THIRD REICH STUDY GROUP

A Study Group of the Germany Philatelic Society

Fundamentals of Feldpost Collecting

Various Authors

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INTRODUCTION

This "monograph" was originally published in 23 issues of the ***Third Reich Study Group Bulletin,*** in a series of installments which appeared between 1999 and 2008. Each installment was authored by a member of the group, and six different authors were involved.

It appears from the Editor's comments that several of the installments appeared in the same form or similar versions in previous issues of the Bulletin. The final installment located was Part 21 in issue Whole No. 166.

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. Please bring any problems or omissions to my attention.

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April 2018
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Table of Contents

TRSG Collecting Feldpost.pdf 1
..... 3
Part 1: Formation of the German Military Mail System 1939-1940, by Benjamin R. Beede 3
..... 3
Part 2: Postmarks of Military Mail Collection Offices, by Jim Lewis 6
..... 6
Part 3: Durch Deutsche Feldpost, by Jim Lewis 9
..... 9
Part 4-1: Fieldpost in North Africa 1941-43, by Rober J. Houston 15
Part 4-2: Fieldpost in North AFrica 1941-43 (Cont), by Robert J. Houston 23
..... 32
Part 5: Feldpost Dispatched by Civilian Post Offices, by Jim Lewis 32
..... 32
Part 6: Luftwaffe Flak Unit Indentification, by Jim Lewis 36
..... 36
Part 7: The 1937 Maneuvers, by Robert J. Houston 39
..... 39
Part 8: The Wehrkreis System, by Jim Lewis 49
..... 49
Part 9: German Forces on Crete, by Robert J. Houston 56
..... 65
Part 10: Military Mail Sorting Labels, by James E. Duffy 65
..... 65
Part 11: Unit Feldpost Gummed Labels, by Gunter Fuchs 71
..... 75
Part 12-1: Mute Feldpost Cancels, by Jim Lewis 75
Part 12-2: Mute Feldpost Cancels (Cont.), by Jim Lewis 84
..... 84
Part 13: German Military, Official & Occupation Posts in Poland, by Benjamin R. Beede 92
..... 92
Part 14: Ground Forces of he Luftwaffe, by John Painter 99
a) Luftwaffe Field Divisions 99
b) Fallschrimjager Divisions (Parachute) 101
..... 106
Part 15: Official Feldpost Stationery, by Jim Lewis 106
..... 113
Part 16: The Replacement and Training Army, by Jim Lewis 113
..... 118
Part 17: Military Camp Postmarks, by Richard Imus 118
..... 122
Part 18: Legions of the Waffen-SS, by John Painter 122
..... 126
Part 19: Special Purpose Feldpost Offices, by John Painter 126
..... 133
Part 20: Feldpost Numbers of POW Unites, by Jim Lewis 133
..... 133
Part 21: "Sch" Feldpost Numbers, by Jim Lewis 142
..... 75

Fundamentals of Feldpost Collecting

Part 1. Formation of the German Military Mail System 1939-40

by Benjamin R. Beede

The purpose of this article is to discuss the beginnings of the wartime postal system. One should keep in mind, though, that pre-war trials of the system took place in the fall maneuvers of September 1937 and during the occupations of Austria, the Sudetenland and Bohemia-Moravia.

Feldpost (military mail) service began on September 3, 1939. **1** Pre-war plans envisaged a broad division of labor between the **Reichspost** (the ordinary civilian postal administration) and the Feldpost. Those military units who served in the homeland made no effort to conceal their addresses and designations and, therefore, could use the Reichspost freely. Combat units outside Germany , however, were given special numbers to serve as addresses. Thus, regulations provided for two types of address and return address on military correspondence: open and concealed. An open address consisted of rank, name, unit or office, and location (town name). A concealed address consisted only of rank, name and **Feldpostnummer** (military mail number). **2**

A complex system was developed for delivery of military mail to and from field units which was designed to keep unauthorized persons from learning the identities or locations of particular troop units. Five-digit numbers were given to battalions, some independent companies, batteries, etc., as well as to **Luftwaffe** (air force) units, certain governmental authorities, labor battalions, and naval ships. Companies within battalions were normally differentiated with letters assigned to some or all of the companies. These letters appeared as suffixes to the numbers.

This system can be traced back at least to 1930, when identification numbers were authorized for use by elements of the armed forces engaged in wide scale exercises. A "**Post Nummer**" was assigned to each unit from companies up. Such numbers were used in lieu of unit designations. **Postleitstellen** (postal routing offices) were established to handle such mail in agreement with the nearest **Oberpostdirektion** (civilian postal directorate). The **Postleitstellen** were given lists of local post offices through which mail was delivered to units. In order to receive mail from the delivery office the unit postal clerk had to show an identification card with the "**Post Nummer**"on It. **3** Numbers were not, however, actually assigned until 1936. **4**

Feldpost numbers were not to be applied to vehicles and equipment, **5** nor were they to be compromised by using the open unit designation and the Feldpost number on the same envelope. **6** Mail from operational areas could not show town names and Feldpost numbers in combination. Such incorrectly marked mail was to be returned with the notation: "**Ortgabe unzulässig**" (town name inadmissible). **7** There were exceptions to this rule. Some para-military organizations, such as the **Reichsarbeitsdienst** (National Labor Service) received Feldpost privileges if they were actually working on projects of direct benefit to the **Wehrmacht** (Armed Forces). Such units had addresses that included both a town name and a Feldpost number. In these instances, numbers were assigned simply to distinguish those Labor Service units with Feldpost privileges from those that did not. **8**

Some modifications of the Feldpost number system were introduced as early as 1939. Initially, each private letter from the front or sent in the opposite direction had to bear the word "Feldpost", name and rank of sender or recipient, Feldpost number, and designation of a particular **Postsammelstelle** (mail collecting office). **9** Postsammelstellen were established at Berlin, Breslau, Dortmund, Dresden, Frankfurt am Main, Hamburg, Hannover, Kassel, Königsberg, Munich, Nuremberg, Salzburg, Stettin, Stuttgart and Vienna. **10** Feldpost numbers were used with Postsammelstelle names for only a brief period, on November 1, 1939, the Postsammelstelle designation was dropped. From then on, post offices in Germany and occupied Poland forwarded military mail to the front by sending it to the NEAREST Postsammelstelle. Therefore, the need for indication a certain office no longer existed. **11**

Other modifications in the Feldpost number system were made before the end of 1939. Prefixes were introduced for use with navy and air force units. Some elements of the Luftwaffe used the letter "L" before the Feldpost number. Their addresses also showed the name of the **Luftgaupostamt** (Air district Post Office), such as Luftgaupostamt Paris. Such mail went to the Luftgaupostamt, not to a Postsammelstelle. **12** Naval units (ships only) were directed to use the letter "M" before their Feldpost numbers. Mil sent to personnel in the navy which came from civilian postal districts Hamburg, Hannover, Bremen, Oldenburg, Münster, Keil and Schwerin was routed to **Marinepostbüro** Hamburg 1. Mail from all other areas of Germany went to Marinepostbüro Berlin SW 11. All letters with ship names had to be returned with appropriate notes indicating that they were inadmissible. **13**

The basic unit of the Feldpost system was the **Feldpostamt** (Military Post Office) which was the equivalent to the American APO (Army Post Office). A Feldpostamt was attached to each army, corps, division and independent brigade. Normally it was located with the command to which it was assigned. **14** Each Feldpostamt was assigned a **Kenn** (code) number for security purposes. This Kenn number played a vital role in mail routing.

Feldpost numbers were listed in the **Feldpost Übersicht** (Military Mail Summary) in three parts. One section contained a listing of units in numerical order of unit designations with the Feldpost numbers assigned to them. Another consisted of a list of Feldpost numbers in order by these numbers. The unit designations were also shown. Still another part of the Feldpost Übersicht was also in Feldpost number order, but instead of showing unit names, it indicated the Kenn numbers of the Feldpost offices serving particular units. Thus, a typical page might begin:

10 000 863
10 001 941

The Postsammelstelle used this list to route mail sent to it by the Reichspost. From the Postsammelstelle mail went to a **Postleitpunkt** (Mail Routing Point) which was also operated by the Reichspost. It transferred mail to the Feldpost system through the **Feldpostleitstelle** (Military Mail Routing Office) which was located at the same site. **15** Only letters with Feldpost numbers were supposed to be sent to the Feldpostleitstellen. A further complication was introduced on November 1, 1939, when a series of **Feldpostpäckenstellen** (Military Mail Package Offices) was established. All packages and parcels, as well as letters in awkward shapes, were sent to these new offices by the Reichspost, rather than to the Postsammelstellen, which were to process letter mail only. **16**

Each army, moreover, had an army postmaster assigned to the commanders' staff, who had full charge of Feldpost activities within the particular army, including all post offices of various categories. Each army had a special **Armee Briefstelle** (Army Letter Office) to handle intra-service mail and incorrectly addressed mail of all kinds. This office had a copy of the Feldpost Summary with all changes. These documents, incidentally, were classified secret. **17**

With such a complex system of military forwarding it was inevitable that errors would occur. One of the first sources of confusion was the abolition of the requirement that the name of a Postsammelstelle be shown on each envelope, etc. Even after Feldpost officials were instructed to disregard this information and to advise the troops not to include the designation in their return address **18**, errors continued to be made. Newspaper publishers seem to have been the major offender. **19** One of the most interesting regulations refers to situations in which a large volume of mail was received by a unit which showed the unit's Feldpost numbers but which was addressed to personnel who were not and had not been members of the unit. In such instances, it was to be assumed that two units might have the same Feldpost number. Units were advised to contact some of the senders for the open address of the unit they wanted to reach! Postsammelstellen and Feldpostpäckenstellen were also authorized to make such inquiries. **20** To clarify some of the questions concerning Feldpost service, a codification of practice was issued on April 1, 1940. **21** In general, the provisions of this directive held up throughout the war. When changes were made, they usually concerned the extension of free franking privileges to other elements of the armed forces (interpreted broadly to include many categories of civilians). The Germans were extremely generous in this respect. Even in 1939, mail TO members of the armed forces was permitted without payment of postage. During the course of the conflict many extensions of the franking privilege were made. Moreover, the facilities of the Feldpost system were opened to several classes of civilians with a slight connection with the armed forces in many occupied territories against payment of DOMESTIC postal fees. The story, however, is beyond the scope of this brief article, which merely highlights a few of the more important developments in German military mail between September 1939 and April 1940.

References:

1. Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, FELDPOSTAMTSBLATT, 11 September 1939 1/1939, p.1.
2. OKW Wehrmacht, MERKBLATT ÜBER DIE POSTVERSORGUNG DER WEHRMACHT IM KRIEGE (Feldpost-Merkblatt), vom 1.3.44. Merkblatt 49/1; Iw. Merkblatt 83, p.3; FELDPOSTVORSCHRIFT (FpV) vom 22.7. 1938, Berlin: Reichsdruckerei 1938, p.15.
3. POSTVORSCHRIFT FÜR DIE REICHSWEHR, 18 December 1930. Berlin: E.H. Mittler & Sohn, 1931, p. 11.
4. Alfred Clement, KLEINES HANDBUCH DER DEUTSCHEN FELDPOST, Graz: Selbstverlag, 1952, p.5.
5. Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, ABFINFDUNG BEI BESONDEREN EINSATZ DER WEHRNMACHT. Berlin: Verlag Bernard & Graete, 1940-2, Vol. II, p. 252.
6. IBID., II, pp. 247-8.
7. Reichspostministerium, POSTNAHRRICHTENBLATT, December 2, 1939, p. 428.
8. Reichspostministerium, FELDPOSTAMTSBLATT, June 18, 1940, 68/1940, p .43.
9. IBID., 11 September 1939. 2/1939, pp. 1-2.
10. IBID., 29 September 1939. 11/1939, p. 7.
11. IBID., 27 October 1939. 29/1939, p. 22.
12. IBID., 15 December 1939. 73/1939, p. 49.
13. IBID., 1 December 1939. 53/1939, p. 43.
14. FELDPOSTVORSCHRIFT, p. 4.
15. IBID., pp. 16-17.
16. Reichspostministerium, FELDPOSTAMTSBLATT, October 27, 1939, 28/1939, pp. 21-3.
17. FELDPOSTVORSCHRIFT, p. 3.
18. Reichspostministerium, FELDPOSTAMTSBLATT, October 27, 1939, 29/1939, p. 22.
19. IBID., November 24, 1939, 58/1939, p. 45.
20. IBID., January 16, 1940, 6/1940, p. 5.
21. IBID., April 1, 1940, 39/1940, pp. 21-3.

