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Philatelic Society

Feldpost in North Africa

1941-1943

Robert J. Houston

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Monograph TRSG-06

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INTRODUCTION

The articles in this “monograph” were originally published in the ***Third Reich Study Group Bulletin***, in two installments which appeared during 1979, written by Robert J. Houston, the current Editor of the Bulletin.

While I found no mention of these articles being combined into a single monograph at the time of publication, it seemed to be a worthwhile project, and I did so as I was compiling the Table of Contents (Title/Author) Index for the issues. In part 2, mention was made of an earlier article by Norbert Kennapin on the “Palmenstempel” or Palm Tree Cancel. Because that earlier article had a number of illustrations not present in the current work, that article was extracted from the Bulletin and added to the present monograph as an Addendum.

Please bring any problems or omissions to my attention.

Mike Ludeman

May 2018

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Feldpost in North Africa 1941-43



By R.J. Houston

A review of the German "Feldpost" operation in this highly mobile and historic campaign.

Outline:

- I - General Background;
- II - Military Operations;
- III - German Army Organization;
- IV - The Feldpost Offices;
- V - Regulations;
- VI - Field Newspapers/Propaganda;
- VII - The "Palmenstempel";
- VIII - The "Tunispäckchenmarke";
- IX - Other Philatelic Items;
- X - List of References;

I. GENERAL BACKGROUND

The story of "Panzer Armee Afrika" begins necessarily with the Italian invasion of Egypt in September, 1940, which had ground to an abrupt halt after reaching as far as Sidi Barrani.

In December, 1940, British forces under Gen. Wavell launched a counter offensive, forcing an Italian retreat westward back into Cyrenaica. Bardia fell on January 7th and Tobruk on January 22, 1941. The Italian's situation was now desperate and previous German plans to send a "Sperrverband" (blocking force), consisting of the 5th Light Division and miscellaneous units, to North Africa were now accelerated and at German insistence, all German and Italian units in Libya were placed under a single German command. As commander, Hitler chose Gen. Lt. Erwin Rommel (later to be respectfully called "The Desert Fox"), who had distinguished himself as commander of the 7th Panzer Division in France.

Rommel was appointed on February 6, 1941 and arrived in Africa on February 12th as the commander of "Aufklärungs Stab Rommel". By this time all of Cyrenaica had fallen to the British and all that stood between the British and Tripoli were 7000 disorganized Italian troops.

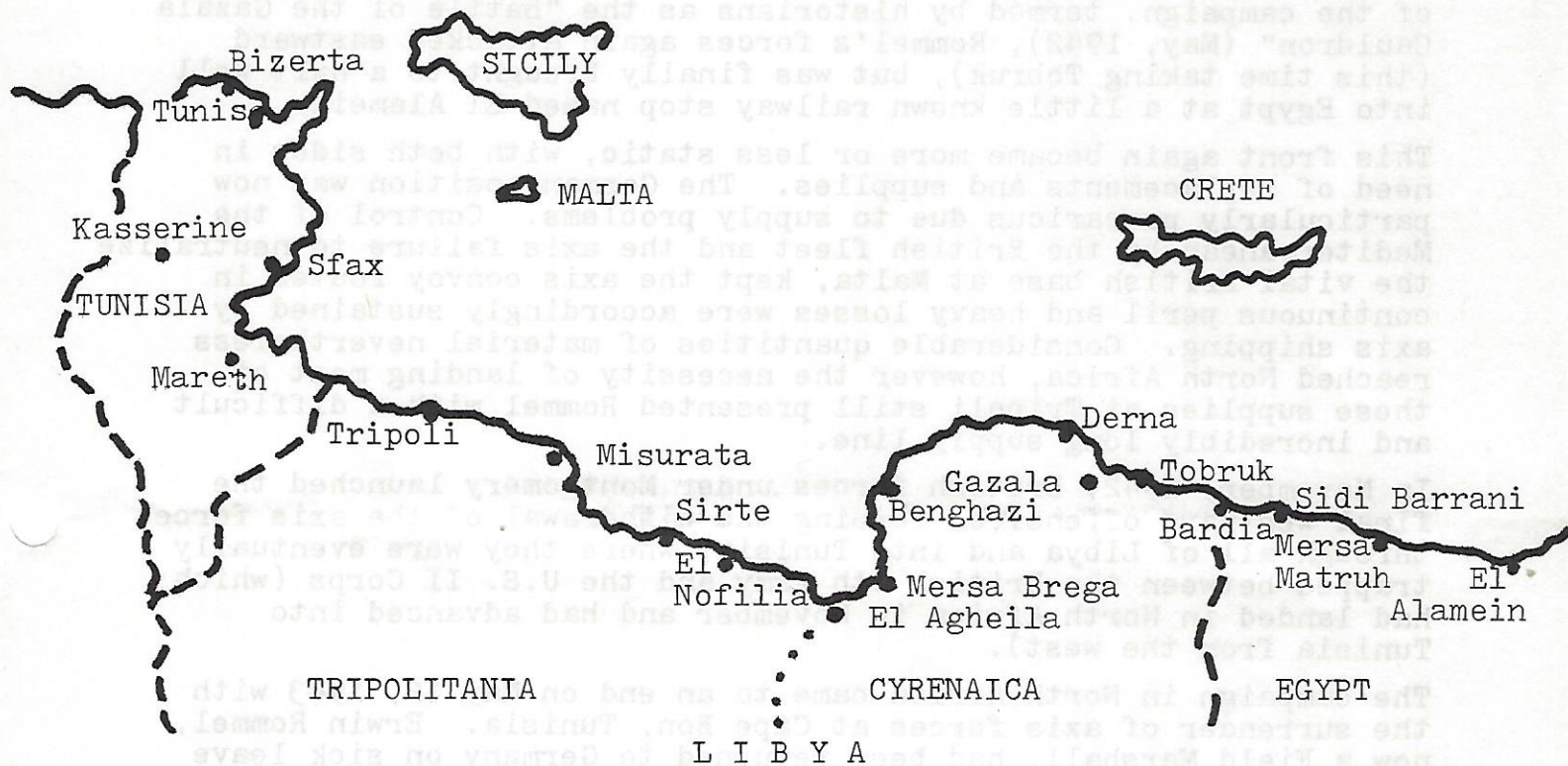
The first German combat troops arrived at Tripoli on February 14th, 1941 and marched immediately to Misurata. On February 18th, Hitler decreed that these German forces would now be designated as the "Deutsches Afrika Korps" and thus began a two year classic of modern military history.

The Afrika Korps arrives, and a new phase in the desert war begins

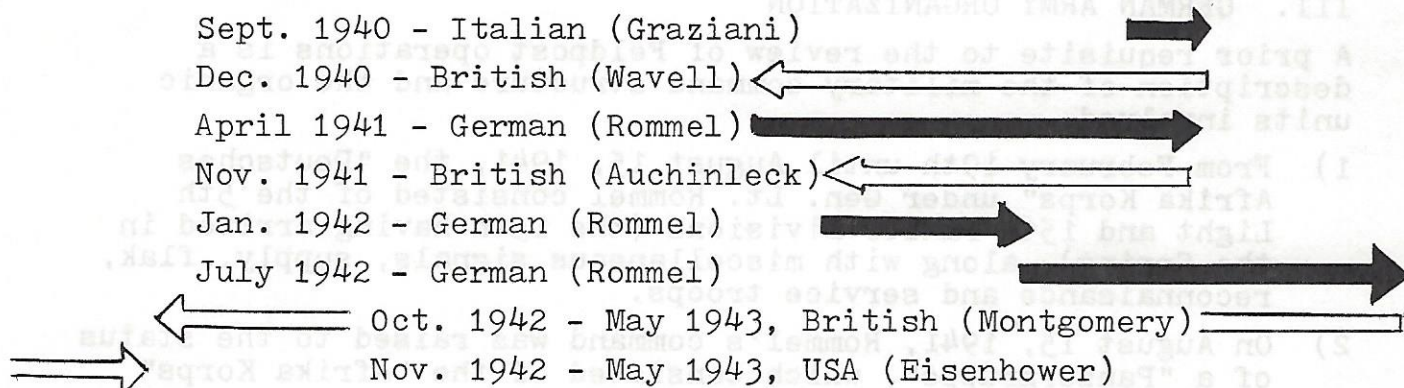


II. MILITARY OPERATIONS

The two year war in North Africa became a "see-saw" battle, with each side launching spirited offensives and racing across the northern edge of Libya's provinces of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, only to encounter the inevitable logistic problems of overextended supply lines - since Tripoli and Alexandria were the only deep water ports capable of handling the supplies required by the Germans and British respectively.



GRAPH OF MAJOR OFFENSIVES



Rommel's first offensive began in April, 1941 and resulted in the driving of British forces all the way back into Egypt, thereby regaining all of Cyrenaica - except Tobruk (whose stubborn defense became a wartime chronicle).

In November, 1941, British forces under Gen. Auchinleck retook virtually all of Cyrenaica in a drive which ended at the "El Agheila Line", where axis forces made a determined stand.

The German/Italian forces launched a new offensive in January, 1942, driving eastward as far as Gazala, where the front again became static for a time. Following one of the bloodiest battles of the campaign, termed by historians as the "Battle of the Gazala Cauldron" (May, 1942), Rommel's forces again attacked eastward (this time taking Tobruk), but was finally brought to a halt well into Egypt at a little known railway stop named El Alamein.

This front again became more or less static, with both sides in need of replacements and supplies. The German position was now particularly precarious due to supply problems. Control of the Mediterranean by the British fleet and the axis failure to neutralize the vital British base at Malta, kept the axis convoy routes in continuous peril and heavy losses were accordingly sustained by axis shipping. Considerable quantities of material nevertheless reached North Africa, however the necessity of landing most of these supplies at Tripoli still presented Rommel with a difficult and incredibly long supply line.

