

# **Air Mail to and from Germany from the End of World War II until October 1948**

**Walter Farber, CCC  
Collectors Club of New York, Jan. 21, 2015**

## **Historical Framework**

### **Part I**

#### **End of WW-II: Air Mail Überroller**

- April 2, 1945 The last published flight schedule of Lufthansa still listed six operational air mail routes between Germany and Scandinavia, Prague, Zagreb, Venice, and Milan. Air mail service to Switzerland had already been terminated in January, 1945. I do not know when the remaining connections officially or effectively came to an end. The air mail route to Spain (and Portugal) via Munich-Barcelona does not seem to be mentioned, but continued to operate, probably as the last one, until April 18/20.
- April 18, 1945 Spain revokes landing rights for Lufthansa, effectively ending what was probably the last air mail service to and from Germany. The last returning flight from Barcelona to Munich seems to have taken off on April 19 or 20.
- April 30, 1945 München, where the last operational German censorship office handling foreign mail was located, is occupied by the US Army. All mail still found in the postal system and at the OKW censorship office is impounded.
- April–May 1945 Postal service in parts of British occupied Northern Germany continues uninterrupted, and even Air Mail POW letters to foreign countries were seemingly still accepted.
- May 7, 1945 Unconditional capitulation of Germany signed in Reims, repeated in Berlin-Karlshorst on May 8, effective May 9, 12:01 am.
- [Late Summer 1945 Beginning of censoring and delivery of impounded “Überroller” mail in Germany by the Allies. Some letters from foreign countries are delivered as early as late 1945 and early 1946.
- April 1, 1946 Resumption of civilian foreign mail service to and from Germany, followed by the delivery of the remaining censored “Überroller” foreign mail, including air mail, in Germany.]

## **Part II**

### **Incoming Air Mail May 1945 – August 1946 and afterwards**

- May 1945 – March 31, 1946 No civilian mail service to Germany from foreign countries. Obviously this includes civilian air mail. Some exceptions were granted to POWs, Internees, and DPs, to receive mail through Allied field post services, potentially also including air mail.
- April 1, 1946 Resumption of restricted civilian foreign mail service to Germany, but officially still no air mail service into Germany. Mail that was transported by air to European destinations (e.g., London), and then forwarded by surface mail to Germany, can occur.
- May 18, 1946 First civilian flight New York – Frankfurt – Berlin (American Overseas Airlines), but officially still no air mail service. After this date, covers from the USA to Germany that were franked for air mail service are known, but it remains unclear whether any of these were actually flown.
- August 28, 1946 First flights New York – Frankfurt – Berlin with air mail service into Germany (AOA and PAA). Mail was only accepted at Morgan Station in New York, and flown to Berlin (no mail was unloaded in Frankfurt). All covers were marked with a special FFC cachet and Berlin arrival cancels.
- After this date, air mail to Germany seems to have been generally accepted from any foreign country, but in the beginning, its use was still hampered by the small number of airlines and foreign airports serving Germany. No further postal regulations or limitations are known.

## **Part III**

### **Private Air Mail From Germany, 1945 – April 30, 1948**

- May 1945–March 31, 1946 No civilian mail service to foreign destinations for civilians in Germany. Some exceptions were granted, especially to POWs and DPs, sometimes using the Allied field post systems, and occasionally including air mail; use by German civilians was strictly forbidden. Normal use of field post / air mail privileges by servicemen, accredited humanitarian organizations, and foreign missions to the Control Council of Germany are not part of this presentation.
- April 1, 1946 Resumption of civilian foreign mail service for Germans, with many restrictions. For instance, there was still no air mail service available for the general public. Again, exceptions for POWs and DPs using Allied couriers or field post air mail channels are known.
- Until the end of April 1948, and for the French and Soviet Zones even longer, the ban on civilian air mail going out of Germany remained unchanged. Incoming mail from most countries increasingly used air mail connections, but sending air mail from Germany remained impossible, because the freight costs would have to be paid in “hard” or convertible currency, which

Germany, i.e. the Deutsche Post, could not supply. In this period, several more or less ingenious schemes to get the mail off the ground were tried, but few of them succeeded.

Nov. 21, 1947 The Saar is separated from the French Zone, but according to international law remained a part of Germany. Soon after the “hard” currency ffr was introduced, air mail service from the Saar to all countries was resumed on 23.2.48. This is the first post-WW II civilian air mail service from German ground available for the general public.

