unfortunately for military censorship, many of these people – soldiers and civilians alike – were literate, and wrote. The battle by military censorship to cope with tons of correspondence is the subject of this next section.

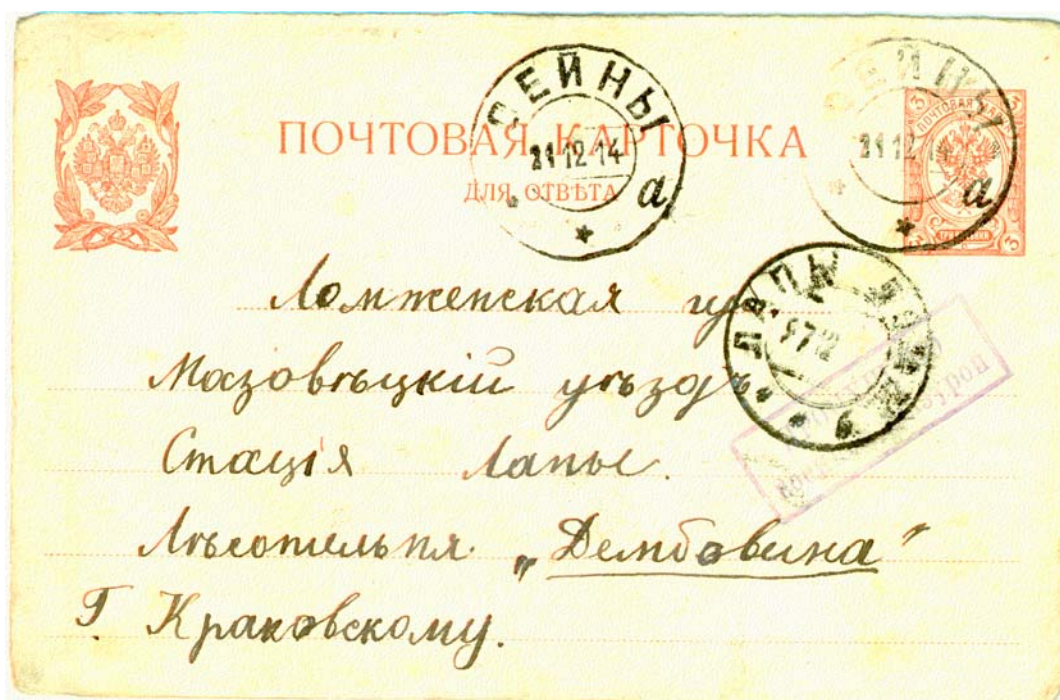
Germany declared war on Russia on 19 July 1914 (Old Style); Nicholas II signed the Provisional Statute on Military Censorship the following day.

This cover is one of the earliest recorded Russian-censored items from the war. Posted in Warsaw on 21 July 1914 and addressed to Geneva, it was “*Opened by Military Censorship*” in St. Petersburg a few days later.



The Introduction of Military Censorship: Total Military Censorship

The 20 July 1914 Provisional Statute on Military Censorship established two levels of mail control: total and partial. Total censorship gave the military authorization to open both domestic and international correspondence in any theater of military operations (TMO), and ignore Article 368¹ of the Criminal Code, which put restrictions on who could open mail and under what circumstances.



The Kingdom of Poland was automatically in the TMO, so its citizens were subjected to total military censorship from the outset of the war. This half of a reply-paid postcard went from Seyny, Suwalki Province to Lapy, Lomzha Province (both in the Kingdom of Poland) on 21 December 1914, taking six days to get there.

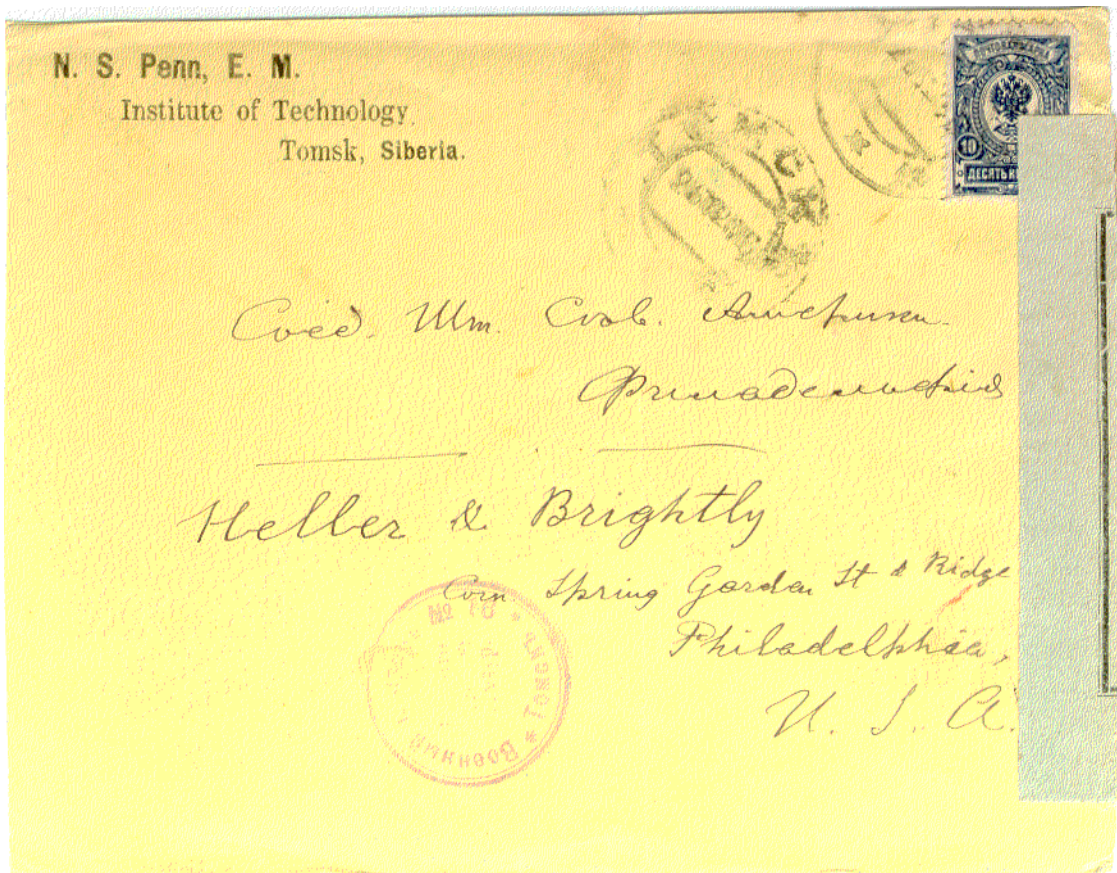
ПРОПУШЕНО
военной цензурой

Violet rectangular “Passed by military censorship” applied at Suwalki.

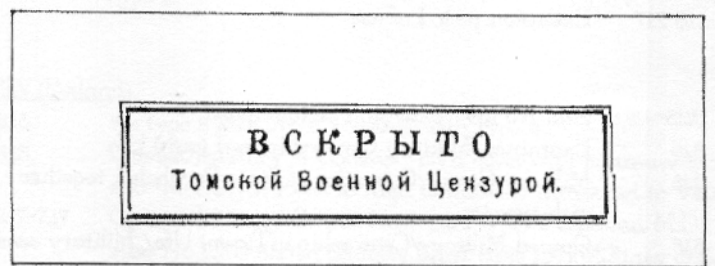
Partial Military Censorship

Partial military censorship was instituted in all areas of the empire outside of the TMOs, and it required the perusal of international mail only; domestic mail was theoretically exempt, with one major exception proving the rule: If a military district commander so decided, even domestic mail could be censored.

Tomsk to Philadelphia, posted on 25 December 1916 and censored at Tomsk. (Censorship-office resealing tape from this city is very rare.)



*“Opened / by military / censor[ship] / * Military Censor No. 16 * Tomsk.”*



Black printing on greenish paper resealing tape, *“Opened / by Tomsk Military Censorship.”*

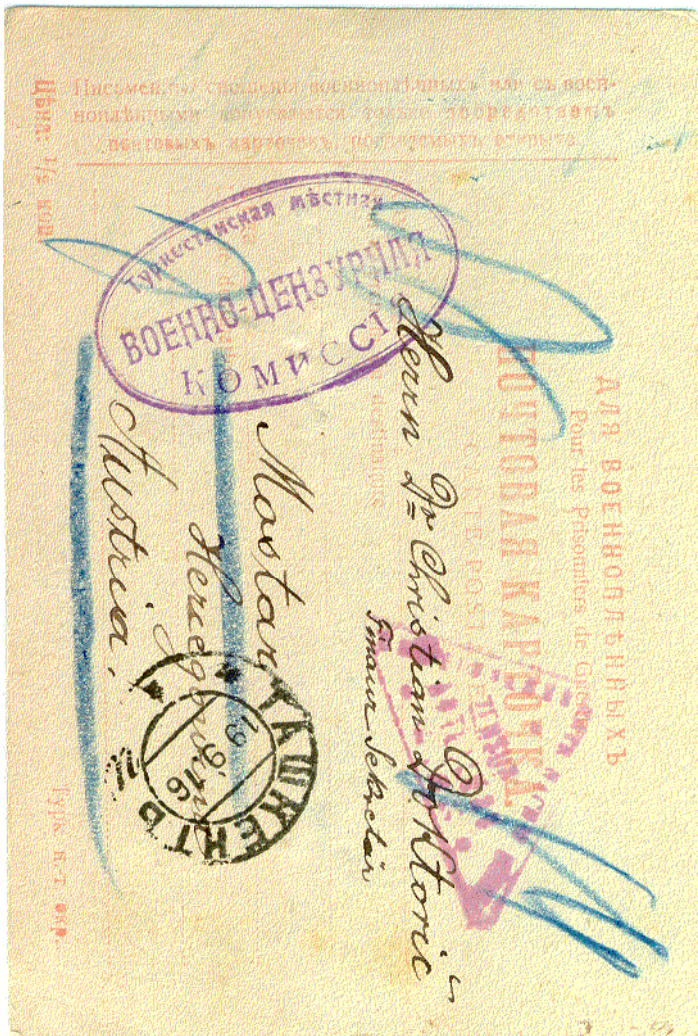
The Main Military Censorship Commission

The MMCC was the top rung of the censorship ladder for all censorship operations within areas where partial military censorship had been imposed. Co-located with the Main Directorate of the General Staff in Petrograd, it consisted of nine individuals, of which three were from the Ministry of War. The MMCC chairman was directly subordinate to the Chief of the General Staff, and his commission was primarily responsible for trouble-shooting any problems that might arise during implementation of military censorship, and supervision of the local censorship commissions scattered around the empire.



Main Headquarters in St. Petersburg/Petrograd, shown on a picture postcard produced by “G.M.B.” The Main Military Censorship Commission was located in this building. No censor marks have ever been identified from the MMCC; it did not itself censor mail.

Local Military Censorship Commissions



So-called “local military censorship commissions” (LMCCs) were supposed to be established in those areas where partial military censorship was in force. They were located at military district HQs, and were subordinate to both the Main Military Censorship Commission in Petrograd and the military district chief of staff.

The six or seven individuals at these LMCCs were tasked with clarifying instructions from the MMCC to their censors, referring intractable problems back to the MMCC for resolution, and supervision of their subordinates.

At left: Tashkent was the headquarters of the Turkestan Military District, and as such it had an LMCC. This POW postcard bears an oval handstamp variety of the “Turkestan Local / Military Censorship / Commission.” It was sent from Troysko POW Camp near Tashkent to Mostar, Montenegro, and posted on 19 September 1916.

At right: A postcard written on 25 October 1915 and sent to a Russian POW in Germany. The rectangular censor mark reads, “Examined / by the Military Censorship Commission at Dvinsk Military District HQ.”



The Individual Censors: Quality

There were thousands of censors – military, civilian and police – that worked in huge offices, small groups, or alone in small towns. Their quality varied wildly in terms of their linguistic abilities, their knowledge of censorship regulations and their judgment. To be fair to the censors, though, censorship rules were imperfectly understood at all levels. Even the Chief of Staff and Quartermaster Generals didn't clearly comprehend their own regulations.

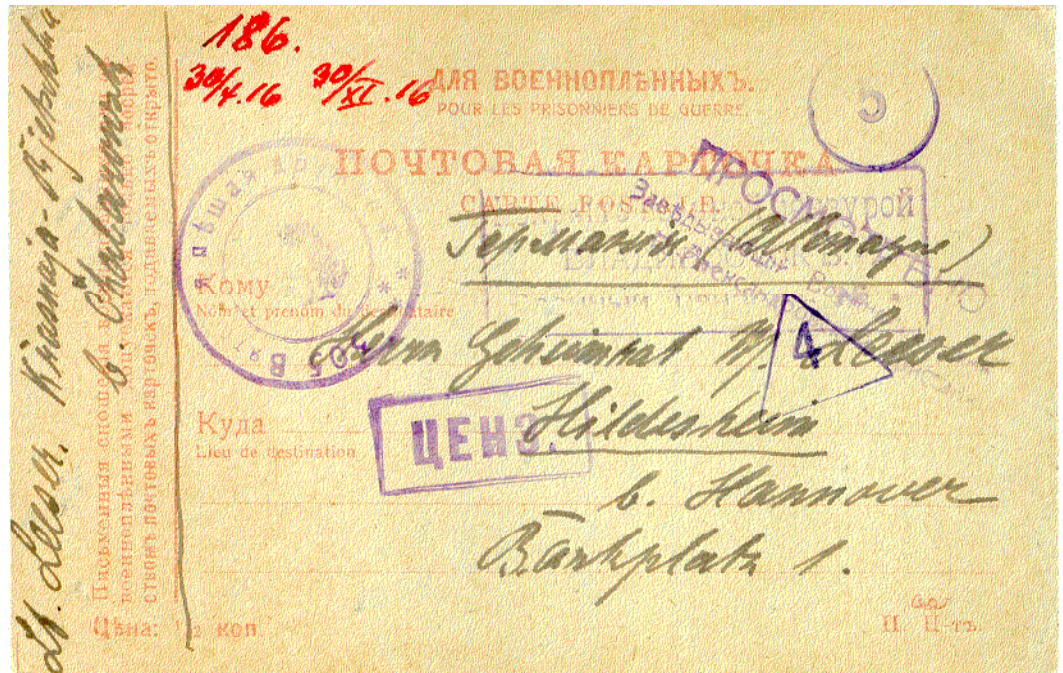


Cavalry captain A.I. Troitskiy, a censor at FPO Letter V of 3rd Army HQ on the Western Front, apparently never got the word about Article 4 of the Provisional Statute on Military Censorship. Mail and telegrams from the imperial family were supposed to be exempt from examination, but Grand Duke Boris Vladimirovich's personal handstamp at top right didn't deter the captain, who applied his censor mark at top left. (FPO Letter V to Paris, 2 July 1915.) The Grand Duke didn't understand postal regulations, either. He assumed that his free-frank seal would carry weight with the French as postage. It didn't.

The Censors: Quality and Quality Control

The skills and temperaments of the Russian military censors were so uneven that quality control was instituted at the LMCCs. Already-censored mail was censored yet again at random, and sometimes even a third and a fourth time, to ensure that the apparatus was working properly.

A well-censored card to Hannover from a German officer POW at Krasnaya Ryechka near Khabarovsk, sent in April 1916. The commander of the 305th Vyatka *Druzhina* of Foot (the unit guarding the prisoners), applied his unit's circular cachet at Krasnaya Ryechka. The card was then censored a second time at Novo-Aleksandrovskaya Pristan' (Wharf), forwarded to Khabarovsk where it was censored again, and then finally routed to Vladivostok, where it received two control marks and yet another censor mark.



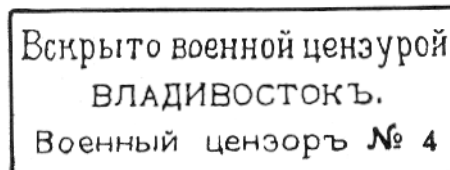
ПРОСМОТРЕНО.

Завѣдывающій Военнопльнными
Н. Александровской пристани

"Examined.
POW Supervisor
at N.-Aleksandrovskaya Wharf"



"Tsenz.[ura]"
(Khabarovsk)



"Opened by military censorship
VLADIVOSTOK
Military Censor No. 4"



Vladivostok sorter mark "5"
and control mark "4."



The Censors: Honesty

The honesty and patriotism of a few censors and sorters were questionable; some were arrested for their misdeeds. At least one censor in Petrograd was a stamp collector not above using his job (and others' mail) to enhance his collection. This registered cover bears two 10-kopeck semi-charity stamps. The one on the right is properly tied to the cover by a Petrograd 15th Branch Office cancel of 19 October 1915. The one on the left is an interloper, used to replace the original stamp. It was cancelled on the same day, but at the 29th Branch Office. The stamp was finally tied legitimately to the cover when it reached Copenhagen. Rectangular "Opened by military censorship. / Petrograd. / Military Censor No. 376" and wax seal "Petrograd Military Censorship."



29th Postal
Branch
Office.

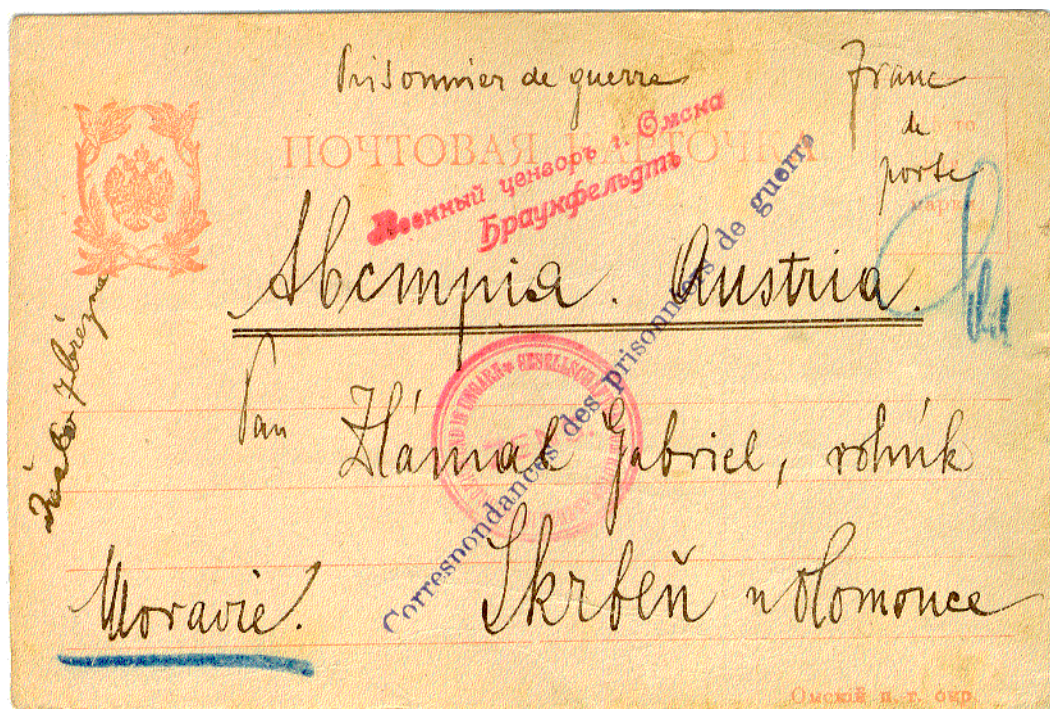


15th Postal
Branch
Office.

The Censors: Loyalty

Numerous censors with German surnames worked for the Russians, most with diligence and honor. A few, however, stole shamelessly from Russian mail, especially packages, while allowing German letters to pass unmolested.

A POW card from Omsk to Moravia, written on 25 January 1915 (N.S.). Read by "Omsk Military Censor Braunfeldt."



A Czech POW card from Petropavlovsk, examined by "Military Censor P.M. Kukne, Omsk" (blue circular censor mark). Two men of German extraction censoring Czech mail for the Russians in Asia.

The Censors: Civilians



The tremendous strain imposed by tons of mail forced the military for the first time to use civilians as censors. Linguists, pedagogues, government bureaucrats, practically anyone from any walk of life was pressed into service, and they worked side by side with the military. At left: A POW card from Buguruslan via Samara to Sweden, September 1915. Green circular “Yu.N.K.” initials and violet three-line censor mark:

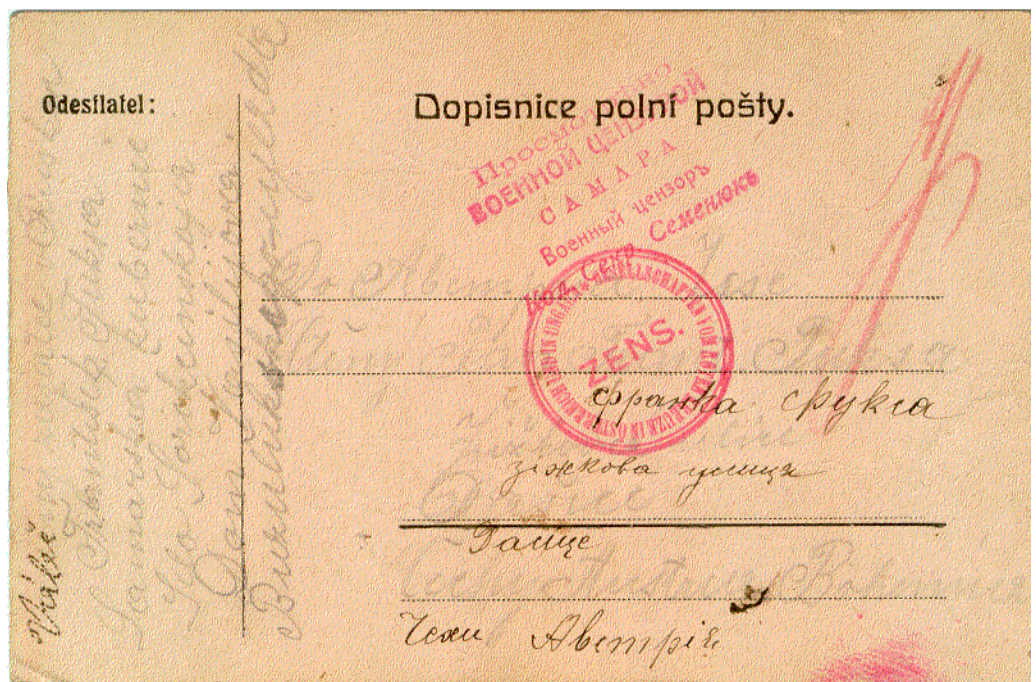
“Permitted by military censorship
Samara Military Censor
Cavalry Captain Solov’evich.”

Разрешено военной цензурой
Военный цензор г. Самары
Ротмистр Соловьевичъ.



At right: A POW card from the village of Sorokinskaya, Samara Province to Bohemia, date unknown. Five-line “Examined / by Military Censorship / Samara / Military Censor / Collegiate Secretary Semenyuk.” (This was the civilian 10th rank, equivalent to a lieutenant.)

Просмотрѣно
ВОЕННОЙ ЦЕНЗУРОЙ
САМАРА
Военный цензоръ
Кол. Секр. Семеновъ



The Censors: Women

Military authorities were loath to use women as censors, even though local censorship offices were scraping the bottom of the barrel in their recruiting for linguists. The ever-growing, mountainous backlog of unchecked mail, however, forced the Army to officially authorize women to work in this capacity from April 1916 on.



This POW postcard from a soldier in the Non-Combatant Company of the 176th Reserve Infantry Regiment near Krasnoye Selo, Petrograd Province was “Examined by censorship / Military Censor Dorofeyeva” (a woman) on or shortly after 15 March 1917, and then went on to a Russian POW in Bavaria. (This is the only recorded WWI Russian marking that can definitely be attributed to a female censor.)

Censorship of Printed Matter: Picture Postcards

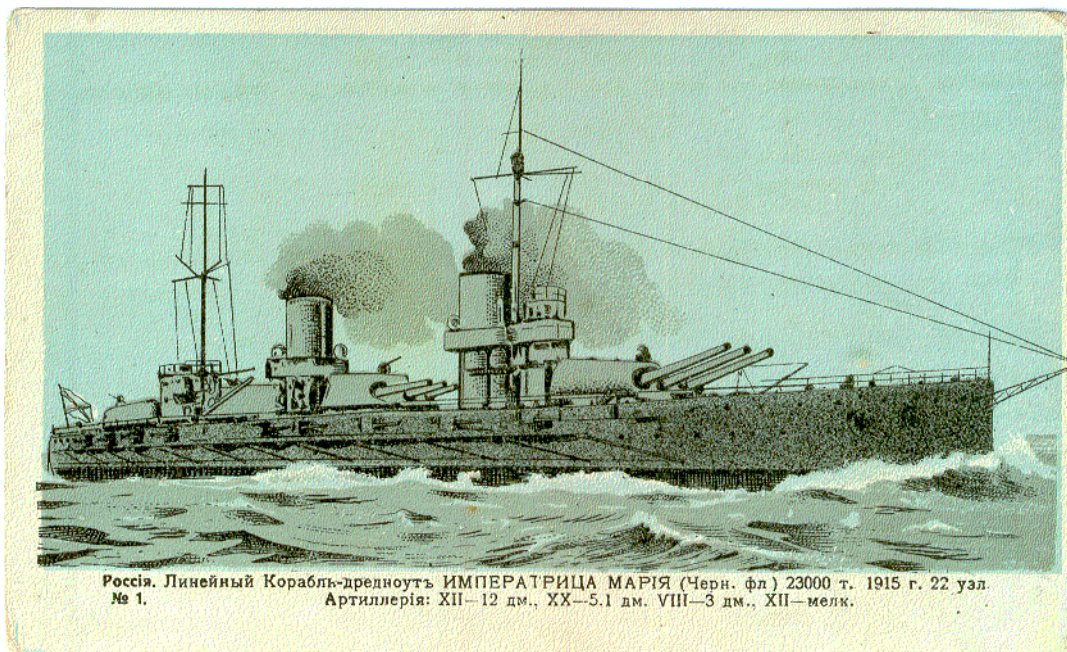
Articles 42 and 44 of the 1914 Provisional Statute on Military Censorship gave army and military district commanders the power to censor all printed matter in a theater of military operations. That printed matter also included picture postcards, which went through the mail. At right: A patriotic card from 1915, produced by the Tekhnograf Company in Warsaw and showing the Allied military commanders.

On reverse of card at right (enlarged): “Auth. by Mil. Cens. Copying is prohibited 28581.”

Дозв. воен. ценз. Репродукция воспрещена 28581.

On reverse of card below: “Authorized by military censorship.” It was produced by the Korchak Novitsky Printing Shop and issued by N.Ye. Khodzitsky in Odessa.

Дозволено воєнної цензурою. Літогр. Корчакъ Новицького
Скл. изд. у Н. Е. Ходзницького Одесса, Пантелеймоновская 116



A representation of the *Imperatritsa Mariya* (Empress Marie), a brand-new battleship that joined the Black Sea Fleet in 1915. The caption gives her speed, tonnage and armaments, but it was still permitted by military censors.

Mail Categories (the “Raw Material”): Ordinary Mail

“Ordinary” mail, i.e., non-registered, non-insured, and non-parcel or packet, was all subject to censorship if it was sent internationally or from a TMO, but it did not require the same degree of book-keeping or resealing after it had been censored.



An ordinary [picture] postcard, 4-kop. international rate, from Novgorod to Paris, mailed on 13 October 1916. Two violet strikes (top right and bottom right) of the censor mark type illustrated below.

“Examined Novgorod Military Censor No. 27.”

ПРОСМОТР. НОВГ. ВОЕНН. ЦЕНЗОР. №

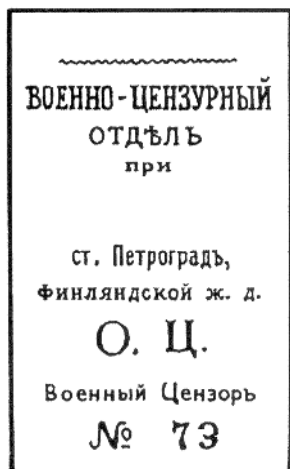
Ordinary letter mail, 10-kop. international rate, mailed on 2 March 1915 from Smolensk to Copenhagen.

Rectangular “Opened by Military / Censorship” and circular “Minsk Military District * Military Censorship * N.I. Pupkov” hand-stamps.



Mail Categories: Packages and Parcels

Due to its bulk, package and parcel mail was much more of a burden to military censorship than correspondence. Such mail came in by the ton, and it had to be properly wrapped up and resealed after the censors inspected it.



At left: A domestic parcel-post card from Milyushino, Yaroslavl' Province to a man in the Communications Service at Degerby on the Åland Islands, mailed on 4 April 1917. It was examined twice, the first time at Petrograd, the second time at Abo, Finland. *“Military Censorship Department at Petrograd Station on the Finland RR, E.[xamined by] C.[ensorship], Military Censor No. 73.”* The censorship department at Petrograd Station handled mostly package mail.



“Military Censorship / Abo.”

At right is a second parcel-post form, this one an international pre-printed version from Troitsk, Orenburg Province, sent to a Swedish firm in Stockholm on 21 March 1916. The violet single-line censor mark reads *“Permitted,”* and the circular marking – *“Military Censor Kazanskago, Military Censorship, Troitsk.”*

РАЗРѢШЕНО



Mail Categories: Packages and Parcels

<p>Coupon Купон</p> <p>peut être может</p> <p>le s адрес</p> <p>Тимпель винажджурого Тимпель почтового адреса</p>	<p>Numeros d'enregistrement Нумеръ по подавательской книгѣ</p> <p>Pays l'origine R U S S I E. Страна подачи Р О С С И Я.</p> <p>Bulletin d'expédition.</p> <p>Сопроводительный адресъ число таможенныхъ деклараций.</p> <p>Ci-joint 3—Nombre de déclarations en douane При семь</p> <p>Valeur assurée Объявленная цѣнность.</p> <p>Montant du remboursement Сумма наложеннаго платежа.</p> <p>10 руб. 35 fr.</p>	<p>Application du мѣсто для timbre-poste ou почтовой марки</p> <p>ТРОИЦКОЕ 213.16</p> <p>ТРОИЦКОЕ 213.16</p>	<p>Stamp Печать</p> <p>ТРОИЦКОЕ 213.16</p>
<p>Тимпель винажджурого Тимпель почтового адреса</p> <p>3. Суларский, Казавино</p>	<p>Сопроводительный адресъ число таможенныхъ деклараций.</p> <p>10 руб. 35 fr.</p>	<p>ТРОИЦКОЕ 213.16</p>	<p>ТРОИЦКОЕ 213.16</p>
<p>Тимпель винажджурого Тимпель почтового адреса</p> <p>3. Суларский, Казавино</p>	<p>Сопроводительный адресъ число таможенныхъ деклараций.</p> <p>10 руб. 35 fr.</p>	<p>ТРОИЦКОЕ 213.16</p>	<p>ТРОИЦКОЕ 213.16</p>
<p>Тимпель винажджурого Тимпель почтового адреса</p> <p>3. Суларский, Казавино</p>	<p>Сопроводительный адресъ число таможенныхъ деклараций.</p> <p>10 руб. 35 fr.</p>	<p>ТРОИЦКОЕ 213.16</p>	<p>ТРОИЦКОЕ 213.16</p>

1) Cadre a remplir par le bureau d'echange d' entree du pays destination.
 1) Графа для пополнения входнымъ мѣстамъ обмѣна страны назначения.

Mail Categories: Registered

Two mail categories were responsible for many of censorship's problems: registered and package. Registered mail, because the Post had to keep a record of it, and it could not be confiscated or destroyed without time-consuming paperwork. It had to be logged individually, and then after censorship it had to be resealed.

This registered letter was sent by Princess Shcherbatova in Petrograd to Nice, France on 19 September 1915. It cleared the capital the next day.



Two-line violet censor mark "D.Ts." (*Passed by censorship*), *Military Censor* (signature in red ink) and a wax seal reading "*Petrograd Military Censorship Commission.*"



(Petrograd was in a theater of military operations and was therefore supposed to be under total military censorship, not partial, but the mail backlog grew so huge that a local military censorship commission was formed, even though it was against regulations.)

Mail Categories: Declared-Value



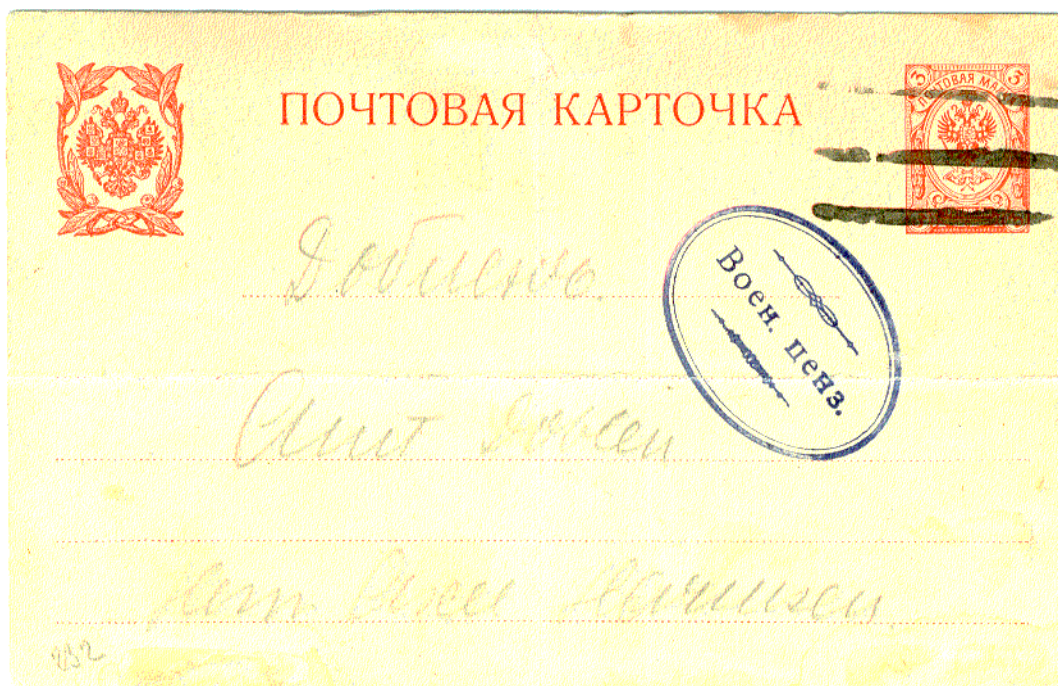
Three wax seals reading “Military Censorship X at the Moscow GPO X.”



