

TWO WAYS “K” CANCELLERS REFUSE TO GO GENTLE INTO THAT GOOD NIGHT

by Alan Soble

I. Lugos/Lugoj: “Continuous Longevity”

After the November 11, 1918 Armistice and the eventual takeover of the lost-territory postal system and post offices by Romania, the cancellers in Lugos did not die, nor were they killed off. I mean that Hungarian cancellers in that town saw continued life, even if they were structurally modified: the “S” in the town name was refashioned into “J”; the date format was rearranged from the Magyar big-endian (year first, day last: 1947/03/04) to the Romanian little-endian format (day first, year last: 04/03/1947); and the prominent crown of St Stephen was replaced with the vertical lines of a less-distinguished grille. This continued use was not sporadic but continuous, through each of the decades (1920s, 1930s, 1940s) after the First War and during the Second, and well into the 1950s of the Communist era.¹ The political fortunes of Romania in the first half of the 20th Century – from the creation of the ruling Magyar “K” cancellers, through the reigns of various kings and the military, to the leadership of Gheorghiu-Dej – absolutely none of this disrupted the continued employment of surviving cancellers in Lugoj. A reasonable surmise is that the cancellers died, by deterioration, the natural death of all humanly-contrived artifacts. When they could no longer be repaired (signs of repair are obvious in the cancel record), they were retired from postal use. Some, we may suppose, were kept as personal emlék or went to museums. We will see in **Section II** (“interrupted longevity”) that “saving” cancellers that were no longer used, storing and hiding them away because they were politically outdated, was postally significant in the various parts of Czechoslovakia.

The Lugos Hungarian cancellers that became survivors were “K”-style devices, especially those used in the main post office: 1A–1P, and 1R, 1S, 1T, from 1912, and the 1U, from 1913.² I have assembled a collection of the following “K” cancellations and their years. Most of the cancels are on entires (covers, cards); some are on loose stamps. Filling in empty boxes would be delightful.

1A	(5)			1936 (2)	1949	1950, 1959
1B	(3)	1918	1922	1933		
1C						
1D						
1E						
1F	(2)	1918 (2)				
1G						
1H						
1I						
1J	(5)	1917		1931, 1934	1940	1956
1K	(8)	1917 (2)		1937 (2), 1938	1940, 1941, 1944	
1L	(2)			1935, 1936		
1M	(5)	1915 (3), 1916, 1917				
1N						
1O	(1)	1918				
1P						

1R					
1S					
1T					
1U	(6)	1926 (3), 1927	1931		1953
1?	(2)	1925		1944	
	(39)	(12)	(6)	(11)	(6)
					(4)

Examples of the “continuous longevity” of Lugos survivors are shown in *Figure 1* through *Figure 3*. See also a postal stationery card (*Figure 4*) cancelled by an Arad survivor in 1922, which is, by contrast, a minor “continuous longevity.” This late date is unusual; the use of survivors peters out almost totally, and in almost all locations, by 1920–1921. If this Arad cancel is extraordinary, Lugos is (by inflationary jargon) hyper-extraordinary. I also have a handful or so Austrian survivor (German-excised) cancels on Polish entires, 1919–1930.³ No series is as spectacularly elongated as the Hungarian-survivor series in Lugo. Why here and not elsewhere? Why here at all?

Post-WWI poverty (e.g., no funds for replacement cancellers) doesn’t explain the singularity of the Lugos-Lugo case. Besides, Lugo had a supply of new, indigenous cancellers that were used alongside Hungarian survivors. (After WWI, new Czechoslovakian cancellers were in service at the same time Austrian and Hungarian survivors were still being used.)⁴ It is irrelevant whether Lugos had had a Magyar majority. (It did not.) One possibility is that an irredentist, extended, transgenerational Magyar family made up the core personnel in the Lugos/Lugo fõposta. Fellow-travelers – to fill out this conspiracy theory – may have been enlisted. The hypothesis has the merit of being rigorously testable, assuming the existence of Romanian postal personnel records.





