The Great Numismatic Deception: Bulak-Balakhovich, the BNR, and Their Stamps

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Preface

> ***"Not every stamp is issued to send a letter. Some are printed to send a message—louder, stranger, and not always true."***

This is not a straightforward tale.

It lives where postage meets paper money—along that uncertain, flickering border between numismatics and philately. And like any frontier drawn in ink, it invites trespass, contradiction, and myth.

At its heart lies a fragile enigma: a peculiar set of stamps, purportedly issued in the name of the Belarusian People's Republic—or perhaps by its so-called Special Detachment, a paramilitary unit led by the mercurial Stanislaw Bulak-Balakhovich. Depending on the narrative, these stamps were either born of necessity in the fog of collapsing empires, or they were cunning artifacts designed to be sold, not sent.

The evidence, maddeningly, permits both views. Some say they were valid postal-fiscal hybrids, used in the desperate logistics of a government in exile. Others insist they were nothing of the sort—merely speculative souvenirs dressed in patriotic typeface. And somewhere between them lies a paper trail littered with official signatures, private contracts, and more silence than certainty.

I admit: Once, I believed.

A decade ago, in an article published in the IBNS Journal, I gave these curious emissions the benefit of the doubt. Their story seemed plausible—romantic even. I called them "Short Leave Money of the BNR," a poetic compromise between postage and pay.

But time does more than erode belief. It reveals.

Newly surfaced archival records from Belarus have cast a sterner light. What emerges is not a tale of postal innovation, but of financial invention. The stamps, it seems, were printed not for communication, nor even for circulation, but for sale—engineered by a Military-Diplomatic Mission whose mandate had withered into performance, and to bankroll a commander whose loyalties were, at best, transactional.

This inquiry does not chase scandal for its own sake. It seeks to understand the anatomy of a deception—one that was never declared yet widely accepted; never used yet broadly collected.

A forgery is not always a falsehood. Sometimes, it is simply an invention that found its believers.

Reader, follow carefully.

The truth here is not printed all at once. It arrives—like these stamps did—piecemeal,

imprecise, and insistently real.

“Detached” or “Special”? — The First Sleight of Name

Even a fiction must begin with a word. And sometimes, that word is mistranslated.

Before we can examine whether the so-called “money-stamps” of the Belarusian People’s Republic ever truly carried authority—or even a letter—we must linger on something deceptively minor: the name of the unit itself.

In surviving correspondence, in catalogs, in articles stretched across decades, two titles drift like smoke: the **Detached Squad** and the **Special Detachment** of the BNR. For a long time, this was treated as a quirk of language. But like any sleight of hand, the choice of words conceals something deeper.

The confusion originates from the translation process between Belarusian, Russian, and English. At the top of the stamps, the Belarusian phrase «*Асобны Атрад*» is translated into Russian as «*Отдельный Отряд*».

The Belarusian word *асобны* translates to the Russian *отдельный*, meaning ***special***. However, the Russian term *особый*, though phonetically similar to Belarusian *асобны*, translates as ***detached***. These words - special *and* detached - are not synonyms as one denotes uniqueness, while the other signifies separation. This distinction is significant and directional.

So, which was it?

To resolve this, we turn to the earliest surviving primary document on the matter: a letter addressed to the Minister of Finance of Latvia in January 1920. It was written by Colonel Kastus Yezovitov, the man who, more than anyone else, orchestrated the entire stamp affair. In this formal request—to print stamps at the Latvian State Printing Office—he names the entity in question as **Особый Отряд**, the Russian term for **Special Detachment**.

The wording is precise. Not poetic, not symbolic. Bureaucratic. And in diplomacy, every syllable matters.

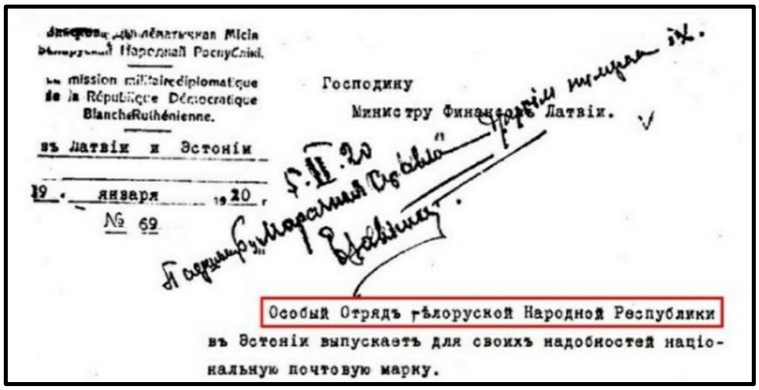
It is this designation—**Special Detachment**—that he used consistently: in requests, in receipts, in correspondence with banks and ministries. It appeared on contracts with stamp dealers, on memoranda to foreign offices, on orders to printers. He affixed it to the scheme like a seal.

To follow the trail of these stamps, we must first follow the trail of language. And here, that trail leads not to confusion, but to intent.

The term *Special Detachment* was not a later fabrication. It was the name chosen by those who launched the issue. It appears in the moment, not in hindsight. It belongs to the story - not the commentary.

And so, with this word - “special” - begins our inquiry. A word carefully selected. A unit dubiously empowered.

A tale of legitimacy… just barely plausible enough to sell.



Господину

Министру Финансовъ Латвіи.

Особый Отрядъ бѣлорусской Народной Республики въ Эстоніи выпускаетъ для своихъ надобностей національную почтовую марку.

A letter written by Colonel Kastus Yezovitov addressed to the Latvian Minister of Finance referred to the group as the Особый Отрядъ Белорусской Народной Республики (“Special Detachment of the Byelorussian Peoples Republic”). A curious choice of words, hinting at a structure more clandestine than official, more tactical than diplomatic.

The Print Run That Raised More Questions Than It Answered

It began, as many deceptions do, with a letter. Not a proclamation, nor a command—but a request.

On January 19, 1920, Colonel Kastus Yezovitov—at once the head of the Military-Diplomatic Mission of the Belarusian People's Republic and its most tireless fabricator—addressed a formal appeal to the Latvian Minister of Finance. The tone was courteous, the phrasing meticulous. He requested permission to print postage stamps—five million of them.

Not for the Republic itself, mind you. That entity had long since faded from the map, its ministers scattered and its treasury barren. These stamps, he explained, were for the *Special Detachment*—an entity more imagined than institutional, a military chimera without barracks, payroll, or post.

The numbers were staggering: **one million in each of five denominations**. And a curious detail was included—half the stamps were to be printed ungummed and imperforate. Ostensibly, this was to reduce production costs.

But any seasoned collector would recognize the deeper motive. **Gumless, uncut** sheets are not made for postage. They are made for **profit**.

Then came the echo—a publication in April 1920 in *Der Baltische Philatelist*, a journal edited by the enterprising stamp dealer Georg Jäger. In it appeared a facsimile of a document signed by Yezovitov himself, claiming that the stamps had been issued between February and March and were in active postal use within the Detachment. He named specific individuals—Jäger and a certain Arkady Livshits—as contractual partners in the issue's distribution.

At a glance, the claim had weight. But the document, on inspection, bore the unmistakable signature of post-facto justification. It referenced an "Act" dated February 3, said to authorize the emission.

Yet this Act was no decree. It was a letter—a desperate plea from officers in the field, not ministers in a government. There was no mention of postal routes, no infrastructure, no authorization from a treasury or civil post.

The supposed stamps—intended, allegedly, to pay for correspondence be—were conceived in the language of fundraising. The very phrase "in search of funds" appears in the original document.

Other defenders would later try to furnish timelines, delivery receipts, and notices of use. They claimed the stamps were ordered in January, printed in March, used for a fortnight in April, and then—peculiarly—withdrawn by April 18.

Furthermore, it is mentioned that Bulak-Balakhovich's detachment was declared part of the Belarusian Army Corps, an entity which never existed.

Such brevity is not the hallmark of necessity. It is the signature of a completed pretense.

If these stamps had indeed been intended for real-world use—why such a brief life? Why no trail of letters, no receipts, no surviving registry?

No—what we are left with is not a postal system, but a paper one. Contracts with stamp dealers, not couriers. Records of payment, not dispatch. Five million stamps—printed not to serve communication, but to masquerade as its instrument.

In short, the stamps were never posted. But they were most certainly sold.

And in that sale—neatly arranged and formally documented—we glimpse the project's true ambition.

Not mail. **But money.**

Plaque of the Military-Diplomatic Mission of the Belarusian People's Republic in Riga.

The Birth of a Nation — and the Invention of Its Army

It began, like many noble fictions, with a declaration.

On March 9, 1918, amid the convulsions of war and retreating empire, the Executive Committee of the Rada of the All-Belarusian Congress issued its Charter to the People of Belarus. It was an act not of power, but of paper. In it, they proclaimed their intention to govern. And on March 25, with breathless audacity, they proclaimed full independence.

It was the birth of a state without land. A government without subjects. A nation whose only borders were inked upon manifestos.

And yet—symbols blossomed. The Belarusian language was declared official. A university was promised. A flag was chosen white, red, and white. A coat of arms adopted. A passport devised. These were the visual ornaments of sovereignty.

