

2.5 1921 - 1932 Charles Ramsay

Charles Stuart Ramsay - Third Tin Can Mail pioneer

Charles Ramsay, born on 19th July 1892, raised in South Marston, Wiltshire, England, was the youngest of five boys. He emigrated to New Zealand in 1909, and in 1911 went to Tonga, where he later worked for a German firm of Copra traders.



A SOLDIER IN FRANCE
Stuart Ramsay in 1916.

In 1915, after the outbreak of the First World War, Charles Ramsay resigned from the German firm, and returned to New Zealand to enlist in the Army. With training accomplished, 900 soldiers left Wellington on the troop ship *Devon*, and after eight weeks reached England for sixteen days of intensive training on Salisbury Plain. He then went to fight in the trenches in France.

2.5 1921 - 1932 Charles Ramsay

Charles Stuart Ramsay and his boys ready to swim the mail



Reference 2

Charles Ramsay with some of his "boys" ready with their swimming poles to swim out to the mail steamers.

To the native boys, Ramsay was known as Lamisi

In a letter dated 15th November 1958, Ramsay writes "Very few Tongans would know my name as Ramsay. I am 'Lamisi' all over the group"

After the war, Ramsay was repatriated to New Zealand in 1919, and then returned to his beloved Tonga. In 1921 he came to Niufo'ou, and was invited by Arthur Tindall to take over the store of Morris Hedstrom Ltd. He stayed on the island until 1932, and did much to encourage and further the cause of Tin Can Mail. He did much of the swimming himself, and was the only white man of European descent to do so, on 112 occasions, both day and night.

Ramsay returned to the island in 1934 for the last two of his 112 "swims", guiding the mail dropped in tins from the S.S. City of Los Angeles on its South Seas Exploration Cruises in January and June 1934.

This photograph is endorsed by Ramsay -

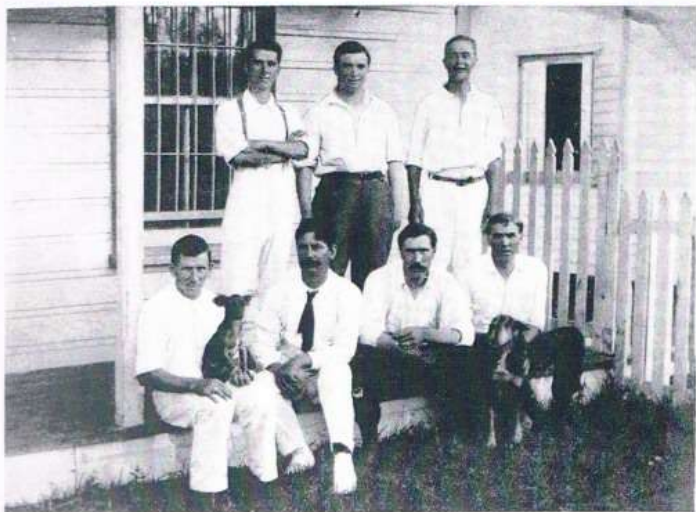
Sincerely yours C.S. Ramsay Tin Can Mail Swimmer of Niufo'ou Tonga 1921 - 1932.



RAMSAY AND SOME OF HIS BOYS READY WITH THEIR SWIMMING-POLES TO SWIM OUT TO THE MAIL STEAMER

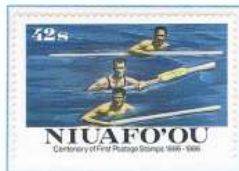
2.5 1921 - 1932 Charles Ramsay

Charles Ramsay with his copra traders, and swimming the mail in the shark-infested seas



A GROUP OF TRADERS DURING THE EARLY DAYS IN TONGA
Ramsay is standing, first on the left.

