

Cancellations special

Mixed covers can be produced using the normal postal way ! A story.

Joint issues did not find a real interest among collectors when I began myself to start collecting those stamps. Actually at that time I was looking for something special to collect which was not collected by others. In my idea it was also a way to enter in an area where the lack of competition could allow me to buy items fitting with my limited budget. About ten years earlier, I had already this thoughts after having decided to stop collecting my home country stamps and found aerogrammes as an excellent and original collecting area. These postal stationery items were not only inexpensive but had nice colors and covered almost all countries from the world. I found myself rapidly limited by the number of items actually described in catalogues and these items were actually easy to obtain. I tried to keep some interest by specializing in thematic on aerogrammes, and even wrote a booklet on this topic, but my interest became eventually blunted.

Joint issues appeared accidentally while I was trying to find a way to produce more spectacular covers such as ship or polar mail on aerogrammes. I intended actually to have as much as possible of cancellations from different countries on the same postal stationery item and I came to the conclusion that this could even be nicer if stamps from different countries could be affixed on the same cover. Moreover if the stamps could have the same topic, or even the same design, this would be even nicer. At the same time France did issue one of their first true joint issue with Germany, the 25th anniversary issue of the French-German Cooperation Treaty showing Konrad Adenauer and Charles de Gaulle. Both stamps were issued on January 14, 1988 and were identical, except country name and postal value. The German stamp is slightly larger but colors are the same and even inscriptions are in French and German on both stamps.



This issue triggered my interest in joint issues and very quickly I wanted to know all previously issued stamps and discovered a huge unexplored area in which the interest was not to collect this stamps, but first all information related to them. So it became really interesting to go through all available literature and catalogues to find the data. Exchange of information with a couple of other collectors found by chance helped me to constitute a nice and original collection. The quest for information is not complete yet, but at least led to a catalogue which can serve as basis for other searcher. You know the following of the story, but lets go back to the initial idea...

The question is rather simple: how can a cover go from France to Germany and back to France, using the normal way, i.e. paying the postal fees in both directions ? In other terms how can I produce a cover bearing the stamps from France and Germany respectively canceled in the town were they were mailed ?

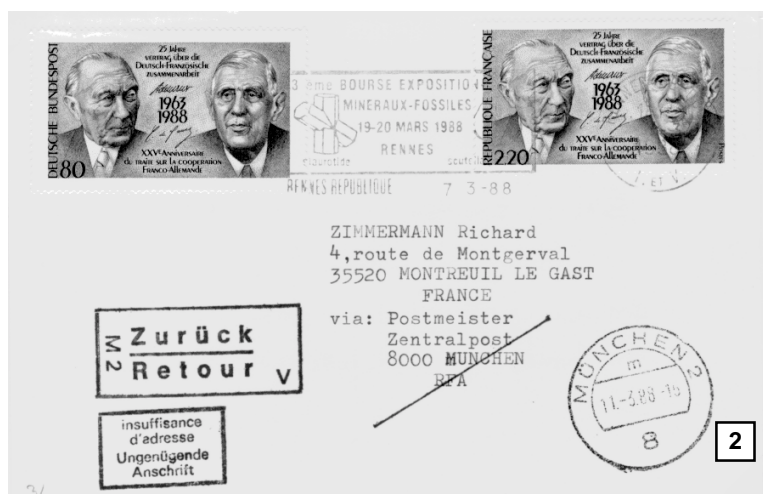
The answer can be as quite simple if you have a chance to have a pen friend in the other country. By asking him not to open the cover but to affix a stamp from his country and to send it back to you. It works also if you have a chance to travel yourself in this country and therefore to send this letter to yourself, or much better, if you are living in the border area of both countries which was my case. This resulted in nice cancellation, however without big interest because helpful only in limited cases.



Example 1 is a cover dropped with the French stamp only in a French mailbox (Mulhouse, south of Alsace) and sent to my home address, then as soon as received dropped in a German mail box (Lörrach, about 20km from Mulhouse, on the other side of the Rhine river) with the affixed German stamp and resent to the same address. Actually, to be sure that the cancellation is printed at the place you want, it is better to give your cover directly to the postmaster explaining him your wishes.

