



# A Beginner's Look at Stamp Collecting

from the

## THIRD REICH STUDY GROUP

(A Study Group of the Germany Philately Society, USA)



2<sup>nd</sup> Edition - Christopher Kolker MD - Editor. Taken in part from the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, by our beloved previous editor of 30 years, Jim Lewis.

# Third Reich Study Guide

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*Find exactly what you would like to collect!*

*Below lists just some of the possible topics you could specialize in.*

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## The Third Reich Study Group's *Study Guide*:

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Do you love history? Or do you just love stamps? Even better, are you the kind of person who loves it when history and stamps come together to tell a story about pivotal events in human history?

If you are, the Third Reich Study Group is the group for you.

We are not an organization that espouses, endorses, or accepts any of the political ideas of Nazism. We are not Holocaust deniers, or some kind of right-wing fringe group. Instead we collect stamps, postcards, propaganda, and other related material from Germany during the second World War, beginning in 1933 and ending in 1945.

We do this because there are very few instances in human history where so much was on the line as this period. From the extremes of Nazism and Communism to the ultimate triumph of democracy, this era was truly a time where differing value systems and ways of life conflicted with each other to the bitter end.



From our standpoint, what makes collecting in this area such a pleasurable thing to do is that whether you are of modest means or relatively wealthy, this niche of philately offers something for you. For a few cents or for a few thousand dollars, you can hold in your hand items that truly reflect courage and valor, violence and degradation, and the ultimate triumph of good over evil that this era spouses.

Our first priority is with the stamps and postal stationery of Germany and its occupied territories. We have collectors who look very closely at printing, gum, perforation, provisional overprinting, or other details, as with any other collecting field. Alternatively, we have others who simply collect a broad spectrum, hoping to understand the overreaching historical perspective that collecting provides.

During this era, propaganda was often promulgated in the form of a postage stamp, whether on the Allied or Axis side. From the stamps, one can see the aspirations of the printing country and get an idea of their values – you can learn about a country in that era simply by looking at its postage stamps. Thus, we have issues for the unification of Danzig, Saar, Austria, and the Sudetenland with Germany in one form or another. German stamps also feature the occupation of the Netherlands, France, and the Ukraine, for instance.

Furthermore, as students of World War II history may remember, the infamous Nuremberg rallies and the Beer Hall Putsch are also commemorated. And history can come alive in a truly shocking and saddening way when one sees despicable images of Hitler's forces, such as the SS and the SA being honored. Even worse, many German World War II era stamps feature Hitler and his birthdays.

But the great thing is that while you may love this broad spectrum of stamps, you might want to delve deeper into one topic. Many look at and study the operation of the civilian mail system, called the **Reichpost**. During its 12 years under the Nazi reign, the Reichpost had many significant postal innovations. Perhaps the foremost postal change was the development of extensive air mail services. The Reichpost also introduced pre-cancellation machines and metered mail. It's interesting to see the growth of those services followed by their sharp contraction as the Germans ultimately lose the war.

Another topic commonly studied is the postal systems in the annexed territories. It's captivating to see how a territory might become occupied by Germany, who would set up a postal system in these territories. As the war ends, a different

foreign state would then occupy that same territory. (Eastern Europe and the Baltic states are two examples of this). Later on, these territories might become truly independent. What's fascinating is to see how these changes are reflected in stamps. And to think, for only a few dollars, you too can own a piece of that history.

Many choose to collect censored mail. And why not, as this is such a fascinating topic. This includes both pre-war currency reform postal examinations, and then wartime mail that was confiscated by advancing armies at the beginning and end of the war. This was called **Uberroller mail**, and it's fascinating to get an insight of what was going on in the hearts and minds of those involved.

During the war years **civilian censorship** proliferated in Germany and its occupied territories. Mail censored by the Gestapo, the SS, and the military are very popular and lucrative collector items. Again, to see what actually transpired during these dark, difficult times is both intriguing yet humbling.

Another favorite of collectors is **POW mail**. Until recently, actual POWs during the war were often the ones to study this, but as time marches on, this is now left to a new generation. This includes mail from the various prisoners in Germany's various kinds of POW camps and from German POWs in Allied camps, often from the United States.

And this leads us to yet another important area of study: **Judaica**. Mail to and from those in concentration camps are an important reminder to all of our humanity and the common decency that we must always treat one another. To be able to see this mail and these letters serves as a reminder that no matter who we are or what our background is, we need to remember the dignity that should be afforded to every human being.

Next on our list is the **Feldpost**, or military mail system. This includes the mail system of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Waffen-SS legions, and other organizations. Much study has been made in unraveling the mysteries of the military registered-mail system. It's fascinating to see mail move from one area to another using special codes and numbers for their secretive organizational system. Many collectors specialize in certain areas of Feldpost philately, including the Sudetenland homeland, the African campaign, or the Russian campaign for collectible items. Others even look before World War II, to the Spanish Civil War

and the Wehrmacht maneuvers of 1937 as their specialty topic. Still others look at postwar items, including mail to returning servicemen called **Heimkehrpost**.

One of the favorites of many collectors is the **propaganda issues**. This includes the various commemorative cancels, stamps, postcards, and labels used to send a particular political message. By viewing these, one can see a definite theme being sent to particular groups. The artistry behind these is often superb; the message is often disturbing and chilling. But by collecting these, one can see the efforts being made to control the hearts and minds of those in Germany and in newly occupied areas.

An offshoot of this topic are the **propaganda forgeries**. They often depict Nazi higher-ups such as Himmler, and Hitler in unflattering ways. They are designed to be used to be as a starting ground for dissension or criticism of the Nazi party. Related to this, some collect **spy forgeries**, which are faithful copies of German stamps to the casual observer. Finally, German parodies of the allies exist such as the “loss of empire” forgeries and postcards featuring Churchill, Chamberlain, and Stalin as “not worth a penny.”

This is just an overview of all the different aspects of collecting the stamps and postal items of the Third Reich era. The most important thing to realize is that there is no one correct way to collect. Collect what makes you happy. If it’s a broad spectrum of this era that you want, so be it. If instead you choose to delve into a particular aspect of this era, we are here to help you as well. But as you continue to collect, remember that the Third Reich Study Group is a source to help you collect and to understand what you have before you. By doing so, we believe that we can both further the hobby of philately as well as promote a

deeper understanding of a troubled historical era.



On the left, the very common “Hitler Head” stamps, and on the right, the also-common swastika stamp used for official mail.



One of the many common Nazi stamps celebrating Hitler's birthday, this one in 1938.



This is a great example of some of the many different kinds of stamps produced by the Third Reich during their reign. What they have in common is that they are very militaristic, quite serious, with an attention to detail in the artistry. GrossDeutsches Reich is seen on stamps that means "Greater Germany" as Germany started using this instead of Deutsches Reich in 1944 (see the blue arrow as an example).

Also, one can see that many of these are **semi-postal** stamps. They are designated by the "6+4" or the "12+8" designation. See the red arrow for one of many examples. This means that the first number is the price for postage, and the second number is an add-on for some charitable or worthy cause at the time. In Germany's case, it was for Hitler's National Culture Fund, used to construct new buildings in Berlin. These are called semi-postal as only some of the total price is used for postage.