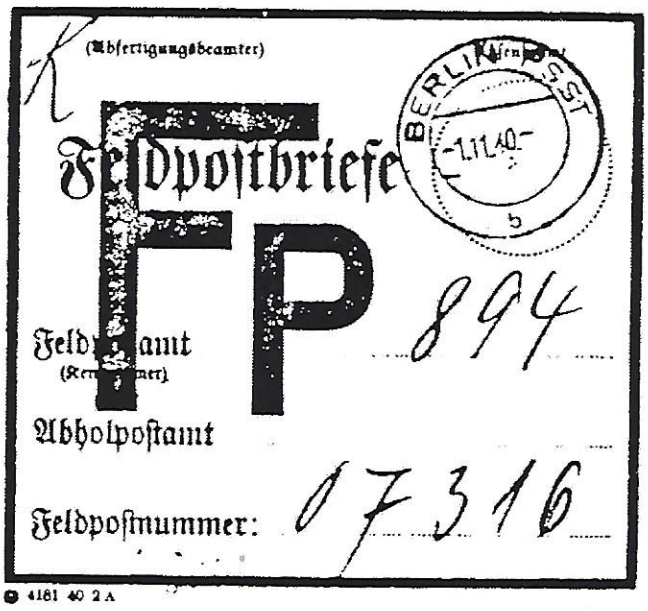
Fundamentals of Feldpost Collecting

Part 2. Postmarks of Military Mail Collection Offices

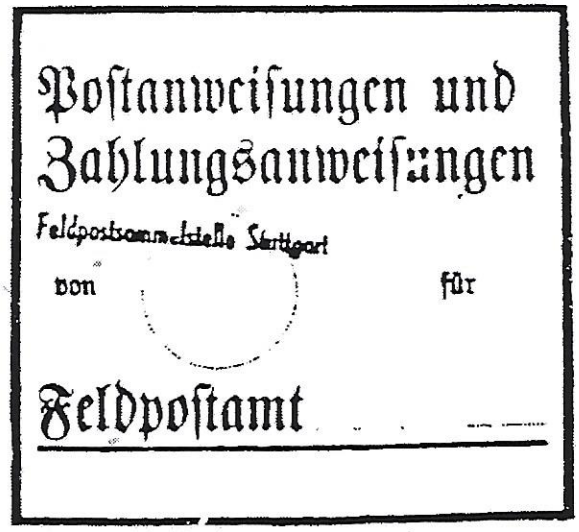
by Jim Lewis

When '**Feldpost**' (Military mail) operations began on September 3, 1939, the Reichspost required a method to transfer mail addressed to Feldpost numbers from the civilian to the military postal system. This was accomplished by establishment of '**Postsammelstellen**' (Military Mail Collection Offices) within each of the '**Wehrkreis**' (Military Districts) of Germany. All civilian post offices within these districts forwarded Feldpost to the Postsammelstelle, where it was sorted and then sent to the '**Postleitpunkt**' (Mail Routing Points) which formed the interface between the civil and military postal systems.

These collection offices employed special hand stamps that included some variation of the designation 'Postsammelstelle'. Most of these hand stamps were circular designs similar to town cancels but a few offices used straight-line stamps instead. These markings are not usually found on items of mail but rather on the '**Vorbindezettles**" (Facing slips) which were attached to stacks of sorted Feldpost.

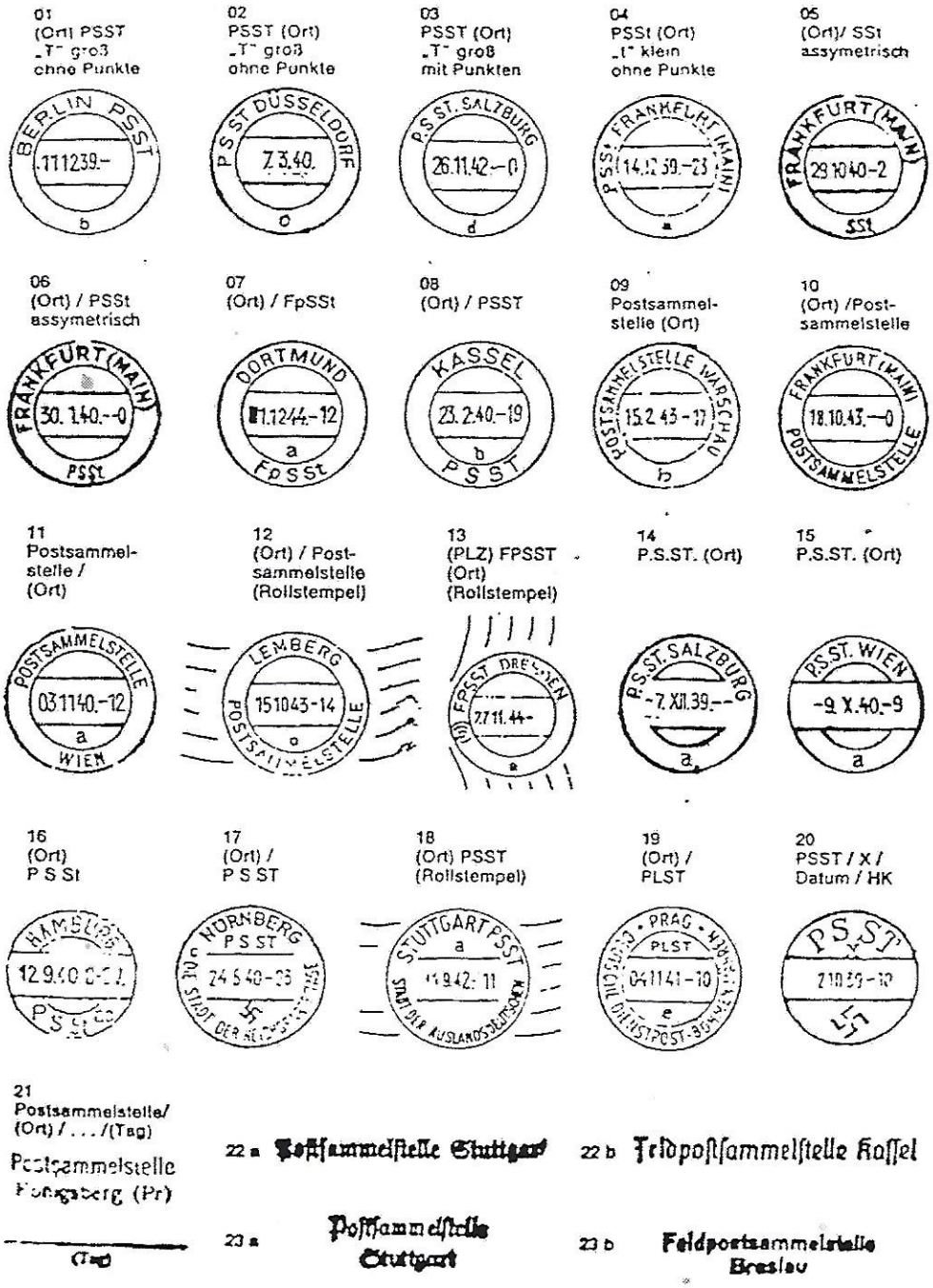


Examples of hand stamps used by the Military mail collection offices. In top row are facing slips with circular hand stamps used in Berlin (left) and Frankfurt/M. (right). Shown at bottom is another type of sorting label that has a straight-line hand stamp used in Stuttgart.



In addition to the 'Wehrkreis' offices, certain towns in the occupied territories were later designated as routing offices for military mail, adding still more special post marks designation '**PSST**', '**Fpsst**' or '**PLST**' to denote their purpose.

In the article "Die Feldpostsammelstellen der Deutschen Reichspost 1939-1945", the late Günter Fuchs identified 23 different circular & line stamps used by these offices which are shown below:



On the following page is a listing of collection officers indicating the type(s) of circular date stamps and line stamps they employed. The 'Wehrkreis' collection offices are denoted by the Roman numeral and location of the military headquarters for each district.

Collection Center	Wehrkreis & HQ	Date Stamp	Letter Codes	Line Stamp
Berlin	III Berlin	01	a thru i, k	22a
Breslau	VIII Breslau	02	d	23a
" "		04	b,c	23b
Deventer	(Holland)	--	--	23a
Dortmund	VI Münster	01	a,b,c,d	---
Dresden	IV Dresden	04	b,d	23a
" "		13	a	
Düsseldorf	---	02	b,c,e	--
Frankfurt/M	XII Wiesbaden	04	a	
" "		05,06	--	
" "		10	a,b,d	
Hamburg	X Hamburg	08	ab	--
" "		16	ab	
Hannover	XI Hannover	01	a,b,c	--
Kassel	IX Kassel	08	a,b,d,e	22a,22b,23a
Königsberg	I Königsberg	01	a,b,c	23b
Lemberg	.2.'42 –4.'45	12	d	---
München	VII München	17	C	---
Nürnberg	XIII Nürnberg	19	a,b,c,d	23a
Prag	Böhmen-Mähren	19	a thru f, p	---
Salzburg	XVIII Salzburg	03	d	---
" "		14	a,b,c	
Stettin	II Stettin	02	a,b,c	23a
Stuttgart	V Stuttgart	08	a	22a,22b,23c
" "		18	a	
Warschau	1.'42-8.'44	09	b	---
Wien	XVII Wien	03	d	---
" "		09	g,h	
" "		11	a,c,e	
" "		15	a	
" "		20	x	

Notes:

1.) All 'Wehrkreis' collection offices began using special hand stamps on Sept. 29, 1939.

2.) Herr Fuchs indicates that 'Leitstelle' offices were also located in Erfurt, Frankfurt/O., Heidelberg, Krakau, Mülhausen/Els and Oppeln at various times. However, as he has not recorded any particular hand stamps for these offices, they were not included in the listing above to conserve space. JEL.

Fundamentals of Feldpost Collecting

Part 3. Durch Deutsche Feldpost

by Jim Lewis

In August 1940, German nationals working in Belgium and occupied France (both of these areas being under German military administration) were allowed to send and receive mail through the Feldpost. While this service did not include free-franking, such mail was only charged domestic German fees. Initially mail was restricted to ordinary postcards and letters up to 250 grams. For private mail, the name of the sender's employer was required in the return address. The address side of each piece of mail required the boxed notation "**Durch Deutsche Feldpost**" (via German Military Mail) in red.

These regulations were revised in July 1941 to also allow packages weighing up to 1000 grams. The address requirements now included designation of the '**Feldpostamt**' (military post office) and notation "**über Feldpost-und Luftgaupostamt...**'

Durch Deutsche Feldpost

Herrn Otto Ziegelhofer
Deutsche Buchmeinschaft
Feldpostamt Brüssel
über Feldpostamt-und Luftgaupostamt Brüssel

Special authorization was required for usage of this service and a request had to be sent to the '**Armeefeldpostmeister**' (Army Field Postmaster) in Paris or Brussels. Permission was not required to send mail to German firms and nationals in France and Belgium.

There were a number of other changes which resulted in a supplement to the regulations which appeared in the '**Amtsblatt der Reichspostministeriums**' (Bulletin of the National Postal Ministry) as S.17/18 (new) of Postal Communication 1156/1942 which has been reproduced on the following page. Entitled "Postal traffic subject to fees sent via German Feldpost", the directive states that such postal traffic is permitted in all areas in which the only German postal system is the Feldpost. German official agencies and firms operating in these areas could send ordinary or registered postcards, letters up to 250 grams and packages up to 1000 grams. However, private mail could not be registered.

It was no longer necessary to include the Feldpostamt but the '**Luftgaupostamt**' (Air District Post Office) designation was still required. The treatment of this mail at '**Auslandsbriefprufstellen**' (Foreign Letter Examining Offices) is interesting. While earlier mail was usually passed unopened with a '**durchlaufstemple**' (transit stamp), by 1944 it was routed directly to the censor offices and received full treatment.

On the following pages are examples of mail sent through this arrangement to illustrate some of the markings used to comply with regulations.

Beilage zur AmtsblMitt. Nr. 1156/1942

Deckblätter zum Merkheft über den Postdienst mit den besetzten Gebieten usw.

S. 17/18 (neu) 17

Gebührenpflichtiger Postverkehr „Durch Deutsche Feldpost"

Ein gebührenpflichtiger Postverkehr „Durch Deutsche Feldpost" ist nach allen Gebieten zugelassen, in denen als deutsche Post nur die Deutsche Feldpost besteht.

Zugelassen zu diesem Verkehr können die in diesen Gebieten eingesetzten deutschen Dienststellen, Körperschaften, Organisationen, Unternehmen und selbständigen Einzelpersonen deutscher Staatsangehörigkeit sowie die bei diesen Stellen usw. beschäftigten Reichsdeutschen werden, soweit sie nicht zur Benutzung der Feldpost berechtigt sind.

Zugelassen sind in beiden Richtungen:

a) im Dienst- und Geschäftsverkehr der deutschen Dienststellen, Körperschaften, Organisationen, Unternehmen und selbständigen Einzelpersonen

gewöhnliche und eingeschriebene Postkarten,

gewöhnliche und eingeschriebene Briefe und Drucksachen bis 250 g,

gewöhnliche und eingeschriebene Päckchen bis 1000 g ohne Rücksicht auf eine etwa bestehende Sperre für Feldpostsendungen;

b) im Verkehr der reichsdeutschen Gefolgschaftsmitglieder der obengenannten Stellen usw. (Privatverkehr)

gewöhnliche Postkarten,

gewöhnliche Briefe bis 100 g,

gewöhnliche Päckchen bis 1000 g, jedoch nur soweit durch Feldpostsperren keine Einschränkungen verfügt sind.

Die Sendungen sind nach den Inlandsgebühren freizumachen.

Die Sendungen müssen über der Anschrift den rotumrandeten Vermerk „Durch Deutsche Feldpost" tragen. In der Anschrift der Sendungen nach den besetzten Gebieten muß angegeben werden

1. die genaue Bezeichnung des Empfängers, und zwar
   a) bei den deutschen Dienststellen, Organisationen, Unternehmen: die genaue Bezeichnung der Dienststelle, der Organisation oder des Unternehmens,
   b) bei selbständigen deutschen Einzelpersonen: Vor- und Zuname sowie Beruf oder Stand der Einzelperson;
   c) bei deutschen Gefolgschaftsmitgliedern: Vor- und Zuname, Beruf oder Stand, sowie die Anschrift der Dienststelle, der Organisation usw., der das Gefolgschaftsmitglied angehört;
2. der Ortsname der Feldpostdienststelle, die den Postaustausch vermittelt;
3. der rotunterstrichene Zusatz „über Luftgaupostamt ....." (Angabe des für die Leitung in Frage kommenden Luftgaupostamts).

