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No. 1

JANUARY 1976

30th YEAR

VERGÉ

by: Fred R. Lesser

(Published in 'Tell' - Journal of the A.H.P.S., Aug. 1975)

..... pronounced 'vairjay', this French word means 'irregular weave'. It is an expression primarily used in the manufacturing process of textiles and woven textures. By 'irregular weave', the weaver refers to the irregularity in the texture of a woven material due to the bunching-up or gaping of threads. By the stretch of the philatelist's imagination, 'vergé' may also denote 'irregular shading'. But there is not such a thing as vergé paper, only 'vergé'-imprinted paper, i.e. paper which carries the imprint of an irregular texture pattern as absorbed under great pressure. Such paper when held up again the light shows a watermark-like pattern and in the majority of cases, this pattern consists of parallel lines of varying capacity.

To understand this phenomenon, reference to specific stamp printing process techniques cannot be avoided. In the first place, 'vergé'-imprinted stamp paper can only originate (as a kind of printing process defect) in a rotary recess printing-press. The emphasis lies on two technological definitions: rotary and recess.

The basic principle of a rotary printing-press is widely known and may not require detailed explaining on this occasion. However, it must be noted that most pre-World War II European, and especially German designed rotary recess printing-presses effected the transfer of the inked (negative) engraving on the form-cylinder onto the stamp paper by counter pressure provided by a counter-pressure cylinder with a pressure absorbing surface. This pressure absorbing surface allowed for the stamp paper to be 'forced' into the inked recesses of the engraved stamp designs on the form-cylinder. The advantage of a rotary recess printing-press is the continuity of operation and its high degree of reliability.

The surface material which covers the counter-pressure cylinder - also known as the under-blanket in the printing trade - was in those pre-World War II days a specially woven felt with thin layers of rubber between each felt layer making the covering into a kind of multi-layer material. Later, a technique was evolved whereby the felt was impregnated with rubber thus forming a homogeneous felt-rubber composite material.

The first rotary recess printing-press used by the Swiss Mint for the printing of engraved stamps was manufactured in Germany and was installed in Bern some time in 1936. It was a very sophisticated equipment even allowing for etched and engraved printing combined. However, after the outbreak of World War II, the Mint could no longer obtain the covering material for the counter-pressure cylinders and had to resort to copying the German material in Switzerland. This was not an easy task. Yarn size, yarn strength, texture density and rubber layer wafering presented enormous problems. It must be remembered that the counter-pressure cylinder rotates at great speed and that its surface covering must absorb considerable pressure at the same time. Very soon, the 'home-made' felts gave way to texture bunching and it was this texture bunching that transferred itself onto the moistened stamp paper and produced the imprinted 'vergé' pattern effect.

As the counter-pressure cylinder rotates in parallelism with the stamp design carrying form-cylinder, any irregularity in the surface material of the counter-pressure cylinder would imprint itself in a parallel pattern or 90° to the vertical edge of the stamp. Occasionally and very occasionally indeed, the

VERGE (Continued)

'verge' condition of the felt resulted in a diagonal imprint on the stamp paper. As the Mint printers were fully aware of the problem, they naturally saw to it that the faults on the counter-pressure cylinder would not degenerate too quickly and where replacement of felt material became a problem, stocks of stamps with 'verge' imprinted characteristics were promptly eliminated. Nevertheless, the press had to be kept running.

This all happened toward the later part of 1940. On January 15, 1941, the PTT was involved in the first post-World War II outbreak printing of an exceptionally, beautifully designed and engraved series of definitives, the famous 'Historical Designs' series (Z.243/251, Scott 270/278). This series consisted of 9 relatively (at that time) high values and, with no restricted validity, reached a total issuance of 638.6 million stamps.

Because this series of stamps remained in use for the full duration of the War and for a long time thereafter, the 3 lower values became exhausted first - hence their relatively high price in absolute mint condition. A mint (**) set of this series carries a catalogue price of £12.50 (\$ 35.--) but on 'verge' paper, the price may be 3 to 4 times higher. Even used stamps of this series on 'verge' imprinted paper are being traded at a premium. Stamps that show diagonally 'verge' imprinted patterns are relatively rare and are being traded among connoisseurs.

