The Siege of Przemyśl 1914–1915

by Dr. Jerzy W. Kupiec-Weglinski

At the outbreak of World War I, Przemyśl was a small garrison town of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the territory of Polish Galicia between two provincial capitals, Krakow (Cracow) in the west and Lwow (Lemberg) in the east. Just forty miles from the frontier with Imperial Russia, Przemyśl was protected by a ring of fortifications thirty-six miles in circumference, similar to the French Maginot Line. After Austria declared war on Russia on August 6, 1914, the Third Russian Army of Radko-Dimitriev advanced on Przemyśl, and by September 18 the fortress was completely besieged. Luckily, the blockade was quickly relieved, lasting only thirty-three days. However, the Russians soon returned, and the second siege commenced on November 10. One hundred and thirty-three days later on March 22, 1915, after disease and starvation had taken their toll, Commander General Hermann von Kusmanek, nine generals, ninety-three staff officers, 2,500 officers, and 117,900 men all surrendered to the Russians. In all, some 12,000 defenders and 100,000 Russians perished in Przemyśl, which makes it one of the largest and bloodiest sieges in the world’s military history.

The provisional air mail effort set up in the besieged Przemyśl by the Austrian Army represents an important chapter in the history of aerophilately. The desperate necessity of the Przemyśl defendants to communicate with the outside world, especially with loved ones, was the primary reason for establishing such a service. This venture, unlike many others that followed, was never philatelically motivated. Although described in the philatelic literature, the Przemyśl mail has never received attention comparable with that of the Siege of Paris. It has not been widely recognized that

One of Przemyśl’s Austro-Hungarian defendants (photo taken in Przemyśl in 1914)
Przemyśl air mails of 1914–1915 illustrate the first time in history that mail-laden airplanes landed and took off within a completely surrounded fortress. Of note, these events happened in a remote part of Eastern Europe less than four years after the much celebrated world’s first air mail service took off on February 18, 1911 in Allahabad, India.

Although I have collected and researched the development of air mail services in the Polish territories for the past twenty-five years, Przemyśl has only recently caught my attention. First, I was lucky enough to acquire some key items from the “Fliegerpost Przemyśl 1914–1915” collection of the late Alexander S. Newall, a famed British aerophilately scholar with Polish roots. Then, I was greatly inspired by the pioneering work of another Brit, Keith Tranmer, who devoted more than fifty years to studying the postal history of Przemyśl sieges. Needless to say, I became fascinated both by the uniqueness of the material and by the wealth of information available, as well as the turbulent circumstances under which the individual components of both collections were created.

With the Przemyśl siege centenary quickly approaching, I believe that publication of this story should “resurrect” interest among both philatelic and non-philatelic audiences. Re-introducing some key items from the Newall and Tranmer collections, which were either exhibited rarely (the former) or not at all (the latter), should also shed new light on this somewhat overlooked and understudied yet fascinating postal history topic from the aerophilately perspective.

Mail Flown by Airplanes from Przemyśl

Since the Russians severed all ground communication links, the only remaining means of contact between Przemyśl and the outside world was by air. Fourteen mail-carrying flights are recorded as having been flown from the garrison, one during the first siege, and thirteen during the second. Seven of them landed in Brzesko (flights 6–8 and 10–13), four in Krakow (flights 2, 4–5 and 9), one in Hungary (flight 3), and another had to make a forced landing in the Russian-occupied territory (flight 14).

First flight: On October 1, 1914, during the first siege, an Austrian military two-seater monoplane Etrich Type VIII, nicknamed “Steffel” and piloted by Lieutenant Aladar Taussig and Captain Emil Raabl flew into Przemyśl from the Third Army General Headquarters at Neu Sandez (Nowy Sacz). Upon its return on October 6, the plane carried about 100 field postcards with private messages. After coming under enemy fire, during which Lt. Taussig was wounded, the plane crash-landed some thirty miles from its destination. Captain Raabl carried the mail by motorcar to Neu Sandez, where he handed it over at Field Post Office (FPO) 11 for further distribution.

