

## **SOMETHING NEW AND TOPICAL**

By Rod Starling

In the December 2010 issue of CTD, our editor, Judy Dawson, indicated her appreciation for articles that are "new and topical". In that spirit, or perhaps I should say under cover of that invitation, I shall risk extolling the virtues of yet another facsimile deck but this one, I am confident, will surely find wide appeal amongst the membership. Let me set the stage.

In 1918, Piatnik of Austria published a deck titled *Soldaten Tarock*. It was a propaganda deck emphasizing Germany's successes in World War I that was waged from August 1, 1914 to November 18, 1918. It must have been a last gasp effort to boost morale because Germany lost the war in the very year that this deck was published. The original 1918 deck is extremely rare and when Stuart Kaplan, the proprietor of U.S. Games, Inc. and author of the three volume *Encyclopedia of Tarot*, auctioned his playing card collection, an original of this deck in "slightly worn" condition sold at Christie's, New York on June 21, 2006 for \$1,680.00!

The deck appeals to card collectors and to those interested in military history. The twenty-one numbered major tarot cards are all dedicated to battle-field scenes, military camp life, air and sea encounters and a few German military commanders. Of particular interest is Tarot XXI that pictures a German submarine sailing victoriously into New York Harbor with the German flag flying over the Stars and Stripes of the United States of America! That single card, all by itself, makes the deck an outstanding collectible item. The deck is French-suited and the court cards are representational.

Piatnik has just re-issued the deck and except for a couple of minor differences that I will describe, it is just about identical to the original. As I have often pointed out in previous articles dealing with facsimiles, they are usually easily distinguished from the originals by either having different back designs and/or being larger or smaller. In this case, the back design is the same as the original, having an overall pattern with a center monogram of the German Iron Cross and the Latin motto *Vita et Sangvinem* (With Life and Blood"). The size is also the same as the original. The differences, such as they are, would be discernable as the original deck was produced by the chromolithographic process while the re-issue utilizes today's modern printing methods. The only two other differences are found on the Ace of Hearts. The original carried a tax stamp, the re-issue does not but what it does carry

in very small print is Piatnik's website address! Slight as these differences are, they preserve the integrity of the original edition of the deck. The quality of the stock in the re-issue is excellent. I have no way of knowing what the stock was like for the original but I have Piatnik Tarock decks pre-dating 1918 and the stock used is as excellent as this re-issue. Piatnik has always used the highest quality stock and I imagine that the original edition of this deck was no exception.

I mentioned that the court cards are representational. The Kings stand as follows: Diamonds - Germany; Hearts - Austria-Hungary; Spades - Turkey and Clubs - Bulgaria. The Queens represent women devoted to war related charity and social work as follows: Spades - a messenger of love; Hearts - a volunteer nurse; Clubs - a fashionably dressed woman collecting money for the wounded and Diamonds - a wealthy woman donating gold and jewelry to buy iron for weapons. The Cavaliers represent mounted officers while the Jacks represent the various soldiers and sailors. Of course, the captions on the cards are all in German as is the explanation card included with the deck.

I am showing some of the Tarot cards including of course, number XXI, but the court cards are so beautifully colored that I am showing all of them subject to space constrictions that may be imposed by our good editor. Should she find it necessary to reduce the number of cards that can be shown, I will leave it to her good judgment to select those that can be shown. In either event, they should be viewed on the club website where they will be seen in full color.

I know that I have carried on ad nauseum about facsimiles but I think that you will agree that this re-issue is particularly outstanding and will probably be sought after by most card collectors.

*Editor's Note; Thanks very much, Rod, How can I really thank you adequately for your wonderful articles. What a stunning deck and in such glorious colors! There seem to be shades of pink, mauve, orange, blue, green, brown, yellow, red, grey and variations of each. Check these out on the website.*

*Rod has a strong interest in the best-of-the best reproductions and as this one is so historical in its details, it would be a great one to add to any collection especially if war cards interest you. Note that the Queens have descriptive comments on each card but none of the male cards is named or described. It seems we women are becoming more important on playing cards and everywhere else!!*



