

The 1925 Experimental Airmail Service

Background: The purpose of the experiment was to expedite mail between Cape Town and Durban, there being no direct rail link. Flights were scheduled to liaise with the movement of the mail boats from Cape Town.

Scope: The focus is on the flights that operated over the 3½ months of the experiment. Included are the different aspects of the flights and treatment of mail. Much of the material is philatelic.

Treatment: The exhibit is basically chronological.

Challenges: The loads carried after the first flights fell off considerably. There was very little international mail, while 95% of all mail carried was posted by stamp collectors. This means covers for most flights are limited or not available. Thus, material displayed for some flights is in the best condition available. With a dearth of covers for some flights, these are not covered.

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References:

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Friedberg, L. 2021. *The Flying Springbok*. Winchester: Chronos.

Illsley, JW. 2003 *In Southern Skies*. Johannesburg: Jonathon Ball.

Putzel, RF. 1993. *The Postmarks of South Africa*. Private Publication.

Wyndham, LA. 1936. *The Airpost of South Africa*. Cape Town: Private Publication.



Loading mail bags into the open space for passengers.

The 1925 Experimental Airmail Service Rates and Routes



1d
Local postcards



3d
Local letters
Overseas postcards



6d
Overseas letters
Local parcels



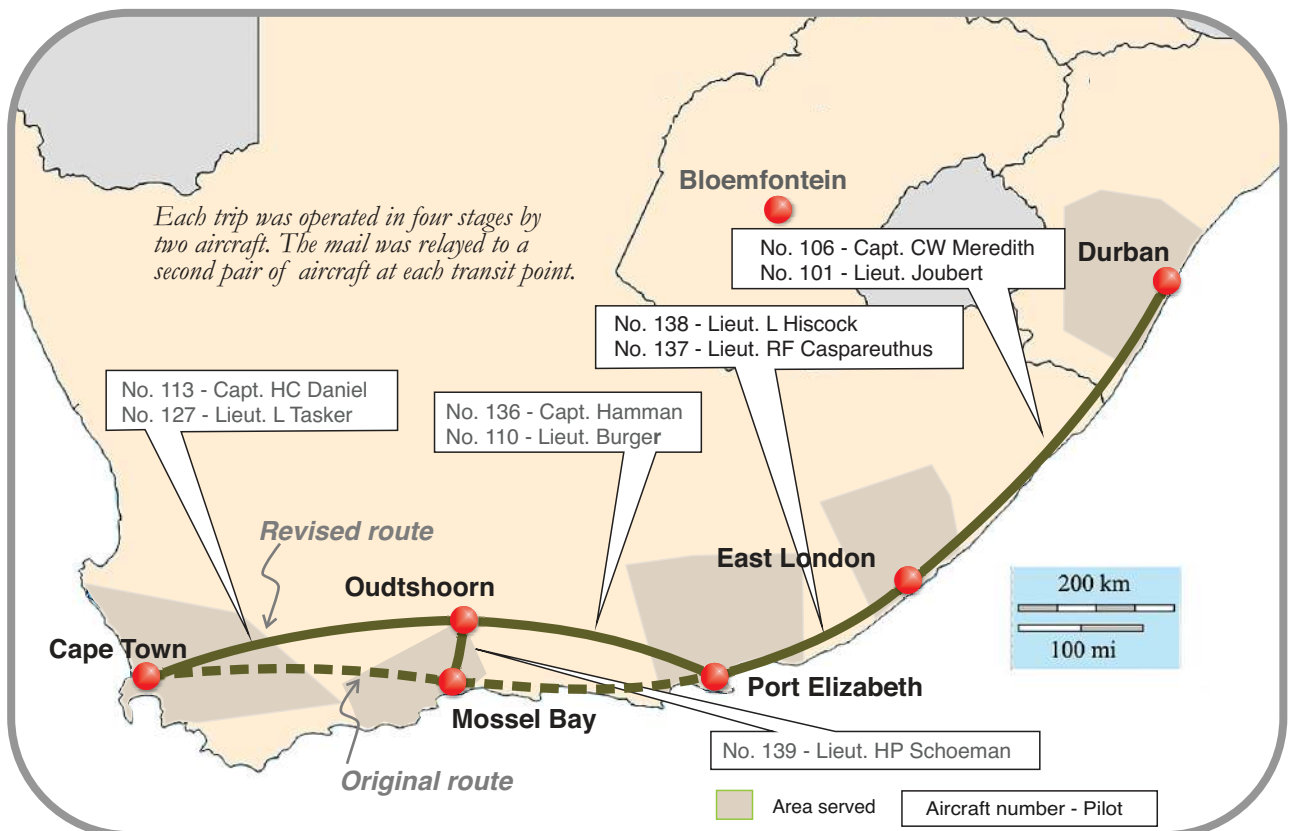
9d
Overseas parcels

- A set of four air mail stamps were issued 25 February 1925 and had to be added to the regular postage.
- There was public resistance to the added charges to use air mail.
- The stamps were withdrawn 31 October 1925 but had no validity after 15 June 1925.



Eleven aircraft were seconded from the Air Force to operate the service.

