

'Germans' interned in the Dutch East Indies during WWII.

by Hans Kremer

When I started researching the postal card of fig.1 I could not have imagined where it would lead me, but in the end the story revealed some very interesting, as well as disturbing, findings.

Protection Camp Taroetoeng



Fig. 1 Front and back of postal card sent in 1940 from the Taroetoeng protection camp in the D.E.I

German-occupied areas and even Dutch citizens born in Germany. Another group included the crews of 19 German merchant vessels that had sought refuge in then neutral

ports in the Netherlands East Indies since August 1939. In total, the group numbered almost 2,800 men. Another One hundred-forty-seven German women (who were known to be Nazi sympathizers) and children were interned on Java that day as well.

When the Government of the Netherlands East Indies on May 10, 1940 received news of the German invasion of the Netherlands, it began the implementation of 'Operation Berlin': the arrest of all members of the National Socialist Movement (NSB), Germans, Austrians and other 'enemy nationals' in the archipelago. The 'Germans' included not only members of the National Socialist party, but also German Jews, political refugees from

Taroetoeng d. 21 Okt. 40
My dear Claerle, To day I got a letter from Mama from 15. Jun
You can imagine, I am always very glad to hear from her. Un-
till now I received 4 letters from 15 & 21 June, 19 July and
one over Manila, inclosed in a letter from Mary. Mary and
family are all well and healthy. since 3. Sept. I am with
the children and the other german ladies in an other kamp
in Taroetoeng, situated between Prapat and the West Koast.
The country is very beautiful, klimat is good and we are wel
looked after. We are all healthy, 2 ladies are teachers
and give lessons to the children. Rudi is a very fine, sound
and funny boy, he laughs all day long and I and Dorle have
much plaesure with him. A fortnight ago he was vaxionated
it did not trouble him. Most of people say, that he is my
image. Clems has also changed his kamp He is now in Kota
Tjane, where all the Germans are together. I cannot visit
him only get cards when it should be possible that the ladie
go to Europe then I shall also join them with the children.
Will jou be so kind as to write to my mother and tell her
all about us. The main thing is, that she knows we are all
healthy.
With all good wishes for you and aunt Setta I remain with

After the initial round-up, other 'German' women and their children, who were left behind, felt threatened by the Dutch and they asked for protection. For this purpose protection camps (often hotels, confiscated from 'German' owners) were set up, among them one in Taroetoeng on the island of Sumatra. The women and their children were generally well looked after; they even retained a fair amount of 'controlled' freedom. They were allowed to correspond, but there were several restrictions. For example only postcards (no letters) were allowed, not more than two a week, content was limited to family affairs, and the number of words was limited to 100 handwritten or 175 typed words. To give you some idea about the volume of this type of mail, during October 1940 about 1,000 of these postcards were sent out daily.

The postcard in fig. 1 was written on October 21, 1940 by Maja Eickemeyer-Burg and addressed to a relative in Switzerland. It went from the protection camp in Taroetoeng (Sumatra) to Batavia, where the "Gecensureerd 2" and "Dev 10" markers were applied. Per boat via Penang to Durban (by K.P.M O.J.A.L or B.A.L) where it was transferred to another ship on its way to London, where the "Passed P.97" marker was added. The censorship office in London censored all airmail and surface mail to and from neutral countries in Europe. From London the card was forwarded to its final destination, Burg in Switzerland (no arrival marker).

The correct postage should have been 10 cents, but the sender probably only had the 3 ½ cent postcard available and another 7 ½ cent stamp; one cent overpaid.

The text reveals a bit about the conditions in the Taroetoeng protection camp. The author writes: "*....Since 3 Sept I am with the children and the other German ladies in another camp in Taroetoeng, situated between Prapat and the West Coast. The country is very beautiful, climate is good and we are well looked after. We are all healthy, two ladies are teachers and give lessons to the children....Clems (her husband (HK)) has also changed his campsite. He is now in Kota Tjané, where all the Germans are together. I can not visit him only get cards. When it should be possible that the ladies go to Europe then I shall also join them with the children....*"

Although it contained more than 175 typed words (I counted about 230!) the card was not returned. Maybe because it was written in English, which could have been considered a 'friendly language'.

