

The Cover Story

Mail Home from World War II, Part II

by Phil Fettig

Last month the article started with examples of mail sent home during World War II from members of the Army Air Corps, Marine Corps and the Navy. This month we will learn about a young man who joined the Navy to “See the World” prior to the start of WWII.

On March 14, 1941, George H. Trousdell of Hillsdale, New Jersey dropped out of his junior year of High School and joined the U.S. Navy. It was his 17th birthday. I wonder how much resistance he had in getting Mom to sign the papers. (I also enlisted at 17 and remember the effort!) **Figure A8 on front cover** shows a young sailor that looks more like 14 or 15 than 17. The photo was taken in April 1941 while in training at Norfolk, Virginia. Unfortunately, no letters written during Recruit Training to Trousdell's parents were in the material I obtained. However, I am really sure this photo was meant to impress somebody back home of his military abilities. The truth is Fireman Recruit Trousdell was probably more familiar with the “tools” behind him against the barracks wall....a mop and broom. (NOTE: I am aware most would call a young sailor “Seaman”, however that is not always the case. Individuals selected for mechanical related occupations are called “Fireman”, a carryover from the days of coal fired boilers.)

The box of letters, documents and other items I have pertaining to George lacks information from his enlistment until 2 letters in 1942 and then skips to 1944.

After recruit training, Trousdell was assigned to a Navy Destroyer, USS WARRINGTON (DD-383). **Figure A9 on front cover** shows a cover cancelled onboard on the occasion of its Shakedown cruise. When a newly constructed ship is placed in commission, extensive testing is necessary. The ship is run hard and fast to see if any problems “shake down” from the rough operation.

With the start of WWII in December 1941 many changes in security were made. Two important items included the name of the ship disappearing from the cancel and severe rules against mentioning in letters where you were at, where you have been and where you were going next. Many letter writers tried to work around this restriction with codes and **figure A10 on front cover** shows one of the more ingenious methods I have seen.

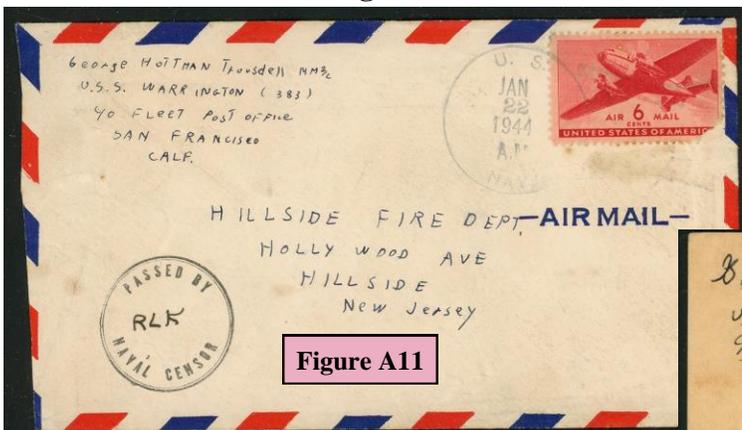


Figure A11

made extensive port calls in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans as well as the Caribbean Sea.

When the letters appear again in early 1944, Trousdell has risen to the rank of Petty Officer Second Class with a rating of Machinist's Mate.

With the unfortunate absence of letters during most of 1942 until 1944, it was not possible to see if Trousdell used his method of location and then stopped, or never used it. Research of ship movement records indicates the WARRINGTON

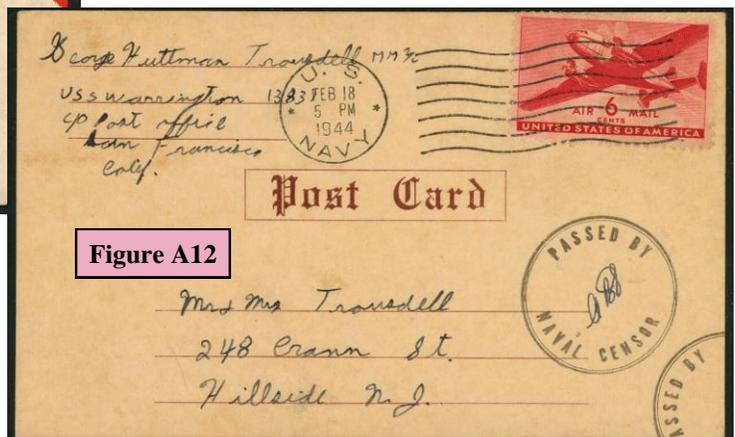


Figure A12

He used several methods of corresponding with his parents. Some letters were addressed to both parents while others went to one parent or the other. **Figure A11** is a “normal” form of a letter, in an envelope and addressed to Fire Department where his father works. An airmail stamp, Scott C-25, is used as he does in most letters.