The 42s stamp from the 1986 set which commemorated the centenary of the first Tongan stamps



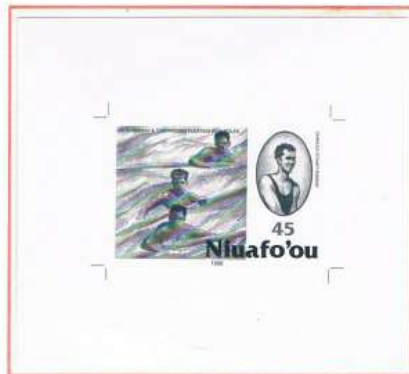
The 45s stamp from the 1996 set which commemorated Tin Can Mail pioneers



and with SPECIMEN overprint



Monochrome Bromide Proof



2.5 1921 - 1932 Charles Ramsay

Charles Stuart Ramsay - Third Tin Can Mail pioneer

In March 1939, The World Wide Magazine, published an 8-page article by Charles Ramsay which summarised his book (see Bibliography on sheet 1). Shown here is page 1 of that article with the other seven pages behind

SWIMMING the "TIN-CAN MAIL"



Specimens of mail for "Tin-Can Island."

By C.S. Ramsay

Illustrated by W. E. WIGFULL

MOST people have heard of a "bus-man's holiday," and it is a matter of common belief that the postman, in similar fashion, seeks relaxation on his day of rest by taking a long walk. I should like to enter a minority report. I always went for a swim, but then I was that kind of postman—perhaps the only swimming custodian of His Majesty's mails in the whole world.

For eleven years I paddled over a delivery-route which traversed a stretch of open roadstead in a far-off corner of the mighty Pacific. By day and night I swam the mail through, in fair weather and in foul. In the course of this self-imposed duty I covered approximately one hundred and fifty miles, spending nearly as many hours in water that was often chilly and, almost without exception, boisterously rough. Yet I still enjoy a swim; which only goes to show that we postmen are pretty much alike,

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either by land or by sea.

The island of Niua Fo'ou, the scene of these aquatic postal operations, is situated in longitude 175° 40' West, latitude 15° 35' South—the most isolated of the Tongan Group. It lies three hundred miles north of Tonga-tapu, principal island of this native kingdom, four hundred and twenty-five miles east of Suva, Fiji, and two hundred and eighty miles south and west

of Apia, Samoa. So much for geography. Niua Fo'ou became "Tin-Can Island" in tourist parlance because the mail for the inhabitants (four Europeans and about one thousand two hundred natives) was delivered from the steamer that passed every month by being sealed up in an empty biscuit-tin and thrown overboard, to be carried ashore by our little group of "swimming postmen." This was the only possible method, for the sheer cliffs and rocky coastline made it impossible for a vessel to approach the shore.

Throughout the more isolated corners of Polynesia the arrival of a ship is always a notable event. In this particularly isolated dot on the map, the monthly call of the four-thousand-ton steamer *Tofua*, from Auckland, via Fiji and Samoa, was a momentous occasion indeed.

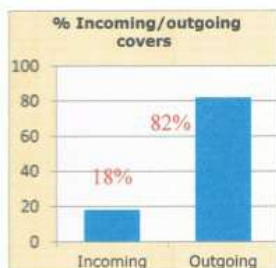
3. The Golden Age 1930 - 1945

3.1 Introduction

The results of an analysis of Tin Can Mail covers during the Golden Age

From an analysis of incoming and outgoing covers between 1930 and 1945 from the author's collection and those for sale on e-bay (about 400 covers) the following statistics were produced:-

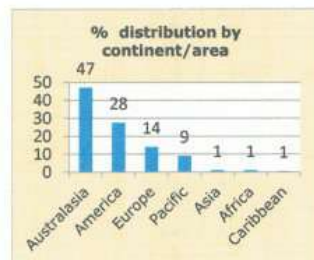
Only 18% were incoming



By country - 82% USA, Australia, New Zealand and England

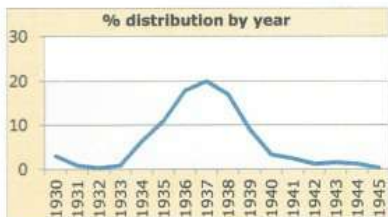


By continent/area - 89% Americas, Australasia and Europe



By year - 75% were between 1935 and 1939 (peak 1937)

By month - 63% were between July and October (peak August)



The ships involved during the Golden Age of Tin Can Mail

Tin Can Mail came into prominence in the early 1930s, when Walter Quensell applied his fancy "Tin Can Mail" cachets to envelopes. The 1930 total eclipse of the sun scientific expedition to Niuafo'ou and the 1934 South Seas exploration cruises did much to promote Niuafo'ou's Tin Can Mail service.