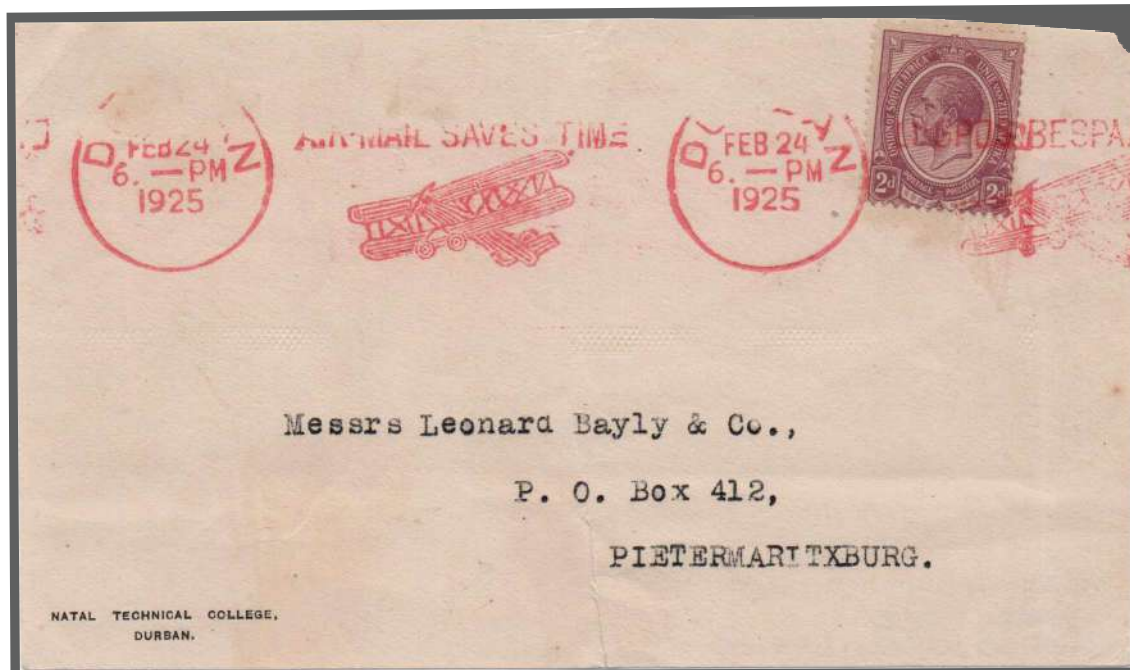
One hundred surplus WWI De Havilland DH9 aircraft were gifted to South Africa by the UK.



The 1925 Experimental Airmail Service
Promotional slogans



- Promotional slogan only applied in Durban and Cape Town to all mail.



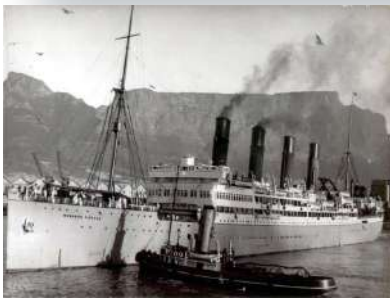
- Franked KGV 2d, cancelled with the bilingual slogan machine in red used to publicise the new service.
- Second day of usage of red, 24 February 1925.
- Front only.



- Under-franked 1d, taxed 2d, converted to 20 centimes.
- Converted to 4¢ due in New York.
- Postage due paid in Meriden, Connecticut
- No back stamps.



The 1925 Experimental Airmail Service
 1st Flight: Cape Town - Durban, 2 March 1925

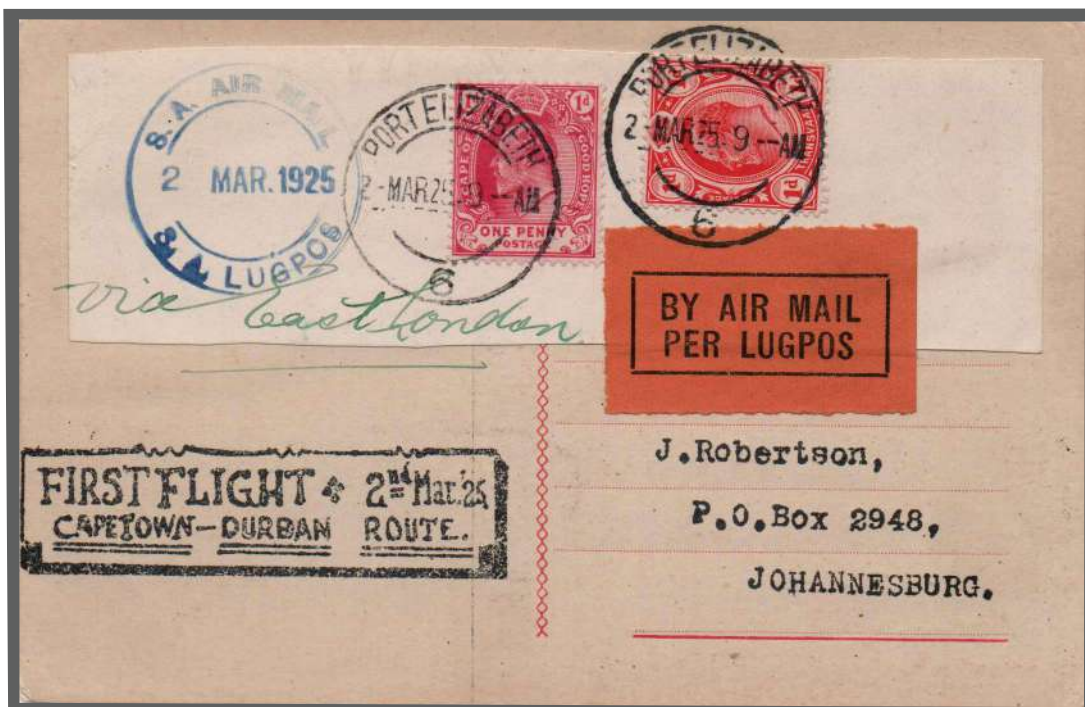


RMS Windsor Castle arrival in Cape Town, 2 March 1925

- Incoming international mail, carried on the RMS Windsor Castle, posted Dulwich, South London, 12 February 1925.
- British air mail fee: 6d plus 1½d airmail per ounce.
- SA airmail stamps not required.
- Cape Town air mail cachet in purple.
- Off loaded at Port Elizabeth, then forwarded by rail to Graaf Reinet..
- No back stamp.

