

TRANSMISSION OF POSTAL MATTER TO AND FROM
AMERICAN FORCES IN FRANCE.

L E T T E R

FROM

THE POSTMASTER GENERAL,

TRANSMITTING

REPORT REGARDING THE TRANSMISSION OF POSTAL MATTER
TO AND FROM MEMBERS OF THE AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY
FORCES IN FRANCE.

FEBRUARY 1, 1918.—Referred to the Committee on the Post Office and Post Roads
and ordered to be printed.

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT,
OFFICE OF THE POSTMASTER GENERAL,
Washington, D. C., January 31, 1918.

To the SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

In response to House resolution 232, Sixty-fifth Congress, second
session, as follows:

Resolved, That the Postmaster General be requested to inform this House upon the
following:

First. What is the length of time now required to transmit postal matter from the
United States to members of the American expeditionary force in France, and from
members of the American expeditionary force in France to the destination of such
postal matter within the United States.

Second. Whether he or any other person or persons or committee or committees or
commission or commissions appointed by him have investigated or are now investigat-
ing the subject in order to ascertain whether the time now consumed in transit can
be curtailed, and losses, if any, of mail matter be reduced.

Third. Whether he or such other person or persons or committee or committees or
commission or commissions have reported.

Fourth. What were the findings and recommendations, if any, contained in such
report.

Fifth. And what, if any, steps he has taken to curtail the time of such postal matter
in transit and reduce the losses thereof, if any.

I beg to report as follows:

First. The time required to transmit postal matter from the United
States to members of the American expeditionary force in France
has been found to be from 15 to 30 days, according to the location of

frequency of change of the location of the military unit to which the addressee belongs and according to the regularity of the ocean transportation. Where the units have changed location frequently, or individuals thereof have been separated from their units on detached duty, longer time has elapsed. On the other hand, instances have been reported where letters from the Middle West, mailed so as to make close connection with departing French liner or fast transport, have reached addressees at the front in from 12 to 14 days. Owing to the irregularity of sailings from New York and constant shifting of military units, about 30 days on an average should be allowed for the average letter from the United States to reach the camps in France, provided that the individual is stationed with his unit at the time of the arrival of the mail.

The Post Office Department does not deliver matter to the individual soldier, but delivers the mail in bulk, in accordance with military regulations, to the properly accredited mail orderlies, whence the mail passes out of the jurisdiction of the Postal Service and is delivered through military channels to individual soldiers.

Mail is dispatched from New York on all available commercial liners and transports. I am informed that the letter mail clears entirely with every dispatch, though occasionally, which is exceptional, the lack of space on liners or transports causes parcel post or paper mail to fall back on the next outgoing ship. The frequency with which mail is dispatched to the troops from New York is shown by the following dates during the past three months when mail was sent either by commercial liners or Army and Navy transports:

November, 1917: 3, 8, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 22, 29, 30.

December, 1917: 7, 12, 16, 18, 28.

January, 1918: 2, 8, 10, 14, 17, 20, 21, 23, 25.

The time that elapses between the loading of the mail on a commercial liner and its arrival at a French port varies from 10 to 14 days, according to the speed of the ship or its route across the ocean. Mail on transports is loaded whenever and to the extent that the Army has space available, but it does not follow that transports sail directly for their destination immediately upon being loaded. Mail placed on transports has arrived in France sometimes in 12 days, and sometime as much as 21 days after being loaded in this country. When as much as 2,000 sacks of mail arrive in France it will require from two to three days to move the last of such mail out of the port for the interior because of the limited space available on the railways in France. The time required for the railways to transport this mail to the camps or stations of the American force is from one to two days, according to the distance or location of the troops.

I am informed that this mail is turned over promptly to the duly designated mail orderlies of the military units to which it is addressed and that no mail for the troops is held at any of the field postal stations. Military orderlies open the lead-sealed sacks and distribute the individual pieces of mail to the soldiers to whom they are addressed, or mail is readdressed by them and forwarded to individual officers or men who may have been transferred to other stations.

Mail from the members of the American Expeditionary Forces in France to destination within the United States is usually brought to the postal stations from the camps by mail orderlies and is distrib-

uted to States and cities and forwarded by first dispatch to this country. Mail returning from France usually requires from 15 to 30 days, according to the frequency of departure of vessels from French ports to this country and the closeness of connections of such mails with departing ships.

Second. Investigations to ascertain whether the time now consumed in transit of mail can be curtailed, and losses reduced, occupy the attention of the postal authorities continually and the question is constantly being studied by postal experts, and every opportunity for quicker and safer dispatch has been utilized. Possible dispatches via Canadian ports or England have been investigated, but none have been found to be as expeditious as the movement from New York direct to certain French ports having trunk-line connection with all points in the interior of France where our troops are located. All safeguards against losses of mail matter have been thrown around the mail in the Chicago and New York terminals, where it is handled, and in France, where it is received in sealed bags, up to the time it is delivered in unbroken bulk to the properly designated mail orderlies.

Third and fourth. The department is in receipt of frequent advices from the ablest postal experts available who are on the ground in France as to ways and means which are utilized for the expedite transportation, distribution, and delivery of mail to those authorized to receive same by the military authorities, but no reports by persons, persons, committee, committees, commission, commissions, have, been made on these subjects, except reports on losses and delays based on individual complaints made by the inspector in charge of such work in France. However, as stated, every possible expedition and safeguard of the mails is being studied and promptly instituted by the Postal-Service officials now in France, and all changes having this end in view are promptly adopted and reported to the department.

Fifth. The complete working of the mails to companies or other military units between the sailing of ships from New York; the dispatching from French ports as promptly as possible of the mails in sealed bags; the transportation of the mail from the ports in France to the full extent of railway capacity, without rehandling, to the postal stations near which the military units are located; and the immediate delivery to the Government trucks and mail orderlies of the mail in the quickest possible manner of the handling of this mail in transit that constant study on the subject has been able to devise. The department can, of course, exercise no control over the dates of sailings of the steamships or transports carrying this mail. It does only its best by never failing to avail itself of each facility of transportation as it presents itself.

A. S. BURLESON,
Postmaster General.