

Development of Airmail Services in Poland (1929-1939)

Part 8: LOT Polish Airlines: Domestic and International Routes (1929-1935) Part 1 of 2

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Editor's Note: Two years ago, we launched a regular Polonus Bulletin column "Annals of Polish Aerophilately," based on articles originally published by Dr. Jerzy W. Kupiec-Węgliński (Beverly Hills, CA) and Jacek Kosmala (Warszawa, Poland) in The American Philatelic Congress Book (2011 and 2012 edition). After completing a seven-part series (Polonus Bulletin 551-557) on the pioneer period of airmail services in independent Poland (1918 – 1928), we now continue the "saga" into the next pre-Second World War chapter, (1929 – 1939).

shows a 1929 brochure, with LOT's summer air route system map, timetable and rates.

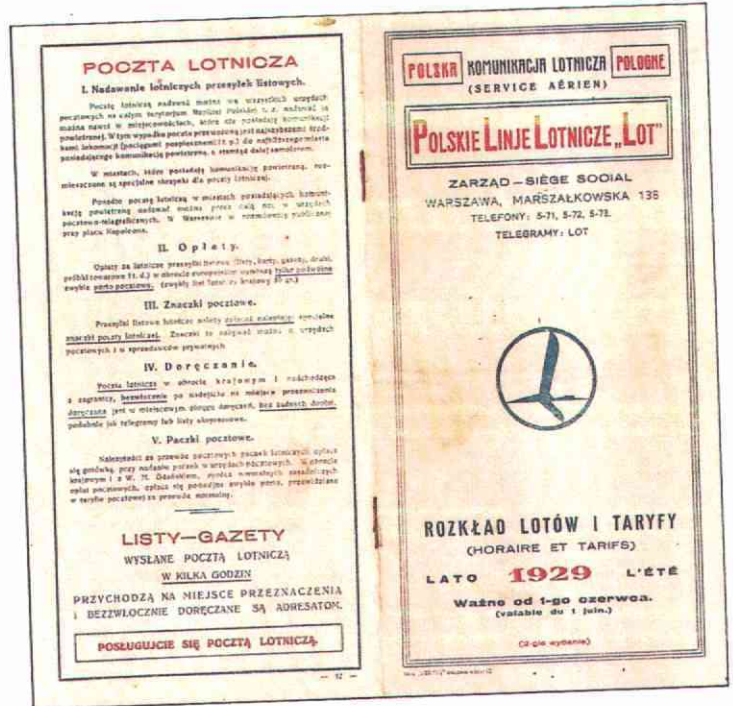
Introduction

On December 28, 1928, a newly created Civil Aviation Office at the Polish Ministry of Transportation dissolved two privately owned airlines, AEROLOT and AERO, and formed a single state-owned entity with a monopoly in passenger and cargo air transport. After the founding deed was signed on December 28, 1928, and the state treasury acquired 90 percent of the shares for 7.2 million złoty, the new corporation became the property of the Polish Government. On January 1, 1929, LOT Airlines Ltd., the third-oldest European airline still in operation, and one of six in the world that have not changed their names, was established.

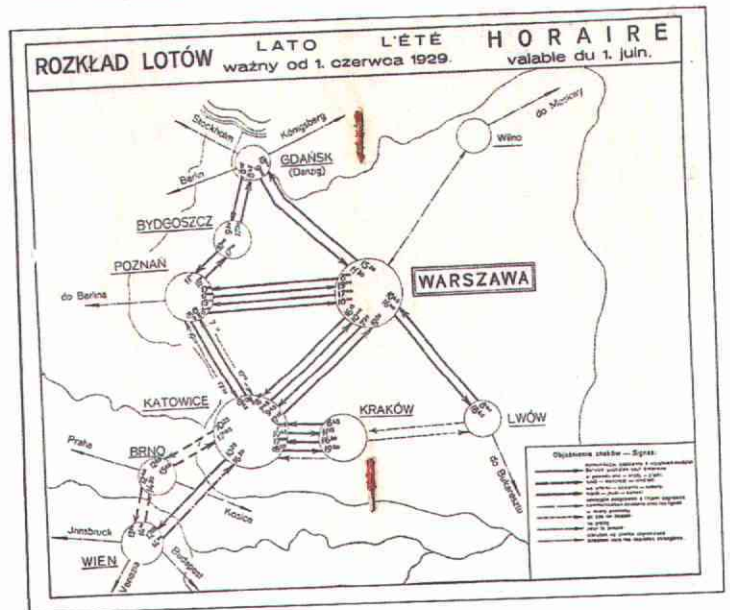
1929: First Year of Operations

LOT Airlines took over the routes serviced by AEROLOT (Warszawa – Lwów; Warszawa – Gdańsk; Warszawa – Kraków – Vienna; Kraków – Brno – Vienna) and AERO (Warszawa – Poznań). On January 7–8, Katowice, the Silesian regional manufacturing center, was connected to the existing Warszawa – Lwów – Gdańsk line. Consequently, Katowice took over Kraków's place on the Polish air map, becoming only the second international airport (after Warszawa) and linking the country with Brno (Czechoslovakia) and Vienna (Austria). Although the Warszawa – Kraków line was discontinued, a new Kraków – Katowice route of just 79 km, one of the shortest in Polish air transport history, kept communication between Kraków and Warszawa.

