

Prisoner of war airmail.

During World War 2, most mail between prisoners-of-war and their home countries was carried by surface transport and was conveyed free of charge. However, for those prisoners who were interned far from their home country, mail could often be carried by air upon payment of an airmail surcharge, although it has to be said that in wartime conditions the airmail transit time was often as long or even longer than surface conveyance.

The Germans were, as always, very correct in their application of the air surcharge, normally indicated by the use of a "Taxe Perçue handstamp on both Allied prisoners' outgoing mail and their own civilian mail being sent to German prisoners in Allied hands. Adhesive stamps were allowed on mail leaving Germany only after November 1944 although examples before that date can be found. Incoming mail, particularly to Stalag Luft III from America had the adhesives removed to check for hidden messages.

The Italians also applied the rules correctly; the surface rate being deemed free and only the air surcharge applied. This did not seem to be the case for Italian prisoners-of-war in East Africa, where the charge applied to prisoners' homeward mail was the full equivalent civilian rate of 1/3d.

For prisoners-of-war in India, mainly Italian, the air surcharge applied was the 8 Anna rate also applied to mail from Allied Forces. Incoming and outgoing POW mail was subject to censorship, mainly carried out in Bombay although Dehra Dun Camp appears to have had its own censor cachets. Incoming mail from Italy usually had the adhesives removed by the censor, and determining the air surcharge applied in Italy is an ongoing project not helped by the missing stamps! Adhesives on outgoing mail were sometimes cancelled by a boxed censor handstamp, or occasionally by an intaglio censor seal.

Wartime routing of airmail was often a haphazard affair, with airmails on occasion taking as long as surface mail. Routes changed according to the combat conditions at the time, with mail to and from Italy taking tortuous routes to India via rail and air links operated by combatant nations and neutral countries alike. Mail to Axis prisoners and internees in Australia had particularly varied journeys, beginning with eastward transport via the "Horseshoe" and later westward via FAM-18 and trans-Pacific surface mail.

One can find rare delights in this area of collecting, such as stampless airmail covers to German internees from the "Graf Spee" held on Martin Garcia Island and mail from German prisoners in Canada sent to Uruguay. When Axis prisoners were moved from camp to camp and country to country, tracing a cover's progress can be a taxing business involving up to a dozen reference books open at the same time and a good memory for dates and places. However, I can't think of a better way to keep one's mind alive, and I trust that this small display will tickle someone's fancy.

Comment, corrections and/or criticism are welcomed, indeed anticipated within the S.P.H.

John Wilson. Buxton. March 2008

Prisoner of War Airmail

Germany to United States 1941

Letter sheet from Oflag VII D Tittmoning, a castle on the Austrian border similar to Colditz, to Linden, New Jersey. Card dated 20.8.41 and cancelled by "dumb" canceller 22.8.41. Sent by airmail with prepayment of 65Rpf shown by German Taxe Percue stamp and manuscript amount. Oflag VII D censor and letter opened and re-sealed by PC90 Examiner 6753 in Bermuda en route.

The letter sheet should have been carried free of surface rate charge but the camp clerk actually charged the full surface + air rate of 65 Rpf.

Rate paid: 65 Rpf. clipper rate via Lisbon. Correct rate should have been 40 Rpf.

Routed via Lisbon and North America.



Text of letter includes:

"We follow events in the outside world as best we can; - lately we've been much interested in this meeting between Roosevelt & Churchill. I think there's a lot behind it."

Obviously well informed despite being locked up in a German castle.

Prisoner of War Airmail

United States to Germany 1944

Newport Indiana to Stalag Luft III located at Sagan, Poland. Letter datelined 12th June 1944, addressee dated arrival 31st October 1944. Original 6c stamp removed by German camp censor to check for hidden messages and Geprüft 33 handstamp over stamp location. Letter forwarded to Stalag IV B at Mühlberg but endorsed manuscript "Nicht IV B" and also handstamped "Nicht Stalag IV B". Germany

On the 9th of January 1945 the airmail surcharge for POW mail was discontinued by reciprocal agreement between US and German postal authorities.

Rate paid: 6c US Forces rate.

Routed via Lisbon and Berlin.

