THE 2003 CIVIL WAR MOVIE – “COLD MOUNTAIN”

PHILATELIC MOVIE PROPS DEVELOPED FOR THE MOVIE¹

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Introduction:

I have been a collector, exhibitor and writer about philatelic movie props for many years. When I watch a movie I see it sometimes in a different light. When I first see a philatelic item in a movie, I wonder if it will play a prominent role. Sometimes the prop ends up as background material sitting on a desk. Or it is in the hands of an actor or actress and it is usually not readable. But sometimes it plays a major role in the film.

If you have not seen the movie you can get an overview by watching the 2 ½ minute trailer at:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXGtunJ9Jqk

The 2003 movie, Cold Mountain, was different matter. The opening scenes of this Civil War period movie shows Confederate soldier W. P. Inman (Jude Law), in 1864, sitting in the trenches at Petersburg, Virginia reading a (prop) letter/envelope (Figure 1) from Ada Monroe (Nicole Kidman) his love interest in Cold Mountain, North Carolina.

Figure 2 is a film clip from the movie showing the letter. Figure 3 is a storyboard that shows Inman reading the letter. Storyboards are used to sketch out the sequences of the movie prior to shooting. They allow the director to plan the film shooting angles, continuity, etc.

Inman did not know that the Union Army was ready to explode gunpowder under the Confederate trenches. Figure 4 is a storyboard from the movie showing a Union soldier lighting the fuse to explode the gunpowder. Figure 5 is a film clip showing the Union soldiers watching the explosion. The scene ends with the prop letter/envelope burning from the explosion (Figure 6). The rest of the movie revolves around his attempt to get back to Cold Mountain so he can be with Ada. The rest of the props covered in the article do not appear directly in the movie but go to show the detail that the movie companies will go to provide accuracy.

Background:

When I saw Inman reading the letter and noticed the envelope with the CSA stamps on it – it was a great combination. I collected and exhibited philatelic movie props and CSA postal history. I hoped that the props may show up on eBay. Disney (Miramax) was selling movie props through the internet auction house. They had auctioned some Cold Mountain costumes, canteens, etc. in the past. I watched but the philatelic items did not show up. In 2004, Premiere Props began to sell movie props on a regular basis on eBay. In April 2006, a Cold Mountain cover showed up (Figure 1). It had a $1,000 reserve and did not sell. Premiere Props did not normally have reserves. It did not sell and was the subject of an article in Linn’s Stamp News (April 4 2006). A
month or so later it (or a similar item) was offered without a reserve. The movie companies always make duplicates of some props in case one is damaged. The production of the movie doesn’t want to have to wait until a new prop is made if the scene has to be re-shot. I was able to obtain the cover and some other items that are the subject of this article.

The Movie:

Inman was a real person as shown by his National Archives card (Figure 7). His full name was William Pickney Inman but the full name is never used in the movie. He actually deserted two times from the Confederate Army but was pardoned. Figure 8 is his military muster roll showing his desertions. His relatives still live in the Cold Mountain area and he is buried in the local cemetery.

The show was nominated for seven (7) Academy Awards – winning one for best supporting actress (Rene Zellweger)

Some movie critiques compared the movie to Homer’s Odyssey. Cold Mountain described a hero’s long and dangerous journey back to see his loved one. The scenery was beautiful and the battle scenes dynamic even if it was mostly filmed in the Transylvania region of Romania.

The Envelopes:

Figure 1 is seen as Inman reads a letter from Ada. Movie prop departments try to create very accurate support items even if they are only seen on the screen for a few seconds. Sometimes they end up on the “cutting room floor.” Their research is usually pretty good but other times they use stamps that are not appropriate for the time period. For example, in “Indiana Jones: Raiders of the Lost Ark” they showed an envelope that had a stamp issued in 1948 on it but the movie was set in the late 30s.

In the Cold Mountain movie, they had mixed success. The computer printed stamps (Scott #7?) on Figure 1 are realistic but the 45 cents is over-franking. The cancel of Pensacola, FL. does not make sense as Ada was either in Charleston, SC or Cold Mountain, NC at the time. The three strikes of a circular “PAID 5” (Figure 12) are from Pensacola (Scott 106XUI, Dietz Type V), so some research was performed by the film prop masters. I could find no reference to the “FORWARDED” marking.

The envelope in Figure 9 was later offered on eBay by Premiere Props and was described as

“A heavily distressed envelope that has been stained tan and water damaged, causing the ink to bleed and run. The 6.5 inch by 3.5 inch envelope has five 2-cent stamps (Scott #8) and one blue 10-cent stamp (Scott #5). The envelope was used as a teaching model for Ada (Nicole Kidman) to line up the stamps according to procedure at the time of the Civil War.”

