Ardalion Vinokurov & Alexander Epstein

The Russian Field Post, 1914-1918

HANDBOOK/CATALOG
The book concerns Russian field post operations from 1914 to 1918. The field post and post-and-telegraph establishments of the Russian Army during the First World War, their activities, locations and the postmarks they used constitute most of this handbook and catalog. The catalog includes about 1,000 different postmarks known to the authors as of 2009. This work is intended for a wide circle of collectors as well as other persons interested in Imperial Russian postal history.

English version edited by David M. Skipton

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FOREWORD

It is now close to 100 years since the First World War broke out, a conflict that led to the deaths of 10 million people and the serious injury over 30 million more.

In many respects, WWI determined further events in the 20th century, but it also left very abundant material for collectors interested in field post history. This is especially true for Russia, where armies fought in a vast territory from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea and Transcaucasia. Rather many articles and notes concerning the Russian field post in this period have been published, but journal articles cannot give a sufficiently complete overview of field post office (FPO) operations in the Russian Empire.

This handbook and catalog strives to present as complete a description as possible of Russian field post operations as a whole and of individual post and post-and-telegraph establishments during WWI. For two dozen years the authors have collected and reviewed not only the philatelic materials and articles published on this matter but also archival documents, primarily from the Russian State Military History Archives. The materials used herein are listed at the end of each chapter. Great attention was also paid to the study of the Russian and foreign military historical and memoir literature on WWI as well as numerous articles and notes published about the field post and matters connected with it. All of these are listed in the bibliography.

The authors hope that a brief description of military operations at different fronts and in different periods of the war, together with corresponding maps and sketches attached, will be useful for collectors, relieving them of the need to turn every now and then to other sources of information.

The Russian Army field post and post-and-telegraph establishments, their operations, locations and the postmarks (date stamps) they used from 1914 to 1918 are the basic themes of this handbook and catalog. The catalog includes about 1,000 such date stamps, and over 600 of them are illustrated at full size. Taking into account that many collectors are interested in the pricing of different field post materials, which is necessary when purchasing or trading for them, the authors propose a 10-point scale, where the points depend on the scarcity and the length of time these postmarks were used. The main principles of pricing different field post entries of this period are outlined as well.

 Strikes of various military cachets, which are often found on mail as a confirmation of the free-frank privilege, are only mentioned in this book as examples. Such cachets can be an independent area for collecting and study, although some of them, such as the cachets of reserve regiments and battalions, military schools and so forth, are only indirectly connected with the Army in the Field. Only the cachets of field post and post-and-telegraph establishments that handled the mail are considered in greater detail.

The military censorship of mail during the war also has no direct relation to the operations of the field post proper. Therefore, it is mentioned only in connection with those field post establishments where military censors operated.
Some materials of use to collectors are provided as Appendices. In particular, all versions of the texts found in the date stamps are listed in Appendix 1 to make it easier to recognize incomplete strikes on mail. The localities in this English version of the book are given as represented in the corresponding documents, literature and on Russian maps of the time, but transliterated in English. As different representations of the same locality are not infrequently found, only one of them is chosen. Exceptions are the city or town names in the forms adopted in English, e.g. Warsaw, Trebizond, etc., as well as the German names of East Prussian towns. All of these localities, plus their modern forms, including their previous and present-day administrative subordination, are listed in Appendix 2. The modern locality names are given as they are depicted on maps of the corresponding countries in the native languages.

Due to the increasing interest in Russian field post operations on the territories of various modern-day states in recent years, we have provided in Appendix 3 a list of field post and post-and-telegraph establishments that were active at various times of the war there. For Used Abroad collectors, Appendix 4 lists those establishments that operated in foreign areas outside of the Russian Empire. Appendix 5 presents a list of military formations with their inherent or supporting field post establishments.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all those collectors who gave us an opportunity to consult the materials in their collections. They are, in particular: A. Averkiev, I. Brun, I. Druzhinin, O. Forafontov, B. Gofman, N. Mandrovskiy, V. Pantyukhin, Yu. Shukhrov, P. Trusov (all from Russia), O. Zhevega (Ukraine), R. Nagapetyants (Armenia), M. Kosoy (Israel) and B. Sohrne (Sweden).

Despite many years of research and a thorough analysis of the material made available to us, we are aware of many aspects that require corrections, additional information and more clarity. This is especially true for the locations of some field post establishments in different periods of the war, the military formations they served and the ranges of use for individual date stamps. We hope that collectors who use this handbook and catalog will be able to supplement this information in the future.

This English-language edition includes a lot of addenda and corrigenda in comparison to the original Russian edition.

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Alexander Epstein
Figure 1
Postcard forms issued in France for the Russian Expeditionary Force, date stamps of French Field Post No. 189 for the special brigades in France and No. 507 (501) for the brigades at the Balkan Front.

RUSSIA IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Many books and articles, both in Russia and abroad, have been written and published as to the causes of the war, not to mention great numbers of publications about the war itself. The primary works of this kind – including those that concern field post operations – are given in the list of recommended literature in the Bibliography.

