

Operation 'Wasser-Welle'

Psychological warfare has become an essential part of modern war. In 1943 the R.A.F. dropped British forgeries of German stamps over the Ruhr. These were the current bpf Hitler definitives but with the head of Heinrich Himmler, chief of the Gestapo, which he regarded as an insult to his leader and the Nazi state and gave the order to forge British stamps as propaganda.

These were printed on paper with a wavy line watermark. This led to the combination of Wasserzeichen Wellenlinie (watermark wavy line), hence the name Operation Wasser-Welle.

British stamps forged were the 1935 Silver Jubilee 1/2d value, 1937 Coronation 1/2d value and six King George VI definitives. The definitives were also overprinted with various themes, the rarest being the Murder Ruin and World Politics series.

Distribution was to be over troop concentrations and the larger British cities by the Luftwaffe.

Genuine British stamps were perforated 15x14 but the Germans didn't have machines capable of producing these sizes. Frantic searching resulted in a machine being found but the size was 11 1/2. This had been used for perforating theatre tickets and such items.

The idea was not a success. By the time the forgeries were ready the fortunes of war had turned in the Allies' favour.

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References: Stamps in Battledress by Joachim Hosang.
Unternehmen Wasserwelle by Wolfgang Prätzsch (English version).

Communist and Jewish Tendencies



Responsibility for Operation "Wasser-Welle" was passed to Section VI-F-4 of the Sicherheitspolizei (the SS) in Berlin which had a print shop in Oranienburg-Sachsenhausen concentration camp (above), among whose inmates were former forgers and experts on paper and print.

Himmler ordered the basic design and colour of genuine British stamps be retained, no change to the profile of the King, Communist tendencies to be in the design and show implications of a Communist influence on the Allies, especially Britain. Detail was not of great importance as the finished product quite obviously had to look like it was a forgery.

Quantities of the accepted designs had to be ready within six to eight weeks.

Obvious Forgeries

Operation "Wasser-Welle"
in English:
Operation Water-Wave

The widely recognised high quality of German printing would have produced better quality stamps. However, it was intended from the outset that the finished examples were to be obvious forgeries.

The German idea that small pieces of paper in their 1000s could make any difference to the morale of civilians or soldiers can only be treated as a joke.

One is at a loss to see what result Himmler hoped to achieve.



Reichsführer
Heinrich Himmler



Production



Paper was in short supply and a large amount was needed for 7 million of the definitives and the other two values one million of each.

It was decided to use remaining stocks of old food coupons. This paper with watermarked wavy lines had become useless because of widespread Allied forgeries of food coupons dropped over the Third Reich. New ration coupon paper had to be produced, thereby making large quantities of old stock.

The printing process was offset lithography whereas the British originals were done by photogravure. The six definitives were possibly 12 values horizontally with a gutter between sixth and seventh and possibly 18 vertically.



Large blocks of the commemoratives have never been found but they were possibly printed in 12 rows of six values.

All images were spaced approximately 12mm between each, the space was to be for overprints. However, as the overprints selected fitted the stamps, the gutters were not needed so they were also perforated.

Surgery alterations

Centre
of rose
replaced
by hammer
and sickle.

Diadem top of crown
replaced by Star of David.

Centre of
thistle
replaced
by Star
of David.



Value tablet for penny
replaced by
hammer and sickle.



Genuine British
postage stamp.

German Propaganda Forgeries



Propaganda forgeries were made of the British "Dark Colours" series of definitives: 1/2d, 1d, 1 1/2d, 2d, 2 1/2d, 3d.

The centre of the rose was replaced by a hammer and sickle.

The centre of the thistle was replaced by a Star of David.

The diadem on top of the crown was replaced by a Star of David.

The value tablet for penny was replaced by a hammer and sickle.



Original British "Dark Colours" definitive series

Imitation British Postmark

"Used" copies of all the forgeries were given an imitation British cancel denoting the 1944 invasion of Normandy reading: London/AAA0/6 Jun/44/Special Stamp, AAA0 thought to be Allied Army Amphibian Operation. As they were intended to be dropped from planes, they were ungummed as most likely they would have either stuck together or stuck to the ground.



Production took longer than intended, it was the summer of 1944, fortunes of the war had turned. Bombs took priority over stamps for the Luftwaffe. For distribution, the Germans made use of their agents and informers in neutral Europe, but instead of distributing them, the agents sold them to stamp dealers. Berlin found out and distribution was made via Sweden and Switzerland, to well known stamp collectors who received letters containing odd values. Probably 15,000-20,000 were distributed abroad.

