

## **Control of postal mail in Norway 1945 – the circle stamps with and without numbers.**

By John Torstad

On May 8 1945, with the German surrender in Norway, control with postal mail to/from abroad was immediately introduced. Prior to the spring of 1945, control of postal mail was conducted at a control office in Kirkenes that was established following the liberation of Finnmark in December 1944. It was also established a control office in February 1945 at the Norwegian military postal mail centre, at the Norwegian delegation in Stockholm. The latter was tasked with censoring mail to/from the Norwegian police forces that was sent to northern Norway in the late winter of 1945.

In the spring of 1945, postal control offices were established throughout the country. Below is a list of the postal control offices that were operational in Norway from the spring of 1945:

- Postal control office no. 1 in Oslo
- Postal control office no. 2 in Stavanger
- Postal control office no. 3 in Trondheim
- Postal control office no.4 in Tromsø – was moved to Narvik on June 6
- Postal control office no. 5 in Kirkenes – was transferred to Narvik on July 17

The primary focus of this article is the circle stamps with numbers, which the postal control office no. 1 in Oslo started using from May 1945. In addition, the article will also talk about two deviant circle stamps without numbers that was used both in Oslo and Stavanger, one circle stamp without numbers that was used in Trondheim and Narvik, as well as one postal stamp machine where the casing was used as a control stamp with neutral circles.

For more than 30 years have I collected and registered postal mail stamped with the circle stamps. The period of use for these circle stamps is much shorter compared to the period of use of ordinary postal stamps. In addition, the circle stamps were only used on postal mail sent to/from abroad. This might suggest that there was a limited supply of postal mail, resulting in several of the stamps only being found on a small number of objects. Many of the numbers are not registered, which suggests the likelihood of the stamps not being produced in whole number series of ten. The stamps are likely produced in rubber, which is a material that is vulnerable to wear and tear. The wear and tear is clearly visible on several of the stamp imprints. The number on the stamps could also have fallen off during use, which might have resulted in the occurrence of stamp imprints without numbers. The latter is just a theory, and has not been verified.

This article is based on my work with “Den norske post- og telegramkontrollen 1945-1946 – del II Katalogdelen”. This book was first published as a working draft under the auspices of the Norwegian War and Field Post Society (KFF) at the end of the 1990s, before appearing as a revised version in January 2000. The work was partly based on comments from members of the KFF, as well as a literature review conducted at the National Archives of Norway, on Sognsvann. It has been a few years since this work was initiated, but as far as I am aware no one else has followed up on and taken the topic further. I have continued to register postal mail with circle stamps and their period of use, and have put together a preliminary overview. The hope is that this overview will provide a basis for further work on the topic, as other collectors might have in their possession objects that can expand and improve the overview. The dates of the stamps will only provide an indication of the stamp's period of use. This is due to the postal correspondence following the German surrender being irregular at times, and postal mail sometimes being kept at the control office before being forwarded.

### Postal control office no. 1 in Oslo

Postal control office no. 1 in Oslo started its work on May 16 1945, following the arrival on May 13 of Major C.W.O. Larsen and 50 controllers, educated in Sweden during the spring of 1945. Within July 24 the postal control office had gotten through all the postal mail that had piled up in the aftermath of the German surrender. The control office was controlling mail to/from the counties of Akershus, Østfold, Vestfold, Hedmark, Oppland, parts of Sør-Trøndelag, Buskerud, Telemark and Øst-Agder. During its period of operation, the postal control office was manned with up to 166 controllers. From August 17, the control of postal mail was partly curtailed (primarily this applied to mail from the allied countries), and lifted for most countries on September 29 1945. After this date it was only postal control office no. 1 Oslo that was active, with the office having its last day of operation on April 30 1946.

### Hallmarks of the control regime of postal mail

The control regime of postal mail used different types of control strips; preprinted and unprinted (neutral), to seal the mail after it had been opened, controlled and if necessary censored. Letter cards, printing material and postal mail that were not opened, were imprinted with a control stamp that showed that it had cleared the postal mail control. There were a lot of different control stamps in use. However, in this article I will only focus on the circle stamps, which were mostly used at the postal control office no. 1 in Oslo.

