The Riddle of the Hindenburg Medallions

This is an exhibit of ordinary mail, simple missives, business and personal letters that appeared in Germany's mailstream between 1932 and the end of the war in Europe on May 8, 1945. The covers in this exhibit have one feature in common: each bears the abundantly common Hindenburg Medallion stamp—the only postage stamp that was produced continuously during the Third Reich.





The Hindenburg Medallion was first issued on October 1, 1932 to celebrate the 85th birthday of Paul von Hindenburg, president of the Weimar Republic. The plain design of the stamp was based on the Hindenburg medallion, created by medalist Karl Xaver Goetz.



The first and second series of Hindenburg Medallion stamps, issued in 1932 and 1933, were printed on watermarked paper using the network or mesh design—more popularly termed the waffle or Waffein design. A third issue was printed in 1933 by the Nazi government and was watermarked with a swastika or Hakenkreuz. On September 4, 1934 a final set of six medallion stamps were issued with the swastika watermark and black borders to note the death of von Hindenburg in August.



This exhibit intends to show that the Hindenburg Medallions were co-opted by Nazi propagandists in 1933 to express solidarity with the Hindenburg legacy. It was important to the Nazis to be viewed in support of familiar ideals of patriotism, continuance and harmony during the radical transition from a democratic republic to the authoritarian dictatorship that followed for a dozen years.

The Medallion definitives were popular with the public. By 1932 Paul von Hindenburg had become a national hero, a man nearly as large as his myth. Hindenburg was not a Nazi, he stood for Germany, for empire, for conservative Prussian values—and for calm in the face of chaos.

Chaos in Germany began during the final years of World War I. By 1918 Germany was facing ruin, people were starving, the army was ill-equipped to face continuing stalemate in the trenches; there were rumors of betrayal in the government and mutiny brewed in the Navy; Emperor Wilhelm II, and King of Prussia, renounced his crowns in November; the war was lost, the Weimar Republic was born and war reparations drained the German treasury. The prevailing excuse for military defeat and social disintegration was that Germany's army had been betrayed, "stabbed-in-the-back" by socialists in the government, by traitors who undermined the war effort and by Jews who were blamed for profiting from the war; government ministers were blamed for conceding to the crippling terms of the Versailles Treaty. Violent political factions emerged from the beer halls and bloodied each other in the streets. By 1919 Germany was in revolt.

From this bedlam, a man emerged with calming effect. Field Marshall Paul von Hindenburg, called the Victor of Tannenberg for his defeat of Russians in 1914, during an early battle of the long, devastating

world war, was at age 66 a professional soldier, a monarchist, a Prussian aristocrat—a conservative man with unshakeable confidence—described by his own soldiers as a rock in an ocean of turmoil. Hindenburg did in fact still the fears of Germans in the streets; he quelled the mutinies and became, during the 1920s, a national hero of mythical proportion.

In 1925, at age 77, Field Marshall Hindenburg was called out of retirement once again to lead the Weimar Republic after the death of President Friedrich Ebert. Hinderburg easily won re-election in 1932 spite of the growing popularity of warning factions still plying the streets—and filling seats in the Reichstag.

As president of the Weimar Republic, Hindenburg exercised a soothing, paternal grip on Germany; he attempted to guide the country to an economic recovery in an increasingly hostile environment of waring factions where growing doubt and mistrust created an environment in which the National Socialist German Worker's Party prospered, and was able to build membership and political relevance in the Reichstag.

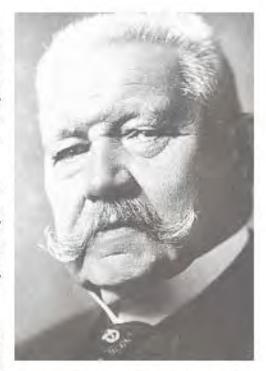
The Nazis incited violence and preached a popular, racist and nationalistic manifesto. Adolph Hitler's growing charisma attracted the marginalized and united millions of people in shared fascination for nationalism, which led, finally, to a majority in the Reichstag, earning Hitler an appointment as Chancellor in 1933. Continual street violence inspired by the Nazis and finally the Reichstag Fire resulted in the enabling act that gave Hitler unfettered power to rule by decree. Hitler recognized the power of propaganda to mold public opinion; he recognized the power of Hindenburg's image.