Figure 1. Top: Lugos 1K survivor used for a receiving strike on a postal stationery card sent internally from Balint (M: Bálinc) on 28 OCT 937, to Lugo (28 OCT 1937). The trip of fourteen km (9 mi) through Timiș County occurred in a day. (The handwritten date, verso, is the 27th.) Bottom: Compare the 1937 Lugo 1K survivor strike with a 1917 pre-Armistice Lugo 1K strike on a (cropped) parcel card, recto, along with its (cropped) verso receiving strike, a Homokos A (R: Mramorac; Sb: Mramorac; Bănság [the Banat]/Temes megye, now in Vojvodina). A two-day trip for 180 km (112 mi).

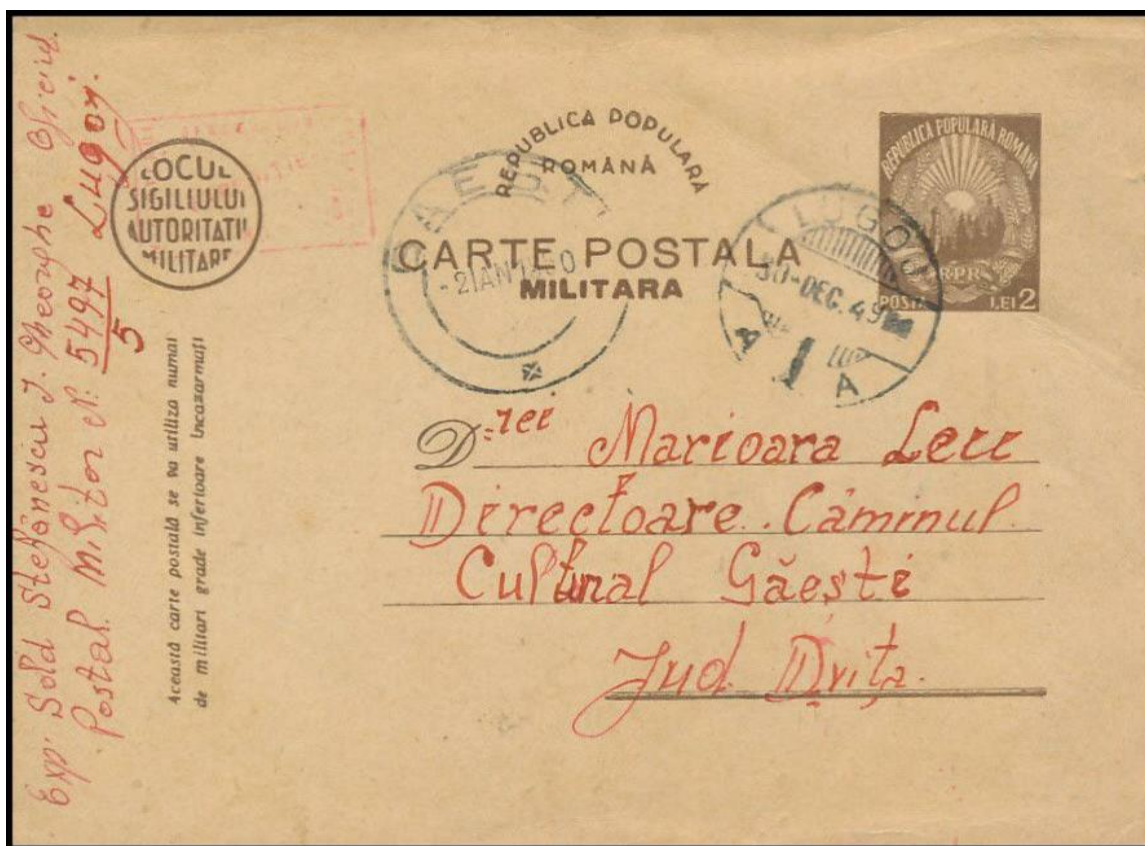


Figure 2. A “Republica Populă Română” 2 Lei military postal stationery card (from the Communist era) cancelled in Lugo by a crownless 1A survivor, left over from the 1912 Magyar Kingdom (oh, the irony), on 30 DEC. [19]49. The card arrived in Găești (Dâmbovița) on 2 IAN [ianuarie] 1950. The distance traveled was 288 km (179 mi.), in 3 days. (See Figure 3 for another Lugo 1A strike.)



