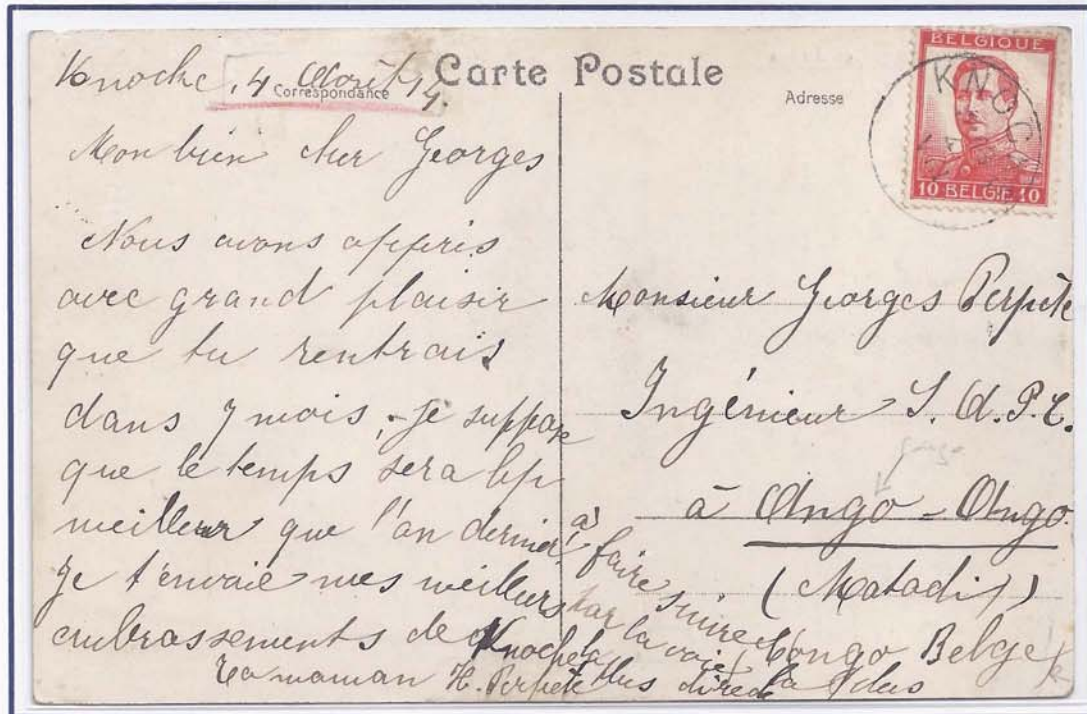


FROM SARAJEVO TO YPRES

During the first three months of the Great War more than a million German soldiers crossed Belgium. Houses were devastated and plundered. At least 6000 civilians were shot, women and girls were raped and thousands of men, women and children were deported to German prison camps.



First day of WW I – Postcard sent from Knocke on 8.VIII-14 to Matadi (Belgian Congo)

This exhibit presents the first chapters of an open class collection (under construction) about the history of WW I



Lest we forget ...

90th Anniversary of the end of Worldwar I - Western Front (center)

1. Historical Background

The Treaty of London 1839 ended the hostilities between The Netherlands and Belgium. Limburg to the right of the Maas and Maastricht went to the Netherlands and the German speaking part of Luxemburg came under a personal union with Willem I. Free entrance to the Port of Antwerp was guaranteed. Great Britain and Prussia guaranteed the neutrality and safety of Belgium. Therefor Belgium asked for British, French and Russian support on August 4th, 1914.



Leopold I of Belgium



Belgian and Netherlands Limburg



Willem III of The Netherlands and Luxemburg



The Unification of Germany was introduced by the Frankfurt Parliament (Paulskirchen-verfassung), sitting from May 18th 1848 to May 31st 1849. Although the Parliament demanded the incorporation of the whole of Austria into the new state the dice had fallen in favour of a smaller German Empire by December 1848. The Prussian King Frederik Wilhem IV was proposed as emperor, but refused to be crowned by the people. Real unification was realised in a military way after the Franco-Prussian war

150 years of Paulskirchen-verfassung
(& 50 years of Parleментар council)



The Franco-Prussian War (1870) was won by the Prussians. General **Helmuth von Moltke**, Chief of the German Army, was a genial strategic, who had important victories in Königgrätz and Sedan. During the 'Siège of Paris' post could only be transferred by balloon.

