

## **Free Franking for Displaced Persons British Zone of Germany, 1945-1947**

**Background** - In May of 1945, at the conclusion of World War II in Europe, the western allies were confronted with the problem of what to do with the millions of former prisoners of war, foreign workers, forced laborers and refugees located in their zones of occupation. The collective term for these categories is Displaced Persons, or DPs for short.

All DPs from western countries were repatriated within a few months. By October 1945 there remained 8 to 10 million DPs from the east – mostly Polish, Baltic (Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian), Russian, Ukrainian and Yugoslavian. While most of these were repatriated, many of these DPs, fearing persecution, did not wish to return to their homelands.

In the western occupation zones of Germany and Austria, hundreds of DP camps were established. Initially these were run by SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force) but by October 1945 the responsibility for all camps was assumed by UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration). The IRO (International Refugee Organization) administered the camps from 1947 until 1952, at which time they were taken over by West Germany.

In January 1947 there were 270,000 DPs in the British Zone, most of them living in one of 130 camps. In March 1949 there were still 142,000 DPs and by the end of the year 67 camps remained. By 1953, about 2 million DPs had been resettled in other countries, principally Israel, United States, Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom. DPs remaining in Germany were mostly old and/or disabled. The last DP camp closed in 1957.

**Purpose of Exhibit** – To study the marcophily and postal history of free-franked mail sent by DPs in the British Zone of Germany during the early post-WWII years. Because of the free franking policy (unique to the British Zone), such DP mail has become a popular collecting subject that is often not fully understood by its collectors. This exhibit will present a logical explanation of the markings found on these covers and highlight the rarities in this collecting field.

... and hopefully this will also unearth more examples of this material. The exhibitor welcomes information about other DP covers as well as offers of material.

**Challenge Factor** – Twenty years ago it was not too difficult to find DP covers in dealers' stocks. That no longer seems to be the case. Furthermore, they almost never appear in auctions. It appears that nearly all of the available material resides in collections and anything still in the marketplace would mostly be considered common and duplicative. Finding the covers shown in this exhibit required many years of dedicated searching.

**Organization of Exhibit** – The title page shows an official card used by DPs to initiate contact with relatives and friends. Following this are 7 pages of domestic DP mail, with coverage of the various markings and labels used for franking. The exhibit concludes with 8 pages of international DP mail.

All international mail was franked with one of four types of markings with the wording “**Displaced Persons Mail PAID**”. Besides an analysis of these markings, topics covered include supplementary markings, usage of domestic postal cards due to shortage of writing materials, censored DP mail and erroneous application of free frankings to POW and Internee mail.

**Scope** – One might think that this is not a suitable subject for one frame exhibit. It is certainly possible to add another half to full frame to the exhibit, but anything beyond that would be padding, i.e. common and duplicative. The material shown in this single frame covers all aspects of free DP mail in the British Zone in the 1945-1947 period.

**Completeness** – With one exception, all markings and labels used to frank DP mail during the 1945-47 period are shown in this exhibit. The missing marking is a handstamp used on domestic mail from the Latvian DP Camp at Flensburg-Murwik with the misspelling “Displaid Persons Mail Paid”. Only one example of this handstamp has been recorded.

**References** – The only really accurate reference for this material is the handbook by Wolfgang Strobel given on the title page. A copy of this handbook is available from the APRL. Rather than list a few secondary references, on the reverse side of this page I have copied the complete bibliography from Herr Strobel's book.

Google and Wikipedia are also excellent sources for background information.

**Rarity** – Several of the items shown are categorized as “only known example”, “earliest known example” and “one of two known examples”. All such statements regarding rarity are based on recent correspondence with Herr Strobel, who must be considered the foremost authority in this field. (I use “known” rather than “recorded” primarily for space considerations. I consider the terms to be synonymous.) **This exhibit cannot be duplicated.**

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