

# Netherlands Behind Bars:

## The 1940 German Occupation Guilloche Overprints

Occasionally a stamp acquires a symbolic value entirely unanticipated by those responsible for designing and releasing it. The seemingly innocuous 1940 guilloche overprints authorized by the German occupation postal authorities in the Netherlands is one such example. This exhibit describes the background behind the 1940 decision to issue the eighteen surcharged postage stamps and the antagonistic reaction to them by the Dutch public. Despite these feelings, patrons were left with little choice but to use the overprints in fulfilling a variety of needed postal functions. Fortunately, numerous covers are available to demonstrate how the stamps were used. Postage rates varied according to destination (domestic or international), weight, and requested special services (printed matter, express and registration). The intent of this exhibit is to display some of the more interesting ways in which these controversial stamps document a dark time in Dutch history.



### Exhibit Plan

The exhibit is organized into four parts:

1. A display of the guilloche overprint stamps and background information on the origin, design, intended use and the decision to replace them (pages 1-4, 16).
2. Assorted covers illustrating domestic postal usage (pages 5-6).
3. Assorted covers illustrating international surface mail usage (pages 7-12).
4. Assorted covers illustrating international airmail usage (pages 13-16).

The viewer should note the use of various combinations of denominations to meet postal requirements. Particularly interesting or unusual covers are outlined in blue. All covers shown provide explanations of the postage used based on rates established for domestic mail, international surface mail and international airmail. Nearly all mail sent during the occupation was subject to German censorship. In addition, international mail was subject to censorship by the receiving country. Explanations of censor markings will be provided. The exhibit closes with an international airmail letter that illustrates the transition from the hated overprint to its more acceptable replacement.

## Part 1: The Guilloche Overprints

First released on October 1, 1940, the overprints were designed by the renowned typographer Jan van Krimpen. They took the form of a Guilloche pattern, an interlaced network of curved lines that surrounded each of the eighteen denominations. The overprint was applied to a 3-cent version of the 1924/1935 flying dove numeral issue and was printed in red, blue and green to comply with UPU regulations.



The 1940 red surcharged stamps were printed in se-tenant pairs of 7½ and 2½ cents to serve post office vending machine customers. Se-tenant pairs of 2½ and 7½ cents as well as strips of three were only available at post office philatelic windows.



## Part 1: The Guilloche Overprint

On April 1, 1940, a month before the German invasion, the Dutch PTT released ten newly designed Queen Wilhelmina definitive stamps. The Netherlands surrendered to the Germans on May 14, 1940. Shortly before, the monarchy and the Dutch ministerial officers had escaped to Great Britain to set up a hostile government in exile. The German occupation authorities banned the continued sale of the Wilhelmina stamps while permitting the use of those already purchased. As a substitute they issued an overprinted version of the 3-cent 1924/1935 “flying dove” definitive. Unfortunately for the Germans, this decision had unanticipated consequences. The new guilloche stamp quickly developed a symbolism of its own. The Dutch referred to them as *traliezegels* or stamps with prison bars. Hence the appellation, “The Netherlands Behind Bars” issue. The angry occupiers even forbade the philatelic press from referring to them as *traliezegels*. Within six months the overprints were replaced with a non-overprinted set of the 1924/1935 flying dove stamps.