In November, 1942, British forces under Montgomery launched the final westward offensive, forcing the withdrawal of the axis forces through all of Libya and into Tunisia, where they were eventually trapped between the British 8th Army and the U.S. II Corps (which had landed in North Africa in November and had advanced into Tunisia from the west).

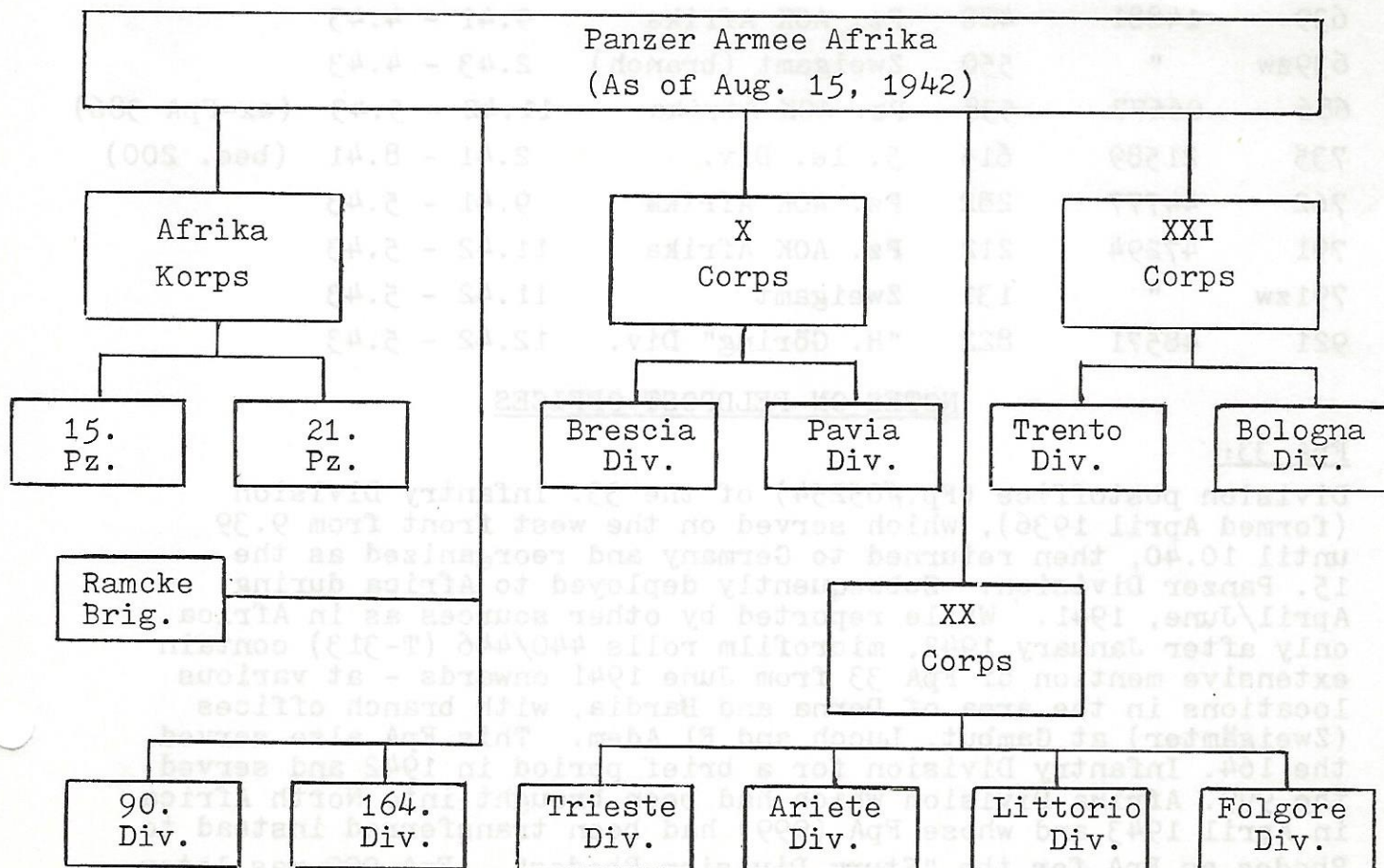
The campaign in North Africa came to an end on May 12, 1943 with the surrender of axis forces at Cape Bon, Tunisia. Erwin Rommel, now a Field Marshall, had been returned to Germany on sick leave however, in March and was destined to once again face these same adversaries on the western front.

III. GERMAN ARMY ORGANIZATION

A prior requisite to the review of Feldpost operations is a description of the military command structure and the organic units involved:

- 1) From February 19th until August 15, 1941, the "Deutsches Afrika Korps" under Gen. Lt. Rommel consisted of the 5th Light and 15th Panzer Divisions (the 15th having arrived in the Spring), along with miscellaneous signals, supply, flak, reconnaissance and service troops.
- 2) On August 15, 1941, Rommel's command was raised to the status of a "Panzergruppe", which consisted of the "Afrika Korps" (15th Panzer Division and the 5th Light Division - now re-organized as the 21st Panzer Division), the 90th Light Division and two Italian corps (XX and XXI) which included six Italian Divisions.

- 3) On January 30, 1942, "Panzer Gruppe Afrika" was redesignated as the "Panzer Armee Afrika" and a year later (Feb. 23, 1943) the title of "1. italienische Armee" was adopted. In the meantime, this army had been strengthened by additional units (see below).
- 4) The Allied invasion of NW Africa prompted the establishment (in November 1942) of a separate axis force in Tunisia under Gen. Walther Nehring, which was designated as the XC Corps and consisted of miscellaneous German field battalions, paratroop and artillery regiments - supplemented by several additional Italian divisions including "Superga" and "Imperiali".
- 5) On December 9, 1942, XC Corps was expanded and redesignated as the "5th Panzer Army" (Pz. AOK 5). This army now included newly arrived reinforcements such as the 10th Panzer Division, the "Manteuffel Division" (former "Division von Broich"), the Luftwaffe Division "Hermann Göring", the 334th Infantry Division and the 19th/20th Flak Divisions - later to be further reinforced by elements of the 999th Light Division.
- 6) The eventual convergence of the two major axis armies in Tunisia, made it necessary to create (on February 23, 1943) a unified command which was designated as "Heeresgruppe Afrika" under the overall command of Field Marshal Rommel. Returning to Germany on sick leave on March 9, 1943, Rommel was succeeded by Generaloberst Jürgen von Arnim, the last commander of the axis forces in North Africa.



IV. THE MILITARY POSTAL SYSTEM

While each organic division had it's own "Feldpostamt", the command structures and multitude of other miscellaneous and auxiliary units required additional postoffices, both mobile and fixed. Mail to and from these postoffices (as well as the several Italian military postoffices in North Africa) was transported by sea and air from Italy where the primary forwarding of German mail was effected in Naples.

As usual, the German field postoffices had "Kenn" (3 digit code) numbers assigned to facilitate routing and P.O. identification. Through the study of microfilmed records of German Army operations/ Feldpost directives and reports, etc., examination/identification of actual covers and the compilation/comparison of information provided by numerous other sources, it is now possible to assemble the following listing of German "Feldpostämter" (FpA) which operated in the North African theatre:

| FpA # (Tact.) | Feldpost No. | Kenn No. | Assignment | Dates (Africa) | Notes |
|------------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| 33 | 05254 | 697 | 15. Pz. Div. | 5.41 - 5.43 | |
| 90 | 21630 | 985 | 10. Pz. Div. | 12.42 - 5.43 | |
| 190 | 19560 | 805 | 90. le. Div. | 8.42 - 5.43 | |
| 200 | 21589 | 615 | 21. Pz. Div. | 8.41 - 5.43 | (ex-FpA 735) |
| 220 | 16550 | 946 | 164. le. Div. | 8.42 - 5.43 | |
| 334 | 48115 | 412 | 334. Inf. Div. | 12.42 - 5.43 | |
| 386 | 06677 | 538 | Pz. AOK Afrika | 3.42 - 10.42 | (bec. 686) |
| 639 | 14881 | 420 | Pz. AOK Afrika | 9.41 - 4.43 | |
| 639zw | " | 550 | Zweigamt (branch) | 2.43 - 4.43 | |
| 686 | 06677 | 538 | Pz. AOK Afrika | 11.42 - 5.43 | (ex-FpA 386) |
| 735 | 21589 | 615 | 5. le. Div. | 2.41 - 8.41 | (bec. 200) |
| 762 | 44777 | 282 | Pz. AOK Afrika | 9.41 - 5.43 | |
| 791 | 47294 | 212 | Pz. AOK Afrika | 11.42 - 5.43 | |
| 791zw | " | 131 | Zweigamt | 11.42 - 5.43 | |
| 921 | 48571 | 822 | "H. Göring" Div. | 12.42 - 5.43 | |

NOTES ON FELDPPOST OFFICESFpA 33:

Division postoffice (Fp.#05254) of the 33. Infantry Division (formed April 1936), which served on the west front from 9.39 until 10.40, then returned to Germany and reorganized as the 15. Panzer Division. Subsequently deployed to Africa during April/June, 1941. While reported by other sources as in Africa only after January 1942, microfilm rolls 440/446 (T-313) contain extensive mention of FpA 33 from June 1941 onwards - at various locations in the area of Derna and Bardia, with branch offices (Zweigämter) at Gambut, Lucch and El Adem. This FpA also served the 164. Infantry Division for a brief period in 1942 and served the 999. Afrika Division which had been brought into North Africa in April 1943 and whose FpA (999) had been transferred instead to Rhodes as FpA for the "Sturm Division Rhodos". FpA 999 was later

designated as the new FpA 33 (Fp.#26908) of the 15. Panzer Grenadier Division formed in Sicily during July, 1943.

FpA 90:

Division postoffice of the 10. Panzer Division, which had served in the Polish, French and Russian campaigns and was transferred to Tunisia in late November, 1942, assigned to Gen. Nehring's XC Korps. It is interesting to note that the Feldpost number (21630) of this FpA was later assigned (July, 1943) to FpA 476 of the LXXVI Panzer Korps in France.