We thought it would be useful in this book to show (at least in fragmentary form) the composition of Russia’s Armed Forces and the stages of military activities during various periods of the war. We hope that this information, in conjunction with the schematic maps, will make it easier to understand how the field post establishments functioned at different times as well as the nature of their positioning and operations. It should be noted that by “Russian troops” we mean the forces of the Russian Army, which included not just Russians but also soldiers of other nationalities that were a part of the Russian Empire at that time. All the dates in this book are given according to the Old Style (Julian) Calendar then used in Russia, i.e., 13 days behind the Gregorian Calendar.
The Armed Forces of Russia

On 19 July 1914 a general mobilization was proclaimed in Germany and a note declaring war against Russia was handed to the Russian ambassador. However, as early as 16 July Russia had announced a partial mobilization against Austro-Hungary, which had started a war against Serbia, a Russian ally. Russia declared a general mobilization the following day, 17 July. Over the course of the next ten days, France, Belgium, Montenegro and Great Britain also joined the war.

On the eve of the war, the Imperial Russian Army had very substantial forces, numbering 1,423,000 troops. After the mobilization and additional call-ups, by 1 October 1914 Russia had 2.7 million men in the Army in the Field alone, including 38,100 officers. Besides those forces, she had at her disposal almost 290 reserve infantry regiments quartered in the rear districts of the Empire and another 109 reserve regiments in the territories subordinated to the Supreme Commander-in-Chief. These and subsequent call-ups allowed the Russian Army to expand dramatically, despite numerous losses. If in September 1915 there were 3,856,000 men (including 58,000 officers) in the Army in the Field, by October 1916 it had grown to 6,963,000 troops (including 115,000 officers); by mid-1917 the numbers had increased to 7,135,000 servicemen. The Ministry of War with its General Staff, to which all military district headquarters were subordinated, remained the central organ of control over the Russian Armed Forces. The Supreme Commander-in-Chief headed the Army in the Field; all front and army headquarters were subordinated to him.

The infantry consisted of 37 army corps by the beginning of 1915 and 69 Army Corps by the end of 1917, and it comprised the bulk of the Army. As a rule, an army corps included two or, much less often, three divisions of two brigades each. However, the number of divisions in a corps could be even higher – up to four or even five in the last two years of the war. An army corps also included a Cossack regiment, a mortar battalion, a field-engineer battalion, a telegraph and a searchlight company, a medical battalion and some other auxiliary units. Cavalry played an important role in military operations. There were 24 cavalry divisions and eight cavalry brigades in the Army at the beginning of the war. During the so-called maneuver period of the war, cavalry corps were restored. By October 1917 there were already 47 cavalry divisions and nine cavalry brigades (most of which became parts of 10 cavalry corps), as well as numerous detached Cossack sotnyas.2

Artillery gained still more importance in the battles of the First World War. If there were as few as 949 artillery batteries with the troops in 1914, their number almost doubled and exceeded 1,750 by mid-1917. Some of those batteries were brought together to form brigades within corps, and also a brigade of special-purpose heavy artillery of (SPHA), formed in 1916, was later expanded into the 48th (SPHA) Corps.

Great numbers of troops and vast amounts of military supplies had to be transported, leading to a considerable increase in the number of railroad troops. They were subordinated to the Military Communications Service of the General Staff as well as to

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1 An artillery battalion was called a «divizion,» not to be confused with a «diviziya,» or division, which was a much larger formation.
2 These were equivalent to regular cavalry squadrons or infantry companies, usually numbering around 70-80 men.
3 An artillery battery was the equivalent of a company in the infantry.
frontal military communications administrations. Temporary military railroads in the regions adjacent to the front lines and in the occupied foreign territories had to be constructed. Both railroad troops and special military engineering units constructed and operated these new railroads. The military engineering units also played a considerably greater role in providing troops with engineering services, including means of communication. The use of wireless, in addition to the telegraph and telephone, was new in this war. Special so-called “spark companies” also made their appearance in this war.

The use of airplanes led to the creation of aviation detachments, and with them came anti-aircraft defense units. New armored car units appeared, and armored trains were widely used. The use of poison gasses by the Germans led as a consequence to the development of special chemical troops. Naturally, the number of military medicine establishments increased considerably, too, from dressing squads, field and evacuation infirmaries to special medical trains and mobile hospitals.

Many people in Russia greeted the beginning of World War I with approval. Not for nothing was this war proclaimed “the Second Patriotic War” in the publications of those years. It was natural, therefore, that apart from the regular troops such formations as the State Home Guard and volunteer družiny⁴ appeared. They were formed from 1st- and 2nd-class soldiers in various regions of the Empire and sent to the front. There were also national družiny. For instance, four Armenian volunteer družiny fought in the Caucasian Army. All told, 320 Home Guard družiny were formed, most of which later reorganized into divisions, artillery and cavalry regiments and field-engineer companies. Volunteer medical and sanitary units, such as infirmaries, hospitals and sanitary trains, were widespread; many of them were created by public organizations.

As for the Navy, only the warships of the Baltic and Black Sea Fleets, the Caspian Sea Special-Purpose Detachment and the Northern Flotilla from July 1916 on were active in this war. Ships of the first six classes had their own names while the others had numbers and sometimes a name as well. All of this was reflected in the strikes of naval ship cachets and the addresses on mail.

Thus, there was a very great variety of formations and units in this war. Considering that most of the military and auxiliary units had cachets of their own (down to companies in the Infantry and Engineer Troops, to batteries in the Artillery and to sotnyas in the Cavalry), one can imagine that the total number of such cachets (official and “for packets”) could reach into the tens of thousands. Strikes of many of them can be found on the items of mail sent during the war.

