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MS-238: Prisoner of War Letters from World Wars I and II

Kelly A. Murphy
Gettysburg College

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MS-238: Prisoner of War Letters from World Wars I and II

Description

This collection consists of various correspondence between POWs and their families, including 86 letters, 174 postcards, and about eight package slips during both world wars. Most of this correspondence was authored by the prisoners and sent to their families from camps in Europe, although it contains some correspondence from camps in Asia and Africa. The collection also contains correspondence from prisoners in concentration camps, such as Auschwitz, and from interned civilians in France and Germany. Because these letters were the main way to contact family members, most of the POW correspondence contain thoughts of homesickness and loneliness along with updates on an individual's health and the various activities around the camps, including work and leisure. There is also correspondence from families to the prisoners which describe family life but also express sentiments for good health and a quick and safe return. There are also about 143 empty envelopes addressed to various places, including Copenhagen, Denmark and the Red Cross headquarters in Switzerland. Moreover, there are correspondence and envelopes from just before and after World War II, including envelopes commemorating French liberation and postcards to the United Nations from prisoners of the Spanish government begging for intervention in their imprisonment by Francisco Franco. In addition, there are various other items in the collection, including a gardening manual and nine photos from a Taiwanese prison camp, unused postcards, seven postage receipts, stamps from India, a work-receipt from Burma, and three anti-Semitic labels from Belgium, as well as various materials from previous owners of the collection. It should be noted that the items in the collection are written in many different languages, including English, German, French, Italian, Polish, and Russian, although some translations are included by previous owners of the collection.

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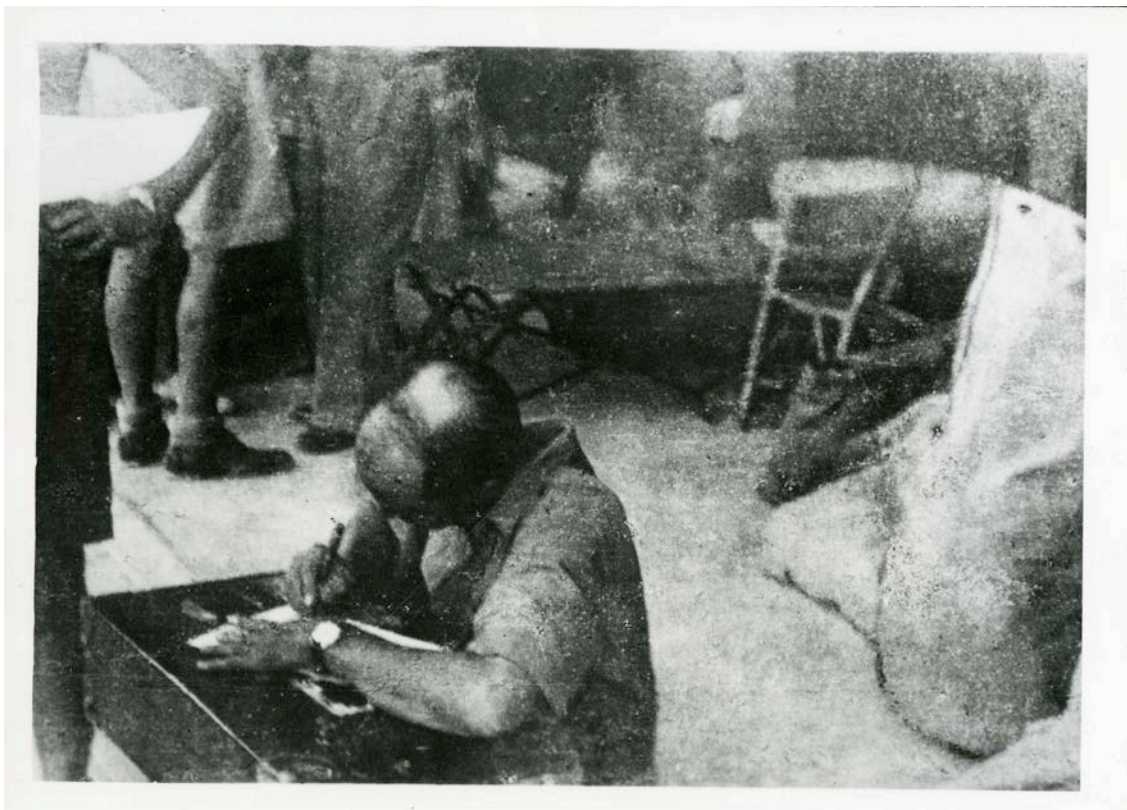
Keywords