## Part 1: The Guilloche Overprint

### The Banned 1940 Queen Wilhelmina Stamps on Cover

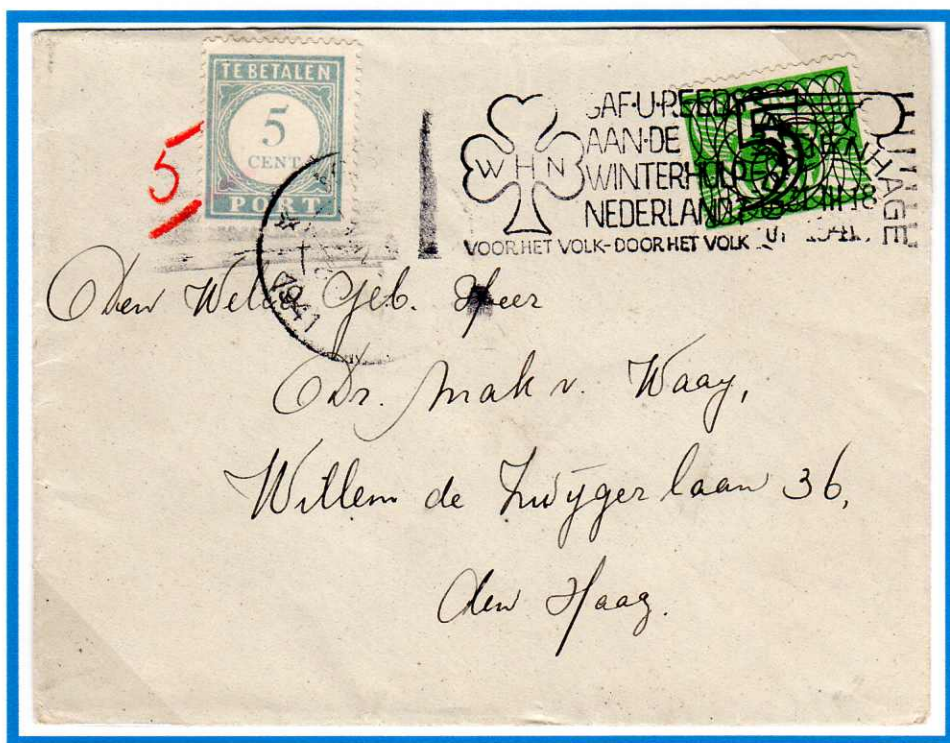
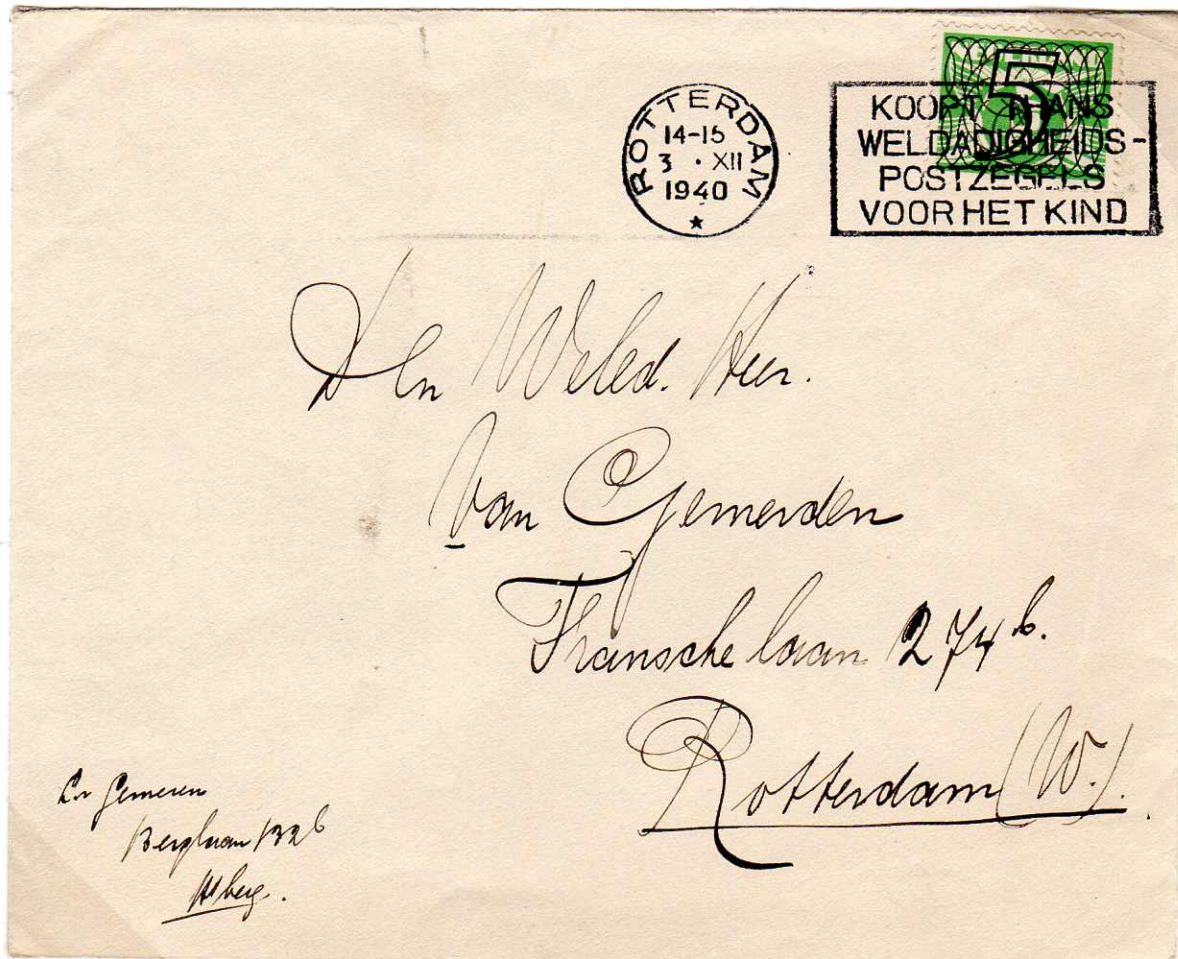
An interesting example of a "philatelic" cover with correct postage. Mailed from the Rietdijk auction house to its chairman who had moved to New York earlier in 1940. The cover shows the ten 1940 Queen Wilhelmina stamps (purchased prior to the ban) along with several of the 1940 guilloche stamps. Postmarked November 6, 1940, it was sent from The Hague to New York City by airmail via Lisbon. An international surface letter of the second weight class (20 to 200 grams) would cost 27½ cents. Add this amount to the *airmail surcharge fee* of 32½ cents per 5 grams, the 47 gram weight of the letter would be calculated at 10 x 32½ cents or 325 cents plus 27½ cents thus making the total postage of 352½ cents exactly correct. The letter was censored by German authorities in Frankfurt and by British authorities in Bermuda. Whether because of mechanical problems or bad weather, records indicate that the Pan American Clipper did not leave Lisbon until November 22. It arrived in New York on November 23 after stopping in Bermuda.