But sovereignty is more than appearance.

The German High Command—whose forces still occupied Belarus—tolerated none of this theater. They forbade the formation of a national army. The BNR, unable to assert itself with force, responded with illusion. It established a "command staff," appointed a "Commissar of Military Affairs," and declared intentions it could not fulfill. The commissar was one Colonel Kastus Yezovitov—ambitious, agile, and soon to become the orchestrator of an even greater masquerade.

By May, the movement had already split. Two competing governments emerged—one in Minsk, the other calling itself the People's Secretariat. Even as declarations multiplied, the infrastructure of governance remained theoretical.

Recognition trickled in—from Latvia, Finland, Romania, France. But it was recognition by courtesy, not conviction. No treasury. No courts. No taxes collected. And most damningly of all: **no army.**

What followed was a slow drift into irrelevance.

By late 1919, the government was itinerant—shuttling between Minsk, Vilna, Grodno. On maps it marked its presence; in practice, it governed nothing.

Herein lies the pivotal truth, one that must guide all that follows:

The Belarusian People's Republic never possessed a military force of its own.

What it had was the vocabulary of power—ministries, seals, epistolary formality—but not its substance. The so-called "Special Detachment," later associated with the stamp issue, was

not a subdivision of a state army. It was an improvised formation, later adopted by convenience and clothed in borrowed legitimacy.

When Colonel Yezovitov struck his deals—when he printed his stamps and wrote his letters—it was not from a seat of power. It was from the void left behind by a government in exile.

And what he built in that void was not an army, **but a narrative.**

Colonel Kastus Yezovitov

The Special Detachment and Its Stamps — Currency of Necessity or Theatre of Deception?

The shadow in this tale leads, eventually, to two names—not etched in granite but scattered through letters and ledgers.

The first is Colonel Kastus Yezovitov—head of the Military-Diplomatic Mission of the BNR, a man whose pen moved more currency than commands. The second, darker figure is Stanislaw Bulak-Balakhovich—a mercenary whose loyalty bent with every wind, a soldier whose allegiance had the half-life of a telegram.

Their alliance began with a meeting—unofficial, unrecorded, yet catalytic.

On October 20, 1919, Yezovitov and Bulak-Balakhovich negotiated a contract with the Estonian government: financing in exchange for service. The detachment would fight—under Belarusian colors, in theory—but at Estonian expense. In truth, it was a loan the BNR could never repay.

Within weeks, Bulak-Balakhovich requested formal incorporation into the BNR military. Yezovitov obliged—quickly, perhaps too quickly. It was a political adoption, not a military one. By the time the Council of Ministers ratified the arrangement in late January 1920, the detachment, officially renamed to *Special Unit of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in the Baltics* (Belarusian: *Асобны Атрад БНР у Балтыі*) was already operating under Belarusian name—but not Belarusian command.

And it was running out of money.

In a flurry of improvisation, Yezovitov turned to symbols. Among the schemes proposed was a military decoration: the Polotsk Belarusian Cross. Ten thousand were minted before any decree had legalized them.

Then came the more lucrative fiction: **postage stamps**.

They were said to be for the detachment's "field post office." They bore the BNR name, its imagined authority, and were to be used for correspondence to "homeland territory"—a phrase that meant little and covered less.

Yet by then, the detachment was already being reassigned. Its operations were shifting from Latvia into the lawless zones of Belarus. There was no postal infrastructure. No clerks. No dispatch.

And yet, the order went through.

Five million stamps. Five denominations. Half imperforate and ungummed—under the pretext of economy, but more likely to entice collectors. Such stamps were never meant to stick to envelopes. They were meant to stick in albums.

Yezovitov later claimed that the stamps generated over 40,000 Latvian rubles and 24,000 German marks. But what he called “postal receipts” were, in truth, proceeds from dealers.

There was no infrastructure. No postmarks. No surviving envelopes bearing a genuine cancellation.

What was printed was not currency. It was camouflage.

These stamps were not born of military need, nor postal duty. They were a financial instrument disguised as national issue. Their distribution bypassed field offices and entered instead the portfolios of philatelic promoters.

At the center of it stood a government with no land, a detachment with no orders, and a colonel with no war—only ambition.

And into that void, **they printed belief.**

A set of five stamps was issued in 1920, with denominations of 5, 10, 15, and 50 kopecks, and 1 ruble. Printed by the Expedition for the Procurement of State Papers of Latvia, all stamps share the same design but differ in color. They were available both perforated and imperforate.
At the top: “Asobny Atrad” - “Special Detachment” - rendered in Belarusian.
At the bottom: the initials “B.N.R.” - for the Belarusian People’s Republic.

The Man Called Bulak-Balakhovich — Rebel, Patriot, or Something Else Entirely?

In every good deception, there comes a moment when the illusion needs a face. In this case, the face belonged to **Stanislaw Nikodimovich Bulak-Balakhovich**—a man equal parts legend and liability.

To some, he was a romantic figure: a guerrilla commander, anti-Bolshevik to the bone, rallying forgotten borderlands beneath the banner of a free Belarus. To others, he was a marauder in uniform—drifting between allegiances with the ease of a man changing coats in the rain.

Even Piłsudski, no stranger to realpolitik, once described him with dry exasperation:

"...Not only a bandit, but a person who is Russian today, a Pole tomorrow, a Belarusian the day after tomorrow, and a Negro the next day..."

It was not a joke. It was a diagnosis.

Bulakh-Balakhovich's career wove through chaos like a thread of fire. He fought under the Russian Imperial Army, then the Whites under Yudenich, only to fall out with his own commanders. In January 1920, he crossed the final line. With stunning audacity, he kidnapped General Yudenich and demanded £100,000 in ransom from the British—threatening, with full theatrical flair, to turn the general over to the Bolsheviks.

The British refused. The Estonians intervened. Yudenich was released.

Bułak-Bałachowicz fled—to Poland. There, Yezovitov gave him a role: not because he was trustworthy, but because he was useful.

And thus, the illusion of the ***Special Detachment*** was born.

Nominally Belarusian, but in truth unaffiliated, the detachment operated more on improvisation than ideology. In March 1920, it was deployed to Polesie with the task of forming partisan brigades. But by August, the grand force promised by Bulak-Balakhovich numbered just two thousand men—underfed, ill-equipped, and barely organized.

Even so, the myth was maintained. Yezovitov continued writing letters as if a functioning military post existed. He spoke of mail routes between Marienburg and Belarus, of stamp usage and postal logistics.

But it was theatre.

There were no routes. No system. No clerks. **No letters.**

And yet, behind this farce of bureaucracy stood the very real figure of Bulak-Balakhovich—a man with a talent not for administration, but for spectacle. His past included documented instances of counterfeiting, including forged **Kerenki** (Provisional Government banknotes).

He authorized the issuance of the **Polotsk Belarusian Cross**, seemingly motivated by personal interest. Eyewitnesses noted that he generously distributed these crosses, which could be obtained from him along with a signed award document.

His reputation was less like a tactician and more like a tactful illusionist.

A patriot? Perhaps. But patriotism that wears a hundred uniforms cannot be easily trusted.

In the case of the BNR stamps, his role was neither distant nor innocent. He signed the very act authorizing their creation—citing, plainly, the need "to obtain funds." Not to deliver mail. Not to support soldiers. But to raise money. Period.

In this, as in all else, he played his part to perfection.

A colonel with no army. A cause with no state. A stamp with no letter.

But always—always—**a stage to stand on.**

Stanislaw Bulak-Balakhovich, 1919.

A Postal System That Never Was — And the Letters No One Sent

There are deceptions built with haste, and others laid brick by careful brick—each document, each dispatch, part of an architecture designed not to serve but to suggest.

By the spring of 1920, the illusion was almost complete. The Belarusian People's Republic, through its so-called Special Detachment, appeared to possess a working postal service. There were stamps—printed, perforated, and stacked. There was an office, nominally in Marienburg. And there was correspondence with ministries, contracts with dealers, letters to newspapers. On paper, the machinery of postal legitimacy had been assembled.

But where were the letters?

Not those prepared for collectors—philatelic fantasies franked for exhibition. Real letters. Correspondence born of necessity. Messages sent from one soul to another, and carried by the indifferent hands of postal clerks across a broken Europe.

They do not exist.

The field post of the BNR never materialized beyond a typewriter's promise. It had no clerks, no routes, no registry. There was no official documentation of mail delivery. No service logs. No stamps cancelled in the course of honest work.

Only silence.

And yet, Colonel Yezovitov persisted. In a letter dated February 15, 1920, he wrote to the Latvian Minister of Transport, enclosing a sample stamp and proposing a bold arrangement: that Latvian post offices accept mail franked with the Special Detachment's stamps. In return, the Detachment would accept Latvian-stamped letters into its own postal network.

It was a diplomatic performance.

The Latvian response, dated February 28, was courteous but unsparing: letters from the Detachment would be forwarded—yes—but only if affixed with valid Latvian stamps.