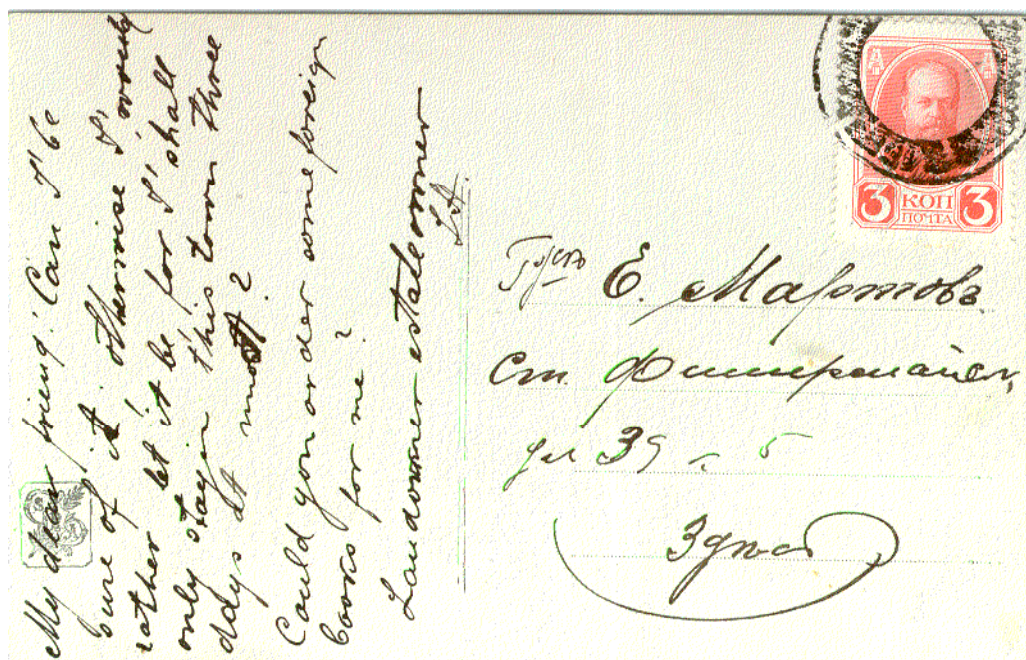
Declared-value mail was in one respect worse than registered for the censors, in that it required more wax seals (3 vs. 1), but there was much less of it, and much less in the way of text to read.

A declared-value envelope conveying 135 rubles worth of money or merchandise to Huddersfield, England on 19 March 1917. Censored in Moscow by “R.N.V” (arrow).

Censorship Procedures: The Introduction of Mute Cancels, August 1914



In August 1914, Russian military authorities grew concerned that civilian mail could give away the location, activity or movement of Army units, so orders were issued to use so-called mute (or “dumb”) cancels that would not contain the name of a post office’s town, thus denying to enemy intelligence, in the event Russian mail was captured, an idea of where an item of mail containing such information originated. This was a form of prior military censorship, akin to excision or obliteration of offending text in a letter, but in advance of the censor’s perusal. Above: Mitava (Mitau) to Doblino, posted on or shortly after 4 Sept. 1914. Below: Mailed locally in Revel’, Estlyand Province, date unknown.



Mute Cancels and Commercial Mail

One thing above all else defeated the purpose of mute cancels, and that was commercial mail. A firm's name emblazoned on the front of an envelope automatically revealed the point of origin; unless it was inked out by a military censor (which almost never happened), the mute cancel was immediately compromised.

Below: A commercial cover from the Priluki, Poltava Province branch of the United Bank, sent registered around 17 August 1914 to the Azov-Don Commercial Bank in St. Petersburg.



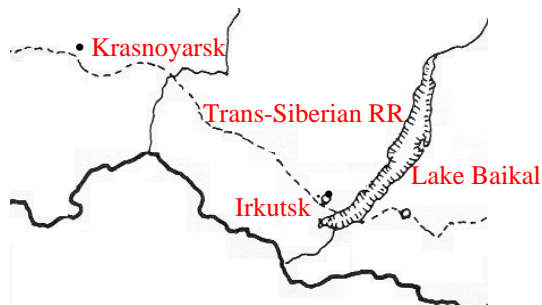
On reverse: Priluki mute cancels.



Note that the “Priluki” town name in the registration label has been excised.

Mail Routing

Routing mail for the purposes of censorship did not always correspond to the way mail was routed for purely postal reasons. For instance, mail addressed to some part of Europe might be sent east on a perfectly good railroad that also ran west, just so that it could be vetted at a big, centralized military censorship operation. Normal mail routing could be altered because of a language problem that only a certain censor at an office somewhere else could handle, or mail could be “detoured” because of its specific address abroad, because only one censorship office in the entire empire handled it. And, of course, there was the war itself to consider. Mail that would ordinarily depart the empire at one point might have to leave it elsewhere, because of the military situation.



Irkutsk served as the central censorship operation for much of Eastern Siberia. POW mail was directed there from many camps and cities, some of them hundreds of miles away. An Austrian POW at Krasnoyarsk, far to the northwest of Irkutsk on the Trans-Siberian Railroad, sent this postcard on 5 February 1915 to his homeland, but it first went east to Irkutsk for censorship. Violet circular “Military Censor 9 at the Irkutsk Post Office” mark.

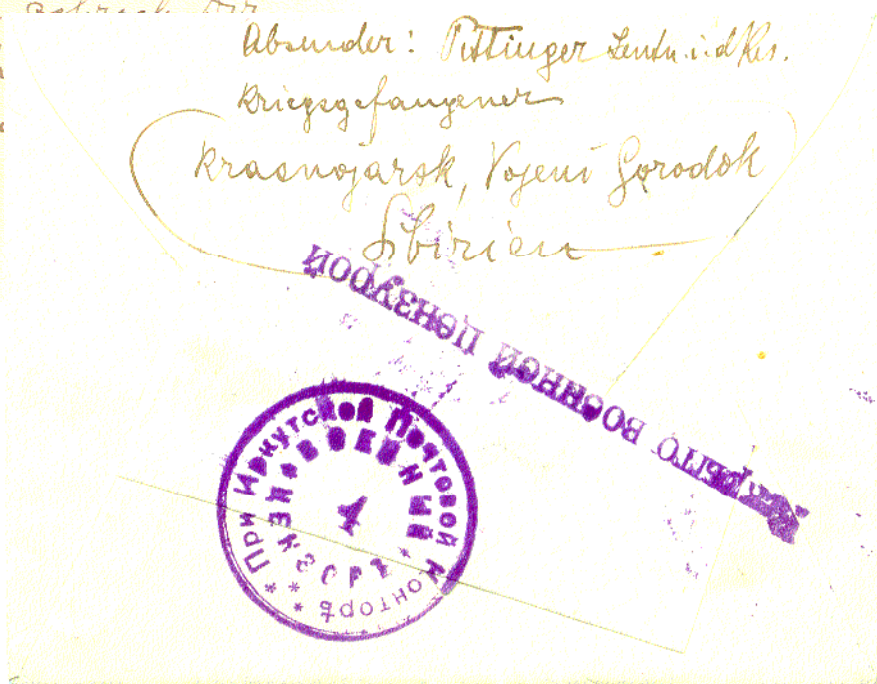
Mail Routing

von unseren Erlebnissen, hat doch jeder verschiedenes mitgemacht und hoffen und harren, dass dieses mordeu bald ein Ende nimt. Gestern wurde uns bekanntgegeben, dass unsere Briefe portofrei seien, dass sie ~~nach~~ ~~Irkutsk~~ ~~und~~ ~~von~~ ~~dort~~ ~~erst~~ ~~zu~~ ~~Euch~~ ~~gehen~~. Dies kostet natürlich Zeit & bei der Masse von Briefen können Monate vergehen ehe du meine Nachrichten bekommst. Von jenen Nachrichten die ich direkt in die Postkästen warf, sagte man mir, dass sie vernichtet werden. Ich schrieb dir viele viele male, ich kann ich's sagen. In Kiew übergab

A lazy Irkutsk censor with a blue pencil made a half-hearted attempt to prevent this news from getting to Austria: "Yesterday (12/25 October 1914) we were told that our letters could be sent post-free, but they have to go first to Irkutsk for censorship, and then on to you."

This letter establishes the approximate date when POW mail was first routed to Irkutsk from other areas to be checked.

Krasnoyarsk via Irkutsk to Brünn, Austria, written on 13/26 October 1914. Violet straight-line "Opened by Military Censorship" and circular "Military Censor 4 at the Irkutsk Post Office."



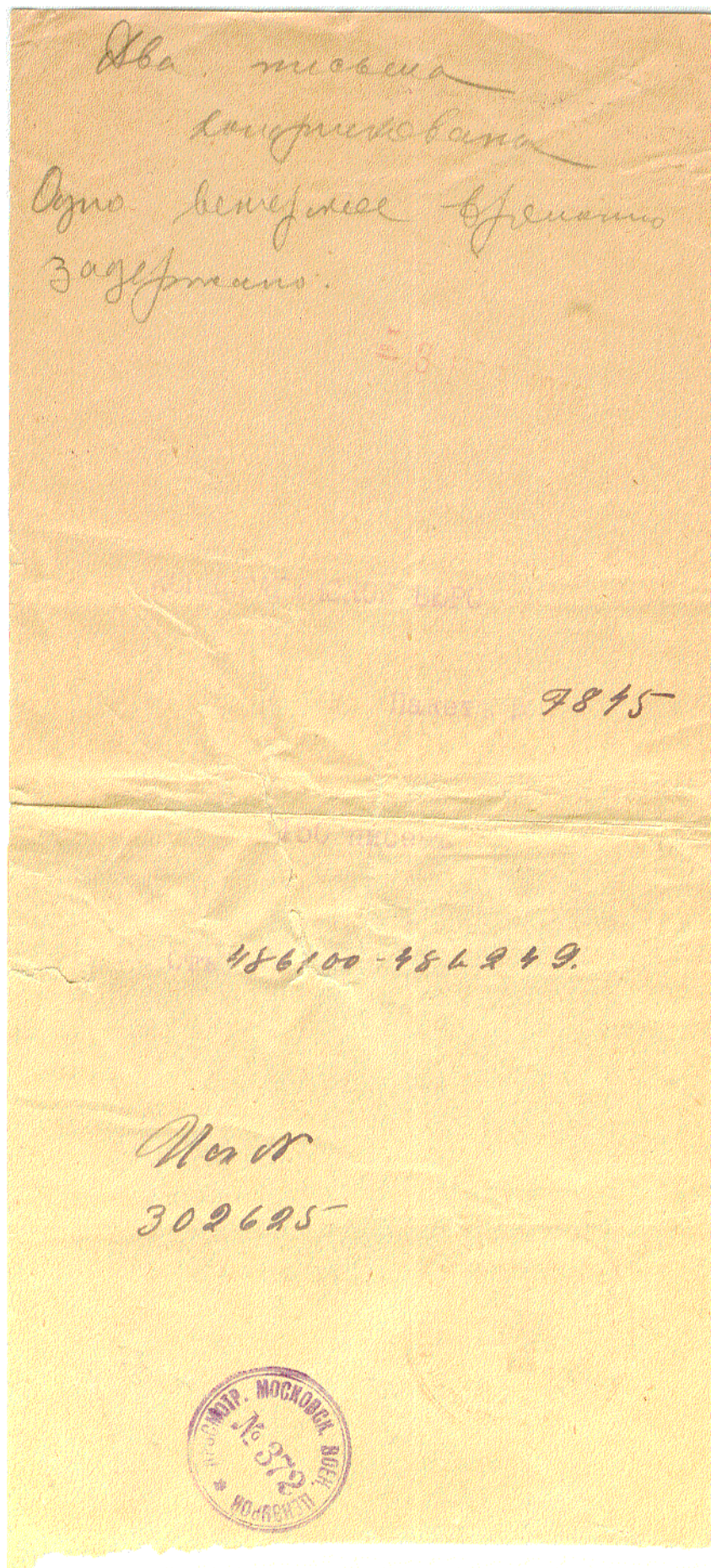
Mail Routing

All mail addressed to the Copenhagen POW Bureau, no matter where it originated in the Russian Empire, had to be routed either to Moscow or Petrograd. No other censorship hub or large city dealt with it.

The volume of correspondence these offices handled was so great that after censorship, the letters and cards were logged, bundled into wrappers of 50, 100 or 150 pieces and shipped off to Denmark.

This wrapper originally held 150 letters, but according to the penciled manuscript entry at top, "Two letters [were] confiscated, one Hungarian [letter was] temporarily held up." The rest of the wrapper reads, "3 Nov. 1916, Copenhagen Bureau, Packet No. 7845, 150 letters, from 486100 to 486249. Reference No. 302625." Some idea of the crushing mail burden the censors and the sorters faced can be gleaned from these numbers.

It was "Examined by Moscow Military Censorship, [Military Censor] No. 372. A faint impression of the Bureau's Red Cross seal is to the right of the violet censor mark.



Mail Routing

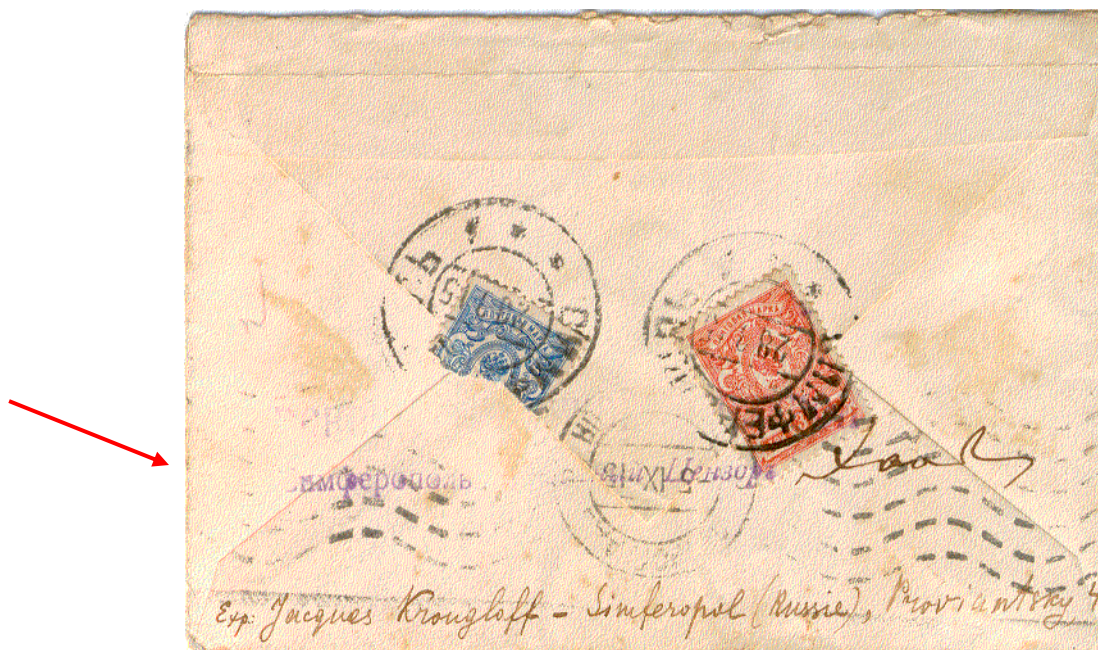


Petrograd 1st Dispatch Office censor mark "D.Ts.U." (The initials stand for *Dozvoleno Tsenzurnym Upravleniyem*) – Passed by Censorship Administration.)



Obverse

This ordinary letter to the U.S. was posted on 28 August 1915 in Simferopol', on the Crimean Peninsula. Under normal circumstances it would have been routed out from the Black Sea, probably through Odessa, but instead it was shipped by rail north to Petrograd, and exited through the Baltic Sea.



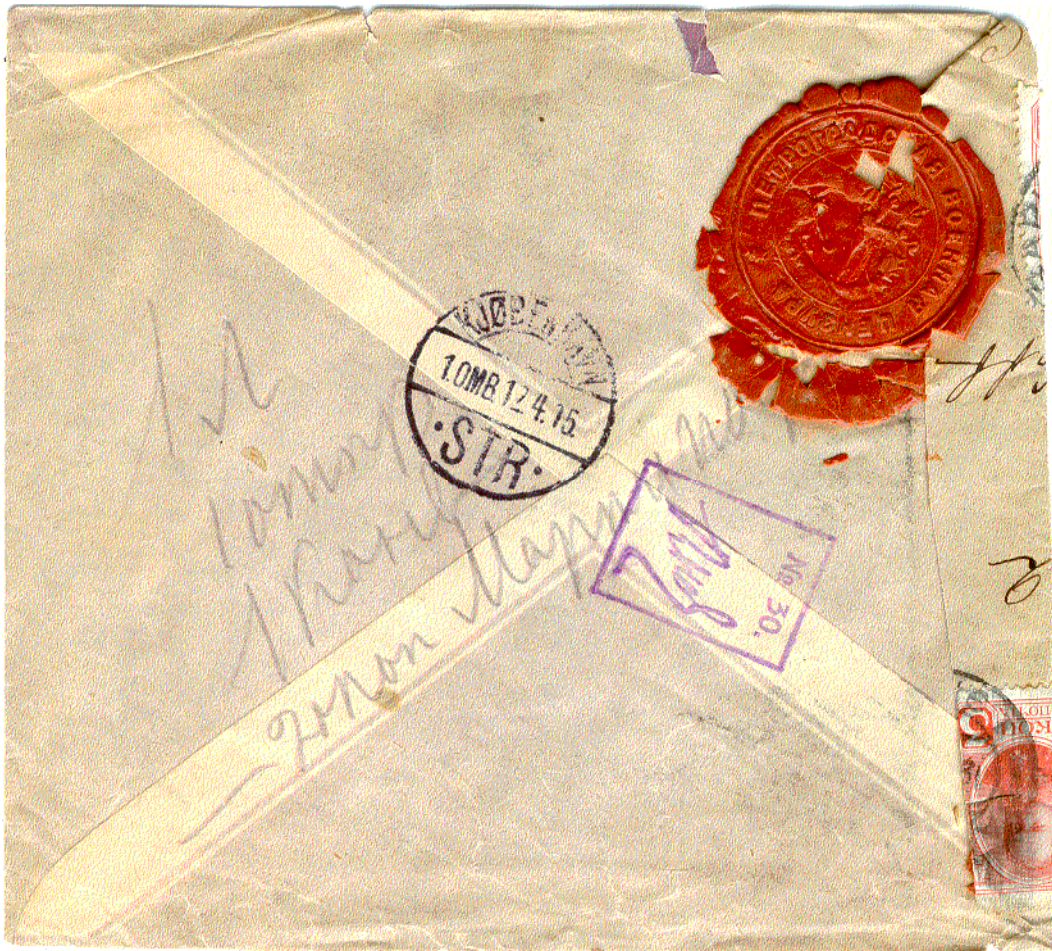
"Opened by Military Censorship Simferopol' Military Censor (signature – Hook)."

ВСКРЫТО ВОЕННОЙ ЦЕНЗУРОЙ
Симферополь Военный Цензоръ

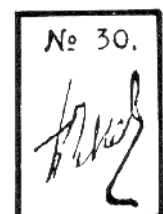
Mail Sorting and Logging

At those censorship offices that dealt with large volumes of mail and more than one language, the letters had to be opened and sorted by ancillary staff, who were responsible for logging the contents of each envelope or packet and routing it within the office to the proper censor.

This registered letter from Warsaw to Copenhagen was mailed on 18 March 1915 and routed through Petrograd, where its contents were first listed at the 1st Dispatch Office: "1 sheet [of paper], 1 postcard, 1 envelope, 20 kopecks in stamps..." After that, it was checked by Censor No. 30 and resealed with wax.



"Petrograd Military Censorship" wax seal.



Provincial Censors and the Language Problem

A major problem faced by many local censors in the provinces was their inability to handle languages other than Russian, German and French. Mail in the more “obscure” languages, especially the artificial ones, had to be forwarded to the major censorship offices for help.



Дослать на военную цензуру
 в г. Военный Цензор № 73
 г. Астрахань , 1915 г.

With a text in Esperanto, this card to Rotterdam, The Netherlands was a mystery to censors in the Caspian Sea city of Astrakhan'. They affixed a label reading “Send to military censorship in Petrograd. Military Censor No. 73, Astrakhan’, 2 December 1915” and forwarded it to the capital, where it was checked by Military Censor No. 416.

Text Effacement

Throughout the war, there censors were not restricted to a single method of text effacement. They could scratch it out, blot it out or cut it out, so long as they did something to keep harmful information from passing.

Petrograd, Dec. 13, 1916.
Dear Sister! Rec'd your postal of 1st part of October. We are all well and everything going along about the same but a - - - - -
We have not had very cold weather up till this last week when it froze and last night we had a little snow also this morning. Hope you had a good Thanksgiving and will have a pleasant Christmas and Happy New Year. Sent with love to all from Betty & Walter. Betty has started her English lessons.

Petrograd Oct 1, 1916 Sunday
Dear Sister:- We had a hail storm to-day about 5 o'clock this afternoon and the streets were all white, look real winterish and we had a cold wind so gave us an idea of what is to come. Expected our King our London auditor and last night was at the station waiting for him till 120 in the morning, he did not come and I go again to-night to try and meet him. Betty and myself went to a picture show last week, seeing an English film taken in South Africa which was very good.
My home sure is nice and I do not care to go out much after I get home, talk and read my Eng & Amer. papers. With love to all from Betty & Walter.

These two cards are from the same late-1916 correspondence from Petrograd to North Easton, Massachusetts, and both were censored in Petrograd. Censor No. 557 liked to scrape the text off, while No. 1723 preferred obliterating it with printer's ink.

Вскрыто военною цензурою
г. Петроградъ.
Военный цензоръ № 1723

"Opened by Military Censorship
Petrograd
Military Censor No. 1723"

“Non-Text” Effacement

It was not just the text of a message that concerned censors; they had to make sure that a free-frank military unit cachet together with a postal datestamp didn't give away an outfit's location to enemy intelligence.



This POW card was posted through a military unit in or near Yekaterinoslav on 22 October 1916. Addressed to a Russian POW in Feldbach, Austria, the cover bore the unit's cachet until it reached Odessa Censor No. 303 (violet rectangular "D.Ts. No. 303"). At first he didn't find anything amiss and applied his censor mark, then thought better of the unit cachet. He scraped it off (plus some of his own censor mark), then wrote his initial – "N" – in pencil over it to signify that it had been done by Russian censorship, and applied his censor mark a second time. A small portion of the unit cachet can be seen under the left corner of the rectangular censor mark on the left.

Confiscation

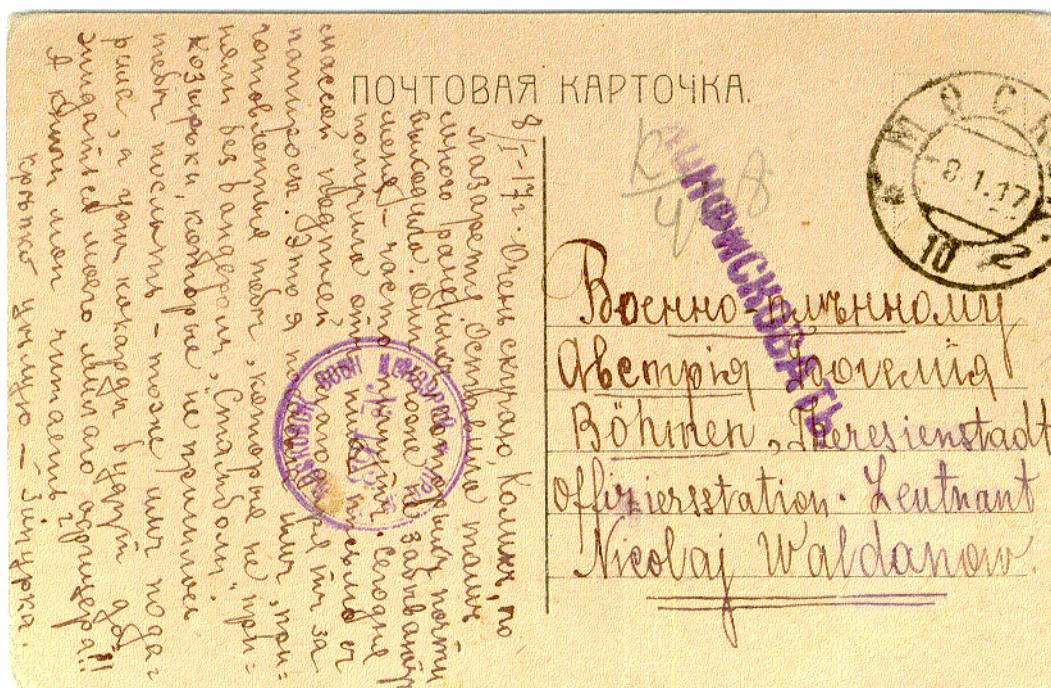
If a censor felt that the contents of a message were such that simple obliteration of a passage would not suffice, or there was evidence of gross neglect, criminal intent or espionage, then confiscation was the next step, and the offending letter or card would be referred to counter-intelligence.

*"Examined by Moscow
Military Censorship /
No. 163."*



КОНФИСКОВАТЬ.

"CONFISCATE."



A Russian nurse in a Moscow military infirmary sent this card on 8 January 1917 to her POW boyfriend in Bohemia, but it was read by Moscow Military Censor No. 163 and stamped "CONFISCATE." The censor undoubtedly objected to her second line: "I left many wounded there..."

Efforts To Expedite Censorship

Article 54 of the Provisional Statute allowed “*senders of those items which on the basis of postal regulations are supposed to be sealed before presentation to the Post... to submit their mail unsealed...*” This saved time for both the censors and the senders, and mail cleared censorship more quickly. Envelopes, for instance, didn’t have to be opened up and then resealed with tape, selvage, staples or glue.



An ordinary letter from the French Consulate in Petrograd to France, 29 July 1916. The censor mark meant that the item had been handed to censorship unsealed, and the “*No. 1*” denoted one of the chief censors.

Предъявлено военной цензурѣ
г. Петроградъ
№ 1

*“Submitted to Military Censorship
No.1”*

Petrograd

Efforts To Expedite Censorship

It didn't take military and postal authorities long to realize that opening POWs' sealed letters and then resealing them slowed censors down tremendously. And too, with full-page sheets, prisoners could write voluminous letters. Russian military authorities consequently introduced a measure making POW letter-mail correspondence possible only on postcards, which greatly diminished the amount of space POWs had to write a message.

Письменная сношенія военноплѣнныхъ или съ
военноплѣнными допускаются только посред-
ствомъ почтовыхъ карточекъ, подаваемыхъ открыто.

"Letter mail of or with POWs is allowed only via postcards presented openly."



A POW card from Solyanka, Samara Province to Feldbach, Austria, mailed on 23 February 1917 and censored at Pokrovsk.

Вскрыто военной цензурой
Г. ПОКРОВСКЪ
Военный Цензоръ № 257.

*"Opened by Military Censorship
Pokrovsk
Military Censor No. 257"*

K.S.M.
Censor's initials
"K.S.M."

Resealing Methods

If the contents of a letter or postcard were not objectionable to censorship, the next step was to reseal the item. For registered mail, the earliest method employed was the wax seal, a carry-over from peacetime postal practice. Mountains of mail soon rendered this approach obsolete; it added much weight to the mail sacks, cost money for the wax, and most important, took too much of the censors' time.



Use of wax seals in wartime Petrograd began in July 1914 and, with a few minor exceptions, ended by early 1916. This “*Petrograd Military Censorship*” seal was applied at the 1st Dispatch Office censor operation to a registered cover to Copenhagen on 26 October 1914. Wax was first used as a glue beneath the folded-over portion of the envelope (where the censor cut into it), then the wax seal was applied on top of that.

Resealing Methods

There was no great degree of coordination between censorship offices when it came to their resealing practices. For instance, while the major censorship operations in Petrograd had by early 1916 nearly dispensed with wax seals for registered mail, the big office at Minsk didn't even start using them until early 1916. The experiment in Minsk was soon discarded that same year.

Two wax seals reading "Military Censorship" on a registered cover from the Minsk 1st City Post Branch Office to Copenhagen, 5 August 1916. The contents were examined by Military Censor No. 8 at the Minsk FPO for Rearward-Bound Front Mail a month later.



Obverse.



"Military Censorship."

ВСКРЫТО
Военный цензор № 8

"OPENED
Military Censor No. 8"

Resealing Methods



Some censorship offices in the Black Sea area and at Kokand used a rather injurious but fast method of resealing to expedite the process – staples. Perhaps because of the potential damage to the contents, very few offices followed Odessa's lead.

After cutting it open with scissors, Odessa Military Censor No. 237 permitted this cover from Nikolayev, Kherson Province to pass on 10 October 1915, closing it with two steel staples at top.



Resealing Methods

One obvious solution to the resealing problem was to print large quantities of tape in order to eliminate the need for time-consuming wax seals. This was tried in a number of cities (e.g., Kazan', Moscow, Petrograd, Revel', and Tomsk), but they were in the tiny minority; other places never used it.



A large FPO at Minsk, which handled only mail coming from the front, had a large censorship operation on its premises. This 3 February 1917 registered cover from Bobruysk to Milwaukee was “*Opened / by Military Censor No. 13*” (two-line violet handstamp) and resealed with the adhesive strip at center. It reads “*Examined by Military Censorship / at / the Minsk Field Post Office for Rearward-Bound Mail.*”

Resealing Methods

When no officially-produced resealing tape was available, the censors often resorted to whatever would stick. Since most of the censors in the rear areas operated out of sedentary post offices, one such sticky means in great abundance was the selvage from stamp sheets.



Addressed to a lieutenant in the Belgian Army, this cover was mailed in Yuzovka, Yekaterinoslav Province on 12 November 1915, then censored in Yekaterinoslav (lilac "D.Ts." in circle) and routed to Petrograd. It was examined there a second time by Petrograd Military Censor No. 161, who resealed the envelope with stamp-sheet selvage before sending it on.



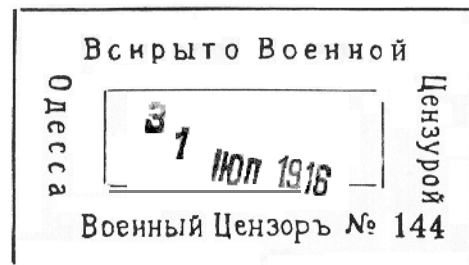
On reverse.

Intentional Mail Delays

Arbitrary delays by censorship were sometimes employed as a means of insuring that if any secrets did leak out through the mail, they would be too old to do the enemy any good.

Odessa was one such censorship office; it instituted a one-month delay, a very unpopular move with commercial firms.

This registered cover from the Yekaterinoslav firm of the Frumkin Brothers' Wire-and-Nail Factory was posted to Copenhagen from the 3rd City Post Branch Office on 25 July 1916. It reached Odessa on 30 July, Censor No. 144 examined it on 31 July, and then it simply sat until 3 September 1916.



The Headaches: Mail Volume and Delays

Registered correspondence passing through Petrograd in late 1914 affords us a glimpse into the beginnings of endemic mail delays due to censorship and initial disruptions in the traditional international mail routes. Although the war was not yet six months old, the average delay in the capital had reached 15-20 days.



Sent registered from Yefremov, Tula Province to Copenhagen on 26 November 1914, this letter reached Petrograd's 6th Dispatch Office (DO) on the 28th. The red manuscript "29 XI" (arrow) shows when it arrived at the desk of censor "A.B." The next day it was again date-stamped by the 6th DO, but the letter wasn't sent on from the 1st DO until 20 December (upper left), a turnaround time of 22 days.



The Headaches: Railroad Mail

Military authorities tried to make sure that censorship prevented mail from slipping through unchecked, but communications and control were often chaotic, and lapses did occur. For instance, it was not until December 1915 that Northern Front HQ discovered a serious oversight: letters posted on RR mail cars had been escaping censorship altogether. The problem was quickly fixed; such mail was either routed directly to a major center, or censors were assigned to the terminal stations.



"N.Sokol'niki – 233 – Vindava"
RR mail car datestamp.



Posted aboard Mail Car No. 233 on the Novo-Sokol'niki-Vindava RR line on 9 June 1916 and addressed to Philadelphia, with postage due. The two violet censor marks are thus far unidentified as to place of origin; they may be from Novo-Sokol'niki in Pskov Province, Vindava in Kurlyand Province, or the capitals of either two provinces. They were applied on 11 June.

ПРОСМОТРЕНО ЦЕНЗУРОЙ
Военный цензоръ И.Р.

"Examined by censorship / Military Censor I.R."

ПРОВѢРЕНО

"Checked," followed by a changeable date plug.

The Headaches: Russian POWs

Axis prisoners were not censorship's only problem; mail to and from hundreds of thousands of Russian POWs in German and Austrian concentration camps also contributed to the flood of correspondence. Since such mail inevitably went first to enemy censors before it reached the addressees, the Russians had to be doubly cautious in what was allowed to pass.



At left: A picture postcard produced by Kahan & Co., GmbH in Koenigsberg, showing a massive column of Russian POWs being marched into captivity.

