

[THIS PAGE BLANK]

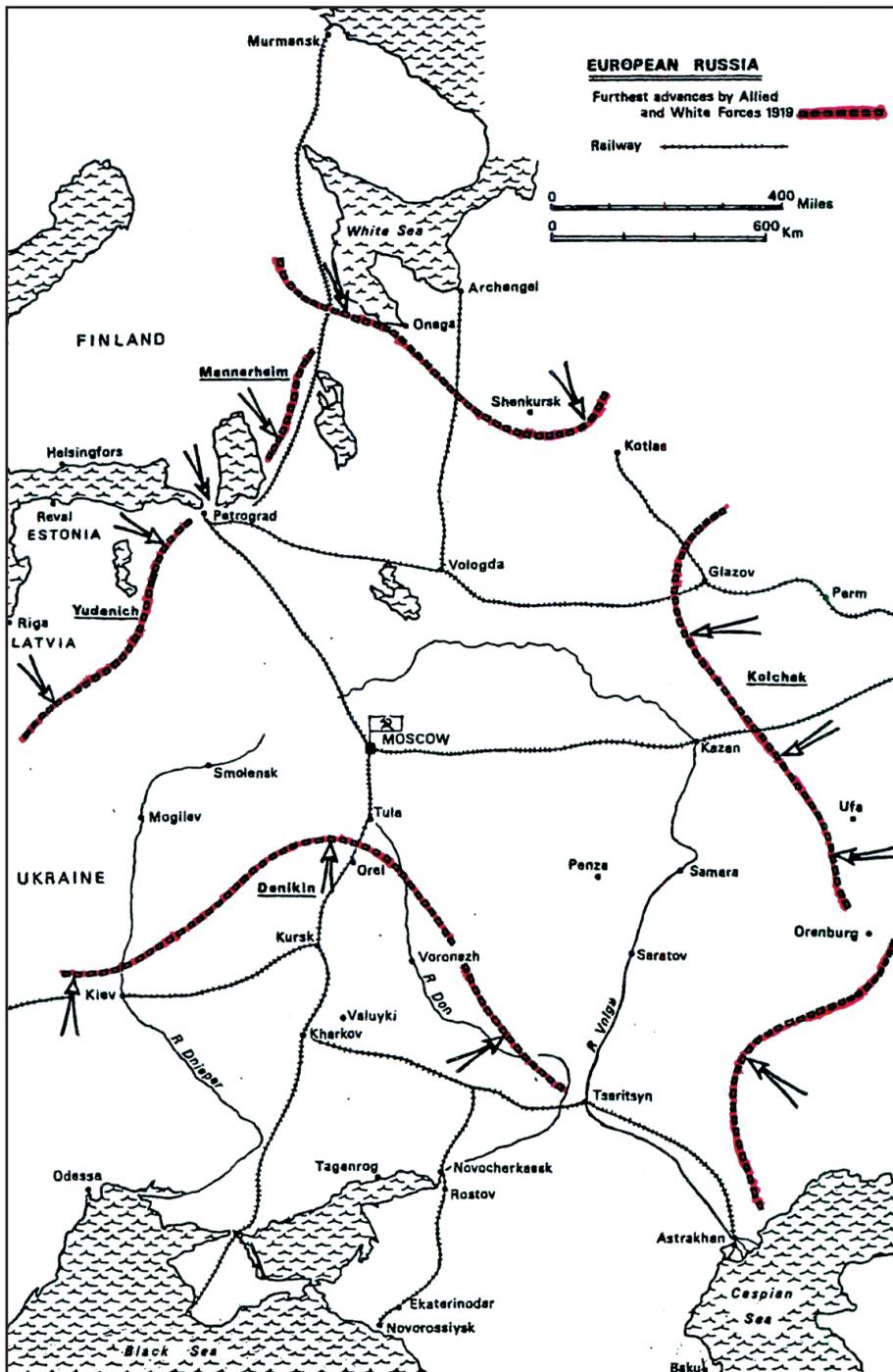


Figure 1. Map of Russia showing limits of White advances in 1919 when Soviet authority was reduced to a broad triangle bounded by Petrograd to the northwest, Ufa to the east, Astrakhan at the south and Kiev to the west. After that, Red successes expanded the area subject to Communist rule and eventually reconstituted a large part of the former empire.

The disintegration of the Romanov Empire 1917–1922

Alfred F. Kugel

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

It was extraordinary that a single family was able to rule a country as vast as Russia for more than 300 years, starting in 1613 when Mikhail Romanov, a sixteen-year old boyar (noble), was offered the crown. Although there were numerous difficulties along the way, including frequent wars and revolts, as well as a shifting of leadership from one branch of the family to another due to lack of male heirs, the ultimate power remained in the hands of Romanovs until 1917.

Some of the monarchs were strong and improved the lot of their subjects, especially Peter I and Catherine II, both later called “the Great,” as well as Alexander II, known as the “Czar-Liberator.” However, some of them were just the opposite. Several were assassinated, and the final imperial ruler, Nicholas II, was executed by the Bolsheviks in Ekaterinburg on July 17, 1918, now known to have been pursuant to a direct order from Lenin who feared that they were about to be liberated by the Czechoslovak Legion which was moving westward.

Notwithstanding all of the problems, if measured by the vast expansion of the territory under Russian control during its reign, the dynasty was very successful indeed. Along the way, they fought a number of successful wars—defeating Sweden (1721), Turkey (1774, 1792, 1829, 1878) and France (1815). There were also several unsuccessful ones—against Britain and its allies (1854), Japan (1905) and Germany and its allies (1918).

As the Empire expanded, it soon included a large number of ethnic minorities well beyond its original Russian roots. Most numerous were Ukrainians, but there were also large numbers of others, including Armenians, Azeris, Belarusins, Estonians, Finns, Georgians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Moldavians and a whole panoply of Turkic peoples living in Central Asia. Many of these were treated as inferiors by the Russian overlords, thus setting the stage for the break-up to come, although many of the people remained loyal to the Czar until quite late in the game. However, a number of the ethnic leaders were prepared to break away from the empire once events started to slip out of the control of the central government.

RUSSIA IN WORLD WAR I

Following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the thrones of Austria and Hungary, by a Serbian anarchist in Sarajevo, Bosnia, on June 28, 1914, World War I became seemingly inevitable. Austria mounted a punitive invasion of Serbia a month later, which

brought Russia into the war to support its Slavic brethren, which caused Germany to join in to support Austria. Soon, most of Europe was involved as a result of the alliance systems that had been created over the prior decades.