Of course, it did not take the Swiss Mint too long to resolve the felt problem and the appearance of the 'Historical Designs' series on 'verge' imprinted paper ceased. But it should be made quite clear once more that there is no such a thing as 'Verge Paper'.

References:

'USA-SWITZERLAND', Basel, 1947
Generaldirektion PTT, Bern, 1975

Apologies for an omission in our January issue: our sincere thanks to Mr. C. D. HARDING, who so superbly translated the excellent article on the 'Swiss Hotel Posts, Red Cross & Telegraph Stamps' by Herr E. D. Merki - another valuable addition to our store of published works.

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U.P.U. 1900

By W. R. MORRISON

Part IV

PRINTINGS AND COLOURS

The colours of the stamps as listed in the current Zumstein (Specialised) and Amateur Collector catalogues are accurate, but some additional points should be noted. Problems arise because individuals perceive colours in different ways, and the colour of the illuminating light can also have a considerable effect. This is particularly important with the 10c. stamps, and it is useful to examine them in bluish daylight (any good daylight, excluding direct sunlight, sunrise or sunset), in yellowish tungsten light (60W or 100W bulb, but not fluorescent tube lights), and long-wave ultraviolet (UV) light (the quartz lamp referred to in the catalogues).

- 77A The 5c. plate 1 is green with varying degrees of dark green or greyish-green - all quite common. The yellowish-green shade (77Ac) is quite distinctive and uncommon - beware of green stamps placed beside dark greyish-green ones!
- 77B The 5c. plate 2 is generally a much richer green. The bluish-green shades are often associated with overall staining of 90-100% of the stamps. Sometimes this can be attributed to inadequate wiping of the plate before printing, but in other cases it looks like a plate defect because the stain covers only part of the perforated margin and the stain contour has a constant shape and is constant in certain plate positions.
- 77C The 5c. plate 3 occurs in green, greyish-green and dark (greyish) green shades which are all quite common.
- 78A The 10c. plate 1 has a continuous left frame to the value tablet and can be distinguished from 78B which has a broken left frame, according to the catalogues. While this is correct for 95% of the stamps, some 78A (e.g. "dry prints") have incomplete frame lines and cannot be reliably distinguished from 78B with nearly complete frame lines. If the 78A has good line perf. which looks like harrow perf., the only certain way to distinguish the two printings is from type and plate flaws.

The ink for 78A contains very variable quantities of a fugitive aniline component and the stamp comes in a spectrum of aniline-rose shades and in aniline-red (78Ad). The latter must not be confused with the very scarce dull carmine (78Ac) which has absolutely no aniline component. The aniline inks fluoresce strongly under UV light and appear from bright yellowish-orange to dull or dark brownish-orange. They are not all bright orange as the Zumstein Spezialkatalog says. The dull carmine ink (78Ac) does not fluoresce at all, even after prolonged exposure, and it appears dull rose to dull carmine, depending on how much blue and violet light comes through the filters of the UV lamp. I have now examined quite a large number of 78Ac and 78Bd dull carmine stamps, and they exist in a remarkable range of intensities and even different shades in daylight or artificial light. I do not think they can be identified reliably without a UV lamp.

It might be worth a few cautionary words for those unfamiliar with UV lamps. Lots of things about ultraviolet light can quench fluorescence. This usually gives a blotchy stamp under the UV lamp - so check the whole stamp for orange fluorescence, and if in doubt give it a full minutes' exposure under a properly warmed-up lamp - the stamp may only be slow to respond. Transparent protective covers also absorb UV light, so always test uncovered stamps. Do not look directly at the light or at reflected light for too long otherwise you will cause eye damage and headaches, and do not work in a confined space because the lamps produce ozone (that odd smell) which is very toxic.

- 78B The 10c. plate 2 also occurs in a dull carmine shade (78Bd) which may well be because this ink was in use during the changeover period from plate 1 to plate 2. Postmark dates are very unreliable in such a short-lived issue, but in all 78Ac and 78Bd I have seen the dates are heavily biased to June - July - (August), while the other shades of 78B are commonly postmarked as late as November.

