

A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words

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Studying propaganda forgeries and parodies is interesting but sometimes quite frustrating. Usually an item's origin and history is obscure and clouded in government "secrecy". To make matters even worse, there is always published information available from someone who "was there" or who has researched the matter for "endless years".

First hand reports and research can be helpful. Unfortunately it can sometimes also be deceptive or misleading. Even worse, erroneous information can become "fact" over a period of time if it is accepted or used as reference material for later studies.



Figure 1. German parody of the King George VI definitive issue.

After World War II, propaganda parodies, based on the British King George VI definitive issues (Scott #235-40) found their way into stamp collectors hands. These stamps were printed by the Third Reich as part of its propaganda effort. The origin of these parodies has been fairly well established and documented ¹⁾. Figure 1 illustrates one of these parodies.

The stamps were never gummed. Some of the stamps have a "special cancel" that reads "AAAO London -6 JUN 44 Special Stamp". A "cancel" is shown in Figure 2. This cancel was also used on both the King George VI Silver Jubilee and the Coronation parodies. The mysterious "AAAO" in the cancel actually looks like three upside down Vs with a bar through

them to form the three As.



Figure 2. "Paddy" cancellation used on the "Special Stamp".

At some point, stamps of the definitive parody were overprinted with a number of different propaganda slogans. There appear to be five different series of slogan overprints. In one series, the cancellation used on the first line of each overprint contains the mysterious "AAAO".

In 1964 a newspaper stamp column of the Phoenix, AZ Sun was devoted to these parodies. Its author, James Chemi, stated that the "AAAO" derived from an early British slogan "Ad Avernum Adolphe Atrox" (To the Devil with you - Monster Adolf). This slogan has also been used by R. J. Houston to explain the small "A"s found in the corners of the Id Jersey Arms issue ²⁾. In 1965, Fred Wolfe, writing in the American Philatelist, stated that the AAAO stood for " Allied Army Amphibian Operation" ³⁾. Joachim Hosang, in his lengthy 1955 essay, also presents "Allied Army Amphibian Operation" ⁴⁾.

Many distinguished authors and researchers, many differing opinions on the meaning of "AAAO". But where lies the truth? This picture (Figure 3) appeared in Herbert Friedman's 1969 article. ⁵⁾ And with it, comes the best solution to date.



To quote Friedman - "(General) Bradley had given (Paddy) Flint command of the 39th Infantry Regiment in Sicily, in an urgent attempt to breathe some life into the men who had shown signs of sluggishness. One of Flint's first acts was to stencil his helmet and jeep "A A A-0". These letters stood for "Anything, Anytime, Anywhere bar nothing. Within a few days the symbol had caught on and the 39th had painted "A A A-0" on every helmet and vehicle in the regiment!

It seems obvious that the Nazis who fought the 39th Regiment in Sicily somehow got the impression that this was a picked force of assault troops. There seems little doubt Nazi soldiers who made it back to Italy must have reported to the German High Command that the crack forces of the United States Army wore the strange "A A A-0" symbol".



Figure 3 Paddy Flint receives the D.S.C. from Gen George Patton. Notice stenciled "AAA-O" on Paddy's helmet. (U.S. Army photograph.)

Friedman goes on to state: "I have been certain for several years that the Nazis had expected the first troops to land at Normandy would be "A A A-0" men."

The rest of the article goes on to detail other points of Freidman's logic in arriving at the source of the mysterious "A A A-0".

Friedman's case for "Anything, Anytime, Anywhere bar nothing" is very strong. The stencil on Flint's helmet exactly matches the "AAAO" used on the overprints and is similar to the one used in the cancel. It also explains the cryptic overprints "AAAO but who will return" and "AAAO Come on, Germany expects you". If the Germans expected Flint's 39th Regiment to show up on the beaches of Normandy, what better propaganda welcome for them then the overprints?

Of course, as the reader, you can choose any of the suggested explanations for "AAAO". To me, a picture is indeed worth a thousand words.

References:

- 1) Anthony Pirie: Operation Bernhard
- 2) Third Reich Study Group. Vol XVIII, no. 3, page 15.
- 3) Fred S. Wolfe: Sachsenhausen's Secret Forgery Cells. (The American Philatelist, December 1965)
- 4) Joachim Hosang: Stamps in Battle Dress (Translated by P. Rickenback.) German Philatelic Review, Vol. 3, No. 4, September 1955. Pages 97,128.
- 5) Herbert A. Friedman: The Mysterious 'A A A-O'. (The American Philatelist, August 1969.)

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