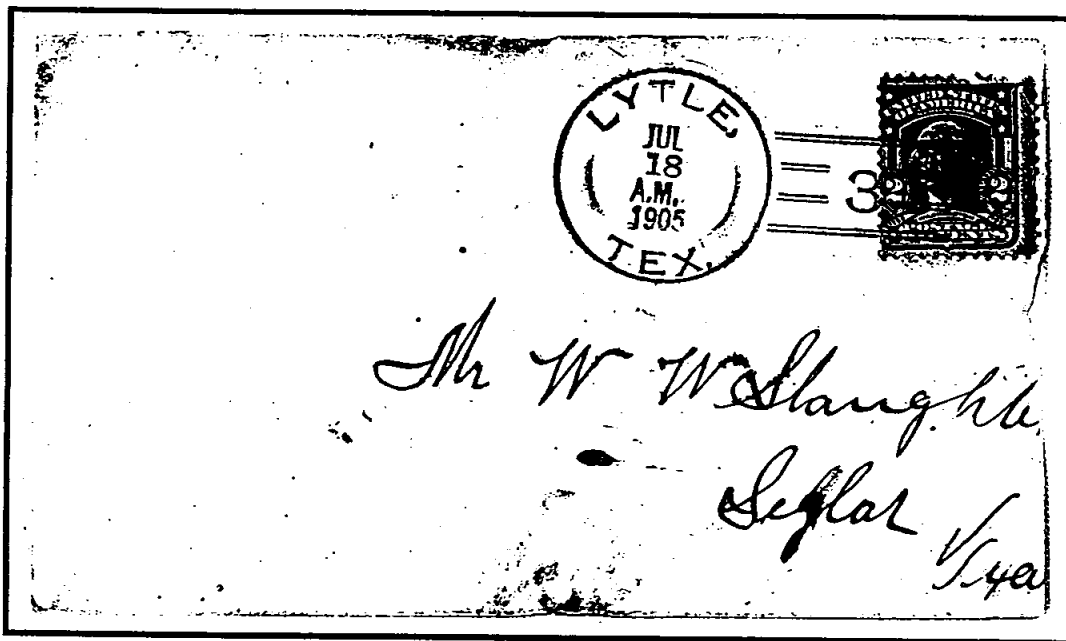
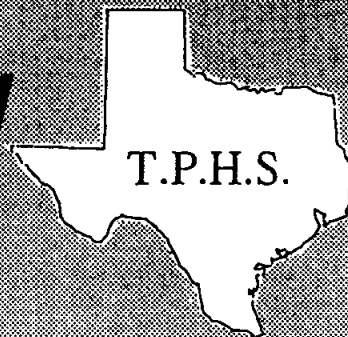


The
Texas Postal History Society
Journal



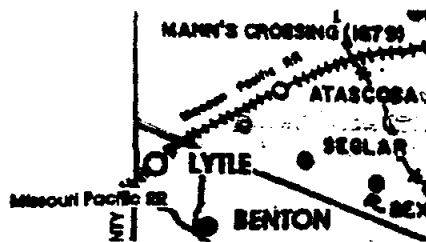
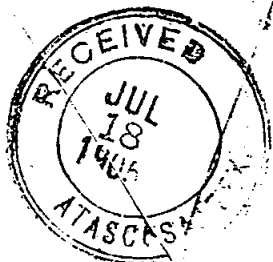
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This issue is a "first" for the TPHS Journal. We have not previously addressed the subject of WWII Prisoner-of-War correspondence involving Texas origins or destinations. This is, however, a legitimate facet of Texas postal history. The articles included herein involve German POW's. There were also Italian and Japanese prisoners in Texas. Can any member produce mail from one or both of these nationalities? They also wrote and received letters. Do a little detective work and see if you can't locate other POW mail.

On the Cover ...

Type 2 Doane cancel from Lytle, Atascosa County, Texas. The July 18, 1905 date is the latest Lytle date reported by Jack M. Smith, Sr., Texas Doane coordinator. The cover did not go directly to its destination, Seglar, but instead rode a Missouri Pacific train to Atascosa from where it was conveyed the next day to Seglar. All three communities are within a few miles of each other with Atascosa and Seglar being in Bexar County.



BACKSTAMPS

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From the President ...

News of Texas Postal History is scarce. I guess we are in the summer doldrums!

No word re the El Paso County collection which I reported on this spring. Regardless, Tom Wegner hopefully has found a buyer and the collection has found a new home.

I have just learned that the editor has received a page of advertising for this issue of the Journal. This is the first ad under our new plan. I hope we have more for the coming issue of the Journal. Quarter page ads cost \$5.00, half page \$10.00 and full page \$20.00. Those prices are per issue. Ads can be for items you want to sell or items you are seeking to purchase. They are not restricted to Texas Postal History but can advertise stamps and literature.

In case you have overlooked how you place an ad, refer back to the instructions which were in my President's message in the May 2002 issue of our Journal.

Our next Texas meeting of the society is scheduled in Humble at the Greater Houston Stamp Show. The show dates are a bit later this year. It will be held Friday September 20th through Sunday the 22nd. Our meeting is scheduled on Saturday the 21st in the early afternoon. I hope you are going to attend the Houston show and set aside time for our T.P.H.S. meeting. We'll again have a short business session followed by a "Show and Tell" program.

That is it for this time.

Good Collectin',

Ed

A ROTAN, TEXAS POSTMARK PUZZLE

by Michael M. Ludeman

The South Plains of Texas were one of the last areas of the state to be settled in the late 19th century. It was the home of the Comanche Indians and the buffalo, but by the late 1870s, both had been eliminated, and the cattle ranchers had moved into the area. In 1886, a community named White Flat was established near the Double Mountain Fork of the Brazos River in what would later become Fisher County. The town was named for the powdery white gypsum sand that was found throughout the area. The town did not amount to much until 1906, when the Texas Central Railroad announced that it was building into the area. Several local ranchers donated land to expand the town and an application for a post office was submitted. [1]

The original application was rejected because of an existing post office named Whiteflat, which had been established on July 15, 1893 [2] at a line camp on the Matador Ranch in Motley County. [3] A new application was submitted, and a post office was approved for the name Rotando, and this office opened on Dec. 29, 1906. However, on January 22, 1907, the name changed to Rotan. John Germann reports that the post office was named for Ed Rotan of Waco, a major stockholder of the railroad. [4] This rapid change of name may have been the result of an error on the initial application. One possibility is that the proposed name was listed as "Rotan PO" and was misread by the USPOD clerk as "ROTANDO".

