

Tunisian POW mail from WWII

Par Johan DELBEKE

Introduction

During the conquest of North Africa, a system of Prisoner Of War camps (POW) was set up in North Africa. 4 of these camps were located in Tunisia ;

1. Camp XV at Bizerte
2. Camp XVI at Tunis
3. Camp XVII at Zaghuan
4. Camp XVIII at Sfax

All of them held German Prisoners. Italians were probably only held in the first 3. The number of prisoners varied constantly, but for none of the camps was it higher than 10.000. Of the first 3, Camp XVI was the biggest and Camp XVII the smallest. The population of Camp XVIII is unknown. One should not imagine each of these to be huge camps with thousands of prisoners. Camp XV for example had 8 locations.

By September 1947 most of the prisoners were transported to France to be used as laborers. 500 men stayed behind in Tunisia to finish the mine clearing. The use of prisoners as labor is against the Geneva convention, but as war crimes go, this is probably a minor one. The last camp closed in 1948. By far the majority of camp mail is addressed to or comes from Germany.

At first the POW mail was censored by the same commissions as censored civilian mail. By April 1944, the French military - who managed the camps – set up a separate organization to censor camp mail. It used types of censor marks that were derived from earlier ones in use in Morocco and Algeria, but there seems to be many local varieties, not all of them catalogued yet.

Correspondance des Prisonniers de Guerre
Kriegsgefangenenpost
Carte Postale Postkarte

A
An Frau

Hedi Schanze

Franc de port ! Gebührenfrei !

Expéditeur :
Absender :
Nom et prénom : Hans
Vor- und Zuname : Schanze
N° matricule : 30543
Gefangenennummer
Designation du dépôt : Camp de
Lager-Einrichtung : prisonniers
de guerre XVI Tunis

Lieu de destination : Anklam
Enfangenort
Rue : Baustr. 1
Strasse
Province ou district : Pommern
Landesteil (Provinz, usw.)
Pays : Deutschland
Land
286

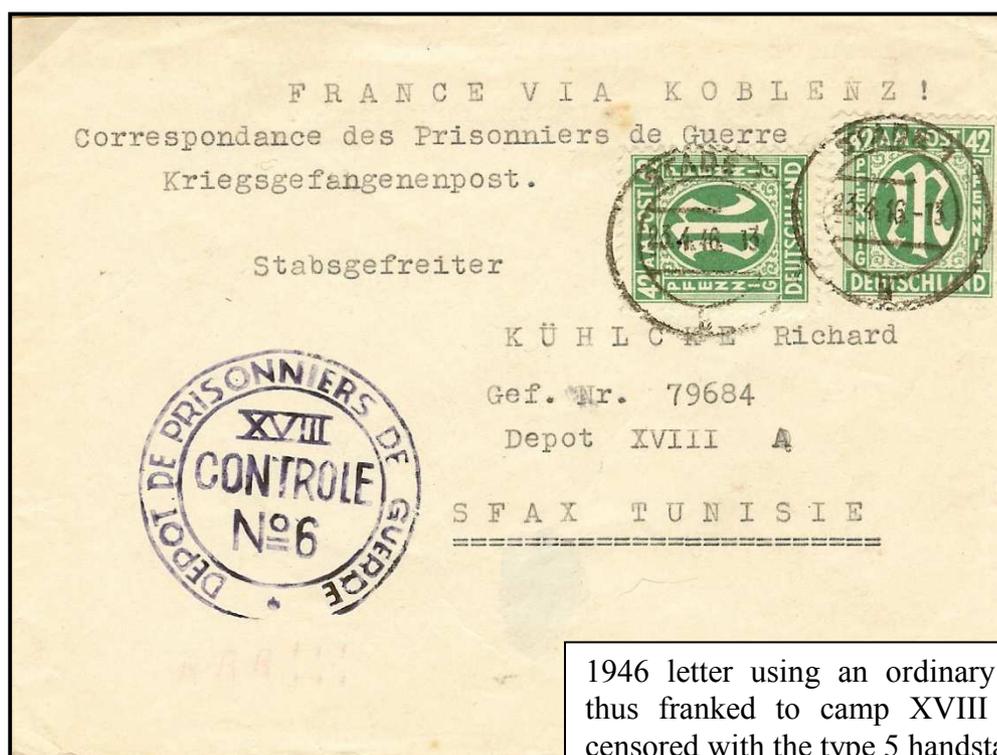
Card dated 26 August 1943 with typical civilian censor marks. The violet mark is German.