Once the war started, the Russian forces were mobilized more quickly than anticipated by the Germans and Austrians, which allowed them to mount invasions of both East Prussia and Galicia in the early fighting. Although they were driven out of Germany by General (later Field Marshal) von Hindenburg, who won a major battle at Tannenberg, they continued to occupy Galicia until well into 1916. However, the Russian troops were poorly led and inadequately supplied, thus being forced to absorb very high casualties in terms of dead, wounded and captured, while the Germans advanced to occupy Russian Poland, Lithuania and southern Latvia in 1915 and 1916.

Later in the war, morale deteriorated due to continued heavy losses on the military front and shortages of food and other supplies on the home front. As a result, when the Central Powers mounted a further advance in 1917, dissatisfaction with the regime spread rapidly, bringing about the first Russian Revolution. This upheaval forced Emperor Nicholas II to abdicate on March 15, 1917, thus bringing to an end the 300-year Romanov dynasty in favor of a provisional civil regime under Georgy Lvov and then Alexander Kerenski. Some months later, of course, the second Russian Revolution took place in November 1917, bringing to power Vladimir Lenin and the Bolsheviks.

THE END OF THE WAR

THE TREATY OF BREST-LITOVSK

By early 1918 it was clear that Russia had lost the war, and the new leader, Lenin, decided that he needed peace at any price in order to concentrate the attention of the government on securing control internally. The negotiations leading to peace between Russia and the Central Powers took place at Brest-Litovsk, a town on the border of former Russian Poland. As a result, a treaty was signed on March 3, 1918, whereby Russia agreed to renounce all claims to the Baltic States, Belarus, Finland, Poland, Transcaucasia and Ukraine in favor of new governments to be established in those areas.

This agreement, thus, set the stage for the dismemberment of the former Romanov territories by the transfer of power to others along much of the western and southern edges of the Empire. In addition, break-away areas in Central Asia and Siberia set up non-Communist governments as disaffection spread all the way to the Pacific.

It should be noted that with the surrender of Germany to the Western Allies in November 1918, the Bolsheviks asserted that the provisions of Brest-Litovsk no longer applied and tried to overthrow them by invading Poland and the Baltic States—an effort that was essentially unsuccessful in 1919–1920 but was then implemented twenty years later in 1939–1940.

The next section of this article will review the political aspects of the disintegration of the Russian Empire. It will be organized geographically starting at the north and west and moving to the south and east. Thus, the commentary will begin with Finland and the Baltics, and then move through Belarus, Ukraine and Transcaucasia as well as eventually across Siberia.

THE CIVIL WAR

The Russian Civil War was a long and complicated multi-party affair that began almost immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution in November 1917, which brought about the collapse of the Provisional Government. It lasted for five years until the Soviet occupation of Vladivostok on the Pacific in October 1922. The most intense fighting took place in 1919 and

1920 between the Red Army and the loosely-allied *White* forces that opposed it. However, with the evacuation of General Wrangel's remaining troops from the Crimea in November 1920, it was clear that the Bolsheviks had survived and that it was then a question of how long it would take to mop up the remaining opposition.

Many of the people in Russia and most of those in the non-Russian parts of the former empire were opposed to the Bolshevik regime. This explains why the civil war was both long and bloody as the various factions tried to exert their independence from the central authorities. For a brief period in 1919, it seemed as if the anti-Communist efforts would succeed as the White armies moved closer to surrounding the Red forces centered on Moscow. (See Figure 1.) However, these efforts were uncoordinated, and a series of successful actions by the Red Army ended in the defeat of one of their opponents after another, eventually resulting in victory by the Bolsheviks and the creation of the Soviet Union, which then lasted for the next seventy years.

Many people in the former empire were caught up as the fighting ebbed and flowed, even though they were not active participants in the Civil War. It is estimated that fifteen million persons died during this tumultuous period, including those succumbing from battle casualties, disease and starvation. This includes one million members of the Red Army and a half million White soldiers. Another group of up to two million people, known as the White émigrés, was forced to flee from their homeland and live elsewhere, including Western Europe, the Baltic area and the Far East.

THE ALLIED INTERVENTION

When Lenin decided that the country lacked both the resources and the will power to carry on the war and that he needed to buy time to consolidate his power within Russia, he opted to sign an armistice with the Central Powers in March 1918. The Allies became concerned (correctly as it turned out) that peace between Germany and Russia would mean that large numbers of German troops would be shifted from the Eastern Front for a new offensive in France.

In response, the Allies sent intervention forces into Russia with four primary aims (not all of which were supported by all of the participants):

1. To attempt to restore a pro-Allied government that would reopen the Eastern Front and keep large numbers of German troops tied down;
2. To prevent large quantities of munitions and other supplies that had been shipped to Russia from falling into German hands;
3. To prevent Murmansk from being used as a German submarine base to threaten Allied shipping in the Atlantic; and
4. To repatriate 60,000 Czechoslovak legionnaires back to Europe for service on the Western Front.

Thus, multinational forces representing thirteen countries participated in three unrelated areas, Siberia, North Russia and South Russia. Americans, British, Canadians, French and Italians served in all three areas. In addition, a large contingent of Japanese was deployed throughout Siberia and on the northern half of Sakhalin Island, and a small number of Chinese were sent to guard the railways. Also in Siberia, former prisoners of war from the Austro-Hungarian army were recruited and organized into ethnic contingents to fight the Bolsheviks, including not only the Czechoslovaks but also Italians, Poles, Romanians and Yugoslavs. Lastly, a small number of men from Belgium and Greece served in South Russia for a time.

In retrospect, the intervention activity was both unwarranted and unsuccessful. The effort mounted was too little to affect the outcome and too late to have any impact on the fighting in Western Europe. For the most part, the actual hostilities between the Allied forces and the

Russians did not turn into full-scale battles, so casualties were light on both sides. However, the clash served to poison relations between the intervening countries and the Russians for many years into the future, thus helping to set the stage for the Cold War that took place following World War II.

In the end, most of the Allied troops withdrew in 1919 and 1920, although the last Japanese units did not leave northern Sakhalin until 1925. The Allied intervention is a separate story and is mentioned here primarily because of its close involvement with some of the events during the Civil War but, for the purposes of this article, it will not be developed additionally.