Shown on page 546 are two outstanding examples of the seldom seen cards from the only flight made during the first Przemyśl siege. The sender of the first one, Hptm. Karl Grebenz, the balloon pilot, writes to his mother in Graz: “The Russians are giving us an easier time just now; I am trying to send this card by a flyer, write or telegraph me how you are.”

Przemyśl fortress and its vicinity in 1914–1915.
The card has a military unit handstamp, which was applied to obtain the free postage concession, and shows an October 7, 1914 transit datestamp from FPO 11.

The second item is the only known civilian postcard carried from Przemyśl by the first flight. Franz Vodrazka, Militärbeamter, writes to his parents in Vienna on October 5, 1914: “This card comes to you by the kindness of a flying officer. The card will travel by train for the reminder of the journey.” Taussig and Raabl left with that card the next day. However, FPO 11 did not cancel it on October 7, because it did not conform to regulations for military mail. Hence, the regular Vienna cancellation was applied on the imprinted stamp upon arrival at its destination on October 17, 1914, as was the correct postal procedure.7

Third flight: On December 9, 1914, Hans Wanneck, of Flying Squadron Nr. 11 flew from the Przemyśl Hureczko airfield, and after crossing over the Carpathian Mountains in strong winds, he landed in Kaschau, Hungary (present Košice, Slovak Republic). The mail received a transit cancellation from Hungarian FPO 30 “TABORI POSTA HIVATAL / 914 DEC. 10- / 30,” sometimes erroneously canceled DEC. 1 or DEC. 11. Displayed here is a unique field

The only known civilian postcard from the first Przemyśl flight (canceled in Vienna instead of FPO 11).

Hans Wanneck, the pilot of the Carpathian flight during the Przemyśl siege.

One of the most valuable pioneer flight rarities from the Przemyśl siege era: a field post card written by pilot Hans Wanneck, after the Carpathian flight, to his flying instructor in Switzerland.
post card, written by the pilot Wanneck himself, after completing the Carpathian flight, a considerable achievement at that time. It is addressed to his former flying instructor, H.W. Eckinger in Dübendorf, near Zurich, Switzerland. Wanneck writes: "My Friend, Flying continues, I carried from besieged Przemyśl some 5000 letters and cards flying over the Carpathians at 3200 meters for 5 hours to land easily in Hungary. In the morning we go back again. I believe that up to now I have made over 15 major sorties. I wish you a very Merry Christmas and a really lucky New Year. Yours, Hans." The card was endorsed “Luftpost” by the pilot and shows a "Fliegerkompagnie No. 14" circular handstamp, a December 11 transit postmark from FPO 30, and a Dübendorf receiving postmark. The card was sent post-free until it reached Dübendorf and a 20-centime postage due stamp was applied.

This card is one of the most sought-after items from the Przemyśl siege era. It was sold in the 1930s to the Marquis of Bute by Georg Sobetzsky, a Vienna air mail collector and dealer. The card was water-damaged in London during Luftwaffe bombing of 1940, when the Swiss stamp was washed off. Finally, it was purchased by Keith Tranmer at the Bute sale of Robson Lowe in 1959.

Wanneck came down in the Russian lines later during the Przemyśl siege, and ended up as a P.O.W. in the Siberian Chita Camp. After his release, he was twice awarded with the most prestigious Austrian Gold Bravery Medal, and died in an air crash on August 29, 1930.

**Sixth, seventh and eighth flights**: Three airplanes left the Przemyśl Buszkowiczki airfield on January 18, 1915 and landed at the Fourth Army Headquarters in Brzesko. This was the largest flight from Przemyśl, and provides most of the surviving mail. Nikolaus Knozer served as an automobilist and postal agent of Flying Squadron Nr. 11, and worked as a volunteer in the Automobile Military Unit. Collectors of Przemyśl mail can find his signature serving as the censor mark, usually at the top right corner. The postal cover illustrated is an example of Knozer’s correspondence to his mother in Baden, near Vienna. It presents an interesting diary of events in the fortress (December 20, 1914–January 15, 1915), including day-to-day weather conditions. Knozer refers to “two flights, which arrived from Krakow on December 24 with 35 letters and cards,” and for December 26 he reports the “departure of a flight back to Krakow.”