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Besides the censor marks, one can also collect the postal stationary used by the prisoners. While it can be argued that the study and collection of camp censor marks is not philately proper, the same cannot be said for the stationary. Proper stationary allowed the camp mail to travel through the civilian mail system without being franked. I have as yet no overview of what there is, so I will just show the different examples I have seen without trying to classify and number them. It seems that the use of this postal stationary was not uniformly obligatory, because other supports were used both during and after the war.

In such cases, the unit handstamp of the camp ensures the franchise, and incoming mail bears stamps.

Type	Number of circles	Outer diameter	Text along circle	Text in center	remarks	Dates	Camp(s)
1	2	30mm	DEPOT P.G. XV	CONTROLE / N° 1	In black, or blue	May 1944	XV
2	2	27mm	DEPOT P.G. XVI	CONTROLE / N° 3	In violet	April 1944	XVI
3	2	34mm	CORRESPONDANCE DE PRISONNIERS DE GUERRE DE L'AXE	XVI / CONTROLE /	Bleu, the censor filled out his number on the third line in the center by hand	Nov 1944 – Feb 1946	XVI, XVII
4	2	25mm	DEPOT P.G. XVII	CONTROLE / N°	Blue, the censor filled out his number on the third line in the center by hand	Feb 1945	XVII
5	2	41mm	DEPOT DE PRISONNIERS DE GUERRE	XVIII / CONTROLE / N° 6	Black and violet. Censor number always seems to be 6	Feb 1945 – Jun 1947	XVIII
7	2	40mm	CAMP DE P.G. N° XV	CONTROLE / PAR / N° 2	black	Jun 1946	XV
6	3	39mm	CORRESPONDANCE DE PRISONNIERS DE GUERRE DE L'AXE	XVI / CONTROLE / 3	violet	Aug 1946	XVI
8	1	36mm	CAMP DE P.G. N° XV	CONTROLE / PAR N° 2	Jun 1947	Jun 1947	XV
9	1?	26mm	DEPOT P.G. XVI	CONTROLE / N° 8	violet	Sep 1947	XVI



1946 letter using an ordinary envelope and thus franked to camp XVIII where it was censored with the type 5 handstamp

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Postal Stationary

Besides ensuring the security, the stationary served the purpose of ensuring the franchise in all transiting countries.

Postcards



This piece of cardboard was used as a postcard in May 1944 from the Tunis camp. It shows that either that the use of stationary was not an absolute rule, or that at the time there was a shortage.

CORRESPONDANCE DES PRISONNIERS DE GUERRE
Kriegsgefangenenpost
zone anglaise

CAMP DE P.O. N° 15
Contrôle
par
N° 2
A
An

CARTE - POSTALE
Postkarte
FRANCO DE PORT
GEBUHRENFREI

Frau HEDI SCHANZE

EXPÉDITEUR - ABSENDER

NOM et PRÉNOM :
Vor- und Zuname
Erwin Brietzke

N° matricule :
Gefangenennummer
71574

N° du Dépôt :
Lager nummer
P.G XV
Tunisie
FRANCE (FRANKREICH)

Lieu de destination :
Empfangsort
24
Hamburg

Rue
Strasse
Hochallee n° 56

Arrondissement :
Kreis
zone anglaise

Province :
Landesteil, Provinz, u. s. w.
Allemagne

A card printed for use in France, but here used from Tunisia in June 1946. The tear at the top is an indication that it had a response part.