The other shades of 78B contain more aniline than 78A, and fugitive ink staining of washed stamps can be quite severe. There is a light eosin-rose shade (78Bc) which gives a very strong fluorescent response. In bluish daylight it is a clear rose, and in yellowish tungsten light it has a very distinct 'salmon' hue. This shade is comparatively scarce.

U.P.U. 1900 (Continued)

- 78C The 10c. plate 3 comes in a narrow range of aniline-rose and aniline-red shades, as well as purple-red (78Cc). The Zumstein Spezialkatalog says that 78Cc appears dull under the UV lamp, which is the same description as the dull carmine 78Ac and 78Bd. This is quite wrong - the stamp fluoresces a distinct orange, and in daylight the colour is a dull flat purplish-red shade which is only superficially similar to the dull carmine. 78Cc is a very scarce stamp, and used copies are almost certain to prove to be aniline-red shades which have suffered through chemical change.
- 79A The 25c. plate 1 light-blue or blue shade is often associated with staining of the stamp (cf. 77B notes above), but the dark and dull blue shades have cleaner impressions. Good copies of this stamp are hard to find.
- 79B The blue shades (light to dark) are similar to 79A, but there is very little staining of the white areas. The violet-blue shade (79Bd) is a dark blue with a distinct violet hue which shows up best in daylight.
- 79C The 25c. plate 3 is a deep blackish-blue which is quite distinctive. There are no recorded shades which is not surprising in such a small printing.

SPECIAL PRINTINGS

Zumstein (1924 Handbook) says that several sheets of the stamps, consisting of 77C, 78Cc and 79C, as they are now listed, were presented to senior officials in Parliament and other Administrations. 78Cc and 79C are also said to be printed on thicker, smoother art paper, like the 1908 issue, and they would appear to have been special printings.

I am puzzled by the reference to special papers, because I have examined quite a few copies of 78Cc and 79C and can find no differences from the paper on ordinary mint A, B or C printings. The thickness of the gummed paper always varies a lot, especially when the paper has shallow wrinkles, but the range of thicknesses on the smooth areas is the same for all the stamps I have examined. Very often the gum on 78Cc and 79C is less cracked and the stamps feel stiffer - this could give the impression of thicker paper.

Very little is known about 79C. Girardet printed 21 sheets x 200 = 4200 stamps and 350 were later destroyed, so that 3850 went into circulation. We do not know how many were used in presentation sets, but there were a few surplus sheets. These were never on sale in the normal way, but some were postally used in BASEL for mass franking (payment of bulk postage for newspapers etc., which were not individually franked - quantities of stamps were cancelled as a form of payment and receipt).

A very limited number of 79C were also used on letters from Parliament House, and these include the earliest authenticated postmarks: BERN FIL. BUNDESHAUS 11.XII.00-1 and 14.XII.00.

Even less is known about 78Cc. The earliest authenticated postmark is reported to be the same as the 79C dated 14.XII.00. According to Hunziker (BBZ 5/6, 1974) the stamp was also on sale at a few places from 28th December. Unused copies are evidently scarcer than 79C, and used copies are among the rarest of Swiss stamps.

(To be continued)

FOR SALE

U.P.U. 1900 - one reconstructed plate of 78B used, complete with all varieties (including 18 x Pf2 = 'warts'; 18 x Pf3; 22 x Pf4; Ret. 1, Ret. 2) but position 041 missing. 199 stamps in total.

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FEBRUARY MEETINGS

NORTHERN GROUP: February 7th - THE PRO PATRIA ISSUES - Discussion Leader
Mr. G. D. Wilson

LONDON GROUP: February 11th - The meeting you must not miss -
LIECHTENSTEIN - presented by Mr. J. Beken

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A PHILATELIC TOUR THROUGH CANTON GRAUBÜNDEN

By S. V. BERTI

6. Oberengadin - Julier - Tiefencastel (Continued)

At its western extremity the Oberengadin ends abruptly, and there is a considerable drop into the Val Gregaglia, or Bergell, the second Italian-speaking district of Graubünden, spread out some 2,000 feet below. On the edge of this great valley step lies the village of Maloja, or Maloggia, which gives its name to the Maloja Pass, a steep road with twelve sharp bends which descends to Vicosoprano, in the Bergell. Z.300, the 15 Rp. definitive of 1949, shows a wintery scene on the pass, with a PTT snow plough clearing deep snow from the road.

