

ALLIED PLEBISCITE ACTIVITY IN THE SAAR TERRITORY 1935

This exhibit was created to show mail sent by plebiscite personnel assigned to the Saar Territory in the mid-1930s to determine whether the inhabitants wished to be reunited with Germany, continue to be administered separately by the League of Nations or be annexed to France. Some of these men were diplomats (to organize and administer the voting) and some were military (to keep order during the process). The number of people involved was relatively small and their assignment was relatively short. As a result, such material can be considered as scarce, and it has taken several decades of diligent searching to gather what is shown here.

Although there were other plebiscites held in parts of Germany in 1920 and 1921, the Saar was considered to be a special case. At the end of the war, the French wished to exploit the coal and iron resources of the Saar Basin to replace those of its own that had been destroyed in the fighting, but the other Allies were not willing to allow annexation of this territory which was heavily German ethnically. As a compromise, France was allowed to administer the Saar economically for 15 years, after which there would be a plebiscite in 1935.

Troops from four countries -- Great Britain, Italy, The Netherlands and Sweden -- were deployed in the Saar prior to the voting. Each contingent conducted its own fieldpost operation and each used its own stamps. As to the plebiscite, the actual event was set for 13 January 1935 and there was a good deal of political activity to stir up supporters prior to the voting, especially on the German side. In any case, the outcome was quite predictable ahead of time, with rejoining Germany being favored by 91% of the participants. Some 8% voted for continuing the Status Quo and less than one-half of 1% voted for France. Based on this outcome, reunion with Germany was authorized for 1 March 1935.



Photo postcard showing troops sent to the Saar Territory by the four participating countries. Note the light tank in the lower left corner.

LEAGUE OF NATIONS

Homburg
29 October 1934

Saarbrücken
21 December 1934



The final act of the Allied occupation of Germany following World War I was the determination of the future status of the Saar. These examples of official League of Nations mail were franked with Saar stamps and have official cachets of the regional Plebiscite administrations in Homburg and St. Ingbert.

LEAGUE OF NATIONS

Saarbrücken
22 December 1934

Volksabstimmung im Saargebiet

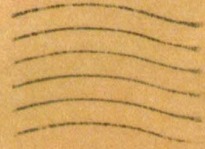
Abstimmungsausweis

Einschreiben-Rückschein.

BENUTZE DIE LUFTPOST



GROSSER ZEITGEWINN



Landessache.



Drucksache

Chaves

Karl Cillmann



Simone Homburg
Jan 13 1935

Additional examples of League of Nations mail. Lower example has wax seal impression inscribed "Plebiscite Commission of the League of Nations" applied to card confirming that the addressee has the right to vote on 13 January 1935.

BRITISH FORCES

Field Post Office 10
7 January 1935

The final chapter in the Allied occupation of Germany in the aftermath of World war I was a plebiscite held in the Saar on 13 January 1935 in order to determine the future status of the territory. Some 1,500 British troops were sent as part of the forces to oversee the voting. FPO #10 was established to provide a postal service for them between December 1934 and February 1935.



BRITISH FORCES

Field Post Office 10
21 February 1935

Saarbrücken
17 January 1935



Unit markings on mail from the British Saar Force are uncommon and sought after by specialists. Above examples from the Commander of the Royal Lancers and the Headquarters of the British Contingent.

BRITISH FORCES

Field Post Office 10
21 February 1935

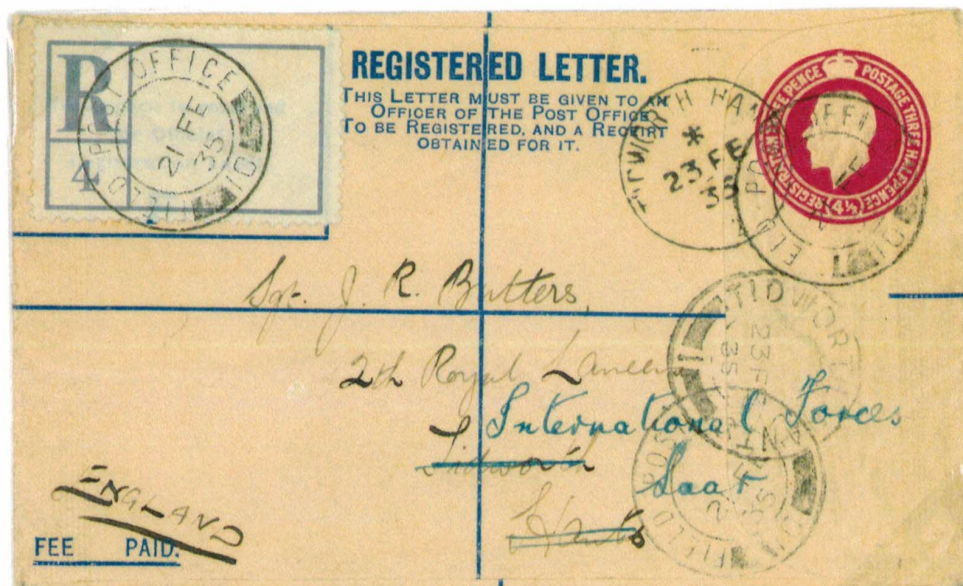
Saarbrücken
13 January 1935



Registered letter sent within the Saar and cover with with special postmark for the “Day of the Plebiscite” as well as a “Saar Force/Headquarters” unit cachet.

