

“Postal Beachhead Europe: APO 813” Synopsis

Scope: This exhibit will present the mail of APO 813, the first APO in the European Theater of Operation (ETO). The three distinct postal rate structures, the evolution of the cancellation in eight steps, and other special postal circumstances are depicted. The emphasis is on the exceptional and chaotic operations over the first eight months

Importance: the mail of APO 813 is unique as it was the only American Base Forces (ABF) in the ETO. This ABF/APO was for four months the only APO in the ETO. Rather than a well-defined straightforward operation, and the handling of the mail is something little short of chaotic as the Military Postal System establishes a “Beachhead Europe”.

Presentation: The United States in early 1942 was just rediscovering the ways of war and military mail was no exception. APO 813 was established in January 1942, after the landing of the 133rd Infantry Regiment, the first US soldiers in the ETO. APO 813 was designated an “American Base Force” (ABF) in keeping with the series of ABF 800-810 used at newly created US bases in British territories of the Western Hemisphere. It began function at Victoria Barracks Belfast Northern Ireland in February. Its first central date canceller (CDC) was incomplete. The British postal authorities refused to allow US postage on the mail. A rocky start.

The exhibit will retrace the development of the CDC with eight iterations with seven in the first eight months. The three postal rate periods demonstrated are the British rates, the US concessionaire rates, and the “free franking” rates. APO 813 is additionally unique is the only ABF CDC used in the ETO. APO 813’s creation was celebrated with a substantial number of first day covers. Unlike most APO’s, it supported a range of units including the 34th Infantry Division (133rd Infantry was its lead element), the V Corps headquarters, elements of the Eighth Air Force, and various support elements. APO 813 was at the onset military postal system for U.S. Army Europe. The ABF CDC was replaced with Army Post Office (APO) in September 1942. Scarce examples of persistence of early APO 813 CDC’s on regular mail and the ABF designation on registered mail are included. Some elements of mail censorship and military history are also noted.