The so-called Belarusian stamps were not recognized. Not valid. **Not post.**

With that, the performance faltered.

Still, the issuance continued. **Five million stamps.** For a detachment of less than two thousand. Printed in denominations never required for daily soldierly correspondence. Issued by a force whose location changed weekly. By the time the stamps reached the field post in Marienburg, the Detachment had already been reassigned to Belarus.

A postal issue without posts. A correspondence with no correspondents.

Even the field post itself—opened on March 28—was quietly shut down just twenty-one days later, on April 18. There was no outcry. No protest. No announcement. It had served its function—not as a post, but as a pretext.

The letters had never been the point.

The stamps were printed. The sales secured. The story launched.

What remained was an edifice of air: letters never written, mail never sorted, and stamps that traveled not across borders but into the vaults of collectors, bearing the scent of a tale too good to resist.

Even fiction, it seemed, needed envelopes.

But not addresses.

Beyond routine cancellations on demand, a number of postal items raise serious doubts about their authenticity. Nearly all bear the same postmark:

«ПАЛЕВАЯ КАНТОРА АСОБН. БЕЛАРУСК. АТРАДА»*—Field Office of the Special Belarusian Detachment—complete with transfer dates.*

Yet something is amiss.

Most cancellations share a single date: 17 April 1920. The so-called Moskowitz item bears 9 November 1920—a stamp once in the hands of Georg Jäger, to whom several such letters were addressed and franked with OKSA stamps.

More curious still is a linguistic slip—small, but significant. The word "field" in Belarusian is correctly rendered as "ПАЛЯВАЯ". Yet the postmark bears the misspelling "ПАЛЕВАЯ."

A simple error? Or the fingerprint of forgery?

In philately, it is often the smallest misstep—the misplaced letter, the repeated date, the uniform ink—that unmasks the entire affair. ***And in this case, the mask is slipping.***

George H Jaeger — The Dealer Behind the Curtain

Every deception requires an impresario—someone not only to perform the illusion, but to sell it.

In this unfolding tale of vanished governments and phantom postage, that role belongs, without hesitation, to George H Jaeger.

To the novice collector leafing through catalogues, Jäger might appear as little more than a footnote—an energetic philatelist, editor of *Der Baltische Philatelist*, and occasional middleman of stamps from troubled lands. But to those who have followed the tangled threads of early 20th-century paper relics, his name rings louder, stranger.

Jäger was no mere enthusiast. He was a **stage manager of myth**.

It was Jaeger who first gave the BNR issue its voice of authority. In April 1920, he published an article in his own journal claiming, with remarkable confidence, that the stamps had been officially issued, used by a functioning field post office, and backed by an act signed on February 3, 1920. The source of this revelation? A document provided by Colonel Kastus Yezovitov himself.

And yet, something about the tone was too neat. The alignment of facts, too symmetrical.

Upon closer examination, the document reads not as reportage—but as choreography.

Jaeger had more than stamps. He had a contract. In a March 10 letter to Yezovitov, he requested an extraordinary quantity—between 100,000 and 200,000 full sets—redeemable in tranches of 5,000, at face value, with a tidy 12% interest. The delivery was to occur through a branch of the Petro-Riga Commercial Bank in Libava.

This was not the language of collection. It was the ledger of commerce.

And Jaeger had a plan.

On March 30, he wrote again, announcing the launch of an international campaign. Fifty “trial” sets of the BNR stamps had been acquired from Second Lieutenant Gladky. These would be sent to major philatelic publications across Europe and America. The goal was unmistakable: to ensure that the issue entered the historical record not as an aberration, but as fact.

The strategy was devilishly effective.

Collectors—lured by rarity, mystique, and an air of rebellion—welcomed the stamps. Jaeger's articles were cited in catalogues, his narratives repeated by club bulletins and dealer sheets. Within months, the BNR issue became not a question, but a category.

But this was not Jaeger's first dalliance with engineered postage.

He was also implicated in the so-called OKSA issue—stamps attributed to the "Separate Corps of the Northern Army." In that case, envelopes bearing OKSA stamps were mailed from a Bolshevik-controlled village—an impossibility, had they been genuine.

The recipient? George H Jaeger. **Again.**

In each instance, the deception was polished, the materials impeccable, the names plausible. Only the history was false.

Jaeger's brilliance lay not in forgery—but in suggestion. He understood that a stamp need not be used to be valuable. It only needed to be believed.

That belief—pressed into perforated rectangles, floated on official-looking paper—was his true commodity. And he sold it well.

Whether Yezovitov was his client, accomplice, or captive remains open to interpretation. But one fact is beyond dispute:

The BNR stamps reached the world not through posts or borders, but through the desk of George H Jaeger.

He did not print them.

He performed them.

George H Jaeger, Riga, 1930s

The Chain of Events — What the Archives Finally Revealed

Every forgery casts a shadow. But sometimes - rarely, almost miraculously - that shadow is traced not by suspicion, but by archival ink.

For years, the story of the BNR's Special Detachment and its enigmatic stamps drifted through the margins of journals and collectors' notes: fragmented, folkloric, evasive. A philatelic ghost story with too many footnotes and too few facts. But in the cool vaults of the National Archives of the Republic of Belarus, the fog began—quietly—to lift.

A new chronology emerged. Not speculation. Record.

And with it, the façade of postal legitimacy dissolved like old gum in water.

January 19, 1920

Colonel Kastus Yezovitov, head of the BNR's Military-Diplomatic Mission, addressed a formal letter to Latvia's Minister of Finance. Polite, restrained, and meticulous, the letter requested permission to print five million postage stamps for the so-called Special Detachment of the BNR.

The reason? Not communication. Not sovereignty. Supplies. The Detachment, Yezovitov wrote, lacked ink, paper, gum arabic—materials as elusive as the legitimacy they sought.

One sentence stands out:

"To reduce costs, we request that 500,000 stamps of each denomination be printed ungummed and imperforate."

A philatelist would raise an eyebrow. A historian should raise the alarm.

January 26–30, 1920

Urgency deepened. A second letter was sent, formalizing the request. The financial crisis became undeniable.

By January 30, a power of attorney was granted to one Mikhail Lyakhovich—permitting him to negotiate the sale of the stamps, though they had yet to be printed. It was the moment the story crossed its own Rubicon.

These stamps were never meant to circulate. They were meant to fund.

February 3, 1920

The so-called "Act" was signed by officers of the Detachment, including Bulak-Balakhovich. For decades, this document would be invoked as proof of postal legitimacy.

But its contents tell a different tale.

It was not a state decree, nor an administrative directive. It was a desperate memorandum, confessing plainly that the stamps were being issued “in search of funds.”

The mission was not communication. It was solvency.

February 14, 1920

The first shipment arrived: 250,000 15-kopeck stamps, split evenly between gummed and ungummed, perforated and imperforate. A collector’s dream, wrapped in the disguise of frugality.

February 15, 1920

Yezovitov wrote to Latvia’s Ministry of Transport. He requested that the new stamps be accepted into the Latvian mail system. He enclosed a sample.

Latvia replied, on February 28, with quiet firmness: the stamps held no postal value. If the Detachment wished to send letters, they would need to use Latvian stamps. No exceptions. No recognition.

And with that, the pretext collapsed.

March 10–17, 1920

Enter Georg Jäger, the orchestrator. His correspondence with Yezovitov outlined a contract to purchase 200,000 full sets, payable at interest, delivered in batches. A week later, Arkady Livshits demanded an exclusive monopoly on sales. Sixty thousand Latvian rubles changed hands.

This was not a post office.

It was a syndicate.

March 28–30, 1920

A “field post office” was ceremoniously opened in Marienburg.

It would last precisely twenty-one days.

That same week, Yezovitov ordered the destruction of the printing stones. On the surface, this lent an air of finality. But in reality, it was another sleight of hand—for reprints would appear years later, uncannily precise.

And Jäger? He was already promoting the issue across Europe, dispatching sample sets to fifty philatelic journals. Not for postage. For publicity.

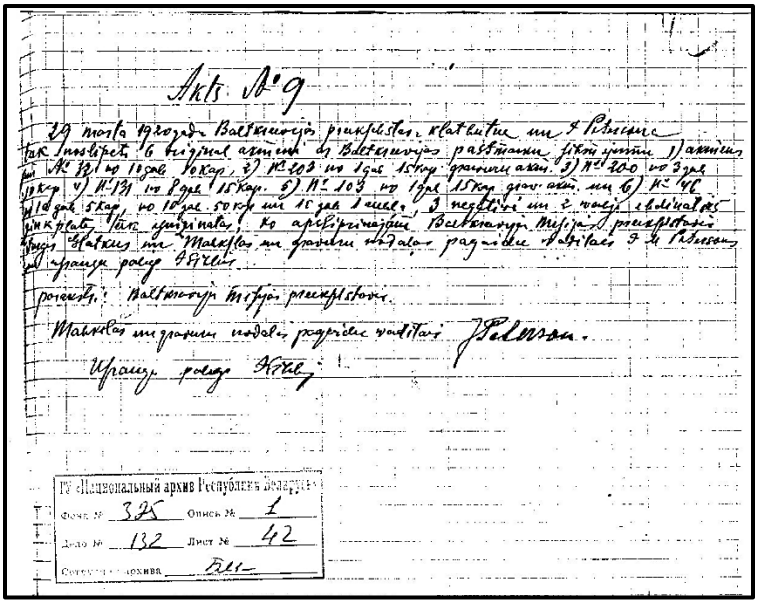
April 18, 1920

The curtain fell. The field post office, having never truly operated, was closed. The operation—brisk, profitable, and thoroughly performative—was complete.

