

MODERN COMMENTARY, 2

The Overrun Countries Stamps of 1943 and 1944

by Ken Lawrence

FOR BEGINNING STAMP collectors, the thirteen-stamp Overrun Countries set of 1943 and 1944, Scott 909-21, is often among their first prized acquisitions. Youngsters are drawn to the multicolor designs that stand out on an album page, especially when they are mounted in sequence alongside the more pedestrian single-color stamps that typified U.S. postal issues of that era.

Twenty million each of the first seven Overrun Countries stamps were printed, and fifteen million of the last six. After 354 of each had been reserved as specimens, all the rest were sold. A substantial percentage of each was sold to stamp collectors and dealers. Quantities issued were small in comparison to normal commemorative press runs, and minuscule when compared to the issued quantities of most definitive and air mail stamps.

The Overrun Countries' 5-cent face value met only one frequently used postal rate, for letters sent by surface mail to foreign countries.

Spreading the Word

The Overrun Countries issue was chronologically the third group of World War

II propaganda stamps issued by the United States. First came the set of three National Defense stamps of 1940, urging the American people to prepare for war. Second came the 1942-43 group of 1-cent Four Freedoms, 2-cent Allied Nations, 3-cent Win the War, and 5-cent Chinese Resistance issues. The Overrun Countries issue followed those. Finally, after the tide of war increasingly favored the Allies, came the 1944 Philippines and 1945 Iwo Jima 3-cent commemoratives.

All thirteen stamps in the Overrun Countries series share a common design — a steel-engraved intaglio frame that depicts a kneeling female figure breaking the shackles of oppression on the right, and the phoenix, a mythological bird symbolizing the renewal of life, at the left, in blue violet ink, sometimes called steel blue color, around a central design of each country's flag in its natural colors, printed by the indirect relief process. President Franklin Roosevelt himself is credited with having chosen the design concept in 1942, and particularly with having preferred an allegory of liberation and redemption rather than one of martial gallantry. The proposal to use national flags as the main subjects came from the State Department.

The upper illustration in **Figure 29-7** shows the wash drawing by the design staff of

American Bank Note Company (ABN) as first submitted to the Post Office Department (POD) for approval. The firm was instructed to delete the years "1776" and "1942" from the top inscription tablet, and the Latin motto "NE PEREAT" ("Let it not perish!") above the phoenix. A black die essay of the revised frame design is shown in the lower illustration of **Figure 29-7**.

In the March 1944 *American Philatelist*, Marty Berg wrote, "The series of a dozen adhesives the United States Government issued between June 22nd and December 7th, 1943, commemorating 'the heroic and continuing resistance to the Axis powers by the peoples of the overrun and occupied countries of Europe' (borrowing the language of the Post Office Department's announcement), played a significant part in the all-important political warfare effort of the United Nations. . . . "As the use of the five centers in ordinary postage here is not great, and as a relatively limited number of each in the series was issued, it is entirely likely that the commemoratives served to better advantages as messages of good will, faith and promise from this country (and the United Nations) to the courageous people opposing their oppressors in each of the nations honored."

When the first announcement of the series appeared, Berg called the Office of War Information (OWI), "charged with the huge propaganda task of the country," to urge that the stamps be publicized in Europe. Encouraged by OWI officials, Berg radio-photographed the designs across the Atlantic. "From reports received, the photos were not only reproduced widely in neutral and allied countries, with appropriate stories, but also found their way into the overrun and occupied countries, so that the people in these latter saw that the United States was doing everything in addition to actual participation in the war against the Axis powers."

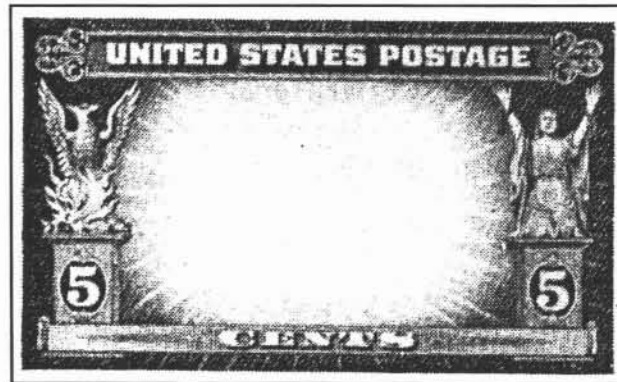


Figure 29-7. (Upper) Preliminary wash drawing of President Roosevelt's concept for the Overrun Countries issue, produced by the staff of the American Bank Note Company. In the approved version "1776" and "1942" were deleted from the top inscription tablet, as was the Latin motto "Ne Pereat" above the phoenix. (Lower) Black die essay of the Overrun Countries frame design by A.E. Foringer, engraved by Arthur C. Vogel.

Berg's commendable enthusiasm for his self-appointed duty exaggerated the degree to which announcements of these stamps were able to cross effectively into enemy territory. For the stamps themselves, the difficulty was greater still, because Axis censors routinely turned back mail bearing stamps or postal markings that promoted the Allied war effort. The cover illustrated in **Figure 29-8** is an outstanding exception, which carried the flags of occupied France and Belgium, and their message of liberation, into the heart of the Third Reich.