## Censorship

Never was censorship of the mail more prevalent than during the second World War. Due to the high-stakes involved in the odious philosophy of the Third Reich, censorship of the mail became an inevitable outcome in Germany. Not only did the Nazis have to worry about mail coming in and out of Germany, but they also had to deal with the many occupied territories. Added to this was the censorship of POW camps, internee mail, concentration camp mail, and an entire industry had to be built around censorship. Members today of the Third Reich Study Group continue to study and learn more about the details of censorship.

After the Reichstag (German Parliament) fire of 1933, attributed to a Communist's act of arson, an emergency decree suspended the secrecy of mail guaranteed by the German constitution of 1919, among its other provisions. Almost immediately, the Secret State Police, the Gestapo, was charged with censoring mail as deemed necessary. The following year, the examination of mail by the customs service, which had existed between 1918 and 1923, was re-established. Its purpose was to detect offenses against the system for controlling the outflow and influx of currency and other valuables.

Postal workers selected items for customs inspections. Although customs officials were told to watch for suspicious writings, the purpose of the program was economic. The Third Reich continued to experience serious balance of payments problems, where currency was being sent in the mail illegally.

Moreover, mail secrecy was considered a sensitive matter. Postal and customs personnel were cautioned to be careful in determining what mail was to be checked. The smooth movement of mail was ultimately more important than watching for foreign exchange violations.

With the outbreak of the second World War, this attitude changed. An official surveillance system with detailed regulations was established by the Directive on Communications Traffic on April 22, 1940. A number of foreign-letter examining offices was established across the country to monitor specific postal traffic. Early in the war, as German territory rapidly expanded, the number of these offices inevitably increased. Each censoring office used a variety of sealing labels and



hand stamps to denote that mail had been examined. In cases where the sensors believed that examination was unnecessary due to the reliability of the sender, a transit hand stamp which was circular and contained the letter “A” (for **Auslandbriefpruefsteelen**) and with a single-letter office code was applied in lieu of examination.

Codes designated from where the mail’s origin or destination. Below is a list of those codes.

<u>Office</u>	<u>Code</u>	<u>For traffic with</u>
Koenigsberg	a	Baltic states, USSR
Berlin	b	North and South America, Airmail, Finland
Cologne	c	Holland, Belgium, northern France, Luxembourg
Munich	d	Italy, Spain, Portugal, Switzerland
Frankfurt southern France	e	Airmail to N. and South America, Switzerland,
Hamburg	f	Scandinavia
Vienna	g	Balkans, Hungary, Turkey
Hof	h	for POW mail in late 1944
Copenhagen	k	Sweden, Norway, Finland
Lyon	l	southern France
Nancy	n	southern France and neutral hinterland
Oslo	o	Sweden, Finland, Denmark
Trondheim	t	Sweden
Paris	x	Red Cross mail, France
Bordeaux	y	Southwest France

German postal censors did not delete portions of letters or obliterate elements of that letter. Instead, it was an all-or-none phenomenon. If the postal item was not in compliance, it was returned to the sender. Those that were returned did usually have a reason hand stamped or via a formal objection label, called a “**Beanstandungszettel**”. Mail with these labels and hand stamps are eminently collectible.

Not surprisingly, official mail of governmental bodies or Nazi party organizations were exempt from censorship. When such mail found its way into the foreign letter examining offices (in German, called “**Auslandbriefprufstellen**”), they received a special transit mark similar to regular transit marks but with a large L instead of the letter A.

The Third Reich Study Group actually has a booklet called *Mail Surveillance Under the Third Reich* written by Robert Houston. Published in 1979, this booklet covers all aspects of censorship and is available for a small fee from the group.



This cover is from Innsbruck to a POW in Fort Wood in Missouri. Notice that there is no stamp, as it is free. The green arrow in part shows the word “Luftpost” indicating that this was via airmail. The Blue arrow indicates the German Censor strip, while the red arrow indicates the US censor strip applied. This letter has been read many times!

## Concentration Camp Mail

The Third Reich-era in Germany obviously still elicits an incredible amount of emotion due to the atrocities, trials, and tribulations that millions upon millions had to endure. This is nowhere truer than what transpired in the concentration camps, where the depravity against one's fellow man reached its horrific climax. Astonishing to many, victims of the concentration camps did send and at times received mail, leaving a reminder of what they endured.

When the National Socialists (i.e. Nazis) came to power in 1933, Hitler immediately wanted to eliminate political opposition. By early 1934 the guarding of prisoners in "protective custody" and administration of the camps established for those political prisoners was made responsibility of the SS Totenkopf (Death's Head).

The first camp was established in Dachau, a suburb of Munich. Additional camps were soon opened across Germany due to the influx of these prisoners, as the Nazis consolidated their power. The assassination of a German legation official in Paris by a young Jew in 1938 led to the smashing and looting of thousands of Jewish stores throughout Germany. This resulted in the **Kristallnacht** that describes the rioting of November 9 and 10<sup>th</sup> 1938. Within days 30,000 Jews were rounded up, and the system of concentration camps had truly begun.

Concentration camp mail in general is easily recognized. Distinct cards were printed for such transactions. This mail was censored even during the prewar years. Different cards and forms were used with different markings depending on the camp and the time. But suffice to say that in general, most can be recognized fairly easily.

Collectors flock to this type of mail. While the markings and distinctions help tell the story, it's the letters themselves that serve as an incredibly poignant and painful reminder of the atrocities endured.



A typical postcard from Auschwitz – taken from the website of Henry Gitner Philatelists, Inc.

Another typical concentration camps letter, this one from Auschwitz. Also taken from the website of Henry Gitner Philatelists, Inc.



## Deutsche Dienstpost

When Germany invaded territories during World War II, in most cases, especially as the war dragged on, they found less and less cooperation from locals. This seems obvious. As brutal occupiers, not many stood in line to help, although at first, some would actually volunteer for Nazi forces, a historical fact to be discussed later in a different section. Suffice it to say, this lack of trust between the occupiers and the natives spilled over into the postal system. Many times, the Germans established a postal system in a foreign territory despite the fact that the territory already had an existing system. This German postal system was called the **Dienstpost**.

The system is actually carried over from earlier eras. For instance, In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, several post offices were established by Germany in China and in Turkey, because of what they thought were the ineptitude of the locals at the time, since those empires were essentially breaking up.

The Deutsche Dienstpost systems provided postal service for the German civil government, their personnel and families, German military units, construction firms, and Nazi party organizations and their personnel. Administratively, these Dienstposts are broken up into the geographical area that the new postal system would serve.

The following is a chronological listing of the different systems:

**Deutsche Dienstpost Bohmen-Mahren** -The system was established in May 1939 in Bohemia and Moravia (Western Czechoslovakia). It served numerous German administrative offices, plus a large number of military installations of the Replacement and Training Army. It only ceased with the German surrender in April 1945.

**Deutsche Dienstpost Osten** - Established in September 1939, this Dienstpost was formed as territories were invaded and conquered during the Polish campaign. This included Danzig, Western Prussia, Posen, Wartheland, and Upper Silesia. Eventually, it was incorporated into the regular German Postal Service.

**Deutsche Dienstpost General Gouvernement**- This service was developed from the Dienstpost Osten after establishment of the general government in some of its territories. This Dienstpost included the former Polish district of Kraków, Warsaw, Radom, and Lublin. In 1941 the additional district of Galacia, previously occupied by the Russians, was formed. The service ceased only when the Russians invaded Eastern Europe in the final stages of the war.

