

THE AIR MAIL STAMPS OF THE UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA

By Andre du Plessis (Pretoria Philatelic Society)

The Union of South Africa issued three sets of Air Mail stamps. The first set was issued in 1925, the second in 1929 and the third in 1936/37.

1925 EXPERIMENTAL AIR MAIL SERVICE

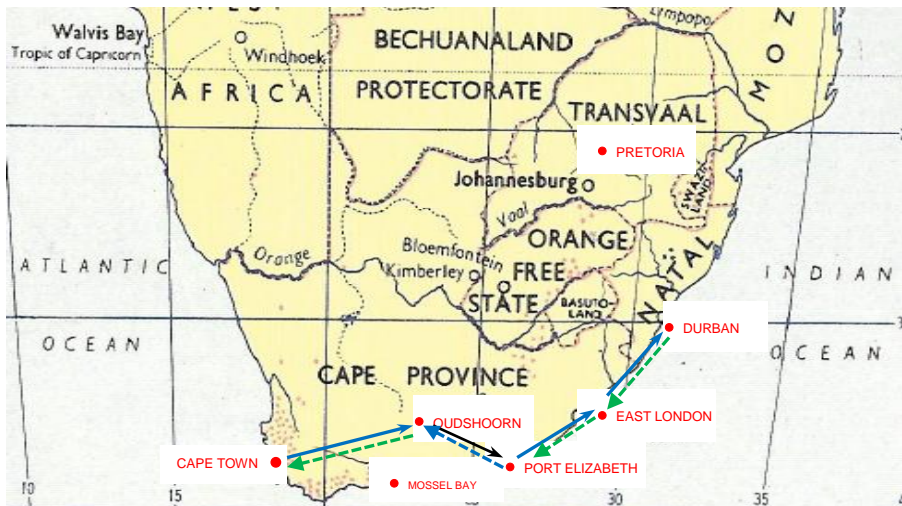
In 1923 parliament passed the Union Aviation Act to control aviation and to encourage flying in South Africa.

A Civil Air Board (CAB) was established in an advisory capacity to the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs. The CAB proposed a three-month trial Air Mail service between Pretoria and Cape Town to commence on the 1st January 1924. The service was unfortunately postponed due to financial restraint.

Early 1925 the Union Government decided to institute a three-month experimental Air Mail service between Cape Town and Durban from 2 March 1925. This was partly to prove the reliability and advantages of air transport.

It would also ascertain to what extent the public would support such service and to obtain information regarding civil aviation in South Africa.

The South African Air Force was assigned responsibility for the organisation and operation of the service.



The service operated with weekly flights in each direction in conjunction with the arrival (Mondays) and departure (Fridays) of the Union Castle mail ships in Cape Town, operated by the Union Castle Line under contract from the South African Government to carry mail.

On conclusion of the First World War, the British Government donated surplus aircraft (De Havilland 9's) plus spares and sufficient equipment to provide the nucleus of a fledgling Air Force to each of its Dominions, known as the Imperial gift.

On the 16th January 1925, the SA Air Force was instructed to make the necessary preparations to run the service.

Eleven Air Force DH 9 air planes were assigned to the experimental Air Mail service.



DE HAVILLAND 9
Fitted with one 230h.p. Siddeley Puma engine

9th Feb., 1925. *Post Office Circular*. No. 346.

AIR MAILS.

CAPETOWN - - DURBAN
DURBAN - - CAPETOWN

CALLING AT

MOSSEL BAY, PORT ELIZABETH, EAST LONDON.

An Air Mail Service from Capetown to Durban on Mondays, and Durban to Capetown on Fridays, will be inaugurated on the 2nd March, 1925. Towns from and to which mails will be carried are Capetown, Mossel Bay, Port Elizabeth, East London, and Durban. Correspondence may also be included for places served through these points.

