

Exhibit Synopsis - WWII- GRAVENHURST GERMAN PRISONER-OF-WAR CAMP – MAIL.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE & ORGANIZATION

This postal history exhibit examines the WWII P.O.W mail system as it operated and was experienced in one specific camp, a relatively small "Officers" camp, the German Prisoner of War Camp on the outskirts of Gravenhurst (Muskoka) Ontario. Types of mail sent and received, regulations, censorship, operational procedures are detailed and explained.

This study is organized according to categorized types of authorized postal stationery available to prisoners, and other special postal items and incoming mail. (Type listings developed by this exhibitor) This organization enables the identification and explanation of the various markings and unique features and illustrates changes over time. This type of research focused on one camp is a first of its kind.

BACKGROUND The camp opened June 30th, 1940, with 476 German prisoners – 153 officers and 323 other ranks (orderlies to serve the officers.) Prisoners from all 3 branches of the German armed forces: Army (Heer), Navy (Kriegsmarine), Airforce (Luftwaffe). On average 450-475 of the 31,500 German armed forces interned in Canada, were imprisoned in this P.O.W. internment camp. (Camp C later identified as Camp 20). 109 VETERANS GUARDS OF CANADA (V.G.C.) #1 Platoon/No 4 Company guarded prisoners.

P.O.W. POPULATION VARIED OVER TIME resulting from transfers between camps, and the arrival of new prisoners. My research confirmed the May 5th, 1942 arrival of a contingent of officers, who had been captured & imprisoned in the Middle East in CAMP 307 (EGYPT).

P.O.W. MAIL TO GERMANY; Regulations are detailed and the 3RD GENEVA CONVENTION Article 36 "convention relative to the treatment of prisoners of War" is detailed and noted.

On Jan 1, 1943, Dept. of National Defense, Directorate of Prisoners of War, took responsibility for Internment Operations for POWs from the Dept of the Secretary of State. Camps were renamed according to Military districts - Oct 15/41, Camp Calydor was renamed Camp 20.

Since this study is focused on Camp 20, the scarce Camp 20 dater appears in relative abundance in this exhibit.



Baily and Toop #M16-5 size 23mm

Rarity factor D- very scarce

In 1945 the Canadian government began to classify the P.O.W.s in terms of the extremity of their views.

White – anti Nazi prisoners **Gray** - lacking any allegiance **Black**- pro Nazi. Camp 20 was designated a black camp.

- P.O.W. Repatriation began June 10, 1946 - 433 P.O.W.s (362 officers and 71 other ranks) sent by rail to Halifax; June 12th boarded the *Aquitania* to England; then were shipped home to Germany. The Gravenhurst internment camp closed June 29, 1946.

CHALLENGE AND SIGNIFICANT ITEMS Since this was a small internment camp, philatelic items required to tell the story in this exhibit have been challenging to find and are the results of a ten-year search and study. Many of the items exhibited are scarce or only reported items.

This exhibit contains the following significant scarce items. - Scarce/only reported items are identified with a red border or in red text.

- Page 2 - REDIRECTED LETTER from Camp 307 Egypt to Base Camp Ottawa Canada. **One of 4 covers recorded showing the transfer to Camp 20 from Egypt.**
- Page 3 - REVERSE OF THE PHOTO CARD OF THE MAIN DETENTION CENTRE with the May 4, 1941, Veterans Guard message noting the Camp C site and the guarding German prisoners of war - **A unique photo card & message combination.**
- Page 6 - POSTAL CARD WITH OFFENDING TEXT OBLITERATED by scraping the paper surface and with the application of black ink. **Only Camp 20 postal card showing obliterated text.** The card also includes the **scarce German VII in red** a special Handling Censor Unit marking.
- Page 8 - TWO CHRISTMAS GREETING CARDS -1941 & 1943 on official postal card Types 2 & Type 4. **Two of three known YMCA Christmas message cards used at POW Camp 20.**
- Page 9 - CIRCULAR CROWN CENSOR 13. **DISCOVERY COPY!** (Not listed in J.M. Powell 's database of red crown sensor cancels.)
- Page 12 - LETTER SHEET TYPE CHEMICALLY TESTED 4 Form I.O. 17 (greenish toned paper) - Chemical solution applied to test for a hidden message - two bleached strips running from corner to corner, visible on both sides- **only reported copy for this camp.**
- Page 12 PHOTOGRAPH OF GERMAN POWS authorized by the Department of Defense. THE REVERSE Facsimile of a standard message card. **One of two reported German officer photo cards for Camp 20 – ex. Liptak**
- Page 13 - OFFICAL MAIL BAG TAG used between Base A.P.O. & Camp C/20. - **only reported Bag Tag used at Camp 20.**
- Page 15 - PARCEL POST ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF RECEIPT CARD – **One of two Parcel Acknowledgement Card used at Camp 20.**

REFERENCES

A Man Worth Knowing – The Memoirs of Hans – Georg Neumann –1996

Camp 132 A German Prisoner of War Camp in a Canadian Prairie Community During World War Two – Master's thesis – R. W. Stotz