My interest in this post office was heightened when I obtained the cover shown in Figure 1. Dated during the first year of operation, the placement of the town name in the dial was decidedly off-center, something not normally seen. Reviewing Germann's work, I learned of the earlier Rotando post office, and with some experimenting, decided that if the additional letters "DO" were added to the postmark, the name would nearly balance in the normal fashion.

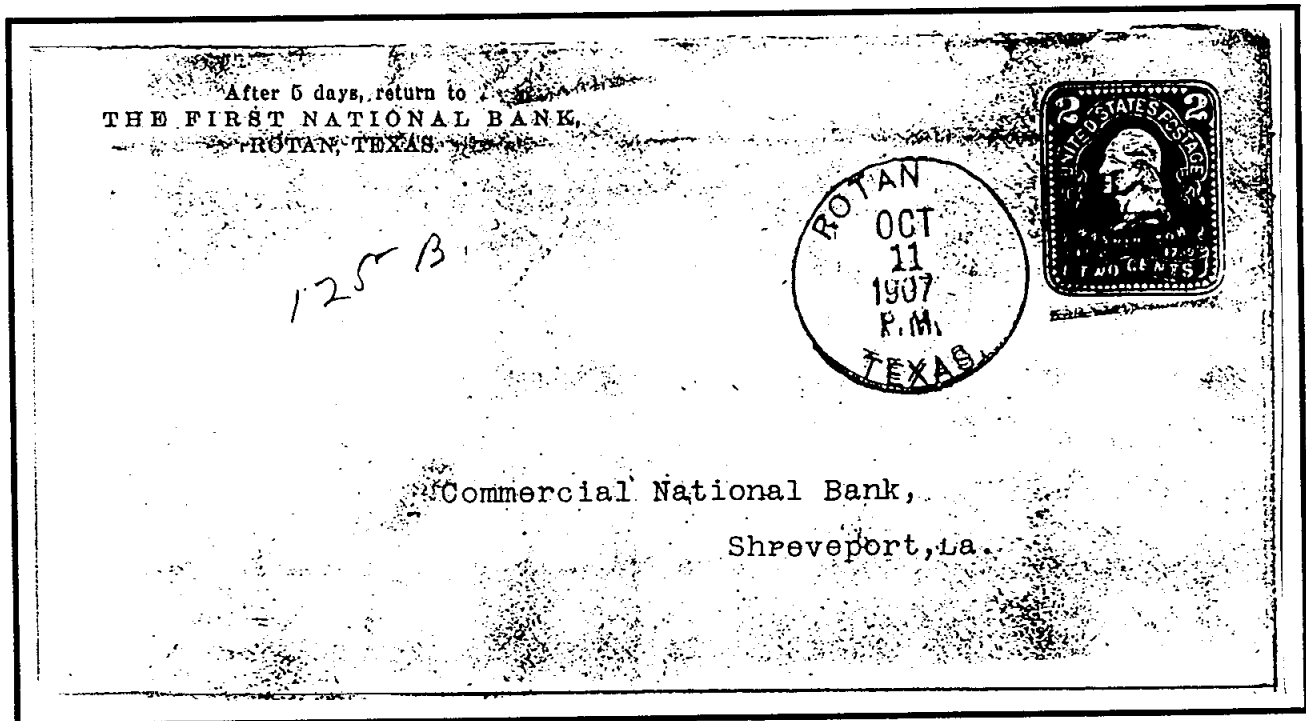


Figure 1

Shortly thereafter, I acquired the second cover shown in Figure 2. This cover was postmarked over three months earlier, but had the ROTAN centered in the dial at the top, and included the comma following the name, as is common for postmarks from this period, but missing on the first postmark. The cover [postmark] in Figure 3 was provided by TPHS member Fred Ekenstam who obtained it from the Internet after reading a draft of this article. It shows that the modified device was used in September, 1907 as well.

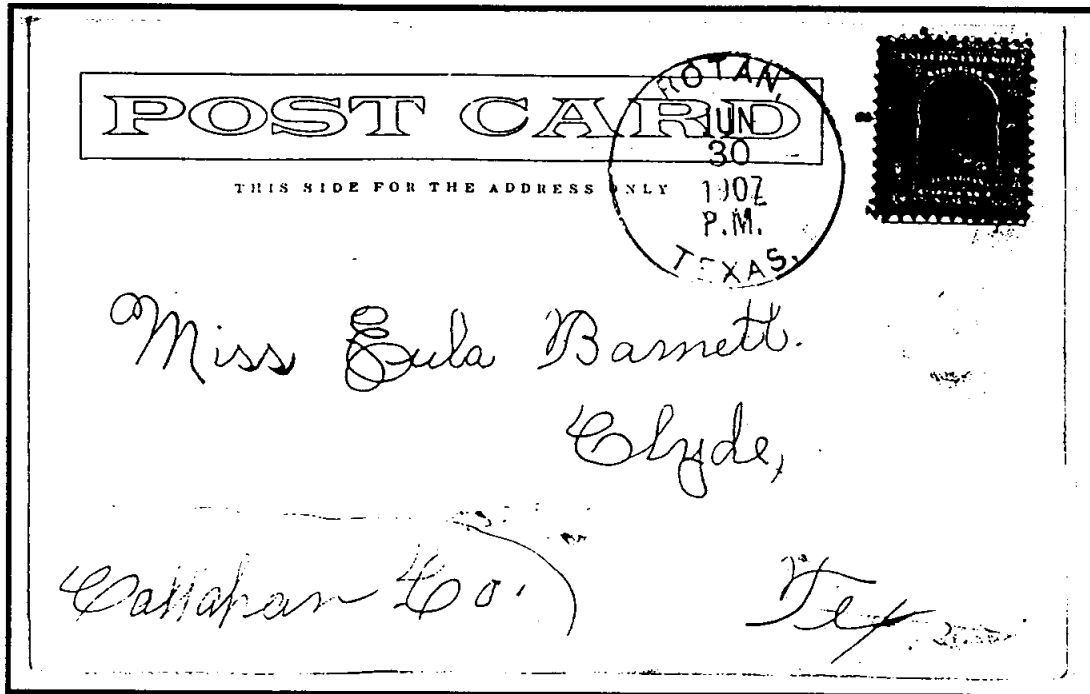


Figure 2

When I had encountered the first cover, and decided that it had been modified by removing the "DO," I had assumed that the postmark device had been used by the postmaster until a replacement could be ordered and received following the name change, and then would have been discarded. Instead, it appears that once the "new" device was obtained (obviously by June 30, 1907), the old device was retained by the postmaster, and was still used occasionally, either by accident or as a backup device.

This raises several interesting questions. How did the postmaster come to have a device with this incorrect name? And more importantly did he actually use it? If our earlier speculation that "ROTANDO" was not the original name on the application is correct, it seems safe to assume that the postmaster did not order the postmark device with the name "ROTANDO". So what might have happened?

