

# The development of Domestic Airmail Services in Guatemala

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## Introduction

Guatemala is the northernmost country of Central America. The country is bordered on the north and west by Mexico, on the south by the Pacific Ocean, on the east by Honduras and El Salvador, on the northeast by Belize and the short northern coast gives access to the Caribbean Sea. Guatemala has a total area of 108,890 sq. km (42,043 sq. miles).

The country is mountainous with small desert and sand dune patches, hilly valleys filled with people, except for the southern coastal area and the vast northern lowlands of Petén department (province). Two mountain chains enter Guatemala from west to east, dividing the country into three major regions: the highlands, where the mountains are located; the Pacific coast, south of the mountains; and the sparsely populated Petén region, north of the mountains.

A railway line was built from Guatemala City to St. José on the Pacific coast and a second narrow-gauge railway to Puerto Barrios on the Caribbean coast via Zacapa was completed on January 19, 1908. Quetzaltenango, the second largest city in the western part of the country never had a proper rail connection with the rest of the country. Although a branch-line was built from San Felipe to Quezaltenango in 1930, the railway was built on difficult terrain and recurrent landslides due to heavy rain damaged the railway beyond repair; the branch-line was abandoned after only two years. The country's mountainous terrain and poor roads prevented rapid transportation on land and the only solution was by air. Hence the development of domestic air routes was on top of the government agenda and by the end of 1935 the domestic air routes to important parts of the country were well established. It was not until after 1949 when state-owned Aviatega (Empresa Guatemalteca de Aviación) took over the domestic air service when further routes were opened up and discussion of these routes is beyond the scope of this article.



## 1926 -27 Pioneer Flights<sup>1</sup>

In 1926, a series of flights operated by military pilots Rodolfo Mendoza, Oscar Morales Lopez and Tomas Letona took place between the Capital City and Flores Petén, to the north, La Libertad Petén, Esquipulas, Santa Rosa, Quiché and Chiquimula. The postage rate on these letters was 1.50 Pesos being the interior rate per 20 grams, no extra fee was required for air transmission.

- Guatemala City – Flores, Petén route was first flown on 28 May 1926. Before that, Petén the northern department where chicle was grown for chewing gum could be reached by land via British Honduras, the journey took 15-20 days, depending on the season. Direct flight took four hours and mail carried was official stampless letters; Goodman<sup>2</sup> recorded only 24 covers carried on this flight. [Figure 1](#) shows a cover from the Ministry of Agriculture mailed from a letterbox with Buzon No. 1 handstamp on reverse. There is a purple boxed cachet worded “PRIMER CORREO AEREO” on the front. Guatemala G.P.O. dispatch 6 AM May 28 1926 and Correos Int. (Interior) arrival on the same day. The return flight was launched on 4 June 1926 and 20 covers were carried.
- Guatemala City – La Libertad, Petén route was flown on 1 June 1926 and the return flight on 4 June. Same boxed cachet applied and very little mail; mostly official letters were carried.
- Guatemala City – Esquipulas route was launched on 3 August 1926 and the return flight on the same day. 140 covers are known carried on the outward flight. Covers have the boxed cachet “PRIMER CORREO AEREO” struck in violet or blue but covers on the return flight do not bear such cachet. In addition, the covers are known struck with a rubber handstamp worded “Via Primer Correo Aeroe / GUATEMALA - ESQUIPULAS” or “primer correo aeroe / Esquipulas / á GUATEMALA” for the return flight in red or violet. [Figure 2](#) shows a cover addressed to a well-known Guatemalan aviator Colonel Miguel Garcia Granados from Alex A. Cohen, then secretary of the Military Attaché of the American Legation and [Figure 3](#) shows a cover sent back to Cohen.
- Guatemala City – Santa Rosa route was flown on 29 August 1926 and the return flight on 31 August. 160 covers were carried on the outward flight and up to 180 covers on the return flight as mentioned in Goodman<sup>2</sup> and Muller<sup>3</sup> A 35.5 mm double-lined “datestamp” without date worded “CORREO AEREO / GUATEMALA” with a star between is known struck on outward covers. In addition, the covers are known struck with a rubber handstamp worded “Via primer correo aeroe / GUATEMALA STA-ROSA” or “ primer correo aeroe / STA-ROSA / GUATEMALA” for the return flight in red or violet. [Figure 4](#) shows a cover addressed to a well-known Guatemalan aviator Commander Jacinto Rodriguez Diaz sent by Alex A. Cohen and [Figure 5](#) shows a cover sent back to Cohen.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