Für die richtige Leitung der Sendungen ist es wichtig, daß der Zusatz „über Luftgaupostamt ....." rot unterstrichen wird, daß aber von einer Unterstreichung oder besonderen Hervorhebung des Ortsnamens des Feldpostamts abgesehen wird.

Auf den Sendungen ist der Absender anzugeben. Die Absenderbezeichnung auf den Sendungen nach der Heimat muß dieselben Angaben enthalten, die für die Anschrift der Sendungen nach dem besetzten Gebiet erforderlich sind.

Fig. 1) Cover to the Kreiger Steel Works in Düsseldorf from a branch office in Belgium. Weight in excess of 20 grams required 24 Pfg. postage. Note Feldpost cancel dated December 1943 and notation "via Air District Post Office Brussels".

Fig. 2) Single weight cover sent to Berlin from Belgium in April 1942 has required notations pre-printed in lower left corner.

Fig. 3) Cover sent from France in November 1943 was passed unopened by Paris censor office per the "A.x" transit stamp. Note "über LGPA Paris" on back side.

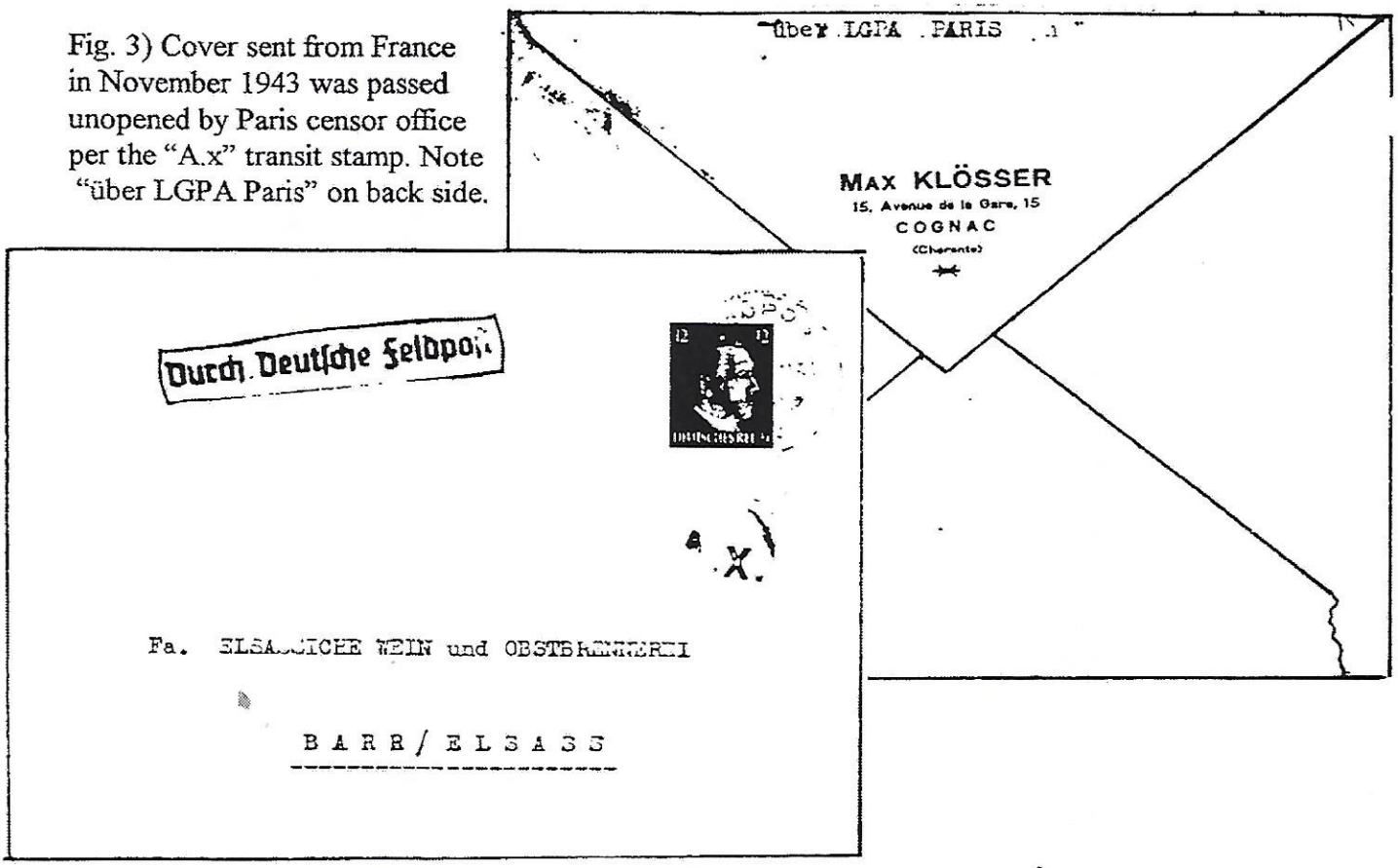
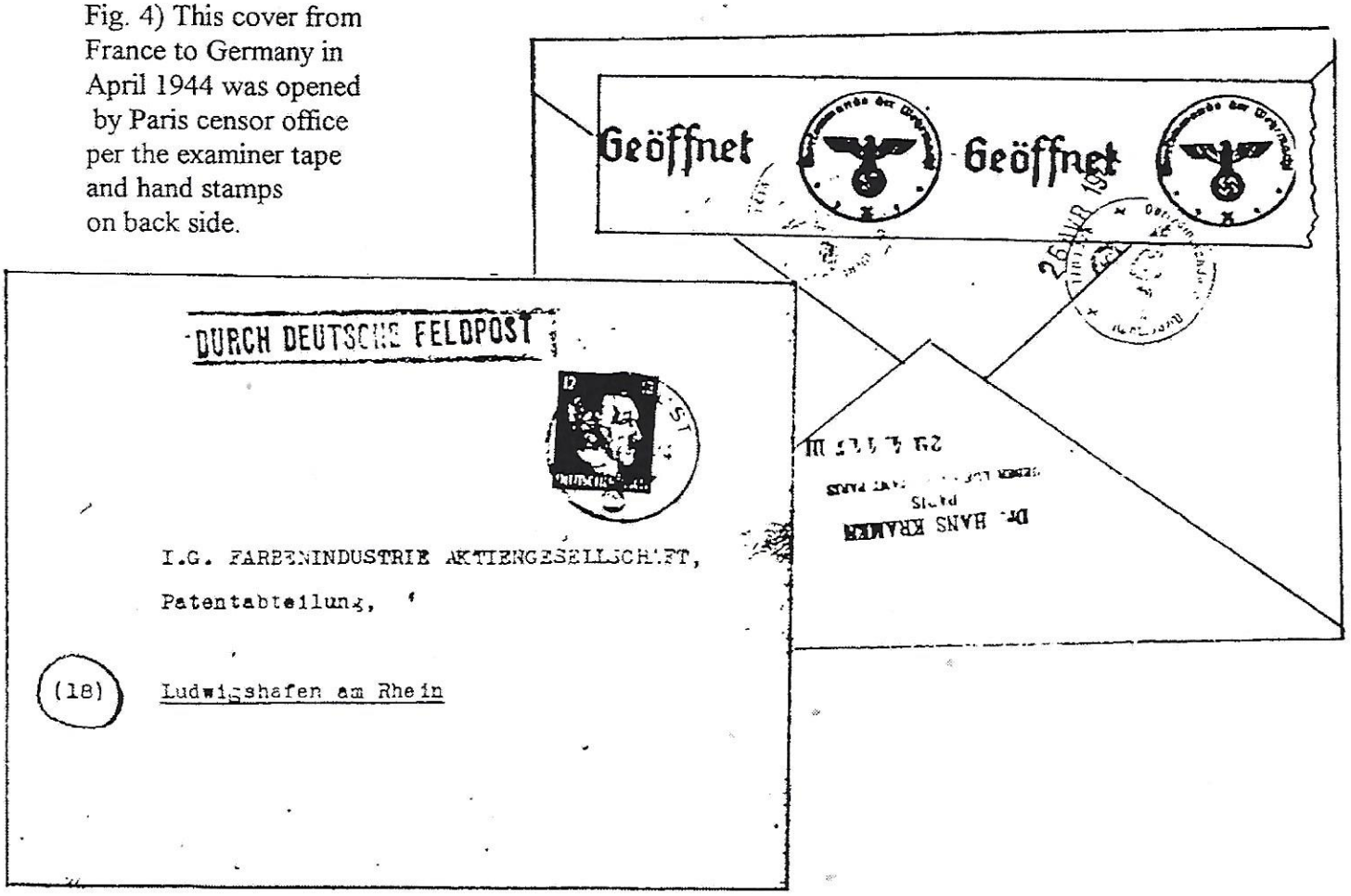


Fig. 4) This cover from France to Germany in April 1944 was opened by Paris censor office per the examiner tape and hand stamps on back side.



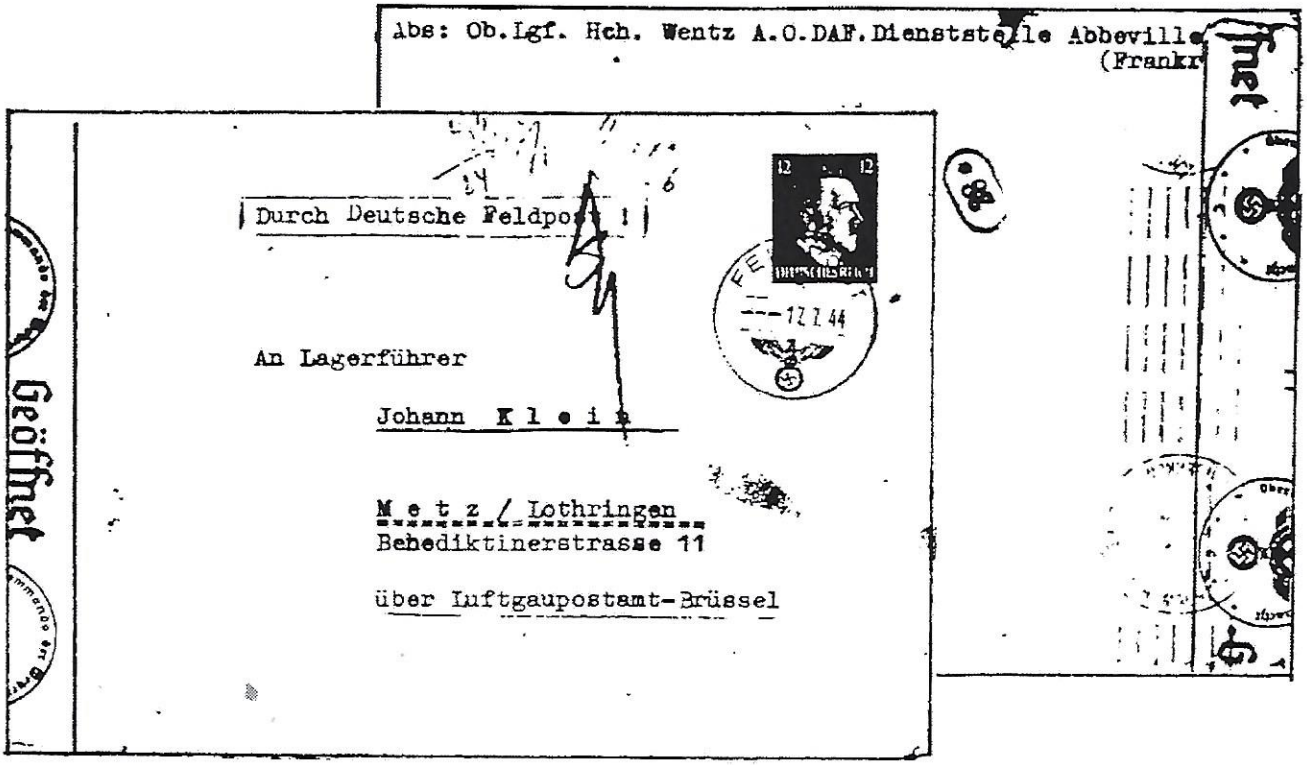


Fig. 5) Cover to Lorraine from occupied France in July 1944 has been examined at the Cologne censor office (Code 'c')

