

Civilians, Merchant Seamen, and Soldiers Interned in Canada during World War II (1939-1946)

Purpose and Scope: This six-frame postal history exhibit documents Canada's World War II internment program. It has a dual focus: 1) mail of Canada-resident civilians interned by the Canadian government; and 2) alien enemies, enemy merchant seamen, and combat soldiers transported to Canada by the United Kingdom. Included is both incoming and outgoing censored mail, domestic and international, from the beginning of the war until final repatriation in 1946.

Organization and development: The exhibit is organized in three parts. Part I focuses on Canada-resident civilians arrested and interned at the outbreak of the War as threats to the nation's national security. Part 2 continues with civilians, enemy aliens and refugees from the Third Reich transported to Canada in July 1940. Part 3 focuses on enemy merchant seamen and combat soldier officers and other ranks.

The exhibit emphasizes the release and repatriation of the internees. For example, virtually all refugees were freed in Canada or returned to the UK by the beginning of 1943. The fate of each correspondent has been noted within each caption. The exhibit concludes with a focus on German soldiers and merchant seamen awaiting their postwar repatriation.

Background: With the outbreak of war, the UK detained resident German enemy aliens and merchant seamen whose ships had been seized. When the threat of a German ground invasion appeared imminent in mid-1940, resident civilian refugees from the Third Reich were also detained. German POWs from the Afrika Korps arrived in the UK as British forces made gains in North Africa.

Fearing their release should a ground invasion be successful, 4,200 civilians and POWs were transported on three ships to Canada in July 1940; an additional 2,730 sailed on a single ship to Australia. Captured German soldiers continued to be transported to Canada throughout the War. The total number reached nearly 38,000 civilians, enemy merchant seamen, and combat soldiers spread out in internment camps from New Brunswick to Alberta.

Significance: Canada was pressured by the UK to take in civilian and combat POWs from Europe as well as hold its own enemy aliens. This made for the complex internment program documented here. Highlights are bordered in red and annotated in *bold italic*.

Plan

Part 1: Internment of Canada-Resident Civilians

I. Civilians

Resident German Aliens
Resident Italian Aliens
Japanese Canadians

Part 2: Internment of Civilians Transported to Canada

I. Civilians

UK-resident German aliens
UK-resident refugees

Part 3: Internment of Enemy Merchant Seamen and Combat Soldiers Transported to Canada

II. Enemy Merchant Seamen

German nationals
Italian nationals

III. Combat Soldiers

German Officers
German Other Ranks

IV. Administration

Mail transport
German Red Cross
World's Committee Y.M.C.A.
Parcel Free Frank

V. Repatriation

1944 Diplomatic exchange
Postwar repatriation