## Part 2: Domestic Mail

### Local Mail

The rate for a domestic letter mailed locally was 5-cents at the first weight step of less than 20 grams. Posted December 3, 1940 this letter was franked and mailed within Rotterdam.



Mailed within The Hague, the 5-cent franking of this letter appears to be correct. If the letter weighed more than 20 grams then the penalty should be  $2 \times 5 = 10$ -cents, not 5-cents. It appears that the letter was incorrectly assessed as  $2\frac{1}{2}$  cents short of the  $7\frac{1}{2}$  cents out-of-town rate thus explaining the 5-cents postage due fee.

**Part 2: Domestic Mail**

Out-of-Town Mail



On August 20, 1940 domestic out-of-town letter rates were set at 7½ cents for the first weight class of less than 20 grams. This letter was mailed from Arnhem to Deventer on September 9, 1941.

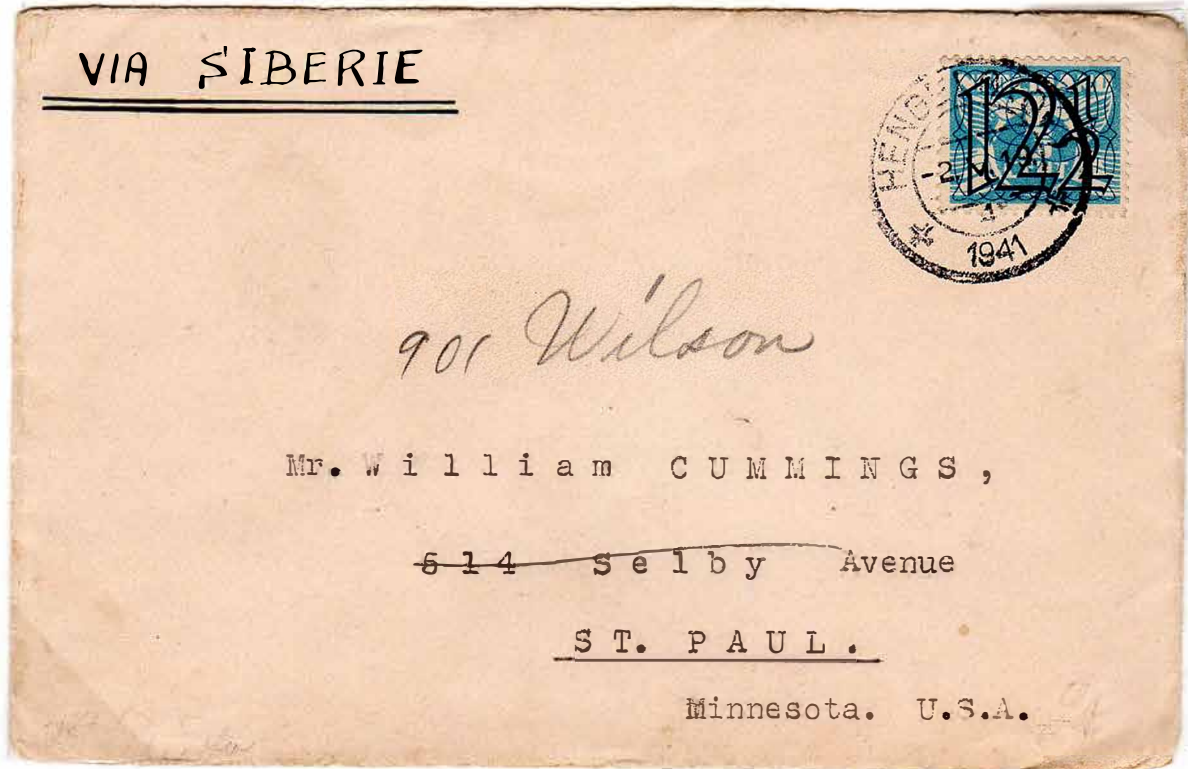


Also on August 20, 1940, out-of-town postcard rates were set at 5-cents. This card advertising shaving articles was mailed from The Hague to Zutphen on November 8, 1940.

