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Notes on Nazi Nuremberg Signatures – by Jim Downey

The note is a common, pre-war printed 20 reichsmark note. They remained valid until the 1948 German Currency Reform. The signatures on the note were obtained by a US Army soldier who was assigned as a guard in the prison where the Nuremberg defendants were held. While US Army personnel were paid in Allied Military Currency, they could have received regular German currency in change when they spent their Allied Military Currency in the local economy.

I purchased the note from a seller on Ebay. The seller's father was the soldier who obtained the signatures. The seller did not know who the signers were. He only recalled that his father carried the note in his wallet and had told him that they were "famous people". The seller would not reveal his father's name. He thought it was peculiar that I asked for it. I only wanted it to search for US Army records that would confirm his service.

The guards and the prisoners were not supposed to fraternize. First-hand accounts of those who worked in the prison reveal that this was widely ignored. The number of autographs from the Nuremberg defendants in the collectible marketplace confirm this. It has been suggested that the prisoners acceded to the guards requests for autographs in order to curry favor with them to obtain privileges.

Why the original source chose a piece of currency for the autographs remains a mystery. His son indicated he did not have a short snorter of his own. It may have been the only piece of paper he had on hand when the opportunity to obtain the signatures presented itself. The official exchange rate made the note worth US\$0.20, so it was an inexpensive souvenir.

The note is in poor condition because he kept it in his wallet. His son recalls him taking it out to show people when the son was young. Some of the signatures are barely decipherable because they have faded and were written over the design of the note.

Among the signatures not on the note are those of Hjalmar Schacht and Franz Von Papen. While they were willing to sign autographs, neither would autograph German banknotes.