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BULLETIN 152

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The Study Circle website
www.belgian-congo-study-circle.be

TO THE

CONGO FREE STATE

(VIA BELGIUM)

PARCELS not exceeding 11 lbs. in weight will now be received at any Post Office in the United Kingdom for transmission to the Congo Free State, via Belgium.

The Parcels will be forwarded twice daily to Belgium and despatched by monthly Steamer from Antwerp to Bauana, on dates which may be ascertained on enquiry at any Post Office.

In the reverse direction, Parcels for the United Kingdom from the Congo Free State will be included in the Parcel Mails conveyed monthly by Steamer to Antwerp, from whence they will be forwarded to London, and distributed by means of the Inland Parcel Post.

The following are the special Regulations and Conditions to be observed:—

RATES OF POSTAGE.

Not exceeding 3 lbs. in weight	3s. 0d.
Exceeding 3 lbs. but not exceeding 7 lbs. in weight	3s. 6d.
Exceeding 7 lbs. but not exceeding 11 lbs. in weight	4s. 0d.

These rates cover the carriage of Parcels from this Country to Banana (Congo Free State). Parcels for places in the Lower Congo (Banana, Boma, Matadi, Ponta da Lenha, and Vivi) are subject to a charge of one franc each upon delivery; and Parcels for places in the Upper Congo (Bangala, Kuichassa, Kwamouth, La Kungu, Leopoldville, and Lutete) are subject on delivery to a charge to be fixed at the discretion of the Congo Free State.

DIMENSIONS.

No Parcel must exceed, in any direction, 2 ft.

PREPAYMENT.

The postage must in all cases be paid in advance, and by means of Postage Stamps which must be affixed by the Sender, and no Parcel will be accepted for transmission which is not sufficiently prepaid.

ADDRESS, &c., AND MODE OF POSTING.

Each Parcel must be plainly directed, such direction setting forth the name and full address of the person for whom the Parcel is intended. It should bear the words "Parcel Post" in the upper left-hand corner, and the name and address of the Sender. The date of posting should also be added. A Parcel must not be posted in a Letter Box nor handed to a Rural Postman, but must in all cases be taken into a Post Office, and presented at the counter.

CERTIFICATES OF POSTING.

A Certificate of posting may be obtained, if desired, by the person posting a Parcel.

CUSTOMS DECLARATION.

Parcels will be liable to Customs duties and regulations, and the Sender of each Parcel will be required to make a

Customs declaration furnishing—upon a special form provided for the purpose, and which can be obtained at any Post Office—an accurate Statement of the contents and value, the date of posting, and the Sender's signature and place of abode. Customs duties will be collected on delivery.

FORBIDDEN ARTICLES.

No Parcel which contains dangerous Articles, Articles likely to injure other Parcels, Liquids (unless securely packed in proper cases), or any Contraband Article or Substance will be accepted for transmission. A Parcel must not contain a Letter, or matter of the nature of a Letter.

RE-DIRECTION AND RETURN OF PARCELS.

Parcels arriving in this country from the Congo Free State, and re-directed from one address to another in the United Kingdom, will be treated and surcharged under the Regulations which govern the treatment and surcharge of Re-directed Parcels by the Inland Parcel Post.

If a Parcel cannot be delivered as addressed, or is refused, the sender, if his address be given on the Parcel, will be communicated with by the Post Office as to the manner in which the Parcel shall be disposed of.

If returned or re-directed from one Country to another the Parcel will be charged a full rate of postage.

UNDELIVERED PARCELS.

Parcels which cannot be delivered will be kept for a reasonable time before being finally disposed of.

PACKING OF PARCELS.

Parcels should be securely and substantially packed and closed by the sender, and in some cases seals may be found necessary. If wax is used it should be of the special quality which resists the heat of a hot Climate.

GENERAL.

Where not repugnant to the foregoing rules, the general Regulations of the Inland Parcel Post will apply equally to the Parcel Post to the Congo Free State.

N.B.—The Parcel Post is already in operation to Ascension, Austria-Hungary, Barbados, Belgium, British Guiana, British Honduras, Canada, Cape of Good Hope, Ceylon, Constantinople, Cyprus, Denmark, Egypt, Germany, Gibraltar, Grenada, Heligoland, Holland, Hong Kong, India (including Aden and Burmah), Italy, Jamaica, Labuan, Leeward Islands, Luxemburg, Malta, Natal, Newfoundland, New South Wales, Norway, St. Helena, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, South Australia, Straits Settlements, Sweden, Switzerland, Tangier, Tasmania, Tobago, Trinidad, Victoria, Western Australia, and Zanzibar, and is about to be extended to the Bahamas, and North Borneo.