THE POLITICAL CHANGES

FINLAND

The first breakaway area from Russian rule was Finland, at the northwest corner of the Empire. The Czars of Russia had also been the Grand Dukes of Finland starting in 1809 when Russia seized the Finnish territories from Sweden, when it was an ally of Napoleon. Although many Finns disliked Russian rule, most remained loyal as long as the Romanovs continued in power. However, with the abdication of the Czar, the desire for independence increased sharply and many of the Finnish leaders began to prepare for that event. As a result, shortly after the Bolshevik revolution formal independence was declared on December 6, 1917, although it was necessary to fight a five-month civil war in order to overcome the resistance of 40,000 remaining Russian troops and local Red Guards who wanted to establish a Communist government. Eventually, the White forces under Baron Mannerheim were able to defeat the insurgents and the fighting came to an end on May 16, 1918. (Later, the Red Army invaded Finland in the Winter War of 1939–1940 and took possession of the Province of Karelia.)

In addition to Finland proper, there were several quasi-Finnish territories to the east (Aunus, Karelia and North Ingermanland) that briefly had autonomous governments in the years between 1919 and 1922 in the chaos of the Russian Civil War. However, each was reoccupied by the Red Army and eventually absorbed into the Soviet Union.

In Aunus (Olonets), there was an attempt by Finnish volunteers to occupy parts of Eastern Karelia. About 1,000 irregular troops crossed the border on April 21, 1919, and attempted to capture Lotinanpelto, Petrozavodsk and the Murmansk railroad. However, they were beaten back by Bolshevik forces and Finnish Red Guards. Under the Treaty of Tartu signed in 1920, this area remained on the Soviet side of the boundary.

During early 1920, a new group of Finnish volunteers invaded the North Ingerman Peninsula lying between the Neva River and the Finnish border in the eastern part of the Karelian Isthmus. This regime lasted until December 5, 1920, when the Soviets regained control. As to Karelia itself, a short-lived revolt took place in the northern and central parts of the territory in early 1922. This, too, was short-lived as the Red Army quickly reconquered the area.

ESTONIA

This area lying to the south of the Gulf of Finland was ceded by Sweden to Russia by the Treaty of Nystad at the end of the Great Northern War in 1721, following which the Czar became the titular head of government. Following the Bolshevik Revolution, the Estonians took the opportunity to declare their independence on February 23, 1918. However, the country was occupied by German troops based on the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk until the Armistice in November 1918 and subsequently had to fight off a Soviet invasion. Its independence was not recognized by Russia until the Treaty of Tartu was signed on February 2, 1920. (Estonia was annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940.)

The principal White force operating in the Baltic area was the Northwest Army under General Yudenich. Based in Pskov (Pleskau), these troops cooperated with the Estonians and, in the summer of 1919, advanced to the outskirts of Petrograd before being repelled. A second force, known as the North Army, occupied a portion of northwestern Russia to the east of the Narova River, including the towns of Pskov, Gdov and Yamburg. It operated in the area until the end of 1919.

LATVIA

Russia acquired the Vidzeme area of northern Latvia under the Treaty of Nystad with Sweden in 1721 and took over the additional provinces of Latgale and Kurland as a result of the partitions of Poland in 1772 and 1795, respectively. At the end of World War I, the Latvians declared their independence on November 18, 1918, although they did not succeed in forcing out the last of the invading Soviet troops until early 1920. (This situation lasted until mid-1940, when Latvia was taken over by the Soviet Union.)

LITHUANIA

Following more than 200 years as a joint state with Poland, Lithuania came under the control of the Russian Empire as a result of the third partition of Poland in 1795. Following the Bolshevik Revolution, independence under German protection was declared on February 16, 1918. After Poland became independent on November 11, 1918, there was a boundary dispute over the area surrounding the historical capital, Vilnius, which was not resolved until the outbreak of World War II when Lithuania was able to annex the area when Poland was divided between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. (A few months later, along with its Baltic neighbors, Lithuania itself was annexed by the Soviet Union.)

CENTRAL LITHUANIA

Although it was known as “Central Lithuania,” the area around Vilnius (Wilno in Polish) was in modern times only part of Lithuania for brief periods at the beginning and end of the first independence period. Initially assigned to Lithuania in 1919 by the Allied peace negotiators, the area was occupied by Polish forces under General Zeligowski on January 8, 1920, and governed as a separate territory until being annexed by Poland on January 8, 1922.

POLAND

With the surrender of the Germans on November 11, 1918, a Polish regency council assumed executive power in Warsaw. Galicia and part of Austrian Silesia were annexed by the Polish state. However, both areas were in dispute with the neighbors—Ukraine and Romania in the first instance and Czechoslovakia in the latter—so the final borders were unsettled for some time. Moreover, the area around Lemberg (Lwow, Lvov), the capital of eastern Galicia, was fought over with Ukrainian partisans for some period before being annexed to Poland.

In actuality, the independence of the Polish State was threatened by Russia almost from its birth. The initial phase saw Soviet troops advancing from the Dnieper River to the Bug by February 1919. However, a successful Polish counterattack was mounted and, by the end of that year the areas up to the borders of Belarus and Ukraine had been cleared. A second phase of the fighting involved an even more serious threat. Breaking through the Polish-Ukrainian lines near Kiev on June 8, 1920, Soviet forces advanced to the vicinity of Warsaw before being defeated by Marshal Pilsudski in the battle of Radzymin.

Subsequently, the Poles advanced to the east and occupied large areas that are now the western parts of Belarus and Ukraine. The Soviet government signed the Treaty of Riga on March 18, 1921, ceding these territories to Poland (until retaking them in September 1939).

ROMANIA

This country was one of the minor Allied powers during the war and its share in the fighting was undistinguished, but it was a major beneficiary of the territorial changes produced by the peace treaties. In fact, its land area more than doubled as a result of the addition of Bukovina from Austria, Transylvania and the Eastern Banat from Hungary as well as Bessarabia from Russia. For the most part, these territories were simply occupied by the Romanian army at the end of 1918 and then officially annexed later in accordance with the peace treaties. (The USSR subsequently annexed both Bessarabia and Bukovina from Romania in 1940.)

BELARUS

This territory, sometimes known as White Russia, declared its independence from Russia in 1919 but never had an independent functioning government. Except for a brief period when it was occupied by Polish troops, it was mostly under the control of Bolshevik forces. There was, however, a Special Belarusin Detachment that conducted military operations in the area.

RUSSIA PROPER

The history of Russia and, indeed, that of the world as a whole, changed dramatically on November 7, 1917, when a small but determined radical left party of Bolsheviks overthrew Kerenski's provisional government in Petrograd and subsequently executed the Czar and his family. In order to concentrate his resources on consolidating power within Russia, the new leader, Vladimir Lenin, made peace with the Central Powers and temporarily renounced claims to the non-Russian territories of the former empire, including the Baltic States, Poland, Ukraine and Transcausia.

