

The Union Overprints - South West Africa Official Stamps 1926 to 1929

Description of the Exhibit

The issuing of the South West Africa Official Stamps was controlled by the Union of South Africa Postal Authority. How this came about is described in this exhibit. I will show how philatelic planning in the Union applied in parallel to South West Africa. The South West Africa Official stamp set is remarkable in that only 10 stamps were overprinted, 5 Union of SA stamps and 5 SWA stamps, and issued in 27 combinations over a period of 27 years. The overprints were done in both English and Afrikaans.

This exhibit shows all 12 Union stamps overprinted as SWA Official stamps. It also shows most of their many varieties.

The purpose of issuing Official stamps was to prevent unauthorised use and theft. Initially Official stamps were not available to the general public. When, after 18 months, this rule was relaxed, the original purpose could no longer be achieved yet Official stamps continued to be issued until 1952.

Certain stamps shown are very rare: the 1926 2d corner control block (only 10 printed), the 1926 proof page and the 1929 1d inverted watermark in a block of four (with Stanley Gibbons authentication).

The overprint proof panel of the 1926 printing clears up a controversy about how the physical overprinting process took place. This proof panel is rare and its authentication by an accompanying 6d stamp is exceptional.

The use of the same set forme for the 1929 May and the 1929 August overprint is discussed using the 2d stamp as reference. All "missing" dot combinations of the 2d stamps are shown.

Full panels and large blocks of stamps are generally scarce. A full panel and a few large blocks, mint and cancelled, are shown.

The Plan of this 16 Page Exhibit:

The Underlying 5 Stamps

The Three Issues and their varieties -

Overprint on Union Stamps - mint, used and varieties

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 1926 | the 2d control number 2 corner pair
forme proof with authenticating stamp
a visual display of the different forme layouts - Union and SWA |
| 1929 (May) | inverted watermark of 1d in block of four
the printing process
May and August issues compared:
same forme used for both issues
close examination of the missing dots of the 2d stamp |
| 1929 (August) | full pane mint ½d stamp |

Sources:

South African Colour Catalogue 2023/2025

Ralph F Putzel - The Comprehensive Handbook of the Postmarks of German South West Africa / South West Africa / Namibia (1991)

Natie Becker RDPSA - The Overprinted Stamps of South West Africa to 1930

South African Philatelist - 1926 to 1931

Interaction with fellow Dealers and Collectors - especially Glen Carpendale (1939-2019)

The Matheson Collection of Union Officials at Stanley Gibbons, Stanley Gibbons Website

The South West Africa Officials

When Britain declared war on Germany on August 4, 1914 South Africa was committed to take control of German South West Africa. On May 5, 1915 the SADF reached Windhuk. On July 9, 1915 the German forces surrendered to South Africa.

From a philatelic perspective South West Africa would now be administered as a fifth province, whatever happened philatelically in South Africa would be paralleled in South West Africa. When The SA Postal authority issued 3 stamps as part of its definitive set, it was accompanied by SWA overprints. When, on 1 December 1926, South Africa issued a set of overprinted Official stamps it did the same for SWA. The family of stamps is shown below.

The three Union of South Africa definitive stamps



The SWA overprints

Normal - 1926

Transposed - 1927

The SA Officials

The SWA Officials



Union Officials and SWA Officials are regarded as rare

The South West Africa Official 2d Control No 2

The Union of South Africa King's Head stamps were printed on sheets of 480 stamps divided into two panes of 240 stamps each. A panel consisted of 20 rows and 12 columns. Each corner had a control number in the margin. The top two control numbers were found above stamps at r/1 c/2 and c/11. The bottom control numbers were found below the stamps at r20/c2 and c/11. The SWA 2d Officials were overprinted on a sheet of 240 stamps. To accommodate both languages stamps were overprinted in pairs. 1200 pairs were overprinted.