Government decree No. 32, April 11, 1933:

"The pfennig values of the postage stamps will in future show only the head of Reichspresident von Hinderburg—in some cases in new colors. Stamps of the 45 Rpf will no longer be issued. A new additional value will be the 100Rpf stamp with the same picture of Hindenburg. Stamps bearing the picture of former Reichspresident Ebert, whose printings have already been discontinued will after completion of the new stamps no longer be used."

When von Hinderburg died in August of 1934, Nazi propagandists seized the opportunity to create a Wagnerian fureral that would install Hindenburg in the pantheon of Prussian heroes—and help to weld Nazism to the Hindenburg myth. While Hitler wasted no time erasing all symbols of the former Weimar Republic, he held fast to the enduring image of the Victor of Tamenberg.

From 1934 until the end of the Third Reich in 1945, two realities would slowly merge: the day-to-day gentility, reflected in the mailstream, gradually coupled with the



turbulent Nazi government that unleashed holocaust at home and abroad until at the end, in May of 1945, when the spine of Germany had been broken and there was left only lingering shadows of humanity—starving, homeless, men, women and children, languishing on the subble of a once great people.

What follows is a simple postal history of the Hindenburg stamps that paced the rise and fall of the Third Reich.

HINDENBURG HAILED THROUGHOUT REICH

Quiet Sincerity of Celebration on 85th Birthday Testifies to His Hold on the Nation.

100,000 IN MILITARY REVIEW CHEERED BY BERLIN THRONG; WORLD WAR CHIEFS HAILED

FETE HAS MILITARY NOTE

President, Up Before 7, Goes t Church and Is Acclaimed as He Reviews Troops.

CROWN PRINCE ATTENDS

Hindenburg Absent at Review; Steel Helmet Slight Recalled

MOVED BY THEIR

Regiments He Served In E Standards—Hitler, Re Children, Disregards

By FREDERICK T. BE
By Cable to THE NEW YORK
BERLIN, Oct. 2.—Toda
elghty-fifth birthday of
Paul von Hindenburg, and
to end of Germany it was
with a quiet sincerity th
how great is the hold of
soldier and true patriot of
sentiment.

Nothing like the vener he arouses among the Ge ple has been known sinc of the first Wilhelm and Bismarck.

In Berlin, although a birthday celebration had a ized an President von 1 himself prefers it-flags where, on public buildin sies, churches and privalike. Many motor cars of

Postkarte

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2 210.32.11.12V

Pomabria Som fose

von Effectioners

Sery. 2.X. 1932.

HINDENBURG AGREES TO SEEK RE-ELECTION; NAZIS TO FIGHT HIM

Victory of 84-Year-Old Marshal on March 13 Believed Certain, Despite Growing Opposition.

HE SEES BILTY TO BEICH

Die soehe vishimenen Hi Timber Newheiter mit hest Tringer, Beipzig Beipzig

October 2, 1932: This postal card was a souvenir of the Weimar Republic in celebration of President Paul von Hindenburg's 85th birthday. Mailed from Leipzig to Asuncion, Paraguay at the foreign postcard rate of 15 Reichspfennigs. The card was paid with the newly issued 4Rpf and 5Rpf Hindenburg Medallions plus a 6+4Rpf Deutsche Nothilfe semi-postal depicting the Tannenberg Memorial. Von Hindenburg was hailed as The Victor of Tannenberg for defeating a Russian army there in August 1914. The message reads: "The just issued Hindenburg new issues with best wishes —Berthhold Krueger, Leipzig." Krueger was editor of The Illustrated Stamp Journal in Leipzig.



July 29, 1933: Berlin to Weggis, Switzerland. Foreign rate 25Rpf. Paid 24Rpf with three 8Rpf Medallions. Shortpaid. Boxed T and manuscript 10 with Switzerland 10¢ Postage Due added. Postal slogan reads: Combat the labor shortage buy German goods.



January 30, 1934: Ostrach to Basel, Switzerland. Foreign postcard rate (15Rpf) paid with an 8Rpf and a 1Rpf medallion plus a 6Rpf postal card indicia showing Hindenburg in uniform with Hitler in the background in civilian dress. The Nazis wanted the public to believe that Hindenburg and Hitler were working together. The card pictures SA troops marching through the Brandenburg gate on January 1, 1933, days before the "Decree for the Protection of the People and the State" was signed by Hindenburg in February, which effectively stripped all civil liberties guaranteed by the Weimar Constitution. Hindenburg's death on August 2, 1934 was remembered by black-bordered, Medallion definitives issued on September 5, 1934.