If we look at the history of cancelling devices in smaller post offices during this period [5], we learn that prior to 1890 most postmasters at 4th-class post offices were required to purchase their device at their own expense. This practice led to a wide range of postmark styles along with a variety of inks. Not all of these devices proved adequate to properly cancel (deface) the postage stamps to prevent reuse. To address this problem, starting around 1890, the USPOD initiated a program to provide steel circular date stamps to 4th-class offices. This experiment was not particularly successful as these devices also failed to invalidate the stamps and prevent their reuse. In 1903 a new experiment began with a duplex device with a bar killer, a device which later became known as the Doane cancel. This experiment was more successful. By the end of 1906 the USPOD began to regularly issue a new style 4-bar device which is the type found on the illustrated covers.

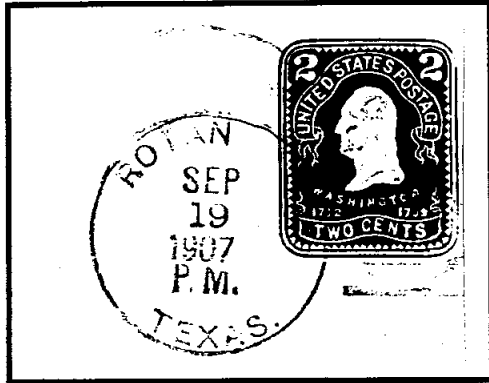


Figure 3 Courtesy Fred Ekenstam

This device is characterized by a vertical bar span of 14 mm compared to 20 mm for those which were used later. It is believed that these devices were automatically ordered for the postmaster when an application for a new post office was approved and were sent to him either with the approval papers or shortly thereafter. If the clerk at the USPOD thought that the post office name was "ROTANDO", then he would have ordered a device with that name, and then would have forwarded it to the postmaster without the latter knowing of the confusion until he received the device.

No doubt when the postmaster received the approved application and observed the incorrect name, he immediately advised the USPOD in Washington of the error. The response was rapid, as we see the name was changed in only 25 days. But what did the postmaster do in the interim? Did he use the device to cancel mail? The only way to show that he did would be to discover a postcard or cover with the full "ROTANDO" postmark from this short period between Dec. 29, 1906 and Jan. 22, 1907. It seems reasonable to assume that the postmaster would have used this original device without modification as he would not want to postmark mail using the revised name "ROTAN" until after the name change was approved. The policy regarding this is clear. Between 1907 and 1920 postal regulations were emphatic about this type of thing. Helbock notes "postal regulations warned postmasters that the 'use of unauthorized postmarking stamps or canceling inks will be considered sufficient cause for removal' ".[6]

It would further seem reasonable to assume that when the application for the name change from "ROTANDO" to "ROTAN" was approved, a new device whose use is shown in Figure 2, was ordered and provided automatically to the postmaster. Depending on the bureaucracy, this new device may not have been received by the Jan. 22nd date and the postmaster decided to alter the original device to read "ROTAN" and began to use it. As can be seen from our examples, its usage continued after the receipt of the corrected device.

Does anyone have a different theory? Efforts to locate additional ROTANDO or ROTAN postmarks from this period have been unsuccessful. Other TPHS members who might have a cover with similar or related postmarks are invited to submit photocopies to the Editor.

The author acknowledges the assistance of John Germann and Fred Ekenstam for providing some of the information used in this article.

References:

1. The New Handbook of Texas (NHBTx). "Rotan, Texas".
2. Schmidt, Walter G., Encyclopedia of Texas Post Offices, Collectors Club of Chicago, 1993.
3. NHBTx. "Whiteflat, Texas". TSHA, 1995.
4. Germann, John J. and Myron Fox. Texas Post Offices by County, "Fisher County", 1986-2001.
5. Richard Helbock, Postmarks on Postcards, 2nd Ed., 2001.
6. *ibid.*, p 71.