Arriving from Sweden the controllers had brought with them the necessary equipment to initiate the control of postal mail. The control strips and stamps that were used were produced either in Sweden or Great Britain – most likely in Sweden – and all ready to use. The control stamps that were in use at the postal mail control at the Norwegian military postal mail centre, at the Norwegian delegation in Stockholm, were transferred to Oslo. This was 8 circle stamps with an inner diameter of about 13 mm, and with numbers from 1-8. At the postal censoring in Stockholm these stamps were primarily used to bind the censor strip to the envelope following the control, and secondary as a passed-stamp.



Illustration no. 1 exemplifies the use of the stamp in Stockholm.

After the stamps were transferred to Oslo, they were used on letter cards, printing material and letters that were not opened, to show that the postal mail had cleared the postal mail control. In

most cases the person handling the mail would write his/her controller number next to the stamp. The different stamps were used by many different controllers, and nothing suggests that the stamps were linked to one person throughout the period of control.



Illustration no. 2 exemplifies the use of the stamp at the control of postal mail in Oslo.

During May, new circle stamps were introduced with numbers starting at 31. The diameter of the stamps was about 13 mm, which suggests that they might also have been brought from Sweden. So far only the numbers 31-34 are known.

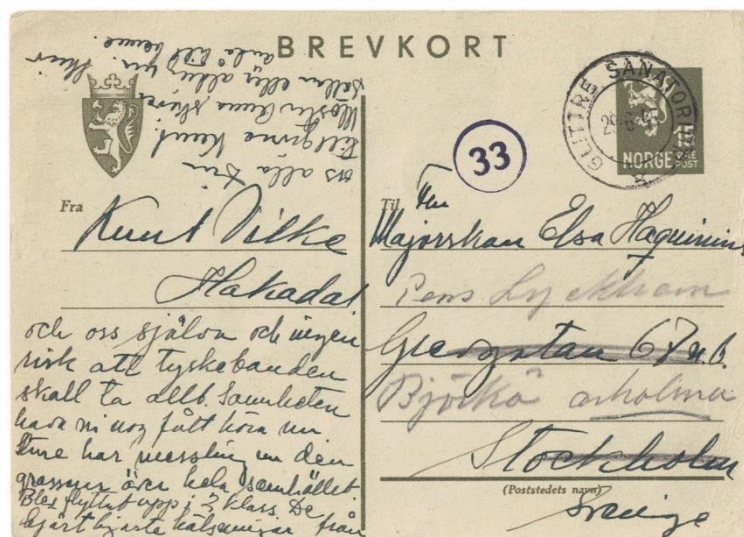
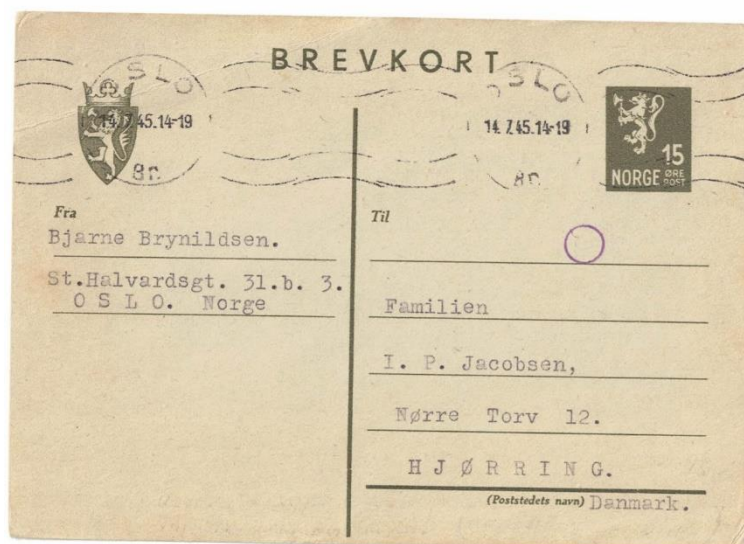