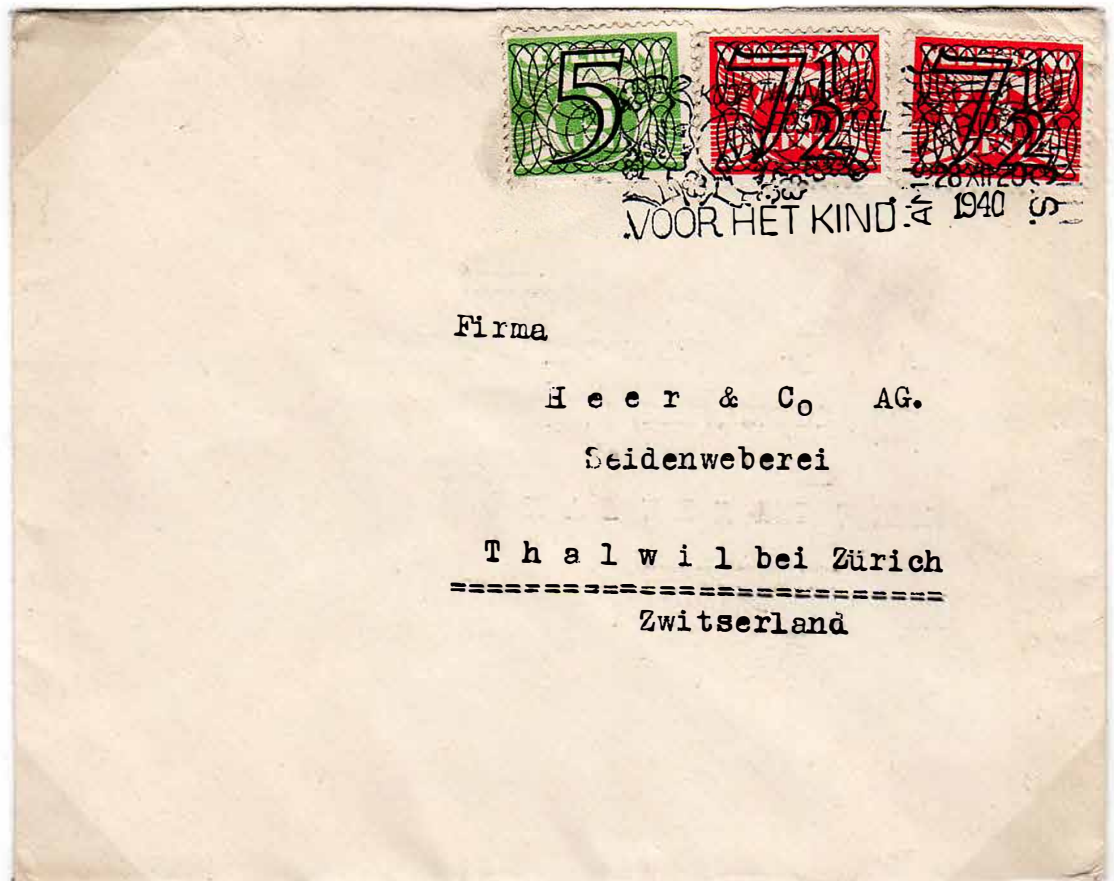
### Part 3: International Surface Mail

#### First and Second Weight

International rates were set at 12½ cents for letters less than 20 grams. Mailed from Hengelo on May 2, 1941 to a forwarded address in St. Paul, Minnesota. All surface mail going to North, Central and South America from the Netherlands was sent through Siberia and Japan until June 22, 1941 when Germany declared war against the Soviet Union.



