

Austria-Hungary's Vistula Flotilla in World War 1

By Al Kugel



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The Vistula Flotilla was created on 30 July 1914, two days after Austria declared war on Serbia. At that time, a handful of steamers were

commandeered, equipped with armor plating and cannons and deployed to protect Austrian shipping from Russian attacks. Headquartered at Krakow and initially operating out of bases at Niepolomice and Nadbezezie in Austrian Galicia, the flotilla extended its activity northward after the successful campaign of 1915 when the Russians were driven out of Poland. Later, the gunboats served largely as escorts (primarily against attacks by bandits) for the tugs and barges moving supplies for the military forces operating further to the east

Sailors and other personnel of the flotilla could send cards and letters free of

postage as members of the Austro-Hungarian military forces. In fact the only stamps seen on flotilla mail come on clippings from parcel cards used to send packages home. In order to qualify for free franking, an official unit cachet to be applied to the covers. To satisfy this need, a substantial variety of such markings were produced, thus providing the primary basis for the story in this story.

Lappenerleutnant v. Philippovic, Krakau.

Herrn

Feldpost

H. v. d. Hauptmann v. L.

Wilhelm Gregoric

Zensuriert



Zagreb.

Akademički trg 6.

Cover mailed in October 1914 from
Krakow to Zagreb by first Lt. of
Engineers Mijo von Philippovic,
commander of the flotilla

Note cachets of the “Imperial & Royal Military Headquarters in Krakow” (in black) and the “I & R Vistula Flotilla” (in violet).

With patience and diligent search, Vistula Flotilla mail can be acquired. However, it is collected by a number of avid philatelists, especially specialists in Polish material. As a result, competition for unusual items is keen. In fact, some of the unit markings are very elusive, and assembling the examples shown here has taken more than two decades.

KRIEGSDIENST
PORTOFREI

Feldpostkorrespondenzkarte

Wellenfalten

Fran



Pržica v. Philippovic

Zagreb

Trnjevska ulica 18

Kroatien

Ubojilnik dr. Kptm. v. Philippo-
vic, Micolomice.

Absender:
Odesinate:
Nadawca:
Mittente:
Posiljatelj:
Posiljač:
Presentator:

*Cover showing new origin at
Niepolomice*

By 1916, the headquarters of the flotilla had moved to Niepolomice, about a dozen miles downstream from Krakow. Von Philippovic was still the commander but had been promoted to Captain, as confirmed by this postcard he mailed to

his wife in Zagreb. It has three cachets: one for the “Headquarters of the I & R Vistula Flotilla.” while the others are generic markings and indicate “Military Service/Postage Free” and “to be Forwarded”.



Cover with cache of S.M.S. Polonez

This fieldpost cover was sent by First Lt. of Engineers Polivka, who was the commander of *S.M.S. Polonez*, to flotilla commander Capt. von Philippovic in Niepolomice and is marked with the official cachet of the ship.

70 K — h

K — h

Waihi
mp. 6/3

476

zufüllen
ca
12

Bestempeln
des Kreuzes
auf
X
64

Raum zum Aufkleben der Briefmarken

Miejsce do przyklepienia znaczków pocztowych
Место за наклеивания почтовых знаков



Unterzeichen des Postbeamten
Podpis urzędnika pocztowego
Имя почтового служащего

Raum zum Aufkleben der Briefmarken

Miejsce do przyklepienia znaczków pocztowych

Место за наклеивания почтовых знаков



Bestempeln des Kreuzes
auf
X
64

Unterschrift des Postbeamten
Podpis urzędnika pocztowego
Имя почтового служащего

*Packages from sailors with pre-paid
franking*

Mail other than cards and letters required payment of postage, thus these examples from packages sent by the sailors provide examples of prepaid franking. As shown by the cachets, these items originated from *S.M.S. Melszryn* and *S.M.S. Neptun* but presumably posted at the nearest civil post office.

[Original article appears to be from the year 2002.]

Published by the Military Postal History

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