

# Evolution of the Postal Coding System in Germany

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## *Foreword*

*Postal coding introduced in Germany in 1941 was the first such system using a numeric approach and exemplary for subsequent systems introduced worldwide after 1945.*

Parcel post activity in Germany during WWII (1939-1945) dramatically increased between the homeland and soldiers in the field (and vice versa) serving on major and minor fronts as well as territories of occupation.

## **1 September 1941: 1-2 Digit Postal Coding for Parcel Post**

In an effort to improve logistics and expediting of mail, the Postal Ministry = 'RPM' (*Reichspost Ministerium*) conceived a zonal postal code system dedicated for parcel post, as published in the RPM *Amtsblatt* 407 dated 5 July 1941.

Thereafter, the entire 'Greater Germany' including eastern occupation territories were zoned, each having a dedicated zone district number, as illustrated below, covering thirty-two zones, remaining in effect after cessation of hostilities on 8 May 1945.



*Figure 1: Original Postal Zone Map of 1941-1945 for Greater Germany Including Occupied Territories.*

### 32 Primary & Secondary District Zones 1941-1945

1. Berlin
2. Brandenburg Province, Schneidemühl, Rural Arenswalde, Friedelberg/Neu markt and Netze Regions
3. Mecklenburg Province
4. Pomerania Province
- 5a. Danzig-West Prussia
- 5b. East Prussia Province
- 5c. Eastern Occupation Territory
6. Wartheland (south-western West Prussia region)
- 7a. General Government Poland
- 7b. Ukraine Occupation Territory
8. Lower Silesia & Grulich Rural Area
- 9a. Upper Silesia
- 9b. East Sudetenland (former Czechoslovakia territory)
10. Saxony Province, Halle-Merseburg, Altenberg (rural area of Thuringia Province)
- 11a. West Sudetenland (former Czechoslovakia territory)
- 11b. Occupied Bohemia & Moravia (former Czechoslovakia Territories)
- 12a. Vienna, Lower Danube Region, Steiermark Region
- 12b. Kärnten, Upper Danube, Salzburg, Tirol & Vorarlberg Regions
- 13a. Bayreuth, Franconia Area, Main Franconia Area
- 13b. Munich, Upper & Lower Bavaria, Swabian Region
14. Württemberg-Hohenzollern Province
15. Thuringia Province
16. Hesse-Nassau, Kurhessen, Province
- 17a. Baden Province
- 17b. Alsace Occupied Territory
18. Westmark District/Saar
19. Magdeburg-Anhalt Region
20. East and South Hanover, Braunschweig
21. Westphalia Province
22. Düsseldorf, Cologne, Aachen, Mosel River Region
23. Weser-Ems River Regions, areas of Bremervörde, Wesermünde, Verden/Aller, Rotenburg/Hanover, Osterholz-Schaumburg, as well as Hoya & Diepholz Counties
24. Hamburg, Schleswig-Holstein Province, Region of Rural Hadeln, Stade, Lüneburg, Harburg and Cuxhaven

Parcels for each zone would be routed to a central distribution location from which parcels would be sorted for subsequent routing in the applicable zone.

### March 1944: 1-2 Digit Postal Coding for Letter Mail

Increased letter mail volume, logistic challenges and postal personnel shortages during WWII, necessitated the 'RPM' to adapt the earlier parcel post zone coding system also for letter mail as officially required and as published in RPM *Amtsblatt* 175 dated 6 June 1944, albeit already promoted unofficially earlier in 1944. Again, such system was applicable for Greater Germany, including occupied territories, with the zonal code placed as a prefix to the addressed-city on the mail.

Publication of the new postal coding system for mail was undertaken using various media approaches, including insertion and use of two primary slogan types with machine postmarks on mail.

**Slogan Type 1:** (Bochmann Series #416) Use: (Black ink) 53 towns & cities between 22 March 1944 to 1953! "Zur Ortsangabe gehört stets die Postleitzahl" ("The postal code should always be indicated with the addressed town/city")



Figure 2: Domestic civilian postcard, postmarked at Würzburg, 3 August 1944, with Slogan Type 1, sent to an addressee in the city of "(22) Essen." 6 Pfennig Domestic Postcard Rate (15 January 1932 – 28 February 1946)

A second slogan postmark promoting use of the postal zone system was alternately applied between 1944-1945.