Shipping companies encouraged their passengers to address envelopes to themselves and their friends. The ships' Purser then arranged delivery to Quensell by Tin Can Mail for cacheting and postage application for their onward journey by Tin Can Mail via the next available passing ship.

The ships that operated the Tin Can Mail service from 1930 to 1945 were:-

1930 Eclipse of the sun La Burnam Ontario Sierra Takonga Tanager Wellington

- The Niagra and Carriso were operational but with no evidence that they carried any Tin Can Mail.
- The Tofua and Veronica were also involved during the 1930 Eclipse.

1934 South Seas Exploration Cruises City of Los Angeles

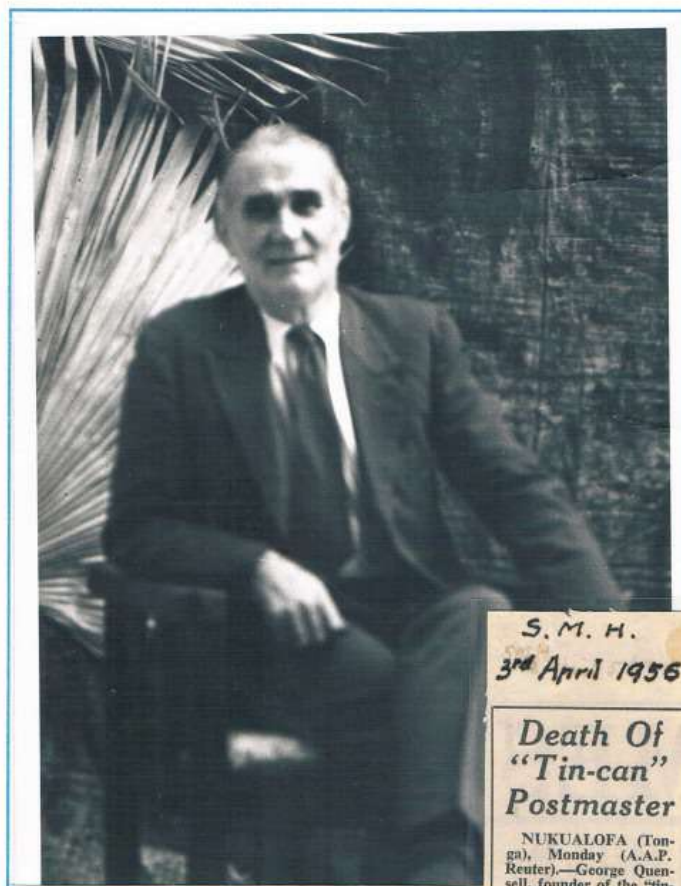
Others Franconia Katoomba Leith Marama Mariposa Maunganui Monowai Monterey
Nomad Tofua 1 Ventura Vileehi Viti Veronica Waipahi Yankee

- The Hifofua and Matua and were also involved during this period but were more prominent in the evacuation of Niuafo'ou in 1946 and 1947.

3.2 1928 - 1956 Walter Quensell

Walter George Quensell was the Fourth Tin Can Mail pioneer until 1946 (he died in 1956)

Walter Quensell was born in Germany in 1877, and came to Niuafo'ou on 15th October 1919 as a copra trader, and representative of the Burns Philp Trading Company from 1919 to 1946.



S. M. H.
3rd April 1956

Death Of "Tin-can" Postmaster

NUKUALOFA (Tonga), Monday (A.A.P. Reuter).—George Quensell, founder of the "tin-can" island postal system, died at his home in Nukunlofa on Saturday. Quensell established his unique mail service while a Burns Philp trader and unofficial postmaster on the volcanic island of Niuafoou.

As the weather rarely permitted the use of canoes, Quensell's native "postmen" kept the island in contact with the outside world by swimming to and from passing mail steamers with letters in sealed 40lb biscuit tins.

