

# THE CZECHOSLOVAK SPECIALIST

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## EDITORIAL

Every collector shows his treasures, at some time, to a non-collector. The non-collector is pleased with the esthetic taste of the arrangement of the stamps; with the artistic beauty of the stamps and, if the collector talks about the stamps, the history of the stamps or of the historical incident which prompted the issue of the stamps, the non-collector marvels at the knowledge the collector possesses. In this materialistic day, the non-collector is bound to ask the question: "How much is your collection worth?" What is the collector's answer? Does the collector overemphasize the money value of the collection? If so, he is to be pitied! If, however, he points out the recreational value of his stamps; if he shows that stamps mean more to his mental health than money in the bank; if he can evince a greater love for those bits of paper than for the money which he could obtain in exchange for these stamps, he is doing a great service to philately.

We, collectors of Czechoslovak stamps, can go farther. We can become ambassadors of the Republic Hitler gobbled up in his greedy conquest. By knowing our stamps, we know the history of our country, we understand and appreciate the love of liberty and democracy fostered there. We can answer the isolationist with the correct answer when he claims that the fate of Czechoslovakia or any other country in the world, is not tied up with the fate of America. If we love America, if we want a world enjoying permanent peace, if we want a complete victory, — let us do the right thing every day and in every way. Let us buy war bonds and stamps; give blood to the Red Cross; support every move in our country to liberate the nations of the world from domination by the hordes of Nazi racketeers. We have these in our country, too, let us remember that after this war, we must get rid of them, too.

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# Military Postal History of Czechoslovakia

By J. W. LOWEY, A. P. S.



Fig. 11



Fig. 13



Fig. 12

At the end of June the division was designated as a reserve of the First Italian Army, with headquarters at the southern tip of Monte Baldo, on Lake Garda. In the middle of September it was moved into the main sector of the battlefield between Adige and Riva. After minor clashes with the enemy at Martello, Doss Casino and La Palu, the great battle at Doss Alto began on October 21st. Just as in the battles of Vouziers (France) and Zborov (Russia), the Czechoslovaks in this instance contributed a major share to the Allied victory. Fortunately, their losses were surprisingly small. Of twenty thousand men in the action, only about 250 were killed, although a substantial number were wounded.

After the signing of the Armistice in October 1918, all Czechoslovak units were quartered at Padova, where some contingents remained until the first half of 1919. The majority, however, had already left Italy before the end of 1918.

The army in Italy was permitted to operate sectional field post offices similar to those in France, although they were established only in the closing months of the war. All of them used the same type of cancellation, which is a somewhat elaborate one, and which differs from the one used in France in that it had an interchangeable date bar. (Figure 14) The translation reads as



Fig. 14



Fig. 15

follows: Outer circle—"Polni Posta Zahranic Vojska" (Field Post of the Trans-territorial Army). Above the date bar—"v Italii" (in Italy). Below the date bar—"Domobr. Cs." (Czechoslovak Home Defenders).

#### Doss Alto

On May 21, 1938 the Czechoslovak government commemorated the Italian Legion with the issuance of a single 50h stamp in green. It was designed by J. Vlcek, and engraved by B. Heinz. Perforation 12½. The adhesive shows a Czechoslovak Legionary in Italian battle dress.

Printing arrangements are the same as in the case of the "Vouziers" commemorative. The side tabs in the center show the hat of the Alpine troops. Above is the inscription "Ceskoslovenska Legie v Italii 1918-1938" (Czechoslovak Legion in Italy 1918-1938). Below are printed the names of battlefields—Piave, Val Bella, Cima Tre Pezzi, and Doss Alto. (Figure 15)

On June 24, 1938 two cities which had housed regiments that had participated in the Italian campaign simultaneously applied special cancellations to mail, as follows:

**Bratislava**—color, blue double circle and rose carmine inscription, "20th Anniversary of Inf. Regt. 39, Commander General Graziani."

**Kosice**—Same color for circle and inscription, the latter reading, "20th Anniversary of the Foundation of Inf. Regt. No. 32."

#### RUSSIA

"Thanks of the whole British Empire for the inestimable service rendered the Empire in the cause of Freedom and Democracy."

