

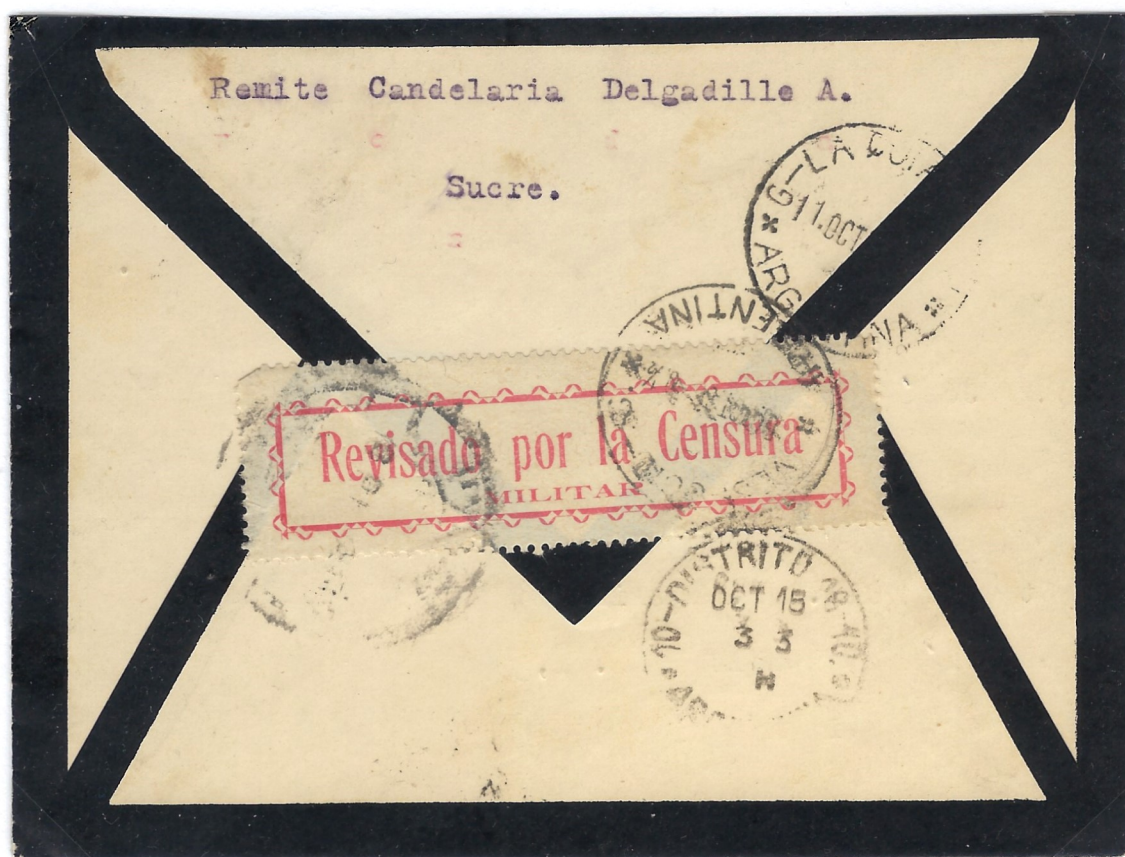
BOLIVIAN CENSOR AND RESEALING LABELS FROM THE CHACO WAR, 1932-1935

Between 1932 and 1935 Bolivia and Paraguay fought for control of an area of land known as the Chaco, a vast largely waterless and unpopulated piece of land through which the poorly defined boundary between the two countries passed.

Both countries imposed censorship controls on the mail once war had been declared. Paraguay did so in a limited way, and it was rare for civilian mail to be censored at all. In Bolivia, on the other hand, the military introduced vigorous censorship as soon as the war began, and both military and civilian mail was subject to the scrutiny of the censors. The main reason behind the enthusiastic imposition of censorship by the Bolivian authorities was to prevent Bolivians from sending money out of the country.

Bolivia made extensive use of both censor and resealing labels. Censor labels were used to show that a letter had been checked by a censor, while resealing labels were needed to reseal an envelope once it had been opened by the censor. The resealing labels show a remarkable variety of subtle design changes.

While covers from the Chaco War cannot be described as rare, they are not common, and appear only infrequently in the philatelic market place. The scarcity is due to two main factors. Firstly, many of the soldiers who fought the war were illiterate, so not a lot of mail was generated. Secondly, the harsh conditions under which the war was fought meant that anything on paper was likely to have a fairly limited survival rate.



Mourning mail was subject to censorship in the same way as any other mail. Cover sent October 1933 from Sucre, Bolivia, to Salta, northwestern Argentina. The sealing label has a distinguishable "scalloped" edge to its design.

References

- Marshall, B. "Philatelic posturing: map stamps and the Chaco War". *New Zealand Map Society Journal*, no.15: 17-24, 2002.
- Moorhouse, B. *The Postal History of the Chaco War (Bolivia and Paraguay) 1932-1935. A Display to the Royal Philatelic Society of London 8th February 2007*. London, Brian Moorhouse.
- Shepherd, A. *Postal History of the Chaco War. Part 2 (Bolivia)*. Halifax, A. Shepherd, 1981.

