

50 Years Ago in Stamps:

Poland's Postal Service in Danzig

by Edward Nowak, Sr. (From STAMPS Magazine, Feb. 21, 1959, with images added)

According to registered philatelic facts, the Polish postal service at Gdansk (Danzig) was inaugurated in 1654 by John Casimir, King of Poland. The mail service, from its inception, waged constant battle with postal services of Prussia, due to the insistence of that country on maintaining service through Poland, especially between the two Prussias.



The second partition of Poland in 1793, and the resultant Prussian absorption of Gdansk, was the cause of liquidation of Poland's postal service in that region of Europe. The last Polish postmaster to serve was A. Stanislawski.

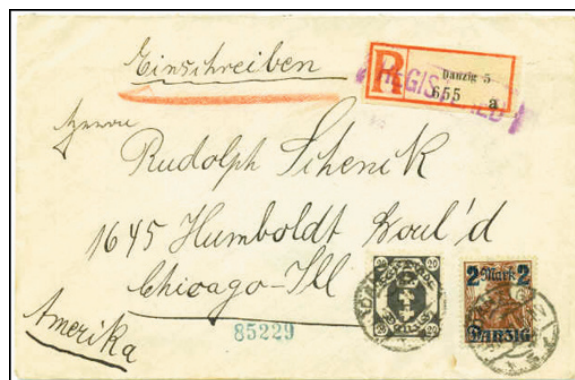
On the strength of the Versailles Treaty (January 10, 1920) Poland again began to organize its own postal department in the newly created "Free City of Danzig" and the Polish corridor to the sea.

Pursuant to laws arrived at during the Convention of Paris (November 9, 1920), Poland not only was given a free hand in establishing a postal service in the "Free City of Gdansk" and the Port of Danzig, but the "Free City itself made agreements to rent or sell to Poland land space or buildings indispensable for Poland's postal facilities: offices, telegraph and telephone housings", etc. The Paris Convention also set up rules upon which Poland could obtain the right-of-way privileges for stringing wire networks through Danzig and the Polish Corridor with connections into Poland proper.

Because several legal points were not concluded during the Convention in Paris, one more meeting was called in Warsaw to iron out discrepancies between Poland and the Free City of Gdansk. The protocol agreement was signed (September 24, 1921) by Leon Plucinski for Poland, while a Senator from the Free City, Julius Jewelowski, signed for the opposition.

The seeming lawfully arrived at agreements and rules in Warsaw did not prevent a boycott, deliberate sabotage of Polish postal property and outright commando tactics by German nationals in Gdansk.

At first, due to a provisional agreement between the representatives of the Free City of Gdansk and Poland, the first Polish post office was established at Danzig October 10, 1920, and was named "Urząd Ekspedycji Pocztowej" (Office of Postal Expediting). The duties of this postal service were the receiving of parcels from United States and elsewhere and the forwarding beyond the Polish border of parcels and bags of mail by seaways.



Danzig 1921, registered cover to U.S. with 1920 2 mark on 35pf, Sc. 27, and 1920 20pf, Sc. 66

After special agreements arrived at between representatives of Poland and authorities of the Free City of Gdansk, a second post office was opened (April 14, 1923) in the Main R. R. Station in Gdansk. This post office (#2) was assigned to maintain contacts with the post office in "Port of Gdansk" and to supervise the inter-Polish postal service, mail trucks, and correspondence on trains arriving at Gdansk.

Neither post office number one nor two was open to the public. During January 5, 1925, the Polish Postal and Telegraph Office—after a public ceremony (photo, right)—officially opened post office building number three on Hevelius Square. This establishment was opened for the general public.



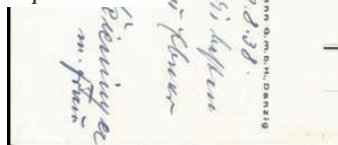
The Gdansk mail was franked with stamps overprinted "PORT GDANSK". These ad-



Polish Danzig 1931, registered commercial cover with "Port Gdansk" overprints, Sc. 1K20, 22, 11



Danzig 1937 Sc. 1K32 with "Port Gdansk" overprint



Frei Stadt Danzig 5pf, Sc. 170, coil stamp pair with slogan cancel "Casino Zoppot Summer and Winter" hesives were valid only for mail service at Polish post offices or for letters deposited in the Polish mail boxes placed at strategic street corners in Gdansk. Mailmen in Polish postal uniforms did not function until 1925.



