

World War One (WW1), also named The Great War meant not only hell for those who took part, but also resulted in great numbers of postcards. These cards are still found in quantity, often neglected by the collector. Not too many collectors are interested in views showing destroyed houses/streets, often places you haven't heard of before, or groups of soldiers photographed somewhere at the many fronts, at hospitals etc.

Those who live in countries who took part in WW1 and trace their family history, sometimes look for certain cards of WW1. I remember several requests from British and French collectors who asked for cards of battle places at Verdun ("my grandfather was wounded there") or certain German P.O.W. camps. There is also a group of WW1 card collectors who concentrate on war planes, U-boats, weapons in general or views of tanks or signed propaganda etc. Some clever persons started to accumulate (better) real photo cards from the time of WW1, because they believe it to be a good investment. They might be right but must show patience, simply because of the sheer mass of cards still around. I found a German fieldpost statistics dating from June 24, 1915 which gives us an rough idea how much fieldpost items were transported to and from the fronts. **On that day** in June a total of 8,5 million pieces were sent from Germany to soldiers in the field. 5,9 million were postfree fieldpost letters and postcards, 2,6 million were fieldpost letters (of heavier weight) and fieldpost parcels mailed at half of the regular postage rate. A total of 5,8 million letters, cards etc were sent from the field back home **on that day**. So the fieldpost service had to transport and deliver (both directions) a total of 14,3 million letters, cards, parcels and packets on June 24, 1915. Let's say that only half of the 5,8 million sendings from the fronts were picture postcards; war scenes as well as regular views from places the soldiers were stationed or came through, plus some greeting type of cards. Deduct the plain field postcards. I guess a amount of 2 million **picture** postcards sent out that day could be quite realistic. Figures found in literature on the amount of fieldpost cards (plain as well as picture postcards) being mailed during WW1 on German side

alone range from 1,5 to 3 million cards per day. Every day! No wonder that there are still so many cards from those years around.

Although I am not an serious collector of cards from WW1 I have a box full of them. Many years ago I purchased a bigger card lot which included at least 200 cards from The Great War. As said before, they are still quite common. I appreciate that many were mailed under (free) fieldpost rate which is of great benefit towards publisher/printer research. Dated cards without any imprinted information hidden under postage stamps. WW1 meant really big business for postcard publishers/printers, even during the final years with (skilled) workforce shortage and very limited supply of paper/card.

When looking through cards from The Great War, you soon notice that certain names of bigger cities as well as tiny villages turn up often. Usually places of severe battles and constant fighting. Positional warfare, few kilometres backwards and forwards, especially on the Western Front. Geographical points, you wouldn't easily take notice of, were of sudden strategic importance. Some hills for example received a number which stands merely for the height above sea-level. You find German cards bearing captions like "Höhe 304" near Verdun, hard to find today, but the soldiers back then knew only too good which hill was meant. Some places were soon nicknamed, often very accurately. "Toter Mann" (Dead Man) for example, a hill which is also somewhere in the Verdun region I believe. The French soldiers used the same name in their language by the way. Other

names differed of course, but the meaning was usually the same.

Names of forests/woods are also often found on war cards. Many located in the Vosges (France) region. I came across several typical war cards which all show the name "Priesterwald" (Priesterwoods) in caption. My p/u samples date from 1915-16 and I wondered where this place once was. Somewhere in France, but where? The personal messages provided no information after I had managed to read the handwriting. Research on (German language) internet brought no results. "Priesterwald" not listed

in regular WW1 literature I have access to. Inquiries sent to WW1 card collectors brought no positive response but I was offered more cards from that place. Appears to had been an well known place among soldiers with the many different cards once available. Well, finally I put my "Priesterwald" cards aside and forgot the matter.

During an flea market visit not long ago – cards on offer were really disappointing – I looked through a box with old books and suddenly found the answer. "Universum Jahrbuch 1915" (publ. by Philipp Reclam jun., Leipzig) lists the name "Priesterwald" several times in the table of contents. "Universum" was a popular weekly (or monthly?) publication covering various topics worldwide. During WW1 the content was of course mostly on what happened on the fronts. Published were the official daily war reports and here I found the information I was looking for.

**Ills:** card used for title dated Sept. 28, 1915, card no. 178, published by "Klingstein & Co." from Metz. Down left we see card no. 178 from the same series (p/u Sept. 26, 1915). Both cards mailed by a soldier of the 2. company, 'Landwehr Brigade-Ersatz-Bataillon Nr. 17' (reserve troops) home to family members. Messages mostly of general content; glad to be still alive, asking for socks and a short note that this is the worst place to be and hopefully their unit to be moved soon. Card below comes from publisher "Julius Berger" also from Metz (no. 186). Not p/u. – All 3 cards show nothing but destruction, sandbags, trenches (?), barbed-wire entanglements etc.