The card shows a handwritten “Flugpost” inscription, a circular flight handstamp, and an official censorship handstamp, along with a seldom seen Krakow FPO 186 transit datestamp of January 20, 1915. The Knozer correspondence provides invaluable insights to everyday life during the Przemyśl sieges. These cards are relatively rare; fewer than twenty have been recorded.

**Fourteenth flight**: The airplanes of 1915 could not climb sufficiently high enough in a short time in a direct line to avoid enemy gunfire, so flying from Przemyśl was difficult.
and done usually in the first light of dawn in order to cross the Russians lines safely. On March 22, 1915, the day of the surrender, an open-cockpit aircraft piloted by Sgt. Robert Meltsch took off from the fortress, but soon developed engine trouble and was forced to land in the enemy lines. The pilot was taken prisoner and almost all the mail was lost. The salvaged cards were seized by the Russians, who forwarded them to Petrograd (St. Petersburg), where they were censored, and passed on to the International Red Cross in Copenhagen for return to Austria. An outstanding item carried by the last flight to leave the fortress has an oval Russian censorship “Petrogradskaja Wojennaja Censura” along with an Austrian Red Cross circular censor marking. The card was received in Vienna almost five months later, evidenced by the August 14 manuscript endorsement.

“Experimental” postcards: These cards were produced in Przemyśl, probably as a result of the paper shortage. Printed in the format and design of ordinary field postcards, they were made from two different pieces of thin paper in red/pink or light blue. The “experimental” cards are very rare, with only four auction realizations recorded in the past fifty years. They all originated in Fort Siedliska of the Przemyśl fortress, were sent by the same people (Lt. Altmann, Hajek, and Kadett Numenmacher), and show a straightline “K.u.K. Fliegerkompanie 11” marking. It appears that these “experimental” cards were used from November to mid-January.

One of them, salvaged from a bomb-damaged London building in 1940, suffered water damage and the pink and white parts separated. Written by Oblt. Altmann, the Commander of Fort Siedliska, to his parents in Vienna during the New Year’s Eve celebration of 1914, it includes signatures familiar to Przemyśl mail collectors, including Wilhelm Hajek (the poet and censor) and Capt. Sverljuga (Artillery Commander for WERK 1/1, the Siedliska Group). Both Hajek and Sverljuga defended the Siedliska Fort during the first siege. The card
also shows a “K.u.K. Festungsartillerie Regiment Kaiser Nr. 1” marking and was censored. As with the “Wanneck” card, this item was acquired by Keith Tranmer in 1959 at the Robson Lowe sale of the Marquis of Bute collection.

The card that was flown three times: Card #18740 was written by Hptm. Georg Edler von Lehmann, one of the most experienced pilots of the Austrian Air Force. On the reverse, while on his way from Krakow to Przemyśl on February 9, 1915, he wrote to his wife: “I think of you on my flight to Przemyśl ….I am healthy and…1500 m above the earth — Pepi.” Interestingly, Hptm. Lehmann had carried this card on his earlier flight (flight 9) from Przemyśl to Krakow on February 7. It was blank and only censored by Hptm. Nimmerrichter, the Commander of the Fortress Balloon Division No. 1. Since the card was never mailed from Krakow, Lehmann used it again to write his wife during next flight to the fortress (February 9). Finally, he took the card with him to Brzesko on February 12 (flight 11). Its rarity stems from the fact that this is the only card known to have flown three times during the Przemyśl siege.

Registered mail: Registered mail flown from besieged Przemyśl is not commonly found. One of the most celebrated examples is illustrated in color on the cover of Keith Tranmer's book. It was posted on November 5, 1914 (two days before the second siege commenced), and received in Vienna January 14, 1915 (crayon manuscript endorsement). This cover was probably expedited privately in late December 1914 or early January 1915. Indeed, in addition to the “official” courier flights, there was a second service for more urgent mail, and for those officers with “connections.”

