



To Survive with Honour ...

Sports and Olympic Spirit in P.O.W. Camps

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THE WORLD WAR II STARTED BY NAZI GERMANY

1st September 1939 – the first day of the World War II

On this very day, 4.45 a.m., the German Nazi Third Reich started a bloody long world war, attacking Poland from air, land and sea. First, heavy guns of *Schleswig Holstein*, one of the Kriegsmarine's heaviest warships, were bombarding on *Westerplatte*, the Polish marine fortress nearby town of Gdańsk which sustained its position by 182 defenders for long seventeen days. In a front of heavy German panzer troops on ground and air forces *Luftwaffe*, the Polish Army, nearly 960.000 Polish officers and soldiers, led a heroic campaign, winning also several unequal battles.



1 September 1939, the World War II started by the Nazi Germany against Poland with bombardment on Westerplatte.



17 September 1939, the Soviet Union aggression on Poland. The Red Army tanks and cavalry troops grabbed the South-Eastern territories of Poland.

A Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, the Pact between the German Third Nazi Reich and the Soviet Union, signed on 23 August 1939 in Moscow, allowed Stalin to send the Red Army troops into Poland without any warning on 17 September 1939. Due to disorientation, significant parts of the Polish Army corps were “interned” by the Russians without specific combats.

In the Polish history, the beginning of the WW II is called the September's Campaign. The Campaign lasted until capitulation of the general Kleeberg's Army on 6 October 1939.

The Polish Army officers - victims of the Soviet's NKWD (National Commissariat for Internal Affairs)

Those of Polish militaries who were taken prisoners by Red Army have had no chance to survive. In the spring of 1940, in forests of Katyń and other places of execution, nearly twenty five thousands of the Polish officers were murdered with a one-shot by Soviet NKWD's soldiers. Among them, were Polish Olympians - Józef BARAN-BILEWSKI – the Olympian 1928, Stanisław URBAN – the Bronze medallist Los Angeles 1932, Zdzisław KAWECKI – the Silver medallist Berlin 1936 and Kazimierz Bocheński, the best Polish swimmer – the Olympian Berlin 1936.



The P.O.W. letter from the German camp for the Polish high rank officers and generals, Oflag IVB in Stargard, mailed on 11 Jan. 1940 to addressee in the Soviet occupation zone



The postal stationery of POCZTA POLSKA listing names of the Polish Officers, the Olympians, murdered by Nazi Germans during the WW II and also by Soviet NKWD in Katyn in 1940

The Polish Army on exile and in the underground

A part of Polish militaries managed to cross Polish-Romanian border and via many countries joined later military forces of European countries being in war with Hitler. The world witnessed heroism of Polish pilots in the Battle of England and contribution in top intelligence activities as the break of the German *Enigma* coding machine by Polish engineers and scientists. The history of the battles of Monte Cassino, Tobruk, Narvik, Arnhem, Breda and other places was written with Polish blood and desperation to liberate homeland from far away.



Ruins of the Old Town in Warsaw after September's 1939 Campaign and soldiers of the National Army on barricades during Warsaw Uprising 1944 against the German occupant



Thousands of militaries decided to stay in Poland, in the country under a bloody occupation by Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. Thousand of the Polish young patriots went into the underground National Army commanded by the Polish government on exile formed in London, the ever largest in the history of an underground military national movement.

Since July 1940, when Nazi Germany extended the war in Europe, about 3.1 million militaries of allied armies were taken prisoners by Nazi Germans and placed in P.O.W. camps all around Europe.

As consequences of the World War II which started in Europe on 1 September 1939 and continued by Nazi Germany until capitulation on 8 May 1945, the Olympic Games of 1940 and 1944 were cancelled.

THE POLISH PRISONERS OF WAR IN GERMAN CAMPS

The P.O.W. camps

During the 1939 September's Campaign, about 420.000 Polish soldiers and 20.000 officers were captured by Germans and placed in camps for Prisoners of War (P.O.W.) in which prisoner's rights were regulated by the convention of Geneva. In beginning, during 1939-1940, the Polish prisoners were placed in 28 camps. From 1942 they were condensed in five main big internment camps: Oflag II C Woldenberg, Oflag II D Gross

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Born, Oflag II E Neubrandenburg, Oflag VI B Dössel and Oflag VII A Murnau, each camp counting from up to seven thousands of the Polish militaries.