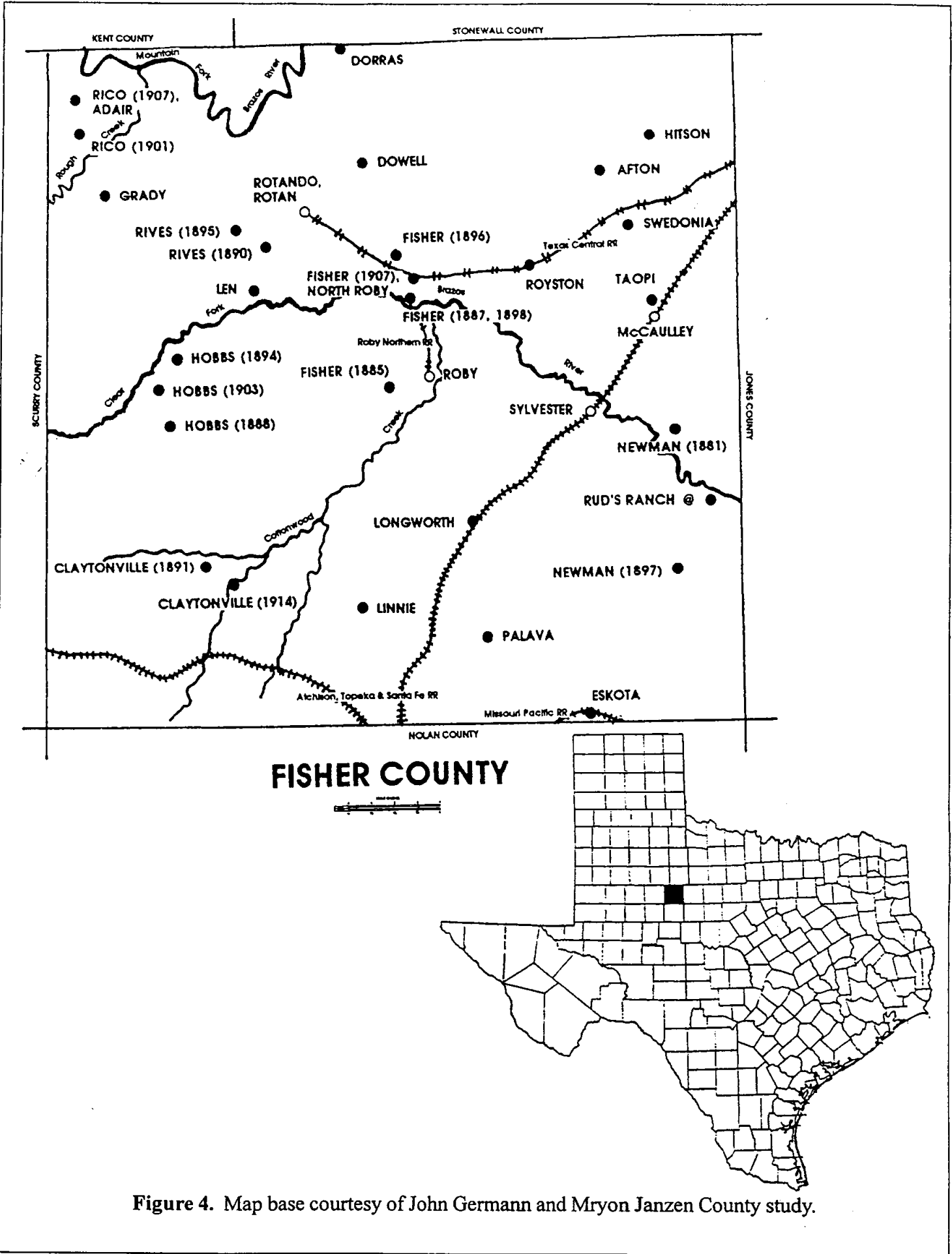


Figure 4. Map base courtesy of John Germann and Mryon Janzen County study.

CENSUS OF PRISONERS OF WAR IN THE CONTINENTAL UNITED STATES

| End of Month | Total | German | Italian | Japanese |
|--------------|---------|---------|---------|----------|
| 1942: | | | | |
| May | 32 | 31 | -- | 1 |
| June | 33 | 32 | -- | 1 |
| July | 49 | 39 | -- | 10 |
| August | 65 | 55 | -- | 10 |
| September | 177 | 130 | -- | 47 |
| October | 183 | 130 | -- | 53 |
| November | 431 | 380 | -- | 51 |
| December | 1,881 | 512 | 1,317 | 52 |
| 1943: | | | | |
| January | 2,365 | 990 | 1,313 | 62 |
| February | 2,444 | 1,026 | 1,356 | 62 |
| March | 2,755 | 1,334 | 1,359 | 62 |
| April | 5,007 | 2,146 | 2,799 | 62 |
| May | 36,083 | 22,110 | 13,911 | 62 |
| June | 53,435 | 34,161 | 19,212 | 62 |
| July | 80,558 | 54,502 | 25,969 | 87 |
| August | 130,299 | 94,220 | 35,986 | 93 |
| September | 163,706 | 115,358 | 48,253 | 95 |
| October | 167,748 | 119,401 | 48,252 | 95 |
| November | 171,484 | 122,350 | 49,039 | 95 |
| December | 172,879 | 123,440 | 49,323 | 116 |
| 1944: | | | | |
| January | 174,822 | 124,880 | 49,826 | 116 |
| February | 177,387 | 127,252 | 49,993 | 142 |
| March | 183,618 | 133,135 | 50,136 | 347 |
| April | 184,502 | 133,967 | 50,168 | 367 |
| May | 186,368 | 135,796 | 50,164 | 408 |
| June | 196,948 | 146,101 | 50,278 | 569 |
| July | 224,863 | 173,980 | 50,276 | 607 |
| August | 243,870 | 192,868 | 50,272 | 730 |
| September | 300,382 | 248,205 | 51,034 | 1,143 |
| October | 338,055 | 248,781 | 51,032 | 1,242 |
| November | 360,455 | 306,856 | 51,156 | 2,443 |
| December | 360,281 | 306,581 | 51,071 | 2,629 |
| 1945: | | | | |
| January | 359,687 | 306,306 | 50,561 | 2,820 |
| February | 360,996 | 307,404 | 50,571 | 3,021 |
| March | 365,954 | 312,144 | 50,550 | 3,250 |
| April | 399,518 | 345,920 | 50,304 | 3,294 |
| May | 425,871 | 371,683 | 50,273 | 3,915 |
| June | 425,806 | 371,505 | 50,052 | 4,249 |
| July | 422,130 | 367,513 | 49,789 | 4,828 |
| August | 415,919 | 361,322 | 49,184 | 5,413 |
| September | 403,311 | 355,458 | 42,915 | 4,938 |
| October | 391,145 | 351,150 | 35,065 | 4,930 |
| November | 358,419 | 324,623 | 29,539 | 4,257 |
| December | 341,016 | 313,234 | 25,696 | 2,086 |
| 1946: | | | | |
| January | 286,611 | 275,078 | 11,532 | 1 |
| February | 208,965 | 208,403 | 561 | 1 |
| March | 140,606 | 140,572 | 33 | 1 |
| April | 84,209 | 84,177 | 31 | 1 |
| May | 37,491 | 37,460 | 30 | 1 |
| June | 162 | 141 | 20 | 1 |

By June 30, 1946, only the 162 POWs serving sentences in U.S. penal institutions remained in America.

Source: Lewis, History of Prisoner of War Utilization by the United States Army, 1776-1945, pp. 90-91.

CORRESPONDENCE TO AND FROM A GERMAN POW

by Walter C. Bauer

Between the spring of 1943 and the summer of 1946 there were about 50,000 prisoners of war held in seventy camps in Texas. They were Germans, Italians and Japanese. Most, however, were Germans.

One of the POWs was Herbert Heim who may have been a member of the German Afrika-Korps. He was held at the "Pine Camp" near Huntsville, Texas. Following are two letters, both written in German which I have transcribed, plus English translations. The earlier letter was written to the POW by his father. The sender of this letter writes awkwardly and probably had very limited education. The second letter by POW Herbert Heim to his brother Willi is better written indicating Herbert probably received a better education. The place in Germany from where the father's letter originated and to where the POW's letter was sent is Koenigshutte, Upper Silesia (now probably in Poland). Figure 1 is a reduced scale photocopy of the cover sent from Germany to Huntsville.