The bulk of the stock remained in a Berlin air-raid shelter. In the closing stages of the war, with the Allies nearing the city, the staff of VI-F-4, mainly SS officers, left Berlin in April 1945 with the remaining stock which they burnt at Jena, Thuringia, just before they were captured.

'Coronation' Sorcery



Original British stamp



German forgery unused



German forgery "used"

Propaganda forgeries were made of the 1937 Coronation 1/2d value.

The emblems and Postage Revenue along the top were replaced with a Star of David on each side of SSSR Britannia, intending to show that Britain had become one of the Socialist Soviet Republics.

The crown had a hammer and sickle added.

Queen Elizabeth was replaced by the head of Stalin.

The interlaced monogram was altered to SSSR.

At the right a hammer and sickle against a five-pointed star background replaced the ampulla.

The date of the Coronation was replaced by the date of the Allies Conference in Teheran in November 1943.

'Silver Jubilee' Forgery



Original British stamp



German forgery unused



German forgery "used"

Propaganda forgeries were made of the King George V Silver Jubilee 1910-1935 1/2d value.

The head of the King was replaced by the profile of Stalin.

The original inscriptions were removed and, true to the propaganda of a Jewish and Communist war, replaced by two Stars of David flanking THIS WAR IS A and at the foot, by a hammer and sickle device on each side of the denomination and the words JEWISH WAR (note misspelling).

The dates 1910 and 1935 were changed to 1939, the start of the war, and 1944, the intending year of victory for Nazi Germany and the end of Great Britain.

The crown was surmounted by a Star of David and the wreath was replaced with a star and a hammer and sickle.

Souvenir Sheets

Two types of Souvenir Sheets were printed by typography, inscribed in English and Russian
The propaganda cancellation is an imitation of the normal London postmark
The other sheet only has the propaganda forgeries of the Silver Jubilee and Coronation issues



SPECIAL-STAMP IN MEMORY OF THE FIRST DAY OF INVASION



Особые марки в память первого дня вторжения



1.-

Liquidation of Empire Overprints



Overprints pointing to actual war reverses were applied to the six definitives with "Liquidation of Empire" and the names of various bases and Colonies, the aim being to influence the British national feeling.

The unity of the British Empire had never been in doubt and prior to the start of the Second World War its size was certainly static. But from 1941 certain parts of the Empire were occupied by the Japanese, whilst specific but strictly limited concessions were conferred on the United States of America on 4 September 1940 in exchange for 50 urgently needed destroyers, which the then neutral U.S.A. could naturally not pass on to Britain free of charge.

This exchange presented the German Propaganda Department with a wonderful opportunity, as they naturally refrained mentioning that only a military base and supply depot had been ceded and that the Colony definitely remained within the British Empire.

Eight of the 14 overprints can be based on this agreement: Bahamas, Barbados, Bermuda, Granada, Jamaica, St Lucia, St Vincent and Trinidad.

The six other overprints referred to the Far East: Borneo, Rabaul, Bougainville, Hong Kong, Rangoon and Singapore.

As shown by the strips, the overprinting plate consisted of different overprints in horizontal singles.



Barbados

St Lucia

Singapore

In the German view, leasing the military bases was a sign of weakness and a loss of British prestige, with the Empire being traded for war supplies.



Hong Kong

Bermuda

Bahamas

Trinidad

Jamaica

Barbados

Bahamas



Location: Group of numerous islands, keys and reefs, 5400 square miles, encircling the eastern end of the Gulf of Mexico in an irregular crescent 700 miles long, extending south east from off the coast of Florida.

Nassau, the capital, has a fine harbour.

British from 1632, until granted independence in 1981.

In 1940 the United States Navy established a base on Mayaguana Island.

Barbados



Location: Island of the West Indies, 166 square miles, at the eastern entrance to the Caribbean Sea.

Capital: Bridgetown.

British from 1605, until granted independence in 1966.

Bermuda



Location: Group of 360 small islands in Atlantic Ocean, 580 miles east of North Carolina, United States of America.

Capital: Hamilton.

British naval dockyard on Ireland Island.

During the Second World War, sites on St David's Island were leased to United States of America for use as naval and airbases.

Grenada



Location: Island of Grenada and six smaller islands in the south-eastern Caribbean Sea.