Two largest POW camps for Polish officers – Oflag IIC Woldenberg and Oflag II D Gross Born were located in North-East Germany, in a near vicinity

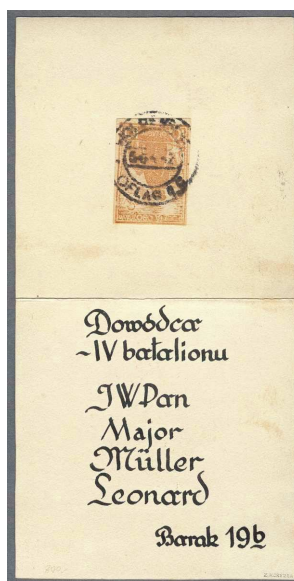
The camps were situated behind wired areas of 8 to 50 hectares. Large camps of a solid village size were divided into zones of restricted access.

Internal postal services in the P.O.W. camps

Organisation of Camp Posts

These huge numbers of the prisoners required organisation of external postal services, including censorship system which was controlled by German military authorities. However, there existed a great need for internal communication and different stuff delivery between prisoners and camp's organisations.

In first period, camp posts were limited to the collecting of out coming mails from prisoners and delivery them to the German censorship office as well were distributing incoming mails from families and relatives to prisoners-of-war, delivered via the German office. The release by Germans of restriction on free traffic of prisoners in the camps opened possibility for organisation of full internal postal services. In 1942, in four biggest Polish camps for officers (Oflag), i.e. Woldenberg Oflag II C, Gross Born II D, Murnau Oflag VII A and Neubrandenburg Oflag II E, internal postal administrations were set up and services started with the permission of German authority. The posts were operating on internal areas, not subjected to German administration due to international conventions. The postal administration was directly supervised by the Polish Senior Commander of the camp whose duty, in general, was reporting to the German commander of the camp on all aspects of the camp's life.



The Easter Greetings from the Sports Club "ORLE" delivered with "THE EASTER POST", franked with "The WIDOW" stamp, cancelled with the daily cancel 5-6.4.142, OFLAG II C.

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First trial of organisational abilities took place during so called “the Easter Post” organized in Oflag II C Woldenberg as a single event, 5-7 April 1942, with permission of German authorities. A purpose of the trail was to deliver Eastern greetings between prisoners and to collect funds for widows and orphans in the homeland. About twenty thousands stamps named “THE WIDOW” were distributed among prisoners. They took the opportunity and sent huge number of postcards franked with this “stamp”

After success of the Easter Post, a regular Woldenberg Camp Post was opened on May 7, 1942 and existed for the duration of the camp that is January 25, 1945.

Postal services

The Post Management or Commission in each POW camp, numbering 3-5 persons, were responsible for the organisation and administration of the post, maintenance of the postal traffic and the emission of postage stamps and other prints. The postal systems were based on experience of Polish postal officers and pre-war organisation of the national post. Internal military postal organisations operated in camps during following periods:

- *OFLAG II C WOLDENBERG: 5-6 April 1942 (the Easter Post) and from 7V 1942 till 25 I 1945;*
- *OFLAG VII A MURNAU: 6 Nov. 1942 till 28 April 1945;*
- *OFLAG II D GROSS BORN: 3 Dec. 1943 - 28 January 1945;*
- *OFLAG II E NEUBRANDENBURG: 29 Jan. till 22 June 1944.*

The camp posts connected not only thousands of individuals who lived in the same area, surrounded by barbed wires but also opened communication with camp’s organisations like among others libraries, hospitals, pharmacies, and sports clubs. Each barrack inhabited by the prisoners-of-war had a postal agency. The postal services included delivery of regular, express or registered mails of different kind.



The miniature letter delivered by the Camp Post in the Gross Born Oflag IID on 1 IX 1944

Postal emissions

Postal services were paid with camp currency (Lagermarka) and for this currency local posts valued stamps, postal entries and miniature sheets. Each official issue of the camp post required approval of the Polish Senior Commander and the German censorship office and was noted in official minutes of the Postal Commission, describing purpose, paper/s used, definitive and trial colours applied, designer’s details, etc. All issues, as well as postal tariffs, were announced in official bulletins. The camp issues have been classified by a research Group of the Polish Philatelists Union as a legal material produced by “THE POLISH MILITARY LOCAL POSTS OF THE P.O.W. CAMPS”, [2].

Quantity of printed postal marks and entire is shown below and demonstrates a scale of postal services in the P.O.W. camps for the Polish militaries, [2].

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Camp location / Oflag	stamps	postal entires
WOLDENBERG OFLAG II C	677.635	34.073
GROSS BORN OFLAG II D	120.250	36.476
NEUBRANDENBURG OFLAG II E	12.357	21.892
MURNAU OFLAG VII A	26.030	8.150

Printing processes of stamps

The printing processes of stamps and other postal items were very primitive, since each copy was produced individually from small woodcuts made by “artist” engravers that were among the prisoners. Engraving works were very popular among the prisoners who participated in several concourses.