NOTE

- Mail was made up on board prior to the ship docking.
- Taken to Central Post Office for processing, then to Wynberg.
- Once loaded, the aircraft left ± 07:40.

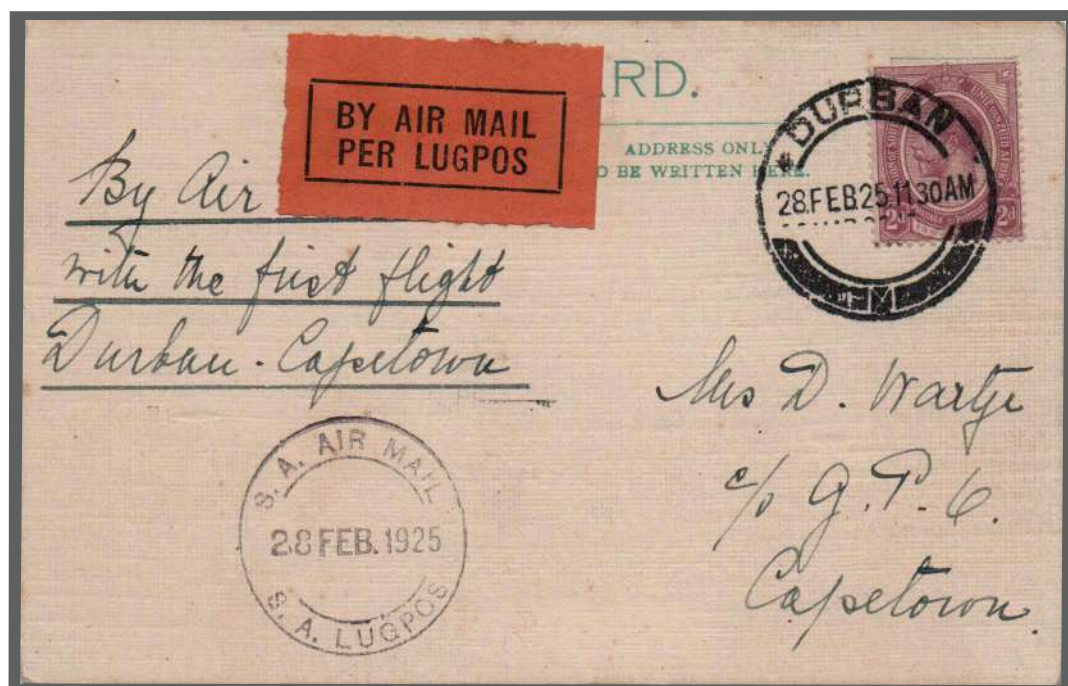


- Postcard rate 1d; second 1d in lieu of airmail stamp — not available.
- Manuscript directional instructions: *via East London.*
- Route: Port Elizabeth - East London, then rail to Johannesburg.
- Port Elizabeth air mail cachet in blue.
- Private cachet applied by J. Robertson, a philatelic dealer.
- No back stamp.

The 1925 Experimental Airmail Service

1st Return Flight: Durban - Cape Town, 5-6 March 1925

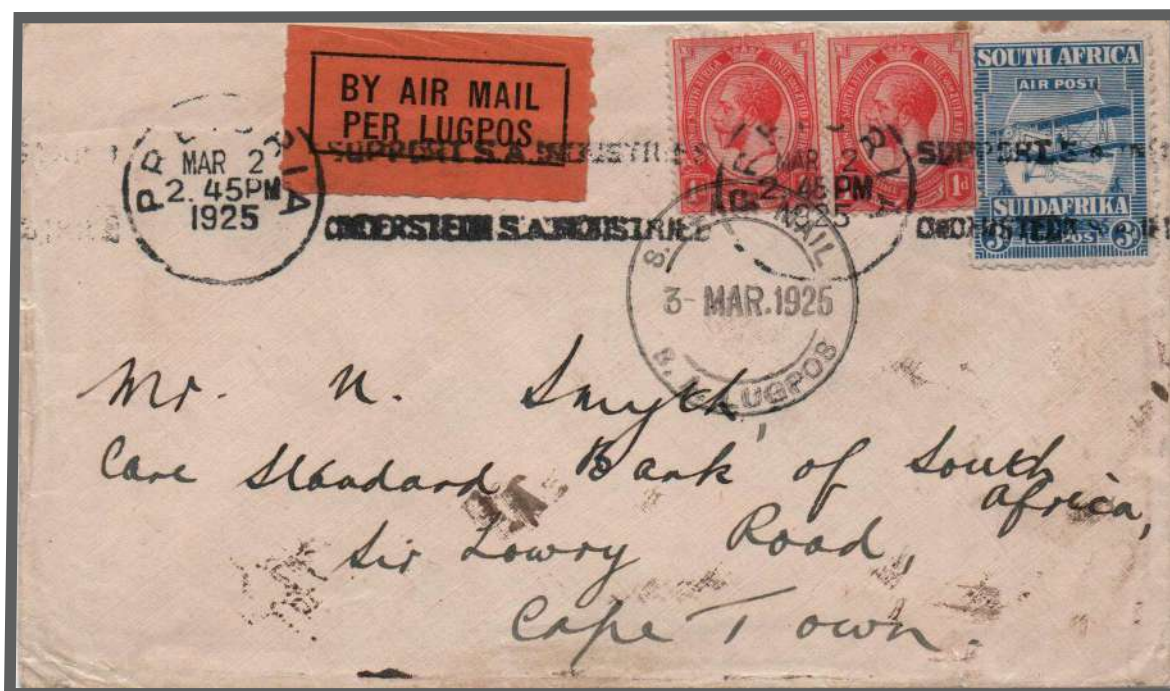
Local Mail



NOTE

- The return flight left Durban at 12:55pm on Thursday, with an overnight stop at East London.
- Departed East London 06:40 to arrive Cape Town at ±14:00, allowing time for the mail to be processed.
- The mail ship departed at 16:00. Union Castle operated a strict schedule.

