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## Are They, or Aren't They?

Two different covers, I mean. They're from the same business; they have the same wording and art work; they're the same size; and they're the same color. In fact, they're identical...except that the strikers aren't the same color. Do you keep them as two different covers, or not?

Most collectors, including myself, would see them as distinctly different covers. But, while you're free to apply whatever standards you see fit to your own collection, if you expect others to agree, you'd best be reasonable in your judgments. When you have something as obvious as one cover with a light gray striker and the other with a black striker, you won't encounter any problems. There have been those over-zealous collectors in the past, however, who have made "mini-collections" out of the same cover by optimistically discerning every possible shade of striker color under the sun. In fact, there's the story about one old Navy Ship collector who had a habit of "helping things along a bit" by leaving covers out in the sun so that they would fade, thereby creating "new" varieties!

One thing to be careful of is recognizing what the *original* color of the striker really was in the first place. Strikers are often susceptible to color changes with age. Some may take on a gray film, or a greenish film, or some may just darken. This is particularly true if the covers have been exposed to high humidity.

And then, of course, there's the long-running controversy about the validity of striker widths as constituting true varieties. Well, they do...and they don't! A good rule of thumb to follow is that the difference in widths should be really significant in order to be counted as two different varieties. For example, the difference between most pre-War strikers (10+mm) and post-War strikers (around 6 mm) is a glaring difference. Otherwise, you can generally forget it. It's been definitely demonstrated that the manufacturing process, itself, can cause smaller differences in striker widths within the same run of covers.