The British Post Office was informed of the service and arrangements for the acceptance of incoming mail to be flown from Cape Town

Under command of Maj. H Meintjies the SA Airforce pilots selected for the service were: Capt. H C Daniel, Lieut. L Tasker, Lieut. H P Schoeman, Capt. Hamman, Lieut. Burger, Lieut. L Hiscock, Lieut. R F Caspareuthus, Capt C W Meredith, Lieut. Joubert, Lieut. Roos, Lieut. Hattersley, Capt. Venter, Lieut. Bentley.

A dress rehearsal took place on Friday 23 February 1925 when three DH 9 planes left Durban at 05:00 inter alia carrying 6 bags of dummy mail and no official mail.

FIRST THROUGH FLIGHT WITH MAILS

Graphic Story by Union's Pioneer Air Passenger.

BREAKFAST IN DURBAN AND DINNER IN CAPE TOWN.

The Union's first Air Mail route has been blazed!

Yesterday the first machines to pioneer the regular by-weekly coast service left Durban. Two of them carried dummy mails, and the third carried as passenger a Special Correspondent of the "Cape Times," who had the exclusive privilege of making the first through flight from Durban to Cape Town in a single day.

"Mails" and passenger were thrice transferred to relay machines en route, and at 4.45—an hour and a quarter over the scheduled time—a safe arrival was made at Wynberg aerodrome.

Our Correspondent brought with him special messages of greeting and congratulation, which had been entrusted to him by the Mayors of Durban, East London and Port Elizabeth for delivery to the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, the Administrator of the Cape, and the Mayor of Cape Town. These messages, which we reproduce in other columns, are not only the first to be carried by air from the east coast towns to the gateway of the Union, but the first to be delivered between these distant points in a single day.

As a further example of the manner in which the airplane bridges the great gulf of time which separates the chief towns of the Union we also reproduce on this page to-day a photograph taken at Port Elizabeth during the five minutes halt made there yesterday while the "Cape Times" representative was changing machines.

The trial run was carried out without a hitch, and in the graphic narrative we print below the Union's first air-mail passenger tells how it was safely accomplished.

Paper cutting dated 24 February 1925 from The Cape Times newspaper in Cape Town reporting on the rehearsal flight.

TIME TABLE.

| | |
|-------------------------------|------------|
| Left Durban | 5 a.m. |
| Arrived East London | 8.55 a.m. |
| Left East London | 9 a.m. |
| Arrived Port Elizabeth | 11.5 a.m. |
| Left Port Elizabeth | 11.12 a.m. |
| Arrived Mossel Bay | 2.2 p.m. |
| Left Mossel Bay | 2.10 p.m. |
| Arrived at Wynberg | 4.40 p.m. |

WEATHER CONDITIONS.

Take-off at Durban was excellent and in good conditions, which continued passing Port Shepstone and Port St. John. Towards East London there was cross wind, but the going was good near Port Elizabeth. Then mist and heavy head winds to Mossel Bay and low-lying clouds, which continued to Gordon's Bay. South-east wind inclined to make final landing difficult.

Mail carried on the experimental service received an additional special SA Air Mail date stamp and orange Air Mail labels.



Examples of the two SA Air Mail date stamps. The cachet on the left being used at all the Air Mail stations. The one on the right was a re-issue and used in Durban only.

The Air label was conflicting with the International regulations of blue labels inscribed in English and French.

PUBLICITY

To promote the service, "AIR MAIL SAVES TIME / LUGPOS BESPAAR TYD" slogan machine postmarks were put into use at Durban and Cape Town on 18 February 1925.





Two types were used in Cape Town and one in Durban.

The advertising slogan was mainly applied to non-air correspondence, but occasionally it was applied to Air Mail Letters as well.

Covers bearing the slogan postmark and Air Mail cachet of the 2nd March 1925 – the day of the inauguration of the service – are scarce.

This slogan postmarks were also used in Johannesburg in 1929 with the introduction of the regular Air Service by Union Airways.

1925 STAMPS

Four AIR POST/LUGPOS stamps were specially printed for the experimental Air Mail service by the Cape Times Ltd. in Cape Town using a photo-lithographic offset process.



Design is a De Havilland 9 (DH 9) Biplane in flight, printed on soft wove unwater marked paper in sheets consisting of upper and lower panes.