FpA 190:

The 90.le. Afrika Division was formed in Africa as "Afrika Division zbV" in August 1941 from miscellaneous units and was designated as the 90th Light Division from November 28, 1941. This title was changed to "90th Light Africa Division" in March, 1942. The unit was served by a branch (Zweigamt) of FpA 33 until August, 1942, when the branch was redesignated as FpA 190 (Fp.#19560). This redesignation is included in a report of the Armee Postmeister covering the period August 16-31, 1942 found on frame 8729437 of microfilm roll 436, Series T-313.

FpA 200:

Originally FpA 735 (Fp.#21589) of the 5th Light Division which had been formed in June, 1940 and dispatched to North Africa in February, 1941. This unit was reorganized as the 21st Panzer Division on August 1, 1941 and it's FpA redesignated as "FpA 200". Following the capitulation in May, 1943, the tactical designation of FpA 200 was assigned to the FpA (Fp.#58445) of the "931. Schnelle Brigade" in France (July 15, 1943).

FpA 220:

Division postoffice of the 164th Infantry Division - originally formed in December 1939, served on the west front from June 1940 until January 1941, participated in the Balkans campaign and was eventually stationed on Crete. FpA 220 (Fp.#02476) was redesignated as FpA 224 and remained on Crete when the major portion of this division was hurriedly flown to North Africa in July 1942 - being temporarily served by FpA 33 until the arrival of a new division postoffice FpA 220 (Fp.#16550) in November. The division was redesignated as "164. Light Africa Division" on August 15, 1942.

FpA 334:

Division postoffice (Fp.#48115) of the 334th Infantry Division, which had been formed in the autumn of 1942 and dispatched into the Tunisian bridgehead in late December, 1942. This FpA was among the units capitulating on May 8, 1943. A new FpA 334 (Fp.#59007) was established in October 1943 and attached to the newly re-formed 334th Infantry Division which carried the honorary title "334. Infanterie Division (Afrika)".

FpA 386:

Designated as "FpA 386 z.b.V." (for special use), this FpA (Fp.#06677) was formed in March, 1942 and assigned as "Gruppe Feldpost beim Pz. Armee Afrika". On October 30, 1942, it's tactical number was changed to FpA 686 (still Fp.#06677) and the tactical number 386 assigned to the FpA (Fp.#08292) of the newly formed 386th Infantry Division back in Germany (Wehrkreis III). The "African" FpA 386 is reported in microfilm records (T-313, roll 440) during the period 3.42 to 10.42 at such locations as:

Derna - April/June, 1942

Tobruk - July, 1942

Marsa Matruk - Aug./October, 1942

(See FpA 686 for further history)

FpA 639:

Also designated as "z.b.V.", this FpA (Fp.#14881) had been attached to Armee Oberkommando 1 in France until reassigned to Panzer AOK Afrika in September, 1941 and established in Tripoli under the "Kdt. d. rückw. Armeegebiet" (Commander of the rear Army Area). FpA 639 took over branch offices of FpA at Benghazi and Derna in July 1942 and later maintained offices at Bizerta, Misurata, Sousse, Gabes and Sfax. A special branch in Tripoli itself had it's own "Kenn" number assigned (K550). This Kenn number had for some time been somewhat of a mystery to Feldpost collectors, but this writer was able to locate a specific reference to this Kenn on frame 8729434 of microfilm roll T-313/436 in which the APM reports that he had assigned "the special K#550" to FpA 639zw in Tripoli on February 23, 1943. This Feldpost unit was successfully evacuated from Africa in April 1943 and became the new FpA 190 (Fp.#14881) of the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division which had been formed from the "Divisions Kdo. Sardinien" in September 1943.

FpA 686:

(Ex-FpA 386). This FpA continued to serve the Panzer Armee Afrika following it's tactical number change and is recorded in microfilm records at the following locations:

Vicinity of Nofilia - Dec., 1942

Misurata - Jan., 1943

Sfax - Feb./March, 1943

Bizerta - April, 1943

The few FpA personnel surviving the African campaign were used as a nucleus for a new FpA 686 z.b.V. which was attached to AOK 14 in Italy.

FpA 762:

Designated as "z.b.V.", this FpA was assigned to Pz. AOK Afrika as an "Umschlagstelle" (re-shipping office) and "Feldpostprüfstelle" (military censoring office). This field postoffice was formed in Africa on September 21, 1941 (considerably earlier than reported in most sources, but confirmed in microfilm roll T313-436, in which the APM reports it's formation - using personnel trained at FpA 735).

Reports in the T-313 microfilm series place this FpA at the following various locations:

Benghazi - Nov., 1941
47km East of Nofilia - Dec., 1941 to Jan., 1942
Benghazi - Feb. to May, 1942
Tobruk - July, 1942
Tripoli - Nov., 1942

and with branches at Benghazi and Derna (May, 1942) as well as Misurata and Sirte (Jan., 1942). This postal unit was among those units capitulating in May, 1943.

FpA 791:

Designated "z.b.V.", this FpA had been formed in August 1941 and assigned as a stationary P.O. at Ploesti under the "APM O.Qu. Schwarzes Meer" (Army Postmaster, Quartermaster Command - Black Sea) until reassigned to Pz. AOK Afrika on October 9, 1942 and located in Tunis with a branch (FpA 791zw using Kenn #131) at Bizerta.

FpA 921:

Portions of the Luftwaffe's Division "Hermann Göring" were sent to Tunisia over the period November 1942 - March 1943 and included a partial postoffice unit (Teil FpA) assigned Fp.#48571. These units, actually operating as "Kampfgruppe Schmid", fought with distinction until the final days of the campaign when some escaped by air to Sicily and were later incorporated into a new unit designated as the "Fallschirm Panzer Division Hermann Göring".

FpA 999:

FpA (Fp.#26908) of the 999. Afrika Brigade, formed in late 1942 - mainly from court martialed soldiers to whom combat duty had been authorized for purposes of rehabilitation. In March 1943 the unit was redesignated as the "999. leichte Afrika Division" and portions were sent to Tunis. All available histories indicate that FpA 999 was sent instead to the island of Rhodes at this time, where it was employed as the postoffice for the "Sturm Division Rhodos".

Surprisingly however, Fp.#26908 - FpA 999 is listed in a then-secret listing (Ref. 8) by the OKW entitled "Übersicht der in Kampfraum Tunisien eingesetzt gewesenen Einheiten" (Directory of units employed in the Tunisian battle theatre). This listing is captioned "Geheim" (secret) and coded "OKW/AHA/Ag E/Tr. - Tr. Abt. 4400/43". In the record, Fp#26908 is crossed out by hand, but the fact that it had been printed there initially would indicate that the FpA had actually gone to Africa and then was subsequently relocated (to Rhodes). This same listing has been one of the many sources for the TRSG publication "Projekt Himmelblau", where it has the special source-code "A" - since it nicely establishes the date of the Feldpost number assignment within the period January to May, 1943.

R Feldpost 615
240

Feldpost - Einschreiben

Präfstelle O.K.H., ANA/General Stb.V. IV,

BREITENBURG, 62
Lambergerstr. 3.

Diensstelle
Feld-Post- Nr. 240

Stuttgart I. 21.4.43

April 21, 1943:
From Fp.#38159 (Kdr. d.
Pz. Div. Nachschub Tr.
200) via FpA 200 (Kenn
#615) of 21st Pz. Div.

Oct. 30, 1942:
From Fp.#06102 (2. gr. Kw.
Kol./Nachschub Kol. Abt. 902)
via FpA 386/686 (Kenn #538) -
cancelled on the exact date of
change from FpA 386 to 686.

Feldpost

Einschreiben

R Feldpost 555

An das

Wehr - Melde - Amt
Stuttgart I.

Stuttgart

Diensstelle der
Feldpostnummer 06102

R Feldpost 985
302

Einschreiben

An das

Wehrmeldeamt

Ulm a. D.

Diensstelle

FELDPOST
985 04 5.43

May 4, 1943:
From Fp.#42879 (4. Kp./
Pz. Rgt. 7 of the 10th
Pz. Divis.) via Div. FpA
90 (Kenn #985) only a few
days before capitulation.

