

German Field Post Mail During the China “Boxer Uprising,” 1900-1901

Historical Background

The “Boxer Uprising” was an anti-foreign, anti-imperialist and anti-Christian movement among local Chinese that arose in North China in 1898, chiefly in Shantung and (North/Pei) Chih-li provinces. The uprising came to a crisis point in June, 1900, when the “Boxers” (so called because of their raised fists) attacked the foreign legations in Peking, setting in motion a siege that isolated the legations from outside contact for fifty-five days. In mid-August an eight-nation relief force of largely European troops already stationed in the port areas of Tientsin and Taku, made their way to Peking and defeated the Chinese attackers, bringing an end to the siege. Fighting continued throughout the area after the end of the siege, including punitive acts and looting on the part of the European troops, and the threat to foreigners did not abate. As a consequence the eight nations involved in relieving the siege despatched large numbers of troops to North China. Germany sent the greatest number, about 20,000, arriving as early as early September, 1900.

The present exhibit illustrates how the German Field Post system was set out and what postal services were available specifically to accommodate the needs of the greatly increased numbers of German military personnel in China as a consequence of the Boxer Uprising.

Initially Field Post offices were established in early September, 1900, in four locations:

PEKING (no. 2), YANG-TSUN (no. 3), TONG-KU (no. 4), TIENTSIN (no. 5).

In November, 1900, the range of field post offices was expanded to include two additional locations:

PAO-TING(-FU) (no. 7) and SHAN-HAI-KUAN (no. 8).

At the same time a Field Post office was also set up at KAUMI (no. 1) on the Shantung peninsula, near Tsingtao.

Lastly, in the spring of 1901 three more Field Post offices were established:

TING-CHOU ~ FU-PING (no. 6), PEI-TAI-HO (no. 9) and KAI-PING (no. 10).



There are four sections to the exhibit, primary among them is the military use of the Field Post offices, including both handling out-going mail (section I) and receiving in-coming mail (section II). Next, the exhibit shows civilian use of the Field Post system (section III), and finally the Epilogue page (section IV) shows how a fire at the German Post Office in Shanghai reveals an important feature of how Field Post mail was moved in and out of North China generally.

- I. Military Mail --- Out-going (free-frank)
 - A. Period (i): September, 1900 --- 31 August 1901
 - B. Period (ii): November, 1900 --- 31 August 1901
 - C. Period (iii): Spring, 1901 --- 31 August, 1901
- II. Military Mail --- In-coming
 - A. letters, cards (free-frank)
 - B. packages (franked)
- III. Civilian use --- franked
- IV. German Post Office in Shanghai, fire and Field Post mail

The Field Post system established by the German postal administration specifically to handle military mail-related matters for the troops that had been sent in response to the Boxer Uprising lasted for no more than twelve months, in some cases of individual Field Post offices, less. Some of the offices were in comparatively large cities, *e.g.*, PEKING & PAO-TING (nos. 2 & 7), and material from these offices is comparatively plentiful. Others were in considerably smaller locales, *e.g.*, PEI-TAI-HO & YANG-TSUN (nos. 9 & 3), with correspondingly less material available. Field Post no. 6 operated for only ten weeks, shifting between TING-CHOU and FU-PING during this period, with the result that examples of F.P. no. 6 material are very uncommon. By the same token, in-coming mail and civilian use is relatively common for the large offices, less common for the small ones, unknown (to me) for no. 6.

The short-lived use of these ten Field Post Offices together with their limited functions and the scarcity of material from several of them allows the subject to be fully covered in a single-frame exhibit.

References

Albert Friedemann, *The Stamps and Cancells of the German Colonies and the German Post Offices Abroad*. English translation. Raleigh (N.C.): Album Publishing Co., n.d.

“Boxer Rebellion”, *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boxer_Rebellion. Accessed 10 September 2025.

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Purpose & Scope

This exhibit will illustrate the postal services provided by the ten German Field Post Offices established in North China for troops despatched in response to the "Boxer Uprising." The focus is primarily on military mail, secondarily on civilian, including registered, mail.

Background

The "Boxer Uprising" was an anti-foreign, anti-imperialist and anti-Christian movement that arose in North China in 1898, chiefly in Shantung and (North/Pei) Chih-li provinces. The uprising came to a crisis point in June, 1900, when the "Boxers" (so called because of their raised fists) attacked the foreign legations in Peking. Germany sent about 20,000 troops to supplement the small relief force that had been mustered from troops already in China and subsequently to guarantee the safety and to sustain the privileged status of Europeans. German troop transport ships departed from Bremerhaven in late August, arriving in China, chiefly at the port of Taku, as early as mid-September, 1900.

Plan

- I. Opening of the Field Post Offices and out-going military mail.
 - a. September, 1900
 - b. November, 1900
 - c. Spring, 1901
- II. In-coming military mail.
- III. Civilian mail, registered and parcel mail.
- IV. Epilogue: Field Post Office mail in the fire at the German Post Office in Shanghai.



Among the first troop transport ships despatched was the *Palatia*, KAISERLICH DEUTSCHE MARINE SCHIFFPOST No. 66. Shown here, a card posted from the *Palatia* on 09 September (1900) from a soldier in the 5th Infantry Regiment of the East Asian Expeditionary Corps (boxed S. B. / OSTAS. EXPED. / 5. INFANT. REGMT.)