**Deutsche Dienstpost Elsass-Lothringen** – This Dienstpost service was established after the armistice between Germany and France in June 1940. The former French province Alsace-Lorraine came under civil administration with these offices. However, this territory was absorbed into the general postal services of Germany in 1941.

**Deutsche Dienstpost Luxemburg** – The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg came under German civil administration in August 1940 to replace the military administration that had been there since May 1940. These Dienstpost offices were in operation until August 1942 when Luxembourg was incorporated into the German district of Moselland.

**Deutsche Dienstpost Niederlande** – This service was established in June 1940 to provide postal service for the German civil and military administrations in the Netherlands. It survived until the Netherlands was invaded from the west by Allied forces.

**Deutsche Dienstpost Unter-Steiermark, Kärnten und Krain** - This service was established in the spring of 1941 following the German defeat of Yugoslavia. As part of the dismemberment of the Yugoslavian state, the Slovene areas of lower Styria, Carinthia, and Carniola came under German civil administration. The services only lasted about eight months until they were incorporated into the greater German Reich late in 1941.

**Deutsche Dienstpost Ostland**- This postal system was established in August 1941 following the German occupation of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, as well as the bordering area of Russia called White Russia. This system remained in service until the end of the occupation when the Russians swept back through toward the end of the war. Several offices in one particular peninsula, called the Kurland Peninsula, continued to operate until the actual surrender of Germany in 1945.

**Deutsche Dienstpost Ukraine** – This postal system was established in August 1941 when the German forces occupied the Ukraine. It remained in service until it was re-occupied by the Red Army in 1944.

**Deutsche Dienstpost Norwegen** - Although Norway was occupied by German forces in April 1940, the German military mail system, known as the Feldpost, was used until the establishment of this Dienstpost system in July 1942. This wasn't an extensive postal system in Norway. Large portions of Norway remained under the German Feldpost. This Dienstpost remained in operation until the end of the war.

**Deutsche Dienstpost Adria** – This postal system was established in October, 1943 following the surrender of Italy. It covered the province of Laibach and Friaul and the Adriatic coast from Fiume to Udine (extreme north east Italy). It was in operation until the capitulation of the Italian front in April, 1945.

**Deutsche Dienstpost Alpenvorland** - This was the postal system established in extreme northern Italy on the border with Austria. In December 1943, this Dienstpost was established in the province of Lower Tyrol. It also was in operation until the German surrender in April 1945.



The different administrative units of Germany during the second World War.





This letter started as official mail in Riva, a small town at the base of the Alps in Italy. The cancellation and the original routing sticker tell us so (red arrows). This letter had printed material in it (Drucksache) (the blue arrow). Furthermore, it was sent via registered mail. “Einschrei(ben)” – see the yellow arrow. It was sent from the province of Alpenvorland (see above) that is in the present-day Italian Alps. (see green arrows). And it was sent to Dresden in Germany (purple arrow). The stamps are labeled “GrossDeutsches Reich” (Greater Germany) as in 1944, their stamps were changed to this nomenclature. These stamps are **semi-postal**, where the larger number on the stamp is for postage (in Marks), and the smaller number is a “donation” for a non-postal cause. In Germany’s case, it was for Hitler’s National Culture fund, used to build new buildings in Berlin.

## Feldpost

The **Feldpost**, or the military mail system of Germany, is a popular theme for collectors associated with the Third Reich Study Group, and for good reason. During most of this era, Germany was at war, and so therefore a large-scale postal system would have to be made. The Feldpost system began in earnest on September 3, 1939 with the beginning invasions of Poland at the advent of World War II. While limited trials of it had started with large-scale Army maneuvers in 1937 during the occupation of Austria and Czechoslovakia, it's this 1939 date that's traditionally thought of as the true start of the Feldpost postal system.

This system was differentiated between that of the civil mail service called the **Reichpost** system. Mail inside the homeland or in occupied territories under civilian administration were not required to conceal their addresses or use unit designations. Feldpost letters were not required to use stamps.

Combat units of the field Army outside Germany were assigned special code numbers to serve as return addresses. Mail to or from units with code number addresses were to carry name, rank, and code (i.e. Feldpost) number only. Mail from Feldpost number addresses processed by civil post offices could not display a town cancellation mark, and thus were provided with a special cancel (called a mute cancellation or a "stumme") which had date lines but no locations. These five-digit Feldpost numbers were assigned to Army battalions, some independent companies and batteries, as well as to Luftwaffe (Air Force) units, naval ships, SS units, and labor battalions. Companies within battalions were differentiated by alpha suffixes to the Feldpost number, so that battalion headquarters was "A", and companies one through four inside that battalion were "B" through "E". As suffixes, these would simply be attached to the end of that number.

Modifications in the Feldpost number system occurred before the end of 1939, when prefixes were introduced for use with Luftwaffe (air force) and naval units. A capital "L" was designated for Luftwaffe and "M" for naval ships. In addition, Luftwaffe units had to include the Air District Post Office as part of the return address.

The basic unit of the Feld post system was the “**Feldpostamt**” (field post office) attached to each army, corps, division, and independent brigade. Normally the Feldpostamt, often abbreviated **FpA**, was mobile, although some were housed in permanent facilities in the rear of the combat zones. Each FpA was assigned a three digit “Kenn” number between 100-999 for security reasons. These numbers appear only in the cancels and registry labels used for official registered Feldpost mail. Since ordinary soldiers were not allowed to send registered letters, Feldpost letters with Kenn numbers actually stamped on the letter are rare.

But even without the Kenn number necessarily being stamped on the letter, that Kenn number was the key to the correct routing of the letter. All letters from Germany proper to the front were sent from the Reichpost to one of the nearest of 18 Feldpost collection centers. These were called **Feldpostsammelstellen** or **FPSSt**. The Feldpost number address was then looked up in one of 15 volumes of the Feldpost directory, called the **Feldpostuebersicht**, or **FpU**. This gave the equivalent Kenn number, so that the workers would know which field post office to send the letter.

That letter was then sent to the main routing point, called the “**Postleitpunkt**” or **PLP** appropriate to the Kenn number. These are still civilian post offices located mainly within Germany. From here the letter was forwarded to the appropriate Feldpost routing office, called **Feldpostleitstelle** or **FPLST**, and then to the correct Feldpost office (the Feldpostamt, the FpA) serving the unit of the intended recipient. Letters from the front to Germany followed the same route in reverse, except at times not having to pass through the FPSSt.

As one might imagine collecting these can take on a dizzying array of possibilities. Many collectors focus their energies on a particular geographic location. Others might try to get as many Kenn numbers as they possibly can. Some collect Air Force covers, while others search for mail from different Naval ships. Mail from different Panzer divisions remains a popular collecting topic

An entire lifetime could be spent collecting any one of a number of different Feldpost topics. The incredible diversity, both geographically and militarily, is amazing, and in a way horrifying, as one realizes the scope and magnitude the war effort encompassed.



A very common Feldpost cover. The Feldpost number is a bit hard to see, but is indicated by the blue arrow, and is found inside the cancellation. No stamp here—remember, these were free during the war.



This cover from Feldpost number 34618 (yellow arrow), was mailed February 19, 1943 (blue arrow) via Feldpost (both red arrows). Notice the “M” for a “Marine” designation (purple arrow), and the company designation the “b” (green arrow) in the cancellation.

## Foreign Legions

Throughout history, many have enlisted in foreign armies for causes that they consider just. As hard as it is to fathom today, at the beginning of World War II, Nazi Germany was no exception. Campaigning primarily on the effort to end Bolshevism, or communism, 1.5 million foreign nationals served in the German armed forces during World War II.

