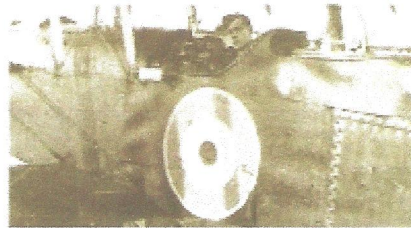


## The evolution of the SAAF's National Insignia

THE INTRODUCTION of yet another national marking for the South African Air Force this year is perhaps a good time to review the various national markings worn by SAAF aircraft over a period of some 83 years.

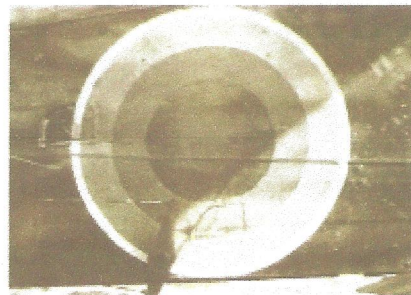
National insignia was first applied to aircraft as a means of distinguishing friendly and enemy aircraft in time of war. Germany introduced a black patee cross as its identity marking in World War one and Britain initially used the Union Flag as a symbol. However, at a distance the cross on the Union Flag could be mistaken for the German Cross and after various experiments were carried out, a roundel, bearing the national colours of red, white and blue were applied to the wings and fuselage of all military aircraft. These colours were repeated as vertical stripes on the rudder.

Countries world wide adopted their national flag colours to usually a roundel format, but sometimes a triangular, rectangular or other format. All the British Commonwealth countries initially adopted the red/white/blue roundels and when the first of over 100 aircraft of the Imperial Gift to South Africa arrived in 1919/20, they too carried these markings. The colours were seen to be vermilion (centre) white (middle ring) and ultramarine (outer ring) which were edged in white on the dark brownish PC-12 protective finish of the DH.9s, DH.4s and other types being delivered. The roundels were marked in the



*Left: Standard WWI RAF/RFC roundel outlines in white as seen on a DH.9A. Centre i Vermilion, then white and outer ring is Ultramarine outlined in white.*

*Below: Standard 4-colour roundel as used by the SAAF seen on a DH.9. Centre is: Village Green, Next circle: Red (Vermilion), Next Circle: Lemon Yellow, Next Circle: Ultramarine, outlined in white.*



proportions 1/5 (centre) 3/5 (inner circle) and 5/5 (outer circle - full diameter). This was later known as the Type "A" roundel (or Type "A2" with white surround).

The rudder was marked in equal vertical bands of ultramarine, white and vermilion, with the ultramarine leading.

Initially the aircraft flew in this colour scheme but on December 10, 1920, an instruction was issued to paint "on the body, tail and wing planes of all aeroplanes of the Union Air Force..." new markings consisting of:

- Centre - orange
- Inner Ring - green
- 3rd Ring - red
- Outer Ring - blue

However, two problems arose - not all the necessary colours were in stock and it had to be ascertained where to obtain the correct colours which would not damage previously applied paint or fabric.

By January 28, 1921, the markings had been painted on one Avro 504K as a trial. No further action was taken until December 20, 1921 when a new instruction was issued to paint the roundels in different colours as the December 1920 scheme had been found to be "unsatisfactory on the ground of visibility".

The new colours were to be:-

- Outer circle - blue
- Next circle - lemon yellow
- Next circle - red
- Inner circle - green

It was proposed thus to overpaint the white of the RAF roundel with yellow and add a centre of green. Messrs Herbert Evans and CW Grovanetti Ltd, paint suppliers of the day were contracted to manufacture the necessary colours which were described as "light or lemon yellow" and "village green" and from early in 1922 SAAF aircraft started to appear in the new markings.

Examination of the SE5a at the SA National Museum of Military History in 1992 showed the rudder stripes to have been originally blue/yellow/red and green (from the front).

It is interesting to note that the South African flag at this time consisted of a red rectangle with the Union Flag marked in the left hand

top corner and the SA coat of arms in green and yellow in the lower right hand portion of the flag. Thus the roundels were marked in the correct colours of the flag of the period.