German internee Paul Rositzka mailed this

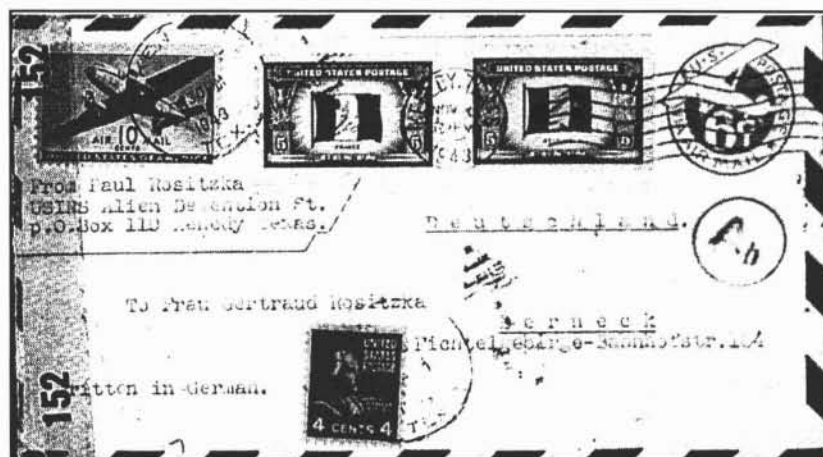


Figure 29-8. Overrun Countries stamps on a 1943 cover that actually reached Nazi Germany, mailed by a German internee in Texas to his wife.

cover from an alien detention station at Kenedy, Texas, to Frau Gertraud Rositzka at Berneck, Germany, on November 4, 1943. Berneck is a small town in Western Germany, less than 40 miles east of Strasbourg, France. Combined with 4-cent Presidential series and 10-cent Transport air mail stamps on a 6-cent Air Mail stamped envelope, the two 5-cent Overrun Countries stamps met the 30-cent air mail rate to Europe.

Although mail service to Germany had been suspended since the United States declared war on Germany in December of 1941, exceptions were made for mail sent by civilian and military internees, and prisoners of war from enemy countries. U.S. censors examined Rositzka's letter before it left this country. After crossing the Atlantic by air, it was routed through neutral Portugal en route to German censors in Berlin, before finally being delivered to Frau Rositzka at Berneck.

Although few Overrun Countries stamps penetrated the enemy's heartland, they became favorites of philatelic warriors, who used them frequently on commemorative patriotic as well as first day covers. The covers illustrated in **Figure 29-9**, showing French flag stamps on Staehle and Teixeira cacheted patriotic covers

canceled on the days of Paris's liberation, are characteristic of the way that hobbyists put these stamps to use in service of the war effort.

Combination Multicolor Printing

Overrun Countries were the first United States postage stamps to be printed in more than two colors of ink (but the U.S. did issue multicolor high-value revenue stamps in

the 19th century). The Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP), which had printed all of this country's stamps since 1894, did not have the practical capability to produce such a product in the 1940s, so the contract was awarded to American Bank Note Company, whose previous U.S. stamp contract had been for the 1893 Columbian series.

The Overrun Countries stamps were printed in the size of then-current special delivery stamps, in horizontal format, 200 subjects per plate, on pre-gummed unwatermarked paper. Their gum appears smoother than gum on Bureau-printed stamps of that era, and has a slightly different taste. Gauge 12 perforations, last used on U.S. stamps from the BEP in 1914, were applied first in one direction, then in the other.

The stamps were issued in rectangular panes of fifty subjects, ten high and five across, with marginal selvage on all four sides. Although no plate numbers appear, the name of the designated country appears in the top margin, always adjacent to the upper right corner stamp regardless of the pane's plate layout position. Inverted T-shaped registration markings appear in the top margin, center position, of upper left and upper right plate

positions, and upright T-shaped markings in the bottom margin, center position, of lower left and lower right plate positions. A right-reading plate layout diagram is shown in **Figure 29-10**. Because the multicolor flag images were printed by a single pass of the blanket, the T and inverted T register marks required only two colors, first the intaglio blue violet of the frame, followed by just one offset color printed as close as possible to the same position.

Pairing the Designs

The first flag of the series, Poland, was laid out in all 200 positions of the central design plates, so four pane positions exist as shown in the diagram. The next ten flags were combined, two countries per plate set, with one in the upper two positions, the other in the lower two. Czechoslovakia, in the upper positions, was combined with Norway in the lower; Luxembourg, upper, with Netherlands, lower; Belgium, upper, with France, lower; Greece, upper, with Yugoslavia, lower; and Albania, upper, with Austria lower. Announcement of the combination printing method was made public just four days before the Czechoslovakia flag stamp was issued.

Like other aspects of Overrun Countries production, philatelic consequences of this novelty had not been elaborated by the manufacturer nor included in POD publicity

