

The German Afrika Korps During World War II

Purpose

This postal history exhibit presents the story of the German Afrika Korps during the North African Campaign of World War II. Military mail, period postcards and related items are used to show the German involvement in the Desert War.

Historical Background

The German Afrika Korps was a German expeditionary force in Libya, Egypt and Tunisia during World War II. Hitler ordered German forces into North Africa at the request of the Italians after Italian defeats at Tobruk and Benghazi. The first German troops arrived in Libya in February 1941. A see-saw series of battles for the control of Libya, Egypt and Tunisia followed for two years.

The decisive defeat of Axis forces at the Second Battle of El Alamein pushed the Afrika Korps into Tunisia. After the late 1942 Allied landings in North Africa and subsequent battles, the Allies encircled and defeated the Axis forces in northwestern Tunisia. On 13 May 1943 the last remnants of the German Afrika Korps surrendered. Falling into Allied hands as POWs were 130,000 German and 120,000 Italian soldiers.

Exhibit Structure

This is a chronological timeline of the German Afrika Korps during World War II. It begins with the deployment of the German troops in Libya in February 1941. What follows are Afrika Korps positions and battles, by month and year, until the Axis capitulation in Tunisia in May 1943. The exhibit ends with German POW mail and a General Erwin Rommel epilogue.

Highlights

Significant military covers and related items are highlighted with a bold box. Select maps are included to show major Afrika Korps positions and battles.

***Rommel card signed
by himself in pencil***

German and Italian units were
under the command of Gen. Lt.
Rommel, "The Desert Fox."



German Afrika Korps during World War II Minnesota Stamp Expo 2025

Purpose and Scope

This is a postal history exhibit depicting the German Afrika Korps during the North African Campaign of World War II. The exhibit reveals the see-saw battle that raged between the Allied and Axis from 1941 to 1943 in Africa. German Feldpost (soldier's mail) has been used to illustrate this part of history. Presented is the span of the first German troops in Africa until capitulation. The exhibit is the result of 18 years study and acquisition.

Treatment and Significance

This is a three-frame exhibit displaying the German Afrika Korps campaign during the Second World War. Mail from German soldiers has been used to represent a time line from the German perspective. This material is significant from the German Afrika Korps viewpoint during the battle for North Africa. This exhibit is arranged chronologically as events, positions and battles unfolded.

Background

The German Afrika Korps was the German expeditionary force in Libya and Tunisia during World War II. The reputation of the Afrika Korps is synonymous with Erwin Rommel, who commanded the Panzer Army Africa, which evolved into the German-Italian Panzer Army and Army Group Africa. Throughout the North African Campaign, the Afrika Korps fought against Allied forces until the Axis surrender in May 1943.

Balance

This is a postal history exhibit of German Feldpost. Soldier's mail was sent duty free without postage. German soldier mail represented here mostly was sent from the front in Africa to home in Germany. There are three examples of Home to Front Feldpost, besides a few Front to Front DAK covers. Most of this material is from Panzer and infantry units. Not many Luftwaffe (air force) divisions were deployed in the African theater. A variety of Afrika Korps units represents several divisions from the desert war.

Condition

All material for this exhibit came from a war zone with a tropical climate. Covers and cards sent through the Feldpost system will show the normal stains, foxing and abuse expected of such usage. When possible, the best material has been included here.

Subject Knowledge

I was first introduced to German Afrika Korps material by top notch philatelic dealer and researcher; the late Al Hyman. Over the years I obtained exhibit worthy pieces of German Afrika Korps Feldpost. Axel Dörrenbach in Düsseldorf and Christian Wapler in Berlin were willing to share their knowledge and vast expertise. Most of my knowledge, personal study and research have been enhanced by the relationships above. I have a substantial library of books, maps and articles on the German Afrika Korps campaign during World War II.

Rarity and Difficulty of Acquisition

It cannot be emphasized how difficult the challenge has been to acquire better quality postal history from this period. This exhibit took 18 years to build with fortunate acquisitions of key and rare items. The material shown came from German auction houses, the late Al Hyman, a Berlin dealer, besides a personal contact in Düsseldorf. Front to Front Feldpost is scarce. Afrika Korps Feldpost covers with the Palmenstempel cachet are very desirable and rare. The signed Rommel card is one of three known to me. The personal Rommel Feldpost cover is an extremely rare acquisition for this exhibit.

Significant Items

Material with meaning and significance in this exhibit need to be noted. Rare covers and related material include:

- Early Afrika Korps Feldpost from 5 February 1941. First German troop deployment into Libya.
- Rommel card signed by General Erwin Rommel himself (title page). One of three known to me.
- Rommel Feldpost cover from his Afrika Korps stationery, sent to his family from France 1944
- German Afrika Korps Feldpost with the Palmenstempel cachet on cover and in the contents.
- Afrika Korps cuff title award certificate. One of two I have seen in the past ten years.