On November 18, 1927 a drawing was issued detailing the new national insignia for the SAAF which reflected the colour of the new national flag to be introduced on May 31, 1928. This was a roundel with circles in equal widths with the centre in Orange, middle circle in White and outer circle in Blue (Ultramarine). The rudder stripes were marked in the same colours with the blue leading and hands being equal.

As before, roundels were marked on both wings, above and below, as well as on the fuselage. This style of roundel was later referred to as the Type "D" roundel. (The RAF did not use these proportions on their roundels until after WWII).

These roundels remained standard on SAAF aircraft until WWII with only occasional aircraft wearing the Type "A" roundel in orange/white/blue, usually deliveries from Britain such as the Hawker Furies which has been painted there before delivery and most other Hawker biplanes.

The Royal Air Force deleted rudder stripes from their aircraft from August 1934 and the SAAF followed suit from about the same time.

During the late 30's six Hawker Hurricanes one Blenheim Mk1 and a Fairey Battle were delivered, all wearing standard RAF

camouflage and Type "A" roundels edged in yellow, officially known as the Type "A1" roundel. These aircraft retained their finishes, only the RAF serial numbers giving way to SAAF numbers.

With the outbreak of WWII and South Africa's participation, the SAAF followed all the directives used by the Royal Air Force as regards to roundel styles, sizes and positions. Centres officially remained Orange instead of Red, but often these were not altered to Orange because of lack of time or material or because of the wishes of the many RAF personnel in use at SAAF units at the time.

On February 23, 1940 a general instruction was issued to camouflage all service aircraft in the SAAF Roundels were at this stage Orange White and Blue but on April 28, 1940, an instruction was issued to camouflage all aircraft in accordance with RAF practice.

This led to the introduction of yet another roundel style, the Type "B" roundel which consisted of a Red (SAAF-Orange) centre surrounded by a Blue outer circle. This roundel which had provided the RAF with a dilemma between identification and concealment and had gone through many revisions up till this time, was

in use mainly as upper wing marking with the centre circle being 2/5 of the outer diameter.

The low visibility of this roundel caused it sometimes to be modified to a type B1 roundel ie with a yellow surround giving proportions 1/4D, 5/8D and D (where D = Diameter of Roundel) but in the field, these proportions were not always adhered to.

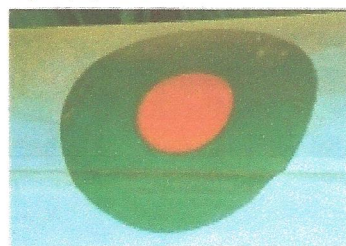
Generally however, the standard roundel styles up till 1942 were Type "B" above the wings, type "A" below the wings and type "A1" on the fuselage. Fin flashes were introduced at the beginning of WWII in equal bands of orange, white, blue with orange leading. These were applied in various sizes and styles but later standardised to



Standard "C" type roundel applied under the wing of Harvard 7370. An attempt has been made to modify the roundel in service with a small orange centre and the rest filled in with white. The roundel has faded in the sun to its original proportions.



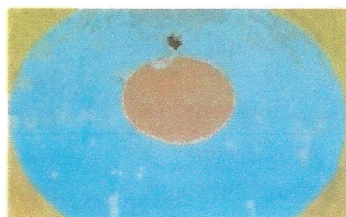
Standard proportion Type C1 roundel on a Spitfire with yellow outer ring some width as white inner ring. Standard dull blue has been used.



Standard Type "B" roundel as seen on a Mosquito. Orange centre, dull blue outer.



The C1 roundel applied at Harvard early post war was in bright colours using Ultramarine instead of the usual Dull Blue.



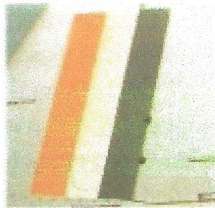
Non standard Type "B" roundel with reduced size centre and light Blue applied over standard dull blue as seen on an old Harvard wing.