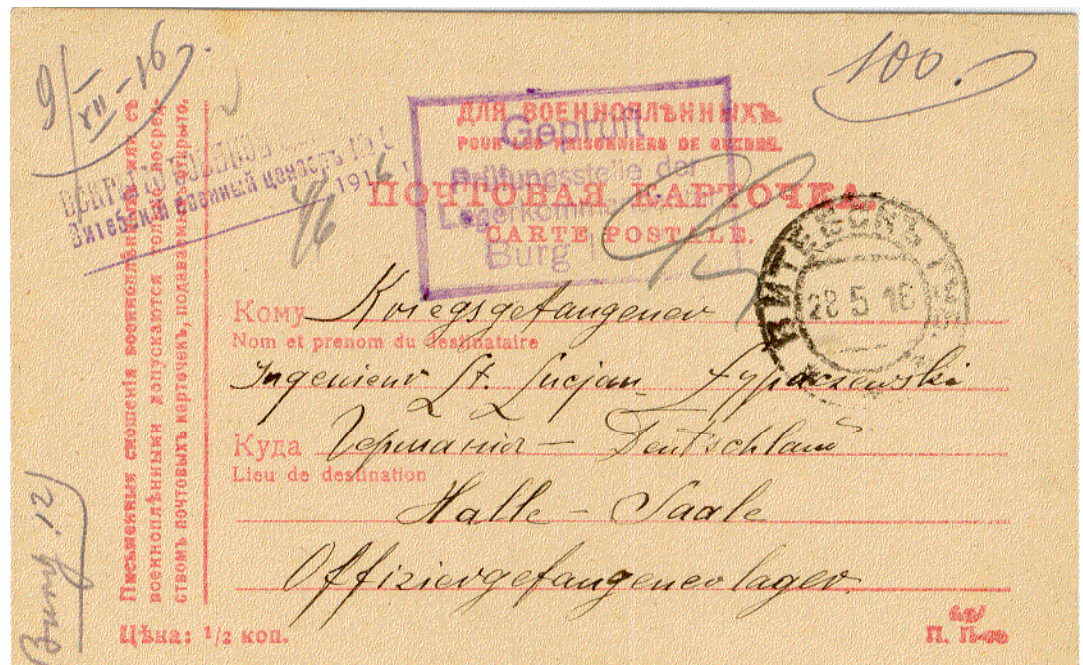
Oestliches Kriegsbild

Abtransport gefangener Russen aus Augustowo

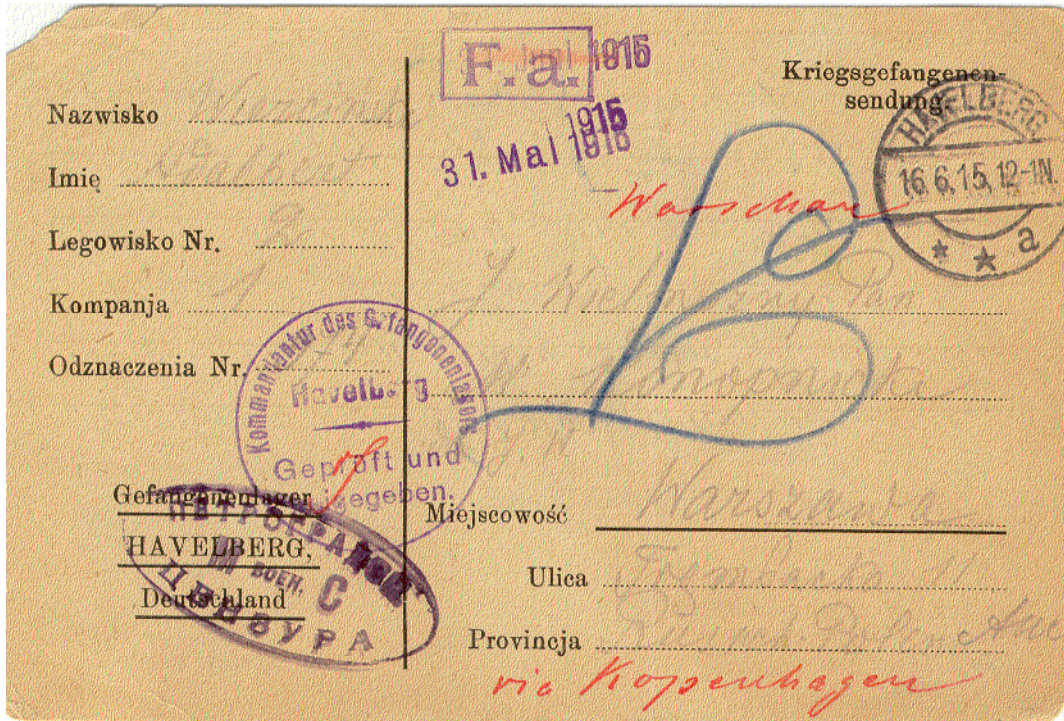
ВСКРЫТО ВОЕННОЙ ЦЕНЗУРОЙ
Витевский военный цензор № 50
..... 191 г.

"Opened by Military Censorship
Vitebsk Military Censor No. 50
.....191

This postcard from a Polish woman in Vitebsk to her POW officer husband in Germany was mailed on 28 May 1916, but didn't clear the censors until 4 June. Her husband received it on 9 July, after the Germans censored it.



The Headaches: News from Russian POWs



Mail coming into the Russian Empire from Russian POWs created a different situation for military censorship. Instead of a counter-intelligence function, now it had to perform censorship in the classic peacetime sense – preventing the “wrong kind of news” from reaching the Russian populace – and gathering whatever meager intelligence it could about the enemy’s POW camps. Above: A POW card from a Pole at Havelberg to Warsaw on 31 May 1915 and censored by “Petrograd Mil. Censorship, M.S.” Below: A German propaganda PPC showing Russian POWs washing dishes.

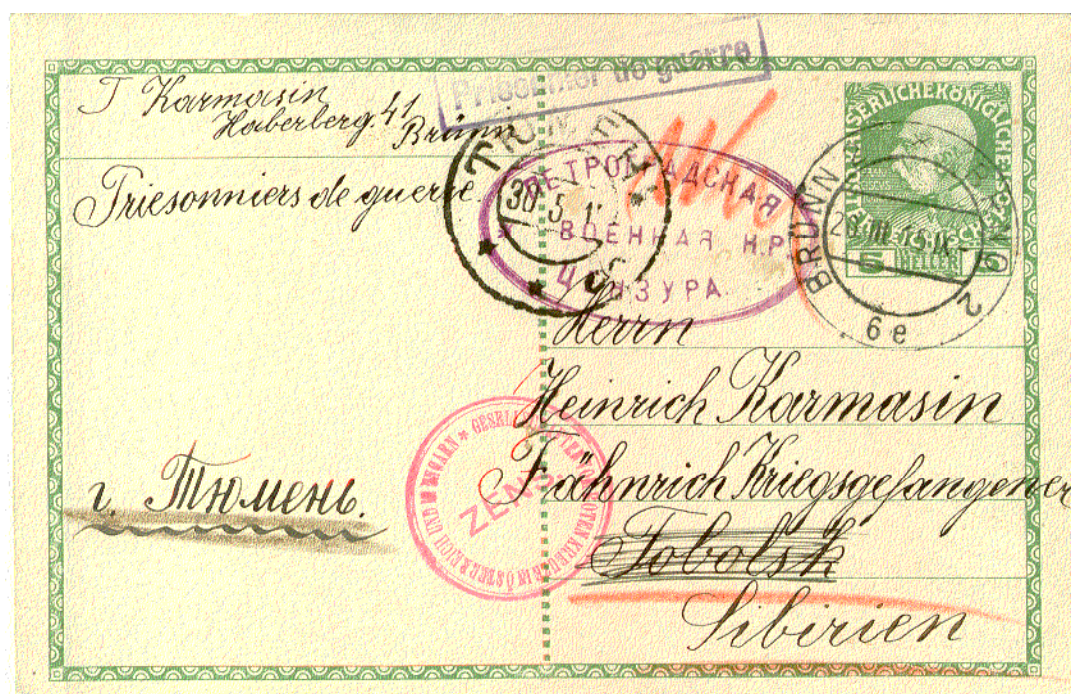


The Propaganda War

The Russians were notoriously poor at getting mail to POWs in the chaos of the camps. This was due in part to the sheer numbers of captured enemy soldiers, but overly strict censorship, inadequate postal resources and poor record-keeping of prisoner locations all contributed. The Axis powers played upon that theme, and the PPC below is one example of this. The carefully-posed picture shows Russian officers and men with stacks of mail and packages, plus a copy of “*The Russian News*.”



At right: A card mailed from Brunn on 20 March 1915, addressed to an Austrian POW in Tobol'sk, censored in Petrograd and re-routed to Tyumen'. Total transit time: 84 days. Violet oval mark “Petrograd Military Censorship, N.R.”

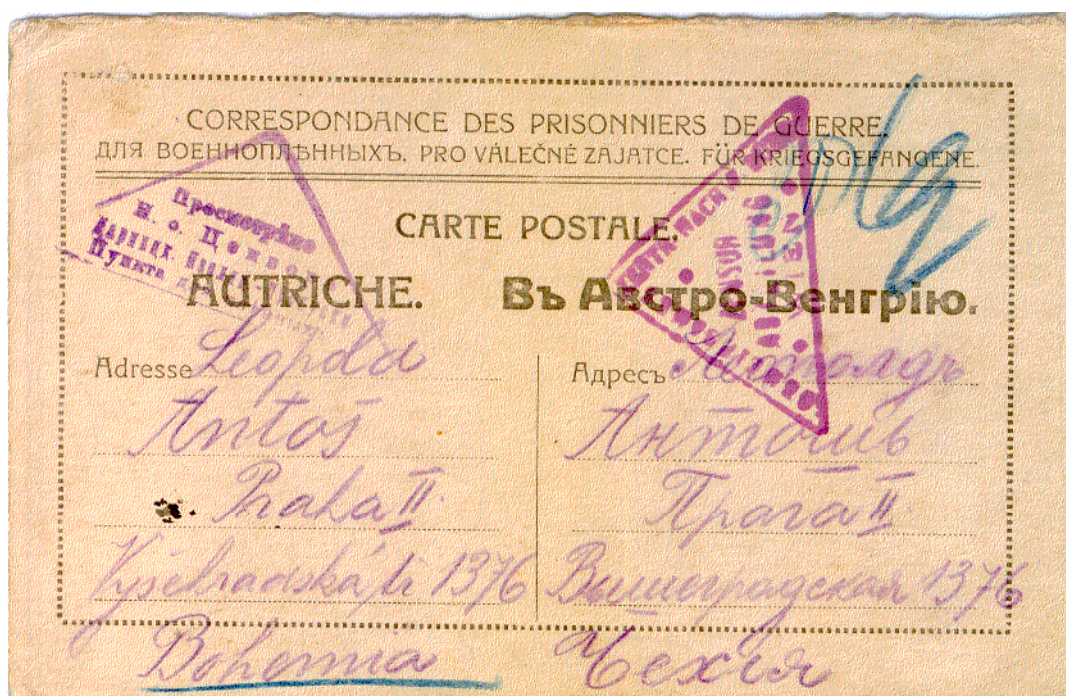


The Great Problem: Enemy POWs

The capture by Russian forces of L'vov in 1914 was the beginning of a steady, burgeoning flood of Austro-Hungarian POWs, augmented by approximately 100,000 Germans and a few thousand Turks. This was something the censorship planners had not foreseen. The overwhelming majority of these men eventually ended up in Siberian and Central Asian concentration camps, but there were many in European Russia as well. Healthy POWs could be shipped far to the east immediately, but sick or badly wounded prisoners had to be treated closer to the front. During their convalescence, they wrote home, adding to the censors' burden.



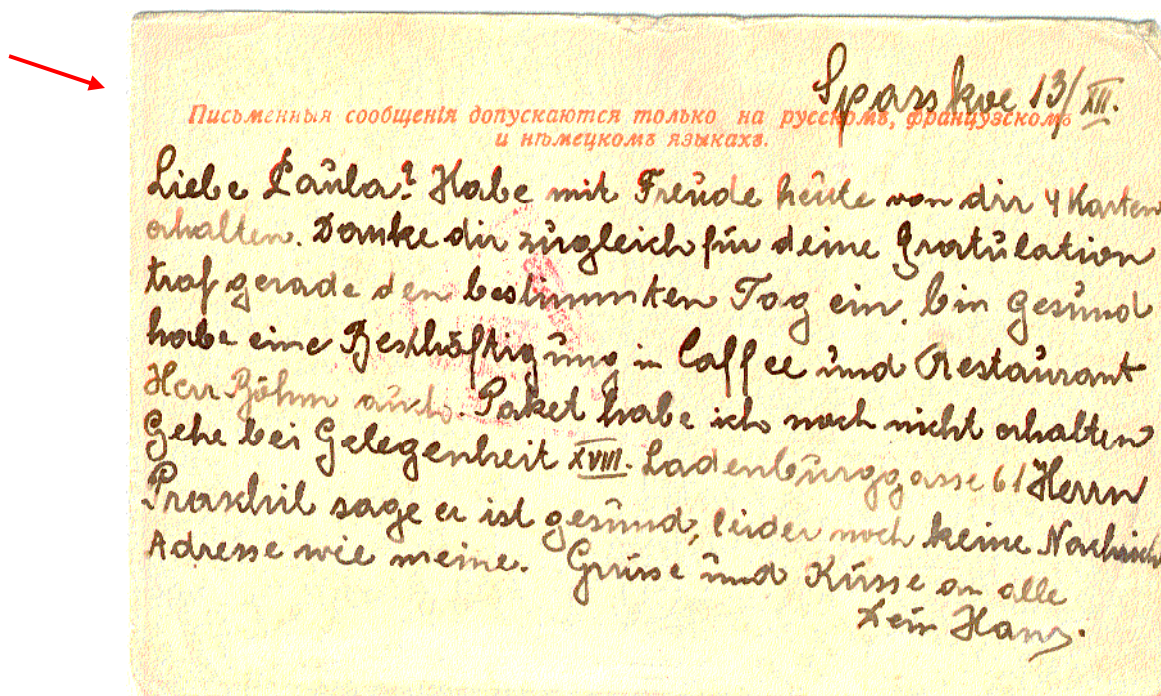
"Examined / Acting Censor / of the Darnitsa Quarantine and Transit / Point for Prisoners"



Darnitsa, the site of a hospital for POWs with infectious diseases, was a small town not far from Kiev. A Czech prisoner recovering at Darnitsa wrote this card in February 1917, and it was cleared not by a regular censor but an “acting-jack” examiner.

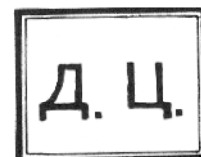
POW Mail and the Language Problem

With hundreds of thousands of POWs pouring into the camps from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Russian military authorities soon realized that they had too few censors who knew Czech, Hungarian and other, less well-known languages. They attempted to solve the problem by limiting the POWs to just those languages where the Russians had better capabilities.

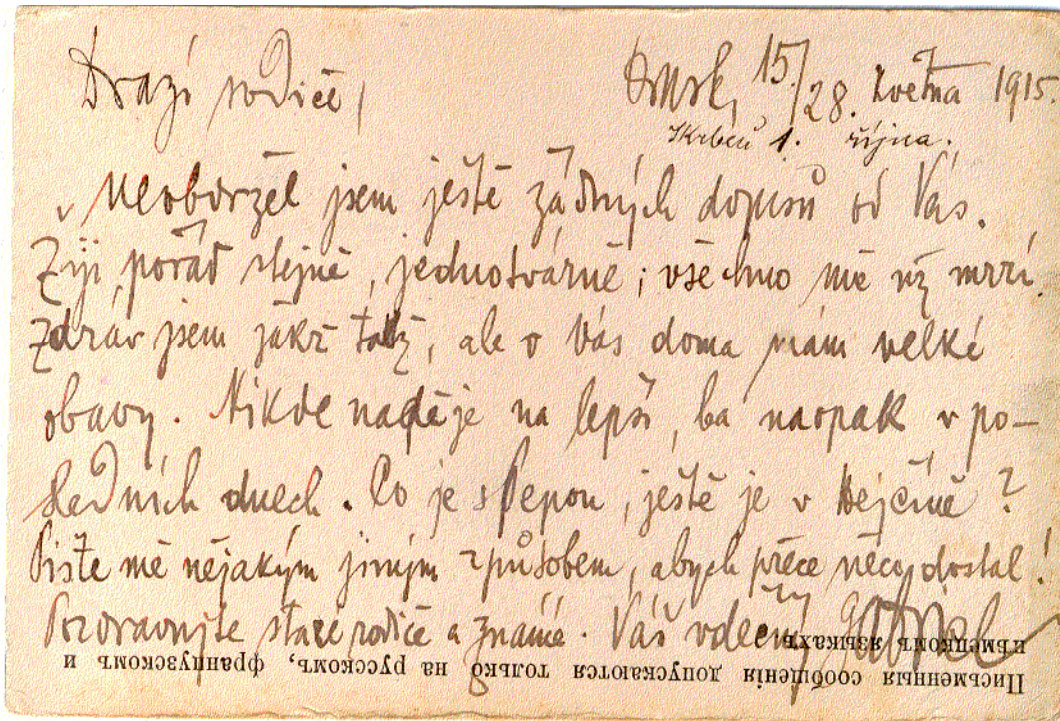


A postcard from an Austrian POW at Spasskoye to Vienna, 13 December 1915. The printed text at top reads (in Russian), “Only correspondence in Russian, French or German is allowed.”

Censored first at Spasskoye by the chief of the 276th Kazan’ Battalion (*Druzhina*) of Foot guarding the POWs (circular violet handstamp), then again at Vladivostok (rectangular pink “D.Ts.”).



POW Mail and the Language Problem



On obverse: Violet
 "Military Censor
 at Omsk / D.Ts. /
 Leparskiy" mark.

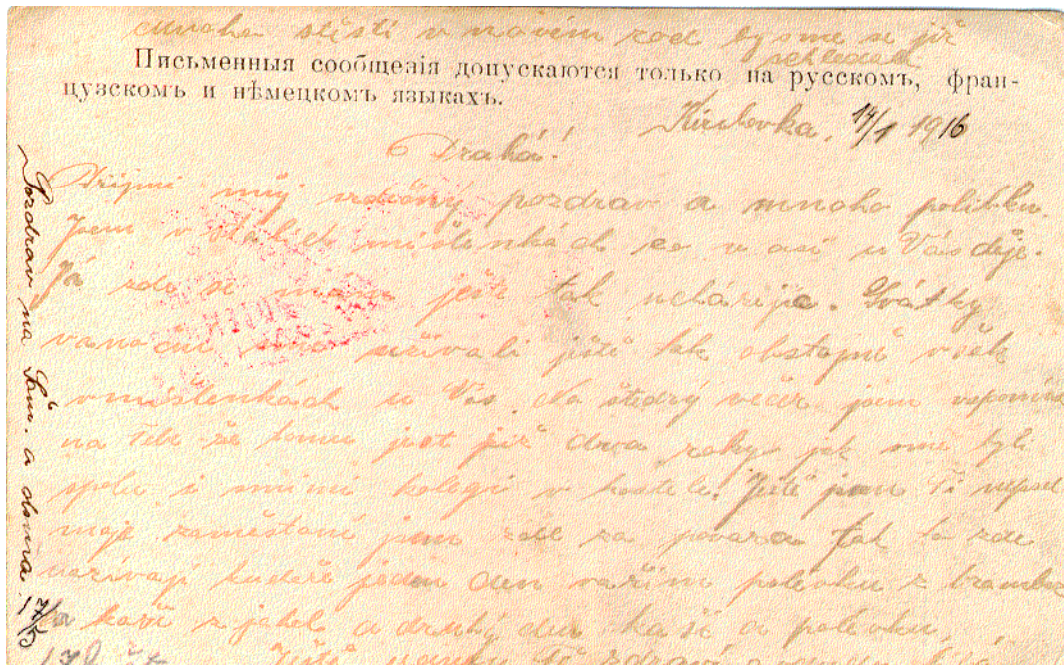
The measure failed, mostly at the hands of Czech and Slovak POWs. Above: A 28 April 1915 postcard in Czech, censored at Omsk. Below: A 14 January 1916 postcard in Czech, mailed at Konstantinograd and censored in Odessa. Note the printed admonishment on each card about which languages can be used, ignored by the senders and censors alike.

ВСКРЫТО ВОЕННОЙ ЦЕНЗУРОЙ

Одесса.

Военный Цензоръ

On obverse: Violet "Opened by
 Military Censorship / Odessa.
 Military Censor (initials)."



POW Mail and the Language Problem

Attempting to regain lost ground, some POW-camp areas began to issue formular notification cards with fill-in blanks. The few words that the POWs could insert were limited to place names and their own names, something any censor with no facility in that language could handle.

A German-and-Hungarian formular card “written” on 22 March 1915 (N.S.) and examined by “Military Censor V.A. Pavlovskiy / Omsk / D.Ts.” (on obverse).



1922/3-15
НЪМ.

Den Verwandten sofort absenden:

Ich befinde mich in Gefangenschaft in der Stadt Tobolsk Gouvern. Sibiria
Tobolsk Ich bin gesund und nicht verwundet. Man kann mir schreiben
auch in meiner Muttersprache. Herzliche Grüsse.
Name und Vorname: Mayer Jaroslav

Tessék most küldeni rokonaimhoz. венгр:

Orosz fogolyságban vagyok, városban.....guberniaba.....
Egészséges és nem sebesülve vagyok. Lehet írni hozzám is magyarul.
Szíves üdvözlét.
Névem és keresztnévem:

*С. Сердечный пощдрав од. Вашх сына.
Адреса за нами не поблизена
Саша и я живем!
Jaroslav Mayer*

15/3.15.

Poslat ihned príbuzným. чешск.

Jsem v ruském zajeti v městě Tobolsk gubern..... Isem
zdrav nejsem raněny. Mužete mě pšat český. Srdečný pozdrav.
Jméno i příjmění. Hannasin Lindrich

Posłać natychmiast krewnym. польск.

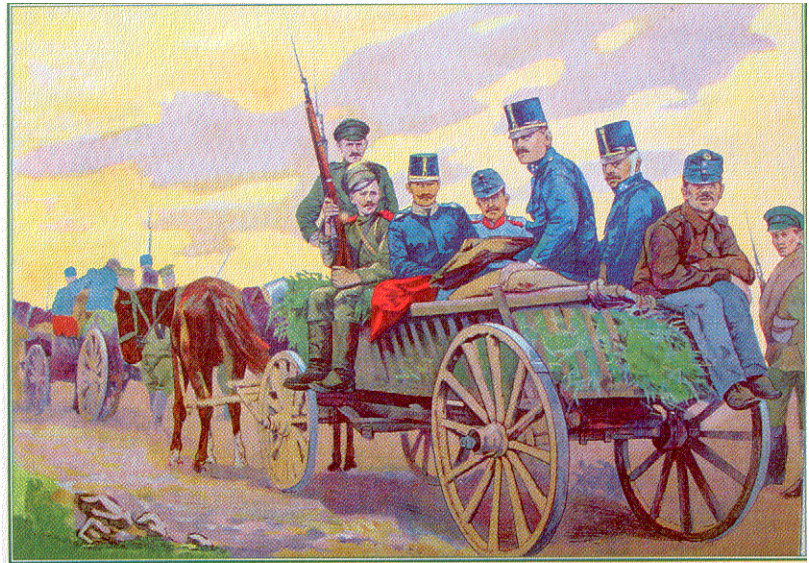
Jestem w niewoli w mieście.....guberni,..... Jestem
zdrow i nie ranny. Proszę pisać do mnie po polsku. Serdeczne ukłony.
Imię i Nazwisko.

A formular card for Czech and Polish, filled out at Tobol'sk on 15 March 1915 (N.S.) and sent south to Omsk for censoring. “Military Censor G.M. Reuk / Omsk / D.Ts.” (on obverse).



Distribution of POWs: POWs in European Russia

Vyatka Province was for many years a favorite tsarist dumping ground to isolate political exiles. Its poorly-developed road-and-railroad infrastructure made it remote and difficult to escape, which also made it a perfect place to put POWs. This card was sent by a POW at Sarapul, Vyatka Province to Austro-Hungary on 22 March 1916 and examined by one of the few censors posted there.



Austrian POWs being transported under guard.

(From a painting in the Russian State Military-Historical Archives.
(*Voyenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal*, No. 9, Sept. 2004, p. iv.)



"Examined by Military Censorship
Sarapul
Military Censor No. 34"

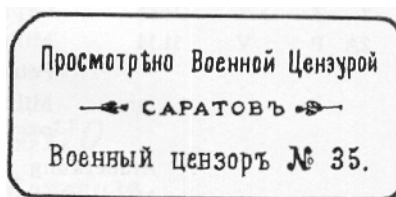
ПРОСМОТРЕНО ВОЕННОЙ ЦЕНЗУРОЙ
САРАПУЛЬ
Военный Цензорь № 34.

POWs in European Russia

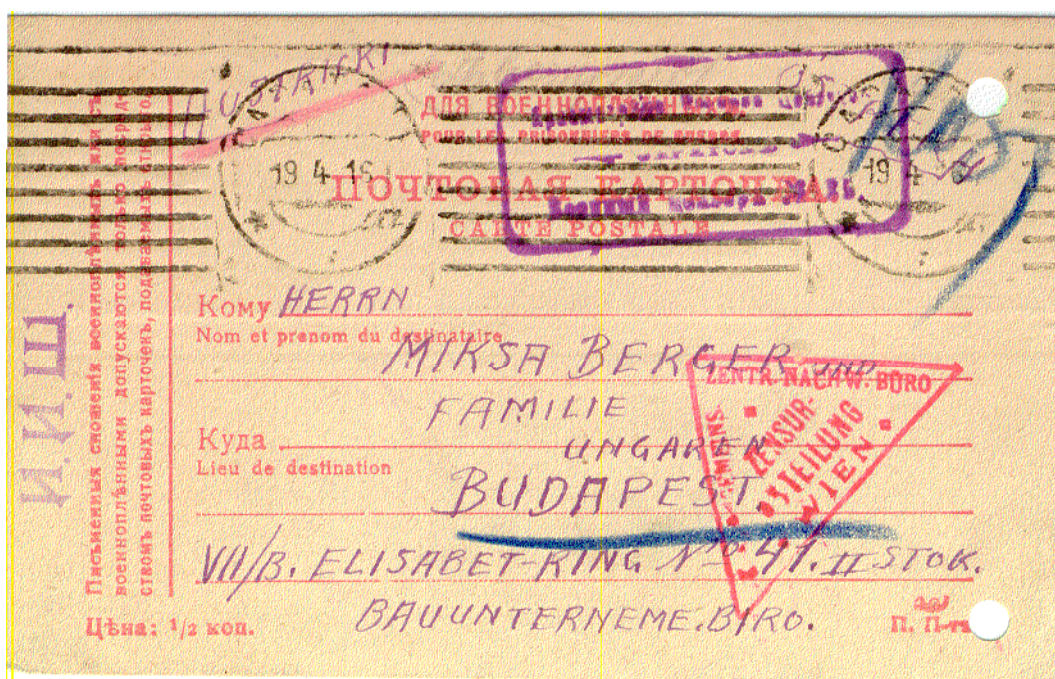
Large numbers of Austro-Hungarian POWs were distributed in the provinces of Saratov, Samara and Astrakhan'. One advantage to this placement was its close proximity to areas settled by the Volga Germans over a hundred years before. The big censorship offices there had a ready recruiting pool of people who could read German easily.

И.И.Ш.

Censor's initials "I.I.Sh."



*"Examined by Military Censorship
Saratov
Military Censor No. 35"*



An Austro-Hungarian POW in the Samara Province village of Tsvyetochnaya (nearest post office: Nesterovka) sent this card on 17 April (O.S.) 1916 to Budapest, but it was first shipped to Saratov for censorship, and cleared that city on 19 April.

POWs in Western Siberia

Tomsk and the surrounding area held many Czech, Slovak, Austrian and Hungarian POWs. As a university town with a population of over 100,000, it was better positioned to recruit linguist censors than many other places.



*"D.Ts." (Permitted
by censorship.)*



*"A.I. Milyutin"
wax seal.*



*"Military Censor
A.I. Milyutin
Tomsk*



A money letter from a POW at Tomsk, sent to Berne, Switzerland ca. March-April 1915. Military censor A.I. Milyutin applied both markings on the obverse, then added three of his personal wax seals to the reverse.

POWs in Western Siberia

Tobol'sk Province was another area favored for decades by the government as a dumping ground for Russian exiles. POWs might escape from the camps there, but they would not escape from the Tyumen' area's taiga.

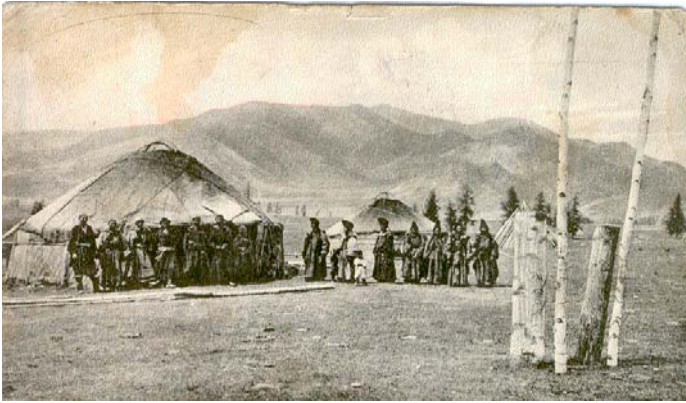


Violet “*D.Ts. / Yerf.*” – a personal censor mark belonging to State Councilor Yerofeyev.



A postcard from a Czech POW being held at Tyumen', Tobol'sk Province in Western Siberia, written on 24 December 1914 (N.S.) and addressed to Moravia.

POWs in Western Siberia



Some places were so remote that it was difficult just shipping the POWs there. One such area was the Altay Mountains in southern Tomsk Province. The small town of Biysk held modest numbers of Austro-Hungarian POWs and an even more modest censorship operation. Only two (and possibly one) censors have been recorded from that office. Finding people who commanded such languages in an area sparsely populated with nomads was not easy.

On reverse: Kalmyk nomads on a PPC produced by the Borisov photography shop in Barnaul.



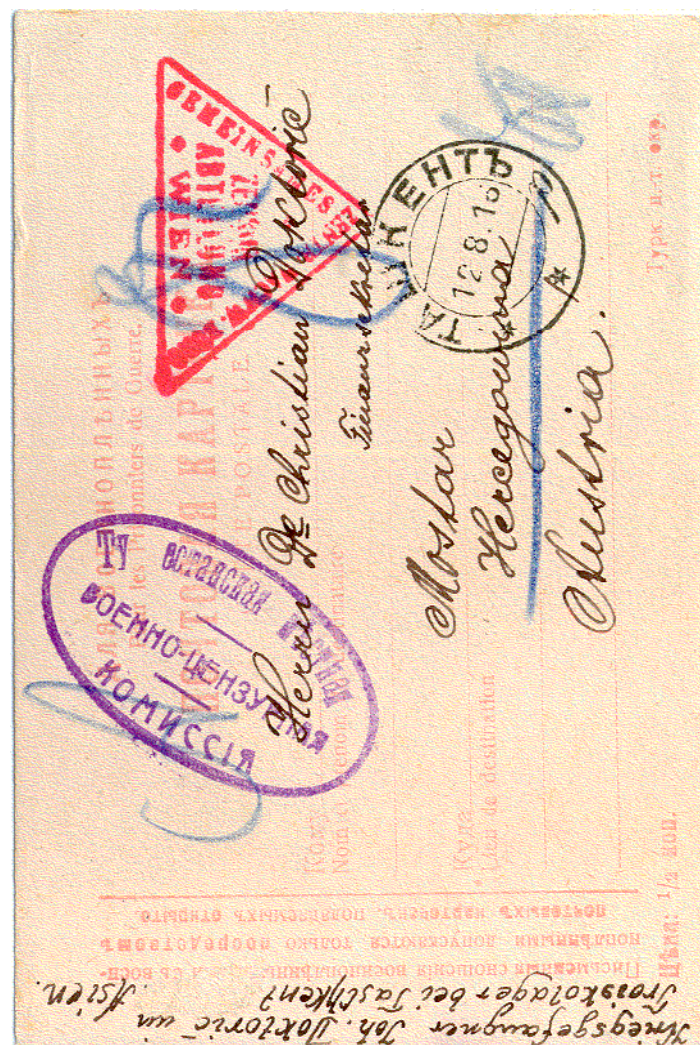
A POW from Moravia wrote this card at Biysk on 23 May 1916 (O.S.) and addressed it to Joscovice in Austro-Hungary. It was held up for five days before Military Censor No. 20 applied his censor mark and released it.

POWs in Central Asia

The area around Tashkent was dotted with big POW concentration camps. Hundreds of thousands of Austro-Hungarian and almost all German prisoners were sent there. Lesser numbers ended up in Kokand and Ashkhabad. A huge LMCC staffed by hundreds of censors operated out of the Tashkent Post Office.

At right: A POW card from Troysko Camp near Tashkent to Mostar, Austria, clearing Tashkent on 12 August 1916. The oval censor mark is the “spelling error” variety, omitting the “rk” in “Turkestan’skaya.” The Russians saw no need to correct or destroy the handstamp; it is the most common of the Turkestan LMCC censor marks.

Below: A German POW officer at Tashkent sent this card to Germany on 17 February 1915 (N.S.). Red oval Turkestan LMCC censor mark.



POWs in Central Asia

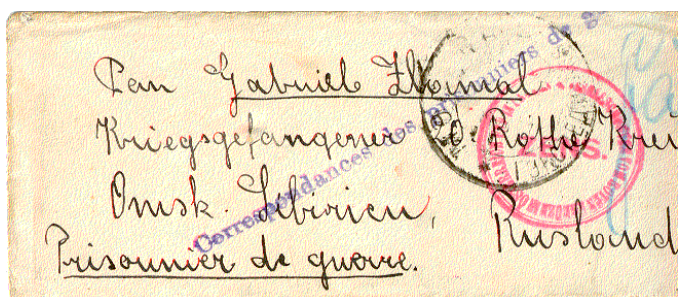
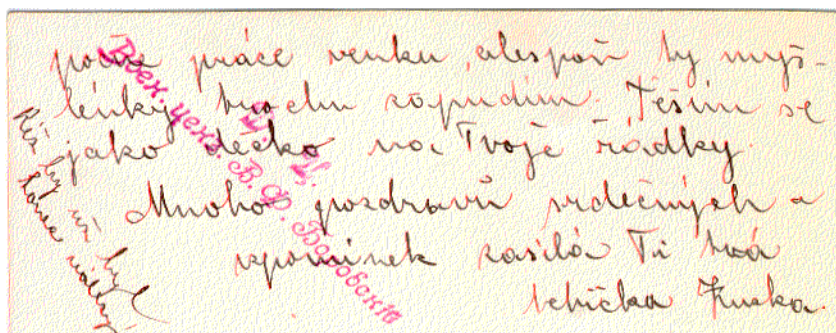
Omsk, in the far north of Central Asia, was “home” to large numbers of POWs, almost all of them soldiers from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The mail they generated and received necessitated a large censorship office, evidenced by a list of censor mark varieties in excess of 60.



Reverse, bearing a circular “D.Ts. / Mil. Censor V.F. Borovskiy [at] Omsk” and a rectangular “Opened by Moscow / Military Censorship / Mil. Cens. (signature).”