World War I, World War II, Prisoner letters, POW's, Correspondence

Disciplines

European History | History | Military History | Public History | Social History

**Guide to the
MS-238: Prisoner of War Letters from World Wars I
and II**



Kelly Murphy '21, Ester Kenyon Fortenbaugh '46 Intern

February-April 2019

MS – 238: POW Letters from World Wars I and II

3 boxes, 1 cubic foot

Inclusive Dates: 1914-1979

Bulk Dates: 1915-1918 and 1942-1945

Processed by: Kelly Murphy, Ester Kenyon Fortenbaugh '46 Intern
(February-April 2019)

Provenance

This collection was purchased from Rulon-Miller Books in June 2017.

Historical Note

World War I began in 1914 after the assassination of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Serbia. The war was fought between the Central Powers (Germany, Austria, and the Ottoman Empire) and the Allied Powers (Russia, France, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, and the United States) in Europe, Asia, and Africa. Although Russia left the war in 1917, the surrender of the Ottoman Empire and Germany in 1918 signaled an end to hostilities, and the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 officially ended the war.

While the 1929 Geneva Convention formalized the treatment of prisoners of war (POWs), there was no standardized system during the First World War. However, there was an understanding on both sides that prisoners were to be treated with dignity, which included suitable housing and rations for the duration of the war. The International Red Cross regularly visited the camps, and POW correspondence was subject to light censorship. Yet not all prisoners were treated with care: in a few cases on both sides, POWs were used as forced labor along dangerous parts of the front lines. Other times, the countries were unprepared for the number of prisoners, and thus some POWs had to build their own living quarters.

World War II began in Asia in 1937 when the Japanese attacked China and expanded to Europe in 1939 after Nazi Germany attacked Poland. The war was fought between the Axis Powers (Nazi Germany, Italy, and Japan) and the Allied Powers (Great Britain, France, the United States, and the Soviet Union). Although France was defeated in 1940, the Axis Powers lost the war with the surrender of Japan in 1945.

Throughout the war, both sides violated terms of the 1929 Geneva Convention, though Nazi Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union were the worst offenders. While the Soviet Union and Japan did not ratify the Convention's terms, Nazi Germany simply ignored the Convention's terms and created their own system of POW camps which led to some of the worst treatment of POWs in history. Many prisoners in these countries suffered from poor living conditions, malnutrition, disease, and forced labor. Some prisoners, particularly officers, were tortured while escape attempts resulted in execution. These camps became the places of several atrocities, and many German and Japanese officers were tried after 1945 for war crimes that included violating the Geneva Convention. Other POW camps, like those in Great Britain and the United States, were like those of World War I, although there were heavier censorship rules.

Scope and Content Notes

This collection consists of various correspondence between POWs and their families, including 86 letters, 174 postcards, and about eight package slips during both world wars. Most of this correspondence was authored by the prisoners and sent to their families from camps in Europe, although it contains some correspondence from camps in Asia and Africa. The collection also contains correspondence from prisoners in concentration camps, such as Auschwitz, and from interned civilians in France and Germany. Because these letters were the main way to contact family members, most of the POW correspondence contain thoughts of homesickness and loneliness along with updates on an individual's health and the various activities around the camps, including work and leisure. There is also correspondence from families to the prisoners which describe family life but also express sentiments for good health and a quick and safe return.

There are also about 143 empty envelopes addressed to various places, including Copenhagen, Denmark and the Red Cross headquarters in Switzerland. Moreover, there are correspondence and envelopes from just before and after World War II, including envelopes commemorating French liberation and postcards to the United Nations from prisoners of the Spanish government begging for intervention in their imprisonment by Francisco Franco. In addition, there are various other items in the collection, including a gardening manual and nine photos from a Taiwanese prison camp, unused postcards, seven postage receipts, stamps from India, a work-receipt from Burma, and three anti-Semitic labels from Belgium, as well as various materials from previous owners of the collection. It should be noted that the items in the collection are written in many different languages, including English, German, French, Italian, Polish, and Russian, although some translations are included by previous owners of the collection.