Only 10 of each corner were printed. Any control pair is very rare. The 2d postal rate was the standard postage for a letter. Considering that this issue was not available to the public for the first 18 months and torn up for use by government departments it is estimated that about 60% of the 2d stamps had been used. That any corner controls survived at all is amazing.

The Union 2d Corner block which was the stamp overprinted to give us



the rarest of SWA Official stamps
the 2d Corner pair, shown here mint



The bottom right 2 number is found on
the sheet below the stamp at r20c11

The 1926 SWA OFFICIALS Overprint Essay Proof. (Displayed on next page)

The South African Philatelist in May 1927 reported as follows: *The Postmaster-General informs us that the 1/2d, 1d and 6d pictorial and 2d King's Head stamps overprinted for Official use are in use in S.W. Africa. As these stamps are not sold to the public we have not seen specimens, but Mr J. Ritchie informs us that when he visited the Government Printing Works recently he was shewn the forme used to transform unoverprinted stamps into S.W. African "Officials."* Mr Ritchie says that the whole of the overprint is done at one operation by a special forme.

Mr Ritchie is saying that the stamps were overprinted on un-overprinted stamps, thus overprinted in one operation (both country and official).

Nati Becker in his authoritative book, **The Overprinted Stamps of South West Africa to 1930**, wrote that the overprinting was done "alternatively at the top of the stamp, the words 'South West Africa/Suidwes Afrika' having previously been applied vertically" (Page 201).

The Essay Proof shown on the next page is a full pane of 60 bilingual impressions on laid paper with "OFFICIAL" or "OFFISIEEL" and country name alternating in English or Afrikaans. The overprint was applied to the Officials first issue. A rare and informative proof.

The Essay Proof is conclusive evidence that Mr Ritchie was right and Nati Becker's information incorrect. But it could be a misinterpretation of the information given to Nati Becker. A close examination and comparison of the "South West Africa" and "Suidwes Afrika" overprinting on the Union stamps and the S.W. Africa Officials shows a high probability that the same forme was used, only that the appropriate slugs "OFFICIAL" and "OFFISIEEL" were inserted into the forme. Even to the naked eye a comparison shown here is thought provoking.



The rare 6d stamp variety, issued in December 1926, shown below authenticates the Essay Proof on the next page. The small mark, as indicated, appears on the Essay Proof in r9c6. To be able to make such an authentication is very unusual.



The 1926 South West Africa Official's Overprint Essay Proof

South West	OFFICIAL	Afrika.	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	South West	OFFICIAL	Afrika.	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	South West	OFFICIAL	Afrika.	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL
Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	Afrika.	South West	OFFICIAL	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	Afrika.	South West	OFFICIAL	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	Afrika.	South West	OFFICIAL
South West	OFFICIAL	Afrika.	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	South West	OFFICIAL	Afrika.	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	South West	OFFICIAL	Afrika.	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL
Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	Afrika.	South West	OFFICIAL	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	Afrika.	South West	OFFICIAL	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	Afrika.	South West	OFFICIAL
South West	OFFICIAL	Afrika.	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	South West	OFFICIAL	Afrika.	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	South West	OFFICIAL	Afrika.	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL
Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	Afrika.	South West	OFFICIAL	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	Afrika.	South West	OFFICIAL	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	Afrika.	South West	OFFICIAL
South West	OFFICIAL	Afrika.	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	South West	OFFICIAL	Afrika.	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	South West	OFFICIAL	Afrika.	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL
Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	Afrika.	South West	OFFICIAL	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	Afrika.	South West	OFFICIAL	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	Afrika.	South West	OFFICIAL
South West	OFFICIAL	Afrika.	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	South West	OFFICIAL	Afrika.	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	South West	OFFICIAL	Afrika.	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL
Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	Afrika.	South West	OFFICIAL	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	Afrika.	South West	OFFICIAL	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	Afrika.	South West	OFFICIAL
South West	OFFICIAL	Afrika.	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	South West	OFFICIAL	Afrika.	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	South West	OFFICIAL	Afrika.	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL
Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	Afrika.	South West	OFFICIAL	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	Afrika.	South West	OFFICIAL	Suidwes	OFFISIEEL	Afrika.	South West	OFFICIAL



The First Official Stamps of South West Africa - An Overview

The first SWA Official Stamps were issued on 1 December 1926. The overprints were on the 2d King's Head issued in 1913 (in pairs to accommodate the two languages), and on the ½d (London printing), 1d and 6d (Pretoria printings) all pairs.