The designer's essay in black colour (the unique known piece until today) and the definitive print of the famous stamp “THE RUNNER”, 10 Pf., commemorating the Olympic Year 1944 in Oflag II C Woldenberg. The essay signed by the designer lieutenant Edward Czarnecki.

Initially, the stamps were printed on scraps of paper salvaged from newspaper margins, thus a wide variety of papers have been met by collectors. Later, the paper and printing paints was supplied from abroad by the Red Cross shipments, mostly from Sweden.

The colour for each stamp was selected by a postal commission after trials (marked with “**PRÓBA**” on a back side of the stamp) and approved later by the manager of the Camp Post.



10 Pf. Woldenberg stamp colour proofs (PRÓBA)

Very often, printing series in designed colours were shorter due lack of sufficient quantity of the same colour paint, thus colour varieties are met regularly.

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When the printing of stamps was finish, the number of prints was recorded into the official minutes of the Commission and the wooden matrix was scratched diagonally or vertically. Unregistered number of prints for philatelic catalogue and commemorative purposes was then produced.



10 Pf. stamp printed with the matrix scratched by the Camp Post Commission after printing process, [3].



The forgery of the "runner" 10 Pf. Woldenberg stamp.

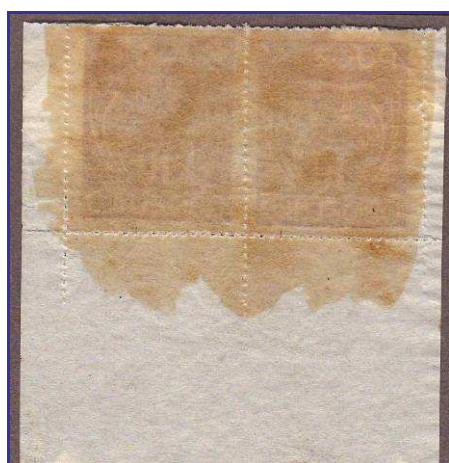
In several publications such scratched stamps were taken wrongly as a stamp proof in black colour. An evident forgery of the "runner" stamp is a stamp offered as printed on a cigarette paper in light green colour.

Perforation and gum

Due to the lack of printing facilities and larger sheets of paper, stamps were mostly printed on single cuts of a paper, thus as final product imperforated stamps, gummed or not, stamps were issued. All issues of Woldenberg OF II C are imperforated. In Gross Born and other two camps stamp "printers" used a watch-wheel to perforate each sheetlet of stamps by hand. When magnified, perforation of stamps produced with this method has rectangular shape. Irregular shapes and dimensions of stamps were the consequence of this technique.



Fragment of the "watch- wheel" type perforation of the Olympic block, 1944 and a example of efficient use of the gum on stamps.



The gum spread on stamps of the Gross Born camp post

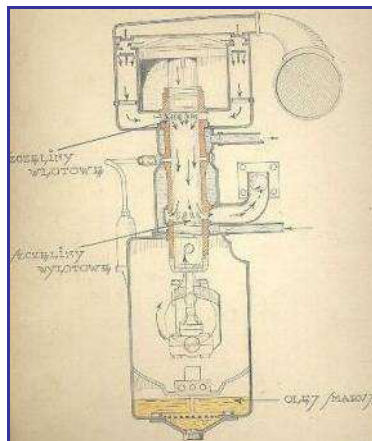


The perforated and gummed sheetlet of the Olympic stamp; value 10 x 10 Pf

Prisoner-of-war activities in camps

This is very important to learn about specific life and activities in the camps for the Polish officers. It must be admitted that the officers were one of the most educated parts of the Polish society before the World War II. Thus, being wired for nearly long six years they have invented many initiatives to be ready for life after the liberation of Poland from Nazi Germans and Soviets. The everyday believe in a freedom of the homeland helped them to survive. Choirs, orchestras, and theatrical groups were organised in POW camps behind the barbed wires. In Woldenberg, for instance, staged the opera “Aida” with a male chorus of 350 singers. There were active study groups for languages, religious services supported the patriotic vigour, medical care was organised in hospitals and lazarets. Canteens and cafeterias were places for daily contacts and cultural performances.

Important for living in the future free homeland was the underground education organised by officers, academic teachers from pre-war military schools. After the war, diplomas of the underground camp education were recognised by some Polish universities after additional procedures.



Members of the automotive courses in the OFLAG VII A Murnau. On the left: a hand-made drawing of a tank engine detail sketched by captain W. Lubienski, a future professor of Warsaw University of Technology, used during technical classes. Unknown sources.

The “underground” courses included also typical military classes and for instance, a course of flying on gliders for future pilots. To cheat German authorities, the local post promoted the flying courses on cancellation together with the Christmas greetings.



