

The Polish P.O.W. Games of 1944

We are indebted to Heiko Volk of Michelstadt, W. Germany, for the following page from his book. The German text of Mr. Volk's page is translated into English:

"The Camp-post Woldenberg existed from 7 May 1942 until it was closed 25 January 1945. Each block in the camp which was occupied by prisoners had a postal station. The mail boxes were picked up twice daily. The postal tariffs were published routinely.

An "Olympic Committee" was elected by the occupants of the camp for the games at Woldenberg to be held from 23 July until 13 August 1944. Within the camp were several sport clubs representing certain regions participating in the following disciplines: 100 meter race, 4x100 meter relay, long jump, high jump, football, basketball, shot put, volleyball, handball, boxing and 10 kilometer walk.

The program of the games was printed on a prospectus which was ornamented with three vignettes showing motifs of the games of old.

The "Olympic Committee" was not paid and all expenses were paid by the sale of these vignettes which sold for 1 mark, 1 mark and 3 marks, which was ample.



The opening ceremony of the games was of ceremonial character. After raising the Olympic flag the participants and guests listened to poems which celebrated the success of previous Games. We have the members of the Committee to thank for saving the flag of Woldenberg which is now in the Sport-Museum of Warsaw, Poland."

Note: Further information on Polish P.O.W. games, from 2 other sources, now follows on 5 following pages. Assorted items that issued within the Woldenberg and Gross-Born camps are listed and illustrated.

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"In the Autumn of 1939, after bloody battles which followed the Nazi aggression on Poland, tens of thousands of Polish soldiers were taken prisoner and spent more than 5 years in German POW camps called "Kriegesgefangenlager" (OFFLAG - Offizierlager).

"The development of social life and social contacts in the camps required the organization of communication links between the dozens of barracks inhabited by thousands of officers. Under the provisions of the Geneva Convention prisoners-of-war have the right to set up their own self-government in the camp. On that basis prisoners' post offices were created.

"The actual printing of stamps was done in a very primitive way as every single stamp was, as a rule, printed separately from small woodcuts prepared by graphic artists who were among the POWs. Initially, the stamps were printed on scraps of newsprint and hence identical stamps were often made on several different kinds of paper. Later paper for the purpose was obtained through the intermediary of the Red Cross which made the process much easier.

"The color of the stamps was decided by a postal commission and then approved by the Camp's Chief Postal Officer. Issued also, aside from stamps, were postcards.

"All stamps printed in the Woldenberg POW camp were imperforate. In Gross-Born some editions were perforated with a sharpened cog-wheel from a watch. Cancellation postmarks were made of rubber from worn-out soles of military boots or from damaged gas masks. Hence, they were not very durable. Despite extreme difficulties and primitive technology, the stamps, aside from their documentary value, represented a high level of graphic art.

"In the Woldenberg Camp, postal services functioned from May 12th, 1942, right up to the end, that is to January 25th, 1945. There was a post office in every barrack and mail was delivered twice daily.

"The Gross-Born Camp Post Office was opened on December 3rd, 1943 and was closed down on January 28th, 1945, when the camp was liquidated. Its activities were carried out on the same basis as in Woldenberg. The money unit in the camps was a mark divided into 100 pfennigs (pf.). The proceeds from the sale of the stamps was earmarked for the Widows and Orphans' Fund in Poland.

"As is known, the war prevented the holding of the Olympic Games in 1944. Yet, there was a group of people who, despite the war, resolved to organize sport contests between... prisoners-of-war.

"Preparations for the games, both in Woldenberg and in Gross-Born, began several weeks before the event and their organization was entrusted to the Camp Olympic Committees.

"In Woldenberg the Olympic Committee set up by the POWs, decided to hold the games from July 23rd to August 13th, 1944. The sports clubs in the camps - each grouping competitors from the different regions of the country, prepared the prospective participants in the games for the following events: 100 m dash, 1500 m race, 4x100 m relay, long jump, hop-step-and-jump, shot-put, football, basketball, volleyball, handball, boxing and 10,000 m walk."

Credit: The above-quoted information plus the listings on 4 following pages are from "Polish Olympic Chronicle in Philately" by Fabien Bura. Publisher: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, Warsaw. 1976, 144pp

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The Games of the XIII Olympiad did not take place because of World War II. But Olympic labels were issued by the Camp Olympic Committee which was formed in 1944 in the POW camp for Polish officers in Woldenberg, Poland. In order to popularize camp games organized by the POW's, three provisional imperforate labels were printed depicting the Olympic emblem and fragments of Olympic motifs:

1. 1,00 ZWKS/ across top; Olympic rings/ below. Vignette: head of a winner crowned with Olympic laurels.
23x30mm, black on green background Rare
 2. ZWKS/ across top; 1,00/ at lower left.
Vignette: uninterlaced Olympic rings below, the God Apollo with an Olympic laurel, behind rings.
23x30mm, black on blue background Rare
 3. ZWKS/ above uninterlaced Olympic rings, at lower right corner; 3,00/ at upper right corner. Vignette: Olympic laurel against the background of a Greek column.
37x22.5mm, black on red background Rare
- (ZWKS, "Związek Wojskowych Klubów Sportowych" which translates "Military Federated Sport Clubs.") "1" & "3" values are marks.

