

BELGIUM UN STAMP: UNUSUAL DESIGN

by Albert Pelsser

The stamp issued by Belgium in 1958 (see Figure 1) for the Brussels International Fair (Expo 58) pays tribute to two major achievements of ICAO, whose headquarters have been in Montreal since 1945, during the first decade of its lifetime, namely the North Atlantic air navigation infrastructure and the airport communications services. Those successes are illustrated on this stamp by an ocean weather ship and a groundmarshaller. However, it is interesting to examine the Organization's work in order to obtain an explanation of the unusual design of the Belgian stamp.

The main design in the foreground depicts a groundmarshaller, with a stylized aircraft shown directly in the background. Aircraft marshalling is a method of visual signalling between ground personnel and pilots on an airport or helipad. As opposed to radio communications, marshalling is a one-on-one visual communication on airports; the marshaller signals the pilot to keep turning, slow down, stop, shut down engines, lead the aircraft safely to its

parking stand or, in some cases, to the runway, etc.



Figure 1

When the Provisional International Civil Aviation Organization (PICAO) was formed on 6 June 1945, it immediately began to improve the draft Technical Annexes prepared by the International Civil Aviation Conference held in Chicago at the end of 1944. The original twelve an-



Figure 2

nexes, numbered by letters (as it had been the case with the annexes to the 1919 Paris Convention) from A to L, were later changed to numerals. The need for the original 12 Annexes conceived at Chicago had grown to 15 by subsequent decisions of the ICAO Council. By 1948, six of them had been formally adopted by the Council.

One of the twelve original annexes was the *Rules of the Air* (Annex C at that time). When first adopted by the ICAO Council in 1948, this annex was renumbered to Annex 2. The third edition of the International Standards and Recommended Practices related to the Rules of the Air became effective on 15 September 1956. A new set of marshalling signals specifically designed for hovering helicopters were incorporated in the new version.

Along with neighbouring countries, Belgium actively pushed for such helicopter signals, as SABENA, the Belgian national airline, started the world's first international helicopter service on 3 August 1953, when an 8-passenger Sikorsky S-55 left the new Heliport at Allée Verte in Brussels for Antwerpen and Rotterdam (see first day cover at Figure 2). The fare on this 73-mile route was \$7.00 one-way. During the first year of helicopter operation by SABENA, a total of 12,797 passengers were carried

on 3,482 regular flights on the company's network of three routes. Prior to that, SABENA had gained experience in the carriage of international mail by helicopter; the first day cover at Figure 3 commemorates the first airmail route between Brussels and The Hague, Netherlands, on 6 November 1947.

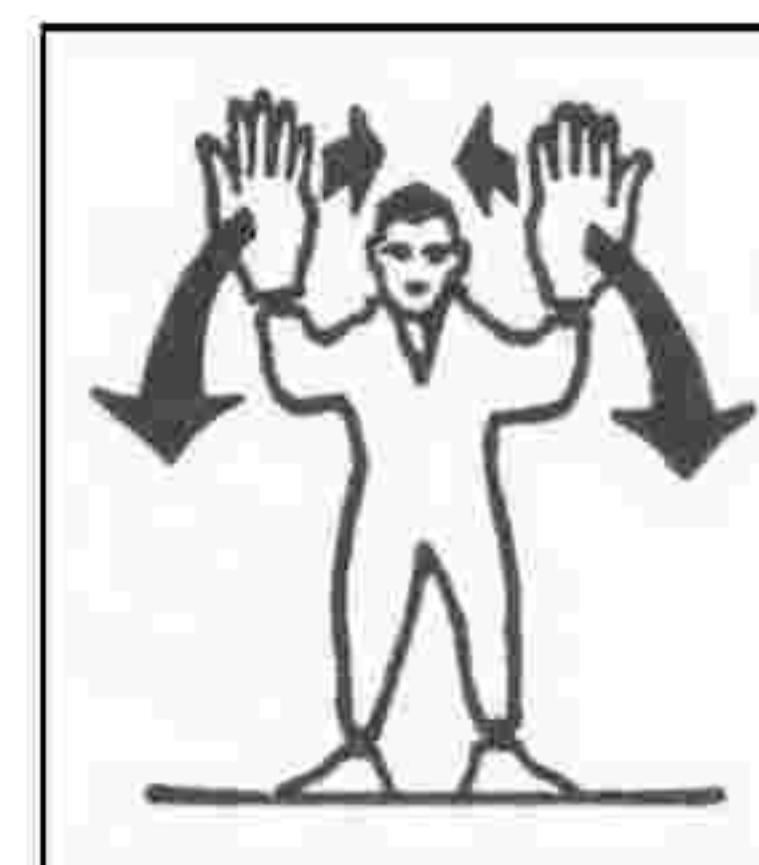


Figure 4

As regards the marshalling signal shown on the Belgian stamp, it can be noticed that the man's arms are a little aside the body; therefore, the signal shown on the stamp means *Straight Ahead* (see Figure 4).

The second interesting design on the Belgian stamp



Figure 3

is a ship and the following provides more input on this abnormal picture in an aviation collection. The ICAO regional meetings, held from the beginning of its life, were the forum of exchange on the establishment and operations of safe and efficient international air services. In some instances, the desired facilities had to be located in inhabited regions and in areas of uncertain sovereignty. Such case was that of the world's most heavily travelled trans-oceanic corridor, that is the North Atlantic.

The recommendations of the Dublin Regional Meeting, held in March 1946, recognized that there was a serious lack of weather observation and air navigational facilities over the Atlantic. Moreover, as underlying sovereign states had little to gain domestically in providing what would have been enormously expensive services for over-flying international services, the Dublin meeting suggested that a network of ships be stationed at specific points to provide all necessary observations and communications relay points, and to serve as emergency air-sea rescue bases.

As a result, a special conference was convened by PICAO in London in September 1946 with all interested parties. The conference considered to retain wartime Atlantic Ocean weather ship stations and decided that

affected member states would financially support the continued operations of these stations in the form of a *Joint Support* action. Twenty-five vessels were in position and in operation by 1949 to man ten weather stations. Subsequently, as aviation advanced and its needs changed, the number of vessels was progressively reduced and the last remaining station was phased out in 1986.

Being part of the Agreement on North Atlantic Ocean Stations, Belgium did however not operate stations, but contributed in cash towards the cost of the operation by other nations. The Belgian stamp reproduces one of these ocean stations.

Without the vital, organized, multi-nationally supported meteorological, navigational, supplemental air traffic control, and search and rescue services provided by the ocean vessels, such early and safe civil air transport operations over the North Atlantic would not have been possible.

The Belgium sets, Scott #516-525 and Scott #C15-C20, were issued for the Brussels World Fair for the purpose of financing the United Nations pavilion during the 1958 Brussels World Fair (Expo 58). The theme of that fair was *Man on the Threshold of a New Era*.

CHECKLIST

Belgium	C15	1958 Apr 17	World's Fair, Brussels (17 April to 19 October 1958 - Expo 58) - United Nations issue
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REFERENCES

Aircraft marshalling, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marshaller>

ICAO Annex 2 to the Convention on International Civil Aviation, Third Edition, September 1956.

Memorandum on ICAO, Various editions from 1949 to 1958.