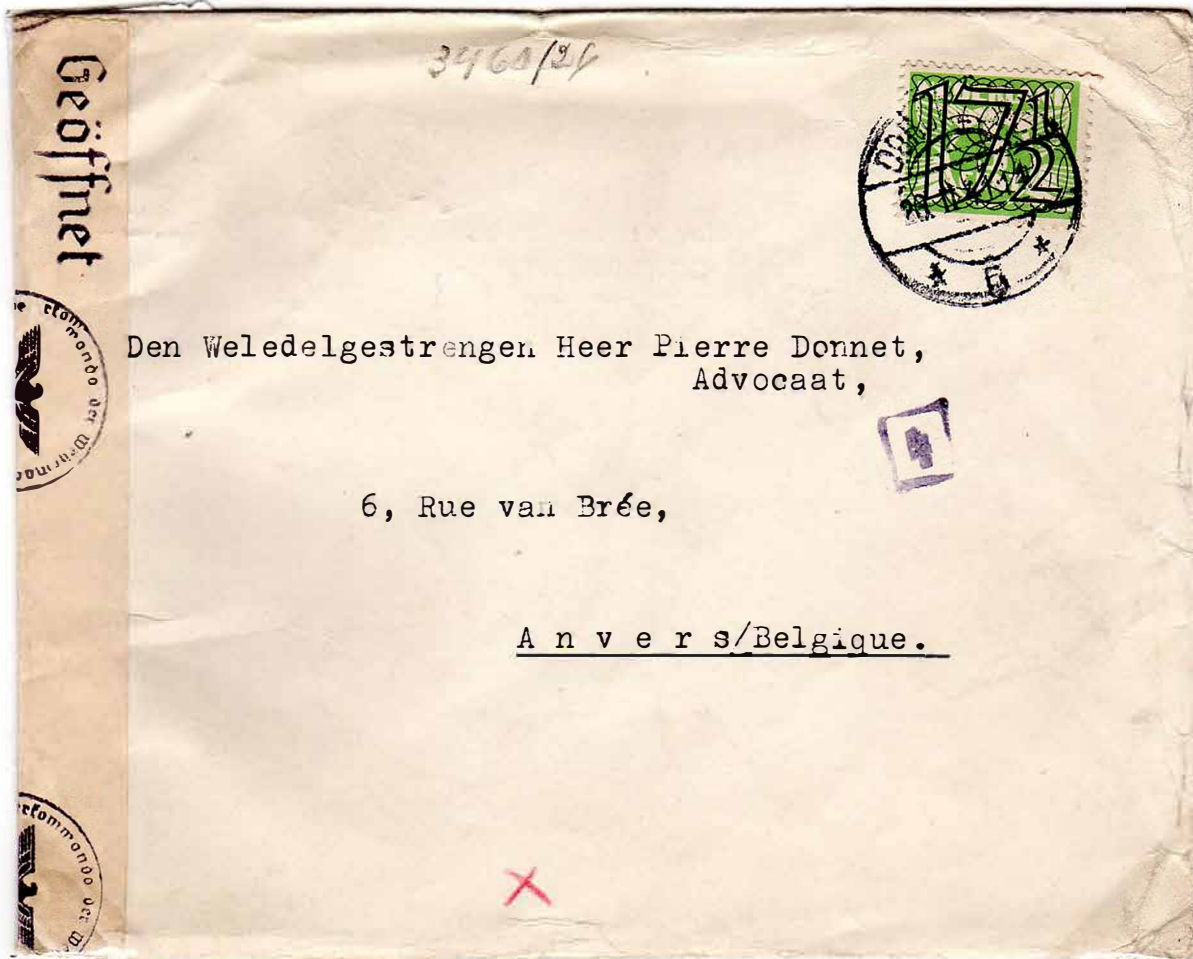
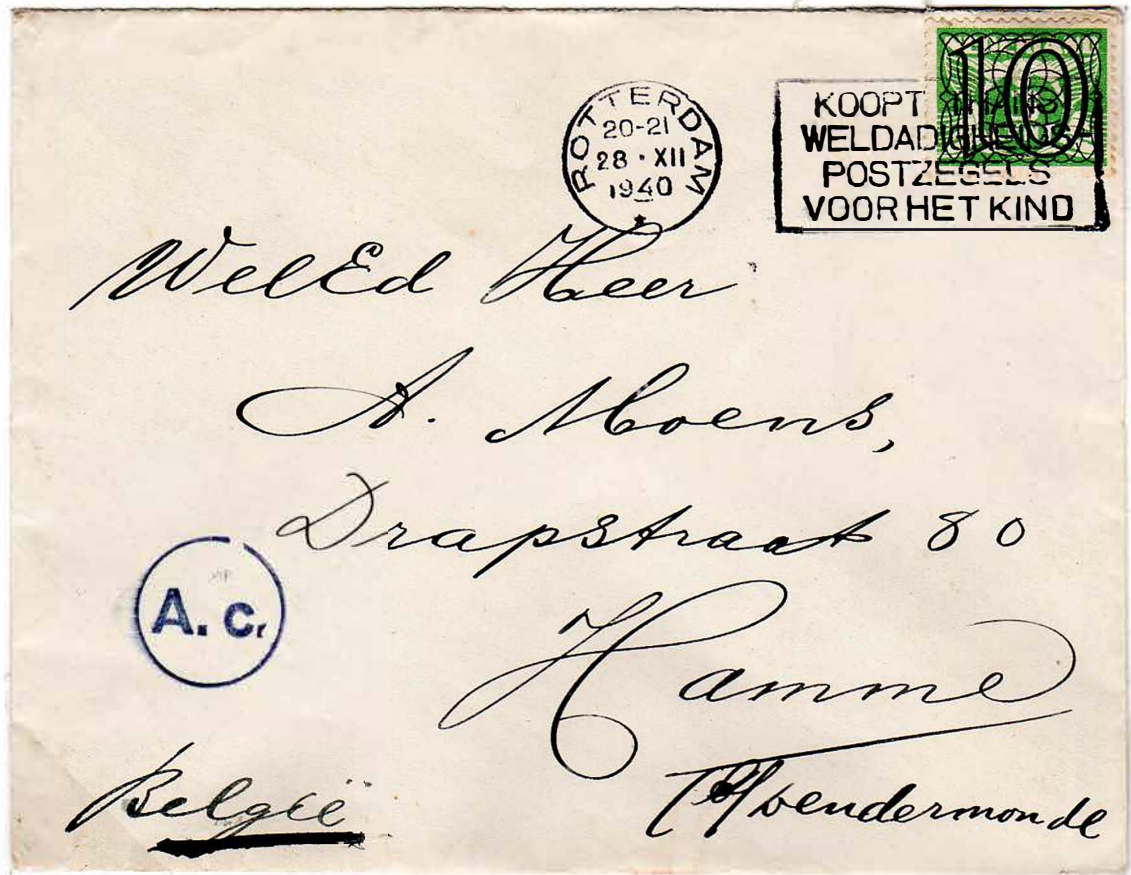
Mailed from Amsterdam to Thalwil, Switzerland on December 28, 1940. Second weight step required 20-cents postage. Censored in Cologne.



