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Post in Gdansk as Source of Political Conflicts

By ADAM S. BERESTYNSKI

One thousand years of Gdansk's history were marked by turbulent times. A brief historical note may help to better comprehend this city's future "postal wars".

The first mention of the city was found in the manuscript "*Vita Sancti Adalberti*" written in the year of 999, describing this missionary arriving "*ad urbem Gyddanyzc*". Gdansk, located at the mouth of Vistula river, was at that time a defensive town ruled by Pomeranian princes, and a trade port at the Baltic sea. Its population of 1200 consisted mostly of fisherman and craftsmen. In the early 12th century Polish king Boleslaw III the Wrymouthed linked Gdansk Pomerania with other Polish provinces. Later Gdansk became an independent principality pursuing its own policies. Przemyslaw II crown king of Poland in 1295, annexed Gdansk Pomerania into Poland in his effort to reunite all Polish provinces under his rule. When Elector (A prince entitled to take part in elect-



ing the Holy Roman Emperor) of Branderburg seized part of Pomerania in 1307, Gdansk was successfully defended by Polish knights, but its calamitous fate was near.

The Teutonic Knights, a German mercenary Order of former crusaders, arrived in Prussia in 1231. Rapidly conquering new territories, by 1283 they entrenched themselves in the captured Prussian lands. In 1308 the Teutonic Knights invaded Gdansk and slaughtered its Polish inhabitants. Soon, the German settlers

attracted by new economic opportunities, flocked in great numbers into Gdansk Pomerania, at this time remaining under the Teutonic Knights' rule. Considerable Germanization of the entire Pomerania region followed, and Gdansk became known as Danzig.

Supported by mighty Hanseatic League of various free German towns, prosperous and productive city of Gdansk remained in active trade with many European countries during the 14th century. That caused an urgent need for an organized postal system. Consequently, by the year 1400 the city maintained a staff of postal messengers, whose task was to carry mail from the



Author Adam S. Berestynski

city council and merchants, for an established fee.

Serious tensions between Poland and the Teutonic Knights continued throughout the 14th century. Finally,



joined Polish and Lithuanian forces, under command of Polish king Wladyslaw II Jagiello, totally defeated Order's forces in the battle of Grunwald in 1410. As a result of this victory in one of the greatest battles of the Middle Ages, in which Order's Grand Master Ulrich von Jungingen was killed, the Teutonic Knights never regained their former military and political power.

In 1454 a successful uprising marked the end of Order's rule in Gdansk. But the continuing saga of the Teutonic Knights did not end there. Assistance granted to the Order by Germany contributed to their waging another war against Poland, that ended in 1466 by signing of the peace in Torun. The peace terms were duly forwarded, Poland recovered most of the Teutonic Knights' territories, including Gdansk, and restored her access to the Baltic sea. The last chapter of the Knights' history came to the end, when Prince Albrecht, their last Grand Master secularized his Order, and pledged allegiance to Polish king Zygmunt I the Elder, as their sovereign, in 1525.

Next year king Zygmunt I accorded to Gdansk special municipal privileges, assuring city's further economic progress. During the 16th century Gdansk developed into the largest seaport on the Baltic, and one of the most important ports in Europe, mostly because of high value of its grain trade. The city became famous for its manufacturing of gold jewelry, fine furniture, and clocks. It monopolized the entire Polish trade going by the sea. Gdansk organized its own postal system, based on royal privileges, that provided service between the city and other Polish territories, and foreign countries.

By the year 1585 the city had 10 postal

carriages, and 2 equestrian couriers. Postal messengers wore uniforms with the city's coat of arms, and carried special postal bags. Regular postal routes included one between Gdansk - Torun - Poznan, and Wroclaw, and another between Gdansk - Szczecin, and Hamburg. Special postal regulations were issued in 1604, one of them stating that route Gdansk - Wroclaw (about 300 miles) must be covered within 9 days in summer, and 11 days during winter time.

The first political dispute over Gdansk's post began in 1646, when the powerful Elector of Brandenburg, Frederick Wilhelm tried to introduce in Gdansk his own postal couriers. He realized, that by monopolizing profitable Gdansk post in his hand, he would gain an exclusive connection between Brandenburg and Prussia, providing



Postal courier in Poland - 16th century.

Letter from Gdansk to France - 1826.
Prussian half-circle "Danzig" postmark.