**The European Theater of War**

In the European Theater of War, the whole western frontier of the Russian Empire, from the Baltic to the Black Seas, became the front line. To control the armies in a more efficient manner, two fronts were created at the very beginning of the war: the Northwestern Front – originally against Germany – and the Southwestern Front – originally against Austro-Hungary. Two independent armies of rather insignificant strength were also formed: the 6th in the St. Petersburg/Petrograd area to defend the Baltic coast against possible enemy landings and the 7th in the Odessa-Tiraspol’ area to watch the Black Sea coast and the frontier with Romania.

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⁴ A družina (dru-ZHEE-na) was approximately the size of a battalion.
Military operations on the Northwestern Front began on 4 August 1914 with the so-called East Prussian Operation. The plan was to have 1st Army (2nd, 3rd, 4th and 20th Army Corps) advance and bypass the Mazurian Lakes from the north to cut the German troops off from Königsberg, while 2nd Army (1st, 6th, 13th and 15th Army Corps) was to go around these lakes from the west. Major battles failed to produce the results expected by the Russian command. The 2nd Army was badly mauled and two of its corps (the 13th and 15th) were actually destroyed; the 1st Army was knocked out of East Prussia. Three additional army corps (the 3rd Siberian, 1st Turkestan and 22nd) transferred by Supreme Headquarters (Stavka) to strengthen the Northwestern Front did not help. At the beginning of September, these corps formed the bulk of the new 10th Army. By winter, military operations in this area essentially came to a halt for awhile.

However, Russian troops gained considerable successes on the Southwestern Front. The military operations that lasted there for over a month (5 August to 13 September) are called the “Battle of Galicia.” Five armies (the 9th, 4th, 5th, 3rd and 8th) and the Dniester Detachment fought along the 320-km front. Initially, the Austro-Hungarian forces inflicted a serious defeat on the Russian 4th Army (Grenadiers Corps, 14th and 16th Army Corps) on 10 to 11 August south of Krasnik. To stabilize the front, the Guards Corps, 18th Army Corps and 3rd Caucasian Army Corps as well as three infantry divisions (the 80th, 82nd and 83rd) were directed there from the reserve, and they helped to launch a counterattack. As result of the whole operation, Russian troops occupied a considerable part of Galicia, and the front length increased to 400 km by the end of 1914. The so-called Siege Army5 of two army corps (the 28th and 29th), later renamed as 11th Army, was formed especially to besiege the Austrian fortress of Przemysl (Peremyshl’ in Russian). Although Romania remained neutral during this period, a special force of warships from the Black Sea Fleet with units attached to it (the so-called “Special-Purpose Expedition”) was directed in August to the Danube at Serbia’s request.

In mid-September, 4th and 5th Armies were transferred north, where they and units of 2nd Army took part in the Warsaw-Ivangorod Operation (15 September to 26 October). The 50th Infantry Division from 6th Army and a regiment of the Officers Rifle School were directed to Warsaw as well. 1st Siberian Army Corps, 1st Siberian Heavy Artillery Brigade, Transbaikal Cossack Brigade and two Siberian infantry divisions (the 12th and 14th) from the Supreme Commander-in-Chief’s rear reserve also joined in these fights. An attempted offensive in November towards the Silesian border and Poznan’ (the so-called Lodz’ Operation) ended without substantive results, as did the second attempted invasion of East Prussia by the forces of 10th Army, which began at the end of October. The location of Russian forces by the end of 1914 is shown on the schematic map in fig. 2.

The Russian armies suffered further setbacks on the Southwestern Front at the beginning of 1915. German and Austrian troops counterattacked there on 9 to 11 January along the whole front line from Bukovina to Mezolaborch. Russian troops were forced to leave the Carpathian foothills and retreat to the Prut and Dniester Rivers. The enemy’s advance on the Bolekhov-Chernovtsy section was halted only after 9th Army was transferred to the area and entered the fray. Przemysl was taken on 5 March, but it was the last success of the Russian army that year. Parts of 11th Army were distributed between 3rd and 8th Armies and a new 11th Army was formed, but this did not save the situation. At the end of March, the armies of the Southwestern Front went over to the defensive.

In Western Galicia, the Russian forces were stretched thin along the front line, with each division having to cover 10 kilometers or more, and the main forces found themselves in

5 Blokadnaya armiya.
the Carpathians. Having received reinforcements, German forces started an offensive towards Gorlitse on 19 April and soon broke through the Russian defenses. The latter’s command transferred reserves from other sections of the front and threw them into the battles piecemeal, so most of these reserves perished.

The troops had little heavy artillery, and what was worse, interruptions in the supply of shells and cartridge began. Therefore, the HQ of Southwestern Front (3rd, 8th, 9th and 11th Armies) tried to preserve its forces, withdrawing them from one defensive line after another. L’vov was abandoned on 9 June, and soon the Russians were ousted from almost the whole of Galicia, excepting only its southeast corner.