The envelope contains a letter from Franz Vodrazka, Militärbeamter, K.u.K. Genie-Direktion Przemyśl, to his parents: “If you do not hear from me for a considerable time do not worry, and when the situation improves you will hear from me.” Registered mail from Przemyśl was sent through the civilian post office, and although it was given priority, it had to be censored with a framed “ZENSURIERT” red handstamp.

Mail Flown by Airplanes to Przemyśl

Many families tried to stay in touch with their loved ones, but the majority of correspondence never reached the addressees. Only a lucky few out of 130,000 stationed soldiers and officers received a letter from home carried by the infrequent courier flights, which was most demoralizing. Based on their correspondence, it seems there was a general belief among the men that a letter could be sent through the Fliegerpost from Krakow. However, an additional frustration came when an order was given on November 9, 1914 that all mail sent to Przemyśl should be retained instead of being returned to the senders. It was not until February 2, 1915 that newspapers announced that mail could no longer be accepted for Przemyśl. Indeed, hundreds of bags of Przemyśl-bound correspondence were found in Vienna and Krakow in early spring 1915.

The last flight to Przemyśl: One of the most famous of all the Przemyśl air mail items is the only known private letter flown into the fortress a day prior its surrender. It was sent by A. Lubanski of The War Press Quarters in Krakow,
The only known private letter flown into the Przemyśl fortress one day before the surrender. Confirmed by the pilot: “Arrived by the last flight on March 21, 1915 at 5 PM.”

and addressed to Major J. Bakowski in Przemyśl (“mit Fliegerpost” — by air). It carries the Krakow “K.u.K. FPO 39/13.II.15” postmark and “K.u.K. Kriegspressequartier” marking. A confirmation on the flap in the pilot’s handwriting states: “Brief angelangt mit der letzten Fliegerpost am 21/3 - 915 um 5 Uhr Nm” (“Letter arrived by the last flight on March 21, 1915 at 5 PM”). Indeed, records show that on that very day two aircraft landed in Przemyśl (pilots Stanger and Meltsch). This exceptional cover (ex Newall collection) was displayed at a prestigious “MonacoPhil 2002” exhibition.10 Organized under the patronage of Prince Ranier III of Monaco, the event featured a “rarest of the rare” display of one hundred stamps and covers exhibited by members of Le Club de Monte-Carlo.

**The Maxa correspondence:** The correspondence of Frau Maxova, a lady from Prague who used a variety of routes with unusual persistence over a five-month period to reach her husband in Przemyśl, is one of the most remarkable stories of the siege era. Keith Tranmer uncovered it in the late 1960s when he acquired from the Maxa son their mail collection (covers, with letters removed). It is highly certain that some of the items expedited to Przemyśl successfully reached the fortress, went into captivity with the recipient, and miraculously survived the Siberian war camps and his later service in the Czech Legion in Russia. The story reads as follows: A Reserve Officer working in the Przemyśl main stores, Prokop Maxa, informed his wife in Prague that he was able to supply red wine for Major General von Nickl. In return, the General had suggested that letters could be sent to Prokop in Przemyśl through an old friend, Oblt. von Mayer of Flying Squadron No. 14 (FPO No. 30 in Kaschau, Hungary), who could then arrange to have mail forwarded to the fortress.

Frau Maxova took the hint, and wrote to her husband on a field postcard, which civilians could purchase in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The card was sent from Prague on December 16, 1914, addressed to Oblt. von Mayer at Fliegercompagnie 14, Feldpost 30, with the Przemyśl address of Prokop Maxa in the upper right corner. With General von Nickl’s name as a useful reference and connecting address, this card was delivered in Przemyśl. There were inward flights from Krakow on December 19 and December 24. However, Oblt. von Mayer was
most likely unaware of the whole arrangement, as many of subsequent Maxova letters sent directly to him were simply returned to Prague.