Danzig le 24 juillet 1826
M. de Bertram
Copenhague le 8 Août 1826
Exp. à M. de Bertram



him with a substantial income. Negotiations between the city and Elector came to a deadlock. Eventually, a pact signed in 1651, established a new postal system. It was agreed, that Elector's and city's couriers will exchange mail half-way between Gdansk and Königsberg in Prussia.

However, that concession was apparently not satisfactory for Frederick Wilhelm, who set up his own postal station in the small village of Stracyn, at one mile distance from Gdansk. In a new agreement of 1654 the city's council conceded to establish a Brandenburg post office within the city's boundaries, bringing resolution to an imminent crisis.

City's Postmaster would receive only 1 Polish grosz for a letter, out of 6 gr.

postal fee, while the remaining 5 gr. was going to the Elector's office. But even this success did not make Frederick Wilhelm happy, and he attempted to gain some influence in city's internal politics. That situation forced city council to send its Postmaster to Warsaw, to lodge a formal complaint against the Elector. Polish king Jan Kazimierz in unrelenting decision abolished the existing city's postal system, subordinated city's post office to Polish Royal postal authorities, and created a new office of General Royal Postmaster in Gdansk in 1660. The resulting strife between the Kingdom of Poland and the Brandenburg Elector almost led to the Polish-Prussian war.

Notwithstanding struggling for the

entire period of its existence with the Prussian posts carrying mail between the Western and Eastern Prussia, Polish postal system in Gdansk operated successfully for several years. 17th century marked the highest point in Gdansk's development, it became the richest Polish town. Its modern fortifications made Gdansk the most powerful stronghold in central Europe. But already in 1698 Frederick Wilhelm's successor, Elector Frederick III met with incompetent Polish monarch and Saxon Elector August II, who easily agreed to set up a joint Polish-Brandenburg post office in Gdansk. That status lasted until a new Royal Postmaster requested that joint Polish-Prussian commission subordinates Gdansk's postal system back to the Polish Royal authorities. The commission agreed.

During the reign of the Saxon dynasty in Poland (1697-1763) decline of nation's development reached its low point, political and economical situation was gradually deteriorating, as a result of long, destructive wars, and serious internal problems. In 1765 the office of Postmaster General in Gdansk was abolished, since the entire Polish postal organization became subordinated under the Royal General Postmaster.

The inefficient ruling oligarchy in Poland, although benevolent, and economic regression led finally to the first partition of Poland between her neighboring powers in 1772. Prussia annexed large portions of Polish western and northern territories, but Gdansk remained within the Kingdom's administration, cut off from the rest of Poland. However, its postal system stayed active until the second partition of Poland in 1793, when Gdansk's mayor and council surrendered the city of Prussia. That

marked the end of Polish post in Gdansk for the next 125 years. The name of Danzig emerged again, and Prussian postal system was enforced.

"In 1798 the German-speaking burghers of Danzig, who have remained loyal to the King of Poland for about 350 years, rebelled against their incorporation into Prussia" Norman Davies – *"Heart of Europe"*, 1990. But after a short battle the revolt was crushed.

Prussia's war with France revived hopes for Poland's independence. In 1806 Napoleon, with the newly organized Polish army on his side, captured the entire Pomerania region, including Gdansk. In the treaty of Tilsit in 1807 Gdansk was declared a Free City under the French army's supervision. A small number of *"Grande Armee"* postmarks on letters from Gdansk's region is known from this period. Gdansk returned under Prussian occupation in 1813, and soon its post began to use first Prussian postmarks of the pre-stamp era.

The Versailles Treaty, ending the first World War in 1918, created the Free City of Gdansk, which at that time already heavily Germanized, was remaining fully under German sphere of influence. Under this Treaty's provisions Poland organized her own postal service in Gdansk, independently of the Free City's postal system. Poland was guaranteed the full use of the port, and also to direct the external affairs of the Free City. The first Polish post office in Gdansk was established in 1920, the second one in 1923, and the third in 1925. For correspondence between the Free City and Poland, Polish stamps overprinted with *"Port Gdansk"* were used, and mailed in separate Polish mail-boxes.