CENSOR LABELS

Censored cover sent from Bolivia to London, England, 1933.

The censor label is printed in black, has a plain ruled frame, and incorporates the phrases EJERCITO DE BOLIVIA (ARMY OF BOLIVIA), Correo Militar (Military Mail) and ABIERTO POR LA CENSURA (OPENED BY THE CENSOR).

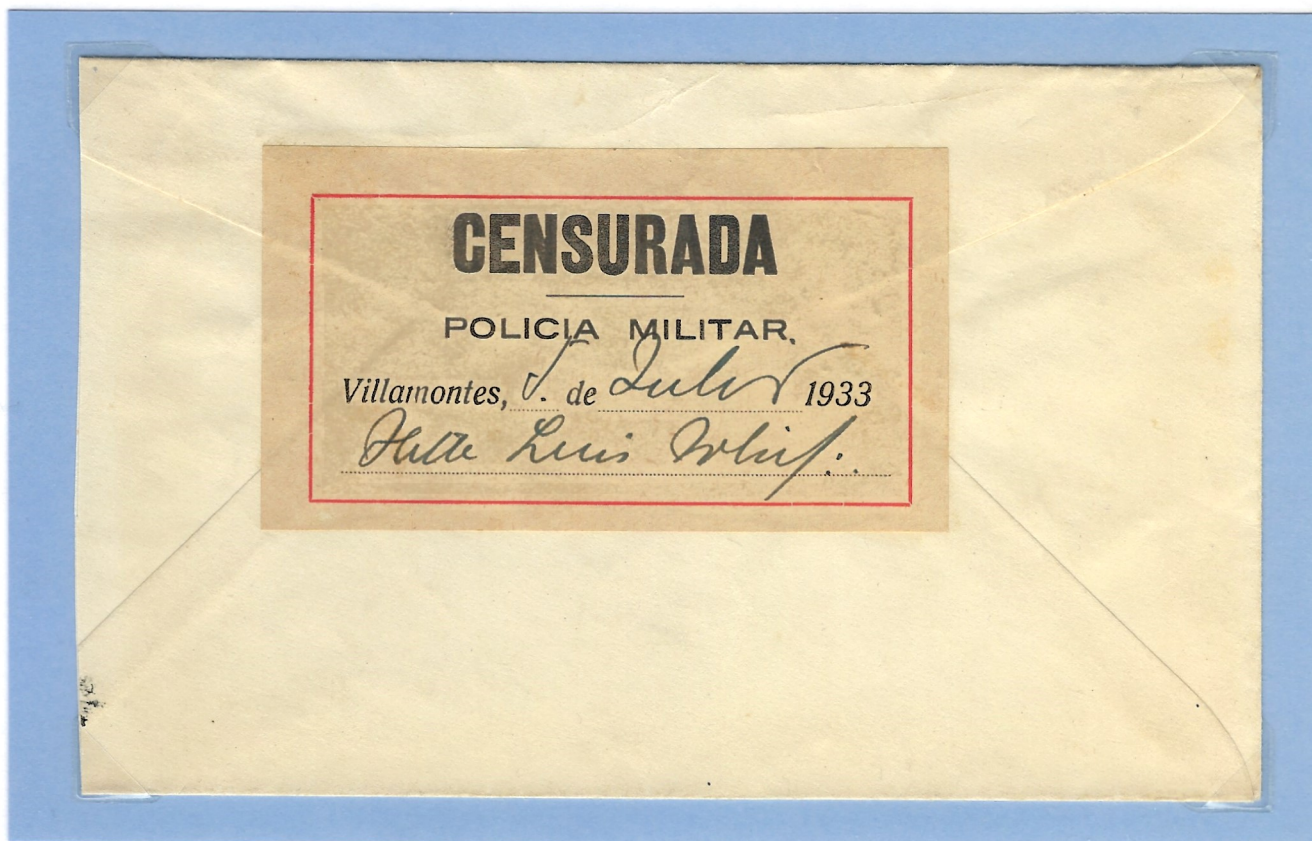
The label is additionally inscribed Form. 54, and these labels were individually numbered using a 5-digit sequence. Earlier versions of the label lack the notation Form. 54 and have no sequential numbering.

The notation Form. 54 on this label is in English rather than Spanish, so was possibly printed in either the United States or the United Kingdom.

Forms very similar to this one, but with 6-digit numbering, also exist.



