

Synopsis “American Red Cross Abroad: The Great War and Aftermath 1914-1922”

Treatment: This eight frame thematic exhibit will follow the American Red Cross (ARC) in its missions abroad during the First World War and the war’s aftermath. The mail of the ARC and by the ARC will have special emphasis. The material will illustrate the profound transformation from a tiny national organization produced to an ARC leading an international organization with truly global reach. This exhibit is divided into three chronologic segments: “Neutrality” 1914 to April 1917, “Yanks at War” April 1917 to April 1919, and “Call It Peace” April 1919 to 1922. Within the first segment “Neutrality”, illustrated ARC activities include mail from the ship SS Red Cross and the ten ARC volunteer hospital teams aiding the major combatants and the Christmas ship, USS Jason. Mail illustrates later volunteer efforts in particular the “American Ambulance”, the hospital established in Paris by US ex-pats. The second phase “Yanks at War” covers the massive expansion both the scope and volume of ARC work. The largest element is ARC on the Western Front and the Paris hub, its overseas headquarters. Examples of ARC work in Italy demonstrate a sharp contrast in focus and style. The third segment “Call It Peace”, illustrates the growth of mission and of global outreach with ARC as the leader of the League of Red Cross Societies. Discovery items and significant material will be highlighted with what else, a red border.

Importance: The American Red Cross, rechartered in 1905, was tested initially in the classic model of providing care for all wounded combatants under the mantra “neutrality and humanity” With US entry into the Great War, its federally chartered mission as the sole provider of care to the sick and wounded of the US military became its primary mission; the government added additional taskings to support the Allied war effort both at the front and for the Allied populations. Unique among the service organizations, the ARC had free franking and established its own Paris post office, censored mail, and created a courier service. In the aftermath of the war, the ARC determined on a broad global approach spreading “modern” public health practices and interventions in the new nation states of the Balkans, Eastern Europe, the former Russian Empire, and the Middle East. Its mission truly made it “the Great Mother”. The military and postal history of the ARC has been a historical blind spot, here corrected.

Presentation: This collection is exhibited illustrates the panorama of the ARC abroad. Among ARC’s functions was the production of a range of stationery and postcards for the personal use by soldiers and sailors as well as “arrived abroad” cards used by the AEF. Its earliest contribution was medical and morale support for the British and French armies. For the French, this took the shape of preserving the volunteer ambulance units (designated SSU) and creating a French oriented canteen system, the Deux Drapeaux (two flags). One of its ARC volunteers was Emma Lansing, sister of the Secretary of State. The ARC replaced the American Relief Clearing House as the central agent for volunteer relief efforts. Its largest programs provided medical care for the American Expeditionary Force (AEF). The ARC supported US military medical units, while also running two additional separate medical services, Red Cross military hospitals for US troops and Red Cross hospitals caring for ARC personnel and others. ARC mail from the first deployed medical units is the earliest US military mail from abroad in the WWI. Ultimately over 10,000

ARC nurses served abroad (in the US Army of WWI, nurses were contract employees). ARC was coordinated with the War Department and Post Office in the 1918 Christmas parcel coupon program. On the Italian front, beginning in late 1917, the ARC provided extensive efforts on behalf of the Italian army and morale of the Italian people. The ARC was the principal US presence (by contrast the US Army committed a single battalion and 25 Army Ambulance Service units in mid-1918). In Italy, the ARC mail was handled through the Italian post with Italian censorship. The ARC mission to Russia was much less impactful. The third phase, "Call It Peace" encompasses the transition to a global ARC led program in public health and war relief. The work involved fewer personnel but the breadth was extended and was expansive. ARC established Commissions to Germany, Austria, Hungary, Poland, the Baltics and Western Russia. Similar programs served the new nation states of the Balkans, South Eastern Europe, and South Russia and yet another to Palestine and Near East. Mail to and from these remote locations often involved the courier system and the Paris ARC post office, although the British, French, and even Italian military post also contributed. The ARC Commission to Siberia had, in addition to its Camp Service in support of the AEF, missions to support the civilian population and POW's. These Siberian efforts, covering a distance of 3900 km, produced an array of stationery and support markings. Exotic, highly significant material, and discovery items will be highlighted throughout the exhibit.

Study and research: What exists in the philatelic literature regarding the mail of the ARC's extensive and far-reaching programs is largely series of vignettes. Van Dam's "The Postal History of the AEF 1917 -1923" touches on aspects involving AEF primarily medical (chapter 7). Dulles' "The American Red Cross: a history" is the single best short non-philatelic overview. The Red Cross Magazine is a useful source describing ARC programs and to a lesser extent its mail. In the postwar period, several of the major players wrote of their ARC wartime service. Records of the National Archive were consulted and provide information on dates of function.

