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 Poznanski 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 (Poznanski 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).

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

![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. backstamp). 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

![Image]

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 is one of 210 covers flown on January 8 from

![Image]

Figure 3
One of 210 covers carried by the first Warszawa – Katowice flight (January 8, 1929).
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 Gryzewski, these were backstamped in Warszawa. The correct 10 groszy (gr.) franking seen on all 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 Gryzewski, 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 happen?

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 Lawica 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
the multi-city air link, collecting all 14 different distance/destination combinations became quite a challenge.

During the International Surgical Congress in Warszawa (July 22–25, 1929), an unspecified number of covers with special postmarks and cachets in French “Congres Chirurgien / Post Aérienne” were flown to Lwów. In addition, a mobile postal sub-station was operating during the annual Eastern Fair (Targi Wschodnie) in the city of Lwów September 7–19, 1929). The flown items carry green adhesive labels from the previous year, but with a newly typed date of the 1929 event.

On October 12, 1929, Poland was among 32 nations signing the “Convention for the Unification of Certain Rules Relating to International Carriage by Air.” This historic agreement, known as the “Warsaw Convention,” has evolved into one of the pillars of aviation legislation regulating liability for international carriers.

By the end of 1929, the LOT Board of Directors, headed by Tadeusz Turbiak, began seeking new opportunities to expand the airline’s routes. The country’s geographical location made it a major hub for east–west and north–south communication in Europe. However, hostile relations with Germany and Soviet Russia effectively closed the east–west direction to Polish aviation for many years. Flights from Warszawa to either Berlin or Moscow were out of the question. LOT’s expansion was only possible to the north and south of the continent.

— To Be Continued —

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1930 – 1935: Phase One Expansion

In 1930, LOT Polish Airlines joined the International Air Transportation Association (IATA). Despite rapid progress of civil aviation in technical and commercial fields, flying remained a rather exclusive means of personal transport. It was around 1930 when the General Directors of Civil Aviation met in Paris and coined the famous phrase: "The layman flies, the expert takes the train." Although such a statement sounds preposterous nowadays, it obviously reflected the uncertainties of air travel at that time, especially during the winter season.

However, the search for higher speed, greater reliability and the covering of greater distances continued. Each step forward in these fields brought potential mass public air transport closer to reality. This is exemplified by LOT’s speedy expansion of its network as well as the affordability of its fares. In the early 1930s, the cost of air travel in Poland was about the same or even lower than by train.

On May 21, 1930, a Polish-Rumanian agreement granted LOT Airlines the concession to exclusively operate the Warszawa – Lwów – Bucharest route. This was an important milestone in a long-term strategy to connect Poland via the Balkan Peninsula with the Middle East.

A cover with a bilingual cachet, depicted in Figure 7, is one of 25 posted in Warszawa on June 1, 1930, and carried by trial flight to Bucharest. The “Pobrano/Perqu” cachet was used to apply 40 gr. air surcharge (1x basic postage). On the first regular mail flight, which took off the following day, Warszawa and Lwów each dispatched 78 covers to the Rumanian city of Galati (Galatz). In addition, there were 132 and 128 Bucharest-bound covers from Warszawa and Lwów, respectively. All bear violet (Warszawa) or red (Lwów) cachets. As of July 31, 1938, the Warszawa – Lwów – Bucharest route was operated jointly by LOT and Rumanian LARES Airlines.

The success of the Warszawa – Bucharest line prompted its extension to Sofia, the Bulgarian capital, and Salonika, the second largest city in Greece. The 1,533-mile (2,468 km) route from Warszawa to Salonika reduced the trip’s duration from five days to just 14 hours. Figure 8 shows a seldom-seen cover from the Warszawa – Sofia leg of the inaugural June 27, 1931 flight. The 1.00 zł rate was 50 gr. international letter rate (per 20 grams) plus 50 gr. (1x basic postage) airmail surcharge.

On June 29, the newly established postal service became available to the public. The first flight carried 65 covers to Sofia and 102 to Salonika from Warszawa, all with special violet circular cachet. There were also 62 covers from...
now measured 1,796 miles (2,890 km), linking the north and south of Europe and crossing territories of six countries with Poland in the middle. About 500 covers dispatched from Warszawa and Wilno were flown on various stages of the first flight. All show a circular violet cachet that reads “First Postal Flight / 17–VIII–32 / Warszawa – Wilno – Riga – Tallinn.” Figure 10 shows a cover flown from Warszawa to Tallinn, and then to Kuopio, Finland (August 19 arrival). It is franked correctly with the international printed matter rate (10 gr. basic postage plus 40 gr. air surcharge).

Figure 11 is an unusual example from the return flight to Poland. Postmarked in Tallinn on August 18 and cacheted “Par premier avion Tallinn – Riga – Warszawa,” it was routed via Warszawa (August

Lwów with a special black circular cachet. Several interesting items are recorded from LOT’s return flight to Poland on July 8, 1931.

Figure 9 is a registered cover from the return flight to Lwów. It was posted in Athens (July 7) and flown by Greek E.E.E.S Airlines (Hellenike Eteria Anaerion Synghanionium A.E.) to Salonika (July 8 transit postmark) to catch the LOT return flight to Poland (Lwów, July 9 arrival cancellation). This letter, prepared by P. J. Drossos, a pioneer of Greek aerophilately, was addressed to Tadeusz Gryżewski, the godfather of Polish aerophilately.