- As a special concession mail carried on the first flight if no airmail stamp was attached.
- Postcard rate: 1d plus 1d airmail, over franked by 1d probably to pay for airmail.
- No back stamp.

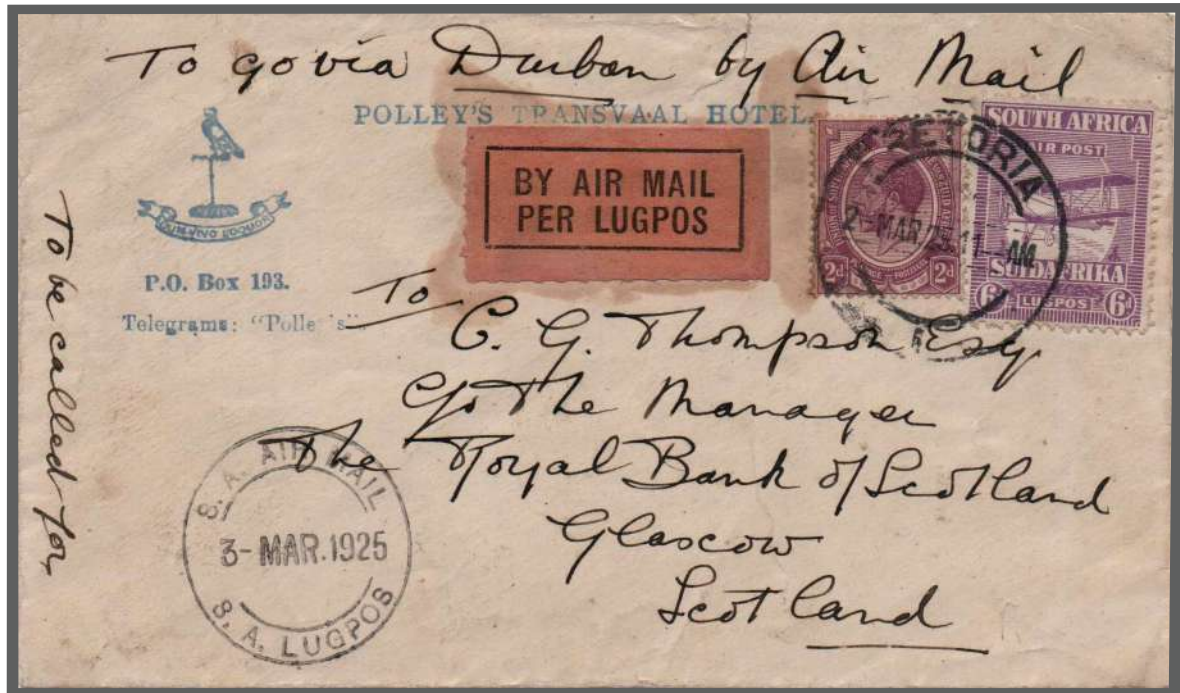


- Normal route Pretoria - Cape Town would have been via rail.
- Carried by rail overnight, 2 March 1925, to Durban for first return flight Durban - Cape Town. Overnight stop at East London.
- Correct franking: 2d plus 3d airmail.
- Airmail cachet applied in Durban
- No back stamp.

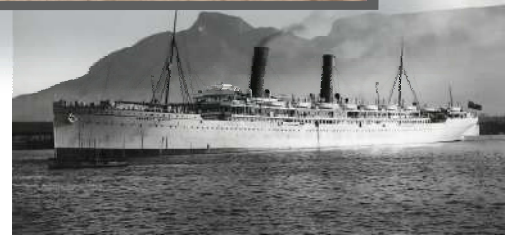
The 1925 Experimental Airmail Service

1st Return Flight: Durban - Cape Town, 5-6 March 1925

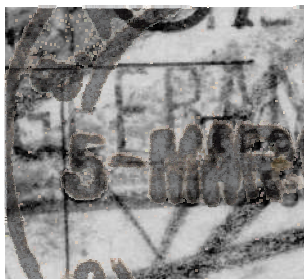
International Mail



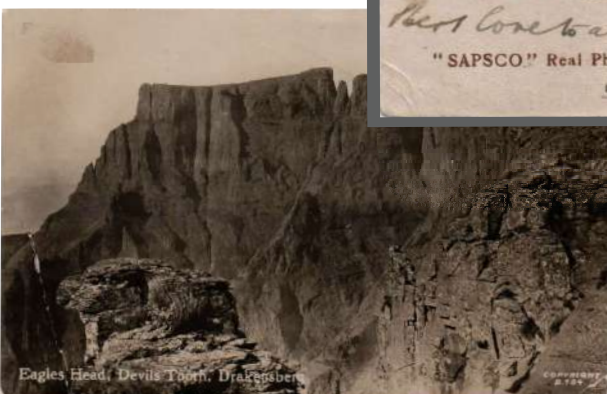
- Posted Pretoria, 2 March 1925, carried by rail overnight to Durban for first return flight Durban - Cape Town.
- Under-franked regular postage 1d, correct franking 6d for airmail.
- No evidence of the cover being taxed.
- Airmail cachet applied in Durban.
- No back stamp.



Outgoing mail carried by RMS Armadale Castle. Departed Cape Town, 4pm, 6 March 1925.



Enhanced enlargement of air mail cachet to show the date.



