

Figure 1: Two maps of the Chickamauga Battlefield, the site of Camp Thomas.

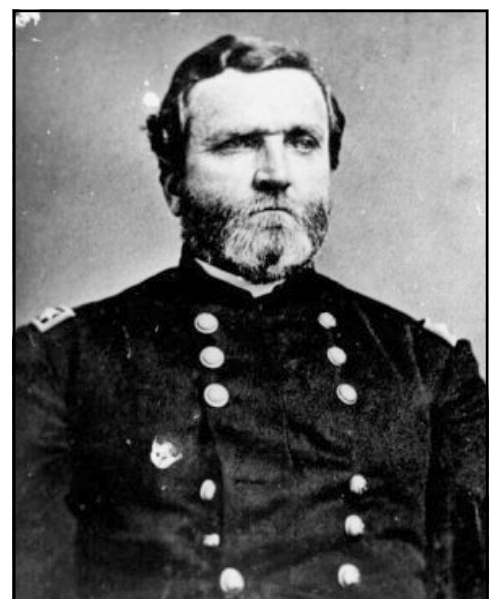
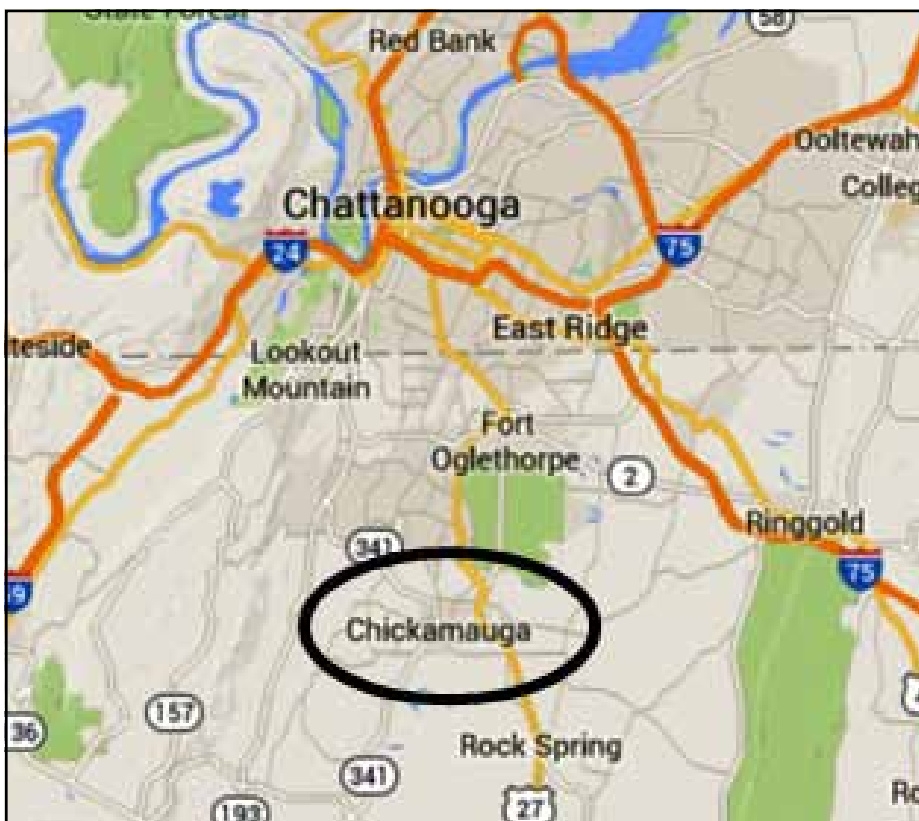
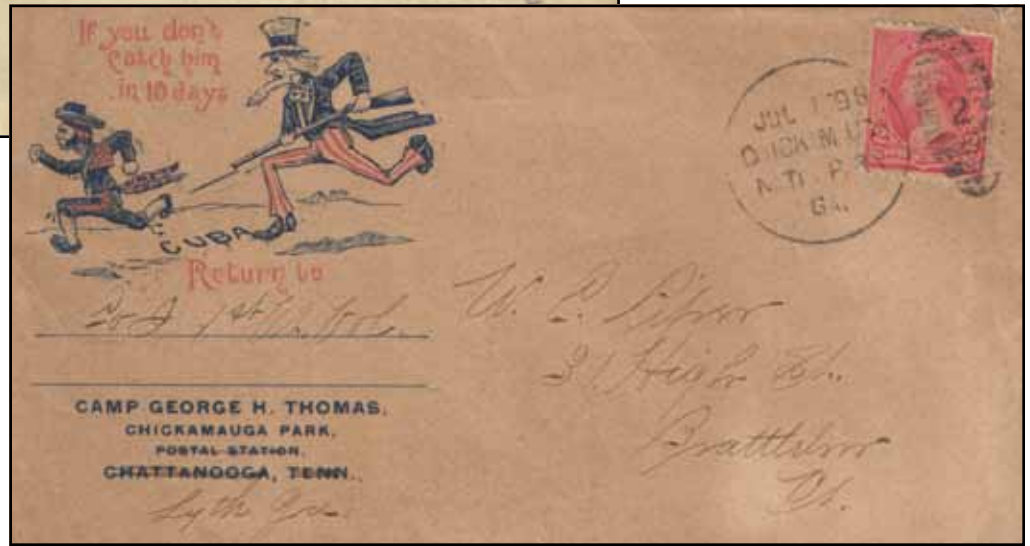