Figure 3. A 6 Lei Communist-era postal stationery card sent from Turnu-Severin (Mehedinți), 14 NOV [19]50; a Lugoj receiving strike was applied by the 1A survivor on 15 NOV [1]950. (Numerical digits have replaced two black boxes; contrast the 1A in Figure 2.) Traveled 160 km (99 mi.) in one day. I have seen “noem” and “noiem” as abbreviations for “noiembrie”; maybe “NOE” in all 3 cancels is the “standard [Romanian] postal abbreviation.”⁵



Figure 4. An Arad 2K “K” survivor cancel on a Hungarian stationery card sent 19 MÁR 1922 (note that the date line, rearranged to the Romanian format, retains the Magyar-language month abbreviation) to Lipova (arriving also on the 19th); the towns, both in Arad County are 33 km (21 mi.) apart. The stationery card is a Hungarian survivor as well, passing through the Romanian mail stream three years and four months after the Armistice, i.e., almost two years after Trianon. I doubt that these cards were stocked and sold in Arad in 1922. A possibility: The cards had been purchased in bulk in mid-1918, were soon overprinted once with a commercial return address, and overprinted again after the regime change. On the verso is an invoice template. The fillér spent on the original (now obscured) indicium were wasted.

II. Oroszka: “Interrupted Longevity”

Searching my holdings and some philatelic web sites, I found an impressive number and variety of cancels on loose stamps and entires postmarked (and bearing dates within the Visszatért period) by “P”-style cancellers newly-manufactured for use in the returned towns of the lost territories. (For the “P” cancellers [1938–1946], see **M-VI**, pp. 420–465.) I admired the promptness, quality, and comprehensiveness of their production. However, whenever I spotted a non-decorative, non-celebratory, ordinary Visszatért-period postal cancel, each had the same small circular shape exhibiting a prominent albeit diminutive Crown of St Stephen that was not surrounded by vertical grille lines (*Figures 5, 6*). For what was I searching? I was hunting, unsuccessfully it turned out, for “K” cancellers used in *returned* towns. With increasing annoyance, I uncovered only piles of “P”s, and maybe a few “N” cancels, too. Of course, “K” devices were used *ad libitum* in rump-Hungary, nonreturned towns in the late 1930s and through WWII into the 1950s.⁶ But they’re abundant and relatively uninteresting. A “K” canceller used in a returned town is glamorous.



Figure 5. Two “P” cancels, Crown and no grilles. Top: A Losonc (*Sk*: Lučenec) receiving strike, [19]38 XI 12, made 10 days after the First Vienna Award (November 2). The B canceller is dated 38.XI.4 in **M-VI** (p. 438). Twelve “P” cancellers were made for Losonc. (Someone was optimistic about permanent restoration.) The Budapest 2N strike, 38 XI 9, was made by a “P” canceller dated 38.IV.15 by **M-VI** (p. 455). Bottom: The letter was hand-addressed to “Losoncz,” the spelling of which deviates from the “z”-less orthography of the new canceller.

To be autobiographically accurate: Before I began the fruitless search, I had already stumbled across one “K” canceller which was used in a returned town in a lost territory, viz., Oroszka, the “interrupted longevity” canceller (*Figure 7*). Teased, or seduced, by my discovery, I believed that other “K” cancels would soon appear. Hence my frustration at finding none. I must point out that I *did* find two other returned-town “K” cancels, in the (literally) first place I looked. Searching eBay for (*naturally*) Oroszka itself, I was rewarded with two “Buy It Now” entires bearing “K” cancels: (1) a 1940 strike of another Oroszka B “K” canceller on a cover to Palestine (aztec-collectables [*sic*], \$300), and (2) an incomplete 1942 Oroszka strike on an uprated postal stationery card (krk966, \$25) sent to Perlak.⁷ Both cancels are unmodified, unobliterated.



Figure 6. Three Kolozsvár (R: Cluj) 2A “P” cancels, [19]40 IX 26, struck less than a month after the Second Vienna Award (August 30). The 2A canceller is dated 40.IX.13, two weeks after the Award, by M-VI (p. 460). The letter was sent from the returned Erdély to Zalaszentő (Zala megye), franked with a Small Crown and 2 Romania Carol II.



