

# Censorship of Civilian Mail in Germany during WWII

## An Introduction

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Censorship of civilian Mail during was practiced by virtually all combatant countries. This presentation will focus on the German efforts to control virtually all mail coming into and going out of the country, as well as any mail in transit going through Germany:

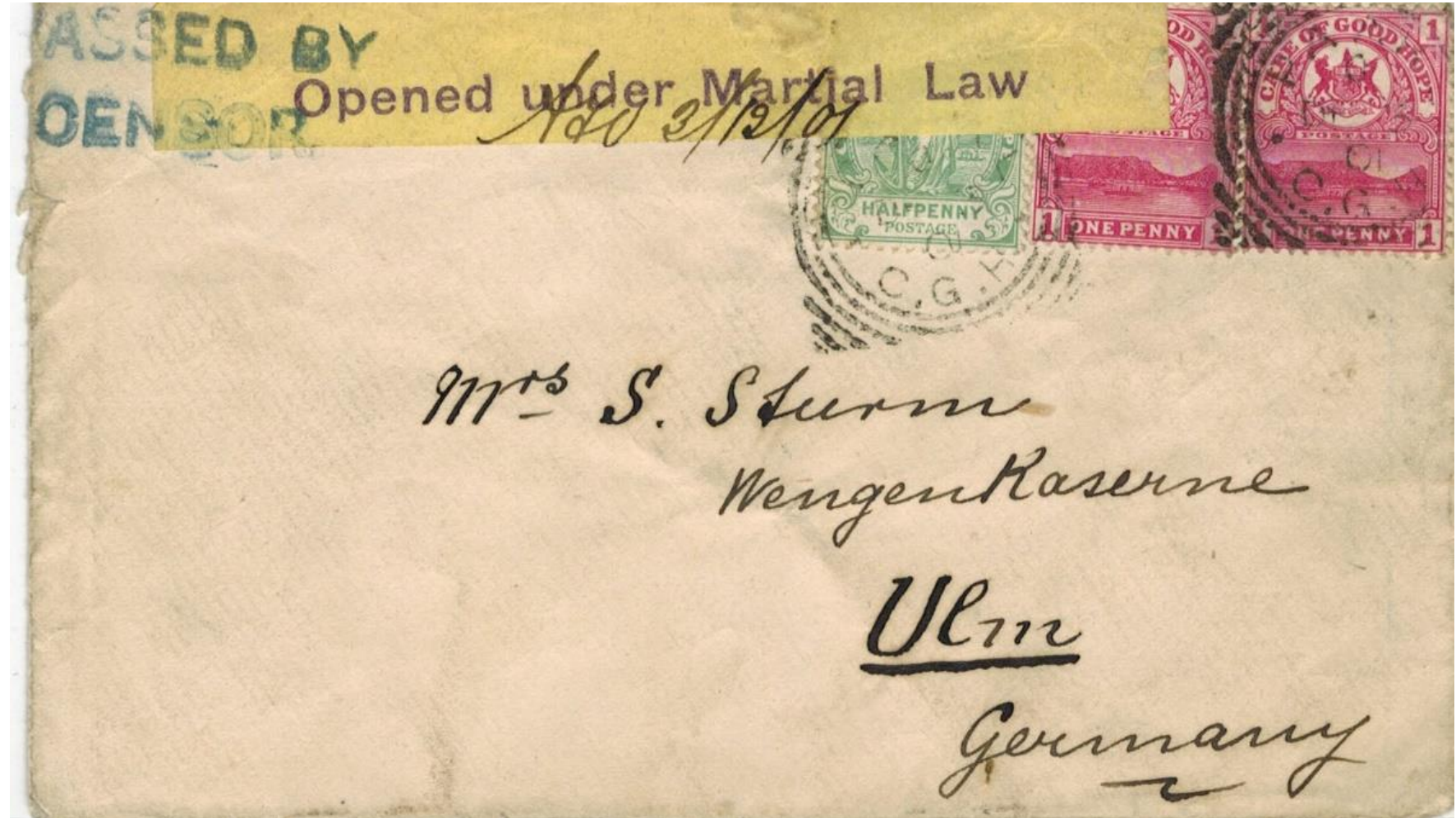
- Very short history of censorship
- German censorship plans
- Basic methods and tools for censorship
- The first Censorship stations Berlin & Königsberg
- Glimpses at the expanded system

# Why Censorship?

“To paralyze enemy spying, sabotage and propaganda and to secure information about the enemy by the inspection of mail.”

“Any information which gets through to the enemy costs German blood. Any information about the enemy gathered via inspection of mail saves German blood.”  
(Riemer, p. 6)

**Censorship  
during Boer  
War 1901  
Cover from  
Cape of  
Good Hope  
to Ulm,  
Germany**





# Censorship during WW I

Letter from Patterson, N.J. to Berlin dated March 28, 1916 which was censored by the French military. Letter going to the Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden (Aid Society of German Jews), founded in 1901 to improve the social and political conditions of Jews in Eastern Europe.