These were the words spoken by David Lloyd George, Prime Minister of England, to the Czechoslovak Legionnaires in Russia and Siberia in September 1918.

The Czechoslovaks living in Russia heeded the call to arms just as had their countrymen living in other countries of the Entente. The problem here was more difficult and complicated, however, due primarily to the small number of Czechs residing in Russia. But another important factor was the vast territory over which they had to travel in order to enlist.

On August 28th 1914 the "Ceska Druzina" (Czech League) was organized at Kiev, and in the same year seven hundred volunteers from all parts of Western Russia joined the movement. Prior to the outbreak of war these men had been engaged in various trades, or as farmers, or they lived in Russia as representatives of Austrian business concerns. Some of them held commissions as lower grade officers of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. During the course of the war a number of them rose to the highest ranks, as for instance, Sirovy, Gaida, Husak, Cecek, Klecanda, Prchala, Medek, and others.

Up to the time of the collapse of the Imperial Russian Army, all efforts to fight as an independent army under their own officers were without avail, and this despite the aid given their cause by many prominent military leaders of Russia and also Allied statesmen. It appeared at one time as if the request would be granted, when the Czar signed a decree which would permit the release of all Czechoslovak prisoners in Russia so that they could join the Druzina. Unfortunately, the Czar was persuaded at the last moment to rescind the order by Germanophile politicians and some officers within the Imperial General Staff. However, coming events were to work in favor of the Czechoslovaks. During the subsequent break-up of the Russian armies and the ensuing civil war, they took matters into their own hands.

Shortly before the Bolsheviks came to power the Czechoslovaks participated in one of the final great battles, and there they distinguished themselves to such an extent that their exploits instantly became known in Allied countries.

On the night of June 9th, 1917, as a unit of the reorganized Kerensky Army, and under the command of General Mamontoff, the Czechoslovaks struck west of the town of Zborov, storming the fortified positions of the Austrians. The action was originally planned by General Mamontoff as a diversion, but the Czechoslovaks disregarded orders and penetrated deep into the lines of the enemy, thereby forcing the adjoining Kerensky forces to move simultaneously. As a result, they captured twelve thousand prisoners, and large

quantities of war material were taken. It was in this battle that Lieutenant (later General) Sirovy lost his right eye, but within three days he was back with his comrades, directing operations.

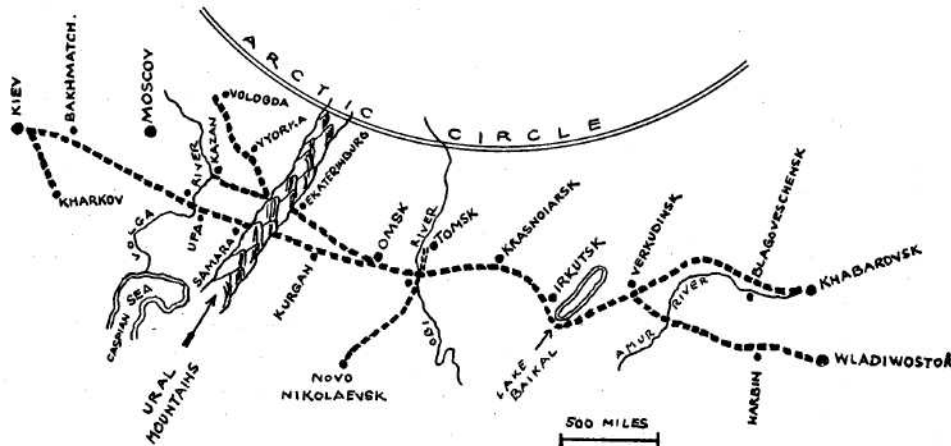
The battle of Zborov marked the turning point in the fate of the Czechoslovak Legion. The Kerensky government immediately permitted the formation of an independent army. Simultaneously, Czechoslovak prisoners scattered all over Russia were released and within a short time the army was thus strengthened by the thousands.

