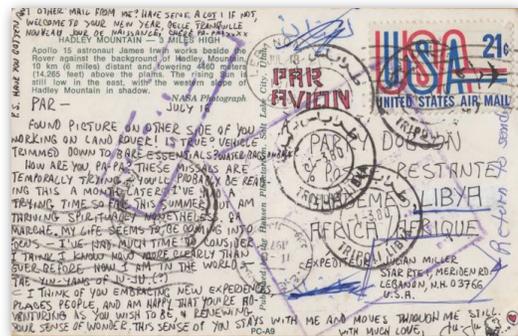


Finding Treasures

On finding weird covers.

Fred Schmitt

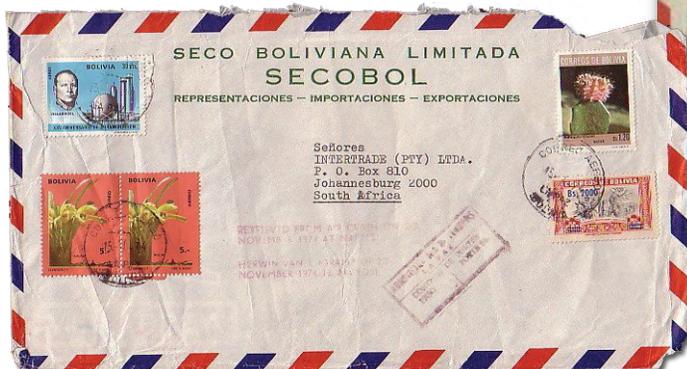


A common 1970s era postcard becomes a valuable commodity when it's sent to Libya in 1977—only to be returned to sender three years later!

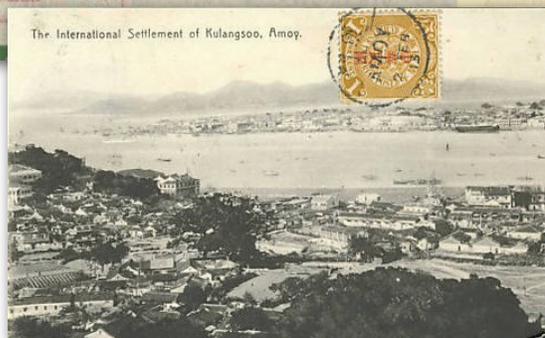
A rare use of Allied Military Government (AMG) stamps on a 1950 cover noting the first helicopter flight from Trieste to San Marino.



Wartime mail from a young sailor to his girlfriend is always made more valuable—and certainly more delightful—when the sailor also had some excellent artistic talent.



A very rare registered cover from Bolivia addressed to Johannesburg, South Africa, recovered from the 1974 Nairobi Lufthansa Plane Crash, with bilingual 'RETRIEVED FROM AIR CRASH ON 20 NOVEMBER 1974 AT NAIROBI' cachet. Such covers from obscure air crashes are quite scarce.



Another unusual (and expensive—worth more than \$400) postcard with a 1913 use from Kulangsoo Amoy in China clear to Bohemia, during an Austrian warship visit to the Far East.

One of the key things that attracts stamp collectors to going after postal history covers are the weird and unusual uses that practically jump right out of a dealer's cover box and into the buyer's hands. Some of these kinds of covers are attractive and striking to look at, while others are rather common in appearance.

I remember, years ago, coming across a somewhat damaged cover that was from a plane crash. The auxiliary marking on the cover stated that the cover was recovered from a United Airlines crash that has occurred outside Las Vegas, Nevada, in January 1942. Something struck me about that cover—so I acquired it and, some time later, managed to look up the information on it.

Bells didn't go off even then—but somehow, I found an accompanying story about the crash and it was a quite famous disaster at the time. One of the victims who died in the disaster was Carole Lombard, then the wife of Clark Gable. Lombard had been returning from a War Bond Rally in Indianapolis when her plane crashed upon take-off from a stopover in Las Vegas.

A cover like that was bought for small dollars and was sold later on for about five times what it had originally been priced.

The more one gets into postal history collecting, the more such finds can be made—and it comes from what I like to think of as "philatelic osmosis." Exposure to an ever-expanding array of covers allows bits and pieces of knowledge—seemingly insignificant when acquired—to seep into

one's skull. Suddenly, such knowledge pays off when one is confronted with a cover that looks obscure, but bears fruit because the buyer has some esoteric knowledge of its particular usage.

Take the Italian AMG cover shown above. Some AMG uses are rare enough, but this "first helicopter flight" use came at a time when those kinds of aircraft were especially rare. It's a gem for the AMG and aero enthusiasts.

Some collectors have made a side hobby out of collecting weird uses—regardless of what kind or what country was involved. They make for wonderful conversation pieces at the local stamp club meeting or while comparing acquisitions with another philatelist over a cup of coffee at a show. ☒