

GERMAN OCCUPATION STAMPS OF FRANCE

1870-1914-1940

Over the course of a 70 year period (1870-1940), German troops have occupied areas of France on three occasions. As the circumstances of each invasion were different so was the manner in which postal delivery was administered. This exhibit will give examples of each along with brief historical contexts.

FRANCO-PRUSSIAN WAR 1870-1871.

Following a dispute between France and Prussia as to who would be named to the throne of Spain, France declared war on Prussia on the 19th of July 1870. Prussian chancellor Bismark had won two previous succession wars against Denmark (1864) and Austria (1866). The Treaty of Frankfurt signed on the 10th of May 1871 ended the war and resulted in:

Occupied territories



Emperor Napoleon III being captured, his rule ending and some 750,000 French dying. The French 3rd Republic being created.

German states were united under Wilhelm I, crowned Kaiser in occupied Versailles in January of 1871. Some 117,000 Germans perished.

The French territories of Alsace and part of Lorraine became part of the new Germany Empire.

An Italian prince, Amadeo I, became King of Spain.

Until the defeat of Napoleon III in September of 1870, mail service in the occupied areas was limited to military personnel (*Feldpost*). The North German post established a temporary *Administration der Posten* (AdP) for civilians in the occupied areas, starting in Nancy, then in Reims and eventually in Metz. A basic set of 7 stamps was issued by the State Printer in Berlin. The first to appear, on the 6th of September 1870, were the 1c (250,000), 2c (300,000), 4c (2.3m), 10c (7.5m) and 20c (2.8m) in colours corresponding to the French stamps. The 5c (4m) and 25c (850,000) appeared later on the 9th of December. All issues were withdrawn on the 1st of January 1872. Of interest is the fact that the stamps have no country identification and are in French only.

Network pointing up.



Feldpost Relais



Feldpost Relais



Im Elsass 4.8.71



Colmar 30 Oct.



Colmar 11.4.71



Muhsen im Elsass



Thann

Network pointing down.



Lettst 18.12.70



Colmar 12 Octbr



Beside these two varieties, Michel catalogue also mentions printers in Geneva (Fournier) and Paris issuing counterfeits of this series. Inconsistent networking, garish colours and paper differences help identify the counterfeits.

During the war, mail was successfully exchanged within the occupied areas and toward Germany and Austria. Mail headed to free France had to transit via Belgium or Switzerland and, for a short time, via England (such transit letters are rare). Following the armistice of the 28th of January 1871 and an agreement, signed on the 4th of February, direct mail links were re-established.

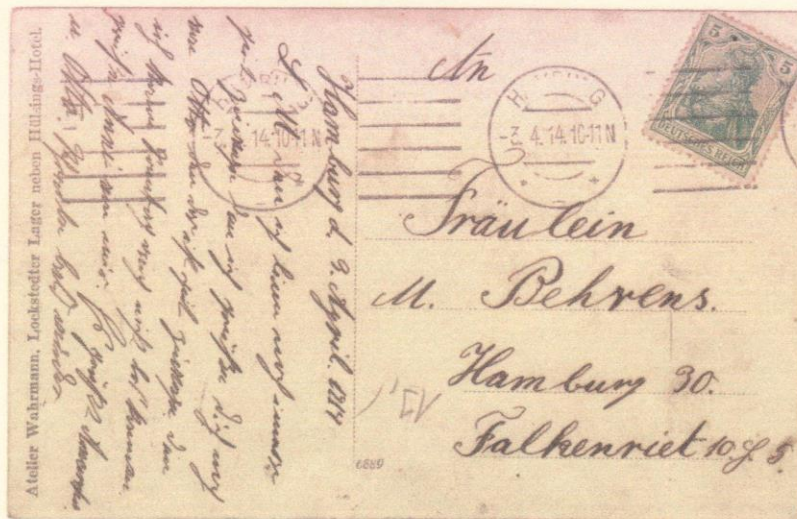
But as a result of France not recognizing the German postal administration in the occupied areas, correspondence between free and occupied France needed double franking or *Doppelfrankatur*: a 20 centimes French stamp and a 20 centimes stamp issued by the German authorities and vice-versa. It was not until the 25th May 1872 when a signed postal agreement between the two countries brought the situation back to normal.

1885 REPRODUCTIONS



In 1885, Germany allowed the State Printing to reproduce the occupation stamps that were issued in September of 1870. This came about following an offer of a stamp dealer named Wiering/Hamburg to cover all production costs and to contribute 7000 marks to the Kaiser Wilhelm Foundation (a social fund for Post and Telegraph employees). A total of 10,000 stamps were printed in double sheets of 100 (2x50) for the seven different values. These reproductions were not valid for postage and are recognizable by the positioning of the letter "P". They are also referred to as "official imitations" or *Nachdrucke* in German and *Réimpressions* in French.

THE "GREAT WAR" 1914-1918.



A real photo postcard depicting a group of 39 German soldiers along with two young girls. A sign reads *Nach getaner Arbeit ist gut Ruhn! 26.3.14* or "Rest is good after work is done". Postally used and franked with a 5pf Germania issue and machine cancelled with a Hamburg circular date stamp 3.4.14.

Four months later, to the day, Germany declared war on France. A war that lasted over four years and involved over 70 million military personnel, 39 million of which were either killed, wounded or missing in action.

Once Germany's major offensive to the west was halted, postal facilities were established in the occupied areas which varied according to the location of the front lines. This administration was referred to as *Etappengebiet West* and covered the areas between the western front and the *Generalgouvernement Belgien*. The Germania and Pictorial issues were used and overprinted with franc and centime values and were for the use of the local population beginning on the 1st of December 1916. Overprinted *Belgien* stamps were also valid in the occupied areas of France but only until the 14th of December 1916.