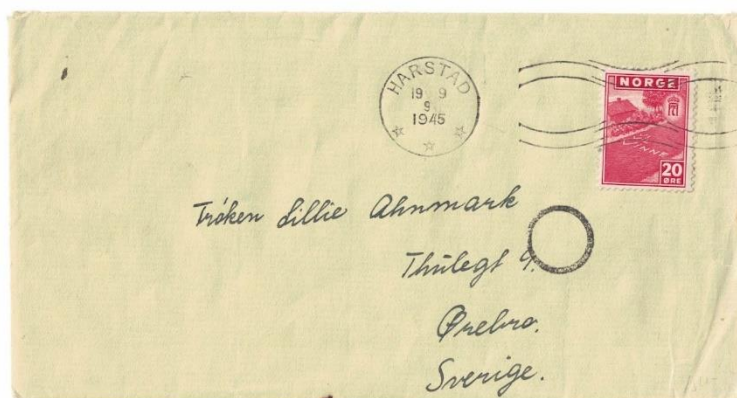
Illustration no. 3 exemplifies the use of the stamps. There was also one circle stamp without number that was used. As mentioned earlier it is uncertain whether this circle stamp was produced without a number or whether the number was removed/worn off.







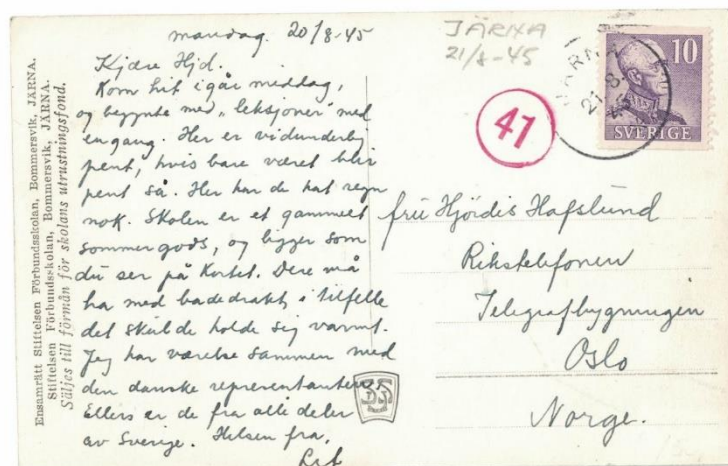
See illustration no. 6. The new circle stamps without numbers and with a diameter between 14 and 15 mm were in use on postal mail to/from Trøndelag and northern Norway. It is thought highly likely that the control offices in Trondheim and Narvik were given these kinds of stamps.



See illustration no. 7. At the control office in Stavanger a circle stamp with a diameter of 17 mm was used, and the stamp can be unambiguously linked to that specific control office.

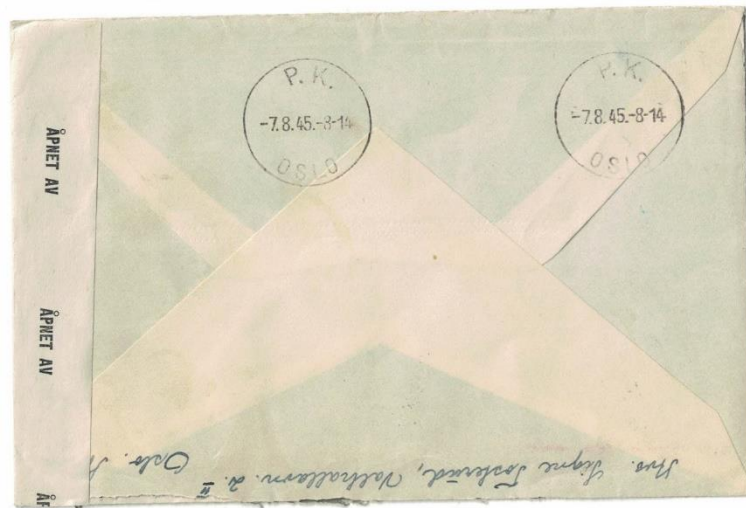


See illustration no. 8. The colours of these control stamps were almost always in a blue-purple to a light black colour. Exceptions included some red stamp imprints, but these were very rare.