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CORRESPONDANCE DES PRISONNIERS DE GUERRE
Kriegsgefangenenpost

DEPOT P. G. XVI
CONTROLE
8

CARTE - REPONSE
Antwort-Postkarte

Au prisonnier
An den Kriegsgefangenen

10
Rep. mil
Arved

BERLIN
FRANCO DE PORT
23942 1677
GEBUEHRENFREI
FRIEDENAU

Gunter Gaede

EXPEDITEUR - ABSENDER

NOM et PRÉNOM:
Vor- und Zuname
G. Wachholz

Lieu:
Ort
Berlin Friedenau

Rue:
Strasse
Grünstraße 44

Arrondissement:
Kreis
Allemagne

Département:
Landesteil, Provinz u. s. w.
Deutschland

N° matricule:
Gefangenenummer
25674

Dépôt n°:
Lagernummer
212

Désignation du dépôt:
Lagerbezeichnung
Tunis

AFRIQUE DU NORD FRANÇAISE

A answer card that could be the other half of the one above, if it were not for the serified font. It is dated Sept 1947

1029/31

Army Form No. W.3494

Frau Hedi Schanze

Empfangsort *Anklam/Po.*

Strasse *Baustr. 1*

Land *Deutschland*

Absender
Vor und Zuname
Hans Schanze

Gefangenenummer *30543*

Lager-Bezeichnung *Tunis*

No. *XVI* P.O.W. Camp

DEPOT P. G. XVI
CONTROLE
3

Commandant de la Prison

PSS/NA/12/43/50,000—AFHQ Press 945

An American card used in April 1944 at Tunis XVI POW camp.

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Correspondance des Prisonniers de Guerre
Kriegsgefangenenpost

Franc de port
Gebührenfrei

Carte postale - Postkarte

EXPÉDITEUR - ABSENDER :

Nom : Schanze
Name

Prénom : Hans
Vorname

N° matricule : 30545
Gefangenenummer

Désignation du Dépôt : Tunis
Lagerbezeichnung

N° du Dépôt : XVII
Lagernummer

Lieu de destination : Anklam
Bestimmungsort

Rue :
Strasse

Province :
Landesteil

Pays :
Land

425

CONTROLÉ

20

Two very similar cards, the first used in Nov 1944, the second in Oct 1945

Correspondance des Prisonniers de Guerre
Kriegsgefangenenpost

Franc de port
Gebührenfrei

Carte Postale - Postkarte

EXPÉDITEUR - ABSENDER :

Nom : Schick
Name

Prénom : Olype
Vorname

N° matricule : 37693
Gefangenenummer

Désignation du Dépôt : Salsou
Lagerbezeichnung

N° du Dépôt : VII
Lagernummer

Lieu de destination : Wehrdorf
Bestimmungsort

Rue : N° 142
Strasse

Province : Sachsen
Landesteil

Pays : Prusse
Land

Tunisie

45

CONTROLÉ

10

Envelopes

The envelopes here described are of a type similar to aerogrammes: they consist of one piece of folded paper that could be closed – but not glued – so as to cover the correspondence.

Incoming envelope from Aug 1946. The Term Rückantwortbrief indicates that it was included in the correspondence of the prisoner for the writing of the answer.

23.7.46

CORRESPONDANCE DES PRISONNIERS DE GUERRE

LETTRE-RÉPONSE
Rückantwortbrief

Au prisonnier de guerre : Gaede Günster
An den Kriegsgefangenen

N° Matricule : 75674
Gefangenenummer

N° du Dépôt : XVII
Lager nummer

Désignation du Dépôt : Zaghouan
Lager-Bezeichnung
Afrique du Nord - Française
FRANCE (FRANKREICH)

Günster

Frankreich

über Wolfenbüttel

WOLFENBÜTTEL
05.8.46-13

FRANCO DE PORT
Gebührenfrei!

CONTROLÉ

1

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CORRESPONDANCE DES PRISONNIERS DE GUERRE
Kriegsgefangenenpost

A *Frain*
An

Heidegarol Leichth

Lieu de destination : *Wehrsdorf*
Empfangsort *über Kückinich - Landorf*

Rue : *N° 148*
Strasse

Arrondissement : *Baßgen*
Kreis

Département : *Sachsen*
Landesteil, Provinz, u. s. w. *Deutschland - Russische Zone*

CAMP P.G. N°
CONTROL
PAR 1° 2

FRANCO DE PORT
Gebührenfrei!

Envelope used to Germany in June 1947, i.e. 3 months before the last prisoners left the last camp. Incoming mail at that time was sent in ordinary envelopes.

Bibliography

- G. Migliavacca: *Italian POWs and Internees in Africa*, Pavia, 1980, 42 pp..