Soon attacks against Polish post started, signs on Polish mail boxes were



a) Original design



b) Corrected design

Polands 15 gr. stamp issued in 1938.

being painted over, letters addressed to "Gdansk" rather than "Danzig" were being returned. This new political crisis, caused by Gdansk's post, turned out to be serious enough to require the League of Nations' intervention. League's verdict confirmed Poland's rights to her own post in Gdansk.

The next conflict erupted when Poland issued a set of historical stamps in 1938. The 15 gr. stamp of this set depicted Polish king Władysław II Jagiełło and Queen Jadwiga, with Teutonic Knights' swords and helmet at their feet. Free City's senate, apparently offended by the scene being a reminder of Order's defeat at Grunwald in 1410, took a retaliatory action. The 25 fen. stamp of Gdansk's newly issued set showed the defeat of Polish king Stefan Batory by Gdansk rebellious forces in 1577. (In fact Batory won this war). Under pressure, Polish authorities replaced the Teutonic swords on the 15 gr. stamp with ornamental motifs. Free City responded by withdrawing their set from circulation on June 30, 1939.

Another provocation took place when the Third Reich issued a set of two stamps depicting Gdansk's old architectural monuments, with an inscription "Danzig ist Deutsch" (Gdansk is German). Poland protested, but it was too late. On August 25, 1939 the German navy battleship "Schleswig-Holstein" entered Gdansk harbor with an official



Commemorative cancel used in Gdansk on Sept. 1, 1939, "Der Führer hat uns befreit" (Führer liberated us).

visit. A few days later, on September 1, 1939 at 4:35 AM "Schleswig-Holstein's" guns opened fire at the Polish army garrison at the Westerplatte fort in Gdansk. The second World War has just begun.

The very same day the Polish post-office building in Gdansk was attacked by the "SS-Heimkehr" units. 50 Polish civil personnel of the post-office barricaded themselves inside the building, and offered courageous, desperate resistance. Although the Germans used tanks, heavy artillery, and fire-throwers, they were unable to enter the building. Only after 14 hours of fighting, when the Germans set fire to the building, the surviving defenders, many of them injured, surrendered. They were not treated as combatants by victorious Germans. Military court condemned all of them to death by machine-guns firing squad. Execution took place on October 5, 1939.

(Continued on page 486-11)

50th Anniversary of the Priestly Ordination of Pope John Paul II

(CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS ISSUE)



ITALY: Rome — November 1, 1996

Commemorative postmark. Homage to Papa Wojtyła. Celebration of the 50th anniversary of Priestly Ordination.

* ROMA PRATI * CELEBRAZIONI 50o ANNIVERSARIO SACERDOZIO / 1.11.1996 / 50o / OMAGGIO A PAPA WOJTYŁA /

ITALY: Rome — November 2, 1996

Commemorative postmark. Special postmark used on letters dispatched to Krakow, Poland.

* ROMA PRATI * CELEBRAZIONI 50o ANNIVERSARIO SACERDOZIO / 2.11.1996 / DISPACCIO STRAORDINARIO PER CRACOVIA / VERSO L'ANNO SANTO 2000.



POLAND: Wadowice — November 1, 1996.

Commemorative postmark used in Wadowice, birthplace of the Pope.

* 50-LECIE KAPŁAŃSTWA OJCA ŚW. JANA PAWŁA II. WADOWICE 01.11.1996. (50th Anniversary of the Priesthood of the Holy Father, John Paul II).

POLAND: Lublin — November 1, 1996.

Commemorative postmark used in Lublin, seat of the Catholic Univ.

* 50-LECIE KAPŁAŃSTWA JANA PAWŁA II * 01.11.1996

LUBLIN 1. (50th anniversary of the Priesthood of John Paul II).

UNITED STATES: Panna Maria, Texas — November 1, 1996.

Commemorative postmark. * JOHN PAUL II * / NOV. 1, 1996 /,

ANNIVERSARY STATION — PANNA MARIA, TX 73144 / 1946

— PRIESTLY ORDINATION ANNIVERSARY - 1996.

