

Resumption of U.S. Postcard and Letter Mail Service to Europe, 1944-1948

Purpose: To show the progression of mail service during the four years required to restore full postal services from the U.S. to the liberated nations of Europe.

Scope and coverage: This exhibit shows the process by which postcard and letter mail originating in the U.S. was dispatched to European countries as they were liberated from German control. It focuses on surface and air mail transiting the New York exchange post office, including registration and special delivery (express) mail. Examples of mail returned to senders reflect both fast changing Post Office Department directives and confusion by postal patrons as to the type of communication permitted.

Exhibit plan: Countries appear in the order that resumed mail service (usually non-illustrated postcards) first occurred. Within each country, representative examples of mail appear chronologically as additional postal services resumed.

Background: During World War II the U.S. maintained postal relations with only ten Allied and neutral nations in Europe. Resumption of mail service to countries under German control began in February 1944, a process that required more than four years to complete.

The commander of Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, General Eisenhower, authorized the resumption of postal service to each liberated nation or region within. Postcard mail with personal messages in English or the native language usually came first in order to minimize the burden on censors and transatlantic shipping. Over time, surface letter mail, airmail, and registration and special delivery (express) mail gradually followed, usually in that order.

Instructions to local postmasters appeared almost daily in *The Postal Bulletin*. Many of the Postmaster General's directives were poorly publicized, often leaving postal patrons confused as to the type of mail allowed. This resulted in significant volumes of mail returned throughout the whole four year period.

With the restart of special delivery service to Germany on 23 August 1948, the disruption of postal service to Europe caused by World War II came to an end.

Importance: This exhibit provides new information on the resumption of postcard and letter mail to Europe that took place between 1944 and 1948. A close examination of *The Postal Bulletin* and personal study drive this presentation.

Postal Cards Now Going To France Once Again

By The Associated Press.

WASHINGTON, Sept. 4—The United States resumed at least limited postal service to northern French provinces today after an interruption caused by Nazi occupation.

Postmaster General Walker said that non-illustrated postcards in English or French, on personal or family matters, will be accepted for delivery to civilians in these places. (The Army takes care of delivering to its own personnel):

Detail from a *New York Times* (Sept. 5, 1944) article outlining resumed postal service to the Normandy region of France.