Another serious situation arose on the East Prussian border at the beginning of 1915. An offensive by 10th Army and the newly formed 12th Army, supported by 1st, 2nd and 5th Armies, was planned for 10 February. However, those forces were situated on the western bank of the Vistula, and when German troops forestalled it and attacked on 25-26 January, they threatened to encircle the Russian armies. The Russian command therefore ordered a retreat to the Kovno-Olita-Sopotskin-Osovets line. 20th Army Corps found itself in a grave situation. Defending itself all the way, it retreated to the Augustov forests and fought to prevent being encircled. By the morning of 9 February this corps had ceased to exist, but it helped to save 26th and 3rd Siberian Army Corps, which had taken up defensive positions on the Grodno-Lipsk-Osovets line, from encirclement. Russian troops (1st, 10th and 12th Armies) started a general offensive as late as 17 February. After protracted fighting and the defeat of German units near Prasnysh, the latter retreated to the East Prussian border and took up fortified defensive positions. This operation essentially ended by late March. The Russian troops also occupied defensive positions along the Middle Neman, Bobr and Narev Rivers. At the beginning of April, German forces invaded Kurlyand. A new 5th Army was formed there to counter this new menace.
Figure 2
The European Theater of War in Russia by the end of 1914.
Figure 3
The European Theater of War in Russia, 1915.
Figure 4
The European Theater of War in Russia, 1916.
Figure 5
The European Theater of War in Russia in the first half of 1917.
Figure 6
The European Theater of War in Russia as of the second half of 1917.

At the end of June, seven German divisions started an offensive toward Prasnysh, where fewer than three Russian divisions were defending themselves. However, in six days of fighting the enemy advanced only 25 to 30 km, even though the Russian troops suffered from a lack of shells, cartridges and even rifles. In mid-June, the Germans attacked the Russian positions by Rozhan but could only cross the Narev River. To minimize losses...
and straighten the front line, the Russian command decided on a retreat to the line Lomzha-Malkin-Vlodava-Brest Litovsk-Upper Narev River-Bobr River.

Eight armies (the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 10th, 12th and 13th) were fighting on the Northwestern Front at that time. On 3 August 1915 it was decided to divide the Northwestern Front into two: Northern Front and Western Front, each subordinated directly to the Supreme Commander-in-Chief. The main task for Northern Front, which stretched north of the modern border between Belarus’ and Latvia, consisted of protecting the approaches to Petrograd from East Prussia and the Baltic Sea. The mission of Western Front – which crossed the territory of modern-day Belarus’ including most of Poles’e – was to cover the approaches to Smolensk and Moscow. At the end of 1915, 11th and 8th Armies made an abortive attempt to advance in the Tarnopol’-Chortkov area. 7th Army and Guards Troops were also transferred to that area. Afterwards, all the armies of Southwestern Front went over to the defensive (fig. 3).

The beginning of 1916 was characterized by a relative lull, with troops fighting defensive actions almost everywhere. However, by that summer a serious offensive was being prepared on the Southwestern Front and the southern flank of Western Front. Western and Northern Fronts were to strike the main blow, but after a few delays and abortive attempts they never managed to begin a decisive advance. So, the blow was struck by Southwestern Front (8th, 11th, 7th, and 9th Armies), which made a deep breakthrough toward Kovel’, Lutsk and Brody (the so-called “Lutsk Breakthrough”). On 25 May, 15th Infantry Division (a part of 8th Army) captured Lutsk and 9th Army crossed the Prut River at the beginning of June and took Chernovtsy. On 11 June, 3rd Army and 78th Infantry Division, both from the Western Front, were temporarily assigned to help General A. Brusilov, the Southwestern Front Commander-in-Chief, develop the offensive. 3rd Army reinforced by two corps from 8th Army (46th Army Corps and 4th Cavalry Corps) was to capture the areas of Galuzeya and Gorodok. A Guards Force, later reorganized into the Special Army, was also transferred there. As a result of the whole offensive, important parts of Galicia and Bukovina were reoccupied, but nevertheless Kovel’ was not captured and 9th Army became stuck in the southern Carpathians.

Romania had remained neutral up to this point, but on 14 August 1916 she declared war on Austro-Hungary. The Romanian Government handed over to Russia about 20 steamships, which after some refitting joined the Black Sea Fleet as of mid-November 1916. They fought under the Russian flag as cruisers, transports, packetships and auxiliaries. The Romanian Armed Forces numbered about 600,000, combined into four armies, but the Austrian, German and Bulgarian forces rather quickly defeated the Romanian Army, forcing it to abandon Bucharest on 21 November almost without a fight. To save the Romanian troops, Russia first dispatched 47th Army Corps with some detached divisions (the entire force comprising the so-called Dobrudja Army) and 9th Army. Later, 4th Army was also added, and a new army was formed – the Danubian (soon renamed as 6th Army). The enemy advance was stopped by the end of December. This raised the question of creating a separate Romanian Front, which was established in December 1916 (fig. 4).