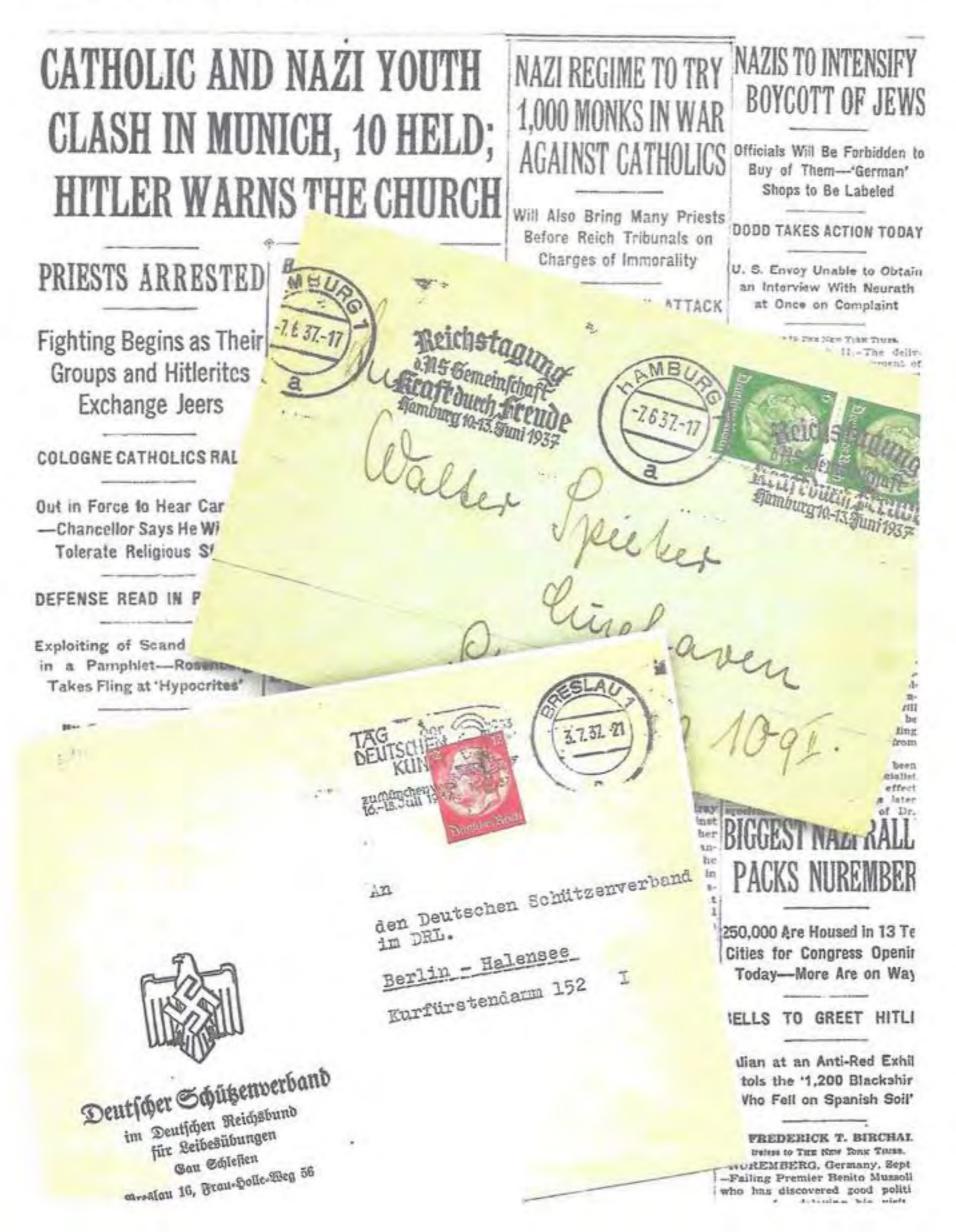


1935 Top: Local letter rate 16Rpf (20-100 grams) plus 30Rpf registration fee was made with three Medallions and a 25Rpf musicians' commemorative (Handel). Bottom: The foreign rate 25Rpf (to Zurich) was made with Medallions and a Bach commemorative. The Nazi government produced prodigious amounts of patriotic philatelic material for collectors in the 1930s and 40s as part of the effort to normalize social and political life.