Captain Horace H. Van Wart, Czechoslovak Honorary Consul for Canada, and a member of the Canadian Expeditionary Forces in Siberia has this to say of the Czechoslovak Legion in his memoirs:

"Some of the most effective assistance the Allies received in the Great War came from a republic which at the beginning of the war did not exist. It was in August 1914 that the 'John Hus' battalion of Sharpshooters, the 'Ceska Druzina' was formed at Kiev in Russia. Its importance was only gradually realized, but towards the end of the war the Czechoslovak Legion in Russia and Siberia was the only bulwark of the Allies on the Eastern front. A thin line of eighty thousand soldiers, welded by incredible hardships into an invincible fighting force, held the Siberian Railroad over a distance of 5,000 miles and prevented the vast resources of Russia from coming to Germany's aid.

"In 1917 the disorganization of the Imperial Russian Army proceeded at a fast pace. Due to this the late President Masaryk, who at that time, was in Siberia with the Legion, decided that the Czechoslovaks would have to leave Russia to fight with the Allies in France. And so one of the most amazing treks of military history started, the march of 80,000 soldiers through 6,000 miles of hostile territory to the eastern sea.

"Numerous rearguard actions with advancing Germans had to be fought. All of these attacks, however, were repulsed. In the first half of 1918 two regiments and one battalion stood against two full divisions of Germans and held them at bay until the last of the troops had entrained from Bakhmatch Station.



The March of the Czechoslovak Army across Russia. Heavy broken line indicates the trek which started at Kiev and ended at Vladivostok, a distance of 6400 miles. The main body of the army was joined at various places by other units. Behind Lake Baikal the forces split, one group going north over Blagoveschensk to Khabarovsk, the other via Harbin, both finally merging at Vladivostok.

"From then on it was constant struggle through a territory of hostile forces. This seemed at an end when the Legion reached Vladivostok about the end of 1918. Here, however, they were confronted with an Allied change of

mind. The Supreme War Council, it appeared, had found an answer to the problem: how to reconstruct the eastern front. The treaty of Brest Litowsk, entered into on March 3, 1918 between the Soviets and Germany, and Austria Hungary, had never been recognized by the Allies. Now they decided to prevent a possible aid to Germany by the new Russia.

"The only organized power in Siberia able to carry out the plans of the Allies was the Czechoslovak Legion. It was decided that it should retrace its steps and occupy the Great Siberian Railway and thus prevent the repatriation of hundreds of thousands of German and Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war. These were returning to their countries to fight the Allies once more.

"This was a big sacrifice to demand of the Czechoslovak Army. Rumors of a breakdown in Austria had revived their hope of returning soon to a liberated fatherland, and now they were in the neighborhood of a seaport from which transportation to Europe was possible.

"Nevertheless they turned about and the long weary journey back began. It continued until they stretched in a thin unwavering line from Wladiwostok almost to the Ukraine a distance of some 5,000 miles. Here they fought until the Allied victory was an accomplished fact. Even then they remained until the end of 1920 when it was finally realized that these lonely Czechoslovak Legions could no longer oppose the Soviet State, already organized and strengthened. And so at long last they started eastward. For a third time they passed over the impoverished and alien country to the sea—and home. . ."

In spite of these experiences there were men with the Legion who felt the need for a postal system. They realized that some sort of communication had to be established so that members of the Legion could write to their relatives in Czechoslovakia. Men got together from the various units and opened discussions as to how to solve the problem. Chief advice and assistance at these gatherings was given by those Legionaries who had been postal employees before the war.

A postal headquarters was finally established at Omsk, Siberia. There it was decided to have the Russian ten kopec stamp then in use overprinted with a suitable text to indicate that it was for use on Army mail. No suitable printing plant could be found in Omsk to do the overprinting, and it was decided to send a detachment of men to Cheljabinsk. In this city a printer was found who was willing to acquire a substantial quantity of the required basic stamps on which to apply the overprint. Since only set type of the Russian alphabet was available, its use was agreed upon. The overprint was to read "Ceska Posta," in two lines set diagonally, and was to be printed in black. An unforeseen hitch came when the printer discovered that only an insignificant quantity of the stamps were available, and as a consequence, though the finished overprints were acquired they were never put to use.