Because of philatelists' demands "tin-can" mail became enormous, but in 1946 volcanic activity forced the evacuation of all residents.

The T\$3 stamp from the 1996 set which commemorated Tin Can Mail pioneers



with SPECIMEN overprint



Imperf plate proof



Monochrome Bromide proof



In 1928, by recognising the philatelic attraction of Tin Can Mail, he began producing colourful fancy cachets in many languages which he applied to covers for both outgoing and incoming mail, and which appealed to, and influenced tourists and philatelists the world over. Tin Can Mail (Canoe) Mail was made known to the world.

Walter Quensell died in Nuku'alofa, Tonga, 30th March 1956, aged 79.

His obituary appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald on 3rd April 1956.

3.2 1928 - 1956 Walter Quensell

Walter Quensell's family, his personal "Tin Can" and a cover addressed to him at Burns Philp company

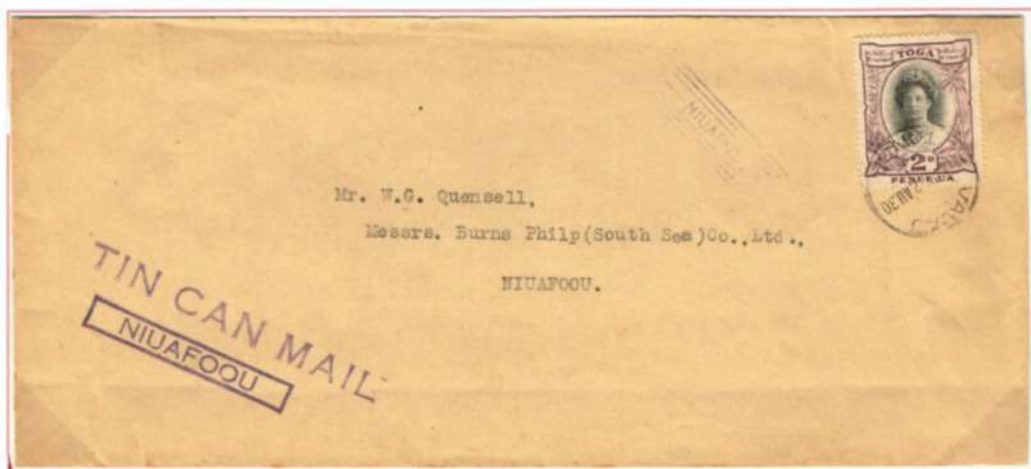
Quensell with (right) with his second wife Emma and son Charles, and (left) his sister-in-law Pauline, the only known woman Tin Can Mail swimmer



A photograph of a tin used by Walter Quensell in about 1932 for his private mail. It is addressed to the Purser of the S.S. Monterey and S.S. Mariposa.



A cover addressed to W. G. Quensell at Burns Philp, Niuafu'ou, with a 22nd August 1930 Vavau Tonga postmark. (Note the characteristic gaps in the circle due to wear in the hand stamp).



3.2 1928 - 1956 Walter Quensell

Examples of Walter Quensell cachets

This table is of the 10-language Quensell "Tin Can Mail" cachets (reduced) that were applied to covers in different font sizes, and in a variety of colours. All suffer from worn type due to profuse usage.

1	BLIKKEN BUS POST	Afrikaans	6	BLECHDOSEN POST ISLAND NIUAFOOU - TONGA	German
2	VERZONDEN PER BLIJESPOST Niuafu'ou-Tonga	Dutch	7	ΚΑΖΙΤΕΡΟΣ ΔΟΧΕΙΟΝ ΑΚΑΤΙΟΝ ΤΑΧΥΣΠΟΜΕΙΟΝ ΝΙΑΦΟΦΟΧΕΙΟΝ (ΑΕΜΒΟΞ)	Greek
3	ORIGINAL TIN CAN MAIL	English	8	post canin Niuafu'ou Island, Tonga.	Irish
4	BLIKK-BOKS-POST	Flemish	9	LA ISLA DE BOTE DE LATA, T.C.M.	Spanish
5	ETAIR POT CANOT COURRIER ICIDONI NIUAFOOU ISLE - TONGA	French	10	MAILI FETUKU AKI KAPA	Tongan

