The First Mail Flight from Europe to Japan: Following the Philatelic Trail of Bolesław Orliński's Pioneering 1926 Flight

Jerzy W. Kupiec-Weglinski

Published in *The American Philatelist,* August 2026.

This article presents an original postal-history investigation of the mail associated with Captain Bolesław Orliński's celebrated 1926 Warsaw-Tokyo-Warsaw flight, one of the earliest aviation links between Europe and Japan and a landmark achievement in interwar aviation. While aviation literature has widely recognized Orliński's expedition, the flight's postal history remains poorly understood and is surrounded by longstanding misconceptions.

Drawing upon rare covers, postcards, official postal documents, contemporary reports, and earlier philatelic studies, the article reconstructs the complex history of the mail prepared for the expedition. It focuses on the official commemorative cachet authorized by the Polish Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs and the semi-official labels issued by the Air and Gas Defense League (LOPP). Through detailed examination of postal rates, cancellations, routing instructions, arrival markings, and surviving correspondence, the study traces the handling of mail connected with both the failed Paris-Tokyo project and the subsequently successful Warsaw-Tokyo flight.

A major contribution of the article is establishing objective criteria for identifying genuinely flight-carried mail. By analyzing postal markings, franking, addressing patterns, and Tokyo receiving postmarks, the study distinguishes authentic flown items from mail transported separately to Japan by the Trans-Siberian Railway. This evidence-based reassessment resolves several persistent errors in the literature and provides a more reliable framework for authenticating surviving material.

The article illustrates and analyzes several exceptional philatelic items, including covers bearing perforated and imperforate LOPP labels; official and private correspondence addressed to Orliński in Tokyo; material related to the abandoned Paris-Tokyo attempt; and scarce mail carried on the return journey from Japan to Poland. Several of these artifacts are unique or exceptionally rare.

By integrating aviation history with rigorous postal-history research, the study documents an important chapter in the development of international airmail and provides the most comprehensive examination to date of the philatelic legacy of Orliński's pioneering 1926 Europe-Japan flight.