

It Would Be Sacrificing the Nation's Honor . . .

WHAT AND WHY? This **Display Class exhibit** evolved from the card on the cover page. The writer of the card had been living with in-laws since the first day of the Germany's WW I invasion of Belgium. The card led to the idea of using stamps, cancellations, and related materials (maps, postcards, newspapers) to show some of what happened to unoccupied Free Belgium—**any area not under German control when an item was mailed**. The time period is **from August 3, 1914 to the end of 1918**, a period including invasion, occupation, shooting of civilian hostages, damage from bombardments, shortages (of food, stamps, etc.), and intentional destruction of property to terrorize the population. Yet it also is a time of people going on with life, mail being delivered to locations near and far, and government continuing to function. It all was part of life in free Belgium.

Consistent with the time frame of the exhibit, all picture post cards in the exhibit were mailed between August 3, 1914 and December 31, 1918 and almost all have Belgian stamps or Belgian origination markings. The stamp and postmark side of picture post cards is shown when the franking or post mark is of interest.

The German-run postal system in occupied Belgium is **not** included as this is the Belgians' story, not the Germans'.

I. THE INVASION MONTHS: the postal system of Free Belgium continued to handle civilian mail from the day of the German invasion (August 4, 1914) through the end of the war. Items posted during the invasion months, August-October, 1914, came from towns later occupied but being served by the Belgian postal service when mailed. (Until mid-October 1914, the German army continued to occupy a growing fraction of Belgium, thus replacing the Belgian postal service with German-run service, stamps, and regulations.)

Items include mail held for five or more days reputedly to keep information from the Germans. Also included is mail from towns in which Belgian hostages were taken and later executed. Maps are used throughout to aid understanding.

II. TOWNS NEVER OCCUPIED: Twenty-three towns in never-occupied western Belgium had civilian post offices for all or part of World War I. A representative selection of mail from most of the towns shows various usages and destinations. Items include mail from **Proven, a town with one of the smallest volumes of originated mail** during World War I, and a card from **Ypres on the day the post office was destroyed**. The never-occupied mail also includes mail from a Belgian enclave within neutral Holland (Baarle-Hetog/Baarle-Duc), and a Belgian village (Elisabethville-Birtley Durham) created in England to provide jobs for refugees and workers for munitions plants. **Mail from Elisabethville-Birtley is uncommon and a challenge to obtain.**

Some items from towns-never-occupied are franked with stamps printed by Waterlow and Sons of London for the Belgian postal service when supplies began to run low. Use of Waterlow was a step to deal with a shortage of stamps and the lack of secure and adequate printing facilities in unoccupied Belgium.

III. GOVERNMENT-IN-EXILE: this includes material from the two consecutive G-i-E post offices in Ste. Adresse, France canceled first with a LE HAVRE CDS and later with a STE. ADRESSE CDS. Consistent with the rest of the exhibit, various usages and destinations are shown, including use of older postal material and mixed French-British-Belgian postage and cancels, reflecting the shortage of postal supplies.

IV. MILITARY: this mail has military origination markings. The section opens with an explanation of the military franking privilege and illustrative examples. All WW I military cancellations are represented, **including the briefly-used 8^{BIS} CDS**. Also in this section is an example of mail relayed through the neutral Netherlands to reach occupied Belgium.

V. POST-WAR: the Armistice did not end the influence of the war on Free Belgium. Belgium, the **world's** sixth-ranking industrial economy before WW I, would **never** be the same again. This section illustrates some of the postmark and stamp alternatives used when the postal service of free Belgium became responsible for the previously-occupied 97% of the country. The section concludes with a November 11, 1918 newspaper from Brussels with the marginal note, "*no more famine now.*"