# World War I German Military Censorship

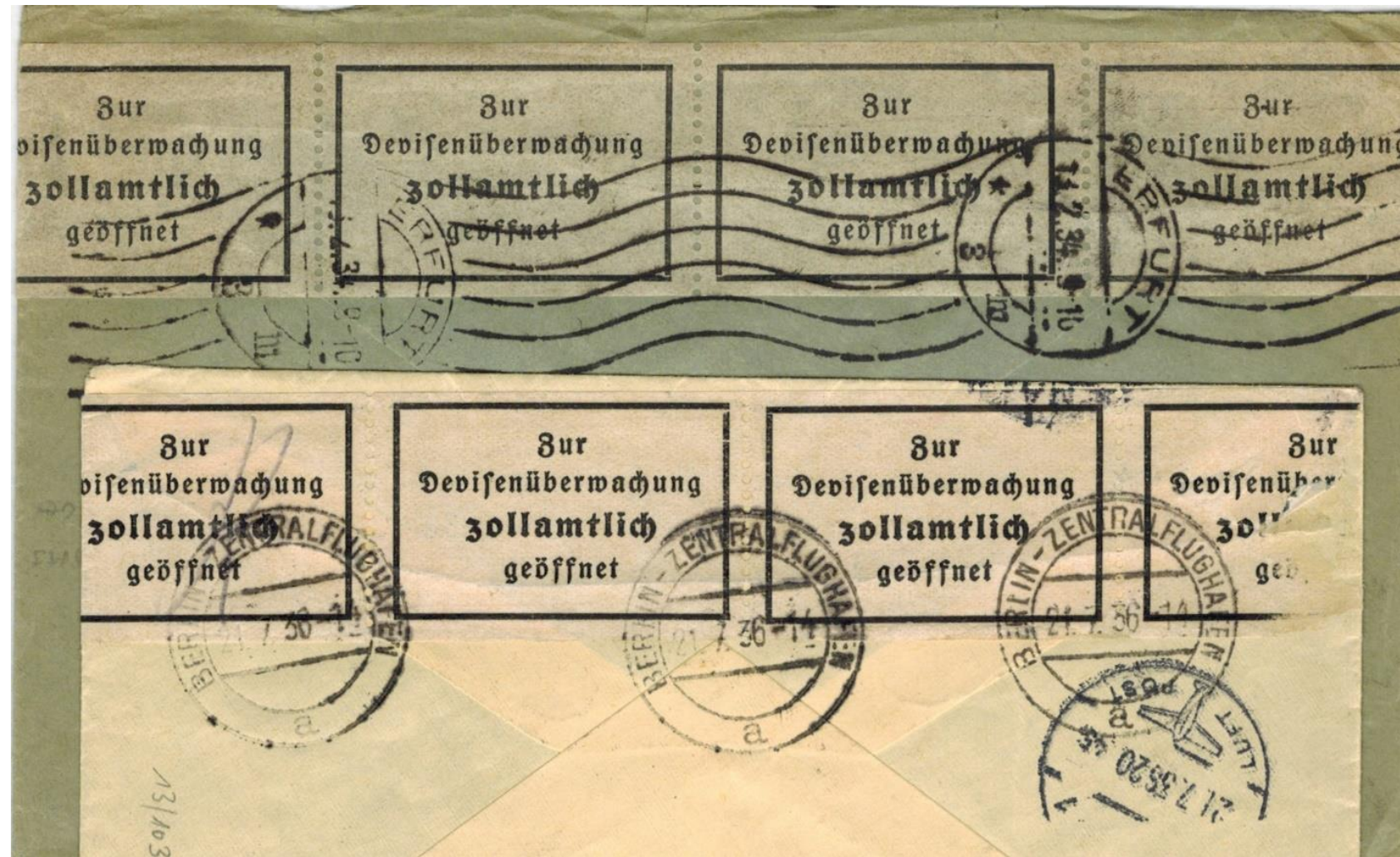
Berlin to Sweden 1918 –  
Opened by military per  
rules of war – Berlin O 17  
on 8 Jan 1918





# Currency Control

Germany imposed strict control over import and export of currency in 1933. The purpose was not censorship of letter content. The dates here are 1934 and 1936.



# **Initial German plans for war-time censorship of civilian mail - Definitions**

**Auslandsbriefprüfstelle (ABP)** – Foreign letter censorship station

**Briefprüfstelle (BP)** – Letter censorship station

**Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW)** – High Command of the Armed Forces

## The mechanics of Censorship:

**Prüfstempel** – Cancel device used to certify and examination

From the  
Auslandsbriefprüfstelle at  
Königsberg (PR) names  
were dropped in favor of  
alphabetic indicators such as  
“A” or “a” for Königsberg, ‘b’  
for Berlin; ‘c’ for Cologne; ‘d’  
for Munich, etc.





## Verschluss –

Paper strip for  
closing letters

Both from Berlin -  
Upper without  
station identification  
and bottom with 'b'  
for Berlin