Letter From Paris/Rue St. Dom^{que} 27 sept 70 to Gent 19 oct 70.

Sent by Balloon "Les Etats-Unis" on the first day after proclamation of the decree. Tariff = Foreign 30c. - Franking Empire 5c. pair + Empire Lauré 20 c.



General von Moltke

1. Historical Background

In 1871 the **Prussian Prime Minister Otto von Bismarck** unifies the German states with "Blut und Eisen" (blood and iron). The new state became very industrialized. Specially the Krupp family played an important role in it. **Gustav Krupp** von Bohlen und Halbach oriented the factory completely to war industry.



The Germans expected a revenge of France and could use this as a reason to attack France in 1914, following the plan, worked out by **Marshall Von Schlieffen**.



Postal stationery for 100 year Firma Krupp



On 28 June 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, heir presumptive to the Austro-Hungarian throne, and his wife, Sophie, Duchess of Hohenberg, were shot in Sarajevo by Gavrilo Princip, a Servian Nationalist. The political objective of the assassination was to break off Austria-Hungary's south-Slav provinces so they could be combined into one Yugoslavia.



Franz Ferdinand & Sophie



Franz Ferdinand



Sarajevo



Nicolas II

On July 23rd Vienna formulated an ultimatum to Serbia: Serbia had to assume the responsibility for the attack and the case had to be sought investigated thoroughly by Austrian police officers. The latter was unacceptable for Serbia and it announced mobilization. Austria also announced mobilization. Russia decided to support Serbia militarily. A conciliation Conference remained without consequence. Austria declared war on Serbia on July 28th. Tsar Nicholas II mobilized Russia on July 30th. Germany suggested in a 12-hours ultimatum that the Russian mobilization had to be withdrawn. Russia failed to answer. Germany declared war on August 1st. Accordingly the alliance with Russia, France decided to mobilization too.

1. Historical Background

At the beginning of the 20th century there were only 2 republics in Europe : France and Switzerland. All the other countries were ruled by princes, kings or emperors. Quite all had ties with the British crown.



This was absolutely no guarantee for peace. They all belonged to different camps during WW I. Also the German Emperor Wilhelm II and King Albert I were distant cousins. Wilhem II was the grandson of Queen Victoria and Albert I was the grand-son of Leopold I of Belgium, uncle of Queen Victoria.

Emperor Wilhelm dreamed of a German colonial empire and of building out a large naval force. He sacked

Otto von Bismarck. After Sarajevo, he gave unconditional support to the Austrians. During the war he was commander in Chief but was unable to real ledership and from 1916 on the chiefs of the army Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff were de facto dictators of Germany.

Letter from King Albert I of Belgium to his Uncle «Sa Majesté le Tsar des Bulgares» (Opponents during WW I)

The letter deals with the interest of his uncle for the illness of his wife Queen Elisabeth, but specially with a diplomatic question concerning the Belgian ambassador in Sofia, Mr. Vanderheyden. This testifies that even before WWI Albert I was personally concerned with state affairs.