8/
Mühlberg
IVB

PRISONER OF WAR POST
KRIEGSGEFANGENENPOST
SERVICE DES PRISONNIERS DE GUERRE

BY AIR MAIL
PAR AVION

NEW YORK
JUN 13
10 A
1944

GEPRÜFT
6c
POSTAGE
33

RANK AND NAME S/SGT. DANIEL G. KRICKE,
(CAPITAL LETTERS) UNITED STATES PRISONER OF WAR.

PRISONER OF WAR No. 1544
(SEE NOTE ON FLAP)

CAMP NAME AND No. Stalag Luft 3,

SUBSIDIARY CAMP No. _____

10879 COUNTRY GERMANY
U.S. CENSOR *Oct. 31-44*
VIA NEW YORK, N. Y.

VIA AIR MAIL

Prisoner of War Airmail

United States to Germany 1944

New York to Stalag VII A. Letter datelined 31st August 1944, addressee dated arrival 16th December 1944. Original 6c stamp almost certainly removed by German camp censor to check for hidden messages. Censor Geprüft stamp of Stalag III B which may explain the transit delay. US NCOs captured in North Africa were shipped in transit via Stalag VII A at Moosburg near Munich to Stalag III B at Fürstenburg north of Berlin on the Polish border.

On the 9th of January 1945 the airmail surcharge for POW mail was discontinued by reciprocal agreement between US and German postal authorities.

Rate paid: 6c US Forces rate.

Routed via Lisbon and Berlin.

Stalag III B 36 Geprüft	PRISONER OF WAR POST	
	KRIEGSGEFANGENENPOST	
	SERVICE DES PRISONNIERS DE GUERRE	
	BY AIR MAIL PAR AVION	
	<i>Recvd 12/16/44</i>	
	RANK AND NAME <i>Sgt.</i> RALPH S. MATARAZZO, JR.	UNITED STATES PRISONER OF WAR.
	PRISONER OF WAR No. I31693	(SEE NOTE ON FLAP)
	CAMP NAME AND No. Stalag 7A	
	SUBSIDIARY CAMP No.	
12311	COUNTRY Germany	
U.S. CENSOR <i>Ks</i>	VIA NEW YORK, N. Y.	