Einschreiben

Feldpost

An das

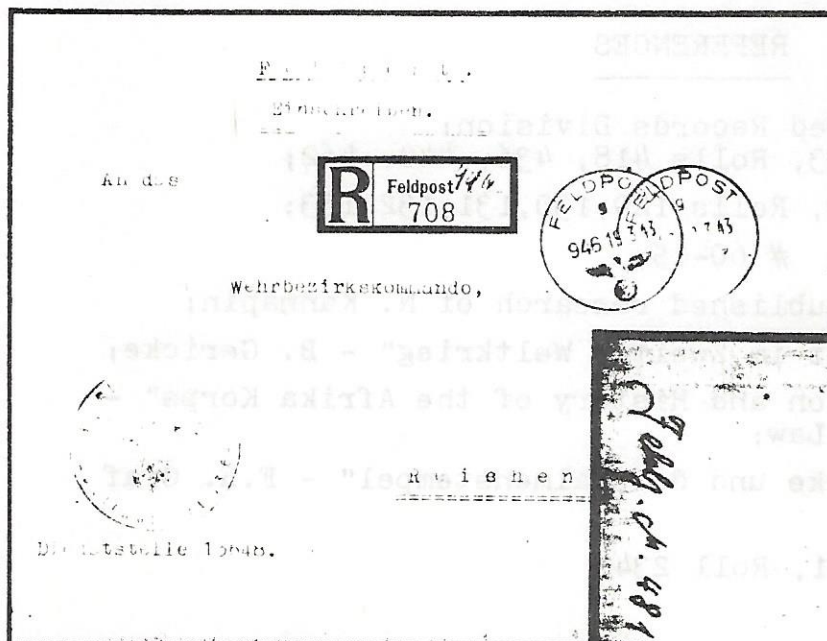
R Feldpost 394

Wehrmeldeamt

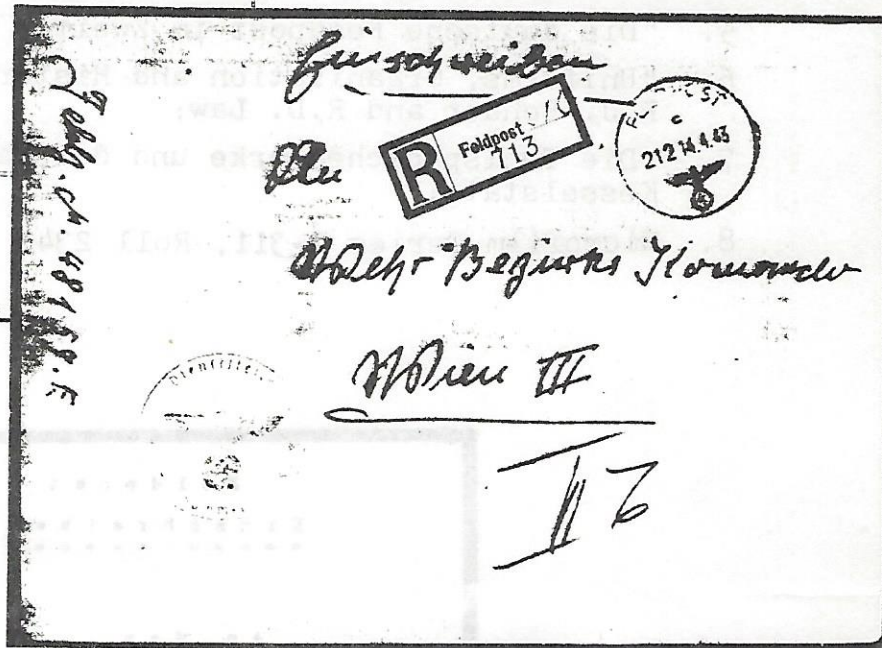
Ulm / Donau

FELDPOST
420 29.1.43

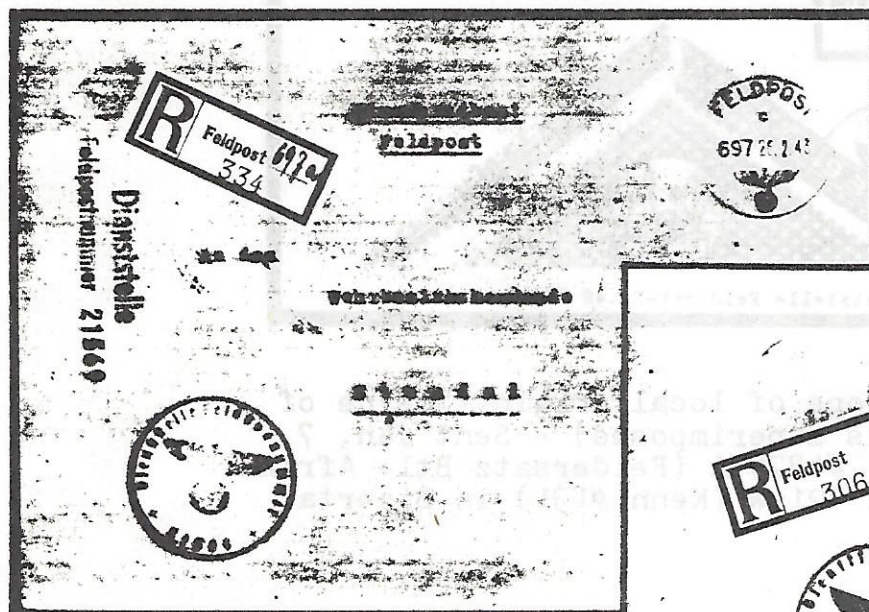
Jan. 29, 1943:
From Fp.#28038 (Stab II/
Pz. Rgt. 8 of the 15th
Pz. Div.) via FpA 639
(Kenn #420).



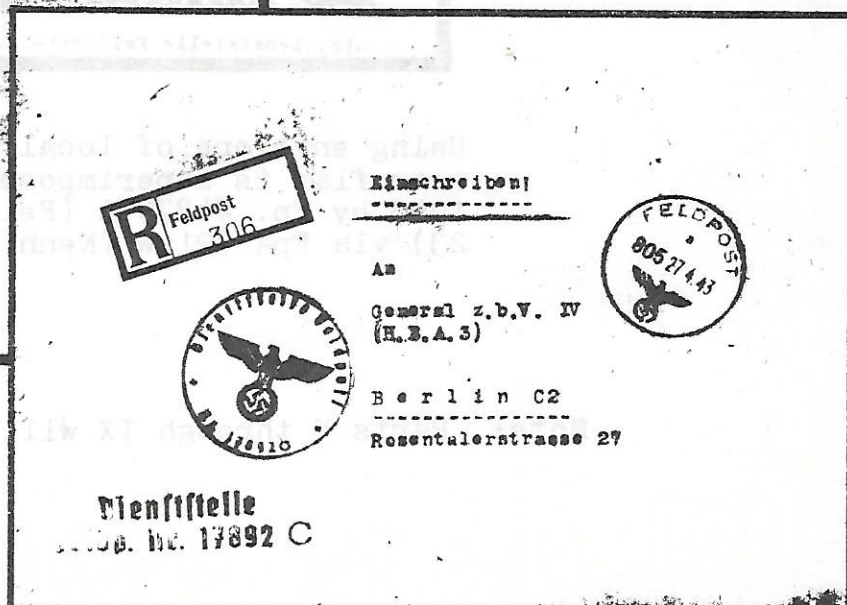
March 19, 1943:
From Fp.#13648 (13. Kp./Pz.
Gren. Rgt. 433 of the 164th
Light Div.) via Div. FpA
220 (Kenn #946).



April 14, 1943:
From Fp.#48159E (4. Kp./
Felders. Btl. 21 - also
designated as "Marsch Btl.
Afrika") via FpA 791
(Kenn #212).



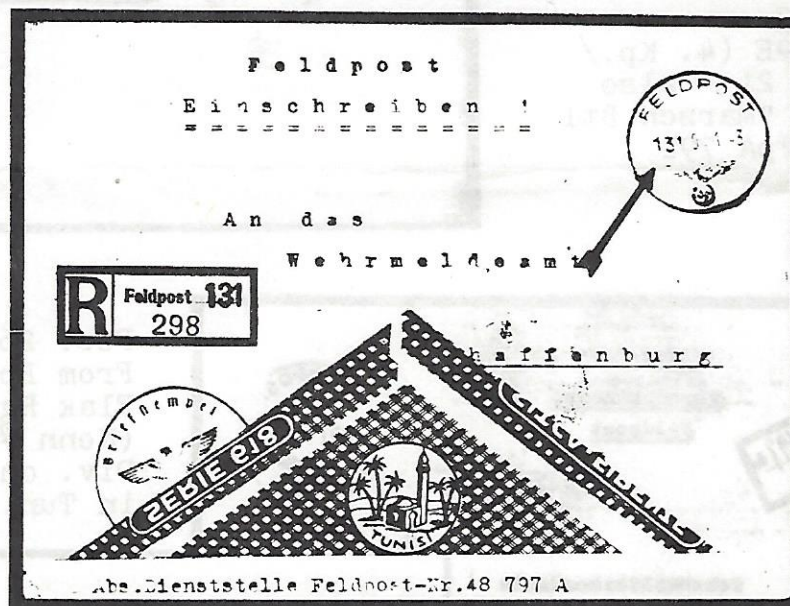
Feb. 26, 1943:
From Fp.#21569 (3. Battr./
Flak Rgt. 43) via FpA 33
(Kenn #697) of the 15th Pz.
Div. on the "Mareth Line"
in Tunisia.



April 27, 1943:
From Fp.#17892C (6. Kp./
Pz. Gren. Rgt. 155 of the
90th Light Div.) via Div.
FpA 190 (Kenn #805).

REFERENCES

1. U.S. Archives, Captured Records Division:
Microfilm Series T-313, Rolls 418, 436, 440, 462;
2. Microfilm Series T-78, Rolls 129,130,131,132,133;
3. Microfilm publication # 60-15;
4. "Feldpostämter" - unpublished research of N. Kannapin;
5. "Die deutsche Feldpost im Zweiten Weltkrieg" - B. Gericke;
6. "Uniforms, Organization and History of the Afrika Korps" - R.J. Bender and R.D. Law;
7. "Die Tunispäckchenmarke und die Palmenstempel" - F.E. Graf Kesselstatt;
8. Microfilm Series T-311, Roll 234;



Using envelope of local origin (inside of rear flap is superimposed) - Sent Jan. 7, 1943 by Fp. #48797A (Feldersatz Btl. Afrika 23) via FpA 791zw (Kenn #131) in Bizerta.

Note: Parts V through IX will follow in next Bulletin.

Fieldpost in N. Africa (Continued from previous Bulletin)

V. REGULATIONS/DIRECTIVES

Microfilm series T-313 contains numerous orders of the "O. Qu." (Oberquartiermeister) "Pz. Armee Afrika", outlining the usual "do's and don'ts" of the Feldpost service which were, for the most part, common to the other theatres of war and need not be repeated here. A few items were, however, of particular interest:

- a) Frame 8733919 of roll 440 contains the "Besondere Anordnung für die Versorgung Nr. 13" (special directive for service) dated June 16, 1941 which, in a sub-part, indicates that:
 Feldpost sendings to Germany will bear the name, rank and Fp. number of the sender, clearly written. All other indicators such as military function or location are forbidden. In particular, such indicators as "Posta Militare" or "Afrika Territoriale" are not permitted. The same applies to letters from the homeland. The field postoffices in Africa have been instructed to return any such improperly addressed mail.
- b) Frame 8733962 of roll 440 contains "Special Directive #19", dated July 19, 1941 and deals with the same subject, specifically prohibiting the indicators "Posta Militare" and "Afrika Orientale Italiano".
- c) Frame 8734005 of roll 440 contains "Special Directive #23" dated August 24, 1941 and indicates that some German soldiers had been sending mail back to Germany by means other than the German Feldpost system (via the Red Cross or using Italian postoffices) and that such practice was strictly forbidden. Also noted is the requirement that any type of "view card" was also forbidden due to it's possibility of establishing location.



