

# Coding of Emil Pinkau Cards

## Part 1: Capital Letter Codes, 1913 to 1926

BY GEORGE WEBBER



Some years ago I bought at auction a job lot of PPC's, all obviously from one publisher, but with no mention of the publisher's name. All the cards had a 3 and 4 letter Capital letter codes on. There was a large variety of processes on offer. Various cards were stamped **Collocolor**, **Photobunt (Orthochrom)**, **Flämisch (handkoloriert)**, **Colorphotoprint gelatiniert (Rotary "Rotochrom" series)**, **Flämisch (lackiert)**, **Effekt lackiert**, **Antik**, **Photobunt (lackiert)**, **Doppelton Braun (also Grün) Collo-Gravure**, **Kupfertiefdruck (braun)**, **Lichtdruck braun**, etc. In fact any process almost that you cared to name. I thought it would be easy to identify such a prolific publisher but the road was to be hard and rocky. Emil Pinkau had long been on the suspect list. Proof finally came with the discovery of the Egyptian card illustrated here. This has an explicit reference to **Emil Pinkau & Cie, Leipzig** and is coded "NLLT" (printed pre WW1).

There turned out to be so many of these Capital Letter coded cards around, for countries all over the world, that I thought it worthwhile to try and break the code. It is just annoying to see so many of these cards about, mostly undated, with no idea at all whether one is talking about a printing date in the 1910's, 1920's or even the 1930's. Also I hope that a code break will allow the "one region dedicated" collectors to classify and date their

cards (e.g. David Pearlman, with his Palestine collection or Bob Conrich with his Bermuda collection).

I kept a simple database of the details of the cards I have seen or were told about. Here I must particularly thank Bob Conrich, David Pearlman, Helmfried and others for supplying cards or details of cards they had seen. Without such help, one does not get far, in this sort of research. A lot of data in this article is drawn up with their help, but the conclusions (and certainly any blame for them!) are mostly mine.

There are **10** code letters used **T, O, N, S, H, E, L, F, U**; so you do not have to be Einstein to see that it is probably a number code. (There are a few quasi-hebraic characters used, but this is a small sideshow).

No code lettering starts with a "T", so no prize for putting **T = 0**.

**3 letter over 2 letter Code** eg LNF  
NL

The break in unscrambling the rest of the code came with the realisation that **only 5** combinations are used, for the "bottom two code letters" part of this 3/2 code and **all of them start with "N"**. We have the following combinations:

NS NS NH NE NL

This indicated a possible year date code for the bottom two. "NN" was particularly relevant, as it could only represent the years (19)**11** or (19)**22** or (19)**33**. Actually, from studying postal use dates (19)22 was the only possibility. This gave **N = 2**. I show here a GSE/NH with an explicit 1924 reference on it. Indicating **N = 2** and **H = 4**.

It is straightforward to put the code numbers in order, by using dates of postal use and we end up with

**PINKAU NUMBERING CODE: 1913 - 1926**

**T = 0 O = 1 N = 2 S = 3 H = 4**  
**E = 5 L = 6 G = 7 F = 8 U = 9**

Having got this far let us tackle the 3 letter codes.

**3 letter only (no 2 letter code underneath)**

This occurs mainly in the period 1918 to 1921. (There is a possibility that they started before 1918 with these, but the bulk of them are 1918 to 1921). The cards are generally poor grade collotype on cheap card, occasionally they are toned or coloured.

**3 letter over 2 letter, Pinkau code.**

These 3/2 cards are mostly collotype on poor board, occasionally coloured. Obviously this was Pinkau's cheap line.

These can be dated exactly, by the year code of these lower two letters.

"NN" = 1922, "NS" = 1923,  
"NH" = 1924, "NE" = 1925,  
"NL" = 1926. (For the last year of use)

I find that this "3 over 2" code disappears, for ever, after 1926. Talking about the year 1926, Henk Voskuilen (TPA 14) says that 1926 was the year of the Pinkau/Trenkler takeover/merger. I will show in the next TPA that these two firms were **not** fully integrated and went their separate numbering ways, using a different coding system. Henk /Helmfried (TPA 14) says that the Trenkler building was sold off. Well, maybe, but Trenkler just went on serving the same old customers in the 1930's as they had prior to the takeover/merger. The illustrations of the Pinkau building in TPA 14, just do not look that big to me compared to say the Röder building, where we are certain that most of their printing was done in the 1930's. I do realise Henk is showing 1921 and not 1926. I hope he can find a clear post 1926 illustration for us.

The full extent of the Pinkau building shown on the 1921 share certificate is particularly (con't next page)



Fotograf I. Kulišić Izdo 1924. Specialiteti Razglednice

**Dubrovnik (Ragusa)**  
Samostan Dominikanaca  
Fotograf I. Kulišić Izdo  
1924.

(GSE/NH)

GSE  
NH

**Alexandrie.**  
Bazar arabe  
with Emil Pinkau  
& Co. AG imprint  
"NLLT" code

Publ. initials (?)  
and card number  
read:  
LS. No. 54



**Emil Pinkau & Cie., Soc. An., Leipzig.**

hard to interpret. One can clearly make out the multistorey building, which presumably is the original works. It seems to be surrounded by whole lines of small houses? / offices? / or printing works, along the surrounding streets? It is possible that the Pinkau building shown is mainly a financial control centre, with some printing facilities? It is a real pity that contact cannot be made with ex Pinkau employees. Even getting in touch with post WW2 East German Trenkler employees would be very useful?

I would guess that this "3 code letters over 2 code letters" outfit was a small firm that Pinkau picked up after WW1?