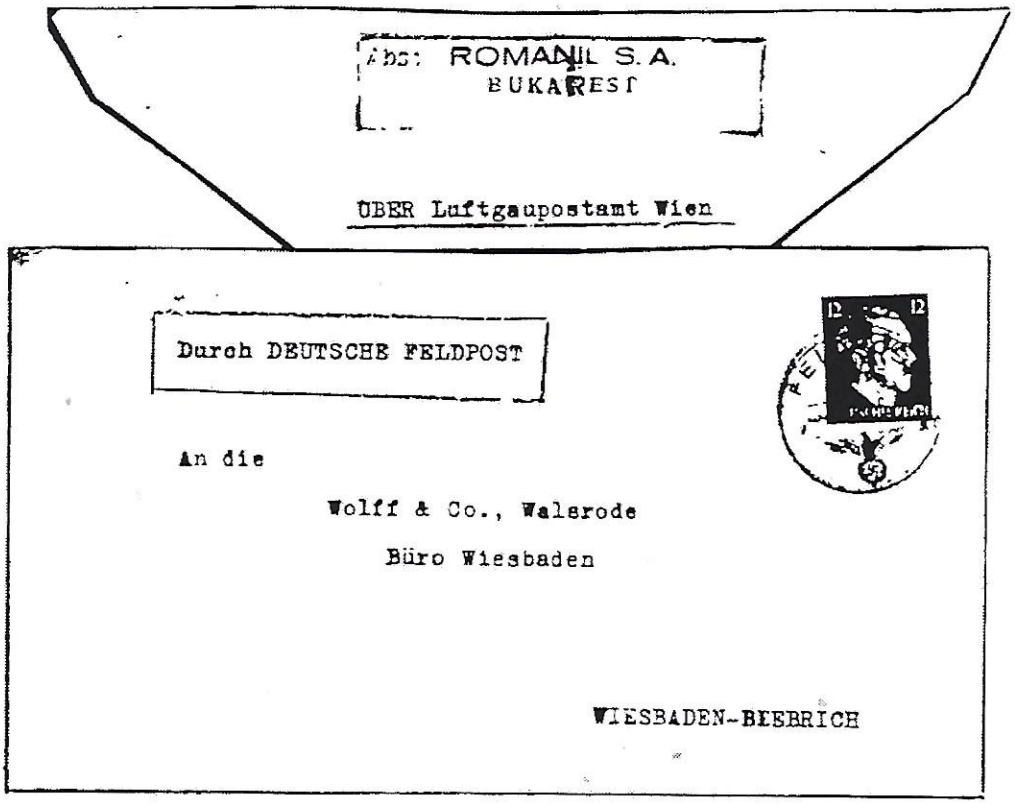
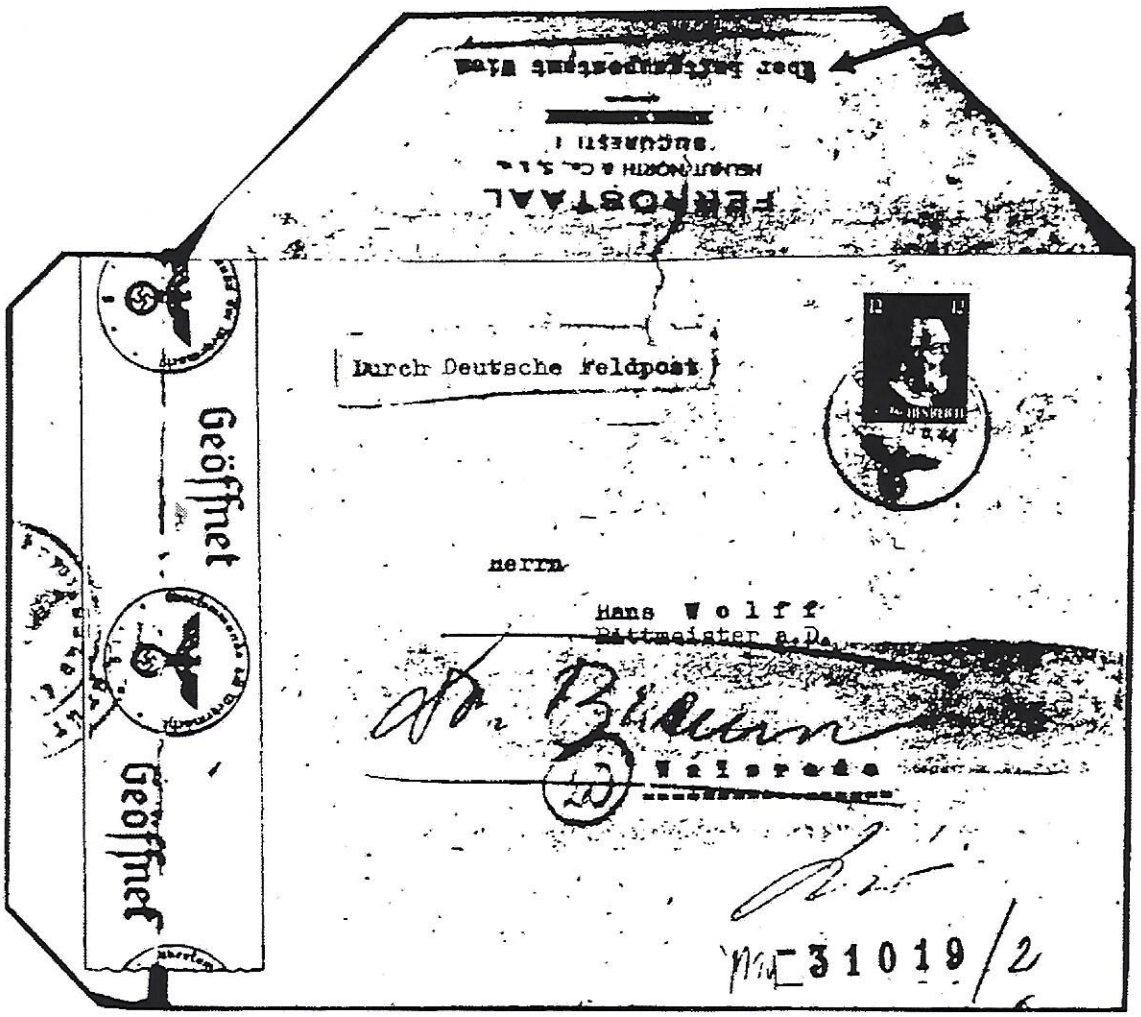


Fig. 6) A cover sent to Germany in June 1943 from a firm in Bucharest, Romania via the "Luftgaupostamt" in Vienna has no censor markings.

Fig. 7) This cover was also sent to Germany from a firm in Bucharest. Posted in June 1944, it received a very thorough examination by the Vienna censor office, including a test for hidden writing that left the dark streak across the address.



The reason for increased censorship was the final revision to the regulations issued in Feldpostamtsblatt Nr. 45/1944 on April 5, 1944 which noted: Sendings from non-hostile foreign nations allowed with the note "Durch Deutsche Feldpost" are not permitted to bear foreign postage stamps nor evidence of foreign postal examination. Such items shall be forwarded by the receiving LGPAs to the competent postal examination office as follows:

LGPA Königsberg (Pr) to Auslandbriefprüfstelle Königsberg 5
LGPA Posen & Breslau to Auslandbriefprüfstelle Berlin-Charlottenburg 2, Zoo.
LGPA Wein to Auslandbriefprüfstelle Wein
LGPA Paris to Auslandbriefprüfstelle Paris.
LGPA Brussel to Auslandbriefprüfstelle Köln.
LGPA Hamburg to Auslandbriefprüfstelle Hamburg.
LGPA Berlin to Auslandbriefprüfstelle Berlin.

Reference: "Die deutsche Feldpost im Zweiten Weltkrieg' – B. Gericke.

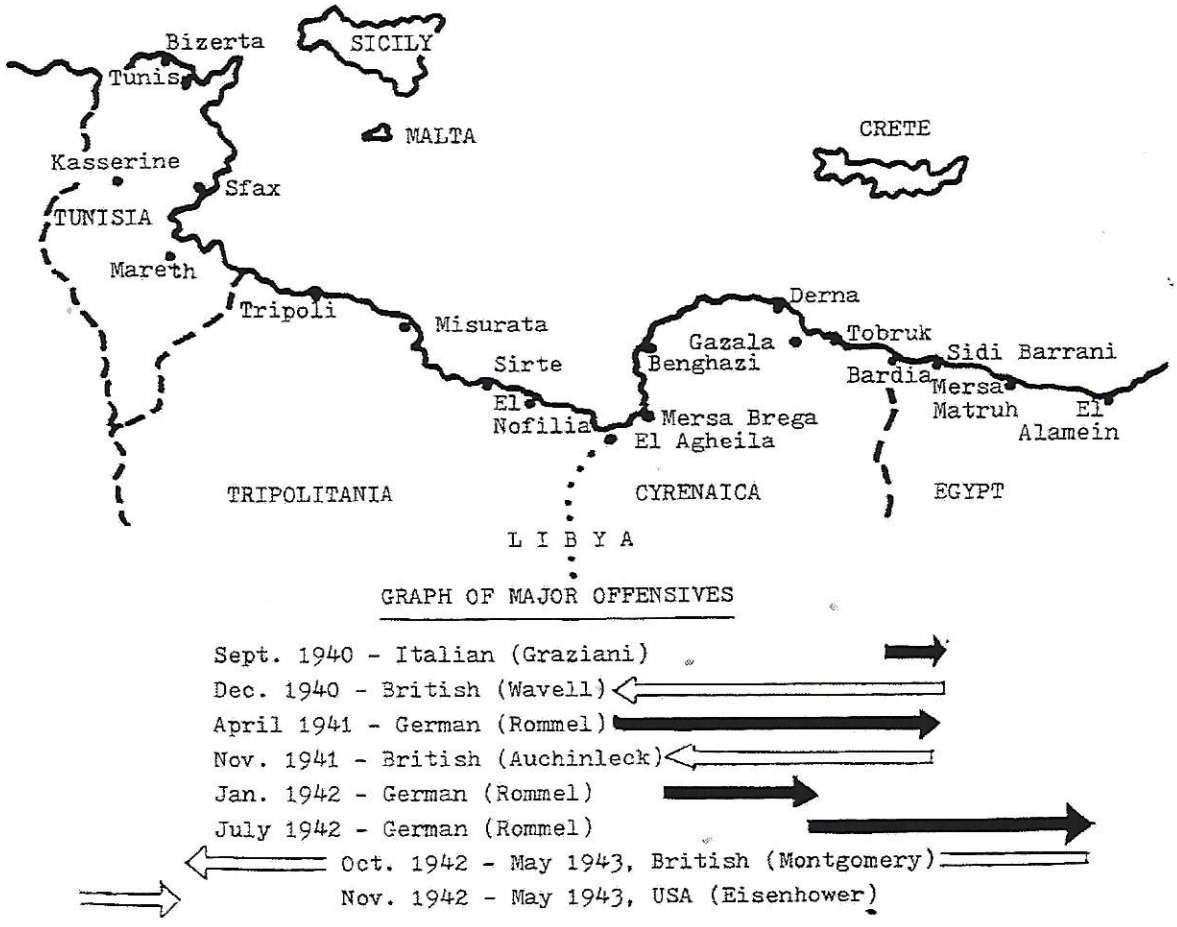
Fundamentals of Feldpost Collecting

Part 4. Fieldpost in North africa 1941-43

by Robert J. Houston

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 General Wavell launched a counter-offensive, forcing an Italian retreat westward back to Cyrenaica. Bardia fell on January 7th and Tobruck 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 Africa Korps" and thus began a two-year classic of modern military history.

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.



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 Tobruck (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 Tobruck), 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 Marshal, 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 Africa 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.

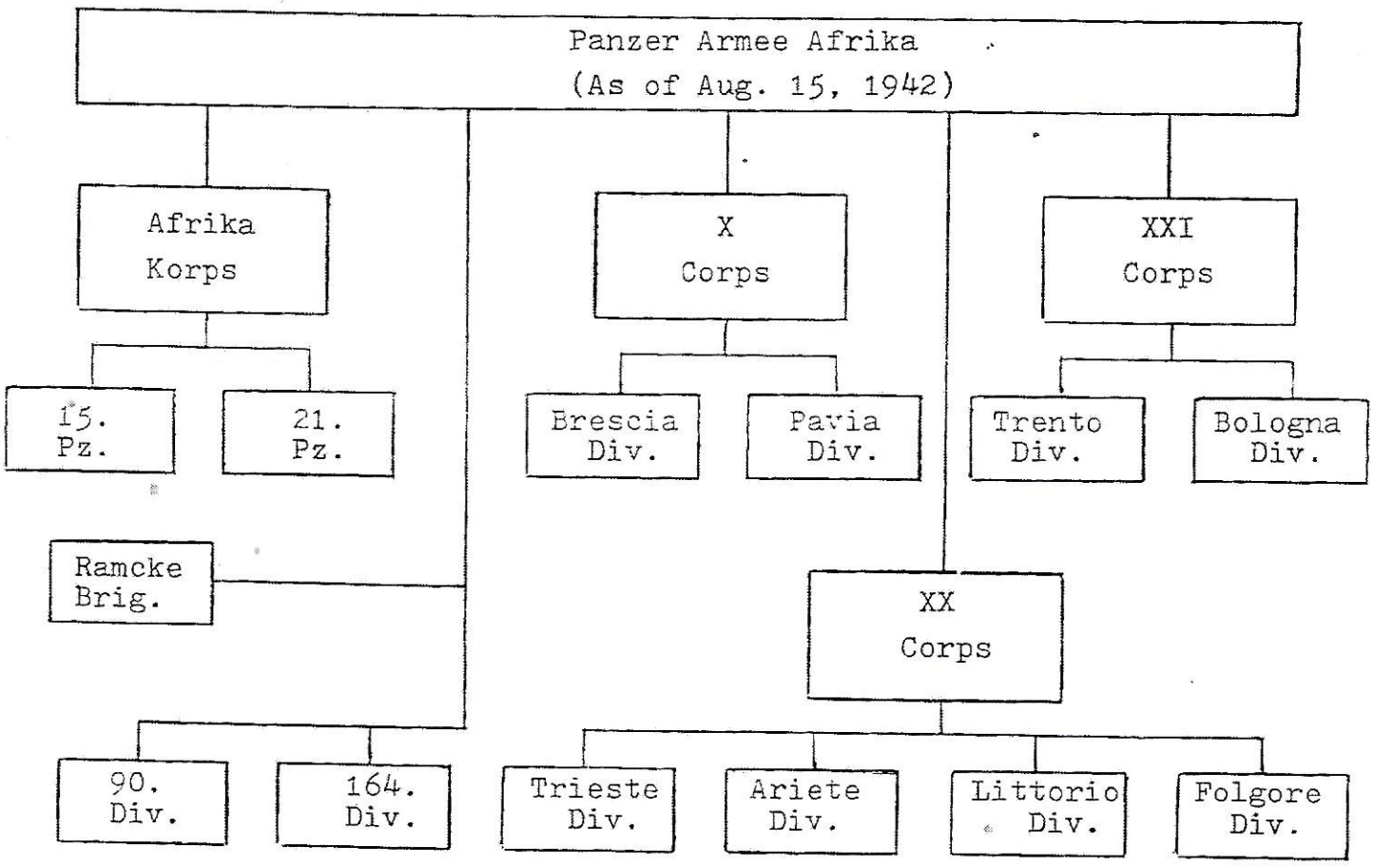
2) On August 15, 1941, Rommel's command was raised to the status of a "Panzergruppe", which consisted of the "Afrika Korps" (15th Panzer Division and the 5th Light Division - now reorganized as the 21st Panzer Division), the 90th Light division and two Italian corps (XX and XXI) which included six Italian 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, additional units (see chart on next page) had strengthened this army.