The situation at the fronts in the first half of 1917 remained rather stable, with the troops fighting mainly defensive battles. However, the situation in Russia itself had changed: the economy had worsened, the February Revolution had ended with the abdication of the Emperor, a Provisional Government had been formed and its activities seriously affected the state of the Army in the Field. Committees of Soldiers’ Deputies were created among the troops, and their decisions were often at odds with the commanders’ orders.
front and army commanders that the Provisional Government found objectionable were replaced. Discipline in the Army was deteriorating. The Provisional Government, with its War Minister Alexander Kerensky and General Brusilov (now the Supreme Commander-in-Chief) prepared a strong offensive on the Southwestern Front. Troops of the 11th, 7th and 8th Armies attacked on 18 June, breaking through the enemy lines of defense in the Stanislav area and capturing Galich and Kalush. However, when soldiers refused to occupy the positions, the delay in regrouping the troops led to tragic consequences. On 6 July, German forces counterattacked near Tarnopol’, forcing the Russians to abandon their positions and retreat almost without putting up any resistance. The retreat did not stop until the end of July on the Brody-Zbarazh-Grzhimailov-Kympolung line, thanks to the drastic measures taken by General Kornilov, who had replaced Brusilov in his post. By this time the Central Rada Government had already been formed in Ukraine, which intended to create its own Ukrainian Army. The democratization of the army started at the initiative of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies (Order No. 1 of 1 March 1917) and the Provisional Government, plus the Bolsheviks’ propaganda on the need to end the war, rendered the Russian Army inefficient.

At Northern Front, 5th Army tried to attack on 10 July but the soldiers did not wish to fight. As a result of the operations on this front, Riga and Ust’-Dvinsk were abandoned to the enemy in late August and 12th Army retreated to Wenden (figs. 5-6).

The Caucasian Theater of War

Turkey began military operations without declaring war on Russia. On 16 and 17 October 1914, Turkish and German warships shelled a number of Black Sea ports, including Sevastopol’, Feodosiya and Novorossiisk. Reacting to these actions, the Russian Government declared war on the Ottoman Empire, and during the night of 20 October advanced detachments of the Caucasian Army crossed the State frontiers. During that same period, Turkish troops began capturing part of Persian Azerbaijan and advanced toward Kars; they also invaded Batum Region. At the beginning of hostilities, the Caucasian Army included a total of two army corps (the 1st Caucasian and 2nd Turkestan, the latter of which arrived later), 66th Infantry Division, two Cossack divisions and 350 field guns, not including fortress artillery. Total army strength came to a little over 170,000 men. Although the front line stretched almost 700 km from the Black Sea coast to Lake Urmia, operations took place only along certain axes and in a few areas.

The main task assigned by the General Staff to the Caucasian Army consisted of an active defense to prevent Turkish forces from invading Transcaucasia and to defend Baku and lines of communications back to the Northern Caucasus. However, as early as November Russian forces began operations toward Erzerum (the so-called Kepri-kei Operation), and only the cold and snow in the mountains forced them to take up defensive positions. On top of that, the Turks landed near Khopa and drove the Sea Coastal Detachment back to Batum, which created a threat to the Caucasian Army’s right flank. During the Sarykamysh Operation in December 1914, Russian troops defeated the advancing Turkish army. Although the Sea Coastal and Chorokh Detachments cleared the Turks from most of Batum Region during January to March 1915, operations elsewhere in Transcaucasia ceased until the spring.

It should be pointed out that the Caucasian Army suffered a constant shortage of shells and cartridges, and it received only limited reinforcements, mainly from the Turkestan and Caucasian Military Districts. It didn’t succeed in forming a complete reserve and expanding new military formations until the first half of 1915. Although the locally
formed 5th Caucasian Army Corps and 20th Infantry Division were transferred to the European Theater of Military Operations, the Caucasian Army was reinforced by 4th Caucasian Army Corps, which secured the defense of the Erivan axis in a 400-kilometer section from Dayar to Tabriz. A considerable part of this corps was concentrated west of Lake Van. At the end of June, Turkish forces launched a major assault against Kop, captured Kara-kilisa and seriously threatened a collapse back to Erivan. A detachment under General Baratov was formed from units of 1st Caucasus Corps and the army’s reserve, which attacked the flank and rear of the Turkish forces in the Dayar area. As a result of the Alashkert Operation, the Turks had retreated to the mountain passes by the end of June and the front was stabilized in the area of Lakes Van and Urmia. Attempts by Russian troops to advance from Sarykamysh and Oltu were unsuccessful, and by end of 1915 they were staying put in the positions they had captured earlier.

In the autumn of 1915, German and Turkish agents and diversionary detachments increased their activities in Persia’s Azerbaijan Province. Therefore, a new Expeditionary Cavalry Corps under General Baratov was formed. (It consisted of about 7,000 men drawn up into three infantry regiments and 39 *sotnyas* of Kuban and Terek Cossacks, with 20 guns.) The corps was transported on ships from Baku, landed at Enzeli and made its way to Kazvin. From there, the corps moved towards Khamadan and Kum in two columns; there it defeated the German/Turkish detachments at the beginning of December. At the same time, the Khorosan Detachment was moved to northeastern Persia from Turkestan Military District to prevent the remainders of those detachments from leaving for Afghanistan.

In November, the Russians began preparing for a large-scale offensive toward Erzerum, which had strong defensive fortifications. In winter conditions up in the mountains, the Shock Army Group and formations of the 2nd Turkestan and 1st Caucasian Army Corps unleashed an assault against the forts of Erzerum from the north and east on 29 January 1916, bursting into the town on 3 February. Having lost over half of its manpower and almost all of its artillery, the Turkish army retreated 70 to 100 km to the west. The Russian troops halted their advance in mid-March due to the difficulties they encountered in transporting equipment and ammunitions over mountain roads.