Figure 2: Gen. George H. Thomas.



Figure 3: A cover from the Chattanooga, Tenn., Chickamauga Park Postal Station.

Figure 4: A 'Lytle, Ga.' manuscript addition to the Chickamauga Park Postal Station return address.



## ‘Fake Town’ Spanish-American War Postal History

By Steve Swain

During the 1898 Spanish-American War, Georgia had the most training camps of any state with 25 locations. The two most important camps were Camp Onward in Savannah and Camp Thomas, established April 22, 1898, which was located on the site of the American Civil War battlefield at Chickamauga, south of Chattanooga, Tennessee (Figure 1).

Camp Thomas was named as a tribute to Gen. George H. Thomas<sup>1</sup> (Figure 2) and his gallant stand during the 1863 Battle of Chickamauga.

Numerous camps were quickly created around the country. Many had similar names and several camps were in the same city or town. Soldiers sometimes stayed in camps only several weeks before being transferred to another camp. Thus, the study and collection of postal history related to the camps can be very challenging.

However, Camp Thomas was the largest training camp. It was the temporary home to more than 7,000 regular soldiers and to more than 60 regiments with approximately 72,000 state troops.

Given this circumstance, the opportunity exists for

more extensive study and collecting of postal history related to this camp than to the majority of other camps in the country.

The first important military post office of the war was established on June 6, 1898, at Chickamauga National Park. At its peak, the Chickamauga Park Post Office and its 20 mail clerks, plus Army mail carriers, processed 320,000 letters a day to service the soldiers encamped there.

As explained in the *Annual Reports of the Post-Office Department Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1898*,<sup>2</sup> camp military post offices were designated as a branch station of the nearest regular post office and placed within the jurisdiction of the postmaster at that office.

In the case of the Chickamauga Park Post Office, it was the postal, or branch, station of the regular post office in Chattanooga, Tennessee, as shown on the return address portion under the cachet on the cover in Figure 3.

But, note the same return address below the cachet on the cover in Figure 4. “POSTAL STATION, CHATTANOOGA, TENN.” has been marked through

**Figure 5: The Lytle Railway Station for arriving troops.**



and the handwritten “Lytle, Ga.” has been added. Lytle, Ga. was not an official branch station of Chattanooga, as apparently known by the person sending the letter. But what was the reason for the changes on the cover to ensure a “correct” return address?