BRITISH FORCES

Field Post Office 10
23 January 1935
21 February 1935



Registered mail involving the Saar Force is very elusive. These examples of incoming correspondence were both dated after the voting had taken place.

DUTCH FORCES

Emmerik-Amsterdam TPO
5 January 1935
13 January 1935

Saarbrücken
13 January 1935

*Nederlandsch Contingent Saartroepen
Kleischtrasse 1. Saarbrücken.*



KORPS MARINIERS

*afg. : W. Kreis
Marinier 1e Jbl.
Ned. Contingent
Saarbrücken*



DETACHEMENT MARINIERS
SAARBRÜCKEN



SOEBOKOOPE
BRIEF-
LEGGRAMMEN

George S. Hill, Esq.,
627 Fairmount Ave.,
Philadelphia, U.S.A.

Holland, along with Britain, Italy and Sweden, was selected to send troops to supervise the Saar plebiscite. Some 250 Dutch Marines made up the contingent. No special FPO was provided, but a few examples of mail are recorded -- sent via the civil post office in Saarbrücken or placed in the mails on the Dutch TPO route Emmerik-Amsterdam.

DUTCH FORCES

Saarbrücken
13 January 1935



Inbound mail to the Dutch forces is extremely elusive. These examples were mailed on Plebiscite Day. Lower cover sent from Saarbrücken to a Dutch Marine in Rotterdam, where it was forwarded to a new posting as a member of the Saar Force himself.

ITALIAN FORCES

Commando Truppe Italiane nella Saar
28 January 1935
5 February 1935



Reg. di Mr. Carlo Milani

raccomandata

R Losaubricher
654



Caro.
Virgilio Luardon
Viale Monzoni 34
10
Roma

Registered mail from the Italian troops in the Saar is very uncommon. Although ordinary postage was free for mail from the soldiers to Italy, the registration fee was assessed at the domestic rate of 1.75 lire plus additional amounts for heavy and/or valuable letters. Demand for registration was modest so blank labels were used.

ITALIAN FORCES

Commando Truppe Italiane nella Saar
21 January 1935



A small contingent of Italians, including the Royal Carabinieri, was part of the Allied force sent to the Saar to supervise the Plebiscite. The Italians arrived on 21 November 1934 (shown in the photo postcard) and departed on 26 February 1935. Above official cover of the Carabinieri (Police) sent to Italy free of postage.

ITALIAN FORCES

Commando Truppe Italiane nella Saar
13 January 1935



Signora
Antonia Oraldonio
Via Lombardo 98
Treviso (Italien)