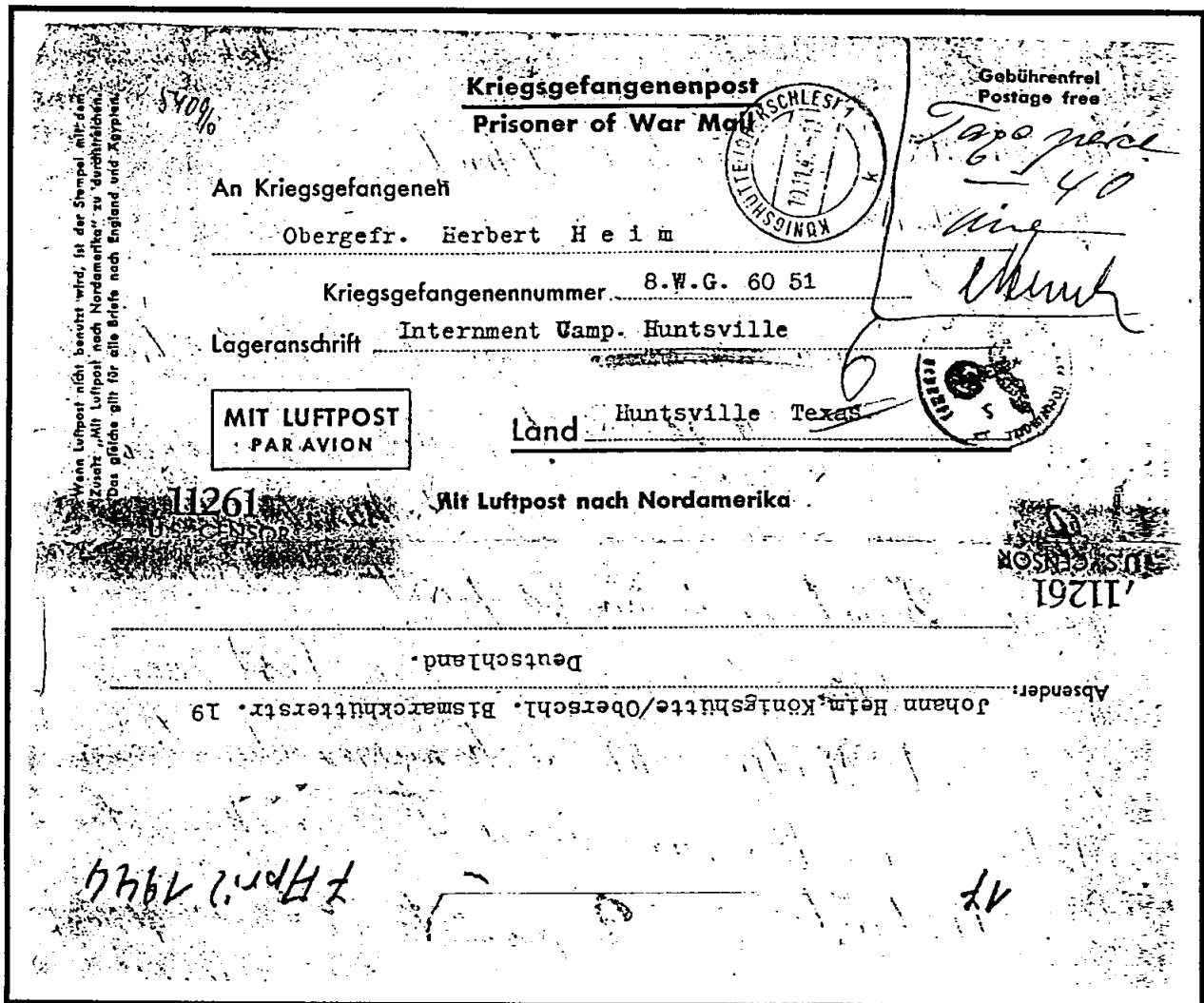


Figure 1

The cover shows the printed remark "gebuehrenfrei-Postage free" in the upper right corner. There is a mark "Taxe perce 40" which means at some point 40 Pfennig or some other unit was charged. The cover has a nice CDS "Koenigshutte / Oberschlesien 10.11.43-11" which translates to Nov. 10, 1943 - 11am. This would indicate that the letter did not leave Koenigshutte for about a month since it was dated Oct. 9th. It apparently did not arrive in Huntsville until April 7, 1944. It was censored by the German Army (red circular stamp with "Geprueft" (examined) and by U.S. Censor No. 11261. Note that this is a printed German envelope for letters to prisoners of war held in North America. The enclosed manuscript letter was written on special printed "stationery" for such letters but could be sent to USA, Canada or Australia with a charge of 40 Rpf (Reich's pfennig) for a letter weighing 5 grams. Below is a free English translation of the father's letter to his son in Huntsville, Texas.

Johann Heim (the father)
Koenigshutte (Kings hut)
Bismarkhutter 19 (street address)

Dear Son:

I have again occasion to write a few lines to you. Thank God you are well. Your three letters and a postcard were received to our great joy. Thanks a lot. We are very glad that you are doing well and that you are enjoying good health. Karl and Willi are doing beautifully. We expect Willi during the next few days — he comes for leave. (Herbert's brother Willi is in German Army). Pappa (probably the POW's grandfather) is still well. I sent you a package a few days ago. Lets hope you will receive it very soon. Otherwise nothing has changed here. Erika Mainka has written to me twice. Otherwise everything is all right. Hearty greetings from your parents and brothers.

The above letter was addressed to Obergefreiter Herbert Heim (a rank just below the lowest non-commissioned officer), POW 8 WG 60 51 at Internment Camp Huntsville, Huntsville, Texas by Air Mail to North America.

Son Herbert's letter was not sent to his father but to brother Willi. The address in Germany is the same — their home in Koenigshutte rather than Willi's military unit. The letter was routed through the G.P.O. at Box 20, NY, NY USA. It shows a New York CDS dated Dec 16, 1944, 7:30 PM. POW Heim wrote the letter at Huntsville on November 28th. It was stamped by U.S. censor No. 10635. This letter was also held for almost three weeks before being passed on. One can speculate that these time delays are for censoring purposes. Figure 2 shows the American printed envelope for POW mail, also a reduced scale photocopy. These envelopes give German, Italian and Japanese prisoners sending instructions. Note the return address refers to the Huntsville POW camp as "Pine Camp".

This cover does not show any German censor marks nor arrival stamp. It was probably not delivered at its destination because of the collapse of Nazi Germany during early 1945. The German army was in full retreat in the East at the time and Koenigshutte may have already been behind the frontline (Russian front) during January / February, 1945.

