THE PIONEER PERIOD OF
HUNGARIAN AIRMMAIL

BY
VICTOR GY. BEREČZ

SOCIETY FOR HUNGARIAN PHILATELY

Monograph Series

Number 1
THE PIONEER PERIOD OF HUNGARIAN AIRMAIL

by Victor Gy. Berecz

SOCIETY FOR HUNGARIAN PHILATELY
Monograph Series
Number 1
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface and Acknowledgements  ...  4

I. The Pre-War Period  ...  6

II. Przemysl Airmail Service  ...  10

III. The War Years  ...  21

IV. The Airline of 1918  ...  24

V. The Post-WW I Period  ...  28

VI. Air Service in Hungary
    1922-1925  ...  31

VII. Airmail Stamps and Markings
     1922-1925.  ...  37
The first page of my stamp album on the pioneer airmail material of Hungary shows a 1901 picture postcard depicting an idyllic scene of many well-dressed families floating above the buildings of Budapest in their private airships. It is entitled "Airships of the year 2000". My writeup on that first page is, I think, an appropriate beginning to this small work as well as to that closely related album. The writeup reads:

"Hungarian mail was recorded as having been flown experimentally on military balloons as early as 1898. Several special balloon flights were made in Austria and in Hungary between 1908 and 1913 which carried Hungarian mail. But, these efforts can better be described as "experiments" than as meaningful airmail service. The airmail service provided to the besieged Hungarian troops at Przemysl, in Galacia, during 1914-5 is the significant event that truly begins the pioneer period of Hungarian airmail."

"Just as this pioneer era did not begin abruptly, its end can not be pinpointed. By 1925 or 1926 a major network of air routes criss-crossed Europe. Domestic air service in Hungary was highlighted by special flights in association with philatelic events. The period of the pioneer was over."

"The 1901 picture postcard below shows the artist's concept of airships in the year 2000. Technically, his aircraft were surpassed in ten years. It is being used as a starting point, therefore, as a testimony to the skills of the aircraft pioneer."

These three paragraphs set the tone of this monograph as well as my collection. I am working as a historian as much as a phil-
atelist. I might be termed a "topicalist" (history of airmail service) collecting the "classical" material of Hungarian airmail. I did not start out to write this monograph, but to gather information to assist in the development of my collection.

I must also note that this monograph is not finished. It awaits your criticism, your additions, and your corrections. Only with your assistance will I, and the other readers, be able to fill in the missing parts of this fast-moving decade upon which I concentrate, 1915-1925. Any additional information or comments may be addressed to me at the Society for Hungarian Philately. I can assure you that they will be published in a future revision of this monograph, or in the NEWS OF HUNGARIAN PHILATELY.

It is difficult for me to address myself to acknowledgements since nothing herein is original, and it comes from so many sources. The standard catalogs and many specialized journals were invaluable. So was the help of many members of the Society for Hungarian Philately, especially Al Bauer who assisted with the translation of several Hungarian articles. I must also thank my wife, Joan, whose help, and particularly patience, is so necessary if I am to continue to spend so much time with my "dirty old envelopes".

I thank you all.

Vic Berecz
I. The Pre-War Period

The pioneer period of airmail in Hungary is considered by many to have begun prior to the first successful flight of a heavier-than-air aircraft. Many balloon flights, in Austria as well as in Hungary, are recorded as having carried Hungarian mail between 1898 and 1914. There is, though, no record of mail having been officially carried by airplane prior to 1914. These free balloon flights have little relationship to the basic concept of airmail—that letters be speeded to their destination—since balloons were neither speedy nor were they likely to end up near any predetermined destination. They were essentially experimental and publicity flights. Their story is presented here not because they were a direct precursor of any meaningful airmail service, but because of the enthusiasm they generated and the ideas that they instilled in the populace about the usefulness of air travel.

The earliest balloon flights that carried mail were in the 1898-1900 period. The mail was carried by Austrian Army balloonists, probably as favors. The only evidence of their having been flown are the manuscript notations of the pilot.

During the period 1907-1914 several mail-carrying flights were made by free balloons manned by both military and civilian pilots. These flights took place in both Austria and in Hungary. A summary of the flights known to the author follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Origin of Flight</th>
<th>Balloon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/5/07</td>
<td>Budapest</td>
<td>Wien II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/19/08</td>
<td>Vienna</td>
<td>Cattaro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/30/10</td>
<td>Vienna</td>
<td>Ragusa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/3/10</td>
<td>Budapest</td>
<td>Hungaria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/24/10</td>
<td>Budapest</td>
<td>Bussard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/16/12</td>
<td>Budapest</td>
<td>Bussard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/27/12</td>
<td>Budapest</td>
<td>Hungaria</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(6)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Unknown</th>
<th>Hungary</th>
<th>Hergesel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date Unknown</td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Tirol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Unknown</td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Uhu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Unknown</td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Sirius</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were probably other balloons and other flights, particularly in Austria, but these are the only ones that the author has found to be recorded to have carried Hungarian mail.