By the end of January 1916, the Caucasian Army undertook one more offensive, this time along the Black Sea coast toward Trebizond. This operation was conducted in close cooperation with the Black Sea Fleet and small ships from the Batum Naval Base. The Sea Coastal Detachment advanced along the sea coast, and forces consisting of two Cossack infantry brigades (18,000 men) and a horse mountain artillery battalion were shipped from Novorossiisk and landed at Rize and Khamurkan. On 5 April, the Turkish garrison left Trebizond. The capture of Trebizond not only allowed the Russians to create a naval base but also to organize the supply of their troops, including those quartered in the Erzerum area, where a rather good land road led from Trebizond. To secure these successes and reinforce the Sea Coastal Detachment, two more infantry divisions (the 123rd and 127th) were transported by sea from Mariupol’ in May and the beginning of June; these two divisions combined with the Sea Coastal Detachment to form 5th Caucasian Army Corps.

One more large-scale offensive took place in mid-July 1916, when the Caucasian Army captured Baiburt and Erdzindzhan. Thus, the Russian army advanced 250 km deep into Turkish territory. The highway from Erdzindzhan to Trebizond ended up wholly in Russian hands, which greatly eased the supply situation.
The units of 4th Caucasian Corps were active near Lake Van on the Kigi-Ognot-Bitlis front. The fighting there continued up to the end of August, especially in the Ognot area, until the snowfalls in the mountains. The troops took up defensive positions when the winter cold came.

In Persia, the British troops in Mesopotamia were in dire straits and urgently requested the Russian command to organize an offensive towards Khanekin to help the twelve-thousand-strong garrison at Kut-el-Amara, which was besieged by the Turks. 1st Caucasian Cavalry Corps (the former Expeditionary Corps) under General Baratov, with 10,000 rifles and 7,900 sabers, had by that time occupied the areas of Kermanshah and Khanekin, threatening the flank and rear of the Turkish army. However, it was already too late, since the British garrison had surrendered to the Turks. Baratov’s corps was forced to halt its advance. Problems with supplies of food and ammunition bedeviled it, and the horses lacked forage. Then a cholera epidemic broke out. Given these circumstances and pressured by overwhelming Turkish forces, the corps was forced to retreat, abandoning Khanekin, Kermanshah and Hamadan.

A positional lull came over the Caucasian Theater of War in the winter of 1916/1917. The offensive toward Baghdad and Pendzhvin by 1st Caucasian Cavalry Corps and 7th Caucasian Army Corps that had begun in early 1917 at the request of the British command was of no help to the Caucasian Army. It could not advance deeply into Turkey due to considerable losses, problems with food, forage and ammunition supply and a great loss of horses. Therefore, in 1917 the Russians concentrated mainly on fortifying the captured areas and securing their troops, who had been scattered over a large territory (fig. 8).

Throughout the course of this war the Caucasian Army carried out all of the missions assigned to it, and in April 1917 it was reorganized into the Caucasian Front. It should be noted that military operations in the territories of Turkey and Western Persia were limited to a considerable degree by the geographical and climatic features of this region. As early as 1915, the Russian command was forced to use pack-animal transport, including camels and donkeys, to supply the army. Forage for the cavalry had practically disappeared by the summer, and they were obliged to carry it in. The lack of woods and forests in most of this area made it necessary to haul in fuel as well. Besides his usual load, each soldier was required to carry two logs of firewood in the winter. The fuel problem in East Anatolia was not solved until 1916/17, when they started working the coal mines near Kara-kilisa and pumping oil in the Erzerum area. Military railroads were constructed to improve the supply situation, but the rails for them had to be brought in from Russia. The narrow-gauge Maku Military Railroad from Shakhatkhty via Maku to Bayazet was among the first of them. It was extended later to Kara-kilisa, with a branch toward Lake Van. A broad-gauge railroad was also extended from Dzhul’fa to Tabriz with a branch from Sophian Station to Lake Urmia. A narrow-gauge line was constructed from Trebizond; it was supplied by sea with ammunition and other cargo to Dzhevezlik and Gemish-khane, and a similar railroad was built from Sarykamysh to Erzerum.

At the end of 1917, Caucasian Front military formations began to demobilize. However, by this time these troops had been influenced by Bolshevik propaganda to the point where they were no longer fit for action. The national units formed from the Transcaucasian peoples also never became combat units. When on 12 February 1918 Turkey broke the armistice concluded earlier and started an offensive to capture Persian Azerbaijan and Russian Transcaucasia, its forces met almost no resistance. The territories captured earlier by Russia, plus Kars, Sarykamysh and many other towns, were lost in the course of a few weeks.
Figure 7
Postcard with a dated cachet of the Van Supply Point, mailed on 18 September 1917 at Reserve FPO No. 160.
Figure 8
The Caucasian Theater of War from 1914 to 1917.
There was only one instance during the First World War when Russian military formations fought as part of the armies of other allied States: the Russian Expeditionary Corps that was sent to France. True, there was a detached army of four divisions formed in August and September 1914 that Russia intended to send to Serbia, but the government of Romania, which was neutral at that time, refused to let the Russian troops pass through its territory.

In 1915 the French Government approached Russia with a request to send Russian troops to assist the French Army. Four special infantry brigades with a total strength of 44,500 men were formed in early 1916 to be shipped to France. These military formations were transferred mainly via Siberia, Manchuria and the former Russian port of Dal’niy, where they embarked on ships that brought them over the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, and this process lasted until October 1916. Two of the four Russian brigades (the 1st and 3rd) operated in northeastern France, where they fought difficult defensive battles. In April 1917, these Russian brigades (although primarily the 1st) took part in the offensive against Bremon Fort. Over 5,000 Russian soldiers perished in the storming of it. In May, both brigades were withdrawn to the rear for rest and recovery in the camp at La Courtine, where they were later combined into the Special Infantry Division.