The stamps were designed by F W Mullins an Architect at PWD and engraved for printing by Arthur Cooper from the Cape Times Ltd.

Stamps were placed on sale from 26 February 1925 and were available in areas served by the service, General Post Offices in Pretoria and Johannesburg as well as at the High Commissioner's Office in London.

Sale of stamps were discontinued at the end of June 1925 except in Pretoria where it was continued until 31 October 1925. Plates were destroyed immediately.

All unsold stamps were officially destroyed on 5 December 1925.

The following is the official numbers printed and sold:

| | 1d | 3d | 6d | 9d |
|---------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Numbers of stamps printed | 210 000 | 210 000 | 147 000 | 110 040 |
| Number of stamps sold | 65 269 | 75 500 | 53 415 | 27 642 |

PRINTING

Photo-lithographic offset process is a printing technique in which the inked image is transferred (or "offset") from a metal plate to a rubber blanket or rollers and then to the printing surface.

When used in combination with the lithographic process, which is based on the repelling of oil by water, the offset technique employs a flat image carrier on which the image to be printed obtains ink from ink rollers, while the non-printing area attracts a water-based film (called "fountain solution"), keeping the non-printing areas ink-free. Pages are separated and trimmed afterwards.

Stamps were printed in upper and lower panes of 60 stamps.



Each pane comprising six horizontal rows of ten stamps separated by a horizontal gutter of 15mm.

Perforation was performed by an ordinary treadle perforating machine which had only a single row of perforating pins with perforation gauge 12 x 12.

These stamps were only valid for prepayment of the Airmail portion at the following rate:

| | | |
|-------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Post Cards: | Inland – 1d each | Overseas – 3d each |
| Letters: | Inland – 3d per oz. | Overseas – 6d per oz. |
| Parcels: | Inland – 6d per oz. | Overseas – 9d per oz. |

Note: Articles carried had to bear ordinary stamps as well for normal Postage (together with the Air Mail rate).

Standard rate for surface delivery:

| | INLAND | COMMONWEALTH | FOREIGN |
|------------|------------|--------------|----------------|
| Post Cards | 1d each | 1½d each | 1½d each |
| Letters | 2d per oz. | 2d per oz. | 3d first ½ oz. |

CONTROLS

No Cylinder Control numbers or marginal arrows were printed on any of the sheets. A larger replica of the value tablet, indicating the denomination, was printed on a disc in a similar colour as the stamp on each sheet.

This disc was positioned halfway along the top and bottom margins as well as in the middle of the right-hand margin.

The perforation runs through the discs, except for the 6d where the top disc was positioned above the 6th stamp.

The stamps were available in areas served by the new service and General Post Offices in Pretoria and Johannesburg as well as at the SA High Commissioner's Office in London.

PROOFS

Three types were constructed: (1) Black and white prints without values from engraver's master design.



Courtesy: Spink



Courtesy: Spink



(2) The four values were printed in the form of a proof sheet of four on unwatermarked, gummed paper. Each block was printed in the following colours: Magenta, Blue, Violet, Vermillion and Green.

(3) Black and white prints (with values) of all four denominations were also printed.



Courtesy: Spink



Courtesy: Spink

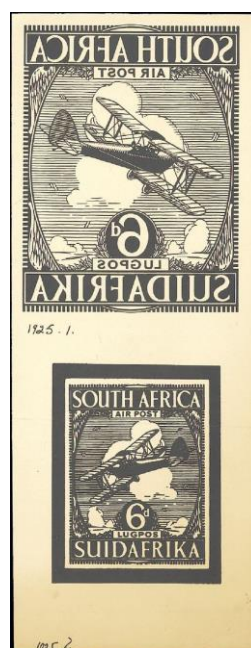
MISAPPROPRIATION

Great care was taken to prevent printers' waste etc. coming into the hands of the public. Two items however were surreptitiously obtained and circulated.

In June 1925, a piece of paper showing the impression of **TWELVE (12)** of the 1d stamps in imperforate condition was bought by a Cape Town dealer from a youth stating he obtained it amongst some waste.

