A Convenient Alliance?

By John Pollock

The two stamps franked on the covers shown below have a similar design element of a rocket. Their connecting links will be revealed as this article unfolds. The stamps are the 8-cent Robert H. Goddard (Scott C69), and the 3-cent Fort Bliss 100th Anniversary (Scott 976). The rocket shown on each stamp's vignette resembles a V-2 design blasting off from a launch pad, a rocket developed and produced by the Germans as a weapon against the Allies during the latter years of WW II. Many were launched, controlled and guided to bomb London and surrounding areas during the conflict.

Figure 1 illustrates a First Day Cover dated October 5, 1964, with the stamp honoring Goddard, a physicist, and a revolutionary in his time. He pioneered rocketry and space exploration from its earliest beginning. From his research and engineering design, he launched his first rocket in 1926. Later he became known in America as the father of rocket science. The stamp was designed by Robert J. Jones, and the cover produced by ArtCraft has a gravure engraved cachet. During the first day of issue ceremony at Roswell, New Mexico, the highpoint of the event was the launching of a couple of rockets that contained 1000 First Day Covers in their capsules, which were retrieved after parachuting to the ground. Some lucky people must have them in their FDC/Space cover collection.

Figure 2 illustrates a First Day Cover dated November 5, 1948, with a block of stamps commemorating Fort Bliss. The stamp was designed by Charles R. Chickering, an employee of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. Chickering was also an artist who designed cachets on FDCs, and who collaborated with cachetmaker, Gladys Jackson, in producing some of them. The cover is another production from ArtCraft. The fort is located near El Paso, Texas, and presently houses troops of the United States Army where they are trained in artillery and guided missile weapons. The army base is part of the Fort Bliss Reservation, which extends deep into the State of New Mexico as far as the White Sands Missile Range where United States conducts space and atomic research. It is also the proving ground for new weapon systems. It has been suggested that, technically, the Fort Bliss stamp could be construed as the first space-related postage stamp issued by the U.S. Post Office, a forerunner of many more that followed.

Growing up in Berlin, Wernher von Braun engrossed himself in the study of science of rocketry and anything pertaining to space travel. He joined the Society of Space Travel and studied the theory of rocketry developed by other scientists who had the same enthusiasm, particularly the advancements done by Goddard, whose knowledge gave von Braun the spark plug and encouragement to advance the science.

During WW II, at Peenemunde, Germany on the Baltic coast where research facilities there produced the V-2 weapon, von Braun became the leader for their development under supervision of the German army. The first one was launched towards London on September 8, 1944, creating havoc and devastation. Prior to the V-2 weapon, London had been bombed by the V-1, familiar to some as a “Buzz-

bomb" because of the noise it created during flight. But the British, accustomed to having German planes drop bombs over targets, referred to the V-1 weapon as a "Flying Bomb".

During the course of the war when the Russian army was advancing towards Peenemunde, the facility was moved to an underground production plant in the Harz Mountains of central Germany. The factory workers consisted mostly of slave labor, many taken from concentration camps. These slave workers lived and worked in hellish conditions and most would not survive. On May 8, 1945, Germany surrendered, and when the American army entered the facility, they found a large cache of rockets at various levels of completion. These were crated and shipped to the United States ending up at White Sands proving grounds.

In July, 1945, and thereafter, von Braun and one hundred of his senior scientists, including immediate families were sent to Fort Bliss to work for the U.S. Army on the captured weapons. They were employed as technical employees and were encouraged to continue the advancement of rocket science. In 1949, the German contingent was relocated to Huntsville, Alabama to work on the Redstone rocket project, an advanced version of the V-2. Also at Huntsville during that time, the United States was seriously pursuing a space exploration program. Wernher von Braun, a strong advocate for this type program, was given the technical leadership to oversee the design of rockets that placed Americans into space and land on the moon. It also gave the U.S. a political leg-up over the Soviets by winning the space race, satisfying President Kennedy's famous proclamation of May 25, 1961 to land a man on the moon and to return him safely to earth.

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