TRANSCAUCASIA

Following the Bolshevik revolution, the three entities located to the south of the Caucasian Mountains—Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia—attempted to bond together to create the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic. However, the ethnic and religious differences between them were too great, and by late May 1918, the three declared independence separately. Pursuant to the Treaty of Brest Litovsk, the Central Powers sent troops to the area, with Turkey occupying Batum (Georgia) and Baku (Azerbaijan), while a German military mission was established in Tiflis (Georgia). With the end of World War I, the Germans and Turks were obliged to withdraw and British forces arrived in the area, providing support for the independent countries from 1918 to 1920.

In due course, these areas were invaded by the Red Army and the indigenous forces defeated. Because of the importance of the oil production in the Baku region to the Soviet economy, Azerbaijan became the first victim when the Red Army invaded on April 28, 1920, and established a Communist-dominated government. Next was Armenia, which saw the Soviet Army occupy Erevan on December 4, 1920, at which time the short-lived Armenian Republic collapsed. In Georgia, the capital of Tiflis was occupied on February 25, 1921, and a Moscow-directed Communist government installed shortly thereafter.

SIBERIA

This easternmost part of Russia has the largest area of any geographic entity on the globe, extending from the Ural Mountains to the Pacific and from the Arctic Ocean to Central Asia. However, it is very lightly populated, with most of the inhabitants living in a narrow belt along the Trans-Siberian Railway not far above the southern border. The situation in this area dur-

ing the Civil War differs from that of most of the other breakaway territories due to the lack of a central authority able to exercise its administrative powers over much of the area or for an extended time period.

However, in June 1918 Col. Grishin-Almazov formed the Siberian Army consisting of about 10,000 volunteers who were able to defeat the local Bolsheviks and clear many Siberian cities of their presence. Later that month, a Provisional Siberian Government declared its authority over the territory and stated that its ultimate goal was the restoration of the Russian state. However, the idea of a cohesive administration of Siberia was mostly illusory, with much of the area really being controlled by regional warlords and autonomous bands of armed “Reds” and “Whites.” In fact, the closest to an effective governing power was the Czechoslovak Legion, which controlled much of the railway between Irkutsk and Vladivostok for many months before being evacuated to its homeland in 1920.

FAR EASTERN REPUBLIC

Due to the struggle for influence going on in Siberia, a buffer state was created between the Communist-controlled area and that occupied by Japanese forces. The so-called FER was initially confined to the area around Verkhne Udinsk, its first capital, but in the summer of 1920, it acquired the Amur region and in October drove Ataman Semenov from Chita, which became the new capital. When the Japanese evacuated their forces from Vladivostok in November 1922, the FER was merged into the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, thus bringing all of Siberia under Communist control and essentially ending the Civil War.

THE PHILATELIC CONSEQUENCES

Needless to say, all of the territorial changes outlined in the prior sections were reflected in the postal situations on the ground in the respective areas. In some cases, new stamps or at least overprinted old stamps were issued by the new authorities to show that circumstances

Figure 2. Registered cover sent in 1918 from Finland to Germany showing a “Lion” definitive and a postmark with the Russian inscription excised.



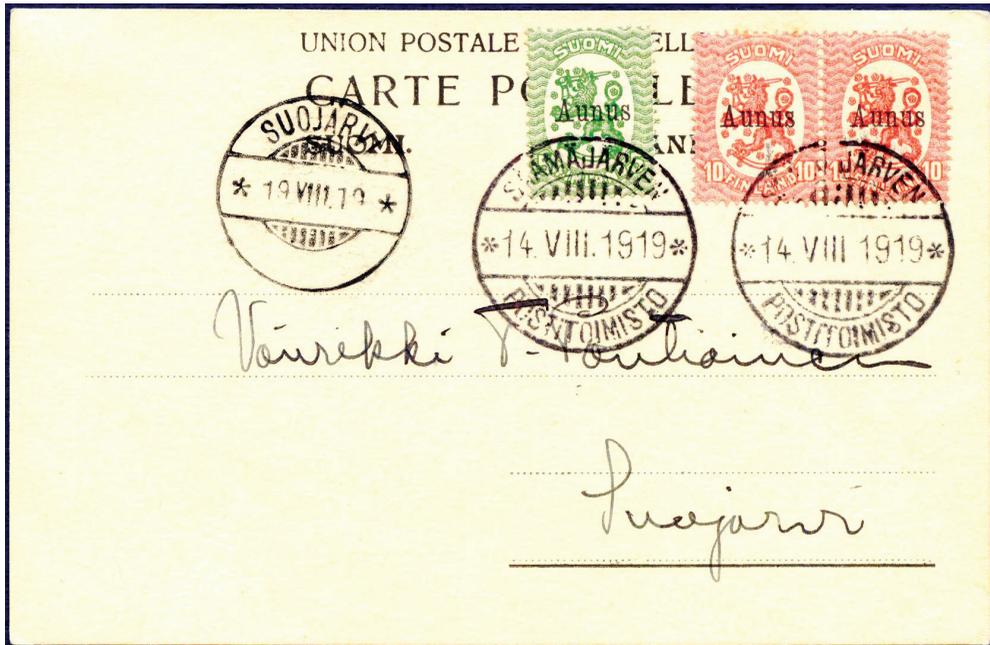


Figure 3. “Aunus” overprints used on postcard mailed from Saamajarven in 1919.

had changed. However, in one of the most unusual aspects of all, the old Imperial stamps remained in use for several years in much of the territory of the former Empire, including the Communist-held territories.

With the exception of two stamps to commemorate the first anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution, the new regime in Russia continued to use the old stamps for most of the ensuing five years. Beyond that period, of course, there was a plethora of new issues touting the virtues of their rule and commemorating various Communist heroes. Most of the stamps that were issued in the annexed and occupied territories during this period are adequately covered in the major philatelic catalogues. Therefore, they will not be emphasized in this article.

Comments on the postal activities in the various former Romanov territories follow, generally in the same order as the political comments provided above, i.e. north to south and west to east.

FINLAND AND ASSOCIATED TERRITORIES

Since the Finns were at the head of the parade in seeking independence, it will come as no surprise to learn that they were the first of the break-away areas to issue their own stamps. Indeed, there was no need for overprints or provisional issues since the first set picturing the Finnish “lion” symbol was printed and placed on sale starting on October 1, 1917. For a while, the old trilingual postmarks (Finnish/Swedish/Russian) continued in use, but usually with the Russian inscriptions excised. (See Figure 2.)