Reverse of postcard, reduced 60%

- Postcard from Vryheid to London via Durban - Cape Town .
- Normal postage under-franked by 1d, airmail under-franked by 2d.
- “Insufficiently franked” cachet applied, cancelled by blue pencil.
- Airmail cachet, dated 5 March 1925, cancelled by pencil.
- Tax cachet of 10 centimes applied twice, one cancelled by blue pencil. No evidence the tax was paid.

The 1925 Experimental Airmail Service
2nd Flight: 9-12 March 1925



- Cape Town - Durban, 9 March 1925; arrived Durban one day late.
- Use of postal stationery with imprinted oval King's Head 1½d plus ½d; 3d for airmail. Correct franking.
- Imprinted envelope issued 1921 for increase in postage rate. Type E.4 as per Legator Catalogue.
- Use of promotional roller canceller on air mail.
- Carried Durban - Pretoria by rail.
- Front only.



Durban postmark showing date and time (Putzel No. 35).

- Durban - Cape Town; arrived 13 March 1925.
- Correct normal rate, 2d. Airmail over-franked with full set of airmail issues, therefore the cover is philatelic.
- Post marked 4pm, 6 March 1925; suggests intended for the first return flight. First return flight left Durban 12.55pm, 5 March 1925, so carried on the second return flight, 12 March 1925.
- Notable, no air mail cachet applied. No back stamp.

The 1925 Experimental Airmail Service Mossel Bay Feeder Service

- A trial flight found Mossel Bay unsuitable as a transit point because of mist and fog. Transit point moved to Oudtshoorn.
- A feeder service from Oudtshoorn was operated when mail needed to be delivered to Mossel Bay.

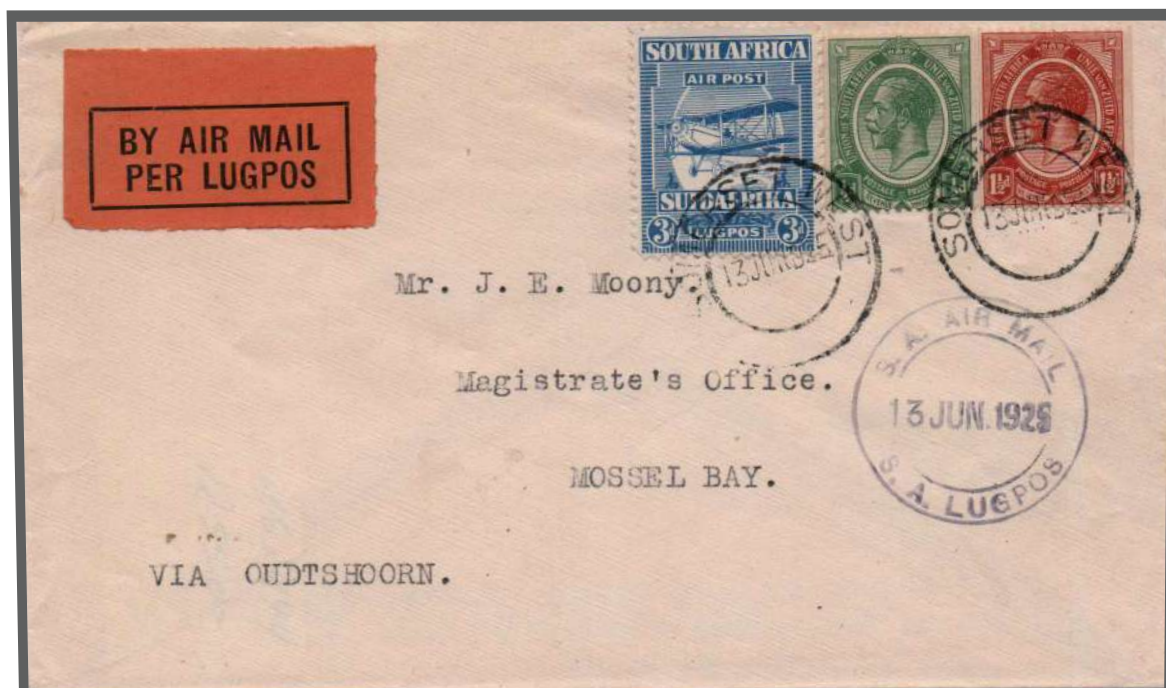


Enhanced image of the air mail cachet to reveal the hidden date.



Confirmation of date of posting

- Transferred to Oudtshoorn by rail, connected with 1st Return Flight from Durban, 6 March 1925.
- Forwarded to Caledon by rail from Cape Town. Caledon is 112km south-west of Cape Town.
- Regular mail over-franked by 2d, air mail over-franked by 3d.



- Carried on feeder flight from Oudtshoorn, transferred from Flight 16, Cape Town - Durban, 15 March 1925. Mail dropped from the air by parachute.
- Somerset West lies 45km south-east of Cape Town; by rail to Cape Town.
- Purple air mail cachet applied at Cape Town main Post Office.
- Correct franking. No back stamp.
- This feeder service not recorded by Burrell or Wyndham. Wyndham reports "no mail flown to Mossel Bay on the concluding flight ..."

