



A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF AMERICA'S COURIERS - THE DIPLOMATIC COURIER SERVICE -



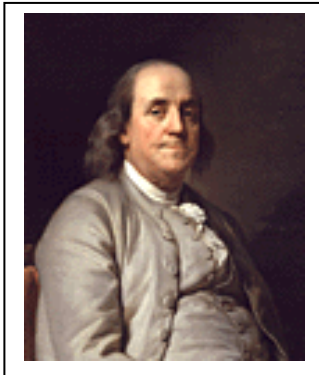
In the beginning

Clearly, the need to safeguard information has existed since the dawn of mankind. One of the earliest recorded, and most well known, occasions where a messenger relayed information of national importance occurred in 490 B.C. following the defeat of an invading Persian Army by the Athenians. The retreating Persians, re-embarked on their ships, headed for Athens to attack the undefended city. Phidippides, a fast-footed warrior, was called upon to run the 26 miles to the city to warn the citizens. After fighting all day and a 3-hour run to the city, Phidippides died of exhaustion after delivering his message.

As civilization became more sophisticated, organized, and social in nature, the need to provide secure and rapid transmission of information has become essential to the existence of nations and success of its leaders. Couriers have long carried messages to permit communications between governments. Initially carrying messages on foot, as did our hero Phidippides, couriers evolved to horseback, coach, and increasingly modern transportation means until, today, they zip through the sky on sleek jet aircraft. Over time, American couriers have delivered dispatches to every capitol on every continent.

Eventually, the right of governments to communicate with their official representatives in other countries was formally recognized by international convention (agreements) which provide official protection for the couriers and their dispatches/pouches. More recently, the secure movement of classified, sensitive, and often bulky, material has become more complex due to increasing sophistication of the threat, but let's not get ahead of ourselves.

Benjamin Franklin, the most distinguished scientific and literary American of his age, was the first true American diplomat. In September 1776, he was appointed to a commission tasked to gain French support for American independence. Two years later, on September 14, 1778, Franklin was appointed as Minister to France. As the first American minister (the 18th century equivalent of the title, ambassador), Franklin's home in Passy, just outside of Paris, became the center of American diplomacy on the continent. Without a doubt, these crucial times involved the need to pass vital state documents and information between Franklin and American political leaders.

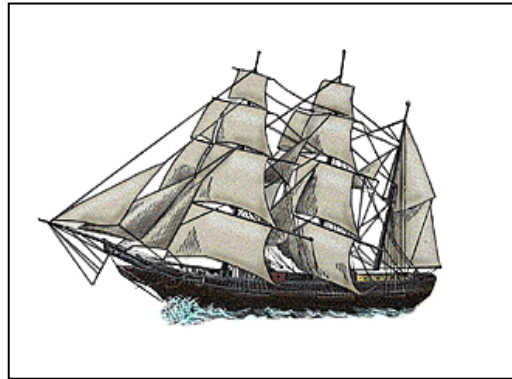


(The first American Minister)

Following establishment of its independence, the fledgling American government became swept up in state protocol. The First Act of Congress, passed on April 14, 1792, authorized the posting of U.S. Consuls abroad. The Department of State, a young body established only in 1789, was party to international expansion of U.S. influence. Again, we can visualize the need to pass information and documents to and from the overseas consuls in a safe and rapid manner – though having to endure often perilous sea voyages may not be considered expeditious by some.

During the early part of the 20th century, a small group of Foreign Service Officers was responsible to transport national information to (and from) overseas areas and U.S. government officials. Unfortunately, this group was limited in size and capabilities, unable to handle all the

requirements to ferry articles between the primary ports of embarkation. Eventually, American ship captains and trustworthy American travelers were selected to augment these Foreign Service Officers. Known as “Bearers of Dispatches,” these individuals were given sealed mail packages to safeguard and deliver to specified officials at their destination. However, as the U.S. government moved toward active participation in World War I, the requirement for a more secure and reliable way to move documents and material grew rapidly. However, there was no formal organized courier service until World War I had swept up the international community.