Two other infantry brigades (the 2nd and 4th combined to form a division) were shipped from Marcel to the Balkans. Later, an artillery brigade and an engineering battalion arrived from Russia and were also directed to the same area. The Salonika or Macedonian Front was created and, with the agreement of the Greek Government, a so-called Eastern Army of Allied forces was formed there as early as 1915. However, it could not save the Serbian Army, which was forced to abandon its country. The Eastern Army began operations in the second half of 1916, when Serbian and Italian divisions and a Russian division joined the French and British troops. In November, the Serbian Army captured Monastir with support from Russian and French troops. The onset of winter stopped their advance and the front stretched from the River Struma estuary to Monastir, Lake Okhrid and the Albanian border. Both sides consolidated their positions and there were no serious operations on the Salonika Front until May 1918.

For correspondence with Russia, Russian soldiers used the services of the French field post, sending and receiving their mail through postal branches (secteurs) No. 189 (1st and 3rd Special Brigades) and No. 501 (the brigades at the Salonika front). Sometimes they also used the Serbian field post. However, Russian servicemen were not limited to just these foreign military posts in WWI. Although there were many Russian field post establishments operating in Romania, the Russian soldiers fighting there were sometimes compelled to use the Romanian Post.

The “army democratization” that set in after the February Revolution also affected the Russian Expeditionary Corps brigades. In August 1917, many soldiers in the La Courtine camp refused to take their positions and demanded to be returned to their native country. The French War Minister ordered the Russian troop mutiny to be suppressed. The officers and most of the soldiers of 3rd Special Brigade were taken out of the camp. La Courtine was surrounded by French troops and on the morning of 3 (16) September, they began shelling the mutineers with 75mm guns. All resistance was broken in just a week. Over a hundred of these soldiers were condemned to penal servitude, while others were sent to the Salonika Front. Many of the Russian Expeditionary Corps soldiers who survived did not succeed in returning home until 1919-1921.
ACTIVITIES OF THE FIELD POST ESTABLISHMENTS AND THE PRINCIPLES OF FORWARDING MAIL

General Rules for Handling and Forwarding Mail

The procedures for handling and forwarding servicemen's mail in wartime were first laid down in the Russian Empire prior to the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878. On 5 November 1876, the Regulations on Administering the Army Postal System were approved as a supplement to the Statute on Command and Control of Forces in the Field. Later, drawing on the experience of that war, those Regulations were thoroughly revised and replaced in 1890 by the Regulations on Postal and Telegraph Establishments Subordinate to the Field Post-and-Telegraph Directorate as Addendum 13 to the new Statute on Command and Control of Forces in Wartime. When they were put into practice during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, both documents were found to have numerous shortcomings. Thus, another revision was completed just before the First World War. The latest Regulations on Post-and-Telegraph Establishments in a Theater of War (Supplement 6 to the Statute on Command and Control of Forces in Wartime, Article 268), hereinafter referred to as “the Regulations,” were approved by the Emperor on 13 August 1914, i.e. about three weeks after the war began. However, before these Regulations entered into force, the Main Post-and-Telegraph Administration (MPTA) reached an agreement with military authorities on new procedures for sorting, forwarding and addressing servicemen's mail; it was introduced on 29 July 1914. Such mail was to be handled both by the State-run post-and-telegraph establishments (both sedentary and mobile) and a field-post network created during a war and subordinate to military authorities. According to Article 27 of these Regulations, the civilian post-and-telegraph establishments were to accept the following kinds of mail addressed to active-duty servicemen in the Army, i.e. to military units (including reserve units) and institutions as well as hospitals and so forth:

a) free-frank ordinary letters weighing under 1 pound (409 g);
b) free-frank standard postcards;
c) free-frank declared-value open letters where only the insurance fee should be paid.
   (Letters of the Ministry of Finance were not charged the insurance fee.);
d) free-frank parcels with coins as mentioned in "c;"
e) private inland ordinary letters weighing under 1 pound, postcards and printed matter (up to 156 loty, or approximately 2 kg / 4.85 pounds);
f) private light-weight open parcels (up to 11 lbs. / ~ 5 kg);
g) postal money orders (up to 5,000 rubles).

Periodicals and private parcels (weighing up to 11 pounds) with no declared value (exclusively to servicemen and military institutions) were also accepted for transmission to an active-duty serviceman with the Army. Field post establishments accepted parcels containing only the personal effects of soldiers who had perished.

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6 Правила об управлении почтовой частью при армии.
7 Положение о полевом управлении войск.
8 Положение о почтовых и телеграфных учреждениях, подведомственных Полевому управлению почт и телеграфов.
9 Положение о полевом управлении войск в военное время.
Declared-value letters up to 200 rubles could be forwarded to the Army only through those postal establishments which did not handle postal money orders, such as the agencies at rural administrations and railway stations.

