

THE BRITISH CENSORSHIP

By ERIC FISHER WOOD

FOR the purposes of organization the censorship is divided into three principal departments: The Naval Censor, who examines wireless messages and searches couriers found upon the high seas; the Cable-Telegraph Censor; and the Postal Censor.

Of these three the postal censorship is by far the largest and most important. It employs nearly five thousand people, the majority of whom are skilled linguists.

There is, of necessity, a great variation in the volume of mail passing through this branch of the censorship. Sometimes for several days at a time it dwindles away to almost nothing, while on other occasions, when several large steamers from different parts of the world arrive simultaneously, it increases to a perfect flood.

This unavoidable variation leads to the most difficult problems with which the executive force has to deal. The five thousand employees are theoretically sufficient to cope rapidly and efficiently with maximum mails. As a necessary consequence, a considerable percentage of the total staff is obliged to be idle during dull times. This evil is, however, put up with in order that neutral mails shall not be unduly retarded; for Great Britain, having discovered the vital importance of the censorship and having determined, on no conditions, to relinquish it, thereupon began to take all possible steps, at any lesser sacrifice, to prevent its becoming unnecessarily irksome to neutrals.

It has been deemed inadvisable to allow even neutral mails to pass uncensored to Scandinavia and Holland, because those countries have proved to be honeycombed with German agents and with intermediaries who allow their names to be used as covering addresses, who thereby act as relay depots for the communications that German spies in all parts of the world attempt to send to their headquarters in Berlin. Entire sacks of mail, coming from neutral countries and directed to Gothenburg, Stockholm or Flushing, have, upon examination, been found to contain nothing but commercial and military reports sent from German spies and agents in neutral and Allied countries to the Wilhelmstrasse and its subsidiaries. German agents have been known to send "intelligence" from an Allied country to Germany through as many as four neutral countries in succession, in the hope that the British Censorship would be deceived as to its true source and ultimate destination.

Censoring by Express

Handwritten German text, likely a letter or document related to the article's theme of espionage and censorship.

THE page reproduced above is the second sheet of a letter written by a German residing in New York to the assistant editor of a German newspaper:
... I will send you by the next mail a small sample bomb—it is not loaded—the sort we are now making; much smaller but also much more effective than the larger ones, and easier to manipulate and place. It is the sort with which we sank the 1500 horses and 600 war automobiles here on the so-called North River, near New York, a short time ago. We might already have destroyed the Canadian Canal, but the affair was betrayed. Mr. Bernstorff, the Ambassador in Washington, has sent us word to lie low for a time until the excitement dies down, and then to go to work again. We have plenty of money, but it is a difficult matter to know how and where to buy materials.
Fay has at times been very imprudent, but if they send him to prison we shall blow up the prison, and then the Yankees will have no more prison.

delay neutral letters is furnished by the case of mails from America to Scandinavia. Ships from the United States to Sweden or Norway almost invariably touch at a British port. There are numerous reasons for this. They frequently have mail or cargoes for England. Moreover, such ports as Falmouth possess special bunkering facilities. Welsh steam coal is the finest in the world and gives the highest mileage per ton and per unit of cost. In addition the British cruisers frequently exercise the right of search for contraband, which belongs to every belligerent; and this is a tedious and time-wasteful job if undertaken on the high seas, especially when the weather is bad; whereas, ships touching at British ports are searched in port and thus escape the more troublesome examination at sea.

As soon as a vessel bound from America to Scandinavia docks at a British harbor its mails are promptly removed and transported on an express train to the postal censorship in London. Their arrival is awaited by a large staff, which has been assembled while the express train is on its way, and which performs the necessary examination with the greatest possible dispatch, sometimes finishing a thousand bags in as short a time as eight hours.

The mails passed by the censors are then placed upon another express train, and reach The Downs in time to be replaced upon the same steamer from which they were removed at Falmouth when that steamer calls at The Downs for her final clearance papers.

Sorting Out the Suspect Letters

IN ACTUAL practice the maximum staff has sometimes proved inadequate to deal with an exceptional flood of mail. In such an emergency time limits are established for all mails, beyond which they may not be detained in the censorship. Letters from England to America, for instance, are never held longer than twenty-four hours; and on several occasions, before the censorship had become as efficient as it now is, large consignments of mail, still unexamined, were promptly forwarded at the expiration of that time limit.

The postal censorship is divided into the censorship of American mails, situated at Liverpool, which employs fifteen hundred people, and the censorship of European mails, situated in London, employing over three thousand people. The sole reason for maintaining a separate branch at Liverpool is to decrease the delay imposed upon American mails.

The Liverpool and the Lon-