There was considerable unhappiness in South West Africa, South Africa and overseas in that no mint stamps were made available to collectors generally and to philatelic dealers specifically. For southern African collectors "used" stamps were difficult to obtain from overseas. The 1926 stamps cancelled, especially pairs, are very rare.

Further in the March 1931 issue the South African Philatelist recorded that "It must be remembered that about half of the first issue was used up for postage by government departments before the stamps were placed on sale to the public."

A set of SWA cancelled Official stamps consisting of the 1/2d stamp, 1d stamp, 2d stamp and 6d stamp is shown below.



A Visual Summary of the SWA OFFICIALS Overprint Formes

Overprint on Union Stamps
All fonts sans-serif

Overprint on SWA Stamps
Except for the first sans-serif
all other fonts are serif



1926

1931



1928 May

1938



1929 August

1945



2d 1929 August

1951

The second issue of South West Africa official stamps came out in May 1929.

The set of 4 stamps consisted of the South Africa Pretoria Printing 1/2d, 1d and 6d stamps together with the March 1927 South Africa 2d stamp. 12 000 pairs of each stamp were overprinted. The lettering was placed horizontally, Official at the top and S.W.A. at the foot of the stamp. Like before the overprint was bilingual, each language on a separate stamp.

In the March 1931 issue the **South African Philatelist** reported as follows: *There is no doubt about the rarity of the first issue. Only ten sheets, each consisting of 120 pairs, were printed. The second issue is also a good set, the total comprising 100 sheets, each 120 pairs, of the 1/2d., 1d. and 6d. values, and 200 sheets, each consisting of 60 pairs, of the 2d. value.*

The mint set



The used set



The Rare 1d Inverted Watermark Official stamp

When the 1929 set of Union stamps was overprinted one sheet of the 1d stamp was incorrectly inserted into the printer resulting in a sheet of stamps with an inverted watermark. These 120 stamp pairs are very rare.

A rare block of four 1d stamps with inverted watermark is shown below



The Stanley Gibbons' confirmation of the above stamps' authenticity is reproduced here



The Overprinting Process - In the Printshop

The Union stamps were printed on sheets of 240 stamps marked horizontal centre with an arrow and vertical centre with a lined cross. The forme for overprinting covered 60 stamps, 10 rows and 6 columns. For overprinting the sheet of stamps was folded horizontally into 10 rows and 12 columns. After printing the left and right panes the sheet was flipped to overprint the other two panes. If by mistake the sheet was flipped incorrectly the overprint would be upside down. If the sheet was reinserted correctly and reprinted the result would be a double overprint as shown here on this 2d Union stamp overprinted SWA. It was certified genuine.



The two samples below show clear signs that they were folded at the arrow marks.