Fin Flash used with C Type roundels seen here on a Mosquito PR1X. In this case the aircraft has Type "B" roundels and should not have had the narrow white strip in the fin flash.



Standard type 'D' roundel as used by the RAF with Post Office Red centre and Aircraft Blue outer ring. The SAAF substituted Light Orange for Red.



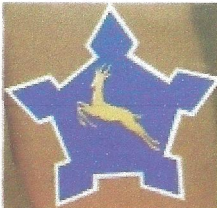
Fin Flash as used with Springbok Castles - as seen on an Impala. The fin flash was often deleted from many types.



Standard Castle in Aircraft Blue with Gold Springbok. Note how Springbok on castle differs from Springbok on roundel. This one has the narrow outline.



Standard Springbok Roundel as applied to a Harvard. Colours are Light Orange Springbok and Aircraft Blue outer Ring. Note how rear foot of Springbok cuts into Blue ring.



Springbok Castle as applied to an Alouette III. Note that the Springbok does not have features.



Springbok Castle with broad white outline as applied to a camouflaged Dakota. The 'Bok' also has no features.



First of the 'low-viz' castles was this version with white hatched outline of castle and standard gold 'bok' all given a light overspray of grey. The blue of the castle is not filled in. Seen on a Mirage F1CZ.



The basic standard Eagle Castle in one of its two forms as applied to an Impala MK.1. Eagle is Gold on an Aircraft Blue Castle. Colour was revised to Flag Blue.



Later type 'low viz' castle in outline form in Dark Grey with Dark Grey Springbok seen here on a Cheetah E.



This 'low viz' castle is a standard one which has been overpainted with a light coating of grey on a Mirage F1CZ.

a size of 24" wide by 27" high.

Colours started to vary with the arrival of aircraft from the USA with approximations of the RAF standard and locally manufactured paints which were not always supplied to the original colour standard.

In May 1942, the RAF revised the proportions of the national insignia with the conspicuous yellow and white portions being reduced in size on both roundels and fin flash. This was known as the type "C" roundel or in the case of that with the yellow ring, the type "C1" roundel. Typical proportions for a medium size roundel would thus be 12" Red (or Orange) centre, 16" White circle, 32" Blue circle (and when applied, a 36" Yellow circle). The type "C" was applied under the wings, type "C1" on the fuselage and type "B" above the wings.

Around this time roundel colours changed from the Bright Red and Blue (Ultramarine) to Dull Red (a brick colour) and Dull Blue (indigo). This remained the standard for the rest of WWII with modified forms of this being used for specialized missions. For example, photo reconnaissance aircraft used type "B" roundels on fuselage and above the wings only, while maritime reconnaissance aircraft and bombers did not carry under wing roundels. In the latter part of WWII many aircraft carried "C" type roundels above the wings as well. Austers of 42 AOP Flight carried "B" type roundels above and below the wings.

At home however, many aircraft retained the early A/A1/B type roundel combination right through and one could also see mixes of these markings. Colours also varied with some aircraft, especially Tiger Moths and Ansons using light blue instead

of the darker shade. There were also a variety of roundels with non-standard proportions.

The post war SAAF saw a revision to the type "A" roundel. Often this was applied to SAAF aircraft wearing type "C1" on the fuselage "B" on the wings and Type "A" under wings!

Many new aircraft eg Devons and Vampires arrived with type "D" roundels (which had been introduced by the RAF from 1947) in orange, white and blue.

By the end of the 1940's aircraft were to be seen with all the various styles of roundels applied. This all changed in 1950 when the SAAF decided to follow the lead set by Canada and introduce a distinctive centre marking in its roundel, surrounded by the blue circle peculiar to all the Commonwealth countries.

The SAAF introduced a Springbok marked leaping forward on the fuselage and inwards on the wings and first appeared on the Mustangs that 2 Sqn took to Korea.

By December 4, 1950 10 Vampires and one Devon had been painted at Waterkloof with 16 Spitfires and six Harvards to be done. By January 3, 1951 all aircraft of No 1 Group had been re-marked.