### Crashed Pioneer flights of 1926-27

Guatemala City – Santa Cruz del Quiché route was flown on 20 November 1926. Figure 6 shows one of 147 covers carried on the outward flight. Covers have the boxed cachet “PRIMER CORREO AEREO / GUATEMALA – QUICHE” struck in violet. Various newspapers of the time gave little coverage to the event, which must therefore have escaped the notice of the majority of Guatemalans. *El Imparcial* of November 20, 1926 mentioned "Today at 9 a.m. an airplane, whose pilot was Garcia Granados\* left this capital for Quiché, where it arrived according to the telegram we received at 9.40 a.m. It carried mail."

*El Imparcial* of November 24 published a picture of the damaged plane at the Quiché airfield and the cause of the accident was stated to be due to the poor condition of the field. The plane *Benifo Juarez* (a gift from the Mexican government) was destroyed, and it was a miracle that the pilot survived. Col. Garcia Granados had driven to Quiché on his motorcycle and the paper then informed that both aviators (Garcia Granados\* and Rodriguez Diaz) returned to Guatemala by motorcycle!

\*The plane was actually flown by Jacinto Rodriguez Diaz<sup>4</sup>.

Guatemala City – Chiquimula route was flown on 12 June 1927. The same 35.5 mm double-lined cachet now with the date JUN 12 / 12M / 1927 inserted in the centre used as a cancel on these covers, Figure 7 shows one of 36 covers<sup>2</sup> carried on this flight. It was reported that the plane crashed on arrival because of a muddy field.

*Nuestro Diario* of June 13, 1927 informed that:

"At 7.40 a.m. on Sunday June 12, 1927, two planes left, one a Morane and the other named San Marcos, piloted by Rodriguez Diaz and Garcia Granados respectively. The distance was covered in 55 minutes, with an arrival at 8.35 a.m. The field appeared to be in good condition, but a lot of rain had fallen the night before so both planes were seriously damaged (on landing) and were dismantled for their return to the capital. We are informed that the pilots were not injured and returned by train!"



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

### Inauguration of regular domestic air mail service

In 1928, two Guatemalan aviators, Colonel Miguel Garcia Granados and Commander Jacinto Rodriguez Diaz brought three Ryan single-engine four-passenger monoplanes from the U.S.A. similar to Charles Lindbergh's *Spirit of St. Louis* on behalf of the government to launch a domestic air mail service.

TARIFA POSTAL	
Para el Servicio Aéreo Interior, que rige desde el 27 de Noviembre de 1928.	
<i>Cartas y todo envío cerrado:</i>	
Por cada 20 gramos o fracción . . .	Q 0.15
<i>Tarjetas postales:</i>	
Por cada una ( sencilla ) . . . . .	0.10
Por cada una ( doble ) . . . . .	0.20
<i>Impresos:</i>	
Por cada 50 gramos o fracción . . .	0.05
<i>Periódicos Nacionales:</i>	
Por cada 500 gramos o fracción . .	0.10
<i>Papeles de negocios:</i>	
Por cada 50 gramos o fracción . . .	0.10
<i>Muestras sin valor comercial:</i>	
Por cada 50 gramos o fracción . . .	0.05
<i>Encomiendas:</i>	
Por cada 50 gramos o fracción . . .	0.05
<i>Pagos postales:</i>	
Por cada 500 gramos o fracción . .	0.50

Table 1

Airmail service was inaugurated on 2 January 1929 operated by military pilots from Guatemala City to Flores, Petén to the north. No special cachet was applied on the letters carried on this flight apart from departure and arrival postmarks.