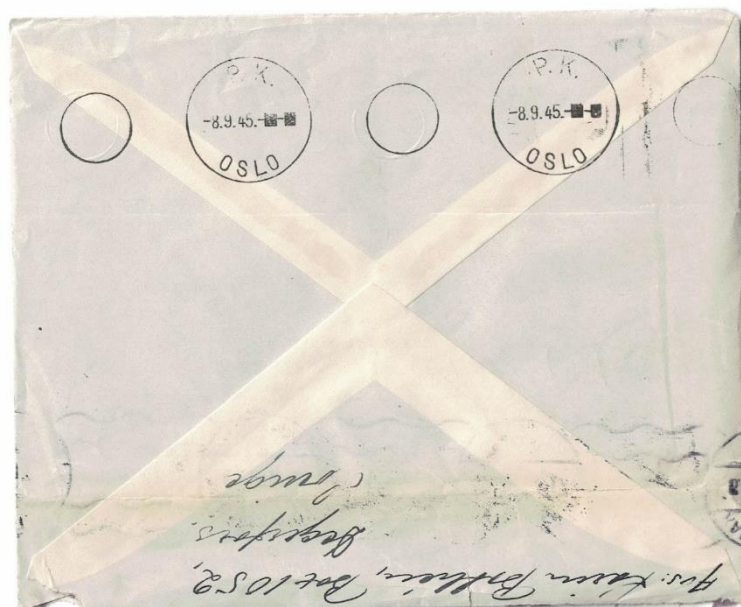


See illustration no. 9.

Lastly, I will focus on a machine stamp imprint that was introduced at the control office in Oslo on August 31. Krag delivered a postal stamp machine on August 7 to the control office. The machine was for stamping postal mail that were going on to control upon arrival, and was operated by hand and consisted of two date stamp places with 38 mm between them. The text on the date stamp was P.K. / the date / Oslo in a circle with a diameter of 26 mm. See illustration no. 10.



The control of postal mail was during the summer of 1945 criticised in the press for causing the delay of postal mail to/from abroad. This was partly denied by the Norwegian postal service, as they during the summer (July 24) had taken care of all the postal mail that had piled up following the German surrender. My theory is that by starting to stamp postal mail that were going on to control upon arrival, it became easier for the public to see that the postal mail was not being delayed or stayed for a long time at the control office. Possible delays might instead have been linked to issues in the country of origin or issues/challenges outside the control or responsibility of the Norwegian postal service. On August 31, it was delivered a casing to the postal stamp machine. The casing consisted of 2 circles with a diameter of 15 mm, and was used together with the postal stamp machine. See illustration no. 11.



The casing was also used without date stamps, and this resulted in postal mail with only the imprint of the casing on them. On postal mail in the normal C-6 format will the imprint of the casing appear as three circle stamps after each other. See illustration no. 12.



This resulted in there being new control stamps that were only in use for about 4 weeks. The stamp was occasionally to be seen on NK342 20Ø Red Cross that FDC sent to Sweden.





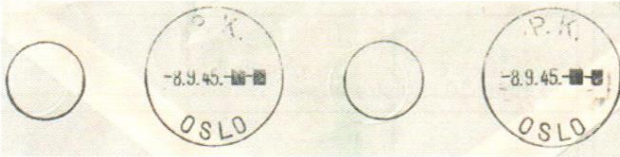
#### **Overview of known control stamps, period of use and degree of rarity**

Below I have put together an overview of the know stamp imprints, when the imprints were seen in use and the possible extent of known postal mail stamped with the different control stamps. I have also prepared an assessment of the degree of rarity for the different stamps. The degree of rarity is based on an internal assessment of the stamp imprints. The number of registered postal mailings seen by the author represents the basis for this assessment. The assessment is therefore subject to revision if or when new information and objects are forthcoming. In the assessment, I have used the same scale as was used in the booklet *Deutsche Dienstpostamt Oslo 1942-1945* (author: Bjørn E. Bunæs), which in turn is based upon the assessment provided by Crowned post horn stamps in *Norgeskatologen* from 2002.