For the Finnish-associated territories of Aunus, North Ingermanland and Karelia, which briefly declared their independence during the chaos of the Russian Civil War, stamps were issued in 1919, 1920 and 1922, respectively. However, these areas in turn were fairly quickly overrun by the Red Army. As a result, very little commercial mail was ever sent, so that most



Figure 4. North Ingermanland pictorial stamps used to Finland in October 1920.

of the stamps ended up being sold to collectors and most of the covers that are available on the market are blatantly philatelic, having been prepared by dealers in Helsinki.

As to Aunus (the Olonetz Province of Russia), this minor territory involving just a handful of small towns issued 1,100 sets of eight Finnish stamps overprinted “Aunus,” which were used only from July 7 to October 15, 1919. An example is shown as Figure 3.

North Ingermanland was located between the Neva River and the Finnish border in the eastern part of the Karelian Isthmus. A group of insurrectionists took over the territory for a period in 1920, during which a set inscribed “Pohjois Inkeri” and depicting its coat of arms and a second pictorial set (each consisting of seven denominations) were issued. However, there was only a single post office in operation at Kirjasalo, which closed when the area was taken over by the Reds on December 5, 1920. (See Figure 4.)

In early 1922, a rebel government in the north and central parts of Russian Karelia issued 15,000 sets of fifteen denominations inscribed “Karjala” and depicting the provincial emblem of a standing bear. Only a single post office was in operation at Uhtua, where these stamps were used from January 31 to February 6 when the Red Army regained control of the area. (Figure 5.)

NORTHWEST ARMY

The principal White force operating in the Baltic area during the Russian Civil War was the Northwest Army under General Yudenich. Based in Pskov (Pleskau) these troops cooperated with the Estonians and, in the summer of 1919, drove the Soviet forces back to the outskirts of Petrograd before being repelled. To meet postal needs, Russian stamps overprinted “North West Army” were in use in this territory between August 1 and October 15, 1919. An example is shown as Figure 6.



Figure 5. Karjala “bear” stamps used on cover from Uhtua to Helsinki in February 1922.

Figure 6. Northwest Army overprints used on registered cover from Pskov to Tallinn in 1919.



NORTH ARMY

In mid-1919, an anti-Bolshevik force occupied a portion of northwestern Russia to the east of the Narova River and Lake Peipus, including the towns of Pskov, Gdov and Yamburg. To provide postal service for the civil population of the area, a set of five stamps printed in Tallinn (Estonia) was issued in September 1919. These stamps depicted a chevron coat of arms and had the initials “OKSA” which stood for *Osobyi Korpus Severnoi Armii* = Detached Corps of the Northern Army. They were in use until December 1919 as shown in Figure 7.

ESTONIA

This country at the northeast of the Baltic Sea was able to establish a functioning government on November 11, 1918, and issued its first stamps denominated in kopeks on November 24 and 30. However, on January 1, 1919, a new currency was adopted with 100 penni = 1 Estonian mark. Thus, the next two new stamps were denominated at 35 and 70 penni and appeared on January 18 and 23, respectively. (See Figure 8.) These were followed with a set of pictorials depicting the sun, doves and even a Viking ship issued between May and September 1919.

The only overprinted Russian stamps that were used came from a local issue supplied in Tallinn on May 7, 1919; these were overprints of “Eesti Post” on Imperial stamps and had postal validity throughout the country until October 1, 1919.

LATVIA

The Latvians established a functioning government on November 18, 1919. Its first stamps depicted the coat of arms and were printed on the backs of German military maps. (See Figure

Figure 7. North Army stamps on registered cover from Polna to Tallinn in October 1919.





Figure 10. West Army overprints on a registered cover from Jelgava to Germany in 1919.

9.) They were issued between December 18, 1918, and January 8, 1919, with higher denominations provided later. There are no examples of overprinted Russian stamps being used by the Latvian government.

WEST ARMY

In 1919, an anti-Bolshevik force under Colonel Bermond-Avalov occupied parts of central Latvia in response to a Soviet attempt to retake the country. On October 10, 1919, this so-called Russian West Army issued its first postage stamps, being overprints of a Russian cross on Latvian adhesives. A second issue with the letters “S.A.” for Sapadnaja Armija = West Army, was issued three days later. These stamps saw very little commercial use, so most of the covers that are available are philatelically inspired. An example is shown as Figure 10. This area was restored to Latvian control at the beginning of November 1919.

LITHUANIA

An independent government was established on November 11, 1918, concurrent with the surrender of Germany. The first stamps were printed in Vilnius and issued on December 27 but most of them were used elsewhere in the country as Red forces occupied the capital. (See Figure 11.) Except for a local issue provided in Grodno, no overprinted Russian stamps were used in Lithuania.

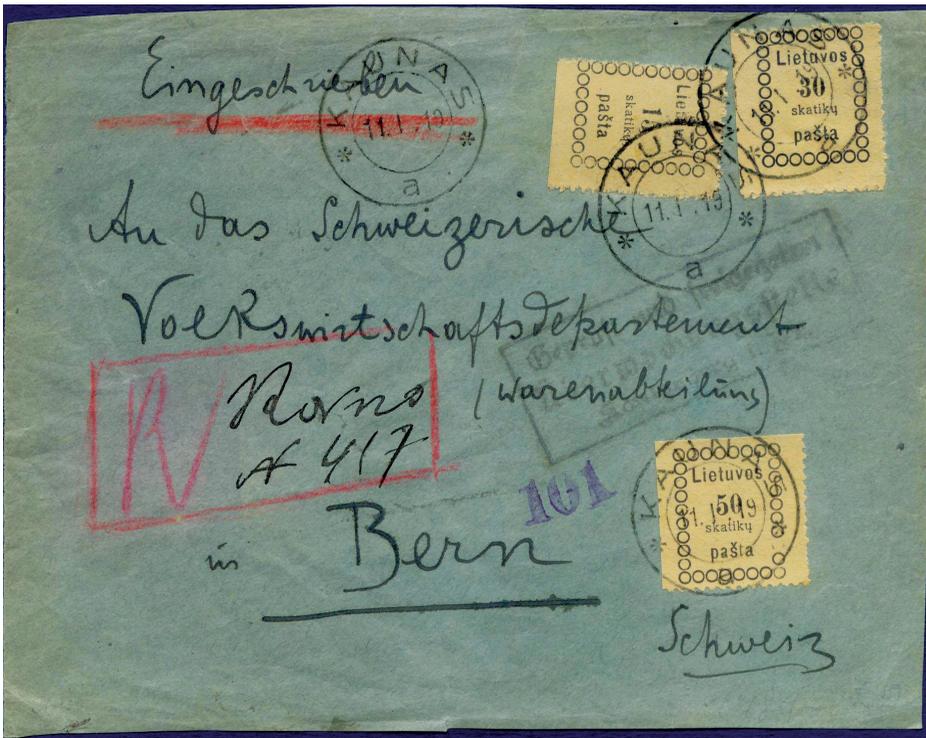


Figure 11. Lithuanian first issues on registered cover from Kaunas to Switzerland in 1919.