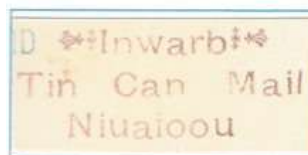
Examples of other Quensell cachets - reduced (including the facsimile of his signature) that were applied to covers



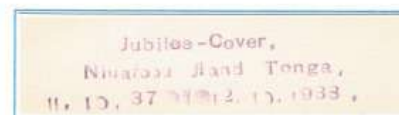
It is believed that most of Quensell's artistic cachets were made in New Zealand, but those made from rubber stamp kits were made on Niuafu'ou. Most of the latter were not well proof-read, and spelling errors occurred.

Here are a few examples:-

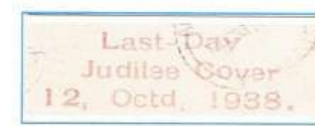
"Inward" mis-spelt "Inwarb"



"Island" mis-spelt "Jland"



"Jubilee" mis-spelt Judilee"



3.3 1930 - 1934 Early incoming and outgoing covers

Two early 1930 covers from and to New Zealand

This incoming cover to W.G. Quensell, has an Auckland postmark for 9th May 1930



This 1930 outgoing Paquebot cover is addressed to (Dougald) George Quensell, the son of Walter George Q



The TIN-CAN MAIL NIUAFO'OU IS. cachet is Reference 1. ML-21 Rarity DD

3 1930 - 1934 Early incoming and outgoing covers

Two early 1931 and 1932 outgoing and incoming covers respectively

A 1931 outgoing Tin Can Mail cover to Merewether, New South Wales. It is franked with two Tonga King George II stamps from 1897, with the Niuafo'ou 7-bar canceller, and with a Merewether receiving mark for 3rd December 1931.



Reference 2

This 1932 cover is from New Zealand, and addressed to W.G. Quensell. The stamps are cancelled with a Greymouth (South Island) Telephone advertising slogan postmark for 9th March 1932.



In addition to the address are the words (in manuscript) "Despatched by Tin Can Mail"
The circular cachet is Reference 1. C - 17 Rarity D

3.3 1930 - 1934 Early incoming and outgoing covers

Use of Walter Quensell's cachets on a very early internal O.H.M.S 1933 cover

All the cachets on this cover pre-date, by two years or more, the earliest recorded dates by Janet Klug

An O.H.M.S cover posted from Nukualofa on 1st April 1933 and addressed to The Wireless Operator on Niuafo'ou. It shows the application of many of Walter Quensell's fancy cachets, including the "inworb" for "Inward" spelling error.



The reverse of the cover (reduced)



3.3 1930 - 1934 Early incoming and outgoing covers

Two early 1934 incoming and outgoing covers respectively

This incoming 1934 cover from New Zealand to W.G. Quensell, has a Ponsonby postmark for 13th June 1934



This outgoing 1934 cover to Honolulu, Hawaii, has an indistinct Niuafo'ou postmark, the earliest known use of which was in 1911, but briefly used in 1934. On the reverse is a Pago Pago Samoa transit mark for 22nd December 1934



The cover is surprisingly devoid of any of Walter Quensell's cachets and the manuscript reference to Tin Can Mail and Tin Can Canoe Mail was probably added by the postmaster, who was not Walter Quensell.

3.4 1930 Total eclipse of the sun

On 22nd October 1930 a total eclipse of the sun was best seen from Niuafu'ou.

Niuafu'ou was chosen by the Washington Naval Observatory as the best possible place to photograph the total eclipse of the sun. A team of New Zealand astronomers also filmed the eclipse.