No mail had been delivered. No stamps affixed in duty. But the illusion of a nation's postal agency had been conjured, briefly and brilliantly, from nothing at all.

What remains, preserved in official reports and yellowing letters, is not a record of statehood—but a timeline of invention.

Five million stamps. Three weeks of performance. And a century of debate.



Act No. 9, dated March 29, 1920, solemnly recorded the destruction of the lithographic stones—witnessed, verified, and signed in the presence of Lieutenant Gladky, the trusted aide of Colonel Kastus Yezovitov. The matter, it would seem, was closed.

And yet—nearly two decades later, in 1939 - **a reprint emerged…**

Shadows of the Original — Reprints and Forgeries

There are forgeries born in war—and others born in the stillness that follows. These latter forgeries are quieter, more patient. They are the second breath of a first deception.

By the middle of the 20th century, long after the ink on the original BNR issue had dried (and with it the ink of its intentions), new iterations began to appear. Some claimed to be official reprints—legitimate continuations of a sovereign legacy. Others were counterfeits with no such pretense, brazenly made for collectors who preferred legend to provenance.

The most infamous of these posthumous creations is the **1939 reprint**—first referenced in a 1954 publication. Attributed not to the vanished Rada of Ministers (which ceased functioning in 1925), but to the BNR government-in-exile, the issue tiptoed between nostalgia and opportunism. Was it commemorative? Fundraising? Or merely commercial? The answer, as with so much in this story, lies not in what was said—but in what was omitted.

Technically, the reprint is almost perfect. Its dimensions match the 1920 originals. The disjointed word *коп* remains. The aesthetic fidelity is startling—so much so that one might believe the original lithographic stones had survived the destruction order of March 29, 1920.

But the lie, as always, betrays itself in a detail.

The girl's sleeve.

In the originals, her right sleeve shows three folds. In the reprint, one is missing. Subtle. Silent. But unmistakable.

And then came the revelation that unraveled everything else.

A collector—patient, inquisitive, unafraid of dusty pages—stumbled across a visual twin to the stamp's central image. Not in a government archive. Not in a nationalist portfolio.

But in a magazine published in Brooklyn in 1962, titled *Russian Independence*.

The image is a compilation of two illustrations from the publication "Illustrated Russia. Belarusian Polesie", which was published in **1882**. The first illustration is titled "*Scenes from the Life of Belarusians*" and the second one is "*Types of the Mogilev Province*".

The caption read: *"Characteristic landscape of the Byelorussian countryside and scenes from the life of the Byelorussians of pre-revolutionary Russia. Below are the legendary hidden treasure, the devil, and a witch."*

There, etched in pre-revolutionary ink, was the girl.

The folds.

The composition.

The very myth.

The stamp's image, long held up as a patriotic rendering—perhaps even the work of Rihards Zariņš himself—was not a creation at all. It was a borrowing. A traceable, published borrowing, from an unrelated folio printed more than two decades before the BNR existed.

What began as a currency of hope had now revealed its final borrowing: even the portrait of Belarus it presented was clipped from the past—recycled folklore disguised as national symbolism.

The forgery was complete. **Not just in stamps, but in story.**

The Forged Types

First Type: Mimicry with a Margin of Error

These counterfeits most closely resemble the 1939 reprint. Printed on white gummed paper in sheets of 112, with perforation 12½, they aim for deception through imitation. But they shrink slightly—by half a millimeter—and betray themselves through poor print quality and weak clichés. Like the reprint, they lack the sleeve's third fold.

Second Type: Photographic Echoes

More recent, these are made from photos of original stamps. Printed on white ungummed paper in sheets of 50, their flaws lie in fidelity. The clichés mimic detail, but lines blur, spacing falters, and ink colors vary across batches. In some, the girl's sleeve shadows appear—faithfully echoed yet clumsily rendered.

Third Type: The Coarse Pretenders

Crude, rare, and catastrophic in execution. Printed on poor ungummed paper, they feature perforation 12½ and inconsistent design. One design was used for all denominations, with values stamped in afterward—sometimes crooked, sometimes off-frame. In one, the denomination wanders into the figure's hair. In another, the girl's face is lost entirely to the void.

These reprints and forgeries do not merely replicate the stamps—they replicate the idea of legitimacy. They reveal how even an illusion, once printed and perforated, can be reborn with value.

The original BNR stamps may never have served as currency, nor as postage.

But they gave birth to an entire genre of deception.

And like any good story—especially the counterfeit kind—they proved remarkably hard to kill.

On the left: an illustration titled “Scenes from the Life of Belarusians.” On the right: “Types of the Mogilev Province.”
Between them, at the top, appear selected details—familiar, if one knows where to look—bearing a striking resemblance to the composition found in the postal stamp shown below. The conclusion is as quiet as it is undeniable: the image on the stamp is not an original work, but a clever compilation drawn from these two engravings, both published in an ethnographic volume from the year 1882.

Conclusions — Not a Stamp Too Far

And so, we arrive at the end of this long and winding trail—not in revelation, but in confirmation.

The case of the so-called money-stamps of the Special Detachment of the Belarusian People's Republic is no longer a matter of hypothesis. It is now, with the benefit of archival clarity and historical distance, a matter of record.

Let us, without flourish, state what the evidence now compels us to accept.

First, the Belarusian People's Republic—as a state—never possessed an army. It had uniforms, yes, and ministers, and declarations drafted in exile. But it had no territory, no civilian administration, no capacity to collect taxes, issue laws, or enforce them. Above all, it had no armed formations under its command. The Special Detachment, to the extent it functioned at all, was not an organ of statehood but a convenient designation—a name in search of authority.

Second, the Act of February 3, 1920, so often cited as the legal foundation for the money-stamp issue, was not a law, not a decree, and not issued by the Rada. It was a signed statement by a handful of officers—field delegates of a wandering detachment—who openly confessed they were authorizing the stamps "in search of funds." That is the language of emergency, not administration.

Third, the stamps were never intended for genuine postal use. There existed no infrastructure to support them. No established routes. No clerks. No cancellations traceable to authentic service. Even the Latvians, whom Yezovitov entreated for cooperation, rejected the request. They permitted the forwarding of letters—but only if properly franked with Latvian postage. This alone renders the very rationale for the issue void.

Fourth, the print run was absurd: five million stamps for a detachment that never exceeded two thousand men. The numbers, by themselves, betray the operation's true nature. This was not a fiscal issue. It was an inventory—a product designed for sale, not service.

Fifth, the figure of George Jaeger looms unmistakably. His early access to sample sheets, his contracts for bulk orders, his articles promoting the issue in philatelic journals across Europe—all point to coordinated marketing, not bureaucratic recordkeeping. His involvement in other dubious stamp episodes (such as the fabricated OKSA envelopes) further weakens his credibility. That he was the first to "confirm" the legitimacy of the BNR issue is, in hindsight, the final irony.

Sixth, Arkady Livshits's appearance—demanding exclusive rights and guarantees against reprints—removes the last doubt. This was a business arrangement. And like all such arrangements, it was governed by supply, exclusivity, and control of the narrative.

Seventh, the forgeries and reprints that followed—produced decades later and passed off as rare survivors—were not the result of misunderstanding, but of calculated mimicry. Each counterfeit served the same function as the original issue: to monetize memory, not to serve mail.

And finally, the last thread: the design itself, long attributed to national artistry or even to imperial engraver Rihards Zariņš, was not original at all.

It was a lifted image—reproduced from a nineteenth-century illustration, published in 1897 in *Illustrated Russia*, depicting Belarusian folklore with witches, devils, and buried treasure. The stamp's most iconic image was not a vision of nationhood, but a recycled folk scene, sold anew under the guise of sovereignty.

This is not a tragedy.

It is a performance that ended exactly as it was written:

With an audience still clapping, long after the stage had been struck.

Epilogue

The tale of the Special Detachment's money-stamps is not a conspiracy. It is not a swindle, nor a satire. It is something more delicate—and far more enduring:

A fiction that behaved like fact.

These stamps were not born of necessity. They were born of vacancy—of a state that had no treasury, no post, no army, and no land. They were created in the absence of function, then presented as proof of function. Printed without post, sold without circulation, and promoted without remorse, they stepped boldly into the masquerade of legitimacy.

And the world, remarkably, played along.

Because they looked real. Because they bore symbols. Because the phrases - "Special Detachment," "Republic," "Post" - were powerful enough to obscure their emptiness. And because, as collectors and cataloguers, we often prefer a good origin story to a dull correction.

Even now, a century later, the debate lingers—not in chancelleries, but in catalogs and auction rooms: Were they used? Were they legal? Are they postal? Are they money?

