The 'Blue Flea' and Its Travels

The NOTOPFER BERLIN Tax Stamps

The 1948 Russian Blockade of Berlin led to the introduction of a special tax throughout West Germany, called Notopfer Berlin, levied upon all incomes and earnings and generally upon postal items sent within West Germany. The postal levy amounted to 2 pf per item and was paid with the little blue stamp shown here. Large mail users could make lump-sum payments in lieu.

The Notopfer Berlin stamps stayed in circulation for over seven years. Mail could not be sent without them, else it was returned to the sender. They were cancelled in the usual manner by a postmark or by postage meter.

German 'posties' soon dubbed the half-sized Notopfer stamps 'blue fleas', perhaps because they were such a pesky nuisance with the first issue being imperforate. But they were mighty 'fleas', indeed. Over the period the levy was in effect—Dec. 1, 1948 to Mar. 31, 1956—they raised no less than 430 million German marks for Berlin aid or more than $100 million at the then prevailing exchange rate. In a parallel measure, some 680,000 marks was collected for housing reconstruction (Wohnungsbau) in the French-occupied Württemberg region. An estimated 17 billion 'Notopfers' were used—the highest number ever of any single German stamp!

This exhibit presents the Notopfer stamps and their usage. There are eight recognized issues, distinguished by various combinations of stamp design, watermark and perforation. The three Wohnungsbaust issues, which saw use from July 1 to Dec. 31, 1949, are classified according to overprint, perforation and design. The covers shown illustrate different types of mail that were subject to the postal Notopfer levy.

Included in this exhibit are many rare perforation varieties; also No. 7 in mint condition, of which only very few copies remain because the issue went undetected at the time and was therefore virtually used up. Included as well are examples with semi-official 'postmaster perforations' and private perforations, plus some oddities and forgeries. The last cover commemorates the 50th anniversary of the 'blue flea' and was prepared by the Notopfer Study Group of the Germany Philatelic Society.
Pirqa
Erwin Stern

Schwenningen /a.N.
Wtbhg.

First-Day Cover with Notopfer No. 1W
# The Four Stamp Designs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Catalogue number</th>
<th>Stamp design</th>
<th>a</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>c</th>
<th>d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occurring watermark</td>
<td>1 and 2</td>
<td>W, X, Y, Z, V</td>
<td>Z</td>
<td>Z, V</td>
<td>Z, BP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'N' of NOTOPFER</td>
<td>pointed</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'R' of NOTOPFER</td>
<td>low-angled foot</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lettering of BERLIN</td>
<td>slim, uniform</td>
<td>E extends beyond N</td>
<td>E extends beyond N</td>
<td>E extends beyond N</td>
<td>E lines up with N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right edge of 'N' of BERLIN and of final 'E' of STEUERMARKE</td>
<td>NF</td>
<td>NF</td>
<td>NF</td>
<td>NF</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Designs

- **Design a**
  ![Design a](image)

- **Design b**
  ![Design b](image)

- **Design c**
  ![Design c](image)

- **Design d**
  ![Design d](image)
The Printers

All Notopfer and Wohnungsbau stamps were made by Hannoversche Gummieranstalt August Wegener in Alfeld near Hannover, except for issues 2AW, 2AV, 2AZ and 4, which were produced by the printing-house of Georg Westerman in Braunschweig. 75% of the Notopfers—i.e., issues 5, 6 and 8—were printed by offset process; all the other, mostly earlier issues as well as the Wohnungsbau stamps, by letterpress. The quality of the paper was improved over time.

The overprint of the provisional Wohnungsbau issues was added by the printing firm Marquart in Aulendorf (Württemberg) for issues 1 and 2a and by the aforementioned August Wegener for issue 2b.
Perforation Types

- pin-perforated
- cross-shaped
- point-shaped
- in lines

Types of Rouletting (D for Durchstich)

- Double comb perforation DK 12¼
- Line perforation, e.g. L 11½
- Parallel perforation P 12
- Comb perforation K 14, used in combination with L 12 (not shown)
- Comb perforation K 11¼x11
- Double comb perforation DK 14
The Notopfer Stamps
- by date of issue -

Dye Proofs
Printed on gummed paper, without watermark
Total number extant: 200 of each type