British colony from 1763, granted full autonomy over its internal affairs as an Associated State in 1967 and full independence in 1974.

Jamaica



Location: Largest island, 4244 square miles, in the West Indies,
90 miles south of Cuba in the Caribbean Sea.
Kingston, the capital, has a fine harbour.
British from 1655, until granted independence in 1962.

St. Lucia



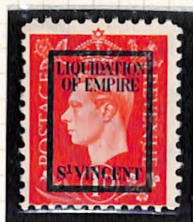
Location: At 238 square miles, the largest of the Windward Islands in the West Indies.

Capital: Castries.

British from 1803 until granted independence in 1979.

For some time the chief coaling station of the British fleet in the West Indies.

St. Vincent



Location: One of the islands, 150 square miles, in the Windward group in the West Indies.

Capital: Kingston.

Granted independence from Britain in 1979.

Trinidad



Location: Island of 1980 square miles in West Indies, off the coast of north-eastern Venezuela.

Capital: Port of Spain.

British from 1802 until granted independence in 1962.

Borneo



Location: Third-largest island in the world and the largest of Asia, lying astride the Equator.
In 1888 North Borneo became a British Protectorate, the south of the island being under Dutch rule and, following the Japanese occupation 1942-1945, was restored as a British colony in 1946. Self-government was granted in 1963, uniting with Malaya, Sarawak and Singapore to form the Federation of Malaysia.

Rabaul



Location: Largest of a group of islands in the Bismark Archipelago, north-east of New Guinea in the western Pacific Ocean.

From 1884 to 1919 a German dependency, then included in the Australian mandate for New Guinea in 1920. In the Second World War, occupied by the Japanese from 1942 to 1945.

Bougainville



Location: Part of the Solomon Islands in the western Pacific Ocean.

Allotted to Germany in 1819 but passed to Australia after the First World War under a League of Nations mandate in 1919. Granted independence in 1978.

Hong Kong



Location: Island off the south-east coast of China at mouth of the Canton River, with an area of 29 square miles.
 British from 1841. Leased to Britain from China in 1898 for 99 years.
 Fortified island of great importance, with naval station and a base for military supplies.
 In the Second World War, occupied by the Japanese from 1941 to 1945.

Rangoon



Location: With Tibet to the north, Siam to the east, the Bay of Bengal forms the south-western and southern boundary of the province.

Rangoon, the chief port and capital of Burma.

British from 1886 until granted independence in 1948.

In the Second World War, occupied by the Japanese from 1942 to 1945.

Singapore



Location: Island and city of 249 square miles at southern end of Malay peninsular.

Strategic British naval and airbase on north shore of island, comprising coaling station and garrison.

Purchased by Britain from Sultan of Johore in 1824. Granted independence in 1959.

In the Second World War, occupied by the Japanese from 1942 to 1945.

Liquidation Overprints



Liquidation of Empire marginal sheetlet of six of the 3d definitive each with a different Colony overprint: Bougainville, Rabaul, Borned, Grenada, Rangoon and St Vincent.

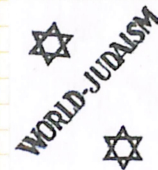
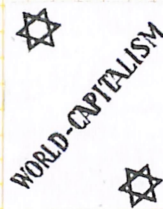
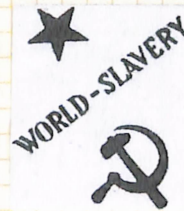


Liquidation of Empire block of 1d definitive each with different Colony overprint: Rangoon, Bougainville, St Vincent and Rabaul.

Extremes of World Politics

This series of overprints and found on all six King George VI issue, is among the rarest of the forgeries and referred to the reasons for the Second World War - that was according to Nazi propaganda.

The Star of David and hammer and sickle are predominant.



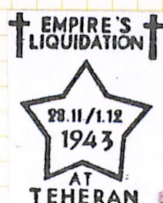
THE BLUFF CHARTA

Refers to the Atlantic Charter of August 14, 1941, agreed between President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill.



TEHERAN

Refers to the conference between Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin between November 28 and December 1 at Teheran in 1943.



MURDER RUIN

The 'bomb' series of six drew attention to the Allied bombing of towns with mostly civilian populations living near industrial targets, as well as towns in neutral and German-occupied territory with consequent loss of life and damage to property.