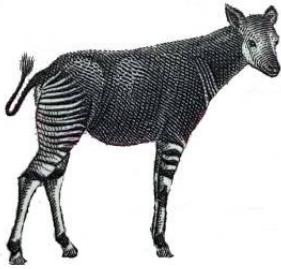
GENERAL POST OFFICE,
21 June, 1887.

By Command of the Postmaster General.

Printed for H.M. Stationery Office by W. P. GIFFERT & SONS, Ltd., Princes Square, Old Bailey, London, E.C.

GENERAL POST OFFICE
21 June 1887

From the Hon. Secretary



Study Circle 'Officer' and administration changes.

There are some important Study Circle announcements concerning administration and reminders of new 'Officer' appointments.

Please read and note as this does concern you!

Belgian Membership Secretary. Since the last Bulletin, the Belgian secretary Emile Hoorens has for personal reasons found it necessary to announce that he will be retiring from office with effect from the end of this year. He was a former President and stalwart of the Circle for very many years. We thank him for his unstinting commitment and service and are indeed fortunate that Patrick Maselis has offered to stand in his stead assuming office as from 1st January 2010.

Patrick Maselis:
Kaaistraat 19
B-8800 Roeslare
Belgium.

Email : Patrick.Maselis@pocoloco.be

Annual subscriptions

Belgian membership subscriptions, 2010.

All future Belgian membership subscriptions should be paid directly into the Belgian Study Circle bank account:

Study Circle Bank account with Belgium ING Bank: 310-1372619-58

U.S.A. membership subscriptions, 2010. There is no change to the existing arrangement and payment will continue to be made to David Schaubroeck.

U.K. and 'Rest of World', 2010. All those who previously paid to Stuart Smith, should in future pay the new Treasurer:

Dr. Charles Lloyd
18 Linefield Road
Carnoustie. DD7 6DP
Scotland

Email: charles.lloyd@blueyonder.co.uk

Auction - accounts and payments

Auction Finance officer – Ludo Achten

As stated previously, Ludo Achten has accepted appointment as 'Auction Finance Officer'. As such he will administer and oversee all account matters on behalf of the Study Circle.

Any unresolved queries concerning payments should be addressed to him.

Ludo Achten
Luikersteenweg 386
3500 Hasselt
Belgium

Email: ludoachten@hotmail.com

U.K. and U.S.A. members will continue to be invoiced for successful bids in their respective currencies by B. Harris and Ed Lavitt respectively. Invoices will confirm how and to whom payment should be made.

Belgian, other European and 'Rest of the World' members will be notified of the bank details into which settlement payments should be made.

Auctioneer – Philippe Lindekens

Philippe Lindekens will continue as 'Auctioneer' and remains the first line of contact for any member wishing to submit material for auction.

Philippe Lindekens
Rue des Trois-Ponts, 38
B-1160 Bruxelles Email : Lindekens.bogaerts@skynet.be

U.K. Packet Secretary – John Kelland

John is very keen to hear from all U.K. resident members who would wish to be included on the next 'Packet' circulation list.

Furthermore, he appeals to all to try to contribute as a seller. There is a feeling that there must be an abundance of duplicate or unwanted material which would help enlarge the content. The Packet is always very successful!

It is also recognised that many of us find it difficult to spend time mounting and sticking things in 'Club books'; but help might be available [*I always need and use it, Ed*] and John is happy to try to assist. Please consider that you might be able to contribute and contact:

John F. Kelland
21 Lyncombe Crescent,
Higher Lyncombe Road
Torquay. TQ1 2HP Email: john.kelland3@btinternet.com

Expert Committee

In the report relating to appointments made at the AGM [Bulletin #151, p.4] the officers of the Expert committee were erroneously reported as:

Chairman Expert Committee *L. Tavano and L. Vander Maercken*

With apologies from the Hon. Sec., please note that Charles Henuzet had been omitted and the entry should read:

Expert Committee *Chairman Léo. Tavano and Charles Henuzet,*
Assisted by *Luc Vander Maercken.*

Membership News

New Members

We extend a warm welcome to two new members and both from Germany – **Dr. Bern-Jürgen Fischer** and **Hans-Bernt Schanze**. We trust they can benefit and enjoy their association with us.

It is not often that we voluntarily receive detailed collecting information from new members but on this occasion I am delighted to welcome a rare 'All world' enthusiast. Mr. Schantze says he collects postally used stamps of the whole world! I quote –

"Yes, it is still possible, just needs much room for the albums."

He also has special interests in – "*the Anatolia overprints of Turkey, Tibet and French colonies in Africa*". Perhaps the latter is how he found us!