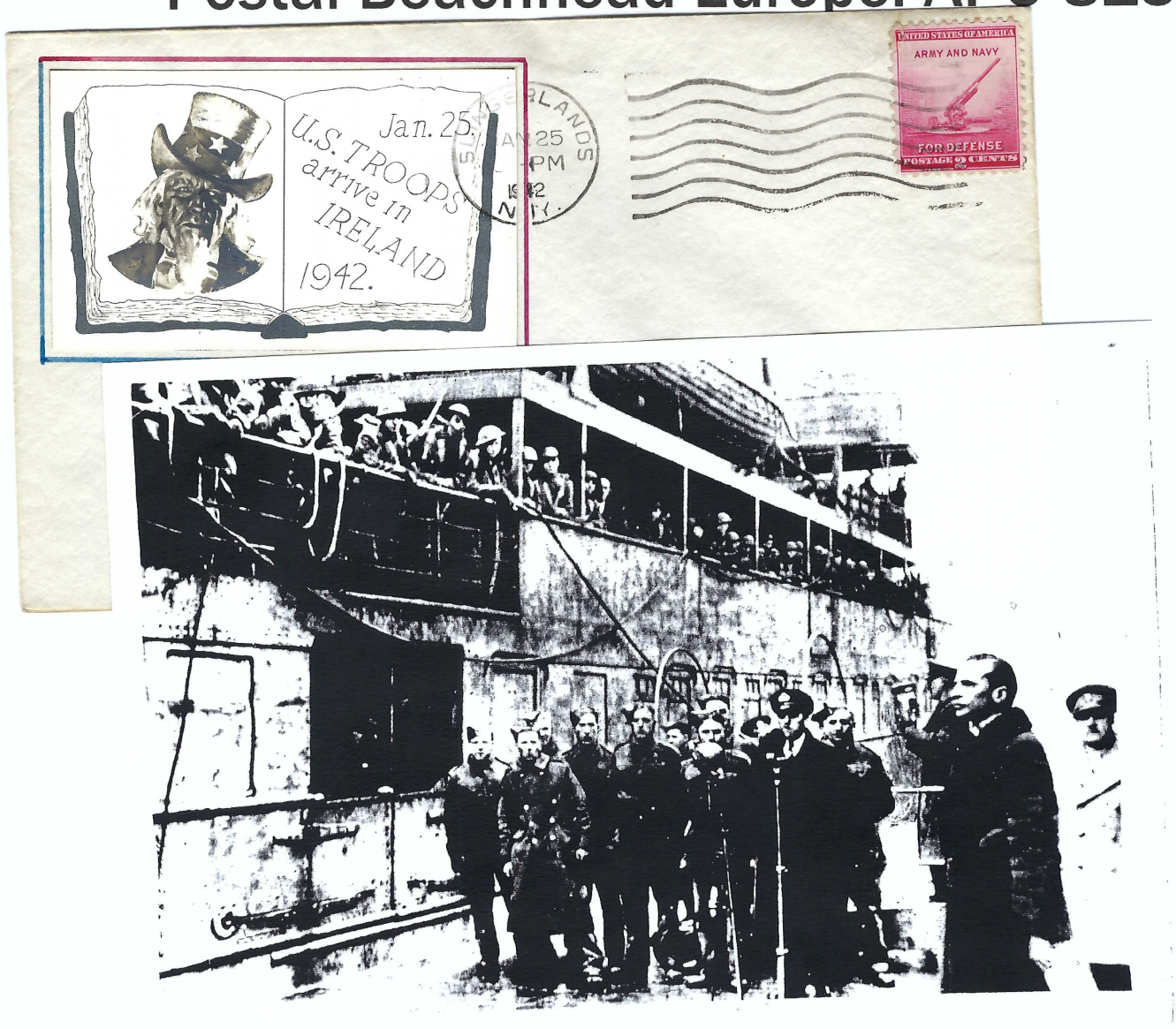
Research: The available information in the philatelic literature is quite limited. The exhibitor has reviewed correspondence between Sir Anthony Eden, Secretary of State for foreign affairs and the American Embassy. Note that United States considered United Kingdom as part of a “war zone” which the British did not. At the time of opening of APO 813, the British position was that unlike on the leased bases (APO 801-810), within the United Kingdom the Post Office Act of 1908 granted exclusive privilege to the British Postal Service. Thus, all mail required the use British stamps. As of April 1, 1942, the use of US postage was granted but limited to destinations in the United States, US possessions and US overseas military establishments. Based principally on the exhibitor’s collection, intervals of use for the eight versions of the APO 813 CDC are presented. Additional information has been gathered with the assistance of Daniel your archivist of the Minnesota Military and Veterans Museum Camp Ripley Minnesota. This museum is a home for the history of the 34th Infantry Division, the National Guard division comprised primarily of Iowa and Minnesota units.

Scarcity: WWII APO material is very common. The challenge for this exhibitor is identifying the “needle in the haystack”. Material from a single APO within a limited timeframe and with another distinction characteristic such as British franking, earliest and latest use, or special usages and markings represents exactly that “needle”. The cover on page 6-7 with the signature of William Darby likely fetches in excess of \$1000 albeit more as military history. This collection can be the basis of a census to more formally establish scarcity/rarity.

Bibliography: Carter, Russ. Numbered Army’ Air Force Post Office Locations 7th ed. MPHS 2001. P 263.

Kugel, Al “American Base Forces Postmarks”. Military Postal History Society Bulletin 36:2. p 8-11

Postal Beachhead Europe: APO 813



The 133rd Regiment of the 34th Infantry Division aboard HMTS Straitford arrived in Northern Ireland on JAN 26 1942. Under the command of MGen. Russell Hartle, they were the first American soldiers in the European Theatre of Operations(ETO). The Army Post Office(APO) arrived with them. Designated APO 813, this post office was the only APO identified as "American Base Forces"(ABF) in the theatre. The United States was just rediscovering the ways of war and the function of military mail was no exception. As the first and for four months the only APO in the ETO, mail through this APO saw three rate periods and ultimately eight versions of its central date canceller(CDC). It uniquely serviced an array of units including the 34th Division, Vth Corps, and 8th Air Force, as well as numerous support units. It was at the onset US Army Europe postal service. Examples of all the rate periods and all CDC versions with intervals of usage are demonstrated as well as late uses of the ABF CDC and ABF designation on elusive examples of registered mail. And finally APO 813 in France.