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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

LOGISTICS AND COMMUNICATIONS  
DIVISION

FEB 20 1980



The Honorable Robert B. Pirie, Jr.  
The Assistant Secretary of Defense  
(Manpower, Reserve Affairs, and  
Logistics)

AGC01073

Dear Mr. Pirie:

Subject: [Movement of Mail Through Diplomatic  
and Armed Forces Channels]

We have completed our survey of the movement of mail through diplomatic and armed forces channels at various Far East locations. Among other things, we found that several military post offices are servicing small numbers of U.S. armed forces personnel. The major users of these military post offices are other than Department of Defense (DOD) personnel. These operations appear inconsistent with DOD's mission to provide overseas postal facilities for the benefit of armed forces personnel. We are of the opinion that DOD should consider alternative, less costly means of providing mail service in these instances.

LEGISLATION GRANTS POSTAL PRIVILEGES  
TO OVERSEAS MILITARY PERSONNEL

Title 39 U.S.C. 3401 grants special mailing privileges to members of the U.S. armed forces serving overseas. To provide the mail service, the military departments operate military post offices under guidance furnished by DOD and the U.S. Postal Service. DOD funds the cost for personnel, administration, and transportation of mail to and from overseas. Postal revenue collected by military post offices from the sale of stamps and postal money orders are submitted to the U.S. Postal Service. *sq*

DOD Directive 4525.5 authorizes the military postal service to serve other U.S. Government personnel and agencies, such as the Department of State and attached agencies, provided such action is not precluded by the host government and the workload imposed will not overburden

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the military facilities and manpower capabilities. Under certain conditions, mail privileges may also be extended to U.S. contractors and their dependents who provide direct support to DOD or to a foreign government through DOD, and to other selected organizations and individuals. When other Government agencies use the military postal service, they reimburse DOD for the cost of transporting mail. However, DOD is not reimbursed for personnel or administrative costs associated with the operation of the postal system.

Authority to establish the first military post office in a country or to disestablish the last rests with your office. Procedures to open the first or close the last military post office require that secretaries of the affected military departments submit requests for approval to you after first coordinating with other affected military departments or government agencies. However, neither your office nor the military departments have firm criteria delineating when a military post office should be opened or closed.

#### MILITARY POST OFFICES SERVING NON-DOD CUSTOMERS

We visited the military post offices in Hong Kong; Jakarta, Indonesia; Bangkok, Thailand; and Manila, Philippines; and found that military customers for whom mail service is primarily intended are in the minority in relation to the total personnel served. In Hong Kong, Jakarta, Bangkok, and Manila, military personnel total 18.3, 22.8, 28.4 and 35.6 percent, respectively, of total U.S. military and civilian personnel served within each of these areas. Details are shown in the enclosure to this report.

The Hong Kong military post office has a staff of six uniformed personnel and a part-time local national contract driver, while Jakarta and Bangkok each have four uniformed personnel and Manila has five. The Bangkok military post office staff is supplemented by two U.S. citizens and two foreign national employees whose salaries and benefits are funded by the Department of State. The Manila facility employs one foreign national secretary. Combined military salaries and allowances for military postal personnel in these four cities total \$200,000 or more per year.

Information obtained from the Departments of the Army and Air Force showed that these are not the only military post offices which serve primarily non-DOD personnel.

Others include, but may not be limited to, facilities in France, Zaire, Liberia, Denmark, Finland, Israel, Jordan, and Egypt.

When military post offices are closed, U.S. military and civilian personnel are required to use international mail service where such is judged to be adequate. Where international mail service is considered inadequate, the patrons would be eligible to send and receive mail through unaccompanied diplomatic pouches.

#### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The armed services are operating military post offices in countries and locations where the number of assigned U.S. military personnel is small in relation to the total number of U.S. military and civilian personnel. At the many locations worldwide where the military personnel are a minority of the American contingent, they are considered a part of the embassy group.

Therefore, these military personnel should be supported by the embassy, receiving the same support as other embassy personnel. It is incongruous for the minority portion of the embassy contingent to be supporting the embassy and other civilian personnel for mail services instead of being supported. These operations appear to be inconsistent with DOD's mission to provide overseas military postal facilities for the benefit of armed forces personnel. By staffing these postal facilities, DOD is expending manpower resources in excess of those needed to provide mail service to armed forces personnel in overseas areas.

We recommend that DOD establish firm criteria on the establishment and disestablishment of military post offices and consider less costly alternatives for providing mail service to U.S. armed forces personnel in countries having minimal military staffs.

#### AGENCY COMMENTS

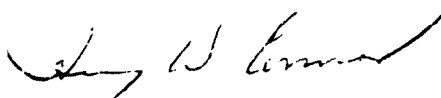
In commenting on our draft report, officials of DOD and the military services generally agreed with the thrust of our report. They pointed out, however, that Hong Kong is one of the most popular rest and rehabilitation points and also a port of call for many of our Navy vessels. Therefore, there could, at times, be as many as 10,000 U.S. military and civilian personnel in Hong Kong seeking both inbound and outbound mail services. For this reason, they believe Hong Kong should be excluded from any consideration for closure.

In addition, the Air Force argued that service to Jakarta and Bangkok should be continued because the recommended alternative (international mail) may not be adequate. It agreed, however, that the establishment or disestablishment of any specific location should be accomplished based on the criteria developed by DOD.

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We will be glad to discuss this matter in detail with you or with members of your staff. We would appreciate being advised of actions taken on the matters discussed in this report.

Sincerely yours,



Henry W. Connor  
Associate Director

Enclosure

ENCLOSURE

PRINCIPALS SERVED AT SELECTED

MILITARY POST OFFICES IN THE FAR EAST

	<u>Hong Kong (Note 1)</u>		<u>Jakarta, Indonesia</u>		<u>Bangkok, Thailand</u>		<u>Manila, Philippines</u>	
	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Military Personnel	26	18.3%	46	22.8%	97	28.4%	143	35.6%
Department of State and Attached Agency Personnel (Note 2)	<u>116</u>	<u>81.7%</u>	<u>156</u>	<u>77.2%</u>	<u>244</u>	<u>71.6%</u>	<u>259</u>	<u>64.4%</u>
Total	<u>142</u>	<u>100.0%</u>	<u>202</u>	<u>100.0%</u>	<u>341</u>	<u>100.0%</u>	<u>402</u>	<u>100.0%</u>

1/The Hong Kong military post office also services fleet units that visit Hong Kong for rest and recreation. A 1-week postal survey performed during 1977 disclosed the following usage percentages based upon the weight of mail received and dispatched.

	<u>User percentage</u>
Assigned military	5.7%
Fleet	9.5
Department of State and Attached Personnel	23.5
Military Exchange Activities, Credit Union, and Stars and Stripes	31.8
Other (consists primarily of personnel and their dependents on temporary duty or vacationing in Hong Kong)	29.5
	<u>100.0%</u>

If the Hong Kong military post office was closed, mail to fleet units could be prepositioned at the American Consulate for delivery to service personnel upon arrival in Hong Kong. Hong Kong data does not depict the fact that the U.S. Embassy, Peking is now being serviced through the Hong Kong military post office, which will increase Department of State user percentages.

2/Includes U.S. Marine Security Guard forces numbering about 12 in each country.