Germany - **Dr. Bernd-Jürgen Fischer** Knesebeckstr. 20
D – 10623 Berlin
Email: fischers_juergen@yahoo.de

- **Hans-Bernt Schanze** Neue Strasse 19
35043 Marburg
Germany
Email : hans-bernt.schanze@web.de

E-mail address addition

Belgium - **Vincent Schouberechts;** e-mail: Victoria2000@numericable.be

x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x

Book Review

Intercontinental Airmails, Volume 1, *Edward Proud*

I am much indebted to Jozef Deruyck who keeps me up to date with interesting bits of 'Belgian Congo' related information. On this occasion he has forwarded copy of John Wilson's review of this latest book, by the highly respected Edward Proud.

It appears this is one of those rare occasions when one must recommend the review in 'Airpost Journal, August 2009' rather than the book. Any of our Belgian Congo Airmail collectors perhaps contemplating paying the not insignificant sum of £80, should think twice.

I qualify my recommendations reservedly, but only on the grounds that John Wilson's analysis and pronouncements refer exclusively to only three chapters of the book. These include specific Belgian Congo related 'Pan American North Atlantic Timetables' and the 'PAA South Atlantic service FAM-22', Miami to Leopoldville.

Editor

Have you seen this 'dumb' canceller before?

Illustrated are three stamps recently purchased by our French member, Jean Herreweghe.

The stamps were described as Belgian, cancelled on arrival in the Congo.

The mark on the mauve 25 centimes stamps is clear to see and that on the 25 centimes gold, is similar except in red ink.



We are trying to validate the comment that "*the canceller was applied in the Congo*" but after preliminary consultations with a few very knowledgeable Congo as well as Belgian members, the origin and place of application of this canceller has not been determined.

It is what would commonly be referred to as a 'Dumb canceller', that is one without an office name and a view has been expressed that it is indeed probably of Belgian origin. The single star at its centre is typical of that used on the original Independent State flag.



Can anyone enlighten us?

Did you know?

Belgas – The currency change!

Michael Round



"I apologies in advance to all our serious stamp collecting members, for this item does not contribute in any way to the study of Belgian Congo philately -but it intrigued me.

Recently browsing through an old [1926-7] volume of the foremost U.K. general philatelic magazine of the time, *Stanley Gibbons Monthly Journal*, I was first startled – as I think many of us would have been - by the following note:

(December 1926, p. 70)

Stamp News in Brief: Belgium.

"We have reason to suppose that new stamps will be required to conform to the new currency recently introduced into this country."

Neither retraction, nor further news about the new currency appeared for six months. Under the same heading we then read:

(June 1927, p.214)

Belgium. "We shall soon have to pay in 'belgas' for stamps of Belgium and the Congo State [*sic*]. Stamps with values expressed in the new currency are expected very shortly."

Given the time-lag between receiving news and reprinting it in a monthly magazine, we might have been forgiven for thinking that the second item was a Brussels-inspired 'poisson d'avril' taken seriously, or even a 75 years-early prediction of the euro!. But what was it that inspired the first quotation?

Furthermore, and at the risk of making *Stanley Gibbons Monthly Journal* look like a repository of false information, which it most emphatically was not, let me quote a further newsbit from just one month later. It is at least equally relevant to our members.

(July 1927, p. 240)

"**Belgium.** – *Congo State* [*sic*]. It is proposed to do away with the beautiful current series [the Vloors, of course: nice to know that it had contemporary admirers – *M.R.*] and to replace it by an historical issue, on which will appear portraits of famous men who have been concerned with the Congo. Among these will be the explorers Livingstone and Stanley."

We all know, of course, that Stanley duly featured on Congo stamps. ***But where did the magazine get the idea that Livingstone would also appear?***

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

For information

Your editor had never previously been aware of the existence of the 'Belga' and whilst now able to refer to its former existence, I am sure that as a result of Michael Round's 'investigative observations', the following will be of interest to most. It is another social history related item and to stamp collectors raises the question of why a country would change its currency without at the same time changing that of its postage and revenue stamps. Clearly that is what appears to have been the intention – ***but why did that never happen when the 'belga' was in circulation for several years.?***

The following are extracts from information obtained:

TIME magazine – Monday 8th November 1926

“Belgians began suddenly last week to think in belgas. Overnight King Albert, by royal decree, proclaimed the creation of a new monetary unit, the belga, worth exactly five Belgian francs and exactly 0.209211 grams of gold.”

**National Bank of Belgium.
1914-1944: wars and Monetary upheavals**

“In 1926, a new unit of account, the ‘belga’ was intended to dissociate the Belgian franc from the French franc and improve the convertibility of the Belgian currency, which was in dire straits. Its value stabilised at only one-seventh of the former parity.

..... The word belga is found on banknotes and coins between 1926 and 1944: never on its own, but always accompanied by the word “franc”. In 1929, persistent inflation led to the issue of a 10,000 franc – 2000 belga banknote, the largest denomination ever issued in Belgian francs.”