"Priesterwald" was a partly hilly and of course wooded region north of the town Pont-à-Mousson (on the River Mosel), Lorraine. About halfway between the cities Metz and Nancy. During WW1 this region was described by Germans as *Battlefield* (between the rivers *Maas and Mosel*. Verdun, the place many know, is not too far away (in eastern direction).

The front lines in the region around Pont-à-Mousson did not move a great deal during 1914-18. The mostly roughness landscape led to severe fighting, long artillery battles followed by infantry attacks and hand-to-hand fighting. I found no mention that other troops than French and German were engaged here. French troops were backed up by soldiers from colonies, Senegal for example and mentioned are also "Turko" (from French Northern Africa) and "Spahis", an group/nationality I cannot identify. The German term is most likely a parody.

Official war reports have to be interpreted with great care. Officials liked to keep negative news away from the public (for some time) or made the situation look better as it really was. On the other hand, the here shown cards with the (mostly) nightmare landscapes speak for itself.

"Universum" published following war news from official German sources of this region:

**March 8, 1915:** French attacks northwest of Pont-à-Mousson – Priesterwald – were repulsed

**March 16, 1915:** Two French attacks in the Priesterwald failed

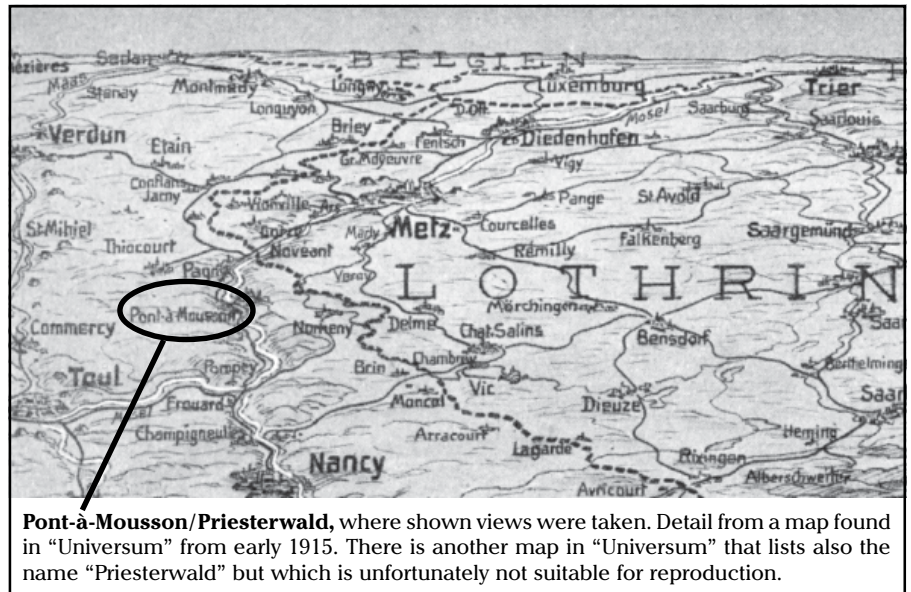
**March 23, 1915:** French attacks in the Priesterwald region, and northeast of Bandonviller (French-Lorraine) as well as at the "Reichsackerkopf" (a hill) were repelled

**March 30, 1915:** French attacks took place in French-Lorraine, westerly of Pont-à-Mousson and east of Regniéville as well as in the Priesterwald, but were repelled with heavy French casualties

**April 1-16, 1915:** Heavy infantry attacks of the French with a newly formed army in this area, which ended all unsuccessfully (according the war report). Long lasting artillery battles as well as many hand-to-hand fights took place. Involved units are mentioned for the first time. French Infantry Regiment No. 13 attacked the western border of the Priesterwald. The counter-attack of a Rhineland battalion nicknamed "Die Wacht am Rhein" stopped the French; etc. Mentioned are fights by day and night all the time. I guess it was during March-May 1915 that the Priesterwald was converted into a nightmare landscape. (...)

**June 3, 1915:** Most lost trenches were recaptured by German troops. There was however no information that they were lost before. Only that massive French attacks had taken place.

**July 4, 1915:** German assault on both sides of Croix des Carmes located on the western border of the Priesterwald. French position of 1500 width and 400 metres depth was taken. 1000 French soldiers were taken prisoners, 3 fieldguns, 7 machine guns, 3 light and 4 heavy mortars were captured. Losses on German side were not mentioned of course.



**Pont-à-Mousson/Priesterwald**, where shown views were taken. Detail from a map found in "Universum" from early 1915. There is another map in "Universum" that lists also the name "Priesterwald" but which is unfortunately not suitable for reproduction.

**July 8, 1915:** Several more French trenches are taken by storm

**July 9, 1915:** Heavy French artillery fire on the Priesterwald positions followed by infantry attacks.  
and so on and on.