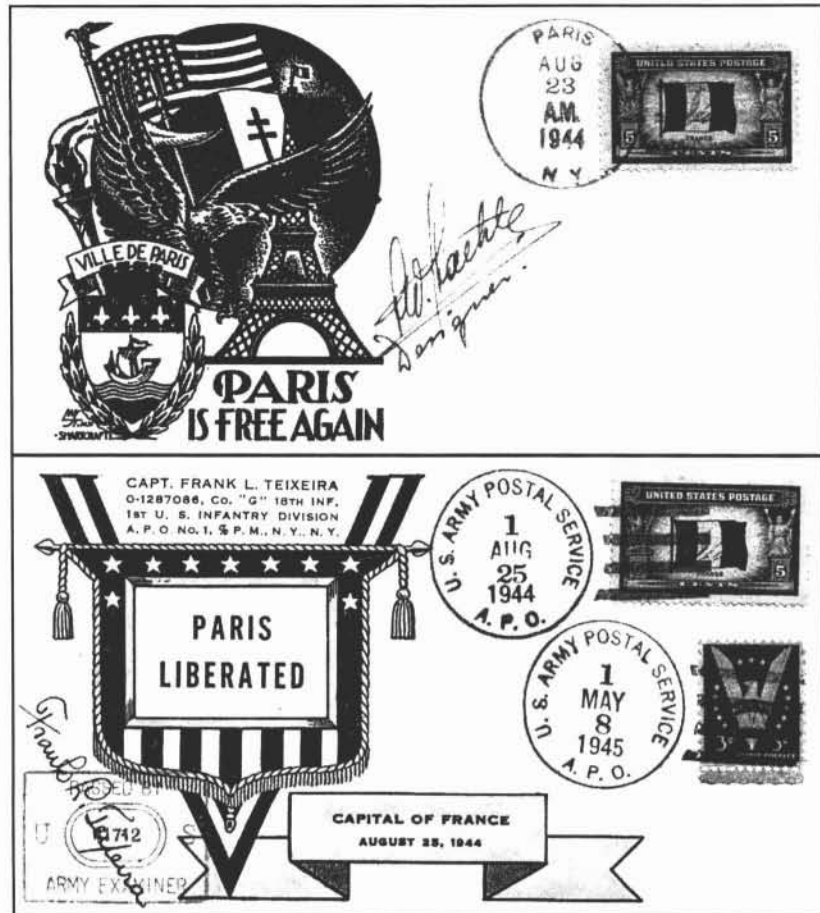


Figure 29-9. Cachet makers often combined appropriate Overrun Countries stamps with patriotic cachets on covers commemorating events of the war. One such event, the liberation of Paris, August 23-25, 1944, was celebrated by an outpouring of patriotic covers. (Upper) Cover by Ludwig W. Staehle, New York City, postmarked August 23 in Paris, New York. Staehle proudly added his signature, "LW Staehle/Designer," between cachet and postmark. (Lower) Patriotic cover by Capt. Frank L. Teixeira, 18th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, featuring different stamps canceled on different days. The first APO 1 cancel was struck in Bagnoles de l'Orne, France, on the France Overrun Countries stamp on August 25. The second was struck in Hof, Germany, on the Win the War stamp, May 8, 1945 (VE Day).

releases. Collectors became aware of them after a specialist in Czechoslovakia complained to the Philatelic Agency in Washington that he could not find bottom position registry markings on Czechoslovakia flag panes. The Philatelic Agent's reply, published in *The Czechoslovak Specialist* for September 1943, explained that only the upper position exists, corresponding to Norway, on which only the bottom position exists.

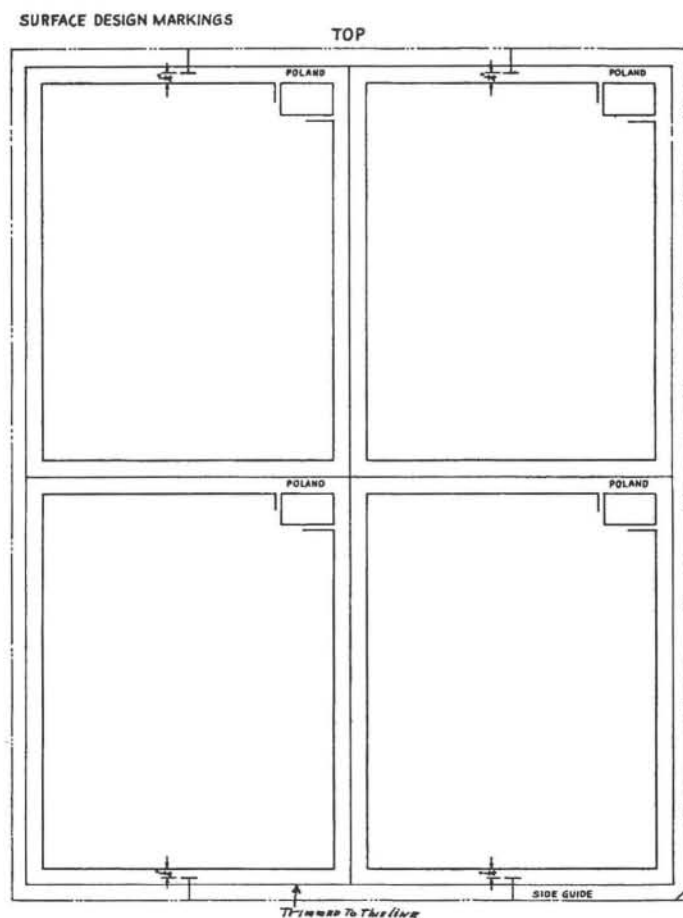


Figure 29-10. Plate layout for the Overrun Countries stamps, showing the positions of the marginal markings. On bottom positions of Denmark and Korea, the T register marks were placed lower; they were trimmed off and do not appear on finished plates.

The final two countries, Denmark and Korea, had not been included in the original plan, and Korea had not been added by the time Denmark was announced. Each of these got full 200-subject plate sets.

Because of these layout position differences, it is possible to collect marginal register markings in either top or bottom positions of Poland flag sheets, but for the next ten, only one position or the other depending on its plate placement. For Denmark and Korea, only top register mark positions are collectible because the bottom register marks were placed below the trim line, and were cut off. Bottom panes of those two stamps have no register marks at all.

European Overrun Countries and their Flags

All European flag designs of the series were copied from Bulletin No. 89, Flags of the U.S. and Other Countries, published in 1938 by the Hydrographic Office, U.S. Navy Department, Washington D.C. From an assortment of flags shown for each country, the set's designers chose the one that seemed most appropriate. Each was drawn as though flying from a pole, with the pole and shading lines printed in black or gray ink, and the flag in one, two, or three colors. The name of the country was inscribed just beneath the flag, printed in one of the flag colors.