Figure 12. Central Lithuanian provisional postal card sent from Wilno to Poland in April 1919.





Figure 13. Belarus pictorial used on postcard from the fieldpost office to Riga in April 1920.

CENTRAL LITHUANIA

At the time of the Armistice, German occupation troops turned the city of Vilnius over to the Lithuanian authorities. However, Red forces occupied the area on January 5 and held the city until April 20, when they were driven out by the Polish Army. Thus, the use of Lithuanian stamps in Vilnius was very brief and covers are extremely scarce. Later, Polish stamps were used and, following a second period of Russian occupation, the Poles returned and began to issue a series of stamps inscribed “Srodkowa Litwa” in October 1920. In addition, provisional postal cards were issued in small quantities and an example is shown as Figure 12. In due course, Central Lithuania was annexed to Poland on April 16, 1922.

BELARUS

In effect, Belarus was a buffer area in the fighting between Poland, the Baltic Republics and the Soviets. The civil post offices there continued to use Imperial stamps, but during 1920 a set of five values inscribed “Asobny Atrad/BNR (Special Detachment/Belarus National Republic)” was prepared by the Latvian State Printing Office for military use. The bulk of this issue was sold to philatelic dealers; a few stamps were canceled to order; and only a handful of examples are known used contemporaneously on cards or covers. (See Figure 13.) These were postmarked “Palevaya Kantora/Asobn. Belarusk. Atrad (Fieldpost Office Special Belarusk Detachment).”

POLISH I. CORPS

Following the Bolshevick Revolution, Poles serving in the Russian army but unwilling to support the Communists formed the Polish First Corps under General Dowbor-Musnicki. In



Figure 14. Polish I. Corps postal card with additional adhesives sent to Bobruisk in April 1918.

early 1918 a postal service was organized to serve the territory that it occupied to the southeast of Bobruisk and Minsk. For this purpose, 700 sets of Imperial stamps were overprinted with the Polish eagle and the wording “Poczta/Pol. Korp.” and issued in March 1918. An example is shown as Figure 14. The Corps was demobilized by the German 10th Army on May 28, 1918.

POLAND

The first new stamps for use in the area of the former Russian Poland consisted of overprints of “Poczta Polska (Polish Posts)” on four stamps that had been originally prepared for the Warsaw city postal service but not issued. These were then sold starting on November 17, 1918, only six days after Germany signed the Armistice. (See Figure 15.) Next, there were overprints with similar wording on the occupation stamps that had been issued by the Germans and Austro-Hungarians during the war. All of these issues were also surcharged in Polish currency of fenigow.

On January 27, 1919, an entirely new set of twelve allegorical definitives was issued with denominations in fenigow and marka. (In fact, all of Poland was converted over to groszy and zloty in 1924.)

During the fighting with Ukraine, Polish forces occupied parts of Volhynia Province in May 1919. For civil use, Ukrainian stamps were overprinted “Polish Post” and surcharged in fenigow. These stamps were used in Kowel for just five days from August 20–24. (See Figure 16.)

During the 1919 campaign against the Bolsheviks, Polish forces advanced successfully against the Red Army and occupied Minsk, the capital of Belarus, in August. Postal service was inaugurated at the end of that month using the old Cyrillic postmarks. New Polish cancels were placed in use before the end of September. However, when the situation on the battlefield changed, the Polish troops were forced to abandon Minsk on July 11, 1920, due to pressure from advancing Bolshevik forces.



Figure 15. Poland's first set used on cover from Warsaw to Radom December 1918.

Figure 16. Ukrainian stamps overprinted for use during the Polish occupation of Kowel in August 1919.





Figure 17. Map of Ukraine showing districts in which the Trident overprints were produced.

ROMANIA

The Bessarabian territory (today principally the country of Moldova) lying between the Danube and Dneister Rivers and on the Black Sea coast, is populated primarily by ethnic Moldavians. On December 9, 1918, the Bessarabian council voted for union with Romania and this action was ratified by the Allied powers. Postal service was taken over by the Romanian authorities, with no use of overprinted Russian issues.

Figure 18. Mixed franking of Ukrainian definitive and trident overprints used in April 1919.



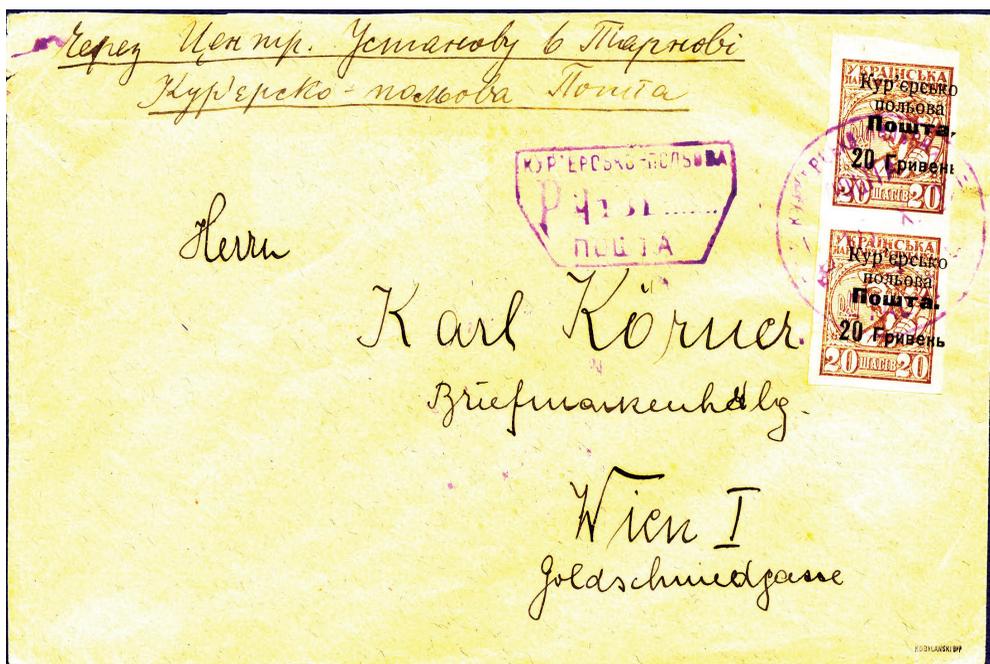


Figure 19. Ukrainian courier fieldpost stamps used on cover to Austria in October 1920.