The most populous village in the Bergell is Stampa, birthplace of the painter and sculptor Alberto Giacometti, subject of Z. 511 of the 1971 portrait series.

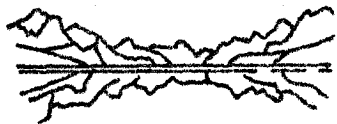


Fig. 17 K.117a
Silvaplana-see

As we retrace our steps back up the Maloja road, it is apparent that the pass does not follow the conventional pattern of an ascent from one village to a hospice, followed by a descent to a second village on roughly the same level as the first; it consists, rather, of a pure ascent/descent between the villages of Maloja (effectively also the summit) and Vicosoprano.

We again skirt the Silsersee and proceed as far as Silvaplana, where we change onto a postal coach marked 'Julier - Tiefencastel'. A last glance at the lake may reveal the view shown on K.117a (Fig. 17), with the surrounding mountains reflected in the water. This cancellation design was based on a well-known painting by Ferdinand Hodler (Z.PJ 152), and the original is to be found in the Art Museum, Zürich.

The Julier Pass (named after the Roman sun-god Jul) is an important link between the Oberengadin and the north, and leads into the Alpine valley known as the Oberhalbstein, or Surses. At Bivio, a small village set amidst wild and desolate scenery, two routes meet, as the name implies. The other 'Way' is the Septimer Pass, no longer of any significance. Due to the certainty of good skiing conditions, Bivio has in recent years developed into a small winter resort, and K.562 (Fig. 18) shows the bifurcation of the two pass roads beyond the village.



Fig. 18 K.562
Bivio

The chief village of the Oberhalbstein is Savognin, with no less than three 17th century churches. Among the tourist amenities are the cableways to Somtgant and Radons, the former, a chairlift, also features - along with one of the churches on the post office handstamp, K.369.

The road continues to descend, passing several smaller villages dotted on the lower slopes of Piz Curver, and reaches the Albula valley at Tiefencastel, a village already familiar to us. We make a short train journey back along the Albula Gorge to Thusis, starting point for the San Bernardino pass route, and the last section of our tour.

7. Thusis - San Bernardino - Mesolcina

The road south out of Thusis constitutes one of the most remarkable pieces of engineering in the Alps, threading its way through the Via Mala gorge, $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles long, where the precipitous rock walls almost overhang each other. The original road was constructed in 1473, while the road as it now exists was completed in 1823. The 25 Rp. definitives of 1934 and 1936, Z.199 and, in greater detail, Z.206, both show the striking Second or Middle Bridge, the Hinterrhein gushing and foaming far below. These stamps also illustrate, by the way, the enormous improvement in engraving technique in the mid-thirties, of which the 1936 definitives are the first examples.

Leaving the claustrophobic gorge the road emerges into the Schamsertal, a wide, pastoral mountain valley with several small villages. The first of these is Zillis where the church of St. Martin contains a unique series of 153 12th century ceiling paintings showing the history and Passion of Christ. Twelve of these were selected for the Pro Patria series of 1965-67 (Z.FP:124-7, 129-132, 134-7), proving most attractive in postage stamp form.

The largest village in the valley is Andeer, a modest resort containing several old buildings with Romansch inscriptions. A group of these is the design on K.51a: 'ANDEER Mineralbad. Ferienort'. A little further on we reach the Roffla gorge,

which seals the south end of the valley as the Via Mala does the north. The road winds up to the west and squeezes through into the Rheinwaldtal, which extends to the source of the Hinterrhein itself.

At Splügen, the Splügen Pass road diverges south towards Italy. The village, another favoured winter-sports resort, contains several old houses, some of which are illustrated on the current 10 Rp. definitive, Z.524. There is also an attractive cancel, K.133a, portraying the village, the church and the Rheinwaldhorn rising at the head of the valley.