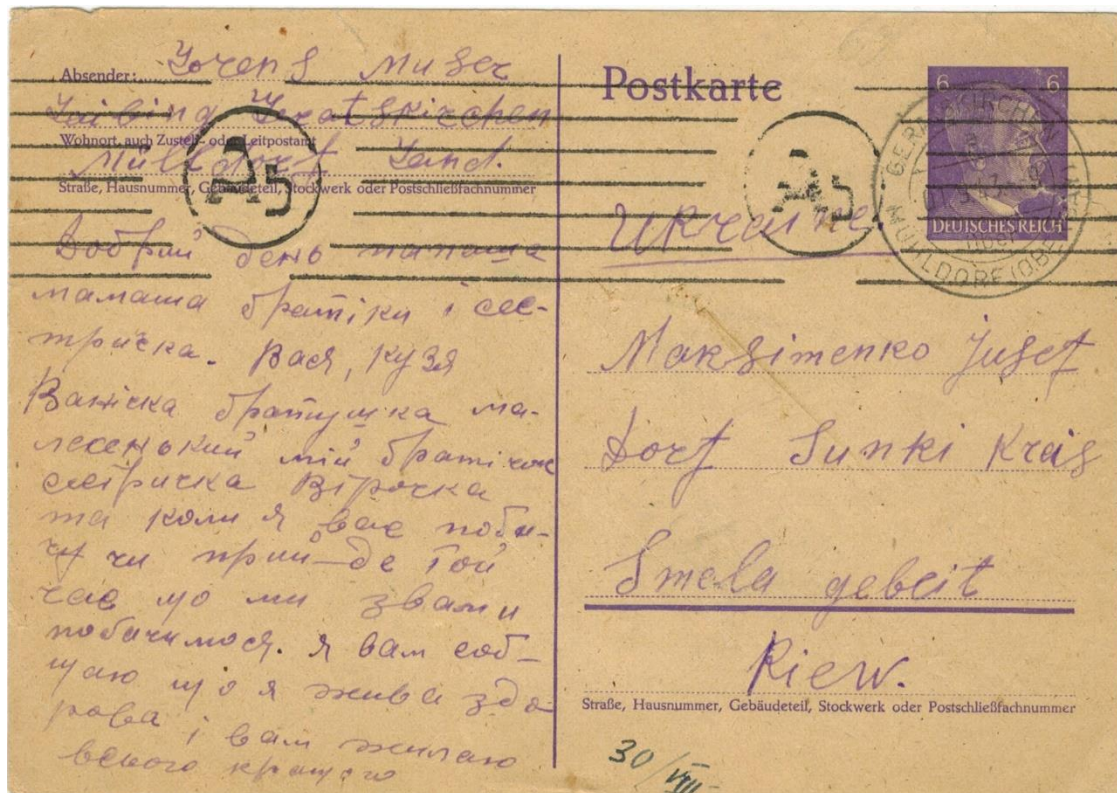






# Durchlaufstempel – pass-through censor marks

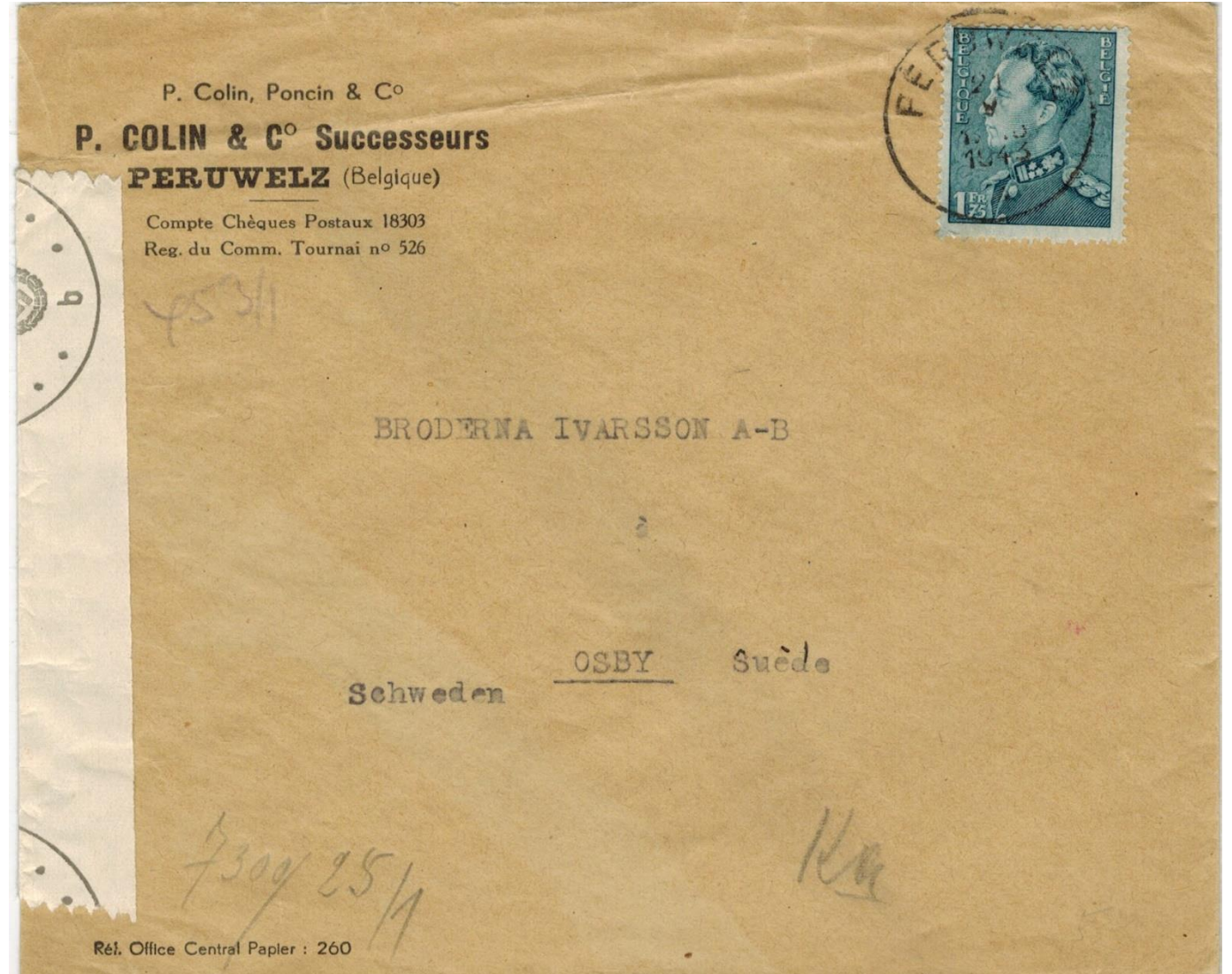
## Machine Ab cancel and large Hand cancel





# Prüferstempel – cancels or stamps which identify individual censors

In Berlin individual censors used initials and numbers to document their work – in this case with pencil markings. Note opening and tape at left side rather than back of envelope.





# Prüfervermerke – individual Censor marks – ‘d’ Munich

A censor could use a small rubber stamp with alpha character, digits, or symbols. He/she could also add pencil marks. The markings can be found on the envelopes, but also on each page of the letter.





# Beanstandungs- und Hinweisstempel – Infractions --- cancel/cachet indicating violation of censorship rules

“Return to sender: per  
regulations ‘normal’  
mail to foreign  
destinations must be  
brought to post office  
counter.”



# Some of the Censorship Rules:

- Deliver at post office counter with ID
- No illegible writing
- No secret languages, ink or Hebraic
- No lined envelopes
- No picture postcards; photos; braille; chess or crossword puzzles
- No non-business printed matter
- Maximum 4 pages in letters with name & address of sender and recipient on each page
- Stamp trading not desired
- No news about economic situation; food supply; bombings; etc.