When troops began pouring into Chickamauga Park, Lytle barely bore a resemblance to a town, having only an aggregation of several shanties and shelters. However, the Lytle community quickly expanded and flourished because of the large military presence at Camp Thomas.

While Chattanooga businesses benefited from the infusion of money each payday, the town of Lytle was always there for those who could not afford a trip to the large city. Any soldier at Camp Thomas could get to Lytle in a few minutes, even on foot.

It was here in “Fake Town,” as the troops dubbed Lytle, where a strip of bars, houses of prostitution, and gambling halls known as “The Midway” quickly sprang up and ran day and night.

Figure 5 is a photograph of the main rail station<sup>3</sup> near Lytle where troops arrived to begin their stay at Chickamauga Park and Figure 6 provides some insight into the layout and life on the Midway.<sup>3</sup>

Eventually, many soldiers considered Lytle their home, as evidenced by the handwritten “Lytle, Ga.” in the return address area of the cover in Figure 4.

There are several intriguing aspects of the postal history of Lytle during the Spanish-American war. Even though the prewar community was minimal at best, Lytle did have a post office, operating from 1890 until 1910. Known examples of covers from Lytle’s pre-war days are scarce.

So, it would be logical to assume that with the onset of the Spanish-American War and many soldiers professing a residential allegiance to Lytle there would



**Figure 6: The Lytle Midway.**

be considerable activity involving the Lytle post office, both for outgoing and incoming mail. However, given the number of recorded covers, that appears not to be the case. A critical factor to remember in this regard is the extremely short duration of the war—a matter of a few months, not years. And, as stated earlier, soldiers sometimes stayed in camps only several weeks before being transferred to another camp.

For additional insight, it is important to note instructions issued to the Chattanooga postmaster, as provided in the *Annual Reports of the Post-Office Department* cited earlier:

*Under terms of a bill (Senate 4554), you will establish a station at some central point on the Chickamauga field, preferably on the Tennessee side, and will make that the clearing house for all work being done through the postal cars side tracked near Lytle, Ga. post office and will as far as possible divert the military mail going to and now being taken from the Lytle post office.*

*This arrangement will not, of course, disturb*



Figure 7: A Lytle, Ga., postmark on a Camp Thomas, Chickamauga Park cover.

the established office at Lytle, and will not in any way abolish or abridge it. But it is our wish that the military mail matter now being sent to that office for distribution, and the issuance of money orders and the registration of letters, sales of stamps and general post office business incident to the military service, be diverted to your station, leaving the Lytle office to perform its normal function.

Your station located at the Chickamauga camp ground will become a *de facto* military post office and I desire that you keep in close touch with the commander of the military forces and such of his subordinates as may be useful in perfecting and maintaining this service.

In essence, the Chattanooga postmaster's instructions were not to use the Lytle Post Office for military mail purposes, but instead position a new postal station (Camp Thomas at Chickamauga Park) as the "official" postal location.

There are various reasons for the less than complete compliance with this directive. Foremost is that the Lytle Post Office was not to be disturbed and the postmaster was not in any way to abolish or abridge it. Thus, the facility was never in jeopardy of being closed and remained available as a viable, working location.

Moreover, it is possible that the Congressional directive was either not properly communicated to the troops (or the Lytle postal employees), some of the troops disregarded the directive, or both. In any event, a limited amount of war related mail was processed in Lytle and postal historians have been afforded an opportunity for a fascinating research and collecting theme.

In this regard, the cover in Figure 7 with the "JUNE 7 98/LYTLE/GA/5 PM" postmark is especially important in that the return address below the cachet

is "Camp Thomas, Chickamauga Park." As such, it is postal history proof tying Lytle, Georgia, with Camp Thomas and Chickamauga Park.

Even though the war lasted only a few months, many enterprising cachetmakers and printers quickly designed and created numerous patriotic covers. Many such covers exist for "Camp Thomas, Chickamauga Park," as shown with the example in Figure 3.