5 Pa
DK 14, dark blue
With pressure line through stamp image
sig. SALOMON BPP

5 Pb
DK 14, dark blue
sig. SALOMON BPP

5 Pc
DK 14, cobalt
sig. SALOMON BPP

Regular Issues

1W
Imperforate, Wmk. W
1.12.1948

2Hw
L 11½, Wmk. W
1.12.1948
Regular Notopfer Issues

2FW
L 11, Wmk. W
1.12.1948
sig. P. HARLOS BPP

2SW
D 12 1/4, Wmk. W
1.12.1948
sig. P. HARLOS BPP

1Y
Imperforate, Wmk. Y
15.12.1948

2BW
K 14/L 12, Wmk. W
15.12.1948

1Z
Imperforate, Wmk. Z
28.12.1948
Regular Notopfer Issues

2DW
P 12, Wmk. W
29.12.1948
sig. P. HARLOS BPP

2AW
K 11¼x11, Wmk. W
5.1.1949

2HZ
L 11½, Wmk. Z
6.1.1949
Certificate: P. HARLOS BPP

2LW
L 12/L 11½, Wmk. W
19.1.1949
sig. P. HARLOS BPP

2BZ
K 14/L 12, Wmk. Z
13.1.1949

2AZ
K 11¼x11, Wmk. Z
24.1.1949
Regular Notopfer Issues

2FZ
L 11, Wmk. Z
27.1.1949
sig. HARLOS BPP

2EZ
P 12xL.11, Wmk. Z
12.3.1949
sig. P. HARLOS BPP

2IZ
P 12xL 13½, Wmk. Z
8.3.1949
sig. P. HARLOS BPP

2CZ
DK 12¼, Wmk. Z
14.5.1949

2AV
K 11¼x11, Wmk. V
25.11.1949
sig. SALOMON BPP

2CV
DK 12¼, Wmk. V
30.11.1949
sig. P. HARLOS BPP

2DZ
P 12, Wmk. Z
1.4.1949
sig. P. HARLOS BPP
Regular Notopfer Issues

3
DK 12¼, Wmk. Z
20.3.1950
sig. HARLOS BPP

5
DK 14, Wmk. Z
23.3.1950
sig. P. HARLOS BPP

4
K 11¼x11, Wmk. Z
16.4.1950
sig. P. HARLOS BPP

7
DK 12¼, Wmk. Z
20.6.1950
sig. P. HARLOS BPP

6Z
DK 14, Wmk. Z
26.6.1950

6V
DK 14, Wmk. V
8.1.1953
sig. P. HARLOS BPP
Regular Notopfer Issues

**8X**
DK 14, Wmk. Z  
18.1.1954

**8Z**
DK 14, Wmk. BP  
17.11.1954

**8Y**
DK 14, Wmk. BP inverted  
8.8.1955  
sig. P. HARLOS BPP

Official issues not shown:  
(extremely rare)

2RW, ca. D 9, Wmk. W, 1.12.1948  
2MW, L 11½x12, Wmk. W, 19.1.1949  
2OW, L 13½x11½, Wmk. W, -3.1949

1X, imperforate, Wmk. X, 20.12.1948  
2NW, L 12x11½, Wmk. W, 25.1.1949  
2PW, L 11½x11, Wmk. W, 1948/1949
A number of postmasters had the imperforate issues—mainly No. 1W—perforated or rouletted at a local shop. A few examples are shown.

- 2GAW
  L 9 - München
  Certificate: P. HARLOS BPP

- 2GBBW
  L 11 - Donauwörth
  Cert.: P. HARLOS BPP

- 2GGW
  L 11½ - Arnsberg
  Cert.: P. HARLOS BPP

- 2ZW/1
  D 11½x7 - Hamburg

- 2ZW/50
  D 8 - Berchtesgaden

- 2ZW/61
  L 11 - Schweinfurt
The Wohnungsbau Stamps
- by date of issue -

Provisional Issues

Aulendorf overprint
Length: 18.5 mm
- Issues 1a and 2a -

Alfeld overprint
Length: 16.5 mm
- Issue 2b -

Wohnungsbau-abgabe

2aAZa
K 11\(\frac{1}{4}\)x11, Wmk. Z
1.7.1949
sig. P. HARLOS BPP

2aAWa
K 11\(\frac{1}{4}\)x11, Wmk. W
1.7.1949
sig. P. HARLOS BPP

1a
Imperforate, Wmk. W
1.7.1949
Certificate: P. HARLOS BPP

2aBZa
K 14/L 12, Wmk. Z
1.7.1949
sig. P. HARLOS BPP

2aDZa
P 12, Wmk. Z
1.7.1949
sig. P. HARLOS BPP

2aEZb
P 12xL 11, Wmk. Z
1.7.1949
The Wohnungsbau Stamps

Provisional Issues

2aCZa
DK 12¼, Wmk. Z
2.7.1949
sig. P. HARLOS BPP

2b
DK 12¼, Wmk. Z
22.7.1949

2aFZ
L 11, Wmk. Z
3.7.1949
Cert.: P. HARLOS BPP

Definitive Issues

3b
DK 12¼, Wmk. Z
25.8.1949
sig. P. HARLOS BPP

3a
DK 12¼, Wmk. Z
19.8.1949

3c
DK 12¼, Wmk. Z
4.10.1949

Not shown:
2aBW, K 14/L 12, Wmk. W
1.7.1949
(exremely rare)
Oddities
A sign of the times!