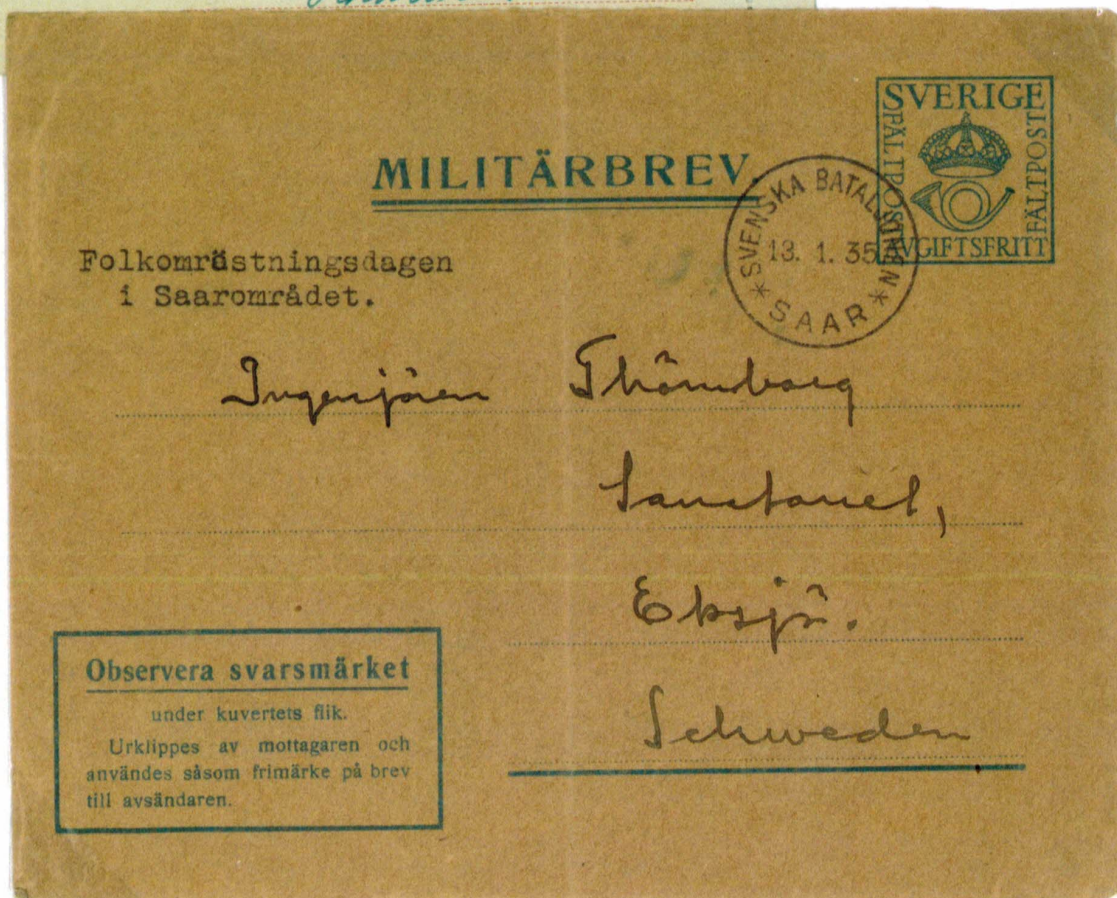


Preg-mo Signor
I° Ten. D'Enrico Cav. Giuseppe
Commando Trupe Italiane dislocate nella Sarre,
2° Batt. Granatieri.
Sarrebruck.
Territorio della Sarre.
Uff. Post. Roma 13.

Mail postmarked on Plebiscite Day is especially sought after by German collectors. Above are a philatelic cover to Italy and an unusual example of an inbound cover from Rome, which happened to be received on the appropriate date.

SWEDISH FORCES

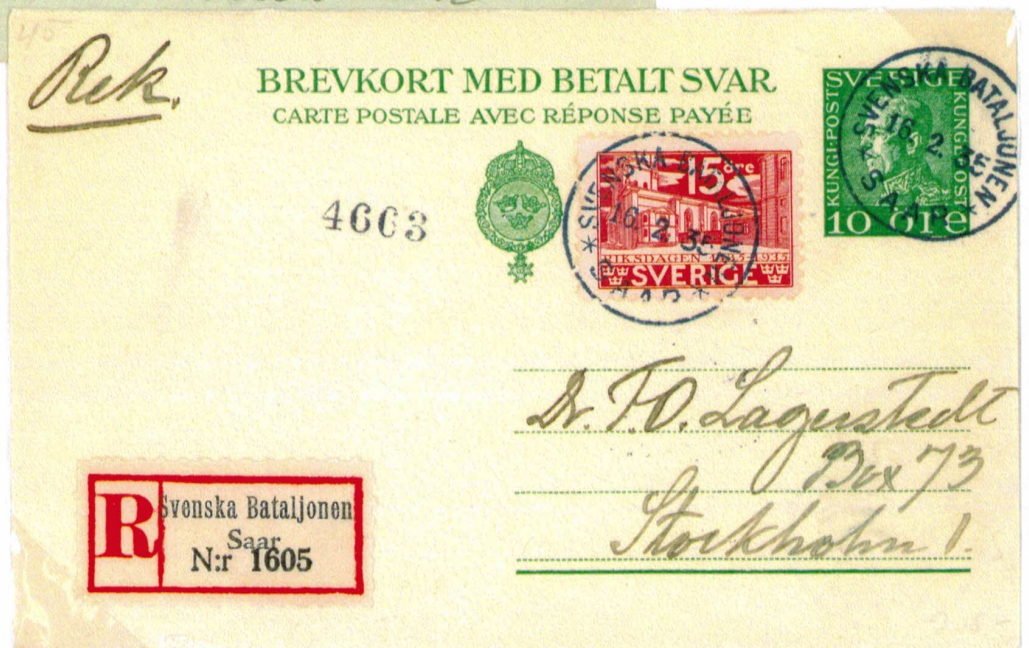
Svenska Bataljonen/Saar
13 January 1935



Sweden, along with Britain, Italy and The Netherlands, sent troops to supervise the Saar Plebiscite in what was to become a foretaste of today's multinational peacekeeping by the United Nations. A special FPO serviced the 260 Swedes, and its marking is recorded from 23 December 1934 to 17 February 1935.

SWEDISH FORCES

Svenska Bataljonen/Saar
2 February 1935
16 February 1935



Registered mail from the Swedish Battalion is encountered more frequently than for the other contingents. In fact, a special printed label was provided, suggesting that a substantial amount of such mail was anticipated.

SWEDISH FORCES

Svenska Bataljonen/Saar
16 February 1935



Incoming mail to the Swedish Contingent is much more difficult to acquire. It was routed through a special address at Malmö. Only two examples are recorded of the forwarding marking in French of "Swedish Detachment in Merzig (Saar)."

GERMAN ANNEXATION COMMISSION

Saarbrücken
14 March 1935



Once the Plebiscite Commission certified that the result of the vote was 91% for reunification with Germany, the supervisory troops were withdrawn and Germany permitted to annex the Saar on 1 March 1935. Above cover shows provisional use of an envelope of the former Saar administration re-used by the "Commissioner for the Reunification of the Saar Territory," thus providing an appropriate ending of the story of the plebiscite.