Censorship of mail in Germany during WWII – Rudi Anders 2020

Notes through Barbed Wire – J Michael Powel -2011

Prisoner of War Mail – Parts 1, 2 and 3 - Lt.-Col L.W. Sharpe - BNA Topics 1952

The Gilded Cage, Gravenhurst German Prisoner- Of- War Camp 20, 1940-46 - Cecil Porter 1999

Michael O'Hagan website <https://powsincanada.ca/veterans-guard-of-canada>



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PURPOSE This postal history exhibit examines the WWII P.O.W. mail system as it operated and was experienced in one specific camp, a relatively small "Officers" camp, the German Prisoner of War Camp on the outskirts of Gravenhurst (Muskoka) Ontario. Types of mail sent and received, regulations, censorship, and operational procedures are detailed and explained.

EXHIBIT PLAN This study is organized according to types of authorized postal stationery available to prisoners, and other special postal items and incoming mail. This organization enables the identification and explanation of the various markings and unique features and illustrates changes over time.

Page 1 Purpose, Exhibit Plan, Background,	Page 5 Message cards 1940 - 43	Page 13 P.O.W. Photo Postal Card
Page 2 Veterans Guards of Canada, P.O.W. population	Pages 6,7, Message cards 1943 - 46	Page 14 Incoming letter mail
Page 3 The Facility	Page 8 Christmas Greeting Cards	Page 15 Mail Bag tag & Parcel Post ARC card
Page 4 Regulations, P.O.W. mail to Germany	Pages 9,10,11,12 P.O.W. Letter sheets	Page 16 End of Censorship & Epilogue

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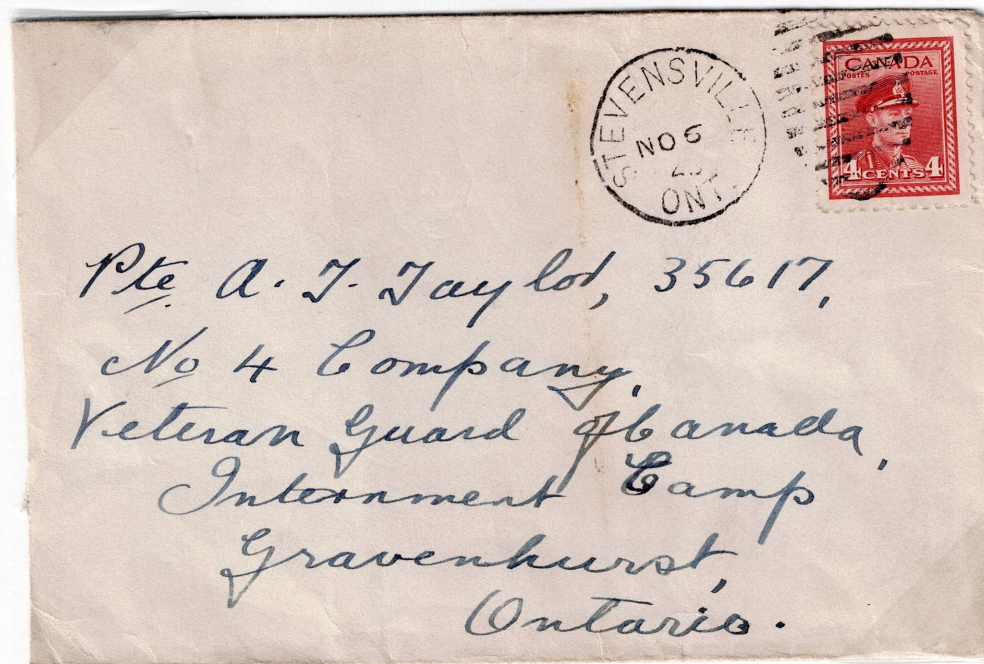
BACKGROUND 450/475 of the 31,500 German armed forces interned in Canada, were imprisoned at this P.O.W. internment camp. Prisoners were Officers and their orderlies from all 3 branches of the German armed forces: Army (Heer), Navy (Kriegsmarine), Airforce (Luftwaffe).



Imperious German Officers in uniform under guard walking from the Gravenhurst train station to the camp. Toronto Star Photo – photographer Henry Fry

The camp opened June 30th, 1940, with 476 German prisoners – 153 officers and 323 other ranks (orderlies to serve the officers.) Article 44 of the 1929 Geneva Convention, officers were allowed to have orderly support.

First group of prisoners left Britain, June 4, 1940 aboard the *Duchess of York*, crossed the Atlantic to Wolves Cove Quebec, then by rail to the Gravenhurst railway station, disembarked and walked to the camp.



Prisoners were guarded by 109 Veterans Guards of Canada (V.G.C.) #1 Platoon/ No 4 Company. Most were WWI veterans. The two V.G.C. covers in my collection indicate that V.G.C. mail arrived at or was sent via the local post offices not Base APO in Ottawa.

The VGC were responsible for good order and discipline of the prisoners. They manned sentry posts, were alert to and foiled escape attempts. Unarmed, they escorted prisoners on parole outings.