

Fifty Years in the Service of Peace

By Arne Rasmussen, Denmark



DKK 4.75 Blue Beret stamp commemorates 50 years in the service of peace.

Denmark issued a stamp on January 10, 2007 with the inscription “50 år i fredens tjeneste” (50 years in the service of peace). This stamp became a reality after a proposal from the Danish organization “The Blue Berets.” This name refers to the blue beret worn by all soldiers serving in one of the United Nations operations established to restore and to maintain peace in a specific area. The Blue Berets are now also open for personnel who have served in similar operations under the authority of NATO, OSCE or the EU.

It was the initial intent of this stamp to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the first Danish contingent formed on November 7, 1956, and arrived in the operational theater (Egypt, later Gaza) on November 15, 1956.

After negotiations with Post Danmark, which was extremely cooperative, it was decided that the stamp should recognize *all* the soldiers and civilians who have served in the world’s trouble spots in the past half-century. Although a small country, Denmark has made about 92.000 persons available for these operations. It should be noted that Finland, Norway, and Sweden have taken part in many of the peacekeeping operations in different parts of the world.

This is the third stamp designed for Post Danmark by Ole Zøfting-Larsen. He states that the motif of the stamp is to communicate the foundation of peacekeeping forces: professionalism, attention and alertness, humanity, and credibility. All of this through a close-up of an unknown soldier wearing the blue beret with the United Nations symbol. The name of the country on the stamp is made by using the actual red strip embroidered with DANMARK that is worn by all Danish soldiers on the shoulders of their uniforms. Zøfting-Larsen also designed the first-day postmark with another symbol also used on uniforms until a few years ago when it was replaced with a small Danish flag.



Arne Rasmussen, then a staff officer at SHAPE headquarters in Belgium, lifts a welcoming toast at the opening reception to mark a Belgian stamp commemorating NATO’s 30th anniversary in 1979. Note the uniform patch worn by all Danish soldiers. Now retired from the military, Rasmussen is president of the Danish club for collectors of U.S. stamps and edits that club’s publication.



Special postmarks honoring the Danish-Norwegian (DANOR) units. The circular DANOR stamp is often used on official letters.



Danish and Norwegian Peacekeepers

Following is a brief story about the first U.N. mission called UNEF (United Nations Emergency Force) with emphasis on the postal history related to Danish and Norwegian troops.

The Middle East was filled with conflict and war after World War II. In 1956, the extremely dangerous situation prompted the U.N. to intervene. The General Assembly decided on November 5, 1956, to establish a peacekeeping force to secure peace in the area after the war between Egypt and Israel had been stopped. A number of nations, including Denmark and Norway, were asked to provide troops for this force, which they agreed to on the following day. By November 7, the Danish contingent of about 400 soldiers was assembled and ready.

It is remarkable that after only a few days the first Danish advanced unit was dispatched to the Capodichino Air Base near Naples, Italy and on November 15, they proceeded to Abu Suweir in Egypt. The Danish group was the first United Nations soldiers to arrive, followed shortly thereafter by a Norwegian unit. On November 28, it was decided by the respective governments that the units should be united in a Danish-Norwegian battalion, called DANOR. The first commander of DANOR was Danish Lieutenant Colonel Carl Engholm. The position as Commander DANOR alternated between the two nations during the existence of UNEF (1956–1967).

Looking back at this operation it is hard to believe that such units could be assembled and be in the area of operation within just one week. The commanders and soldiers had no experience in operations in the desert, and their equipment certainly was not the best for the task. Despite this, DANOR, and the rest of UNEF, were able to do what they were expected to do.

Postal Services to/from Soldiers

Communication and postal service between the soldiers and their homelands was a completely new field for everyone; new systems and procedures had to be established. The Danish postal authorities issued orders by telegram to all post offices about handling mail to and from the soldiers. In the beginning, letters to the soldiers were to be addressed to: *De Angelis UNEF, Capodichino Airport, Naples, Italy* where the U.N. had established a Post Office (Canadian) that forwarded all letters by U.N. aircraft to Abu Suweir for further dispatch. Letters from the soldiers were collected and forwarded to Capodichino where the Canadian postmen franked the letters with Italian stamps and delivered them to the Post Office in Naples. Letters from the first month with Italian stamps and a Napoli postmark are quite difficult to find.