Stempelavtrykk (siffer)	Bruksperiode 1945	Sjeldenhets- vurdering	Bemerkninger
1 	Mai-august	5	
2 	Juni	9	2 registreringer
3 	Juni-august	5	
4 	Mai	7	Under 10 registreringer
5 	Mai-august	5	
6 	Mai-august	5	
7 	Mai-juni	5	
8 	Mai-juni	5	
30	Mai	?	Registrert håndskrevet på postkort stemplet Stockholm 8.5.45 til Oslo, men kan også være en signatur
31 	Mai-august	3	
32 	Mai-august	3	
33 	Mai-august	3	
34 	Mai-juli	5	
35		?	Ikke sett

Stempelavtrykk (siffer)	Bruksperiode 1945	Sjeldenhets- vurdering	Bemerkninger
36		?	Ikke sett
37		?	Ikke sett
38		?	Ikke sett
39		?	Ikke sett
40		?	Ikke sett
41 	August	7	Sett i rød og blållilla farge
42 	Juli-august	5	
43 	Juli	7	Under 10 registreringer
44 	Juli	7 (9)	Under 5 registreringer
45		?	Ikke sett
46 	Juni	9	1 registrering Oslo 14.06
47		?	Ikke sett
48	Mai/Juni?	9	1 registrering stemplet Göteborg 07.05 til Haugesund
49		?	Ikke sett
50 	August	7	Under 10 registreringer
51		?	Ikke sett
52 	Juli-august	5	
53 	Juli-august	5	
54	August	9	1 registrering Skjærhallen 15.8
55 	August	7	Under 10 registreringer
Uten siffer 	Juli-august	5	Brukt i Stavanger: 17mm

Stempelavtrykk (siffer)	Bruksperiode 1945	Sjeldenhets -vurdering	Bemerkninger
Uten siffer 	Juni-juli	7	Brukt i Oslo: 7mm (24.06-15.07)
Uten siffer 	August-september	7	Brukt i Narvik: 14 mm
Uten siffer 	Juni-september	5	Brukt i Trondheim: 14 mm
Uten siffer 	Mai-september	1	Brukt i Oslo: 13-14 mm
Uten siffer 	31.08-26.09	5	Maskinstempelhylse med to sirkler 15 mm. Brukt i Oslo

## Cataloguing

In the revised workdraft, which was published in 2000, are all control stamps catalogued with a number. With all the control offices working with several different control hallmarks, in terms of different stamps and control strips, it became necessary to number each of the control stamps to be able to keep them apart with descriptions and references.

For control office no. 1 in Oslo circle stamps with numbers are catalogued as control stamp Oslo no. 3.

Circle stamps 13-14 mm without number are catalogued as control stamp Oslo no. 4.

Circle stamp 7 mm without number is control stamp Oslo no. 5.

The machine stamp casing with 2 circle stamps without number are catalogued control stamp Oslo no. 8.

For control office no. 2 in Stavanger circle stamps without number are catalogued control stamp Stavanger no. 4.

For control office no. 3 in Trondheim circle stamps without number are catalogued control stamp Trondheim no. 2.

For control office no. 4 in Narvik circle stamps without number are catalogued control stamp Narvik no. 5.

This might seem very confusing for those who are not familiar with the system of the catalogue part. It is therefore time to revise the system of the overview, however, this work falls outside the scope of this presentation. Nevertheless, the author welcomes feedback and comments related to the revision of the article. An updated overview will be forthcoming following incoming feedback and comments.

**References:**

Letters and copies of letters from the author's own collection

Bunæs, Bjørn E. (2004): Deutsches Dienstpostamt Oslo 1942-1945.

Torstad, John (2000): Den norske post- og telegramkontrollen 1945-1946. Del II – Katalogdelen

Wågeman, Ingemar (1995): Svensk postcensur under andre världskriget