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**T**HE ugly, torn cover shown in Figures 1 & 2, a recent (cheap) purchase on e-Bay, is an 1883 registered letter with AR (*avis de réception*) addressed to an inmate at Fort Leavenworth military prison, who escaped before the letter could be delivered.

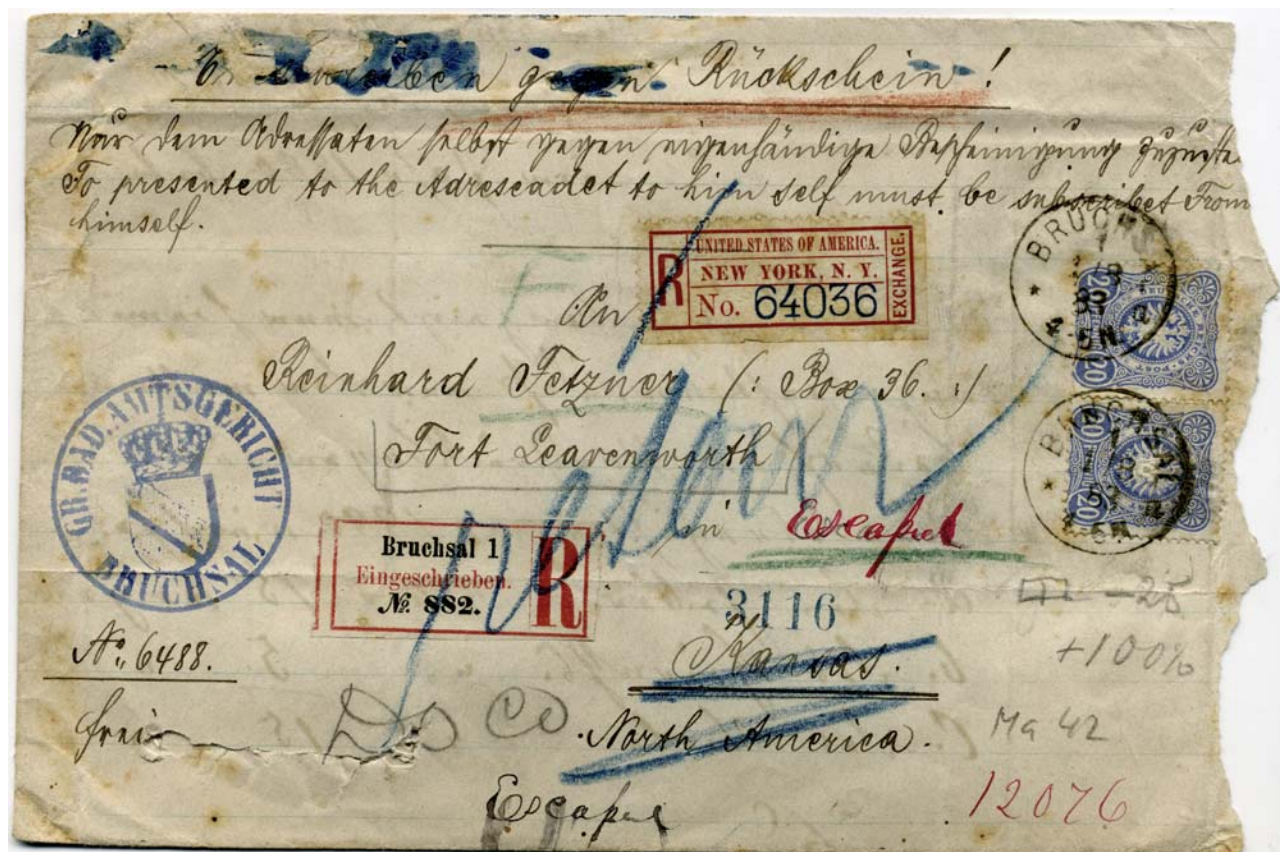


Figure 1. Germany–US returned to sender (1883)

On folded lined paper, missing up to a centimeter on the left. The *frei* (free) at lower left is a leftover from an earlier period, meaning that the receiver did not have to pay any postage.



Figure 2. Postmarks on reverse

Mailed from Bruchsal August 11 (front), it arrived at New York August 18; it must have been sent from Fort Leavenworth to the dead letter office on September 18 after arriving there considerably earlier, it arrived at the DLO on September 24, and finally to Bruchsal on October 18.

It was sent from a tribunal in Bruchsal, Germany, addressed to Reinhard Fetzner in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. In red and grey inks (same handwriting) is the endorsement *Escaped*.

Fort Leavenworth is the location of what was a famous military prison 1875–95, after which it became a penitentiary. It currently has a website, sternly advising that public tours of the facilities are not available. Just why a German was doing time in an American military prison is an interesting question.

*Postal history* At the top (mostly covered by blue paint, but underlined in red crayon) is the endorsement *Eingeschreiben gegen Rückschein!* (registered with return receipt). Covers provably sent with return receipt or AR are rare in the UPU-period prior to July 1892 (Treaty of Vienna), in part because there was no requirement for an indication of return receipt to be marked on them (unless they were mailed from the US). In this case, the sender rather than a postal clerk had endorsed it. The postage of 40 Pfennig (equalling 10 ¢ or 50 centimes) is made up of 20 Pf for each of registration and UPU rates. Most jurisdictions for which I have examples (including German states) paid the AR fee on the AR form that would have arrived in the same mail, rather than on the cover.

This is the earliest international AR cover addressed to the US of which I am aware. Coincidentally, the three earliest AR covers from the US that I have recorded are also dated 1883. Since the United States had treaty agreements with both Switzerland and Germany that predate even the GPU, registered letters could have been sent with AR between these countries from 1874, possibly earlier.

Below the top line is a sesquilingual (German and very broken English) endorsement, the English version reading, *To presented to the Addressee to him self must be subscribet from himself*. I believe that this means that only the addressee could sign for it, which service (available only for domestic return receipt mail) became known as restricted delivery a couple of decades later. This became moot after the prisoner had escaped, and a blue crayon was used to write a large *retour*, also striking through part of the address.

At lower left is the endorsement *frei*, indicating that the letter was fully prepaid (that is, it was free to the recipient), a leftover from an earlier period. There is also a mysterious pencil marking *Do co* at lower left, and a German dealer's pencilled comments.