They came from occupied countries such as France and Belgium, from German allies such as Finland and Croatia, as well as neutral countries such as Spain and Switzerland. Many other volunteers actually came from Allied prisoners of war. And not surprisingly, members of German minorities in central Europe and the Balkans often volunteered. Postal history material relating to these volunteers is called **Legion** material.

The first large-scale recruiting for the German Army occurred at the time the Germans attacked the Soviet Union in 1941. Recruiting for this effort was primarily successful because of a widespread fear of Bolshevism. As they were restricted from large-scale recruiting in Germany, the Waffen-SS (the armed, paramilitary part of the Nazi party) initially sought volunteers from the “Germanic” occupied countries of northern Europe, but later opened their ranks to Eastern Europeans. While at the outbreak of World War II there were almost no foreigners in the Waffen-SS, by 1945, foreigners actually outnumbered native Germans. Of the 38 SS divisions in existence in 1945, none were entirely German, while 19 were primarily foreign in their composition.

The most collectable philatelic material are legion stamps issued by pro-German groups in France, Holland, Belgium, and Norway. Most of these are not actually postage stamps as they had no postal validity. They are similar to our present-day Christmas seals, as their purpose was to raise funds to send parcels of candy and cigarettes to the volunteers serving on the Russian front.

As an inducement to purchase these charity stamps, the sponsors often arranged for complete sets of stamps to be affixed to envelopes which are then cancelled at the Waffen-SS recruiting offices. Such covers usually have SS censor tape and hand-stamped cancellations to make them more appealing to collectors. Although these were not required for the Feldpost, which was already free of charge, they are occasionally found in Feldpost covers being mailed back to their homeland.



Nazi Germany - 1944 MINT Flemish Legion WAFFEN SS FELDPOST stamp sheet

## Occupied Lands

Obviously, World War II brought a plethora of occupying forces and occupied lands. As the war turned from one favoring the Axis powers to a subsequent complete and total victory by the Allies, it wasn't too unusual for a particular land to be occupied by one power and then subsequently another. Poland is a classic example of a country first by the Nazis and subsequently by the Russians, before obtaining their independence (of a sort) after World War II.

While collectors have long looked at the occupied territories as a source of collectible materials, it seems almost impossible to find any two collectors that do exactly the same thing. Many collectors focus on one country; others may focus on the German or Russian occupation of a particular land, while still others try to find a broad spectrum of any kind of occupied land during the second World War. This can actually be a very daunting field, because the Germans reached an area stretching from the Atlantic coast of France to the heartland of Russia, and south from the Arctic Circle to the islands of Greece.

In terms of postal history three types of occupied territories existed:

1. **Annexed territories** – One of the strongest planks of the Nazi political platform was restoration to Germany of those territories which have been lost as a result of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. This position was later modified to include the incorporation of all lands with ethnic-German majorities, even if they had not been a part of Germany in 1914.

During the prewar years, Hitler succeeded in annexing the Saarland (now southwest Germany) and Austria (by plebiscite, meaning a vote), the Sudetenland (from Czechoslovakia) and Memel (far western Lithuania, from Lithuania). After the defeat of Poland in 1939, those parts of Poland which have been German in 1914 were also annexed.

Following the German victory in the west in 1940, districts of Eupen and Malmedy (from Belgium) and Alsace-Lorraine (from France) returned to Germany. After the defeat of Yugoslavia in 1941, the districts of Kärnten and Krain also became districts of the Third Reich.

All of these areas underwent a transition in which the post offices were absorbed by the Reichpost. During this transition, locally produced “liberation” postage stamps and/or cancels proclaiming reunion with Germany were often printed.

**2. Territories under German civilian administration** – Certain occupied territories were administered by German civilian authorities appointed by Hitler. One consequence of these changes from military to civil authorities was a withdrawal of German Feldpost offices which provided secure military German postal service in these areas. These Feldpost offices were superseded by German official mail (**Deutsche Dienstpost**) systems for the exclusive use of German authorities.

As the “Versailles-created” states in Eastern Europe were dismembered after the initial successful German invasion of Eastern Europe, postal systems were established for the civilian populations of these new vassal states. Thus, the protectorate of Bohemia-Moravia (Western Czechoslovakia) and the general government (central Poland) issued new postage stamps and operated civil postal systems under German supervision.

In the western portion of the Soviet Union occupied in 1941, the territories “Ostland” and “Ukraine” were administered by Third Reich commissioners, who permitted civil postal systems to resume once they were purged of communists. The Russian stamps were replaced by German Hitler stamps overprinted with “Ostland” or “Ukraine”, which are also used by the Deutsche Dienstpost offices in these areas.

As no territorial changes were made in Norway and the Netherlands, the existing civil postal systems underwent few changes, other than operating within guidelines laid down by the German Reich commissioners appointed to administer these occupied nations. Indeed, the civil postal system in Norway was operated by pro-Nazi members of Major Vidkun Quisling’s Nasjonal Samlig, which was entrusted to handle both civil and military mail of the German occupation offices. Eventually the mounting resistance in Norway corroded this confidence, and a new Deutsche Dienstpost system was established in July 1942. However, there exists no occupation stamps issues in each of these two countries.

**3. Territories under German military administration** – Following the capitulation of France in June 1940, German military commanders were appointed by the Wehrmacht to administer northern France, Belgium, Denmark, and the English



Channel Islands. These areas were considered to be of considerable strategic military importance. Local governments were allowed a degree of autonomy, including the operation of their civil postal system. No Deutsche Dienstpost system was required because the German military established permanent Feldpost offices which handled the mail for German military and official agencies. Even private German firms with branch offices in these occupied territories were instructed to use the Feldpost in lieu of the civil postal system.

Only the Channel Islands issued special occupation stamps for use in the local postal system when the existing supplies of British stamps became depleted.

In the Balkans, the nation of Yugoslavia was dismembered following its capitulation to Axis forces in 1941. The former territory of this "Versailles-created" nation was parceled out to Italy and Bulgaria, while the new Fascist nation of Croatia was created independent of these powers. The remaining Serbian territory was placed under the administration of a Luftwaffe general, who authorized civil post offices to issue new stamps designated "Serbia". Only in Serbia was censorship imposed on domestic mail.

In southern Europe, German military administrations operated in central Greece and several Greek islands. However, no occupation stamps were issued by the Greek Postal Service. With the collapse of Italy in 1943, German military forces occupied those areas which had been occupied by Italian forces. As Germany's Axis partners capitulated later in the war, similar military occupations occurred in Hungary and other places. However, no new additional stamps were to be issued from those areas.



Left: An example of the German occupation of lands previously occupied by the Italians. The stamp is translated as “German Occupation of Zara”, a city on the Adriatic in present-day Croatia. After the Italians left, the Germans occupied the area, using simple overprints to mark the new reality of the occupiers of Zara.

Bohemia and Moravia – 1942. These stamps “commemorate” three years of German occupation of the territory.



Previous Danzig stamp (a previously autonomous city in what is now northwest Poland) with an overprint of the new denomination (12pfennig) and of course, the “Deutsches Reich” to make fully clear who is ruling whom.

## Official Mail

At the time of Hitler's ascension to power in 1933, the National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazi party) was notably lacking in administrative and managerial capacity. While the Nazis did have an administrative apparatus throughout the country before 1933 organized by "Gzu" (district) and "Kreis" (County), Hitler's aim was to parallel and control the existing state bureaucracy, not to destroy it.