#### **Part IV**

#### **German Business Air Mail before 1.5.1948 (“JEIA Forerunners”)**

- Dec. 2, 1946 The document “Economic Fusion of American and British Zones of Occupation in Germany,” creating the Bi-Zone, is signed in New York by Secretary of State J.F. Byrnes and the British Foreign Minister, E. Bevin.
- Feb. 2, 1947 The “Joint Export-Import Agency” (JEIA) for the Bi-Zone is created by the Bipartite Board in Frankfurt.
- 1947-1948 Some German branch offices of British and American firms located in Germany are privileged to use the field post systems for their foreign air mail letters without JEIA involvement. This practice continues during the “JEIA period” after May 1, 1948
- Fall 1947 – April 1948 JEIA offices in the Bi-Zone forward important German export-import related correspondence worldwide by air via APO and FPO channels (so-called “JEIA Forerunners”). While covers from Hamburg are generally treated as “official,” and thus were postage free, other offices often required franking at the current US or British air mail rates. This practice also continues briefly into the “JEIA period” after May 1, 1948.
- Jan. 21, 1948 JEIA merges with the Joint Foreign Exchange Agency (JFEA). Under chairman J. Logan (USA), the agency manages a fund in “hard” currency, provided through the Marshall Plan, to further German export-import activities. This fund eventually will pay for the hard currency subsidies needed for air mail service (see part V).
- May 1, 1948 Beginning of JEIA and IRC air mail in the Bi-Zone (see parts V-VII).

#### **Part V**

#### **JEIA Subsidized Business Mail (1.5. – 19.10.1948)**

Apr. 15, 1948 The Bipartite Control Office authorizes certain categories of air mail service for Germans to foreign destinations starting May 1, 1948, and publishes the “JEIA – Operational Memorandum 23” regulating issue and control of authorization labels for export/import firms (“JEIA stamps”). One day later, a German version of these regulations is published in Amtsblatt der HVPFW 20, no. 93/1948.

- May 1, 1948 Admission of air mail business letters up to 100g with JEIA labels. Letters are taxed at the basic foreign letter rate + air mail surtaxe of 50 Rpf. per 20g (Europe) or 100 Rpf. per 10g (Overseas): rate period 1.  
 Postcards and additional services (registration and/or special delivery) are neither specifically mentioned, nor banned; examples are rare. There were no regulations regarding cancellation or non-cancellation of the JEIA labels, which regional postal authorities thus could handle at their discretion. The labels were distributed through “Außenhandelskontore” (foreign trade offices of the individual states) which had full discretion to grant or deny the privilege. The offices were encouraged to be “liberal” but expected to check that only firms which actually contributed to German export/import business were admitted. Unauthorized use or further distribution of the labels led to immediate loss of privileges. The cost of this air mail service in hard currency was covered by the JEIA fund.
- June 21, 1948 Currency reform in the Western Zones. Germany now has a “hard” or convertible currency again, and also new stamps in Dpf. denomination. JEIA labels and rates stay the same: rate period 2.
- Sept. 1, 1948 Significant reduction of postal rates, cutting air mail surtaxes in half. JEIA letters now cost the reduced foreign letter rate + air mail surtaxe of 25 Dpf. per 20g (Europe) or 50 Dpf. per 10g (Overseas): rate period 3.
- Oct. 18, 1948 The French Zone counterpart to JEIA, the “Office du commerce extérieur” (OFFICOMEX) is integrated into JEIA, but no JEIA labels were distributed in the French Zone in the following two days, and no JEIA letters from there are possible.
- Oct. 20, 1948 Air mail without permits, admission labels, or IRCs, is now available for everyone in all three Western Zones. Air mail rates stay the same as in JEIA rate period 3.

## **Part VI**

### **Other Air Mail Using JEIA Labels (1.5. – 19.10.1948)**

Very little is known about legitimate but non-export/import related usages of JEIA labels during the JEIA period. Existing covers show that JEIA labels were also used (and thus probably distributed) in some DP camps, and by private and government agencies involved in foreign relations but not directly in foreign trade. Only for the use of JEIA stamps at “Devisenpoststellen” at US and British military installations, and possibly also at major hotels with mainly Allied clientele, there is some secondary documentary evidence. Most JEIA covers with private senders’ addresses which do not belong to any of these categories are probably illegitimate usages of the labels, although it is often hard to tell whether there might be a hidden business connection that prompted the Außenhandelskontore to issue a permit.

- 7.5.48 Air mail covers up to 100g can be mailed by foreigners associated with the Allied forces at special branch offices, the “Devisenpoststellen” of the

Deutsche Post, which have special permission to accept \$, £, (American) MPCs, and (British) BAFSVs. – In the published regulations, there is no indication how such air mail pieces would be marked as legitimate, but it seems safe to assume that in many cases JEIA stamps were also used for this purpose. Issuing a special “hard currency” air mail stamp, or perfining JEIA labels for use at the Devisenpoststellen, was at one time considered, but these ideas were never realized.

1.10.48 Payment for “Devisen” air mail is now restricted to US currency (\$ or MPC), and probably also to the American Zone (regulations unclear).

