

Section	Caption
	How did V-Mail get from a writer's desk to a recipient's hand? <i>National Archives (111-SC-124-164864)</i> .
step 1	V-Mail stationery was made as readily available as possible to both military personnel and civilians. The Post Office gave away up to two sheets per customer per day and the special stationery was available at many local shops. Pictured here, an Airborne unit is given V-Mail blanks for their last letters before leaving England for the continent, June 6, 1944. <i>National Archives (111-SC-673-320904)</i> .
step 2	The single-page letter sheet had room for up to 700 typed words. Some sheets, like the one this sailor in Oahu, Hawaii is using, had pre-printed greetings to make correspondence a snap. The stationery functioned both as a letter and as an envelope in one. <i>National Archives (80-G-407-203951)</i> .
step 3	V-Mail was recognizable to postal and military clerks around the world due to its size and bright red lettering. Because it acted as both a letter and envelope, each V-Mail sheet was carefully labeled with the V-Mail logo and address information. Notice that the V-Mail in this picture was sent by a member of the military -- evident by the word "free" written in the spot usually reserved for postage stamps. <i>National Archives (111-SC-188-183217)</i> .
step 4	V-Mail stations were set up in strategic locations to accommodate men and women serving in both the European and Pacific theaters. Often, V-Mail was processed simultaneously with regular mail out of Army Post Offices (APO). APOs ranged anywhere from buildings to tents and some were more well-equipped than others. This V-Mail station is on Guadalcanal. <i>National Archives (111-SC-559-286981)</i> .
step 4	The personnel of the 20th V-Mail detachment pose in front of their laboratory on Guadalcanal. Throughout the war, the number of military post offices in the U.S. decreased as the numbers overseas grew. Between fiscal years 1943 and 1944 the APOs outside the U.S. rose from 356 to 806 and the number of Navy post offices increased from 2,035 to 4,869. <i>National Archives (111-SC-559-286984)</i> .
step 5	V-Mail was separated from other types of mail and sorted for its specialized processing and preferential airmail transport. <i>National Archives (111-SC-164068)</i> .
step 5	Not all V-Mail was microfilmed. Damaged and illegible forms could not pass through the microfilming machinery. In some cases, processing stations were not available and in others, simply forwarding full-sized sheets was the fastest option. The man on the right is pouching V-Mail ready for dispatch. Although not as dramatic a reduction in volume and weight, sending these single-page letters still helped save cargo space and ensured that the message continued its journey. <i>National Archives (111-SC-164066)</i> .

step 6	Notice the labels on the pigeonholes; some of this mail is incorrectly labeled. Similar to other mail for the military, V-Mail was commonly misaddressed. Whether due to forgetfulness or a lack of knowledge, civilians often sent letters to their servicemen and women without writing their full name, title, rank, unit, and APO or FPO number -- all of which were needed to track down their location. <i>National Archives (111-SC-97-147635).</i>
step 7	A system of locator cards matched the addressee with record of their current location. <i>National Archives (111-SC-164072).</i>
step 8	A number of V-Mail stations had machines that were designed to open envelopes and smooth the stationery in preparation for filming; this man uses a device at the San Francisco office. At some of the other stations, staff did this work by hand. <i>National Archives (111-SC-201-186616).</i>
step 9	Censors reviewed correspondence from military personnel for sensitive information, clearly leaving marks and signatures. Sometimes with traditional letters they cut out larger sections, but they couldn't do this with V-Mail because it would prohibit feeding the sheet into the Recordak equipment. Censors would black out questionable sections; the most common was troop location. If there were too much sensitive text, they would confiscate the letter. <i>National Archives (111-SC-97-147635).</i>
step 10	Clerks assigned numbers to each V-Mail letter sheet. This was part of the insurance policy on V-Mail. In the event that a shipment of the microfilm was lost in transit, these letter sheets were retained as a back-up and could be re-photographed. It was also useful if the printing quality proved sub par and the original had to be accessed again. When the sending station got the all-clear from the V-Mail receiving station, the original sheets were destroyed. <i>National Archives (111-SC-193-184470).</i>
step 11	Civilian workers eager to contribute to the war effort filled positions in the Post Office, War, and Navy Departments. They sorted, numbered, and recorded letters, and helped V-Mail move swiftly around the globe. These civilian women feed V-Mail letter sheets into a Kodak Recordak at the Naval V-Mail Station in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. <i>National Archives (80-G-497-203954).</i>
step 11	The letters inserted into the Kodak Recordak machine were photographed for 16 mm microfilm. <i>National Archives (111-SC-151-172651).</i>
step 11	Original letters stacked high look bulky in comparison to the microfilmed copies of these 40,000 messages. The reels were ready to be flown from the Naval V-Mail station at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii to the three processing centers that handled V-Mail for the continental U.S. <i>National Archives (80-G-497-203953).</i>

step 12	Because microfilmed V-Mail was so small it was easy to pack into cargo planes. V-Mail received top priority in shipments all around the world, including this shipment that is bound for the U.S. from Australia. <i>National Archives (111-SC-149-172284)</i> .
step 13	The stations around the world required not only V-Mail supplies but also basic facilities to run a photographic lab: a sergeant starts up the power plant at APO 913. <i>National Archives (111-SC-380715)</i> .
step 13	Photographic development and enlargement required a steady temperature inside the processing stations. Temperature extremes were a challenge from Cairo and Guadalcanal to Iceland and the Aleutians. <i>National Archives (111-SC-456-257941)</i> .
step 14	When the air transport of V-Mail arrived at the receiving station, clerks inspected the microfilm before processing it. This corporal in Iceland views the film on a Recordak. <i>National Archives (111-SC-129-166392)</i> .
step 15	Smaller batches of microfilm were processed on reel machines, such as this equipment in Oran, Algeria. <i>National Archives (111-SC-179589)</i> .
step 15	When many reels were ready for processing, larger machines such as this Houston model were used. All specialized microfilming equipment had to be brought in to V-Mail stations, including this 750 pound, 2 feet by 5 feet by 4 feet high model in the Port Moresby, New Guinea laboratory. <i>National Archives (111-SC-456-257943)</i> .
step 16	A Pentagon operator adjusts the enlarging equipment. He is preparing to reproduce the 16 mm film to a larger format for the 4 1/2 inch by 5 1/2 inch prints. <i>National Archives (111-SC-97-147637)</i> .
step 17	Undeveloped photographic paper is prepared for printing in the Pentagon. <i>National Archives (111-SC-97-147636)</i> .
step 18	With the film transferred to print, the rolls of papers are cut into their individual messages at the plant in Chicago, Illinois. <i>National Archives (111-SC-315613)</i> .
step 18	A civilian clerk cuts prints by hand in Australia. <i>National Archives (111-SC-151-172649)</i> .
step 19	Each print had to be folded so that the address portion was visible in the envelope's window. Once folded, the letter was inserted into an envelope. These facsimiles (photographic prints) are being readied for dispatch from Australia. <i>National ArchiveFs (111-SC-151-172648)</i> .
step 20	The facsimile letter reaches the home front. V-Mail letters fostered communication, expression, and connection between senders and recipients both owing to and in spite of the technological concessions of the small, reproduced one-page letters. <i>National Archives (80-G-497-203959)</i> .