4) The Allied invasion of NW Africa prompted the establishment (in November 1942) of a separate axis forces 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 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 a unified command on February 23, 1943 which was designated as "Heeresgrupe 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 post offices, both mobile and fixed. Mail to and from these post offices (as well as the several Italian military post offices 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 post offices 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	Feldpost #	Kenn #	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	became 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	12589	615	5. le. Div.	2.'41-8.'41	became 200
762	44777	282	Pz. AOK Afrika	9.'41-5.'43	
791	47294	212	Pz. AOK Afrika	11.'42-5.'43	
791zw	" "	131	Zweigamt (branch)	12.'42-5.'43	
921	48571	822	"H. Göring" Div.	12.'42-5.'43	

NOTES ON FELDPOST OFFICES

FpA 33: Division post office (Fp.#05254) of the 33rd 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 15th 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 164th Infantry Division for a brief period in 1942 and served the 999th Africa 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 15th Panzer-Grenadier Division formed in Sicily during July 1943.

FpA 90: Division post office of the 10th 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 90th le. Africa 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. This 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 its 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 post office 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 post office FpA 220 (Fp.# 16550) in November. The division was redesignated "164th Light Africa Division" on August 15, 1942.

FpA 334: Division post office (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 was 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 t0 10.42 at such locations as: Derna (April/June 1942); Tobruck (July 1942) and Marsa Matruk (Aug./Oct. 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. Armeegebeit" (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" (Code) number K-550 assigned. 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 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 (December 1942); Misurata (January 1943); Sfax (Feb./March 1943) and 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 post office was formed in Africa on September 21, 1941 (considerably earlier than reported in most sources, but confirmed in microfilm roll T-313-436, 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 (November 1941); 47 kilometers east of Nofilia (Dec. 1941 to Jan. 1942), Tobruck (July 1942) and Tripoli (November 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 Panzer AOK Afrika on October 9, 1942 and located in Tunis with a branch (FpA 791zw using Kenn #131) at Bizerta.

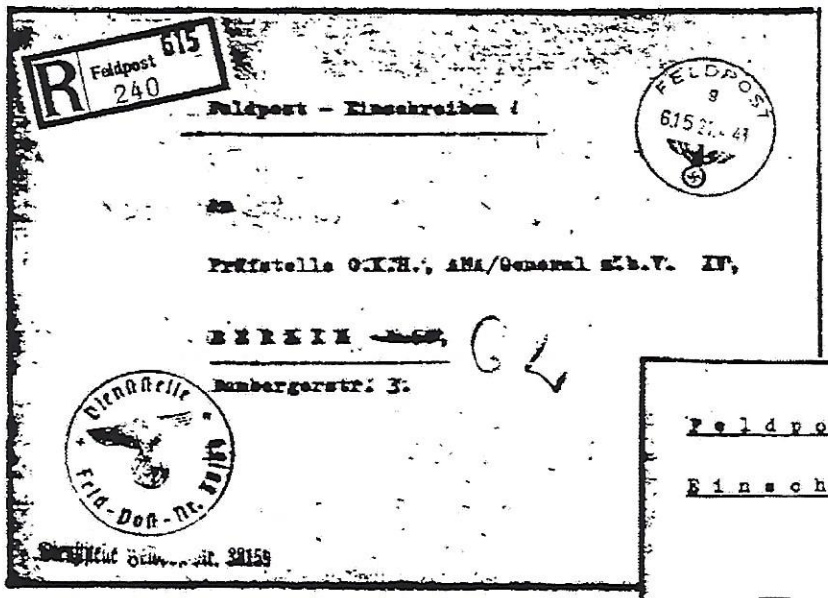
FpA 921: Portions of the Luftwaffe's Division "Hermann Göring" were sent to Tunisia over the period November 1942 – March 1943 and included a partial post office unit (Teil FpA) assigned Fp.# 48571. These units actually operating as "Kamfgruppe Schmid" fought with distinction until the final days of 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: The FpA (Fp.#26908) of the 999th Afrika Brigade, formed in late 1942 – mainly from court marshaled 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 post office 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.
On the following two pages are examples of registered Feldpost covers from FpAs in North Africa.

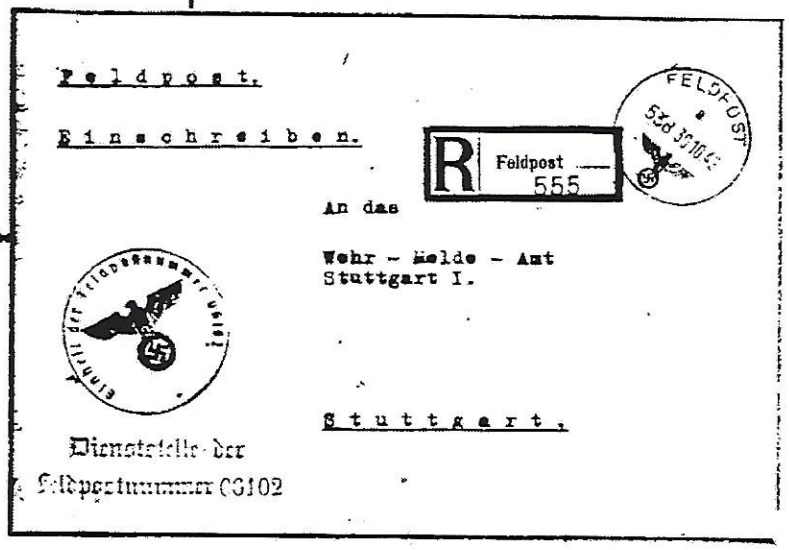
REFERENCES

1. U.S. Archives, Captured Records Div. Microfilm Series T-313, Rolls 418, 436, 440 & 462.
2. U.S. Archives, Captured Records Div. Microfilm Series T-78, Rolls 129-133.
3. Microfilm publication # 60-15.
4. "Feldpostämter"- unpublished research of N. Kannapin.
5. "Die deutsche Feldpost im Zweiten Weltkreig" – B. Gericke.
6. "Uniforms, Organization and History of the Africa Corps" – R .J. Bender and R.D. Law.

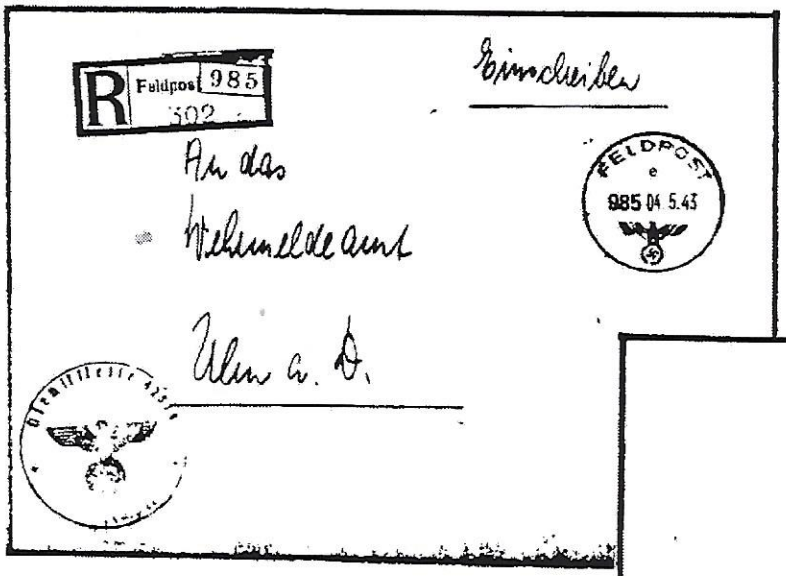
Note: Originally published in TRSG Bulletin # 50 (1979), Parts V to IX will appear in Bulletin # 136.



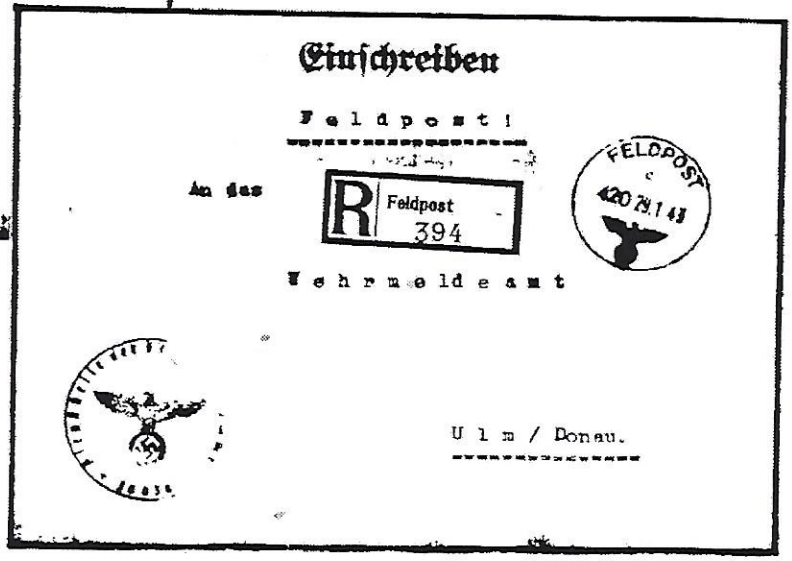
April 21, 1943:
From Fp.#38159 (Kdr. d. Pz. Div. Nachschub Tr. 200) via FpA 200 (Kenn #615) of 21st Pz. Div.



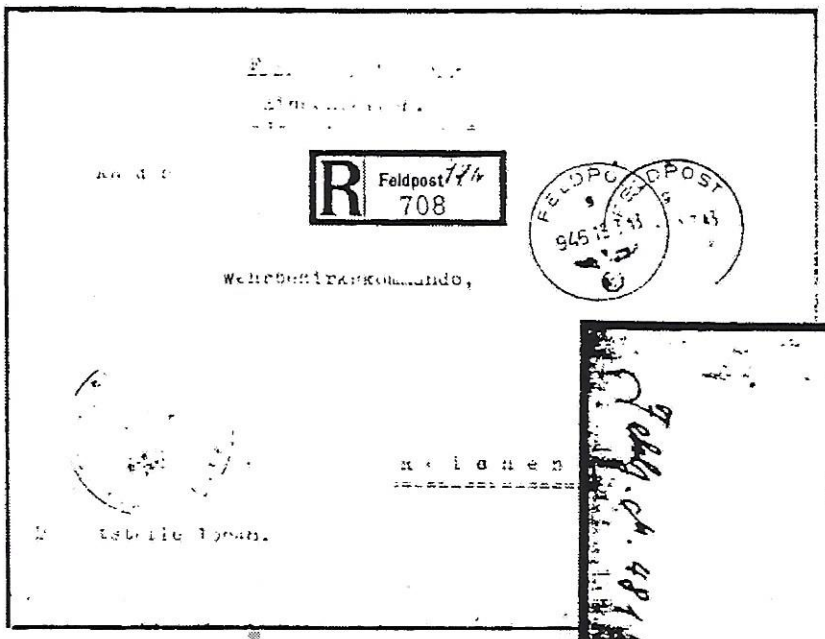
Oct. 30, 1942:
From Fp.#06102 (2. gr. Kw. Kol./Nachschub Kol. Abt. 902) via FpA 386/686 (Kenn #538) - cancelled on the exact date of change from FpA 386 to 686.



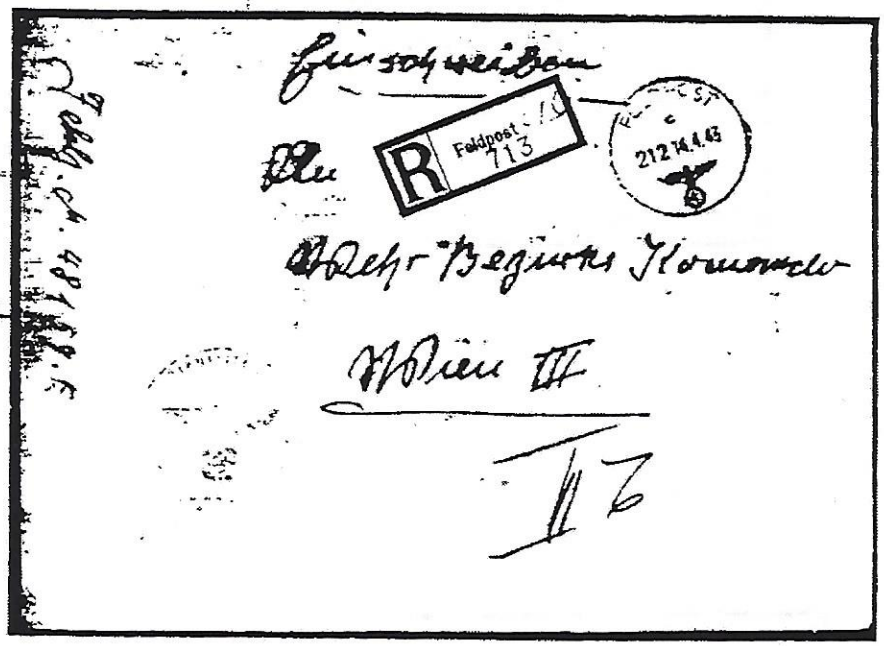
May 4, 1943:
From Fp.#42879 (4. Kp./ Pz. Rgt. 7 of the 10th Pz. Divis.) via Div. FpA 90 (Kenn #985) only a few days before capitulation.