X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

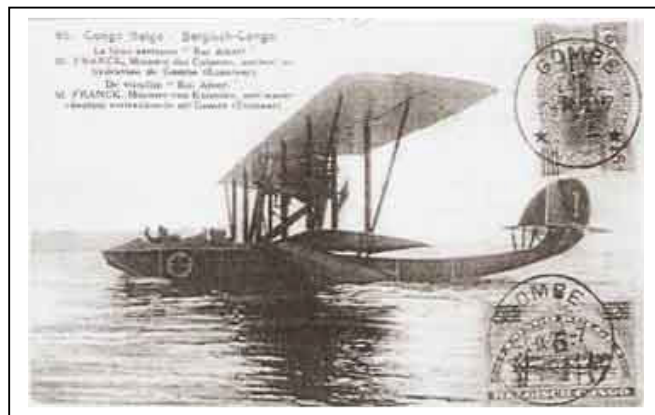
The ‘Lara’ flights 1920-1922

Walter Deijnckens

Preface

The substance of this article has been previously published in ‘Koninklijke postzegelvereniging van het Land van Waas, No 449’ and ‘Koninklijke Antwerpse kring voor stempelstudie en postgeschiedenis, No. 313.’

It is reproduced here for the convenience of those unable to access or possibly read the originals.



Sold by ‘La Passion Philatelique’ [P.P.]

In 1920 ships of the ‘Compagnie Belge Maritime du Congo’ brought the mail from Belgium to the harbour of Matadi. This was then transported by train to Leopoldville from where it was distributed. All mail for Stanleyville and villages between Stanleyville and Leopoldville were

reached by the river Congo. Aviation was still in its infancy but in the Belgian Congo people were already considering finding a solution to overcome the long distances involved.

A first trial was made by CENAC in August 1919 who gave an order to the company SNETA to effect an air connection between Leopoldville and Stanleyville.^[1]

That link would take place with *flying boats* of the Levy-Lepen type as illustrated at the title and in figure 1. It was the intention to carry people as well goods. [*Apparently not much room for many passengers, Editor.*]



Figure 1.

The first part of the connection between Leopoldville-Stanleyville was inaugurated on 1st July 1920 and this was between the villages of Kinshasa and Gombe, 550 km. north of Kinshasa.^[2]

'La Tribune Congolaise' announced that the first flight would take place on 1st June 1920 between Kinshasa and Coquilhatville.^[1]

The air route was named 'Ligne Aérienne du Roi Albert', shortened as 'LARA'.

A first extension from Gombe to Lisala was inaugurated on 1st March 1921 (635 km.) and a second from Lisala to Stanleyville on 1st July 1921 (535 km.). In the summer of 1920 it became apparent that stops and mail drop offs would be desirable at Kwamouth, Bolobo, Lukelela and Gombe. From 30th November 1921 these had been extended to also include Coquilhatville, Mobeka, Lisala, Bumba and Basoko.

Flights took place every day after the arrival of a C.B.M.C. ship (either the s/s Anversville or s/s Albertville) which normally embarked twice monthly at Matadi. The flights followed the river and took place during daylight hours for obvious reasons and also because the weather was not always favourable. The flight to and from Gombe took 5 hours in both directions; but the same distance by boat took 5 days stream upstream and 3 days down. The flight to Stanleyville took 3 days in both directions against 14 days upstream and 9 days down by boat.^[3] The service was finally terminated on 7th June 1922.

During this period 95 passengers had been carried and in 1921, 1630 private letters and 5606 official documents had been transported.

However in spite of these numbers, very few covers have survived.

Airmail stamps

The Belgian postal administration stipulated that from 22nd July 1920, four special Belgian Congo airmail stamps would be available for purchase from the head post offices in Antwerp, Brugge, Brussels, Charleroi, Gent, Hasselt, Luik, Mons and Namur.^[3]

‘Snetta’ [Syndicat national pour l’étude des transport aériens] who managed the Lara flights would have been in possession of these stamps during 1920.^[4] The Vice-Governor stated in an official report that the stamps were available on 30 August 1920 but it was not until the 2nd August 1921 that their issue was announced by the Colonial minister. They had a long postal validity and were not withdrawn until 1st January 1951.



Figure 2.^[5]

Figure 2 is one of very few that have survived from this period - a cover from Boma 13 January 1921 to Coquilhatville with 3.50 fr. airmail stamps and 0.15 fr. normal rate stamps for the internal rate. It is clear proof that the airmail stamps were already in use before the official publication date.

Postal and airmail rates.

Initially and perhaps understandably, there was some confusion about the official airmail rate.