In December, 1956 the U.N. established a free mail service and created special postmarks that were to be used on letters from the soldiers instead of regular stamps. In the 10 years that UNEF existed, several types of Free Mail postmarks were created. These postmarks were

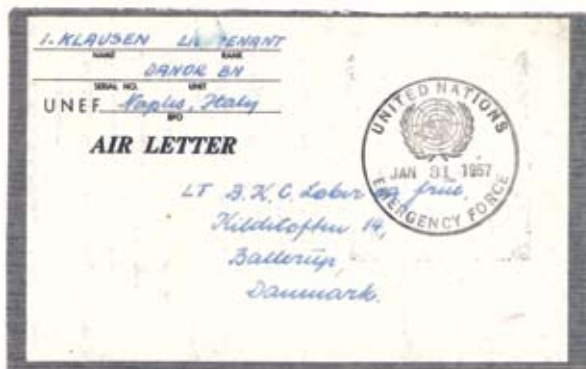


Rare 1956 covers to and from Danish soldiers in Egypt transiting Italy.



Different free mail hand-stamps used over a 10-year period. Types 3a, 3b, and 4 exist with different numbers beneath the dateline.





UNEF air letter with free mail postmark.



Examples of damaged hand-stamps. One was broken but repaired using a rubber band.



distributed to different units and locations. It has been possible to make a register showing where a specific postmark was used and the period it was in use at a certain location. With such a register, it is possible to determine where a letter was posted. These hand-stamps were made of rubber, and the heat and the low standard for offices resulted in a fairly short span of life for some of the devices. If a new hand-stamp was not prepared in time, it was necessary to use a damaged one.



Mechanical postmark used on a UNEF air letter.

On February 4, 1957, a mechanical postmark was introduced, existing in two types. Also special Air Letters (aerogrammes) were produced for the soldiers' free mail.

Danes Establish New System

All beginnings are difficult, and the U.N. postal system was a bit slow — at least that is what the Danish soldiers felt. A Danish mail system was therefore established at the end of March, 1957. The Danes could buy Danish stamps (domestic rate) and place them on their letters. The Danish Post Office collected the letters and placed a special hand-stamp on the front of the envelope but *not* on the stamp (see illustration). The Danish mailbags were transported by the U.N. to a base in Italy where a Danish supply plane picked them up and brought them to Denmark. After arrival in Denmark the mail was delivered to a special Danish Post Office. Here the letters received a regular Danish cancel and were delivered as other mail.



Two-line hand-stamp used on official letter.



Circular hand-stamp used on letter to Denmark, with stamps canceled in Denmark and placed into the mail.

detail, but further information can be found in an American catalog, *United Nations Philately*, edited by Arleigh Gaines.¹ Unfortunately the editor has passed away and this splendid catalog has not been brought up to date. Anyone interested in more information or letters from Danish soldiers may contact Arne Rasmussen, Pilevej 9, DK 2740 Skovlunde, Denmark; email, avr@tdcadsl.dk. ■

Endnote:

¹ *United Nations Philately*, Arleigh Gaines, ed., R&D Publications, New York, c. 1980-1997, three volumes.

Following UNEF, Danish soldiers have served in numerous operations: the Congo, Cyprus, Namibia, Kuwait, Yugoslavia (Croatia, Bosnia, Macedonia, Kosovo), Albania, Eritrea, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Sudan. In all these operations there is a very interesting postal history to be told and many different postmarks and special postal meters that were used. It is more difficult today to find actual letters to and from the soldiers because the use of mobile telephones and the Internet has made it a much easier to communicate compared with writing an old fashioned letter!

This was a brief story about an interesting way of collecting postal history. It is not possible in a short article to provide more