As the clouds of war over Europe increased, the U.S. Government struggled to administer its international obligations amidst the rapidly developing situation. In concert with the expanding U.S. military presence overseas, the State Department employed noncommissioned officers of the Army and Navy to deliver secret documents to our embassies overseas. Though this may seem strange, it was a practice that would be periodically be used to support both military and State requirements

In the fall of 1917, Captain Amos J. Peaslee was sent to Europe as Chairman of the New York Election Commission to oversee voting by New York State residents serving in the military or living abroad. During this trip, Captain Peaslee noticed tremendous confusion in the handling of military dispatches. As he moved from site to site, he observed the large piles of baggage and military stores (supplies) in all railway stations, causing all-too-frequent confusion and delays in movement. Further, trains were crowded and schedules were constantly disrupted by the unforeseen movement of troop trains which, of course, had priority on the rail lines. Total chaos!

Upon his return to the United States, Captain Peaslee was assigned to the Ordnance Department in Washington, D.C. There he noticed that the difficulties he had seen in Europe were severely affecting the Department’s communications with its offices in France. Being a devout Quaker, he realized that the war might possibly be shortened and many lives could be saved if a special courier office could be created to serve the Department’s needs to transmit time-sensitive operational information.



Captian Peaslee submitted his idea in a report to his immediate superior, General C. B. Wheeler who, in turn, sent a cablegram to General John J. “Blackjack” Pershing, Commander in Chief of the American Expeditionary Force. Pershing liked the idea and ordered Captain Peaslee, along with seven officers and four enlisted men, from Washington to France, to organize an overseas courier service. Once functional, Peaslee’s force quickly reduced the transit time of documents between Europe and America from 30 to 11 days.

(At left, newly promoted Major Amos J. Peaslee)

Once the war ended, Captain Peaslee and his small corps of couriers were disbanded. But the validity of his services had been noted and Peaslee, now an Army major, was soon summoned to Paris to organize an official courier service throughout Europe. The war had totally devastated communications systems, necessitating establishment of confidential, dependable channels to re-establish communications with isolated American embassies and legations. *Peaslee's efforts would eventually result in the creation of the Diplomatic Courier Service.*

Simultaneously, military leaders were pursuing an organized military courier system to transfer sensitive military information between headquarters and field elements, establishing the "Military Postal Express Service" in December, 1918. These two systems, with shared purposes, supported each other on numerous occasions.

The Courier Service Matures

Borrowing their title and emblem from the British King's Messenger Service, Peaslee's new service was known as the "Silver Greyhounds." The group became renowned for the speed and efficiency with which the couriers delivered dispatches throughout Europe and across the Atlantic Ocean. Unfortunately, after the Treaty of Versailles was signed and hostilities ceased, Major Peaslee and his officer couriers returned to the United States. By replacing the officers with civilians and arranging for additional non-commissioned officers, the courier service was able to continue its operations, but on an ever-diminishing basis, until 1933.



In the Spring of 1933, with the Depression at its peak, the decision was made to shut down the courier service -- the Government's severe financial straits could not support this expense. The threatened discontinuance of the Service brought immediate and loud protests from overseas embassies and legations which had become dependent on secure, regular delivery of material. Rather than dying out as the weeks went by, these protests grew in intensity. The few civilians still serving as couriers could not be expected to continue the legacy of Peaslee's "Greyhounds."

To remedy the situation, a rider was added to the 1933 State Department budget giving the President the power to (again) appoint military officers as diplomatic couriers. This provision resulted in the detailing of 24 Army officers to the State Department for six month periods as diplomatic couriers to augment the civilians still serving as couriers. Eventually, another six civilians were hired to flesh out the service. Thus, though the courier service was "reborn," it was a rather inauspicious event.