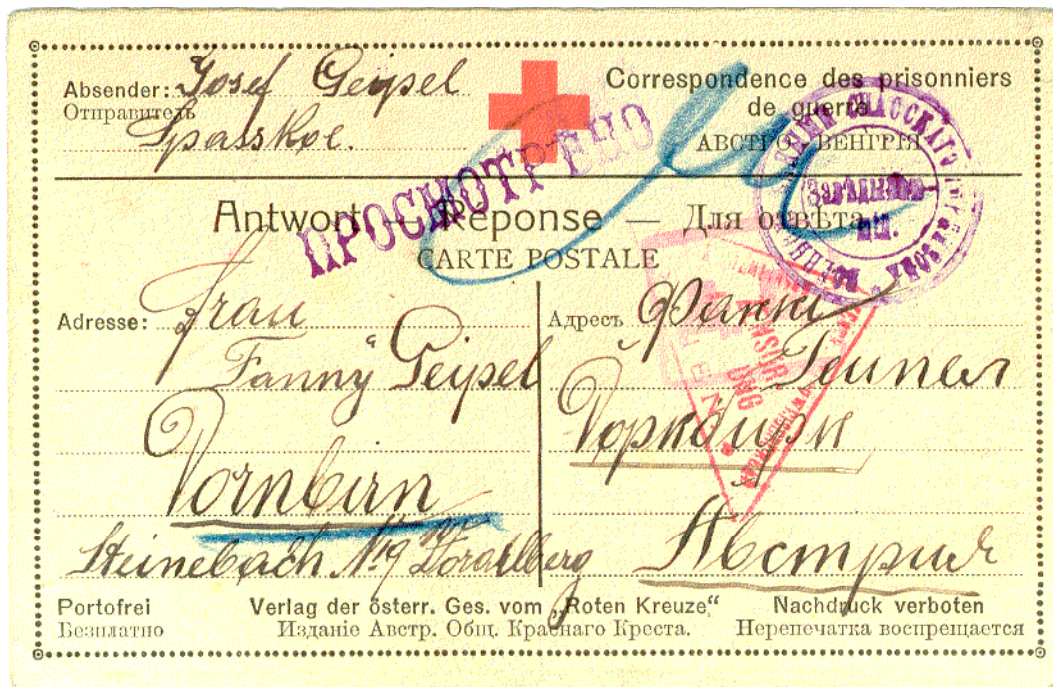
D. Y.
Воен. ценз. В. Ф. Боровский

“D.Ts. / Mil. Cens. V.F. Borovskiy”
on the enclosed card.



Obverse, reduced to 80%. An unusual usage for POW mail: a visitation card and envelope mailed in February 1915 to a POW in Omsk, censored first by the Red Cross in Austro-Hungary and again in Moscow and Omsk.

POWs in Eastern Siberia



Stretching from Irkutsk near Lake Baikal east to Vladivostok, Eastern Siberia was home to dozens of big POW concentration camps. Most of the mail was sent to Khabarovsk, Irkutsk, Vladivostok or Chita for censorship, but a few of the smaller garrisons and towns had their own censors.

ПРОСМОТРЕНО

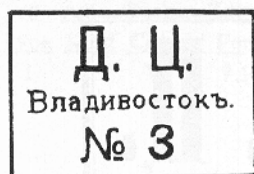
“Examined”

Above: Spasskoye to Dornbirn, Austria, 20 December 1916 (N.S.), censored by the “Supervisor of the Spasskoye Garrison POWs” (violet circular handstamp at upper right) and again at Vladivostok (“D.Ts.”).

“Spassk
Military Censor.”

**С п а с с к и й
Военный цензоръ.**

Spasskoye to Vienna, written on 15 April 1917, censored first at Spasskoye and again at Vladivostok (faint blue rectangle under the Spasskoye censor mark).

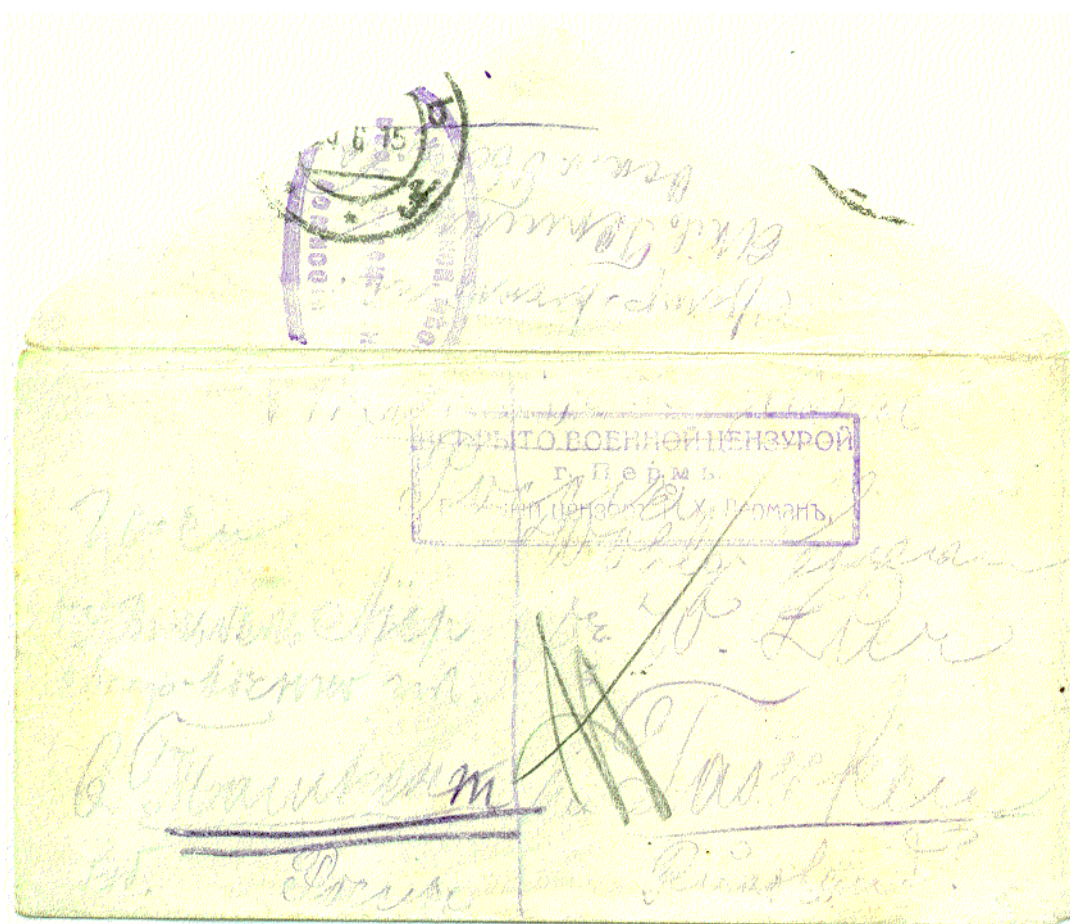


“D.Ts.
Vladivostok
No. 3”



POW Inter-Camp Mail

Examples of POW correspondence that bear two or more military censor marks are abundant, but those are almost invariably mail items moving “up the chain,” from censor to supervisor, say, or from hinterlands camp to major censorship office in Petrograd or Moscow. Far more rare are the items sent from a POW in one camp to a POW in another. It was difficult for prisoners to obtain the address of another camp inmate, and often, if such information was included in a letter by relatives in the Axis countries, it was blocked by censors.



An extremely rare POW-to-POW usage of 20 June 1915, mailed from an Austrian prisoner in the Perm' Province town of Osa to another in Tashkent. The letter was examined once in Perm' and again at the destination.

ВСКРЫТО ВОЕННОЙ ЦЕНЗУРОЙ
г. Пермь
Военный цензор Р.Х. Лермань.

*“Opened by Military Censorship
Perm’
Military Censor R.Kh. Lerman
“Turkestan Local Military
Censorship Commission”*



Censorship at the Front to Sub-Unit Level

Russia went to war in 1914 with over 3,000,000 troops. By war's end, over 16,000,000 had been called to arms, with the numbers of dead, wounded and sick exceeding 7,000,000. The amount of mail generated by these men required thousands of warrant officers and officers to examine it, a huge undertaking that dwarfed anything Russian military censors had done in the Russo-Japanese War. Despite the vast scope of this "enterprise," however, censorship of military mail is much less understood and documented than is censorship of civilian and POW mail. Many Russian soldiers were illiterate, so there was less mail to examine than the numbers of troops would suggest. Most of the censor marks emanating from FPOs, military sub-units, units and formations are rare to extremely rare.

Mail from the military could be censored in one of three ways: at the headquarters of the military outfit where it originated, at a nearby FPO or civilian post office, or not at all until it reached its destination in the rear areas, if then. Censors were chosen from the units and sub-units themselves; no one was recruited from the outside to perform that function. They were usually the lower-ranking officers, assigned to that drudgery by their commanders, and censorship was often not their only duty.

This section will look at military censorship from the standpoint of echelon in descending order, from front and military district HQs on the Army side down through corps, fortress, division, regiment, battalion, detachment and company, ending with non-combatant military establishments such as hospitals and training units. On the Navy side, the progression is also in descending order, from naval fortresses down through vessels (also in descending order from battleships to boats) to shore-based units, hospitals and training schools.

A PPC mailed at Tula's 12th City Post Branch Office by a soldier to Hospital No. 26 of the Khar'kov Red Cross Society, located at the [759th] Kolomna Regiment's barracks in Minsk, 27 December 1916. It was not censored until it reached Minsk on 31 December, either at the hospital or more likely at the regiment. Two-line "Examined / Staff Captain (signature)."

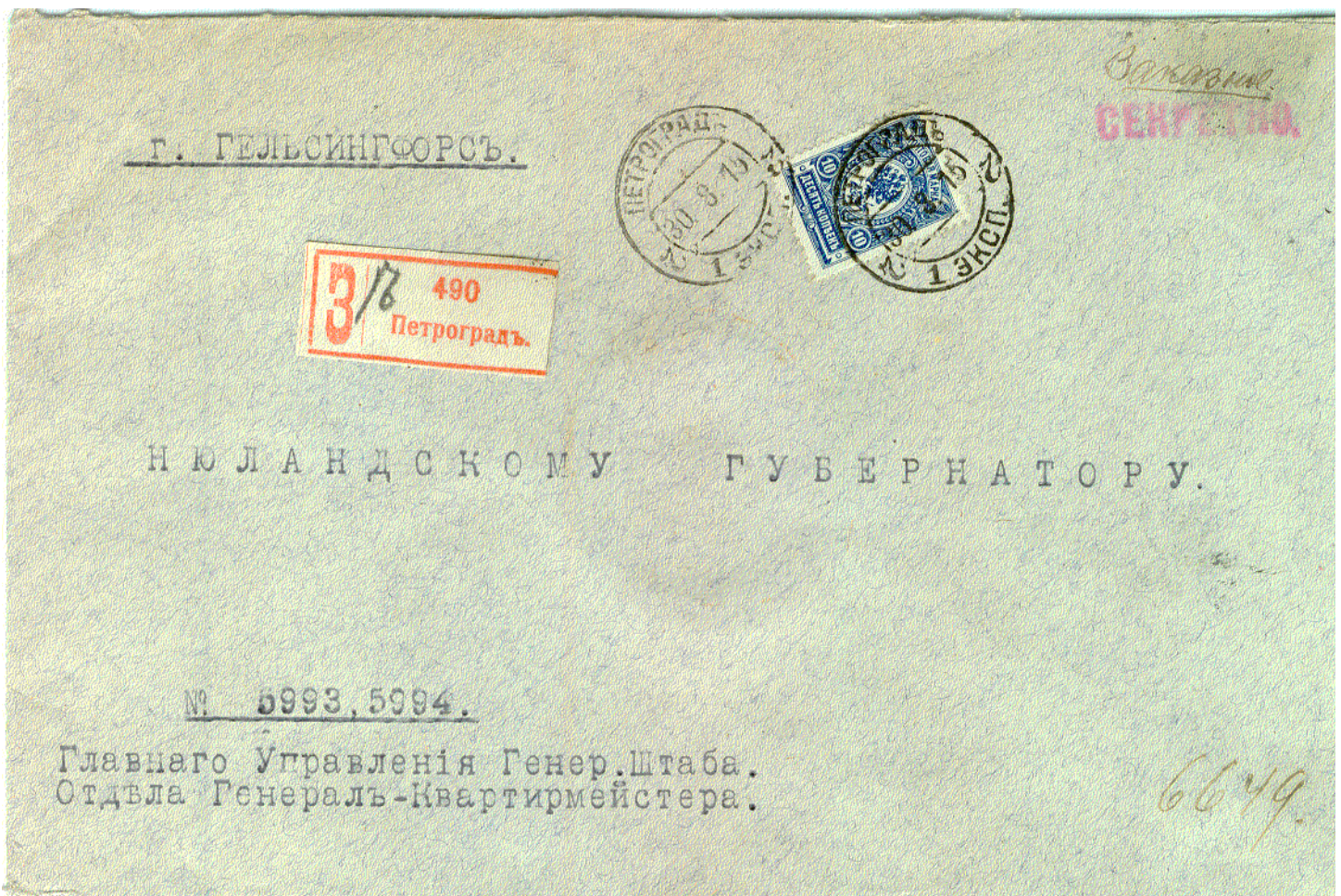


**The General Staff:
Main Directorate, Quartermaster-
General's Department**



The Minister of War was the head of military censorship, at least in theory, but its daily operations and the counter-intelligence analysis of the information it gleaned was the domain of the Quartermaster-General, in whose department the military censorship section resided.

This registered envelope, classified "SECRET," was sent on 30 August 1915 from Petrograd by the Quartermaster-General's Department of the General Staff Main Directorate to the Governor of Nyuland Province in Helsingfors, Grand Duchy of Finland. The wax seal on the reverse (enlarged at left) bears the same text as at lower left (arrow).

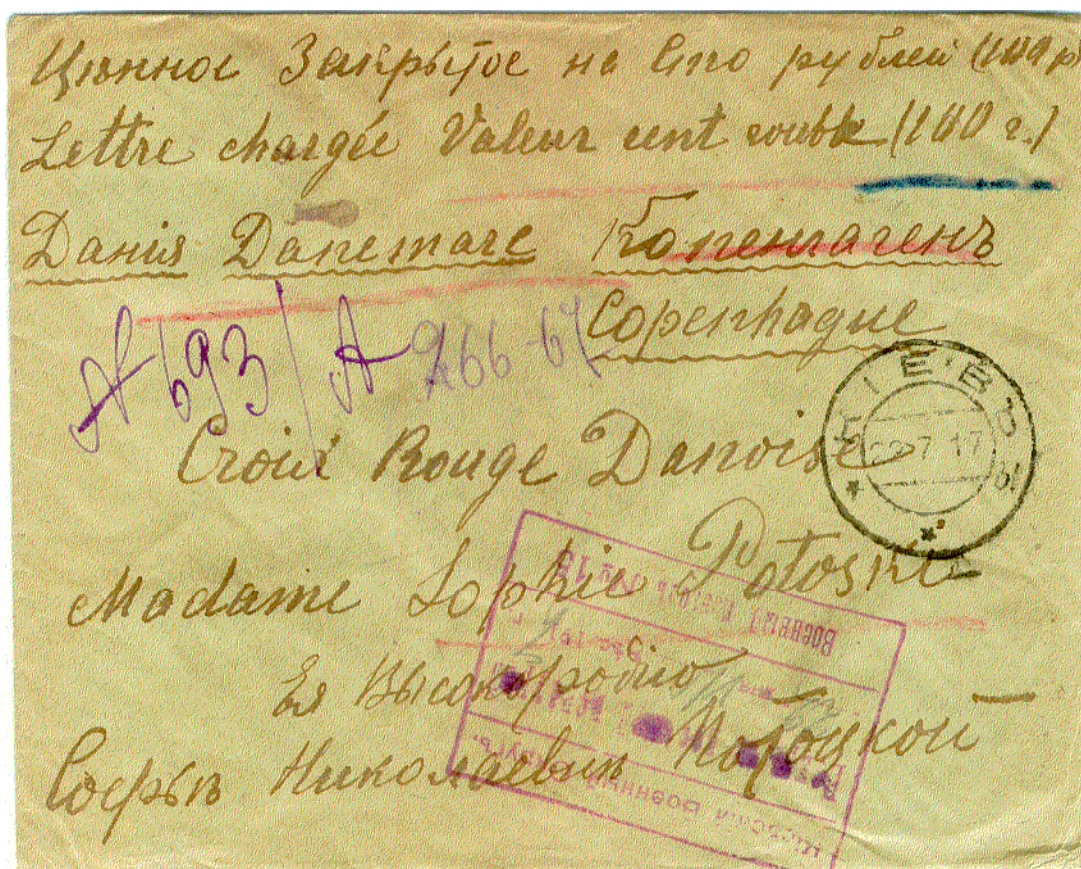


Censorship at the Military District Level: Kiev MD HQ

Кіевскій Военный Округъ.
Вскрыто военной цензурой
....." дня.....мѣс. 191 г.
Военный цензоръ №

*"Kiev Military District
Opened by Military Censorship
.....day.....month, 191
Military Censor No. 15"*

Unlike fronts, which could and often did move, military districts (MDs) stayed put. They were equivalent to a front, but because they were permanent, with fixed HQs, their censorship offices handled more than just mail to and from the military; they also processed large amounts of civilian and POW correspondence. Those MDs from which censor marks that specify the district have been recorded include Dvinsk, Kazan', Kiev, Minsk, Odessa, Petrograd, Turkestan and the Caucasus.



A declared-value money letter for 100 rubles, posted at Kiev on 22 July 1917 to the Danish Red Cross in Copenhagen. The Kiev MD censor entered the date of examination – 29 VII 17 – in pencil and allowed it to pass.

Censorship at Military District Level: Minsk MD HQ



An extremely well-censored cover sent from Warsaw to Minsk in September 1914, with a Warsaw mute cancel and a red-pen manuscript “*Military Censorship*” on the front (possibly applied at Warsaw). Three censor marks adorn the reverse: circular “*Minsk Military District Headquarters / Military Censorship / M.M. Shvarts*” and “*Minsk Military District Headquarters / Military Censorship / P.N. Lizgar,*” along with a two-line “*Opened by Military Censorship.*”



Obverse.

Censorship at Front Level: Main FPO at Velikiye Luki

Main field post offices were established at major railroad junctions along the state border in the theater of war soon after hostilities began. As the front advanced or retreated, so did they. There could be several main FPOs in the rear of a front; they did not necessarily correspond on a one-to-one basis. Their primary function was to collect and process mail coming to the front from the rear, acting as central distribution points to ensure that correspondence was routed to the correct State post office or FPO further forward. They also handled inter-front mail until the end of 1914, and for the first part of the war, mail from the front to the rear. These were large operations, with 100+ individuals handling just the mail. The censorship offices set up at these main FPOs could also be substantial.



A picture postcard from Revel' to a soldier in the 335th Tver' *Druzhina* of Foot, 1st Company, 4th Platoon, mailed on 17 June 1916. It reached the Northern Front's Main FPO at Velikiye Luki on 20 June, where it was "Read / [by] Warrant Officer Geyne" (Heine).

Censorship at Front Level: L'vov Main FPO

ДОЗВОЛЕНО ВОЕННОЙ ЦЕНЗУРОЙ

“Permitted by Military Censorship,”
with the signature of a 2nd Lt. in the
blank rectangle below the words.



A POW card from Tsarev, Astrakhan' Province, mailed to Vienna on 12 May 1915. It was examined first by the Tsarev District Military Chief (violet circular handstamp at upper right), then by Military Censor Fok (Vock) at Tsaritsyn, Saratov Province. From there it was inexplicably routed to the Main Field Post Office at L'vov, where a 2nd Lt. examined it the third time.

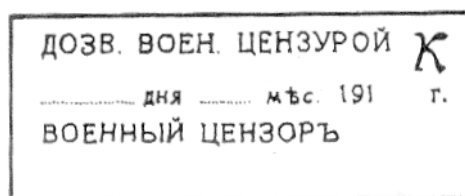
Просмотрѣно
военной цензурой
г. Царицынѣ
Военный цензоръ Фокъ.

*“Examined
by Military Censorship
Tsaritsyn
Military Censor Fok.”*

Censorship at Army Level: FPO Letter “Ye” (9th Army, Southwestern Front)

Field post offices designated by a letter rather than a number were usually assigned to an army HQ (on rare occasion, to a front HQ or a corps HQ). Their task was to handle the mail of units subordinate to that particular army, and they too had censors attached. FPO Letter “E” was situated near 9th Army HQ at Kamenets-Podol’skiy when this card was mailed.

Blue rectangular handstamp
“Permitted by Military
Censorship K / 27th day 7th
month of 1916 / Military Censor
(initials in blue pencil).”



A PPC bearing an “On Active Duty” circular violet free-frank handstamp, dispatched from FPO Letter “Ye” (serial “g” canceller) on 28 July 1916 and addressed to Petrograd. It was censored the day before, and bears two extremely rare censor marks: the one shown above and a two-line marking at top – “Contains no impermissible information. Translator (initials in red pencil).”

Censorship at Army Level: XII Army HQ, Northern Front

Censors could also be attached to the headquarters of a major formation, such as an army, rather than at the field post office that supported the HQ. These censors were limited to checking the correspondence emanating from the HQ's personnel. It is unlikely that they would have been concerned with the mail of subordinate units, because that would have been routed through the FPO.

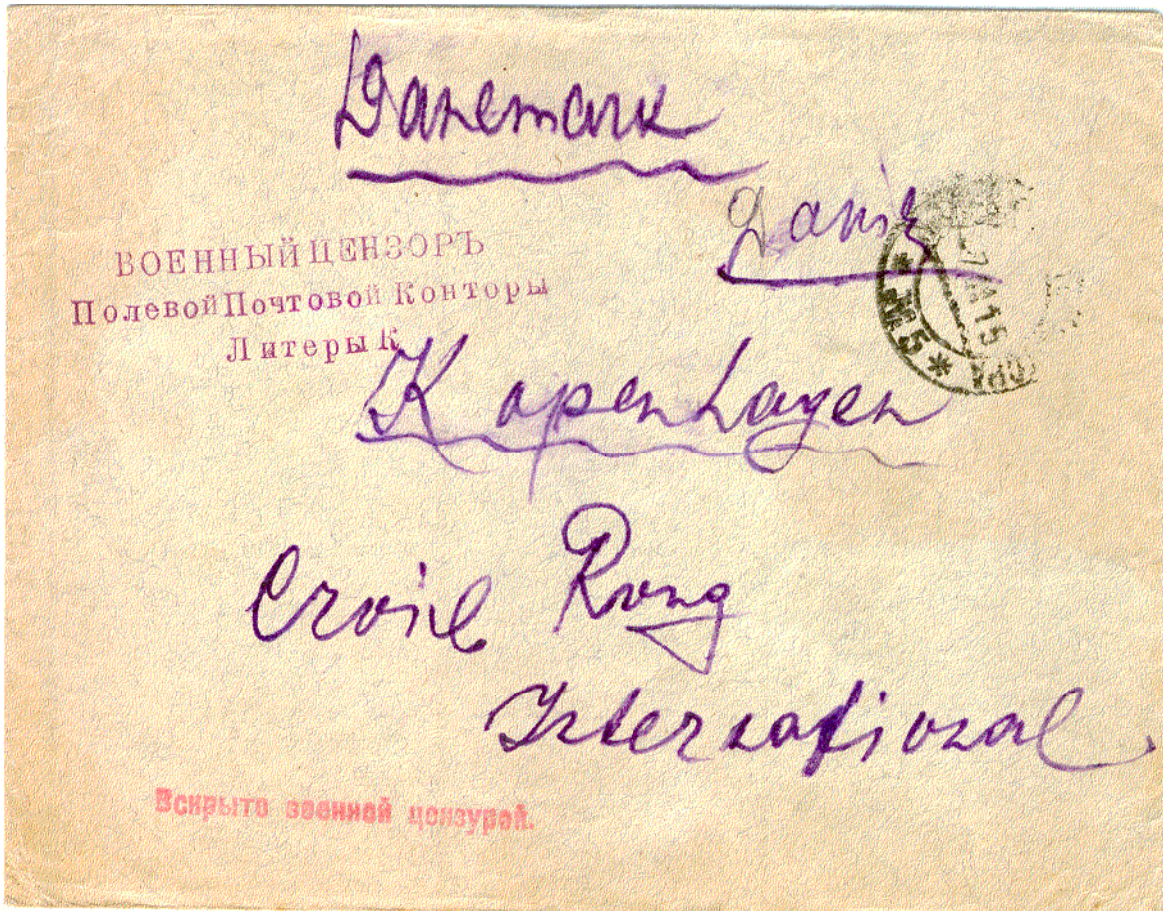
Штабъ XII армії
ВСКРЫТО ВОЕННОЙ ЦЕНЗУРОЙ
Военный цензоръ № .

"XII Army Headquarters Opened
by Military Censorship Military
Censor No. 3."



A PPC mailed by an officer in the Duty General's Department of 12th Army HQ to Petrograd via Field Post Office Letter U (located at Wenden on the Northern Front), serial "v," 8 November 1915.

**Censorship at Army Level:
5th Army HQ, Northern Front**



This envelope was mailed on 7 November 1915 by a soldier in a workers' battalion (unit cachet on reverse) in Northern Front's 3rd Infantry Corps, which at the time was supported by FPO No. 5. The censor at the FPO applied the red straight-line marking at bottom left ("*Opened by Military Censorship*"), and then the envelope went up-echelon to FPO Letter K (Kreizburg), which supported 5th Army HQ. There it was examined again ("*Military Censor / of Field Post Office / Letter K*") before being sent on to Copenhagen.



Unit cachet on reverse:
"*Workers' Battalion at
the Directorate of the
Dvinsk Chief for Lines-
of-Communication.*"

Censorship at Corps Level: FPO No. 7, 5th Army Corps, Western Front

Numbered field post offices (*polevyya pochtovyaya kontory*, transliterating from the old orthography) were for the most part attached to Army corps, usually set up at or near the corps headquarters. Mail moving its way from the corps' subordinate elements up-echelon to its FPO, if it had not already been censored at lower level, could be examined at the FPO.



A PPC from a soldier in the 1st Field Hospital of the 10th Infantry Division (circular violet unit cachet at upper right) to Kotel'nich, Vyatka Province, posted on 30 August 1915 from FPO No. 7, which supported Western Front's 5th Army Corps. Straight-line "Opened by Mil. Censorship" at top, with "Acting Military Censor" below. The censor wrote in "5 Arm. C." and what may be his initials after that. It took 10 days to reach its destination, and then not before it was examined a second time, at Vyatka, by Military Censor Masalitinov.

"Opened by Military Censorship,
Mil. Censor Masalitinov" (applied
in Vyatka).



**Censorship at Corps Level:
FPO No. 16, 14th Army Corps, Western Front**



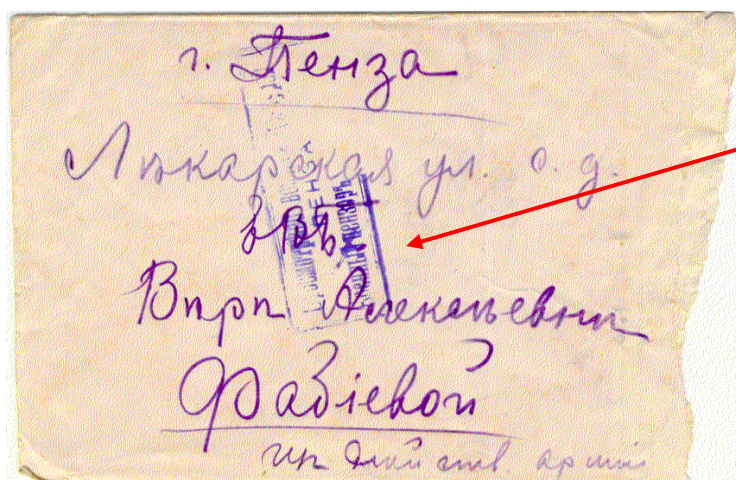
FPO No. 16 (serial “b” canceller) to Switzerland, posted on 21 January 1916. It was censored the following day (violet date stamp at left – “22 Jan. 1916” – by “Military Censor 2nd Lt. (signature). The second single-line handstamp reads “Opened by Military Censorship.” Swiss military censorship opened it a second time. Once assigned to a corps HQ, the FPO usually accompanied it wherever it went. 14th Army Corps, for instance, fought on four different fronts during the war – Southwestern, Northwestern, Western and Northern – and FPO No. 16 never left it.



**Censorship at Corps Level:
FPO No. 19, 17th Army Corps,
Southwestern Front**



A letter posted from FPO No. 19 on 7 December 1915 to Penza, arriving 13 days later. Censored probably at the FPO by a lieutenant (manuscript "Poruchik and his last name) and a second time when it reached Penza by Military Censor No. 84.



Просмотрѣно военной цензурой
ПЕНЗА
Военный цензорь 84.

On obverse:
"Examined by Military Censorship
PENZA
Military Censor 84."

**Censorship at Corps Level:
FPO No. 37, 27th Army Corps,
Northern Front**

**ВСКРЫТО
ВОЕННОЙ ЦЕНЗУРОЙ**

Военный цензоръ

Подпоручикъ Шревш

“Opened
by Military Censorship
Military Censor
2nd Lt. Yurevich”



A member of the 302nd Surazh Infantry Regiment’s combat engineer team sent this PPC to Petrograd via FPO No. 37 on 16 January 1917. That FPO supported 27th Army Corps on the Northern Front.

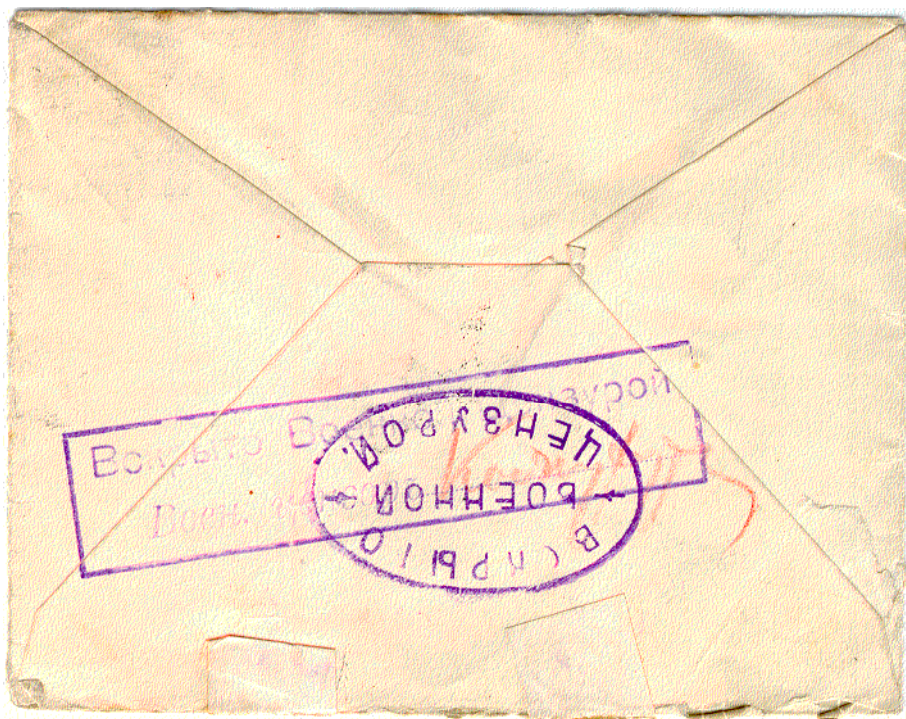
**Censorship at Corps Level:
FPO No. 30, 3rd Caucasus Army Corps,
Southwestern Front**



Written by a soldier at the HQ of the 53rd Infantry Division (violet unit cachet at upper right), this picture postcard was mailed on 13 February 1916 at FPO 30, which supported 3rd Caucasus Army Corps. The three-line black censor mark reads, “*Opened by Military Censorship / [at] Field Post Office [No.] 30 / Military Censor No. 2.*”

(This was the second 53rd Infantry Division; the Germans inflicted heavy casualties on the first one at Verzhbolov in the Russian retreat from Eastern Prussia in 1914, then wiped it out in the woods around Avgustovo. The division was re-constituted in the Moscow Military District and took part in the Brusilov offensive into Volhynia.)

**Censorship at Corps Level:
Reserve FPO No. 128, 30th Army Corps,
Southwestern Front**



The rectangular handstamp reads “*Opened by Military Censorship / Mil. Censor (signature in red pencil).*” It was censored a second time when it reached Petrograd (oval handstamp).

This censor handstamp was evidently introduced in or after March 1915.

Reserve FPO No. 128 (serial “v” canceller) to Geneva, Switzerland, posted on 17 May 1915. Despite the fact it now supported a corps, the “Zapasnaya” (Reserve) in the canceller had not yet been excised.



Obverse.

**Censorship at Corps Level:
Reserve FPO No. 128, 30th Army Corps,
Southwestern Front**

This Reserve FPO was originally formed to support the Dnyestr Detachment, but its status was upgraded to a corps FPO in November 1914, and it stayed with the 30th Army Corps for the rest of the war.

This cover was submitted to Reserve FPO No. 128 (serial "v" canceller) on 24 March 1915, but it had to await censorship for three days before it was dispatched to Copenhagen.



On reverse,
reduced.