2EZ
Small Stamp

2BW
Large stamp

2BZ
Without K 14
L 12 only
sig. HARLOS BPP

2BW
Gross misperforation

2AZ
With "diamond perfs"
K11 ¾x22

1W
With offset print
on gum side
More Oddities

2BZ
With offset print on gum side, but without stamp imprint

1W
Print on gum side

1W
Double Print
Certificate: P. HARLOS BPP

3
Famous NOTOPPER misprint

8X
Blind print
Cert.: FRIEDRICH HARLOS BPP

8Z
Faint print image
Forgeries

L 9 forgery
Feigning the München postmaster perforation
sig. HARLOS BPP

L 12 forgery
2DZ perforation forgery
sig. P. HARLOS BPP

L 13½
The infamous "2KW" perforation forgery
sig. ROSE (in error)

Wohnungsbau "1aZ"
Fabrication of a non-existent issue
sig. ROSE (in error)

Overprint forgery of 2aAW

Red pencil deception of 2aAW
The Blue Flea in Its Travels
Types of Mail Requiring Notopfer

Bund der Philatelisten in Hessen e.V.
Geschäftsführer:
CARLO GUEROSE
Frankfurt a. M. + Glückner
Taubach 41 – Tel 227 49

Herrn
Hermann Deninger
Frankfurt a.M.
Taususstr.21.

Local letter with D 11 privately rouletted Notopfer stamp (1KW/126)

An die
Frankfurter Versicherung-Aktiengesellschaft
Frankfurt/Main
Taususchlagen 20

Out-of-town letter with provisional Wohnungsbau stamp 2aDZb
(sig. P. HARLOS BPP)
Large mail users could pay the Notopfer levy in cash without pasting the pesky little stamps. This is sometimes noted with a stamped marking as here "Steuermarke verrechnet".

Postcard with L 10 postmaster perforation from Euskirchen (2GCW), precancelled by metered postage.
Mail Requiring Notopfer

Returned for missing Notopfer stamp and re-mailed with added blue flea (6Z). Note later date of second cancel.

Notopfer 2AZ with prominent plate flaw on express letter
Mail Requiring Notopfer

COD letter or Nachnahme with Notopfer levy paid in cash; not indicated.

Frei durch Ablösung item (free under special exemption) with 2CZ.
Gebührenpflichtige Dienstsache (official mail, sent collect) with 6Z

Drucksache  Firma
F. A. Würling Papierhaus
Essen
Gildehofstrasse

Printed matter (Drucksache) with 2AZ, which was subject to the Notopfer levy until 27.7.1949
Mail Requiring Notopfer

Einige Zeitungsdrucksache!
Herrn-Fa.

Wenn unzustellbar bitte zurück.
Besten Dank!

Newspaper mailer (Zeitungsdrucksache) with, horizontally only, L 11 privately perforated Notopfer (1G/1)

Ulter Haidmärker
Alleiniger Hersteller:
G. F. HARMS
Kornbranntwein-Brennerei
SALZHAUSEN
im Lüneburgischen
Gegründet 1843 — Fernsprecher 101

Geschäftspapiere

Envelope for business papers (Geschäftspapiere) with 2AZ
Mail Requiring Notopfer

Address label from small packet (Päckchen) with 2CZ

Express parcel card (Paketkarte) for one package with 6Z
Economy parcels were accompanied with a green *Postgutkarte*. This one, seen from the back, covered off five parcels with one blue flea for each package (8Z).
Mail Requiring Notopfer

German expellee mail (Heimkehrerpost, literally, 'homecomer mail') was postage-free, but required a Notopfer stamp until 12.5.1949. This cover shows late use of Notopfer (2AZ).

Mail to and from the Austrian customs exemption zone Kleinwalsertal required a Notopfer stamp until 31.12.1950 (2CZ).
Anomalies in Notopfer Usage

Doppelbrief with double fleas! Overweight local letter erroneously provided with two Notopfers (1W).

Notopfer stamp (2BZ) on Württemberg postcard. The flea should have been its Wohnungsbau cousin.
Anomalies in Notopfer Usage

Postcard to West-Berlin with Notopfer 2HW, although exempt.

Foreign mail, too, was exempted from Notopfer, but confusion reigned supreme in the early days. Here with 2HW.
Blue fleas were not to travel to the Soviet Zone, East Germany or any part of Berlin. This letter with 2AW was returned to sender by the West German postal service before it got the chance.

East German authorities returned offending items with a curt *Zurück* or some other wording to that effect. When obliterated (1W), the letter went through.
Anomalies in Notopfer Usage

Notopfers used in payment of regular postage (8Z)—A no-no!

Money was tight, so why not use a look-alike trading stamp?! It slipped by.
Memorable Date

Last-day cancel (8Z)—the end of the blue fleas!