While all civil servants were compulsorily enrolled in the "Reichsbund Deutscher Beamten" (the Association of Civil Servants), the existing civil service was integrated into the Nazi state machine with its structure essentially intact. Except for the very notable purging of social Democrats, liberals, and Jews, there were no widespread changes nor appointments of Nazis to key positions. Instead, new ministry such as Goering's Air Ministry were grafted onto the existing government structure.

By and large the Nazi party and the civil service remained distinct. However, some overlap between the two institutions occurred either at the local level or at the level of Secretary of State in heavily Nazified ministries such as those of interior, agriculture, and propaganda. Therefore, the entire intermediate levels of government retained relative immunity from party encroachment. In terms of postal history, this led to two distinct kinds of mail, each with many different markings.

1. **Official Mail** – All elements of the Reichspost sent their mail without charge in Germany, but each piece had to bear an official seal and the note **Postache**, indicating free franking. Reichsbank mail related to services on behalf of the Reichspost could also be sent free. Reichspost mail sent abroad was not generally subject to free franking.

Other governmental organizations at the national level paid for most postal services by making periodic payments to the Reichspost. Such mail had to bear an official seal and the inscription "**Frei durch Ablösung Reich**," which meant effectively, Prepaid in lump sum." Some postal services, such as airmail, express, and late mailing, however, had to be paid for outside these arrangements with

the Reichspost by using adhesive or meter stamps. If a governmental agency wished to contact a member of the public on a matter primarily in the person's interest, then the cover would be sent without postage. The "Frei durch Ablösung Reich" marking would be replaced by a notation reading "**Gebührenpflichtige Dienstsache**," that is, "Official mail subject to postage." Such concessions, which were not free franking, were invalid on mail sent outside Germany.

At the state level, governmental authorities used official stamps (**Dienstmarken**) purchased from the Reichpost. Like their federal counterparts, state agencies had to fully pay for postage. Shortages at times forced agencies to use both official and ordinary postage stamps on a particular cover.

2. **NSDAP Mail** – Prior to 1938, most agencies of the NSDAP (Nazi) party did not enjoy any special privileges, but the mail was easy to recognize because of the use of official seals of the party on the envelopes. Some agencies were so closely linked with the government that they are granted the same postal "Frei durch Ablösung Reich" procedure as governmental agencies. Among the agencies receiving this exemption were the Chancellery of the NSDAP and SS units (paramilitary units) attached to the police.

On January 26, 1938 special stamps were introduced for the so-called constituent bodies of the NSDAP, such as the SS, the SA (the Brownshirts, another paramilitary group that the SS superseded), and NSKK (the motor corps) etc.

One peculiar connection with party official stamps is that they did not come into use in the annexed territories as soon as did German postal stamps. For example, although the German postage and official stamps were valid in the Sudetenland by October 1938, party officials did not receive validity until March 17, 1939. A similar gap occurred in Polish territories annexed to the Reich. Covers bearing party stamps used in Alsace-Lorraine and other annexed territories were "occupation stamps". These areas were only part of Germany during wartime and reverted to foreign states in 1945.

A classic ink stamp for the NSDAP shown by the red arrow and the "Frei durch Ablösung Reich" across the bottom, indicated by the red arrow



## POW Mail

During World War II the Germans captured millions of enemy soldiers. While no completely accurate figures exist, estimates are that by December 1944, 2,450,000 POWs and civilian internees were being held in German camps. This included the following:

Americans 46,000	Belgians 64,000
British 167,000	Dutch 10,000
French 920,000	Italians 96,000
Polish 70,000	Russians 929,000
Serbians 123,000	Others 25,000

After capture, prisoners were moved to permanent camps in stages. A POW was sent initially to a main front camp called a “**Frontstammlager**”. This camp was controlled by the Army or Army group in whose area of operation where the particular internee had been captured.

After preliminary screening and processing, the internee was sent to a rear area transit camp called a “**Durchgangslager**”. From here, further screening and assignment took place. Officers and other ranks were segregated and distributed to appropriate camps located throughout the Reich. Numerous types of camps existed:

Army officers camp – “Offizierlager” or “Oflag”

Army, other ranks – “Mannschafts-Stammlager” or “Stalag”

Punishment camp – “Staflager”

Special camp – “Sonderlager”

Naval personnel camp – “Marinelager” or “Marlag”

Merchant Marine camp – “Militarlager” or “Milag”

POW labor camp – “Kriegsgefangenen Arbeitslager”

POW hospital – “Kriegsgefangenen Lazarett” or “KFG-Lazarett”.

**Stalags** and **Oflags** were designated by the military district or “**Wehrkreis**” in which they were located. The POW organization in Germany was administered by the commanders of these military districts, which carried Roman numerals. Thus, the first enlisted men’s camp in the Wehrkreis III was designated Stalag IIIA. Staflager and Sonderlager camps were assigned numbers in the “300” series. There were also a large number of labor camps to which POWs from the Stalags were assigned on a temporary basis.

As a signatory nation, Germany abided by the Geneva Conventions articles regarding postal service for POWs. One exception was with the treatment of Russian POWs. The Soviet Union had not signed the Geneva Accords and refused Germany’s offer to provide postal service for their respective POWs.

An extensive collection may be formed of mail sent to and from Allied prisoners in German-held areas and from German prisoners in Allied hands. Collections often concentrate on one particular camp or a series of camps, as a general collection will have a huge number of censor markings and formula cards that may become very difficult to interpret and fully understand.

Literature: No comprehensive work in English exists dealing with this particular subject. The most important work in German is volume II of Kurt Wolter’s Die Postzensur, which lists many censor markings from POW camps.



**Kriegsgefangenenpost** - "Prisoner of war mail" Sent March 9, 1943, as evidenced by the cancellation (blue arrow). This POW mail was sent by Bojovic Radoslav (purple arrow) to a Mr. Dimitrije (green arrow) in Serbia (yellow arrow). Of note, this came for an Oflag, an officers' POW camp (orange arrow), specifically, from Oflag XIII B. Image taken from [virginstamps.com](http://virginstamps.com). Check them out!

## WD PMG Form 6-1

Postage Free post card for German POWs, approved 1<sup>st</sup> November 1942

Top card sent to Pasadena from Scottsbluff Camp, Nebraska, on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1945

Bottom sent to Karlsbad from Aliceville Camp, Alabama, on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1944

FROM: Günther Spingalis #948028  
Prisoner of War Camp, Camp Scottsbluff, Nebr.  
Branch Camp #2

Postage Free  
Portofrei

**PRISONER OF WAR POST CARD**  
Postkarte für Kriegsgefangene

German - A PASSED BY Damascus-Mail  
U 21 Address  
Adresse  
MAG

Do Not Write Here!  
Nicht Hier Schreiben!

Margarethe EDLER  
1750 Walworth  
PASADENA 6  
CALIFORNIA, USA

W. D., P. M. G. Form No. 6-1  
November 1, 1942

Liebe Emmi und Karl! 26. Okt. 1944.

Tausend Küsse und Grüße von Euren Tati! Liebe Emmi noch habe ich keine Nachricht von zu Hause, ich hoffe aber daß in den nächsten Tagen von dir Post eintrifft. Das Leben wird dann wieder für mich einen anderen Wert haben. Bleibt recht gesund und du meine liebe Emmi bleibe mir brav. Auf Wiedersehen Euer schwergeliebter Tati!