But perhaps the better question is not *what* they were—but *why* they were.

Because in the end, these stamps speak not of states or soldiers, but of belief. Misplaced belief. Monetized belief. Belief manufactured in sheets of gummed paper and exported through narrative.

They were never postally valid. They never carried a letter. Their detachment never received formal orders. Their republic never fielded an army. Their "issue" was, from beginning to end, an improvisation dressed in patriotism.

And yet...

They were printed. They were distributed. They were catalogued. They were believed. They were collected. They survived.

Not because they were real—but because they were ***almost* real enough.**

And in philately and numismatics, as in history, that is sometimes all it takes.

Appendix: The Curious Case of the Fifteen Kopecks

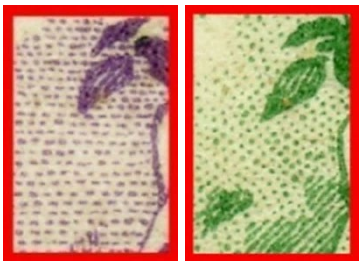
It was the first to appear—modest in denomination, yet singular in design. The 15-kopeck stamp emerged not merely as a forerunner, but as an anomaly.

Distinct from its successors in both form and finesse, it bore the marks of a preliminary effort, an initial draft before the hand grew more confident, the eye more discerning. One need only study the profusion of minute details—borders less precise, typography less balanced—to recognize the subtle awkwardness of an early attempt. And yet, within that awkwardness lies charm. It is the charm of something nascent, before perfection overwrites personality.

Later issues would refine the vision. The design grew sharper, more elegant, more assured. Line by line, the composition matured. Compared to them, the 15-kopeck seems almost rustic—a quiet outlier in a set destined for order.

As for varieties—those elusive phantoms of the philatelic world—none of note have emerged. No rogue cliché, no unexpected hue. The color remained obedient, the printing, uniform. It is, in short, consistent. And yet, in its very consistency, it draws attention. For this, it seems, is a stamp content to be singular—not through deviation, but through origin.

A comparison between the 15 Kop stamp of the first issue and the details of the second issue stamps reveals significant differences:

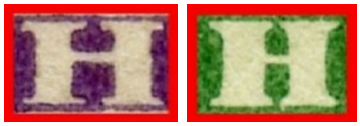
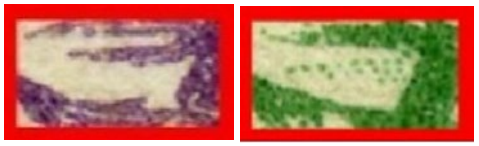
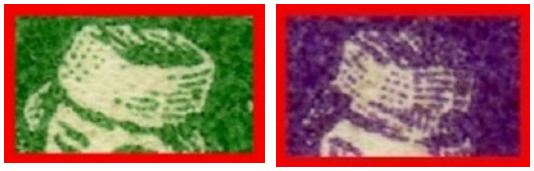








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Appendix: Reprint & Forgeries

In the shadowy corridors of exile, rumor often outpaces truth. One such tale tells of a reprint—purportedly issued in 1939 under the authority of the so-called Rada of Ministers of the Belarusian People's Republic (BNR). Yet a closer inspection reveals the tale's flaw: the Rada of Ministers had drawn its final breath as early as 1925, its official functions dissolved and its seal, at least in principle, broken. By 1939, it existed no more than a name etched in memory.

What remains plausible, however—and far less dramatic—is that the reprint in question was the work of the Rada of the BNR itself, a separate body which, unlike its ministerial cousin, continued its precarious journey through the years of exile. It is to this body that responsibility for the 1939 reprint most logically falls.

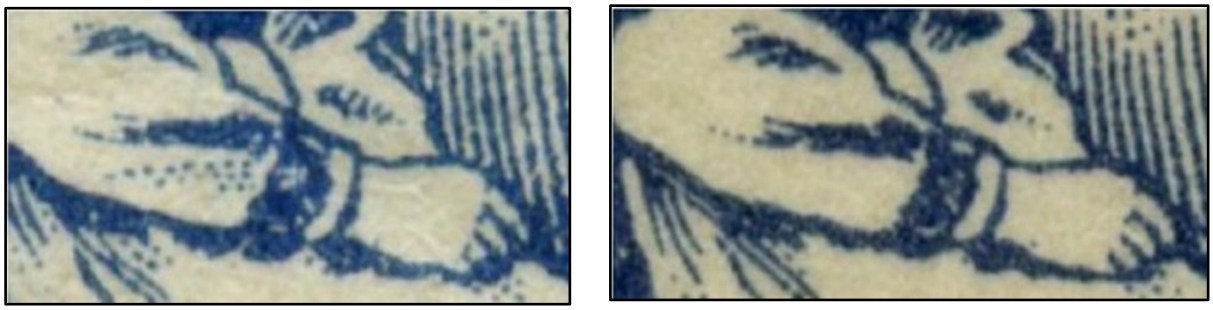
Yet the tale does not end with a simple reprint. There exist, lurking on the philatelic periphery, three known issues of outright forgeries—each distinct, each crafted with varying degrees of audacity and deceit. They speak not merely of counterfeiting, but of the enduring temptation to alter history with a well-placed stamp.

Reprint

The quality of the reprint stamps is, to the naked eye, almost indistinguishable from that of the original issue. Paper, impression, even the subtle grain of the inked surfaces—all appear as though poured from the same mould. And indeed, one might reasonably suspect that not all the original lithographic stones met the fate they were meant to. Some, it seems, may have slipped quietly past the hands of destruction.

Especially telling is the fact that the reprint matches the original not only in print clarity but in physical dimensions. Such fidelity invites a chilling question: where these prints made using the same stones once employed for the official issue? If so, who preserved them—and why?

Yet for all this uncanny similarity, there remains one detail, a single note of discord in the symphony of forgery: the sleeve. In the original issue, the right sleeve of the girl bears three gentle folds—a trifling design feature, one might say, but unmistakable to the trained eye. In the reprint, the third fold is absent. **Vanished.**



On the left: the sleeve on a genuine 50-kopeck stamp. On the right: its reprint counterpart.

It is in such absences, such silences in the design, that the truth reveals itself. And it is by that missing fold—no more than a breath in the drapery—that one may, at last, distinguish the reprint from the original.

Further scrutiny reveals that the 15-kopeck stamp, once singular in its appearance, was also altered in the reprint. Its design was brought into harmony with the rest of the series—made uniform, deliberate, and one suspects, more cunning. Only one subtle difference remains to betray the disguise: the letters forming the word "**коп**" are still unjointed, as they were in the original issue. Yet they now share the same thickened form as seen in the other denominations - more confident, perhaps, but no less telling.

On the left: at the top, a genuine 15-kopeck stamp; beneath it, a close-up of the "15 Kop" inscription.
On the right: reprint counterparts, respectively for the 15- and 50-kopeck denominations.

The stamps were printed on white gummed paper, which has since mellowed to a soft ivory hue, kissed by time. Four varieties of perforation are known - each a quiet variant in this tale of replication, and each holding its own whisper of mystery to those who know where to look.

On the left: a genuine 50-kopeck stamp. On the right: its reprint counterpart.

At first glance, they might pass as twins, but under the lens of suspicion, differences emerge—silent yet certain. The eye must be trained, the mind alert, for in matters of forgery, the truth is rarely in what is added...

but in what has been quietly taken away.

Forgeries of the First Type

It begins with the familiar: white paper, gummed and unassuming, bearing sheets of 112 impressions—just as in the original issue. A forgery that walks in the shoes of the real thing, mimicking its posture, its dress, its mannerisms. Even the perforation is correct: gauge 12½, neat enough to deceive the inattentive, uniform enough to pass beneath the radar of routine inspection.

But then, the masquerade falters.

These forgeries, though clearly inspired by the reprint series, lack the discipline of craftsmanship. The clichés—the printing templates—bear the unmistakable marks of haste. Their edges waver, their lines tremble. It is forgery in broad daylight but wearing a blurred disguise.

The design itself is a narrower whisper - approximately half a millimeter smaller than the genuine issue. An almost imperceptible flaw, and yet one that reveals everything. A veteran collector might not need calipers to know that something is amiss; the stamp does not sit on the page with the same confidence.

And then, once more, the sleeve. That telltale fold. Or rather, its absence. Just as with the reprints, the third shadow on the girl's sleeve is missing—erased from the portrait like a forgotten lie. Whether by design or oversight, the result is the same: a quiet confession embedded in ink.

They are forgeries, yes—but of the First Type: imitative, but careless. Echoes of an original tune played just slightly off-key.

On the left: a genuine 15-kopeck stamp. On the right: reprint counterparts, respectively for the 15- and 50-kopeck denominations.

Forgeries of the Second Type

Forgeries of the second type were printed on white paper without glue in sheets of 50 stamps per sheet, which are periodically found on sale. The stamps did not have perforations.

The clichés were made from photographs of genuine stamps, so fakes have the appropriate features. For example, a 15-kopeck stamp differs from other stamps, as well as a genuine stamp.