**Slogan Type 2:** (Bochmann Series #417) Use: (Black Ink) 5 towns/cities between 20 April 1944 – 11 February 1945. “(-- ) ist die Postleitzahl für den nebenbezeichneten Aufgabort” (“(-- ) is the postal code for the adjacent origin-city”)

Similar to Slogan Type 2, the slogan was again applied (Bochmann Series #423) between 30 August – 6 September 1944 in black or red in two additional cities.

Fieldpost mail was not affected, since such mail was addressed with a ‘fieldpost’ number, with such handled by the military post offices coordinated with the civilian post office (see Figure 3). However, domestic military-related or return soldier mail to the homeland family or friends had to have the postal code indicated.



*Figure 3: Free-frank “Fieldpost” domestic military office communications mail, postmarked at Münster/Westphalia (Postal Zone ‘21’) with Slogan Type 2, sent to a civilian addressee at “(21) Hörste, near Halle/Westphalia.”*

Because each zone code covered a wide area or number of towns and cities, mail for such was routed in bulk to a central location (*Postleitstelle*) in the respective zone, where mail was subsequently sorted for forwarding to the specific addressed town or city. Should the latter have been devastated from hostilities or Allied occupation, then that mail would be delayed and held for intended later distribution and delivery.

Where space existed, the authorities advised local post offices to have their local code inserted into their postmarks (Figure 4). Such insertions could have the code in brackets or in a circle. Even inner-city mail was to include the postal code in the address, despite such often being superfluous.



Figure 4: Inner-city commercial cover, postmarked “(10) Leipzig”, 4 January 1945, sent to an addressee in “(10) Leipzig.” 8 Pfennig .. Domestic inner-city letter-mail rate up to 20 grams in weight. (1 August 1927 – 28 February 1946)

### **8 May 1945: Five-Zone Allied Occupation of Germany Postal Code Modifications**

With the end of hostilities on 8 May 1945 and surrender of all German forces, all postal activity in Germany became dormant because of Allied occupation.

Between June-July 1945, domestic mail in certain towns was permitted by the Allied occupiers with more-or-less full functionality by August 1945, albeit with the Allies retaining the heretofore established zone code configuration for Allied-Zone Germany, albeit with a few alterations, as follows:

American Zone:

- 12a Nürnberg (Nuremberg)
- 13b München (Munich), Augsburg
- 14 Stuttgart
- 16 Frankfurt/Main

French Zone:

- 17a Karlsruhe, Freiburg
- 18 Saarbrücken
- 22a Koblenz

British Zone

- 20 Hannover, Braunschweig
- 21a Münster
- 21b Dortmund
- 22a Düsseldorf
- 23 Bremen
- 24 Hamburg, Kiel

Once postal movement restarted, mail would continue to be routed to the central postal routing station in an applicable zone for subsequent sub-sorting, if the addressed town was not a large city having a dedicated postal code.

The Soviet Occupation Zone postal authorities also continued to use and accept the pre-1945 postal zone codes applicable for Allied-occupied Germany, with those being retained in postmarks, where applicable, and in addressed mail, as illustrated in the examples, Figures 5, 6, 7.



Figure 5: Season's Greetings postcard, postmarked "(19) Halberstadt (Saxony)", 20 December 1945, sent to Frankfurt/Main (American Zone). 6 Pfennig Domestic postcard rate. (1 December 1933 – 28 February 1946)