Prisoner of War Airmail

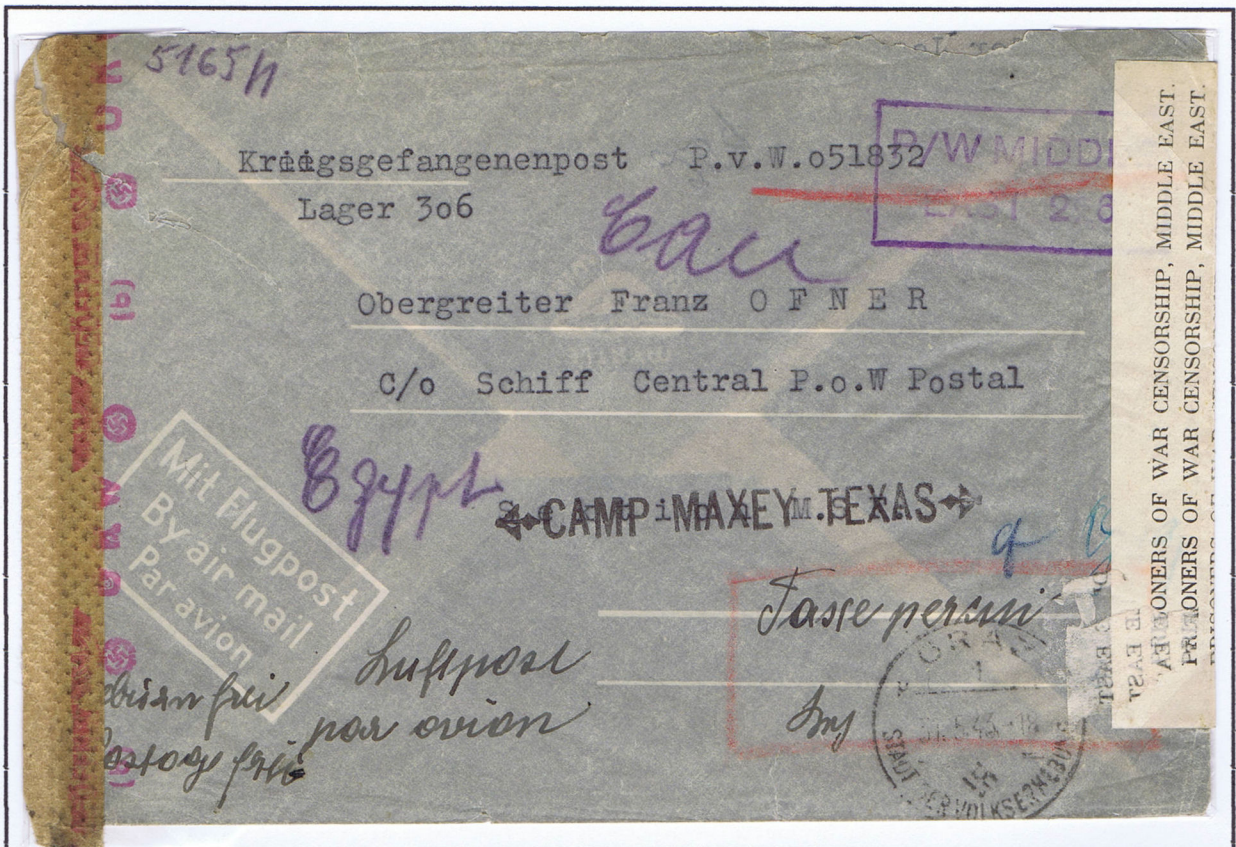
Germany to America via Egypt 1943

Cover from a German civilian to a German prisoner of war, originally addressed to the Middle East but then forwarded to America. Despatched Graz 31/5/43 the cover was censored in Berlin, endorsed "Luftpost" and sent to Camp 306 at Fayid. The cover was opened and re-sealed using "Middle East" tape with a cachet of P/W Middle East 226. The cover was then redirected to Camp Maxey, Texas without incurring transit censorship.

Prior to late 1944 the air mail fee was recorded by the use of the Taxe Percue handstamp, allegedly because the German authorities were cautious about "secret" messages being written underneath postage stamps or airmail labels on incoming or outgoing mail.

Rate paid: 25pf air surcharge to Cairo and East Africa. Surface rate 25pf free.

Routed via Sofia-Istanbul-Cairo then unknown.



Prisoner of War Airmail

Germany to United States 1945

Cover from German civilian to a German prisoner of war held in the United States. Despatched Weilburg 8.01.45, opened and re-sealed by German censor and again in America.

Prior to late 1944 the air mail fee had been recorded by the use of the Taxe Percue handstamp, allegedly because the German authorities were cautious about "secret" messages being written underneath postage stamps or airmail labels. Amtsblatt Nr. 380/1944 allowed use of such stamps or labels from 3rd November 1944 but these had to be applied by German postal staff. However, on the 9th January 1945, POW airmail to and from the U.S. was carried free of surcharge. On the same day the air surcharge for mail to Australia and New Zealand was reduced from 40 Rpf. to 30 Rpf., so this sender was incorrectly charged since the letter should have been carried free.

Rate paid: Double 30 Rpf./5g. clipper rate via Lisbon. Surcharge incorrectly applied.

Routed via Lisbon to North America.



Prisoner of War Airmail

Germany to India 1943

Stalagluft III Sagan to Calcutta. Letter dated 29.4.43 but not cancelled by "dumb" canceller until 13.5.43, suggesting a delay due to camp censorship. Sent by airmail with prepayment of 25Rpf shown by the Taxe Percue stamp applied by camp postal clerk. Stalagluft III censor and Indian POW censorship in Bombay before arrival in Calcutta on 8.7.43. The Indian censors seem to have ignored the fact that this was incoming mail from a British prisoner rather than mail to an Axis prisoner in India.

Card endorsed "Ab Ankara" by the sender but this was the Luftpostliste instruction for civilian mail. For POW mail the correct endorsement should have been "Ab. Bagdad" despite the fact that the service did in fact pass through Ankara and not Baghdad.

Rate paid: 25 Rpf.

Routed via Berlin-Sofia-Istanbul-Adana-Lydd-Cairo-Horseshoe.