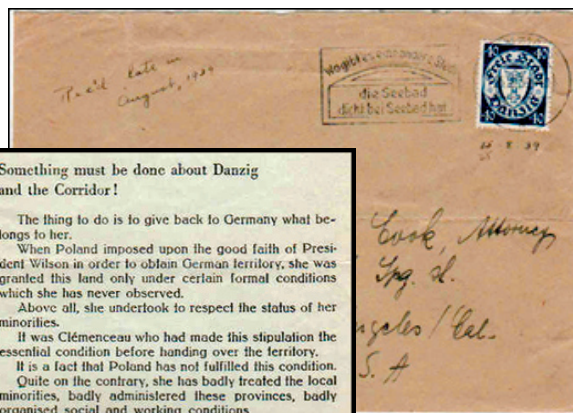
Danzig 1938 Sc. 1K36 with "Port Gdansk" inscription upper right

The establishment of the Polish post office in Hevelius Square caused much destruction and sabotage by Prussian nationals in Danzig. As early as the night of 5-6 January "unknown



Danzig 1939 (Jan), philatelic registered cover to Germany with Danzig Stamp Day set, Sc. 234-37 tied by "Tag der Briefmarke" date stamps

vagrants" painted over Polish mail boxes, and poured oil or tar into mail receptacles. In general, anti-Polish attacks were started to harass the Polish mail service. The mail deposited in the "Free City of Gdansk" post offices was returned after a lapse of days, because it was addressed "Gdansk" instead of "Danzig". Echoes of the incidents reverberated through Warsaw to the meetings of the League of Nations, International Forum, and the Tribunal of Justice at The Hague. Poland suffered the humiliating Prussian insults until 1939 when the Nazis took an open stand, and Hitler's might began threatening an open war on Poland.



Something must be done about Danzig and the Corridor!

The thing to do is to give back to Germany what belongs to her.

When Poland imposed upon the good faith of President Wilson in order to obtain German territory, she was granted this land only under certain formal conditions which she has never observed.

Above all, she undertook to respect the status of her minorities.

It was Clémenceau who had made this stipulation the essential condition before handing over the territory.

It is a fact that Poland has not fulfilled this condition.

Quite on the contrary, she has badly treated the local minorities, badly administered these provinces, badly organised social and working conditions.

She should have considered Danzig, according to her own words her natural port, as her obvious and only harbour. Instead she has willfully neglected it and has herself established a dangerous competitor port at Gdynia, which latter she has moreover supplemented by a naval base not specified in the Treaty of Versailles and not in accordance with the disarmament provisions contained therein.

In the parallel case of Salonika, Yugoslavia showed that there was no need for her to seize the slightest particle of Greek soil in order to obtain an outlet.

What would France have said if at Versailles Switzerland had claimed a corridor down the Rhône valley to provide her with access to the Mediterranean, where the port of Cettle had proved so useful during critical times?

What would Britain say — a question put by W. H. Dawson, the well-known British author — if she were to be cut in two by a strip of land under the sovereignty of a foreign power reaching from Hull and Newcastle to Liverpool and Bristol?

Pro-Germany 1939 Propaganda cover and letter received in U.S. August 1939

It was during the late morning of August 25, 1939, that Hitler's battleship *Schleswig-Holstein* steamed into the "Free Port of Gdansk" and anchored in the canal. There were no incidents until Tuesday August 29, when at noon, in front of the Commissariat of Prussian Police, the "visitors" from the Nazi battleship murdered a Polish mail carrier by throwing the victim to the ground and kicking him to death. Thus the Polish mail carrier, Franciszek Mionskowski was the first victim of Nazi brutality in the "Free City of Gdansk."

Two days later—September 1, 1939—at 4:35 a.m. the *Schleswig-Holstein* opened intense fire on the Polish barracks on Westerplatte. At the same instant detachments of Danzig police and battalions of Nazi brownshirted S. S. Troops attacked the Polish post office building at Hevelius Square. The S. S. Troops encircled the Polish post office building and attempted to enter. The Polish employes in the building: mailmen, officials, truck drivers, janitors, and custodians, barricaded the building and attempted to communicate with the General Commissioner of Poland at Neugarten Street, but in vain. The wires had been cut.