Continuing Henk/Helmfried's line of thought (TPA 14), we may be dealing with a controlling firm like Unilever, but obviously on a smaller scale. Unilever has an enormous number of semi autonomous factories and brand names scattered all over the world. You could tell very little about Unilever's size, merely from a picture of its headquarters? Also I doubt if there are many food products actually named "Unilever". The same with Pinkau, after WW1.

Of course Pinkau was in overall financial charge. This may represent the pattern of Pinkau's activities of buying a firm and letting it continue its activities under Pinkau's supervision. Big Brother and the Holding Company, so to speak. This would account for "obvious" Pinkau cards turning up that are not coded. I show a coded/uncoded back here. We have clearly got a tiger by the tail here, but for the moment lets get back to

**4 letter Pinkau code**

By using my database with a number of postally used cards, I can give **approximate** dates of all 4 letter code printings. Obviously I concentrate on the first two letter of the code, as giving the major information of the 1000's and 100's details of the coding. Maybe, somebody, someday, will give the fine details of the last two numbers (10's and units), but I don't think it will be me! (In the following "xx" stands for the 10's and unit part of the code; i.e. = "too small to bother with now")

Any 4 letter code starting with "N" was printed prior to 1914

- STxx, SOxx and SNxx printed 1914
- SSxx printed 1915
- SHxx printed 1916
- SExx printed 1917 and 1918
- SLxx printed 1918
- SGxx and SFxx printed 1919
- SUxx printed 1920

**4 letter codes starting with "H"**

I said that the order of the coding letters used was T, O, N, S, H, E, L, G, F and U standing for 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9.

There is some evidence, that with 4 letter codes starting with "H", that these cards were numbered **downwards** starting with "HUxx" in 1921 and going down to "HTxx" in 1922 (N.B. All other cards are numbered upwards, as far as I can see). I would be most grateful for details of any **dated** "Hxxx" cards to confirm or deny this unusual downwards numbering, for "H" cards.

From separate work I believe that this coding was some sort of "ration" or "allocation", of so many coded cards to be printed in any one year, the rest of the year's printing being uncoded. If "Hxxx" cards really are numbered downwards then this would confirm this suspicion. I regret that I do not know the what or why of this "allocation". I merely strong suspect it. The year by year numbers of coded cards are just so suspiciously steady and the uncoded cards seem to be the residual varying production.

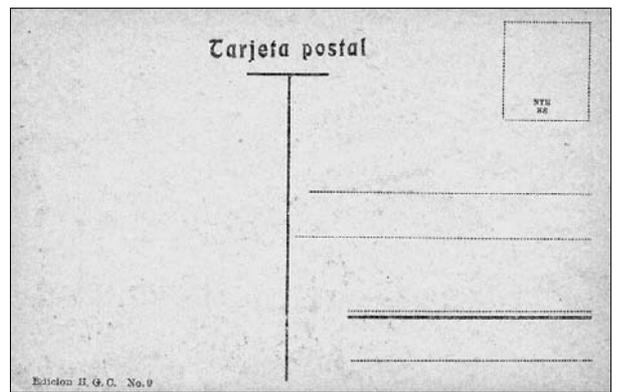
- ETxx printed 1923
- EOxx, ENxx, ESxx, EHxx, ELxx, EGxx, EFxx all printed 1923 to 1925
- EUxx printed 1925

The coded letters seem to finish with Lxxx. If you know of a **four** letter code starting with "G", "F", or "U", please get in touch. The last 4 letter code I know of, was discovered by Chris Ratcliffe and is "LULF" = 6968. The switch to the dot and dash code was a bit ragged as Bob Conrich reports a first dot and dash coded card of 68xx.

I will show in next TPA that the Pinkau coding continues **with a dot and dash code** from about 1927 onwards. As said the transition seems to have been a bit ragged. The dot and dash code introduction happens to roughly coincide with the Trenkler/Pinkau takeover/merger in 1926/7.

**Purpose of the codes?**

This is a difficult question. There are salient facts to consider. A lot of the Pinkau cards are uncoded and also the year on year rate of production of coded cards is very steady indeed, in the 1920's and 1930's, (the 1930's coded rate is about half of the 1920's coded card rate). It is my opinion that this coding was used for some sort of "ration" or "allocation". Maybe something to do with cartelisation in the PPC trade? The coding is not a production reference or shipping department code.



NTH/NS (Spain)

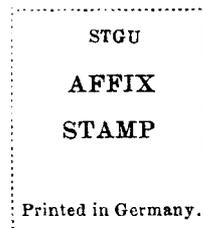


uncoded (Argentina)

Thanks to Bob Conrich we have a large amount of data on the dot and dash codes. This will allow us to set out the full Pinkau schedule for the late 1920's and all the 1930's. This will be in Part 2, next time.

As Helmfried said last time, this is going to be a long journey. I hope this Pinkau code break is a small step forward on this journey. I think the above dating is broadly correct but further details much sought as usual. This kind of research is not possible without a lot of collaboration.

Finally, if by this time you have lost track of the point of all this, may I say that it is to date and investigate Pinkau's card production. In looking into this, there are a number of interesting "spin offs". For example, we have come across Lehnert & Landrock activities in North Africa, which was very interesting and also have turned up a lot of unexpected material on Bermudan PPC's and the cruise trade of the 1930's. Studying a major PPC manufacturer does lead to useful and interesting results.



**Dumpton Gap, Broadstairs.**  
Rotary "Rotochrom" Series - Pinkau's "Colorphotoprint gelatinier".  
Coded STGU = 1914