Subjects

World War I – POW Letters

- Western Front
- Eastern Front
- POW Camps
- Red Cross
- Home Front
- Colonies

World War II – POW Letters

- European Theater
- Pacific Theater
- Censorship
- Home Front
- Colonies
- Concentration Camps
- Forced Labor Camps

Correspondence

Letters
Postcards
Envelopes
Photography – POW Camps
Taiwan

Series Description

This collection is divided into 2 series which are divided into subseries.

Series 1: (World War I Materials) – Subseries A: (From POW camps), Subseries B: (From Civilians), Subseries C: (Miscellaneous Materials).

Series 2: (World War II Materials) – Subseries A: (From POW Camps), Subseries B: (From Forced Labor Camps), Subseries C: (From Concentration Camps), Subseries D: (From Civilians), Subseries E: (Postwar Materials), and Subseries F: (Miscellaneous Materials).

Box List

Box 1 – WWI and WWII

(1-0) Finding Aid and Collectors Information

Series 1 (World War I Materials)

Subseries A: From POW camps

- (1-1) From Austria Hungary 1916 (1 envelope in French)
- (1-2) From Britain 1918-1919 (2 envelopes in English)
- (1-3) From France Undated (1 envelope in French)
- (1-4) From France 1915-1917 (6 envelopes in French)
- (1-5) From Germany Undated (2 envelopes in German)
- (1-6) From Germany 1914-1915 (20 envelopes in German and French)
- (1-7) From Germany 1916-1918 (21 envelopes in German, French, and English)
- (1-8) From Russia 1916-1917 (4 envelopes in German, French, and Russian)
- (1-9) From Austria Hungary Undated (2 postcards)
- (1-10) From Austria Hungary 1915-1918 (19 postcards in German, Italian, French, English, and Bosnian, one with descriptive card)
- (1-11) From Belgium 1917 (1 postcard in French)
- (1-12) From Germany 1915-1917 (23 postcards and 1 letter in German, Italian, French, and English)
- (1-13) From Germany 1918 (24 postcards and 1 letter in German, French, English, and Russian)
- (1-14) From Russia 1915-1917 (5 postcards in German and another unknown language)

Subseries B: From Civilians

- (1-15) From Belgium Undated (1 postcard in French)
- (1-16) From Belgium 1915 (4 postcards in French)

- (1-17) From Italy 1918 (1 postcard in Italian)
- (1-18) From Russia 1915-1916 (2 postcards in Russian, both with descriptive cards)
- (1-19) From Switzerland 1917 (1 postcard in English)

Subseries C: Miscellaneous Materials

- (1-20) Letter Card From France 1915 (1 letter card in French)
- (1-21) Correspondence, No Place of Origin (1 postcard and 1 letter in French and an unknown language)
- (1-22) Envelopes, No Place of Origin (5 envelopes in English, French, and an unknown language)
- (1-23) Unused Postcards (5 blank postcards in French with auction card)

Series 2 (World War II Materials)

Subseries A: From POW camps

- (1-24) From Algeria 1941-1944 (2 envelopes in English and French)
- (1-25) From Austria 1941(1 envelope with 3 extra stamps and descriptive card)
- (1-26) From India Undated (5 envelopes in English with descriptive cards)
- (1-27) From India 1941-1943 (2 envelopes in English with descriptive card)
- (1-28) From Libya Undated (1 envelope in Italian)
- (1-29) No Place of Origin (1 envelope in English with “India” and prisoner of war camp stamps)