Note: It is not known whether or not the three above labels are available except as cutouts from the program, considered below. To quote Mr. Bura, "The Woldenberg labels also exist separately - pasted on letters."

One program of the mini-Olympics was printed on a special card embellished with the three, above-described, labels. This card is illustrated below. Its central text, above the labels, surrounds Olympic rings, in their usual multicolors (not interlaced but with the upper three rings printed on top of the lower two rings). The text states: Olympic/Year (rings) Woldenberg Camp/July 23 August 13/ 1944, in black; the program-text, to left and right, is black. The above descriptions of the three labels were obtained from this program-card. Rare
(See next page for another program which lists the events of the first four days of the Woldenberg games)



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Another rare program card is shown above. It lists the events of the first 4 days of the Woldenberg games (the larger card on the previous page continues such a listing, on to the final day, August 13th). The red stamp, considered below, is not imprinted but has been affixed and the cancel then applied. The August 13, 1944 cancel includes a flag and the text "Year 1944 Woldenberg Camp" above Olympic rings.

At the motion of the Camp Olympic Committee the camp post, upon the closure of the Woldenberg games, issued a commemorative postage-due stamp of 10 pf. face value.



1. POCZTA OB . OF . IIC/ across bottom. Vignette: a runner breasting a finish-line tape; Olympic rings at upper left; "10" at lower left. 26x40mm, imperforate, vignette design is white on red, the lower text is red \$20.00 (Meaning of text: Post Office Camp . Officers . Woldenberg)

(Designed by graphic artist Czarnecki. Printed on small pieces of paper, just large enough to hold one stamp, hence, does not exist in pairs. A total of 17,500 stamps were printed)

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Woldenberg Souvenir Postcards:

1. OBOZ IIC/ down upper right side of vignette; POZYTOWKA/ across upper right portion of card. Vignette, on left: depicts an athlete rising from the ground and hold high the Olympic torch, in front of Olympic rings.
151x68mm (overall card), 57x57mm (vignette), blue on white
2. Same as 1 but black
3. Same as 1 but red
4. Same as 1 but yellow
5. Same as 1 but green all Rare

(Translation: CAMP IIC POSTCARD)

Note: IIC designates Woldenberg Camp (IID designates Gross Born Camp)

The card is illustrated below with the red Woldenberg stamp affixed and cancelled with the same flag cancellation that is considered on the previous page. The red stamp is not imprinted on these cards.



The above example of these cards is from the collection of Morris Rosen, a noted Olympic philatelist. The color is earmine-violet, a red variety. The two shades of red indicate that these cards exist in color-shades.

Note: The major label & stamp issuances of the Woldenberg and Gross-Born P.O.W. camps, that relate to sports events held in 1944, are presented in this catalog for information purposes. Other items such as invitations of admittance to the games, winner's awards, etc. were also issued.

We are indebted to Messrs. Bura, Rosen & Volk for their kind permission to utilize their information and illustrations. We now conclude this presentation via listing the Gross Born P.O.W. stamps, on the following page.

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The news about the Camp Olympic Committee in the Woldenberg camp soon reached the Gross-Born camp situated several dozen kilometers away. There, too, a Camp Olympic Committee was set up and organized the Gross-Born Games which lasted from July 30th to August 15th. On the opening day three Olympic stamps were issued.

During the final days - i.e. from August 12th to 15th, the local philatelists club (there was one in the camp) organized an exhibition of stamps. This event was commemorated with a miniature sheet which depicted the three, above-mentioned Olympic stamps, in different colors. Only 1155 copies of the sheet were printed. This sheet is illustrated, with the "Philatelic Exhibition" postmark.

SS 1. About 140x93mm (this varies considerably), colors of the imprinted stamps: 10 pf - lilac, 20 pf - gray-green and 50 pf - brown \$200



The stamps, of same individual design as those on the souvenir sheet are now listed:

1. POCZTA/ across top; OBOZU II C/ across bottom; 10 (pf.)/ above bottom text. Vignette: Olympic rings surrounded by stylized laurel leaves. 21x26mm, perf 15 or imperf, red-brown or dark brown-rose, total edition: 5137
2. Same as 1 but 20 (pf.) and brown or olive-brown, total edition: 5245
3. POCZTA . OBOZU . II . D/ across top; OLIMPIADA/ across bottom; 50 (pf.)/ at lower left of vignette area. Vignette: Olympic rings above a speeding chariot. 38x25mm, perf 15 or imperf, dark green or emerald-green, total edition: 4702 Set of three \$75

Nos. 1, 2 & 3 were issued in sheets of ten (2x5)