The postcard features several stamps and handwritten entries:

- Top Left:** A pink rectangular stamp with the text "Mit Luftpost Kriegsgefangenenpost Par Avion Postkarte".
- Top Center:** A purple rectangular stamp with the text "GEPROBT".
- Top Right:** A pink rectangular stamp with the text "Luft Post AIR MAIL perçue ANKARA PL." and a handwritten "1/2" below it.
- Center:** A circular postmark from "CALCUTTA G.P.O." dated "28 JULY 43" with "P.M." and "KASSEL" written across it.
- Address:** "J. SHANCO KASSEL Esq." written in the center.
- Bottom Left:** A circular "PASSED" stamp with a crown icon. Below it, "Gebührenfrei" and "DHP/19" are written.
- Bottom Left (Form):**
 - Absender: _____
 - Vor- und Zuname: FLYING OFFICER DOMINIC PAGE RAF
 - Gefangenennummer: 707
 - Lager-Bezeichnung: 9-10
 - Stammlager Luft 3
 - Deutschland (Germany)
- Bottom Right (Form):**
 - Empfangsort: G.P.O. Box 200.
 - Straße: CALCUTTA.
 - Land: INDIA.
 - Landesteil (Provinz usw.): _____
- Bottom Right:** A purple stamp with the text "DHP/185".

Prisoner of War Airmail

Italy to South Africa 1942

Cover from an Italian civilian to an Italian prisoner of war in South Africa. Despatched Tortora 5/6/42 the cover was censored in Italy and again in South Africa.

In April 1942 by arrangements between Italy and Great Britain a surface/air route for POW mail to Africa and India was established via Chiasso-Sofia-Jerusalem-Cairo. The route was closed again in June 1943. This cover, although not endorsed for the route, probably travelled by it, since it has been endorsed by the recipient as arriving on 22/7/42.

There are no signs of any fee being paid and one must assume that it was carried free of charge.

Rate paid: Apparently carried free.

Routed via Rome-Chiasso-Sofia by train, Sofia-Istanbul by Lufthansa, train to Adana, Turkey then BOAC Adana-Lydd-Cairo-Horseshoe to South Africa, under a 1942 Anglo-Italian agreement for POW mail.



Prisoner of War Airmail

Italy to India 1943

Letter sheet sent by air from Italy to an Italian prisoner in India. Originally bearing stamp(s) which have been removed to check for hidden messages, probably by the Indian censor since there is a DHP/3 (Bombay POW) censor cachet where the stamp was originally fixed. Despatch c.d.s. of Trevi, Perugia dated 23/1/43. Endorsed routing via Istanbul; actual journey much more complex. Arrival triangular camp cachet No. 24 located at Clement Town.

Rate paid: Airmail surcharge only. Rate not yet determined.

Routed: Rome-Chiasso-Sofia by train, Sofia-Istanbul by Lufthansa, train to Adana, Turkey then BOAC Adana-Lydd-Cairo-Horseshoe to India, under a 1942 Anglo-Italian agreement for POW mail.

POSTA AEREA PER PRIGIONIERI DI GUERRA.

POSTA PER PRIGIONIERI E INTERNATI CIVILI DI GUERRA

Via ISTAMBUL.

Al Tenente
(GRADO DEL DESTINATARIO)

FLAMINI S ANTE fu Luigi
(COGNOME-NOME-PATERNITA' DEL DESTINATARIO)

Matricola N. 185560 - Prigioniero di guerra
DI SEGUITO SCRIVERE: "PRIGIONIERO GUERRA", OPPURE "INTERNATO CIVILE,,

Campo N. 24 P.O.W./ Wing 5 - C/o G.P.O.
(RIPORTARE TUTTE LE INDICAZIONI RELATIVE AL NUMERO E NOME DEL CAMPO SEZIONE DI CAMPO ECC. SECONDO LE INDICAZIONI FORNITE DAL PRIGIONIERO DI GUERRA O INTERNATO CIVILE)

B O M B A Y .
(STATO O PAESE DI DESTINAZIONE)