As from **1st April 1920** postal rates to Belgium were matched equally with those used internally in Belgium, that is the basic rate for a letter up to 20 grams was 0.15 fr.

In **September 1920** 'L'Avenir Colonial Belge' published that the airmail rate of a 20 grams letter would be 2.50 fr. plus a further 2.50 fr. for greater fractions. It was also stipulated in the same publication that an extra 0.30 fr. would be required if the letter was posted as 'Express'.

On **1st March 1921** the basic rate for letters up to 20 grams was increased from 0.15 fr to 0.25 fr.

'La tribune Congolaise' announced the airmail rate as being 3 fr. per 20 grams letter plus a further 3 fr. for additional 20 gram units.

Letters for airmail conveyance had to be endorsed **PAR AVION**.

Finally in the official Belgian Congo paper dated 30th July 1921 a definitive airmail rate of 3 fr. for a 20 gram letter was set.

Figure 3 is a registered, 'RECOMMONDE' letter from Kindu 15 October 1921 via Stanleyville 22 October and Lisala 27 October, with arrival at Kinshasa 12 December 1921. It finally arrived at Coudekerque on the 3 January 1922. [3]

It took some two months from the Congo to its final destination. Presumably for safety and in the absence of a clear definition of costs to France, the sender paid 5 fr. At that time the rate for a 20 gram letter to foreign destinations [France] was 0.50 fr. and the 'Belgium local airmail rate, 3 fr.



Figure 3.

The EXPRES mark

A notice in 'L'Avenir Colonial Belge' of the 0.30 fr. rate for 'Express mail' would have confused many people. As a consequence of it, it was probably thought appropriate to apply the straight line EXPRES hand stamp to be sure that letters went by airmail, but the PAR AVION mark would have been. EXPRES continued in use until the end of year 1921.



Figure 4. [L.D.C.]

Figure 4 is a letter with manuscript 'affranchi par l'expéditeur' and EXPRES hand stamp, this time from Basoko (situated between Stanleyville and Lisala) It was cancelled 8 November 1921 and addressed to Sint Niklaas in Belgium. The sender put stamps on to the value of 6.50 fr. but the rate should only have been 0.25 fr. letter + 3 fr. airmail.

I know of three other covers bearing the EXPRES mark:

From Lusambo 19 July 1921 to Wépion.

Cover from Gombe 15 December 1920 to Bruxelles. ^[5]

Registered cover from Gombe 12 February 1921 to Antwerp. ^[6]

The AVION mark

As from the beginning of 1922 the AVION mark was introduced and used until this airmail service was terminated on the 7th July 1922. In June 1925 Sabena took over the inland air connection.



Figure 5. ^[W.D.]

Figure 5 illustrates a cover from Bolobo to Anvers, cancelled 9 April 1922 and with a boxed AVION mark.

1. F. Broeckart. *Het luchtpostvervoer tussen België en Belgisch-Congo 1920-1940*
2. R. Gallant *De geschiedenis van de postdienst in Belgisch Kongo (1886- 1960)*
3. Amicale philatélique Octobre 84 (J.D.B.)
4. Ch. Stockmans. *Congo Belge et Ruanda-Urundi*
5. J. Du four. *Cinquante ans d'histoire postal*
6. José Henin. *4 Épopée de l'ai.*

Illustrations

P.P. Catalogue, La Passion Philatélique, Décembre 2004

S. Catalogue, Soeteman, Octobre 1999

L.D.C. Collection, Léo De Clercq

W.D. Collection, the author

The 1898 'Excursion au Congo' label.

Jean Herreweghe

Preface

Rarely do we receive for publication articles on Congo Cinderella material. That coupled with the labels relevance to the ever popular topic of sea and Paquebot links, makes it a most welcome addition to our collecting themes.

Many of us have been intrigued by these labels inscribed - 'EXCURSION AU CONGO, COMITÉ ORGANISATEUR, 1898. Where and why were they produced? Perhaps I can provide some answers.



X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

In 1877 after returning from his crossing of Africa from east to west and his descent of the river Congo, Stanley made this famous pronouncement, during his first meeting with King Léopold II –

“I declare that the Congo Basin was not worth a two shilling piece in its present state. To reduce it into profitable order, a railroad must be made between the Lower Congo and the Upper Congo, when with its accessibility will appear its value.”

In effect the rapids of the Crystal Mountains formed an unbridgeable barrier to any internal navigation and only by by-passing them, could one reach the ‘Stanley Pool’ and its 18,000 km of navigable rivers. Representing British investors, Stanley failed to obtain the concession to build a ‘rapids bypass’ railroad from King Léopold II, as their demands in ensuring security of investment effectively meant a transfer of sovereignty.