The special postcards that were carried are of several types. The cards are printed in blue, black and brown. The card front is typical, with space for address and message, but contains the words "post card" in ten languages. On the reverse is the inscription "Glück ab!" or "Glück ab! Gut Land!", with a picture of a balloon at the right. Also on the reverse is a place for the finder to put his name and the place and time the card was found. An example of the reverse is shown in figure 1.1.

The event that gave the first feeling of the potential of heavier-than-air airplanes in Europe was the flight across the English Channel by the Frenchman, Louis Bleriot on July 25, 1909. Less than a year later there was an international flying competition staged in Budapest from June 5 to 15, 1910. Bleriot made an appearance there and was greeted as a hero. Mail dispatched from the landing field received a large ornate cancellation adapted from a commemorative cancellation used a year earlier. An example is shown in figure 1.2. Some mail also received a green vignette reading "Nemzetközi Repulóverseny Budapest 1910, Junius 5-15". This material was not flown, but simply dispatched from the airfield.

A brief description of the state of aviation in Hungary immediately before the World War follows. In 1912 the Austro-
Hungarian Army had 26 airplanes, and the Navy had four seaplanes. At the same time there were 20 private aircraft in Hungary. The only internationally recognized airfield in Hungary was at Rákos, a suburb north of Budapest. During 1913 a military airfield was set up at Ujvidek, in southern Hungary (65 km NW of Belgrade, the capital of Serbia). It is notable that at the same time the airfield at Przemysl, Galacia, that later played such an important part in the history of airmail, was established. By the end of 1914, the Army had 110 aircraft, and the Navy which will be discussed in more detail later, also had a large number of seaplanes. The numbers of aircraft expanded greatly during the war, and many military airfields were established.

Glück ab!

Ausgeworfen aus Ballon

Fuhrer: Insasse: 25

Der Finder dieser Karte wird gebeten, nachstehendes zu unterzeichnen:

Auffindungszeit:

Zeit: Uhr: Min.

Name des Finders:

Figure 1.1

(8)
LEVELEZŐ LAP

Nagypáros
Papovits Miska

Honvédség
Kereskedelmi Tanácsos

Budapest

II. Váci utca 25.

Figure 1.2

(9)
II. Przemyśl Airmail Service

Przemyśl was an important town in Galacia (southern Poland) which was at the time a part of Austria. When referring to Przemyśl herein, we are referring to a fortified area of about 60 square kilometers which included the town itself and about 35 surrounding villages and settlements. The civilian population was about 60,000, and the military garrison consisted of 130,000 members of the Austro-Hungarian army, the majority of whom were Hungarian. The garrison was under the command of generals Tamasy and Kuzmanek. The czarist Russian forces, driving to the west, encircled Przemyśl on September 18, 1914. Because of a shift in emphasis, the siege was withdrawn on October 10. Przemyśl, though, remained cut off from other Austrian forces. On November 7 the second siege began, which culminated in the surrender of the entire fortress on March 22, 1915. On June 1, 1915 Przemyśl was regained by the Austro-Hungarian army and retained until the war's end. During the two sieges, the only means of communication were a single radio in the fortress and airmail. The total outgoing mail consisted of about 85,000 pieces officially carried, and another 5 to 10,000 pieces carried by the pilots as "favors".

The military airmail service was formed as soon as the first siege was established. During the first siege only a single plane, the "Staffel" carrying Capt. Taussig and Raabl got to Przemyśl. They landed on October 1 carrying no mail. They departed on October 6 carrying a few pieces of official mail and about 100 fieldpost cards, as favors to various officers. The cards are all cancelled by Fieldpost Office Number 11 on October 7, 1914. This and a circular censor mark were applied at Cracow army headquarters where the mail was brought for distribution by Capt. Raabl, after a forced landing at Jasło, Gal-

(10)
acia and an injury to Capt. Taussig.

There were a number of communication flights to Przemysl during the month between the blockades. No mail has been definitely established as having been flown during this period.

During the 4½ month second siege 12 planes left Przemysl on 9 separate days. The first four planes, leaving during 1914 carried official documents, and relatively little other mail, as favors to officers. Beginning in January 1915 the airmail was established as a regular service, and much larger amounts of mail were carried. On November 23 Capt. von Lehmann left Przemysl with the mail collected from November 8 until November 22. The plane landed in Cracow and the cancellation of Fieldpost Office Number 11 was applied on the 23rd. The mail was forwarded to Vienna for distribution, and a November 27 receiving mark was applied there. This mail also bore one of the two violet marks of Fliegerkompagnie Nr. 11 shown in figures 2.1 and 2.2. On December 9th, a flier named Wanneck and Lt. Wagner left Przemysl with mail collected between November 23 and December 7. They flew over the Carpathian mountains and landed on Hungarian soil. This mail was cancelled on December 10, 1914 by Fieldpost Office Number 30. The mark of Fliegerkompagnie Nr. 14 in violet, shown as figure 2.3, was also applied to this mail. On December 26 two planes left Przemysl, and it is not determined which carried the mail. The first was flown by Lts. Schmoezer and Martinek, and the second by Lts. Reischer and Rzemienowsky. They flew to Cracow with mail collected from December 8 until December 25. A few items bear the December 27 cancellation of Fieldpost Office Number 186. The mail was distributed in Vienna on December 30 and in Hungary in early January 1915. This mail also carries a mark of Fliegerkompagnie Nr. 11.
K.u.k. Fliegerkompagnie Nr. 11.