July 8, 1941: One of the items which no doubt prompted the above order. Posted via Italian civil P.O. in Tripoli and using mixture of Libyan stamps.

- d) "Special Directive #17", dated October 23, 1942 and found on frames 8734265 and 8734266 of roll 440, indicates the following in regard to the regular parcel-permit stamps:

"For October, six parcel permit stamps are being issued in addition to the regular issue of two stamps for the Christmas parcel traffic - insofar as the field postoffices find it possible. The stamps will authorize sendings up to 1000 grams by affixing one stamp and up to 2000 grams by affixing two stamps. For the month of November, no parcel permit stamps will be issued."

- e) "Special Directive #21" (frames 8734291-8734293, roll 440) dated December 6, 1942, indicates an embargo of parcel post traffic:

"A prohibition of parcel traffic between Africa-Homeland and Homeland-Africa has been in effect since November 20, 1942. In Germany, packages destined for this area have been returned to the sender with the notation

Return - not to be forwarded at this time

- f) Regulations governing the sending of official parcels containing the remaining effects of individuals (Nachlaßsachen) from Africa were as prescribed for the other war zones (see TRSG Bulletin No. 49).

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Absender: Dienststelle Feldpost-Nr. 51740
Luftpostamt München 2

Besondere Vermerke des Absenders (f. Rückseite):
Nachlass - Sachen
eines Gefallenen

An: Herr Frau
Herr Christe

Freigewicht (Pfl.)

Postgewicht (kg)

in: Bonn
Königsplatz 41

(Straße, Hausnummer, Gebietscode, Postmark)

⊕ (6. 55)

C20 Das A 4

Parcel card from Hdqtrs. of Fp. # L-51740 (2./Luftnachrichten Rgt. 5 - Abt. zbV 1) inscribed in longhand "Nachlass-sachen eines Gefallenen" - sent Feb. 23, 1943 via FpA 639 (Kenn #420).

- g) The major problems of supply by sea become quite apparent in reviewing reports of the "O.Qu." in microfilmed records which, while containing an almost endless list of axis ships discharging cargos, also mentions here and there some of the losses being sustained. Two typical items relating to lost cargos which involved the loss of Feldpost are reproduced in part as follows:

Oberkommando der Panzerarmee Afrika

Der Oberquartiermeister

A.H. Qu., den 26.3.1942

Besondere Anordnungen für die Versorgung Nr. 7

(VII.) Feldpostwesen.

Durch Feindeinwirkung ist 1 Dampfer mit 3190 Sack Feldpost verlorengegangen. Der Verlust ist der Truppe bekanntzugeben. Die Soldaten sind anzuweisen, auf ihre Angehörigen einzuwirken, dass sie zeitraubende und unnötige Nachforschungen unterlassen.

(A steamship with 3190 sacks of military mail has been lost by enemy action. As the loss is known to troops, servicemen are advised to impress upon their relatives that this is due to perilous times and not to attempt a needless tracing.)

Besondere Anordnungen für die Versorgung Nr. 10

A.H. Qu., 30.4.1942

(VI.) Feldpostwesen.

Verlust von Feldpostsendungen.

Durch Feindeinwirkung sind 2 Dampfer mit über 1650 Beuteln Päckchenpost verloren gegangen.

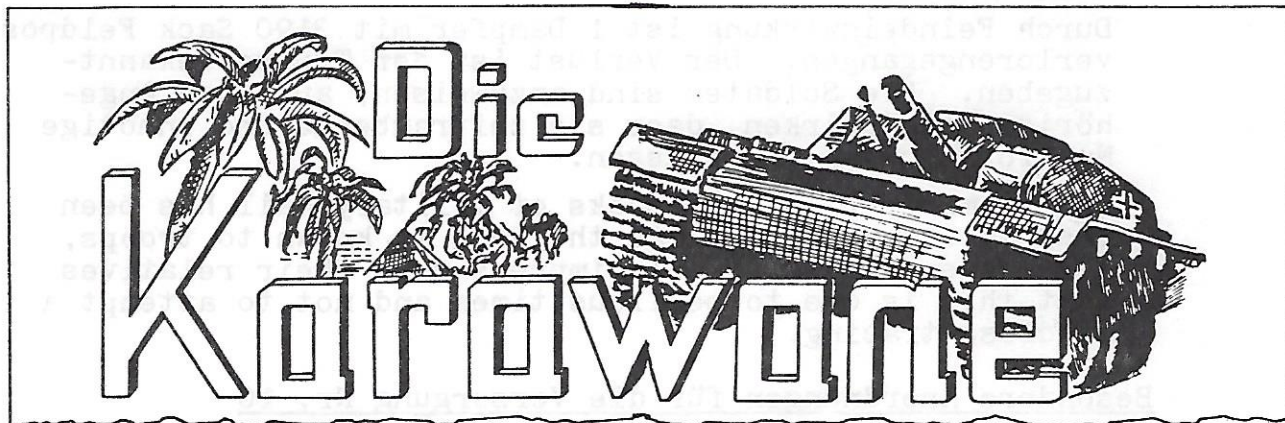
(Two steamships with over 1650 sacks of parcels have been lost to enemy action).

VI. FIELD NEWSPAPERS AND PROPAGANDA

Several field newspapers were produced for German personnel in the African theater (Ref. 6), with their contents ranging from unit interest to international matters. It was the responsibility of the Feldpost to get them dispersed to their distribution points within the various commands. The most significant of these field newspapers were:

1. The Panzerarmee's "Die Oase", a weekly for all German troops in Africa;
2. The X. Fliegerkorps' "Adler von Hellas"; (distributed within the Panzerarmee through the Pz. AOK 5, Ic).
3. "Die Karawane", for German troops in Tunisia;

Of the three aforementioned newspapers, I have been able to establish the Feldpost number of only one: "Die Oase", Fp. No. 44709 (Ref. 8).



Mast-heads of "Die Oase" and "Die Karawane" (Ref. 6)

Propaganda officer for Panzer AOK5 was Oberleutnant Haupt, who directed a rather energetic campaign, not only to boost the morale of the German forces, but to lower that of the Allied troops and to influence the Arab population.

Roll 418 of microfilm series T-313 (starting frame 8731580) contains a number of rather unusual propaganda cards directed against the British and Americans in the form of cartoons, but with the captions in Arabic.

Under this section came the "Propaganda Kompanie Afrika" (Fp.#43402) and the "Propaganda Zug Tunis" (Fp.#57002). With it's headquarters at 95 Rue Courbet in Tunis, the Propaganda Zug had sections working on written propaganda in the English, French and Arabian languages as well as radio broadcast facilities in German, English, Spanish, Irish and Afrikaans.

VII. THE "PALMENSTEMPEL"

TRSG Bulletin No. 36 contained an extensive discussion/illustrations of the so-called "Palmenstempel" or "Afrika Korps cachets", in which serious doubt of their postal validity was expressed - primarily for the reason that Afrika Korps Feldpost records seemed to make no mention of these cachets and that the use of such an insignia would have been expressly forbidden by the strict regulations against location disclosure as previously referred to in this article.

For some time the subject cachets were purported to be a form of "pre-cancelled" envelope, whose issuance could then be rationed - thereby controlling mail volume. Blank envelopes bearing the cachets, such as that illustrated below, seemed to lend credence to this theory, but it has since been discarded.



A recent publication in Germany (Ref. 7) has brought additional information to light and now states the "official" position as follows:

"The cachets definitely had no postal use or validity, but were simply the handy-work of rear-area troops reflecting their pride in the Afrika Korps."

Citing a good deal of research*, cooperation of the Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv* and reporting confirmations by ex-Afrika Korps postal officials, this publication goes on to point out that the cachets were apparently not applied by the individual senders, but at unit or FpA level - since A.K. veterans are reported to have confirmed that, while applying no such cachet themselves, their letter had been received in Germany with the cachet.

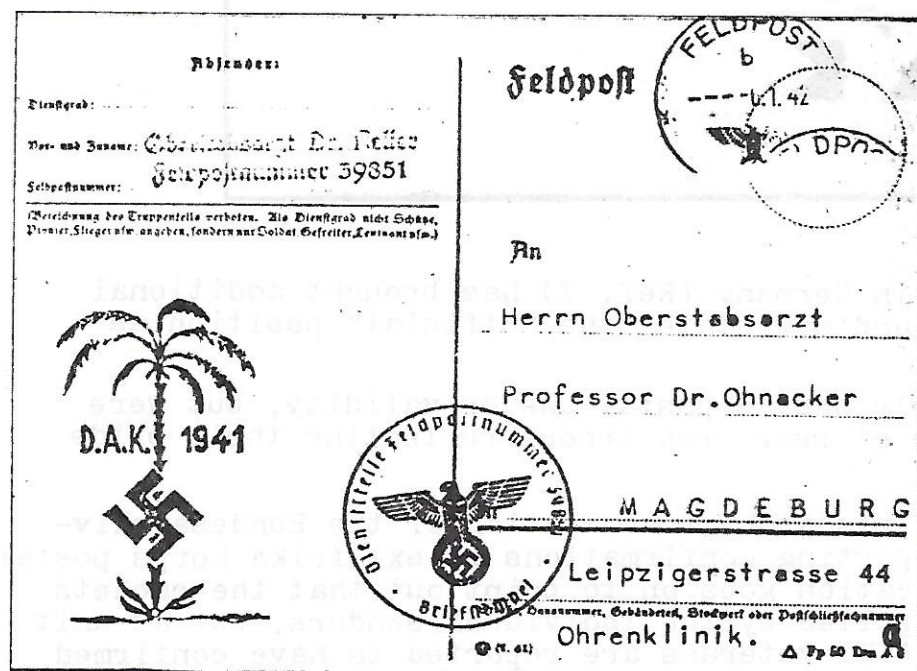
* Note: While indicating "research" and "verification by the Bundesarchiv", it is disappointing that no specific documents are stated for reference and the entire case for the "Palmenstempel" and the "Tunis Marke" is presented to us in the form of "hearsay" evidence only.