In *Memoria de Fomento* for 1929 which was signed on March 13 of that year with the then Director of the Academia Nacional de Aviacion, Colonel Miguel Garcia Granados. This contract was approved on 11 June 1929, and officially established airmail service between Guatemala and the province of Petén. The *Memoria* also informs that a few other airmail dispatches were sent, to Quetzaltenango, Retalhuleu, Quiché and Jalapa, but that these were not regular flights.

Table 1 shows the postal rate effective from 27 November 1928, the letter rate is shown as 0.15 Quetzal or 15 centavos per 20 grams.

The regular airmail service to Petén only lasted for two and a half months and it was suspended on September 16.



An example of a Ryan monoplane

### New Postal Contract with the Compañía Nacional de Aviación (CNA)

The *Revista Postal* of April 1930 announced that on 11 April, the Postmaster General signed a contract with Alfonso Alejos and Carlos Irigoyen of the CNA, whereby they were to provide for the transport of airmail on their own planes, along three main routes:

- 1) From Guatemala to the North
- 2) From Guatemala to the West
- 3) From Guatemala to the East

The contractors were obliged to supply a minimum of two round trips a week to all the places listed, with the exception of Peten, to which service was to be provided once a week. The contract specified that they were forbidden to carry mail other than that remitted by the postal services. The National postal service was to pay 4 Quetzales per gross kilo of mail transported. This contract gave birth to the CNA that started operating in the first days of June 1930, carrying passengers and mail to these places:-

Retalhuleu, Flores, Petén, Zacapa, Puerto Barrios, Jalapa, Cobán, Quetzaltenango and Jutiapa

Conditions: Max. weight: 5 kg; Volume: 20 cubic decimetres; Length: 45 cm; Samples: max. weight 500 grams; Airmail fee(s) for the interior and/or exterior to be paid with airmail stamps, in addition to regular postage and postal tax.



By circular #10 dated 30 May 1930, the General Direction of Mails notified all the post offices served by this airmail service that they were to use the most lightweight packing possible, because CNA charged for the gross weight transported. This same circular informs postal employees that the postage they were to charge was 6ctvs. de quetzal per 10 grams, plus regular postage and postal (for construction of a new post office building) tax. The "new rates" in Table 2 were to take effect on August 15 but already can be seen on the first flight covers of 6 June to 7 July 1930 to various parts of the country.

La nueva Tarifa Postal Aérea para el interior de la República.			
SECRETARÍA DE ESTADO EN EL DESPACHO DE FOMENTO		Categoría de los envíos.	Peso máximo de los envíos.
República de Guatemala. América Central.		<i>Papeles de negocios:</i>	
Guatemala, 18 de Agosto de 1930.		Por cada 20 grs. o fracción. . .	Q 0.03.— 2,000 grs.
<i>Señor Director General de Correos.</i>		<i>Muestras sin valor:</i>	
Presente.		Por cada 20 grs. o fracción. . .	„ 0.03.— 500 „
Por el órgano de esta Secretaría se emitió el acuerdo que literalmente dice:		<i>Encomiendas:</i>	
		Por cada 20 grs. o fracción. . .	„ 0.04.— 5,000 „
<p>“Guatemala, 13 de Agosto de 1930.—<i>El Presidente de la República</i>, ACUERDA: Poner en vigor desde el 15 de Agosto del corriente año, la siguiente Tarifa para el Servicio Postal Aéreo del Interior.</p>		<p>El porte de los PERIÓDICOS NACIONALES comprende únicamente los envíos de las empresas editoras, no así los de los particulares que deberán sujetarse a la tarifa de impresos. En la tarifa que antecede queda incluido el porte ordinario de la correspondencia, debiendo agregarse, únicamente, a cada envío, el timbre de construcción de Q 0.01 (un centavo de quetzal).—COMUNIQUESE.—<i>Chacón</i>.—El Secretario de Estado en el Despacho de Fomento.—<i>Daniel Hernández F.</i></p>	
Categoría de los envíos.	Peso máximo de los envíos.		
<i>Cartas y todo envío cerrado:</i>			
Por cada 10 grs. o fracción. . .	Q 0.06.— 2,000 grs.		
<i>Tarjetas postales:</i>			
Por cada una sencilla. . . . .	Q 0.04.—		
Por cada una doble. . . . .	„ 0.06.—		
<i>Impresos:</i>			
Por cada 20 grs. o fracción. . .	„ 0.03.— 2,000 „		
<i>Periódicos nacionales:</i> (2ª clase.)			
Por cada 500 grs. o fracción. . .	„ 0.02.— 2,000 „		
		El que transcribo a Ud. para su conocimiento y demás efectos.	
		D. y C.	
		De orden del Señor Ministro.	
		(F) PORFIRIO BARRIOS P., Subsecretario.	