Prior to World War II, and for a brief period thereafter, the diplomatic and military courier systems again overlapped. War Department classified material destined within the continental

United States was sent through military message centers or registered mail channels. Any classified material destined to overseas areas was entered into the State Department Diplomatic Courier Service. This was primarily the result of cutbacks in the military courier program that closely paralleled that in the diplomatic service. So, the detailed military officers must have felt very much at home moving their own material.



(Edwin Schoerlich)

By 1941, the Diplomatic Courier Service was again established and functional. That year, the very first Courier Service Headquarters was created, and was established in Room 109 of the original Department of State site (the Old Executive Building). Edwin Schoerlich, a Foreign Services Officer, was selected as the first “Chief of Couriers” and the first central head for the group since Amos Peaslee, many years before. One of his initial challenges was to resolve the worldwide personnel needs of the expanding workload that the couriers were facing. One can well imagine the increased need for confidential and secure movement of documents as international intrigue played out.

President Roosevelt once again exercised his power to appoint military officers to serve as diplomatic couriers. This did prove to have advantages during the hostilities, however, since these officers could easily assimilate into the flow of men and materials that rolled across Europe and island-hopped in the Pacific.

Following the invasion of Europe, Allied armies rolled across Europe quite rapidly, uncovering former national capitols at a furious pace. Freeing these capitols did not immediately restore normal governmental functions – that came only slowly, under the watchful eye of the Allied caretakers. As was mentioned earlier, the military officers delegated as diplomatic couriers were better able to negotiate transportation and operational issues at that time than a civilian courier could have. Further, the airfields in Europe and the Pacific were generally commandeered for military use, so were not available to commercial flights and the normal (peacetime) movement of diplomatic courier material. These conditions, among others, led to a long-serving relationship between the Diplomatic Courier Service and its military counterpart. Without going into too much detail, the relationship provided for “long-haul,” trans-oceanic movement of diplomatic pouches by the military couriers, and facilitated the exchange of courier material between the two systems, depending upon the final destination.

When World War II ended, the State Department civilian couriers continued to perform their mission even as the detailed military officers were released from courier duty and returned to the United States to be discharged. Additional civilian couriers were hired to prevent a void and, by 1947, all military couriers were gone and the diplomatic courier service was, once again, an all-civilian operation.

Even as the post-World War II courier realignment was taking place, the Courier Service itself was being realigned. Passage of the Truman Act of 1946 led to a reorganization of the federal Government. Within the State Department, that included transfer of the Diplomatic Courier Service from the Foreign Affairs Administration to the Office of Communication. As peace returned to the globe, the couriers provided diplomatic pouch service to virtually the entire world. Over the next few years, the organization reflected operational requirements. Regional courier offices were established, at one time or another, in Shanghai, **Bangkok**, Panama, Cairo, **Frankfurt**, Athens, Paris, **Miami**, Manila, and Washington, D.C.*

** Courier Division offices are currently located at the highlighted sites; CourierHubs are found at Dakar (Senegal), Manama (Bahrain), Pretoria (South Africa), and Seoul, South Korea.*

An Elusive Peace

Following the restoration of peace, the courier service again excelled in expeditious service. From the 1950s, into the 1970s, the couriers provided service twice a week to U.S. embassies and several consulates across the globe. This was a time when U.S. and other governments relied on coded telegraphic messages as a primary communications tool. Unfortunately, this period also hosted the Cold War, when Russia – our primary adversary at that time – and other nations devised ever-more sophisticated ways to intercept (and decode) government cables and spy on one another.

The discovery of a listening device in the Great Seal at our Moscow mission in 1960 was the catalyst for a critical appraisal of how the federal Government communicated securely with its agents in other lands. For the courier service, this was a busy time. The compromise in Moscow resulted in a wealth of new and replacement materials being shipped, by truck, from Helsinki to the embassy. A diplomatic courier was assigned to accompany each truck to ensure the contents were not tampered with. Also, daily diplomatic pouch service was established between Moscow and Frankfurt, from where the mission's messages could be transmitted to Washington and other points.