However the project was pursued in Belgium by Lieutenant-Colonel Albert THYS, the king’s aide-de-camp and tireless champion of the project. No matter what difficulties arose, either from the original investors, expensive errors in the early stages of construction or belittlement from the press and members of the Belgian Chambers - his confidence and commitment to the project remained, without ever doubting its chance of success.



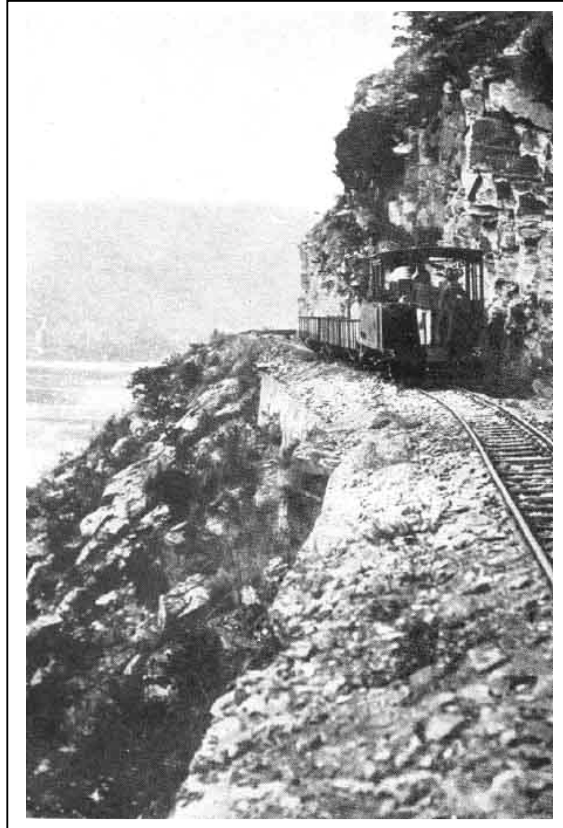
Le lieutenant-colonel ALBERT THYS.

After three years (1889-1892) of experimentation and fears, heavy work on steep slopes, hand drilling of rock and having spent most of the initial invested capital, the engineers reached the 23rd kilometer - the appropriately named ‘Col de l’Horizon’.

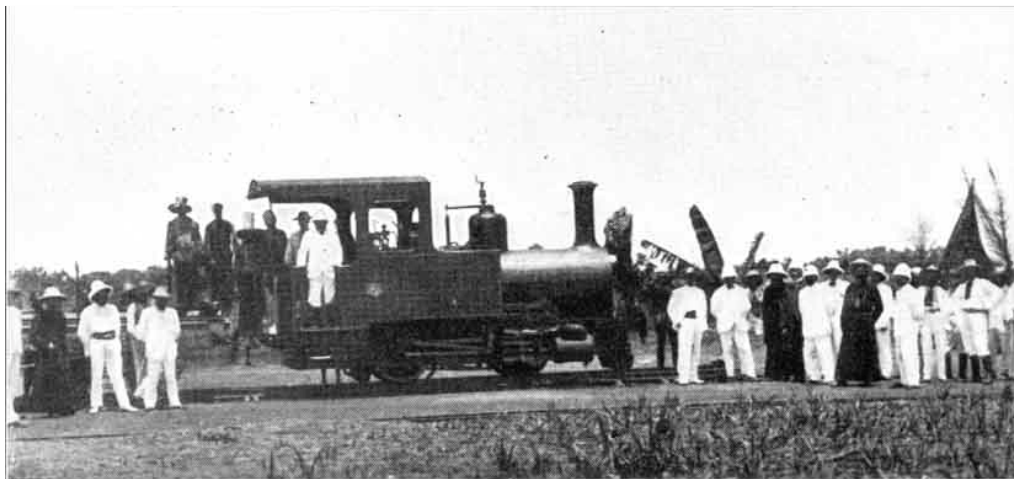
This short section could then be exploited and the concerned investors reassured by showing these first benefits. After this the terrain was easier, daily construction faster and the equipment and organization of the work much improved.

After eight rather than the projected four years, and having spent 60 million francs, two and a half times the initial budget, the railway finally arrived at N'Dolo at Stanley Pool on 16th March 1898.

The battle had been difficult and the Railroad administration decided to formally celebrate completion of the project. At this time there was already talk of tourism to the Congo and a committee proposed an excursion to Stanley-Pool to celebrate the railway's inauguration. The cost was 3,000 francs per passenger (a workman in Belgium at that time earned 75 francs per month, an engineer in Congo 600 francs) and a commemorative label was issued for the occasion!



The view at km. 2,700



La première locomotive, conduite par l'ingénieur Nicolas Cito, arrive à N'Dolo (16 mars 1898).

(Document Otraco.)