The 1925 Experimental Airmail Service

Deterioration of Durban Air Mail Cachet

Carried Durban - Port Elizabeth
3rd return flight, 19 March 1925
Arrived 20 March 1925

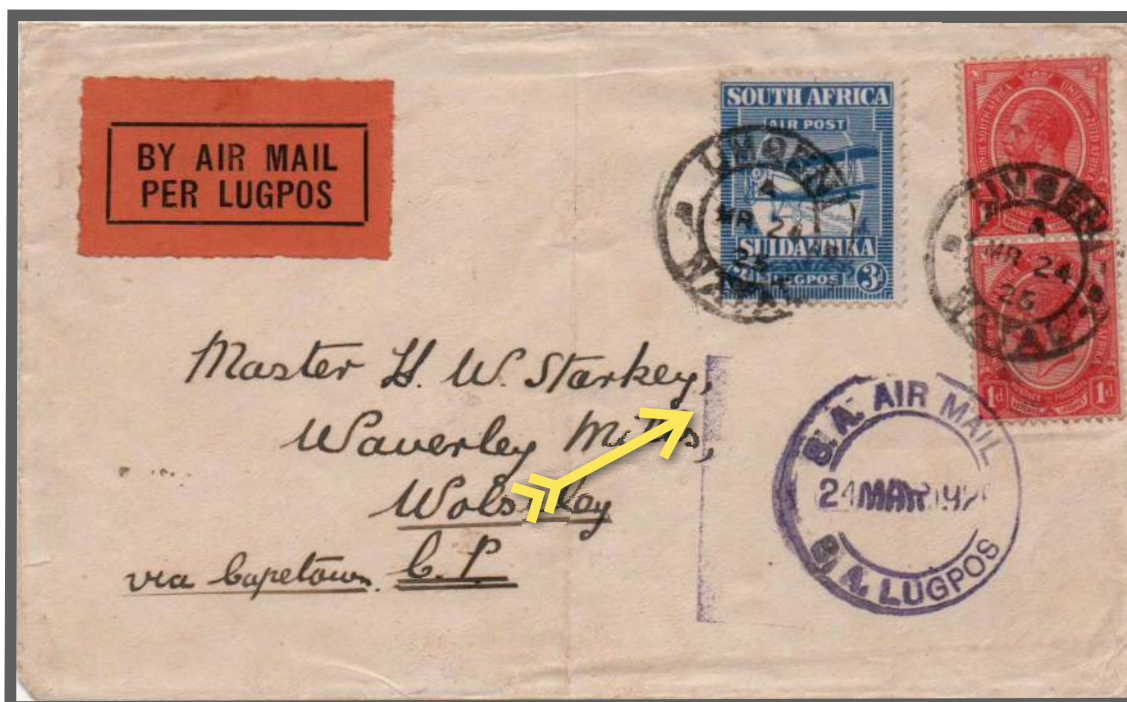
Carried Port Elizabeth -- Durban
2nd flight, 9 March 1925



Port Elizabeth air mail cachet

Durban air mail cachet
Dated 18 March 1925

- Double flown cover; Port Elizabeth - Durban - Port Elizabeth.
- Black India Ink used for Durban air mail cachet. The India Ink caused the rubber to deteriorate. Port Elizabeth cachet in blue.
- Correct franking, applied twice. No back stamp.



Indistinguishable back stamp.

Durban air mail cachet
Dated 24 March 1925

- Carried on Flight 4 from Durban, 26 March 1925, arrived Cape Town, 27 March 1925.
- Posted Umbilo, a residential and industrial suburb of Durban. Manuscript direction instructions: *via Capetown.*
- Transferred to Wolseley by rail. Wolseley lies ± 130 km north-east of Cape Town.
- Durban air mail cachet now in purple. Edge of rubber stamp visible.
- Correct franking.

The 1925 Experimental Airmail Service
Replacement of Durban Air Mail Cachet

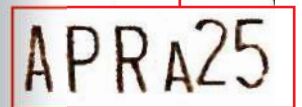


Durban air mail cachet after one month's use. Dated 30 March 1925.

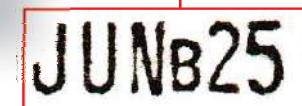


Beaufort West transit mark with date and time code, thick bar at bottom. Not recorded by Putzel.

- Second last day of usage of the large air mail cachet (30mm diameter). The rubber stamp deteriorated rapidly from using India Ink, later changed to a purple inkpad.
- Off loaded Oudtshoorn, transferred to Beaufort West by rail. readdressed to De Aar. No forwarding address on reverse.
- Carried on Return Flight 5, departed Durban 2 April 1925, arrived Oudtshoorn 3 April 1925.
- Correct franking. No back stamp.



The digits for the year in the morning cachet are raised above the base line. Constant variation.



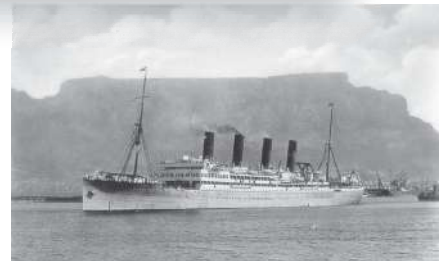
Afternoon air mail cachet for comparison.

- Replacement metal cachet (26 mm diameter) included a time code; A for morning, B for afternoon. First used 2 April 1925.
- Carried on Return Flight 7, departed Durban 16 April 1925, arrived Cape Town 17 April 1925.
- Durban roller canceller not recorded by Putzel. Similar to Type 63y which included a number at the bottom and no bars.
- Correct franking. No back stamp.

The 1925 Experimental Airmail Service
 12th Flight, 18 - 22 May 1925, Double Flown International
 Registered Cover



- Correct franking: 3d for international rate, 9d for airmail, 4d for registration.
- Manuscript direction instructions: *BY AIR MAIL / VIA DURBAN*.
- Posted East London, arrived Durban 18 May 1925; sent to Cape Town by return flight, 21 -22 May 1925.
- Carried by *RMS Windsor Castle* to UK, then to Egypt by sea.
- Return address on reverse, Kimberley.



RMS Windsor Castle departed Cape Town, Friday, 22 May 1925.



Reverse, reduced 60%

Max Victor Anhoury
 1 August 1905 - 2 September 2003
 Born Alexandria, Egypt. Immigrated to Canada, then Portland, Oregon USA.
 Store keeper and City Councillor.