Box 2 – WWII

Subseries A (cont’d): From POW camps

- (2-1) From Algeria 1944 (1 letter in Italy)
- (2-2) From Britain Undated (2 letters in German and Italian)
- (2-3) From Britain 1943-1946 (5 postcards and 6 letters in German and Italian)
- (2-4) From Czechoslovakia 1944 (2 partial packing slips in German)
- (2-5) From Egypt 1941 (1 notification in Italian)
- (2-6) From France 1945 (1 letter in Italian)
- (2-7) From Hungary 1940 (1 postcard)
- (2-8) From India 1942-1943 (2 letters in Italian with descriptive card)
- (2-9) From Italy 1941-1943 (4 postcards and 1 letter in English)
- (2-10) From Poland 1942-1944 (1 postcard, 1 letter, and 3 package slips in English and German)
- (2-11) From South Africa 1945 (1 letter in Italian)
- (2-12) From Taiwan Undated (1 postcard in English)
- (2-13) From United States 1943-1945 (8 postcards and 7 letters in Italian)
- (2-14) From OFLAG IIC – Woldenberg 1943 (1 card)
- (2-15) From OFLAG IID – Gross Born 1944 (1 letter in Polish)
- (2-16) From OFLAG VIB – Dussel-Warburg 1943 (1 postcard in Polish)

- (2-17) From OFLAG VIIA – Murnau am Staffelsee 1941-1944 (2 postcards and 2 letters in Polish with descriptive card)
- (2-18) From OFLAG 64 – Schubin 1944 (3 letters in English)
- (2-19) From Stalag IIB – Hammerstein Schlochau 1944 (1 letter in French)
- (2-20) From Stalag IIC – Greifswald 1941 (1 letter in French)
- (2-21) From Stalag IIE – Schwerin 1944 (1 letter in Italian)
- (2-22) From Stalag IIIA – Luckenwalde 1944 (1 postcard in Italian)
- (2-23) From Stalag IIIB – Furstenberg/Oder 1944 (1 postcard in Italian)
- (2-24) From Stalag IIIC – Alt-Drewitz 1943 (1 postcard in Italian)
- (2-25) From Stalag IIID – Berlin 1944 (1 postcard in Italian)
- (2-26) From Stalag IVB – Muhlberg 1940-1941 (2 letters in French)
- (2-27) From Stalag IVC – Wistriz bei Teplitz 1944 (1 parcel receipt and 1 postcard in English and Italian)
- (2-28) From Stalag IVD – Torgau 1940-1944 (1 postcard and 2 envelopes in German and Italian)
- (2-29) From Stalag IVG – Oschatz 1943 (1 letter in Italian)
- (2-30) From Stalag VA – Ludwigsburg 1941-1943 (5 postcards and 7 letters in French)
- (2-31) From Stalag VIF – Bocholt 1943-1944 (1 letter and 1 postcard in Polish and Italian)
- (2-32) From Stalag VIG – Bonn-Duisdorf 1944 (1 postcard in Italian)
- (2-33) From Stalag VIIA – Moosburg 1944 (1 postcard in Italian)
- (2-34) From Stalag VIIIA – Gorlitz 1944 (1 parcel receipt in English)
- (2-35) From Stalag VIIIB – Lamsdorf 1942-1943 (8 postcards in English and French, 4 are completely censored)
- (2-36) From Stalag IXA – Ziegenhain 1940-1944 (1 postcard and 1 parcel receipt in French and English)
- (2-37) From Stalag XA – Schleswig 1944 (1 postcard in Italian)
- (2-38) From Stalag XIA – Altengrabow 1943-1944 (2 postcards in Italian and English)
- (2-39) From Stalag XIB – Fallingbostal 1944 (1 postcard in Italian)
- (2-40) From Stalag XIC – Bergen Belsen 1944 (1 parcel receipt in English)
- (2-41) From Stalag XIID – Trier 1942 (1 postcard in French with descriptive card)
- (2-42) From Stalag XIIF – Forbach 1944 (1 postcard and 2 letters in Italian)
- (2-43) From Stalag XIII A – Bad Sulzbach 1943 (1 letter in French)
- (2-44) From Stalag XIII C – Hammelburg 1941 (8 letters in Polish)
- (2-45) From Stalag XIII D – Nuremberg 1941 (1 envelope in German)
- (2-46) From Stalag 344 – Vilnius 1943-1944 (1 post card, 1 letter, and 4 parcel receipts in English)
- (2-47) From Stalag 369 – Krakow/Kobierzyn 1944 (1 letter in Dutch)
- (2-48) From Stalag 383 – Hohenfels 1944 (3 parcel receipts in English)

Subseries B: From Forced Labor Camps

- (2-49) From Austria 1942 (1 letter)
- (2-50) From Germany Undated (1 envelope in French)