Beanstandungs- und Hinweisszettel – **label or note** inserted in letter indicating violation of a censorship rule

*“Name & Address of Sender must not just be on envelope but on every page of the letter”*



# Königsberg – ABP “a” – the first functioning station

This station began operating on Sept. 4, 1939. Letter from Oct 17, 1939 to the Red Cross in Geneva has circular cancel indicating inspection and the hand-stamp: Von der Wehrmacht zugelassen – Allowed by the Army.





# Königsberg – Early censor Oct. 1939

The reverse of the cover has sealing tape with hand-stamp: “Im Staatsinteresse geöffnet” – opened in interest of the state/country. The circular cancel is the same as on the front of the cover:  
Auslandsbriefprüfstelle –  
Königsberg (Pr).



# Königsberg – Dec. 1939

German card going to Tallinn has a new cancel in red indicating examination, but the city name is still present.





# Königsberg - 1941

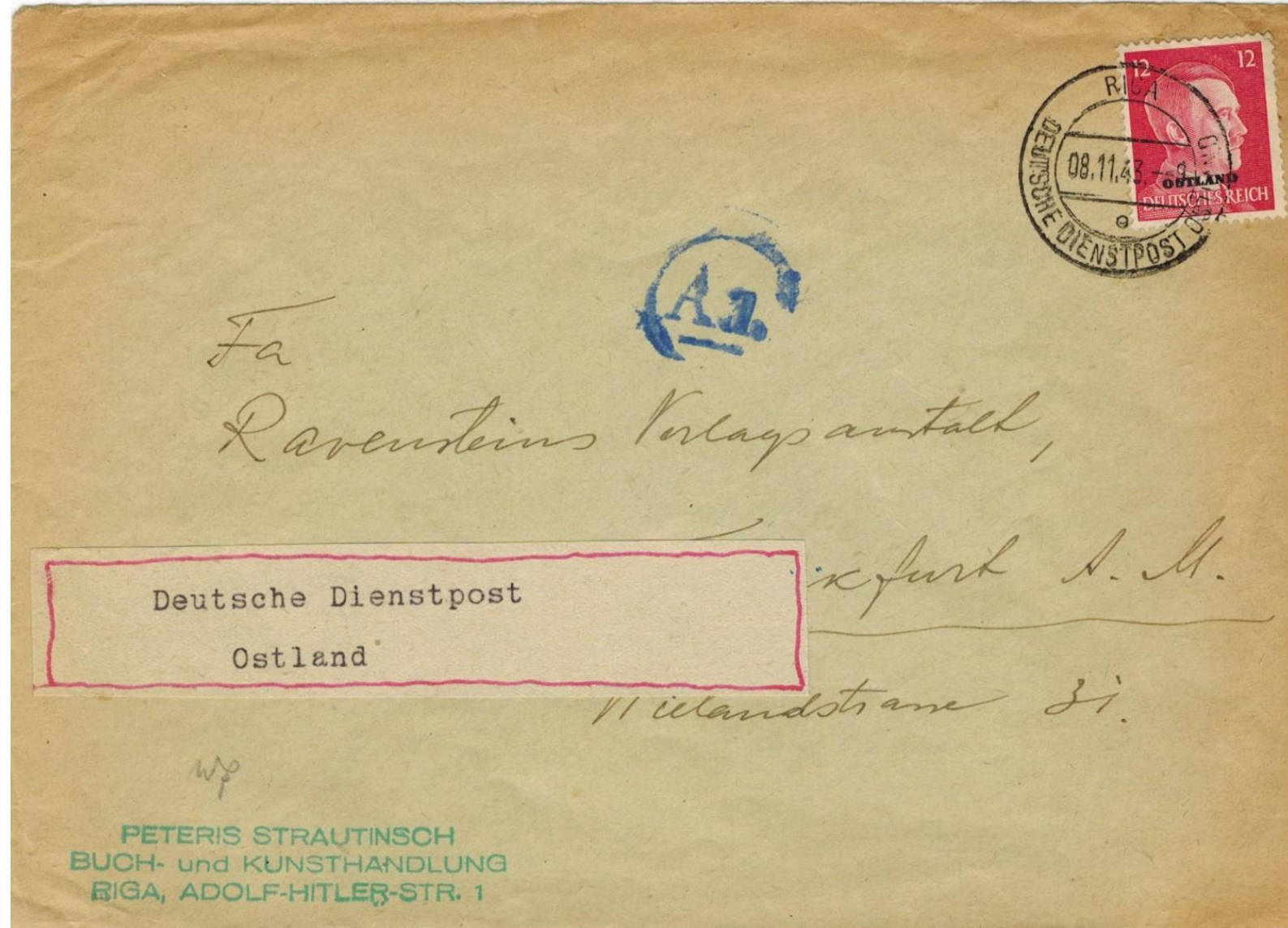
Card from Kaunas,  
USSR to Münchberg,  
Germany has red  
cancel, but now uses  
the lower case 'a' to  
indicate the location of  
the censorship station.





# Königsberg - 1943

Letter from Riga to  
Frankfurt posted  
Nov. 8, 1943 via  
Deutsche Dienstpost  
with a hand-stamp  
passing cancel 'Aa'  
indicating that the  
censor did not  
inspect the contents  
– thus not opened  
and resealed.





# ABP Berlin 1939

Berlin Censor station started in early September 1939. It had no censor cancels or separate sealing strips. Thus there was continued use of the 'Currency control' strips used by customs since 1933. The letter from Potsdam bears the typical roller cancel over the labels – dated 14.10.39.





# Currency Control and Censorship July 1940





# Berlin Censorship 1939 and sometimes not.....?

This airmail letter posted in Berlin on Nov. 21, 1939 shows no evidence of censorship. The franking of a 60 Pf and 5 Pf Hindenburg stamp reflects correct rate – 25 Pf for foreign letter and 40 Pf for transatlantic air.





# Berlin Censorship 1939

The Berlin station received its own sealing strips in late 1939. The strips show the word “Geprüft” – examined and the seal which reflects the censor: Oberkommando der Wehrmacht – High Command of the Armed Forces. There is no reference to location of the station and no censor cancel on the sealing strip.