Forgery of second type. respectively 15- and 50-kopeck denominations.

The shadows on the girl's sleeve have also been preserved.

Forgery of second type. Detail: Eyeshadows on the girl's sleeve on all denominations respectively.

Nevertheless, it is quite easy to distinguish fakes from genuine stamps, both because of the mass of errors in the clichés, and because the cliché has not been retouched and the contours of individual clichés are clearly visible on it.

Forgery of second type. Details of all denominations respectively.

It can be noted that forgeries of this type were issued by at least two editions, since there are differences in both the clarity of the print and the color of the stamps.

Forgery of second type. At the top is the first edition, at the bottom is the second edition. All denominations are corresponding.

Forgeries of the Third Type

Among the shadows of deception, there exists a species of forgery so crude, so unmistakably poor in its execution, that it almost seems to confess its guilt outright. These are the forgeries of the third type—rare, elusive, and alarmingly degraded.

Unlike their predecessors, these counterfeits were printed on low-grade paper, entirely ungummed. Time has not been kind to them: the paper, once perhaps serviceable, has since darkened to the tone of old parchment left too long in damp rooms. Their perforation, like that of the genuine issues, measures at 12½, but the resemblance ends there.

These forgeries are far scarcer than the original stamps, the reprints, or even the first two counterfeit types. Yet rarity, in this case, does not equate to value—it equates to audacity.

Forgery of the third type. 10- and 15-kopeck denominations, respectively.

The clichés used are astonishingly careless. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the denomination panels, which frequently appear misaligned, askew, or outright displaced. What should be a stamp's identifying numeral becomes its telltale flaw.

The variety and frequency of these shifts gave rise to a striking hypothesis: that the image of all denominations may have been printed from a single master cliché—generic and blank—after which the denomination plates were impressed manually using a handstamp. The hypothesis, once tentative, finds firm support in several surviving examples, where the denomination has visibly "driven" itself onto the main design, trampling the borders and skewing the alignment.

Forgery of the third type. 5- and 15-kopeck, and 1-ruble denominations.

On each, the denomination has gone astray—tilted or shifted with the indifference of a tired clerk sealing a package. The hand that held the stamp was unsteady, the eye that guided it inattentive. It is forgery by exhaustion, not precision.

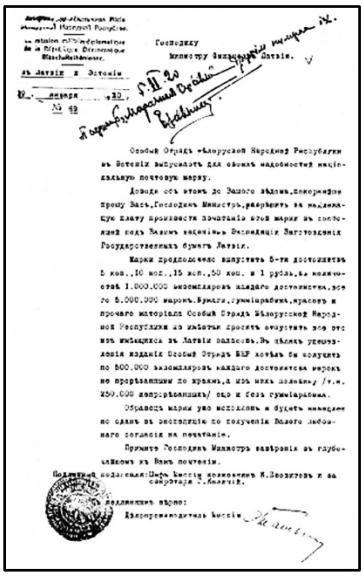
The overall print quality descends even lower. Not a single known example is free of grave errors—lines missing, margins uneven, details blurred into oblivion. Yet among these troubled specimens, one stands apart.

Forgery of the third type: 1-ruble denomination.

In this instance, an entire portion of the stamp's design has vanished—gone without explanation, as if the plate itself had simply given up. The result is less a counterfeit and more a ghost, half-formed and strangely haunting. It is a reminder that not all deceptions strive for excellence.

Some, **it seems, rely instead on chaos.**

Appendix: Letter from K. Yezovitov dated January 19, 1920



From the Military-Diplomatic Mission

of the Belarusian People's Republic in Latvia and Estonia

To the Honorable ***Minister of Finance of Latvia***

No. 69 — Dated January 19, 1920

Your Excellency,

The ***Special Detachment of the Belarusian People's Republic in Estonia*** *is preparing to issue a national postage stamp for its official needs.*

In this regard, I respectfully request your permission to have these stamps printed at the ***Expedition for the Procurement of State Papers of Latvia****, which operates under your esteemed Ministry, for the appropriate fee.*

The stamps are planned in ***five denominations****:* ***5, 10, 15, 50 kopecks, and 1 ruble****.*

With a ***print run of 1,000,000 copies*** *for each denomination— totaling* ***5 million stamps****.*

*As the Special Detachment lacks the necessary resources—****paper, gum arabic, inks, and other printing materials****—we kindly request that all required supplies be provided from existing Latvian stock.*

To reduce production costs, the Special Detachment also requests that ***500,000 stamps of each denomination*** *be delivered* ***unperforated****, with* ***half of those (i.e., 250,000) issued without gum****.*

The order will be officially submitted to the Expedition upon receipt of your kind approval for the printing.

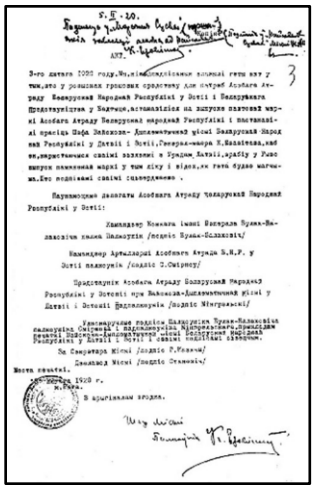
Please accept, Mr. Minister, the expression of my highest respect.

K. Yezovitov *(signed)*

On behalf of the Secretary ***G. Kazyachy*** *(signed)*

January 19, 1920

Appendix: Act, dated February 3, 1920



3. II. 1920

ACT

We, the undersigned, hereby draft and confirm this Act to state that, in the search for financial resources to support the needs of the ***Special Detachment (SD)*** *of the* ***Belarusian National Republic (BNR)*** *in Estonia and the Belarusian representation in* ***Badytse****, we have resolved to issue* ***postage stamps*** *on behalf of the SD of the BNR.*

We further resolved to request the Head of the Military-Diplomatic Mission of the BNR in Latvia and Estonia, ***Major General K. Yezovitov****, to make use of his connections with the Latvian authorities to arrange for the production of these stamps in* ***Riga****, in such* ***quantities and denominations*** *as may be feasible.*

Confirmed by our signatures:

Colonel Bulak-Balakhovich

Commander of the Cavalry Regiment

Colonel Smirnov

Commander of the Artillery of the SD of the BNR in Estonia

Lieutenant Colonel Mingrelski

Representative of the SD of the BNR in Estonia at the Military-Diplomatic Mission in Latvia and Estonia

Riga.

(Seal)

Certified by ***Colonel Yezovitov***

Appendix: Report dated February 14, 1920

Delivery Report on BPR Stamps

February 14, 1920

Report

I have the honor to report that, on February 14, by your order, I received from the Expedition for the Procurement of State Papers of Latvia and delivered to the Military-Diplomatic Mission of the Belarusian People's Republic in Latvia and Estonia:

- ***250,000 copies** of the **BPR 15-kopeck stamp, imperforate and gummed**, and*
- ***250,000 copies** of the **same stamp, imperforate and ungummed**.*

*The total expense for delivery and packaging amounted to **26 Latvian rubles**.*

Attached herewith:

***Receipt No. 150 and No. 151** from the Expedition for the Procurement of State Papers of Latvia.*

Signed:
*Second Lieutenant **Y. Gladky***

Appendix: Letter dated February 15, 1920

Letter to the Minister of Transport of Latvia Regarding the Special Detachment's Field Post

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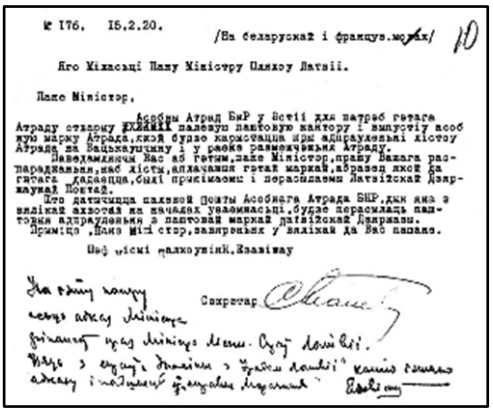


№ 176. 15.2.20. /На беларускай і французскім.мовах/

Яго Міласьці Пану Міністру Шляхоў Латвіі.

Пане Міністар,

Асобны Атрад БНР у Эстоніі для патрэб гэтага Атраду стварыў палявую пантовую кантору і выпусціў асобную марку Атрада, якой будзе карыстацца пры адпраўленьні лістоў Атрядам на Бацькаўшчыну і у межах размяшчэньня Атраду.

Паведамляючы Вас аб гэтым, пане Міністар, праду Вашага распараджэньня, каб лісты, аплачаныя гэтай маркай, абразец якой да гэтага далучаецца, былі прыймаемы і пераправляемы Латвійскай Дзяржаўнай Поштай.

Пры дачыненьні пальвой пошты Асобнага Атрада БНР, дзе яна з вялікай ахвотай на пачатках узаемнасьці, будзе пераслаць пантовыя адпраўленьні з пантовай маркай Латвійскай Дзяржавы.

Прымеце, Пане Міністар, запэўненьні у вялікай да Вас пашаны.