January 22, 1936: Stuttgart to Philadelphia. Winter Olympic Games were held February 6-16 in the Bavarian village of Garmisch and Partenkirchen. Foreign letter rate 25Rpf to 20 grams. Overpaid 1Rpf with 4th Winter Olympic Games semi-postals 12+6Rpf and 6+4Rpf and an 8Rpf Medallion. The surcharge was deposited in Hitler's culture fund and used for stadium construction.

August 3, 1936: Berlin to Bethlehem, PA: Foreign postcard rate of 15Rpf paid with Medallion. The Summer Olympic Games slogan postmark depicts an icon of the Third Reich, the Brandenburg Gate.



Top: June 7, 1937: Hamburg to Cuxhaven sent at inland letter rate 12Rpf to 20 grams. Slogan postmark: "Community power through joy."

July 3, 1937: Breslau (now Wroclaw, Poland) to Berlin. 12Rpf Medallion paid inland letter rate. Letter addressed to DRL, the umbrella organization of sport in Nazi Germany (Deutscher Reichsbund für Leibesilbungen). After 1933, sporting clubs connected to the Social Democratic Party, the Communist Party or a church were banned. Postmark slogan notes a coming German Art Day. Fetes, fests and fairs were popular, generated crowds and enhanced a sense of community; all strongly supported in Reichspost slogans.

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, MARCH 12, 1938. TWO CENTS IN NAM TOOK NAZIS SEIZE AUSTRIA AFTER HITLER ULTIMATUM; GERMAN TROOPS INVITED TO MAINTAIN ORDER; SEYSS-INQUART CHANCELLOR; POWERS PROTEST 1005 Netherlands Likens Crisis ITALY GETS SHOCK The Austrian Situation SCHUSCHNIGG GOES To Invasion of Belgium DUT Wireless to THE MEN THE TIMES, Following an ultimatum from Berlin, the Schuschnigg gov-Visit of Hitler Probably Resigns After Threat of THE HAGUE, The Netherlands, ernment in Austria retired yesterday evening and was succeeded March 11 .- The news of the draby one headed by the Nam leader, Arthur Seyss-Inquest, as Chanmatic events in Austria has seri-Will Be Canceled as Invasion as Powers cellor. He immediately asked Germany to send troops to help ously impressed The Netherlands. in preserving order. Some 50,000 highly armed and mechanized where it is considered the most Result of the Coup forces marched to the border, Both Munich and Vienna report Fail to Back Him alarming intelligence for smaller some crossed into Austria. Berlin denies this. Nazi mobs took European countries since August, possession of Vienna and raided the Jewish quarter. The awastike 1914, when German troops inwas flown over public buildings, and Patherland Front forces were yaded Belglum. ROME-BERLIN AXIS SHAKEN PLEBISCITE IS CALLED OFF Although German relations with disarmed. There were similar demonstrations in other cities. -The The Netherlands are quite differ-Europe was agrast at the coup of Hitler. His action struck ent from those with Austria, it Italy with the force of an exploding bomb. The impression was is felt that some pretext or other Parleys With Britain Likely to that Italy would not retort with force, but it was believed the Goering and Hess Expected might serve the Reich some day Rome-Berlin axis had been shaken and that Hitler's visit to Rome in Vienna Today-Noxis to intervene in The Netherlands' Be Speeded and Accord is etion might be canceled. No advance notice of Germany's intention is internal affairs as well. 0 per believed to have been given to Mussolini. Now Thought Probable The attitude of the British Govmady Britain dellement PERMEISE ernment in the face of the new situation is impatiently swalted. batso In any case the lesson of Austr's 4 WAR will not be lost on The Nethe Innds. ed to and dered it ee nt alt ng In Monsieur Refuses to Cor y the France and P of to wran-Suppor le Directeur Nico Iampugnani, I sind monte Nap" FAILURE h the one divi-Prem' ed Corso Magenta 42 n the t tax rates Milano. axes. visio? ird/ Mr. Medanasana So. Italien After n of Ψ. AIDE TO RULE ritsch TIGE After Blomberg, See'Moderate Influence Chancellor

March 1938: Wien to Milan, Italy. Foreign rate 25Rpf paid with two Medallions and an Austrian 1 Groschen stamp valid after the Anschluss was completed on March 13, 1938. Two plebiscites were held, both yielding 99% vote of acceptance of Austria into Greater Germany.