(The device was both simple and ingenious)



By the late '50s/early '60s, hundreds of listening devices planted by foreign intelligence services were found in our embassies in numerous countries. Diplomatic couriers again were called upon to escort replacement equipment, furniture, and other items, as well as the classified pouches that were the norm – in essence, anything that went into the sterile areas of the post.

In the late '60s, several ambassadors and Department officials became targets of radicals and were kidnapped or assassinated. These actions highlighted the possible exploitation of U.S. diplomats for political purposes, a new wrinkle to serving the nation overseas. To meet this new threat, new protective capabilities were necessary, and many new products were added to the courier services' list of items that were pouched or covered in burlap for movement under courier escort.

The latter 1960s and first half of the following decade continually brought diplomatic couriers into harm's way – though this term did not come into vogue until much later – as they provided support to U.S. government elements in the Republic of Vietnam. On any given day, and especially as the military situation deteriorated, commercial airliners were subjected to deadly fire as they approached Tan Son Nhut Airport in Saigon to land, or as they struggled for altitude after taking off. The embassy itself was a prime target of Viet Cong rockets or bombs. Many of us can still recall the sad conclusion to this chapter as staff members were evacuated by helicopter from the roof of the American embassy in Saigon.

The intensity of terrorist attacks against Americans increased. In the period between 1979 and 1983, there were over 300 attacks; in 1984 alone, there were over 100 attacks. In 1984, Secretary of State George Shultz formed an advisory panel to study and make recommendations on minimizing the probability of terrorist attacks on U.S. citizens and facilities. Headed by retired Admiral Bobby Inman, this commission was known as the Advisory Panel on Overseas Security, or the Inman Panel. The panel examined the Department's security programs and, in a report published in June 1985, made its recommendations to the Secretary. As a result of this study, on November 4, 1985, the Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DS) and the Diplomatic Security Service (DSS) were officially established. Another recommendation was to integrate the Diplomatic Courier Service into the Bureau of Diplomatic Security and use special agents as couriers.**

*** Special agents were employed as temporary couriers for approximately five years, after which the courier service returned to hiring career professional couriers. The close relationship between DS agents and diplomatic couriers continues today.*

The Inman Panel's recommendations received strong support from Congress, and the Omnibus Diplomatic Security and Antiterrorism Act was signed by President Reagan on August 27, 1986. The new Bureau of Diplomatic Security was structured along the lines of other Federal law enforcement, security, and intelligence agencies. Thus, the Diplomatic Courier Service was a good “fit” since security is the primary objective of the courier function.

Since that time, the information age and technology have revolutionized the communications process. The development of the computer, the microchip, the satellite, and other sophisticated communications systems, and the exponential advancement in their capabilities, have been (and are) reflected in the materials entered into the courier service for escort around the world. The diplomatic couriers of today no longer hand-carry merely pouches of communications, papers, and files, but protect vast amounts of supplies, equipment, and/or construction materials bound for sensitive overseas posts.



Terrorist bombings at Dar es Salaam (left) and Nairobi (right) have forever altered security parameters for courier operations.



Following the August 7, 1998, terrorist bombings of the U.S. Embassies in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, and Nairobi, Kenya, the State Department declared the protection of American personnel and facilities overseas a top priority. Congress passed a \$1.4 billion Emergency

Embassy Security Supplemental, of which the Bureau of Diplomatic Security received a substantial amount for security improvements at every U.S. diplomatic mission overseas. The Diplomatic Courier Service has also benefited from this program with upgrades in vaults, vehicles, and other operational features. As overseas security requirements have increased, so have the demands on the Courier Service. Diplomatic Couriers now routinely transport several tons of classified and sensitive materials on trips in their evolving role.

