

CHAPTER 2

ACTIVE SERVICE LETTER CARDS OF SOUTHERN RHODESIA

On 28 July 1941 South Africa introduced an Active Service Letter Cards, printed by the Government Printer in Pretoria, bearing a 3d stamp showing Groote Schuur. These Letter Cards were in the design of air letter sheets in that they were printed on light paper, with an airmail logo or etiquette, and a predetermined postage rate. These forms were produced for use to and from the Union Forces serving in North and East Africa, and subsequently in the Middle East, Sicily and Italy. They were intended to speed up communications between those serving in the military forces, and to reduce the cost both to the sender and to the Government in carrying this correspondence as air mail. The Letter Cards were intended to replace an earlier British design of air mail letters which had been introduced to and from North Africa earlier in 1941.



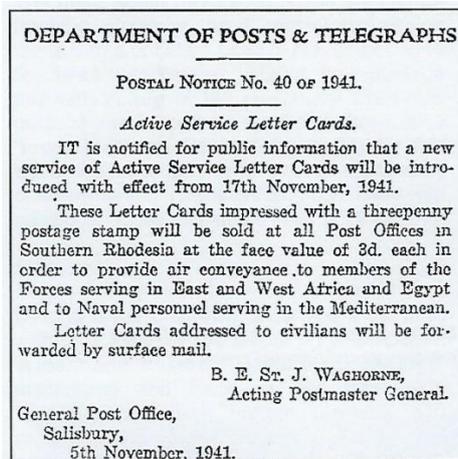
South African Active Service Letter Card (first issue with Afrikaans stamp)

The position in Southern Rhodesia was equally pressing. Not only were many men from the Colony actively serving in the British Forces, particularly in East and North Africa and the Middle East, the country had become a major base for military training, especially of aircrews. The need for an inexpensive and quick means of communication between those on active service and their friends and families back in Southern Rhodesia, and between those training in Southern Rhodesia and their friends and families elsewhere, was obvious. The cost of an airmail letter had been fixed at an expensive 1s3d per ½ ounce, and there were considerable delays in the delivery of such letters. A system had to be devised to overcome these issues.

The Government directed that preliminary work be commenced on the design of a letter card, based on the South African form. In a letter dated 29 August 1941, the Principal Revenue Examiner of the Treasury wrote to the Controller of the Government Stationary Office stating that the Minister of Finance had approved the introduction of Letter Cards with the 3d Victoria Fall stamp to be reproduced on each card. An initial supply of 100 000 cards was requested. It was decided that the Letter Cards would be sold at face value if it were to be determined that the costs of production and delivery would be recouped on that basis.

In the Post Office Circular of October 1941, the introduction of the Active Service Letter Card was first publicised in the Colony. In that Circular it was stated that the service was being introduced “in order to provide a reduced airmail rate for communications exchanged between the public in this Colony and members of the Forces serving in East and West Africa and the Middle East”.

Postal Notice No 40 of 1941 advised that the introduction date was to be 17 November 1941. The use of Active Service Letter Cards was restricted. Air conveyance would only be provided where the cards were addressed to a member of the Forces serving in East and West Africa and Egypt and to Naval personnel serving in the Mediterranean. If addressed to a civilian the correspondence would be forwarded by surface mail.¹



Postal Notice 40 of 1941

With effect from 15 December 1941 Letter Cards addressed to members of the Forces stationed at all points served by the Egypt-Australia Air Mail Service would be conveyed by airmail. From that date Letter Cards posted by members of the Forces in Southern Rhodesia addressed to civilians in East and West Africa, Egypt or at points served by the Egypt-Australia Air Service would be conveyed by airmail if the card bore the franking stamp of a military or

¹ Expedited mail services for civilians became possible after 18 May 1942 when the airgraph service to and from Southern Rhodesia was started.

air force unit.² On 17 August 1943 the Letter Card service was extended to permit Letter Cards to be used when addressed to members of the Forces stationed in Great Britain. The service was further extended on 1 February 1944 to allow these Letter Cards to be addressed to civilians in the United Kingdom; in that event the Letter Card had to be uprated with a further 3d postage. From that date the sender was obliged to give his or her name and full address on the rear panel of the Letter Card. This made the Active Service Letter Card service so popular that from 15 April 1944 the Post Office was obliged to restrict sales to one Letter Card per person at any one time.³ After the end of the War the use of the Active Service Letter Cards was permitted to all destinations provided the postage paid was that applicable to air letter sheets (aerogrammes).

