

The British forged a German label, but who paid the price?

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ON April 18, 1942, the German *Feldpostdienst* (field post service) started a new service, a dedicated airmail initially for soldiers on the Eastern Front only. Oddly enough, this service was only announced on April 24, 1942, through a special announcement by the German postal service.

In order to facilitate this new service, the German field post issued a blue *Luftfeldpost* label, to be used on mail that would not be sent by truck and train. Instead, letters with this label would be transported on a dedicated Junker-52 plane, which was depicted on the label, using two different airmail routes.

A third airmail route, serving the southern portion of the German advance into Russia, was started on May 9, 1942. This route was later extended, as described in my article, "Extending the Southern German Airmail Route in 1942: Short but not Sweet," published in the November 2021 edition of *The American Philatelist*.

Given the vast distances of Russia, the German troops were far away from their hometowns and this new service meant that soldiers would have faster communication with their loved ones, which improved morale. Much of the Eastern Front ran about 800 miles from the Baltic Sea south to the Black Sea.

Figure 1 shows an early use of the military airmail label for the *Luftfeldpostdienst*, namely one that was mailed on April 20, 1942. I call it a label rather than a stamp as it carries no denomination.

This cover was mailed just two days after the start of the service, though not all soldiers received their *Luftfeldpostmarken* on the starting date. For example, a soldier named

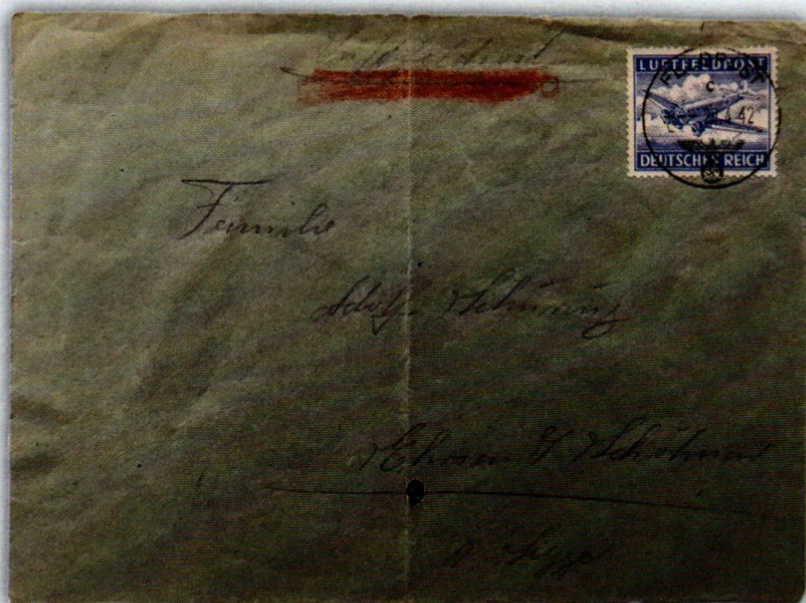


Figure 1. A first day of use with a *Luftfeldpost* label, mailed on April 20, 1942.

Üblacker wrote on May 17, 1942 to his parents and said that he received his first special label on May 15, 1942, at which point he immediately sent them some, so they could send him mail.

Back to our cover, though. Adolf Schüring sent this letter to his family, who lived in Ehrsen bei Schötmar in the Free State of Lippe, a former principality that was incorporated into the *Deutsches Reich*.

Coming from a family that made furniture, Adolf was serving in the 2. *Kompanie* of *Pionier Bataillon* 675, which was subordinated to the 16. *Infanterie Division*. There were different types of pioneer units and the type of pioneer unit that Schüring served in was regarded as a separate combat arm trained in construction and the demolition of fortifications. However, they were often used as specialist infantry, supporting the regular infantry in clearing mines while under fire.

