

U.S. Internment of Noncombatants in World War II (1939-1948)

Scope

This exhibit shows mail of detained and interned noncombatant enemy nationals from Germany, Italy, and Japan. Included is their incoming/outgoing domestic and international mail. Emphasis is on censorship, internment camp markings, and postal rates relevant to internee mail. The exhibit is divided into sections reflecting the jurisdiction of the captors, the political status of detainees and internees, and their nationalities.

Background

In World War II the U.S. government interned more than 13,000 noncombatant enemy nationals. Among them were 1,700 German and Italian seamen, 8,000 U.S. resident German, Italian, and Japanese nationals, and 2,700 German, Italian, and Japanese deportees from Latin America. All incoming and outgoing mail was subject to censorship. Although some enemy nationals were paroled during the war, most seamen and deportees and some U.S.-resident enemy aliens were repatriated during or after the war. The last internment camp closed in 1948 bringing an end to the internment program.

Significance

This exhibit illustrates a relatively unknown aspect of World War II postal history about which little has been documented in the philatelic literature. Personal historical and philatelic research drives this presentation.

Key Items

Covers of special philatelic or historical note have been matted in red and/or annotated in bold.

Plan

- 1 Axis Merchant Seamen Internment
1939-1945**
 - 1.1 German Nationals
 - 1.2 Italian Nationals
- 2 State Department Detention
1941-1944**
 - 2.1 Axis Diplomats
 - 2.2 French Diplomats
- 3 Justice Department Detention
1941-1942**
 - 3.1 German Nationals
 - 3.2 Italian Nationals
 - 3.3 Japanese Nationals
- 4 War Department Internment
1942-1943**
 - 4.1 German Nationals
 - 4.2 Italian Nationals
 - 4.3 Japanese Nationals
- 5 Martial Law in Hawaii
1941-1945**
 - 5.1 German American Citizens
 - 5.2 Japanese American Citizens
 - 5.3 Odyssey of a German
American Citizen
- 6 Justice Department Internment
1943-1945**
 - 6.1 German Nationals
 - 6.2 Italian Nationals
 - 6.3 Japanese Nationals
- 7 Latin America Deportee
Internment 1942-1945**
 - 7.1 German Nationals
 - 7.2 Italian Nationals
 - 7.3 Japanese Nationals
- 8 Post-War Internment
1945-1948**
 - 8.1 Ongoing Internment
 - 8.2 Repatriation