**Part 3: International Surface Mail**

Reduced Rates to Belgium

Mailed from Rotterdam to Dendermonde, Belgium on December 28, 1940 at first weight class rate of 10-cents. Censored in Cologne.



Mailed from Dordrecht to Anvers, Belgium February 20, 1941 at second weight class postage of 17½ cents. Censored in Cologne.



### Part 3: International Surface Mail

#### Post Cards

Post card rates were set at 7½ cents for all foreign destinations including Belgium. Mailed from Rotterdam on October 14, 1940 to Esschen, Belgium. Censored in Cologne. The cancel reads: "Buy cultural and social care summer stamps."



Mailed January 10, 1941 from Oosterend to Livorno, Italy. Not often seen, note the Italian censor marks in purple and the German censor mark in black.



### Part 3: International Surface Mail

#### Special Service Rates



Mailed from Hattem to Geneva, Switzerland on November 17, 1941, the 2½ cents postage covered the international rate for printed matter. It was censored in Frankfurt.



This *express mail* letter was sent from Rotterdam to Madrid on March 21, 1941. Prior to its arrival on March 29, it was censored in Berlin. The 32½ cents in postage covered the express fee of 20 cents plus the international surface rate of 12½ cents.

**Part 3: International Surface Mail**

**Special Service Rates (Over and Under Paid)**



Posted from Zwolle on March 27, 1941 as an express letter to Freiburg, Germany, it arrived March 31 after censorship in Cologne. The postage on the letter is 37½ cents. However, the surface rate to Germany was 12½ cents plus the 20-cent express fee. The letter was *overpaid* by 5-cents.

This second letter to the same address was mailed with 22½ cents postage from Arnhem on February 24, 1941 to Freiburg, Germany after censorship in Cologne. The letter was *underpaid* by 10-cents since the correct postage should be 32½ cents.



**Part 3: International Surface Mail**

Special Service Rates



A registered letter sent from Utrecht to Bad Godesberg, Germany on September 6, 1941. The letter arrived on September 9 after being censored in Cologne on September 8. The total postage of 30-cents is correct, 10 cents for the registration fee and 20-cents for the second weight step over 20 grams and up to 40 grams.

## Part 4: International Airmail

### Prize Court

This airmail letter was sent from Amsterdam on April 9, 1941 to New York City. Added to the international letter rate of 12½ was a 32½ cent *airmail surcharge* for each 5 grams equalling 45-cents. The registration fee of 10-cents was added for a total of 55-cents postage.