Though the expansion of American diplomatic interests overseas has been matched by a corresponding growth of courier workloads, courier management realizes that resources cannot be expected to increase correspondingly. During the past few years, courier focus has been on being better shepherds of U.S. taxpayer dollars and on improving the efficiency of operations.



(Sealed containers of pouched material are brought from the airport to FRDCD)

This focus has led to several improvements, too numerous to list in this short history. A primary initiative that does deserve specific mention is the innovative idea to partner with Federal Express (FedEx) to enhance movement and lower costs. Tapping into this commercial system has been a win-win for both groups in that FedEx garnered additional business on established air channels and the courier service received airfare and cargo rates well below those previously paid to passenger airlines for the same route. In addition, delivery times were shortened and the

need for support personnel was reduced – both measures that enhanced courier operations. The success of the FedEx initiative has prompted the Diplomatic Courier Service to explore similar opportunities with other commercial parcel delivery companies.

As the Diplomatic Courier Service looks to new horizons and improved effectiveness, necessary changes have resulted to operational parameters and long-term relationships. The decades-old interoperability with the Defense Courier Service (DCS) has again evolved as diplomatic couriers have taken over most of the long-haul (trans-oceanic) movements formerly accomplished by our military counterparts. Exchange of material with DCS has been reduced, but will continue for State customers serviced by DCS; conversely, diplomatic customers located in the continental United States or areas serviced by DCS will be handed to the military couriers for final delivery.

Today

Security of information and material is as important today as it has ever been. Diplomatic couriers continue to ensure the secure movement of classified U.S. Government secrets and sensitive items on a daily basis, to every corner of the globe. Further, diplomatic courier control officers escort sensitive, but unclassified, crated materials within the United States and across international boundaries. These articles receive the same secure shipment as diplomatic pouches but, unlike diplomatic pouches, are declared to customs on entry into another country.



The Diplomatic Courier Service securely delivers more than 10 million pounds of classified and controlled material across international borders to over 190 Foreign Service missions annually, and has evolved to a program of nearly \$34 million. As workloads grow, courier procedures also must compensate for the increasingly restrictive guidelines imposed by various nations and the increased technological challenges encountered during global support requirements..

In addition to the regularly scheduled trips via commercial aircraft, several special State Department military support flights go to South America, Africa, the Middle East, the Far East, Europe, and the Commonwealth of Independent States (formerly known as the Soviet Union) each year. These flights transport heavy, oversize pouch material that cannot be moved by commercial aircraft.

Sensitive, but unclassified controlled materials, are also transported by the Diplomatic Courier Service. For example, the Courier Service has followed the route blazed by Alexander the Great's couriers in conducting overland and sea shipments of materials to Dushanbe, Tajikistan, for the new embassy to be erected there. Also, the Courier Service has worked closely with the Office of Overseas Buildings Operation (OBO) to escort shipments of construction material and equipment by sea from the West Coast to China in support of the new embassy office building in Beijing, China. These projects, as well as future construction projects planned for China, further define the flexibility and resourcefulness of the Diplomatic Courier Service.

The Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) has changed many of the protocols for our international relations and has again placed diplomatic couriers in harm's way during the performance of their duties.



(Manama Chief Steve Moffit at Baghdad)

To support our interests in Iraq, couriers from Manama perform flights of classified pouches into Baghdad on a fortnightly basis, using DHL aircraft. They rendezvous at planeside with Embassy staff representatives at the Baghdad Airport to deliver and pick up material. This minimizes ground time and facilitates overall security. Courier service to Afghanistan is also accomplished on a fortnightly schedule by Manama using DHL flights. MRDCH couriers rendezvous with representatives of the Kabul Embassy at Bagram Airbase for planeside delivery and pick up of pouches, again, for security.

And thus, we conclude a brief overview of the Diplomatic Courier Service. Though a small organization, it truly performs a giant-sized role in helping the State Department carry out its foreign policy missions safely and securely, and in helping to keep American diplomacy safe.



None is Swifter Than These