This cover has a Charleston, MD. cancel (?) and a Lynchburg, VA. cancel (Figure 12). The cancel from Charleston, MD. does not make sense and is probably a mistake made by the prop master who intended it to be SC. The 20-cent franking is probable but not likely. The envelope is addressed to Inman at Company I, 25th N.C. Ransom's Brigade C.S.A. This is a reasonable address since the Order of Battle for the Battle of Fredericksburg shows a Ransom's Brigade (Table 1)

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Postal History Symposium, Nov. 2012
Mystery:

The preparation for this article uncovered an envelope mystery. Figure 1 was offered on eBay as the “hero” envelope read by Inman in the trenches prior to the explosion. Figure 2 is a film clip showing the envelope in Inman’s hand. They are very similar as to the cancels and the stamps and their positioning but a closer look shows the addresses to be different. The film clip envelope in Figure 2 shows the same address as the “training’ envelope in Figure 9. They are compared below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 1 Address</th>
<th>Figure 2 Address</th>
<th>Figure 9 Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. W. P. Inman</td>
<td>Mr. W. P. Inman</td>
<td>Mr. W. P. Inman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highland Guards</td>
<td>Company I 25th</td>
<td>Company I 25th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>N.C.</td>
<td>N.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ransom’s Brigade</td>
<td>Ransom’s Brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C.S.A.</td>
<td>C.S.A.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It raises a possible continuity problem for the director. Since these items are only seen for a few seconds it was not caught or they felt it would not make any difference. This discovery also reinforces the idea that until you create an exhibit or attempt to write an article about your specialty you may discover things you did not know.

Order of Battle for Fredericksburg

RANSOM’S DIVISION
Brig. Gen. ROBERT RANSOM Jr.

RANSOM’S BRIGADE
Brig. Gen. ROBERT RANSOM Jr.

24th North Carolina
25th North Carolina, Lt. Col. Samuel C. Bryson
35th North Carolina
49th North Carolina

Branch’s (Virginia) Battery

TABLE 1
The Stamps:

The Premier Props auctions also produced some single stamps, as seen in Figure 10. While the stamps were described as computer generated, they look very similar to the TASCO fakes of many years ago. The only one that I have not found on a cover from the movie is the 10-cent green (Scott 10?).

The Cancels:

The cancelling devices also showed up on eBay and I was able to get them. Figure 11 shows the actual devices and Figure 12 shows the resulting cancels. They are quite well done and could confuse collectors.

Conclusions:

Most collectors know that the search for unusual and illusive items is a major part of collecting. The primary research begins after the acquisition of the item(s). This is where you learn more about the items than you suspected when you first obtained them. The searching for the items covered 2-3 years as Premier Props was in the process of selling items from many different movies over that time period. Cold Mountain material would only show up on occasion. Due to the quantities of items Premier Props was selling, it sometimes took two months to receive the material from them. There is no doubt that other copies of some of the items exist as I was the under bidder on similar items.

You Tube Video:

There is a 2 ½ minute video on You Tube that covers much of the material in this paper. It is located at:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBb6kMZgWvY

References:

1 The original version of this topic appeared in the Confederate Philatelist, Oct. - Dec. 2006, Vol. #51, Number 4, Whole Number 351, p. 11-16.
2 More information on Inman’s military service can be found in the NARA’s summer, 2004 issue of PROLOGUE or at http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2004/summer/inman.html
3 Order of Battle: http://civilwarhome.com/anyfredericksburg.htm
4 The 25th Infantry Regiment, formerly the 15th Volunteers, was assembled at Camp Patton, Asheville, NC. In August 1861. The following counties furnished companies for the regiment: Henderson, Jackson, Haywood, Cherokee, Transylvania, Clay, Macon, and Buncombe. It moved to Grahamville, SC. and remained there until March 1862. The unit then moved back to North Carolina and arrived in Virginia on June 24. Serving in R. Ransom’s and M.W. Ransom’s Brigade, it fought with the army from the Seven Day’s Battles to Fredericksburg, serving in North Carolina, then saw action at Plymouth and Drewry’s Bluff. Later the 25th participated in the long Petersburg siege south of the James River and the Appomattox Campaign. It reported 128 casualties during the Seven Days’ Battles, 15 in the Maryland Campaign, 88 at Fredericksburg, and 103 at Plymouth. Many were disabled at Sayler’s Creek, and on April 9 1865, only 8 officers and 69 were present.
Gen Alfred H. Colquit. (Later in the campaign, Beauregard’s Department would be expanded and reorganized to consist of the divisions of Maj. Gens. Hoke and Bushrod Johnson.


FIGURE 1 – W.P. Inman’s envelope from Ada Monroe.
FIGURE 2 – Film clip of the letter in Inman’s hand.

FIGURE 3 – Storyboard showing the letter in the book.
FIGURE 4 – Storyboard of the Union soldier lighting the fuse.

FIGURE 5 – Film clip of the Union Soldiers watching the explosion.
FIGURE 6 – Film clip of letter and photo burning up.

FIGURE 7
FIGURE 8

FIGURE 9 – Training envelope for the actors.
FIGURE 10 – Cold Mountain prop stamps.

FIGURE 11 – Actual cancelling devices.
Dr. Richards' current primary interest is collecting all phases of movie related mail, mail to/from movie stars, to/from movie companies, philatelic movie props, etc. He has written extensively on movie related mail and has co-authored a monthly column about movie related military postal history, “Stars and Strife”, for the last ten (10) years in the Military Postal History Society’s (MPHS) Bulletin. He also collects, writes about, and exhibits Allied Military Government (AMG) Military Travel Permit stamps, the 1937 and 1942 Christmas Seal and Confederate Texas Manuscript cancels. He is currently working on a one frame exhibit of U.S. Naval Mission to Brazil cancels.

Related articles:

Richards, Thomas, YouTube Video, “Cold Mountain”, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBb6kMZgWvY