Five distinct Active Service Letter Cards were produced by the Government Printer in Salisbury between November 1941 and the middle of 1944. On each issue the printed stamp was the 3d Victoria Falls 'Revenue and Postage' in blue, and each issue was on unwatermarked paper



1935 'Postage and Revenue' 3d
definitive stamp (SG 35b)



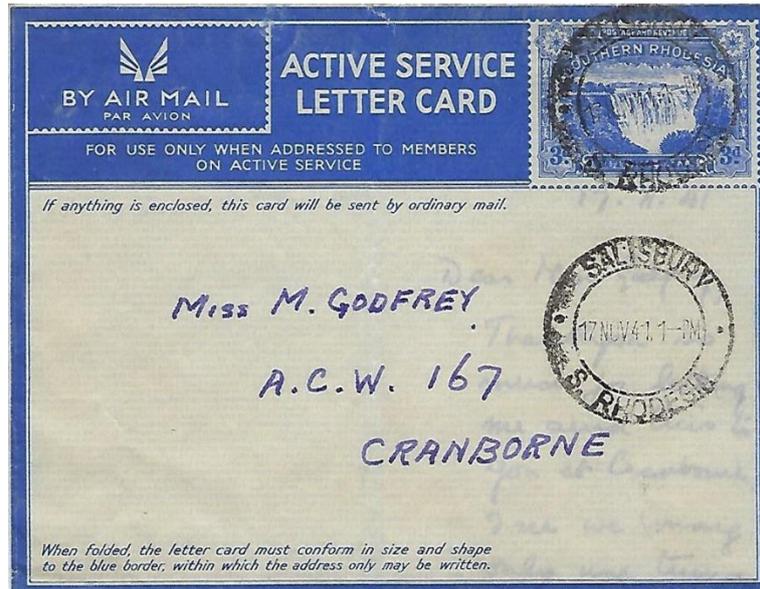
'SOUTHERN RHODESIA GOVERNMENT'
inlay (enlarged)

The first three issues, which went on sale between 17 November 1941 and 25 March 1945, had the same design, and in particular did not require the sender to give his or her name and address. The first issue is readily identified by the overlay on the inside of the centre panel of the words 'SOUTHERN RHODESIA GOVERNMENT' in light blue using a micro font.⁴ The first issue was printed on high quality white paper, the second on rough buff paper and the third on a creamy white paper. All three had two side flaps which folded into the centre before the Card was folded in half.

² Postal Notice 45 of 1941.

³ Postal Notice 12 of 1944.

⁴ This concept was also copied from the South African version, which had a plain blue overlay on the inside centre. A similar overlay was used on the early printings of the air letter sheets of Great Britain.



First day use (philatelic) of the first issue

In the Post Office Circular of October 1941 the following was stated:

The service is being introduced in order to provide a reduced air mail rate for communications exchanged between the public in this colony and members of the Forces serving in East and West Africa and the Middle East.

The ambiguous use of the word 'exchanged' was not reflected in Postal Notice 40 of 1941. That Postal Notice was clear. The Letter Cards were introduced '... in order to provide air conveyance to members of the Forces ...' No postal notice issued in Southern Rhodesia specifically authorised use of these Letter Cards in the Middle East. However, a limited number of Letter Cards were used from the Middle East back into Southern Rhodesia. In the example shown below, the Egyptian postal authorities clearly accepted an imprinted 3d Southern Rhodesia stamp as prepayment for the conveyance of the Letter Card to Salisbury, and no local surcharge was raised against the recipient as the postage paid was valid. The 3d rate for air mail letter cards had been introduced in Egypt with effect from 1 May 1941.