Relative to what occurred in other areas, it was very unusual that, for whatever reasons, the Romanians decided not to issue new stamps for Bessarabia, but merely supplied normal Romanian postage to the offices there. These can, of course, be identified by the postmarks from towns in the designated area.

UKRAINE

Following the declaration of independence of this territory, the first Ukrainian stamps were issued in the form of four pictorials denominated in shahiv on August 18, 1918. However, these were not available in sufficient quantities to meet postal needs, so old Imperial stamps remained acceptable for postage until October 1. In the meantime, the authorities became aware that the Communists were shipping large quantities of the old stamps into Ukraine to the detriment of the postal revenues. As a result, it was decided that the old issues should be overprinted with the Ukrainian trident symbol. To speed up production, overprinting took place in the five regional capitals as well as Kiev, each with their own versions of the tridents. (See map provided as Figure 17.) As a result, a vast number of potential varieties were created, estimated at over 2,000 different stamps.

In addition to stamps for regular postage, a set of overprints on the first Ukrainian set was made in August 1920 for use by the fieldpost courier system. These are rarely seen properly used, with an example shown as Figure 19. When the Poles and Soviets signed a peace agreement in March 1921, independent Ukrainian activity came to an end.

DON COSSACKS

Following an uprising against the Bolsheviks, an autonomous state was declared in May 1918. Imperial stamps remained valid but, due to inflation, higher denominations were needed, resulting in surcharges of 25 and 50 kopeks on five different low value stamps.



Figure 20. “United Russia” stamps issued by General Denikin and used on registered letter from Novorossisk in January 1920.

CRIMEA

In November 1918 the Crimean Regional Government surcharged the by then worthless 1 kopek Imperial stamps to a new face value of 35 kopeks. In 1919, a large 50 kopek stamp showing a double-headed eagle was issued. In 1920, other Imperial and some South Russian stamps were surcharged and issued at Sevastopol during the occupation by the army of General Wrangel.

KUBAN

A Republic of the Kuban was established in August 1918 when the Soviet forces were expelled from Ekaterinodar and this government was able to maintain itself until April 1920 when the Red Army returned. Imperial Russian stamps continued in use but, as was the case elsewhere in the region, surcharges with higher denominations were needed to keep pace with inflation. Eventually, due to shortages of the old postage stamps, surcharges produced on postal savings stamps were put into circulation.

SOUTH RUSSIA

As suggested by the number of different stamp issues, many of the inhabitants of the southern parts of the Russian Empire desired independence from the Bolsheviks, including the Ukrainian,



Figure 21. Batum stamps with “British Occupation” overprints used in April 1920.

Don Cossack, Kuban and Crimean territories. In order to provide a more significant resistance to the Communist efforts to establish rule from Moscow, General Denikin attempted to amalgamate the White forces into a single army. Although eventually unsuccessful, his government did issue postage stamps inscribed “United Russia” in May 1919 for use in the areas that joined his movement. (See Figure 20.) However, this effort was defeated by the Red forces, and the remainder of the Whites went into exile in November 1920.

TRANSCAUCASIA

Similar independence movements were successful for a time in the territories lying to the south of the Caucasus Mountains. When the Ottoman Empire surrendered to the Allies, British forces occupied the port of Batum at the eastern end of the Black Sea. The Georgian government opposed the occupation and declined to send postage supplies. As a result, the British printed a set of six stamps depicting an aloe tree, which was used with and without an overprint reading “British Occupation” until July 1920, when the territory was turned over to Georgia. (See Figure 21.)

Georgia itself declared independence from Russia in the spring of 1918. In May of that year, it issued a set of six low denomination stamps depicting St. George, which was the national emblem, with higher values showing Queen Tamara being provided in early 1920. In imitation of the major powers, Georgia actually opened its own post office in Constantinople and overprinted some of its pictorial stamps for use there. An example of a cover used in this service is shown as Figure 22. In due course, however, Georgia was occupied by the Red Army in February 1921.

Armenia also became independent in April 1918. It continued to use the Imperial stamps but, when the Communists began shipping in large quantities of old stamps to undermine the currency, it was decided that overprinting was required with the initials “HP (Haykakan Post = Armenian Post.)” Several types of these overprints were applied and surcharges were also required due to the effects of inflation. (See Figure 23.)

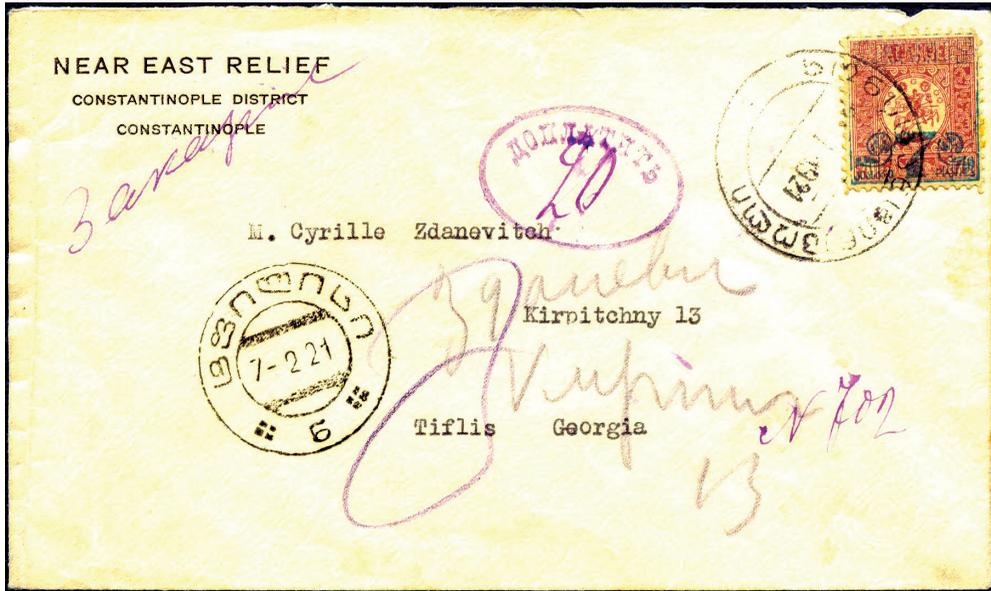


Figure 22. Overprinted stamp for use at the Georgian post office abroad in Constantinople on letter to Tiflis. Additional postage of 20 kopeks was assessed on arrival in January 1921.

