



Smithsonian

*National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center*

Stephen A. Douglas World War  
Two Envelopes, 1942-1945

NMAH.AC.0755

Frank R. Jenkins

April 200

Archives Center, National Museum of American History

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
<b>Title:</b>	Stephen A. Douglas World War Two Envelopes
<b>Identifier:</b>	NMAH.AC.0755
<b>Date:</b>	1942-1945
<b>Creator:</b>	Douglas, Stephen A., 1912- (World War II soldier) (Creator)
<b>Extent:</b>	0.25 Cubic feet (1 box)
<b>Language:</b>	English .

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

This collection was donated to the Archives Center, National Museum of American History by Mr. Stephen A. Douglas, the artist, on January 7th, 2001.

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### Related Materials

Mauldin Cartoon Collection, 1946 1987. Believed to contain all of Bill Mauldin's published cartoons during those years; also periodical and newspaper articles about and by Mauldin, personal items, including his genealogy, and an original sketchbook used by Mauldin while he was in Vietnam, February 1965.

War posters, ca. 1914 1960s (mostly 1942 1945). Isadore Warshaw donated this collection of 350 items. Artists such as Howard Chandler Christy, James Montgomery Flagg and Norman Rockwell are represented. It is part of the Smithsonian's Warshaw Collection of Business Americana

Jes Wilhelm Schlaikjer Poster Collection, 1942 1952. Twenty posters designed by Schlaikjer during World War II and after.

### Processing Information

Collection processed by Frank R. Jenkins, 2002.

### Preferred Citation

Stephen A. Douglas World War Two Envelopes, 1942-1945, Archives Center, National Museum of American History. Gift of the artist.

### Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

## Conditions Governing Use

Collection items available for reproduction, but the Archives Center makes no guarantees concerning copyright restrictions. Other intellectual property rights may apply. Archives Center cost-recovery and use fees may apply when requesting reproductions.

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## Biographical / Historical

The Stephen Douglas Collection consists of eighty-one envelopes that Mr. Douglas mailed to his family from U.S. Army posts in the Pacific during World War II. Mr. Douglas decorated the front of the envelopes with watercolors depicting the life of a GI in the South Pacific.

Mr. Douglas grew up in Wewoka, Oklahoma and trained for one year at the Art Institute of Chicago. He then worked in the Oklahoma oil fields and sold paintings of scenes of oil production. He was drafted in the Army in 1942 and served as a corporal with the 864th Engineering Aviation Battalion, Army Corps of Engineers until war's end in 1945. After mustering out he worked thirty-three years in the Postal Service, retired and continued to paint.

Corporal Douglas began mailing the illustrated letters from Geiger Field, Washington, where his unit trained, then from Los Angeles where it shipped out. By the time the men arrived at Townsville, Australia in September 1943, US forces had already won the battle of Guadalcanal and were occupying much of the Solomon Islands. The rest of the Southwest Pacific including New Guinea had yet be taken before the Japanese could be driven out of the Pacific. His unit's mission was to build and maintain the airstrips and facilities that the allies would use as they advanced on Japan. The 864th moved through various bases in New Guinea then to Cape Gloucester in New Britain, and finally to Luzon in the Philippines.

Using a child's watercolor set, he captured both the deprivations of GI life at these bases and the romance of the islands with their colorful natives, lush foliage, lagoons and tropical moons. Some of the illustrations depict battle scenes involving aircraft and ships, others provide commentary on Army food, housing and recreation, or the lack thereof. They are all humorous or upbeat. The US aircraft or ships are always depicted on the envelopes defeating the enemy and one is a fanciful illustration of Hitler and Tojo on the run. But only fifteen of the eighty-one depict planes, ships, guns or fighting, and most of those are sketches of guard duty. The rest show GI's successfully coping with such mundane activities as laundry, showers, and latrines and overcoming boredom. Illustrating the envelopes was his way of escaping the tedium.

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## Scope and Contents

This collection is divided into two series.

Series 1: Illustrated Envelopes contains envelopes drawn by Stephen Douglas and mounted on mat boards. This type of painted envelope is also called "patriotic." See Lawrence Sherman, *United States Patriotic Envelopes of World War II*, 2006.

Series 2: Unit History, documents the engineers in the South West Pacific, *The 864th Aviation Engineers in World War II* by Bob George, a member of the unit. The history contains anecdotes and photographs of many of the locales Mr. Douglas drew.

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## Arrangement

The collection is arranged into one series.

## Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

### Subjects:

- Postcards
- Wit and humor
- World War, 1939-1945 -- Art and the war

### Types of Materials:

- Cachets (Philately)
- Envelopes
- Paintings
- Watercolors

### Names:

- Aviation Engineer Battalion.

### Places:

- Oceania

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: Illustrated Envelopes, 1943-45

[Illustrated envelopes mounted on 27 mats, 1943-45](#)

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## Series 2: Unit History, 1943-45

Box 1, Folder 1

One fifty page brochure: Engineers in the South West Pacific - The 864th  
Aviation Engineers in World War II

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