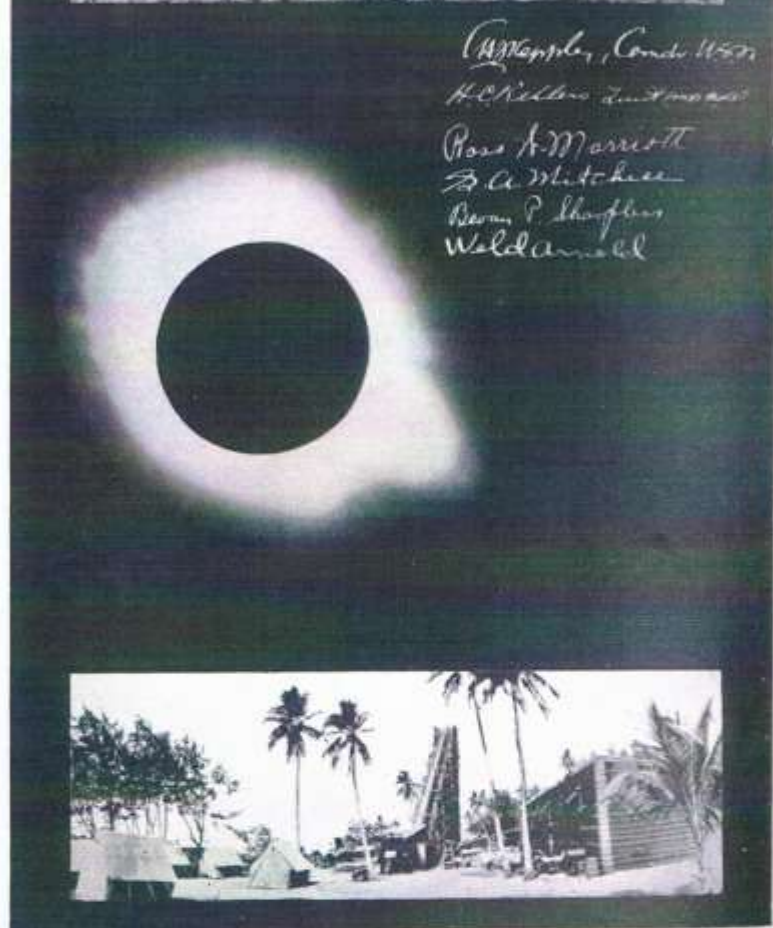
The eclipse commenced at 55 minutes and 35 seconds after 7am and lasted for 94 seconds.

Paul Diefenderfer who was the Director of Education for American Samoa, joined the expedition as the official Navy and Smithsonian photographer

Illustrations of a) Landing of instruments and equipment and b) The giant camera



Amagata, Comdr. U.S.N.
H.C. Kellens, U.S.N.
Ross A. Marriott
B.A. Whitehead
Bernie P. Langford
Waldemar



THE ECLIPSE OF 1930

(Inset) Landing of instruments and equipment of the expedition.
The giant camera which was used to take the photograph.



A very early postcard of Niuafu'ou showing ships seen on Eclipse Day

Reference 2

3.4 1930 Total eclipse of the sun

Photographs taken at Niuafu'ou during the Eclipse Expedition

Dr. Thomas A. Jaggar was an eminent volcanologist from the Volcano Observatory, Hawaii. He was invited to Niuafu'ou by the United States Naval Observatory as part of the Eclipse expedition, to study the geological and volcanic features.



AN ELABORATE, ANCIENT COSTUME FOR A MODERN CEREMONY

A postcard of Walter Quensell sitting next to Tipiano, the Catholic Mission Priest. They were both waiting to observe the total eclipse of the sun.



Written on the back are the words -
"My Grandfather is sitting near Tipiano at Niuafu'ou Group.

Kato Kakala Quensell

His name is George Quensell"

Dr. Jaggar wrote an article "Living on a Volcano" that was published in The National Geographic Magazine, July 1935, a copy of which is in the possession of the author. It was illustrated with many photographs taken by himself.

While Dr. Jaggar was on the island, the Government Radio and Telegraph station was finished and put into operation. In celebration, the command went forth that native dances, or *laka-lakas* would be performed.

The two digitised prints of dancers, An elaborate, ancient costume for a modern ceremony, and Little girls with garlands and beads who are dancing sitting down, are from photographs taken by Dr. Jaggar.