In early 1929, LOT Airlines operated a fleet of 21 aircraft (15 Junkers F–13 and 6 Fokker F–VIIA/1M). A stylized flying crane, designed by artist Tadeusz Gronowski, became (and still is) LOT's emblem. In May 1929, the company's name was extended with the adjective "Polish." **Figure 1**



Figures 1a and 1b
LOT Polish Airlines brochure: outside cover, above; inside route map and timetable, below (summer 1929).



Between January 7–11, 1929, LOT made several first mail flights between Warszawa, Lwów, Katowice, Poznań, Gdańsk and Kraków, as well as to Brno and on to Vienna. There is an interesting philatelic documentation from the very early period of LOT services. Most of these plain-looking covers carry commemorative cachets and are unusual, with between 25 and 210 flown on each route segment.

Warszawa directly to Katowice. A circular cancellation of January 8/12 p.m., and airmail receiving cachet were applied upon arrival in Katowice. Based on these similarities, we can assume with some degree of confidence that both covers were actually carried by the same first flight from Warszawa to Katowice.

Figure 4 depicts one of 65 covers posted on January 8, 1929/8 a.m. in the Polish postal branch of the Free City of Danzig (Gdańsk) and flown to Katowice (extension of the Gdańsk – Warszawa route, in operation since July 10, 1928). We believe this item was carried by LOT to Warszawa only, then transported to Katowice by train (January 8/9 p.m. back-stamp). It is doubtful that Katowice airport, lacking electricity at the time, was capable of accepting night flights in the middle of a harsh Polish winter. Moreover, unlike Figures 2-3, which were flown from Warszawa on the very same day (January 8), this one is lacking the "Arrived by airmail" cachet, suggesting a surface route to the Silesian capital. It should be noted that



Figure 2
One of 55 covers from the inaugural Lwów – Warszawa – Katowice postal flight (January 7, 1929).

A trio of covers shown in Figures 2-4 show some interesting postal details, not apparent at first glance. These are inaugural LOT dispatches of January 7-8, 1929 to Katowice from three different cities: Lwów, Warszawa and Gdańsk. Figure 2 shows one of 55 covers, posted at Lwów on January 7, flown by LOT to Warszawa where it was transit postmarked (January 7). It continued the next day to Katowice, where it received a circular cancellation dated January 8/12 p.m., and a straight-line special cachet that reads "Nadeszła pocztą lotniczą" (Arrived by airmail).



Figure 3
One of 210 covers carried by the first Warszawa – Katowice flight (January 8, 1929).

Figure 3 is one of 210 covers flown on January 8 from



Figure 4
A cover from the first post-carrying flight (January 8, 1929) between Gdańsk and Katowice via Warszawa.

it was not until May 22, 1929 that mail could be delivered by air in one day from Gdańsk to Katowice via Warszawa or via Bydgoszcz and Poznań (map, Figure 1b).

In addition to Katowice-bound first flight covers (all addressed to Dr. Brzeski), there are known flown items without the "I Lot / Gdańsk – Katowice" marking. Addressed to Kazimierz Gryżewski, these were backstamped in Warszawa. The correct 10 groszy (gr.) franking seen on all

open?

During the early period of LOT operations, mail was collected at the Warszawa Main P.O. up to 30 minutes prior to airplane departure. Here, the postal clerk either did not have enough time or simply forgot to perform his duty and the stamps were ultimately canceled after the plane landed in Gdańsk at 8 p.m. The card was then transported to



Figure 5
On this card flown from Warszawa, the postage was canceled after arrival in Gdańsk (July 26, 1929).

three covers consists of 5 gr. printed-matter rate plus 5 gr. air surcharge (1x basic rate).

The postage applied at the Polish post office in Gdańsk (Figure 4) requires explanation. Beginning in 1925, regular Polish stamps with "PORT GDAŃSK" overprints were used in one-way traffic to mainland Poland. Here, a mixed postage of 10 gr. met a basic printed-matter rate of 5 gr. paid with a Port Gdańsk adhesive. An airmail surcharge hand-stamp (used in Gdańsk at least since October 20, 1928) confirms 5 gr. paid with a Polish stamp of the first airmail issue of 1925.

Figure 5 shows a very unusual non-philatelic item. Posted in Warszawa on July 26, 1929 by Kazimierz Gryżewski, and addressed to his wife in Gdynia, the card was endorsed "By air mail via Gdańsk." It is lacking departure cancellations and the correct franking of 30 gr. (15 gr. postcard rate plus 15 gr. air surcharge) was canceled at Gdańsk with a "Received by airmail" straight-line cachet. How could this hap-

pen? During the early period of LOT operations, mail was collected at the Warszawa Main P.O. up to 30 minutes prior to airplane departure. Here, the postal clerk either did not have enough time or simply forgot to perform his duty and the stamps were ultimately canceled after the plane landed in Gdańsk at 8 p.m. The card was then transported to Gdynia where it arrived at 11 p.m. That's how efficient air mail services were in 1929!

During the National Exhibition in Poznań (May 16–September 30, 1929) commemorating the 10th anniversary of Poland's independence, special flights from the Ławica Airport carried out mail with cachets and multi-lingual labels. Then, on June 1, 1929, the city of Bydgoszcz was rewarded for its investment in LOT's capital and incorporated into the air service network, now encompassing Katowice, Poznań, Gdańsk and Warszawa. The organizers issued preprinted envelopes with private cachets, as illustrated in Figure 6. With 80–150 covers flown at each leg