Our long standing suspicions of anything which would so blatantly breach the location disclosure regulations is explained away by an indication that, while objecting at first, a somewhat different set of standards came to prevail in Africa, particularly after the cachets were found on the mail of some of the higher officers. Evidence of this contention is offered in an illustration of a "Palmenstempelbrief" with a military censor's tape applied over the cachet (which happened to be on the rear of the subject cover). Also pointed out is the reported registration of the first "Palmenstempel" by G. Volz in 1943 - countering any suspicions that these were a postwar fabrication.

Expertization of these items is stated to revolve primarily around:

- a) Cover bearing the Feldpost number of a unit which had actually served in Africa on the date of the cancellation - such information having been supplied to the Bund Deutscher Philatelisten e.V. (This is no doubt the list previously mentioned in this article as Ref. 8).
- b) The ink utilized in the cachet.
- c) Conformance to known and recognized types.
- d) Proper postal cancellation.

One of the many nice illustrations in this publication is the card shown below, bearing cachet "Form #8", cancelled Jan. 1942 and bearing Fp. #39851. Curiously however, the cachet appears to include the inscription "D.A.K. 1941" which is absent in other illustrations of form #8.



(Form #8)

Palmenstempel Form 8 auf Fp-Karte vom 6.1.42.
Briefstempel 39851 — Kriegslazarett 950 und Genesungs-
heim der Pz.-Armee Afrika.

Along with illustrations of the various cachet forms (such as was already printed in TRSG Bulletin No. 36), a chart giving the earliest known usage dates of most of the known forms is provided:

| | |
|------------------|--------------------|
| Form 1 - 4. 5.43 | Form 39 - 23. 4.42 |
| 2 - 15. 5.42 | 40 - 21. 4.43 |
| 3 - . 2.43 | 41 - 3. 5.42 |
| 4 - 30. 8.42 | 42 - 12.12.42 |
| 5 - 19.10.42 | 43 - 21. 4.43 |
| 6 - 12.12.42 | 44 - ? |
| 7 - 15. 9.42 | 45 - 18. 8.42 |
| 8 - 7. 7.41 | 46 - 23. 8.41 |
| 9 - 1. 5.42 | 47 - 7. 6.42 |
| 10 - 19. 1.43 | 48 - 20. 4.43 |
| 11 - 4. 5.42 | 49 - 21. 2.42 |
| 12 - 16. 7.41 | 50 - 10. 1.43 |
| 13 - 26. 5.42 | 51 - 16.10.42 |
| 14 - Fälschung | 52 - ? |
| 15 - 8. 7.42 | 53 - ? |
| 16 - 8.11.42 | 54 - 16.10.42 |
| 17 - 13.12.42 | 55 - 3. 1.43 |
| 18 - 25.12.42 | 56 - 17. 9.42 |
| 19 - 19.11.42 | 57 - 29. 4.42 |
| 20 - Fälschung | 58 - 19. 4.43 |
| 21 - 22. 9.42 | 59 - 5. 1.42 |
| 22 - 12. 2.43 | 60 - 10. 2.42 |
| 23 - 5. 8.42 | 61 - 17. 2.42 |
| 24 - 20.10.41 | 62 - 5.10.42 |
| 25 - 23. 4.43 | 63 - 27. 5.42 |
| 26 - 28. 8.41 | 64 - 7. 3.42 |
| 27 - 21. 4.42 | 65 - 14. 2.43 |
| 28 - 14. 2.43 | 66 - 8. 7.42 |
| 29 - 15. 9.42 | 67 - 2.12.42 |
| 30 - 10. 7.41 | 68 - 22. 9.42 |
| 31 - 16. 9.42 | 69 - 11. 6.42 |
| 32 - 16.12.41 | 70 - 3. 4.42 |
| 33 - 12. 9.42 | 71 - 28. 9.42 |
| 34 - 3. 7.41 | 72 - 14. 6.42 |
| 35 - 23.12.42 | 73 - 13. 1.43 |
| 36 - 29. 4.42 | 74 - 15.12.41 |
| 37 - 4. 1.43 | 75 - 10. 5.42 |
| 38 - 10. 1.43 | |

VIII. THE "TUNISPACKCHENMARKE"



Another philatelic memento of the Afrika Korps is the so-called "Tunis Parcel stamp" which is said to have been used as a parcel permit stamp during March/April, 1943, just prior to the final end of the campaign. While such an issue would again contradict regulations and normal practice, reference #7 provides a detailed description of the design conception, production and use of these stamps - including the names of Feldpost officials approving the idea, the designer, etc., and lists under source credits the names of 15 veterans of the A.K. postal service, maintaining that by this time it was as acceptable to the military censor as the "Palmenstempel" cachets.

It is now reported (Ref. 7) that a committee headed by Feldpostoberpostarat Dr. Erdelbrock (Army Field Postmaster of the "Deutsch-italienischen Panzerarmee") delegated the task of designing a suitable stamp to ordnance officer Lt. Roleff. Accordingly, two designs were prepared, with the first containing an outline of the African continent with a swastika suspended over it. The second design was the Palmtree/swastika emblem of the D.A.K. with a border design reflective of the Greek and Roman culture of the area. A posthorn appropriately adorns each corner of the border and designer's initial "R" appears in the lower right corner of the center design.

The second design was agreed upon immediately and Lt. Roleff proceeded to implement the preparation of the stamps. Printing was done by the Army newspaper "Die Oase" in Tunis, employing the lithograph process (Steindruck). Two basic types of paper were used and the stamps perforated by a very primitive, foot-operated machine. It is further reported that the printing plates, destined for eventual delivery to Berlin, vanished during the confusion of the campaign's final days.

With an ordered printing of 800,000 stamps (based on 2 stamps per month per soldier X 200,000 men X two months), it is estimated that including waste, etc., approximately one million stamps were printed. Of these, approximately 620,000 were destroyed according to the testimony of two former Feldpost officials.

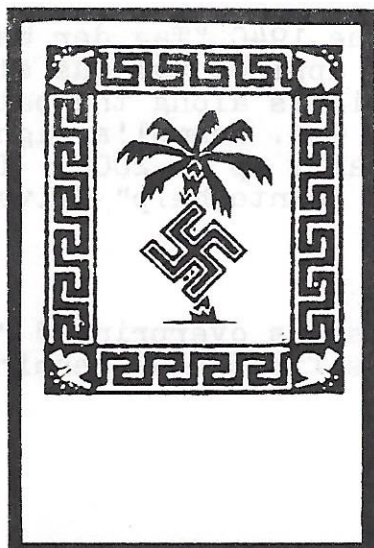
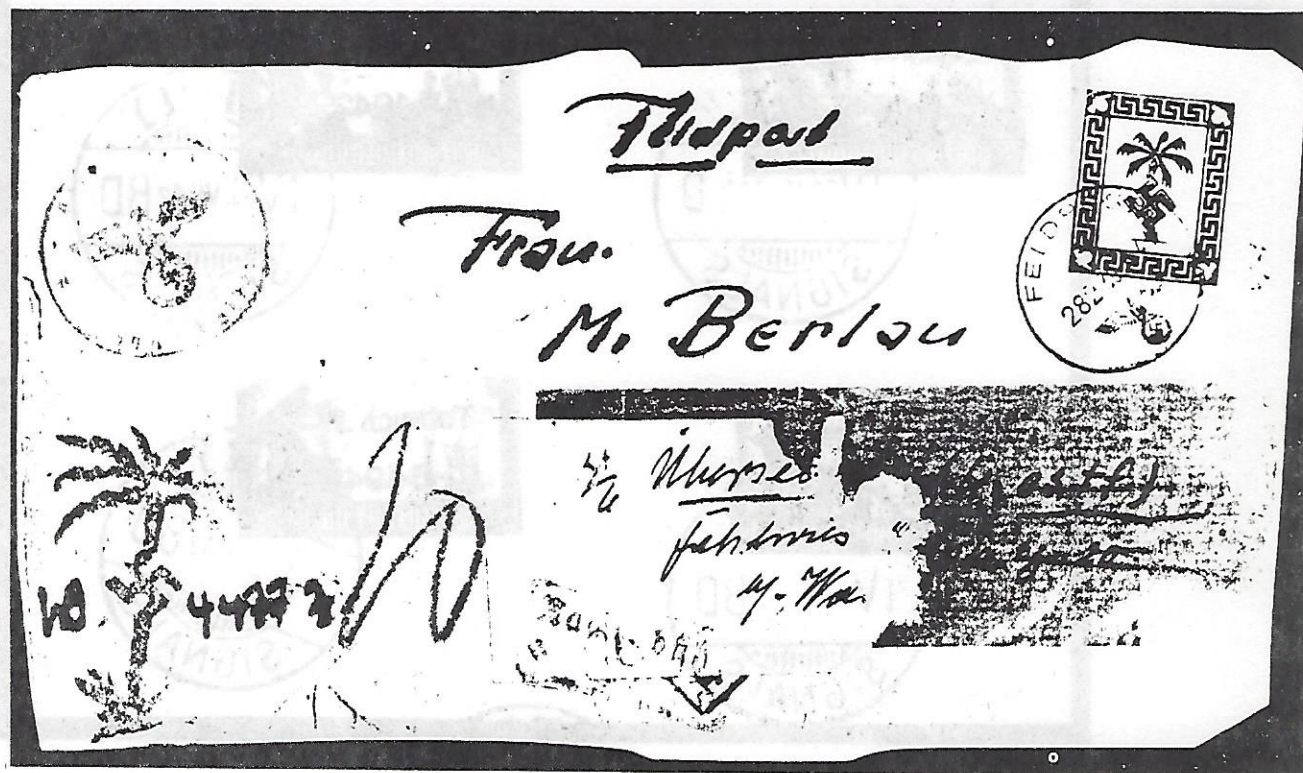
Each stamp was to permit one parcel (up to 1000 grams maximum weight) and also required accompanying postage of 20 Pf. Usage is reported to have been confined to the period March/April, since a complete parcel embargo was imposed on May 3rd.