# Berlin Censorship 1940

Sealing strip B51 with  
Censorship cancel B2a on  
both front and back of  
cover going from Berlin to  
New York “via Siberia”.  
The censorship cancel has  
OKW (Oberkommando...) at  
top and “Briefstempel –  
geöffnet” at bottom. A  
typical feature for most  
subsequent cancels is the  
wavy line under the right  
wing of the Eagle





# Berlin Censorship 1941

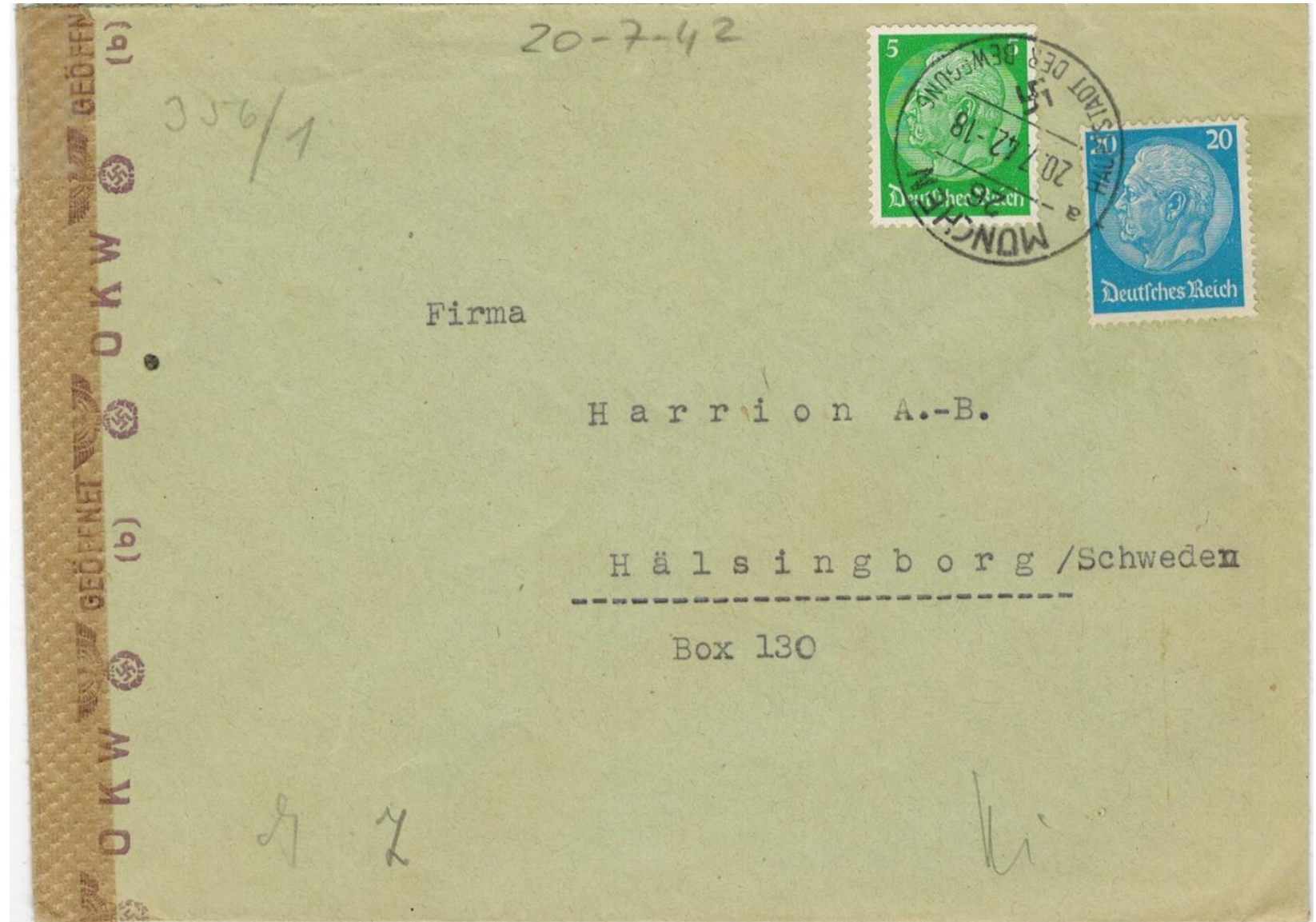
Berlin to Washington DC cover received Nov. 41. The B4 censor cancel is similar to B2, but has the lower case 'b' under the swastika. The registry also prompted the addition of a red sequential number '42783'. The "Einlieferer" – actual person presenting the letter at post office counter is noted. Both the sealing strip and the censor cancel now show 'b'.





# Berlin 'b' letter sealing machines

Special machines were used to speed up the letter sealing process. The machine also imprinted information on the seal. Here “OKW – eagle – Geöffnet/b – eagle – OKW”. Note several pencil marks by individual censors or processors.



# Berlin 'b' Censorship 1942

The B8 censorship cancel features the 'b' on each side of the swastika and the 'Tilde' wavy line under the right wing. Censored in Berlin because this card related to patents – otherwise would have been censored in Munich.