Later this principle was applied to other joint issues involving neighbor countries such as Germany, Switzerland or Belgium. If we want to have a more general way to get these mixed covers, we have to find another way. First both stamps were affixed at the same time on a card, the French stamp on the right side, the German on the left side. The card was sent to myself, via any German postmaster with the request to have it sent back with a nice cancellation on the German stamp. I forgot that some cancellations are such large that they can cover both stamps. So the card sent on March 3, 1988 came back 12 days later, uncanceled, however with an arrival cancellation dated March 11 (example 2). The trial of affixing stamps on both sides of a folded card resulted in a double French cancellation. The card went to Germany but got just a violet "Zurück" (Return) imprint (3). A third trial with a diagonal distribution of the stamps on the cover failed as well, the postmaster having not seen a difference between both stamps (4). This last example was actually a funny experience. To be sure that at least one of the cover would return to me, all of them were sent at different places in Germany. This one was sent to the Bonn post office. It

appears that Bonn, with Berlin, is one of the two centers of first day cancellation of Germany. Although being sent to a normal post office (February 23 from Rennes), this cover arrived to the office of the "Bundesminister für das Post- und Fernmeldewesen" (Ministry of Post and Communication), service of stamp production and cancellation (imprint of arrival dated March 2). They apparently were willing to cancel the German stamp but could not do it. So, to compensate this, they did send my card under cover together with a first day Ministry card bearing a German stamp first day canceled from January 14. This gift was very much appreciated.



In the meantime, an identical letter was sent to the same center in Berlin. I must admit that the Berlin officers are much strict concerning regulations. It appeared that for the first time a letter arrived at a German post office with the German stamp not canceled. This card was sent back, under cover, without German cancellation on the German stamp, except the arrival cancellation, but with a leaflet explaining why they did not cancel the stamp: In Germany it is not allowed that a cover or a parcel bears other stamps than the one needed for the distribution fees, i.e. previously canceled stamps from Germany or any other countries have to be removed. A second try ended in the same result with this time a 20 pages booklet explained under which conditions German stamps are sold and canceled. This booklet was opened at the pages concerning other countries stamps and specific text was underlined in red. I learned later that in Europe this rule is true and applied at least in Germany and Spain, but there is no problem in France, Italy and Belgium. The way to avoid to loose a cover in these countries is to start sending mail from these countries. Actually, it appears that the rule is known only from the Berlin and Madrid main post offices and all other postmasters are canceling your stamps as much as you want, including at Bonn as explained above.

To avoid double cancellation by the same country I used later only double sided cards with stamps on each side: a 21x15cm card is folded in a 10,5x15cm double card and closed with paper all around; stamps are affixed on both sides; upon arrival the card can be unfolded again showing both cancellation on the same side (see example 3).

The half success I got in Bonn prompted me to try a second time with a card sent to the postmaster, after having had a good explanation with the French postmaster. The card came back with the German cancellation and this was considered as my first success ... almost (5): as Bonn is the center of first day cancellation, my card came back under cover with the first day cancellation from Bonn. In other term one can consider that the card who left France on March 29, 1988, was sent back on January 14, 1988, i.e. two and a half months earlier ...

At least it was working. So, the idea was to produce a mixed cover with the help of postmasters from both countries. Double sided cards were send under cover to a postmaster in France or in Germany with both stamps affixed on each side with the request to cancel the corresponding stamp and to send it to the other country postmaster who discovers the explanation for him

on the cover itself. It is a risky way but it works. Less risky but more expensive is to send in an envelope the cover bearing one stamp to one postmaster and get it back before sending it again to the second one who completes the work. This second way cannot be considered as a real triangular correspondence as expected from the beginning. At last the best way is to send the covers from one country to another using penfriends who respectively resent them in a circular (triangular) way.

