

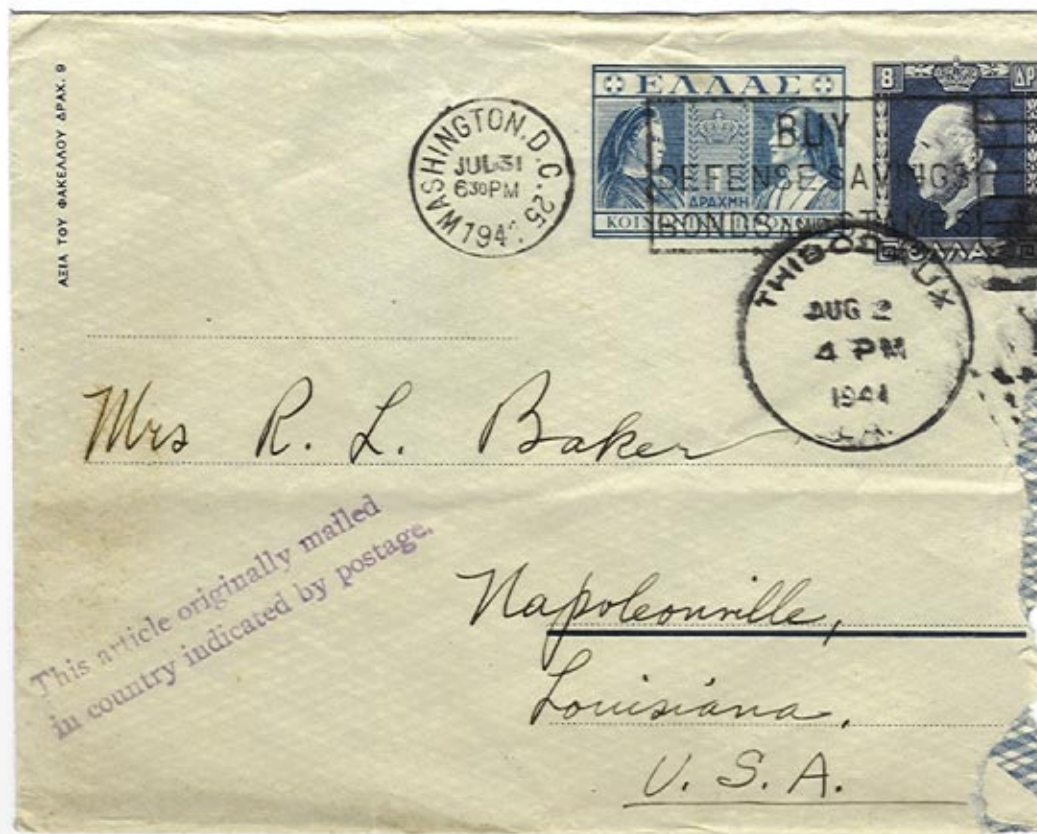
Diplomatic Pouch Mail from U.S. Missions Abroad

by Tom Broadhead

The envelope below is one that I have had in my collection for several years, and I have just gotten around to giving it a close look. Greece is not one of the countries I collect, and this envelope had been very roughly opened at the right, but sometimes a stamp or cover is so unusual that it just jumps out at you.

Probably the main reason I bought it was for its unusual postal markings. The cancellation has a circular date stamp of Washington, DC dated July 31, 1941, and the accompanying slogan “killer” says “BUY DEFENSE SAVINGS BONDS AND STAMPS.” Why was this envelope with Greek postage cancelled in the US?

A look at the backflap shows that it was mailed by Major J.K. Baker, Military Attaché at the American Legation in Athens, and the two-line, purple diagonal handstamp on the front says “This article originally mailed in country indicated by postage.” Those are clues that this envelope was mailed in Greece, but traveled to the US in a diplomatic pouch – an important means of conveying important papers without them being exposed to the curious eyes and hands of customs inspectors at either end of their journey. So, it didn’t enter the regular mailstream until it had arrived in the US, and then was on its way to Napoleonville, Louisiana, with a transit through Thibodeaux on August 2. United States diplomatic pouch mail, arriving continually from our many embassies and consulates typically shows these markings – and it’s an interesting collect area of postal history.



Another interesting aspect of this cover is that it is a preprinted postal stationery envelope – with two stamp imprints, no less! In the Higgins & Gage catalog of postal stationery, it is Greece B3 – with an 8 drachma imprint showing King George of Greece and a one drachma postal tax stamp imprint showing queens Olga and Sophia. Postal tax stamps are similar to semipostal stamps in that they raised funds for charities, but whereas semipostals are a voluntary payment of additional money, postal tax stamps typically were required to be used on all mail during certain time periods.

So there you have it – unusual stamps on an imprinted envelope that was handled in an unusual way from its origin to its final destination.