Шэф місіі палкоўнік Езавітаў

Сакратар

№176. February 15, 1920

(In Belarusian and French)

To His Excellency the Minister of Transport of Latvia

Dear Minister,

*The **Special Detachment of the Belarusian People's Republic in Estonia**, for the needs of the Detachment, has established a **field post office** and has issued a **special stamp of the Detachment**, which shall be used to pay for the dispatch of the Detachment's correspondence to the Homeland and to the areas where the Detachment is stationed.*

*In informing you of this, Mr. Minister I respectfully request that you issue the necessary order to ensure that letters **franked with this stamp**—a **sample of which is enclosed**—be accepted and transmitted by the **Latvian State Post**.*

*As for the field post office of the Special Detachment of the Belarusian People's Republic, it will gladly and in the spirit of reciprocity **transmit postal items bearing the Latvian State postage stamp**.*

Please accept, Mr. Minister, the assurances of my highest consideration and esteem.

***Head of the Mission, Colonel K. Yezovitov** [signed]*

***Secretary: Stanevich** [signed]*

Appendix: Letter dated March 10, 1920

Letter from George H Jaeger to K. Yezovitov dated March 10, 1920


George H. Jaeger, Libau (Lettonia).
Wholesale Dealer in Postage Stamps.

Libau, March 10, 1920
To: ***K. Yezovitov***
Head of the Military-Diplomatic Mission
of the Belarusian People's Republic in Latvia, Riga

Your Excellency,
As the largest dealer in collector postage stamps in Latvia and with the intention of promoting the sale of Belarusian People's Republic (BNR) stamps across Europe and America, I have the honor to offer you my services as a business partner.

I would like to acquire ***100,000 to 200,000 complete sets*** *of stamps issued by the* ***Special Detachment of the BNR*** *under the following terms:*

The specified quantity of stamps is to be placed at my disposal through the ***Libau branch of the Petrograd-Riga Commercial Bank (PRKB)****.*

Payment will be made upon delivery in ***Ost-rubles****, at the* ***face (nominal) value*** *of the stamps.*

The payment term shall be ***six months****, with* ***12% annual interest****.*

I will purchase the stamps in ***batches of no fewer than 5,000 sets*** *at a time.*

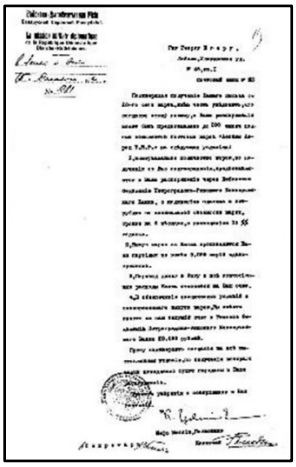
All costs associated with money transfers to Riga and any ***banking commissions*** *will be covered at my own expense.*

With the highest respect,

[signed] ***George H Jaeger***

Appendix: Letter dated March 11, 1920

Response from K. Yezovitov to George H Jaeger dated March 11, 1920



To Mr. George H Jaeger

Libau, Ulikhovskaya Street 46, Apartment 1

No. 281, dated March 11, 1920

Re: No. 25 – Confirmation of your letter dated March 10, 1920

Dear Mr. Jaeger,

*In response to your letter of March 10, I confirm that up to **100,000 complete sets** of postage stamps may be made available to you under the following conditions:*

1. *The aforementioned quantity will be placed at your disposal—upon your confirmation—through the **Riga branch of the Petrograd-Riga Commercial Bank (PRKB)**, with **payment in Ost-rubles at nominal value**, for a term of **six months**, and with **12% annual interest**.*
2. *You agree to purchase the stamps from the bank in **batches of no fewer than 5,000 sets** at a time.*
3. *All expenses related to **transferring funds to Riga** and any **banking commissions** will be borne by you.*
4. *As a guarantee of adherence to the agreed terms and timely purchase of the stamps, you are required to deposit **10,000 rubles** into our current account at the **Riga branch of PRKB**.*

Respectfully,
***K. Yezovitov:** [signed]*

Head of the Military-Diplomatic Mission of the Belarusian People's Republic

***Treasurer:** [signed]*

***Secretary:** [signed]*

Appendix: Letter dated March 17, 1920

Agreement Between the Military-Diplomatic Mission and A. S. Lifshitz

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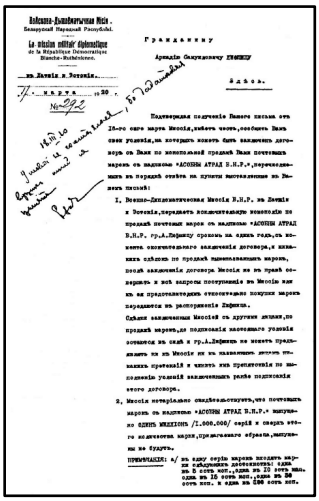

*From the **Military-Diplomatic Mission** of the Belarusian People's Republic in Latvia and Estonia*
To Arkady Samuilovich Lifshitz
***No. 292, dated March 17, 1920** (Excerpt)*
In confirmation of receipt of your letter, we have the honor to communicate the following terms in response to the points outlined therein:

1. *The Mission grants Lifshitz **exclusive monopoly rights for the sale of the stamps for a period of one year**. (Transactions previously concluded shall remain in force. Lifshitz may neither present claims against the Mission nor impede the actions of those previously involved.)*
2. *It is **notarized that one million (1,000,000) copies have been printed**, with no additional print runs to follow. Of this amount, **250,000 series—non-perforated and ungummed—are reserved for the Mission's own purposes** and may **not be released for sale before the expiration of the agreement with Lifshitz**.*
3. *Clauses 4-6 of Lifschitz's letter is accepted without changes.*
4. *Lifshitz is granted the **right to sell the stamps at a premium above face value**. Should circumstances render such sales impracticable, he is permitted to **sell up to 200,000 series at face value**, retaining **20% as compensation for expenses**. This condition shall subsequently be subject to **review**, and both parties shall have the right to **conclude a new agreement**.*
5. *In the event of premium sales, **25% of the gross surplus shall be remitted by Lifshitz to the Mission's treasury upon receipt of proceeds**.*
6. *The Mission shall extend full assistance and support…*
7. *Lifshitz commits to **purchasing no fewer than 5,000 series** from the Mission's warehouse, paying **in cash in Ost Marks or German Marks**, at a rate of **3 German Marks and 60 Pfennigs per series**.*
8. *As advance payment toward these acquisitions, **Lifshitz shall deposit 60,000 Latvian rubles**, calculated at the **exchange rate on the day of payment**.*

Signed,
Kastus Yezovitov

Appendix: Letter dated February 28, 1920

Response from The Provisional Government of Latvia to Council of the BNR, dated February 28, 1920

The Provisional Government of Latvia. Ministry of Foreign Affairs
February 28, 1920. No. EC. 3065/3305, Riga
Sir,
I have the honor to inform you that the ***Chief of your Military Mission****, under reference No. 176 dated the 15th of this month, addressed our* ***Minister of Railways*** *with a request to authorize the dispatch of correspondence bearing a special postal sign. This emblem, as stated, was printed by a special military group of your Republic currently stationed in Estonia, intended to facilitate* ***written communication with Byelorussia****. The sign is said to indicate the presence of this group.*
The Ministry of Railways has reviewed the matter and asks us to convey to you that it raises no objection to forwarding such correspondence and will do so without levying a surcharge. However, it must respectfully ***decline to permit*** *post offices to receive or transmit letters bearing the* ***Belarusian postal sign****. As per regulation, all postal correspondence leaving the borders of Latvia must bear official* ***Latvian postal franking.***
May I take this opportunity to remind you that all communications addressed to the various departments of the Latvian administration must proceed via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
Please accept, ***Mr. Consul,*** *the assurances of my highest consideration.*
For the Director of the Economic and Clerical Department
/signature/
For confirmation:
/seal/
Secretary /signature/

The Latvians, it seems, were not unwilling to accommodate the dispatch of Belarusian correspondence—provided that it bore Latvian stamps. The implication was quietly damning, there was, in fact, no need for the issuance of BNR postage stamps.
The Belarusian “postal sign” had no standing beyond the narrow circle of its creators. It was tolerated but never recognized. And in that subtle distinction lies the stamp’s true story - not one of legitimacy, but of illusion.

Appendix: Stamped, but Never Sent: A Study in Fabrication

Postal Items Received and Sent by the Field Office of the Special Detachment

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Postal envelope addressed to the Chief of the Belarusian Military-Diplomatic Mission. Riga, Nikolaevskaya Street 20.

To date, only three items have come to light: two postcards and a single envelope. On their own, they might appear unremarkable. But examined together, a pattern emerges—too neat to be coincidence, too flawed to be trusted.

All three bear the same Riga arrival postmark. At first glance, this would suggest official processing, a tidy confirmation of delivery. But a closer inspection reveals something altogether different.

The postmark contains no recognizable letter - just a strange, looping figure, more like a treble clef than any proper postal character. No genuine Latvian item has ever been recorded bearing such a mark. It is, in all likelihood, a forgery—subtle enough to pass casual inspection, but unmistakable to the trained eye.

