

GERMAN PRISONERS OF WAR IN JAPAN

FIRST WORLD WAR 1914-1920

SYNOPSIS

Purpose & Scope demonstrates the intriguingly historical story (drama) of the internment camps & their mail movement/distribution from 1914 to 1919. These 18 internment camp enclaves in Japan utilized mail as the key means of communication to & from the German POW's. This formed a microcosm of how a system of postal operations started, effectively operated while overcoming numerous obstacles, & terminated w/ the repatriation of the POW's.

Treatment/Plan is the story line of POW mail during an armed conflict in the far east in WWI. It is arranged in essentially ascending by date order by the type of mail movement, such as incoming mail. Pertinent postal, chronological, geographical, & historical aspects are provided for clarity of understanding. Exhibit starts w/ the earliest known POW mail for this subject & concludes w/ repatriation of the POW's to Germany from Japan.

Importance is crucial & the key items are highlighted w/ a **red** border. The exciting importance of exhibit is paramount as this is the **1st assemblage** of these covers ever shown in a philatelic exhibit. It is typical for this exhibitor to not find an additional item for inclusion for years even with diligent searching.

The Knowledge & Research utilized had to be clever & innovative as the issues of language translation was crucial to the comprehension of the markings & movement of the POW mail system employed at the 18 camps in Japan. Four languages were involved & the exhibitor while fluent in English & German, had to employ "consultants" for a clear understanding of the markings & context almost entirely written in Japanese & Chinese.

The Rarity & Condition of the materials in exhibit are allover 104 years old and from wartime era. The covers selected (@204) are in fine to better condition & most are the only ones known/recorded. Highlighted through out the exhibit are items that are highly unusual, extremely uncommon, or the first time reported in the literature. The collection of these covers occurred over the **past six decades**.

The Presentation is shown in an easy format to follow, w/brief, clear, & concise descriptions allowing the viewer to always easily comprehend the postal history, the complexity of the subject, rates, routes, markings & the varied destinations reflecting the vast movements of POW mail be it short or long distances. Apropos epilogue shows the vessel of repatriation of the German soldiers arriving in Germany.

Of special note: The analysis of each philatelic item in the exhibit is comprehensively provided which allows the full story to be told of the capture of the Germany combatants in China; their internment for as many as 5 years in Japan, their creation/utilization of a postal communication system; & the ending of WWI allowing the repatriation to Germany of the thousands of captured soldiers of war.

References:

- 1.- *"Handbuch der Kriegsgefangenpost Tsingtau"* (Handbook of POW's Mail Tsingtau) - Helmut Ruefer & Wolf Rungas, Poststempelgilde - Rhein-Donau e. V. Dusseldorf (Germany), 1963
- 2.- *"DAI NIHON FURYO YUBIN"* (Greater Japan Prisoner of War) Ludwig Meyer, 1976
- 3.- "Prisoners of War (Japan) - International Encyclopedia of the First World War" - Atsushi Otsuru, 2014

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FIRST WORLD WAR - 1914 - 1920

Purpose & Scope

JAPAN & GERMANY WERE AT WAR - The exhibit demonstrates the fascinating Prisoner of War (POW) history of the movement of mail of the German POW's held in Japanese Internment Camps after their capture in China during World War I, 1914-1920. The POW's were all repatriated by 1920.

Background

Throughout the period of the late 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century, Germany had joined w/ other European powers in a scramble for colonial possessions. In 1897 China was forced to agree to the Kiautshou Bay Concession in Shantung to Germany in 1898 re: 99 year lease. When the war in Europe began in 1914, the U.K. asked for Japanese assistance. In mid-August 1914 Japan issued an ultimatum stating Germany must withdraw from Chinese/Japanese waters & transfer control of the port of Tsingtao to Japan. Germany rejected the ultimatum & on August 23rd Japan declared war on Germany. The siege of Tsingtao by Japan & the U.K. occurred between August 27th - November 7th, 1914. An outcome of this action was over 4,600 German combatants were captured & transferred to Japan for internment. This resultant created the movement/distribution of mail from **18 POW camps** all located in Japan.

Plan & Organization

4 chapters accomplish the story of this complex series of postal activities. 1) First chapter is the seldom seen Camp to Camp mail (26 covers aid this story); 2) Interesting and surprising incoming mail to the POW's (only 14 covers); 3) Only 16 covers found to date of unusual Domestic mail to recipients in Japan; finally chapter 4). Tells the story of Foreign mail usages including 78 to Germany & 61 to China. POW mail for ease of understanding is arranged in ascending mailing date order in each chapter. The exhibit is heavily weighted to outgoing mail, as the saving of incoming mail was unlikely & and was most likely heavily controlled by Japan's postal POW authority. Examples of mail from all 18 camps is shown w/ comprehensive display of routes/rates & markings.

Knowledge & Research

Of note, significant research regarding censor markings, translations of multiple languages displayed, & in depth study regarding camp locations & dates of operations as well as deciphering of complicated postal markings is noteworthy. . Denotes personal research

Importance

The story of the movement of mail re: the POW camps in Japan is a difficult saga to illustrate but is historically significant as the world's powers (i.e. Japan, China, Germany , & U.K.) were involved in this war effort. The telling of this story via it's postal history is a challenging one (re: languages, etc.) but for the 1st time is fully detailed in this exhibit.

Rarity

All covers in this exhibit have less than 3 known (most are the only one known) & key items are highlighted in **red**.

Condition

Be reminded that every item shown is at least 104 years old. The best available cover has been selected.



CAMP MARUGAME to TSINGTAU (China) - 2 December 1914 (Distance 1488 Mi.)

- 4-character "Furyo Yubin" handstamp in orange.
- Large single line handstamp "Sce DES PRISONNIERS DE GUERRE" in orange.
- Destination mark "Tsingtau" penciled in at extreme left.

Article 16 of the Hague Convention : "Letters, money orders, and valuables as well as postal parcels destined for the prisoners of war or dispatched by them, shall be free of all postal duties both in the countries of origin and destination, as well as those they pass through"