Table 2

Local newspaper *El Tiempo* reported that on Thursday, 29 May 1930 at 10:50hr three civil airplanes of the Compañía Nacional de Aviación (CNA, National Aviation Company) arrived at La Aurora Airport, Guatemala City.

- (i) Hodkinson trimotor biplane, register NC-82-M, piloted by Capt. Harold White.
- (ii) Fleet biplane of sport size, register NC-9435, piloted by Capt. Daniel Ellis.
- (iii) Travel Air biplane of the Union Oil Co., USA, piloted by Capt. Harding.

CNA was a private company formed by two Americans, William W. Hodkinson, founder of Paramount Pictures and Roderick Burnham, son of Frederick Russell Burnham, the “King of Scouts”. The Hodkinson trimotor airplane, built in California by the Hodkinson Aircraft Corporation, has an upper wing spread of 56' and a lower wing spread of 30' 6". The length of the fuselage from nose to tail is 30' 3". It has an empty weight of 2,200 lbs. with a maximum carrying capacity of 7,000 lbs. It has three Curtiss Challenger engines of 170 horsepower each. It has capacity for two pilots, six passengers and 300 lbs. of baggage or mail.

The planes took 32 hours from California to Guatemala, principally because the two smaller planes that accompanied the trimotor have a small fuel capacity and had to refuel frequently.



Hodkinson trimotor biplane



Fleet biplane



Travel Air biplane

## Publicity Flights by the CNA

*El Tiempo* reported that on Sunday, 1 June 1930, Mr. Carlos Irigoyen and Mr. Alfonso Alejos de la Cerda, representatives of the CNA, invited officials and members of the press on several flights over Lake Amatitlan near Guatemala City.

## Survey Flights

*El Tiempo* reported that on Tuesday, 3 June 1930 at 6.00hr the Fleet NC-9435, piloted by Capt. Daniel Ellis and accompanied by Mr. Alejos, departed on inspection flights to air fields in the departments in the west near the Mexico border. Also the Travel Air, piloted by Capt. Harding and Mr. Durham accompanied them.

The survey reviewed the following: -

Quezaltenango. The landing field is in bad condition for large cargo and passenger planes. Therefore, it is not yet possible to inaugurate this route.

Retalhuleu. It is safe for regular service; therefore, starting June 6 regular airmail service will be established.

Huehuetenango & San Marcos.

These could not be inspected due to bad atmospheric conditions.

They will be inspected, however, in the course of the week. Unconfirmed information is that the landing fields at Cobán (Alta Verapaz) and Saláma (Baja Verapaz) are in magnificent condition.

## The first airmail definitive issue

The 6 centavos rose-red was issued on Wednesday, 4 June 1930 to be used on the domestic flights. The stamp also serves as propaganda for the country since it bears the inscription: "Guatemala produces the best coffee in the world" in English.

The stamp was designed by Alfredo Galvez and printed in lithography on white paper by a local printer Byron Zadik. There are 100 stamps per sheet (10 x 10 format) and perforated 12.5. Total 461,000 stamps were printed and 111,525 stamps were sold. Left-over 350,000 stamps were overprinted with the wording "EXTERIOR-1931" in May 1931 for use on external airmail. Some stamps produced are also known in rose-pink shade. The poorly produced stamps resulted in several errors such as imperforation, double perforation, and double printing.