## **Part VII**

### **IRC Air Mail: FFCs, Aerograms, and Ersatzaerogramme (1.5. – 19.10.1948)**

May 1, 1948 Parallel to the JEIA subsidized business correspondence, private air mail for Germans is also authorized, but restricted to air letters (aerograms) preprinted with the text “Taxe Perçue 100 Pf. / Deutsche Post,” to be purchased at the Post Office for two IRCs (rate period 1). Incidentally, the IRCs had to be provided by the foreign correspondent, since they were not available in Germany.

Although no official document that actually says so has been found yet, it is generally assumed that, in the rather common case that a post office did not have aerograms in stock, private letters up to 5g (or maybe 10g? Examples weighing between 6g and 9g are known) were accepted as “Ersatzaerogramme,” the postage for which also had to be paid for with two IRCs. It seems that such envelopes were supposed to be franked with a handstamp or handwritten note similar to the preprinted aerograms, but often stamps were also used for franking. These should have been affixed only by the post office in exchange for the IRCs. In spite of this, philatelic frankings, most probably affixed before the “Ersatzaerogramme” were handed in at the post office, also occur. Pre-franked air letters could not be posted through mail boxes because of the IRC requirement.

Aerograms were also available at the Devisenpoststellen, and although no pertinent regulations are known, occasionally “Ersatz-aerogramme” were also sent from there by paying the postage in hard currency instead of IRCs.

On May 1, 1948 only, special purple FFC cachets were issued for all mail flights that actually left Germany on that day (Frankfurt to New York, London, Zürich, Prague, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, and Brussels; Hamburg to New York, London, Copenhagen, and Brussels). All such covers had to be prepaid by sending two IRCs along with the unfranked covers to Frankfurt or Hamburg, where they were supposed to be uniformly franked with a 1 RM “Dove” stamp and marked with the commemorative cachet. These FFCs thus in fact are FDC “Ersatzaerogramme.” As said before, it was

very hard for Germans to get IRCs from their correspondents by surface mail on short notice, but large numbers of FFC covers were ordered by American dealers and collectors for the flights to the USA. According to unofficial tallies, at least 5,586 such covers were flown on the three flights from Frankfurt to New York, and another 375 were flown from Hamburg to New York. Other flights were used much less, and covers are uncommon to rare. At the low end, the flight Hamburg–Brussels is believed to have carried a total of just 12 covers. Given the circumstances, it is almost impossible to find commercial covers from these flights. Forgeries also exist, most of them easily recognizable by the color of the cachet, or by their fancy frankings.

- June 21, 1948 Currency reform in the Western Zones. Germany now has its own “hard” or convertible currency, the DM. The rate for aerograms and Ersatzaerogramme of 100 Dpf., as well as the IRC requirement, stay the same (rate period 2).
- July 15, 1948 Domestic air mail service within Germany, requiring an air mail surcharge of 5 Dpf. per 20g, becomes available to everyone. Since no IRCs were needed for this service, it was possible to send foreign mail with the instruction “air mail within Germany only,” or similar. This especially made sense for mail to the port cities of Bremen and Hamburg if it was desirable that the letter reached a certain boat to an overseas destination with few or irregular scheduled departures, potentially cutting days from the mail’s time in surface transit to the port city.
- Sept. 1, 1948 Significant reduction of postal rates (rate period 3). The old aerograms imprinted “100 Pf.” continued to be sold unchanged, but now for 60 Dpf., and could now be purchased for only one IRC + 30 Dpf. in cash. Presumably, the same is true for Ersatzaerogramme for which the rate also went down to 60 Dpf.
- Oct. 20, 1948 Air mail letters up to 100g can be sent without permits, admission labels, or IRCs, by everyone in all three Western Zones. Aerograms of the Bi-Zone are now also valid in the French Zone, but are not sold there before January 1949.

## **Part VIII**

### **After Oct. 20, 1948: Epilogue**

Starting on October 20, 1948, civilian air mail without the need for authorization or IRCs was again a normal fact of life for all Germans living in the three Western Zones, since air mail from the French Zone also began on that day. To close this overview, and if time permits, I will show a few unusual covers used thereafter, but still relating to the problems and regulations of the preceding periods. The process of normalization was by no means over yet. Many individual services, like higher weights, printed matter, parcels, etc., still needed to be authorized for international air mail. Air mail from Berlin would follow soon with a host of problems and collectable details, and finally, the GDR would also

resume worldwide air mail service. In West Germany, the system of Devisenpoststellen providing cheap and fast air mail service by the Deutsche Post for foreign nationals and Allied service personnel, parallel to the still existing APO and FPO air mail connections, still needs a lot of research. And then there are rates, rates, rates ... ever complicated, and ever changing. Collecting of postal history never ends!