Figure 7. Parcel card from one Visszatért town, in Prekmurje,⁸ to another returned town, in Slovakia. Left: Recto, cancelled Felsőlendva (Sln: Grad), [19]42 X 23 (indicium), 42 X 24 (stamp). Addressed to the Cukorgyár (sugar factory) in Oroszka (southern Bars; Sk: Oraska, Pohronský Ruskov). The Felsőlendva cancels were made by a new “P.” Right: Three arriving strikes are on the verso, applied by two different Oroszka cancellers: [19]42 X 26 was struck, twice, by a new Oroszka A “P”; 42 OKT 25 was struck by the lost-then-reinstated Oroszka B “K” canceller.

The single “K” Visszatért cancel I possess is on the verso of the *Figure 7* parcel card. Two 1942 arriving strikes were made by the Oroszka A “P” canceller newly-fashioned in 1938 (M-VI, p. 443); the other, larger, strike was made by an unmodified, fully intact (Crown not excised, date line still Magyar, town-name untouched) Oroszka B “K” canceller from 1913 (M-VI, p. 327). The post office in Oroszka had both “K” and “P” cancellers available. The use of the new “P” is unproblematic. But the late use of the Oroszka B “K” canceller is not like the continuous longevity of Lugoj “K” cancellers. Its use was deliberately silenced for the whole period between the two Wars, so it exhibited an “interrupted longevity” that was, in contrast to Lugoj survivors, directly influenced by the political background in which the Post did its business. In what way was the use of the Oroszka B “K” interrupted? It had been hidden away (not liquidated) and later used again.

The phenomenon of hiding away, and then rehabilitating, politically incorrect, prohibited, or useless cancellers was brought to light 50 years ago by Karel Všetečka:

[M]any post offices [in Czechoslovakia, post-WWII] supplemented them [i.e., temporary rubber cancellers] with various improvisations, using the Protectorate or German cancellations after the deletion of their German text. Even the pre-war Czechoslovak cancels *hidden by some postal authorities* after the German occupation [1939] were put to use.⁹

Czech postal workers who were not convinced that the Germans would occupy Prague for very long had good reason to squirrel away cancellers. Let’s try to apply this prescient subversion to the post-WWI Hungary-Slovakia situation: “Soon after WWI, someone who had access to the Hungarian postal apparatus in Slovakia removed and stored away the Oroszka B ‘K’ canceller, while the control of the postal administration was passing from Hungarian to Czechoslovakian personnel. It may have been lifted as a souvenir or, quite differently, protected deliberately (by whom?) in case this thickly Magyar region of Slovakia was reunited with Magyarország. In fact, the Oroszka B ‘K’ canceller which was grabbed and stored around 1920 returned to official status from unofficial status and was excavated and re-activated, robust enough to be used on a parcel card in 1942.”

We may wonder how many “K” cancellers were put safely away in 1920 with foresight about possible re-activation in an indefinite re-Magyarization future. The gap between the Armistice and Trianon may have given hope to some post-office personnel, but more despair than joy prevailed along the borders as reality sunk in. A protected existence for cancellers in the long period between the two Wars is difficult to fathom. Nevertheless, the substance of this narrative is (barely) true.

Figure 8. To the right is my only survivor cancel of an Oroszka “K”-style, struck on a 5h imperforate Hradčany. Because the Crown of St Stephen on this cancel seems to be (or may have been) damaged, in the process of trimming and reducing it to a grille, this “K” may not be the Oroszka “K” used in 1942 (*Figure 7*). The “22” in the date line is likely the day, not year, making the line Hungarian big-endian format.



According to **M-VI** (p. 327), the Oroszka B “K” canceller was originally put in service in 1913; right after WWI it became a survivor (*Figure 8*) fated to be used in Slovakia. (The Czechoslovak **Monograph 16/II**, p. 218, claims that the survivor was used in or to 1920.) Further, according to **M-VI** itself, the canceller was not dead but alive and well, although hidden; it had been *returned to service* in 1939 (**M-VI**, p. 327), nearly two decades after it had disappeared. Where had it been? How did it slide back into service after sleeping for 20 years like Rip Van Winkle? One more step: after its stint as a Magyar canceller in Visszatért Oroszka, the “K” canceller *again* became a survivor in the custody of the post-WWII Czechoslovakian Post (**M-VI**, p. 327). Assembling the whole series of these Oroszka cancels is a worthwhile if daunting task. To further boggle our postal history minds is the fact that the Oroszka A “P” canceller from 1938 was also destined to be used as a survivor in Czechoslovakia (**M-VI**, p. 443). At the end of WWII, Czechoslovakian Oroszka had both Magyar “K” and “P” survivors, a “K” from 1913, “P”s from 1938.¹⁰