The block was cut up into single stamps and sold as imperforate's.

Despite the bad condition, it reposes in Union collections.



Courtesy: Spink

ESSAY:

Unaccepted Engraver's master design. Three sets of these designs found their way into the hands of collectors.

Numbered "1925 /1" and "1925 /2" in black ink.

FORGERIES

Forgeries of these stamps appeared on the market in Europe from 1953. Four distinctly different printings have been identified.

Perforations are of a different gauge being 11, 11½ or 13.

Together with the difference in paper, differences in the design and the colours, forgeries can be easily detected. One of the most significant differences is the colour of the gum that is smooth and clear, opposite to the originals.

The forged stamps also show differences in the presentation of the design as well – poorly printed, the colours look faded and or brighter compared to the genuine stamps.

1929 UNION AIRWAYS

The government fulfilled its promise and obtained information regarding civil aviation in South Africa and viability of an Air Mail service. Although it was indicated that new proposals would be considered, Government unfortunately did not encourage nor support civil aviation on a commercial basis in the years following 1925.

However, in 1929 an agreement was entered between Government and Maj. A M Miller, on behalf of Union Airways (Pty) Ltd, to establish an Air Mail and passenger service between Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. Routes would be extended from Port Elizabeth to Durban via East London and to Johannesburg via Bloemfontein.

The agreement provided the service to be run weekly in each direction in conjunction with the Union Castle Line mail ships.

To conduct the service and to do chartered flights, five DH Gipsy Moth airplanes were imported. The pilots selected by Maj. Miller to assist him was GW Bellin, RF Caspareuthus and WF Davenport.

The British Post Office was again advised of the developments.

The inaugural flight take place on Monday 26 August 1929 from Cape Town to Port Elizabeth.



1929 STAMPS

These stamps marked the inauguration of a regular Air Mail Service by the Union Airways from 26 August 1929. Two denominations were issued and placed on sale from 21 August 1929.

The design is a sideview drawing of a De Havilland D.H. 60 Cirrus Moth in flight against the background of Table Mountain, Cape Town.



As was the case with the first Air Mail issue, the stamps were valid for pre-payment of the Air Mail portion only. Items sent via Air Mail also needed additional franking for surface delivery.

Early 1932 it was announced that with effect 27 January 1932, the Air Mail rate within the Union would become an inclusive fee of 4d per half-ounce. Further that Air Mail stamps would be valid for all postage requirements, including the prepayment of parcels and registration fees.

PRINTING

Typograph printing is a hot metal typesetting system used in letterpress printing. The device casts bars, or slugs of type, out of hot metal primarily consisting of lead. These slugs are used for the actual printing. The system uses molds, known as matrices, which are hand-set into a special composing stick.

Once a line has been completed, the composing stick is inserted into the Ludlow machine, which clamps it firmly in place above the mold. After printing is completed, the slugs are melted down and recycled on the spot.

Stamps were printed by the Government Printing Works, Pretoria using a typographic printing process, perforated 14 x 13½ with no watermark.

Sheets were fed into the single comb perforating appliance at their left-hand margin, which is not perforated through. The top and right hand ones are perforated through.

Stamps were printed in sheets with an upper and lower pane of 60 stamps each (6 rows by 10 columns), with no cylinder control numbers, marginal arrows or sheet numbers.

The upper and lower panes were separated with a 13,5-mm gutter.



The stamps remained on sale until March 1933 when supplies became exhausted.

ESSAY

The artwork of a proposed design for a stamp as submitted by the artist. Some essays are provided photographically, whilst others could be drawn in pencil or ink or are painted.

Most essays are rejected. (One becomes the essay for the accepted design, with the stamp sometimes different from the essay).

Two slightly different essays for a 6d denomination in black on stout, surfaced paper, each measuring 103 x 82mm. Small differences in the background and side ornamentation as well as the landscape and numbered "1929 /1" and "1929 /2" in black ink.

According to Hagger (page 20) drawings purporting to be rejected designs for this series have no status.



