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# Philately and First World War

by

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A 1914 Red Cross issue

*A collection built round the theme of the First World War must include a great deal more than just stamps*

*Capt. F. C. Holland, President of the Forces Postal History Society, here outlines such a collection, one which can be satisfying philatelically and historically. The story starts with Bosnian portrait stamps of the assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife.*

JUST a half-century ago the newspaper headlines and posters recorded the beginning of the First World War. It developed from the assassination at Sarajevo, on June 28th, 1914, of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife. From that event stemmed world history, and much of it is recorded in the stamp album.

The personal element plays an important part in philately, but 50 years is a long time, and there cannot be now a large number of collectors who are able to claim to have themselves used the Occupation stamps of the First World War, or to have in their albums envelopes or cards with Field Post Office and Censor markings that they sent home while on active service during 1914-1918. That does not lessen the philatelic and historical interest of the stamps and postmarks of the First World War. It is impossible in a single article to give more than an outline of the subject, for many groups have been the subject of intensive study with resultant records.

The stamps and postmarks of the period fall into seven main groups:—

1. The Allied and Enemy Occupation issues, supplemented where possible by later stamps depicting places prominent in the fighting.
2. The "War Tax" and War Charity issues, together with stamps of new values or changed colours required by the wartime increases in postal rates.
3. The Base Army Post Office, Army Post Office, and Field Post Office postmarks connected with the Western and Eastern Fronts, and the campaigns in Greece (Salonica), Italy, the Dardenelles, Palestine, Mesopotamia, S.W. and E. Africa and the Pacific.
4. The markings on letters to and from prisoners-of-war and internees.



Double: one inverted

5. The "Security" markings on Naval mail.
  6. The early postage stamps and postmarks of the new countries that came into existence as a result of the war—the so-called "Neurope" of the 1920's. (One interesting feature of some of these is the appearance of stamps printed on the back of maps and worthless banknotes, and on ruled paper and thick paper originally intended for other purposes!)
  7. The Plebiscite stamps of 1920 issued in disputed districts, such as Allenstein, East and Upper Silesia, Marienwerder and Schleswig, until their future was settled by the inhabitants' votes. (Here, used examples on non-philatelic covers are far harder to find than the mint stamp!)
- Ideally, a comprehensive collection from these groups could be mounted to form a miniature history of the war, year by year. A booklet would be needed to describe such a collection in full, but it may be helpful, as a guide, to show in outline how the main events of 1914 can be illustrated.



"Wipers;"

parts of Northern France). The Belgian issue of 1915-22, and the Belgian Anti-tuberculosis Fund stamps of 1928 and



"Albert, the Brave"

In the west, the most important event was the German invasion of Belgium and Eastern France. This led to the issue of German stamps overprinted with "BELGIEN" in Gothic type and surcharged in centimes or francs (one of the later issues omitted "BELGIEN", so that the stamps could also be used in 1939 depict buildings in towns such as Dinant, Liège, Louvain, Malines, Mons, Namur, Tournai and Ypres, that figured so prominently in the early fighting. Numerous stamps also show the man who was an heroic figure to his nation and to many others in those days—King Albert of the Belgians—the best being the famous Steel Helmet issue of 1919-20.

Early in September, the tide turned in the Allies' favour with the Battle of the Marne and the retreat of the Germans to the Aisne. The figurehead in this was the French Commander-in-Chief, General (later, Marshal) Joffre. He and one of his subordinates, General Foch, later to be in command of the Allied Forces on the Western Front, appear on the 80c. and 1f. values respectively of the French May 1940 War Charities issue. Soon, the rival armies were entrenched from Nieuport to the frontiers



Joffre

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In the east, the early successes of the Russians against the Germans ended with the victory of General von Hindenburg at Tannenberg, but they continued to fare better against the Austrians. Russian and German and Austro-Hungarian army mail to illustrate the early Eastern Front fighting is not easy to obtain, but does at times appear in postal history auctions and the exchange packets of the Forces Postal History Society. The year 1914 also saw great progress towards the conquest of the German Colonies. By August 29th a New Zealand force had captured German Samoa. The German colonial stamps there were overprinted "G.R.I." and surcharged with a new sterling value, these soon being followed by New Zealand stamps overprinted "SAMOA"



Hindenburg



Rare double surcharge on 3m German Samoa

The Australian Government was also asked to equip a force to capture the other German areas in the Pacific. German New Guinea was taken by late September and the other localities by mid-October. The German colonial stamps of New Guinea and the Marshall Islands were dealt with at first in the same way as at Samoa. In New Guinea, certain registration labels were also pressed into service and received the "G.R.I." overprint. The Japanese took the naval base of Kiauchou and assumed control of the Caroline, Marshall and Marianne Islands. Here, postmarks are needed for illustration. In Africa, French forces from Dahomey and British forces from Gold Coast invaded Togoland. After its capture in late August, both the British and the French issued overprinted stamps for their joint occupation. The campaigns in the Cameroons, S.W. Africa and East Africa took longer and are best illustrated later in a First World War collection.

These 1914 Occupation stamps provide collectors with a number of varieties and include numerous scarce and rare stamps.