Another attempt to reach Prokop on January 22, 1915 apparently failed. Here, in her effort to assure message delivery to her husband, Frau Maxova used the address of Nikolaus Knozer, a well-known Przemyśl siege figure and a friend to Hptm. Blaschke, the commander of Flying Squadron No. 11 stationed in Przemyśl. In order to make sure that Knozer, who censored some of Maxa's mail before, recognized the connection, she mentioned her name along with a return Prague address on reverse. However, she wrongly addressed the card, combining Fliegerkompagnie No. 11, which was indeed in Przemyśl, and Feldpost 30, which was in Kaschau, Hungary. The letter was held by authorities until after the siege ended, and ultimately returned to sender, as evidenced by a red-framed “Derzeit nich zustellbar / zurück” ("Impossible now to deliver / back") Krakow handstamp.

The Maxova card with the rarest markings was posted in Prague on January 22, 1915, just before publication of the ban on future mail to the garrison. It is addressed c/o Fliegerkompagnie No. 11 Krakau, with Maxa's address almost obliterated by the datetamp. The card was censored in Krakow (“Zensuriert Hauptpostamt” cachet) and transferred to Squadron No. 10 instead of Squadron No. 11. Indeed, in the beginning of January 1915, to strengthen the air connection with the garrison, the operational unit of Fliegerkompagnie No. 10 was moved from Krakow to Brzesko. If
not subjected to any delays, the card might have flown to Przemyśl as early as on February 1. The Fliegerpost No. 10 circular acceptance handstamp of “K.u.K. Luftschifferabteilung” is extremely rare. There is only one other card with this marking recorded; it was posted on January 5, 1915 and flown from Brzesko to Przemyśl on January 12.

**K.u.K. Fliegerpost Przemyśl cachet:** A controversy exists about one item related to the siege of Przemyśl, a special framed rectangular handstamp depicting the “Taube” type of airplane used by the Germans. Described as a Sobetzsky-type (it was first identified by Georg Sobetzsky), it was most likely produced with the idea of making Brzesko a base for all flights from and to Przemyśl.11 This handstamp, measuring 45mm x 27mm, can be found in violet or black. It was applied to some unofficial or courtesy correspondence flown into Przemyśl after the sender made a suitable donation to the charity.

However, in *Handbuch der Luftpostkunde* published in Germany in 1925, authors Berezowski and Paganini write: “After the fall of the fortress, the original device used for the cachet fell into the hands of private party. Thus, one finds later canceled-by-favor cachets in both black and violet on covers and postal cards, all with Austrian postage stamps. Genuinely used on legitimate air mail, this cachet is exceedingly rare.”12 We do not know how many envelopes with Kinsner’s name were printed; however, it is plausible that the envelope shown here derives from K.u.K. Aviation Archives, as described by Herr Koselin. Certainly, it is attributed to the Arsenal Airfield near Vienna, identifies gunmaster Kinsner as its designer, and should be treated as an unusual philatelic souvenir of the Przemyśl siege era.

**Paper Balloon Flights from Przemyśl**

Since airplane flights from Przemyśl were often disrupted, delayed, or canceled altogether due to weather conditions, on January 9, 1915 Commander Grebenz of the Fortress Balloon Division No. 3 issued an order allowing transport of mail by paper balloons.5,6 Special cards were sold at 50-heller per card, with proceeds going to a fund for the Widows and Orphans of Fallen Soldiers. One card was allowed per officer or fifteen soldiers (who were to send a combined message). It is unlikely these cards were printed separately and solely for that purpose. Recent research suggests that about 6,000 cards in various shades of blue were simply separated from the previously printed bulk of field postcards. These “balloon blue” cards were then numbered with a four-digit metal numerator (the lowest and the highest numbers recorded are 0089 and 5909, respectively), although a single hand-numbered card (#1020) and a one with a five-digit number (#15747) do exist. All cards received a special “Ballonpost Przemyśl 1915” violet handstamp, a “IX/54” control “camouflage” seal (where “IX” stands for Galicia and “54” for Przemyśl), and a “Festungsballonabteilung” flight handstamp.