April 26, 1938: Essen to New York. Foreign rate 25Rpf using Medallions and a 12+38Rpf Hitler birthday semi-postal. Several German cities used similar special postmarks to note Hitler's 49th birthday on April 20, 1938.

"All the News That's Fit to Print."

DEC S COXXIII

The New York Times.

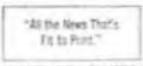


GERMAN ARMY ATTACKS POLAND CITIES BOMBED, PORT BLOCKADE DANZIG IS ACCEPTED INTO REI



October 26, 1939: Wien (Vienna) to Sydney, Australia paid 25Rpf foreign letter rate plus 150Rpf. Airmail should account for 90Rpf at 5 grams. The Australian Jewish Welfare Society was established in 1936 as a support agency for Jews fleeing the Nazis.

April 11, 1939: Cologne to Havana. Foreign letter rate 25Rpf plus airmail 30Rpf. Regulations required that all letters to non-hostile foreign countries be mailed at a post office counter by the writer who must present an official identity card with photo. On August 17, 1938, the Nazis issued an Executive Order requiring German Jews bearing first names of non-Jewish origin to adopt an additional name: Israel for men and Sara for women. The writer above complied by showing his "Jewish" middle name, Issac on the back flap.



The New York Times.



FRENCH SIGN REICH TRUCE, ROME PACT NEXT; BRITISH BOMB KRUPP WORKS AND BREMEN; HOUSE Y PASSES 2-OCEAN NAVY BILL



July 15, 1940: Kiel to San Cristobal, Venezuela. Foreign surface letter rate of 25Rpf paid with Medallion. The cover was censored in Germany and arrived in Caracas on September 12 and San Cristobal on the 17th. The writer may have been asked to spell out her middle name for the Kiel postal clerk.

December 3, 1940: Berlin to Philadelphia 65Rpf paid with Medallions (25Rpf + 30Rpf airmail). Censored in Germany. Clarence Pickett was an American Quaker active in humanitarian services and engaged in the rescue of refugees in Europe and the Middle East. The Yankee Clipper service from Lisbon was threatened after the fall of France—service would end if Spain or Portugal joined the Axis.



February 7, 1941: Hamburg to Erie, Pennsylvania. Foreign postcard rate 15Rpf (convenience overpayment of 2Rpf). Sent to U.S. via Dissabonn (Lisbon). Jewish sender has added the middle name of "Israel" to comply with the 1938 law requiring German Jews bearing names of "non-Jewish" origin to add Israel and Sara (below) to their given names.

October 7, 1941: Berlin to Lynbrook, New York. Foreign letter airmail to North America 65Rpf (25Rpf+ 40Rpf airmail). A "Sara" letter complying with the August 17,1938 Law on Alteration of Family and Personal Names.

AY, SEPTEMBER 7, 1942.

THREE CENTS SEW SORK C

NAZIS PUSHED BACK ABOVE STALINGRAD CLAIM NOVOROSSIISK, BLACK SEA PORT 10TH FORTRESS RAID COSTS 2, FIRST LOS



February 7, 1942: Inland surface rate of 12Rpf is paid with a 1Rpf Medallion, and two Winter Relief Fund, semi-postal stamps (5+5Rpf and 6+4Rpf) both issued in November 1940 and valid through June 30 1941—eight months invalid at the time this cover was canceled.

July 24, 1942: Halle to Berlin. Inland rate 12Rpf plus 30Rpf registration fee is met with six Medallions, a 12Rpf Hitler definitive and one 12+38Rpf semi-postal issued on Hitler's 52nd birthday in April. The Hitler-head definitive was first issued in August of 1941 and was in production until May 1945.

New York Times Company.

AY, FEBRUARY 23, 1943.