Heinold wird dir noch einmal zur Seite stehen und dich entschädigen für das, was Du alles Gutes für uns getan hast, warum stark bleiben und aushalten. Es küßt dich Heinold! Lebe wohl.

16-21675-1 GPO

Taken from postalcensorship.com (Please check it out!), this is an excellent example of cards made by the Americans to be sent by German POWs in the United States back to relatives. Note that these are postage-free.



## Postal Service History

Postal service history is the collection and study of material dealing with how mail was processed and delivered. While collectors look at many different aspects of postal service history, it can be said that this branch of philately can be divided into the following categories:

1. **Postal rates** – This is the study of how much postage costs over time and how those costs changed with time, geography, and method of delivery.
2. **Delivery methods** – This is the study of how mail was delivered. During this era, for instance, air mail became much more common, and specifically, the zeppelin was a viable source of mail transit during the first few years of the Third Reich.
3. **Rules and regulations.** During this era, there existed a complex system for domestic and foreign mail during this time. The German Postal Force had to have a publication call the *Bulletin of the National Ministry of Postal Service* printed to keep up with all of these changes. However, these changes, which might include a PO Box system on streetcars in Hamburg or pneumatic mail “Rohrpost” in Berlin, in order to deliver mail, would require different fees and markings on letters, making it a very interesting topic.
4. **Postal schemes.** This includes the intriguing ways people would use to disguise the origin or the destination of mail during World War II. One of the best schemes was the **Thomas Cook and Son Travel Service**. This British company had branch offices worldwide. Cook acted as an agent for the forwarding of mail from British territories into German-occupied Europe through their office in Lisbon, Portugal. Replies to such mail were addressed to:

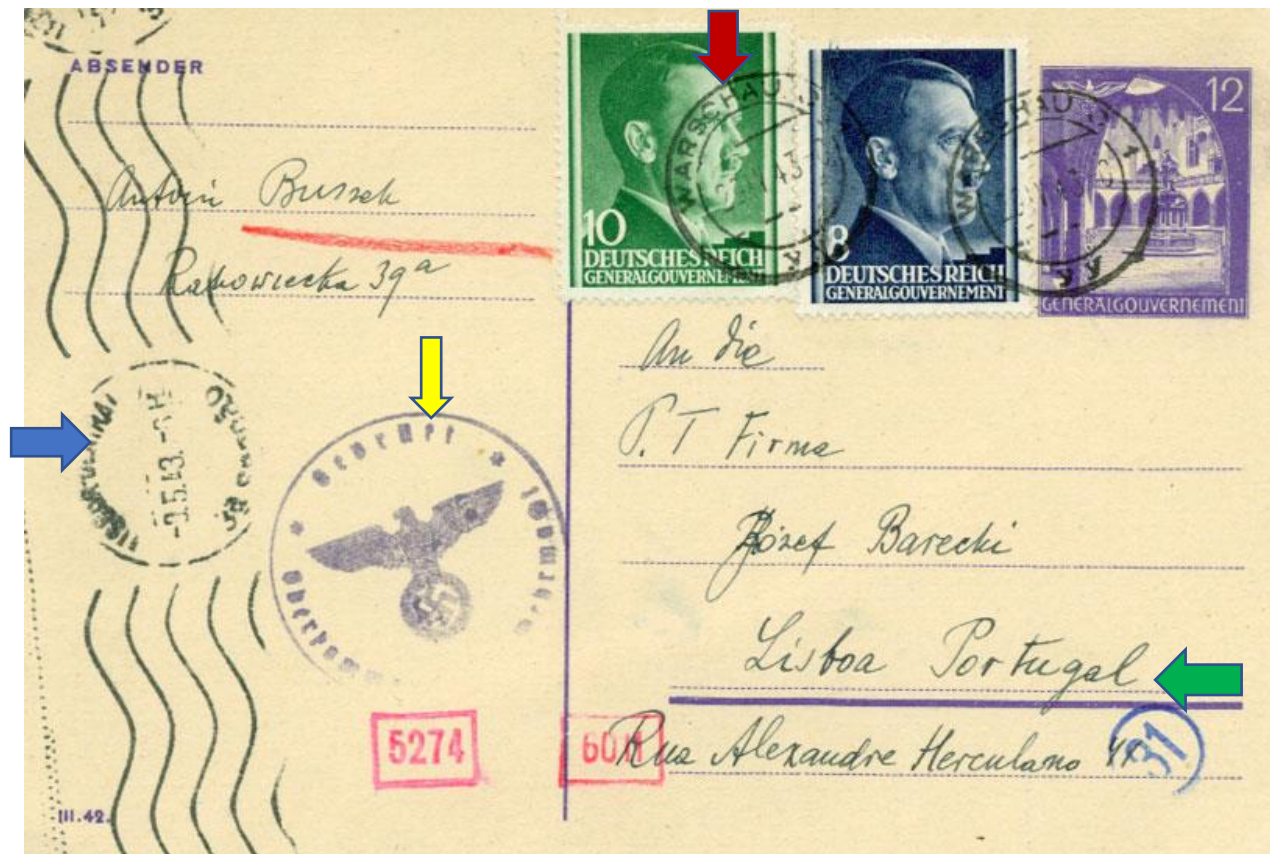
P. O. Box 506, Lisbon, Portugal

which was a drop-box maintained by Cook.

Germans also use drop-boxes to disguise mail to and from volunteers in the German Armed Forces whose homes were outside of Germany proper. This was especially common in Romania. Such mail would be enclosed in outer envelopes addressed to:

F. R. – P. O. Box 110, Vienna

and forwarded from there to the serviceman. Replies were received at the same address and placed in outer envelopes with the “F. R” return addresses reporting to the serviceman’s friends or family.



A postcard postmarked April 23, 1943, from Warsaw (red arrow) to P.T. Firma, Rua Alexandre Heruclans 41, Lisbon (green arrow). This was an undercover address for the Polish offices in London. The card’s German Army censor marks (yellow arrow) and the Lisbon receiving cancel (blue arrow) are dated May 9, 1943. Taken from [www.edwardvictor.com](http://www.edwardvictor.com)

## Postal Stationery

The field of Third Reich postal stationery comprises several different categories. The most common type of postal cards is the “**Amtliche Ausgaben**” (official issues) which were ordered by the highest-ranking postal authorities and printed by the state printing works or by private firms. These official issues had to be available at all postal offices or at a special counter at the exhibition they commemorated.