"A series of eleven new postage stamps, commemorating the heroic and continuing resistance to the Axis powers by the peoples of over-run and occupied countries of Europe, will be issued at intervals during the next several months, Postmaster General Frank C. Walker announced last night." So began the first public notice of the series, a May 11, 1943, POD news release.

"The countries to be honored are Poland, Czechoslovakia, Norway, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Belgium, France, Greece, Yugoslavia, Albania and Austria. The stamps will all be of the five-cent denomination, and the same size as the present special-delivery stamp.

"The first of the stamps, honoring the people of Poland, will be placed on first-day sale June 22 at the post office in Washington, D.C., and on general sale at post offices throughout the country on the next day, or as soon thereafter as supplies can be made available. Dispatch of mail to destinations in Poland is now under suspension."

The announcement brought two quick responses from stamp collectors. Myron E. Steczynski, president of the Polonus Philatelic

Society, addressed an open letter to Third Assistant Postmaster General Ramsey Black, urging him to "consider adding Chicago as a focal point for the first day of issue. Chicago is the largest 'Polish' city in the world not now subjugated. It is the home of the largest Polish fraternal and civic organizations in the world. It is the national headquarters of the Polish Council, Polish Relief, and others. Each and every one of these organizations would be vitally interested in appropriate ceremonies at the Chicago Post Office...."

"We heartily believe that if you accept our suggestion to add Chicago as a city for the first day of issue, such an arrangement would greatly promote the spirit and objectives for which the stamp is being issued."

Steczynski's proposal was quickly adopted. A POD news release dated June 1, 1943, announced that the Poland stamp would be issued at both Washington and Chicago on June 22.

A second appeal came from stamp dealer A.E. Pade of Denver. He complained to the Postmaster General that Denmark had been slighted, and urged that a stamp showing the Danish flag be added to the set. A June 17 reply to Pade from the office of the Third Assistant Postmaster General temporized. "The Department has this matter under advisement and it may be possible to make provisions for a Denmark stamp before the series is completed, which, at best, will not be until later this year." A June 28 news release made it official -- a Denmark stamp would be added to the list, bringing the total to twelve.

Poland - Scott 909

The Poland stamp, which shows Poland's national flag in the central design area, was issued at Washington, D.C., and Chicago on June 22, 1943. In Washington, Roy North, Deputy Third Assistant Postmaster General, presented the first sheet to Poland's ambassador to the United States, Jan

Ciechanowski, in a small ceremony at the main post office.

At Chicago, a huge crowd gathered to hear dedication speeches by Postmaster General Walker and Dr. Karol Ripa, consul general of Poland, in the lobby of the main post office. An aspect of the ceremony that disturbed me as I studied the historical record was an absence of context and sensitivity. Although the officially stated purpose of the stamp was to honor "the people of Poland," no one paid tribute to Polish Jews, who as a group suffered and lost more than the rest of their countrymen at the hands of Nazi tormentors.

On April 19, 1943, Jews of the Warsaw ghetto rose up in arms. Against impossible odds they battled the German army for nearly a month. Finally, on May 16, the Germans snuffed out the last pockets of resistance, transported survivors to the Treblinka death camp, and obliterated the buildings that remained in that sector of Poland's capital. One month afterward, at the Chicago ceremony dedicated to anti-Nazi resistance in Poland, Postmaster General Walker said, "There is a world of symbolism in the stamp we dedicate today," but he paid no homage to Poland's Jewish martyrs.

Max Johl wrote, "After the first day of sale at Chicago it was reported in the Philatelic Press that petty politics among various groups in Chicago had almost ruined the first day celebration. It is believed that this fact caused the Department to limit the first day sale of all other of the 'flag' stamps to Washington." Perhaps petty politics was the reason, but perhaps it was the potential for serious political embarrassment (because some Polish nationalists had a more expansive definition of Poland's territory than did the Allied governments), and by the conspicuous absence of European Jews from the commemorations.

One million Poland stamps had been shipped to Chicago. They proved to be so popular that a second million had to be sent

soon after the stamp was dedicated. A total of 224,172 first day covers were canceled, 136,002 at Washington, and 88,170 at Chicago. By the time they were removed from philatelic sale on April 10, 1944, 2,545,000 Poland flag stamps had been sold through the Philatelic Agency, 12.5 percent of the total issue.

Czechoslovakia - Scott 910

The Czechoslovakia stamp, which shows Czechoslovakia's national and merchant flag in the central design area, was issued in Washington, D.C., on July 12, 1943. In a dedication ceremony at the White House, Postmaster General Walker sold the first sheet to President Roosevelt. The Czechoslovakian ambassador to the United States, Vladimir Hurban, also was present.

This was the stamp for which the series originally had been conceived. The engraved female figure breaking her shackles in the right frame design of the flag stamps had appeared on Czechoslovakia's definitive series of 1920.

The issue date was the first anniversary of the founding of Lidice, Illinois, named in honor of the martyred Czech village whose people had been slaughtered by the Nazis in reprisal for the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich by Czech resistance fighters. The decision not to hold public dedication ceremonies for later Overrun Countries stamps, after political problems emerged at the Poland celebration in Chicago, deprived that town of its promised day in the sun.

A total of 145,112 first day covers were canceled. By the time they were removed from philatelic sale on April 10, 1944, 2,103,000 Czechoslovakia flag stamps had been sold through the Philatelic Agency, 10.5 percent of the total issue.

Norway - Scott 911

The Norway stamp, which shows Norway's merchant flag in the central design area, was issued at Washington, D.C., on July 27, 1943.