The balloons were made from varnished wrapping paper to be as light as possible, were small enough in size to avoid detection, and were filled with about eight cubic meters of illuminating gas in order to carry approximately five to six pounds of mail. They had to travel about 120 km over the front and enemy-occupied territory. The mail pack was accompanied by a credit note or 10 Kronen for finding and handing over the mail to the authorities. Five paper balloons, each with 500–600 cards wrapped in balloon material to waterproof it, were released on January 20. Two balloons were intercepted by the Russians, but the remaining three reached Hungary, and were found in Turia-Remete (March
Lemes (May 18), and Margitfalva (June 20), as confirmed by postmarks on some of the surviving cards.

There is some controversy regarding the “Lemes” balloon as only a single card carrying a “Lemes” postmark has been recorded (ex Newall collection). The item was addressed to a person living in that village, and it remains unknown whether the balloon did indeed land in Lemes itself, or whether the postmark was applied upon the arrival to the addressee’s hometown. In all, Przemyśl balloon mail is much scarcer than that transported by airplanes. It is a fair assessment that only about 5 percent of all existing cards sent from the fortress were flown by paper balloons.

One of the field postcards (#629), written on February 3, 1915, was addressed to Szeged, Hungary. This item was flown in the balloon released from Przemyśl on March 7. The balloon was found in Turja-Remety, Hungary, as evidenced by a seldom seen March 19 postmark applied at FPO 47, which is known to have been used to process some mail from that balloon flight.

Another unusual balloon card was addressed to Budapest. It contains short messages from seven Hungarian soldiers stationed in the fortress, along with addresses of the families to be notified that they all were doing just fine. Interestingly, this card was never censored, since it lacks the required rubber-stamp markings. Additionally, it carries an unusual handstamp: “K.u.K. Festungskanonenregiment/Fürst Kinsky Nr. 3/ Festungskanonabteilung.” The card is now accompanied by a letter written in May 1926 by Vienna-based Przemyśl collector and stamp dealer, Adolph von Arx, who states: “The mark is particularly scarce...only 3 of my 43 balloon cards carry this flight cachet.” He also writes that he intends to attend a stamp show in New York City in the fall 1926 where he will bring 750 (!) of the Przemyśl siege cards.

A unique Przemyśl balloon card has previously been described in Austrian air mail catalogues by Sobetzky, Köhl, and others. It carries the “15747” serial number, the one reserved for airplane correspondence (only about 6,000 consecutively numbered blue balloon cards were prepared). The message was written on January 5, 1915, seven days prior to when the blue balloon cards went on sale.

It was canceled at the Post Office on February 1 and has a “Ballonpost Przemyśl 1915” handstamp.

The use of an “inappropriate” airplane number on a blue card intended solely for the balloon transport, as evidenced by an “appropriate” balloonpost handstamp, may be explained as follows: An officer with apparent access to airplane cards wrote the message (January 5). When the item was discovered among those meant for an airplane flight, the card was numbered, and later (February 1) it received a control seal along with the datetamps at the post office. However, since the “Fliegerpost Przemyśl 1915” marking was still missing, the “Ballonpost Przemyśl 1915” marking was applied in error. The card was then censored and, instead of being flown by balloon (as implied by the handstamp), it
was most likely carried by aircraft to Krakow on February 7, 1915. Is there an army in which everything always goes according to regulations? If so, it certainly was not in the Austro-Hungarian Army.

Manned Balloon Flights from Przemyśl

Shortly before the surrender of the Przemyśl fortress, an effort was made on March 19 to send out manned balloons — named Przemyśl, Austria, Josef Ferdinand, Schicht, and Steiermark, although the latter was carried away by a storm before the crew could board it. The others got away, but none of four piloted balloons reached the Austrian lines and all had to land in the Russian-occupied territory. On landing, each balloon and most of the official mail it carried were destroyed by the crew, as instructed, before capture. The few surviving cards were handed over to the Red Cross in St. Petersburg, who in turn passed them on to the Red Cross Bureau in Copenhagen, from where they were eventually delivered to the addressees at least six months later. Not surprisingly, these items are among the scarcest of the Przemyśl post.