GR 2 24

PERUGIA 23/1/43

PASSED
DHP/3

Prisoner of War Airmail

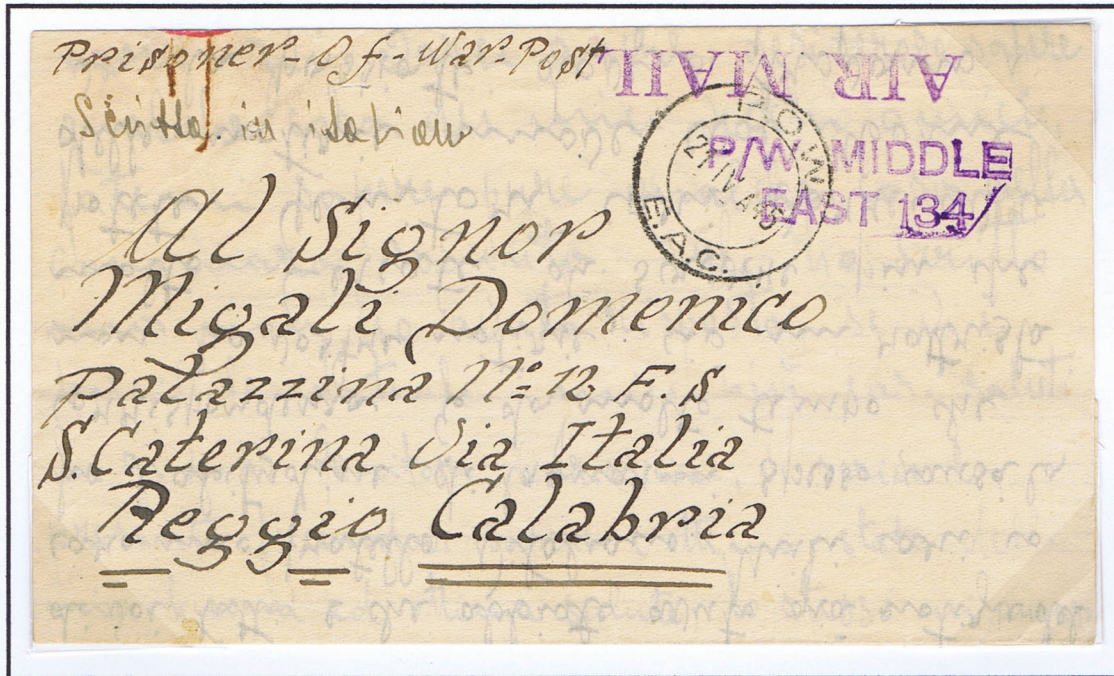
East Africa to Italy 1945

Handmade folded letter sheet from an Italian prisoner of war in camp 356 at Eldoret, Kenya, to Reggio Calabria. Locally censored and cancelled 21st April 1945. Airmail fee of \$1.30 shown by "Postage Paid" on rear of letter. No further censorship en route.

After December 1942, POW mail to and from Italy was carried by BOAC Cairo-Lydda-Adana, train to Istanbul, Lufthansa air to Sofia, train to Swiss Chiasso then transferred across the border to Italian Chiasso then Rome for censorship.

Rate paid: \$1.30.

Routed via Cairo-Lydda-Adana-Istanbul-Sofia-Chiasso-Rome



Prisoner of War Airmail

Italy to America 1943

Cover from an Italian civilian to an Italian prisoner of war in Crossville Camp, Tennessee. Despatched Bologna 5/7/43 the cover was censored in Italy and forwarded to America via Lisbon. Cover opened and re-sealed by POW censor 347 in New York.

Mail to Italian prisoners of war was conveyed free of charge for surface transmission and by airmail on payment of the current air fee, in this case L2.75. Boyle records "No service to USA" between December 1941 and September 1943, but Lufthansa route 117 flew Rome-Barcelona-Madrid-Lisbon four times weekly during 1943 and this cover was almost certainly carried by that route.

Rate paid: Single L2.75 air surcharge to North America. Surface rate L1.25 free.

Routed via Rome-Barcelona-Madrid-Lisbon then FAM-18.