Since 1967 the traveller arriving at Hinterrhein, the village at the foot of the San Bernardino Pass, has the choice of either crossing the pass itself, a long, steep haul, or availing himself of the modern, well-lit San Bernardino Road Tunnel, 6.6 Km. long, which provides a snow-free passage all the year round into the Mesolcina, or Moßsatal, the third Italian-speaking district of Graubünden. The opening of the tunnel, on December 1st 1967, is commemorated on Z.451, which depicts the north side of the tunnel area. In addition a special cancellation was used the following day for the opening of the postal coach route Bellinzona-Chur, showing a post-horn and reading '6500 BELLINZONA Apertura linea postale Bellinzona-Coira'.

San Bernardino Villaggio, at the south entrance to the tunnel, is the highest village in the Mesolcina and an expanding ski-resort. K.298a advertises it as a 'Luogo di Cura'.



Fig. 19 K.296a
Mesocco Castle

The modern road, with several galleries and bridges, descends towards Mesocco, huddled together on one side of the Pian San Giacomo, a plateau at the edge of another steep valley 'step', guarded in the Middle Ages by the substantial, now ruined castle illustrated on both Z.PF.24 (1944) and K.296a: 'Monumenti storici' (Fig. 19).

A view of the Moßsa valley, a good example of abrupt slopes characteristic of the south side of the Alps, is to be found on Z.PF.59 of 1952. From Roveredo a road winds up to the lateral Calancatal, a poor region, although Santa Maria has a tourist cancel, K.339a, pointing out that the area is rich in old churches and ruined fortifications.

We have reached the gates of another Canton, and thus our philatelic tour of Graubünden has come to an end. Of course, Canton Ticino is also of considerable philatelic interest, but that would be another story, and another tour

To close, however, mention may also be made here of the following stamps of the Principality of Liechtenstein, which have a religious connection with Graubünden: Z.453 (FL) shows the arms of the monastery St. Luzi, in Chur, while Z.453 has the ibex, the arms of the bishopric of Chur, and also to be found, of course, in the Cantonal arms. Finally, a set just issued, the Christmas series on 4th December of this year, features 13th century Roman sculptures from the interior of Chur Cathedral.

..... The End

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THE JOYS OF CHRISTMAS

Well, with a bit of luck we are back to normal - the Great Rush is over, somehow the parcels were packed and the mountain of cards and letters dealt with, but not even when the last load went into the post, was it possible to relax.

The HNL, intended for despatch before the holiday, was unfortunately delayed by a mechanical breakdown at the printers, and then disappeared into the vortex of the Christmas mail. It could almost have gone to Timbuctoo and back before finally turning up on the afternoon of 23rd Dec., to my great relief, since unable to get out shopping I was almost resigned to existing over the holiday on baked beans and similar delicacies from the store cupboard ... the things one does for Helvetia! However, a last minute rush round saved the situation and all ended well - or almost -----

Christmas would hardly be Christmas without a mystery ... in this case the arrival of a tin of Devonshire Cream, correctly addressed, oh yes, but with absolutely no indication as to the sender. I only hope some telepathic influence will advise her - him - them (?) of its receipt and my appreciation.

To my many kind philatelic friends who have sent Greetings and words of cheer, my grateful thanks, and to all our members around the globe my sincere Good Wishes for a Happy and Prosperous 1976.

E. J. RAWNSLEY

From C. RAUCH

I wish to thank the many members who have sent Christmas & New Year Greetings - which are heartily reciprocated - and my appreciation to those who expressed appreciation of the Packet.

I much regret to have to report that a valuable Packet has been lost between London and Edinburgh, due to INCORRECT ADDRESSING. A search is in progress, but may I once again plead for extra care to be taken when forwarding Packets, i.e. strong packing and PLEASE check addresses carefully. Even if compensation is received we cannot replace the material and thus many members are disappointed.

Packets are going well - let us try to keep them flowing without trouble.

30.8.73 ITU/WMO and Com.II, 30.5.74 ILO & PP., 17.2.75 WHO & Com.I.

..... that Question No. 44 is: Switzerland is not one of the 90 odd countries that has issued triangular stamps, but has come pretty close to it, such as early air show stickers, soldier stamps and bisects. What is the nearest?