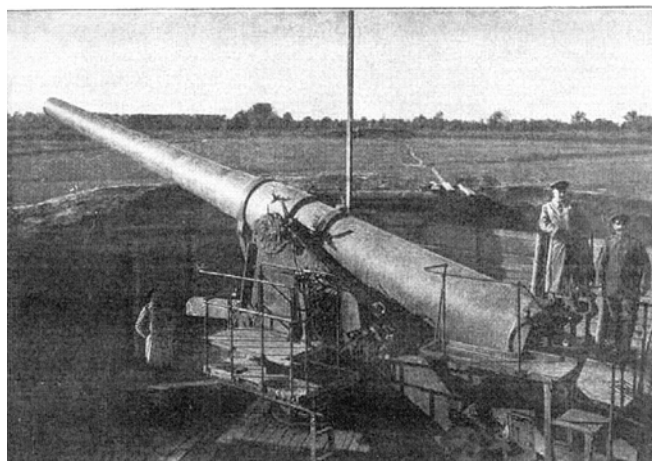


*“Opened by
Military Censorship.”*

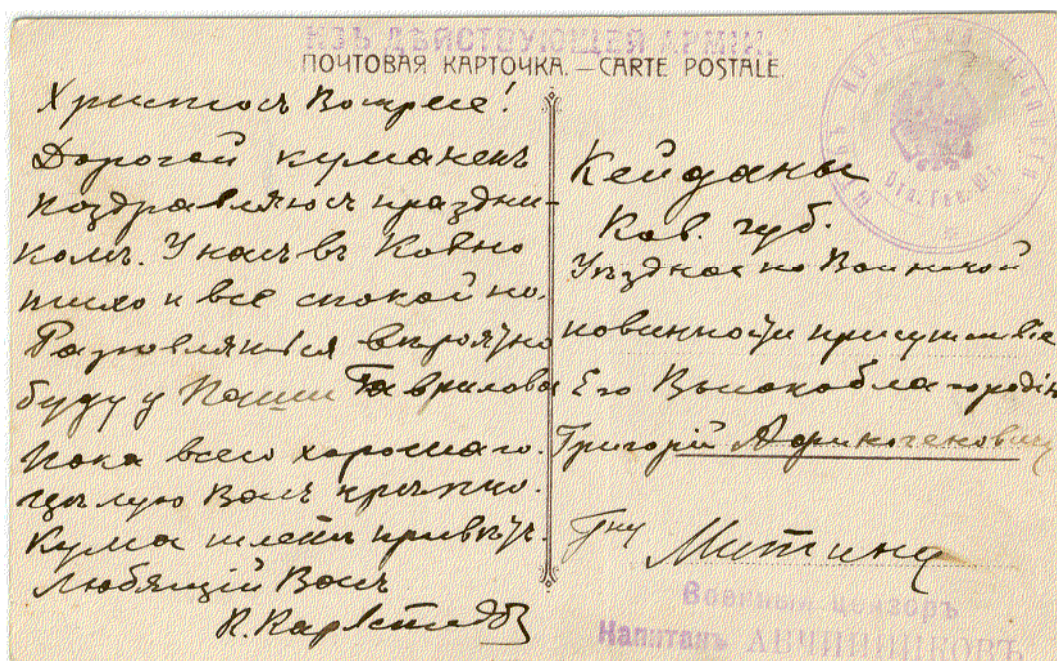
Note the similarity between this censor mark and that of Stage FPTO 237 in the next frame. (The violet circular “D.Ts” marking was applied in Petrograd.)

Censorship at Fortress Level: Kovno Fortress

The series of fortresses along Russia's western reaches were designed to withstand concerted attack by large enemy formations. The in-depth, extensive defenses bristled with guns and had large numbers of infantry and artillerymen to man the walls, casemates and firing positions. Fortresses were on an hierarchical par with corps-level formations, and just as did corps, their HQs during wartime had permanent censors assigned to them, as well as inherent censors in many of the units within the fortresses.



A 10-inch naval gun emplaced at Kovno Fortress.
(Photo from <http://www.kovno.ru/index.php?module...>)



An Easter greetings PPC from the General Staff Section at Kovno Fortress HQ (undated) to Keydany, examined by “Military Censor / Captain Avchinnikov.”

**Censorship at the Regimental Level:
Unknown Regiment, 47th Army Corps,
Rumanian Front**

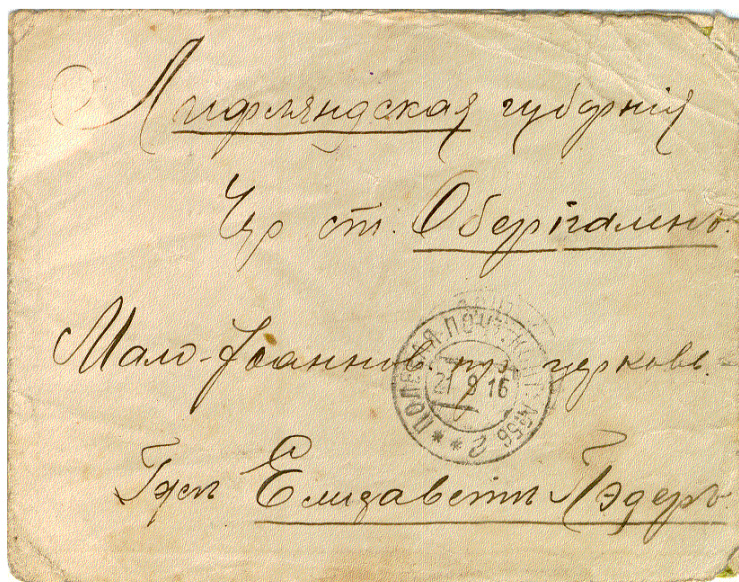


ПРОСМОТРѢНО ПОЛКОВОЮ ЦЕНЗУРОЮ

"Examined by Regimental Censorship."

Sent post-free ("*On Active Duty*" circular handstamp) by a soldier in an unknown regiment. In addition to the straight-line censor mark, there is a faint penciled inscription on the top flap: "*Seen by Warrant Officer (last name)*".

Obverse. Addressed to a church near Oberpalen, Lifyand Province, and mailed on 21 September 1916 through FPO No. 56 (serial "g" canceller), which supported 47th Army Corps from at least September 1916 to the end of the war.



Censorship at Regimental Level: 264th Akhul'ginskiy Infantry Regiment, Caucasus Front

The two sewn-together postcards below represent a most unusual usage. Both were sent to a Russian POW in Feldbach, Austria, one from a town in Odessa Military District in early January 1917 (card on the bottom), the other from the 261st Akhul'ginskiy Infantry Regiment via Stage FPTO No. 245 in late December 1916. The 261st Regiment was a famous part of the Caucasus Army's 66th Infantry Division, and participated in the Russian advance into Persia. It saw heavy fighting on the banks of the Euphrates River and at Melaskert, Van and Erzerum against the Turks.



The black-pencil manuscript inscription at upper left (arrow) – *Checked / by Regim[ental] Censor / W[arrant] O[fficer] (signature)*” – was applied at the 261st (lilac unit cachet at upper right) upon dispatch. It reached Stage FPTO 245, where it was sent back to the rear area of the Caucasus Front on 29 December 1916. It was censored again – two-line violet handstamp “*Opened by Military Censorship / Cauc. Military Censor No. 58*” – either at the stage FPTO or a sedentary civilian post office in the Caucasus, where the examiner scratched out part of the stage FPTO’s number before releasing the card.

Censorship at Regimental Level: Reserve Machinegun Regiment



Above: A PPC with Easter greetings card addressed to Novozybkov, written and examined on 6 April 1915. There are two elements to the censor mark: “*Opened by Military Censorship / of the Reserve Machinegun Regiment / Censor,*” followed by a separate handstamp – “*Warrant Officer Pastukhov*” – and a censorship datestamp of “*6 Apr. 1915.*” The violet circular marking at lower left is the regiment’s unit cachet. Below: No. 15 in the Scherer, Nabholz & Co. series published by the G.V. Gruzintsev firm in Luga, 1916: “*Machinegun in position.*”



Censorship at Battalion Level: Reserve Machinegun Battalion, Oranienbaum



**Просмотрѣно военной цензурой
Пулеметнаго запаснаго батальонѣ**

*“Examined by Military Censorship of
the Reserve Machinegun Battalion.”*



Reverse: One wing of the Officer’s Rifle School at Oranienbaum. The Estonian officer who mailed it was either attending the school or had recently graduated from it. That, plus the fact that the censor who read the card had to know Estonian, indicates that the Reserve Machinegun Battalion was probably located somewhere in the general area of Oranienbaum. The card reached Revel’ on 8 July 1915.

Censorship at Battalion Level: 356th Lifyand Druzhdina of Foot



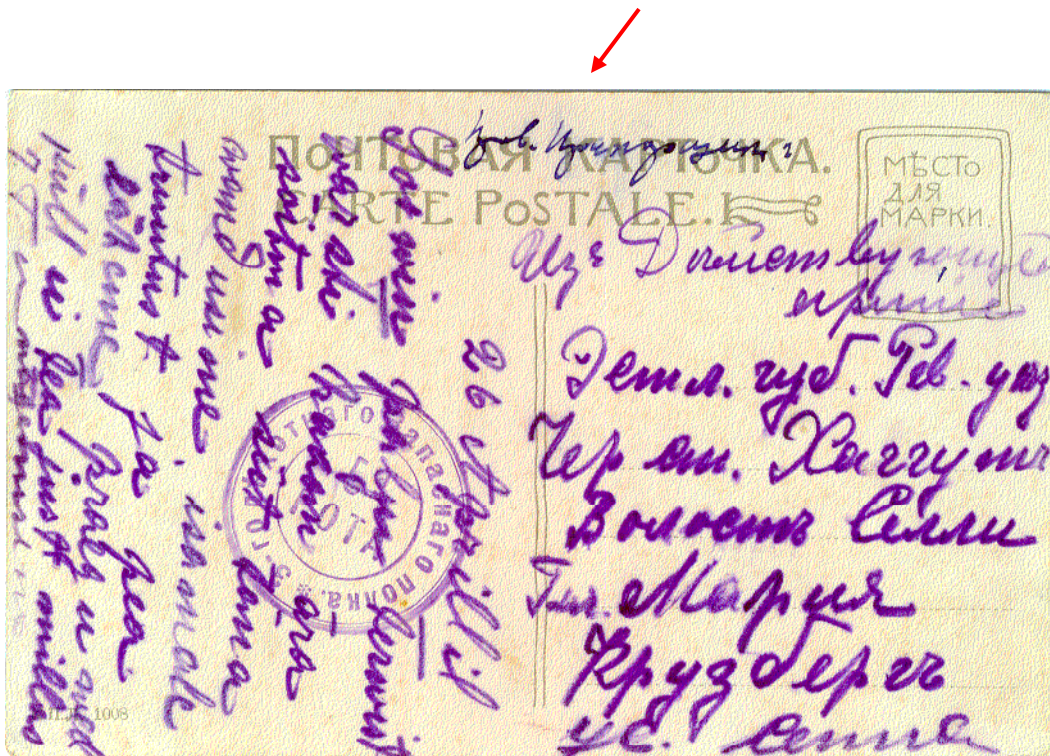
Two picture postcards bearing the two-line marking “Examined by military censorship / 356th Lifyand Druzhdina of Foot.” A druzhdina was a battalion-sized home-guard outfit, assigned to keep order in a specific area, so it was not a maneuver unit. Above: Posted on 16 February 1915 at Kambi, Lifyand Province to a country estate near Yur’ev, re-routed to Vammelsuu, Finland. Below: Addressed to Petrograd in February 1915 and re-routed to Vammelsuu, Finland.



Censorship at Company Level: 5th Company, 3rd Reserve Infantry Regiment

The lower a military unit's echelon was, the less likely it was to have a censorship handstamp, even though the overwhelming majority had unit cachets. The junior officer(s) who were assigned to examine their unit's mail were obliged to scribble something on each card or letter. This card bears just a spare manuscript notation "*Prov. Praporshchik*" (Examined, Warrant Officer), and no signature.

A PPC mailed on "26 April" by an Estonian serving in the 5th Company of the 3rd Reserve Infantry Regiment (violet circular unit cachet). Addressed to Selli Rural District Administration in Estlyand Province, the card bears no postmarks.



Russian infantry fording a stream, shown on a Scherer, Nabholtz & Co. PPC issued by G.V. Gruzintsev in Luga, 1916.

Censorship at Company Level: 12th Company, Siberian Rifle Regiment

Written on 22 February 1916, this PPC was sent to Semipalatinsk, where it arrived on 8 March. The writer was a warrant officer in the 12th Company of a Siberian Rifle Regiment (the number is obscured), and because he gave his name and rank at the bottom of the card, he may have been the censor who applied the lilac straight-line “EXAMINED” handstamp at top.



11th Company, 2nd Reserve Infantry Regiment



A soldier in the 2nd Reserve Infantry Regiment, 11th Company (deployed somewhere in the Grand Duchy of Finland), mailed this PPC to Petrograd on 9 June 1916 (N.S.). The violet censor mark(s) reads “Exam. by Military Censorship / Military Censor / D....” The location in the terse message – “Greetings from ---. I’m alive and well. Boris” – was inked out by the censor.

Censorship (and the Lack of It) at Company Level

When texts were written in a minority language, especially in those of the Baltic provinces, Russian censors needed help. This card, sent from Rikhimyaki in the Grand Duchy of Finland to Torgel' in Lifyand Province on 18 Feb. 1916 (N.S.), was written in Estonian. At the top of the card the censor wrote: *Estonian / Private Fooz translated / Warrant Officer (signature) read [it].*" Blue circular unit cachet of 8th Company, 172nd Reserve Infantry Battalion.



"Military Censorship
26 VIII 1916
Nikolayshtadt"

*Not read
Warrant Off. (signature)*

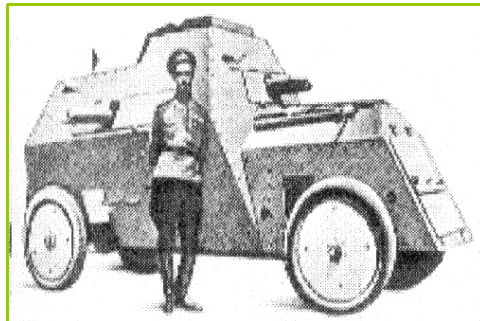
"Not read
Warrant Off. (signature)"



A warrant officer in the 2nd Platoon, 11th Company of an unknown unit near Nikolaistadt (Grand Duchy of Finland) alerted other military censors to the fact that he had not censored this postcard to Kerro, Lifyand Province. It was censored at Nikolaistadt on 26 August 1916 (N.S.).

Censorship at Company Level: Reserve Armored Car Company, Petrograd

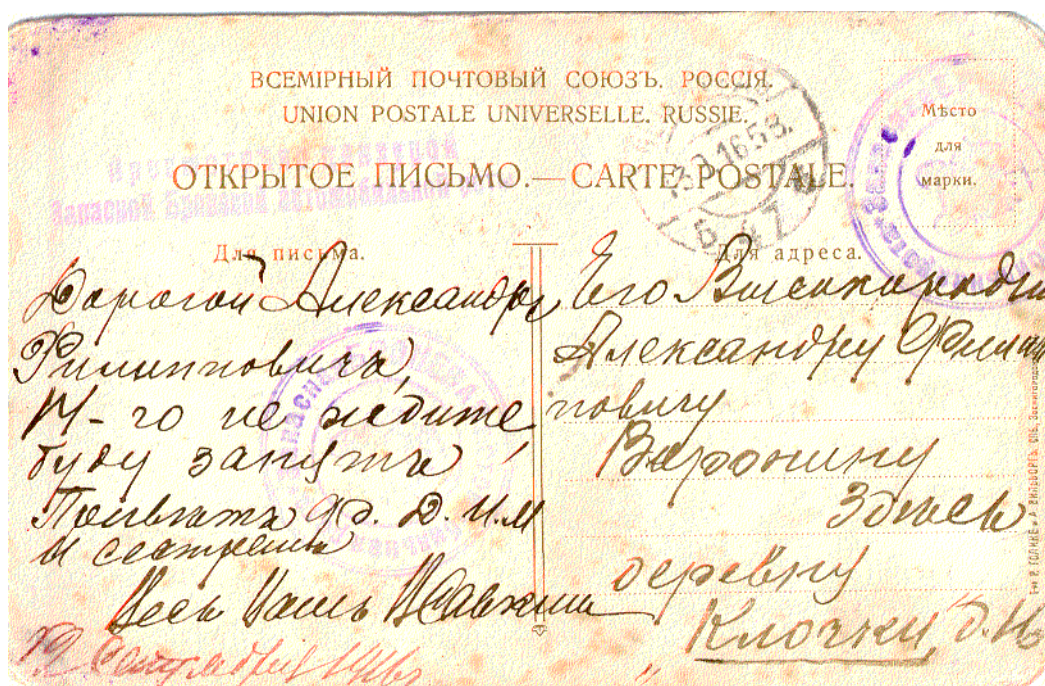
Armored cars played a very visible role in the February 1917 Revolution and the subsequent Bolshevik coup of October 1917. This postcard may well have been sent by one of the individuals who aided in those actions.



A Russian armored car, built on the chassis of a “Russo-Balt” M truck, ca. 1914. (Picture from “*Broneavtomobili russkoy armii*,” <http://www.museum.ru/museum/bronem...>)

Просмотрѣно цензурой
Запасной Броневой Автомобильной роты

“Examined by Censorship / of the Reserve Armored Car Company.”



A PPC from a soldier in the Reserve Armored Car Company, mailed locally in Petrograd on 13 August 1916. The red-ink manuscript “12 September 1916” entry at lower left, probably the day the addressee received it, indicates a considerable delay.

**Censorship at the Battery Level:
3rd Battery, Independent Mountain
Artillery Battalion, Caucasian Front**

So-called “stage field post-and-telegraph branch offices” were set up along an army’s lines of communication. They served troops in the rear areas, and accepted mail from civilians as well. They were assigned numbers from 201 up, and at war’s end there were 80 of them.

Addressed to the Zemstvo Psychiatric Hospital at Stavropol’, this cover was mailed on 6 October 1916 from the 3rd Battery (equivalent to a company) of an independent mountain artillery battalion through Field Stage Post-and-Telegraph Branch Office No. 202, somewhere on the Caucasian Front. It did not reach Stavropol’ until the 15th.



Прочитано
пр. Нафетануки

On reverse:

Manuscript “Examined / Warrant Officer Lordkipanidze”
entered upon censorship at the 3rd Battery.

Censorship at Battery Level: 2nd Battery, 38th Artillery Brigade, Rumanian Front



A soldier in 2nd Battery, 38th Artillery Brigade sent this PPC to Petrograd via Reserve FPO No. 169 (serial “v”) on 9 November 1916. That RFPO supported the Baltic Naval Division at Sulina on the Rumanian Front from October 1916 to the end of the war. The violet two-line censor mark at top right reads “Read in the unit at time of dispatch,” and the censor’s name and rank (*poruchik* – lieutenant) follow. Note that he obliterated parts of the PPC’s small text at two points in the upper left part of the card. These can be read through the ink – the town of Roman in Romania – and that may well have been the approximate location of the 38th Artillery Brigade at that time. The town name and hotel shown on the reverse have also been (poorly) inked out.



No. 26 in a series – “Loading a light artillery piece” – produced by the Moscow firm of Scherer, Nabholz & Co. and sold by G.V. Gruzintsev in Luga, 1916. “Authorized by Military Censorship” inscription on the reverse.

Censorship at the Battery Level: 2nd Battery, 1st Caucasus Mortar Battalion, Caucasian Front

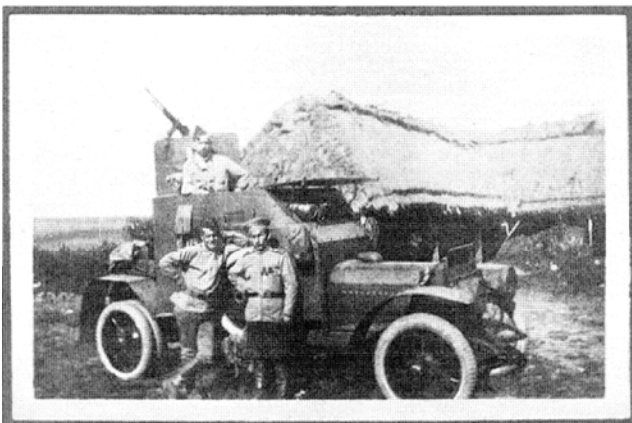
A PPC from a soldier in the 1st Platoon, 2nd Battery of the 1st Caucasus Mortar Battalion, Caucasus Army to Ufa. It reached its destination on 6 July 1915.



A lieutenant in the 2nd Battery had no proper censor mark, so was forced to jury-rig one from his handstamp that he normally used on the unit's paperwork. He wrote in "Examined," next applied the violet two-line handstamp "Clerk / Lieutenant," then signed his name. The faint unit cachet is at lower left.

Censorship of Allied Military Mail: Belgian Army in Russia

Russian military units could censor their own mail if they so desired, but allied units fighting on Russian soil were another matter. They were required to submit their correspondence to a Russian FPO or sedentary post office, where it would be examined or sent back to Petrograd for censorship as international correspondence.



In 1915 the Belgians sent an armored car unit to fight alongside the Russians. It was shipped first to Arkhangel'sk, then traveled by rail to Petrograd, where it stayed for several months before heading to Galicia. It was not until June 1916 that it finally engaged in combat.



A picture postcard from a soldier or officer in the Belgian Army, mailed to Paris at Petrograd on 29 December 1915 and examined there. The unit cachet reads “Belgian Army in Russia / Automobile Artillery and Machinegun Regiment.” Rectangular “Opened by Military Censorship / Petrograd / Military Censor No. 382.”

Censorship and Rear-Area FPOs: Stage FPTO No. 228, Southwestern Front

Stage field post-and-telegraph offices were established in rear areas where there were no Russian State postal establishments (i.e., sedentary post offices). This meant that most of these SFPTOs operated on occupied enemy territory.

Up to January 1915, this SFPTO had been located in Czernowitz, but that month it left the city and followed 9th Army HQ. When the cover below was posted, this office would have been somewhere in the Tarnopol region, serving the army's rear area.



SFPTO No. 228 (canceller with no serial letter) to Copenhagen, 24 February 1915. The problem of censoring the letter was passed back to Kiev (blue pencil “*Kiev cens.*”), where it was examined and stamped “*Opened / by Military Censorship.*”

That this cover was passed back to Kiev could have meant one of several things: there were no censors currently available at SFPTO No. 228; censors were available but their workload at that point was too great; the enclosed letter was in a language they couldn't read, or there was something else about it – the need for a criminal or counter-intelligence investigation, for instance – that needed resolution at a higher echelon.

**Censorship at Rear-Area FPOs:
Stage FPTO No. 237, Droghobich, Austro-Hungary**



This letter, mailed by a civilian on 29 March 1915 to Copenhagen, is an example of censorship at a stage field post-and-telegraph branch office. Assessed postage due of 14 kopecks (double the missing postage – 7 kopecks – to make up the standard 10-kopeck international rate – oval handstamp) at the SFPTO, it received two censor marks on the reverse: rectangular “*Opened by military censorship*” and a separate straight-line “*Military Censor (signature).*” SFPTO No. 237 was located at Droghobich on the Southwestern Front.



Censorship at Reserve FPOs: Reserve FPO No. 114, L'vov

Reserve FPOs usually served an area where numerous military units were deployed, rather than a single, specific formation. Their numerical designations were chosen from a block of numbers from 101 to 182, although there were only 39 of them at war's end. They handled both military and civilian mail; censor marks have been recorded from a handful of them.

Д. Ц. Воен. Ценз. Дзюрковскій

*"Permitted by Censorship
Military Censor Dzyurkovskiy"*

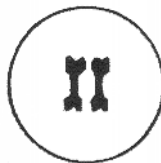


After the Russian offensive into Galicia early in the war, Reserve FPO No. 114 deployed to L'vov (Lemberg) on the Southwestern Front, and operated there from August 1914 to May 1915. This postcard was presented to RFPO No. 114 (serial "d" canceller) by a civilian on 27 May 1915, not long before the Russians were forced to retreat. It was addressed to Vienna via Copenhagen.

Censorship at Military Installations: Fort Alekseyevskiy



*"Fort Alekseyevskiy
Military Censor."*



The significance of this marking is unknown. It appears to be a stylized Roman numeral "II."



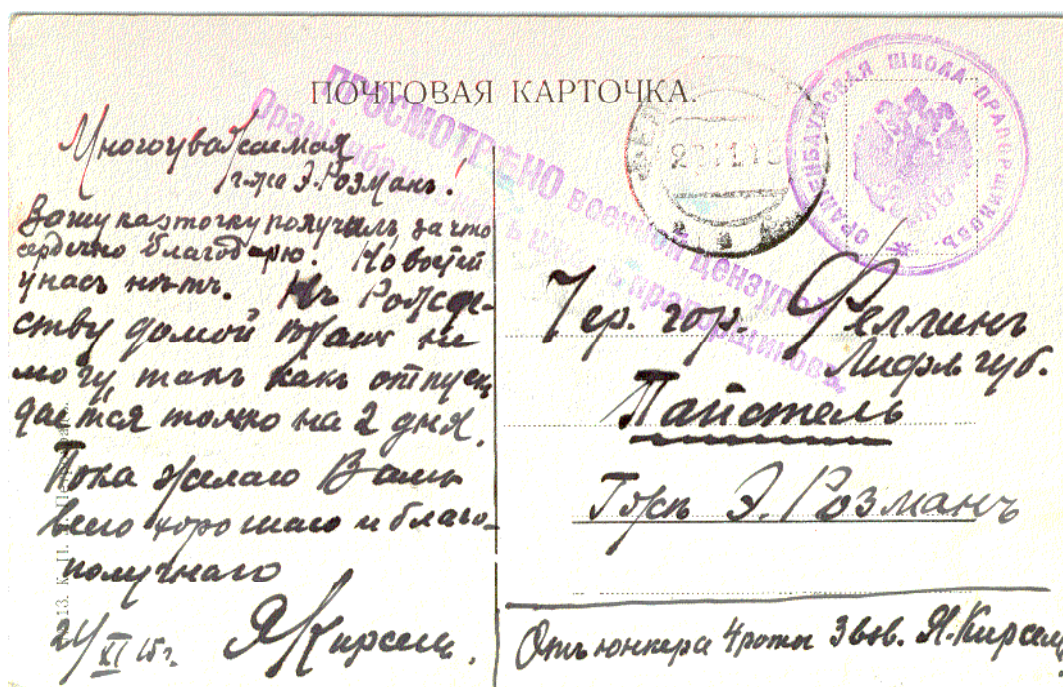
A greeting card from a woman at Fort Alekseyevskiy to nearby Oranienbaum via Petrograd, 29 February 1916.

Construction on the fort started in 1909, along with Fort Ino, and became operational by 1915. Their purpose was to defend the entrance to the Gulf of Finland, but Fort Alekseyevskiy never saw any action during WWI.

Censorship at Non-Combatant Facilities: Oranienbaum Warrant Officers' School



Oranienbaum and environs, located west of Petrograd on the southern shore of the Gulf of Finland, was home to several training facilities. The picture at left (on the reverse of the PPC below) shows the Officers' Rifle School at Oranienbaum.



A PPC sent on 27 November 1915 to Fellin, Liflyand Province by a junker (cadet) in the 3rd Platoon, 4th Company at the school. The free-frank unit cachet is at top right, alongside the two-line handstamp "Examined by Military Censorship / Oranienbaum Warrant Officers' School."

Censorship at Hospitals



In addition to the hundreds of field hospitals, medical trains and other facilities in the rear areas of the fronts, there were many more in the big cities, especially Moscow and Petrograd. Wealthy individuals donated large sums of money to establish hospitals and infirmaries for the troops; others, much less rich, pooled their resources to do the same. Their mail had to be censored, too.

Manuscript entry on reverse:
 "Opened
 by Military Censorship
 Military Censor
 (signature)"

*Вскрыто
 Военной Цензурой
 Военный Цензор
 Н. К. [Signature]*



A free-frank letter from the “Infirmary of Her August Imperial Majesty Grand Duchess Militsa Nikolayevna’s Committee” (green circular unit cachet) to Preobrazhenka, Taurida Province. Posted at Moscow’s 9th Branch Office on 10 January 1915.

**Censorship at Naval Fortresses:
1st Company,
1st Kronstadt Artillery Regiment**



Obverse.

Kronstadt Fortress, with its huge naval guns and much of the Baltic Fleet, guarded the sea approaches to Petrograd.

This patriotic cover was posted by a soldier in the 1st Company of the 1st Kronstadt Artillery Regiment to Kesovo, Tver' Province, prior to 24 March 1915. The censor mark reads "Opened by Military Censorship / Military Censor / Warrant Officer Przhisetskiy," and is accompanied by what appears to be a control number – "5."



Censorship at Naval Fortresses: Special Training Group, Kronstadt Fortress Artillery



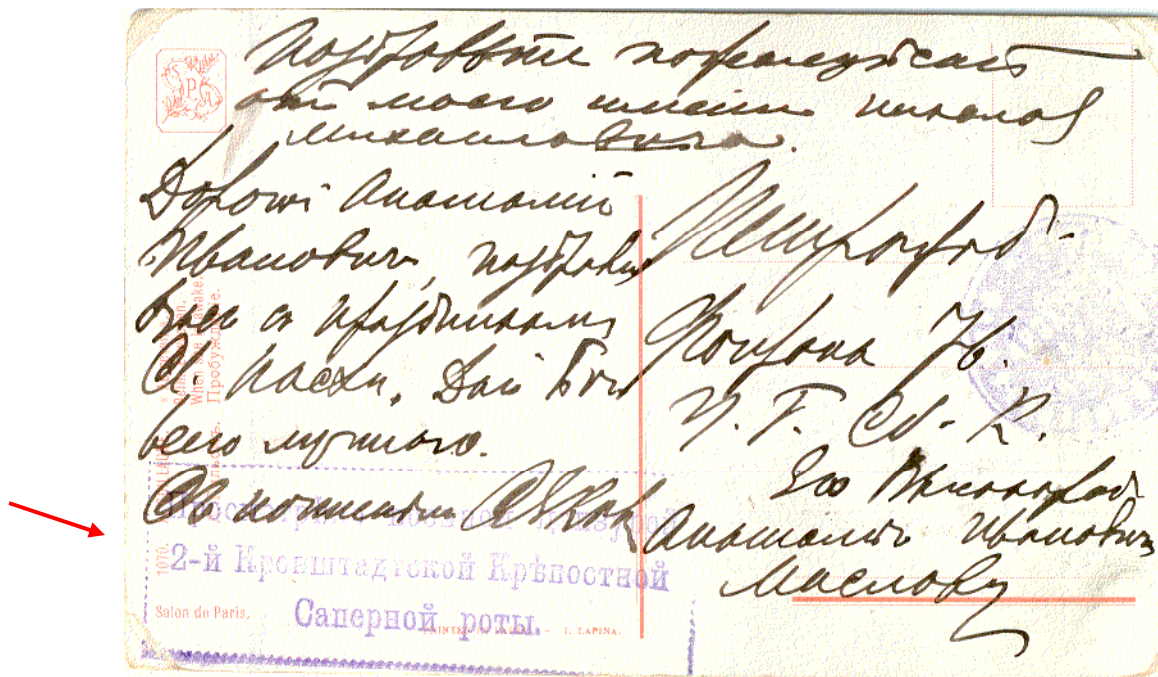
This letter was posted to Geneva by a colonel in the Kronstadt Fortress Artillery's Special Training Group in October 1915, and examined by a warrant officer at the fortress: three-line marking "Opened by military censorship / Military Censor / Warrant Officer Kazanskiy" at left on reverse. Since the sender was an officer writing to a foreign destination, he was required to pay postage.

Obverse.



Censorship at the Naval Company Level: 2nd Kronstadt Fortress Combat Engineer Company

Fortress combat engineers repaired and extended fortifications, barriers and buildings, mined the approaches to the fortress to slow down an attack, counter-mined against enemy sappers attempting to blow up a wall or some other part of the defenses, provided clean water for the other troops, and did electrical installation work. They could also act as infantry if the need arose. Kronstadt had one combat engineer company in 1914, but as the PPC below demonstrates, at least one more company was added to the fortress complement after the war began. Both company HQs had inherent censors.



An undated PPC from Kronstadt Fortress to Petrograd. The dotted-rectangle censor mark reads, “Examined by Military Censorship / 2nd Kronstadt Fortress / Combat Engineer Company.”

Censorship at Naval Fortresses: Sveaborg Fortress Artillery



Sveaborg Fortress, called “The Gibraltar of the Baltic,” was scattered across four small islands in Helsingfors Bay. Construction on it began in 1748, with additions and improvements following over the next 150+ years.

Below: Soldier’s mail from the Sveaborg Fortress Artillery to Petrograd ca. 1916. The unit cachet at center reads, “Sveaborg Naval Fortress.”

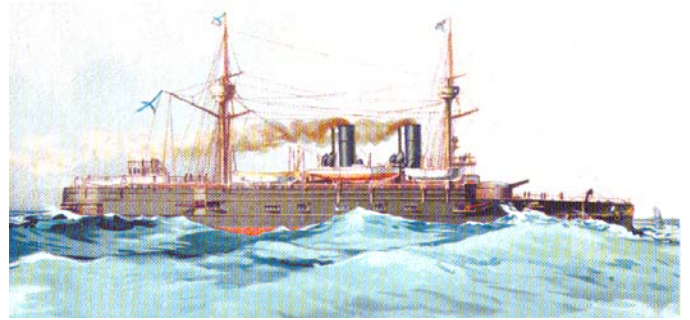


Читаль
Прапорщикъ

“Read
Warrant Officer (signature)”

Censorship of Mail from Warships: Battleship “Imperator Aleksandr II”

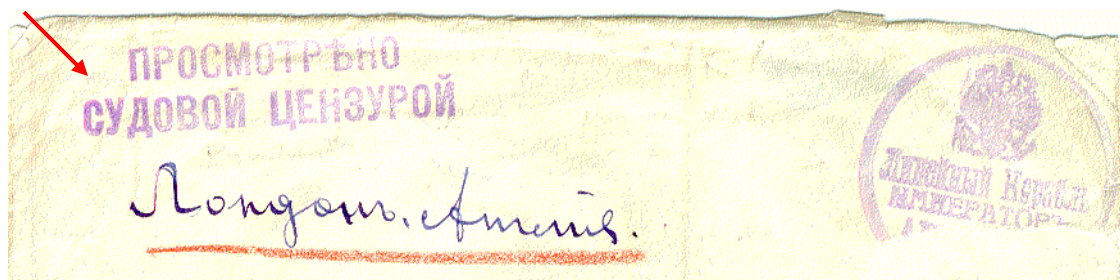
This was an old German-designed battleship (launched in 1887) with a crew of 31 officers and 638 men, assigned to the Baltic Fleet. At the time this cover was sent, she was being used as an artillery-training ship at Kronstadt.



(From “Entsiklopediya. Korabli Rossiyskogo imperatorskogo flota 1892-1917 gg.,” Minsk, Kharvest, 2000.)

“Examined
by Ship’s Censorship”

On obverse.