But printers were indeed aware of Lytle, Georgia, and existing return address graphics and cachets were redesigned to include a reference to Lytle, as seen on the covers in Figures 8 and 9.

Printers also made available "Lytle, Ga." letterhead sheets for soldiers to purchase and use for correspondence back home. One of the most intriguing aspects of Lytle postal history are these letters, such as the one written on July 13, 1898, by Lt. Brady G. Ruttencutter to his mother in Parkersburg, West Virginia (Figure 10).

Through such letters, valuable insights are available into both the military and personal lives of the soldiers at Camp Thomas and they significantly complete the postal history equation of the Spanish-American War.

*My Dear Mother,*

*I received your letter today and was very glad to hear from you. I intend sending you money sooner but couldn't get to town.*

*I am sending you a \$25 money order and a ten dollar bill. Which is all I can spare this time. I have been to so much expense this month figuring everything. And things cost so much down here. It will first take the dentist a day & a half to finish my teeth. I am going down Saturday and stay until he finishes me up. The pain is something awful. He filled all my front teeth and is attending to the back ones.*

Figure 8: A patriotic cover from Camp George H. Thomas, Chickamauga Park, Lytle, Ga.

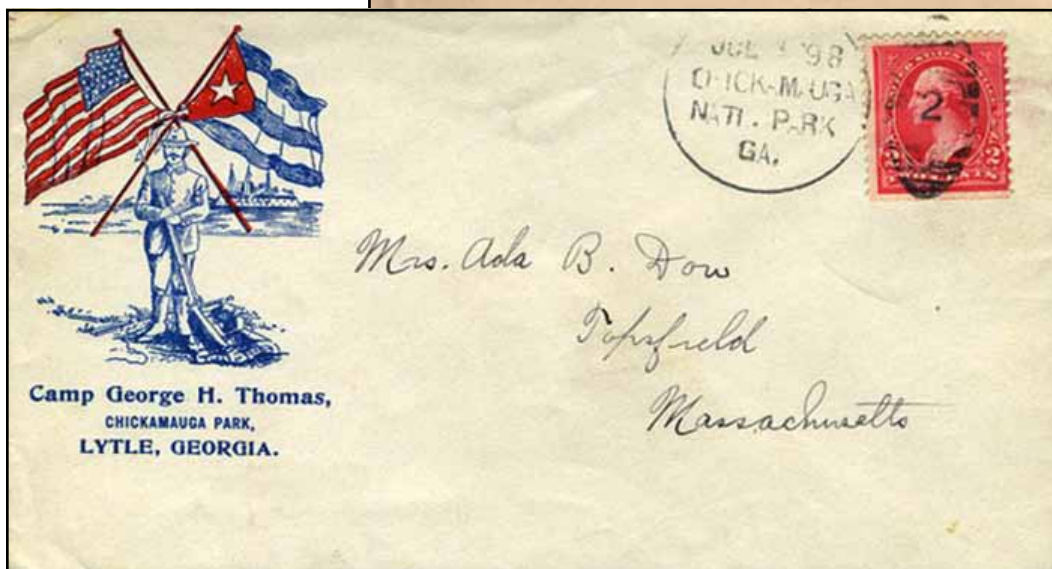


Figure 9: Another patriotic cover from Camp George H. Thomas, Chickamauga Park, Lytle, Ga.

*I would send you more money but I must have plenty with me as we don't know just when we will pull out. And we have to pay for everything we get. People down here are robbers, charge you any old price. 75 for my meal.*

Research revealed that Lt. Brady was born in 1877 and was a mere 19 years old when stationed at Fort Thomas.<sup>4</sup> At that young age, a fair assumption would be that he was a volunteer from West Virginia when the call was made for additional troops.