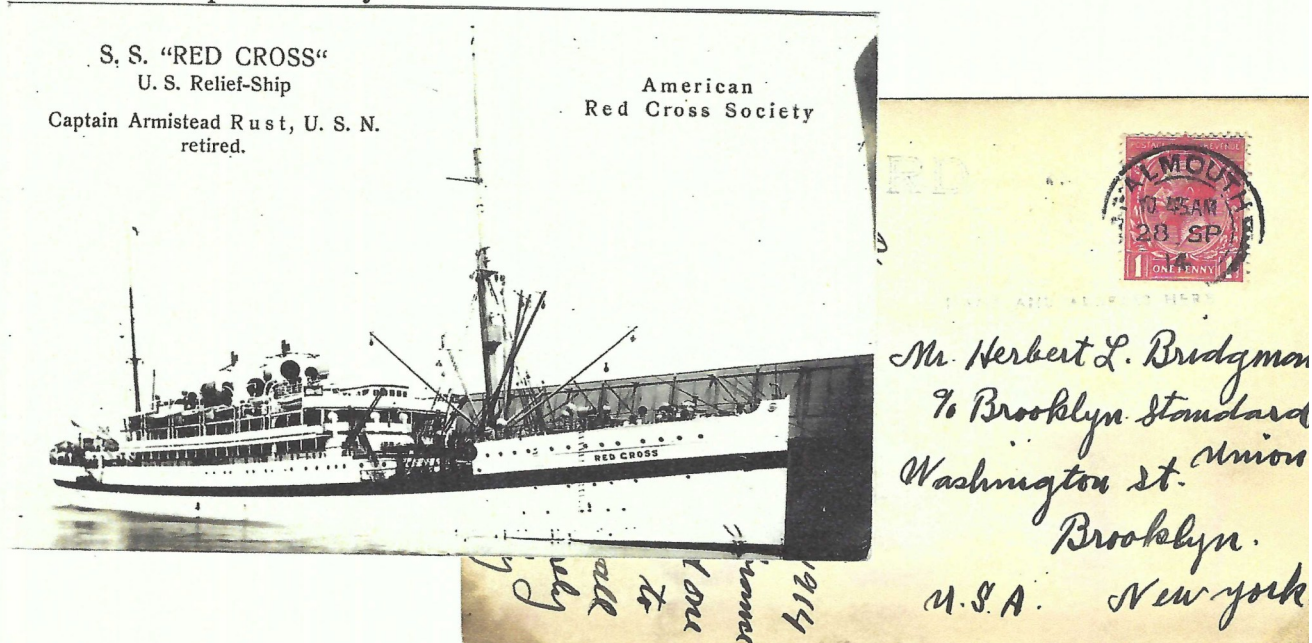
Scarcity: Red Cross material is relatively common. It becomes considerably less common when the ARC stationery and Red Cross mail representing military medicine are excluded. Evaluation of individual pieces of mail is made more difficult by the status of nurses, Red Cross versus military, and the use of substantive rank by Red Cross "officers", who also wore the same uniform and rank insignia as the US Army. The real challenge is mail from a specific function, location, or mail application. It is exactly here that this exhibit shines.

Significance: The breadth of the material in this collection allows the exhibitor to provide insights into less explored areas particularly the ARC post office and mail service.

Bibliography: van Dam, Theo. *The Postal History the AEF 1917-1921* 2ed
Dubin, Ed and Al Kugel, "World War I 100", *American Philatelist*. 131:4/2017 P328- 358

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With onset of the First World War in 1914, the American Red Cross(ARC)was tasked to provide succor for the sick and wounded combatants. In the first phase guided by their motto "Humanity and Neutrality", ten medical units of ARC volunteers were sent abroad, two to each major combatant. This small beginning was but the prelude to deployment vastly broader in scope and geography of tens of thousands of ARC volunteers. In the second phase, with US entry in the War, the ARC primary focus, now "Yanks at War", was their federally chartered mandate to provide care for the sick and wounded of the US military. The government additionally tasked ARC to support both the armies and population of the Allied nations. Its earliest contribution was medical and morale support for the British and French armies. The largest commitment was to the Western Front and was directed through the ARC Paris offices. Their functions were wide-ranging and included an ARC post office, censoring, and mail distribution. The ARC supported AEF and US naval medical units while running two additional medical services, Red Cross military hospitals for US troops and Red Cross hospitals caring for ARC personnel and others. On the Italian Front from late 1917, the ARC was the primary US presence with a dispersed network supporting the Italian Army and the morale of the Italian people. The ARC commission to Russia was much less impactful. In 1919 the third, "Call It Peace" phase, the ARC transitioned to a primary provider in global public health and war relief. The work involved far fewer volunteers breadth was expanded ranging from defeated Germany and Austria, into the turmoil of the new nation-states of Eastern Europe and the Balkans, serving in the Middle East, and providing a Commission to Siberia serving US troops, the civilian population, and POWs. Please enjoy this panorama of Red Cross postal history.



Card of SS Red Cross formerly SS Hamburg ready for her voyage. JT Donnelly Engineer writes: "Falmouth, England. Sept. 28 1914. Just a little remembrance of the Red Cross and one who is on his way to see the show. With all good wishes." ARC units for England disembarked. Uncensored.