

Stamps As Political “Footballs”

By Stan Cronwall

Following the end of World War II in Europe, Germany was divided into four parts occupied by four of the Allied nations; the United States, Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union.

The three western allies occupied western Germany and the western part of Germany’s former capitol, Berlin. (Berlin itself was located in the Russian Zone of eastern Germany.) East Germany and the eastern portion of Berlin became a Russian satellite or “puppet state” of the Soviet Union.

In the west, the joint Allied Military Government (A.M.G.) of the U.S. and Great Britain issued stamps for civilian use. Separate stamps were issued under French occupation as well as for the German states under their control – Baden, Rhine-Palatinate, and Wurttemberg.

The western sectors of Berlin occupied by the Americans, British and French who jointly issued stamps for their part of the city. At first, these were overprints “BERLIN” on the German issues of 1947-48 (Scott 557-569 and 571-573)



On April 9, 1948 the western sectors began issuing stamps for Berlin with separate designs. (This ended October 3, 1990 when Germany and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) merged.)

The German mark was re-valued in June 1948.

In the Soviet Zone of occupation a provisional overprint was hand stamped in black, violet or blue with various city, town and post office or zone numerals. These were applied to existing stocks of stamps issued for Germany as a whole.

On July 3, 1948 a new overprint “Sowjetische Besatzungs Zone” was applied to Germany Scott 557-573, as well as on certain Germany Numeral Stamps of 1946 (Scott 534, 547, 550, 553 and 555), and the Berlin-Brandenburg 1945 “STADT BERLIN” stamps Scott 11 N 1 – 11 N 7.

Later in 1948, Soviet Zone issues began printing the designation "DEUTSCHE POST" on their stamps. Then beginning with the March 2, 1950 issue (Scott 51) the east German stamps were printed "DEUTSCHE DEMOKRATISCHE REPUBLIK" (German Democratic Republic) or DDR.

Now, after all that background (and details you really didn't want or need), let's get to the subject title of this exercise.



The post office authorities in the DDR designated certain issues from the West as politically forbidden. An example of this is Germany Scott 697 (shown left). This stamp with the war prisoner in profile and barbed wire was issued May 9, 1953

The issue honors German Nazi soldiers who had fought during World War II.

This "offended" the East German politicians (and their Russian masters) despite the fact that thousands of German POWs remained captive in the Soviet Union until sometime in 1956.

On the other hand, the West bristled at DDR Scott 2560 issued August 5, 1986

which commemorated the 25th anniversary of the Berlin Wall. The issue (shown right) is with East German soldiers at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin and the Wall in the background.



Letters franked using this stamp were refused in West Germany and the western sectors of Berlin. They were returned to the sender with the message that the mail was not delivered because it was deemed to display forbidden political propaganda.

There have to be many other examples where the politics of the time or the politicians have decided to use stamps as low key weapons.

Anyone else have a less complicated story - perhaps another divided country like North and South Korea?

Stan Cronwall's collecting interests include *Germany: Third Reich 1933-45 and the areas it occupied (stamps covers & cards)*. He also collects *U.S. World War II Patriotic Covers and Cards; Civil War Patriotic Covers (both U.S. and CSA); U.S. Naval Covers; DDR stamps; and, Post WW II Soviet Zone Hitler Head Obliteration stamps, covers & cards.*