# Berlin Censorship 1942

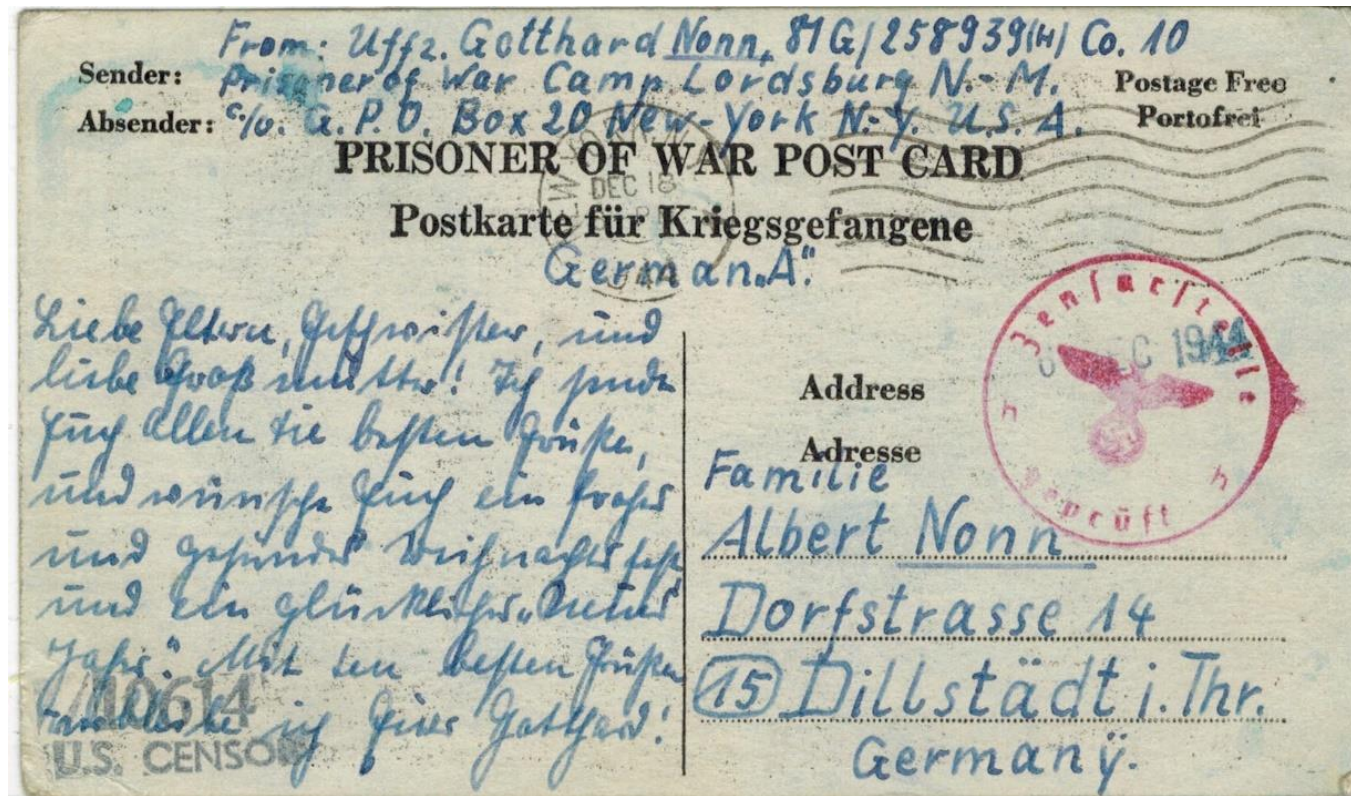
Letter from France to Sweden has another variant of this cancel – B7 – with a ‘T’ above the eagle’s head. The ‘T’ apparently referenced that this was ‘Transit’ mail.





# Berlin (Hof) 'h' Censorship 1944

The station at Hof was established after the Berlin Station was severely bombed in 1943/44. Its prime responsibility was to process POW and Internee Mail which had been handled by Berlin until late 1943.





# Berlin Censorship 1944-45

New censor cancels are introduced in early 1944 indicate in upper segment:

**‘Zensurstelle’** and in lower half  
‘b – geprüft – b’. This reflects  
that the responsibility for  
censorship was moved from the  
Abwehr (military counter  
intelligence) to the head of the  
SS, H. Himmler.





# Berlin pass-through censorship

The 'Ab' – which probably means

Auslandsbriefprüfstelle b – is a pass-through censorship stamp. This is one of more than a dozen similar types. The letter from Bohemia/Moravia to Sweden was not opened.





# Berlin pass-through censorship

This diplomatic letter from the Hamburg consulate of the Panamanian Republic received a pass-through censor mark and was not opened. Note the registry and the crossed-out numerator number.





# Berlin pass-through censorship

Even with the pass-through marking, this letter was also opened and censored. Sometimes pass-through marks were actually applied to the paper strip. In this instance the paper strip shows that the letter went through a machine canceling device.





# Berlin 'Lb' Auslandsleitstelle pass-through censorship

Public entities and some businesses could expedite mail by going through a foreign routing station of the Reichspost. These received a circular mark with 'L' – here Lb for Berlin. The round, blue cancel at top left is not a censor, but a seal of the Reichsbahndirektion – the Reich Railway authority.



# Berlin 'Lb' Auslandsleitstelle pass-through Censorship

The 'Lb' is in gothic lettering on this express letter from Switzerland probably going to a German firm or governmental entity. At least a dozen different types of the Lb mark have been identified.





# Berlin Censorship – Rule infractions

Judging what has survived, letters not complying with rules were either returned or destroyed. This letter going to Finland bears portions of a label indicating “return to sender....” This may have been an instance where the letter was dropped in a mail box, but had to be turned in at the post office. Was this a censors label or was it a post office label?