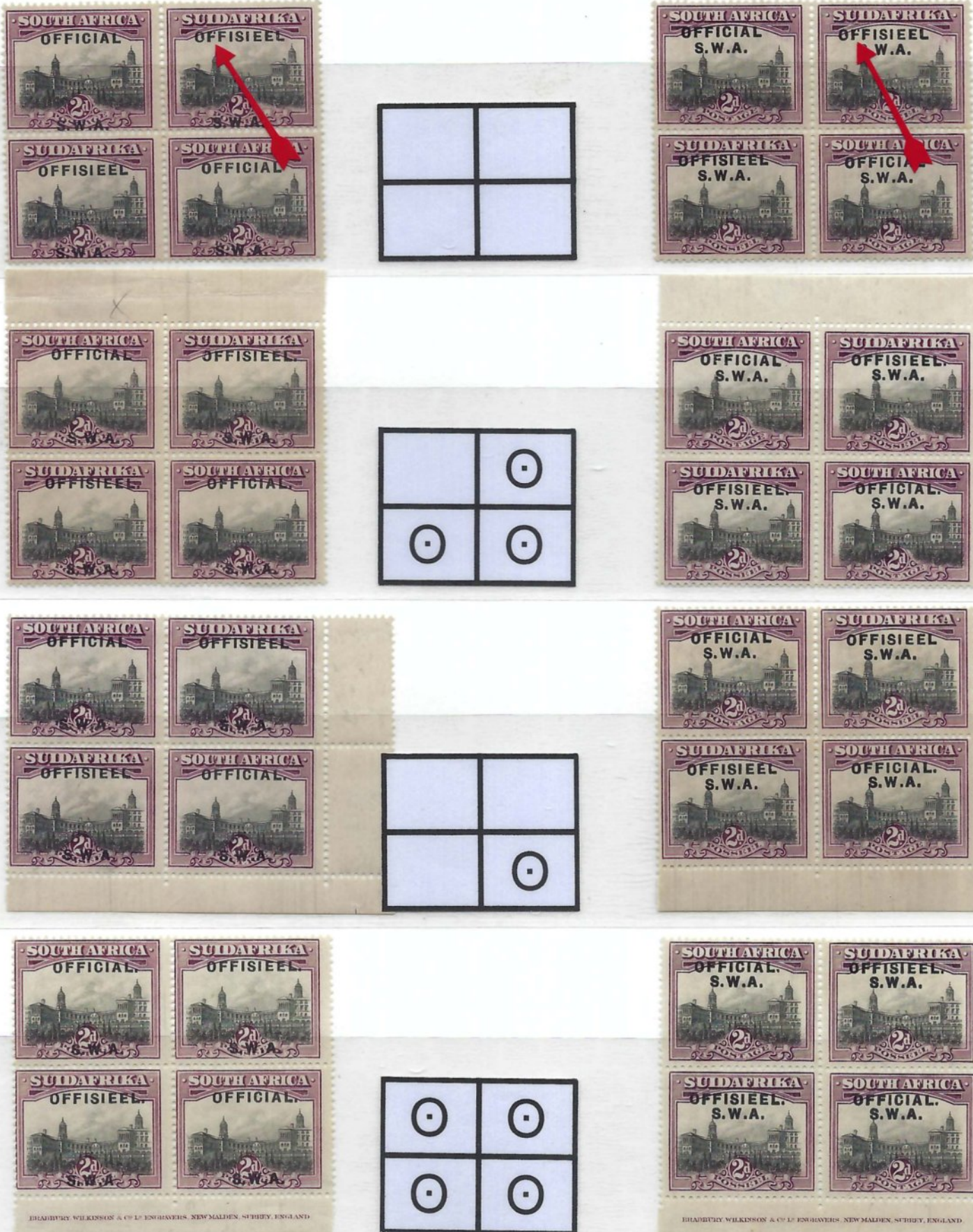
Variants of the 2d Overprint - The same Forme used for both 1929 Overprints

A recent article in the South African Philatelist (February 2026) pointed out that the same forme was used for both the May 1929 and August 1929 2d Official overprints. The proof is based on four overlapping blocks of 4 stamps and an overlapping 6-stamp block. This statement was tested in a simulation of two formes set independently for 60 stamps. The simulation showed that only one overlapping block of four, determined by dots and position, could be expected. An overlap of 4 blocks of four and one of 6 stamps, by dots and position, would give a 99% certainty that the same forme was used in both cases. The evidence is presented below and on the page following.