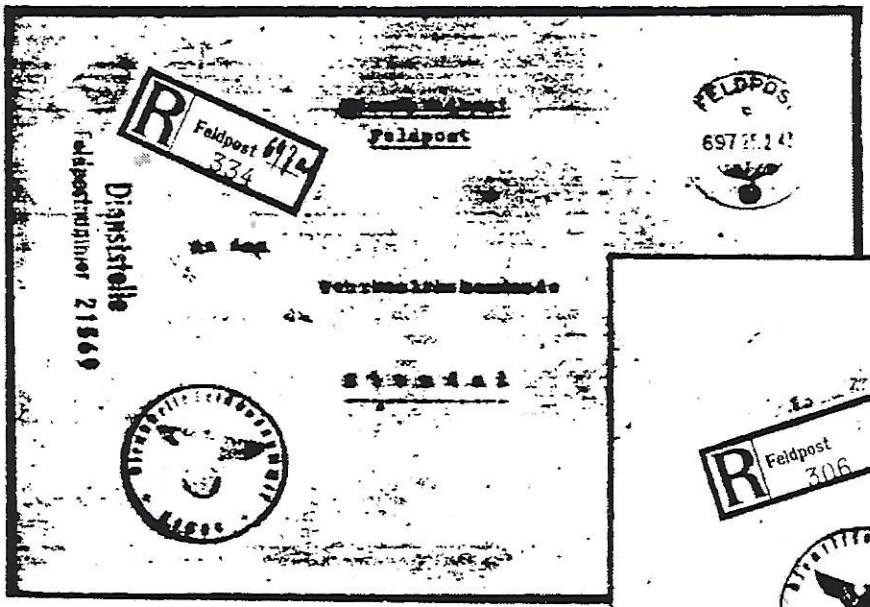
Jan. 29, 1943:
From Fp.#28038 (Stab II/ Pz. Rgt. 8 of the 15th Pz. Div.) via FpA 639 (Kenn #420).



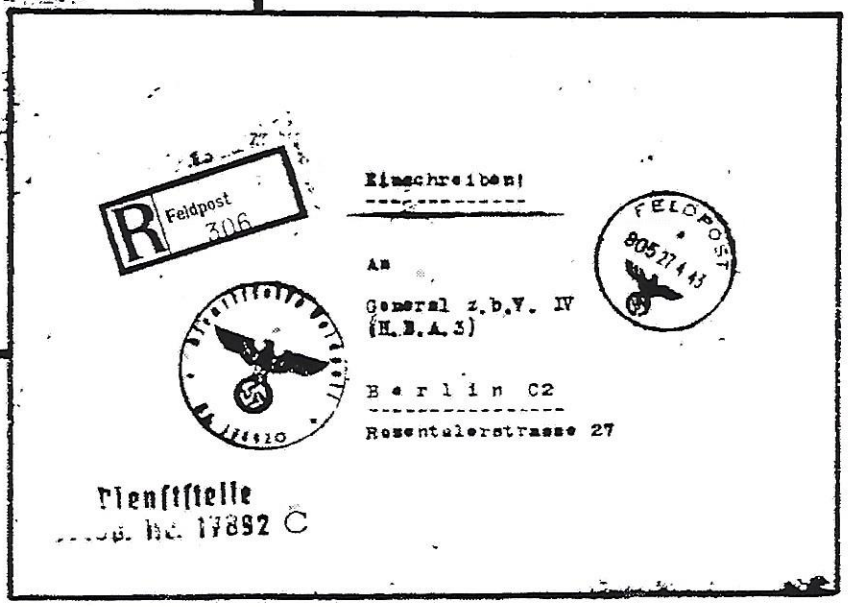
March 19, 1943:
From Fp.#13648 (13. Kp./Pz. Gren. Rgt. 433 of the 164th Light Div.) via Div. FpA 220 (Kenn #946).



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).

Fundamentals of Feldpost Collecting

Part 4. Fieldpost in North Africa 1941-43 (Cont.)

by Robert J. Houston

V.) REGULATIONS/DIRECTIVES

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

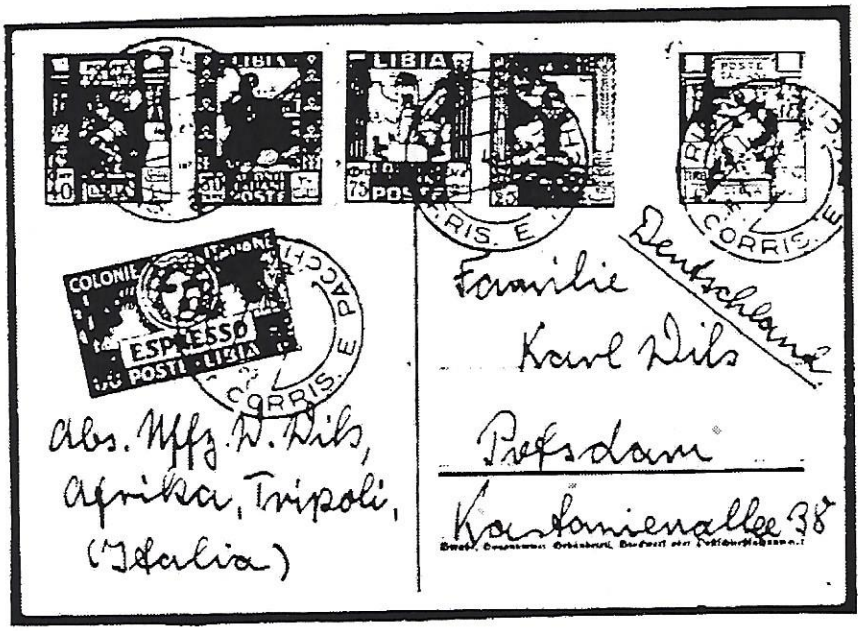
a) Frame 87339129 of roll 440 contains the "Besondere Anordnung für die Versorgung Nr. 13"(Special directive for service) dated June 16, 1941 which, in a sub-part, indicates that:

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 post offices 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 Red Cross or using Italian post offices) and that such practice was strictly forbidden. Also noted is the requirement that any type of "view card" was also forbidden due to its possibility of establishing location.

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



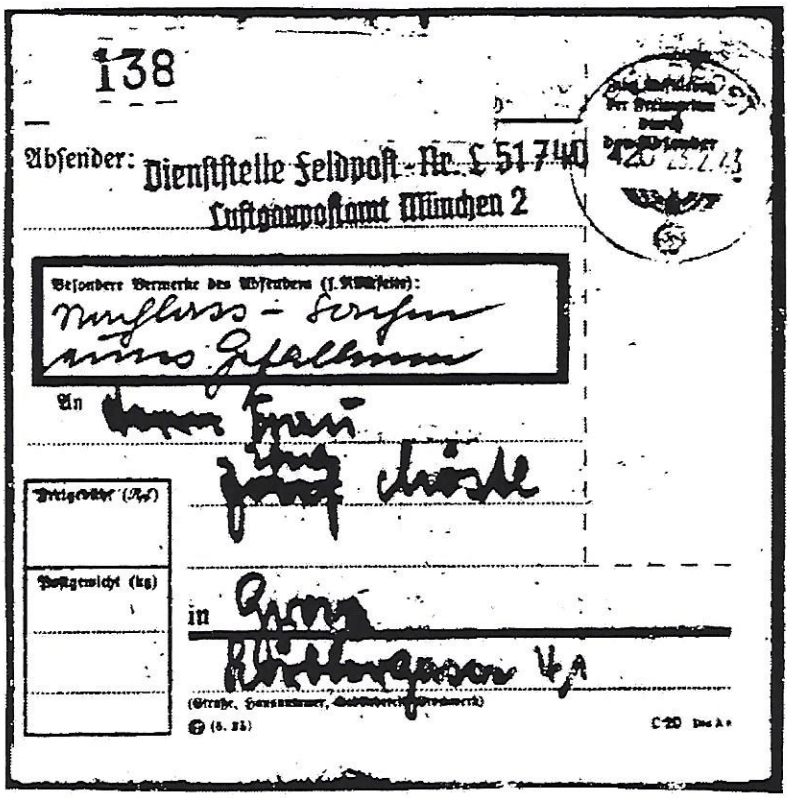
d) "Special Directive #17, dated October 23, 1942 and found on frames 8734265 and 8734266 of roll 440, indicates the following in regard to the regular parcel-permit stamps:

"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 post offices 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 8734291-874293, 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 individual parcels containing the remaining effects of individuals (Nachlassachen) from Africa were as prescribed for the other war zones.

Parcel card from Headquarters of Fp. # L51740 (2./Luftnachtrichten Rgt. 5 – Abtl. 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 cargoes, also mentions here and there some of the losses being sustained. Two typical items relating to the loss of Feldpost are reproduced in part as follows:

Oberkommando der Panzerarmee Afrika
Der Oberquartiermeister
Besondere Anordnungen für die Versorgung Nr. 7 A. H. Qu., den 26.3.1942

(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., den 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 German forces, but also to lower that of the Allied troops and to influence the Arab population.

Roll 418 of microfilm series T-1313 (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 its 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 referenced 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 validity, but were simply the handiwork of rear-area troops reflecting their pride in the Afrika Korps."

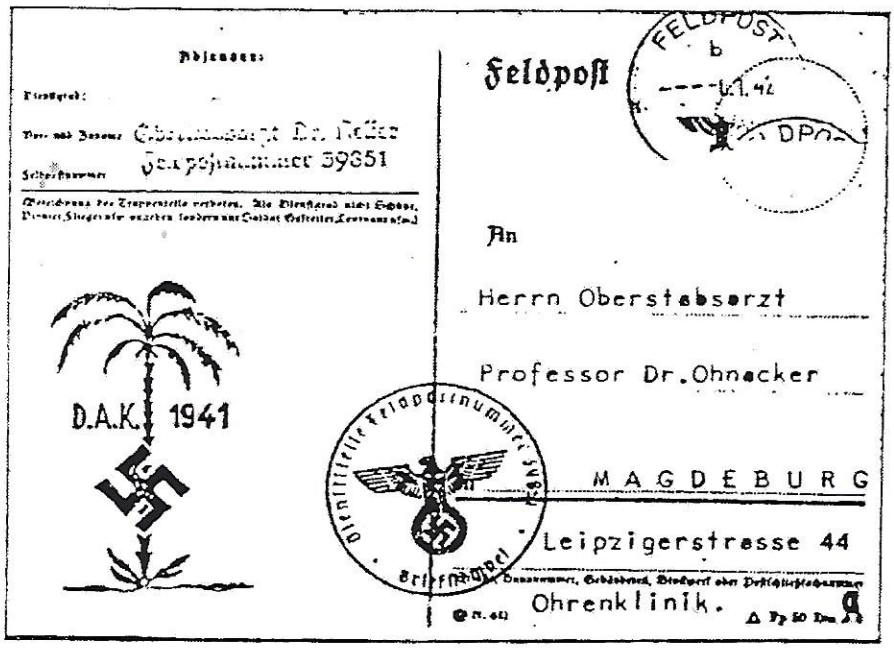
Citing a good deal of research*, cooperation of the Bundesarchiv-Militararchiv* and reporting confirmations by ex-Afrika Korps postal officials, this publication goes on to point out that the cachets were apparently not applied by the individual senders, but at unit or FpA level-since A.K. veterans are 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 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 that 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 Genesungsheim der Pz.-Armee Afrika.

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 Feldpostoberpostrat Dr. Erdelbrock (Army Field postmaster of the "Deutschitalienischen 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 post horn 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 these 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 Pfg. 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.