In a dedication ceremony at the White House, Deputy Third Assistant Postmaster General North sold the first sheet to President Roosevelt. The Norwegian ambassador to the United States, Wilhelm M. de Morgan, also was present.

A total of 155,054 first day covers were canceled. Max Johl wrote, "It had at first been announced that the total of first day covers was 130,054 but this figure was corrected to the higher total shown above." The incorrect number refuses to die. It has been published recently by the Postal Service, and is the figure listed in the current Scott Catalogue. By the time they were removed from philatelic sale on December 2, 1944, 3,469,000 Norway flag stamps had been sold through the Philatelic Agency, 17.3 percent of the total issue.

Luxembourg - Scott 912

The Luxembourg stamp, which shows Luxembourg's ensign, national, and merchant flag in the central design area, was issued at Washington, D.C., on August 10, 1943. In a dedication ceremony at the White House, Deputy Third Assistant Postmaster General North sold the first sheet to President Roosevelt. The Luxembourg Minister to the United States, Hughes LeGallais, also was present.

A total of 166,367 first day covers were canceled. By the time they were removed from philatelic sale on January 3, 1945, 4,665,000 Luxembourg flag stamps had been sold through the Philatelic Agency, 23.3 percent of the total issue.

Netherlands - Scott 913

The Netherlands stamp, which shows the Netherlands' ensign, national, and merchant flag in the central design area, was issued in Washington, D.C., on August 24, 1943. A dedication ceremony was held in the office of Washington Postmaster Vincent Burke. Deputy Third Assistant Postmaster General

North sold the first sheet to Dr. Alexander London, Ambassador of the Netherlands to the United States.

A total of 148,763 first day covers were canceled. By the time they were removed from philatelic sale on February 3, 1945, 5,088,000 Netherlands flag stamps had been sold through the Philatelic Agency, 25.4 percent of the total issue.

Belgium - Scott 914

The Belgium stamp, which shows Belgium's ensign, national, and merchant flag in the central design area [Figure 29-8], was issued in Washington, D.C., on September 14, 1943. In a dedication ceremony at the White House, Postmaster General Walker sold the first sheet to President Roosevelt. The Belgian Ambassador to the United States, Count Von der Straten Ponthoz, also was present. The Ambassador purchased the second sheet, which was autographed by President Roosevelt and Postmaster General Walker.

A total of 154,220 first day covers were canceled. By the time they were removed from philatelic sale on February 3, 1945, 5,545,000 Belgium flag stamps had been sold through the Philatelic Agency, 27.7 percent of the total issue.

France - Scott 915

The France stamp, which shows France's ensign and merchant flag in the central design area [Figure 29-9], was issued in Washington, D.C., on September 28, 1943. In a dedication ceremony at the city post office, Washington Postmaster Vincent Burke sold the first sheet to Postmaster General Walker. Deputy Third Assistant Postmaster General North also was present.

A total of 163,478 first day covers were canceled. By the time they were removed from philatelic sale on December 2, 1944, 6,049,000 France flag stamps had been sold through the Philatelic Agency, 30.2 percent of the total

issue.

Greece - Scott 916

The Greece stamp, which shows Greece's ensign and merchant flag in the central design area, was issued in Washington, D.C., on October 12, 1943, in a dedication ceremony at the White House. Postmaster General Walker sold the first sheet to President Roosevelt. Also present were Deputy Third Assistant Postmaster General North, and Cimon Diamantopoulos, Ambassador of Greece to the United States.

The press run for the Greece flag stamp and all subsequent Overrun Countries stamps was reduced from twenty million to fifteen million. By this time, post offices throughout the country were well supplied with 5-cent stamps. In a normal year, from 150 million to 185 million 5-cent stamps were distributed; if the order had remained at twenty million for each flag issue, by the end of the year 240 million Overrun Countries stamps would have been in circulation, greatly exceeding postal needs and potential philatelic sales.

A total of 166,553 first day covers were canceled. By the time they were removed from philatelic sale on June 17, 1944, 3,135,000 Greece flag stamps had been sold through the Philatelic Agency, 20.9 percent of the total issue.

Yugoslavia - Scott 917

The Yugoslavia stamp, which shows Yugoslavia's national and merchant flag in the central design area, was issued in Washington, D.C., on October 26, 1943. At a dedication ceremony in the Postmaster General's office, General Walker sold the first sheet to Constantin Fotich, the Yugoslavian Ambassador to the United States.

A total of 161,835 first day covers were canceled. By the time they were removed from philatelic sale on August 2, 1944, 3,195,000 Yugoslavia flag stamps had been sold through

the Philatelic Agency, 21.3 percent of the total issue. (Johl reported an incorrect figure of 3,135,000.)

Albania - Scott 918

The Albania stamp, which shows Albania's national flag in the central design area, was issued in Washington, D.C., on November 9, 1943. At the dedication ceremony, Deputy Third Assistant Postmaster General North sold the first sheet to Postmaster General Walker, who forwarded it to President Roosevelt for his collection.

A total of 162,275 first day covers were canceled. By the time they were removed from philatelic sale on August 2, 1944, 3,154,000 Albania flag stamps had been sold through the Philatelic Agency, 21.0 percent of the total issue. (Johl again reported an incorrect figure of 3,135,000.)

Austria - Scott 919

The Austria stamp, which shows the Austrian flag in the central design area, was issued in Washington, D.C., on November 23, 1943. At a dedication ceremony that received scant public notice, Third Assistant Postmaster General Black sold the first sheet to Postmaster General Walker. The first shipments of Austria flag stamps were to post offices in Puerto Rico and Hawaii, as if to keep them out of sight on the mainland.