- (2-51) From Germany 1942-1945 (6 postcards, 5 letters, and 4 envelopes in Polish, Russian, French, and German with descriptive cards)
- (2-52) From Poland 1942-1945 (7 postcards, 1 letter, and 1 envelope in German, Polish, and possibly Frisian with descriptive cards)

Subseries C: From Concentration Camps

- (2-53) From Czechoslovakia – Theresienstadt 1944 (1 postcard in German)
- (2-54) From Germany – Buchenwald 1940-1943 (3 postcards and 2 letters in German)
- (2-55) From Germany – Dachau 1940-1945 (10 letters and 1 envelope in German; 1 is a facsimile from the 1960s/1970s of original letter with a translation into English)
- (2-56) From Germany – Mauthausen-Gusen Undated (1 letter in German)
- (2-57) From Germany – Mauthausen-Gusen 1941-1944 (5 letters and 1 envelope in German)
- (2-58) From Germany – Sachsenhausen-Oranienburg 1940-1943 (3 postcards and 3 letters in German with descriptive card)
- (2-59) From Poland – Auschwitz 1942-1944 (1 postcard and 5 letters in German with descriptive cards; 2 are facsimiles from the 1960s/1970s of original letters with translations in English)
- (2-60) From Poland – Gross-Rosen 1943 (3 letters in German)

Box 3 – WWII

Subseries D: From Civilians

- (3-1) From Algeria 1944 (1 envelope in Italian)
- (3-2) From Austria 1938 (1 envelope)
- (3-3) From Britain Undated (2 envelopes in English)
- (3-4) From Britain 1942-1944 (2 postcards, 2 letters, and 4 envelopes in English and Italian with an auction card)
- (3-5) From France 1940-1943 (26 envelopes in French)
- (3-6) From France – Refugee Camps 1941 (1 envelope in French)
- (3-7) From French Equatorial Africa 1943 (1 envelope in French)
- (3-8) From Germany Undated (1 postcard in German)
- (3-9) From Germany 1938-1944 (3 postcards and 1 packing slip in German)
- (3-10) From Germany – Civilian Camps 1942-1943 (2 postcards in English and another unknown language)
- (3-11) From Guadeloupe 1943 (1 envelope in French)
- (3-12) From Italy 1942 (1 envelope in Italian)
- (3-13) From India Undated (1 envelope in English)
- (3-14) From Italy 1944 (2 postcards in Italian)
- (3-15) From New Zealand 1942 (1 envelope in English with descriptive card)
- (3-16) From South Africa 1943 (1 envelope in English with descriptive card)

Subseries E: Postwar Materials

- (3-17) From Brazil 1945/1946 (1 postcard in German)
- (3-18) From France Undated (5 postcards in Spanish and French)
- (3-19) From France 1946-1979 (6 postcards, 2 letters, and 9 envelopes in French, English, and Spanish)
- (3-20) From Germany 1946-1975 (1 postcard, 1 letter, and 3 envelopes in German)
- (3-21) From the United States 1948 (1 envelope in English)

Subseries F: Miscellaneous Materials

- (3-22) From Belgium – Anti-Semitic Labels (3 anti-Semitic labels from the Belgian “La défense du Peuple” party in French and German)
- (3-23) From Burma (Myanmar) – Work Receipt 1944 (1 work receipt in English)
- (3-24) From Germany – Dachau – Postage Receipts (2 receipts in German)
- (3-25) From Germany – Mauthausen – Postage Receipts (4 receipts in German)
- (3-26) From India – Stamps 1942 (Part of an envelope with 5 stamps and descriptive card)
- (3-27) From Taiwan – Gardening Manual (1 manual in English)
- (3-28) From Taiwan – Photographs (9 photographs from a Japanese-run POW camp in Taiwan with descriptions in English and 1 envelope with description of material)
- (3-29) Correspondence, No Place of Origin (1 postcard in unknown language)
- (3-30) Unused Postcards (2 postcards)

Related Collections

- MS-056 – World War II German Prisoners of War Collection
- MS-117 – Papers of George H. Sweet Jr. '42
- MS-131 – Jes Jerry Jessen World War I
- MS-171 – Corporal Luther Jacob “Jake” Thomas Papers