I would *here* conclude that the whole story is out of Kafka, Hitchcock, or “The Twilight Zone” – except that there’s one more peculiarity. After my fruitless search for Visszatért “K” cancels (other than Oroszka), I began to suspect that not many Visszatért “K” strikes exist. As mentioned in the captions to *Figure 5* and *Figure 6*, “P” cancellers of returned towns were in service immediately, or nearly so, after the Awards, lessening the need for continuing the service of older “K” cancellers. However, there is a more important reason why not many Visszatért “K” strikes exist. It is not that the “K”s were not used in returned towns because they had been replaced by newly-made “P”s, but “P”s were made for the returned towns because there weren’t any or enough “K”s remaining in lost territories after 1918–1920. Indeed, I found no returned-town “K” cancels, other than Oroszka, exactly because the only town in Visszatért Slovakia which still possessed a “K” canceller was Oroszka. All other “K”s had been liquidated. This Slovakian town uniquely exhibits interrupted longevity the way that Romanian Lugoj uniquely exhibits continuous longevity.



Figure 9. Two cancels struck in a post office in Komárno, a lost-territory Slovakian town on the northern side (left bank) of the Duna. Left: “Komárom” cancel struck by a Hungarian “K” 1G survivor canceller, dated [1]919 MÁJ 8, on a 25h Hradčany. Right: “Komárno” cancel struck by a new indigenous Czechoslovakian device on 11 VII [19]20, employing the local little-endian date format, on a 20h Hradčany.

The evidence goes further than the absence of observations of “K” cancels in returned towns other

than Oroszka. I examined, slowly and tediously, the town-canceller entries in the various “K” sections of **Monograph VI**, focusing on Slovakian towns. Only the entry for Oroszka (p. 327) indicates that a Magyar canceller was rehabilitated and re-installed at any time after WWI; for no other town in returned Slovakia is the appropriate annotation attached.

Some caution is required in understanding the entries for the Komárom “K”s (**M-VI**, p. 351). The town’s bifurcated geography is important. One chunk of the town was on the northern or left bank of the Duna, on the stretch of the river between Bratislava and Esztergom (where it intersects the Váh),¹¹ and was called by the Slovakian name “Komárno,” especially after the Armistice of WWI, when this chunk was located in lost Felvidék territory. To this chunk of the town, Hungarian “K”1, “K”2, and “K”3 devices were bequeathed as survivor cancellers. None of these “K” cancellers (according to **M-VI**) ever again saw the light of day after their survivor internship (see *Figure 9*); none was re-activated, after a period of being sequestered, when north-shore “Komárno” was returned to Hungary during the Visszatért period. Instead, Komárom was supplied with dozens of new “P” cancellers, many of which were, after WWII, left to Czechoslovakia as ... survivors (**M-VI**, p. 460). Celebratory Visszatért covers cancelled “Komárom” were struck with “P” cancellers newly-made for the re-re-named Komárno.

The other chunk of the town, the part that was on the southern or right bank of the Duna, possessed post office #4 cancellers, the “K” 4A through the “K” 4D (**M-VI**, p. 351). This chunk of the town was in rump-Hungary, hence was never lost, was never returned, and (unlike its sister Komárno, but like its long-gone unreturnable cousin Lugos) was not a fitting subject of Visszatért celebration. (Horthy’s horse marched across the river into the cheering left bank town.) Its four “K” cancellers were used continuously, without interruption, in the periods 1918–1947 (4A), 1918–1946 (4B), 1918–1922 (4C, replaced by an “M” canceller), and 1918–1946 (4D). These cancellers were not in any sense survivors, no different from any Budapest “K” canceller used from, say, 1910 until the late 1940s or so, and in no way was their use interrupted.