Australia followed suit with the Kangaroo as did New Zealand and eventually Rhodesia. The new marking, arguably the most attractive insignia carried by SAAF aircraft was not to last long however.

At the Staff Conference on December 7, 1956, the outline of the plan view of the castle at Cape Town was chosen as the Defence Force symbol. On February 4, 1957 it was decided that the symbol would constitute the new SAAF national insignia. Colours were to be Air Force Blue (ie light blue) with a dark blue

surround and an Orange Springbok super-imposed.

There were complaints about the clarity of the marks and a revised scheme was adopted. Trial markings were painted on VIP Ventura 6487 and a maritime aircraft on May 2, 1957. There were two versions, one described as "Gold and Blue" and the other "Yellow on White".

Dakota 6854 was to be painted in castle markings on July 10, 1957 and the following month the aircraft went to the United Kingdom in the new markings. The marking was approved by the Minister of Defence on October 5, 1957 and as finally chosen was in Aircraft Blue with a white surround with a gold leaping springbok super-imposed, the latter being somewhat different to the original on the Springbok Roundel showing all four of its legs and with the head turned slightly.

The Orange/White/Blue fin flash still remained however in deference to the flag. Policy had now changed from this point with the national insignia no longer showing the national colours but being more of a SAAF "Logo".

Some of the Shackletons which arrived from 1957 carried the Castles with orange Springboks - these were gradually changed to gold.

C-130s had castles in USAF Insignia Blue, while Mirages were delivered in French Cerulean Blue. Over the years, anomalies were to be seen. Yellow Springboks, Springboks jumping backwards, reversed fin flashes (all the C-160Zs had the fin flashes reversed on one side!).

During the long border war, many SAAF aircraft carried no national insignia. Since this time, application of castles on many types has been erratic to say the least.

Low visibility castles were introduced in the 1980's during the latter part of the "bush war", initially will the standard markings overpainted with a soft spray of grey and later outline markings in black and grey.

The SAAF Eagle replaced the Springbok in the castle from 1993 and various low visibility versions were introduced for maritime and fighter aircraft.

The present national flag was introduced from April 27, 1994, and soon after replaced the Orange, White and Blue fin flashes on SAAF aircraft. For many types of aircraft, this has been the only identification, castles not being carried.

A new marking was proposed to be introduced from this year. A dark blue roundel replaces the castle upon which is superimposed a light blue twelve pointed design edged in white with the SAAF Eagle superimposed. Colours were similar to those rejected in February 1957 on the grounds of visibility. This has been replaced before introduction by a similar roundel all in dark blue with a white 12-point design and a gold eagle. One wonders whether the SAAF should not have reverted to its original 1921/22 roundel. With a few modifications all the present national colours could have been incorporated.

It is interesting to observe that with two styes of 4-colour roundels at least four types of orange, white blue roundels, a Springbok roundel, two types of castles and now a roundel with a 12-point star (to say nothing of variations) the SAAF has probably had more types of national insignia than any other air force on the planet! ✈



The standard castle as applied to a PC.7 MkII Astra with Blue outline.



National flag used as a fin flash on Harvard 7156/5.



Alternative version of Eagle Castle with ribbon and motto below eagle as applied to a C-130B 9404.



Another alternative version of eagle Castle with eagle applied in Golden Yellow instead of Light Gold on C-130B 405.



No standard small eagle in gold with ribbon and Black outlining on a light Blue Castle on C-47TP 6628.



'Low viz' Eagle Castle on Cheetah C 370 with dark grey outline and darker grey eagle.



'Low viz' outline 'Eagle Castle' in Black on CASA 212 0010.



Light Yellow Eagle on Eagle Castle on C-47TP 6887.



Detail of Eagle on Eagle Castle in Light Yellow on Light Blue castle on C-47TP 6880.



'Low viz' Eagle Castle in Light Blue with Golden Yellow eagle on a C-47TP 6835.



The initial proposal for the new SAAF insignia. The Light Blue centre has been replaced by dark blue.



The new national insignia which was unveiled on April 27. It remains to be seen how this will be applied to SAAF aircraft.