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### [WWI Russian Propagandist Broadside: 'The Air War. - The Feats of Pegu'] *Voina v vozdukhe. - Podvig Pegu.*

**Stock#:** 37962  
**Map Maker:** Sytin  
**Date:** 1914  
**Place:** Moscow  
**Color:** Color  
**Condition:** VG+  
**Size:** 20.5 x 14.5 inches  
**Price:** \$ 975.00



#### Description:

***A Rare Russian World War I Propagandist 'Lubok' broadside, celebrating the feats of French fighter ace Adolphe Célestin Pégoud, printed in Moscow by Ivan Stylin.***

This amazing Russian WWI broadside shows the French fighter ace Adolphe Célestin Pégoud, known simply as "Pegu" to most Russians, mounting a successful aerial attack from his biplane against a German military rail convoy, with wounded German troops in the foreground. The gory but vibrant scene was meant to be part of a popular propaganda campaign celebrating the victories and feats of Russians and their English and French allies in their epic contest against the Germans, Austrians and Turks.

Adolphe Célestin Pégoud (1889-1915) was one of the World's first fighter aces, and a popular hero in Russia due to his close friendship with the premier Russian fighter ace, Pyotr Nesterov (1887-1914). Nesterov was famously the first pilot to make a loop with an airplane (on September 9, 1913), a feat shortly duplicated by Pegoud. When the Western press credited Pegoud for inventing the maneuver, the pilot declined the honor, giving credit to Nesterov. Pegoud visited Russia in 1914, and became close friends with Nesterov. Both pilots were the founders of the modern field of aerobatics.

After World War I broke out in late July 1914, Russians closely followed the daring exploits of both pilots. Unfortunately, Nesterov was killed performing his "ramming technique" on an Austrian plane near Lviv, Galicia on September 8, 1914. After scoring many hits, Pegoud was himself killed on August 31, 1915, ironically shot down by a German pilot whom he had once taught to fly. Their deaths made both Nesterov and Pegoud the first martyrs of air warfare, and their reputations survived them for decades.



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The present print is from the Russian genre of broadsides, called *lubok* (plural: *lubki*). The first *lubki* appeared in the late 17th Century and were meant to be easily reproduced, cheap prints that could be affordable to Russian peasants. It was the first printed medium to gain a mass audience in Russia, a country where illiteracy was high and conveying messages through pictorial means was most effective. While many *lubki* dealt with religious matters and folklore, the *voennyyi lubok*, or war *lubok* emerged a popular propagandist medium. The first known war *lubok* was made during the Seven Years' War in 1759 and is a crude scene of a Cossack beating up a Prussian grenadier. The basics of the motif were established, showing brave and noble Russians thrashing rapacious, evil foreigners. The medium became widely popular after Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812. Due to the creeping effect of hidden satire and double entendres against the Russian government, *lubki* with political and war themes were banned for a time from 1851. However, after a hiatus, the genre was revived during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5). Russia's involvement in World War I, which lasted from 1914 to 1917, was a propagandist's dream, as it pitted Russia against all three of its ancient enemies at once - Prussia (Germany), Austria and Turkey.

In the present *lubok* one can see a modernization of the established crude patriotic theme. As Russia was highly self-conscious that it was seen by the Germans and the Austrians (let alone Russia's allies) as technologically primitive, its propaganda aimed to show that the opposite was true. Many war *lubok* thus explicitly aimed to showcase Russians using high technology to defeat their opponents - the Germans in particular. As World War I was the first conflict to feature aviation, it has been said that the old theme of "the brave and clever Cossack was combined with technology and taken into the air" (Jahn, p.20). While Pegoud was French, his heroic status as a friend of Russia, made him an acceptable stand-in for a Russian ace.

The present *lubok* was printed by Ivan Demitrievich Sytin (1851-1934), whose printing firm, Sytin & Co. (founded 1883), was by far the largest Russian publishing house in the decades leading up to the 1917 Revolution. It is estimated that as much as 25% of material printed in Russia during this time came from Sytin's presses in Moscow's Zamoskvorechye District. Sytin specialized in creating visually attractive and well designed, but extremely cheap lithographed books and prints which were easily affordable by the masses. He started out printing almanac-type calendars, but soon progressed into issuing affordable editions of Russian literary masterpieces, such as the works of Pushkin, Gogol and Tolstoy. Tolstoy even formed a business and marketing alliance with the printer. One could buy an entire novel for 90 Kopecks (less than 50 U.S. cents). He also printed monumental encyclopedias, textbooks, newspapers and Russian language editions of foreign books.

Sytin was also the most important publisher of *lubki* in the early 20th Century, and he hired large teams of artists to create literally thousands of different issues. The output was so prolific that *lubki*, in general,



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were commonly referred to as 'Sytinskie'. Maxim Gorky referred to Sytin as the de facto "minister of people's education" whose calendars and leaflets "cut down at least by half the number of relapses into illiteracy".

The present lubok, printed in the early days of World War I, is a pioneering example of the air war lubok theme. While Sytin likely issued many examples of this broadside, lubki were considered to be ephemera and, like newspapers, were regularly discarded after a short time. Their survival rate is extremely low, and this lubok is now very rare. We are aware of an example at the Stanford University's Hoover Institution and a copy at the British Library, but are not aware any other examples appearing on the market.

**Detailed Condition:**

Chromolithographed 'lubok' broadside.