Christmas cancellation promoting underground courses of flying. OF IIC Woldenberg, 24 XII 1943



Training courses on reconstruction of buildings

The cavalry troops were the most proud units in the Polish army before the war. Cultivating national traditions, in Oflag VII A Murnau, officers organised the Camp Equestrian Association with no horses. But, one of the important social events in Murnau was a Sunday's morning activity in which horses made of cardboard pieces, were ad-

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vanced at the throw of the dice. It was a very popular “horse race sport” with many cigarettes wagered and real camp’s money in game in order to collect also funds for the martial widows and orphans. Among members of the association were famous Polish Olympians, J.Trynkwald - the bronze medallist from Amsterdam Olympics 1928 and S.Seweryn - silver in Berlin 1936. On December 10th, 1943 the camp’s post issued a 20 Pf. Stamp named “THE HORSE” to commemorate the 50th Horse Race Lottery and the Camp’s Equestrian Association (TKW), [4].



OF VIIA Murnau. A stamp commemorating 50th horses run of the Camp’s Equestrian Association, December 1943. Colour proofs, only known.



Definitive stamp printed in short series, thus variations in colour and size.

From a Report of the Postal Commission MURNAU VIIA is known that a total number of printed single stamps - 20.000, [4]:

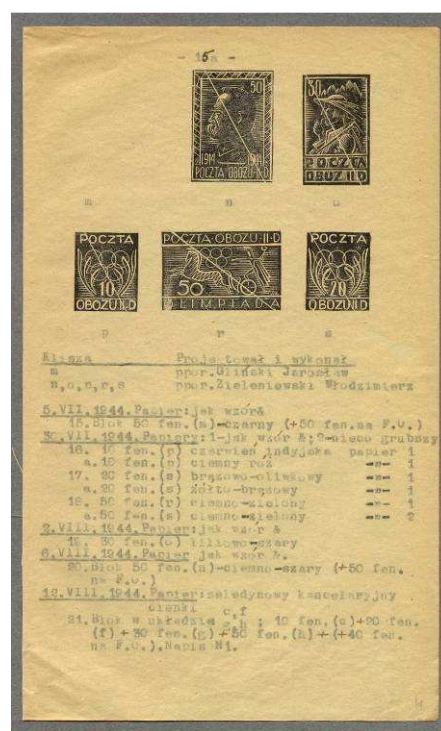


<i>Printing date</i>	<i>Number of pieces printed</i>	<i>Paper used</i>
10 XII 1943	313	white, gummed
22 XII 1943	240	white, gummed
4 I 1944	140	white, gummed
14 I 1944	264	white, gummed
29 IV 1944	324	white, gummed
15 VII 1944	299	white, gummed
10 VIII 1944	420	white, gummed

A limited number of commemorative sheets was printed in 1945, before the Murnau camp post closed its operation.

Camp's philatelists

In fact, a concept of issuing stamp by the camp post of Oflag IIC Woldenberg came out from officers who were philatelists. After success of the Eastern Post, a philatelic circle started activities and organized a competition for a design of the first camp post stamp. By the end of 1944 the philatelic circle reported about 300 members. Its members actively initiated a lot of commemorative issues of camp post. Apart from meetings and exchanges clubs in Woldenberg and Gross Born issues stamp catalogues with detailed information about stamp issues and cancellations, [3]. Prices were given in cigarettes.



Pages with the Olympic issues from stamp catalogues. Above, from Woldenberg, [4] where stamps in black colour were fixed to a page and on the left, from Gross Born, [3] - copies were printed directly on the catalogue page. In the both cases copies of stamps were printed using the scratched diagonally (after printing process) matrix of the stamp.

Physical culture and sport

Physical training was absolutely crucial for prisoners to survive physically and mentally the years in the German's captivity. Very strong support came from captured academic teachers of the Central Physical Institute of Warsaw and Poznań as well from military instructors. Immediately, after being placed in camps, officers organised physical training and sports activities, recalled sports military clubs and circles. Building and using primitive sports facilities, or without any at all, several spectacular sports events were organised in the POW camps.



The occasional postmark used by the Camp Post Woldenberg Oflag IIC on 9 Aug. 1942 commemorating "Week of Physical Culture and Sport", 9-16 VIII 1942. On the reverse a hand made sketch of the discus thrower.

The physical culture and sports activities were systematically organized at two levels, i.e. first the mass physical culture for all prisoners and also specialized courses for instructors. In camps were also active "military sports clubs" which were based on pre-war clubs for militaries. Main mission of the camp clubs was to attract as much as possible prisoners to do sport actively in order to avoid so called "the barbed wire" illness.