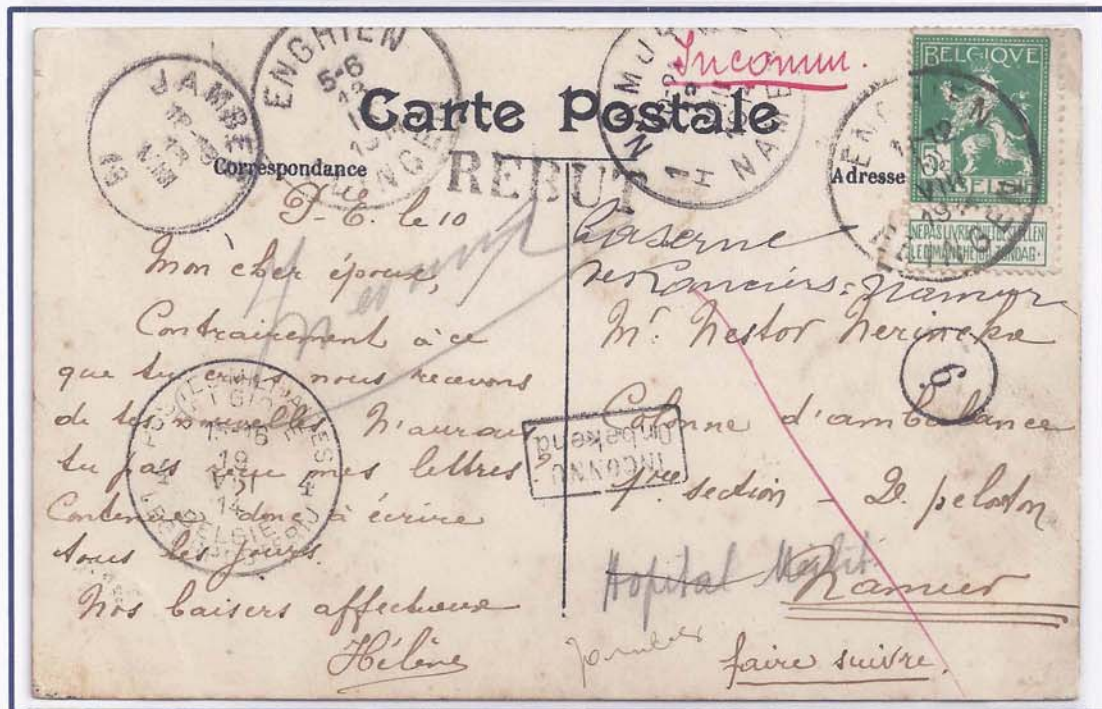
The letter was probably sent by diplomatic mail.

Royal seal



2. German Invasion of Belgium

The **General Mobilization** is declared on Friday 31 July 1914. All classes up to 1901 are summoned. After the mobilization there are 13 classes active. On 4 August the classes 1900 and 1899 are also summoned. The large number of not delivered letters testifies that mobilization happened in great disorder.



Postcard from Enghien 10.VIII.14 to 'Colonne d'Ambulance/1re section - 2nd peloton / Namur /faire suivre.
Cancellations Namur 13.VII / Jambes 13.VIII / In Military post circuit 19.VIII. Written and canceled 'inconnu'. To REBUT-service.

Letter sent within the military post circuit
Belgian Army Post 8 - 4.XII. 14 to Mr. Fur-
nemont, Volontaire, 2^e I 1 Da. Unknown at
different places in Northern France. Can-
celation Belgian Army Post 4. XII. 14.



2. German Invasion of Belgium

August 2nd 1914 King Albert I wrote a personal letter to the German Emperor, in a final attempt to avert disaster. At 7 pm. as an answer an ultimatum was given in which was informed that France would attack Germany via Belgium. At the same time German troops already were passing the Luxembourg border. Luxembourg came into German hands the same day. King Albert I gave a negative answer to Germany on August 3rd after he had received the confirmation of armed support from the United Kingdom and France. In response, Germany declared war to France.