- Special delivery airmail Feldpost, sent Front to Front. Mailed from Vienna to the El Alamein line.
- Tunis stamp with 20 Pf stamp on piece – used for sending military packages from North Africa.
- German Feldpost covers, sent from the homeland to Afrika Korps units at the front.
- German Afrika Korps POW mail from Allied prisoner of war camps.

References

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R.J. Houston, "Feldpost in North Afrika 1941-43", Third Reich Study Group Bulletin Vol. XIII, No. 1 and Vol. No. 2, 1979

Gianluigi Soldati, "Panzer Feldpost Offices", German Postal Specialist, Vol. XL, No. 4, April 1989

John Strawson, "The Battle for North Africa", Bonanza Books, New York, N.Y. 1969

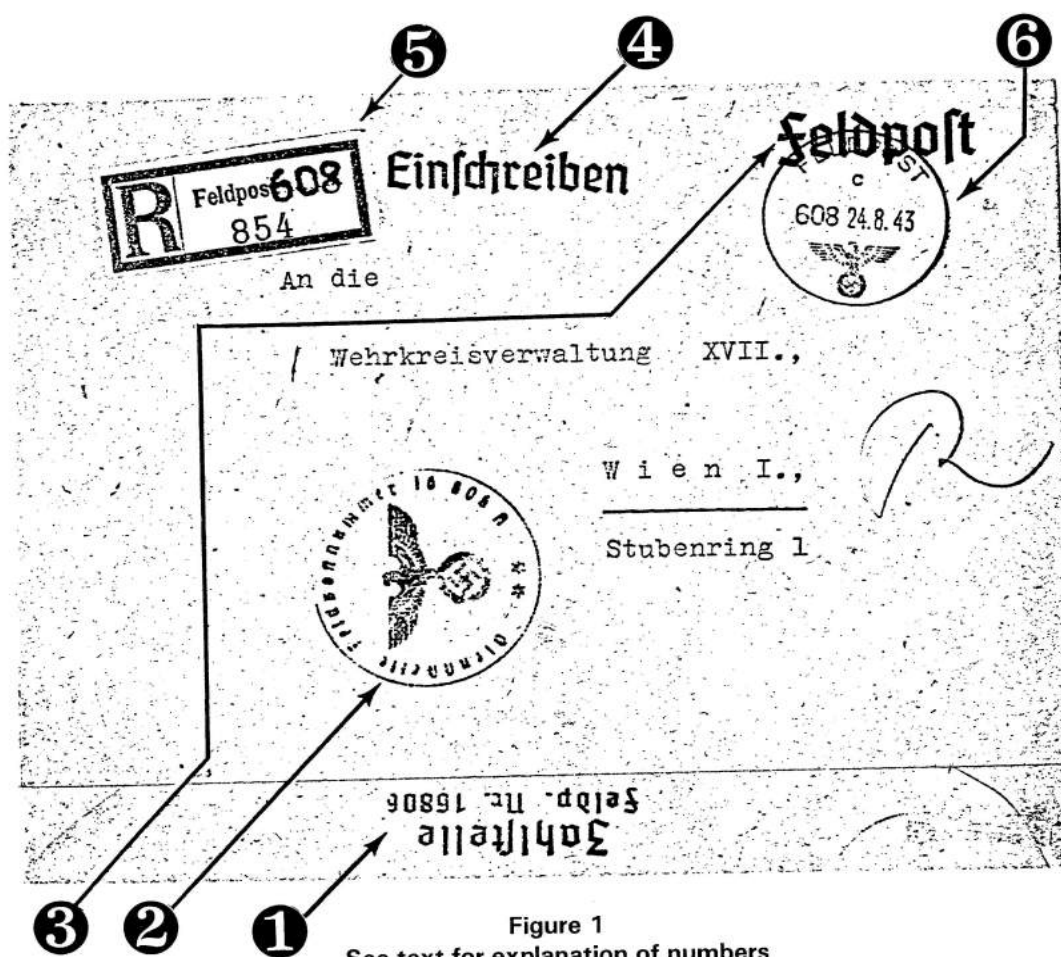


Figure 1
See text for explanation of numbers

Identification and meanings on a German Feldpost cover.

- 1) Feldpost Number indicating military unit. Senders five-digit field post address.
- 2) Briefstempel (unit validating cancel)
- 3) "Feldpost" marking for duty free mailing.
- 4) Registered ("Einschreiben") indication on cover for official mail.
- 5) Registration label for official mail.
- 6) Mute date cancel with "Feldpost" for soldier's free franked mailing.