Registered letters and postcards, declared-value letters and letters with notice of receipt, telegraph money orders to the Army in the Field and from field post-and-telegraph establishments were not subject to delivery. However, there were some exceptions. For instance, the Russian/Asiatic Branch in L’vov requested permission to "send to the Empire the necessary documents registered at the field (post) office in L’vov." Supreme CinC’s HQ granted its permission on 2 May 1915 [1]. However, registered covers dispatched from L’vov through Reserve Field Post Office No. 114 have been found from as early as October 1914.

With the exception of free-frank mail, i.e. ordinary inland letters weighing up to 2 lots (30g) and postcards, any other kinds of mail allowed to be sent to or from the Army had to be prepaid in accordance with the postal rates then in force. It should be noted that according to His Majesty’s Command of 2 January 1917, special privileged rates were introduced for mail to the Army on 1 February: five kopecks for letters up to 30g and two kopecks for postcards. However, the post let such mail through unfranked almost until mid-February. These rates were abolished at the end of March by a decree of the Provisional Government [2], and mail to the Army became free again.

When correspondence was sent to someone in the Army, the address had to contain, besides the inscription "To the Army in the Field" [10] (this designation also applied to mail sent to the Caucasian Army), the addressee's rank, his first name, patronymic and last name, and the designation of his military unit or institution. It was prohibited to indicate the higher military formation’s designation (division, corps, army - except for the Caucasian Army) as well as the addressee’s location. If such excessive information were discovered, it would be blotted out or excised by a censor or a sorter. All of the information necessary to direct mail accurately (including the field post establishments that supported the corresponding units) was kept in special, classified, constantly updated distribution lists. These lists were kept by officers assigned to sort the mail at all Main Field Post Offices (later on, also at Control FPOs and some others), where the mail sent to the Army was first directed from the post offices that had accepted this mail, then forwarded to the Army, i.e. to the corresponding field or state post offices in accordance with Paragraph 36 of the Regulations.

Ordinary letters (up to 30g) and postcards from active-duty servicemen to points in the Empire were forwarded post-free during the whole war, under the condition that they were handed in at a field or state post office by specially authorized persons (delivery men). Every such item of mail was to bear an official cachet indicating the corresponding military unit or institution, thus confirming the free-frank right. However, it was prohibited to send mail with such cachets abroad. Unfranked mail with no cachet or dropped by servicemen away from their units into a mailbox were to be charged at twice the corresponding rate according to the current postal regulations, whereupon a postage-due marking would be applied.

Actually, these rules were usually mitigated. For instance, mail with “For Packages” (Dlya paketov) handstamps or something similar – other than official cachets – was forwarded free in most cases. Cachets reading “On Active Duty with the Army” (Iz deystvuyushchey armii), “Active Duty” (Deystvuyushchaya armiya), “On Active Duty

10 Another possible equivalent term would be «On Active Duty.» – Translator.
with the Navy” (S deystvuyushchago flota) and so on (fig. 7) were also employed in place of unit-specific cachets almost from the beginning of war. Covers and postcards with a straight-line cachet “On Active Duty” have also been found, rather than the more frequent circular versions. These cachets were not obligatory on mail handed in at a field post office by the delivery man. Such indulgences were officially enshrined in the new regulations for forwarding military mail, introduced by MPTA Circular No. 21 of 2 July 1916. Officers were entitled to send letters and postcards post-free with no cachet if they handed their mail in at a field post or state postal establishment in person. However, mail dropped in the mailboxes of state postal establishments had to have an official cachet.

The authorities’ attitude toward mail with “On Active Duty with the Army” cachets or similar formulations changed repeatedly. Sometimes they considered it illegal, ordering that such mail not be accepted and forwarded (for example, Decree No. 41 of 22 January 1916 for 5th Army troops). Sometimes, to the contrary, preference was shown for cachets such as these rather than those with a unit name, especially where mail sent abroad was concerned. On the other hand, such cachets prevented military censors from identifying the sender if the message contained prohibited information. A suggestion to put a conventional number corresponding to the particular military unit (in 8th Army) using an indelible pencil near the cachet was never instituted. Only among Guards troops were official “On Active Duty with the Army in the Field” cachets used with conventional designations that included letters and numbers in the lower portion. These letters and numbers identified the various formations, units and sub-units of every Guards Corps (fig. 7), and they were introduced in May 1916 [3]. From 1916 on, the “On Active Duty” cachets or similar formulations on mail prevailed over those with the unit name; they became obligatory at some fronts (for instance at Northern Front – see Northern Front Commander-in-Chief Order No. 72 of 28 March 1916). After the February Revolution, cachets with the two-headed eagle excised or with the Provisional Government’s coat-of-arms appeared in mid-1917 (fig. 9).

The aforementioned circular extended the free-frank privilege to employees of public organizations and civil institutions that attended to the needs of the Army in a theater of war. Earlier, these individuals had to frank their mail with postage stamps according to the corresponding postal rate. Beginning on 10 January 1917, MPTA Circular No. 3 also granted the free-frank privilege to servicemen outside a theater of war as well as ill or wounded soldiers in hospitals and infirmaries located in the rear areas. Finally, MPTA Circular No. 24 of 28 March 1917 restored the obligatory application of an official cachet to officers’ mail.

According to Paragraph 42 of the Regulations, the Army-to-Empire mail forwarded through field post establishments was sorted there by province in the address and then handed over to the nearest sedentary state postal establishment or traveling post office, to be forwarded to the addressees. Later on, the return field post offices organized in the