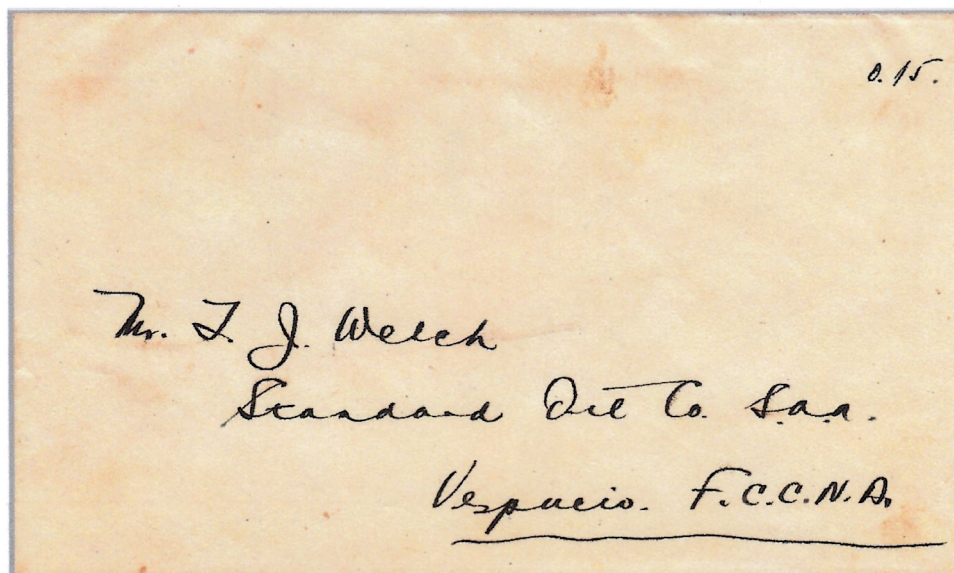
CENSOR LABELS



Label used by the Bolivian Military Police at Villa Montes (headquarters of the Bolivian Army) in 1933. The label is printed in black, with a plain red single line frame.

The label has been dated and signed by the censor.

Brian Moorhouse, a British philatelist and acknowledged Latin American expert, describes this as "a relatively scarce label".



The lack of a stamp on the front of the above cover probably indicates that there were no stamps available when the cover was mailed, although it may well have travelled outside the official postal system. The "0.15" was the surface mail rate to Argentina.

The cover is addressed to Standard Oil at Vespacio which is a stop on the FCCNA (Ferro Carril Central Norte Argentino— Central Northern Railway of Argentina). Vespacio is close to Argentina's border with Bolivia..

RESEALING LABELS

Resealing labels, used on mail that had been opened by the censors, were used widely on both military and civilian mail. The labels have the wording Revisado por la Censura – Opened (Reviewed) by the Censor – usually followed by Militar – Military [censor]. Militar appears sometimes in lower case, sometimes in upper case.

The resealing labels may be divided into two categories. With the first, the frames on the label appear as a plain straight single or double line, although there are variations in the thicknesses of the lines. The second category is made up of labels that have different styles of ornamental frames, such as a diamond pattern, a scalloped edge, or a zig-zag edge. The labels show subtleties of design, and ten different formats are known. Not all of them are shown in this exhibit. Whereas the censors' handstamps were produced locally, the manufacture of these resealing labels was most likely done centrally, and probably in La Paz.

There are slight variations in the shade of the red ink used for these labels. Most have been described as red, but a few have been described as salmon-red and even orange. They were printed on either white or cream paper, and the labels exist both perforated and imperforated.



A November 1933 air mail cover from Oruru in Bolivia to Buenos Aires in Argentina.

The two resealing labels have a single line frame and are lacking the word MILITAR. It seems likely that this was actually the first version of these resealing labels to be used.

The purple stamp is the official Government stamp of the Prefecture (Department) of Oruru.

RESEALING LABELS

Top: Cover flown from Buenos Aires, Argentina to La Paz, Bolivia, via Arica in Chile. The resealing label has a double line of equal thickness, and a sans-serif lettering style. A violet censorship handstamp has been applied at La Paz. This violet handstamp was in use at La Paz from May 1935.

Bottom: Internal airmail cover to La Paz. The back of the cover has been signed and dated by the censor. The resealing label has a "scalloped edge" pattern frame.



RESEALING LABELS



Registered airmail cover from La Paz to Czechoslovakia, dated September 1934. The resealing label has a "Diamond" pattern frame, and has been date stamped 12 .9.1934 in red. The censor's handstamp has been initialled in green by the censor.



Cover flown from La Paz, Bolivia, to Peru, March 1934. The resealing label has a double line frame of thick and thin rules, and a "Bold" lettering style.

RESEALING LABELS

Top: Registered Bolivian airmail cover flown from Potosi to Athens, Greece, dated September 1935. The resealing label has a double-lined frame with a row of dots in-between the frame lines. The green double-boxed censor handstamp is a Potosi handstamp, in use between September 1934 and November 1935. The censor has written his "number" on the stamp, and his initials appear on the cover as well.

Bottom: International cover from Oruru, Bolivia, to Rosario de Santa Fe, Argentina. The resealing label has a "chequered" pattern frame. The censor's double-boxed handstamp, initialled and dated by the censor, was in use at Oruru between May and September 1934.



RESEALING LABELS

Censorship remained a fact of life in Bolivia long after the conclusion of the Chaco War. Bolivia's defeat in the War brought about considerable political and social unrest, leading in 1941 to the emergence of the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement.

Although the cancellation on this cover is illegible, the postage stamp was not issued until April 1941. Yet the cover has a resealing label from the Chaco War period, with a "Diamond" patterned frame. The censor's handstamp dates from the 1940s.