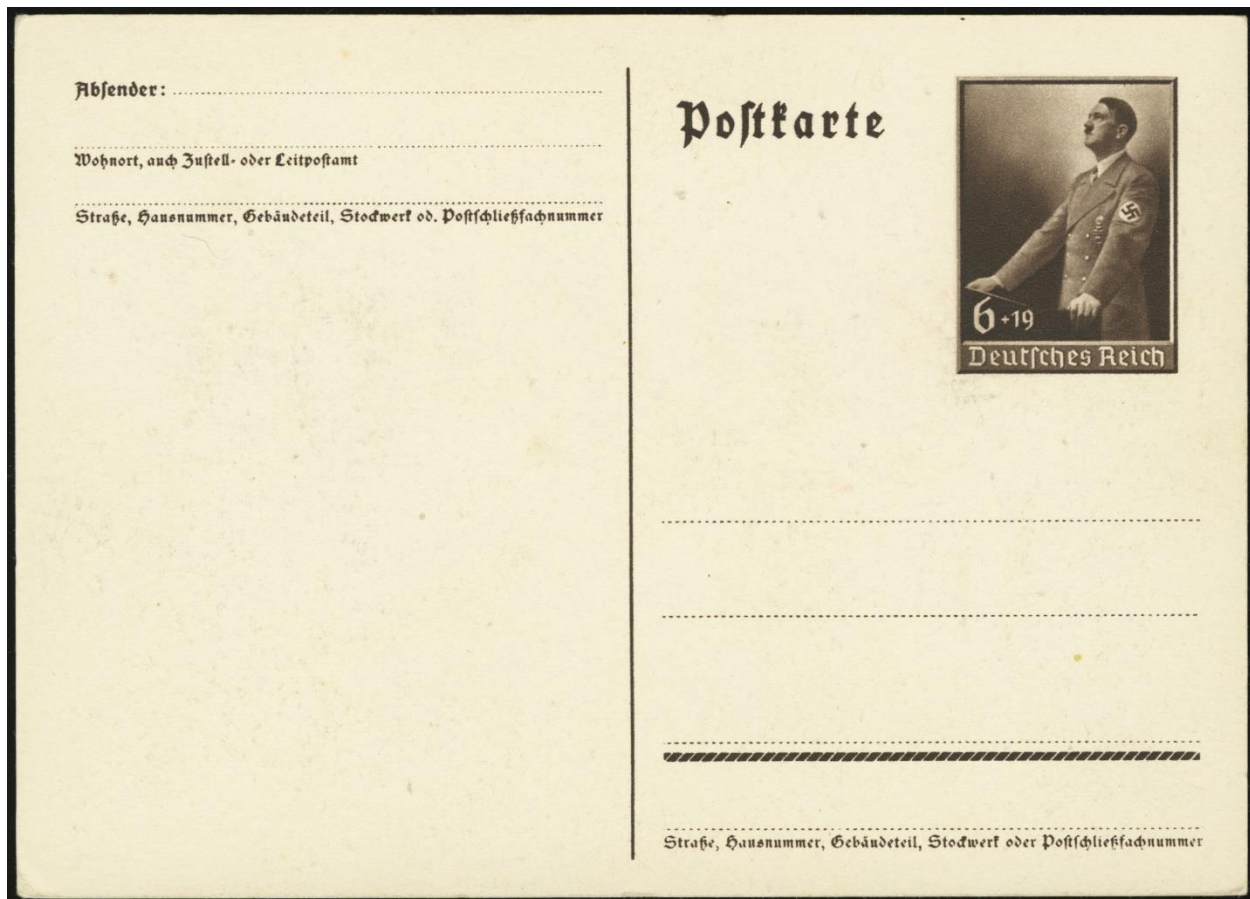
Not all postal cards had this official issue status. Some were half-official “**hambamtlich**” and even partially official “**teilamtlich**”. Qualifications for these types of items were based on the fact that they might be printed for organizations such as the NSDAP (Nazi party), the WHW (the Winter Relief Charity), or even the Union of German Philatelists.

These cards had a size of 148 x 105 mm. Unsurprisingly, a large number of cards were those printed for special events. The 1936 Summer Olympics would be an example where several different cards were issued. The catalog *Genzsachen-Spezial-Katalog Deutschland ab 1933 (Specialized Postal Stationery Germany from 1933)* is a catalog that systematically lists these cards. Their artwork at times can be spectacular, even while the message many times is chilling. Still, it makes for fascinating collecting.

See a couple of examples on the next two pages.



A classic example of the postcards of the Third Reich. This depicts their Iron Cross. Loosely translated it says, "Only one can win, and that's us"



A typical postcard from the Third Reich. While the structure is the same as postcards of today, the chilling caricature of Hitler most certainly is not. Notice the 6+19, a designation making this a **semi-postal** issue. The 6 Marks were to pay for postage, and the 19 pfennigs (cents) were to pay for Hitler's National Culture Fund – which was a fund to pay for new buildings in Berlin.

## Propaganda Cards

The term “propaganda cards” denotes postcards from 1933 to 1945 which have distinctly political illustrations. This is as opposed to the postal cards which tend to have more generic scenes or cultural or sporting events. In many instances, these postcards are similar to privately-produced postal stationery except that they lack postal markings and require a postage stamp. As postcards, they were usually produced in much smaller quantities than postal stationery. As such, for collectors today, they command much higher prices.

Literally thousands of different cards exist, and there really isn't one place that showcases every single card made. Collectors may have hundreds of different kinds. The artwork can be stunning. Because of their historical relevance, these cards remain very interesting items to collect, despite the often-repugnant message.

Below represents several different propaganda cards often seen today at stamp shows and in private collections:

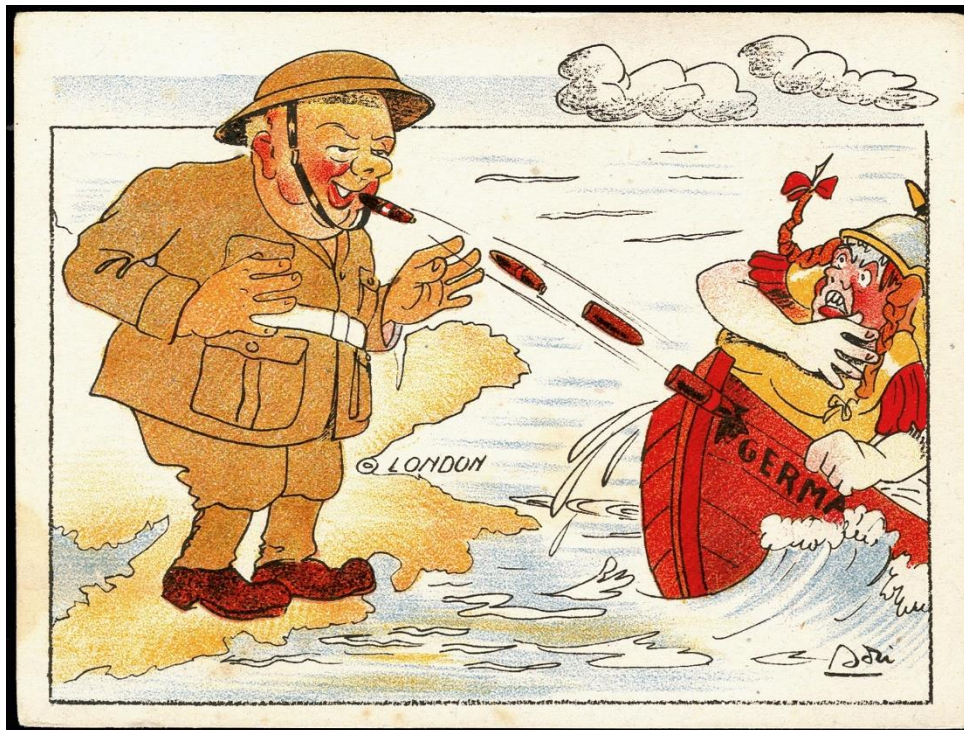
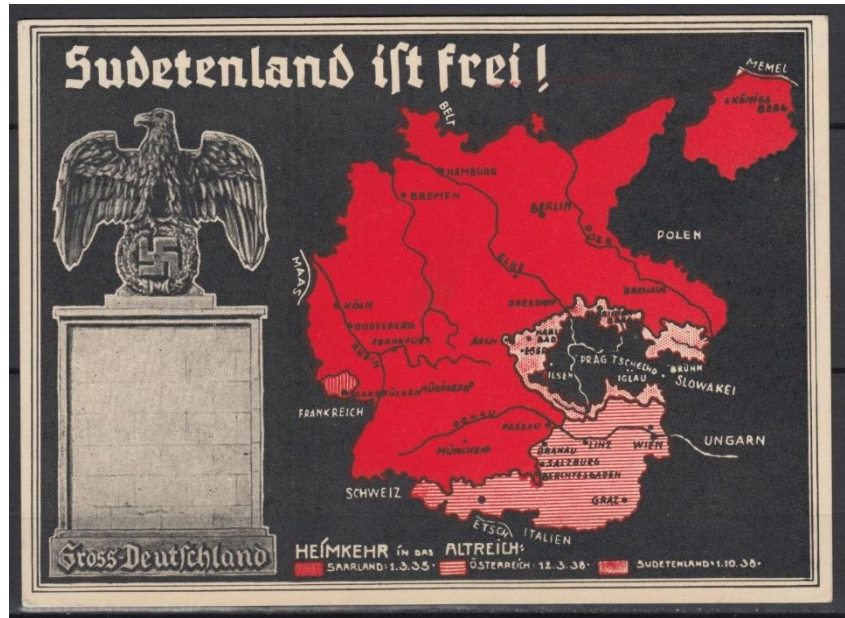