M.R.

DID YOU KNOW?

..... that the new postage rates from 1st January make all postage at least 33% more expensive, but some items like minimum COD jump from SFr.1.50 to 3.50, an ordinary wall calendar to a foreign country from 1.50 to 3.20 etc. However, some things are better, printed matter can be sent if over 50 pieces, small packets (foreign) can be properly sealed or tied up, giro transfers to foreign countries are now free, COD payments can be made at the door with a giro check, all letters to the Mediterranean littoral now go by airmail at no extra cost, as in Europe.

..... that the postage due rate is now the missing amount plus 50c. Under the old system - twice missing amount - a letter posted with 30c. stamp instead of 40c. would require 10c x 2 = 20c. To-day this is 10c. + 50c. = 60c. But I don't yet know what happens with a foreign letter with several francs of missing postage.

..... that on Jan. 5th new booklets in green covers appeared, but only at the philatelic counters at first and at the same price, SFr.5.--. The contents are: a pane with 2x10c. Nfels dark blue, with 2 criss-crossed 'stamps' as in the 1970 issue, to make up the pane of 4 spaces, 2 panes each with 4x20 Samedan green and 2 panes each with 4x40c. Geneva violet (these from a new tête-bêche sheet). There have been many adverse comments on the use of these old 'Buildings' stamps again.

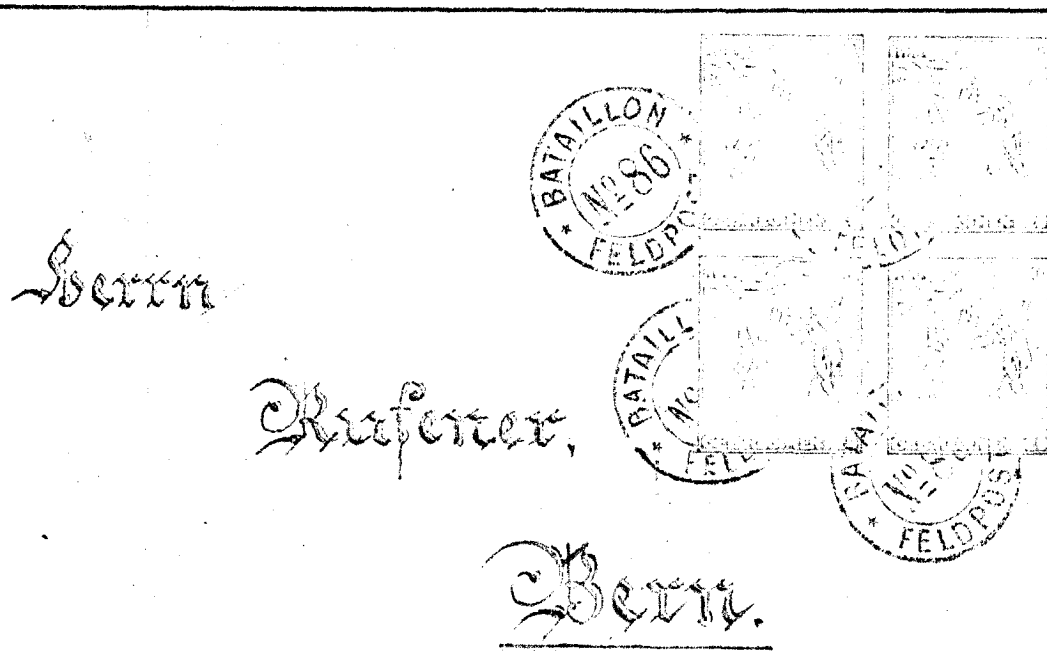
..... that the PTT announced that "as significant quantities of the old 30c. postcard are still in stock they will be overprinted 40c." - again on sale at philatelic counters only until the old stocks held by post offices are used up (sold with a 10c. stamp added).

..... that with postal rates changing so often it happens frequently that people get confused and use values above those actually needed. I have noticed this on Swiss and UK letters, both internal and foreign. An interesting variation for postmark & cover collectors, but difficult for those exhibition judges who insist on correctly franked mail.