Members of the lawn tennis section in the Camp Military Sports Club "WARTA" Poznań

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The camp-internal letters send from the Camp Military Sports Club “WISŁA” Cracow, decorated with its symbols (above) and the letter mailed by the Collegium of the Sports Referees.

In Woldenberg six clubs were registered in the Union of Military Sports Clubs. The union was responsible for a “competitive” sport and organization of all-camp events for prisoners and provided courses for sports referees in various disciplines.

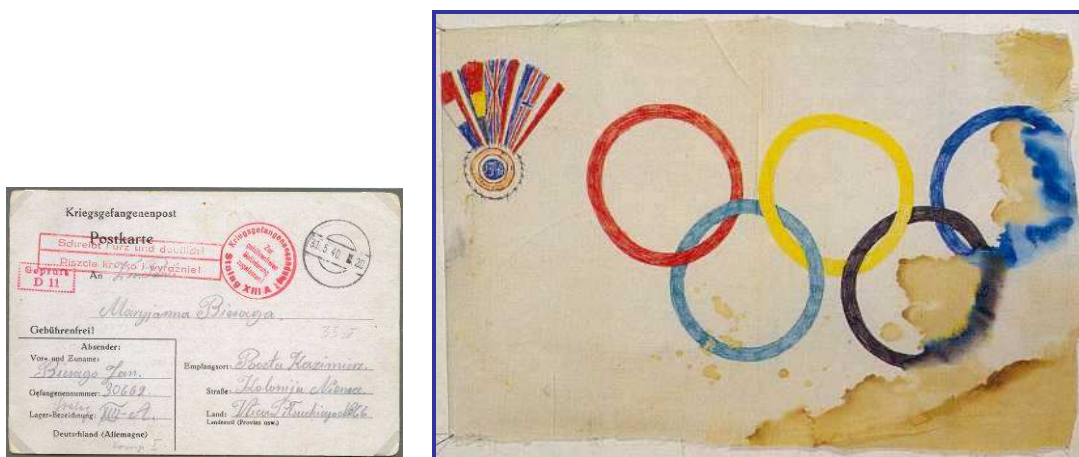


The appeal camp square and barracks, the Bavarian Alps mountains behind and the Polish prisoners-of-war during a sports gathering in the Oflag VII/E, Murnau, 1942

THE OLYMPIC SPIRIT

The Olympic Year 1940 in Stalag XIII A Langewasser

Already in 1940, in the year of the Olympic Games in Helsinki, prisoners-of-war from seven countries gathered by Germans in the soldier's camp Stalag in Langewasser, organised the "International Olympic Camp Games". The games were held in full conspiracy, but all Olympic ceremonies as singing the anthem, raising the flag and saying the Oath were in place. The Anthem was played on a comb and the flag was raised up in hands. Related memorabilia of Games belong to most fascinating treasures of the Museum of Sport and Tourism in Warsaw. No philatelic documents were produced.



*Fragment of the Olympic flag made and raised up by prisoners of Stalag XIII A, in Langewasser (Southern Bavaria, Germany), during "International Olympic Camp Games", July 1940.
Photo of the flag: a courtesy of Museum of Sport and Tourism, Warsaw, [6]*

The Olympic Year 1944 in Oflag II C Woldenberg

The culmination of sports activities in the Polish POW camps was demonstrated in the Olympic Year 1944. In two camps OF II C and OF II D, the Camp Games were held with official ceremonies, wide sport and cultural programmes. Prisoners used they all artistic skills and fantasy to produce postcards, tickets, programmes, diplomas, commemorative sheets decorated with Olympic and patriotic symbolic.



The program (front page and inside) of the sports events during the "OLYMPIC YEAR 1944" held in the Woldenberg Oflag IIc, 23 VII – 13 VIII 1944, including the Olympic vignettes



Funds gathered from sales of the tickets for the sports events and the vignettes were used to buy some equipment and extra food for competitors.

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The commemorative graphics and the embossed miniature sheet (unique known with a pair of the Olympic stamps) handed to participants of the Camp Olympic Games in Woldenberg OF IIC.

Postal mails were cancelled with an occasional Olympic postmark depicting the Olympic flag and patriotic symbolic elements. Three military formations sketched in the cancellation, as the ground forces, the navy and the airborne forces symbolize a motto of the victory over the occupants of Poland, saying: *“We will win at the ground, in the air and on the sea”*.



Registered letter with four 10 Pf Olympic stamps and the occasional pictured postal card (printed in five Olympic colours), cancelled with the Olympic commemorative cancellation used on 13.VIII.1944 by the OF II C Camp Post

“The Camp Olympiad 1944” in Oflag II D Gross Born

In the Gross Born Oflag IID the first meeting of the “Camp Olympic Committee” took place on May 26, 1944. The games in Gross Born started 30 July with the Olympic parade and closure ceremony took place on August 15, 1944. Games were carefully watched by Germans and an order to remove protecting covers from machine guns was issued by the camp commander.

