

Recent printing of Flag coil on nonphosphored paper

By Richard Nazar

Part of a recent printing of a United States 37¢ Flag coil stamp was produced on nonphosphored paper.

The stamp in question is the 37¢ Flag coil of 2002 (Scott 3632) printed in self-stick rolls of 100 by the Bureau of



A 37¢ Flag coil stamp produced by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. A recent printing of this stamp is on nonphosphored paper that was then tagged.

Engraving and Printing in Washington, D.C. A single stamp is shown nearby.

BEP stamp production records recently provided in response to a Freedom of Information Act request show that the Bureau printed some 37¢ Flag coil stamps on nonphosphored paper and then applied phosphorescent tagging over the printed stamps.

Tagging is the usually invisible phosphor material added to stamp paper or to printed stamps.

It is used to activate automatic mail-handling equipment and is visible under shortwave ultraviolet light.

The new variety has not been reported as having been found by collectors or dealers yet, but it should be easy to distinguish from stamps printed by the Bureau on prephosphored paper.

The Bureau began printing the 37¢ Flag coil stamp on June 11, 2002.

Since late 2002, the Flag coil is the only stamp being printed by the Bureau.

(Although the Bureau has produced most U.S. postage stamps during the last 111 years, it will end its production of U.S. postage stamps in 2005, completing the transition of all U.S. Postal Service stamp production from the Bureau to competing private stamp printers.)

All printing of 37¢ Flag coils was done on the Bureau's Andreotti (601) press using sets of four cylinders, one cylinder for each ink used in the gravure printing process — yellow, magenta, cyan and black.

Each of the 480-subject cylinders (20 subjects across by 24 subjects around) prints one ink of the multicolor stamp image and one of the digits in the plate-number combination that is printed in the bottom margin of some stamps at a regular interval.

Each cylinder is made of copper and then plated with a

thin layer of chrome for durability.

So far, the Bureau has used the following 12 plate-number combinations to print the 37¢ Flag coil: 1111, 2222, 3333, 4444, 5555, 6666, 7777, 8888, 9999, 1111A, 2222A and 3333A.

Cylinder combinations 2222, 3333 and 8888 were rechromed and used on further press runs.

All 12 plate-number combinations were printed on prephosphored paper known as LP797.

However, a month after a brief test, on Oct. 28, 2004, the Bureau began printing the 37¢ Flag coil stamp on nonphosphored paper.

The new paper was produced by the same paper supplier as the previous prephosphored stock, but it had different specifications — most notably, it was not prephosphored paper.

It therefore had a different designation, LP800. In total, 23 rolls of nonphosphored paper were used before switching back to the prephosphored LP797 paper on Nov. 2, 2004.

All production using the nonphosphored paper was printed using plate-number combination 3333A.

This plate-number combination, therefore, exists on two different papers with different types of tagging.

According to Bureau records, 198,300 cylinder im-

pressions were made from combination 3333A on the nonphosphored paper.

This equates to about 10 percent of the total impressions from combination 3333A through November 2004.

Although Bureau records explain that the stamps printed on the nonphosphored paper were coated with taggant at the last station on the printing press, we currently do not know if the tagging was applied as block tagging over each stamp image or as overall tagging across the printed web (continuous roll) of stamp paper.

Regardless of the type of tagging (block or overall), each of these stamps will have the taggant on top of the four inks that make the stamp's printed image.

In contrast, stamps printed

on prephosphored paper have taggant that is below the colored inks of the printed stamp image.

The reason for using the nonphosphored paper is not noted in the Bureau reports, but a likely explanation might be linked to the approaching end of the Bureau's stamp production in 2005.

It is possible that rolls of nonphosphored paper were remaining from the production of a previous stamp, such as the nondenominated (5¢) Wetlands coil, which was last printed in September 2002, and the Bureau used those rolls for the 37¢ Flag coil as a cost-saving measure.

An interesting possibility exists that some of the 37¢ Flag coil stamps printed on the nonphosphored paper might end up as untagged errors — a possibility that has

not existed for many years on first-class letter-rate coils since the predominant use of prephosphored paper.

Flag coil stamps bearing plate-number combination 3333A were originally found in post offices in late October 2004.

The new variety, printed on nonphosphored paper with taggant applied after printing, was likely distributed in December 2004 or early in 2005. Who will be the first to find it?

Richard Nazar researches and writes about production varieties of modern U.S. stamps and specializes in plate-number coils. He resides in New Jersey.

A previous version of this story appeared on the Virtual Stamp Club, located at www.virtualstampclub.com. ■

Two Dutch stamps for new rates

The Netherlands' post office, TPG Post, issued two definitive stamps Jan. 3 to meet new international-mail rates that went into effect Jan. 1.

The 0.61-euro stamp pays the new basic rate for mail sent from the Netherlands to other European countries. The 0.76e denomination is for the new basic rate for mail sent to non-European countries.

These self-adhesive stamps depict Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands. The design by P.

Struycken features an image of the queen comprised of dots of the same color, blue-violet for the 0.61e stamp and bronze green for the 0.76e.

The country name and the denomination are a different color than the portrait, carmine red on the 0.61e and green on the 0.76e. Gerard Unger did the typographic work for the stamps.

The portrait of the queen is based on a photograph taken by Vincent Mentzel.

Walsall Security Printers of the United Kingdom printed the stamps by gravure in panes of five.

The printing quantities are 230,000 panes of the 0.61e and 150,000 panes of the 0.76e.

For more information, contact PTT Post Filatelie, Box 30051, 9700-RN Groningen, The Netherlands; or its agency in the United States, Interpost, Box 420, Hewlett, NY 11557-0420. ■