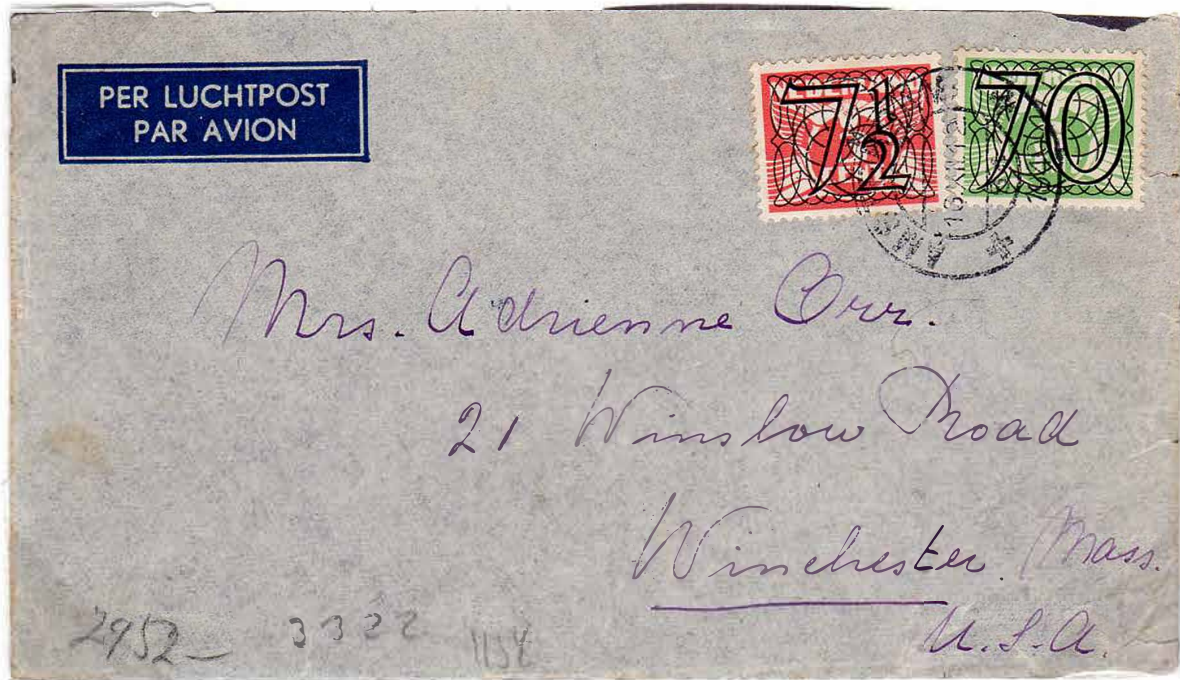
After German censorship in Frankfurt the letter was forwarded to Lisbon for the Trans Atlantic Clipper flight to Bermuda where it was subject to British censorship and inspection by the *Prize Court*. Covers deemed too sensitive could be seized by the court for distribution after the hostilities ended. Note the imprint "Released by Prize Court" on the rear of the cover authorizing its continued journey to New York.



## Part 4: International Airmail

### Second and Third Weight Steps

Dated December 18, 1940 this Amsterdam to Winchester, Massachusetts airmail cover was franked at the *second weight class* at 32½ cents per 5 grams for the airmail surcharge of 65-cents plus the regular international charge of 12½ cents for a total of 77½ cents. The cover was censored in Frankfurt.