Of course there is a step further allowing a complication of the system. As it was working without almost no limitation in postal sites, why not using also some complementarity between the towns involved. So came the idea of using the twinning of towns. Since last war most of the French and German towns are involved in twinning activities.

In 1988 some of them already had their 25th or 30th anniversary to celebrate. At that occasion they produced special cancellations. It was expected that the partner town would also produce a special cancellation. Therefore mixed covers with mixed joint cancellations would be a kind of maxi-mixed cover.

Several trials led to failure but also to successes: the 25th anniversary of the twinning between Armentieres (Nord) and Osterode am Harz took place in 1988 (6). A card sent from Armentieres on April 6, 1988 was sent back from Osterode by April 11 and both cancellations were mentioning the twinning, including the name of both towns.

Based on the same principle, I obtained during quarter II, 1988 covers related to the twinning between Privas and Weilburg, Bayon and Straelen, Avranches and Korbach, Condom and Grünberg, Pont de Beauvoisin and Erbach (7) or Combs-la-Ville and Duderstadt.

Not all of them are as nice as the one represented here but at least this exercise demonstrated that these mixed covers are easy to produce (see example 6 and 7 on next page).



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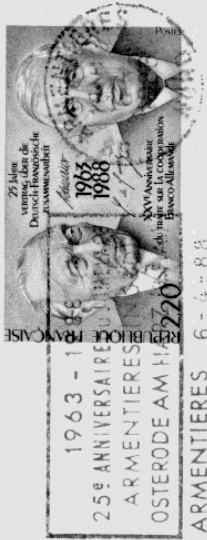
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New European joint issues were produced in the following year and allowed some further experiences. The Denmark - French issue (22 September 1988) (8) belongs to the easy to produce cover if you are living in France. It becomes more complicated when only foreign countries are involved. Example 9 shows the result of an exchange of correspondence between Liechtenstein and Costa Rica. Knowing the price and the difficulty to get stamps on time, you do not try tens of time. It must work with the pairs of stamps you want to risk in this trial. And you can believe me that you feel very happy when you discover the result in your mail box. An envelope bearing on each side a pair of the stamps issued on June 6, 1988 was send under cover to the postmaster of Vaduz (Liechtenstein) with the request to send this cover to the postmaster at the main office of Cartago (Costa Rica). Address was already written on the cover.

Explanation for the Costarican postmaster were directly written on the envelope and the reverse side was mentioning the final address in France below the stamps from Costa Rica. The cover left Vaduz on April 24, 1989 and Cartago on April 28. The result is shown as example 9.

Diese Anschrift, bitte durchstreichen

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ARMENIÈRES 6 - 4 - 88

EXP

An Herrn Vorsteher
 Hauptpost
 D-3360 OSTERODE AM HARZ
 RFA

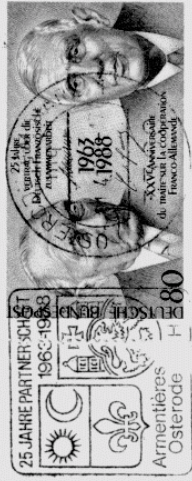
RFA



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Bitte wieder zurücksenden mit gestempelten deutschen Briefmarke.
 Vielen Dank.

Regel 14/1/88



Dr ZIMMERMANN Richard
 4, route de Montgerval
 MONTREUIL LE GAST
 35520 MELESSE
 FRANKREICH



Dies Angeht, bitte durchstreichen.

4



PA (M) 6120 Erbach, Odenw
 2 5. MAI 1988

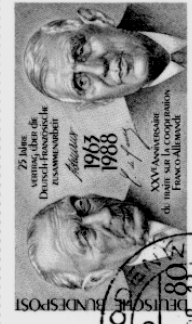
An Herrn Vorsteher
 Hauptpost
 D-6120 ERBACH/ODENWALD

RFA

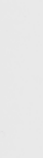


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Können Sie bitte, dies Karte wieder nach Frankreich zurücksenden, mit gestempelter deutscher Briefmarke. Vielen Dank.