The postcards are blank. Not a single line of text. Their philatelic nature is therefore undisguised. Curiously, the addresses differ, but the handwriting does not. One pen, one author—despite multiple recipients.

The timeline, too, strains belief. The postcards are dated April 17, the letter April 21. Yet all three, according to the Riga marks, arrived on April 23.

A four-day gap in posting. Zero delay in delivery. In a world without direct rail from Marienburg to Riga.

Now consider the geography. Marienburg lies 202 kilometers from Riga—a formidable distance in 1920. Even under ideal conditions, an overnight delivery would border on the miraculous. But this letter—mailed on the 21st—arrived in Riga on the 23rd, just like the postcards mailed four days earlier. And not a single transit mark from Marienburg appears. None.

This absence is not a clerical oversight—it is a rupture in the story.

According to postal regulations of the time, Latvian postal offices were required to apply a receiving mark the moment mail passed into their custody. That mark is missing. No Marienburg office acknowledged the items. No record confirms they were ever posted.

And still they arrived—conveniently, perfectly, falsely.

One is left with only one conclusion: the so-called *Field Office of the Special Detachment* was not merely issuing stamps. It was crafting a fiction. These items were not sent but staged. Not delivered but composed.

In the end, it is not the stamps that betray the illusion.

It is the silence where there should have been ink.

Appendix: The Letters That Never Truly Traveled

Postal Items Received and Sent by the Latvian Post

Postal envelope addressed to the Belarusian Military-Diplomatic Mission. Riga, Nikolaevskaya Street 20, apt. 1.

To understand the truth behind the alleged circulation of BNR stamps, one must first turn to a seemingly unassuming reply—from the Latvian Ministry of Transport to Colonel Yezovitov's request, asking that correspondence franked with Belarusian People's Republic (BNR) stamps be accepted and transmitted through Latvian postal channels.

The Ministry's response was carefully worded, even polite. The Mission, it said, had interpreted Latvia's position thus:

"The Latvian postal service agrees to forward correspondence bearing stamps marked 'Special Detachment of the B.N.R.' free of charge—but only within Latvia."

At first glance, it appears a triumph. But read more closely, and the illusion begins to dissolve.

If taken literally, such phrasing would imply that *any* Latvian resident could purchase BNR stamps and freely send mail across the country, bypassing official Latvian issues—a notion as absurd as it is damaging to the sovereign postal revenue. But in truth, this was no open endorsement. The statement referred only to the forwarding of *accumulated correspondence* from the Special Detachment's Field Office—not to public usage, and certainly not to equal standing with the stamps of the Latvian state.

And so, we turn to the physical remnants—the so-called "evidence" of use.

The first is a registered envelope, the only one of its kind known to survive. It was allegedly sent from Liepaja to Riga on March 16, 1920. On its reverse is a Russian-style postmark—

already a curiosity in itself. Some have insisted that this envelope was legally processed by the Libau post office, and that it bore cancelled BNR stamps accepted without surcharge. The sender, they claim, was none other than the BNR's Military-Diplomatic Mission in Libau.

But this story crumbles under scrutiny.

The stamps are not cancelled by Libau's postmark, but by the so-called "Field Office" stamp - the same one allegedly based in Marienburg. Are we to believe the letter was carried from Marienburg to Liepaja simply to be posted to Riga? A circuitous route with no logic. Even if this improbable detour were true, it is highly doubtful that the Libau post office - hardly a rogue institution - would have accepted BNR- stamped letters, especially if the stamps had already been cancelled.

Yet there is one detail that casts a long shadow: Libau was the home of George Jaeger.

And Jaeger, a stamp dealer of sharp instincts and shrewd arrangements, had a reputation. In those days, a few discreet coins could persuade a postal clerk to turn a blind eye—or to press a postmark on a piece that never passed through the postal system at all.

Another envelope exists—its stamps removed, its secrets harder to read. It bears, on the reverse, a Russian-style Riga mark and a seal from the BNR's Military-Diplomatic Mission. The date, curiously, precedes the issuance of the BNR stamps themselves. And yet, some writers have leapt on this fragment, insisting it proves that Russian postmarks remained in use in Riga as late as March 1920.

To that, we may borrow from Mark Twain: *It's not that the claim is false - it's that it isn't true.*

As early as 1930, a study titled *"Cancellation Stamps on Latvian Stamps in the First Days of Independence"* categorically refuted this notion. Russian cancellation devices, the author stated, were seized in Riga at the end of 1918. Though scattered remnants lingered elsewhere, they had no place in the capital's official use by 1920.

And the Riga postmark itself - when examined closely - betrays the final clue. The circles are not concentric, as they should be. The inner ring is distorted, flattened at the top and bottom. The numeral "1" in the month slants unnaturally left. The outer letters in "LATWIJA" are stunted compared to those at the center.

It is, in short, **a forgery.**

All signs point to one conclusion: the surviving postal items were fabricated. They were not mailed but manufactured. Their purpose was not to carry messages - but to carry a message: that these stamps were used, that they were legitimate, that they had traveled.

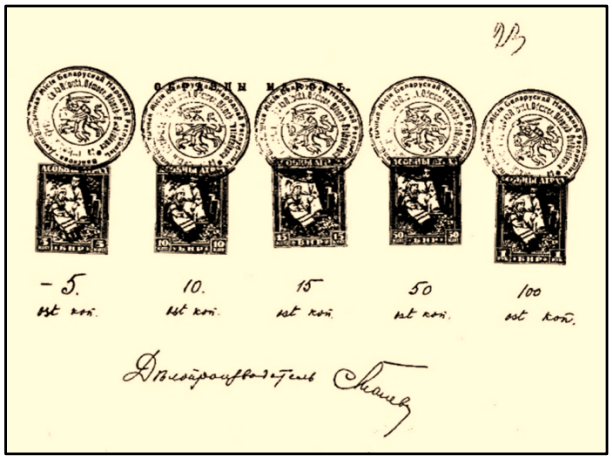
And who would benefit from such an illusion?

We return once again to George H Jaeger. Contemporary accounts suggest that the production of exactly fifty postal items was part of his arrangement - an artificial trail, meticulously constructed to simulate authentic postal use.

But as with all fabrications, the truth was in the details.

And in this case, the details have spoken.

Appendix: The Remaining Specimens



A single sheet, yellowed at the edges but unbowed by time, lies preserved within the National Archives of the Republic of Belarus. Upon it are arranged the specimens—each a modest rectangle of defiance, each bearing the sober imprint of legitimacy: the official handstamp of the Military-Diplomatic Mission of the Belarusian People's Republic.

It is no mere ornament. That stamp speaks, quietly but unmistakably, of provenance and purpose. And it speaks of one man.

Konstantin Yezovitov.

The evidence is unambiguous—his hand guided the issue; his authority sanctioned it. There is no trace, not a shadow, to suggest the involvement of Colonel Bulak-Balakhovich or his detachment. No clandestine printing, no whispered orders from the front.

The stamps are diplomatic, not partisan. They belong not to a colonel's whim but to a head of a Military-Diplomatic Mission resolve.

Thus, in the neat geometry of philatelic design and the cold certainty of archival ink, the truth is fixed:

this was Yezovitov's undertaking alone.

P.S.

The form bearing the stamp specimens presents five issued denominations: 5, 10, 15, and 50 kopecks, and 1 ruble. On the surface, a straightforward enumeration. But upon closer inspection, two curious details emerge—small peculiarities that speak volumes.

First: the denomination on each stamp is expressed in a linguistic hybrid - ***"Ost Коп."*** The word *"Ost"* is unmistakably German, meaning "East." The second word, *"Коп,"* is the Cyrillic abbreviation for *kopeck*. A curious pairing—part Teutonic precision, part Slavic familiarity—suggesting a postage system straddling identities.

And second: the 1-ruble denomination is not labeled as such. Instead, it follows the same *kopeck logic* as the others and is presented not as "1 ruble" but as *"100 Ost Коп."* A subtle attempt at visual unification? Perhaps.

A hint of deliberate camouflage, cloaking national ambition in philatelic uniformity? Perhaps more than that.

Such are the secrets hidden not in ink or paper—but in the choice of a single word.

The End


Чеф Военно-Дипломатической Миссіи Бѣлорусской Народ-
ной Республики в Латвіи и Эстоніи Полковник
Секретарь Миссіи
Повѣренный Министерства Финансов Бѣлорусской На-
родной Республики.

The document bears the weight of formal authority, its signatories inscribed with practiced solemnity:

[Typed] Chief of the Military-Diplomatic Mission of the Belarusian People's Republic in Latvia and Estonia – Colonel (signed)

[Typed] Secretary of the Mission – (signed)

[Typed] Attorney of the Ministry of Finance of the Belarusian People's Republic – (signed)

[Handwritten] Administrator (inaudible) of the Council – (signed)

[Handwritten] Minister - (signed)

A quintet of endorsements—some clear, others smudged by time or carelessness. But even among blurred names and faded ink, one cannot help but sense the choreography of intent behind the strokes.

It is not always what is written that reveals the truth—**but who dares to sign it.**

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