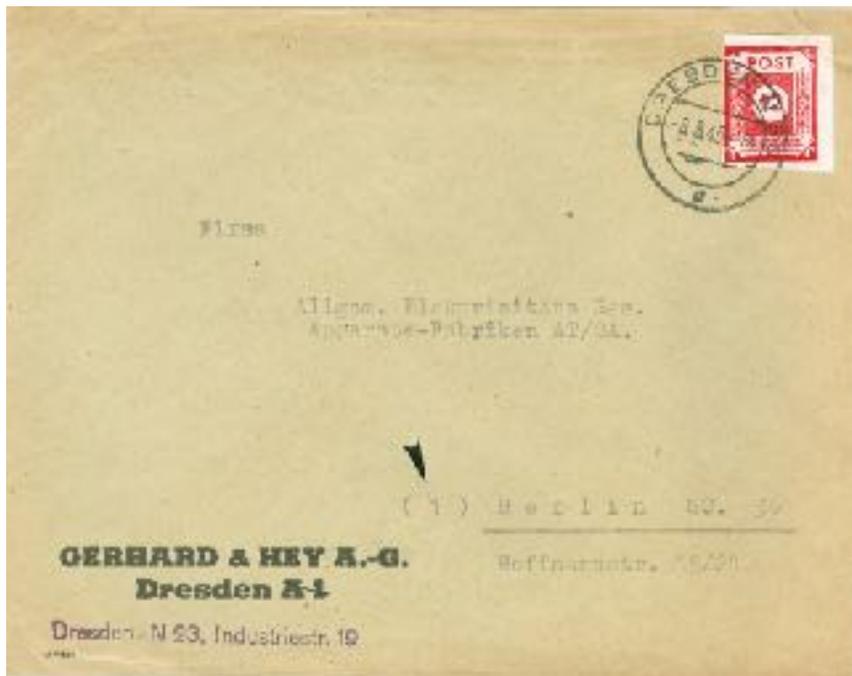


Figure 6: Commercial cover, postmarked at Dresden (Saxony), 8 August 1945, sent to "(1) Berlin" (four-power occupied zone). 12 Pfennig Domestic letter-rate (20 grams). (15 January 1932 - 28 February 1946). Figure 7: Official (Behördenpost) collect-postage-due (24 Pfg.) court mail, postmarked at "(10a) Freiberg (Saxony)" 7 September 1950, sent to "(10b) Buchwald (Saxony)."



### March 1962: 4-Digit Postal Coding

Upon the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany (BRD) in 1949 and its Deutsche Post (Postal Authority) on 1 April 1950, the heretofore zone codes, including variations introduced by the Allies in 1945, remained initially valid.

However, with the economic recovery and increase in mail volume of the 1950s, the postal authorities by 1956 recognized a need to upgrade or revise the postal code system for automation and improved mail handling purposes so that the valid code system now needed to include coding for specific individual towns or cities, not just simply identify code distribution centers (*Postleitzellen*).

Thus, on 3 November 1961, the Federal German Post Office announced that a revised postal code system had been established with such taking effect in March 1962.

The new system would have three or four digits, depending upon the size and importance of the town or city within the system.