Prisoner of War Airmail

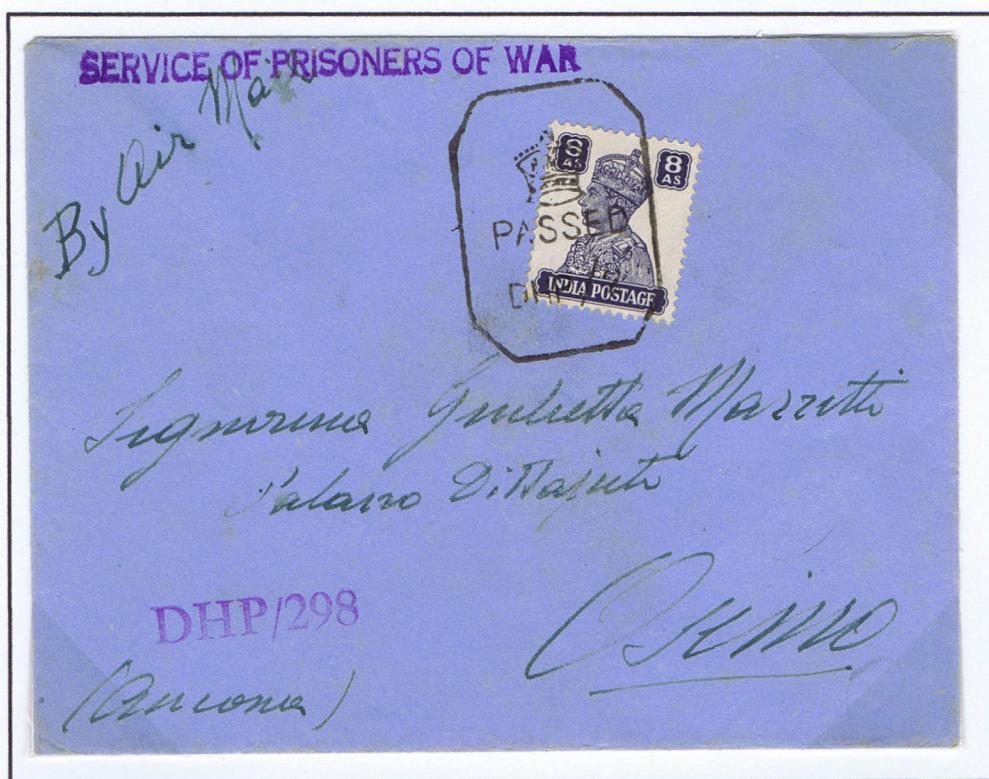
India to Italy 1945

Cover from Brigadier General Mario Mazzetti to his wife in Ancona. General Mazzetti was captured in North Africa in 1941 and interned in India. Sender's address given as "General Officer's POW Camp" (*apostrophe as given in address*) but no camp number given. 8 Annas air surcharge cancelled by Bombay censor, with further strike of DHP/298. Arrival stamp of Osimo, Ancona, 16.6.45.

After December 1942, POW mail to and from India was carried by BOAC India-Cairo-Lydd-Adana, train to Istanbul, Lufthansa air to Sofia, train to Swiss Chiasso then transferred across the border to Italian Chiasso then Rome for censorship.

Rate paid: 8 Annas.

Routed via Cairo-Lydd-Adana-Istanbul-Sofia-Chiasso-Rome.



Prisoner of War Airmail

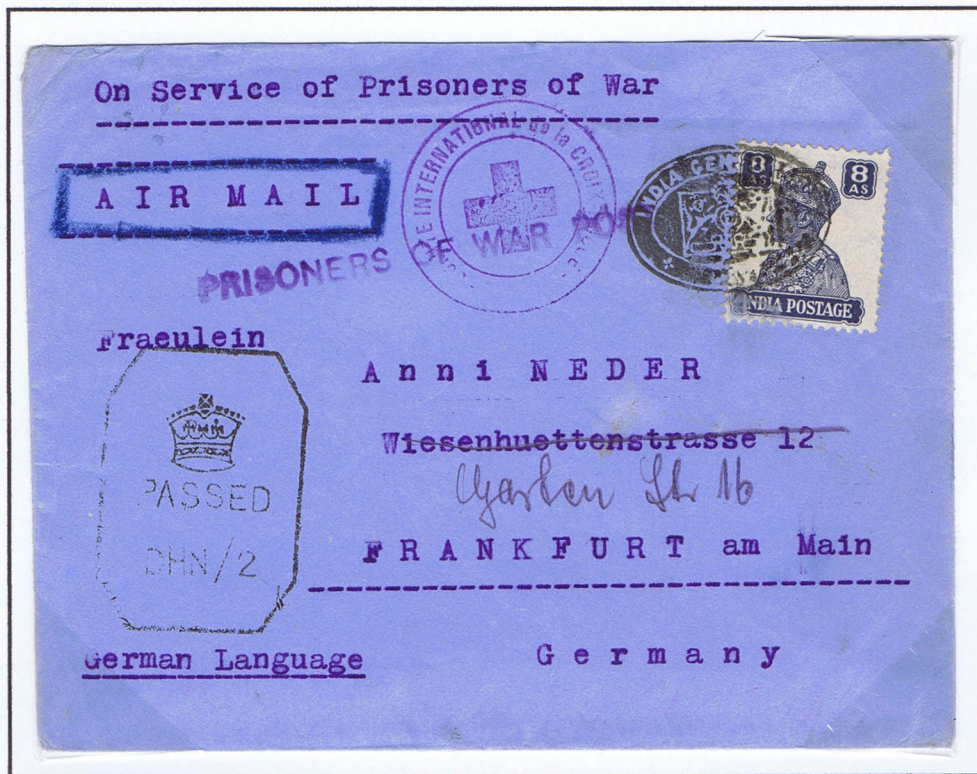
India to Germany 194?

