

World War II, Polish Displaced Persons Camps

by Robert Fisher

Most of you know that one of my collecting interests is collecting local stamps from Displaced Persons Camps following World War II. The camps were mostly located in Germany, Austria, France, and Italy, with a smattering around the rest of the world. In my quest for these philatelic gems, I ran across some Polish stamps issued in Italy. I originally thought that these must be from some Polish DP Camp in Italy. However, a little research revealed an entirely different scenario.

My first clue was when I translated the text on the stamps “Polish victories in Italy”. Somehow that did not sound quite right. After some time, I was able to acquire an Italian Sassone stamp catalog. After some more translating, a whole new chapter of World War II history unfolded before me.

These stamps were from the military post offices of the Polish II Corps. They were in use only during 1945 and 1946. But I am getting ahead of myself and starting at the end of a fascinating tale.

Figure C1



The story starts in 1939 with the invasion of eastern Poland by the Soviet Union and western Poland by Germany. In August 1939, Hitler and Stalin agreed to divide Poland between them. One and a half million Polish civilians and military were sent to prison or exile in Siberia by the Soviets. The German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 ended the Nazi-Soviet pact. The Polish government in exile in England signed a Polish-Russian Military Agreement on 14 August 1941. This allowed for the creation of a Polish Army on Soviet soil. This led the Soviets to release many thousands of Poles, Belorussians and Ukrainians from the Soviet Gulags. Lieutenant General Wladislaw Anders was released from Lubyanka prison in Moscow in August 1941 to take command of the II Corps.



Figure C2

Over the next two years, the army was formed and grew in Southern Russia and Kazakhstan. The Soviets then began to withdraw support for political reasons and reduced their supply of military equipment. In reaction to this, General Anders moved all of his troops south to British held Persia and Iraq. From there, the British moved them to Palestine where they

were joined by the 3rd Carpathian Division, which was made up of Polish soldiers who had escaped Nazi Europe via Romania and Hungary. The 3rd Carpathian Division had already seen heavy action in Egypt and the battle for Tobruk.

By February 1944, the Corps was trained and eager to fight the Germans, so they were transferred to Italy where the Polish II Corps became an independent unit of the British Eighth Army under Lieutenant General Oliver Leese. The Corps fought with distinction in the fourth and final battle of Monte Cassino (May 1944), the Battle of Ancona and the Gothic Line (September 1944) and the Battle of Bologna (March 1945). During these battles, the corps suffered heavy casualties. The stamps of the souvenir sheet [Figure C1] commemorate the three significant battles in which they fought and honors their beloved leader, General Anders. The stamp with the map [Figure C2] shows the Polish eagle where the troops landed in Italy.

After the war, the Polish troops were used in Italy to assist Poles and other refugees escaping from the Soviets. In 1946 they were transported to Britain and demobilized. The majority of the 103,000 soldiers of the Polish II Corps stayed in exile and settled in Britain. Many of the Jewish soldiers, including Menachem Begin, returned to Palestine to help build the State of Israel.

June Meeting Report

Zoom It Is – For Now

With Covid-19 shutting down our face to face meetings, the CFSC has had two excellent on-line presentations in June. The first on June 4 featured **Jim Cooney** presenting all the stamps of the world issued in the first 10 years from 1840-49. Jim's favorite stamp from the presentation is found as **Figure C3**. About 24 members checked in for the Zoom conference. Jim showed stamps from Britain, Zurich, Brazil, Geneva, Basel, U.S., Mauritius, France, Belgium, and Bavaria. Jim has accumulated about half of the stamps issued from those countries and (tongue-in-cheek) solicited Christmas presents if anyone wants to help him fill some holes. The screen shot shown below (provided by R. Ridgeway) of the meeting shows from left to right and down; Robert



Ridgeway, Jim Cooney, Stan Brodersen, Henry Jehan, Steve Patrick, Josh Furman, Francis Ferguson, Mel Borofsky and David Allen.

On June 18, **Rick Cohen** showed a collection of registered covers of the world from his father Lynn's collection. After a brief history, he first showed covers from the seven continents, including a spot in Antarctica that sends 60,000 letters a year due to cruise ship trade. Then there was a colorful parade of covers from places like Lichtenstein, Brunei, Comoro Islands and even a cover from a 1936 flight of the Hindenburg.

Figure C4 shows a colorful registered cover from the Dominica. About 23 members listened in to Rick's presentation. The screen shot below shows from left to right and down, Jim Cooney, Francis Ferguson, David Zambon, Rick Cohen, Henry Jehan, David Allen, Forest Smith, Gene Perry, Newton Kulp, Josh Furman, Charlie Price, Steve Patrick, Carlos Guffain, Mel Borofsky, iPad(2) Unknown, James Archbold, Jim Moffitt and Stephen L. Strobel.



Figure C3

The next program will be **Thursday, July 2, at 7:00 p.m.**, and the speaker will be **Henry Jehan** showing hidden images on U.S. stamps from 20 years ago that needed a special decoder to recognize. Hopefully more members can join the video programs. You can do so from your computer (no camera needed, but preferred for a better experience), your I-pad, or even a smart phone.



Figure C4