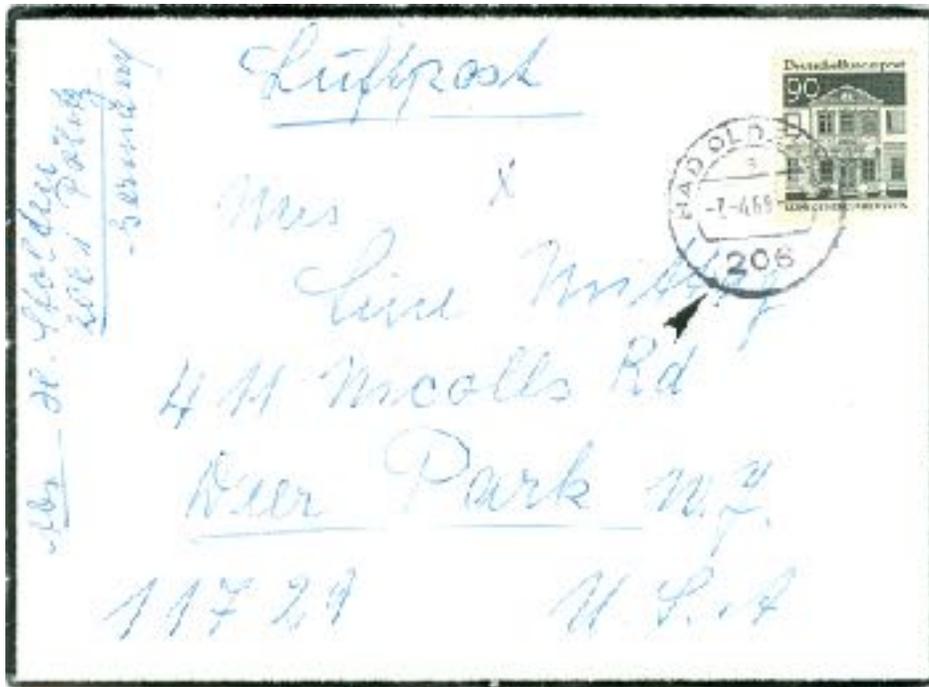


Figure 8: Mourning cover, postmarked at (206) Bad Oldesloe, 7 April 1969, sent to Deer Park, New York. Code: '2060' = Bad Oldesloe \* District '2' = 'Hamburg' District Distribution Center \* '06' = 'Bad Oldesloe' \* Fourth '0' superfluous and could be dropped. 90 Pfennig ... 30 Pfg + 3x 20 Pfg Airmail Surcharge (15 grams) (1 April 1966 – 30 June 1972)

Basically, the code comprised of four digits. Using the example of the City of Stuttgart, it had the official designation of '7000' with '7' of the four digits designating 'Stuttgart' as 'zone district distribution center'. Digits 2-3 of the four designated a sub-city of the district, such as '7530' for Pforzheim. The final digit of the four, i.e., '0' indicated that city as junction point, i.e., '7530' for smaller towns of the district sub-city applicable. Digits '1-9' of the fourth digit in the code referred to the town of the sub-city whether a railway junction or having another routing meaning.

For simplification purposes, if the code had a fourth digit of '0', then such '0' could be dropped resulting in the code '753', for example, for Pforzheim, being dropped, or in the instance of Stuttgart, three digits '0' could be dropped.



Figure 9: 2-Kg Parcel Card, postmarked at (3521) Hofgeismar (BRD), 7 September 1972, sent to 'X' 154 Falkensee (DDR = East Germany). Franking: DM 2.40.

With regard to mail sent from West Germany to East Germany, each having its own valid code system, mailers would indicate the applicable town code and insert an “X” as prefix to alert the postal clerk that the code involved was applicable for East German (see Figure 9).

### 1 July 1993: 5-Digit Postal Coding

As a result of the unification of Germany in 1990, the need arose for an upgraded code system which now incorporated or integrated the postal code systems of both the Federal Republic of Germany (BRD) and that of the German Democratic Republic (DDR), where the latter had formalized subsequent to its establishment in 1949.

For example, there existed 800 double postal codes for both areas; the postal code for ‘Bonn’ (BRD) and ‘Weimar’ (DDR) was in each system ‘5300’!

Thus, prior to the introduction of a new system, mail between the two entities had to indicate their respective codes but also indicate, as a prefix to the



*Figure 10: Unified Germany divided into ten postal code zones.*

town code, and a “W” (West) for West Germany (BRD) or a “O” (East) for the German Democratic Republic (DDR) or East Germany.

Unified East (DDR) & West Germany (BRD), now indicating “*Deutschland*” (Germany) on postage stamps, became a single postal entity in 1993, where the authorities divided the country into ten zones for the new 5-digit numeric postal code system, as shown in Illustration 10.

All towns and cities in each zone were allocated a five-digit code, where the first digit reflected the zone number. Subsequent digits reflected city code, sub-city code and other dynamics, similar to the breakdown explained earlier for the ‘1962 4-Digit Numeric System’. Figure 11 shows mail postmarked at Berlin of Zone ‘1’ sent to Nassau located in Zone ‘5’.



*Figure 11: Commercial cover, postmarked (12527) ‘Berlin Flughafen Schönefeld’, 1 February 1994, sent to (56373) Nassau (BRD). DM 1.00 = Single-weight (20 gr) domestic letter-mail (standard format). 1 April 1989 -1 April 1995)*

Domestic inner-city mail continued to require the mailer’s postal code as well as the addressee’s code, since the five-digit code of each reflected a particular city district, now incorporated in the five-digit code, similar to the ZIP Codes used in the United States.

### **Conclusion**

The ‘1-2-Digit Code System of 1941’ along with the subsequent ‘1962 Four-Digit Code System’ are considered pioneering efforts to automate and ex-

pedite the handling of mail in their times using numeric zone coding. Since 1964, in the United States and 1993 in Germany, a 'Five-Digit Code System' has been in operation and effective with other countries subsequently adopting similar numeric systems.

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