Dr Richard ZIMMERMANN
 4, route de Montgerval
 MONTREUIL LE GAST
 35520 MELESSE
 FRANKREICH





Other joint issues were used to produced mixed covers. The Limburg twin issue (30 September/2 October 1989) led to a nice cover in an exchange of mail between Maastricht (The Netherlands) and Tongeren (Belgium). On July 14, 1989, the United States issued a stamp at the same time France released a triptych in honor of the bicentenary of the French revolution. The card was initially coming directly from USA with the US stamp canceled in Concord, NH, on November 29, 1989. The three French stamps were then affixed on the cover and sent from Rennes (France) by December 4, 1989 to land in my mailbox a next day.

The choice of the originating town's name had also to be in relation with the topic of the issue. In order to come even closer to this concept of partnership or "joint cancellation" it was proposed to use towns either related to the stamps or related to each others. Beside twinning you have also name similarities. For example, as many US town names have an European origin, it is easy to organize correspondences between those US towns and the corresponding European town in the case of a joint issue involving the US. Example 10 shows an example of an exchange between Geneva (Switzerland) sent on July 5, 1991 and Geneva, IL from which the cover came back on July 15, 1991. As at least 9 towns with the name Geneva are existing in the States (AL, FL, IL, IN, NE, NY, OH, PA, WA) - and one in South Africa - one has the choice. The most difficult is to find the postal code of each town, as accuracy of information is of the utmost importance. Nowadays, the web becomes very useful to find this information, but was not existing at that time. The 700 years Helvetic Confederation Swiss-US issue from February 22, 1991 was used in this mail.



To be sure that the mail is really used properly, one has also to be sure that postal fees correspond to the normal and real costs. That means that one has to know the postal rates from each country, to have some other stamps from this country to complete the fees and to be sure that at the time of using these stamps they are still valid in the country.

Moreover it is very important to used all local required labels, in particular "Air mail" labels from the country from where the stamps are originating. These items can be found on mail received previously from these countries.

With all these constraints in mind, one could produce a nice mixed canceled cover based on the Australian Bicentennial issue from January 26, 1988. The US side bears two 22¢ stamps from the joint issue together with a 1¢ to complete to the overseas rate of 45¢.

The cover (11) was sent from Sydney, FL (33587) on August 12, 1988. An US Air Mail label had to be affixed on this side. The Australian side is similar. Two 37¢ stamps covered the postage fees but were unfortunately higher than the requested overseas rate from Australia to France. Stamps with smaller values were not available for me at that time. The cover was sent back to France on August 24, 1988 from Sydney (NSW 2000). An Australian "Air mail" label was also affixed in advance on this side. To the contrary of Geneva, it seems that only one town with name Sydney is existing in the States, the third one being located in Canada (NS). Beside labels, stamps and cancellations in it important to find on these cover the proof that they have really gone through the postal distribution system. A small "A8" imprint shows the US postal administration participation, while the automatic red code bars shows a processing on the French side. Although this cover is not yet perfect it gives a good flavor of what can be produced.

Beside postal marks and label, you can sometimes discover unexpected cancellations, labels or even writings from the different persons having had this object in their hand. For example I had a nice surprise on a letter bearing the Belgium- Finland issue from September 7, 1991 which traveled from Namur 5000 (Belgium, October 14, 1991) to Rovaniemi (Finland, October 17), back to France. The cancellation on the Finnish stamp was an unexpected special Santa Claus cancellation from Napapiiri Arctic Circle, Rovaniemi and a handwritten message was discovered on the back side wishing a "Merry Christmas from Santa Claus, Main Post Office, SF-96930 NAPAPIIRI, FINLAND".

As joint issues can involve more than two countries, another system for this special case was investigated. Of course, if you have pen friends in all these countries it is obvious that you can just ask them to send your letter to each other following a certain order before it comes back to you. Unfortunately this is rarely the case and you must define a process in which, without large explanation you can replace your pen friends by "friendly" postmasters (yes these people exist!). Of course we are speaking about an issue involving three countries different from the one in which you are living, so in total at least 4 countries.