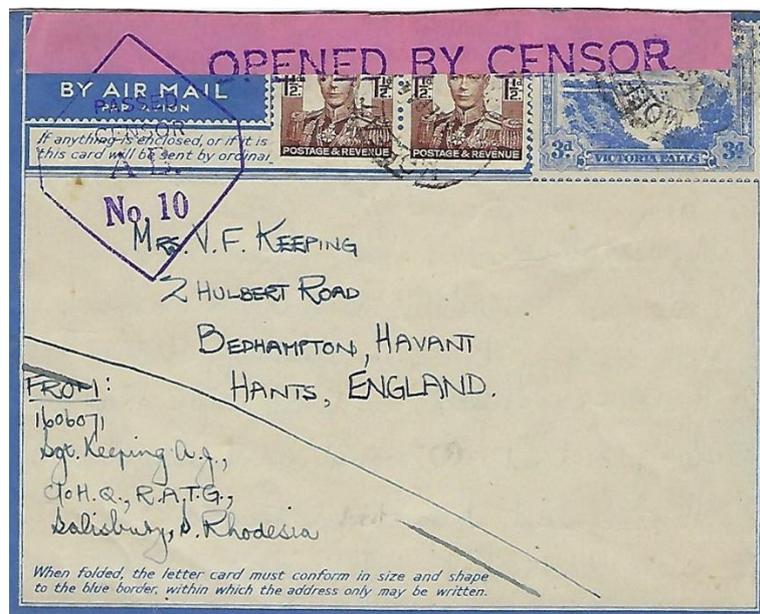
The Post Office did advise that there was no reduced rate for Active Service Letter Cards sent *from* India to Southern Rhodesia, and that such Letter Cards sent with the prepaid rate applicable to the United Kingdom would be forwarded by surface mail.⁵ India did not produce prepaid Active Service Letter Cards for air mail postage, so the advice from the Post Office probably applied to the forms produced in Southern Rhodesia.

⁵ Post Office Circular No 257, 1 September 1943, paragraph 6.



Letter card (ASC 2) posted from Egypt on 27 December 1943 to Salisbury with 6520 censor mark

The fourth and fifth issues had a different design on the front panel. The words 'FOR USE ONLY WHEN ADDRESSED TO MEMBERS ON ACTIVE SERVICE' were removed. A white box contained a warning against enclosures and use by civilians to other civilians was printed under the air mail etiquette. On the lower front panel the sender was required to give his or her name and full address. These two issues did not have two side flaps, but a single full size flap which enabled the Cards to be folded into quarters. The fourth issue of May 1944 was on thick cream paper and the final issue, released later in 1944, was on coarse buff paper.



Fourth issue upgrade with 3d as it is addressed to a civilian

There are variants in the cutting of the various issues, resulting in some cases of bevelling of the bottom of the cards. Variations in the intensity of the blue print are common.

The Post Office did not demonetise Active Service Letter Cards and presumably sold them until stocks were exhausted. The 3d rate service was discontinued with effect from 5 May 1947⁶.

Neither Northern Rhodesia nor Nyasaland issued any Active Service Letter Cards.⁷

	RSC Wheatley RSCJ 153 page 161	Harrop RSCJ 127 pages 129-131	Higgins & Gage World Postal Stationery Catalogue Vol 16	Kessler Catalogue of Aerograms
ASC 1	1	1	I 1	M-A 101
ASC 2	2	2	I 2	M-A 102
ASC 3	3	3	I 3	M-A 103
ASC 4	4	4	I 4	M-A 104
ASC 5	5	5	I 5	M-A 105

Comparative table of catalogue listings of Active Service Letter Cards

⁶ Postal Notice 9 of 1947.

⁷ Further reading:

Cooksey & Harrop: The Postal History of Southern Rhodesia During World War II pages 15-24 (RSC Memoir 17)

Harrop: Air Letter Cards RSCJ 127 (September 1984) pages 129-131

Creasy: The Air Letters of Southern Rhodesia – The South African Philatelist June 1947 pages 92-94

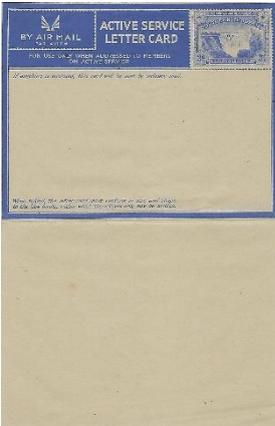
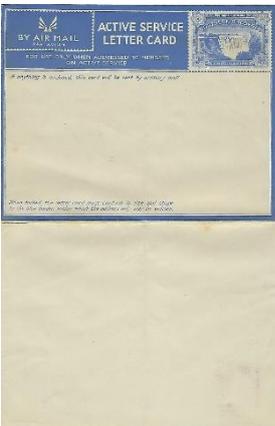
Bridges: The Aerogrammes of the Union of South Africa 1942-1981 (2004) pages 11-12, 18-29