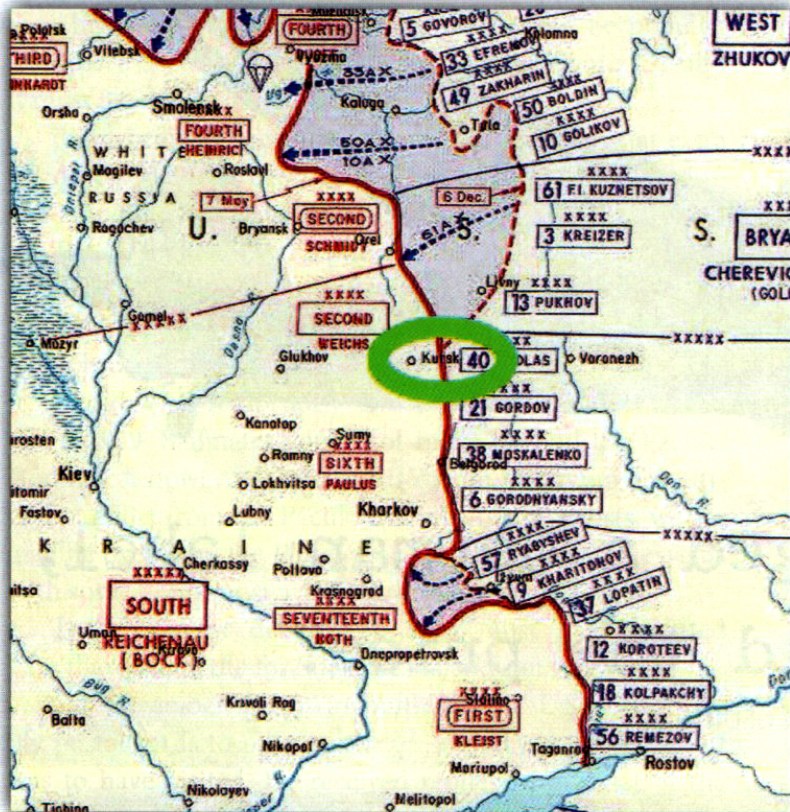


Figure 2. A map shows part of the front in 1942 where German and Soviet troops were in pitched battle.

At the moment of writing his letter, Schüring's unit was east of Kursk, not far from Ukraine (Figure 2) in Russia. This unit was at the central front and the letter was transported on the first flight to this part of the front. The first documented flight on April 18 was to the northern part of the front, with the second flight going to the central part of the front. It is thus a first day cover.

The map gives a good sense of the vast distances in Russia, but also of the massive number of German troops that were needed to man the frontline and in the supporting units behind the frontline.

Each of them received four *Luftfeldpostmarken* per month, with the expectation that she or he would send at least half of them back to friends and family, so they would receive their mail faster. (Female nurses and administrative personnel also served, albeit typically far behind the front line.) This was the only way for people at home to get these

labels, since they were not available at post offices. It is not surprising that the Germans printed a massive amount of these blue labels. Indeed, the initial number of labels that were sent to Russia on April 13 and 14, 1942 was 20 million!

On February 26, 1943, a memo was produced within the Special Operations Executive (SOE), which was a secret British World War II organization that was to conduct espionage, sabotage, and reconnaissance in occupied Europe.

In this memo it was proposed to create forgeries of the *Luftfeldpost* label, with the intent to "hamper the German field postal authorities, who, as part of a campaign for the isolation of the front from the home country, are cutting down, as far as possible, field post in general," according to a book by Lee Richards about psychological warfare against the Nazis.

Indeed, the memo expected that this would "swell the volume of airmail, that is burdening the German airmail to an extent undesired by the German authorities". For this purpose, 237,500 forged *Luftfeldpost* labels were printed.

Figure 3 shows the original (German) *Luftfeldpost* label on the left with the British forgery next to it. Can you spot the differences? There are four main differences, ignoring paper discoloration, and the solution can be found on page 53 of this issue.

Clearly the British were capable of printing an excellent forgery, so why was the forgery not without mistakes? Such mistakes could jeopardize whoever was going to distribute these forgeries in occupied Europe.

Furthermore, could 237,500 copies really disrupt the German airmail service, when it was transporting millions of letters each month?

I believe that notwithstanding the memo, it was never meant to distribute these forgeries and indeed there is no proof that any of them were used or that it was even attempted to distribute them. Indeed, how would they be distributed?

In order for the German airmail service to be disrupted, all of the stamps would have needed to enter the mail system at the same time and even then, it would have a minimal impact.



Figure 3. The legitimate *Luftfeldpost* label (left) and a fake printed in the United Kingdom.

However, they were distributed among stamp collectors after the war, which coincidentally could not have been done if the forgery was perfect, which the British would have been able to do.

At the moment of writing this article individual stamps can typically be bought for around \$100. In conclusion, I think that the answer to the question posed in the title of this article is: The stamp collectors – including myself, who owns two singles of this forged label – paid the price.

Resource

Richards, Lee. *The Black Art: British Clandestine Psychological Warfare Against the Third Reich* (2010), www.psywar.org.

The Author

Tom G. Geurts, Ph.D., fellow of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, currently holds the William H. Dunkak Chair in Finance at Bucknell University and enjoys writing stamp articles based on his extensive *Luftfeldpost* collection as a pleasant distraction from writing his more academic articles. In particular, he is very pleased with the articles that he wrote with his brother, John, for the premier Dutch stamp magazine, *Filateli*, especially their article on Dutch citizens serving in the German army on the eastern front and their use of the *Luftfeldpostdienst*. They also published a follow-up article in the premier Belgian stamp magazine, *De Postzegel*, on Belgian citizens serving in the German army on the eastern front and their use of the *Luftfeldpostdienst*. This is his third article for *The American Philatelist*.

Barang yang dipalsu targetnya barang mahal supaya dapat banyak besar keuntungan.

Hati-hatilah selalu membeli barang mahal.

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Selamat membaca.

