

master plate variety. I have only been able to plate it as a stamp in the second row of an unknown sheet. (Figure 16)

- The January 1955 issue of *The Australian Commonwealth Specialists' Society of Great Britain Bulletin* records: *Coloured flaw under word "AUSTRALIA" from right leg of first "A" to right leg of second "A", Stamp 52.* (Stamp 52 is row 6, number 4). The writer goes on to say that he has found 18 copies. I was unable to find any examples in

bundleware. However, at some time I acquired a mint block with the variety. I can only assume that the flaw is transitory, confined to sheets issued to one location. (Figure 17)

#### Acknowledgements:

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Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 17

#### References

Australia Post, *National Philatelic Collection*

*The Australian Commonwealth Specialists' Catalogue: Queen Elizabeth II, 2019* edited by Geoffrey Kellow, p8/47

*Victorian Railways News Letter*, Centenary Number, September 1954

*Notes on First Australian Locomotive – compiled by L.J. Harrigan, Victorian Railways*

*Australian Stamp Monthly*, September 1958, p545

*The Australian Commonwealth Specialists' Society of Great Britain Bulletin*, January 1955, p196

## 'A Few of My Favourite Things', Number Four: The Missing Poles

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No, this is not an article about polar philately, or the melting icecaps, or even a Colour Omitted Error. This is the tale, as far as I can discern told for the first time, about two Polish aviators who were determined to fly from Poland to Australia. It is a little-known event, about which information is difficult to obtain and of which the details are largely unknown. The sources are two brief catalogue entries, three newspaper articles published two years apart, and the envelope featured here. And what on earth could it possibly have to do with Charles Kingsford Smith?



1930s commercial airmail covers at the 9d per ½oz rate to Malaya and Java are relatively common. However, to Timor? That is an entirely different matter: our subject here is the only example I have recorded. And, despite being franked with one of the ugliest of 9d Kangaroos, it is an absolute cracker!

The address is what instantly intrigued me. The word "Warsaw" jumped off the envelope. Then I deciphered the whole endorsement: "Captain Stanislaw Karpinski/Aerodrome/Kopang/(Flying from Warsaw/to Melbourne)". By this time, regular flights carrying both passengers and mail had been established between Europe and the Far East by the British carrier Imperial Airways, connecting at Singapore with Qantas flights to Australia; by the Dutch carrier KLM to Batavia; and by Air France to Indo-China.

My initial thought was that Captain Karpinski might have been a pilot with one of those airlines. However, Koepang, in the Dutch portion of Timor, was a stop only on the Qantas sector between Darwin and Soerabaya<sup>1</sup> (although it was also serviced by the Dutch subsidiary airline KNILM). In any event, I was unable to find any such pilot record.

*The Australian Air Mail Catalogue* (AAMC) by Nelson Eustis (2008 Edition, edited by Tom Frommer) set me on the right

track. At page 85 is entry #544 'Poland – Thailand (unofficial)'. The header states: "1935 (21 October) – Major Karpinski and M Rogolski left Warsaw in a Lublin RX111D for Australia. Flight abandoned after crash in Thailand on 8 November".

Over the past 40 years, I have handled literally thousands of 1930s souvenir flight covers. I had no recollection of Karpinski and Rogolski. I realised that is probably because mail from their flight is not recorded, as indicated in the AAMC by the symbol 'Ø', and I must have therefore ignored the catalogue entry. Of course, my cover is not the first discovered from that flight, but it may well be the only recorded cover to the aviators.

A very useful (bilingual) work is the two-volume study *Courrier Recupere: Recovered Mail* by Henri Nierinck (self published, 1992 & 1995)<sup>2</sup>. The first volume covers aerial incidents between 1910 and 1936 and, at page 477, includes the following entry: "351108 [= 8 November 1935] Siam / Avion: Liblin RX 111D/ Varsovie [Warsaw] – Australie/Pilots Maj Karpinsky et M Rogolsky", then a note in French and the English translation: "The plane left Poland for Australia. It met with an accident in Siam and the flight was abandoned. Mail was carried."

The AAMC and Nierinck records are essentially the same but it is useful to compare them closely. Firstly, while the Kingdom of Thailand is the country's modern title, it was officially known as Siam until its renaming on 23 June 1939. Secondly, the aircraft manufacturer is correctly cited in the AAMC as 'Lublin', not 'Liblin' as noted by Nierinck, but both sources misquote the model of the aircraft which should be 'R-XIII' and not the hybrid 'RX111'<sup>3</sup>. Next, there is the spelling of the pilots' names, with either an 'i' (AAMC) or a 'y' (Nierinck); both are correct, the former is the Anglicised version. The most notable difference is that the AAMC's symbol indicates 'It is believed mail no longer exists', which is ambiguous in that it is unclear if mail was even carried on the flight. Nierinck states unequivocally, "Mail was carried". It is perhaps a moot point but it is worth knowing that at least one authority thinks mail from the flight between Poland and Siam may yet be discovered. [Relentless airmail crash investigator Brian Peace has confirmed that no mail has been recorded.]