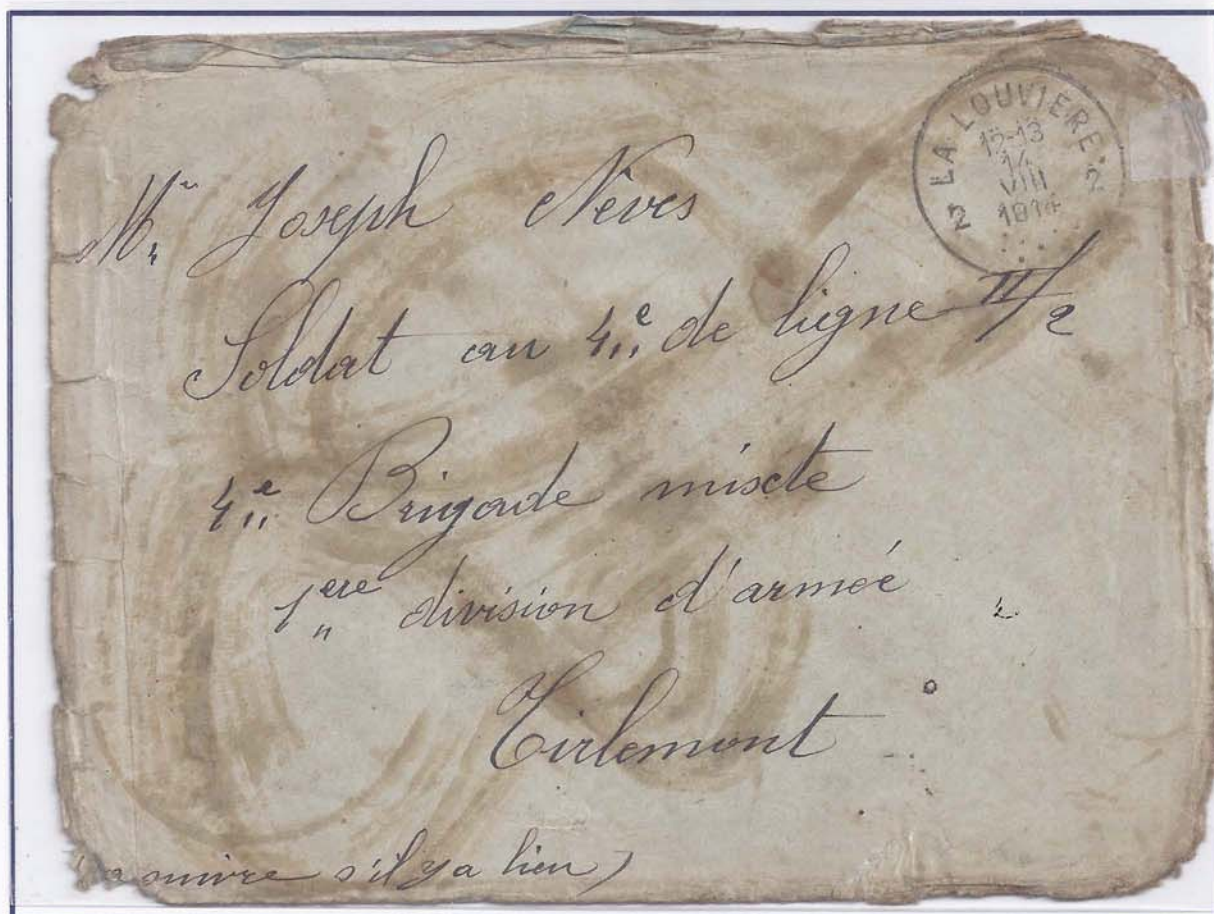


According to this, the Belgian armies were moved as followed:

- 1st Division from Ghent to Tienen
- 2nd Division from Antwerp to Leuven
- 3rd Division would move to Tongeren but Minister of war De Brocqueville sent this Division to Liege
- 4th Division remained in Namur
- 5th Division from Mons to Peruwez
- 6th Division from Brussels to Wavre



5th, 2nd and 4th regiment infantry (Cinderella's)



The 1st Division was moved to Tienen – Letter from Lalouvière 14. VIII. 1914 to Soldier 1st Division/Tirlemont. "Suivre s'il y a lieu". The letter was sent by Antwerp (14. VIII. 14). Because the letter is sent after the battle van Halen and before the battle of Aarschot, the 1st Division was probably on the battlefield (State of the letter!).