The identification of mail carried by the manned balloon flights is further complicated because it is comprised of cards carrying both “Fliegerpost” and “Ballonpost” markings. This makes it difficult to distinguish balloon mail from similar mail salvaged from the airplane flight made on the day of surrender, March 22 (Sgt. Melta), unless these are cards dated after March 19, all of which are very rare.

Two extremely rare cards were flown in the balloon Austria, piloted by Hptm. Nimmerrichter.15 Both cards were written on March 18, the day before the balloon flight. The first one is from Oblt. Alex Piskorz, Intendant of the 108th Infantry Brigade in the Pizudica area of Przemyśl, who was well known to Nimmerrichter. The second one is from Karl Vareschi, an FPO 152 official. Both cards show identical censor initials but only the Piskorz card appears to have a censor handstamp “Zur Beförderung geeignet” (“suitable to forward”). Both arrived safely in Innsbruck, even though one was redirected. Vareschi writes: “Although the delivery of this card is uncertain I send it anyway to give a sign of life. Should you not hear from me for some time, do not worry. I will be back. Kisses, greetings, — Karl.” Piskorz writes a sentimental letter, but opens with an interesting note: “I just got your letter from 9/3/15 No. 230,” which establishes that he was able not only to send mail privately but to receive replies the same way through his connections with Nimmerrichter, and most likely someone outside the fortress. Interestingly, Piskorz was sending quite large amounts of money to his wife throughout the siege.

After crash-landing in Lukowo in the Russian lines, some thirty miles south of Brzesc Litewski, Nimmerrichter managed to destroy the balloon and burn the approximately eighty-eight pounds of mail on board. However, the aviator also carried some private mail in his greatcoat pocket, including the two cards shown here, as well as one to his wife, now in another collection.9 The captured flyer was arrested and taken to the Russian Army H.Q. at Cholm for interrogation. When he was accused of being a spy, two Russian flyers intervened to confirm that Nimmerrichter was indeed a pilot and, in an act of friendship, they offered to post his private mail. Both cards were sent first to Petrograd where they received censor marks. Although they are partially washed out, these marks and a red Austrian Red Cross handstamp can be seen on the cards.

Of note, the Russian censor mark on balloon cards (a rectangular “D.C. Petrograd”) is distinct from that found on salvaged cards from the fourteenth airplane flight (an oval “Petrogradskaia Wojennaja Censura”), which also was forced to land in the enemy lines. This may also help to distinguish these two very seldom seen Przemyśl mailings.

The Piskorz card arrived in Innsbruck more than five months later, on August 26, 1915, as annotated by his wife. Indeed, she meticulously numbered all the correspondence from her husband, which reached “267” on this particular card. So much for one card per officer! However, this fascinating story does not end here. After World War I, both cards became part of the air mail material acquired in the 1930s by the Marquis of Bute from Georg Sobetzsky. Unfortunately, the cards had suffered water damage during the bombing of London in 1940. Finally, Keith Tranmer purchased them, together with many other prized Przemyśl items presented by the Bute collection.
here, at the Robson Lowe auction of Bute air mail holdings in 1959.

Epilogue

Keith Tranmer once wrote: “There are many interpretations of what constitutes postal history, but in my long experience the human aspect that the student can discover is the true reward of collecting, and in a subject such as the siege of Przemyśl ... the collector is able to relate closely to some of the personalities engaged.” During fifty years of forming one of the most significant Przemyśl siege collections, Tranmer made a major effort to uncover its personal aspects and to get the relevant information first hand. It took him four years, for instance, to acquire the Maa correspondence from the son of one of the Przemyśl defenders. He also became a good friend and an eager listener to the late Franz Graf Czernin von Chudenitz who knew many Przemyśl veterans, including Oblt. Nimmerrichter. It is my hope that this article, a testament to Keith Tranmer’s Przemyśl siege postal history philosophy, will provide the impetus for a new generation of international scholars to further study this fascinating topic.

Endnotes


The Author

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