The January 8, 1915 issue of the base newspaper Tabori Ujsag announced the regulations under which the imminent regular airmail service was to operate. All mail was to be on official postcards that were to be sold for 50 filler, the proceeds going to a trust fund for war widows and orphans. Only one postcard was to be allocated to five men, and it was recommended that men from the same town send cards jointly. The cards were to be numbered for control purposes. No military matters could be included in the messages, and no codes were permitted. The cards were censored twice, and on one of these occasions they had to be signed by an officer. No unit identification could be included in the message, and regular fieldpost cancellations could not be used.

Few complied with the rule concerning five men per card, and the rule about unit markings was only rarely violated as is mentioned below. Otherwise the regulations were carefully followed.

The following is the list of flights made during this "regular" airmail service. On January 18 three planes left Przemysl. (12)
Which of the three carried the mail is unknown. The pilots were: Lt. Schindler; Lts. Schmoczer and Kumstat; and Lt. Stanger. Mail collected from December 25 to January 16 was carried, plus some "favor" mail. Some of the mail was later cancelled at Morowska-Ostrawa on January 20, and a few pieces were cancelled by the "Mobile Fieldpost Office Krakow-Vienna". On February 7 Capt. von Lehmann and Rankenberger carried out official mail, and a few favor pieces, collected between January 17 and February 5. They landed at Cracow, and a few pieces were cancelled by Fieldpost Office Number 22 on February 8. On February 10, Lts. Schindler and Kozma flew out with mail collected on the 6th and 7th of February and landed at Brzesko. A few items were cancelled by Fieldpost Office Number 56 on February 11. On February 12 Capt. von Lehmann flew out with the mail of February 8-10, some favor items, and some mail that had missed the previous flight. He landed at Brzesko and a few pieces carry also the cancellation of Morawska-Ostrawa with an illegible date. On February 18 Lt. Piala and a non-commissioned officer named Melsch carried mail collected between the 11th and 16th of February. They flew to Brzesko, and a few pieces have a Morawska-Ostrawa cancellation of February 20th and 21st. On March 22, Lt. Stanger and Capt. von Lehmann flew out with some of the mail collected between February 17 and March 20. A few pieces carry the March 22 cancellation of Fieldpost Office Number 11. Delivery of the mail was delayed two or three months. A second flight that day, carrying mail, with the non-com Melsch at the controls, made an emergency landing in Russian occupied territory because of engine failure. All of this mail was lost.

In all, 124,000 cards were printed and 84,000 were sold. At first the paper used was very thin, but it later became thicker. In all there were 25 variations in the cards themselves. They were printed in both German
and Hungarian. The basic colors of the cards were yellow, green and pink (each in various shades). Grey and blue cards are rare. In a recent survey of a large lot of these cards, 39% were yellow, 33% green, and 28% were pink. Generally, of course, stamps were not used or required on these cards, but a few troops with a philatelic bent did add stamps to some. Some unused cards are known, but most of the remainders were burnt just prior to the surrender. During the last few weeks, the cards were cut into strips before being sent, to maximize the number of messages that could be carried. These strip cards are very rare.

For control purposes, all the cards were numbered. At first the numbers were handwritten. The handwritten numbers went to over 29,000. All of these cards were sold between December 15 and January 6. Most of the remainder of the cards sold were numbered by machine. The highest number here is about 36,000. Two numerators were used, the one used from January 11 until February 24 with 5 3/4mm. numbers, and the one used from January 16 until the surrender with 6½ mm. numbers. Numbers were not necessarily used by date, and some very low numbers are known used in February or March. Unnumbered cards are very rare.

The basic cancellation is a two line rubber stamp reading "Fliegerpost Przemysl / (Janner) 1915" where the word "Janner" is only present on the first type. The six types are illustrated in figure 2.4. The first four types are all 67mm. long, and are distinguished by the second line. Type 1 includes "Janner". Type 2 is the type 1 rubber stamp with "Janner" cut out. Type 3 has the "1915" centered under the first line. Type 4 differs from type 3 in that the "1915" is slanted. Types 5 and 6 are distinguished by their lengths. They are 59mm. and 57mm. long respectively. These marks are found in colors ranging from light blue through shades of lilac, to black.