2. German Invasion of Belgium

The RAID on August 4th 1914 was led by the 1st German army under General Alexander von Kluck and the 2nd army of General Karl von Bülow. At 7.30 pm German troops entered at Gemmenich. 34,000 Germans under the command of General Von Emmich with 125 pieces of artillery approached the forts around Liege. These were defended by the Belgian 3rd Division (ca. 23,000 men) under General Gérard Leman and some smaller units, 500 vigilantes and the crew of the forts (app. 32,000 man). They had about 250 new cannons, a hundred outdated pieces and 30 machine guns. On request of the Belgian Crown Council Great Britain sent at 11 p.m. an ultimatum to Germany to leave Belgium. After refusal Great Britain declared war to Germany. The British Field Marshal H. Kitchener gave the order to cross the channel.



Post-paid - Ministère de la Guerre - Navire Frigorifique Général Leman - Trésor et Postes *506 - 2.5.16

The Germans, who beat a bridgehead over the Meuse River, were driven back by artillery from the Fort of Pontisse. Heavy reprisals followed: houses were set on fire and 36 people were shot. The Fort held out until August 13th.

On August, 16th the Germans hit the ammunition room of Fort Loncin, that burned out.. General Leman surrendered.



Loncin



Gen. Leman



Gemmenich



Fort de Pontisse - Permis de sortir 9.10.1912

The Germans try to cross the Maas in Lixhe and penetrate the South between Boncelles and the Ourthe.



From August 6th on, German troops penetrate Limburg. On August 12th the Battle of the Silver Helms took place at Haelen. The German advance to the North was interrupted.

2. German Invasion of Belgium

The battle of Sint-Margriet-Houtem - 18 August 1914. After the battle of Haelen Belgian soldiers were drawn up around Tienen to prevent the advance of the Germans. 2,200 Belgian soldiers of the 22nd regiment, a battalion of the 3rd regiment and three batteries of four cannons each tried to stop the German army, which was about six times as numerous. The battle is also referred to as the **Battle of the Seven Zils**.



Postcard with only name (print rate) sent from Tienen on 18. IV. 14, the day of the battle!



Center of Tienen (Trapstraat & St. Germanushurch) – Specimen.

Aarschot was occupied on August, 19th 1914 by the 8th infantry brigade under Colonel John Stenger. Stenger was shot in the Center (probably by one of his own soldiers). This was followed by heavy German reprisals. The civil and administrative life was disrupted, so that at the end of 1918 a date stamp was even not available.



Postcard from Aarschot to Antwerp (28.12.1918). Stamped in Aarschot with a very old line cancel of the rural post and two linear cancels Aarschot.



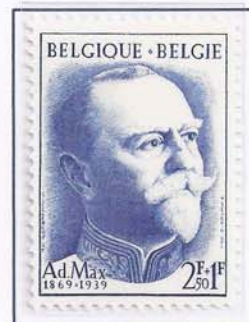
Numerous citizens and b.o. the mayor, were shot

2. German Invasion of Belgium

Brussels was occupied on August 20th, 1914 without fighting or artillery fire. Mayor Adolphe Max had asked the citizens not to fight themselves. The capital came fairly undamaged out of the war. Nevertheless there was resistance. Edith Cavell, founder of the first nurse school in Belgium, was executed for taking care of British soldiers..



Field postcard with cancellation Lazarett Brussel -14.9.15



Adolphe Max



Florence Nightengale
& Edith . Cavell

After the Battle of Leuven the university town was occupied on August 20th. A Belgian counteroffensive did withdraw a number of German soldiers. They were seen as Belgians and shot by the Germans. As a reprisal many citizens were murdered and many houses put on fire, among others the University Library.



Registered letter from St. Adresse (23. IV 17) -Correct franking 50 c. library of Leuven - to Washington. ' Ouvert par l'Autorité militaire and censorship strip ' Control Postal Mil '. Verso: Bordeaux 25.4.17 and Washington, May, 13, 1917.



University library
burning (Cinderella)



2. German Invasion of Belgium

The battle of borders is fought between 14 and 24 August 1914 in the Ardennes region and the North of Metz. French armies under General Ruffey and General de Langle de Cary are severely damaged. The French drew back near Verdun. The Germans set up many military hospitals.