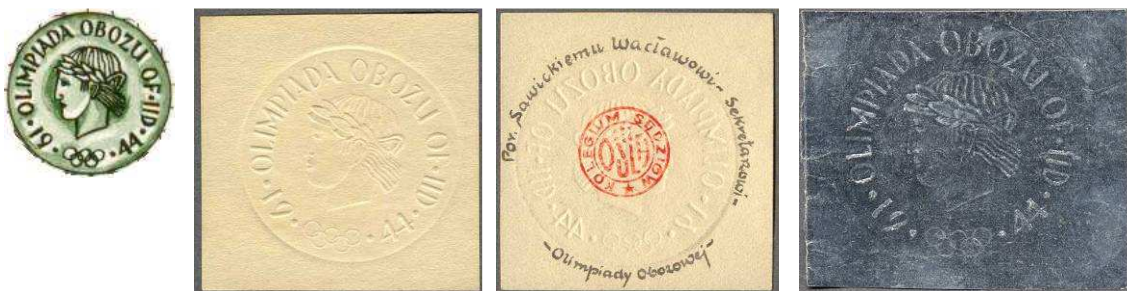


The copy of the invitation letter for the first meeting of the “1944 Camp Olympic Committee” sent by dipl. colonel Witold Morawski, President of the Committee. Unknown source.

The sports program included tournaments, competitions and demonstrations in following sports: track & field (runs – 100 meters, one stadium, 800 meters, 3000 mmeters, 4x100 meter relay), long and long jumps, shot put, discuss throw; football, handball, basketball (demo), volleyball, boxing (demo), chess. Apart of sports events there were several cultural events like an architecture exhibition, patriotic song festival, competition in naval signalization (demo), choir concerts, cabaret in the cafeteria, and many others. On August 12, the Olympic Philatelic Exhibition was opened for the public!

Program Olimpiady Obozowej	
Program Olimpiady Obozowej	
27.VI.44. godz. 8,00 - 10,00	Koncert w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 10,00 - 11,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 11,00 - 12,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 12,00 - 13,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 13,00 - 14,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 14,00 - 15,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 15,00 - 16,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 16,00 - 17,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 17,00 - 18,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 18,00 - 19,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 19,00 - 20,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 20,00 - 21,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 21,00 - 22,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 22,00 - 23,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 23,00 - 24,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 24,00 - 25,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
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27.VI.44. godz. 26,00 - 27,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 27,00 - 28,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 28,00 - 29,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 29,00 - 30,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 30,00 - 31,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
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27.VI.44. godz. 43,00 - 44,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 44,00 - 45,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 45,00 - 46,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
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27.VI.44. godz. 52,00 - 53,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 53,00 - 54,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 54,00 - 55,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 55,00 - 56,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 56,00 - 57,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 57,00 - 58,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 58,00 - 59,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 59,00 - 60,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 60,00 - 61,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 61,00 - 62,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 62,00 - 63,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 63,00 - 64,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
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27.VI.44. godz. 65,00 - 66,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 66,00 - 67,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
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27.VI.44. godz. 68,00 - 69,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 69,00 - 70,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 70,00 - 71,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
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27.VI.44. godz. 74,00 - 75,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 75,00 - 76,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 76,00 - 77,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 77,00 - 78,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 78,00 - 79,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
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27.VI.44. godz. 83,00 - 84,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 84,00 - 85,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 85,00 - 86,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 86,00 - 87,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 87,00 - 88,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 88,00 - 89,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 89,00 - 90,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 90,00 - 91,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 91,00 - 92,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 92,00 - 93,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 93,00 - 94,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 94,00 - 95,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 95,00 - 96,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 96,00 - 97,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 97,00 - 98,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 98,00 - 99,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali
27.VI.44. godz. 99,00 - 100,00	Wystawienie sztuki w sali

A copy of the sports program of the Games 1944 in the Gross Born Oflag IID. Unknown source.



The commemorative cartoon medal handed to lieutenant Wacław Sawicki, the Secretary of the “Camp Olympiad”. A symbolic young Greek’s head decorated with olive laurels was embossed on the medal as well on a piece of silver cigarette wrapping paper.