# Censorship Station 1939-45

a – Königsberg Gestapo 5

b – Berlin 1

c – Cologne 7

d – Munich 3

e – Frankfurt 4

f – Hamburg

g – Vienna 2

h – Hof

k – Copenhagen

l – Lyon

n – Nancy

o – Oslo

t – Trondheim

x – Paris

y – Bordeaux



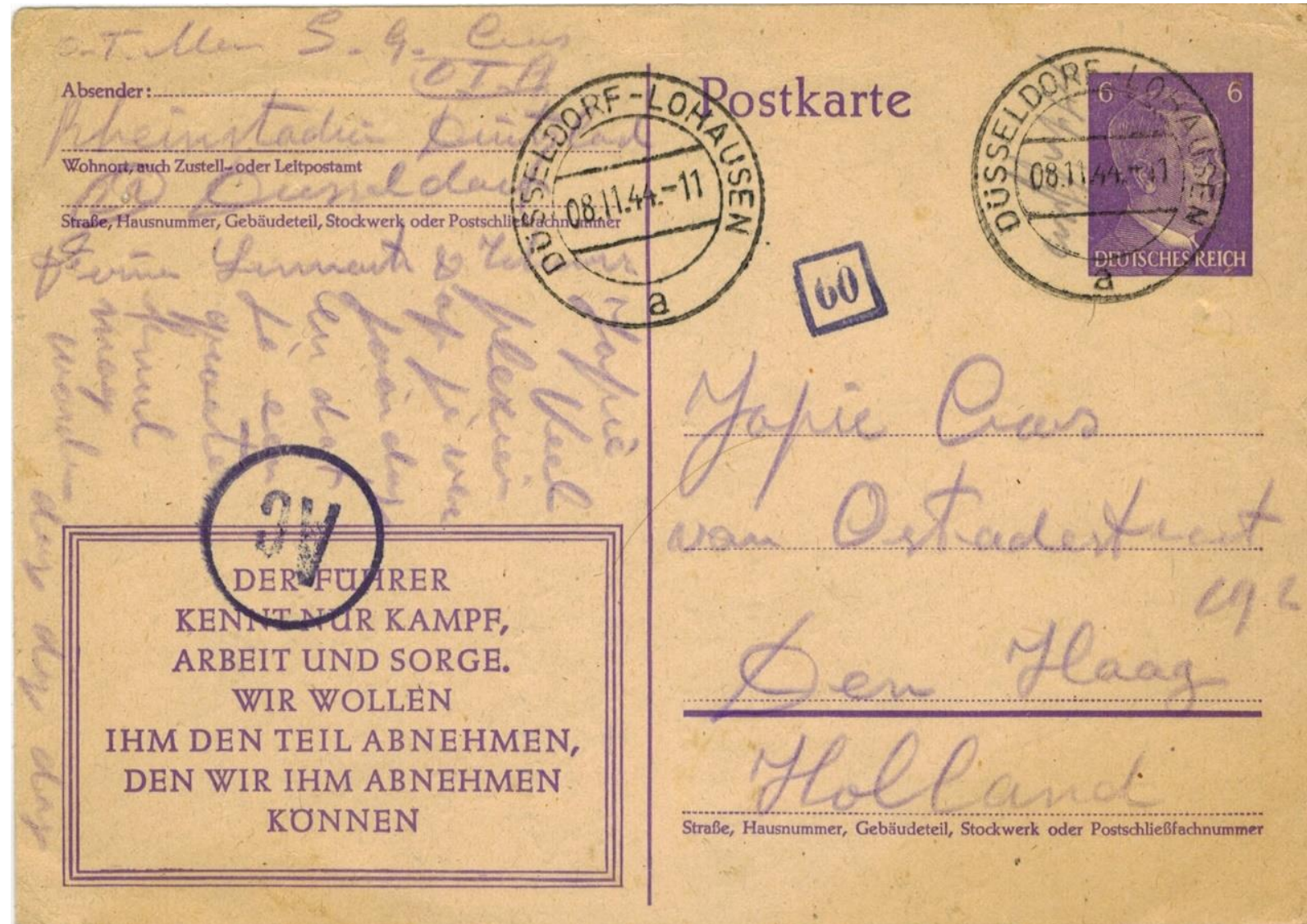


# Köln (Cologne) 'c' Station (Nov 1939 – late 1944)





# Köln 'c' Censorship Nov 1944





# München (Munich) 'd' Censorship





# Munich 'd' Censorship

Individual censor markings  
featured 4-digit numbers; upper  
case alpha; and 'designs'





# Munich 'd' Censorship on late Feb 1945

Card from a 'forced' laborer at the Italian Lager at Dessau. Note the revised text in cancel 'Zensurstelle' – no longer OKW.





# Frankfurt 'e' Censorship

Transatlantic air mail from Germany to USA dated Oct 30, 1940 and 'e' sealing label and machine cancel. Faint 3-digit numbers is in rectangular box. The mailer was Maximilian Israel Rothschild. One may assume he was Jewish and thus required to insert the middle name of 'Israel'.





# Frankfurt 'e' Censor Transit mail

Letter from Oslo to  
Sioux Fall dated Nov 1,  
1941 reveals Frankfurt  
sealing tape and red  
cachet with 'e'. Also  
shows individual  
censor markings –  
small boxed numbers.