Posted aboard the “Imperator Aleksandr II” and censored there, then taken ashore at Kronstadt and censored again at the post office (two-line “Kronstadt Military Censorship” and censor’s initials “A.K.”) Addressed to London, England and dispatched on 5 March 1917.



Battleship “Chesma”

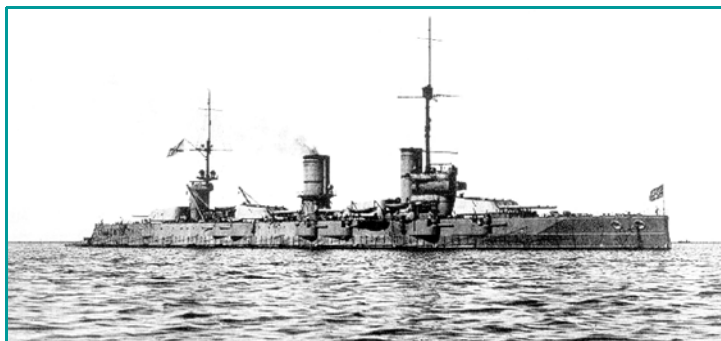
Most examples of mail censored aboard Russian battleships come from ports and naval bases. These ships did not venture out much in WWI, being bottled up in the Baltic and Black Seas, so they stayed put for defensive purposes most of the time. The card below is a remarkable exception to this rule, even more so because of its venue. “Chesma” was originally the old battleship “Poltava,” sunk by the Japanese on 22 November 1904 at Port Arthur and raised in July 1905. The Imperial Japanese Navy repaired and used her for coastal defense as the “Tango,” then sold her back to the Russians in 1916, who named her the “Chesma” (a new “Poltava” having already been built) and sent her around the world to join the Arctic Ocean Flotilla, based at Arkhangel’sk.



This picture postcard was manufactured at Gibraltar and sold to a Russian sailor aboard the “Chesma, which had called at “The Rock” while making her way around the Eurasian continent to Arkhangel’sk. After the card was read by one of the officers on board (violet two-line *Examined / by Ship’s Censorship* at top left, blue ship’s seal at center top), it was posted at Gibraltar on 20 November 1916 (N.S.), entered Russia probably at Petrograd or Arkhangel’sk, traveled to Moscow where it was examined yet again (by Military Censor No. 119 – center bottom), and finally reached its destination of Sevastopol’ in the Crimea on 3/16 December 1916.

Battleship "Poltava"

This Baltic Fleet battleship, with her complement of 31 officers and 1,094 men, produced very little mail that survived, and even less that was censored. Even so, it is likely that she had two or possibly more officers who served as ship's censors.



The "Poltava" in 1915.
(Picture from www.battleships.spb.ru.)

Просмотрѣно
на мин. кор. „Полтава“

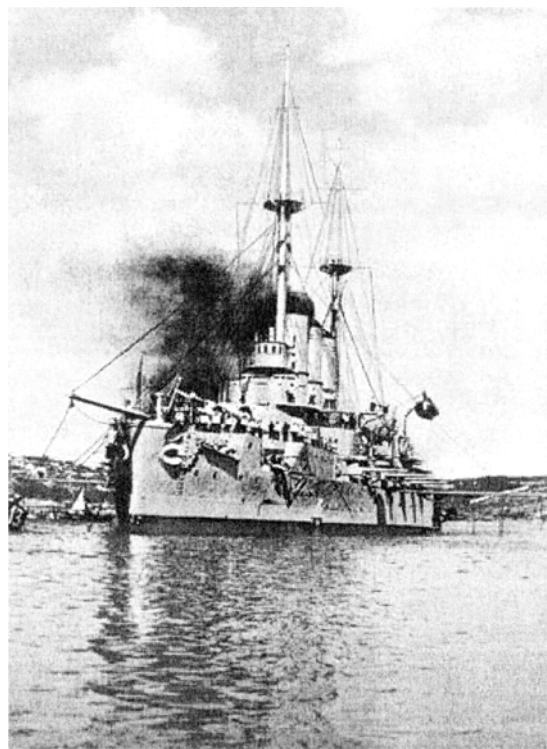
*Examined
on the Battleship "Poltava"*

Below: A picture postcard censored on board (two-line censor mark – red arrow – reproduced at left) and carried ashore at Helsingfors on 17 April 1915 (Julian calendar). Addressed to Petrograd.



The blue circular ship's seal reads *2nd Company of the Battleship "Poltava."*

Battleship “Yevstafiy”



An Easter greetings card from a sailor aboard the Black Sea Fleet battleship “Yevstafiy,” censored on the vessel in port (two-line light gray marking reproduced below) at Sevastopol’ and submitted to Field Post Office No. 158 on 7 April 1916. Addressed to Petrograd. (FPO 158 was established at Sevastopol’s Main Naval Base in early 1916 to handle Navy officers’ mail.)

ПРОСМОТРЕНО СУДОВОЙ
 ЦЕНЗУРОЙ

“EXAMINED BY SHIP’S
 CENSORSHIP”

← “The Yevstafiy” at anchor but under steam, with torpedo nets deployed on her port and starboard sides.

Cruiser “Ryurik”

Censors aboard warships great and small often passed their chores along to the shore-bound censors at sedentary civilian postal establishments. At 17,250 tons and carrying a crew of 26 officers and 917 men, the English Vickers-designed, 1st-rank cruiser “Ryurik” was bigger than most of the older Russian battleships. And despite the fact that she was only a cruiser, “Ryurik” nevertheless served as the Baltic Fleet commander’s flagship.



The picture of the “Ryurik” at left is from a PPC of unknown origin and date (not the one below), probably issued in France ca. 1914-1915.



“Military Censorship *
Gel’singfors / D.Ts.”



This PPC bears the “Ryurik’s” ship cachet at upper right and is addressed locally in Helsingfors. Once the free-frank cachet was applied, it was taken ashore and censored at the Helsingfors Post Office on or about 9 August 1915.

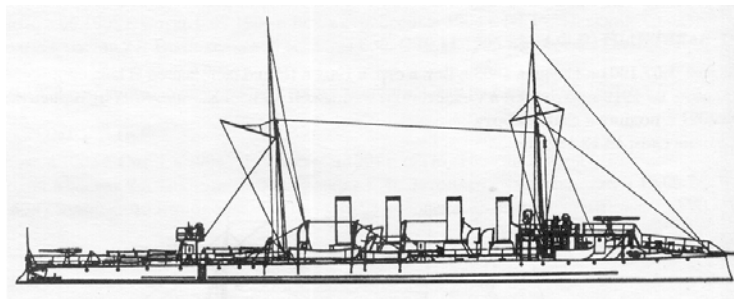


Destroyer “Dostoyunny”

If it was good enough for the “Ryurik” to have its censorship duties transferred ashore, then it was good enough for the “Dostoyunny.” With a crew of four officers and 63 men, her mail volume (and therefore censorship burden) cannot have been all that much.



A picture postcard sent in July 1915 from the “Dostoyunny” in Helsingfors harbor to a manufactory in town. The destroyer’s free-frank ship cachet is at upper right; the Helsingfors military censor mark is at bottom left.

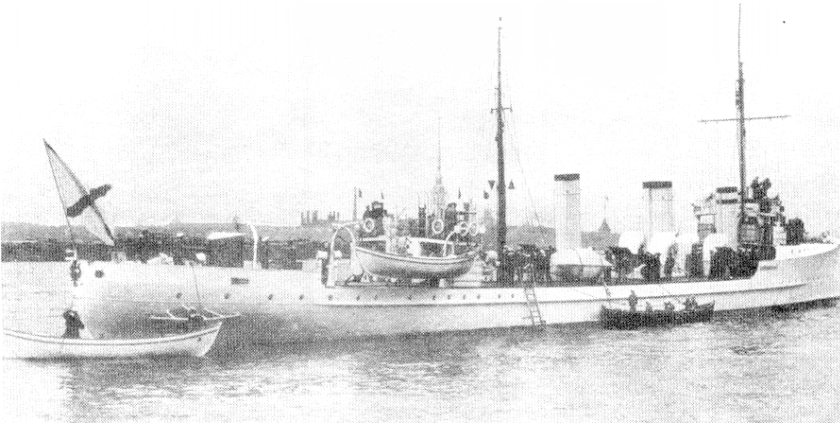


Side sketch of the “Dostoyunny.”

(From

Entsiklopediya. Korabli Rossiyskogo imperatorskogo flota.)

Destroyer “Voyskovoy”



(Photo from “Entsiklopediya. Korabli Rossiyskogo imperatorskogo flota 1892-1917 gg.,” Minsk, Kharvest, 2000.)

The “Voyskovoy” carried seven officers and 83 men, and although her captain was responsible for seeing that all the mail from his crew was censored, he could delegate that responsibility to one of his six subordinates. The person he chose, the “*rotnyy komandir*,” was the low-ranking officer in charge of provisioning the ship.



A PPC from a sailor on the destroyer “Voyskovoy” to Ivanovo-Voznesensk, Vladimir Province, arriving on 13 March 1916. The circular ship’s cachet is at upper right, and the violet two-line censor mark reads, “Examined / by the Provisions Officer.”

Просмотрѣно
Ротнымъ Командиромъ

Censorship Aboard Submarines: "Tyulen'"

Censored mail from the WWI Russian Navy is generally difficult to find; from capital warships and the smaller surface vessels, very difficult. Beyond that is mail from submarines, censored or not. Their small numbers and crews make censored mail from them great rarities.

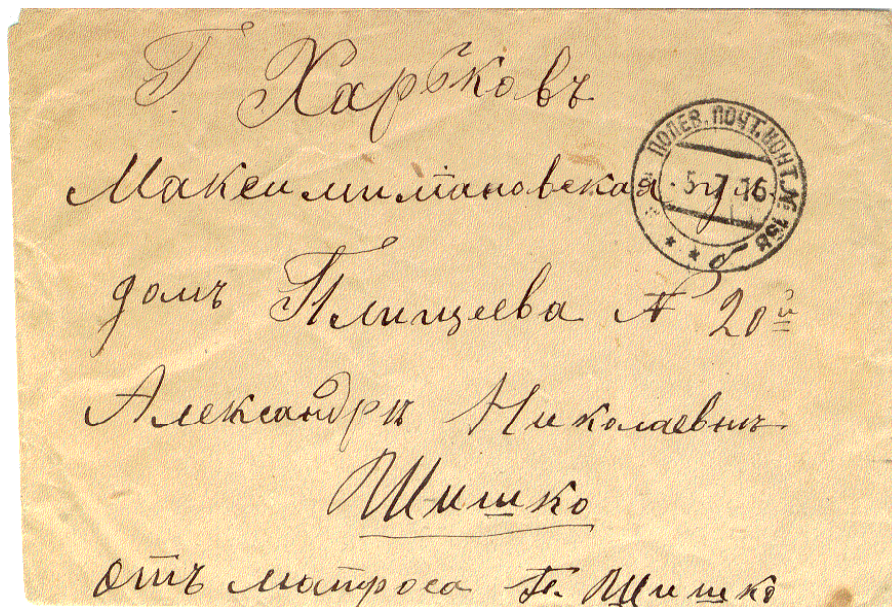


An envelope bearing the free-frank ship cachet of the "Tyulen'" (Seal), posted to Saratov in November 1917 and arriving on the 17th. Naval censor mark "Opened / by military censorship." This second-class submarine was one of three "Nerpa" class vessels laid down in 1911 at the Baltic Shipyard branch at Nikolayev. She joined the Black Sea Fleet in 1915 and survived WWI. Below: reverse.



Censorship on Naval Auxiliary Vessels: Military Transport “Kronshtadt”

Obverse: An envelope addressed to Khar'kov by a sailor aboard the transport “Kronshtadt,” moored at the big naval base of Sevastopol'. It was submitted to FPO No. 158 there on 5 July 1916 (serial “b” canceller). “Kronstadt” was a 16,400-ton, German-built, freight-and-passenger ship that was mobilized in May 1907. The Russian Navy converted her into a transport-and-repair ship, with a crew of 26 officers and 368 men.



Circular “Military Transport ‘Kronshtadt’” ship’s cachet, and rectangular “Examined by Censorship / Transp. ‘Kronshtadt’.” The censor, an ensign, signed his name and rank below the rectangular marking.



Transport “Vozrozhdeniye”

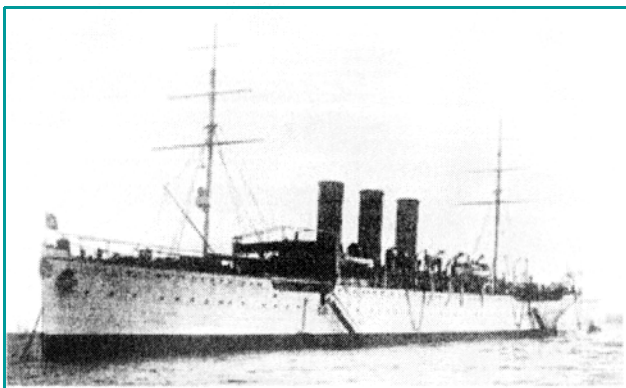
The “*Vozrozhdeniye*” (Renaissance) was a passenger ship launched in 1898 at Trieste and mobilized in January 1915. The Russian Navy converted her into a Black Sea Fleet submarine tender, retaining her name. At 860 tons, she carried a crew of four officers and 22 men.

This letter was posted aboard the “*Vozrozhdeniye*” in early June 1917 to Saratov, and censored by one of the officers on board (two-line “*Examined / by Ship’s Censorship*”).



On reverse: Saratov machine arrival mark dated 5 June 1917, and second strikes of the two-line ship’s censor mark and the vessel’s cachet, identifying her as a transport.

Training Vessel “Okean”



This Baltic Fleet ship carried a crew of 277 men and 19 officers, plus up to 400 trainees from the Naval Machine School. When at full capacity, she had a larger crew than many cruisers. The ship’s censor was most likely one of the junior lieutenants or ensigns.

The “Okean” at anchor. (Photo from astronomer.ru.)



A picture postcard mailed by a sailor in the *1st Company of the training vessel “Okean”* (blue circular free-frank marking at upper right), which at that time was docked at Kronstadt. After the card was vetted (two-line *Examined / by Ship’s Censorship*), it was taken ashore and submitted to the Kronstadt Post Office, which forwarded it to its destination of Saratov on 25 May 1916.

“Mute” Naval Censor Marks

While the civilian post offices in the front areas moved quickly in an attempt to conceal themselves with mute cancels in August 1914, the Navy was slow to react. It was not until 1915 that the realization began to dawn: a censor mark bearing the name of a ship could identify the location of that vessel to enemy intelligence if the mail fell into the wrong hands. To correct that oversight, they resorted to “mute censor marks,” in the sense that no mention of the vessel appeared in the marking. Further, use of the ships’ free-frank cachets was supposed to stop, because that too was giving their location away. For that, the “*On Active Duty*” markings were introduced to serve as a substitute, something that would still qualify the sender for postage-free mail.



A Finnish picture postcard addressed to Arkhangel’sk from a sailor on a Navy vessel that was probably moored at Helsingfors. It arrived in Arkhangel’sk on 19 March 1915. The circular free-frank cachet reads “*For letters / On Active Duty in the Baltic Fleet*” (even those were soon phased out) and the violet oval censor mark reads, “*Examined / on / Ship.*”

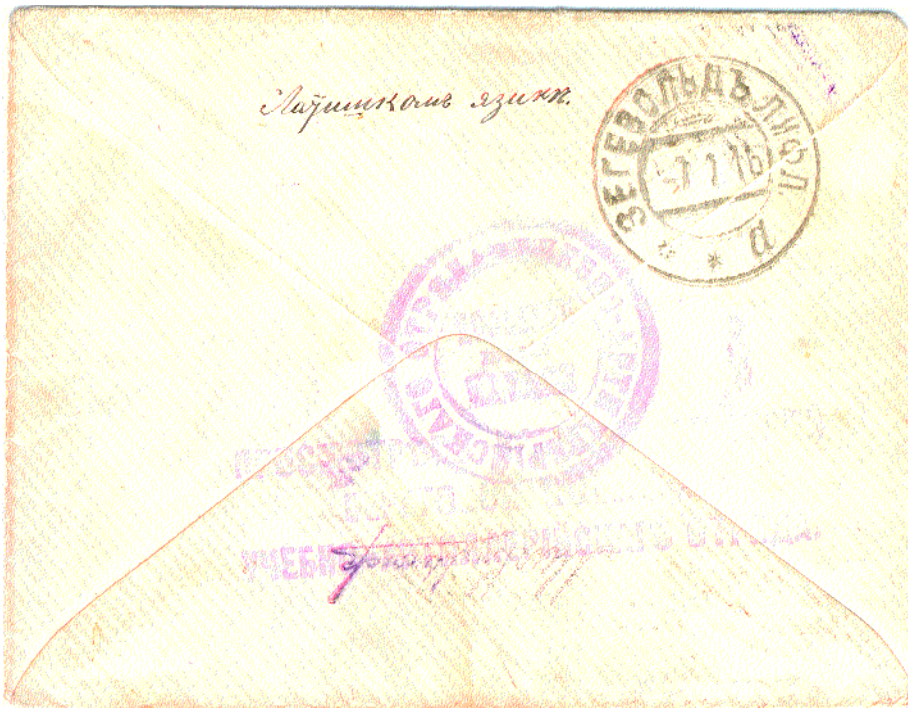
Censorship at Crew Level: Naval Artillery Training Detachment's Shore Crew

A detachment (*otryad*) in the Navy was a small outfit that could range in size from 20-30 men up to 300 or so. They could be formed as a combat or non-combat unit. Naval artillery, if practice firing at targets on shore, needed a shore crew to make, repair, replace and store the targets.

The envelope below contained a “*Latvian language*” letter (manuscript entry on reverse at top) and was addressed to a brick factory at Zegevol’d, Lifyland Province, arriving on 7 July 1916.



Sailors aboard the battleship “Andrey Pervozvannyi” swab out one of the barrels of the ship’s 8-inch guns. (On a Golike and Vil’borg picture postcard ca. 1915.)



The violet circular free-frank unit cachet reads “*Seal for packets / of the Artillery Training Detachment.*” Beneath it is a three-line censor mark: “*Examined by Censorship of the Artillery Training Detachment’s Shore Crew,*” with the censor’s facsimile signature stamped upside down over it.

Censorship at Non-Combatant Facilities: 1st Baltic Fleet *Ekipazh*

An *ekipazh* was a large, shore-based sailor unit, approximately the size of an Army regiment, from which ship crews would be assembled. In essence, an *ekipazh* was a “holding tank” where the sailors could stay until they were assigned to a ship. They were housed in massive barracks like the one shown below – the Naval *Ekipazh* at Arkhangel’sk, similar to the 1st Baltic Fleet *Ekipazh* building – but despite the large numbers of personnel at these units, censor marks from them are very rare.



ПРОСМОТРѢНО
ВОЕННОЙ ЦЕНЗУРОЙ
1 го БАЛТ. ФЛ. ЭКИПАЖА.

“Examined
by Military Censorship
of the 1st Balt. Fl. Ekipazh”



A PPC addressed to Petrograd on 23 November 1915 by a sailor at the *ekipazh*. The poorly-struck unit cachet is at upper right, next to the rectangular censor mark.

Censorship at Non-Combatant Facilities: Naval Hospitals



“Inter-military” mail sent to a soldier in the 10th Aviation Company, 2nd Observation Station on or about 29 November 1916. “On Active Duty” free-frank seal at upper right, two-line “3rd Kronstadt Fortress Temporary Hospital / Examined by Military Censorship” censor mark at upper left. The large numeral “2” is a censorship sorter’s mark or control mark.

Просмотрѣно Госпитальной Цензурой

“Examined by Hospital Censorship”



A PPC of Tallinn, bearing the unit cachet of the Temporary Naval Hospital at the Emperor Peter the Great Naval Base, written on 26 October 1916?.



Censorship Operations at Sedentary Post Offices

Russian civilian mail, both domestic and foreign, naturally constituted the majority of the counter-intelligence load. Military censorship offices were set up at the post offices of many towns, big and small, and they examined whatever mail crossed their desks: civilian, military and POW. They focused primarily on uncovering enemy spies attempting to report through the mail or receive their instructions, preventing sensitive information from reaching the enemy through foreign and domestic correspondence, and at least in the Baltic area, combating speculation and smuggling activities.

This part of the exhibit will provide a selection of scarce to very rare censor marks from numerous offices, arranged geographically as follows: a) Kingdom of Poland, b) Baltic-area provinces from Kovno to Estlyand, c) St. Petersburg Province and the Grand Duchy of Finland, d) the northern provinces, e) Central Russia, f) Ukraine less the Black Sea provinces, g) Bessarabia and the Black Sea provinces excluding the Caucasus, h) the Urals, i) the Caucasus region, j) Central Asia, k) Western Siberia, l) Eastern Siberia and m) censorship offices abroad.



The Kingdom of Poland



As a forward area on the front lines, as a nation that had rebelled against Russian control on two occasions in the 19th century, and as a region that had seen bloody strikes and work stoppages in 1905, Poland was viewed with great suspicion by Russian authorities. The entire area was under total military censorship, and censors operated in many small towns there. However, due to the fact that the Germans had occupied Poland by the end of August 1915, the censors only worked there for at most a year. Thus, censor marks from Polish towns are generally rare.

A nurse serving in the Finnish Industrialists' Field Hospital (under the Finnish Red Cross) posted this PPC from Warsaw to Helsingfors on 5 November 1914.



Вскрыто военной цензурой
ВОЕННЫЙ ЦЕНЗОРЬ

“Opened by Military Censorship /
Military Censor (penciled initials).”



On reverse: A picture of the Łazienkach (Lazienkovskiy) Palace in Warsaw, probably the site of the field hospital.

Kingdom of Poland: Warsaw and Kal'variya

This envelope was posted from Warsaw's Brest Railroad Terminal to Alassio, Italy on 6 May 1915. It bears two censor marks from Warsaw that were applied either at the terminal or at Warsaw's Main Post Office. "Opened by Military Censorship / Military Censor," followed by a facsimile signature of "Lt. Col. (name illegible)."



**кальварійскій Воекный
Цензоръ**

"Kal'variya Military
Censor"

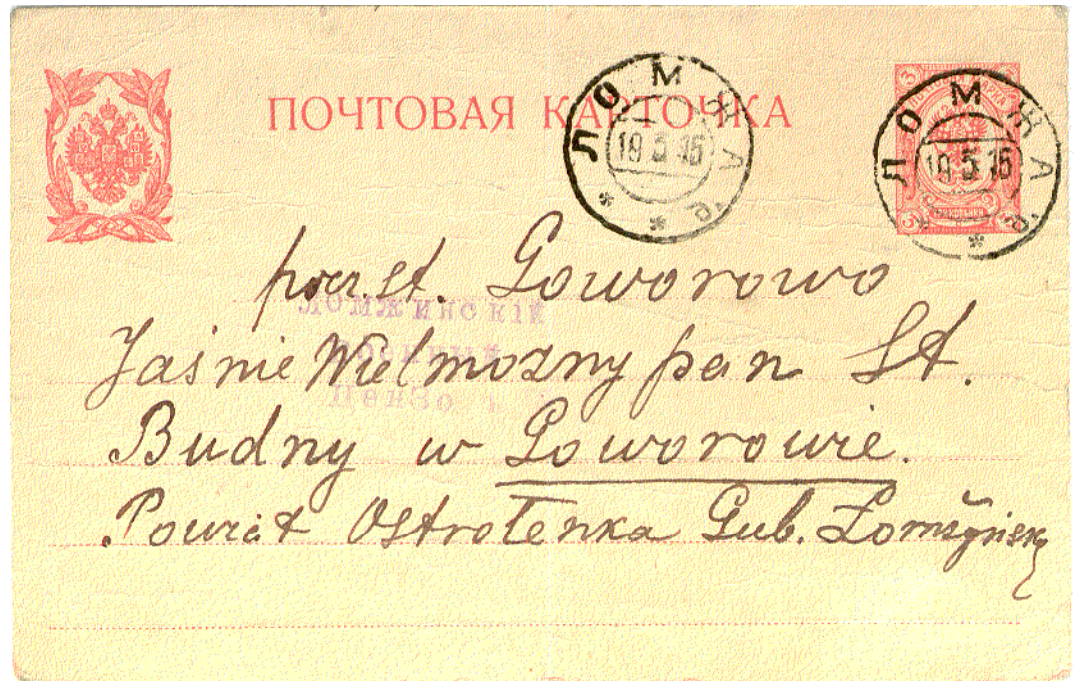


Kal'variya, Suvalki Province to Ozery, Grodno Province, 19 July 1915.

This was a very small censorship operation, and may not have been in existence until after the Germans started to advance across the Kingdom in 1915.

Kingdom of Poland: Lomzha and Sokoly

Lomzha to Govorovo in Lomzha Province, posted on 19 March 1915. Since all of the Kingdom was under total military censorship, this local-area mailing was still examined. The violet censor mark itself appears to have been cobbled together from a child's font play set.

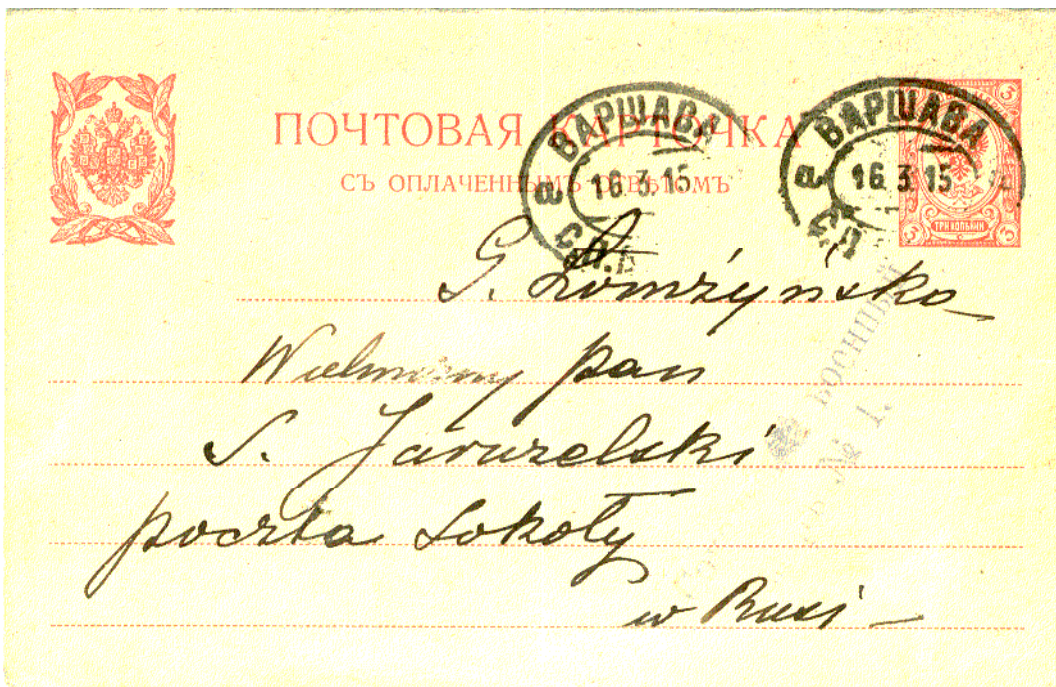


"Lomzha
Military
CenSor
No. 1"

Ломжинский
Военный
Цензорь
№ 1

Сокольский военный
цензорь № 1.

"Sokoly Military
Censor No. 1"



A reply-paid postcard mailed at Warsaw's St. Petersburg Railroad Terminal on 16 March 1915 to Sokoly, Lomzha Province. From the censor numbers and the very few items recorded from these towns, the censorship operations there probably consisted of no more than one or two men.

Kingdom of Poland: Syedlets and Yanov



A PPC bearing the unit cachet of the "1st Syedlets Convalescent Element," mailed at the Syedlets Railroad Terminal on 4 June 1915 to Smorgon, Vil'na Province.



"Syedlets Military Censor No. 6"

Вскрыто военной цензурой
Военный цензоръ В.Я.СОКОЛОВЪ

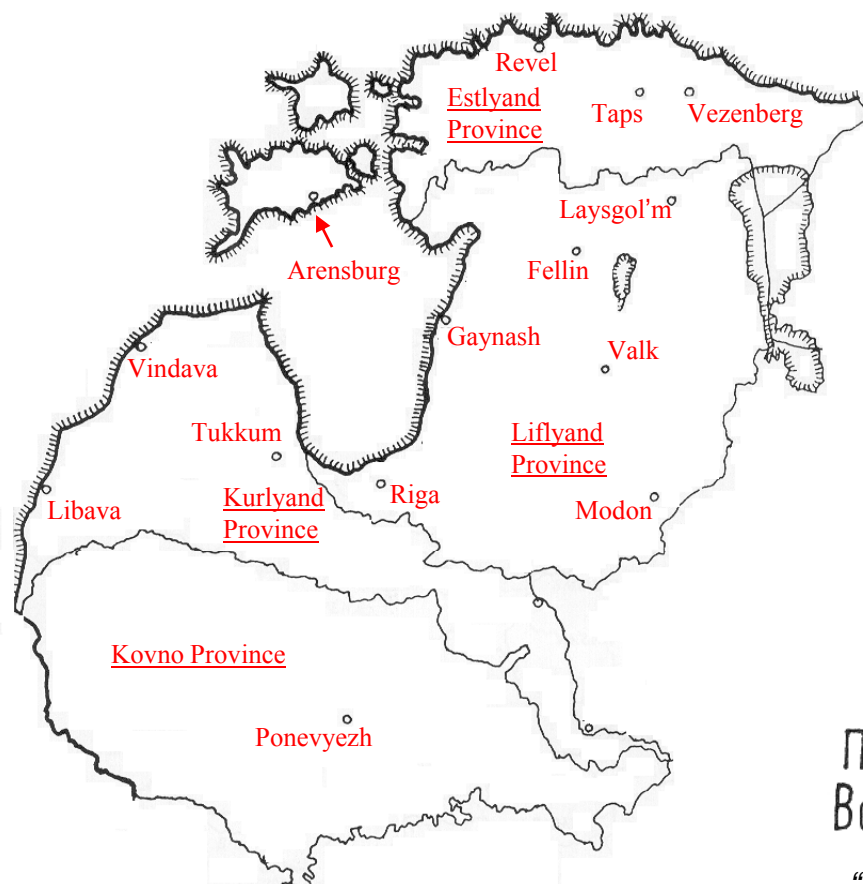
"Opened by Military Censorship
Military Censor V.Ya. Sokolov"



Yanov to Koden', both in Kholm Province, posted on 23 February 1915. The censor mark was probably applied in Yanov, but Kholm is also a possibility. Kholm Province was created in response to the German advances of 1915; it was essentially the remains of the Kingdom of Poland in the east.



The Baltic Provinces

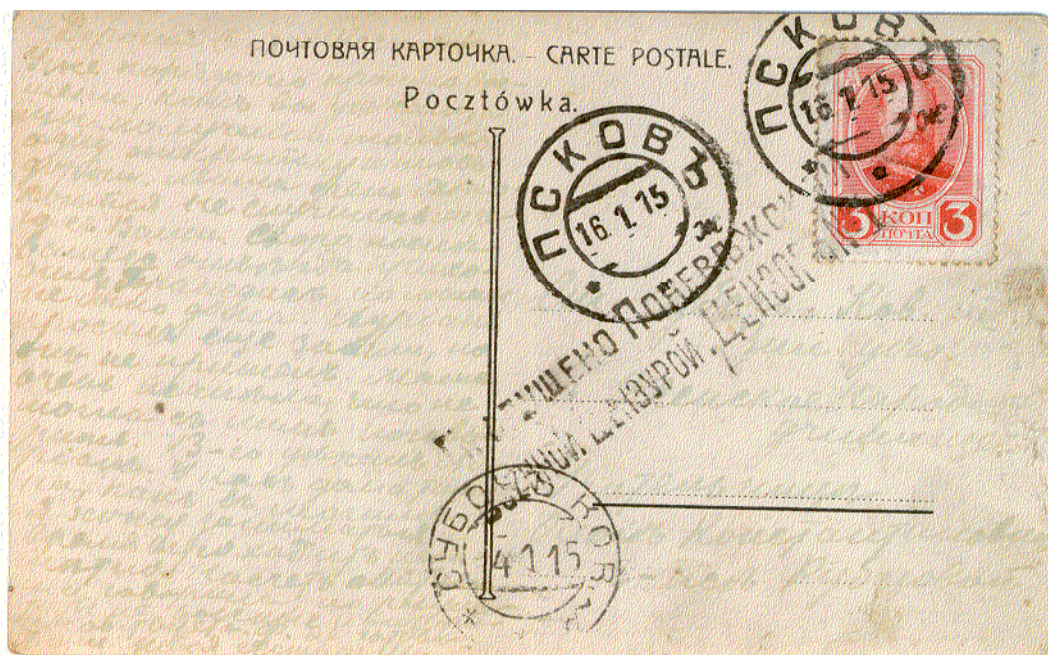


With their genetic and cultural ties to Germany and as part of the Northern Front, the Baltic provinces were a source of constant anxiety for the Russian authorities. Military censorship there was pervasive and very intrusive (the area was under total censorship), and in addition to its normal counter-intelligence functions, it also watched for smuggling activities. The Baltic provinces had some of the highest concentrations of military censorship offices in the Empire.

ПРОПУЩЕНО ПОНЕВЪЖСКОЙ
ВОЕННОЙ ЦЕНЗУРОЙ. ЦЕНЗОРЪ №1

*"Passed by Ponevyezh Military
Censorship. Censor No. 1"*

A PPC from Suboch, Kovno Province to Pskov, mailed on 14 January 1915. Censored at Ponevyezh, Kovno Province. (Ponevyezh fell to German troops in August 1915.)



The Baltic Provinces: Libava and Vindava



The Baltic Sea coast-line towns of Libava (Libau) and Vindava (Windau) were occupied by German troops in May and July 1915, respectively. Russian military censors were forced to flee, but they were pressed back into service deeper within the Dvinsk Military District. A PPC posted at the Vil'na Railroad Terminal by a military serviceman on 13 November 1914 and addressed to Libava.

"Libava
Military Censor No. 3"
and
censor's initials to the left of the censor
mark.

Виндавский
военный цензор № .

"Vindava
Military Censor No. 2"

Civilian mail sent
on 8 December
1914 from Vindava,
Kurlyand Province
to the Moscow
Province town of
Kolomna.