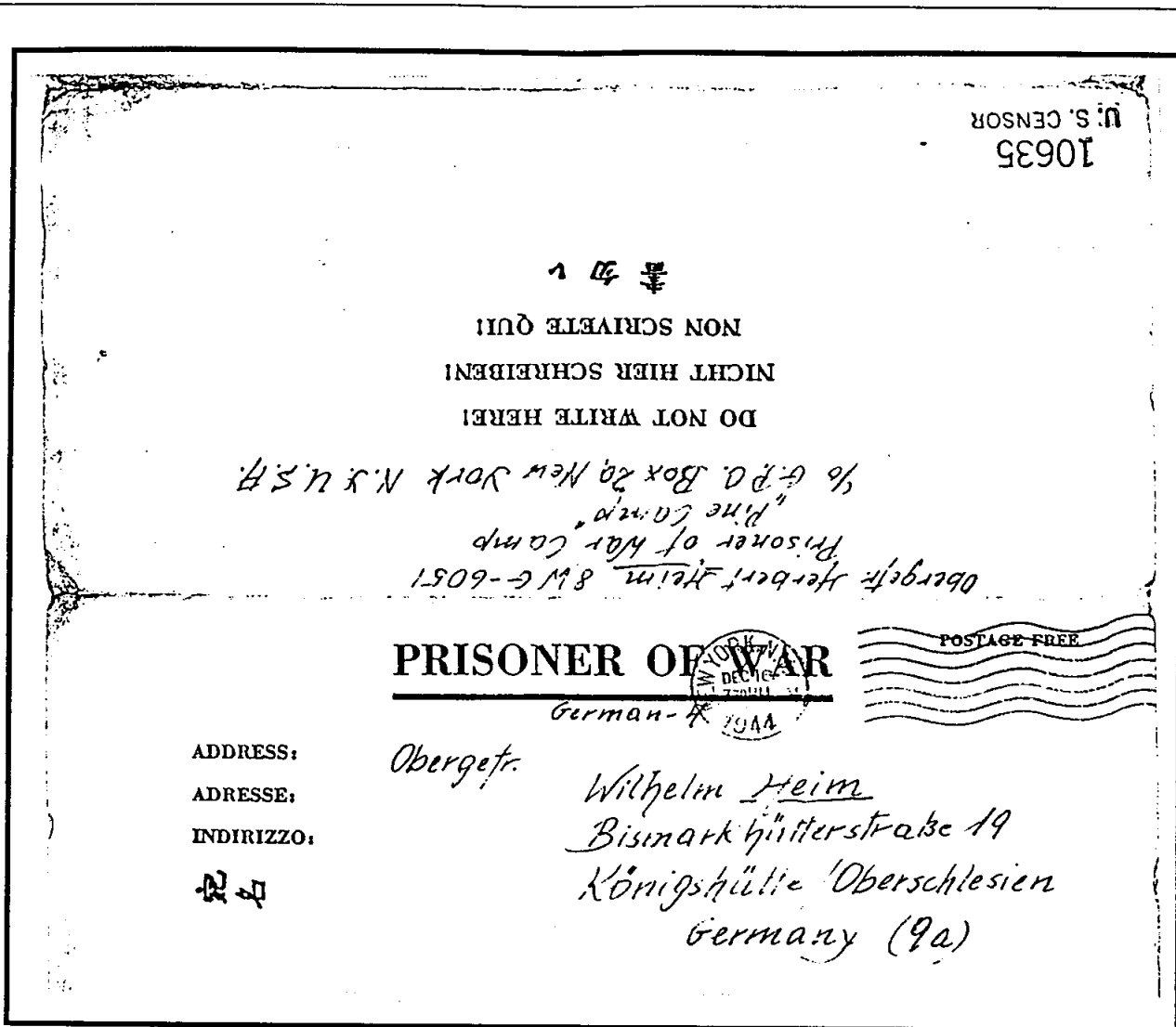


Figure 2

Below is a free translation of POW Herbert Heim's letter to brother Willi. The US also provided a special form for prisoner's letters with instructions on where to write and where not to write plus a return address space at the bottom.

Obergefreiter Wilhelm Heim
Bismarkhuttestr. 19
Koenigshutte / Upper Silesia

Dear Willi:

America, November 28, 1944

Already four weeks have passed since my last letter. I hope that you have received it already. Hopefully you continue to do well which I wish you with all my heart. From you I received so far two letters, the last one in September. Time passes and by the time you receive these lines the New Year will already have begun. I wish that the Holy Days will be nice for you. I am doing well, considering the circumstances. My biggest wish is to be able to return very soon in a happy Heimat. I think that we will be able to spend the next Christmas (1945) at home. Dear Willi, if possible please send me a picture of you. We have not seen each other for over

two years. I wish you continuing good soldiers's luck I close with 'til we see each other again soon. Greetings also to the parents & Karl. Herbert

One thing these poignant letters show is that people are the same the world over.. Did Willi survive the last few months of the war? Were Herbert and Willi eventually reunited with brother Karl and their parents? After Germany's surrender US-held POW's were returned to Europe. When they arrived in France the French put them to work. In many cases these men toiled for a year or two before being repatriated. Many Germans are understandably bitter about this and question whether the rules of the Geneva Convention were followed.

Reference:

Walker, Richard P., The Lone Star and the Swastika: Prisoners of War in Texas, Eakin Press, Austin 2001.

Note:

Following are verbatim statements excerpted from the above reference by Dr. Walker, deceased history professor at Victoria College, Victoria, Texas.

Camp Huntsville was located eight miles east of Huntsville, just off Highway 19 on an 807-acre tract.

Preparatory to actual construction, engineering studies were made of possible sites on February 1942. After five sites were surveyed, the Corps of Engineers concluded that Huntsville was the most favorable location of those examined.

No explanation for the army's original motives for consideration of the Huntsville site could be determined from an examination of the available documents: however, the location did meet the various criteria established by the army in determining sites for prisoner of war camps. Huntsville was not near a major center of population, was not near a vital military installation, was not near the coast, and was in an agricultural area where prisoner farm labor could be utilized.

The original August 20, 1942 completion date was delayed by one month, and the camp was actually finished by mid-September. On 18 September 1942 Camp Huntsville held an open house, and for the first time citizens of the town had an opportunity to view the facility. The townspeople were directed over a carefully marked route and were led on tours of the recreation hall, barracks, hospital, and mess hall. The purpose of the camp and nature of the American personnel stationed remained a mystery to the general public, and no reason was given for the barbed wire fences or guard towers. Indeed it was not until 15 June 1943 that one of the area newspapers carried an article describing Camp Huntsville.

