

Don't be caught with

This is it, folks. The last day to get a first-class letter in the mail for a mere 20 cents.

Beginning tomorrow, first-class domestic mail must bear 22 cents postage or it will return right back where it started for the additional postage. If there is no return address, it goes to San Francisco, to the dead-letter office.

To qualify for the 20-cent postage, any letter you mail today must be placed in the box before the last pickup of the day. So if you mail a letter at 5 p.m., and the last pickup was at 4 p.m., you're out of luck.

The same goes for letters placed in private collection boxes where there is no pickup on the weekend. If they don't have 22-cent postage, they will

be returned to the return address, and if there is no return, they are routed to the dead-letter office.

Jerry Vega, postal service spokesman in San Diego, said once a letter is routed to the dead-letter office in San Francisco, postal officials open it to determine who sent it.

If it can be determined, the letter is returned to the sender, with 70 cents postage due. Beginning tomorrow, the 70-cent charge will be eliminated, he said. If the sender does not want it or if there is no indication of who sent the letter, it is destroyed.

Vega said the practice of letters arriving postage due has been discontinued because some postal customers failed to place stamps on envelopes containing payments to utili-

Mother, son convicted on conspiracy charges

A mother and son who are wanted in Indiana in the January 1984 crossbow slaying of a 74-year-old female relative were convicted by a federal court jury here yesterday of conspiracy to pass the victim's Social Security checks.

The verdict was returned against Hilma Marie Witte, 36, and her son, Eric Witte, 18, a Navy enlisted man.

Following four hours of deliberations and three days of trial before U.S. District Court Judge William B. Enright, the mother was found guilty of two conspiracy counts, three forgery counts and three counts of passing the forged Social Security checks.

Her son was convicted of two conspiracy counts, three counts of aiding and abetting in passing the checks and three counts of aiding in the forgery of the checks.

Sentencing is scheduled here on April 8. The two are in custody awaiting later return to Michigan City, Ind., where they face charges of accessory to murder in the death of Elaine Witte, 74, the stepmother-in-law of Hilma Witte.

Charged with murder is Hilma Witte's son, John David "Butch" Witte, 15. Douglas Menkel, 22, a friend of Eric Witte, also is charged with being an accessory. He was arrested early last November as a

Navy deserter.

Only Hilma Witte and her son, Eric, were charged with the conspiracy and forgery counts involving the passing of the dead woman's checks.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Phillip L. Halpern, during trial, said the checks cashed in Chula Vista totaled about \$1,335. But he said checks involved in the overall conspiracy amounted to about \$7,000. Conspiracy allegations also involved about \$20,000 in the victim's bank account.

Hilma Witte and her son, John, were arrested after she attempted to cash one of the checks at a Chula Vista bank last November. Her son, Eric, was arrested at his duty station at the Naval Hospital here.

Elaine Witte lived in Trail Creek, a suburb of Michigan City. According to Trail Creek Police Chief Marshal M. Chastain, Hilma Witte allegedly instructed her youngest son to kill his step-grandmother.

Chastain testified in proceedings in Indiana that the boy allegedly went to his grandmother's room and shot her in the chest with a crossbow as she slept.

Authorities said her body was then dismembered and stored in a freezer pending disposal of parts over a period of time.