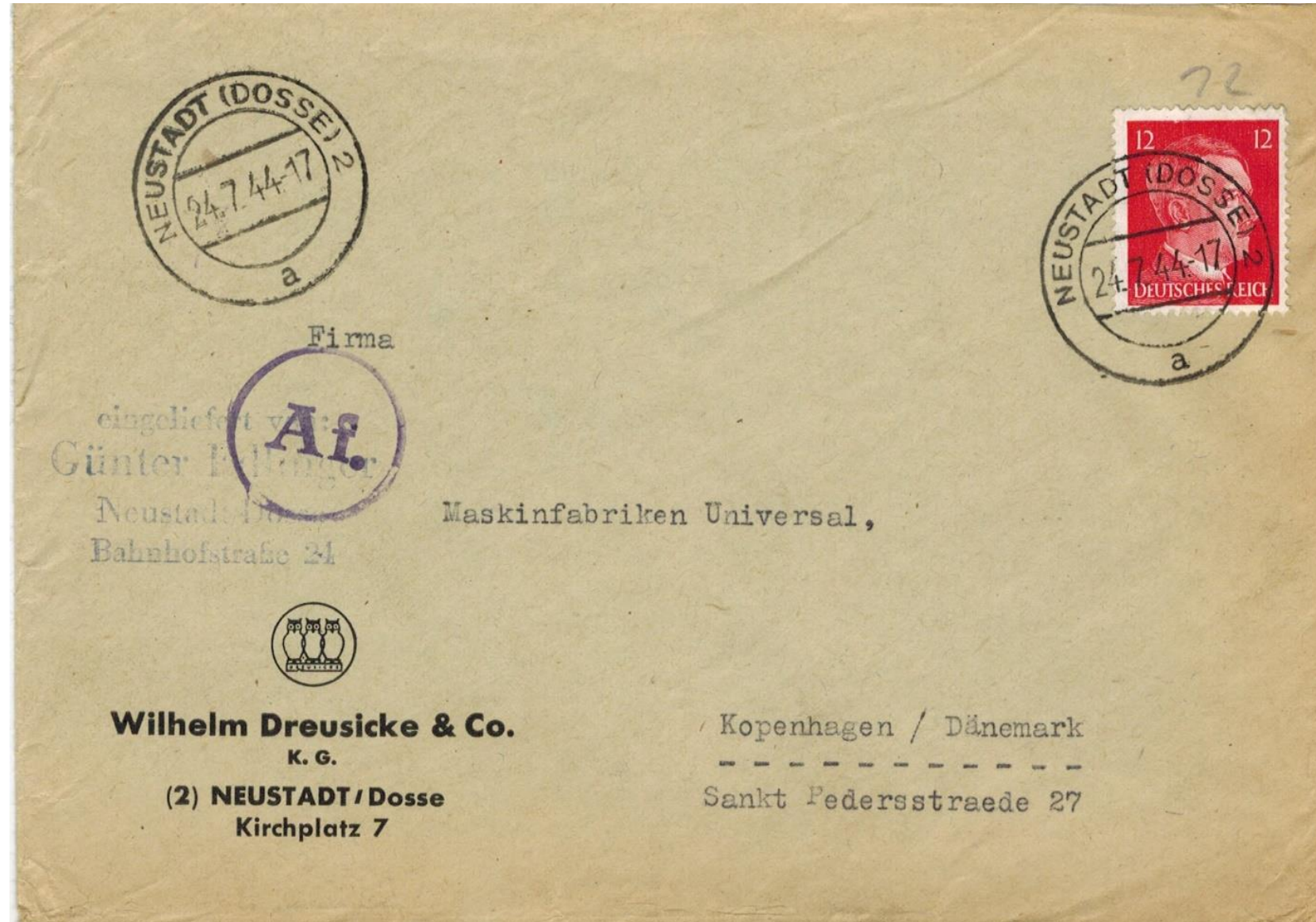


# Hamburg 'f'





# Hamburg Pass-through Censor 'Af'





# Wien – Vienna Censorship 'g'





# Vienna 'g' Pass-through Censorship





# Kopenhagen 'k' Censorship 1943



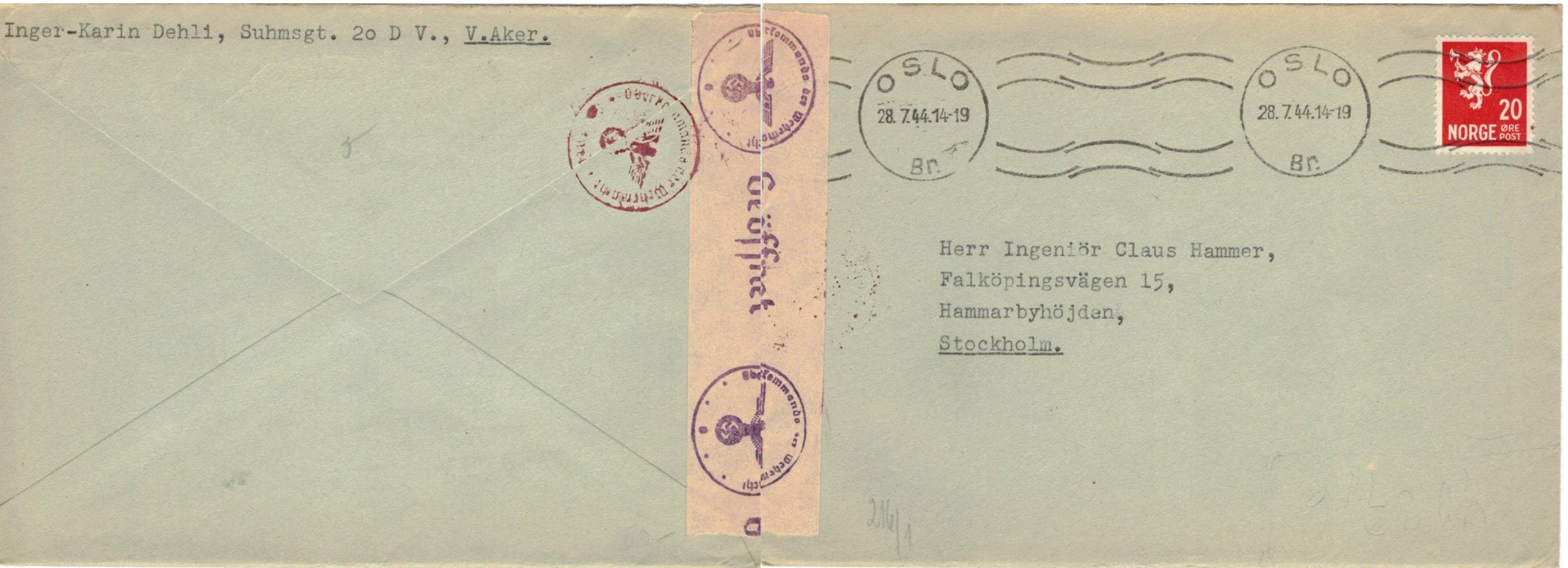


# Kopenhagen 'k' censorship 1944





# Oslo 'o' censor station 1944





# Oslo 'o' Censorship April 1945





# Durchlauf – Pass through censor from both Copenhagen and Oslo

Relatively few instances exist where more than one censorship station leaves a mark on a cover. There are many instances where a pass-through marking was used along with an opening of a letter.





# Lyon 'I' Censorship

The Lyon station was opened in Feb. 1943 to inspect mail going between France and Switzerland. In Aug. 1944 the staff was moved to Nancy because American troops occupied Lyon in that same month.





# Trondheim "t"

This cover from Kirknes, Norway to Stockholm, Sweden sent in Nov. 1943 was censored in Trondheim, Norway which was the smallest of the censoring stations.





# Paris 'x' Censorship 1943





# Paris 'x' Censorship 1943