Courtesy: Spink

DIE PROOFS

In philately a die proof is a printed image pulled directly from the block or master die for an engraved stamp. They are typically attached to a larger sheet or card. Once the die is completed, it is transferred multiple times to the plate from which the stamps are printed.



Courtesy: Spink

1/- Die proofs 5,35mm x 4,3 mm in black printed on glazed card (affixed to a piece of paper). It is accepted that this was the master design used to produce the printing plate.

These are also described and known as the so called "Paste-Up's".

Extremely rare.

PLATE PROOFS

Plate proofs are made from the above (Die proof). To attain the status of a proof, a proposed design (or essay) must be the same as the issued stamp for which it was submitted.



60 stamps (one sheet) of each value are known to exist. The sheets were cut up and sold to collectors.

COLOUR TRIALS

Five different colour trials were specially run for submission to the postal authorities. These were made from the actual plates that had been prepared for the printing of the sheets of the 1/- stamp.

One full sheet of each colour was printed and should have been destroyed upon their return to the Government Printing Works, but were surreptitiously obtained and circulated.



Bright rose



Scarlet



Orange-yellow

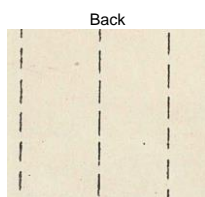


Orange

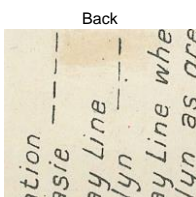


Orange-vermillion

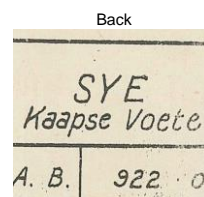
It was printed on the back of obsolete Government land charts, imperforated, un-watermarked and un-gummed.



Back



Back



Back

The three images are examples of the back of the colour trials.

THE 1½d STAMP of 1937

Under the Empire Air Mail Scheme all first-class mail was to be conveyed over the Empire air routes at a rate of 1½d per half ounce.

Upon the operation of the Empire Flying Boat service in 1937 the Postal authorities decided to prepare a special 1½d stamp to meet the demand for such denomination.

The design is symbolic of the gold mining industry in South Africa and depict the headgear and dump of a gold mine against a golden background. Two air liners, an Imperial Airways "Atalanta" class and a South African Airways Junkers flying in the background over the skyscrapers of Johannesburg. The dark green border of the design incorporates two small winged springboks, incidentally the emblem of the then South African Airways.



PRINTING

Printed by the Government Printer, Pretoria using a rotogravure printing process.

In rotogravure printing a photographic glass plate is used in the production of the printing plate which is known as the multipositive.

Stamps were printed alternately in Afrikaans and English in sheets of 120 (20 rows by 6 columns) on multiple Springbok head watermarked paper.

Perforation 14.



Although the words Air Mail do not appear on the stamps, it was primarily intended as an Air Mail stamp.

This issue was envisioned for the Empire Air Mail Scheme. All first-class mail would be conveyed over the chain of Empire Air Routes at 1½d per ½ oz unit. This was introduced on 1 July 1937 and remained in force until the war broke out in September 1939.

The intention was that all postal items franked with these stamps was to be automatically forwarded by air doing away with affixing air mail labels to items addressed to any part of the British Empire.

Stamps were unexpectedly released and placed on sale on 12 November 1936.

| AIRMAIL RATES – EMPIRE AIR ROUTES | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------|------------------|----------|-----------------|----------|-----------------|--------|-----------------|--------|
| 1.7.1937 | 1½/5 oz | 7.11.1939 | 1½d/½oz | 1.4.1943 | 2½d/oz | 1.5.1947 | 1½d/oz | 1.4.1950 | 2d/oz |
| Foreign | + ½/oz | Foreign | + ½/½ oz | Foreign | + ½/½ oz | Foreign | +½/ oz | Foreign | + ½/oz |

These stamps were on sale up to April 1948. It appeared at various times in three different formats viz Large, Medium and Bantam.

Please note that images are not according to scale.

Acknowledgement

Permission from Spink to publish appropriate images are acknowledged with thanks.

References

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