However, he was regular Army, having been commissioned a 2nd Lt. with Co. E, 2nd Infantry on November 30, 1897, at age 18.<sup>5</sup>

This certainly is indicative of how the young Ruttencutter had set his early sights on a military career. After the Spanish-American War, he was stationed in Luzon, Philippines, with the 41st Infantry and continued his military career to ultimately be promoted to the rank of colonel. He died on September 24, 1957, in Washington, D.C.

A significant aspect of Lytle postal history is the use of the rare Type 4 Milam and Holmes wavy line cancel.<sup>6</sup>

In 1894, Samuel B. Holmes was appointed postmaster of Frankfort, Kentucky. He quickly saw a need for better means of cancelling letters and post cards. Collaborating with his business neighbor, John W. Milam, the two designed and built a machine to replace the laborious handstamps.

Mail to be cancelled by the Milam & Holmes machine was placed face up on a conveyor belt and, by electricity or hand power, the belt pulled the mail into the machine for a continuous, repeating cancel.

The operator had to hold the stack of letters so that the belt would only take the bottom envelope or card. The roller canceller consisted of soft rubber parts that needed replacing periodically. As a result, there was a succession of different styles of Milam & Holmes cancels. The Type 4 Milam and Holmes cancel is four wavy lines, with large serified letters.<sup>7</sup> Nine covers (Figure 11 shows one such cover) are reported from Lytle on June 4, 5, and 6, 1898, the only three days the cancel was used.

During the few months of its operation, more than 72,000 soldiers had been at Camp Thomas. By the middle of September 1898, however, all units,

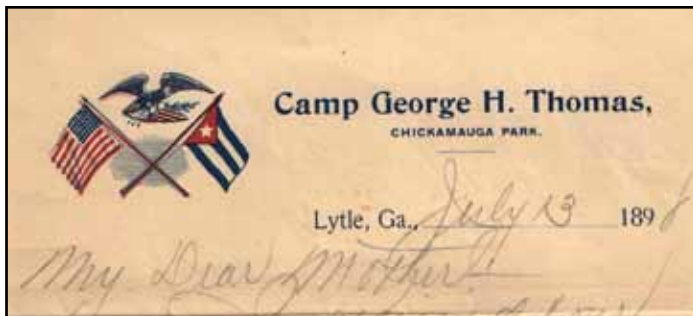


Figure 10: A July 13, 1898, lettersheet with correspondence from Lytle, Ga.



Figure 11: A Type 4 Milam and Holmes wavy line cancel on a Lytle, Ga., cover.

except seven battalions of the Sixth and Eighth U.S. Volunteer Infantry had departed. Gen. Henry Boynton, who in June had been appointed brigadier general of volunteers, now assumed command of Camp Thomas. He ordered all nonmilitary trading establishments closed, including those along the infamous Midway.

“Fake Town” Lytle, Georgia, quickly became a ghost town and wartime postal history ceased.

### References

- 1 <http://militaryhistory.about.com/odamericancivilwar/plghthomas.htm>
- 2 <https://books.google.com/books?id=bSpHAQAIAAJ&pg=PA125&lpg=PA125&dq=lytle+georgia+post+office>
- 3 [http://www.usgennet.org/usa/ne/topic/military/SpanishAmericanWar/span\\_am\\_camps/](http://www.usgennet.org/usa/ne/topic/military/SpanishAmericanWar/span_am_camps/)
- 4 <http://us-census.mooseroots.com/d/b/Brady-Ruttencutter>
- 5 <https://books.google.com/books?id=SHVMAAAIAAJ&pg=PA54&lpg=PA54&dq=Brady+ruttencutter+parkersburg+west+virginia>
- 6 [http://machinecancel.org/forum/2007\\_01/milam\\_and\\_holmes.html](http://machinecancel.org/forum/2007_01/milam_and_holmes.html)
- 7 [http://exploreuk.uky.edu/catalog/xt7qft8dgc7d\\_4\\_14?](http://exploreuk.uky.edu/catalog/xt7qft8dgc7d_4_14?)

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