Civilian & Military Organization of Mail Operations for the American Expeditionary Forces

Postal clerk in New York with Christmas 1918 mail for soldiers. National Archives

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Curator

Smithsonian
National Postal Museum
Logistics of mail service for the deployed military took the coordinated efforts of the Post Office, War, and Navy Departments.

US postal work in France, c. 1918 (top)
National Postal Museum

“Mail call” for U.S. Army Air Service in France (bottom)
National Postal Museum
The Post Office hired new staff to handle the increased volume of military mail.

Female clerks in New York City processed military mail for overseas, January 1919. 

National Archives
By the summer of 1918, approximately 1000 clerks volunteered to be assigned to the 123 military post offices located across the United States.

Camp Wilson, Texas (left)
Smithsonian Libraries

Identified as possibly Camp Upton, New York (right)
Smithsonian Libraries
The “War Post Office” at Union Station, Washington, DC, was organized by the Post Office Department and staffed by the military to handle mail for the US camps and the AEF.

Military service members cancel mail (above) and pose for a photograph (right) at the postal branch in Washington, DC.

*National Archives*
Between July 1, 1917 and June 30, 1918 the Post Office Department dispatched 35 million letters to the American Expeditionary Forces.

Christmas 1918 mail at New York port was destined for the AEF.

*National Archives*
Post Office Department’s Mail Agency in France

Charles Leary, civilian, served as the postal agent at APO 714, Langres, Haute-Marne, France. Documents from his work with the post office include: travel pass (above), passport (center), and letter in recognition of his service (right).

*National Postal Museum*
Military Postal Express Service

“M.P.E.S.” duplex handstamp for APO 753
(Above. Image on left is reversed)

Colonel T.D. Howe, Chief of Postal Express Service, based at APO 702, Paris, France

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Military Postal Express Service

MPES clerks redirect mail using up-to-date record cards -- each person in the AEF had a record card on file with current location information.

National Archives
A small number of civilian postal agents with the Post Office Department remained overseas to work alongside the Military Postal Express Service.

This window for postal money order business at the APO in St. Amand Mont Rond, Cher, France, was described as being staffed by a civilian, 1919.

National Archives
US Postal Inspector Gartland wrote a review of overseas mail operations as handled by the Post Office Department’s Mail Agency and by the AEF’s Military Postal Express Service:

“The part that is under our care is handled in such a manner that there is absolutely no reason to charge the PO Department with failure to do their work in an expeditious manner.”

Letter from Postal Inspector Joseph F. Gartland to his wife Jane and children Robert and Charlotte, February 27, 1919

National Postal Museum
Post Office Department’s Mail Agency in Occupied Germany

Walter B. Wesley, the last U.S. postal agent to leave Germany, April 1923

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