The Baltic Provinces: Riga and Tukkuum

Riga, the capital of Lifyland Province, had at least three censorship operations during the war, one at the Post Office, another at the train terminal, and a third (thus far unlocated) that was subordinated to the Dvinsk Military District. Despite the three operations and the large size of the city, however, censor marks from Riga are scarce to rare.

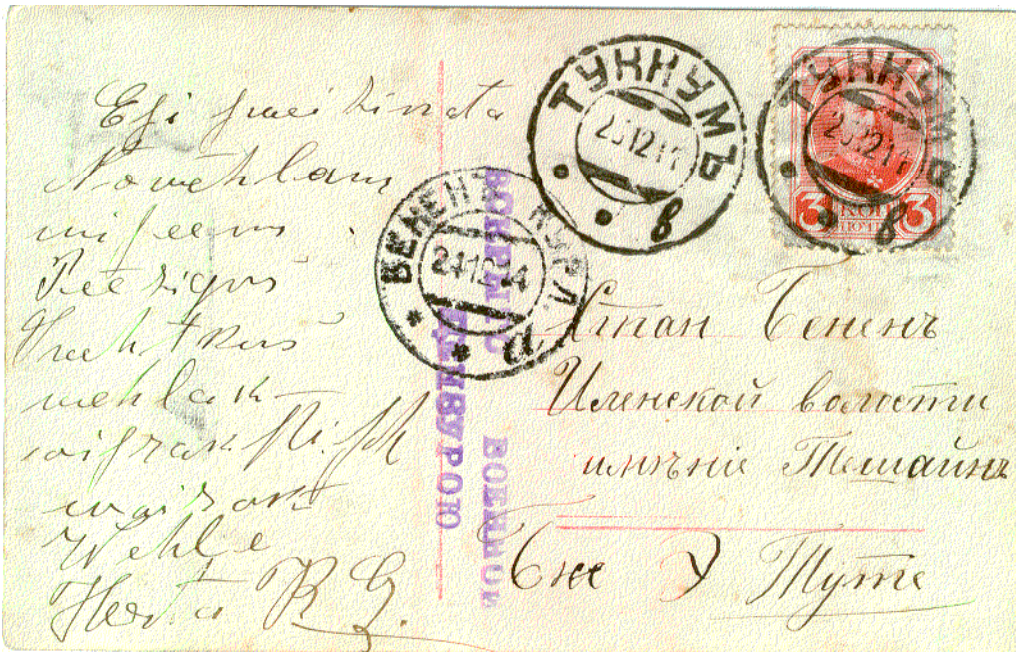
Wellesley, Mass. to Doblen, Kurlyand Province, censored in transit at Riga, Feb. 1915.



"Opened by Military Censorship
Riga Military Censor
No. 7"

Вскрыто военной цензурой
Рижский военный цензор
№ 7

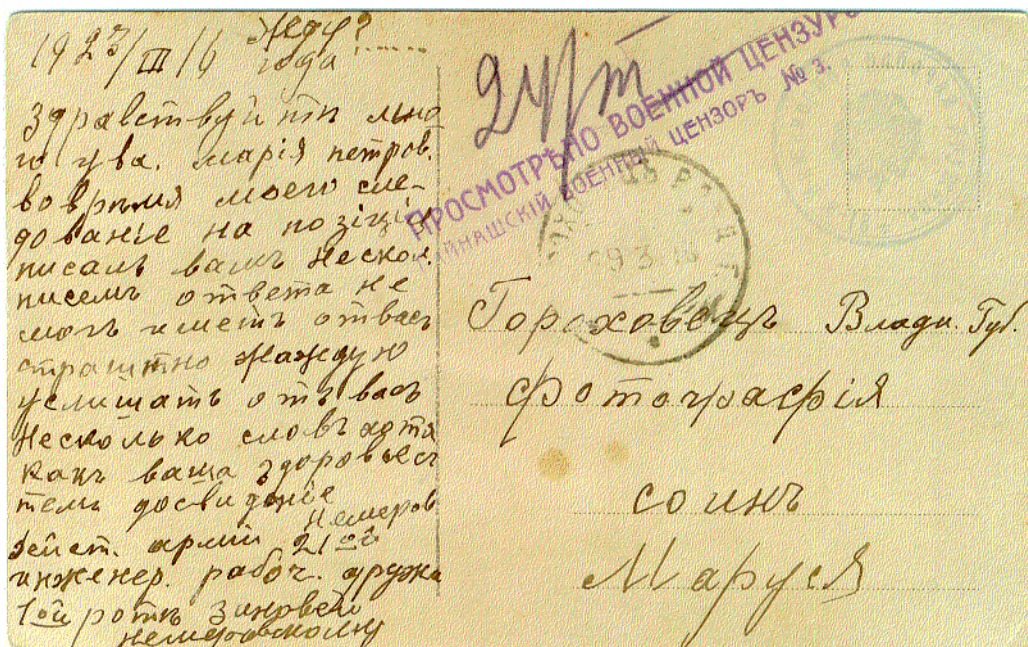
"Opened by Military Censorship" ВСКРЫТО ВОЕННОЙ ЦЕНЗУРОЮ



A picture postcard from Tukkuum to Benen, both in Kurlyand Province, mailed on 23 December 1914.

Russian censorship would have ceased there on or before 17 July 1915; the town was taken by the Germans the following day.

The Baltic Provinces: Gaynash and Modon



Above: A PPC from a man in the 1st Company of the 21st Engineer Labor *Druzhina* at or in the area of Gaynash (Hainasch), Lifyland Province to Gorokhovets in Vladimir Province, written on 23 March 1916. Two-line censor mark “Examined by Military Censorship / Gaynash Military Censor No. 3” and a penciled date “24 /III.”

Below: Modon, Lifyland Province to Moscow, 7 January 1917. Rectangular marking “Examined / by Military Censorship / Mo don Mil. Censor No. 3” and a penciled censorship date of “7 /I.”



The Baltic Provinces: Laysgol'm



*"Examined by Military Censorship
Laysgol'm. Military Censor No. 3."*



Laysgol'm (Laisholm) in Liflyand Province to the postmaster at Nuiya, also in Liflyand Province, mailed on 28 October 1915 and received two days later.

This town probably had no more than one or two censors until the German offensive in 1915 brought the front much closer, at which time the censorship operation's staff there increased to at least five.

Obverse.

The Baltic Provinces: Arensburg and Valk

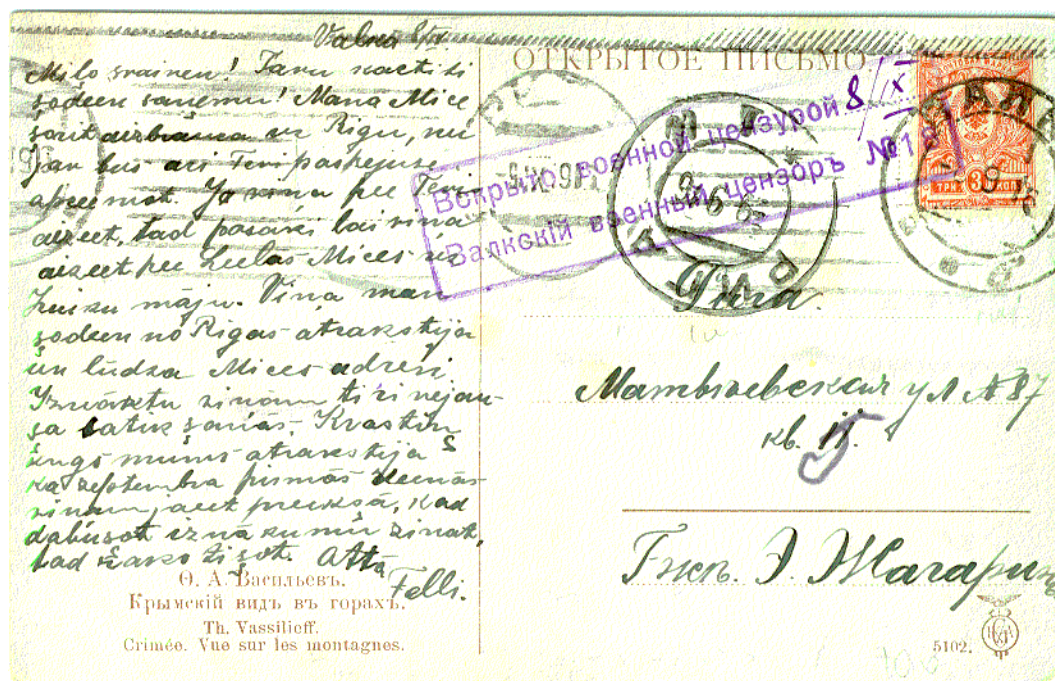


Arensburg, Liflyand Province to Petrograd, posted on 6 November 1915. The blue two-line “hands” variety marking reads “Arensburg / Military Censor No. 1.”

This town, on Oesel Island in Riga Bay, had approximately four censors.

“Opened by Military Censorship.....
Valk Military Censor No. 18”

Вскрыто военной цензурой.....
Валкскій военный цензоръ №

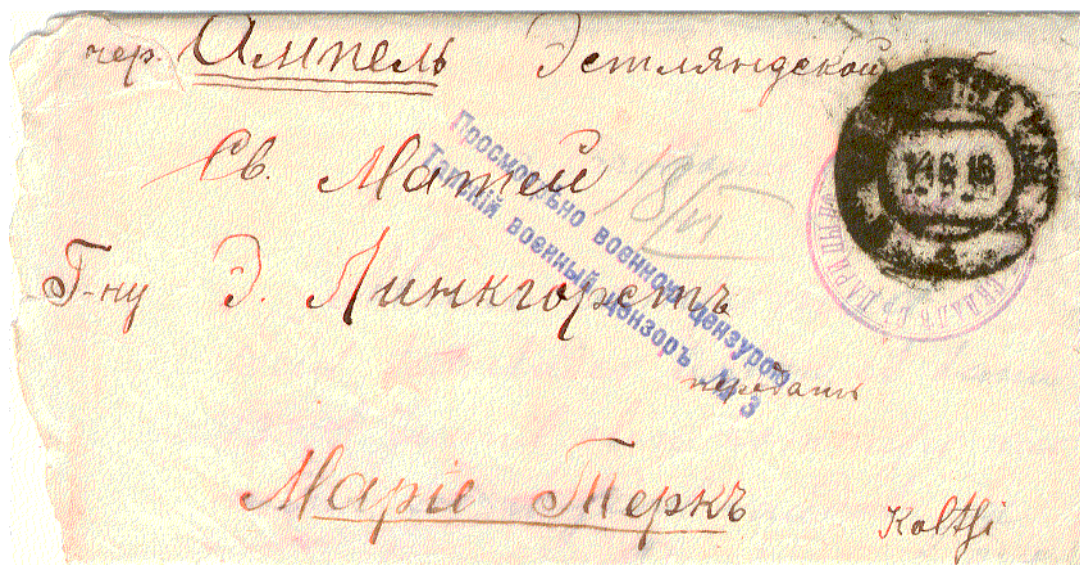


Valk (Walk) to Riga, 9 September 1916. Over 10 censors worked there.

The Baltic Provinces: Revel' and Taps



A PPC mailed at the Revel' Railroad Terminal via Vezenberg to Yakobi, Estlyand Province on 26 June 1917. The censor inked out the card's six lines of printed text at upper left, then stamped it "Examined" and allowed it to pass.



A soldier posted at a military depot in Tsaritsyn, Saratov Province, sent this cover to Ampel' in Estlyand Province on 14 June 1916, but it was censored in transit at Taps, Estlyand Province on 18 June (penciled date over "Examined by Military Censorship / Taps Military Censor No. 3" two-line marking) and reached its destination two days later.

The Baltic Provinces: Vezenberg and an Unknown

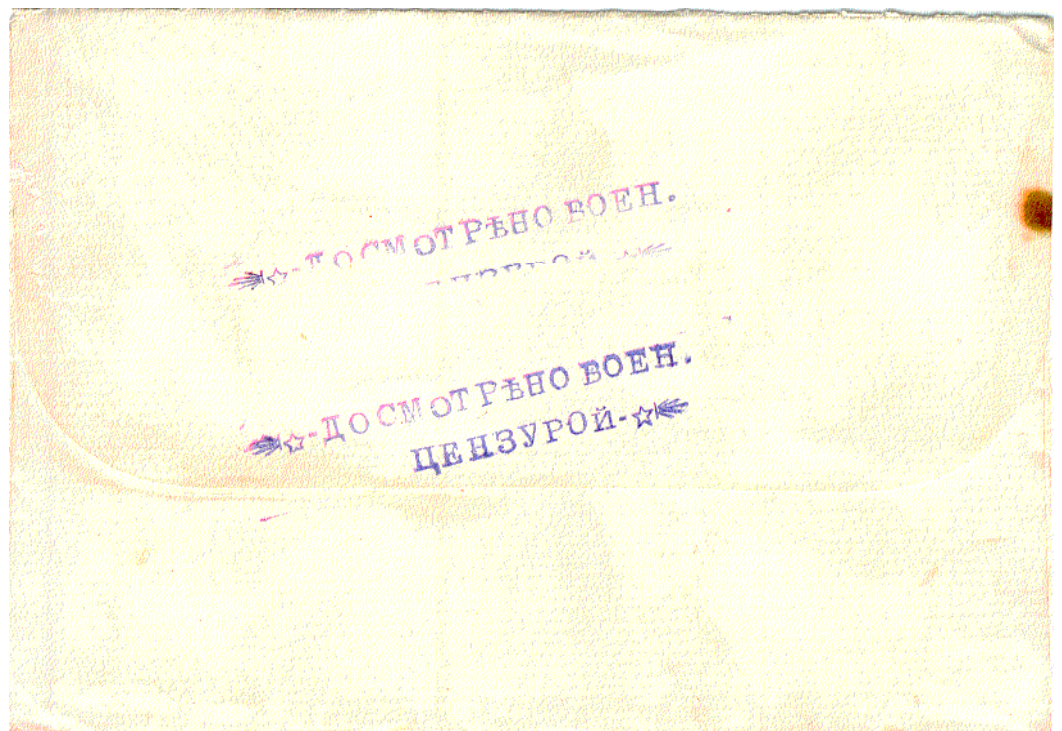


A PPC from Murom, Vladimir Province to Vezenberg (Wesenberg) in Estlyand Province, bearing the unit cachet of the “Commander of the 205th Reserve Machine-gun Battalion.” It was mailed on 24 April 1916 but was not censored until it reached its destination.

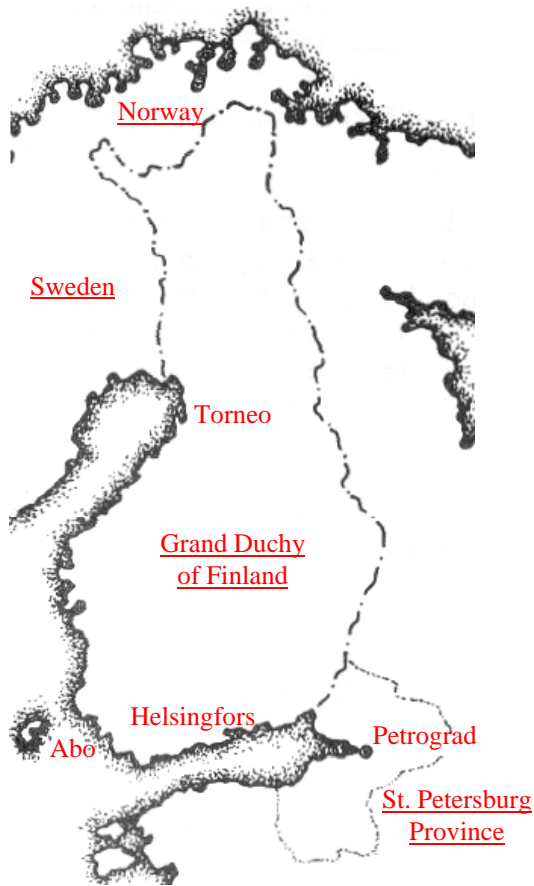
ПРОСМОТРЕНО
Военною Цензурою
г. Веэенбергъ, Военный Цензоръ №

“Examined by
Military Censorship Vezenberg,
Military Censor No. 7”

Addressed to Subbat, Kurlyand Province, date and place of origin unknown. The two-line “Examined by Mil. / Censorship” marking may be from Laisholm, as it bears a resemblance to a censor mark recorded from that town.



St. Petersburg Province and the Grand Duchy of Finland



St. Petersburg (Petrograd) Province was at the same time subject to total (mostly from Petrograd west) and partial (east) military censorship, and accounted for more censor marks and censors than any other area of the country. It was quite a mish-mash: Northern Front HQ, VI Army HQ, Petrograd Military District, the Main Military Censorship Commission, the Petrograd Local Military Censorship Commission and the Ministry of Internal Affairs all had some say in military censorship operations.



"Opened / by Military Censorship / A.I. Izmaylovich"

A PPC with the unit cachet of the Quartermaster General's Department at XII Army HQ (at that time located in Wenden), mailed to Sergiyevskaya Pustyn' in St. Petersburg Province, not far to the west of Petrograd. It arrived on 23 September 1915. No matter the lofty venue of the card, censor A.I. Izmaylovich examined it anyway.



St. Petersburg (Petrograd)



This envelope was mailed from Rostov-na-Donu on 20 July 1914, the day the Provisional Statute on Military Censorship was introduced. It would have reached St. Petersburg two or three days later, whereupon it sat in the GPO's 1st Dispatch Office for approximately two weeks before a military censor could examine it. The cover reached Rotterdam on 16 August 1914 (O.S.), meaning that it would have been shipped out of St. Petersburg on the 12th or 13th.



Вскрыто военной цензурой

On reverse: "Opened by Military Censorship." (This handstamp probably existed prior to the war.)

The Grand Duchy of Finland: Torneo



A very efficient and capable military censorship operated in Finland from the first days of the war. Finnish censor marks appear in one or more of three languages: Finnish, Swedish and Russian.

Obverse.

This registered cover from the Hotel Kamp in Helsingfors was addressed to Copenhagen and posted on 14/27 August 1914, but instead of being routed directly west, it went north to Torneo and was censored there before crossing over to Sweden and then down to Denmark. (Tri-lingual "Torneo" wax seals and bi-lingual re-sealing tape "Opened by Military Censorship.")



The Northern Provinces: Arkhangel'sk



Northern Russia boasted very few military censorship operations. As of 2005 only four had been recorded, and none of them were large undertakings.

Arkhangel'sk, as a naval base, port city and provincial capital with a post-and-telegraph office, was the most important of the military censorship offices, but from the censor mark record, it does not appear to have functioned prior to late 1915.



Arkhangel'sk to Cardiff, England, posted on 30 December 1915. Two-line violet censor mark "Opened by Military Censorship" and penciled censor's initials. One of the earliest recorded censor marks for this town.

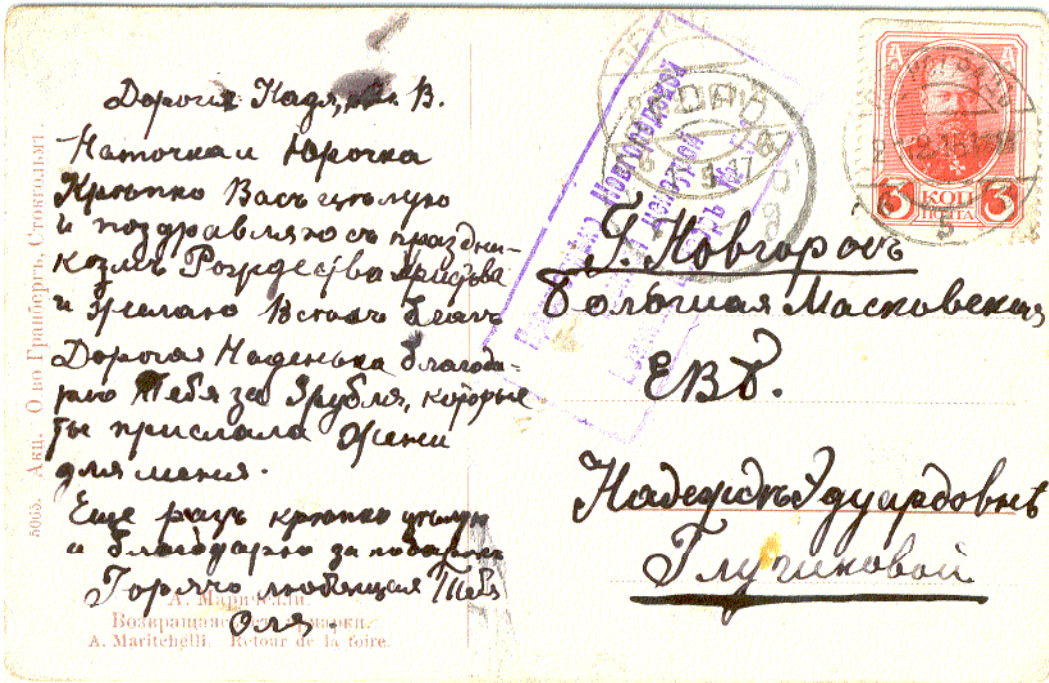
Central European Russia

From the standpoint of military censorship offices, the heart of Central European Russia, with its considerable population, big towns and cities, was a desert with a single oasis – Moscow. The second-largest censorship office in the empire, Moscow handled the mail of those provinces immediately surrounding it as well as those to its northeast. The easternmost provinces had large numbers of Austro-Hungarian POWs, so their provincial capitals and the bigger outlying towns had their own offices.



A registered envelope from Tsarevokokshaysk, Kazan' Province to Stockholm, posted on 5 November 1914, and censored in transit at Moscow. Violet circular "*Military Censor Yu.Yu.G.*" and rectangular "*D.Ts.*" markings, plus a red-pencil "*I.*"

Central Russia: Novgorod and Samara



A picture postcard from Petrograd to Novgorod, mailed on 21 December 1915 and not examined until it reached its destination.

Violet rectangular
Examined by
Novgorod / Military
Censorship / Military
Censor No. 54.”

Б. А. Соловьевич

“B.A. Solov’evich”

Вскрыто Военной Цензурой

“Opened by Military Censorship”

Pletskaya Zashchita, Orenburg Province to Stockholm, sent on 9 November 1914 and examined at Samara, where military censor B.A. Solov’evich allowed it to pass on or about 11 November 1914. The wax seal appears to belong to Solov’evich, too.



The Ukrainian Provinces: Zhmerinka and Kiev



The Kiev and Odessa Military Districts covered almost all of Ukraine (excepting parts of Chernigov Province), and as Ukraine was the immediate rear area for the Southwestern and later the Rumanian Fronts, most of it was under total military censorship. It had an abundance of censorship offices, not to mention censor marks.

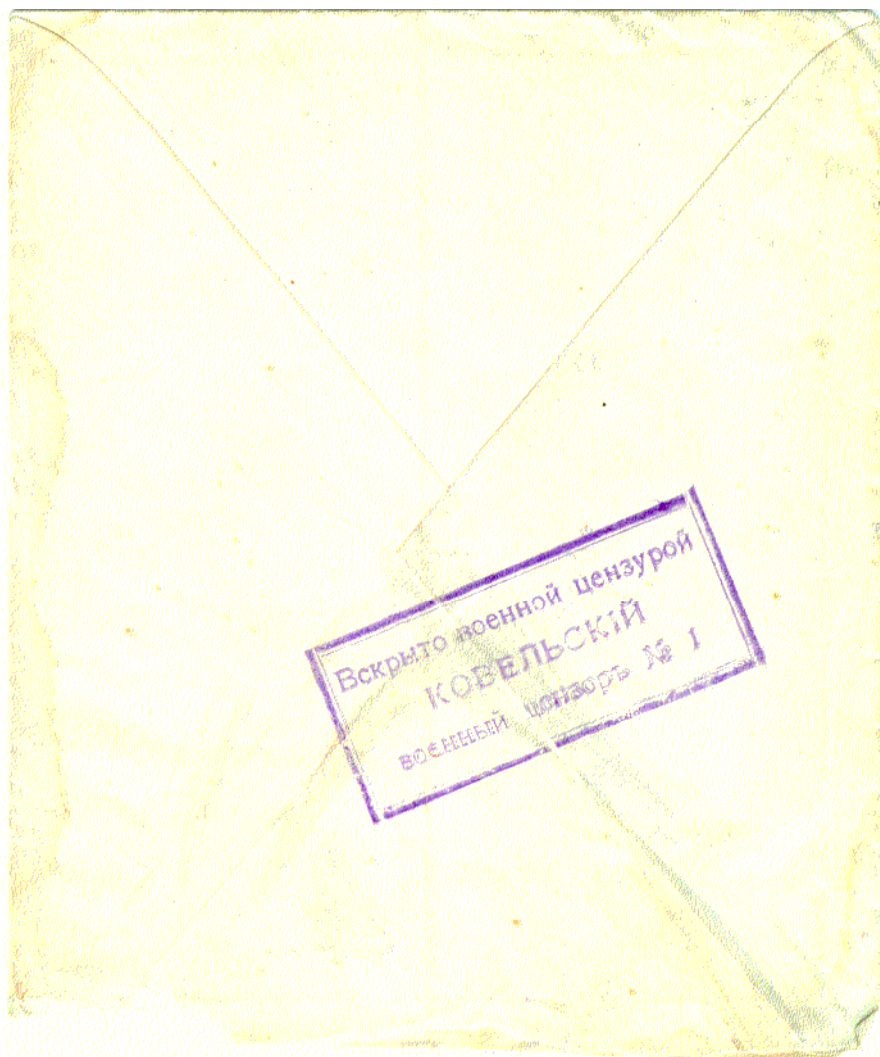


POW mail posted from the Zhmerinka Railroad Section to Austria, 5 May 1915. The Zhmerinka censor applied a blue single-line marking "To Kiev censorship" and routed it to that city, where censor V.Ts. Kravchenko examined it (arrow), crossed out the routing handstamp with blue pencil, and allowed it to continue on to Austria.

The Ukrainian Provinces: Kovel'

Posted from the Kovel' Railroad Terminal (Volhynia Province) on 12 July 1915, this ordinary-mail cover addressed to Moscow was "*Opened by Military Censorship / Kovel' / Military Censor No. 1.*" As of 2005, no censor mark from Kovel' had been recorded in the literature, so this operation probably consisted of no more than one or two individuals, and the operation itself was most likely short-lived. It may have been located at the train terminal.

Obverse



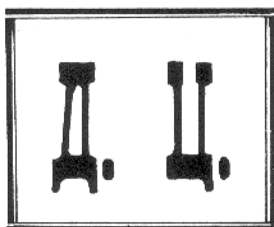
Bessarabia and the Black Sea Provinces of Southern Ukraine: Tatarbunary



Bessarabia was essentially a backwater rear area for the Russians until after August 1916, when Rumania joined the Entente and was soon pummeled by the Central Powers. At that point, Bessarabia became the immediate rear area of the Rumanian Front, and military censorship offices were either established in places they had not previously been, or were reinforced.



Tatarbunary to Galatz, Rumania, 27 June 1916. (As of 2005, this is the only recorded military censor mark from Tatarbunary.)

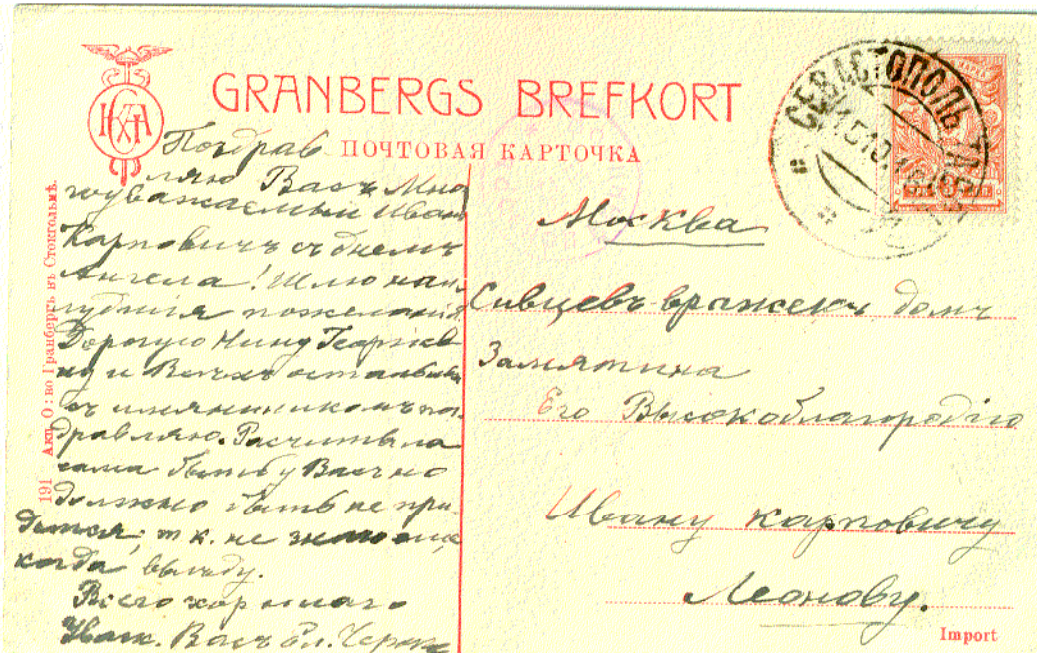


"D.Ts."

Татарбунарской п.-т. конторь

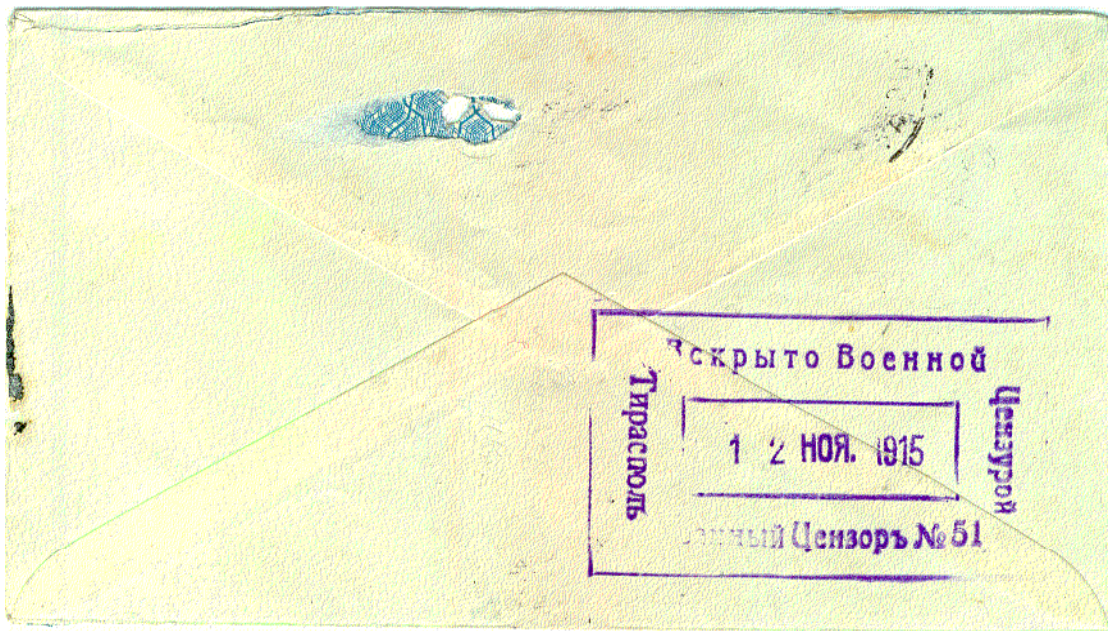
"Tatarbunary P.-T. Office"

Bessarabia and the Black Sea Provinces: Sevastopol' and Tiraspol'



“Military Censor No. 12”

A PPC from the Black Sea Fleet naval base of Sevastopol' to Moscow, posted on 15 October 1916. Few censor marks have been recorded, and those date from late 1916 to late 1917.



Kazinskoye Rural District Administration, Voronezh Province to Berlin via Tiraspol', Kherson Province, October 1915. The censor mark is patterned on those of the Odessa Military District and reads from top, clockwise: “Opened by Military / Censorship / Military Censor No. 51 / Tiraspol’.” The changeable date plug in the center shows that it was examined on 12 November 1915.

The Caucasus Region

The Caucasus Military District became a theater of military operations when Turkey joined the Central Powers, so much of that area fell under total military censorship.

Batum was a strategic port and staging area for the Russian Army's operations against the Turks, so its military censorship office was active very soon after war was declared. This registered commercial cover from Batum to Utica, New York was posted on 12 February 1915 with the flaps sealed. It was cut open by the Batum censor and then resealed with staples.



Straight-line "Opened by Military Censorship," circular "Military Censor at Batum / A.G.A."

The Caucasus Region: Novorossiysk

Novorossiysk was an important port on the Black Sea, important enough to be shelled by the Germans early in the war, but despite that, it appears that military censorship was slow to react there. To date, no censor marks have been recorded prior to early 1915.

Вскр. Воен. Ценз. г. Новороссійск.
полковникъ Левашовъ

*“Opened by Mil. Cens. at Novorossiysk.
Colonel Levashov”*



Commercial registered mail from Novorossiysk to Marseilles, France, 15 April 1915.

The Caucasus Region: Sukhum and Petrovsk



“Sukhum Military Censor
A.L.”

Sukhum, on the Black Sea, was a small port with a miniscule censorship operation. Very few items have been recorded from it.



A soldier in the 4th Company of the 585th Kuban *Druzhina* of Foot sent this picture postcard from Sukhum to Moscow on 14 November 1914.



“Cauc. Military Censor No. 75”



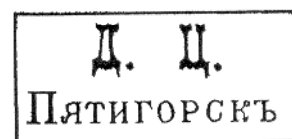
Petrovsk was a port city on the Caspian Sea, in Dagestan Oblast'. It appears not to have had any censorship operation there until late in 1915.

A man living in the apartment of the Petrovsk Prison priest sent this postcard on 13 January 1917 to a stamp dealer in Copenhagen. It was assessed 5 centimes postage due on arrival.

The Caucasus Region: Pyatigorsk and Dzhul'fa

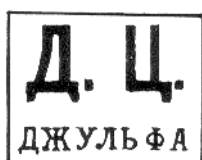


A PPC mailed at the Kislovodsk Railroad Terminal to New York on 11 November 1915. It was censored at Pyatigorsk in Terek Oblast', clearing that town on the 15th, then it headed on to Odessa for shipment abroad.