Gen de Langle de Cary



Feldpost - Metz * Festungslazarett III - 22.1.17



Maréchal Joffre

In Tamines (Charleroi) on August 21st the Germans use a living shield of 650 citizens against the French bullets. Their design fails and they put the houses on fire and murder 460 men.

Feldpost – Kriegslazarett * Chareleroi – (23.XI.15)



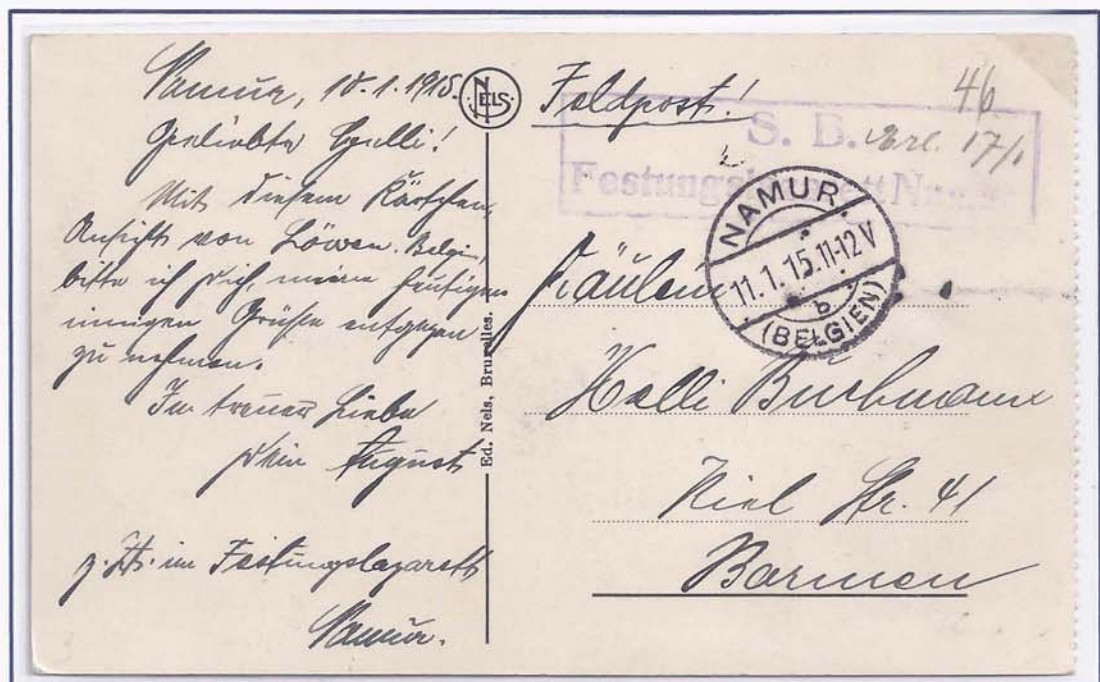
In Dinant more than 80 men are shot on August 22nd, the city is then set on fire. Also women and children were killed.

Manschafts Genes. Heim / Ardennenschloss / bei Dinant in Belgien – 14.2.15



French commander-in-Chief, General Joseph Joffre, sets up the 5th Army of General Charles Lanrezac between Sambre and Meuse to block the German invasion. The Germans use heavy howitzers to take Namur and more than 27,000 French soldiers die. Namur finally falls on August 25th.

Feldpost – Festungslazarett * Namur – 11.1.15



2. German Invasion of Belgium

During the battle of Mons on August 23rd there is a first contact between the Germans and the British. The 4th Battalion, the Royal Fusiliers, lose many soldiers.



Feldpost – Kriegslazarett * Mons – 2.8.1915



Royal Fusiliers (Cincerella)

The British Expeditionary Force, killed many German soldiers but then they were forced to withdraw five miles backwards. The battle of Borders will come to an end.