The total human cost was considerable; 132 Europeans and more than 1,800 Asian and indigenous Africans died during the construction. A saying at the time was that 'under each sleeper rests a man'.

Such projects are at the mercy of many incidents but fortunately the Congo railroad reached and passed the critical point before irreparable workforce desertions.

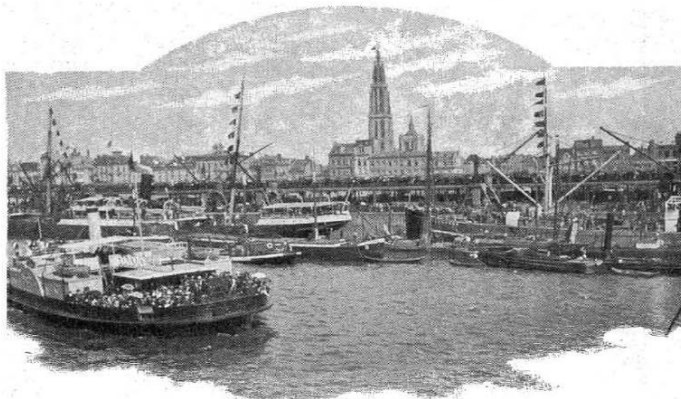
After a peaceful two day journey to Stanley Pool, all travellers on leaving their carriage could reach N'Dolo, Kinshasa, Leopoldville, State ports on the Pool and on to the Congo River and its thousands of kilometres of navigable tributaries. The total distance between Matadi, the last point accessible to sea going ships and the terminus at Leopoldville, was 390km.

The 'Compagnie Maritime Belge du Congo' steamer *s/s Albertville* was converted to carry both Belgian and other nationality guests, to the inaugural celebrations in July 1898. The manager of this cruise was in fact Colonel Thys himself, the real force behind the railroad, who also showed himself to be a great organizer of tourism. It had been announced that King Léopold II would attend, but General Daelan, was appointed as his special representative (it was well known that the King was terrified of illness and infections). Invitations to send delegates were received by the Belgian government, other European powers and the large Congo trading companies as well as artists, the Belgian Press and selected privileged newspaper reporters from France and Germany. It should also be noted that the list included four women, admired for their courage, as it was quite exceptional for women to leave for Africa.

There were only 65 places available on the ship and so thousands of applicants for the journey were disappointed. These had to wait for reports and books from the journalists to understand the importance and huge scale of the completed railway.

The excursion

The excursion left Antwerp on the 11th June, guests enjoying many luxuries aboard the 'Albertville' - choices from menus and wines, and champagne at every opportunity. There was a darkroom for photographers, a whole library of French and English books, maps and engravings of the Congo and Equatorial Africa as well as a post office for the despatch of mail.



11 June Anvers

La rade d'Anvers au moment du départ de *l'Albertville*.

Members are encouraged to look in their maritime mail collection, specifically for the period from 11th June to 6th August 1898 - and perhaps find a pleasant surprise!

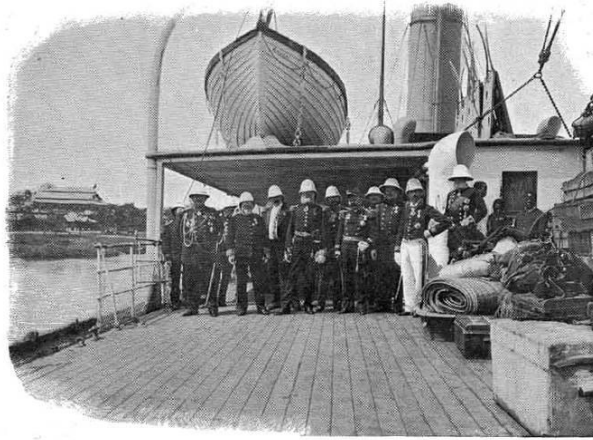
There were piano concerts by the ladies and sometimes, the Colonel gathered the delegates in the lounge for an inspirational and lively talk about the countries of Africa and of course, the railroad. There were two doctors on board to watch over the health of the excursion members, but they were never called upon for anything major.

Elaborate menus were created in Brussels and all provisions were taken from Belgium; table linen, place settings, crockery, glasses, a wide range of drinks and four colossal fireworks. Details of the Bar provision on the 'Albertville' gives an idea of what was consumed: 4000 bottles of 'St-Emilion 1892', 1200 bottles of 'Chateau Roques 1887' and thousands of red Bordeaux and Bourgogne. 2000 bottles of

white wine, 3000 bottles of Champagne, 300 bottles of Liqueur brandy, 200 old Hasselt bottles, hundreds of flasks of liqueurs and aperitifs, 1000 bottles of old port as well as thousands of bottles of beer and Vichy water. In a cabin shielded from the humidity, 3000 Havana Cigars were stored on absorbent cotton.