This issue had evoked controversy as soon as the announcement of its issue date was mailed. In a letter to *The New York Times* and the *New York World Telegram*, reprinted in the philatelic media, K.H. Schwarz wrote, "Austria is not a member of the United Nations. This has been authoritatively clarified by the United States as well as by the British Government.

"Unlike Poland, Czechoslovakia, Norway, etc., Austria has not been overrun or conquered by Germany against her will, which is a widely recognized fact. Anyone who

happened to be in Austria when in March, 1938, she went 'back into the Greater Reich' knows that the great majority of the Austrian populace undoubtedly even called for the Germans and greeted them as 'liberators.' Recognition of this fact may be one of the reasons why the United States, as well as the British Government, never recognized any Austrian Government in exile.

"If, therefore, the postal authorities issue a stamp in honor of Austria it is with just as much justification that a stamp could be issued in honor of Bavaria, Thuringia, or Saxonia."

A total of 172,285 first day covers were canceled. By the time they were removed from philatelic sale on August 21, 1944, 3,344,000 Austria flag stamps had been sold through the Philatelic Agency, 22.3 percent of the total issue.

Denmark - Scott 920

The Denmark stamp, which shows Denmark's merchant flag in the central design area, was issued in Washington, D.C., on December 7, 1943, the second anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor that brought the United States into the war. At a dedication ceremony in the Postmaster General's office, Third Assistant Postmaster General Black sold the first sheet to Henrik de Kauffmann, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of Denmark to the United States. Also present were J. Rechendorff, Secretary of the Danish Legation, and Robert Fellers, Superintendent of the POD Stamps Division.

The Wisconsin Federation of Stamp Clubs had sought to have a first day dedication ceremony at Racine, with "the largest pro-rata Danish American population of any American city." Holding firm to the policy decision that followed the Poland flag ceremony at Chicago, this request was denied.

A total of 173,784 first day covers were canceled. By the time they were removed from

philatelic sale on June 17, 1944, 3,159,000 Denmark flag stamps had been sold through the Philatelic Agency, 21.0 percent of the total issue.

The POD's press notice about the Denmark stamp called it "the last in the series of twelve stamps issued by this country as a tribute to the overrun countries of Europe." At the time, no one had reason to expect that the series would get another stamp. More than eight months after the Denmark flag stamp was issued, Postmaster General Walker announced "special postage stamps commemorating the Philippines and Korea in continuation of the Overrun Countries Series of last year."

The Asian Overrun Country and its Flag

President Roosevelt was gratified by the twelve European Overrun Countries flag stamps, which he regarded as a popular success. Early in 1944 he urged the POD to develop a similar set honoring countries overrun by Japan. The POD sent FDR's list of proposed Asian and Pacific countries to the State Department, which vetoed all but two of them, mostly in deference to the imperial and colonial powers allied with the United States. Only Korea and the Philippines were approved.

Of the president's other recommendations, Thailand was unacceptable because its government had declared war on the United States; Manchuria was legitimately an integral part of China, not an independent state; Formosa, a tougher case to call, was "predominantly Chinese in race, language, and perhaps spirit." Hong Kong could not be honored without consulting Great Britain. Timor had been occupied by Japan with the consent of Portugal, and the Japanese presence in Macao was inconsequential.

Burma, Malaya, New Guinea, North

Borneo, "and other British and Australian possessions and mandates" would need "the concurrence of the British and Australian Governments." Similarly, Indochina would require French approval, and the Netherlands Indies, Dutch approval. Only Korea and the Philippines were added to the list, and stamps were issued for them. Although the POD regarded the 3-cent Corregidor stamp for the Philippines as a member of the Overrun Countries series, neither its design nor its denomination matched the others, so it has never been included by stamp collectors. The Korea flag stamp came as a late surprise, but it did match the others.

Korea - Scott 921 (formerly Scott 926)

The Korea stamp was issued in Washington, D.C., on November 2, 1944. The 1938 Navy Department manual used as the source for European flag designs did not include any flags of Korea, so the POD relied on an earlier publication — the 1899 Edition of the Navy Department's *Flags of Maritime Nations*. Critics claimed that the design was inaccurate, but disagreed among themselves as to the true Korean flag design. In an article titled " 'Tah Gook' " in the May 1953 *American Philatelist*, Frank Morse wrote, "This flag was originally the Korean merchant ensign but when adopted as the national ensign four diagrams in blue were added to the red and blue symbol on the white background."

At a dedication ceremony in the Third Assistant Postmaster General's office, Postmaster General Walker sold the first sheet of Korea stamps to "Misses Marian and Lillian Lee, twins from Korea. The Misses Lee were attired in their native costumes of blue and pink which just tipped the ground," according to a POD circular distributed afterward. A



Figure 29-11. Three Overrun Countries flags and a 1-cent National Defense stamp paid air mail and special delivery rates to Canada in 1943, the same as U.S. domestic rates. Patriotic cover by Jacques Minkus, New York City.

delegation of twelve men and women, including the Lee sisters, represented Korea. The Korean representatives autographed a first day cover bearing a block of four Korea flag stamps, addressed to President Roosevelt. Dr. J.K. Dunn, a member of the delegation, presented General Walker with a scroll that told the story of Korea's struggle for freedom, another gift for the President. Earl Dickover and G.M. McCune represented the State Department.

Editors of the Scott Catalogue had not reserved a number with the previous Overrun Countries group, so Korea became No. 926 in the 1944 chronology. The 1948 edition of the Specialized catalogue renumbered the 1944 issues placing the Korea flag with the others as No. 921.