However, the Germans miscalculated. Von Moltke sends a part of the army to Paris, to the Alsace region and to Belgium. He also sends two more Corps to the eastern front. Joffre now knows the location of the German troops and prepares for a counter attack in the northeast of France from Verdun. Two new armies, under General Foch and under General Maunoury, became active.



Meanwhile the German war crimes in Belgium go on. On Friday September 4th strong divisions of the German army invade Dendermonde. The Belgian army offered little resistance and withdrew beyond the Schelde. The following two days pioneers of the 8th regiment (Hamburg) put the city systematically on fire. Numerous inhabitants were shot.



La Destruction de Termonde — L'Anéantissement complet d'une rue



On October 8th, in still unoccupied Bruges postcards with the ravages of Dendermonde were available

2. German Invasion of Belgium

On August 10th, 1914 the official institutions withdrew to Antwerp. Also the stamp printing company moved to Antwerp. The Red Cross stamps (De Merode and small Portrait King Albert) are printed at the company Verschueren.



On September 6th 1914 – after a parade – King Albert dismisses his Chief of staff Antonin de Selliers de Moranville and the generals De Rijckel and Dufour and takes himself the operational management of the Belgian army.



In this period also the control measures with regard to the post were installed. Normal post from Antwerp was deliberately held up for three days.



Postcard – Postpaid (S.M.)

Sent from Antwerp 1 on 19.

VIII. 14 to Ostend. Arrival on 25.

VIII. 14. Conscious delay

2. German Invasion of Belgium

Antwerp 1 (Groenplaats) was the transit Office for all post. Here a first control of trade-, banking- and foreign letters and of all registered letters was done. There is also a control according to a list of 'suspects'. The letters are not opened. They receive a cancel "NAGEZIEN-VERIFIE", a cancel that was used before the war to recognize printed matter. It is used from August to the beginning of October 1914.



Letter from Antwerp 1 op 22.IX.14 to Stockholm (Sweden) 1.X.14.
Control cancel 'Nagezien/Verifié'. English label 'Opened by censor'.

From the end of September on, one by one the forts around Antwerp were shot by Austrian Skoda mortars caliber 305. Zeppelins bombarded Antwerp in the first days of October and on October 10th Antwerp fell into German hands. The stamps printed at Verschuieren are rushed to Ostend and the engraved printing plates had to be destroyed, which did not happen.. After the war a large numbers of false Merode-series appeared.



Skoda-mortier



Zeppelin

Falsification to identify by the Q of Belgique that appears as an O.
Presumably also the cancellation is falsified.

2. German Invasion of Belgium

Already on October 2nd King Albert I ordered the withdrawal to Ostend, where the British arrived the next day. When Winston Churchill visited Antwerp on October 4th it was already too late and the Germans could no longer be stopped. On the night of 6/7 October the Belgian troops crossed secretly the Schelde. The next day the Belgian Government and the diplomatic corps left for Ostend, but they left again for Le Havre on 12/13 November.



Winston Churchill

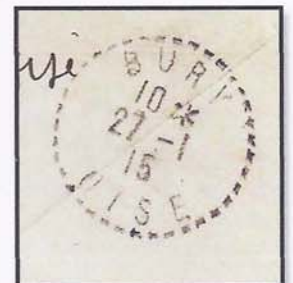


President Poincaré

On October 10th 1914 the Belgian Government asks permission to France to settle at Le Havre. President Poincaré consents on October 11th, 1914. The Belgian Government reached Le Havre on October 13th 1914 by ferry of State 'Pieter de Coninck'.