**[Note to would-be authors:** What this little exercise highlights is the fact that many philatelic writers are notorious for getting details wrong. If you observe a trend in this area, it can cause you to lose confidence in the overall accuracy or veracity of the work. That said, both the AAMC and Nierinck are, in my experience, generally very reliable.]

Confidence was an issue for the sender of my cover. As if anticipating that Captain Karpinski – yes, it seems he had not been promoted to Major at this time – might not get to Koepang or that he may not receive the letter, the sender made the endorsement at lower-left: "If unclaimed in 1 month/Please return..."

As we know, the Polish plane crashed in Siam and the Karpinski saga was terminated at that point. I say "saga" because this was an adventure more than two years in the making. Evidence for this comes from a most unlikely source, the *Northern Argus* provincial newspaper published in Clare, South Australia! Courtesy of that marvellous resource Trove, we know that this well-informed paper recorded on 11 August 1933 that: "Captain Stanislaw Karpinski...proposes to leave Dublin [sic; error for Lublin] on an attempt to establish a new international record for a flight to Australia...under the auspices of the Polish Ministry of Commerce and Industry as propaganda for the Polish aircraft industry..."

What happened? It surely did not take two years to come to an ignominious end in the Siamese jungle? Again, Trove comes to the rescue. On 24 October 1935, Brisbane's *Courier-Mail*

reported "Captain S Karpinski, the airman who in 1933 planned to make a record flight from Dublin [sic; apparently Australian newspapers were geographically challenged and believed their sources could not spell!]...was forced to abandon his plans owing to the exigencies of military service, has now decided to undertake a Poland-Australia-Poland flight...[in] a Lublin R-XIII high wing monoplane...He will be accompanied by Mr Victor Rogalski..." At last, we can confirm what I had expected, that 'M' Rogolski stood for the French 'Monsieur', but now we have an alternative spelling for his surname.

The article continued with the expected routing for the flight including, from India, "Karachi, Agra, Calcutta, Rangoon, Bangkok, Alor Star (probably), Palembang, Batavia, Surabaya [sic], Rambang (or Grogak), Bima, **Kupang** [sic] (or Dilly [sic]), Port Darwin..." and on to Melbourne.

It will be seen that the Brisbane article was published on the day our subject cover was posted from Sydney to Koepang, which indicates that the same information had been published in New South Wales on or about the same day. Unfortunately, Trove yielded nothing of relevance from the Sydney papers.

The story told by the subject cover itself is just as interesting, and it highlights the fact that international communications in 1935 could still be quite rudimentary. Today, if an expected flight was overdue at a particular airport, a quick internet search would reveal the circumstances and social media would be lit up with useful, if largely uninformed, comment. In 1935, Koepang was a small town on a small island far removed from major centres. News of a plane having crashed on Java might have been relayed to Timor, but a plane that had crashed in Siam might as well have gone down on another continent.

According to the Qantas schedules published in Ted Proud's massive *Intercontinental Airmails Volume Two: Asia and Australasia*, our cover missed the service per 'Adelaide' ex Brisbane on 23 October. The next available service was a week later per 'Melbourne', departing Brisbane 30 October, arriving Koepang 1 November.

Interestingly, although clearly addressed to "Kopang" and mentioning the anticipated arrival of a plane from Warsaw (not that the Timorese would necessarily have known where that was: heck, the Australian press could not distinguish Lublin from Dublin), the cover bears no Koepang arrival backstamp. However, there is a vertical endorsement at left "Kopang/onbekend" [= unknown at Koepang, in Dutch] and a manuscript endorsement "Ampanan" in red-pencil (later crossed-through).



Ampanan is a town on the west coast of the island of Lombok, some 1000km ENE of Koepang. There may have been internal flights between Timor and Lombok but it is almost certain

that this is where the airmail label was obliterated, also in red pencil, and from where the cover was forwarded by sea. The 'AMPENAN/12.11.35 4-5N' backstamp indicates a significant delay in reaching that port. Why it was even sent there is an unresolved mystery, as is why it was then forwarded to Lamboeanhadji, a port on the east coast of the same island. There it was datestamped on the reverse 21.11.35 and on the face 30.11.35.

Then it was back to Ampenan with cds of 5.12.35 on the reverse and 7.12.35 on the face. Here, the endorsement "Koepang" was added to the face in dark red ink. There is a 'KOEPANG' arrival backstamp of 14.12.35. A similar marking of 17.12.35 is accompanied by endorsements "return to sender" on the face and "return/Timor Koepang/Inconnu [= unknown, in French] return to sender" on the reverse, both in bright red ink. The reverse also shows a small Dutch East Indies black/pink label inscribed "N. 8. Btl./INCONNU./Onbekend."

The cover would then have been sent back to Australia, presumably by surface because: a) the airmail label had already been crossed-through; and b) there is no additional Sydney backstamp, as would be expected had it arrived by air.

So, that is the 'end of the road' for the cover...but it is not the end of the story.