The cancellation found on these stamps should be one of the familiar "Bei der Feldpost eingeliefert" types - either 1 or 2 line handstamps, with or without box.

Continuing in reference #7, it is further reported that a quantity of imperforate copies (printer's waste) appeared on the market in Germany shortly after the war, however the number of such printer's sheets (full sheets of 100 subjects) which had survived is unknown.

In 1960, a quantity of "reprints" came out of Canada, the "reprint" being so good that it is suspected that these were made from the original plates which had disappeared in 1943. Other forgeries have been traced to Austria and France.

Expertization of this issue is stated to be accomplished by use of ultra-violet light and the microscope. With used copies, an added factor is the cancellation (type and ink) and with fully addressed parcel pieces a correct Feldpost number is a further verifying factor.



Above: Making what appears to be a further case for both the "Tunismarke" and the theory of the "Palmenstempel" being applied at the field postoffice, is an illustration (Ref. 7) of a large parcel piece from Fp.# 44777 (FpA 762) - bearing the parcel stamp cancelled with the regular Feldpost cancel (Kenn #282) and Dienstsiegel of #44777 accompanied by cachet form #27.

Left: Imperf lower-margin copy.

IX. OTHER PHILATELIC "SOUVENIERS"

The "Tobruk Overprints"

Upon finally re-taking Tobruk on June 21, 1942, an undetermined, but small number of Italian colonial stamps were overprinted by the axis forces "Tobruk/21-6-1942-XX" (the "XX" denoting the 20th year of Fascist rule in Italy). Obviously done by an avid philatelist in the occupying forces, these stamps had no postal purpose or validity as such. A few of these overprinted stamps are also found "tied to piece" with a captured British military cancel of the IV South African Brigade - the cancelling device having been left behind during the hurried exodus from Tobruk and apparently seized upon by the same avid philatelist.

The "Rommel Gedankblatt"

A souvenir folder originally produced for the 1940 "Tag der Wehrmacht" in the Rhineland, to which were subsequently applied various stamps and cancellations marking geographical highlights along the path of Rommel's military successes. A facsimile of Gen. Rommel's signature was added and the "issue" numbered individually up to 2000. These were then sold as souvenirs in a subsequent "Winterhelp" drive.

The "Algerian A.K. Provisionals"

Apparently a postwar fabrication, Algerian issues overprinted "for use by the Africa Corps" cannot even be classified as a "genuine souvenir".

Geheim! 173

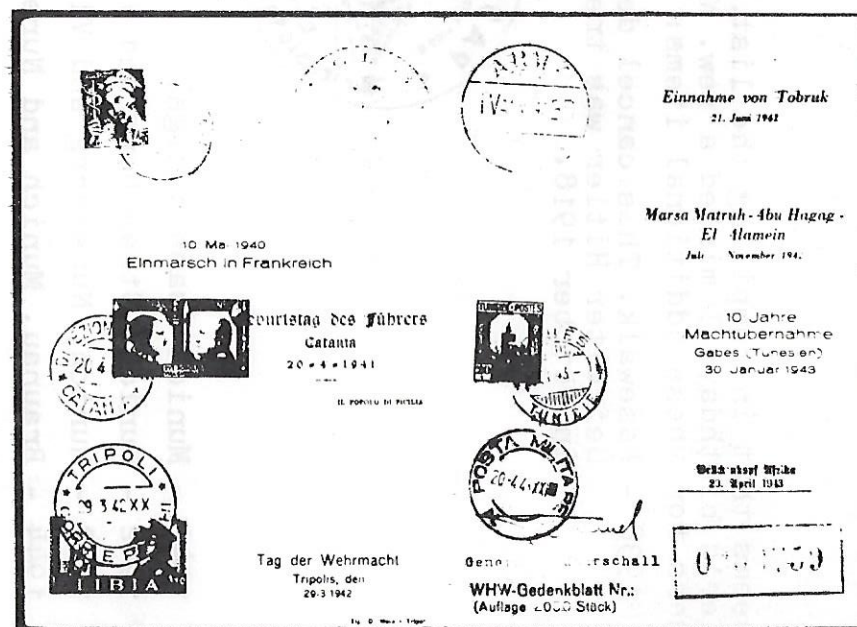
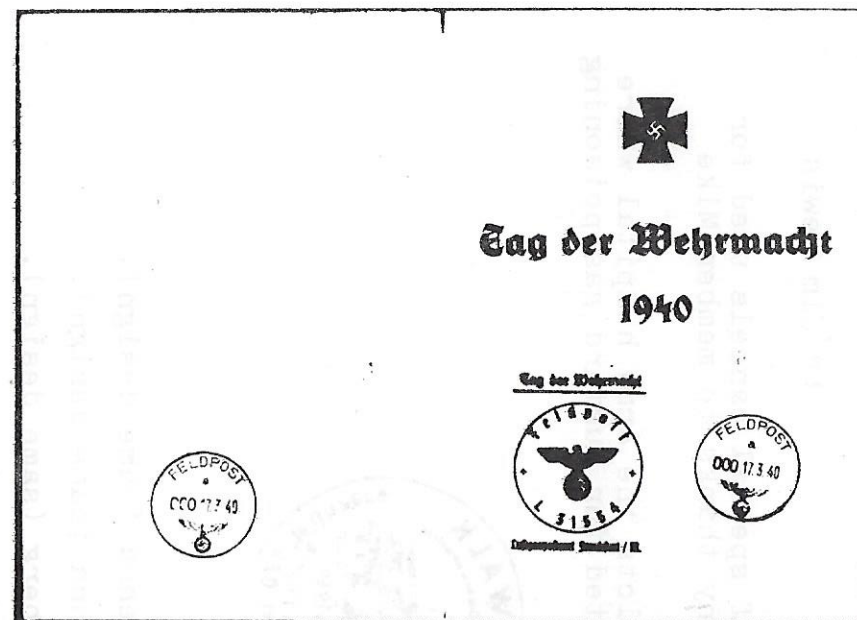
1. Nachtrag

zur Übersicht der im Kampfraum Tunesien eingesetzt gewesenen Luftwaffeneinheiten

| Flugzeug- Nr. | Offener Verbandbezeichnung | Ersatztruppenteil | Fl. Bsp. |
|------------------|---|--|----------|
| L 05 567 | Transportkol. (mot.) d. L. 5 XI | Fl. Ers. Batt. XI, Neumünster | VI |
| L 06 911 | Fl. H. Kdr. (B) 39/IV (trop) | Fl. Ers. Batt. IV, Leipzig-Schöna | III |
| L 06 911 | Kw. Werkstattzug d. L. (Ortsfest) 106/VII | Fl. Ers. Batt. VII, Nagold | VII |
| L 11 402 | 1. schw. Flakbtl. 264 | schw. Flak Ers. Abt. 9 (trop), Fürth | XII |
| L 14 516 C | 2/Jägerregt. Herm. Göring | Ers. u. Ausb. Rgt. Herm. Göring, Urech | III |
| L 15 414 | Leit. Flak Kol. 841 | schw. Flak Ers. Abt. 9 (trop), Fürth | XII |
| L 19 981 | 4/L. N. Abt. Tunis | 6. Lg. Nachr. Rgt. 7, Augsburg | VII |
| L 24 227 | Flak. Kol. II 25 | schw. Flak Ers. Abt. 9 (trop), Fürth | XII |
| L 26 126 | Feldflakinstandsetzungswerkstatt 7/XII | schw. Flak Ers. Abt. 39, Koblentz | XII |
| L 27 766 | Kdo. Flugh. Bereich 10/III | Fl. Ers. Batt. III, Frankfurt/O. | III |
| L 29 165 | Fl. Gast 103-TV | Fl. Ers. Batt. IV, Leipzig-Schöna | III |
| L 29 773 | Kdo. Flugh. Bereich 18/XI (trop) | Fl. Ers. Batt. XI, Neumünster | VI |
| L 33 621 | Munitionsaufgestelle d. L. 6/VII | Fl. Ers. Batt. VII, Nagold | VII |
| L 35 780 | Fl. H. Kdr. (B) 6/IV | Fl. Ers. Batt. IV, Leipzig-Schöna | III |
| L 41 583 | Leit. Feldwerftabtl. (mot.) 1/30 | Feldwerfters. Abt. Eschwege | VI |
| L 41 762 | Fl. Gerätemenge- u. Sammelstelle 7/XII | Fl. Ers. Batt. XII, Trier-Euren | XII |
| L 42 581 | Kw. Werkstattzug 7/III | Fl. Ers. Batt. III, Frankfurt/O. | III |
| L 43 886 | Feldluftkanklager z. h. V. 1/VIII | Fl. Ers. Batt. XVII, Wien-Seyring | VII |
| L 43 714 | Flak. Gast 5/VI | schw. Flak Ers. Abt. IV, Isenlohn | VI |
| L 46 645 | 1/Kol. 1 Flakrpt. 53 | schw. Flak Ers. Abt. 9 (trop), Fürth | XII |
| L 47 481 | Flakauswertung (Z-135) | schw. Flak Ers. Abt. 9 (trop), Fürth | XII |
| L 49 982 | Nachschubkomp. Hermann Göring 18/IV (trop) | Ers. u. Ausb. Rgt. Herm. Göring, Urech | III |
| L 50 186 | 2/Wachbat. O. B. S. II | Fl. Ers. Batt. VII, Nagold | VII |
| L 50 652 | 3/Vierlingsbatt. zugl. für 1./Leit. Eisenbahntransportflakbtl. 880 | schw. Flak Ers. Abt. 9 (trop), Fürth | XII |
| L 50 861 | 2/Wachbat. O. B. S. I | Fl. Ers. Batt. VII, Nagold | VII |
| L 50 676 | Kdo. Flugh. Bereich Tunis | Fl. Ers. Batt. VII, Nagold | VII |
| L 50 949 | 4/Res. Flak Abt. 503 | Pl. Ers. Abt. II, Rosenheim | VII |
| L 51 332 | 1/Wachbat. O. B. S. II | Fl. Ers. Batt. VII, Nagold | VII |
| L 51 400 | 2/Wachbat. O. B. S. I | Fl. Ers. Batt. VII, Nagold | VII |
| L 52 881 | Nachschubstelle 18. Flakdiv. | schw. Flak Ers. Abt. 9 (trop), Fürth | XII |
| L 52 867 | 15./La. Rgt. 200 | 6. Lg. Nachr. Rgt. 7, Augsburg | VII |
| L 54 620 | 16./La. Rgt. 200 | 6. Lg. Nachr. Rgt. 7, Augsburg | VII |
| L 54 780 | 1./La. Abt. 68 | 6. Lg. Nachr. Rgt. 7, Augsburg | VII |
| L 55 636 | 10./La. Rgt. 200 | 6. Lg. Nachr. Rgt. 7, Augsburg | VII |

