

Old Graham's Philatelic Tales No.4

Cornflakes and Forgeries. Forgeries and Cornflakes. These are two words that you don't often see together, so I thought it was wise to say it twice. One of the best resourced forging rings of the mid-Twentieth Century used the code word "Cornflakes" to throw a deep shadow over their work, but now it is time to throw some light into this mysterious world.

Operation Cornflakes was masterminded by the American Office of Strategic Services, and it involving tricking the German postal services (Deutsche Reichpost) into delivering anti-Nazi propaganda to German citizens. The operation used special planes that dropped bags of false, but properly addressed, post in the vicinity of bombed out trains. The ruse was that the postal service would then confuse the false post with the real post, and then deliver the propaganda to German homes. Firstly, the Office of Strategic Services had to forge and print convincing six and twelve pfennig stamps of Adolf Hitler. Together with the printed materials, they also enclosed another design; here the twelve pfennig stamp was redrawn to show his exposed skull, and the words "Deutsch Reich" were changed to "Futsches Reich" (meaning Collapsed Empire).



The addresses were obtained by a careful trawling of German telephone directories. Surprisingly, documents were printed in neutral Switzerland as well as England. The Swiss Authorities were also on the track of OSS operations there as they had no wish to offend their German neighbour.

The first mission of Operation Cornflakes took place on the 5th of January 1945, when a postal train to Linz was bombed. Bags containing about 3800 propaganda letters were then dropped on to the site of the wreck. Deutsche Reichpost then obligingly picked them up, and delivered them! The OSS also had to forge the mail bags and postal markings to fool Deutsch Reichpost. Prisoners of War who had been postal workers were interrogated to provide information, and spies were used to collect examples of the mail bags.

Most of the fake post had return addresses for legitimate businesses, like the Wiener Giro-und Kassenverein. This latter address eventually blew the operation's cover when an OSS operative writing out the addresses misspelled the name as "Cassenverein". After German police recovered Allied mailbags from one of the train bombings and took it to a post office, one of the postal clerks noticed the misspelling. The same mistake turned up on several envelopes and the postal workers grew suspicious. They opened the envelopes and discovered the propaganda. Operation Cornflakes was basically shut down due to a typographical error!

Some 20 loads of fake post were dropped in a total of 320 mailbags with more than 96,000 pieces of propaganda in the last days of the War. However, no one is sure how effective this particular "black operation" was in the light of the other stresses which the Germans were under. The OSS was acting under the authority of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who received copies of these stamps for his collection. This came to light after his collection was sold in the 1940s. Please note that these have been extensively forged by others since the Second World War!

Why was it called "**Cornflakes**"?- because the recipients would get the results at breakfast time!