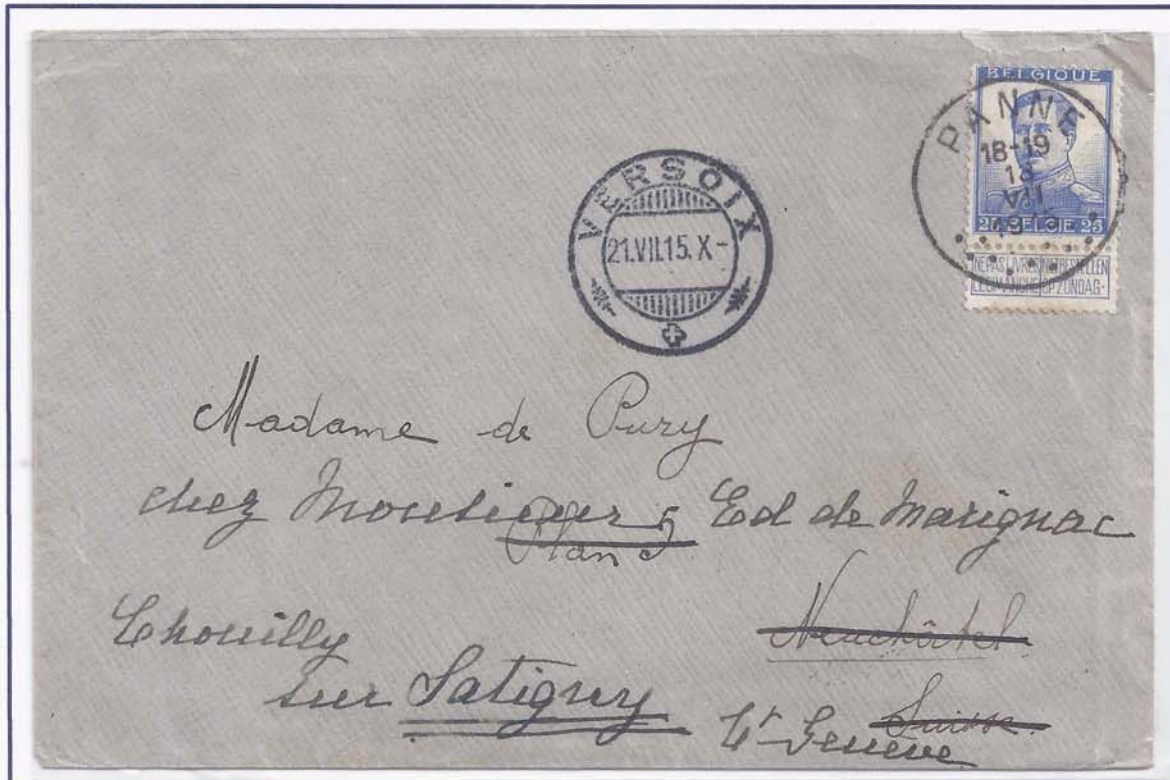


Letter from the "Ministère de la Guerre/Courrier de l'Armée" to a « Carabinier belge » à Bury. Cancellation Ste Adresse – Seine-Inf^e – 25.1-15. Verso: Bury/Oise 27.1.15. Undeliverable.



2. German Invasion of Belgium

The German armies will now advance quickly to take the Channel ports. After consultation with Mayor Braun the Germans take Ghent on October 12th without resistance and destruction. Bruges was occupied on October 14th. The next day, French, British and Belgian troops dug trenches behind the Yser. The battle of the Yser could start.



Ghent



Bruges

Letter from De Panne (behind the Yser) 18.VII.15 to Neufchatel (verso), forwarded via Versoix to Satigny 22.VII.15

For almost 4 years the Belgian territory is limited to a small strip behind the Yser and the Belgian enclave Baarle-Hertog.

Registered letter from
Baarle-Hertog 17.XI.17
to Washington DC
18.Dec.17. – **Oval
cancellation “Ouvert
par l’Autorité
Militaire” – Strip
“Controle Postal
Militaire”.**

Tariff : 50 c. by one
stamp Louvain Library.



2. German Invasion of Belgium

The intention of the Germans was to occupy all the Channel ports, to prevent ammunition and troops to be transferred. Envelopes were issued by the Germans with private additional printing, mentioning the dates on which important Belgian cities capitulated, ending with "Am Meer bei Ostende : 15 Oktober"



The brave Résistance of the Belgian army and its allies at the Yser prevented that the ports in France were occupied.