A May 1939 propaganda card celebrating a popular sports festival, complete with a not-so-subtle political message.



Yet another card commemorating sports and the Nazis – this one a 1938 German Sports Festival with the implied but still obvious political overtones.

Translation:  
The Sudetenland is  
Free!



Not all propaganda cards were pro-German or even serious. In what is believed to be an attempt at humor, Churchill is shooting cigars that turn into bullets, stopping any would-be invasion by Germany during the early stages of WWII.



## Special Cancels

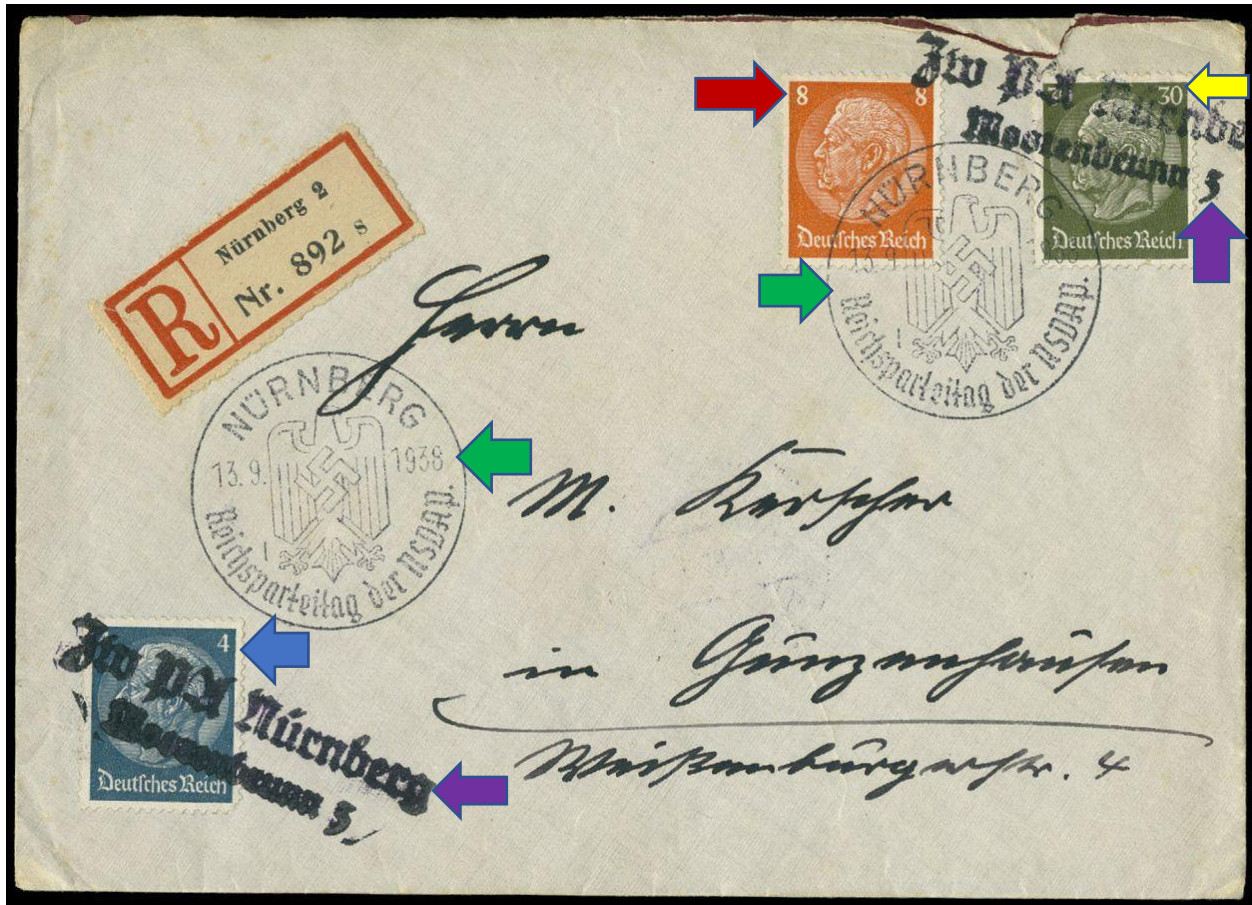
Yet another collection piece for German stamp collectors is to actually focus on the cancellation mark. That is the stamp applied to postage stamps and postcards to let everyone know that this has been used for postage. While in America we are familiar with the generic wavy lines going across the stamps to denote that the stamp has now been used, that is not always been the case throughout the world. In fact, during the reign of the Nazis in Germany, they used thousands of different cancellations to denote a used stamp.

Most of these involved yet more propaganda. Some show the Nazi swastika, while others might commemorate a special event. For instance, the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin produced several different kinds of cancellations. The infamous Nuremberg party rallies that inflamed public sentiment to the Nazis also produced several different kinds of cancellations as a way to remind the public of the perceived success of these events.

Some collectors instead focus on cancellations from certain cities. For instance, Berlin features a number of different cancellations. Others collect Danzig, Hamburg, Hanover, or whichever city they choose to focus.

Still others may focus on a topic that is found in some of the cancellations. That might be a horse, a military uniform, or a mode of transportation.

Since so many variations exist, it is simply impossible to truly believe one can collect all the different cancellations available from 1933 to 1945. Instead most focus on one theme, place, or style. The German book Bochmann's Sonderstempel is considered the ultimate source for the most comprehensive listing of cancellations during this time.



Nuremberg Nazi Party Congress September 13, 1938 (green arrows), registered letter with 4, 8 and 30 Pfg. (blue, red, and yellow arrow, respectively) Hindenburg stamps and two rare Zw PA Nuremberg Moorenbrunn 5 cancellations (purple arrows).



Another excellent example of a specialized cancel: This is from a meeting of the district court (Okresni soud) in the town of Ceske Kamenici (blue arrow), sent on October 3, 1938 (red arrow). Printed is "Wie sind frei!" – We are free (green arrow). Such cancellations with obvious propaganda implications were all too common.