With four machine guns, several carbines, and hand grenades the Polish crew in the encircled building decided to fight and die rather than surrender. The S. S. Troopers from the S. S. Heimwehr regiments, under the personal command of Gen. Eberhardt, charged at 5 a.m. against the fifty Poles barricaded in the building. The crew of Polish mailmen opened withering fire and tossed hand grenades, forcing the S. S. Troops to retreat with considerable losses. Three more times the Nazis attacked and each time were repulsed with losses. The Polish postmaster, Konrad Guderski, was in command of the valiant crew, and when the S. S. Troopers finally broke into the hall on the first floor of the post office he entered the hall with hand grenade in hand, and blew himself up along with 27 Nazis. After the heroic death of the postmaster the command was taken over by Alfons Flisykowski, already wounded and walking with aid of improvised crutch.

Continued on page 18

By this time over six agonizing hours had passed for the barricaded Polish postal workers. The S. S. Troops again charged, this time with the help of artillery firing point blank from a fifty-meter distance beyond the bridge over Rudnik. Armored cars also now arrived, and as if that was not sufficient to subdue fifty ill-armed Poles, the S. S. Troopers started a new attack with flame throwers. The doomed building, saturated with gasoline by Nazis, soon was a blazing inferno.

After fourteen hours—at 7 p.m.— the valiant Polish postal workers gave up. The thirty-five survivors, mostly wounded and burned, emerged from the building under the white flag of truce. Even at that moment of surrender, Dr. Jan Michon, the assistant secretary of the post office fell mortally wounded. Joseph Wasik, superintendent of Polish Post Office #1, was literally roasted to death in the flames from a firethrower in the hands of a Nazi Trooper.

Disregarding all rules of war and the International Convention, the Hitlerites refused to recognize the Poles as combatants. The Nazi military court, on orders from Gen. Eberhardt, condemned (October 2, 1939) the Poles to death. Of the original fifty Polish postal workers barricaded in the post office building, only elderly Mrs. Malgorzata (Margaret) Pipkowa escaped the death sentence. Her husband, Jan Pipkowa, a janitor in the destroyed post office, had died a hero's death, carbine in hand.

The sentence of death was carried out October 5, 1939. The valiant Poles, most of them wounded, burned and maimed, were



“marched” over to the former Prussian rifle range in the vicinity of Zaspas, near Wrzeszcz, where they were mowed down with machine-gun fire by S. S. Troopers.

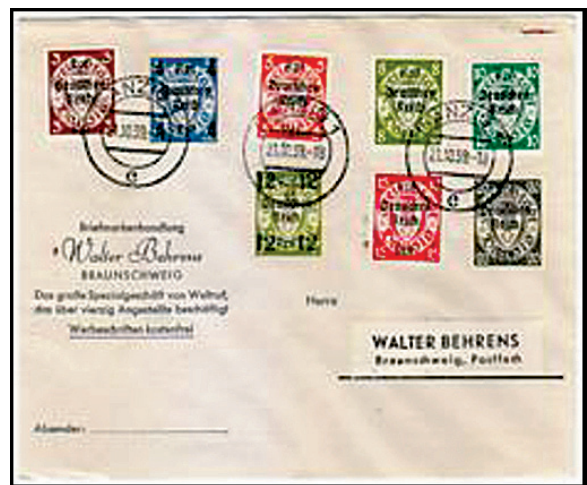


Danzig Sc. 244, with German Administration overprint on Danzig Sc. 168

The bodies of the martyred Poles were secretly buried by Nazis in a single grave on Zaspas which even today, after careful search, remains unknown. The grateful Polish Government



Sc. 492, Unification of Danzig, issued by Germany September 18, 1939 immediately following the fall of Danzig.



1939 cover with stamps issued under German Administration following the fall of Danzig, Sc. 241 / 250

in recognition of the valiant and above duty defense of the Gdansk Polish Post Office, decorated the standard of the “Postal, Telegraph and Telephone Workers Alliance” with the order of Virtuti Military V class.



Poland Sc. B48

The Polish Ministry of Posts also honored the memory of their valiant



Sc. 819

mailmen and postal employees with two commemorative stamps: one in 1946 (left), and the second in 1958 (right).



Memorial to the Danzig postal workers and 1979 stamp picturing the Memorial, Sc. 2354

(Subsequent to this article, a memorial to the Danzig Polish postal workers was erected and a 1979 stamp was issued depicting that Memorial. JFD.)