Figure 23. Armenian overprints used on registered cover from Erevan in April 1920.





Figure 24. Azerbaijani pictorials used on registered cover from Elisabetpol to Tiflis in April 1920.

Azerbaijan was the third constituent of Transcaucasia. It did not issue separate stamps until October 1919 when a set of ten pictorials was put on sale. A cover franked with these stamps is shown as Figure 24. The country remained independent for nearly two years, when it was overrun by the Red Army in April 1920.

One anomaly was the creation of the North Caucasian Mountaineers' Republic in May 1918, when an area approximating the Terek Oblast proclaimed its independence. However, in spring 1919, the capital of Vladkavkas was occupied by General Deniken's troops and the republic terminated. The Bolsheviks came in the spring of 1920 and the Mountain Soviet Socialist Republic was proclaimed on November 17 of that year. In August 1922, a thousand sets of three stamps were overprinted with a five-pointed star and the initials "G.S.S.R. (Gorskaya Sovetskaya Sotsialisticheskaya Respublika)" which were used for about two months. (See Figure 25.)

SIBERIA

By far the largest of the breakaway regions of the former Romanov Empire was Siberia. Never seriously under Bolshevik control, this huge area was fought over between the Whites and Reds, various regional warlords, the Czechoslovak Legion and various Allied intervention forces, including Americans. Admiral Kolchak was named as the leader of the White forces in the East, and at one time advanced as far west as Ufa. However, the Reds later took the offensive and captured Omsk in November, prompting the Admiral to turn over power to Ataman Semenov in Chita. As the surviving Whites fled to eastern Siberia, several successor governments came into power until resistance ended when the Reds captured Vladivostok on October 25, 1922.



Figure 25. Mountain Republic overprints on cover from Grozny to Gadauty in August 1922. (Mikulski certificate states that fewer than ten covers are recorded from this territory.)

Figure 26. Siberian surcharges used on postal card from Irkutsk to California in December 1919.





Figure 27. Mixed Far Eastern Republic definitives and overprints used on registered cover from Vladivostok to Latvia in March 1921.

With the geopolitical confusion in Siberia, it is not surprising that the philatelic scene was also conflicted. However, most of the area continued to use the old Imperial stamps for a considerable period following the revolution. Only when inflation and the lack of new stamp supplies from Petrograd caused shortages did the Siberian postal authorities in Omsk issue a set of six surcharges in the summer of 1919 in order to provide the necessary higher denominations. (See Figure 26.) During the Semenov regime, more surcharges were required and issued in early 1920. Further east, a new government came into power at Blagovescensk in the Amur Province in 1920. New stamps were issued there depicting the provincial coat of arms and posthorns.

With the Bolsheviks moving east as far as Khabarovsk and Japanese intervention forces protecting the Semenov regime in Chita and the area near Vladivostok, the Far Eastern Republic came into existence on November 1, 1920. Its first stamp issue consisted of overprints of “DVR (Dalne-Vostochnaya Respublika)” on Imperial stamps, which were used from November 1920 until late 1922. (See Figure 27.) Other Far Eastern Republic stamps included a set of four that were similar in appearance to the old Imperial stamps but had an updated coat of arms and a set of overprints of “1921–1922.”

Meanwhile, back in Chita, FER representatives taking over from Semenov issued a set of eleven stamps with the new coat of arms in December 1921. When the Bolsheviks finally captured Vladivostok, some of the FER stamps were overprinted “1917–1922” to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the revolution and placed on sale in December of that year.

SOURCES CONSULTED AND ADDITIONAL READING

PHILATELIC CATALOGUES:

Michel, Scott

GENERAL:

Kugel, Alfred. 2001. The New Order in the Baltic 1918–1923. *Postal History Journal* February.

Gilbert, Martin, Ed. 1966. *Recent History Atlas*. The Macmillan Company.

Walsh, W. B. 1958. *Russia and the Soviet Union—A Modern History*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

ESTONIA:

Hurt, V. and E. Ojaste. 1986. *Estonian Philately & Postal History Handbook-Catalogue*. New York: Estonian Philatelic Society.

FINLAND:

Pelander, Carl. 1947. The Associate Group of Finland. *The Posthorn* May; 4:21.

Moxter, Hans. 1978. *Finnland-Feldpost*. Forschungs-Gemeinschaft Nordische Staaten e. V. im Bund Deutscher Philatelisten.

Ahoniuss R. 1972. *Suomen vapaussodan 1918 Kenttäposti*.

LATVIA:

The Stamps of Latvia. Chicago: Stereo Stamps, 1959.

Engel, A. 1981. The First Soviet Occupation of Latvia, 1917–1920. *Latvian Collector* April–October.

LITHUANIA:

Grigaliunas, J. et al. 1978. *Postage Stamps of Lithuania*. New York: The Collectors Club.

Fugalevicius, V. 1984. P. O. Cancels in Lithuania. New York: Lithuanian Philatelic Society of New York.

RUSSIA:

Kugel, Alfred F. 1997. The Allied Intervention in Russia, 1918–1925. *Rossica Journal* November.

House of Romanov. [HTTP://EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/ROMANOV](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanov).

Kugel, Alfred F. 1997. Mail from Russia and the Ukraine after Brest-Litovsk. *The Post Rider* No. 41; November.

Nicholas II of Russia. [HTTP://EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/NICHOLAS_II_OF_RUSSIA](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicholas_II_of_Russia).

Romanov Dynasty. [HTTP://WWW.EDU/EMUSEUM/HISTORY/RUSSIA/ROMANOV.HTML](http://www.edu/emuseum/history/russia/romanov.html).

[HTTP://WWW.EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/RUSSIAN_CIVIL_WAR](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_civil_war).

TRANSCAUCASIA:

S. Tchilinghirian and P. Ashford. 1953. *The Postage Stamps of Armenia, Part One*. The British Society of Russian Philately.

Kugel, Alfred F. 2006. German Military Activity in Transcaucasia in 1918. *German Postal Specialist* May 2006.

Kugel, Alfred F. 2002. The Turkish Occupation of Transcaucasia in 1918. *Military Postal History Society Bulletin* Fall.

[EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/AZERBAIJAN](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Azerbaijan)

[EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/ARMENIA](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenia)

[EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/GEORGIA_\(COUNTRY\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgia_(country))

UKRAINE:

Bylan, Peter. 1996. *Independent Ukraine*. Ukrainian Philatelic Resources.

Lea, John. 1956. Stamps of the Ukrainian Field Post. *Stamp Collecting* October.