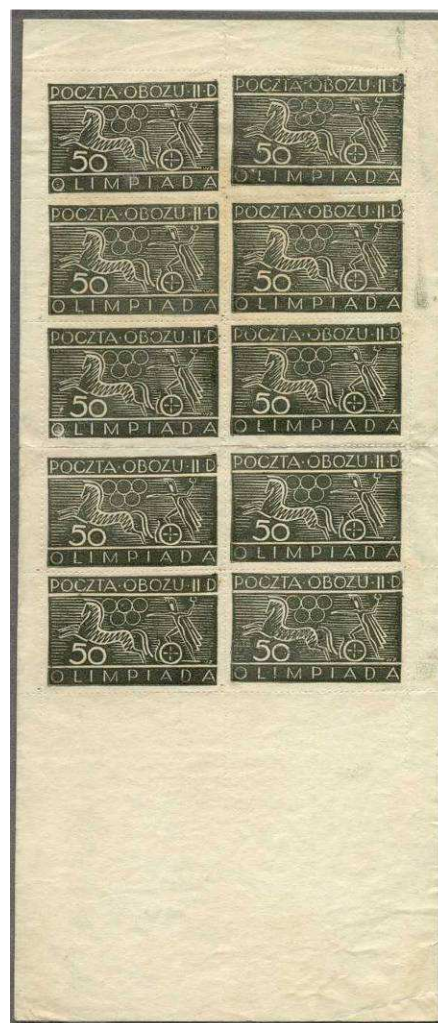
The Olympic ceremonies were fully celebrated at the opening and closing of the Games. Winners in sports competitions were handed a medal made of hard cartoon with embossed symbols and commemorative text “THE 1944 OLYMPIAD OF THE CAMP IID”.

Postal documentation of the Games

On the first day of Games, 30 July 1944, the Gross Born Camp Post issued a series of three stamps promoting intensively the Games.



60 Lepta stamp of the Olympic set issued by the Post of Greece for the Games of the 1st Olympiad, Athens 1896,



The bottom part of the 20 Pf stamp sheetlet with the propaganda cancellation for the duration of the Games, 30 VII – 15 VIII 1944 and Gross Born Camp Post daily postmark 2 VIII 44. The full printing sheetlet of 50 Pf stamps belongs today to Olympic collector’s rarities.

The design of the stamps and stationery, presented by Włodzimierz Zieleniewski, refers to the Olympic symbolism, but not only. The Goddess of Victory, Nike was portrayed on 50 Pf camp stamp, symbolising the great desire among prisoners of the victory over Nazi Germany. In parallel, it refers to the first ever-issued Olympic stamp, on which the winged Goddess Nike as coach-woman drives the chariot to the victory. It proofs a high philatelic sense and knowledge of the designer. Other two stamps of this issue, ten- and twenty-pfennig value, feature the Olympic rings surrounded by stylized laurel leaves. The total printing of this issue included 5.137 of the 10 Pf value, 5.245 of the 20 Pf stamps and 4.702 of the fifty-fenig value.

The Gross Born Camp Post issued also a postal stationery with 10 Pf value. Due to a shortage of printing paper and paints the stationery was issued in two sizes: 60 x 90 mm and 70 x 100 mm and on two paper varieties.



The 10-pfennig Olympic postal stationery issued on July 30, 1944. The Camp Post offered all postal services, including registered mails (left).

The Olympic Philatelic Exhibition 1944 – Oflag II D Gross Born

Huge number of postal issues of camps posts resulted in organisation of philatelic clubs which were ruining philatelic exchange meetings and preparing stamp catalogues. The philatelic circle of Oflag II Gross Born organised also the Olympic Stamp Exhibition in connection to the Camp Games 1944. The miniature sheet in 1155 pieces was printed and issued on 12 August.1944. The colours of stamps in the block were changed if compared with the originally designed stamps.