**Naval Engagements of 1914**

In the naval history of 1914, the successes of the German submarines and the activities of such German raiders as the *Emden* and *Karlsruhe* figure prominently. A philatelic history can depict their deeds by "K D Feldpostamt des Marine-Korps" postmarks accompanied by "U-Flotille" cachets or, in the case of the latter, by pre-war covers from the ships concerned. In addition, on November 1st came the loss of the cruisers *Good Hope* and *Monmouth* in the Battle of Coronel

off the coast of Chili. Mail that could not be delivered to those ships was returned with a "SHIP LOST" postmark.



Falklands Battle Memorial

Admiral Sturdee, with his battle-cruisers, avenged the defeat by the destruction of all the German ships except the *Dresden*, in the Battle of the Falkland Isles on December 8th, 1914. The memorial to commemorate that battle is shown on several stamps of the Falkland Islands, and, of course, there is the new

set coming soon to mark the 50th anniversary of the battle.

It was soon realised how essential it was that mail from ships in Home Waters should not disclose their whereabouts, and 1914 saw the beginnings of the varied hand-stamps in the shape of circles, crosses, bars, anchors, propellers and so on. These were later used as cancellations, together with machine markings that also gave away no useful information. Sailors abroad were often in places where no British stamps were available, and a series of postmarks with "RECEIVED FROM H.M. SHIP./NO CHARGE TO BE RAISED", gradually came into use.

Soon, camps for prisoners-of-war, in addition to those for internees, were needed. Specialised collections of letters to and from such camps have been formed. One interesting 1914 group is connected with the sending of a British Marine and two Naval Brigades in an unsuccessful attempt to save Antwerp from the Germans in October, 1914. Some men escaped into Holland, where they were interned, and letters can be found with inscriptions such as "Hawke Bri., R.N.D., Interned at Groningen".

The events of the years 1915 to 1918 can be traced in the same way, but only a brief outline can be given here. The successes of the enemy in the east, followed by the collapse of Russia in 1917, are illustrated by occupation stamps consisting of German stamps overprinted: "Russisch-Polen" (1915); "Gen. Gouv. Warschau" (1916-17); "Gültig 9 Armee" (1917); "M.V.i.R." (for Roumania in 1917); "Postgebiet Ob.Ost" (1918), and by Austrian stamps overprinted "Serbien" (1916); "Montenegro" (1917); and in Roumanian currency (1917) and Italian currency (1918).

The campaigns against the Turks, who entered the war in November 1914, are marked by the scarce "Bushire under British Occupation" stamps (1915); the Long Island "G.R.I." typewritten stamps (1916); the "Baghdad in British Occupation" stamps (1917); and the Iraq Occupation stamps (1918). The Dardanelles campaign is remembered on the two New Zealand Charity stamps of April 1936 (the 20th Anniversary of the Gallipoli landings) and



Map of the Dardanelles

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the Turkish issue of March, 1955. In 1966, Australia, New Zealand and Turkey are to issue stamps for the 50th anniversary of the campaign. The "E.E.F." stamps (1918), mark the retreat of the Turks from the borders of Egypt into Palestine. Even Lawrence of Arabia's help can be recalled by the Hedjaz stamps of 1916-17.

The African campaigns led to the "C.E.F." stamps for the Cameroons; the Mafia stamps (1915); the "N.F." overprints for the Nyasaland-Rhodesia Forces (1916); and "G.E.A." overprints on the stamps of Kenya (1917). Indian troops were more suited to the fighting in East Africa and Mesopotamia than they had been on the Western Front. For their use, Indian stamps appeared from 1914 with the overprint "I.E.F."

The stamps of these last two occupation groups include again a number of scarce and rare varieties.

From 1915, British Colonial "War Tax" stamps need to be included. These began with the specially printed Canadian stamps and New Zealand overprints of 1915, and their use spread to the majority of our colonies. They include quite a number of types and varieties, Bahamas, North Borneo, Trinidad and Tobago also had Red Cross overprints, while British Honduras produced even more interesting stamps of 1c., 2c. and 5c. values with a moiré overprint so that they could be made invalid if captured by the enemy.



Canadian War Tax Stamp of 1915

As in the case of 1914, Services mail can be used to supplement the stamps of the later war years. For example, the lucky gifts of two batches of envelopes with the original letters still inside, have enabled me, after some study of two regimental histories, to include the horrors of the Somme and Passchendale. Some of the other periods of fierce Western Front fighting can be recalled by stamps, e.g. the French 75c. and 1f.50 stamps of July 20th, 1936 show the Canadian War Memorial on Vimy Ridge, and the same countries 30f. of March 3rd, 1956, with its picture of trench warfare marks the 40th Anniversary of the struggle for Verdun.

The varieties of markings on Prisoner-of-War mail naturally became more prolific as the war progressed, and among these must be included examples of the internal mail and "local" stamps of Ruhleben Camp, even if they have to be of the "philatelic mint" type.



"They shall not grow old"

The last pages before those with the stamps and postmarks of Occupied Germany, the new countries and the Plebiscite districts, may well be filled with a Western Front envelope or card with the historic Armistice date of November 11th, 1918, and the two Australian stamps of March 1935 depicting the Cenotaph in Whitehall. To follow these can come "Peace" and the "Victory" issues, such as those of Bahamas, Barbados, British Honduras, Italy, New Zealand and the United States.

The important part played in the war by the Americans is difficult to illustrate, except by the 1919 Victory stamp, Services mail, and a series of postcards issued to bolster French morale by pictures of the arrival of American troops in France.

A most fitting conclusion is a cover, or card, with the postmark of the Versailles Conference, again, perhaps, necessarily of a "philatelic" nature.