..... that the 'Marken Müller' catalogue shows next to each issue the FD cancel used, a useful feature.

..... that the answer to Question No. 43 is that on 1st June 1966 the Pro Patria set was issued with its FD cancel, and the 20c. stamp of 'The Fifth Switzerland' (Swiss living abroad) Z.442 also with its own FD cancel. New stamps for the UN agencies have also been issued on the same day as Swiss stamps, as follows:

(see Ccl. 1)

A CATALOGUEERROR ?

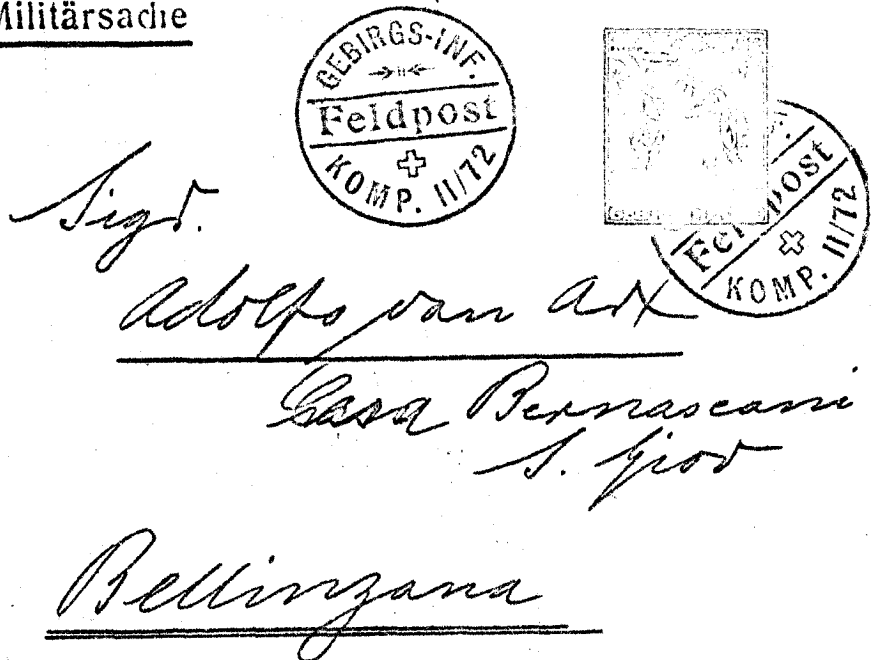
In Locher's World War I Soldier Stamp Catalogue the 5th Division Geb. Reg. 29 (Bat. 47, 72 & 86) No. 254/254a, the release date is shown as Sept. 1918.

Our member, Mr. P.G. Nicholson of Weston-super-Mare, reports that he has two genuinely used covers - as illustrated - of this issue.

The BELLINZONA cover has the CDS backstamp for 17.XI.16, and the BERN item similarly a date of 3.IV.1917, again on the backstamp.

Such very wide discrepancies make one wonder whether any other instances of a similar nature have been noted.

If so we would welcome any information which could be published for the benefit of those interested in the Soldier Stamps.

MilitärsacheBOOKLETS FOR THE PACKET

Just a quick reminder that our Pkt. Secretary would be grateful if he could have any booklets for inclusion in the present circuits by the end of this month (i.e. January 1976). After then he will be fully occupied on personal matters and will only be able to cope with the winding up of returned packets.

ANNUAL COMPETITION

It is not too soon to remind Members that this year the Competition will be held in April, and not May as formerly. It is, therefore, as well to begin planning your entries. We will endeavour to publish the Rules next month in order to give ample notice.

CENSORED MAIL

We will be resuming the research into this subject in our next issue and would still like to hear from any members who have any additional information to contribute.

A Very Good Philatelic Year to all Members of 'Helvetia'.

I hope to be of service in helping you to make the most of your collecting interests and invite you to send me your Wants Lists for prompt attention.

Approval selections also available for:

- STAMPS - all issues - mint or used
- COVERS - pre-stamp, FDC, Airmails etc.
- MATERIAL - for special studies or for 'side-line' collections: TPOs, Soldier stamps, 'Day of the Stamp' cards etc., etc.

J.S.ARMSTRONG

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