GRACE IS INHERENT IN NIUAFOŪ NATIVES, WHO DANCE SITTING DOWN

Little girls take part in the ceremonials, decked in their finery of *sii*, as the garlands of beads are called. Some of these are made of shells and beans of different kinds.

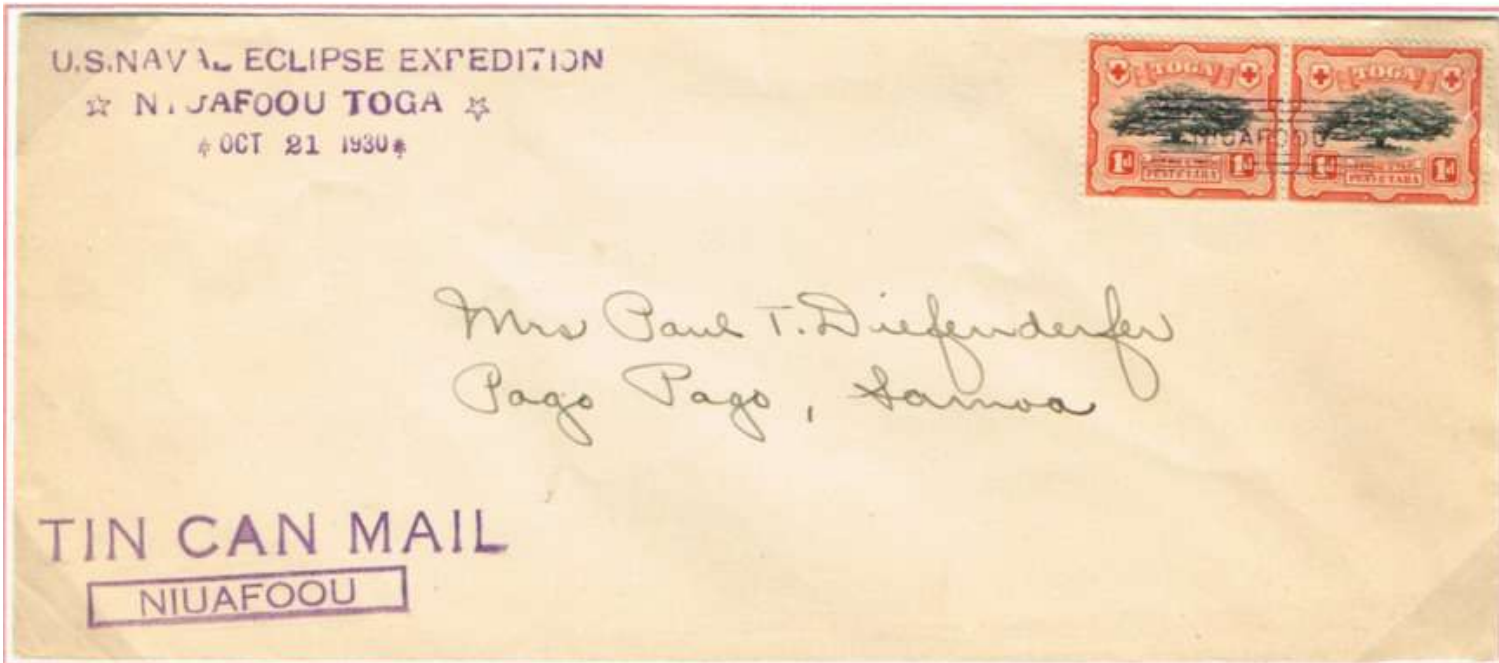
3.4 1930 Total eclipse of the sun

The U.S. Navy, and Walter Quensell were keen to promote the Eclipse Expedition and Tin Can Mail covers. They were dated 21st October 1930, which was American time, as opposed to 22nd October, Tonga time.

The US Navy was quick to make a cachet of its own in honour of the Eclipse Expedition



Paul Diefenderfer, the photographer, was influential in persuading Walter Quensell to produce his own cachet in addition to the US Navy's own cachet. This cover is an example of Walter Quensell's expedition cachet.



This US Naval Eclipse Expedition cachet is - Reference 1. ML-11a. Rarity D