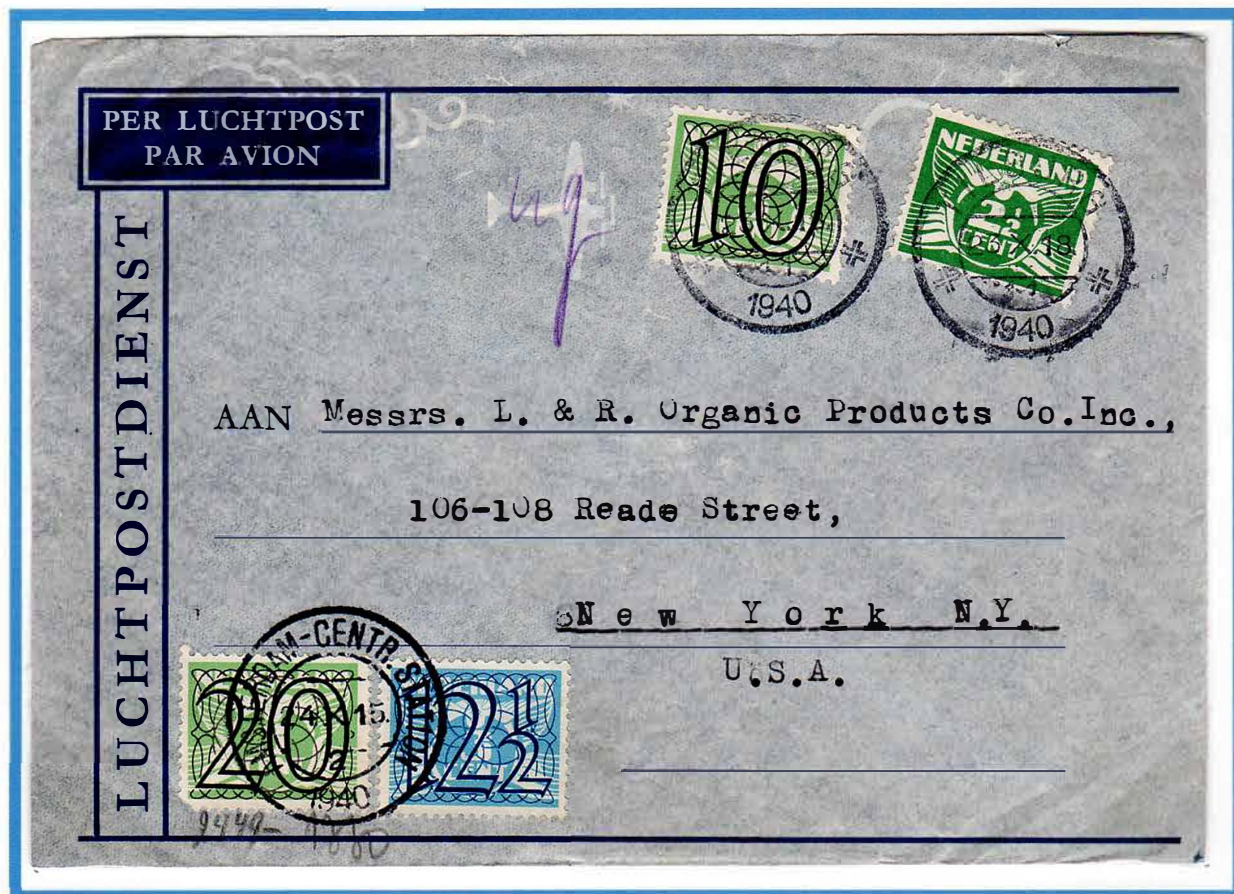
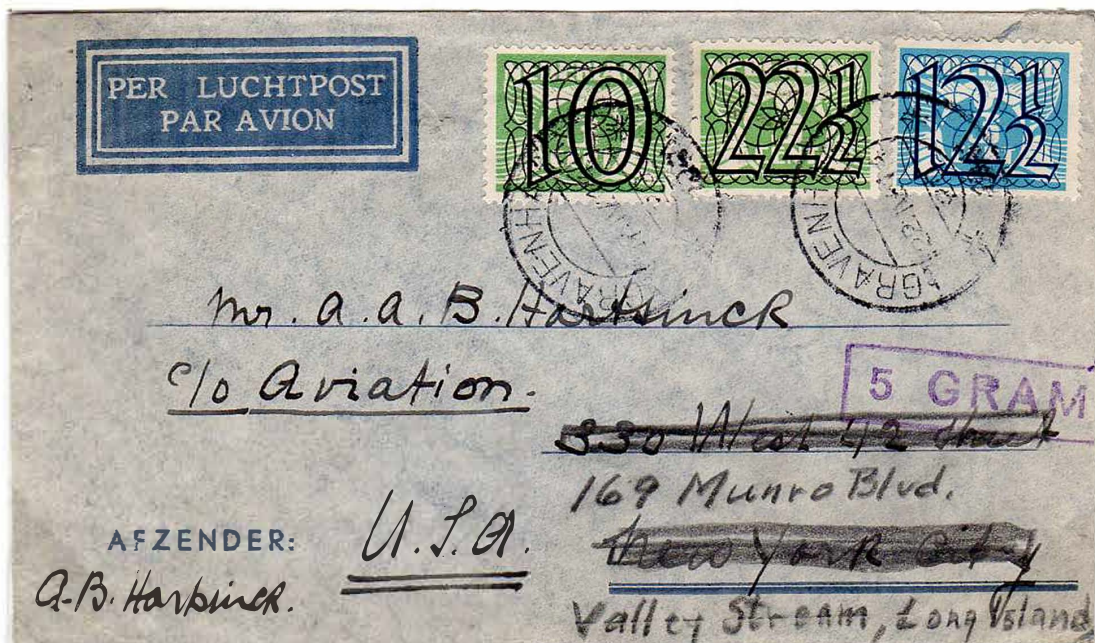
Posted March 1, 1941 from Gorinchem to Mount Vernon, New York, the letter was assessed at the *third weight class*. The airmail surcharge of 97½ cents was applied at 32½ cents per 5 grams to which was added the standard international letter fee of 12½ cents equaling the 110-cents in total postage. The letter was censored in Frankfurt and then forwarded to Lisbon for the Trans Atlantic Clipper flight.



### Part 4: International Airmail

#### Forwarded Mail and Insufficient Postage

Sent from The Hague on April 22, 1941 to New York City and censored in Frankfurt. This 5-gram letter arrived in New York on May 13 and was forwarded to its corrected address in Valley Stream, New York.



Dated October 23, 1940 this Tilburg to New York City airmail cover was franked with the international surface mail rate of 12½ cents. The missing airmail surcharge postage of 32½ cents was added at the Amsterdam Central Station on October 24. Presumably the cost of the additional postage was collected from the sender at a later date.

## Part 4: International Airmail

### The Guilloche Stamps Replaced

Seldom do we see a humble postage stamp caught up in momentous historical events such as occurred during World War II in the Netherlands. The unpopularity and negative symbolism evoked by the guilloche overprints was apparent to all including the postal authorities controlled by the Nazi occupiers. Six months after it was first released on October 1, 1940 the guilloche was replaced on April 1, 1941 with a definitive set in thirteen denominations based on the original 1924 flying dove stamp. Although the guilloche overprint was not withdrawn from use until March 31, 1944, the familiar flying dove stamps received ready acceptance by the Dutch public.

With its mixed franking the airmail cover below illustrates the transition from the guilloche to the revived flying dove stamps. Mailed from The Hague on September 17, 1941 to Dallas, Texas, the letter weighed 10 grams requiring 77½ cents in postage (12½ cents plus 65 cents). The letter was censored in Frankfurt prior to its departure from Lisbon.

