

POSTAL HISTORY

NETHERLANDS LION LABELS FOR BELGIAN INTERNMENT CAMPS

By Greg Balagian

At the beginning of World War I in August of 1914, Germany invaded Belgium. From that moment onwards hundreds of thousands of Belgians fled to the Netherlands, and among them were about 40,000 Belgian military refugees.

In compliance with the Peace Treaty of The Hague of 18 October 1907, the neutral nation of the Netherlands was obliged to disarm and intern every military man. Due to the mobilization, the military refugees who had fled to the Netherlands were transferred to empty military barracks.

Two camps, Zeist and Harderwijk, were designed as small villages in 1914. Fifty permanent barracks were built in an area of 79 acres (32 hectares) to accommodate 12,000 to 15,000 internees.

In February of 1916, the Dutch government at the request of German authorities issued two non denominated labels (green and brown) to be used to frank correspondence between internees in the Netherlands and people living in parts of German-occupied Belgium.

Both labels pictured the Dutch virgin with a lion: a standing lion on the green label and a resting lion on the brown. Both are inscribed in Dutch: "Aug 1914. Kingdom of Netherlands. Internment camps." There were 65,000 of each label printed, but only the green one was used for postage.

Letters with these stamps were returned by the Germans with an additional cancel "*Unzulässig zurück*", or "*Zurück weil unzulässig*," which means "Return, not permitted."

One theory for the returned letters is that the back of the stamps (roughly 1.1 by 1.6 inches) could have provided space for messages between internees.

The cover in my collection [on the front cover] is franked with the green internment camp stamp on February 7, 1916 to Belgium. The stamp is tied to the cover by a purple oval handstamp of Camp Harderwijk, then by the camp datestamp. The stamp is initialed by a camp official; the cover also bears "Return not permitted" in German. ❁



The two World War I Netherlands internment camp labels each have a lion next to the Dutch virgin. A resting lion is on the brown label [left]; a standing lion is on the green label [right].