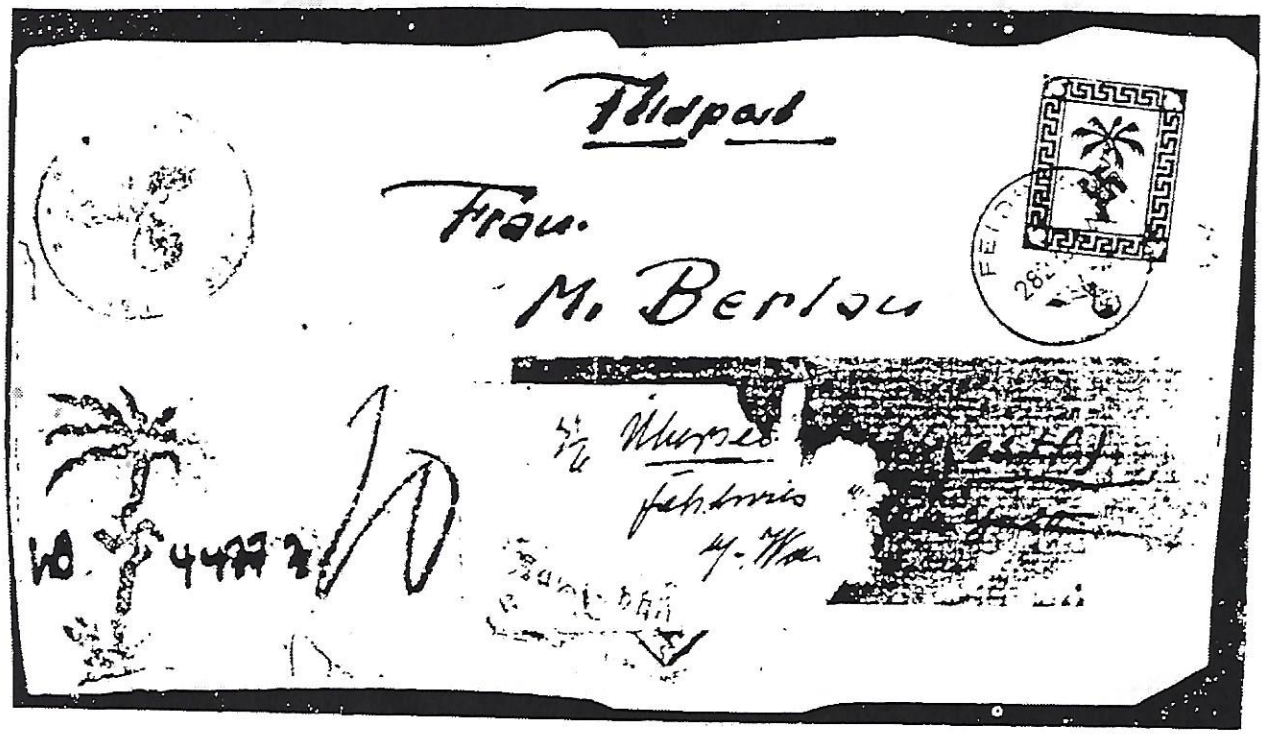
Continuing in reference #7, it is further reported that a quantity of imperforate copies (printer's waste) appeared on the market in Germany shortly after the war, however the number of such printer's sheets (full sheets of 100 subjects) which had survived is unknown.

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 that 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 a ultra-violet light and the microscope. With used copies, an added factor is the cancellation (type & ink) and with fully addressed parcel pieces a correct Feldpost number is a further verifying factor.

Left: Imperforate lower-margin copy.

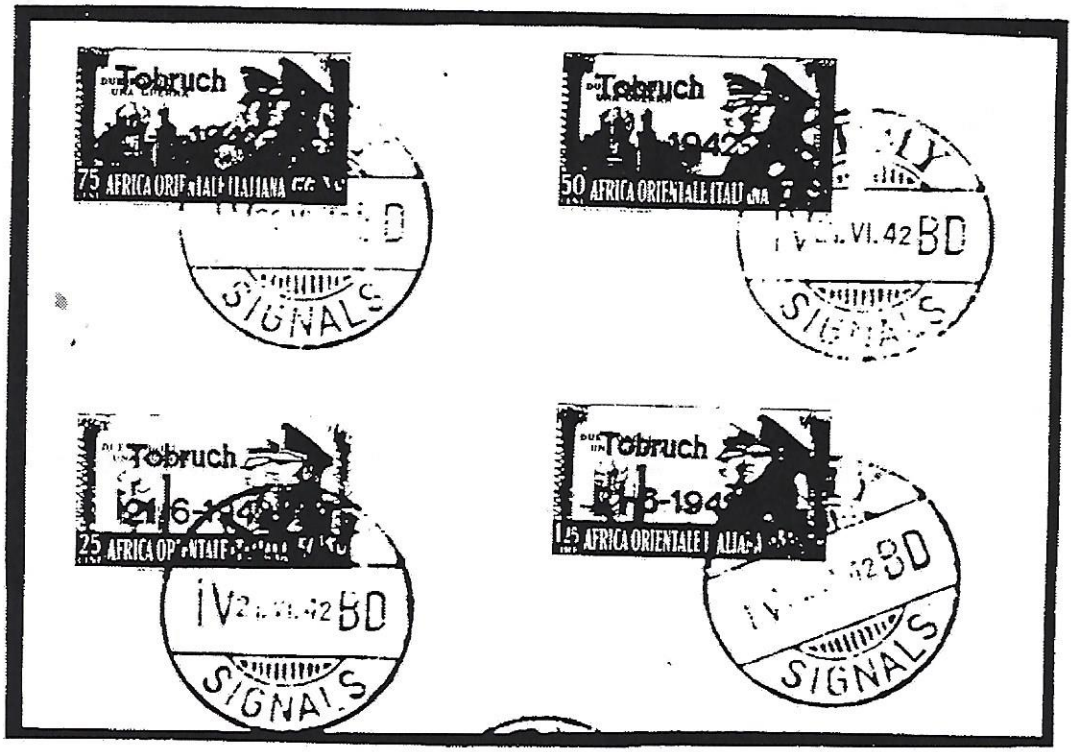
Below: Making what appears to be a further case for both the "Tunismarke" and the theory of the "Palmenstempel" being applied at the Feldpost office is an illustration (Ref. 7) of a large parcel piece from Fp. # 44777 (FpA 762) - bearing the parcel stamp cancelled with a regular Feldpost cancel (Kenn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



IX.) OTHER PHILATELIC "SOUVENIRS"

The "Tobruch Overprints"

Upon finally taking Tobruk on June 21, 1942, an undetermined but small number of Italian colonial stamps were overprinted by the Axis forces "Tobruch/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 canceling device having been left behind during the hurried exodus from Tobruk and apparently seized upon by the same avid philatelist.



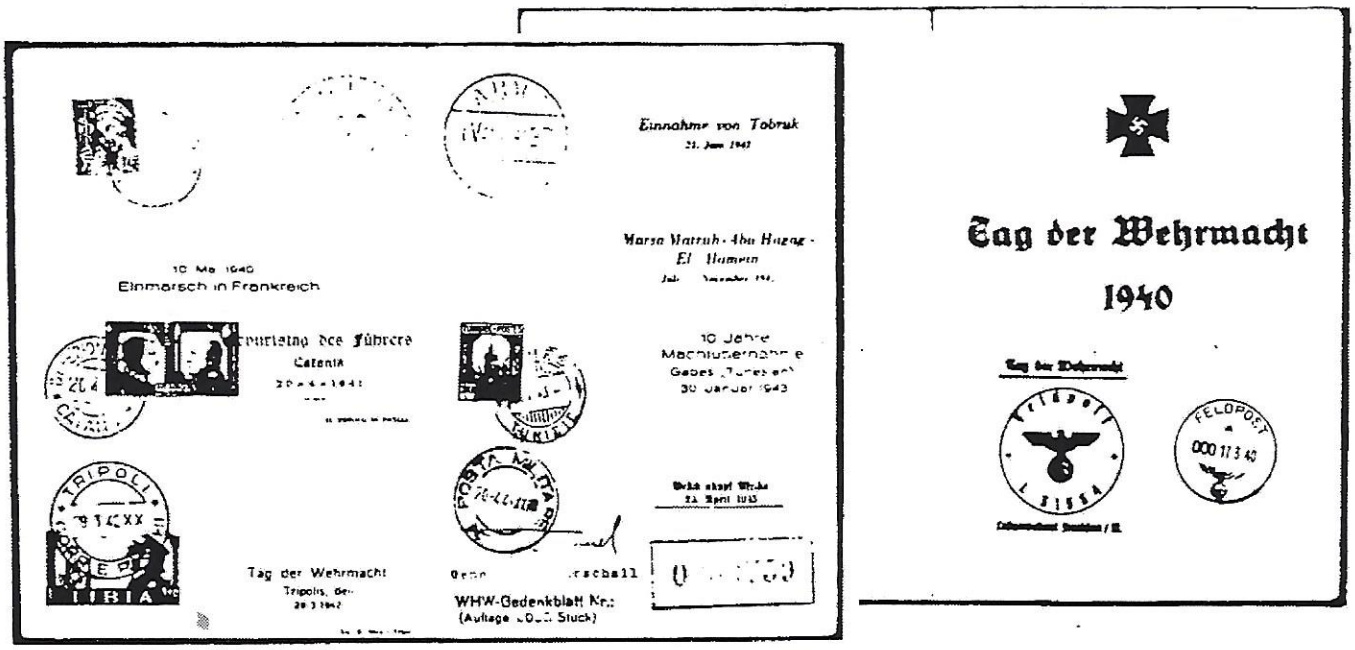
The "Rommel Gedankblatt"

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".

The "Rommel Gedankblatt"



REFERENCES

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

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article was originally published in TRSG Bulletin Nos. 50 and 51 in 1979. While additional information on this subject has appeared in other journals during the subsequent twenty years, we decided to retain former TRSG Editor Bob Houston's article in the original form. We welcome comments on any aspect of this subject matter and will publish same in future Bulletins. JEL

Fundamentals of Feldpost Collecting

Part 5. Feldpost Dispatched by Civilian Post Offices

by Jim Lewis

One of the most satisfying experiences for a Feldpost collector is to "decode" a particular item of mail so as to identify not only the unit of the sender but also the dispatching post office. In the case of military post offices using standard 28mm FELDPOST canceling devices, the post office identification is usually only possible if the item is official registered mail and the cancel includes the office's 3 digit "Kenn" (Code) number.

However, a considerable portion of Feldpost was also dispatched by civil post offices in the homeland as well as Dienstpost offices in the occupied territories. These offices used many different cancel types and these types, combined with the occasional errors made by postal clerks, often provide the clues which enable the astute Feldpost collector to identify many of these offices.

To understand how such errors occurred, one must understand that all military mail was not subject to the same regulations. For example, training, depot and administrative units located within each "Wehrkreis" (military district) of Greater Germany could show unit designations on their mail. Such mail could be deposited in mailboxes or delivered to any civilian post office, where a standard town cancel would be applied. (Fig. 1). If units of this type were stationed in occupied territories under civilian control, the town was still identified in the standard Dienstpost cancels (Fig. 2).

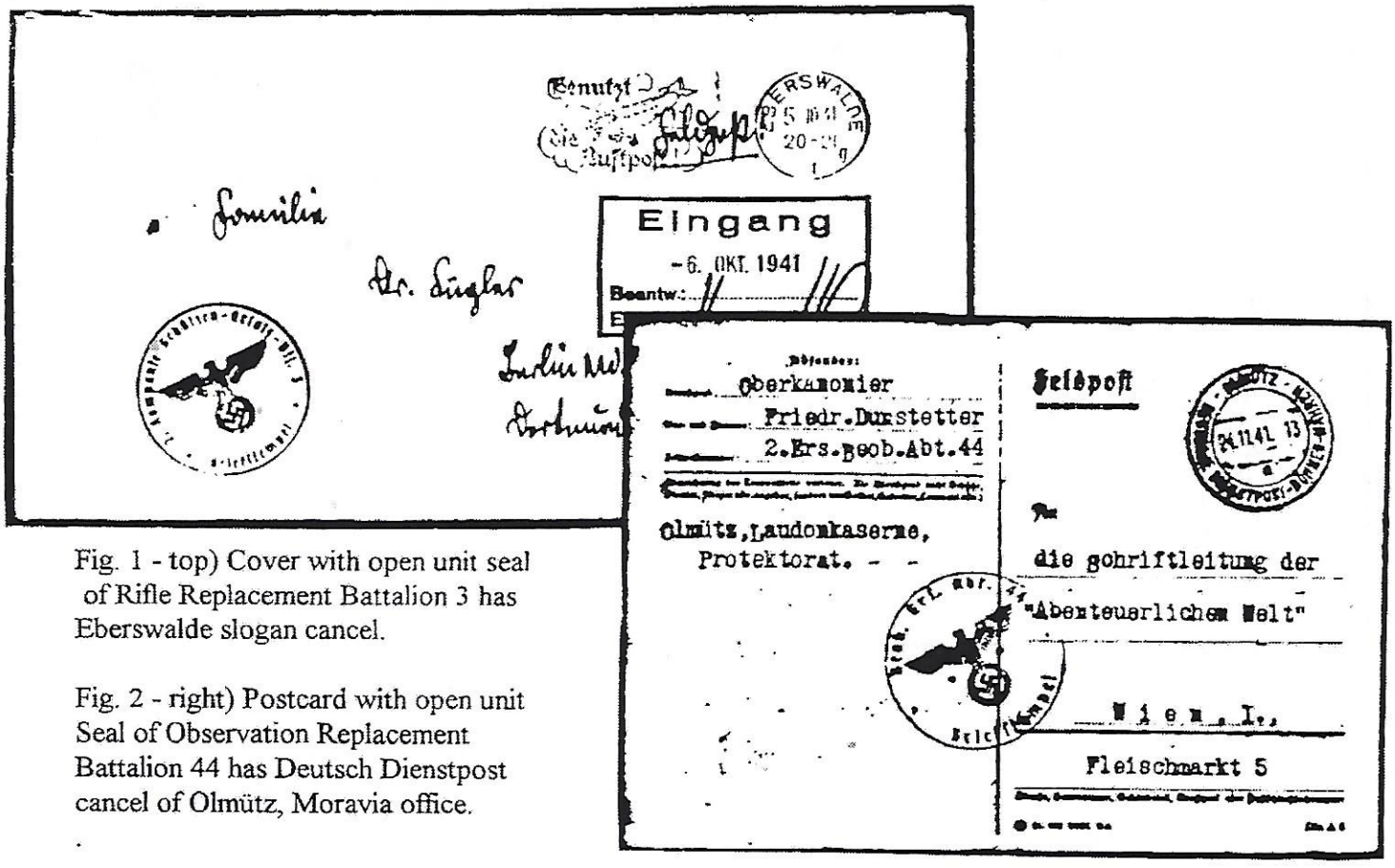


Fig. 1 - top) Cover with open unit seal of Rifle Replacement Battalion 3 has Eberswalde slogan cancel.