In total 12 different values were issued. Used examples bear the cancellation *Postüberwachungsstelle* (Post Control Body).

WORLD WAR II 1939-1945.

In the case of WWII, the speedy signing of an Armistice after only six weeks of fighting gave France a semblance of autonomy and, with it, continued authority to issue stamps in most of its territory. The following pages will describe the many subtleties that this would involve.

Dunkerque



For a six week period (1 July to 10 August 1940), German authorities allowed 30 local post offices in the Dunkerque area of northern France to re-establish civilian mail. This was limited to local mail using current French stamps overprinted with *Besetztes Gebiet Nordfrankreich* (occupied area Northern France). The overprint was applied beforehand to pairs of stamps to correspond to the existing rates for post cards (80c) and letters (1f).

The cover above shows this overprint applied to two 50c Peace issues for a letter travelling some 15 kms within the occupied *Département du Nord*, leaving Cassel on 5-7-40 to Rubrouck. An arrival CDS on the back shows it transited via Arnèke, the closest post office to destination. Certified by both Pierre Mayer and Bertrand Sinais.

Alsace and Lorraine (*Elsaß Lothringen*)

Following the German victory of France in 1871, these areas were incorporated into the newly formed German Empire but then returned to France following the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. Not surprisingly Germany quickly reclaimed Alsace and Lorraine as part the *Deutsches Reich* in 1940.

Elsaß



Lothringen



In August of 1940, a 16 stamp set was issued for each of the two regions using the 1933 Hindenburg medallion with an *Elsaß* or *Lothringen* overprint. From the 15th of July 1941 to their withdrawal on the 31st of December 1941, these stamps along with the similar *Luxemburg* variety were valid in all three areas. As of the 1st of January 1942 German stamps were used. Above is a representative selection.

The commercial over below shows two 12pf Hindenburg stamps with the *Lothringen* (Lorraine) overprint with the 24pf total covering the domestic German rate. It was sent from *Kneuttingen* (Knutange) to Metz, some 30 kms to the south and bears a 13.3.41 CDS and a 77 censor marking.



Following the June 22nd 1940 Armistice and the creation of the Vichy government under Marshall Pétain, France maintained the appearance of being in charge of the post office and the issuing of stamps. But in reality, many changes were being implemented that showed that the German authorities were calling the shots:

République Française to Postes françaises

Beginning on the 10th of July 1940, France was referred to as *État Français* and stamps would simply state *Postes Françaises* or France with never a reference to the Republic. This can be seen by comparing the first (1938-41) and second (1942) printings of the *Mercure* issue designed and engraved by Georges Hourriez. All were withdrawn on the 12th of May 1945.

1st Printing: République



2nd Printing: Postes



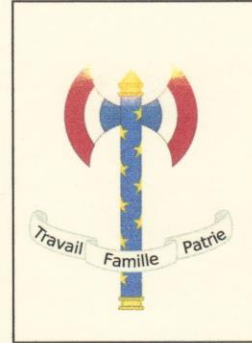
France Overseas Issue

An interesting example is the *La France Outre-Mer* issue of 1940, 1941 and 1945 with the RF symbol blotted out in the 1941 occupation issue. Worth noting is the fact that it was only in the 1945 issue that *Outre-Mer* was spelt correctly.



République Française to État Français

By accepting the terms of the 1940 Armistice, Pétain wanted to avoid the death and destruction inflicted upon France during the First War. Adopting the “*voie de la collaboration*”, he attempted to create a new French State based on new slogans and symbols. Gone is the well-known “*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*”, replaced by “*Travail, Famille, Patrie*”, with the emblem of the Frank battle axe (*francisque*).



These two strips best illustrate the concept of the new French State or *État Français*.

Semi-postals issued for the National Relief.



Issued: 8.2.1943 and withdrawn 23.10.1943. Quantity: 1,250,000 strips of five.
Designed and engraved: Charles Mazelin and Jules Piel.

Issued to commemorate Pétain's 87th birthday (23 April), these stamps are the only ones to state *État Français*.



Issued: 7.6.1943 and withdrawn 23.10.1943; Quantity: 1,075,000 strips of five.
Designed and engraved: Mazelin Lemagny, Cami, Munier, Feltesse et Serres.

City and Regional Crests

A less political series showed city and provincial crests. This approach would allow the French to identify with their region but not their country. Again here no mention of the *République*, France is referred to as *Postes Françaises* in the 1941, 1942 and 1943 issues or simply **France** for the 1944 issues.

1941



Nancy



Lille



Rouen



Bordeaux

1942



Grenoble



Angers



Dijon



Limoges

1943



Lyonnais



Bretagne



Provence



Île de France

1944



Flandre



Languedoc



Orléans



Normandie

Légion Tricolore

The Vichy government created the *Légion Tricolore* which would fight within the German command but for French causes, such as in North Africa. Two commemorative semi-postal stamps were issued on the 12th of October 1942 and withdrawn on the 23rd of May 1943. A total of 120,000 sheets of 20 strips were printed. They were designed by Éric and engraved by Pierre Gandon. One of the 1f.20 stamps would cover the domestic postcard rate while both (2f.40) would cover the international postcard rate.



Following the Allied landings in North Africa in late 1942 and more importantly the D-Day invasion of June 1944, France gradually reclaimed autonomy over the postal administration which was done, not surprisingly, in stages and on six different fronts:

The colonies, the Algerian issues, the American issues, the British issues, the French issues including the myriad of regional overprints and finally full liberation and the resumption of traditional definitive and commemorative issues.

All but the American issues were printed under the instruction of the *Comité Français de Libération Nationale (CFLN)* headed by Generals de Gaulle and Giraud. Established on the 3rd of June 1943, it would be recognized as France's provisional government one year later.