ACTIVE SERVICE LETTER CARDS



Air mail etiquette 1

<p>ASC 1</p>	<p>Sheet size open: Sheet size folded: Colour: Watermark: Folding: Frame: Printer: Issue date: Air mail etiquette: Design details:</p>	<p>248 x 200 mm 127 x 100 mm Blue ink on thin high quality white paper. None Two side panels which fold inwards and then bottom half folds upwards. Single gummed flap. Solid blue line, and thin blue inner frame. Government Printer, Salisbury 17 November 1941 Etiquette 1. 'BY AIR MAIL/PAR AVION' on two lines outlined in blue box below a pair of stylised wings. The etiquette is shown with perforations on three sides. Imprinted 3d Victoria Falls stamp with perforations in blue on top right. On bottom of front panel is printed in blue 'When folded, the letter card must conform in size and shape to the blue border, within which the address only may be written'. Centre inner panel overlay in blue with words 'SOUTHERN RHODESIA GOVERNMENT' in micro font. Either straight or bevelled edges. The size of the side panels varies.</p>	
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<p>ASC 2</p>	<p>Sheet size open: Sheet size folded: Colour: Watermark: Folding: Frame: Printer: Issue date: Air mail etiquette: Design details:</p>	<p>248 x 200 mm 127 x 100 mm Blue ink on rough buff paper. None Two side panels which fold inwards and then bottom half folds upwards. Single gummed flap. Solid blue line, and thin blue inner frame. Government Printer, Salisbury 27 July 1942 Etiquette 1. 'BY AIR MAIL/PAR AVION' on two lines outlined in blue box below a pair of stylised wings. The etiquette is shown with perforations on three sides. Imprinted 3d Victoria Falls stamp with perforations in blue on top right. On bottom of front panel is printed in blue 'When folded, the letter card must conform in size and shape to the blue border, within which the address only may be written'. No overlay inside.</p>	
<p>ASC 3</p>	<p>Sheet size open: Sheet size folded: Colour: Watermark: Folding: Frame: Printer: Issue date: Air mail etiquette: Design details:</p>	<p>248 x 200 mm 127 x 100 mm Blue ink on cream white paper. None Two side panels which fold inwards and then bottom half folds upwards. Single gummed flap. Solid blue line, and thin blue inner frame. Government Printer, Salisbury 25 March 1944 Etiquette 1. 'BY AIR MAIL/PAR AVION' on two lines outlined in blue box below a pair of stylised wings. The etiquette is shown with perforations on three sides. Imprinted 3d Victoria Falls stamp with perforations in blue on top right. No overlay inside. On bottom of front panel printed in blue 'When folded, the letter card must conform in size and shape to the blue border, within which the address only may be written'. No overlay inside.</p>	

<p>ASC 4</p>	<p>Sheet size open: Sheet size folded: Colour: Watermark: Folding: Frame: Printer: Issue date: Air mail etiquette: Design details:</p>	<p>256 x 204 mm 128 x 102 mm Blue ink on thicker cream paper. None Single side panel folds inwards from right and then bottom half folds upwards. Single gummed flap. Solid blue line, and thin blue inner frame. Government Printer, Salisbury May 1944 Etiquette 1. 'BY AIR MAIL/PAR AVION' on two lines outlined in blue box below a pair of stylised wings. The etiquette is shown with perforations on three sides. Imprinted 3d Victoria Falls stamp with perforations in blue on top right. White box with blue printing with instructions. On lower panel 'Sender's name and full address' with no lines. No overlay inside.</p>	
<p>ASC 5</p>	<p>Sheet size open: Sheet size folded: Colour: Watermark: Folding: Frame: Printer: Issue date: Air mail etiquette: Design details:</p>	<p>256 x 204 mm 128 x 102 mm Blue ink on coarse buff paper. None Single side panel folds inwards from right and then bottom half folds upwards. Single gummed flap. Solid blue line, and thin blue inner frame. Government Printer, Salisbury 1944 Etiquette 1. 'BY AIR MAIL/PAR AVION' on two lines outlined in blue box below a pair of stylised wings. The etiquette is shown with perforations on three sides. Imprinted 3d Victoria Falls stamp with perforations in blue on top right. White box with blue printing with instructions. On lower panel 'Sender's name and full address' with no lines. No overlay inside.</p>	