A total of 192,860 first day covers were canceled. By the time they were removed from

philatelic sale on December 30, 1944 — less than two months after their date of issue — 4,020,000 Korea flag stamps had been sold through the Philatelic Agency, 26.8 percent of the total issue. Because the stamps sold out in record time, calls were heard to issue more of them.

On January 20, 1945, the Korean American Council urged that the design be reprinted as a souvenir sheet of four: "March 1, the date on which Korea declared her independence from Japan in

1919, might be a good occasion to bring out such a second edition. It will electrify the Korean people and hearten their leaders at home and abroad, especially now that the American forces are fast approaching the shores of Asia."

The POD ignored these blandishments. By July, the collecting community realized that



Figure 29-12. The air mail letter rate to Mexico in 1944 was ten cents per half ounce, paid by two Overrun Countries stamps on this cover.

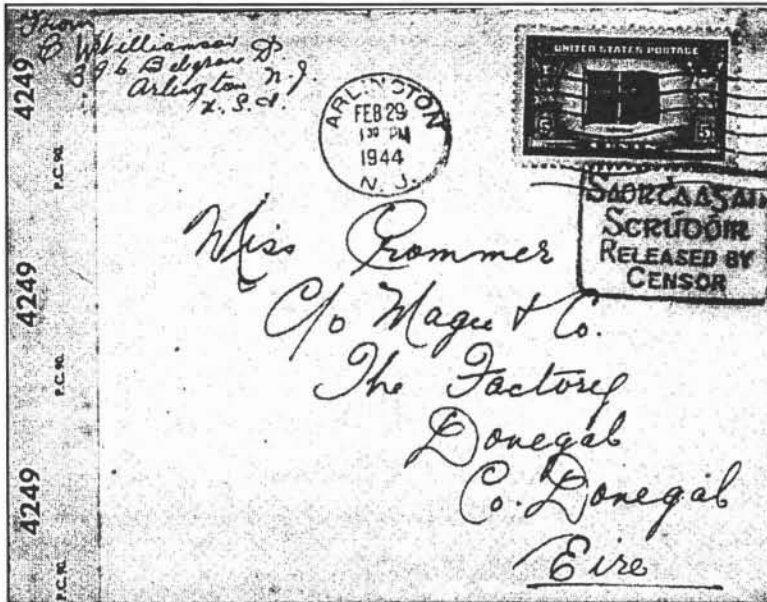


Figure 29-13. A Norway flag stamp paid surface postage from Arlington, New Jersey, to Donegal, Ireland, on Leap Year Day 1944. Both British and Irish censors examined it en route.

abundant quantities of all Overrun Countries stamps were available, including the Korea issue. Speculators dumped their hoards, and the market returned to normal.

Overrun Countries Stamps on Cover

Despite relative uniformity of production, distribution of Overrun Countries stamps was uneven to the point of being lopsided. An exception was the Washington, D.C., post office, which received ample supplies of each. Most large cities received at least token quantities of every flag stamp.

Besides the extraordinary shipment of Poland flag stamps to Chicago, that issue and the Czechoslovakia flag stamp were shipped to post offices throughout the country. Many of those offices, especially

smaller ones, had no need for additional supplies, and did not get any. Poland and Czechoslovakia also were the first two stamps of the series to be taken off sale at the Philatelic Agency, as supplies in Washington were depleted. The first delivery of Luxembourg flag stamps was to Wailuku, Hawaii. Large quantities of the Albania flag stamp were shipped to post offices in California, Oregon, and Washington state. Hawaii and Puerto Rico received the main distribution of Austria stamps mentioned earlier. No doubt other shipping anomalies went unreported, but being aware of these may be useful in trying to assemble a representative showing of usages.

As post offices became overstocked with flag stamps, the press order for later issues was reduced, lowering the number of stamps available to mailers. After that the proportion of each issue sold through the Philatelic Agency increased dramatically. That was true also of the Korea flag stamp, even though it was removed from philatelic sale less than two

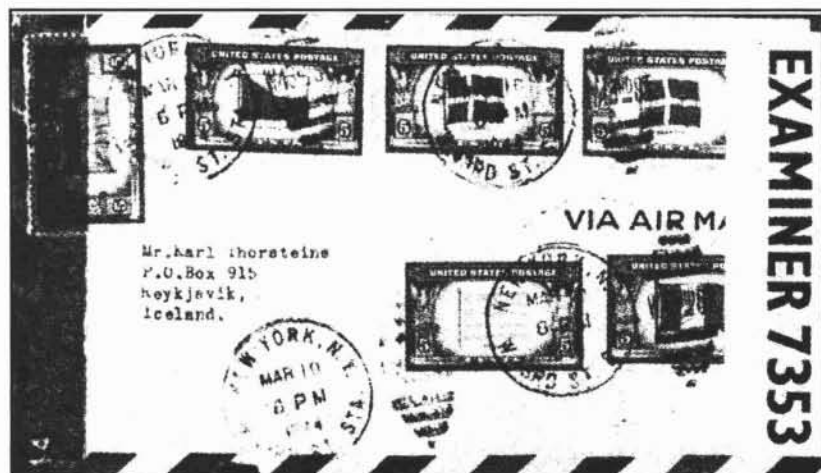


Figure 29-14. Six flag stamps met the air mail rate to Europe and to Iceland in 1944.