All I wanted was to find out where the often in card captions mentioned "Priesterwald" was located. It was not one of the "big names" during The Great War", but a region of continued fights, backwards and forwards with plenty of casualties on both sides. It was "famous" enough however, that the mention of "Priesterwald" alone (without an French town added) made everybody clear which place on the Western Front was meant.

→ **Captured French trench in the Priesterwald.** Common motif and nobody can say for sure if this is really in the Priesterwald. Perhaps it was French again a couple of days later. Publ. Julius Berger, Metz, card no. 184, average to poor collotype printing, not p/u.

↓ **Priesterwald: totally destroyed log cabin.** Single German soldier surrounded by nothing but destruction. Publ. by Willy Koehler, Metz, as card no. 222. Good quality collotype printing with retouches. Mailed home by the earlier mentioned soldier, member of an reserve troop battalion on Nov. 11, 1915. No mention that the French destroyed the log cabin.





Here now the final "Priesterwald" card. No ruined landscape, no trenches but "soldiers in combat" with unwanted guests. A motif found on a number of cards from the time of WW1 (documented in earlier TPA issues). These three bearded German soldiers hunting fleas belong to a "Landwehr" unit, something I cannot find the correct term in English. Usually some years older than the regular soldiers, typical reserves troops. (Sometimes you see the term "Landsturm" = conscripted militia in times of war, were often men over 40-45 years of age). However, these "Landwehr men" were forced to take over the role of first line combat troops more and more. There were plenty of them in the Priesterwald region while the regulars died at Verdun, other places in France/Belgium. German forces in the Priesterwald region were not too strong. Too many units were ordered to the Eastern Front (Imperial Russia) as well as sent for support to the Austro-Hungarian/Russian Fronts. This flea-hunter view was published as card no. 584 by "P. Maas Sohn" from Metz. Not p/u.

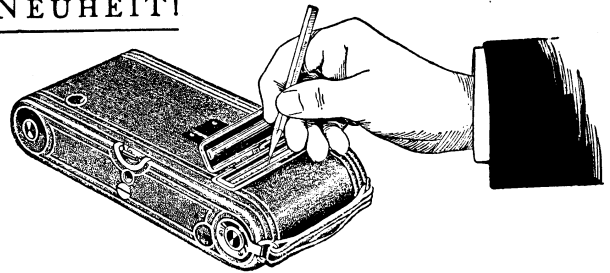


Deutsche Landwehr bei der Bekämpfung eines neuen Feindes im Priesterwald.

Camera manufacturers and the photographic supply trade soon realized the huge customer potential when the war broke out. Soldiers came to foreign lands and cities, wanted to show relatives back home where they had been, photographed their comrades and also documented the daily life at and behind the fronts. There is indeed a flood of real photo cards showing various motifs from WW1. Many however, without any helpful information where the photo was shot. The majority was sent home inside letters. Censorship during the first 2 war years appeared to have been not that strictly.

Kodak offered the "Autograph" camera (together with special film material) as novelty. The advert doesn't say that this camera was specially designed for war use, but is found together with other mostly war related advertisements. (By the way, all illustrated adverts on this page come from the publication "Universum" and date from mid 1915). The "Autograph-Kodak" allowed the user to add a line of information after an photo was taken. You had to open a hinged lid, and simply "wrote" a caption onto the negative film and exposed it for 2 to 5 seconds. After the film was developed the information was found between negatives on the roll film / always below the view, and made sure that you kept records where, when and what you had photographed. Quite expensive camera. — "AGFA" the big photographic supplies producer, offered to buy "interesting war views", but only when their own negative material had been used. — "Heinr. Ernemann", camera manufacturing company from Dresden (famous for their "Ermanox" camera in the 1920's) had various special artist-designed adverts appearing in most popular magazines and newspapers. Showing German / soldiers of allied nations with "Ernemann" camera in hands. The army model (roll film or plates) was described as most favourite field camera; because it was "pocket-sized".

NEUHEIT!



Jedes Bild, welches überhaupt wert ist, aufgenommen zu werden, verdient auch Datum und Aufschrift. Fast jedes Negativ gewinnt an Interesse, wenn man auf seinem Rande Antwort auf die Fragen: „Wer?“ „Wo?“ „Wann?“ findet. Dies ermöglicht der

### Autograph-Kodak.

Mit den Autograph-Kodaks kann man fast zugleich mit der Aufnahme eine bleibende Aufschrift auf dem Negativ anbringen. Man öffnet die Klappe auf der Rückseite des Kodaks, schreibt die entsprechende Notiz nieder, belichtet diese Schrift 2—5 Sekunden lang und schliesst darauf die Klappe. Beim Entwickeln erscheint dann auf dem Rande zwischen den Negativen eine bleibende photographische Wiedergabe der gemachten Aufschrift. Dieses auf so einfache Weise erzielte Resultat beruht auf der Verwendung von

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