18 May 1925: East London Putzel Type 94a



18 May 1925: East London airmail cachet



19 May 1925: Durban Putzel Type 94a



21 May 1925: Cape Town airmail cachet with incorrect date, Flight 12 arrived 22 May 1925.



22 May 1925: Cape Town Putzel Type 75



22 June 1925: Alexandria



23 June 1925: Alexandria

The 1925 Experimental Airmail Service
 15th Flight: Cape Town - Durban, 8 June 1925
 Uncertainty about the service



Somerset West,
 6th. June, 1925.

Dear Mr. Reynolds,
 Many thanks for your letter of the 4th. received this morning. All the covers mentioned by you have come to hand, and I shall return the ones you mention during the week.

I think you are mistaken in supposing that the mail on Thursday was the last from Durban. I have just got our Postmaster to get into touch with Cape Town and the position is this: Mail will be carried between Cape Town and Durban on 8th. and 15th. inst., and from Durban to Cape Town (last flight) on 11th. inst. I shall be very pleased if you could manage to post me at least half a doz. postcards and a like number of envelopes including a couple with full sets. I shall remit you the cost. Kind regards,
 Yours sincerely,
 H.B. Gunn

- Postcard address to GW Reynolds, philatelic dealer.
- Correct franking.
- Cape Town airmail cachet applied twice.
- Left Cape Town, 8 June 1925; arrived Durban 9 June 1925.
- Reverse contains correspondence concerning uncertainty when the flights would end. Also indicates the role of philatelists inflating the volume of mail carried.

← Refers to return of Flight 14, left Durban 4 June, arrived Cape Town 5 June 1925.

- Reverse of postcard reduced 75%.



- International mail carried on Return Flight 14 referred to in the postcard correspondence as the last flight from Durban.
- Correct franking for non-British Commonwealth mail.
- Carried on the RMS Edinburgh Castle.
- No back stamps.

The 1925 Experimental Airmail Service

15th Flight: Penultimate Service, Cape Town - Durban, 8 June 1925



- Postcard carried on Flight 15, departed Cape Town 8 June 1925.
- Loaded at East London transit, ± 1:30pm, arrived Durban ± 4pm.
- Directional instructions, VIA DURBAN. Forwarded from Durban by train to Pretoria, via Johannesburg.
- East London air mail cachet in purple.
- No back stamp, no correspondence.



UNPAID
ONBETAAL

Probably applied in
Cape Town.
Cachet not recorded
by Putzel



Tax paid Durban
9 June 1925
Postmark not recorded
by Putzel

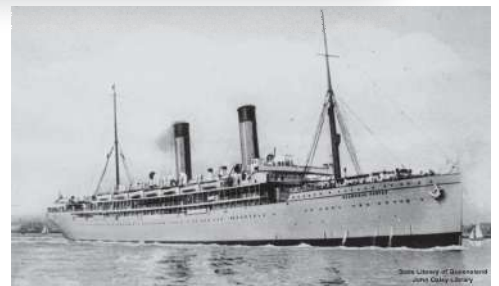
- Air mail paid with a complete set of the four stamps, resulting in over-franking. Regular postage of 2d omitted.
- Cover taxed 4d. UNPAID / ONBETAAL cachet applied. Tax paid with two 2d postage due stamps in Durban.
- No back stamp.

The 1925 Experimental Airmail Service

15th Flight: Final return flight, Durban - Cape Town, 11 June 1925



- Correct franking; 2d for UK mail, 6d for air mail.
- Durban postmark and airmail cachet dates do not match.
- If the Durban postmark is correct, the cover should have been carried on Return Flight 14, departing Durban 4 June 1925, arriving Cape Town 5 June 1925. More likely an incorrect date in the Durban postmark.
- No back stamp.



Outgoing mail carried by RMS Balmoral Castle. Departed Cape Town, 4pm, 12 June 1925.



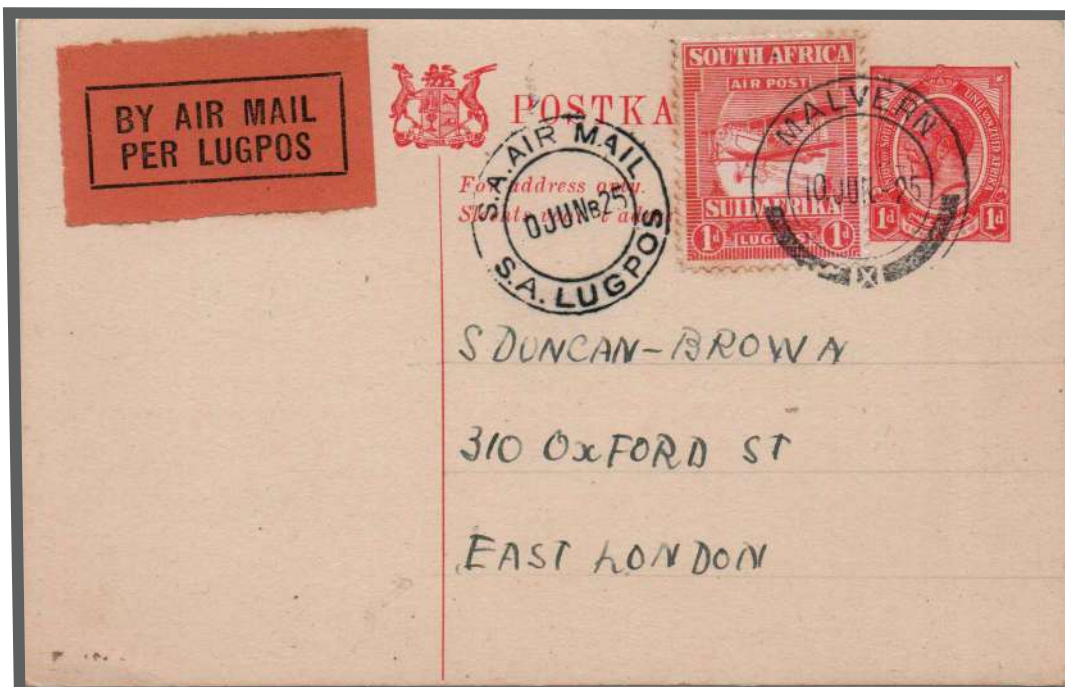
11 June 1925: Durban air mail cachet



Missing digit, 1 June 1925: Durban Putzel Type 43

NOTE

- The venture was a losing business and was shut down by Government after three months.