Note that the envelope's meanderings around the Dutch Indies had mostly taken place *after* Karpinski and Rogolski had crashed in Siam, which occurred on 8 November 1935. This comes back to what was noted earlier, that communications in the region in the 1930s left a lot to be desired. Not only could not the officials at the regional Dutch Indies post offices, despite their best efforts, find anyone by the name of Karpinski, they apparently had no knowledge that a pilot of that name had plummeted from the skies over Siam.

And here is where we come back to the Kingsford Smith teaser at the outset.

8 November 1935 was not only the date of the Karpinski crash, it was also the date on which Sir Charles Kingsford Smith and his navigator/co-pilot Tommy Pethybridge disappeared on a flight from England to Australia, somewhere near the coast of Burma. Extensive searches of the region and interrogation of the native population failed to find any trace and the men were presumed to have been killed in a crash at sea. However, rumours circulated that they had survived.

One tale that had some credence, probably because a non-Asian mine manager had reported an aeroplane overhead early on the morning of 8 November, was that Kingsford Smith and Pethybridge had crashed in the Takuap Pa District on the Thai mainland, north of Phuket. However, an aerial search found no evidence of a crash in the area.

This story was repeated in Perth's *Western Mail* of 28 November 1935, again discovered on Trove. It spoke of a crash at Laikpu, a locality some way south of the Thai-Burmese border. However, their conclusion was that the downed airmen were our Polish friends, Captain Stanislaw Karpinski and Victor Rogalski (or Rogolski). It states: "The last message received by the Consul of Poland...was that the airmen had crashed at Takuappa [*sic*]

on November 8 and that they were returning to Poland by steamer...neither of them had been seriously hurt."

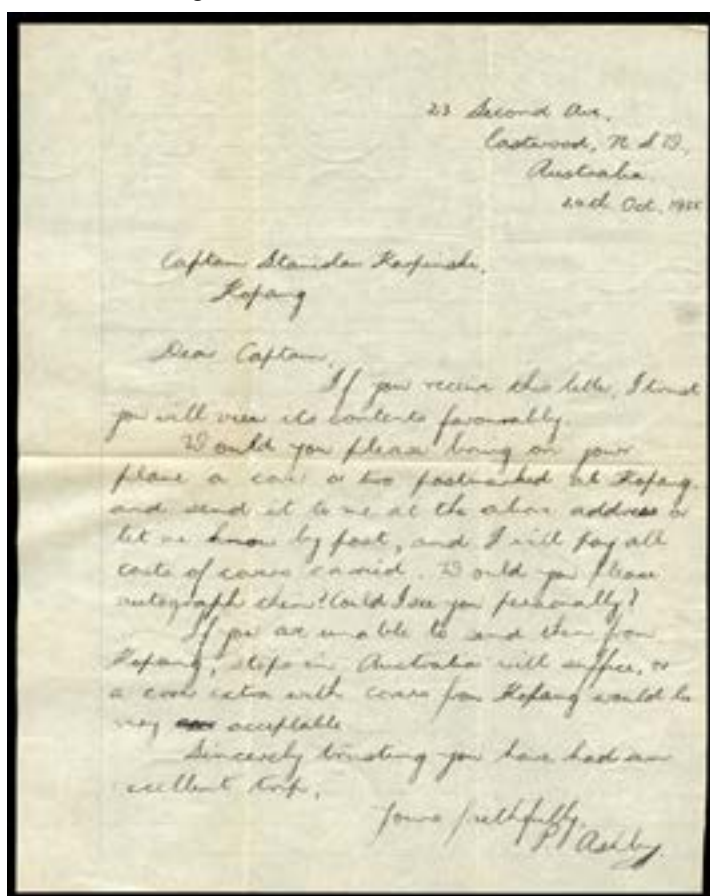
One can only wonder, if Smithy had not been lost at the same time, perhaps the Karpinski story might have been far better known.

What I can be sure of, is that this cover that went in search of a Polish aviator who never arrived is one of My Favourite Things.

## POSTSCRIPT

Although the cover is undoubtedly 'commercial', there is a philatelic element to it, as revealed by the original contents that have also survived.

The sender was one P Ashby from Eastwood, a Sydney suburb. A contemporary, and possibly a rival of Ernie Crome, Ashby might have been trying to get one-up on his well-connected rival who seemed able to get covers flown on every imaginable connection throughout Australia.



He asks Karpinski: "Would you please bring on your plane a cover or two postmarked at Kopang...and I will pay all costs. Would you please autograph them?...If you are unable to send them from Kopang, stops in Australia will suffice..." Then, really trying it on, "Could I see you personally?"

Such was the life of the early airmail collector. Personally, I am glad Karpinski never received this letter and was thus unable to create any souvenirs for Mr Ashby. But I am even more pleased that, instead of shredding the cover and letter in frustration, Ashby actually retained them.

### Notes:

1 'Qantas Aeriana' by EA ('Ernie') Crome (1955) at page 72

2 Ken Sanford and Brian Peace are working on a monumental revision of the Nierinck work.

3 See the well-resourced Wikipedia article 'Lublin R-XIII' at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lublin\\_R-XIII](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lublin_R-XIII)