



Did You Know?

The World's Rarest Airmail Stamp

By: Alex Gill

With one stamp in existence the 10-cent Black Honduras Airmail Stamp (Honduras Scott C12) is the world's rarest airmail stamp. When issued in 1925, the stamp was designated for mail flown between the central capital city of Tegucigalpa and Puerto Cortes along the coast. As the remote capital city lacked directed rail service, the city could only be accessed through rough roads and mule trains, and therefore, the need for airmail service was essential. Compania Aerea Hondurena (known as CAA, Central American Airlines) was responsible for completing 1.5-hour flights between the two cities and transporting mail.

Previously in 1922, the Postmaster General of Honduras contracted with an American physician, Thomas C. Pounds to establish airmail service between Tegucigalpa and the North Coast and the contract was approved by Honduras President Lopez Gutierrez. On April 25, 1929, an announcement was made introducing new airmail services from Tegucigalpa. In response, the government planned to issue a series of special stamps for exclusive use for new routes, however the government failed to deliver on its promises leaving the post office in limbo. In response, Thomas Pounds worked with a business associate Karl J. Snow to overprint surcharges to existing definitive stamps using a manually operated press. Snow already had a printing press as he had been responsible for printing brochures for a local church. Black surcharges reading "AERO CORREO" were applied to existing blocks of 12 stamps and various positions. It should be noted that each overprint position setting differed from another creating different characteristics making stamp plating easier. The name "Black Honduras" refers to the color of the overprint and it is believed the poor quality of the overprint and use of black in was done as a trial leading up to the later usage of red colored overprint.

The existence of the stamp was not discovered until 1925 when the "Ustariz Single" was discovered. Various catalogs mentioned the airmail routes and various overprinted stamps used, but not the 10-cent overprint. In March 1927, philatelist John Luff received airmail stamps from Julio Uustanz, owner of the airfield at Puerto Cortes. Ustariz obtained the stamps from a friend F.W. Budde, who had received from Pounds a year earlier. Luff plated the stamp believing it to be a genuine trial print, told Ustariz the stamp was likely a counterfeit and never paid for nor returned the stamp. The Ustariz Single passed through various collectors and sales before it was tragically lost after a 2002 sale.

In March of 1927, Luff received an additional collection of Honduras stamps which included a pair of the 10-cent overprinted stamps from stamp collector Raul Duran Membreno, a dentist who later become secretary of the Honduras Postal Administration. Luff tried to convince Membreno to sell the pair but failed. Later in 1927, a letter by Membreno stated that he had tragically lost the pair and it has not been seen since. However, photographs of the pair exist today. The only existing single stamp was discovered in a collection in 1930 by Washington D.C. stamp dealer H.A. Robinette. Widely regarded as the only remaining overprinted stamp, the stamp has gained notoriety by passing through the hands of many famous collectors including Nicolas Sanabria, Fred Kessler, Phillip Cole Thomas Matthews, Alfred Lichtenstein, Raymond Weill, Armand Marc Russo, Josiah K. Lilly, Jr., and others. Additionally, the stamp had made many appearances at stamps shows including TIPEX 1936, Anphilex 1971, Interphil '76, Anphilex 1996, and the 2016 New York World Stamp Show. The stamp sold in January 2012 for \$130,000, the highest price paid for one stamp in a public auction in America at the time.



Red Honduras Scott C3