As previously agreed, the boat arrived at Banana on 1st July, the anniversary of the proclamation of the Independent State in 1885.

On 2nd July the boat cast anchor in front of Boma and on the 3rd, at Matadi.



On 4th July, between five and seven o'clock in the morning, seven trains left Matadi for the Crystal Mountains; every wagon having been supplied with the food necessary for the journey. Each train had about twenty native blacks to serve as *Boys*, that is domestics.

All the guests spent the night at the Tumba station where bungalows had been specially prepared and fitted out.

The trains arrived on 5th July at N'Dolo and the following day guests visited Kinshasa and crossed to Brazzaville aboard the steamer 'Brabant'. During the afternoon an informal buffet had been provided: elephant trunk in a champagne sauce, accompanied by a spectacular show by the Beteke tribe.

During the evening of 6th July, the official reception banquet and toast was held in the Leopoldville Officers Mess and there was a firework display.



5 juillet. — L'arrivée du train à N'Dolo.

The return journey home began a few days later – Matadi 8th and Boma 9th and on 10th July the 's/s Albertville' was already at Saint-Paul de Loanda. She arrived home at Antwerp on 6th August without having encountered the slightest problem.

The Label

The label measures 48 mm x 36 mm and is perforated 11 ½ x 11 ½. As can be seen in the examples illustrated, it contains a frame in the same colour as the centre, with the annotation 'EXCURSION AU

CONGO / COMITE ORGANISATEUR' The organising committee's address is incorporated into the lower panel and reads 'BUREAUX MONTAGNE DU PARC, 15 BRUXELLES'. The date 1898 is repeated in the upper left and bottom right corners.

The centre is illustrated with a boat, fully furnished and viewed sailing upstream alongside banks planted with palm trees.



Labels printed on white paper



Labels printed on blueish paper

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

Reference sources to the 'Inauguration of the Matadi-Leopoldville Railroad'

1. **1898.** Date of inauguration.
2. **Excursion Au Congo.** This is the name used to describe the journey marking and celebrating the inauguration of the railroad.
3. **'La Bataille du Rail' René J. Cornet.** An eminent historian records information related to the organisation, and his Committee issued a commemorative label and memories of this journey under the heading 'The Excursion'.
4. **'Compagnie du Chemin de Fer du Congo – Inauguration de la Ligne de Matadi au Stanley-Pool'** The book provides a list of participants, described as 'excursionnistes'.
5. **Montagne du parc 15, Bruxelles.** It is in this district of Brussels that the Belgian companies active in the Congo were concentrated. Typically - Société Générale Union Minière du Haut Katanga, etc.

Conclusion

It has been these *References* that enable me to confidently assert that the above described commemorative label was the one issued in 1898 on the occasion of the railroad inauguration - nevertheless several questions still remain.

- Who designed, engraved and printed the labels?
- Are there other colours or any varieties?
- Why two different papers?
- Were they issued in Brussels and/or the Congo?
- Were they produced simply as souvenir presents to the participants?

The definitive answer may rest in the archives of the 'Compagnie du Chemin de Fer du Congo', subsequently Otraco and stored I believe at the Tervueren museum. Have any of our member's access to such information?

Acknowledgement

Thanks are due to Philippe Lindekens and Thierry Frennet for their help in establishing that we know these labels exist on both white and a blueish paper and in five colours – pale blue, dark blue, blue green, red and brown. In my experience, most commonly 'brown' labels.

As well as being extremely rare, they have never been seen on mail.

X-X

15c Combination III7+C1 sheet position #27

Stuart Smith



All 'platers' will be aware that one can easily be misled by an apparently obvious, but non constant printing blemish.

It is in this context, that I illustrate such an example.

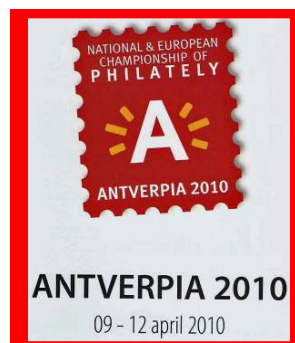
Whilst waiting for confirmation of some financial information to complete 'From the Hon. Secretary' page 3, I was plating a 1915 15centimes stamp on card from Kigoma and came across this very prominent blemish.

For illustrative purposes I have computer enhanced one of the constant plate varieties of the outer bottom left vertical frame of combination III7+C, which confirms sheet position #27, *but* I have not enhanced that of the 2 dots below the bottom frame line.

I simply illustrate for the benefit of 'platers' as it surely wasn't confined to the one sheet from which my stamp originated - albeit it isn't present on any other in my collection. It would be interesting to know if anyone else has an example!



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