Pope John Paul II Issues in 1996

(Except World Travels and 50th Anniversary of Priestly Ordination)

ITALY: — Colle Val d'Elsa - March 30, 1996

Commemorative postmark. Meeting with workers at the La Piana Glass

Works, *53034 COLLE VAL D'ELSA (SI)* / 30.3.1996 / VISITA

DI S.S. GIOVANNI PAOLO II /



ITALY — Siena - March 30, 1996

Commemorative postmark. Visit to the Diocese of Siena. Mass for the faithful of the Region of Tuscany. *53100 SIENA CENTRO* / 30.3.1996 / VISITA DI S.S. GIOVANNI PAOLO II /

ITALY — Rome - April 5, 1996

Commemorative postmark. Participation of Pope John Paul II in the Way of the Cross on Good Friday, April 5, 1996 in the Roman Colosseum in Rome. *ROMA CENTRO C.P.* / 5.4.1996 / PARTECIPAZIONE S.S. GIOVANNI PAOLO II / VIA CRUCIS AL COLOSSEO / In center: VERSO IL / GUBILEO / DEL / 2000. (Toward the Jubilee of 2000).



ITALY: — Como - May 4, 1996

Commemorative postmark. Visit to the Diocese of Como. * 22100 COMO CENTRO* / 4.5.1996 / VISITA S.S. GIOVANNI PAOLO II.

POLAND: — Szczecin - May 31, 1996

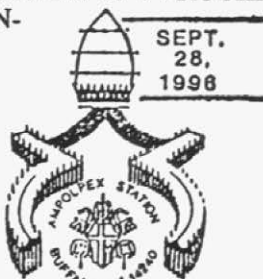
Commemorative postmark. Welcome to the Statue of Our Lady of Fatima. WITAMY MATKĘ BOŻĄ FATIMSKĄ / 31.05.1996 SZCZECIN 1.

SLOVAKIA: — Kosice - July 2, 1996

Commemorative postmark. First anniversary of the visit of Pope John Paul II to Slovakia in 1995. Vatican State coat of arms. 1. VYROČIE NAVŠTEVY SVATEHO OTCA NA SLOVENSKU / 2.7.1996 / KOSICE 1.

U.S. - Buffalo, NY - September 28, 1996:

Commemorative postmark. Pope John Paul II, Pilgrim of the World. AMPOLEX Philatelic Exhibition by the Polish Philatelic Society. Papal Tiara, St. Peter's Square, Coat of Arms of Pope John Paul II. SEPT. / 28, / 1996 AMPOLEX STATION / Buffalo, NY 14240.



POLAND: — Wadowice - November 1, 1996

Regular postmark used in the city of Wadowice, birthplace of the Pope. Coat of arms of the city is shown over the Papal tiara and crossed keys. The inscription: Home town of John Paul II (this is a revised postmark used since 1911).
MIASTO RODZINNE JANA PAWŁA II
WADOWICE / -11196-8.

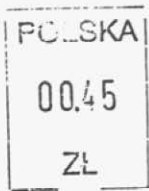


POLAND: Wadowice - December 3, 1996

Commemorative postmark used on mail deposited in the John Paul II Museum located in the house where Karol Wojtyła was born.

DOM RODZINNY OJCA ŚW. JANA PAWŁA II W WADOWICACH.
(In circle: 03129615
(WADOWICE)).

Front of the house where
Karol Wojtyła was born.



→ ul. Papieża
62-26
tel. (0-66) 23-4

Postage meter cancellation used by the District Office in Gniezno which is located on a street named after Pope John Paul II.

PARAGUAY:

First Day of Issue:

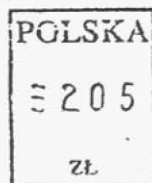
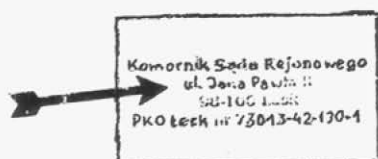
October 4, 1996.

Set of two stamps -
Homage to the Holy
Virgin of Caacupe.
G200 stamp.

Pope John Paul II im-
parting blessing. Statue
of the Holy Virgin of
Caacupe. Basilica of
Caacupe.



G1.300 stamp. Pope John Paul II imparting blessing. Statue of the Holy Virgin of Caacupe. Basilica of Caacupe.



Postage meter cancellation used by the District Court's Bailiff Office in the city of Lask, located on a street named after Pope John Paul II.

ITALY: Introd - August 3, 1996

Commemorative postmark in French and Italian. Opening of the John Paul II Museum in Introd.

* 11010 INTROD (AO) / 3-8-1996 /

APERATURA CASA MUSEO GIOVANNI PAOLO II / OUVERTURE MAISON-MUSEE JEAN-PAUL II.