THREE CENTS

ROMMEL GAINS IN DRIVE TO SPLIT +1 STALIN SAYS SOVIET BEARS WAR'S BE 850 LOST ON 2 OF OUR SHIPS IN ATLA



February 13, 1943 (top): Registered cover to Berlin from Rheine. 12Rpf inland plus 30Rpf registration using a vertical pair of 1Rpf Medallions and a 1941 40Rpf Hitler definitive.

April 8, 1943: Moresnet to Eupen: Local rate 6Rpf. Moresnet/Eupen was a German-speaking region in eastern Belgium that was annexed by Nazi Germany on May 23, 1940. The mourning cover was franked by a 6Rpf Medallion to pay the local rate.

April 18, 1943: Meppen to Badbergen paid the inland rate of 12Rpf with two 6Rpf Medallions.

right, 1944, by The New York Times Changany. THREE CENTS NEW YORK CITY YORK, FRIDAY, MARCH 24, 1944. Nottingham 6,720 TONS HIT REICH IN 24 HOURS; al Welcome RUSSIANS RIP LINE NEAR TARNOPOL; BRAM. England. Amid all the red-JAPANESE CONVERGE ON INDIA BASE my this ancient city /. forty-eight GI's right Bistes deside luxurious food and iders with generals TEMPO OF AIR WARFARE IS STEPPED UP 5.000 PLANES USED ebration of Ameri-37-NILE GAIN MADE riendship. arranged the lunchrivates an a show of to United States Michelle - Son Fires Rage in Frankfort Red Army in New Drive ENGL his vicinity. Lord rick Mitchell, in a After RAF's Record Smashes Hinge of med with gold butad each soldier at -ina Front 3,360-Ton Blow white murble stairnuncil House. ills of Ogden, Utah, w. Chosen to make thanks, he brought ALLIES LOSE 66 CRAFT use with this: "We est the damned Hun-Einschreiben to this end we are Americans Blast Six Enemy was represented by Bases-Destroy 20 German truce of Mount Ver-Fliers in Sky Battles rsey by Sgt. T. E. Trenton and Cow bei ber igt George J. Me MIDDLETON imebury. Doft= ORE TYPICS. spartaffe! March 24-HE, BANK sees and fifthe Then v. d. Weck Awe important Sesterday un-Deutliches Perich PALM BF of approximate. fighters n the Ewenty-four-hour As been the heavihilanthro & American formsmeward yearday Collection All ale might had sunt 60 Aircraft over Eu-Stricke in Wednesday to noon in addition to resteron attack, Anglo-Amerin New! ACH, mes had bombed Bertin. na B / afternoon in an operastar about 1.600 Insted phy scraft and had meaned Mincher fl-on-the-Main with more 80 tons of hombs, a record A for one target, from the Air Force Thunderburds inday sight. hat the Allied all blown Trodersenstr fixued during Thursday night a demonstrated by a Feuter Murrel and spatch from London Priday Warren Persisting cening which stated that Roy-Air Force bombers were again. in. Jour J. Pershing. Marshul Bo ever German-occupied trrrknry. I Get Art Works the most important -Never has air power been exing the owner or one Mosow communiques, which erted with greater strength and ineat private art col- announced the capture of more) effectiveness than on Wednesday January if was and than 115 other inhabited points let a commun and Thursday. It is estimated here, this collection would five other southern front sectors other Japanese Dathat not less than 6.720 tone of given to the Metro other than the Tarnopol Prockurov the upper Chindwin River bombs have fallen on targets in Thaungdut and had advanced to ap n of Art. Valued at region. Germany and occupied territory in s given to the State | Nest in importance was the fact point thirty miles east of Impha. the three biggest successive air anby Mr. Bache, under that the troops moving on Niko- [The Tokyo radio said last saults of the war, which means By The Alle ter of the Board of layer continued clearing smany might in a broadcast reported by LONDON, March 20 des that an average of 250 tors have

March 24, 1944: Registered cover to Munich from Tutzing (25 miles). 13 grams rated 12Rpf inland + 30Rpf (registration). 64Rpf on cover: Four Hindenburg Medallions (booklet) and two semi-postals. The 12+38Rpf Fulda was issued on March 11, 1944 and the 42+108Rpf Junkers (Ju90) was issued on February 11, 1944. Germany produced a trove of philatelic material for collectors—presumably in the name of continuity and harmony— but people or the post office continued to use the Hindenburg Medallions until the bitter end