While researching the subject I consulted Mr. P. R. Bulterman's publication about the "D.E.I in Wartime (May 1940- December 1949). To my amazement on page 15 I noticed a very similar cover, sent the same day by the same person. Mr. Bulterman was kind enough to send me a scan (fig. 2) This time the card was written in German and addressed to her husband, Clemens Eickemeyer, who by then resided in the Kota Tjané internment camp, also on Sumatra.

Maybe because it was written in German that, in this case, the card was returned with a sticker, which translated says “Return to sender. Contents contain more than 100 hand written, 175 typed words.”

Fairly early after the protection camps (there were six of these, four on Java, two on Sumatra) were opened plans were made to return the women and children to Germany. The first group left from

Tandjong Priok (Batavia’s main port) the end of October 1940. Those who could afford to pay paid their own transportation. If you did not have the funds the Dutch government would pay for the transportation to Japan, with the German government paying for the Japan to Germany (via Siberia) portion. Since there were only a few Japanese ships going from the D.E.I to Japan, only small groups of women and children (about twenty at a time) did return to Germany. However, on July 4, 1941 the “Asama Maru” left from Batavia for Japan with about 600 women and children. The route went via Bangkok, Manila, Shanghai, Nagasaki to Kobe, Japan. Unfortunately for them on June 30, 1941 Germany had invaded Russia, in effect cutting off the Vladivostok and Siberia route between Japan and Germany. Some of the women and children disembarked in Shanghai, others ended up in Japan. The majority of them did not make it to Germany until 1946/47.

The Van Imhoff disaster

Starting in July 1940, the men were brought to the Lawé Sigala-gala (known as Kota Tjané by the Germans) internment camp in Aceh, Sumatra. When war broke out in Asia, the internees were transported to British India. The first 975 prisoners aboard KPM’s “Ophir” departed from Sibolga (Sumatra) end December 1941 and arrived in Bombay on 8 January 1942. Two days later, the “Plancius” arrived there with another 938 internees. The third and final transport of 478 internees, aboard the “Van Imhoff”, departed Sibolga on 16 January, 1942. While underway in the Indian Ocean, the “Van Imhoff” was attacked by a Japanese reconnaissance aircraft and began taking on water. The crew and guards abandoned the sinking ship without leaving enough lifesaving equipment for the internees.

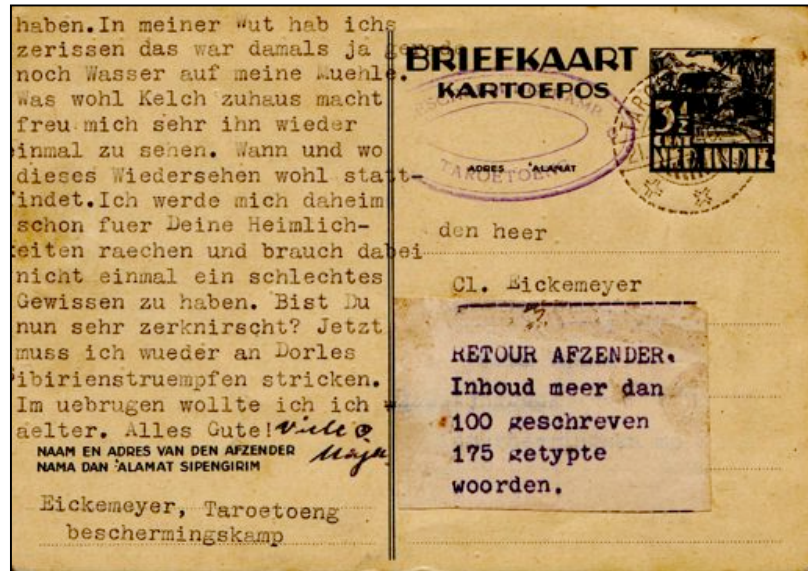


Fig. 2 A second postal card sent the same day by the same person (courtesy P.R. Bulterman)