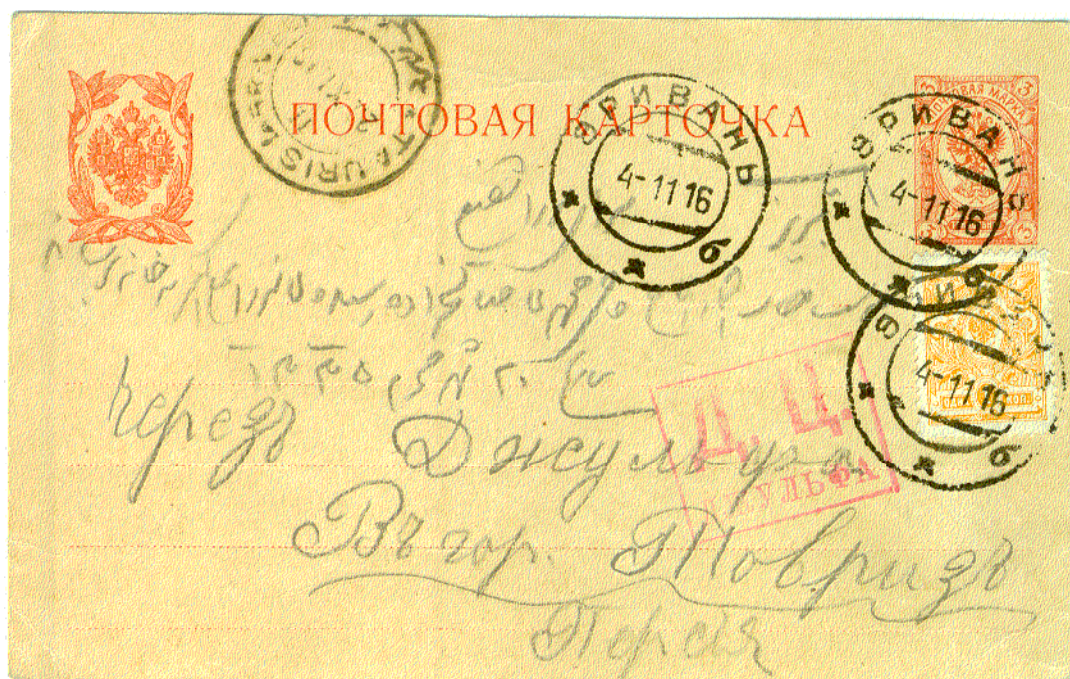
"D.Ts. Pyatigorsk"

Pyatigorsk's military censorship office was operational no later than October 1914, and appears to have had a staff of at least 5-10. Dzhul'fa, on the other hand, seems to have been a tiny operation, despite being the site where Russian and Persian mail was exchanged.



"D.Ts.
Dzhul'fa"

Erivan' to Tavriz, Persia, posted on 4 Nov. 1916. Although Erivan' had a censorship office well before this date, the card was not censored until it reached the Russo-Persian border town of Dzhul'fa.



The Urals Region

This region was under partial military censorship throughout the war. Even though it was a strategic mining area with a substantial population, military censorship in the Urals seems not to have begun until the first half of 1915, with Orenburg as the notable exception. With the arrival of Austro-Hungarian POWs, though, numerous camps were built, and the number of censors (and censor marks) increased dramatically.

Troitsk had a fair-sized censorship office thanks only to the POW camps in and surrounding it. The office was established ca. April 1915.

Below: Troitsk, Orenburg Province to Copenhagen, 5 April 1916. Delayed by censorship for one week.



P. X Ю

R. Kh. Yu."

(Censor's initials.)

Вскрыто военной цензурой
Троицкь.
Военный цензоръ № 87

"Opened by Military Censorship
Troitsk.
Military Censor No. 87"



The Urals Region: Verkhneural'sk and Ufa

Verkhneural'sk in Orenburg Province either had at one time a very small military censorship office (i.e., one censor) or none at all, but the police chief (*ispravnik*) there would have been responsible for watching the mail of POWs and interned civilians in the area. The censor or the police chief wrote "To Ufa Cens." in pencil on the cover (red arrow) and routed it to that rather large military censorship office.



A registered cover from a POW at Verkhneural'sk to Geneva, Switzerland, posted on 10 March 1917. It took five days to reach Ufa, where it was "Opened / by Military Censorship / Ufa / Military Censor No. 50."

The Ufa censor mark is extremely common, but the manuscript marking is the first recorded censorship-related inscription from Verkhneural'sk.



The Urals Region: Zlatoust

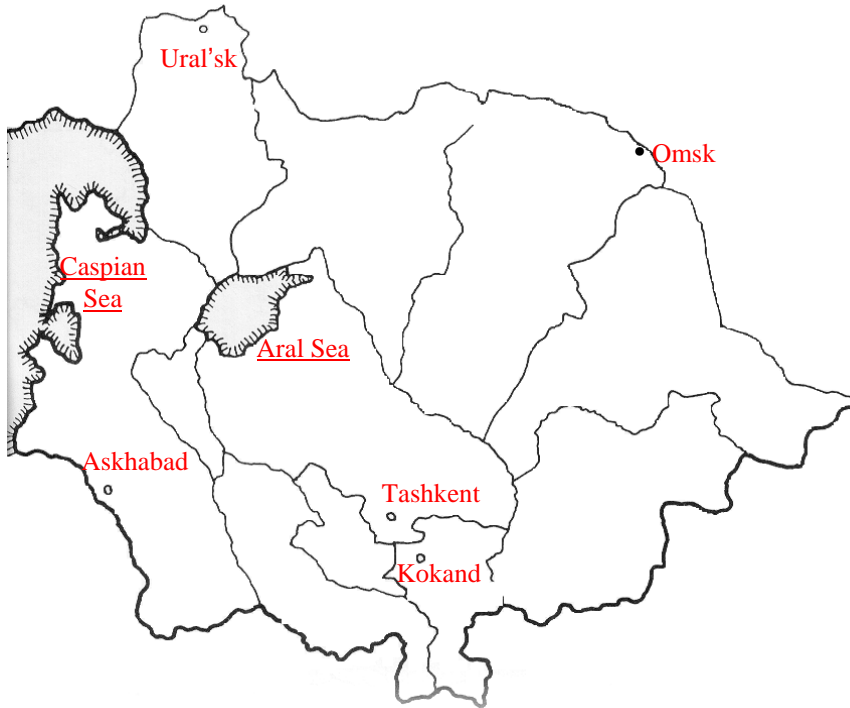
A registered letter from Magnitnaya, Orenburg Province to Copenhagen, posted on 12 June 1917 and forwarded to Zlatoust for censorship, which took one day. That office began operations in early 1915.



ВСКРЫТО
 И
 ПРОСМОТРЕНО ВОЕННОЙ
 ЦЕНЗУРОЮ
 г. Златоуст.
 № 287.

Opened and
 Examined by Military
 Censorship
 Zlatoust / No. 287." (Zlatoust
 spelling error.)

The Central Asian Region: Ural'sk

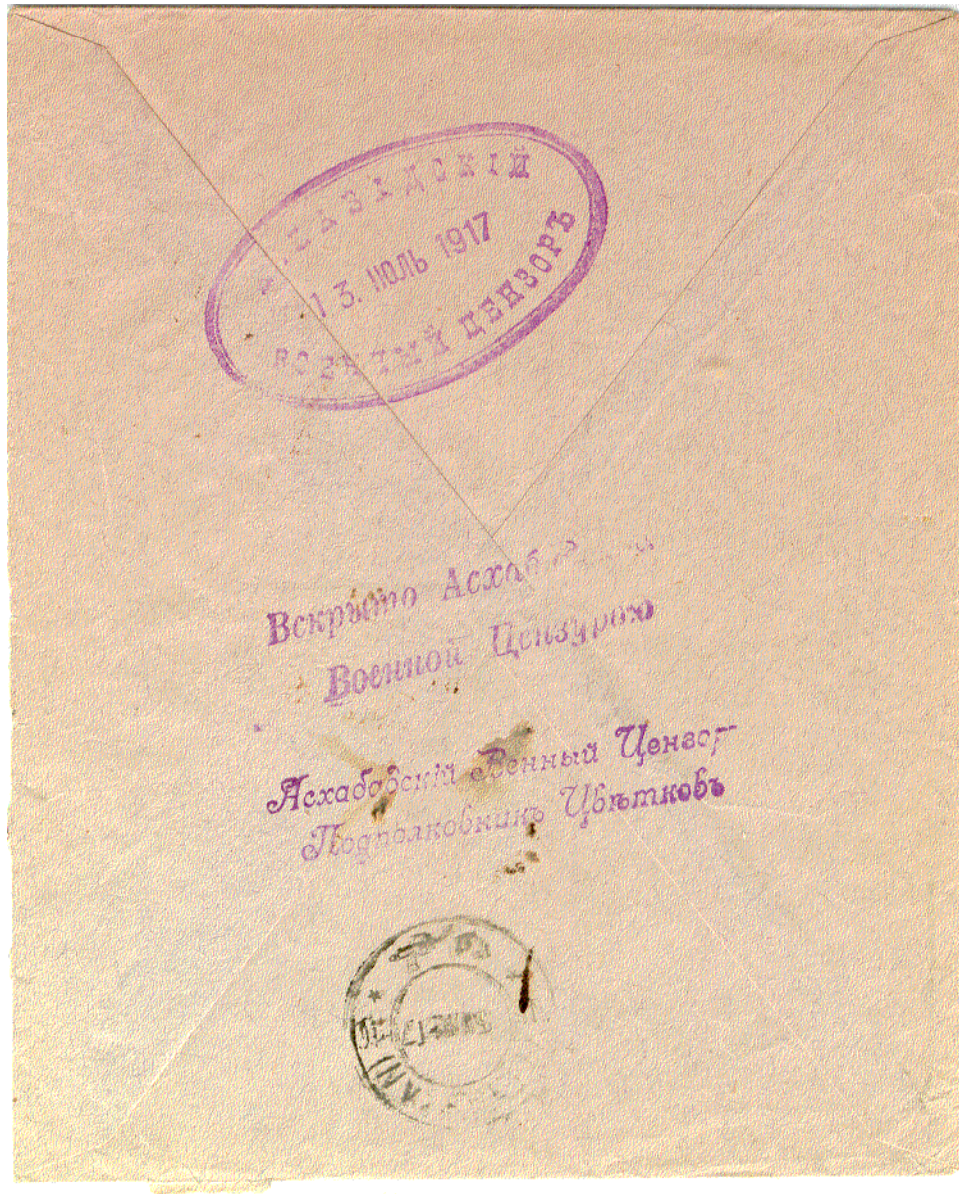


This area operated under partial military censorship, being far removed from the fighting in the west and south. Most of the WWI-era censored mail that emanated from this area was POW correspondence from the big Tashkent and Omsk concentration camp complexes. Outside of those places, the censorship office staffs were minimal, as the Russians were far outnumbered by the Turkmens, Kazakhs and Uzbeks, who didn't send much mail.



A PPC mailed uncensored from Moscow's Ryazan'-Ural'sk Railroad Terminal on 15 May 1915, and addressed to Ural'sk, Ural'sk Oblast', arriving there four days later, where it was finally examined. The violet rectangular censor mark reads, "Opened by Military Censorship / Ural'sk / Military Censor A.A. Lyuberskiy."

The Central Asian Region: Askhabad

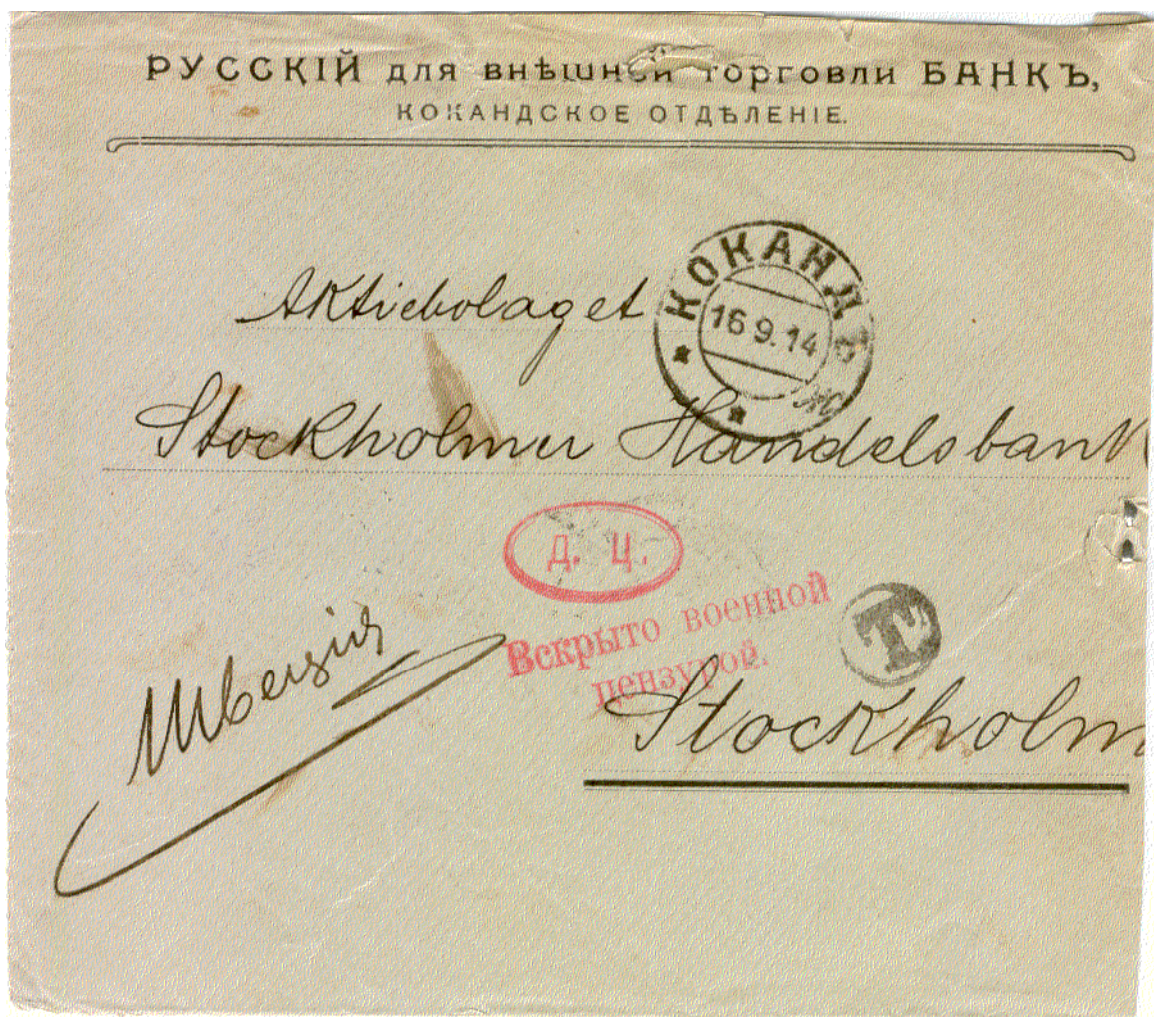


Commercial mail from the Russo-Asiatic Bank in Askhabad to the Imperial Bank of Persia in Teheran, 11 July 1917. The three censor marks, from top to bottom, read "Askhabad Military Censor / 13 July 1917," "Opened by Askhabad / Military Censorship" and "Askhabad Military Censor / Lieutenant Colonel Tsvyetkov." (Spelling error "Vennyy" vs. the correct "Voyenny" – Military.)



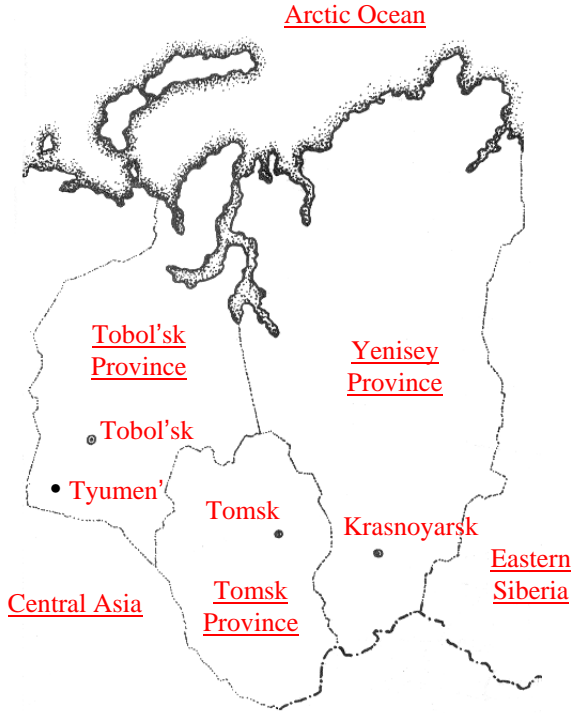
The Central Asian Region: Kokand

Kokand, in Fergana Oblast', had a population of over 110,000, only 6,000 of whom were Russians. Many of them were merchants and bankers whose correspondence accounted for a significant percentage of the Kokand censorship office's burden. That office is thought to have contained fewer than five censors.



Commercial mail from the Kokand Branch of the Russian Bank for Foreign Trade to Stockholm, posted on 16 September 1914. Oval "D.Ts." and two-line "Opened by Military Censorship," plus resealing staple at right.

The Western Siberian Provinces



The three provinces of Western Siberia were under partial military censorship for the duration of the war. Censorship operations there were small until 1915, when the POWs started to arrive. As a result, most of the Western Siberian censor marks are encountered on POW correspondence.

Below: A registered commercial cover from Tyumen' to a Danish bank in Copenhagen, 29 January 1917.

Tyumen's military censorship office evidently opened in late 1914 or early 1915; it produced only a handful of censor marks up to February 1917.



"V.V." (Censor's initials.)

Вскрыто военной цензурой _____

"Opened by Military Censorship _____"



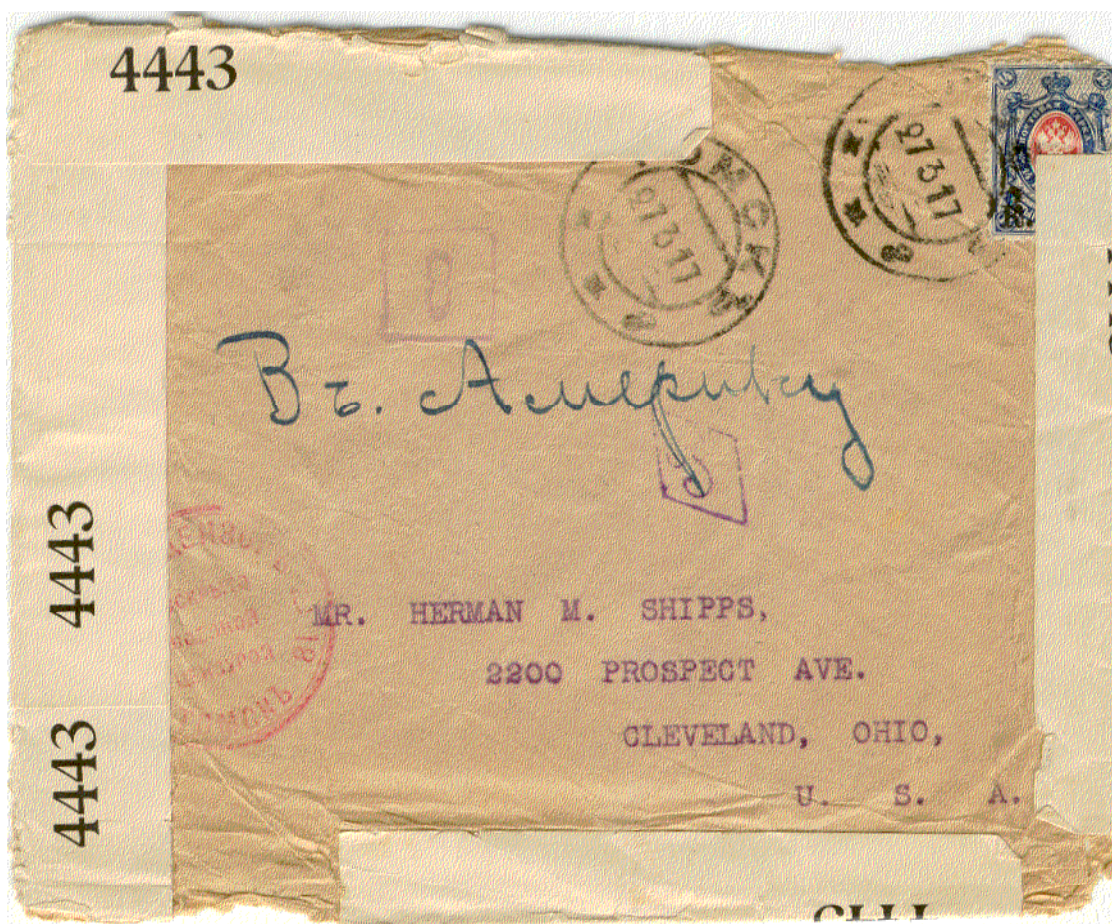
"D.Ts. / Military Censor No. 15 * Tyumen' *"



Western Siberia: Tomsk

The large military censorship office at Tomsk was up and running no later than September 1914. In its three years of existence, it produced approximately 30 censor mark and censorship tape varieties, evidence of a robust operation.

Below: Tomsk to Cleveland, Ohio, 27 March 1917. It was censored by the Russians first at Tomsk, then again when it reached Petrograd, and a final time by the U.S.

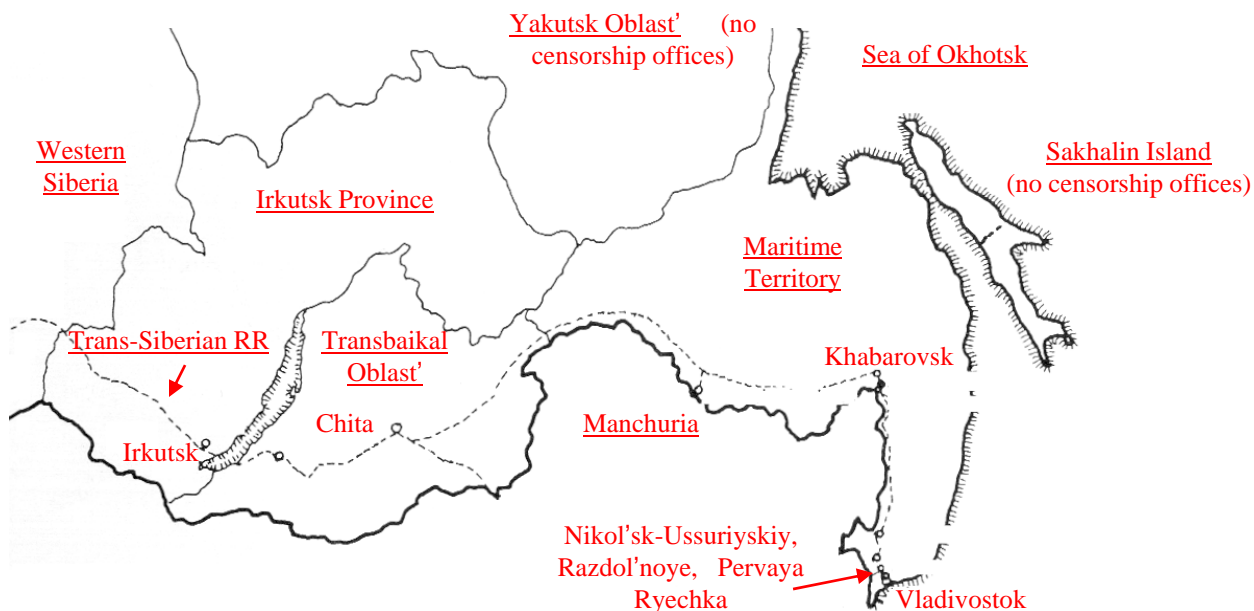


*"Opened by Military
Censorship / Military
Censor No. 18 / Tomsk"*



Petrograd control mark "R"
and sorter mark "8."

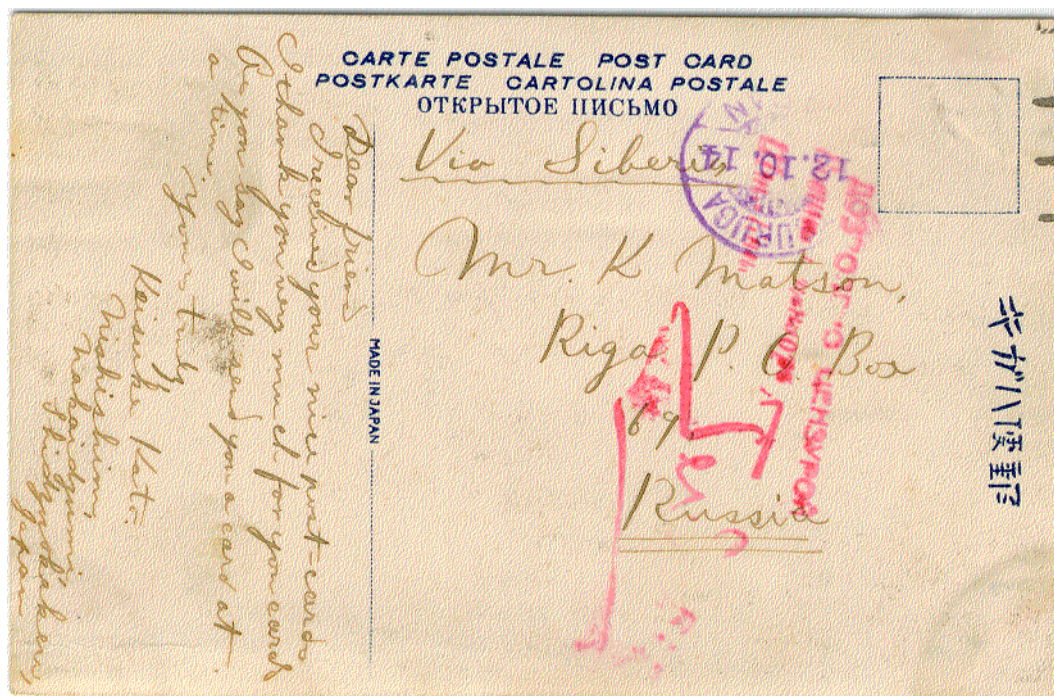
Eastern Siberia



Eastern Siberia was under partial military censorship, with large censorship operations at Irkutsk, Khabarovsk and Vladivostok. Most of their “business” was POW mail.

A PPC from Japan to Riga, transiting Tsuruga on 12 October 1914 and censored at Vladivostok several days later.

Vladivostok was Russia’s outpost in the Pacific, with a huge fortress and naval base. Its military censorship office was in operation at the very beginning of the war, and expanded greatly with the arrival of hundreds of thousands of POWs at camps immediately to the north.



ДОЗВОЛЕНО ЦЕНЗУРОЙ

Военный цензоръ

Шт.-Кап

“Permitted by censorship

Military Censor

Staff Captain (facsimile signature)”

Eastern Siberia: Chita

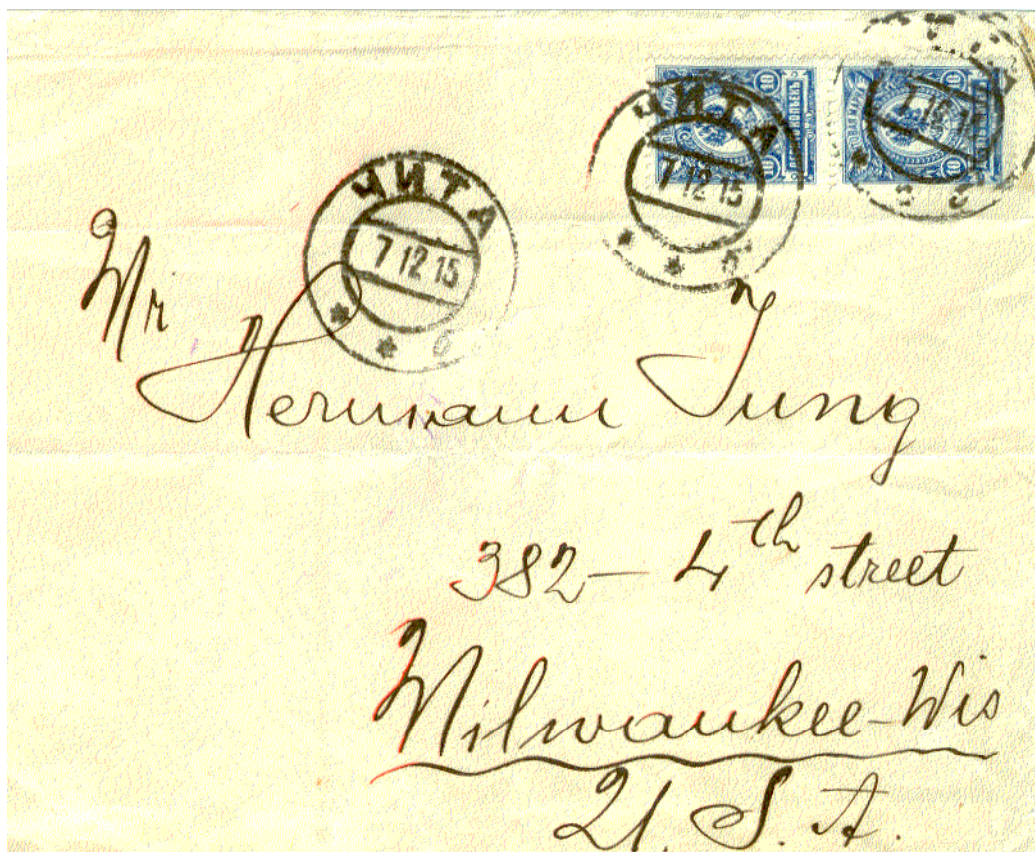


On reverse.



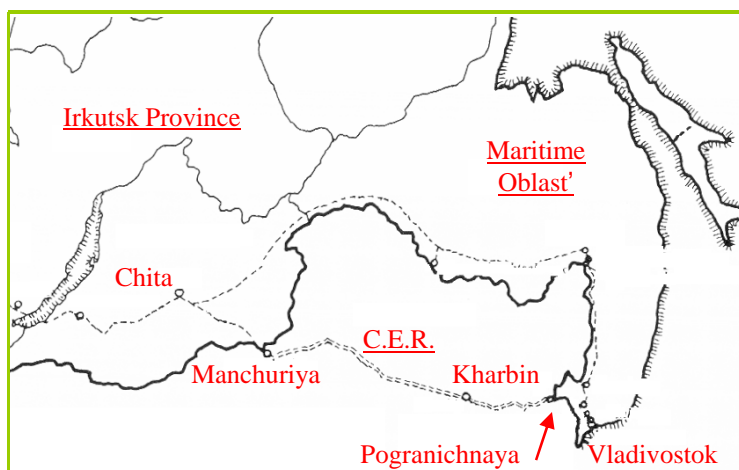
At left: “Chita Post-and-Telegraph Office / Military Censor.” Below: “Opened by Military Censorship.”[¥]

Вскрыто военной цензурой



Chita to Milwaukee, 7 December 1915.

Russian Military Censorship Operations Abroad: Manchuriya and Pogramichnaya



In addition to these two offices, the Russians maintained military censorship operations at Kharbin, Shanghai and Tien-Tsin. Censorship did not begin in the latter until 1916.

These two stations sat at either end of the Chinese Eastern Railroad (C.E.R.), Russia's strategic communications link that ran stretched across Manchuria to Vladivostok and the Pacific.

The tissue sheet at right is a most unusual "document" composed by the military censor at the railroad station of Manchuriya, in English. Apparently prepared at the request of an English acquaintance, the document presents all but two of the recorded types of Manchuriya censor marks. Moreover, the markings on the tissue paper are all in pink, but the markings on actual mail are in violet. The censor's name, V. Dakhnovich, is known from a correspondence he maintained with people in London. This sheet is the only recorded "specimen" document for censor marks from any office.



A POW's notice of receipt for 30 rubles from Razdol'noye in the Maritime Oblast' to Tien-Tsin via Pogramichnaya, 14 October 1916. The violet rectangular censor mark reads "D. Ts. / Pogramichnaya / No. 1."

Russia
Russian Post office Manchuria
Censor Marks.

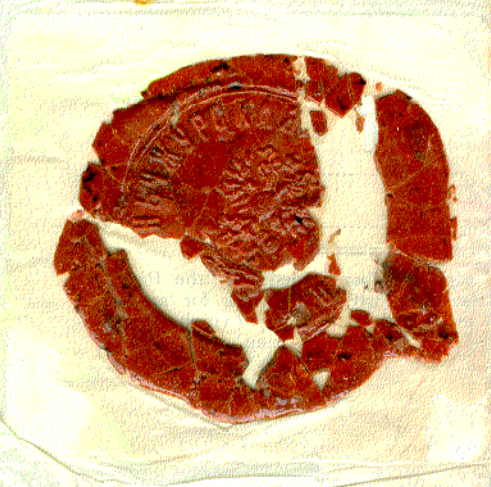


Бюро цензуры

В. Давыдов



These I use for ordinary
& registered letters when applied for
examination

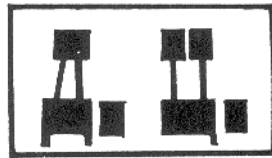


Бюро цензуры

This I use if in the
letter was found money, checks, stamps
or documents in
war cases V. Dan

Russian Military Censorship Abroad: Tientsin, China

Russia had had post offices in China since at least 1865, notably Tientsin, Kalgan and Peking, and added several more at the Treaty Ports. They were still operating when WWI began. With so many POWs in Russian concentration camps not far to the north and especially northwest of China, large numbers of Russian citizens along the Chinese-Eastern Railroad and at the Treaty Ports, and important commercial considerations in the area, some of these offices were logical places to have military censorship offices. Tientsin's office started operations around April 1916.



A POW-aid card to a prisoner at Sryetensk, posted from Tien-Tsin on 23 December 1916 and censored there. (Violet rectangle with “D.Ts.”)

Censorship Abroad: Persia



"Examined by Military Censorship"

Russian troops occupied Hamadan in December 1915, but lost it to the Turks in August of the following year. They recaptured it in March 1917, and it was during this occupation that a censorship operation was established in the town. The bilingual censor mark was applied to Persian mail.



Hamadan via Resht to Broadway, New York, posted on 13 October 1917 (N.S.).