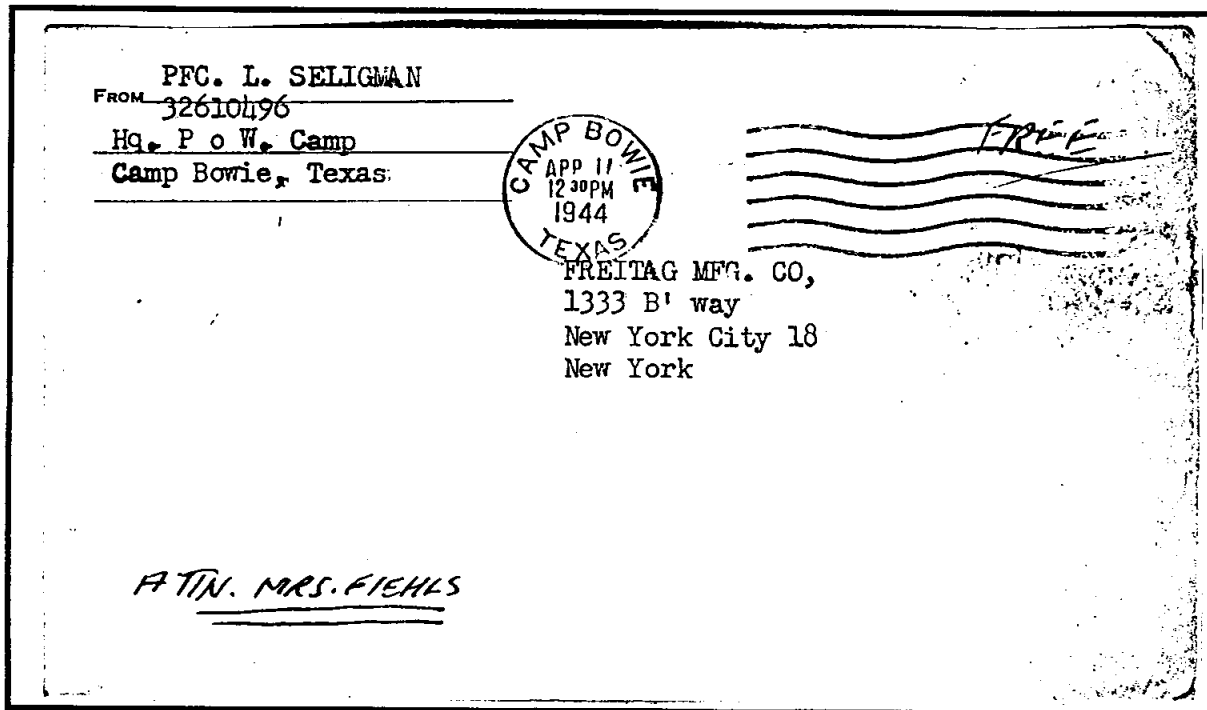
All the buildings, except the well-equipped hospital, were made of heavy tarpaper over a pine frame and were designed to have a five-year life expectancy. The prisoners' portion of the camp was likewise expansive.

Army regulations were quite specific as to what requirements were in terms of space and facilities for each POW. Within the prisoner compound, all the buildings were barracks "of the standard American Army model." The POWs were divided into companies of 250 men each. Each company was delegated six barracks for living quarters, one for showers, one for company officers (American), one mess hall and kitchen, and one for a recreation room. In addition, there was one canteen barrack and one infirmary for each four companies.

The shower rooms had hot and cold running water, lavatories, and toilets. Both the prisoners and the American personnel utilized the camp hospital, even though it was located outside the prisoner stockade. The kitchen and mess hall were in the same barrack, separated by a serving counter. In the mess hall were two rows of tables, each seating eight persons. The prisoners enjoyed a spacious canteen, and an athletic field was available.

Each company was divided into a separate compound by a high barbed-wire fence. Another fence divided the prisoner compounds from the American administrative offices, and still another, a ten-foot-high, electrically charged fence of barbed wire, surrounded the entire camp. Guard towers equipped with powerful searchlights were located along the outer and inner fences.

The prisoners incarcerated at Camp Huntsville, all captured during the African campaign, first arrived in the spring of 1943. From then until the end of the year, new arrivals continued to be processed at Huntsville. By October 1943 the number reached 4,840—the largest quantity of POWs ever to be imprisoned there at any one time. Camp Huntsville housed German prisoners until September 1945, when they were transferred to other camps, and the camp was made ready to receive 185 specially selected Japanese prisoners destined to take part in a special propaganda program. Camp Huntsville, which was home to an average of about 3,200 POWs, closed in February 1946.



American servicemen were assigned to duty at Prisoner-of-War camps as guards, clerical help, translators, etc. This cover was written by an enlisted man working at Camp Bowie (near Brownwood in Brown County) headquarters. US military personnel on active duty could send mail free to addresses in the US or territories and possessions. The regulation, Postal Bulletin 18418 dated April 1, 1942, required the word "Free" at upper right plus name and rank at upper left.

“DEAR UNCLE”

by R. M. Arndt

A German World War II POW's (Prisoner of War) correspondence to his Texas uncle provides an initial insight into a lesser known phase of Texas military postal history.

A little background regarding POW's is perhaps in order. A monthly census of POW's began in May 1942. When it ended in June 1946 only 141 German prisoners of war who were serving sentences in penal institutions remained in the continental United States. The peak presence of German POW's in the continental United States was in May 1945 and was stated to be 371,683. There are many numbers bandied about for the number of German POW's in Texas. They range from 50 to 70 thousand, and up to 30 percent of the total POW's in the country or slightly over 100,000. The “exact” number depends on the source. The same is true for when various POW camps opened, received prisoners, and were closed.

Several people seem to agree there were more POW's in Texas than in any other state. Some attribute this to a clause in the Geneva Convention that says prisoners may be confined in climates similar to those where they were captured. Personally, I am more inclined to believe that the powerful Speaker of the House of Representatives, Sam Rayburn of Texas, and the former Vice-President of the United States, John Nance Garner, also of Texas, may have been more influential in the number of Texas POW camps.

The “Uncle” Lueder (Luther) Brand was a German immigrant who arrived in 1909 and was sponsored by a relative. He was a farmer in the Yorktown (De Witt County), Texas area. Mr. Brand later farmed in the Orange Grove area (Jim Wells County). If you were to visit the Orange Grove Museum today, You would find a photograph of Luther Brand with his first bale of cotton from his early days in the Yorktown area. His name is also on a sidewalk plaque listing area pioneers. Luther passed away in 1946. Many of his descendents still reside in Texas, including Minnie, a cousin mentioned in the letter below who was kind enough to provide me with information and access to additional correspondence from Helmut, a German POW and nephew of Luther Brand.

The letter was written in German at Camp Robinson, Arkansas and was sent after the war ended. It is shown in Figure 1. A translation is as follows:

“Dear Uncle”

17 March 1946

Greetings from me today. I recently received a letter from Minnie which made me very Happy, tell her thanks so much. I was happy to hear that everybody is well. You are probably very busy on the farm now that the weather is very good. I'm fine. We are waiting now for our departure which will probably take place in the next few weeks. I have spent three years in captivity and still don't know if we will be sent home or not. The only news that I have had from home is a postcard from 5 January; they are all well an are waiting for me. I hope that you soon hear from Germany and that you can also write. I wish you well and kindest regards to everybody.

Your Nephew
Helmut

My address is: Sgt Helmut Ramien (address shown at bottom of Figure 1 on next page.)

...

Little is known at this time of his first years as a POW. We do know he learned English and worked at various physical tasks from clearing brush to picking cotton. This was quite different from his training as a bookkeeper/accountant.

Mr. Lueder Brand
Jim Wells Co.
ORANGE GROVE
Texas / U.S.A.

DO NOT WRITE HERE!
NICHT HIER SCHREIBEN!
NON SCRIVETE QUI!
書勿
German-A.