PARAGUAY:

First Day of Issue: July 22, 1996

Set of three stamps commemorating 100 years of Salesians of St. John Bosco in Paraguay.

200 G stamp — St. John (Don) Bosco with priests, teachers and boys. In circle portrait of Pope John Paul II.

300 G stamp — St. John (Don) Bosco, Founder of the Salesians of St. John Bosco Society. In front: Pope John Paul II.

1,000 G stamp — St. John (Don) Bosco. Map of Paraguay. In circle portrait of Pope John Paul II.

VATICAN:

First Day of Issue: November 20, 1996.

The travels of His Holiness John Paul II in 1995.

Set of 6 stamps. Each stamp features a kaleidoscopic view of the countries visited by the Holy Father, in a graphic composition of architectural, artistic and social motifs. Each stamp shows a profile of the Holy Father, his eyes resting on the complexities of the countries he visited (Italy); engraver: Antonio Ciaburro; 450,000 complete sets issued.

(To be continued)



Commemorative cancel used in Gdansk on Sept. 25, 1939, "Danzig grusst jubelnd seinen Führer und Befreier - Adolf Hitler" (Gdansk greets jubilantly its Führer and liberator - Adolf Hitler).

Although 183 Polish soldiers on Westerplatte continued fighting with an enemy outnumbering them 15 to 1 until September 7, the Free city of Gdansk, and its postal system, was incorporated into the Third Reich on September 1, 1939. On that day a special cancellation, prepared in advance, was being used in the city - "Der Führer hat uns befreit" (Führer liberated us). Hitler triumphantly entered the city on September 19, 1939, and on that occasion Gdansk issued another commemorative cancel - "Danzig grusst jubelnd seinen Führer und Befreier - Adolf Hitler" (Gdansk greets jubilantly its Führer and liberator - Adolf Hitler).

In 1944, with Soviet army approaching, the Germans proclaimed Gdansk "Festung Danzig" (Fortress Gdansk). Consequently, when the advancing Soviet army entered the city in March 1945,

90% of the old city core, and 66% of the entire city area were in ruins.

Gdansk returned to Poland after 152 years, and became incorporated into Polish postal systems.

In 1980 an anti-communist movement "Solidarity" was born in Gdansk, and was issuing its own underground stamps. But this is another story.

POLPEX 98

Polonus will hold POLPEX 98 on March 20-21-22 at the White Eagle in Niles, IL. There will be two themes. 80th Anniversary of Poland's Independence after World War I, and the 20th Anniversary of the Pontificate of Pope John Paul II.

IN MEMORIAM

**Walenty Poniecki
Dr. Józef Kuderewicz**

THE ORGANIZATION "MIECZ I PŁUG" AND ITS "POLISH UNDERGROUND MAIL" STAMPS

By STANLEY KRONENBERG

"Miecz i Pług" (Sword and Plough) during the German occupation of Poland (1939-1945) was originally a patriotic organization led by Grad and Sławikowski. Soon the Soviet Intelligence planted Bogusław Hrykiewicz, a communist from Łomża, who on the basis of forged documents accused Grad and Sławikowski of cooperation with the Gestapo and had them liquidated. Thus "Miecz i Pług" secretly became an organization lead by Soviet intelligence and from this time on starts its collaboration with the Nazis. Soviet Intelligence sent Czesław Skoniecki to Poland. He was a pre-war Polish communist who became the intermediary between Moscow and Hrykiewicz and Ritter-Jastrzębski, a Soviet NKWD (predecessor of KGB) agent who worked for the German Gestapo in Warsaw.

One spectacular act of this conspiracy took place on February 17, 1944, when the AK (Country's Army) archives in Warsaw, 12 Poznańska Street were raided. The archives' superintendent, Wacław Kupiecki was liquidated and most of the twenty persons caught there were given to the Gestapo. All traces of them vanished. Captured documents concerning Polish communists were taken by Marian Spychalski to Moscow and documents concerning the AK were given to the Gestapo by Ritter-Jastrzębski and as a result, 60 AK members were arrested.