A hidden-away “K” canceller, ready to be used after Trianon was overturned, cannot be found in Komárno/Komárom, one of the jewels of Magyar Slovakia, although – a mystery of postal history – one existed in the tiny (also Magyar) village Oroszka.

NOTES

1. Soble, “Persistent Survivors in Lugos/Lugoj,” **The News of Hungarian Philately** 45:4 (Oct.–Dec., 2014), pp. 10–19; “Wounded but Persistent Magyar Survivors in Lugoj,” **Philatelica** (2018/2), pp. 9–16. For background information about survivor cancellers, see Soble, “Obliterations and Their Absence (Part 4),” **The News of Hungarian Philately** 41:4 (Oct.–Dec., 2010), pp. 3–24; “Obliterations and Their Absence (Part 6),” **The News of Hungarian Philately** 42:2 (April–June, 2011), pp. 14–37; and “Post-Trianon Hungarian Survivors in the Successor States,” **The News of Hungarian Philately** 43:1 (Jan.–Mar., 2012), pp. 14–29.

2. Lists of Lugos cancellers, details about them (e.g., dates of use), and illustrations of cancellation styles can be found in **Monograph VI** (Kostyán Ákos), pp. 123, 219, 264, 322, and, for the “K”1 cancellers, 351.

3. Right: A philatelic *joile laide*, a multiply-uprated postal stationery card sent registered from Kraków, Poland, to New York. The cancel is an obliterated Austrian-Hapsburg (Galician) survivor canceller. (“Krakau” has been excised from the top arc.) Below: Close-ups of two adjacent cancels display the 29.VII.26 date in little-endian format.



4. “Post-Trianon Hungarian Survivors in the Successor States.”

5. Cs. Kohalmi, “Indication of the Month in Hungarian Postal Cancellers,” **The News of Hungarian Philately** 49:2 (April–June, 2018), pp. 20–25; Soble, “Notes on Hungarian Postal Orthography,” **The News of Hungarian Philately** 49:3 (July–Sep., 2018), pp. 21–27.

6. Two messy but readable 942 SEP 12 “K” cancels, Jászapáti D (in Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok):



7. Soble, “Perlak-Prelog,” **The News of Hungarian Philately** 49:2 (April–June, 2018), pp. 12–16.

8. J. Sevenhuijsen and H. Buitenkamp, “Cancels Used in Prekmurje 1919–1921,” **The News of Hungarian Philately** 45:4 (Oct.–Dec., 2014).

9. “Postal Cancellations and the Language Question in the Czech Lands,” **Czechoslovakian Specialist** XXXI, no. 291 (March 1969), at p. 37 (trans. Ladislav H. Vydra), discussed in Soble, “Obliterations and Their Absence (Part 4),” p. 24, note 61. For the putting away and re-activation, 20 years later, of a “cenzura” handstamp, see p. 34 in Soble, “Notes on Einstein and Miskolcz,” **The News of Hungarian Philately** 46:4 (Oct.–Dec., 2015), pp. 31–35.

10. In **M-VI**, the letter “C” is employed to indicate that a specific canceller was passed on to Czechoslovakia as a survivor. (“R” for Romania, “H” for Croatia [Hrvatska], and so forth.) These “C,” etc., survivors were

routinely used for several years after the Armistice of WWI. The same “C” mark was used in **M-VI** to indicate that “P” cancellers which were newly-fashioned in 1938 to be utilized in the post offices of the Visszatért (returned) towns of Slovakia were also passed on, after WWII, to Czechoslovakia as survivors. For example (other than Oroszka), see the “C” with the Érsekújvár “P 2C” canceller (**M-IV**, p. 459). I submit that a search for actual cancels struck by Hungarian “K” and “P” surviving cancellers on Czechoslovakian stamps after WWII will yield nothing. During months after the end of WWI, no cancellers existed in the post offices of the new country Czechoslovakia except Hungarian and Austrian survivors. Simply, indigenous cancellers had not yet been manufactured. Hence survivor cancels on the Hradčany abound. By contrast, at the end of WWII Czechoslovakian post offices had access to an abundant supply of (indigenous or modifiable) cancellers; there was no need to resort to the cancellers of an occupying nation, even if available.

11. Soble, “Vágújhely,” **The News of Hungarian Philately** 43:2 (April–June, 2012), pp. 17–26.