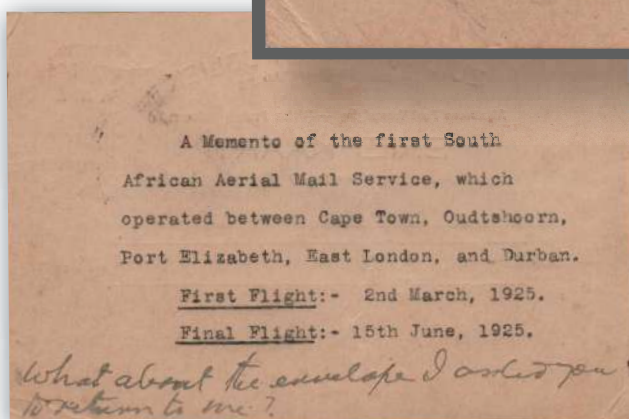
Missing digit

- Local imprinted postcard, franked 1d; airmail franking 1d.
- Postcard issued 1913.
- Malvern was a suburb of Durban, renamed Queensburgh in 1952.
- No back stamp, no correspondence.

The 1925 Experimental Airmail Service
15th and 16th Flights from Oudtshoorn



- Carried on Return Flight 15, departed Durban, 11 June 1915, picked up mail at Oudtshoorn, 12 June 1925
- Correct franking.
- Forwarded from Cape Town by train to Pretoria via Johannesburg.



Reverse of postcard, reduced 60%

- Postcard carried on Flight 16, departed Cape Town, 15 June 1925.
- Interprovincial usage of Zuid-Afrikaanse Republiek postal stationery. Demonetised 1 January 1938; therefore still valid. Overfranked 1d, correct airmail franking of 1d.
- Manuscript direction instruction *Via Durban*.
- Forwarded from Durban by train to Johannesburg, then road to Heidelberg.

The 1925 Experimental Airmail Service

16th Flight: Last Service, Cape Town - Durban, 15 June 1925



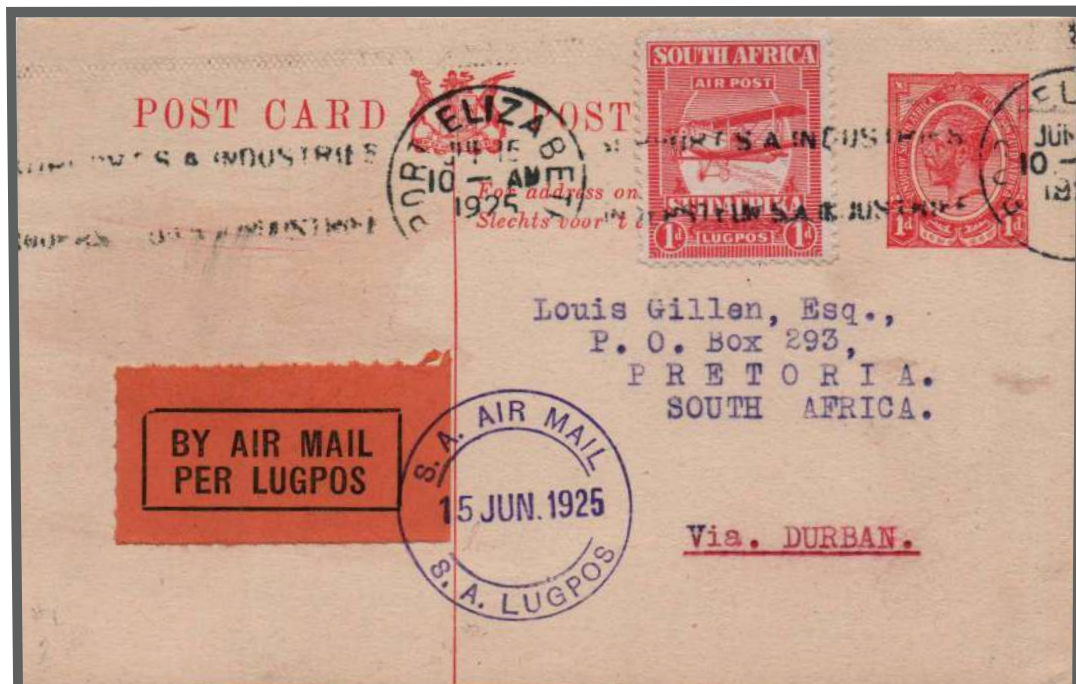
- Normal postage over franked 1d; airmail over franked 1d.
- Over franking suggests a philatelic cover.
- Final flight delayed by one day, arrived Durban 16 June 1925.
- No back stamp.



"H" instead of a "B" in CAMBRIDGE
Putzel Type 5a



Broken R in SUIDAFRIKA



- Postcard, correct franking.
- Flight delayed, arrived Durban 16 June 1925. Probably weather related.
- Direction instruction *Via. DURBAN.* in red. Carried Durban - Pretoria by rail, via Johannesburg.
- No back stamp, no correspondence.

NOTE

- There was no return flight.
- All aircraft returned to base in Pretoria after completing this flight.