Fig. 2 - right) Postcard with open unit Seal of Observation Replacement Battalion 44 has Deutsch Dienstpost cancel of Olmütz, Moravia office.

Units that were under operational commands, however, were required to use 5-digit Feldpost numbers on their mail and this imposed the need for security precautions. The "Reichspostministerium" (National Postal Ministry) issued a number of "Postnachrichtenblätter"(postal directives) which detailed the handling of mail from field units at civil post offices. Such mail had to be delivered at the postal counter because the use of mailboxes was prohibited. To avoid compromising the security gained through the use of Feldpost numbers, civil post offices were told that such mail could not display a normal town cancel. Incorrectly marked mail was to be rejected & returned with the notation "Ortsgabe unzulässig" (town name inadmissible). Note: one well known exception to these security requirements was the case of certain land-based naval units which openly displayed a town name along with their 5-digit Feldpost number (see Clement #510c).

To comply with security regulations, special canceling devices without town identification known as "Stummstempel" (mute cancel) were provided to civil post offices in the homeland as well as to Dienstpost offices in Holland and northern Italy. These mute cancels conformed to the two most common types of German designs. These were "Ringsteg" (double ring/date bridge) with dimensions of 24/16/8mm [Petersen type 33m] and "Kreisbrücke" (ring/bridge/segment) with dimensions of 26/15/9mm [Petersen type 33c]. For reasons I do not know, some mute cancels have no distinguishing feature (Fig. 3), while others have one or more letters in the lower portion of the ring (Fig. 4). In terms of post office identification, the first type present an almost insurmountable problem. Conversely, many of the letter coded cancels are identified in Clement's "Kleines Handbuch der Deutschen Feldpost 1937-1945" and the majority of these seem to have been used by post offices in Austria and Holland.

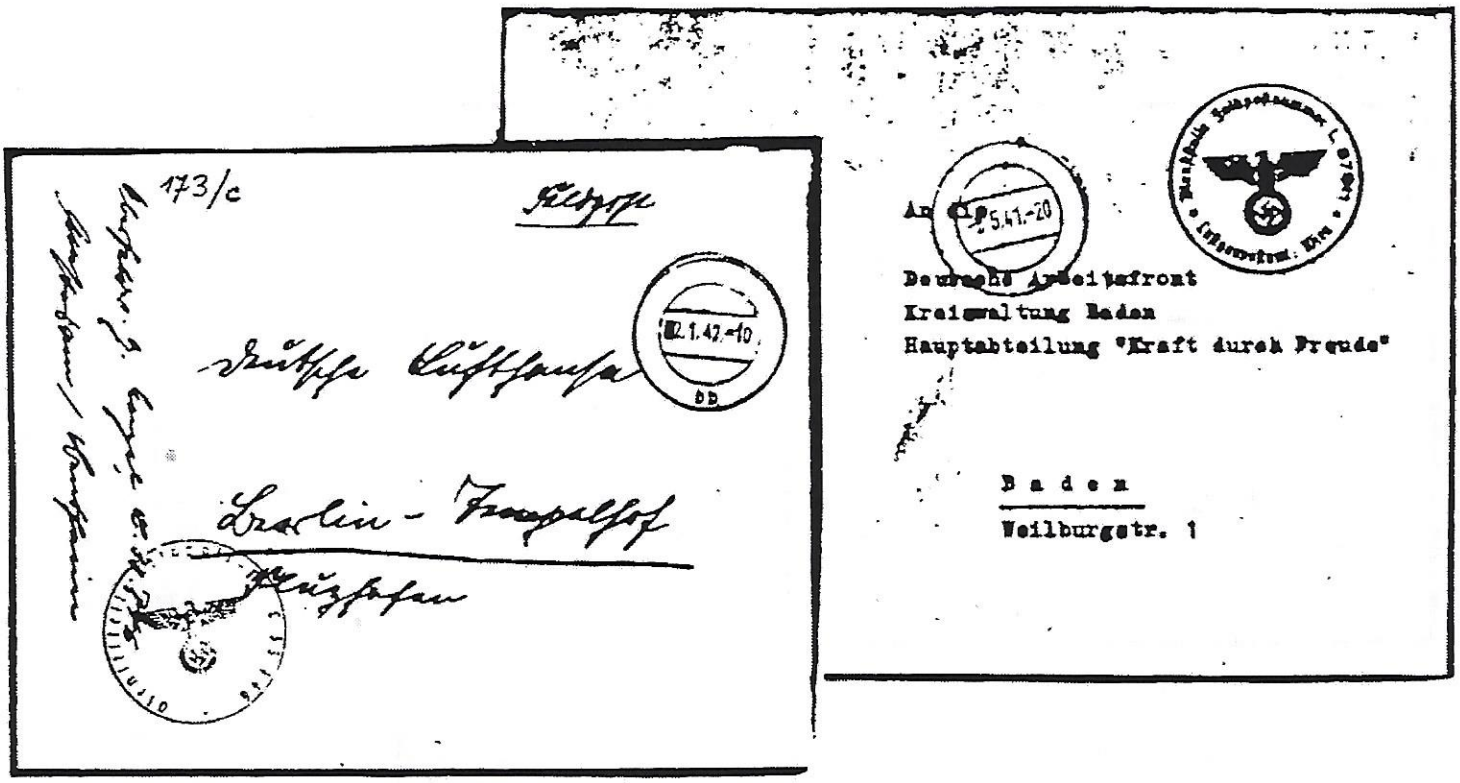
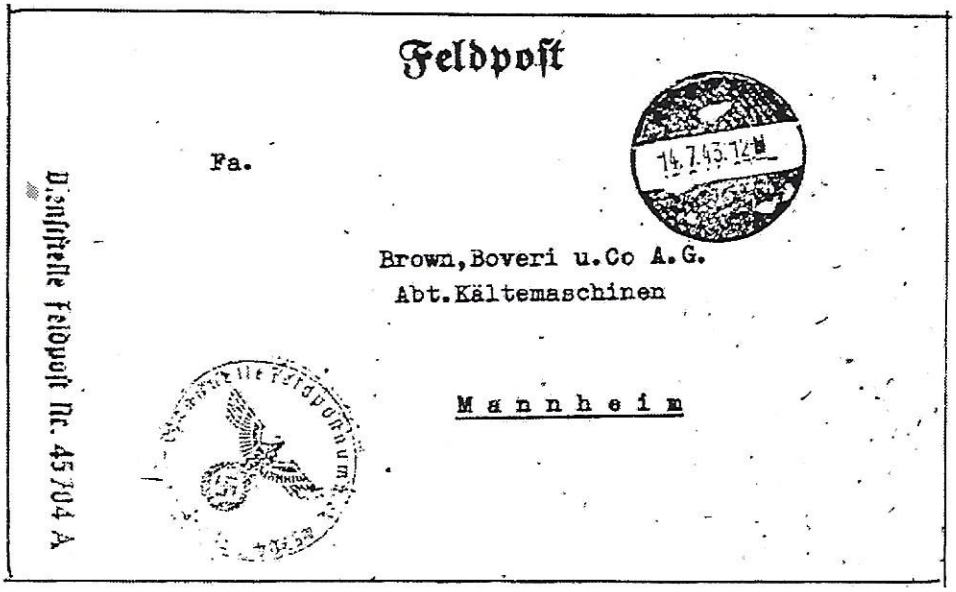


Fig. 3 – above right) Cover to German Labor Front in Baden from a Luftwaffe unit using Feldpost number address has a "Ringsteg" mute cancel with no distinguishing features.

Fig. 4 – above left) This cover to Berlin is also from Luftwaffe unit using Feldpost number address but "Ringsteg" mute cancel has code "bb" in lower portion of ring.

As noted earlier, the "Deutsch Dienstpost" (German Official Mail Service) in the eastern occupied territories handled Feldpost when Feldpost offices were not available. The same regulations applied and Dienstpost offices also used mute cancels. However, these were usually produced by altering canceling devices left behind by the previous Polish or Soviet occupants. These alterations were accomplished by several methods: 1) grinding down all of the die except the date bridge, 2) removing only the town name or 3) filling in the recessed areas with solder. These altered foreign canceling devices often retain basic design details such as stars, asterisks, alphanumeric codes, etc. Retention of such features was not a conscious effort to "code" the cancels, but rather the result of only removing the prohibited town name. These altered designs are generally considered to be the most interesting of the mute cancels as they offer a wide variety of shapes, sizes and details. Clement has identified quite a few and others identifications can be found in the eight volumes of Schultz's "Deutsche Dienstpost , 1939-1945".
The cover below (Fig. 5) has a 5-digit Felpost number unit seal and a foreign "black out" cancel in which all details of the original device except the date bar were obliterated with solder.



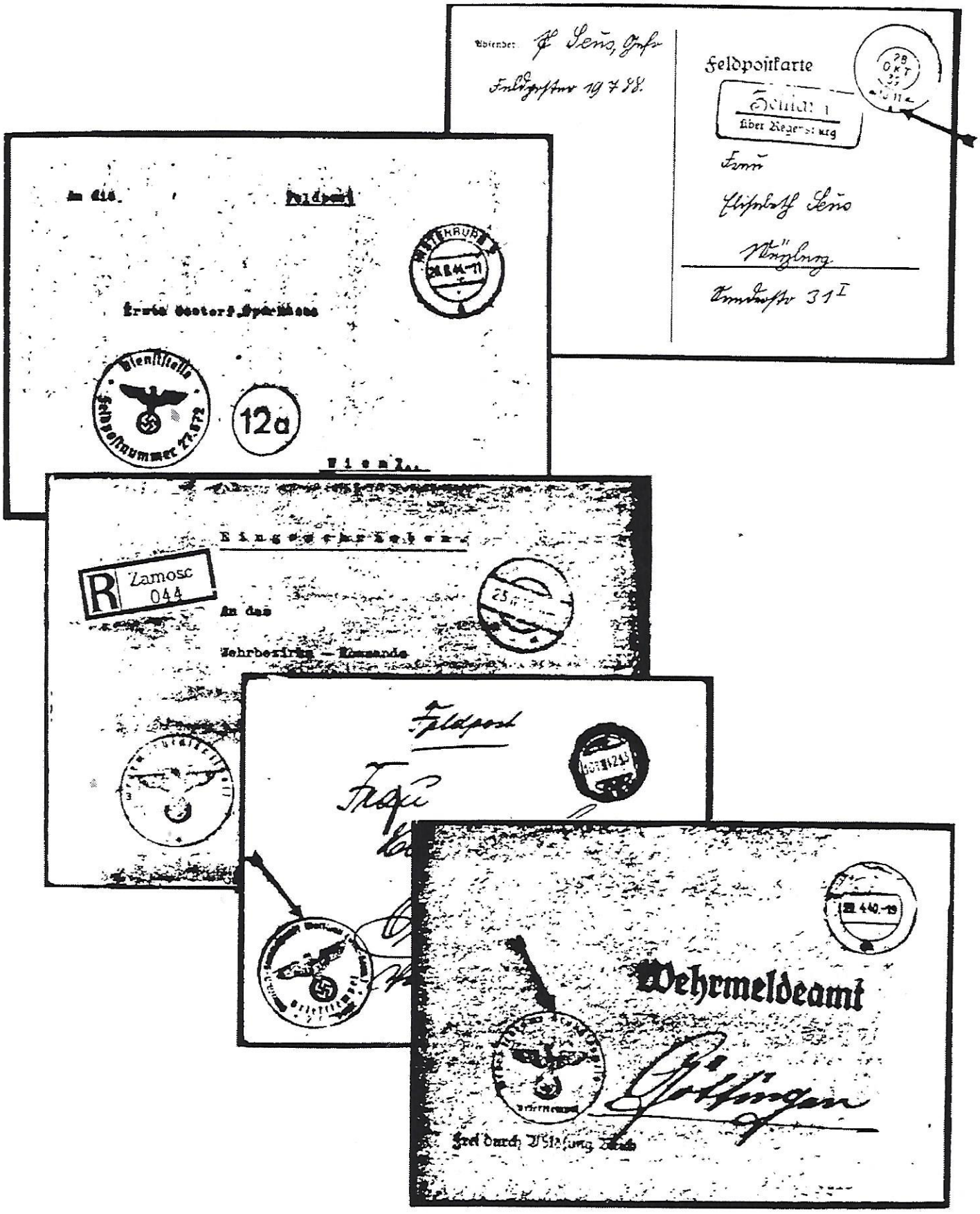
As noted at the beginning, errors by civilian postal clerks handling Feldpost often lead to fairly positive identifications of post offices. The five illustrations shown top to bottom on the following page provide these examples of such errors:

Fig. 6) Card with 5-digit Feldpost number posted at rural postal agency in Zeitlarn, Germany has "Landespost" routing stamp for forwarding to the main post office in Regensburg. Though security was compromised, the Regensburg office duly applied a mute cancel.

Fig. 7) Official military cover with 5-digit Feldpost number has a standard Westerburg town cancel.

Fig. 8) Registered cover has mute cancel but registry label of Zamosc, Poland. The mute cancel was not required because unit seal simply reads "Wehrmachdienstpost" (Armed Forces Official Mail).

Fig. 9) The Cover "black-out" mute cancel was not required on this cover from a unit with open address "Co. 2, Convalescent Collection Center Warsaw".

Fig. 10) This mute cancel was also unnecessary because the open unit seal on this cover reads "Military Records Office – Braunschweig", an administrative unit in Germany

Figs. 6 through 10 are shown below running top to bottom. Note: This article originally appeared in TRSG Bulletin # 46 and is presented here in slightly altered form.