The growth plan for LOT network included the expansion to the Baltic States and Finland. A new route from Warszawa via the Polish city of Wilno to Riga, Latvia and Tallinn, Estonia was opened on August 17, 1932. With its southern extension to Salonika, the north-south LOT route

Figure 9
Registered cover from the return Salonika – Lwów flight (July 8, 1931).
Figure 10
A cover carried by the first flight from Warszawa to Tallinn (Estonia), and then routed to Kuopio (Finland) (August 17, 1932).

18) and Poznań (August 19) to Cape Town, South Africa (September 6). This item was most likely flown by Imperial Airways on its route to South Africa from London with intermediate stops in Brindisi, Athens, Alexandria, Cairo, Assuan, Wadi, Halfa, Chartum, Malakal, Juba, Buttiaba, Kisumu, Nairobi, Dodoma, Mbeya, Broken Hill, Salisbury and Johannesburg. The London–Cape Town route was inaugurated December 9–21, 1931.

On May 1, 1934, the connection between Warszawa and Poznań was extended to Berlin. It was operated jointly with the German Lufthansa (DLH) in a “pool” air transport system, the only LOT air link with Western Europe at the time. Both Warszawa and Poznań used circular cancellations (violet and black, respectively) on mostly philatelically motivated printed-matter carried on the first flight to Berlin.

Figure 12 shows a postcard from the inaugural flight to Berlin. Posted in Nowy Tomyśl, a small town in western Poland, and addressed to Göttingen, this item was flown on May 1, 1934 from Poznań via Berlin to Hannover where special cachets were applied. The postage of 55 gr. is consistent with 35 gr. international postcard rate plus 20 gr. for Germany-bound air service.

Figure 11
A possibly unique dispatch from Tallinn by a return LOT’s flight to Warszawa (August 18, 1932), and then by British Imperial Airways from London to Cape Town (South Africa).
Figure 12
A postcard carried by the first Poznań - Berlin flight (May 1, 1934).

The Free City of Danzig (Freie Stadt Danzig in German; Wolne Miasto Gdańsk in Polish), was established as an autonomous state in November 1920, under provisions of the Treaty of Versailles and under the protection of the League of Nations. The Post and Telegraph Management buildings in Gdańsk were considered extraterritorial property of the Republic of Poland. There were three Polish post offices operating in Danzig, yet only Gdańsk 1 in the Old Town district was servicing the Polish community. The post office also maintained a direct telephone line to the mainland.

The airport in the Free City of Danzig in Wrzeszcz (Langfuhr) was built to service air traffic primarily by DERULUFTH Airline between Moscow, Königsberg (the capital of East Prussia) and Berlin. Despite the official autonomy in Freie Stadt Danzig, working relations between Polish and German postal authorities were often tense, to say the least. Indeed, in one of his published columns in 1930, Kazimierz Gryżewski stopped just short of implying the German sabotaged Polish airmail efforts. Not only were the Danzig - Poland air fees almost three times higher than the corresponding ones in opposite direction, but in many instances air dispatches at Langfuhr were either purposely delayed or forwarded by surface altogether.

This notorious situation prompted the Polish government to build a new airport in the nearby Polish port city of Gdynia. Its opening in 1935 allowed the Warszawa - Gdańsk route to be suspended, and to channeled air traffic from Warszawa to Gdynia instead. On June 1, 1935, 50 covers with special cachets were flown on each leg of the Warszawa - Gdynia - Gdańsk route. The seldom seen cover shown as Figure 13 is from the first postal flight from Gdańsk to Gdynia. Mixed Polish and Port Gdańsk postage was affixed in Danzig and a large "Gdynia Port Polski" datestamp was applied at arrival. The postage, 15 gr. paid 5 gr. for printed matter (up to 20 grams) and 10 gr. air surcharge, is correct.

The city of Gdynia on the Polish Baltic Coast was instru-
turned to the sender in Sweden, but must have been underpaid as it first received a 10 gr. Polish postage-due at Warszawa (September 21).

*Figure 15* is an example of an uncommon philatelic cover (30 flown) from the second trial flight between Warszawa and Malmö on September 11, 1935. Here, the correct postage of 35 gr. is consistent with 10 gr. international printed matter rate (per 50 grams) plus 25 gr. airmail surcharge for European mailing (per 20 grams).

Rapid growth of commercial aviation meant an urgent need for a new airport in the Polish capital. After a gradual transition from the country’s oldest Mokotów airfield (operated since 1910), a new Warszawa-Okęcie Airport, with modern technical facilities, along with hangars workshops and warehouses, officially opened on April 29, 1934. During the first years of operations, LOT Polish Airlines utilized German Junkers, Dutch Fokkers and Polish PWS–24 aircraft. Their capacity, however, was increasingly insufficient. Two 14-seat Douglas DC–2s and some smaller 10-seat Lockheed L-10A Electra American–made aircraft were added to the fleet in 1935. They were
used mainly on international routes, in particular to the Balkans.

Bibliography

Polonus Bulletin Procedures and Deadlines

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Deadline for the receipt of articles, letters, advertising and news is the first of the second month of the quarter. For example, we need everything for the June issue by May 1, everything for the September issue by August 1, everything for the December issue by November 1 and everything for the March issue by February 1.

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Questions can be directed to editor Vickie Canfield Peters by emailing vcanfieldp@gmail.com.

Your attention to and compliance with these procedures and deadlines assures the best quality we can achieve.

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