DO NOT WRITE HERE!
NICHT HIER SCHREIBEN!
NON SCRIVETE QUI!
書勿

Lieber Onkel: 17. März 1946.
Heute sollst Du wieder einen Brief von mir haben. Kürzlich
erhielt ich einen Brief von Minnie, worüber ich mich sehr ge-
freut habe. Sage ihr bitte meinen herzlichsten Dank. Es
freut mich, daß es Euch allen gut geht. Jetzt habt Ihr
allerhand Arbeit auf Eurer Farm, denn das Wetter ist ja
nun schon sehr schön. Mir geht es auch immer gut, wir
warten jetzt nur noch auf unsere Abreise, wahrscheinlich
wird es in den nächsten Wochen wohl losgehen. 3 Jahre Ge-
fangenschaft habe ich nun bald hinter mir und noch weiß
niemand, ob man uns nach Hause schickt oder nicht.
Die einzige Nachricht aus der Heimat bis jetzt ist eine
Postkarte vom 5. Januar. Alle sind wohl auf und warten
nur auf mich. Ich hoffe, daß Du bald wieder Post
aus Deutschland bekommen wirst und auch Du nach
dort schreiben kannst.
Alles Gute und viele herzliche Grüße für Euch alle
Dein Neffe Helmut.

DO NOT WRITE HERE!
NICHT HIER SCHREIBEN!
NON SCRIVETE QUI!
書勿

MY ADDRESS IS: Uffz. Helmut Ramien
MEINE ADRESSE IST WIE FOLGT: 7WG-27171, Co. 21
IL MIO INDIRIZZO È: Prisoner of War Camp
住所: Camp Jos. T. Robinson, Arkansas, U.S.A.

While it appears Helmut may have had a premonition about getting home, it was almost a year before he returned to Germany. It has been said that the occupying forces in Germany requested a delay before returning all the German POW's because of a lack of jobs and the potential for organized unrest. Helmut was shipped to England and was there for almost a year. Other German POW's were sent to France and Italy where many were put to work repairing damage. Not all of them were repatriated by 1948. I was stationed in Germany in the early 1950's and recall meeting a German who had been a Soviet prisoner. He was over 8 years returning home after the war ended in 1945. He considered himself lucky since many of his comrades did not survive the 8 year trek from the Soviet camp. He said he walked almost all of the 1500 miles from an Eastern POW camp.

Figure 2 is a POW card written from a British camp to Minnie without any cancelation. The identification number assigned by the British system is used rather than the earlier American number. The 3rd line on the card indicates Camp "695" is at "Shrivenham." The "G" is for German, the "PWW Company" is thought to be "Prisoner War Work Company." The seven lines on the other side are in English, dated 26 June 1946, and reads as follows:

Army Form No. W3494
(Revised)

PRISONER OF WAR POST
KRIEGSGEFANGENENPOST

ADRESSE

An Mrs. Rudolph Klavemann

Empfangsort R.T. Box 121

Strasse ORANGE GROVE

Land Texas U.S.A.

Absender
Helmuth Ragmien
D 382975
Vor und Zuname 695 (G) P.W.W. Company

Gefangenennummer
Bergard Barracks
Shrivenham

Lager-Bezeichnung
nr. Swindon

No. P.O.W. Camp Wilshire
Great Britain

2142m 1/44 [90875] 48564/848 14 million 2/46 M&C Ltd. 47-211

Figure 2

"My Dear Cousin. As you already know we weren't sent home but to England without having had/ an idea of it. Now the time of waiting begins/ once more. The life here is quite different from/ that over there, and I'm well, hoping the same/ of you. I should be very glad to hear from you/ soon again. With the best wishes, your Cousin Helmut"

Helmut's POW writing privileges beginning in February 1945 were 2 letters (not to exceed 24 lines) and 4 cards (not to exceed 7 lines) per month. There was a period of disruption when the war ended. The British allowed the same 2 letters, but only permitted 2 cards per month.

Dear Cousin:

April 5th, 1947.

Four weeks ago I came back from England and I'm very happy now to be home again. It was really a very long time, four years and seven months, since I saw my loved ones for the last time. Meanwhile everything has changed for the worse, and I was very much surprised when I saw our once so beautiful country and cities. Although the war has ended two years ago many things are still out of order. More than a half of our city is a field covered with ruins and nothing has been done yet to rebuild for there is no material. So everybody has to be contented with his lot now and has to see how to get through. Above all the main problem is food. How can a human being exist with two ounces of fat and 5 ounces of meat inclusive sausage a week? People in the country, of course, are far better off now, but you can't get nothing there unless you pay enormous prices or offer other valuable goods, coffee, cigarettes and things like that. As you know we had a very hard winter in Europe, most people without coal or other fuel to keep themselves warm. Dear Minnie, in your last letter you wrote that you didn't believe your newspapers but many things are even worse. We only can hope for a better time, that's all.

My mother isn't well at present, she had a bad cold and a swollen cheek and needs a good care now. During the past years she grew very thin, now the doctor could only prescribed a half pint of milk daily for her, that's all. As for me, my wife and my father, we are in good health, that's the main thing to-day. I don't take a job for the time being, after so many years I need some leave now. For the next weeks I have to see the dentist to get my teeth fixed.

Now, dear Cousin, I'll finish for to-day. I hope that my letter will find you all in the best of health. Please let me hear from you some time again.

With the best regards to all of you, I remain,

Your cousin Helmut, my
wife Alice and parents.

Last week I saw my cousin Herta in Bremen. She told me that you both kept up a correspondence many years ago. Do you remember her? Please note that the name of our city has been changed now from "Wesermunde" into "Bremerhaven".

Figure 3

The earliest letter from Helmut to Uncle Luther is dated after the war ended (August, 1945). I am not sure writing to relatives in the United States was permitted while the war was in progress! The letters indicate that Helmut was last home in August, 1942 and had been a prisoner since 1943. These dates indicate he may have been with the Afrikakorps. Figure 3 (on the previous page) is the letter Helmut wrote shortly after his repatriation in 1947.

While many have personal correspondence from WWII from the Allies side, it is not often we have personal correspondence from the side of the Axis. This is rather akin to the personal correspondence we see from the Civil War in this country.

Figure 4 is a photograph taken in 1985 in Germany. Helmut is on the left next to his wife, then Minnie and her husband. Several years prior to 1985, in the 1970's, Helmut and his family visited the U.S., including his relatives in Texas.



Figure 4

Helmut Ramein passed away September 19, 1999. He is survived by his wife and a son. Minnie still lives in Orange Grove, Texas. She has interested her great granddaughter, who is in high school, in this phase of her family's heritage and this area of Texas history.

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