The twin issue from March 29, 1988 celebrating the Swedish-Finnish settlement in America involving Sweden, Finland and USA was used as reference issue (12). For this purpose a special folding system was developed: a cardboard size 15x27cm was folded in three parts resulting in a smaller card size 15x9 cm. When open, you can see from top to bottom

three limited parts called A, B and C on which the stamps will be affixed. The first part of the exercise is quite simple: as you cannot ask to two consecutive postmaster to forward your mail in order to create a four step journey for your mail, it has to be transformed in a double triangular mail. The first stamp is affixed to side A. The card is folded and taped in order to have a closed document (paper with glue is better than plastic tape of course). The card is sent to the country A postmaster with request to sent it back to you. When back, just open the card and refold it in order to have this A side inside. Once folded and taped, faces B and C will be outside and can be used as described above in the case of a normal two countries joint issue. Be aware about the final presentation of your card, i.e. avoiding upside down stamps when unfolded and take care about the space required by the tape for the second folding.

Actually the first step can be done in the same way, if you do not want to have the first step done under a cover. All information for the first postmaster can be written on the cover itself, but the folding system must be done in such a way that this first stamp which does not belong to the joint issue will be at the end on the reverse side of the final document. In this case you will use the reverse side of face C.

It came finally to a nice document. Unfortunately, and I learned that later, if you want a final document with real time cancellation, do not send your document to place where normally first day issues are produced. In the case of the Finnish - Swedish - US issue, sending to Wilmington, DE and Helsinki, Finland resulted in both cases in the imprint of the first day cancellation instead of a normal one. The Swedish cancellation was just not a first day cancellation because it came in too late. In most of the countries you can get first day cancellation up to about two months after issuing. If it is your intention to have only the first day cancellation on all stamps, this is much easier, because, multiple cancellation on joint issues is usually accepted in most of the countries and you can just send your cover bearing all stamps directly to the different main post offices of the respective countries. This is exemplified by the Austria - Belgium - Germany issue from January 12, 1990 shown in 13.

It might be that some of you found an interest in this way of producing special items involving joint issues. It could become a new area for collecting covers, parallel to polar mail, first flight mail, ship posted covers or even maxi cards which are all created actually for this purpose and seldomly for real purpose. It is therefore proposed to experiment further these possibilities and to fix some basic rules to avoid a too large dispersion. As it is much more complicated, I would first recommend to avoid multiple countries joint issues and to limit the trials to two countries issues. Except for the illustration, there are some similarities to maxi card collection and rules can be derived from those governing the production of maxi cards.





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Let us call them in the meantime, and before we find a better name, Maxi Mixed Joint Covers (MMJC):

Maxi Mixed Joint Covers are items bearing stamps from all countries involved in a joint issue and having really traveled within and from these countries.

- the MMJC must bear all stamps from both countries (A and B) respectively cancelled from a post office from these country
- stamps and cancellations must be affixed on the same side at least when unfolded
- at least one step of the journey of the mail must be from country A to country B and not under cover (open)
- the difference of cancellation dates must not exceed a week. Actually the journey of the cover must be as fast as possible
- first day cancellations are not allowed as they can be obtained any time at least during two months after first day issue
- town of departure and/or cancellation must have any relation with the topic of the issue or the topic of the cancellation of the other country
- postal rates have to be adapted and completed with other stamps if necessary
- labels (e.g. airmail labels) have to be local labels
- all stamps and labels must be still valid in the country at the time of use

Of course one can think about other improvements or modifications such as illustrations related to the topic like with maxi cards. Today computers allow easy access to personalized covers which could be used in the production of MMJC. However, that should not be another constraints as it is already difficult to produce these items.

This topic is now open for discussion and I hope will give ideas to some of you. The last point I did not mention is that it is really time consuming explaining why all items reproduced here are dated for the latest 1991. However I can assure you that you will find fun entering this new area the first time you will get such a cover back in your own mailbox. Good luck.