Once more a conference was held among the members of the postal unit, and a decision quickly reached. It was decided to have specially designed adhesives printed which were to be of symbolical design and entirely Czech as to printing. Design for a 25 and 50 kopecs value submitted by Legionary Jan Maly and for a 1 ruble by Legionary Karel Cile were accepted. The 25 kopec



Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18

value, carmine, shows the Cathedral of Irkutsk, in front of which is a large urn and laurel sheath. The 50 kopeck value, yellow green, has as its design a car of the famous armored "Orlik" train. The 1 ruble stamp shows the silhouette of a Legionary. (Figures 16, 17, 18). The stamps were lithographed by Makushin & Pososhin at Irkutsk.

The first issue appeared in November 1918, and was partly gummed and partly ungummed, and imperforate. In January 1919 a quantity was perforated  $11\frac{1}{2}$ . When the postal outfit of the Legion returned to Czechoslovakia early in 1919, it delivered the plates with which the issue had been printed to the government authorities. From these plates the government made reprints which were perforated  $13\frac{3}{4}$ . These were never used on mails, of course, and the purpose of the reprints has never been made clear. The original perforated  $11\frac{1}{2}$  stamps are, of course, much more valuable than the reprints.

The printing of the second issue was begun at Prague. The stamps were die stamped from single dies, embossed in reverse, which applied the "perforation," the embossed design, and the ink in one operation. We use the word "perforation," but as a matter of fact, being printed singly they cannot be said to be perforated in the usual sense of the word. The little scallops are merely for the purpose of ornament, as no separation was involved. They were printed and gummed on cardboard paper. Then the printing equipment and printed stamps were sent to Irkutsk, where printing was continued.

First a single stamp appeared, which shows the white Bohemian Lion in a red oval, surrounded by inscriptions and ornaments and husitic as well as modern weapons, printed in blue. There are two types, namely:

Type One: Large sabre handle in the left side of the blue border.

Type Two: Small sabre handle (Figure 19)

In 1920 the stamp was overprinted on the bottom in black with the year "1920." (Figure 20). Later on the overprinted stamp was surcharged with the following denominations in green: 2, 3, 5, 10, 15, 25, 35, 50 kopecks and 1 ruble. (Figure 21)



Fig. 19



Fig. 20



Fig. 21

Although the basic stamp as well as the one overprinted with the year was postally used, no proof has ever been found that the surcharged stamps saw postal duty. It is believed that they were issued after the Legion had already disbanded its postal system.

Since Irkutsk had become the postal headquarters, letters had to be sent to this point from various sub-post office stations scattered over Siberia. There were several of these sub-stations located in this vast territory. From there mails were delivered from time to time to Irkutsk by whatever means were available for transportation, such as automobiles, troop trains, armored trains, bicycles, horses, as well as foot messengers, depending on the distance to be traveled. From Irkutsk accumulated mails were sent in armored trains to Wladiwostok, where they were entrusted either to American or Japanese authorities, who re-routed them on Allied steamers.

The postal service of the Legion handled not only first class mail, but also packages and money orders. The more valuable mails were always transported in armored trains, which were heavily guarded. Only a small portion of the mails actually reached Czechoslovakia. This is due to the fact that very few steamers were available at Wladiwostok at that time, and it has remained a mystery to this day what was done with the missing mail pouches.

Roessler-Orovksy, who organized the Scout Delivery System and printed the stamps for it during the revolutionary days in Czechoslovakia in 1918, also supervised the printing of the Legion stamps. Both of these stamps were printed by the same method. It is not known whether he had arranged for the shipment of the printing equipment to Russia or had taken it there himself. After the postal headquarters at Irkutsk had been disbanded, the unused remainders of stamps were shipped to Roessler-Orovky's address at Prague. Perhaps in recognition of services rendered the government at various times, and because it was not known what else to do with the remainders, he was permitted to retain them.

Shortly after this various philatelic organizations of Czechoslovakia, in a combined effort, petitioned the government to reprint the originals, since they were much in demand but were not available in sufficient quantities. The government consented and as a result two subsequent printings were made.