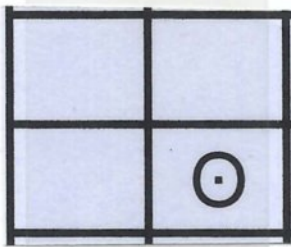
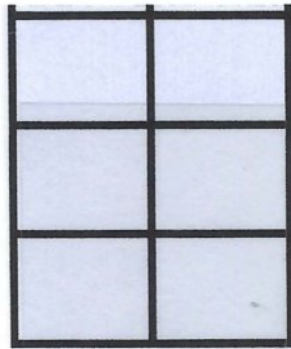
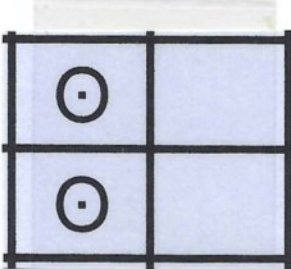
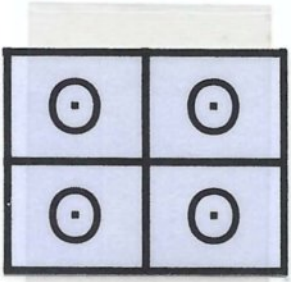
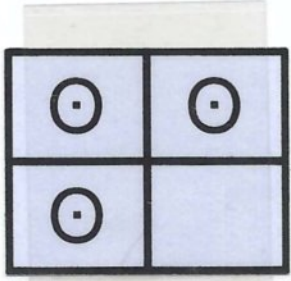
The blocks with dots, present and missing indicated, are shown here:

May 1929 printing

August 1929 printing



Variants of the 2d Overprint
with Dot Indicators



Variants of the 2d Overprint



S.W.A. overprint shifted to the right. The "S" of S.W.A. under the first "I" of OFFISIEEL. r7c4 of right pane only.

Block of 4 on the left and pair at right.



Small stop after OFFICIAL



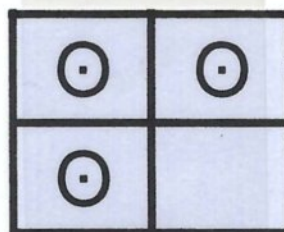
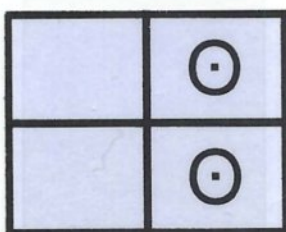
Damaged letter "A" of OFFICIAL - short leg



Broken "O" of OFFISIEEL and dropped OFFICIAL r10c1



Major left shift of "OFFISIEEL" under SUIDAFRIKA



The Third Issue of SWA Officials Overprinted on Union Stamps

The SWA Official issue of May 1929 was reissued in August 1929. The same set of Union stamps was used, the ½d, 1d and 6d with the 2d stamp of March 1927. The lettering is now placed vertically on the stamp except for the 2d stamp where it is still horizontally placed but higher up on the stamp. These features distinguish this issue from the May 1929 issue. Because the same forme was used for overprinting both the May and August issues the missing dots are identical as shown on the previous pages.

Mint

Used



A complete pane of 60 mint halfpenny overprinted stamps is shown on the next page. Both the arrow centre horizontal marking on the left top and the centre vertical line-cross marking bottom right can be clearly seen. This pane comprises r11c1 to r20c6, that is the left bottom quarter of a 240 sheet of stamps. Complete panes are rare.

A Complete Pane of the August 1929 Halfpenny Overprinted Official Stamps



The August 1929 Overprinted Official Stamp Varieties



The "I" is broken in the 2nd "I" of OFFICIAL.
This is recurring and shown in the ½d and 6d issues. It appears in r7c1.



The font is damaged in the "S" of S.W.A. This is recurring and seen in r9c6



The font is damaged in the "A" of S.W.A.
This is recurring and shown in the ½d and 6d issues. It appears in r2c1