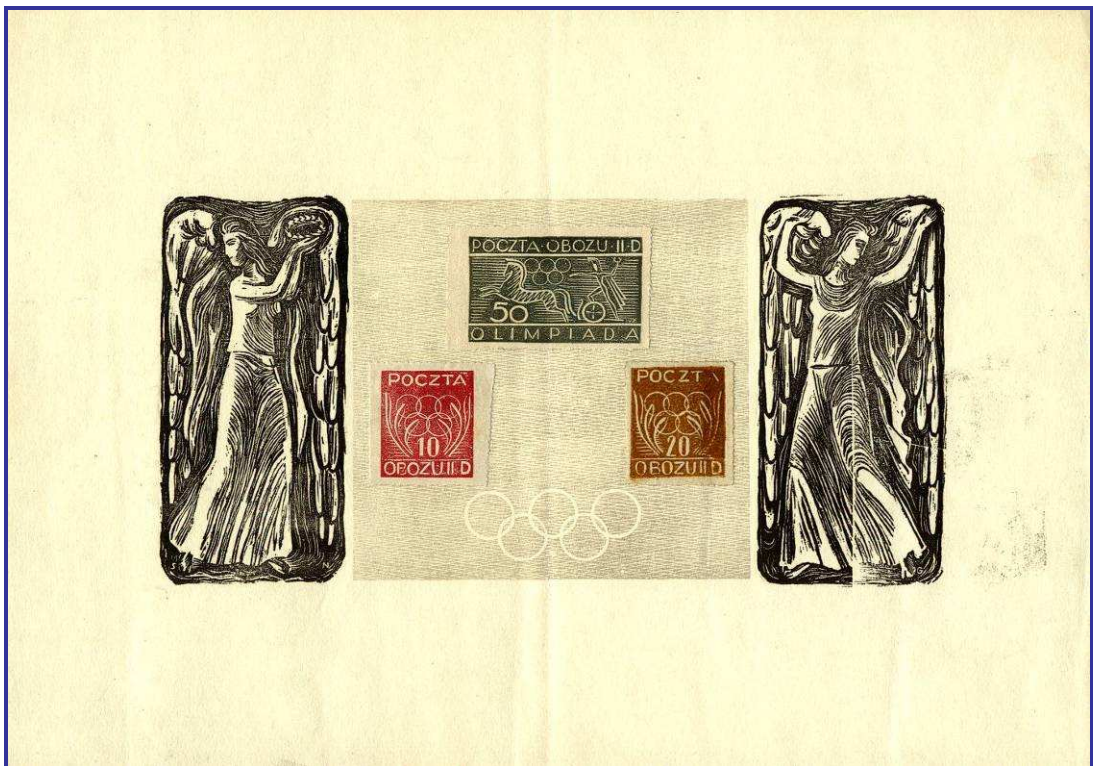


The souvenir block commemorating the Camp's Philatelic Exhibition, 12-15.VIII.1944. On the left: the unique known mint item; on the right the block cancelled by the rectangular cachet with the five Olympic rings and the exhibition cancellation of the 3rd Day.

THE EPILOGUE

Intention of this article and collection is not to present the life of Prisoners-of War in order to survive, only. The Polish militaries used also their best skills and experience to develop activities which were supposed to be used in reconstruction of the homeland after liberation from occupants. After liberation of P.O.W. camps in early 1945, the officers returned to the homeland, Poland. Unfortunately, vast majority has met with restrictions and persecution of the communist regime which ruled Poland until 1989.

The very important aspects of their life behind the barbed wires were physical culture and sports activities, which reached their culmination in the Olympic Year 1944. The Olympic spirit was expressed by the Polish prisoners-of-war through various activities and arts. Lets the graphics presented below be the symbol of those.



A commemorative graphics combining the philately and the Olympic arts – the unique example of the prisoner-of- camp Olympic spirit. Oflag II Gross Born, August 1944, unknown author.

References:

1. All philatelic illustrations are based on original camp postal material included in Author's two philatelic exhibits titled:
 - **“EUROPEAN SPORT IN SHADOWS OF THE WORLD WAR II” (previously titled “Sports Events 1939-1945”** awarded LARGE VERMEIL medals at the International Stamp Exhibitions “ATHENS 1896-1996”, “OLYMPHILEX 2004” and the FIP World Stamp Exhibition “BELICA 2006”, and
 - **“TO SURVIVE WITH HONOUR ... Sports and Olympic Spirit in P.O.W. Camps”** awarded GOLD medals at the FIP World Stamp Exhibition “ESPANA 2004” and the FEPA Salon du Timbre “PARIS 2004” with Special Prize (in a one-frame exhibit class).
2. **THE POLISH PHILATELISTS UNION:** “The Attitude of the Polish Philatelists Union to a Question of the Camp Posts for the Polish Prisoners of War in German Camps during the World War II”. Special Research Team for the Camp Posts Matters of the Polish Prisoners Of War. Szczecin-Kraków-Poznań-Łódź, 1991.
3. **WŁODARSKI ZB.:** “Catalogue of Internal Posts for the Officer's Camps II/D and II/E”.Gross Born. The Camp Philatelic Circle, October 1944.
4. **COLLECTIVE WORK:** “Catalogue of Internal Posts for the Officer's Camp IIC. Woldenberg. Editor: The Camp Philatelic Circle, October 1944.
5. **CHLEBOWSKI T.:** “Catalogue of Stamps of the Camp Post OF VII A Murnau, Bavaria”. Nowe Horyzonty, Przemyśl, 1947
6. **GRABOWSKA D.:** “Physical Education and Sport in P.O.W. Camps. Memorabilia and Archives of the Museum of Sport and Tourism in Warsaw”. Studies and Materials. Volume VII, 1994, Warsaw.

From the Author

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