

SA AIR FORCE NATIONAL INSIGNIA

By Geoff Timms

- a brief history

Germany introduced a black cross as it's national identity marking during World War 1 and Britain initially used the Union Flag as it's national identity symbol. However, at a distance the cross on the Union Flag could be mistaken for the German Cross and various experiments were carried out bearing the national colours of red, white and blue. Roundels were placed on the wings and vertical stripes on the rudder of all military aircraft.

Some countries adopted a triangle and others, a rectangle. Commonwealth countries initially adopted the red /white / blue roundels.

When South Africa received the Imperial Gift during 1919 / 1920,these aircraft also carried the red /white / blue markings.

However, on 10 December 1920,the South African Minister of Defence directed that a new national insignia be applied to the aircraft of the Union Air Force. These colours were orange – centre, green-inner ring,red-3rd ring and blue-outer ring. The rudder was to be marked in equal vertical bands of ultramarine (blue),white and vermilion(red),the ultramarine band leading. By 28 January 1921,an Avro 504K had been painted as a trial. Problems arose in that not all the necessary colours were in stock and it had to be ascertained where to obtain the correct colours which would not damage the previously applied paint or fabric.

The 20th of December 1921 a new instruction was issued as the colours were found to be "unsatisfactory on the grounds of visibility". The new colours were green- centre, red – inner ring, 3rd lemon yellow, blue – outer ring. The rudder stripes were to marked with blue, yellow, red and green ,with the blue as the leading colour. Messrs Herbert Evans and CW Grovanetti Ltd were the paint suppliers of the day and were contracted to manufacture the necessary colours. These colours were used until a drawing was issued on 18 November 1927, detailing a new national insignia for the SAAF which reflected the colours of the new national flag which was to be introduced on 31 May 1928. Up until then, the national flag 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 position of the flag.

The new national insignia was to be a roundel with the colours of orange –centre, white –middle circle and blue (Ultramarine) outer circle. The circles were to be of equal width and known as the Type "A" roundel. Upper, lower wings and fuselage were marked with a different style of roundel been divided up into 6 proportions, this was to become the "D" Type roundel. This type of roundel was only introduced into the RAF after 1948 and is still in use by the RAF! Rudder stripes were also painted with orange, white and blue, the blue leading. The RAF deleted rudder stripes from their aircraft from 1934 with the SAAF following suit shortly thereafter.

With the delivery of the 6 Hawker Hurricanes, 1 Blenheim Mk1 and a Fairey Battle, Type "A" roundels were applied to the aircraft with yellow outer circle, this was to become the Type "A1" roundel. At the outbreak of WW2 and with South Africa's participation in it the SAAF followed all the directives used by the RAF with regard to roundel size, style and positioning. This also saw the introduction of the orange, white and blue fin flash with orange leading. The fin flashes were applied in various sizes and styles. Centres of the roundel officially remained Orange. Research has shown that a large amount of aircraft used in SA for training did not have the red centre changed to orange. This was sometimes because of the lack of material, time or the wishes of the RAF personnel undergoing training in SA. At the war front it was a different scenario as the "erks" quickly changed the centres of the roundels to orange upon receiving an aircraft from the RAF.

A general instruction was issued on 23 February 1923, to camouflage all service aircraft in the SAAF, a further instruction issued on the 28 April 1940 to ensure that the aircraft were camouflaged in accordance with RAF practice. This led to another type of roundel being introduced and known as the Type "B" roundel with the white deleted from the roundel and used only on the top of the wings. The low visibility of this type of roundel was so good that a thin yellow outer circle was applied to the roundel, thus the Type "B1" came into being.

May 1942 saw a revision of the national insignia with the white and yellow portions being reduced in size on both roundels and fin flash and was identified as the Type "C" roundel and fin flash. Type "C" roundels with a thin yellow outer circle were identified as the Type "C1".

New aircraft that were obtained after WW2 eg Devons and Vampires had the "D" Type roundel with an orange centre on arrival in SA.

Recent research has shown that the Canadians were the first to have a "national symbol" instead of the red centre to the roundel, a photograph of an Anson taken in 1946 has proved this point. The SAAF not to be outdone followed the lead and introduced a Springbok marked leaping forward on the fuselage and inwards on the wings and first appeared on the Mustangs serving in Korea. The Springbok's head faced forward on the roundel. Australia, New Zealand and eventually Rhodesia followed with their own "national symbols" instead of a red centre of the roundel.

A Staff Conference held on 7 December, 1956, decided that a plan view of the outline of the castle at Cape Town was to be used as the Defence Force symbol. On the 4th of February 1957 it was further decided that the symbol would constitute the new SAAF national insignia with a dark blue background and an orange Springbok super-imposed. Ventura 6487 was used as a trial aircraft and was painted on the 2 of May, 1957. Dakota 6854 was also painted with the new national insignia on the 10 of July 1957 leaving the following month on a trip to the United Kingdom. The Minister of Defence approved the new national insignia on the 5 of October 1957. The colours chosen were Aircraft Blue with a white surround with a gold Springbok leaping showing all four of the legs and the head turned slightly.

With the delivery of new aircraft from the USA, UK, France and Italy saw various interpretations of the blue colour used on the castle insignia. C-130's had USAF Insignia Blue, Mirages had French Cerulean Blue amongst other colours used. The French delivered the Transalls with the

fin flash reversed on the early deliveries. The leaping attitude of the Springbok also differed from paint shop to shop within the SAAF, this can still be easily seen on originally SAAF painted Harvards as the Springbok's jump is at a more vertical attitude.

The Springbok Castle remained in service for many years with a few variations that were noted on the Mirage F1CZ 203, Cheetah and Dakota C-47TP aircraft. Mirage F1CZ 203 had a broken white outline of the Castle with the background colour the same as the aircraft and a light overspray of the background colour over the Springbok.

Cheetah aircraft had the Springbok Castle with the outline and Springbok either in Dark Sea Grey or black.

Maritime and cargo Dakota C-47TP aircraft had the blue / gold Springbok Castle with an overspray of the aircraft's colour. The V.I.P. aircraft had the standard blue and gold Springbok Castle with no overspray.

With the political changes taking place in the early 1990's a move was made to replace the Springbok with a more acceptable national symbol and the SAAF Fish Eagle replaced the Springbok. Transall C-160Z 337 was the first aircraft painted with the Eagle castle. Colours remained the same for high visibility and low visibility aircraft. The Eagle's head look forward on the fuselage of the aircraft and looked inwards to the fuselage when placed on the wings. There were two variations of the Eagle Castle, the first with the scroll clasped by the eagle's feet and the second variation with no scroll under the eagle.

The new national flag was introduced on the 27 April 1994 and soon replaced all the orange, white and blue fin flashes. The black triangle on the new national flag faces forward with the red portion of the flag on top of the flag.

The South African National Defence Force adopted the 9 point roundel as the new Defence Force symbol for all the Arms of Service during 2003. The 9 points represent the nine provinces of SA. The initial SAAF proposal for the nine point roundel had Light Blue inner background with a Union Jack Blue outer circle background. The nine points were outlined with a white border, this was later changed to a Union Jack Blue inner background and was as such unveiled on the 27 April 2003.

The latest changes to the 9 point roundel also known as the "cookie cutter" is the outline and eagle painted in black, light or dark grey colour for aircraft that require low visibility national insignia for operational purposes, V.I.P. aircraft have the standard blue and gold national insignia.