Figure 29-15. This November 20, 1944, cover from Detroit to Paris was an early example bearing a France flag stamp that carried a letter to France. Letter mail service to Paris had been restored on November 3.

months after it had been issued. But by the time the Korea stamp appeared, mail service was opening up to countries that had disallowed correspondence from the United States for the previous three years. In relative terms, a run on that issue occurred, but not before collectors and dealers had fulfilled their needs.

In my experience, the Austria flag stamp seems somewhat scarcer than the others on non-philatelic mail. I attribute that to public antipathy, because Americans tended to view Austria as an enemy country.

Sampling Mail to Foreign Destinations

Our country's nearest neighbors have enjoyed more favorable postal rates than most other foreign destinations. During World War II, both air mail and special delivery rates to Canada equaled the U.S. domestic rates. One 1-cent National Defense and

three Overrun Countries flag stamps on the cover shown in Figure 29-11, sent from Boothbay Harbor, Maine, to Montreal, Canada, on July 31, 1943, paid the same rates (six cents air mail and ten cents special delivery) as they would have if the letter had not crossed the border. The flags—Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Norway—included one of each that had been issued by that date.

Air mail to Mexico was somewhat more expensive—ten cents per half ounce until June 11, 1945, when the rate was reduced to

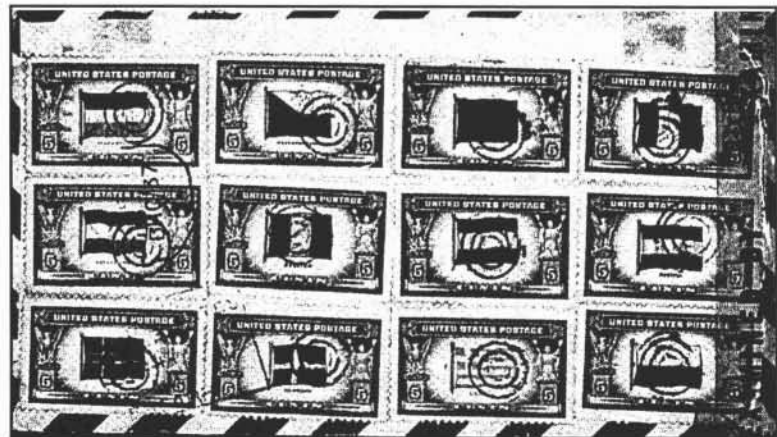


Figure 29-16. A full set of twelve European Overrun Countries flag stamps on the back, plus two other 5-cent commemoratives on the front, paid the correct 70-cent air mail rate to India in 1944. For some reason the cover did not go by air and took three months to arrive.

eight cents. The censored cover shown in **Figure 29-12** from Kalamazoo, Michigan, to Mexico City on December 13, 1943, reflects the ten-cent rate, paid by France and Greece flag stamps.



Figure 29-17. Twelve Overrun Countries flag stamps paid the double air mail rate to Surinam in 1943.

Transatlantic mail from the United States to European destinations typically was censored by British examiners at Bermuda. The cover in **Figure 29-13**, mailed on February 29, 1944, Leap Year Day, from Arlington, New Jersey, to Donegal, Ireland, has both a British censor's tape and an Irish censor's maroon handstamp. Again, the Norway flag stamp paid the surface letter rate.

The air mail rate to Europe was thirty cents per half ounce. On March 10, 1944, six flag stamps—France, Greece, Luxembourg, Czechoslovakia, and a Denmark pair—on the cover shown in **Figure 29-14** paid the same air mail rate from New York City to Reykjavik, Iceland. In this case, the cover was censored twice; once by the United States, once by Britain.

The **Figure 29-15** cover, censored by the United States, is exceptionally nice for a couple of reasons. It has a France flag stamp paying the surface rate to France, from Detroit to Paris, mailed on November 20, 1944. Limited mail service had just been restored to liberated France. At first only "non-illustrated" post cards of a personal nature were permitted to certain parts of France, starting September 4, and gradually extended to all departments as German forces retreated. Surface letters up to one ounce were allowed beginning November 3, but no air mail, special delivery, money

order, or registry services were available, and enclosures of money or financial instruments were forbidden. Normal mail service was not fully restored until 1945, in stages from March to June. Details of this evolving mail service to France may be found in Chapter 31, "Resumption of Postal Service to Liberated Countries."

The cover shown in **Figure 29-16**, mailed on August 21, 1944, at Allentown, Pennsylvania, was supposed to go by air mail to Fatehgarh, India. A straight-line magenta "Not in Air Mail" handstamp shows that it did not. Perhaps someone at the post office failed to take note of the twelve Overrun Countries flag stamps on the back, a full set except for the Korea stamp, which had not yet been announced. Together with two other 5-cent commemorative, they combined to meet the seventy-cent air mail rate to India.

The cover was censored before it left the United States, and again by British censors at Calcutta. An arrival date stamp shows that it took three months to reach its destination. Mail to India was sent by both transatlantic (Africa route) and transpacific (Orient route) routes; this letter might have gone either way.

Twelve Overrun Countries flag stamps—two Austria and one each of all the others except Luxembourg and Korea (which

had not yet been issued—paid double the thirty-cent half-ounce air mail rate to Surinam (Netherlands Guiana) on the cover shown in **Figure 29-17**. It was posted at New York on December 20, 1943, passed by a U.S. censor, received at Paramaribo on December 28, and passed by a Dutch censor.

Air mail rates to countries of South America were reduced across the board on

April 1, 1945, but they did not become uniform (at ten cents per half ounce) until November 1, 1946.

This essay is a condensation of "U.S. Stamps that Went to War: The Overrun Countries Stamps of 1943 and 1944," which originally appeared in the January 1998 issue of American Philatelist, pp. 48-74.