

A Collection of One

By: Michael Martin

We think of collections as a group of objects that have some common feature. There are coin, stamp, art, baseball card, and countless other types of collections. There are often collections within collections, such as a collection of airmail stamps in a stamp collection. Within that airmail collection, there might be a collection of four US Zeppelin stamps.

Stamp collectors take special pride in assembling a set of stamps such as the Columbian Exposition Issue of 1893. Not only do they strive to collect all the stamps of that set, but all in the same condition: used or unused, near perfect centering, or with specific cancellations. That is the challenge. Any one stamp from the series is nice to have, but it isn't a collection.

On the other hand, I think a good argument can be made for a collection of one stamp or cover if that item is unique and its primary value is not based upon being a part of a set or group. Like a painting by a great artist of the Renaissance, it stands by itself.

Here's an example from my collection of postal used covers.



This cover (no letter inside) was sent from the USS Indianapolis, stationed in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba on March 20, 1939. Note that it has a Cuban stamp on it, not a US stamp. The US Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay has been in the news for the past several years, but it was originally leased from Cuba in 1903.

The Indianapolis was a heavy cruiser and fought in a number of Pacific battles in World War II. One of its most notable contributions was to transport key parts of Little Boy, the first

nuclear weapon ever used in combat, to the United States Army Air Force Base on the island of Tinian. Included in the delivery was virtually half of the world's supply of enriched uranium U-235. This was accomplished on July 26, 1945.

The ship was in route to Okinawa on July 30, when struck by a Japanese torpedo and sank. Because of security procedures, the sinking was not reported immediately and ultimately only 316 of the 1195 crewmen survived. The sinking of Indianapolis resulted in the greatest single loss of life at sea from a single ship in the history of the US Navy.

It is not known when the sender of the letter, G. D. Alsworth, served on the Indianapolis.

So here I have a piece of history that I contend stands by itself. Certainly, it can be part of collection of covers from other US ships or mail from Cuba to the United States, but it doesn't need to be part of a larger collection to have historical value.

Do you have a stamp or cover that you feel is a collection of one? I would love to read about it.