In 1927 Roessler-Orovksy died. During the liquidation of his property, his family found a note among his documents which divulged that the remains of the issue he had been permitted to retain consisted of eighty complete sets, which were enclosed with the note. Some time later the eighty sets were sold by the family to a Prague dealer of postage stamps. To be sure that he had bought the original issue, the dealer submitted forty sets each to the experts, Leseticky, and Gilbert, and after they had pronounced them to be genuine, they were asked to apply their expert marks on the reverse of each single item.

From information gathered over a substantial period of time, I have come to the conclusion that only a very few sets of the original issue are in the hands of American collectors or dealers. I have examined sets in quite a few collections, and in each instance they have turned out to be one or the other of the reprints. About seventy-five percent of the originals are still in Czechoslovakia, and the rest are scattered to all parts of the world.

In order that collectors who have these stamps might be able to tell the originals from the reprints and the many counterfeits which flooded Europe in the early twenties, specimens should be examined for the following details:

Original Issue—Color of frame varies in shade from blue to steel blue. Oval brick red to brown red. Printed on white carton paper, deeply embossed. The gum is yellowish to brownish, unevenly spread, and shows bubbles.

First Reprints—Printed on identical paper. Embossing less marked. Gum yellowish, but even, and does not show bubbles.

Second Reprints—Frame in darker blue, and shows white spots. Lion, off



center, and printed in luminous red. Ink is unevenly applied, causing the upper part to appear darker and the lower part much weaker.

Most covers and cards with these stamps are in poor condition, due to exposure to varying climatic conditions or long journeys in improper, leaky pouches. However, regardless of condition, they are sought by specialists, and bring nearly any price asked. This is because they are not only philatelic rarities, but also documents of Czechoslovak military history.

Several cancellations were used. Quantities of mail were obliterated at the various branch post offices in Siberia, although most of them have the bilingual (Czech-French) double circle steel postmark, "Military Post Czechoslovak Army in Russia." (Figure 22)



Fig. 22

Some letters received in addition at Army headquarters the identical, though larger rubber impression. Many letters also show straight-line rubber stamps, which denote the various Army units, and vari-colored labels with the inscriptions "Czechoslovak Army Mail" or "Via Army Mail to Prague," and many others.

(To be continued)

## Posta Ceskoslovenska 1919

Translated from the Hirsch Franek Handbook  
by W. L. Russell

(Continued from the October number)

### Overprint "D"

This was used for overprinting all stamps of quadrilateral format, i. e., Austrian Newspaper Stamps and Postage Dues, the latter, however, only the red Heller values, both large and small figures. After exhaustive search we have established the fact that the stereotyped blocks were made from three hand-settings, so that three different types occur. Their differences lie first of all in the different angles, Type 1 being 45 degrees, Type 2, 42 degrees, and Type 3, 41 degrees; and secondly in the altered positioning of the letters, which is made clear in the illustration on page 189 of the Handbook. The same plate was used for overprinting all values of the Newspaper stamps and the Heller values of the Postage Dues. Page 189 of the Handbook shows the plan of the plate, in which Type 1 occurs 32 times, Type 2, 31 times and Type 3, 37 times. Four overprints of Type "D" can also be found on the stamps of the 5 h. Rea-per (see later in Overprint "F").

### Overprint "E"

A special plate was arranged for overprinting the long upright Kroner Values of Austrian Postage Dues, 1, 5, and 10K Blue. After careful scrutiny of the individual overprints, we have established that for the creation of the clichés, two hand-settings were used, from which two types resulted. Their differences are quite trifling and consist, as the enlarged illustration in the handbook shows, principally in the altered shape of the "K" in CESKOSLOVENSKA (Type 1 has the K more open at the top). We have found no other essential differences, either in the relative positioning of the words, or in the degree of angle, which is always 55 degrees. Theoretically, of course, it must be admitted that other differences do exist, but they are imperceptible. Note that the second "9" of 1919 is never cut through at base in this overprint. Because we only had large blocks of the 1K and 5K at our disposal, it was not possible to reconstruct the whole plate. We can say, though almost with precision, that a single plate sufficed for overprinting all 3 values. These stamps, which were printed in Austria in large sheets of 320 stamps, came as a rule to the Post Offices in part sheets of 80 stamps, the 10K value in even smaller lots. It is probable therefore, that smaller blocks — particularly of the 10K — were overprinted.

(To be Continued)