Handwritten note: 18. Juni 1942

Ref. No. 8 - addenda



The "Rommel Gedankblatt"

THE PALM TREE CANCEL - A PRE-CANCEL?

by Norbert Kannapin
221 Itzehoe, Germany

(Translation by Sheldon Dunham, Jr. Richmond, VA)

Almost every collector of German material and certainly every collector of Feldpost material is familiar with the palm tree cancel from the time of the Africa campaign from 1941 to May 1943. This cancel exists in various forms and color varieties. As is generally known, the various forms of the cancels are registered by number in the Mainz Index and letters having palm tree cancels can be expertised there.

At auctions, in catalogs and in the minds of many collectors a letter with a palm tree cancel has a very high value - in some cases as high as DM 1000.--!

I now address by question to the public and to the specialists: Why are these letters with the palm tree cancels valued so highly?

In the long period of my activity as a collector and in my extensive research in the specialized field of German Feldpost, I have found no proof of or provision for the use of the palm tree cancel as a pre-cancel, to say nothing of any official order concerning the significance or purpose of such a cancel! Mr. Alfred Clement, of Graz, in his publication "Small Handbook of the German Feldpost 1937-1945" (see page 35, under No. 566), the fact that when the German Afrika Korps ran out of airmail (permit) stamps, the troops were given pre-cancelled envelopes. These envelopes, whose distribution was rationed, served the same purpose as the airmail (permit) stamps. And a few lines further on he uses the designation of - "Pre-cancel for the military airmail shipments from Tunis!" All of these statements are very vague. I might mention in passing that I am familiar with letters with these cancels which came from Libya.

Countless numbers of former military personnel who fought in Africa have replied unanimously to my inquiries that they were not at all familiar with the palm tree cancel and also that they had never been given a military airmail (permit) stamp for sending military airmail letters. Almost all of these statements seem to agree that most Feldpost letters were carried by air anyway. I myself possess some letters from former Afrika Korps soldiers, all with only the normal 28 mm circle Feldpost cancel and the unit seal of the unit concerned. These letters have no military airmail stamp and no palm tree cancel. These letters were forwarded and delivered without hesitation to the addresses. The most recent letter bears the date of April 27, 1943.

In addition to the fact that no official decree existed for its use, instructions relating to secrecy forbade the use of the palm tree cancel. But in contradiction to what has just been said, we have the well-known and widely used sender's cancel DAK 18 436, of Antitank Unit 33/Staff (Pz. Jg. Abt. 33/Stab).

The Palm Tree Cancel, continued.

I have examined very thoroughly the official Feldpost records from 1939-1945 and I have found no provision, order or proof for the use of the palm tree cancel as a pre-cancel. Likewise, in all of my special military literature there cannot be found any proof or justification for the use of this cancel. I nevertheless am of the opinion that this cancel would certainly have been produced in a standardized form if there had been any official provision for the use of such a cancel.

I have also seen envelopes with the palm tree cancel on the reverse side. What is a pre-cancel or permission cancel doing on the reverse side of a letter? And most importantly, all troops would have had to use the cancel.

Based on my many years of research, I have now become convinced that the palm tree cancel had neither limited Feldpost validity nor did it have legitimacy for any type of "special" forwarding such as did the East Prussian Feldpost card!

On the contrary, I compare the palm tree cancel with the "V" cancel. This latter cancel also exists in various forms and color varieties and is found just about as seldom as the palm tree cancel. I also assure that all cancellations were prepared by soldiers who were assigned to rear units. These soldiers had more time for such activities than did those troops who were stationed at the front.

If I should be correct with my statements here, then the palm tree cancel has been valued much too highly and would logically have to be compared with the "V" cancel - and so that no false impression arises, I must admit that I also own letters with palm tree cancels on them!

If, however, some expert or specialist should possess any official documents or official decrees for the legitimate existence of the palm tree cancel as a pre-cancel for the troops in Africa, then I am certainly ready to accept this information. In this regard I would also be very pleased to receive letters about this matter or to see specialized periodicals containing articles which present opposing points of view. At any rate, this matter must be straightened out once and for all, i.e., "Klarschiff muss gemacht werden" as we say here in North Germany.

* * * * *

The palm tree cancel has been a subject of vast interest to collectors of WWII German Feldpost, as Mr. Kannapin so correctly stated. To give additional flavor to the question, the following pages illustrate all of the palm tree cancels known to exist on cover or card.

Bob Houston, our Secretary-Treasurer, sent illustrations of these palm tree cancels to me about 3 years ago, to hold in abeyance for a possible article on this subject. They were not numbered or identified in any way at this time, so I in turn sent copies to a good friend in Germany to determine a numerical sequence or registration of "genuine" covers if it existed.

More on the Palm Tree Handstamps.

I was told that after much correspondence with collectors all over Germany, it was ascertained that all but two palm tree hand stamps were recorded as having been expertised as genuine on cover and they had certificates to back them up. Two palm tree handstamps were definitely listed as "Falsch".

A publication of the 75th Anniversary of the Verein für Briefmarkenkunde von 1885 E. V., Mainz, in connection with MABRIA 1960, 27-29 August, contained an article "Afrika-Feldpost" by Gustav Volz, pp. 73-84. Mr. Volz gives an accounting of the Tunis parcel stamp (Michel Nr.5 (Feldpostmarken), as well as his impressions of the palm-tree covers.

Mr. Alfred Clement (Kleines Handbuch der Deutschen Feldpost 1937-1945) Graz, 1952, lists Mr. Volz among the acknowledgments and cites two literature references: "Das Neueste über die Tunis-Päckchenmarke" (Austria Philatelist 66-67) and; "Tunispäckchenmarke gebraucht" (DBZ - Deutsche Briefmarken Zeitung 13/1951).

I believe it was Mr. Volz who conjectured that the palm tree handstamp could be a substitute for the military airmail permit stamp, and also indicated special handling of certain military posts by couriers where necessary.

The Bundesnachrichten magazine of the Bund Deutscher Philatelisten E.V. Nr. 77, 1 July 1967, p. 20, illustrated two palm tree covers that had been certified genuine at an earlier date, and now were identified as not being genuine. The two "un-genuine" palm tree hand stamps are numbers 14 and 20, i.e. types 14 and 20.

The Michel Deutschland - Spezial Kataloge 1974, lists the palm-tree handstamps as follows: 1941 February/1943 May, Propaganda handstamp for Feldpost mailings from the African battle area. Front or back stamp (hand) of a palm tree design, with or without swastika, pyramids, minaret, or tent, also with D. A. K. (Deutsches Afrika-Korps) or only A. K., etc., in most (cases) black, dark blue and red (rare) colors for Feldpost communications between Tunis and Germany; cancelled with the Feldpost 28mm circle canceller; presently 67 different types acknowledged.

Notice: Because of the rarity of these provisional (issues) it becomes especially important that such pieces be carefully certified to have the date and Feldpost number of units from the African battle area (this is not a literal translation).

Perhaps, the idea of propaganda hand stamps may not be too difficult to accept. The palm tree hand stamps are a variation of the insignia of the Afrika-Korps. Feldpost covers have carried a variety of art work by soldiers throughout the war. With the "esprit de corps" engendered by Rommel, it may well be that the palm tree hand stamps were a reflection of unit pride, having nothing to do with the handling of the mail, and are no more or less than a very rare, and very interesting document of the African campaign, when certified genuine. (Ed.)

AFRIKA KORPS PALM TREE HAND STAMPS

Type number sequence
as registered for certificates



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



10



11



12



13



14 (FALSCH)



15



16



17



18



19



20 (FALSCH)



21



22



23



24



25



26



27



28



29



30



31



32



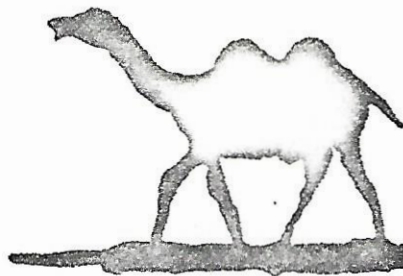
33



34



35



36



37



38



39



40



41



42



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44



45