After World War II, Hrykiewicz was tried in Moscow and was sentenced to five years in prison, not for cooperating with the Nazis, but for inaccurately informing the Soviet intelligence. He did not go to prison because Poland's president Bolesław Bierut planned to use him in the accusation of W. Gomułka and M. Spychalski of cooperating with the Germans. This trial never took place, instead Władysław Byszek, one of Hrykiewicz's assistants was sentenced. It was also announced that "Miecz i Pług" was a fascist organization which cooperated with the Gestapo. It was never admitted that in reality it was a cover organization for Soviet Intelligence which pretended to be a pro-western Polish Patriotic organization.

The above information is based on a footnote on page 86 in the book by Henryk Piecuch "Tajna historia Polski od Bieruta do Ochaba, Akcje Specjalne", Warsaw, 1996.

"Miecz i Pług" issued stamps as did other, often competing underground organizations in Poland. Some of these stamps had in their designs the words "Polish Underground Mail" but most were produced to obtain funds and were not used to prepay postage. Nevertheless they constitute an interesting part of Poland's philately and illustrate the troubled times in Poland during World War II. Some of them are rare and elusive. Stamps issued by Miecz i Pług are illustrated and described on the next page.



Sikorski
10 zł — black



Sosnkowski
10 zł — blue



Sculpture: Uprising
10 zł — red
100 zł — magenta



Raczkiewicz
10 zł — red
(perf. or imperf.)



Roosevelt
10 zł — violet (perf.)
— red (imperf.)



Churchill
10 zł — blue (perf.)
10 zł — red (imperf.)



Festival of the sea
5 zł — blue



Underground fighters
5 zł — brown
20 zł — blue
50 zł — violet brown
100 zł — green
500 zł — red



"Poland after WW II
and its colonies"
10 zł — red



In gratitude to John Such for his extensive philatelic display of Pulaski material, a Polonus medal desk ornament was presented to him. (Left to right): Director Alfred Szebel, Pres. Roman Strzelecki, John Such, Director Stanley Dobrzycki.

FALL STAMP SHOW

The Polonus Fall Stamp Show was held September 26-27-28, 1997 at Przybylo's House of the White Eagle in Niles, IL. As the theme honored the 250th Anniversary of the Birth of General Casimir Pulaski, our member from Medina, Ohio, John Szuch, exhibited 12 frames (61 pages per frame) of his Pulaski cover collection. In addition, he displayed cases filled with Pulaski stamps, medals, coins buttons, patches, books and other memorabilia. John was on hand during most of the exhibition answering questions and explaining his displays to interester visitors. He must have more items pertaining to Pulaski than anyone else in the world.





Casimir Pulaski
Polonus Fall Stamp Show
Sept. 26-28, 1997



A special cancellation designed by artist Leon Kaweck, was used by the U.S. postal station operating at the show. Members wishing to obtain this cover may do so by sending \$1.00 plus postage to Polonus P.S., P.O. Box 458, Berwyn, IL 60402.

FLOOD SEMIPOSTAL NEW ISSUE

Poland recently issued semipostals to help victims of some of the worst flooding in central Europe. The flooding occurred this summer along the banks of the Oder River.

The 60 groszy + 30 gr semipostal from Poland shows the flood waters surrounding houses. Maciej Jedrysiak designed this stamp.

The new-issue announcement from Poland described the effects of the flood: "The flood, which in July this year spread over the south and west part of Poland, brought enormous devastation. Many provinces, hundreds of villages and towns were under water. One of the largest Polish cities, Wrocław, also was flooded. The big water swept away the whole life properties of thousands of people, damaged fields, roads, factories, churches and many objects important in Polish culture."



SPECIALIZED ALBUM FOR POLAND REVENUE STAMPS

This illustrated album contains spaces for all Polish revenue stamps as listed in Erlor's 1993 revision of the Norton Catalog of the Adhesive Revenue Stamps of Poland and includes their catalog number below each space. The work is arranged in two volumes and a supplement. Vol. 1 covers Stamp Duty, Treasury Fee, Court Delivery, Court Fee, Silesian Stamp Duty and Fiscal Surtax stamps. Vol. 2 covers all other issues. Pages are 8½x11. For more information contact Scott Marusak, 110 Dunhagan Pl., Cary, NC 27511.

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PPF VOLUME II: Port Gdansk, General Government, Locals, Do-płata Ovpts, P.O.W., Central Lithuania, Groszy Ovpt all illustrated in full color with Polish Text and English/Polish Philatelic Term cross reference. PRICE: \$20.00 plus \$3.00 R/H.

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