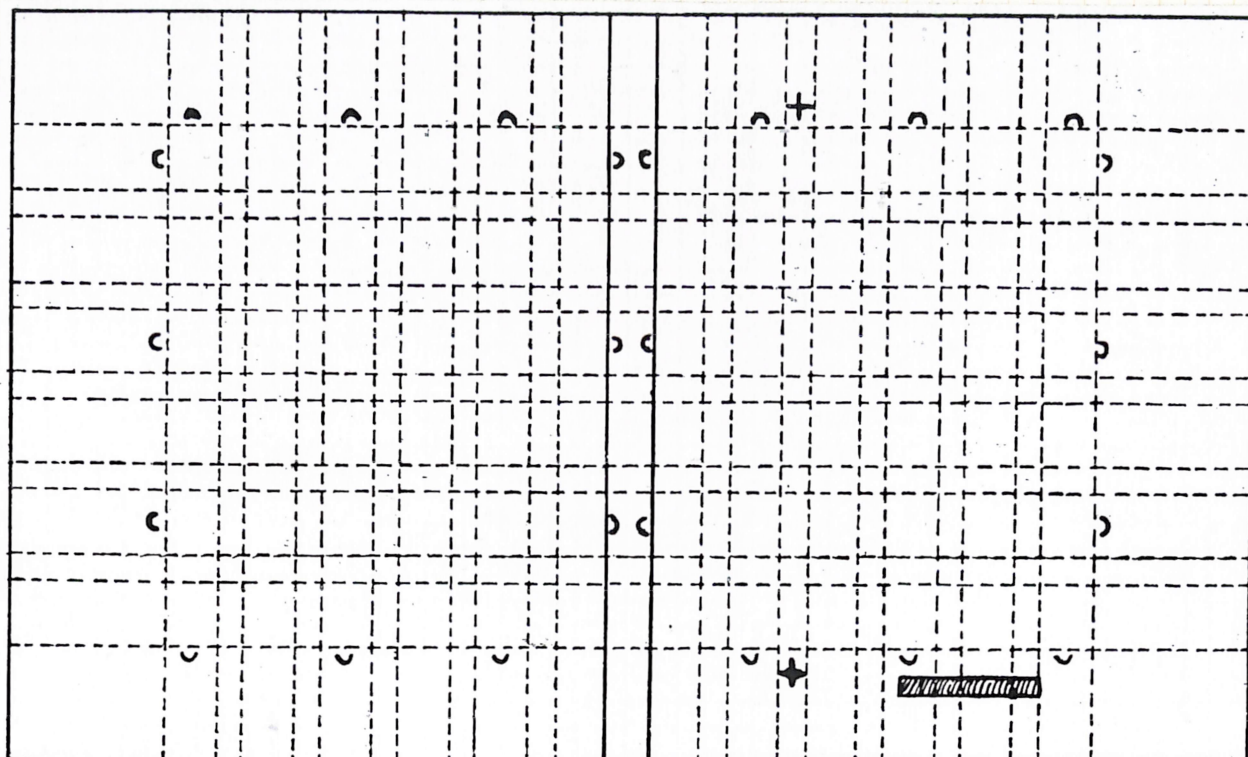


Overprints: Rouen Cathedral, Monte Cassino, Schaffhausen, Cologne Cathedral, San Marino and Castelle Candolfo (above).

Marginal Markings

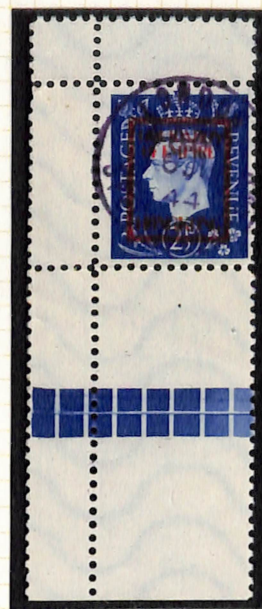


The 1/2d and 3d values show a mark of a semi-circle in the margin open towards the stamp.



Positions of semi-circle.

Colour Bars and Marginal Markings



Colour bars: A colour bar 50mm and either 6½mm or 10mm thick appear once in each sheet. The bar is divided horizontally only once but frequently vertically and only on the bottom margin.

E: On the right of the bar is the letter E followed by a number, both in reverse. The numbers are 1-6 according to the value ½d-3d. No. 3 is the 1½d value.



The 1d, 2d and 2½d values have a dot in the margin in the same colour as the stamp; not in every margin.