Cover from a German prisoner in Dehra Dun to Germany. Censored by Dehra Dun camp censor DHN/2. 8 anna airmail surcharge cancelled by intaglio Indian Censor cachet. No indication of date.

No routing instructions but probably BOAC Cairo-Lydd-Adana, Turkey then train to Istanbul, Lufthansa air to Sofia-Budapest-Vienna-Berlin for censorship.

Rate paid: 8 Annas.

Routed via Cairo-Lydd-Adana-Istanbul-Sofia-Berlin.



Prisoner of War Airmail

Germany to Canada via Egypt 1943

Cover from a German civilian to a German prisoner of war, originally addressed to the Middle East but then re-directed to Canada. Despatched Köln 2/3/43 the cover was censored in Berlin, addressed "Mit Luftpost ab Kairo" to Camp 306 at Fayid then redirected to Camp 310 at Gineifa. The cover was opened and re-sealed using "Middle East" tape with a cachet of P/W Middle East 260 (266?). The cover was then forwarded to Canada to Camp 310 at Medecine Hat, Alberta having been opened and re-sealed by Canadian censor tape with handwritten "DB"/C.418. Transit cancel of Canadian "Base APO 4" dated December 4th, and a handwritten arrival date of 10/12/43. Nine months in transit, but a tribute to the various Postal services involved.

Prior to late 1944 the air mail fee was recorded by the use of the Taxe Percue handstamp, allegedly because the German authorities were cautious about "secret" messages being written underneath postage stamps or airmail labels on incoming or outgoing mail.

Rate paid: 25pf air surcharge to Cairo and East Africa. Surface rate 25pf free.

Routed via Sofia-Istanbul-Cairo then unknown, but in view of the transit time, probably by sea from Durban.



Prisoner of War Airmail
Germany to Argentina 1944 "Graf Spee"

Cover from a German civilian to a German internee from the "Graf Spee" apparently released and living in the German enclave of Villa Ballester in Buenos Aires. Despatched Frankfurt 4.9.44, opened and re-sealed by the Wehrmacht censor in Berlin and again by an unidentified American censor, the cover did not arrive in Villa Ballester until 27/2/45, a six month delay. The addressee is shown in the 3rd Division of the Graf Spee crew lists. POW/internee surface mail was carried free but could be conveyed by air on payment of a surcharge, in this case corresponding to the rate for carriage by Pan American from Lisbon.

Prior to late 1944 the air mail fee was recorded by the use of the Taxe Percue handstamp, allegedly because the German authorities were cautious about "secret" messages being written underneath postage stamps or airmail labels on incoming or outgoing mail.

Rate paid: Rm 0.90. Normal airmail rate was 25pf surface (free) plus Rm 0.90 air surcharge.

Routed via Lisbon.



Prisoner of War Airmail

South Africa to Germany 1943

Cover from German civilian internee in South Africa to Flensburg. Despatched Andalusia Internment Camp 21st August 1943, censored at Andalusia Camp, opened and re-sealed by South African official censor and passed unexamined in Berlin. POW surface mail was carried free but could be conveyed by air on payment of a surcharge.

No indication of route or arrival date.

Rate paid: 9d airmail surcharge.

Routed (if carried by air) probably via Lisbon.