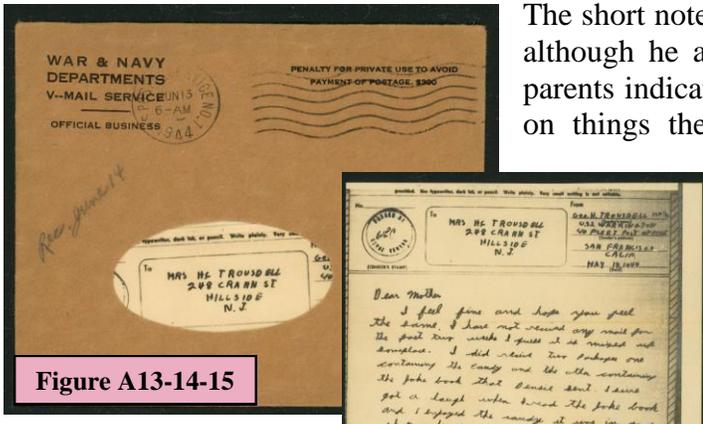
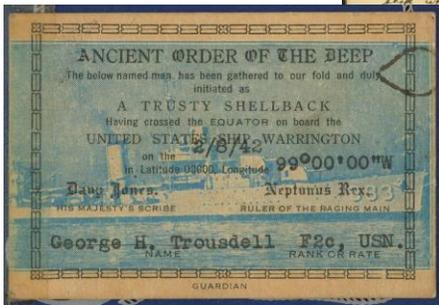


Figure A13-14-15

The short note enclosed mainly bemoans the lack of contact with girls, although he also states that helps save money. Other letters to his parents indicate they should spend the money he sends home for them on things they need. In February 1944, Trousdell switches to a postcard as shown in **Figure A12**. His pattern holds with the use of another airmail stamp as postage. The message on the card informs his parents he will write a letter when he gets the urge and can think of something to say. Petty Officer Trousdell also tells them not to expect to see him for some time to come. All in all, I would say this card did not cheer his parents up much!



During the war it was necessary to transport millions of letters from all over the world back to the recipients. Not only was the cost high, but even worse was the amount of space required onboard planes and ships to move the mail. A system to solve this problem was developed called “V-Mail”. A service member would write a letter on normal paper. The letter was then microfilmed. The rolls of microfilm were then

transported back to the U.S. and developed and placed in the mail system. **Figures A13 & A14** show an envelope and letter.

One common aspect of all the mail is the indication of the letters being censored. This usually was accomplished by a Junior Officer being assigned this task.

Reading through the material that came with the box of letters makes it clear that Petty Officer Trousdell served outside the U.S. on this ship from January 1942 until returning to the New York Naval Yard in July 1944. While no indication is given that he visited his parents, I have to believe a 50-mile trip was possible during the shipyard stay. During this long period on the Destroyer, Petty Officer Trousdell visited many countries. The ship saw action in the Pacific War area including Bougainville, New Ireland, Wakde Island and Biak Island. Early in this long cruise the ship crossed the Equator and Trousdell was initiated as a Trusty Shellback as evidenced by the card shown in **Figure A15**.

After the 30-month tour in the Atlantic and Pacific war zones, the WARRINGTON was due some easier duty. In September 1944 she was assigned duty to escort another vessel on a visit to Trinidad. As happens in life, especially during wartime, events can take a bad turn and stories do not have happy endings. On September 14, 1944, five Navy ships were sunk by a hurricane with a loss of 344 men. The USS WARRINGTON and Petty Officer Trousdell were part of that tragedy.



Machinist's Mate Second Class; George H. Trousdell 1924 – 1944
Sailor, Rest Your Oar.