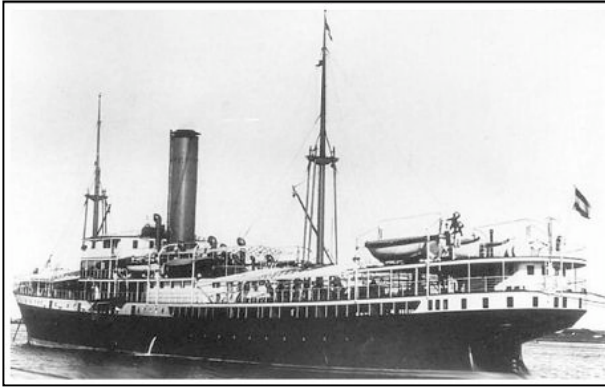


Fig. 3 K.P.M.'s "Van Imhoff"

For a total of 593 people, there were only six large boats with a capacity of a maximum of 50 people, a work boat for more than 14 men, six rafts of bamboo and 650 life jackets. The Dutch left the sinking ship in five large boats, which they had launched. One was a motorboat that took the other four boats. The five boats could accommodate 200 people, but were occupied by only 111 people.

More than 400 internees died when the ship sank. However, about 65 of them did manage to occupy the remaining lifeboat.

A day later the Dutch ship "Boelongan"

passed through the waters to rescue any of the Dutch crew of the "Van Imhoff". Upon finding no Dutch personnel, the "Boelongan" crew rejected all pleas of the stranded Germans, even for fresh water, and left the surviving men to paddle their rudderless lifeboat, until they came to the island of Nias, where they were promptly re-interred. On account of the war activities such atrocities were conveniently forgotten. A horrid story indeed.

In 1966 a documentary, to be shown on Dutch TV, was made about what happened to the Van Imhoff. At the last moment it was withdrawn for being 'too controversial'. Once the German weekly "Der Spiegel" heard about this it published a two part series in their magazine causing quite a stir in the Dutch newspapers and Parliament.

I was curious to find out more about Clemens Eickemeyer, the husband of the lady that sent the postal cards. This brought me to his brother Manfred who, in 1943, was interrogated by the Gestapo about his connection to the 'White Rose' resistance group. As part of this interrogation Manfred mentioned that he had a brother Clemens who had been a farmer in the DEI since 1929 but was now interned in British India. This of course means that Clemens was on one of the two earlier groups leaving the Kota Tjané camp, ultimately ending up at the Dehra Dun camp in then northern British India.

The White Rose Resistance Group:

In the early summer of 1942, a group of students at the University of Munich, including Willi Graf, Christoph Probst, Hans Scholl and his sister Sophie formed a non-violent resistance group in Nazi Germany. The group became known for an anonymous leaflet campaign, lasting from June 1942 until February 1943, which called for active opposition to the Nazi regime.

The group co-authored six anti-Nazi Third Reich political resistance leaflets. Calling themselves the White Rose, they urged Germans to passively resist the Nazis. They had been horrified by the behavior of the Germans on the Eastern Front where they had

witnessed a group of naked Jews being shot in a pit. A draft of a seventh leaflet, written by Christoph Probst, was found in the possession of Hans Scholl at the time of his arrest by the Gestapo.

Both Hans and Sophie admitted their full responsibility in an attempt to end any form of interrogation that might result in them revealing other members of the movement. However, the Gestapo refused to believe that only two people were involved and after further interrogation, they gained the names of all those involved who were subsequently arrested.



Fig. 3 Hans and Sophie Scholl, E. Germany 1961

Sophie, Hans and Christoph Probst were the first to be brought before the People's Court on February 22nd 1943. The People's Court had been established on April 24th 1934 to try cases that were deemed to be political offences against the Nazi state. Invariably these trials were nothing more than show trials designed to humiliate those brought before it, presumably in the hope that such a public humiliation would put off anyone else whom might be thinking in the same way as the condemned. All three were found guilty and sentenced to death by beheading. The executions took place the same day.

Other trials took place on April 19th and July 13th 1943 where other members of the White Rose movement were brought before the People's Court. At the third trial (July 13th) (which included Manfred Eickemeyer) a witness withdrew the evidence she had given during her interrogation. As a result, the judge acquitted all of those on trial that day with the exception of one, who was sentenced to six months in prison.

Closing Note

Efforts to find out what happened later on to Manfred and Clemens Eickemeyer and Clemens' wife Maja have failed so far.

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