6ctvs. rose-pink shade



Double-impression



1931 exterior airmail overprint

## Domestic airmail service announced

As reported in *El Tiempo* of Thursday, 5 June 1930, the Postmaster General informed that inter-departmental air service would be established in the following manner:

### Closing of Dispatches

For Retalhuleu - Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday

For Zacapa & Puerto Barrios - Monday, Wednesday

For Flores, Petén - Friday

### Correspondence will be accepted during the day:

In the branch post offices, until 5 p.m.

In the mailboxes until 10 p.m.

In the international (central) office until 11:55 p.m.

### Postage rate

The Domestic Airmail fee was 6 centavos per 10 grams in addition to the Domestic Letter rate 3 centavos per 20 grams, and 1 centavo postal tax per item. Domestic Registration fee was 5 centavos.

The Domestic Airmail fee and the domestic service schedule to the three routes were published in a Postal Memorandum shown in [Figure 8](#); it was sent to officials, local and abroad free of charge. In addition, foreign airmail fees to the Pan-American Postal Union countries were also published.

1,000 pieces were produced and they were first seen used on the Guatemala City–Quezaltenango flight on 29 June 1930. Front of the pamphlet features six different color airmail stamps of the same design but with different denominations; only the 6 centavos rose-red was ever produced. The reverse depicts a flying Fokker F-VII trimotor plane.

DIRECCION GENERAL DE CORREOS  
GUATEMALA C. A.

MEMORANDUM POSTAL

SEÑOR \_\_\_\_\_

Señor:

Con motivo de inaugurarse hoy el servicio postal aéreo INTERIOR tengo el gusto de presentar a usted un cordial saludo en nombre de esta Dirección y del personal de sus dependencias.

Siendo el servicio que hoy se inaugura, un positivo beneficio para el comercio y público en general, van nuestras calurosas felicitaciones y mejores deseos por la prosperidad de ese departamento y de todos sus habitantes, quienes, estoy seguro, sabrán apreciar este esfuerzo del Gobierno que preside el General Chacón, en bien del progreso del país y del acercamiento de los pueblos.

Soy de Ud. muy atento y seguro servidor.

*Benigno Luna*  
Director General.

ITINERARIOS

SALIDAS, regresando el mismo día.

A RETALHULEU:  
Lunes, miércoles y viernes a las 6 a. m.

A FLORES (PETEN),  
COBAN Y SALAMA:  
sábados a las 6 a. m.

A ZACAPA Y PUERTO  
BARRIOS: martes y  
jueves a las 6 a. m.

TARIFA PARA SERVICIO POSTAL AEREO.

PARA EL INTERIOR

Por cada 10 grs. o fracción, además del porte ordinario y timbre de construcción. Q.0.08

PARA EL EXTERIOR

PARA ESTADOS UNIDOS DE AMERICA, México, Cuba, El Salvador, Honduras, Belice, Nicaragua: por cada 10 grs. o fracción. Q.0.11

PARA COSTA RICA, Panamá y Zona del Canal de Panamá: por cada 10 grs. o fracción ..... \*0.15

PARA PTO. RICO, Rep. Dominicana y Haití: por cada 10 gramos o fracción ..... \*0.23

PARA COLOMBIA, Ecuador y Venezuela (al tener conexión con este último país): por cada 10 gramos o fracción ..... \*0.27

PARA PERU, por cada 10 grs. o fracción ..... \*0.36

PARA CHILE: por cada 10 gramos o fracción ..... \*0.45

PARA REP. ARGENTINA y Uruguay: por cada 10 grs. o fracción ..... \*0.49

Fig. 8



### First Flight: Guatemala City - Retalhuleu

*El Tiempo* on Friday 6 June 1930 reported that:

"The first airmail service between the capital and Retalhuleu in the south-west part of the country on the Pacific Ocean border was inaugurated at 08.00hr. At that time the Hodkinson trimotor NC-82-M departed, piloted by Capt. Harold White, Messrs. Irigoyen and Alfonso Alejos, representatives of the contracting company for the mail, and passengers Francisco Linares and Luis O. Alvarado, a reporter for the newspaper *El Tiempo*. The flight from Guatemala to Retalhuleu took 57 minutes after having circled over the cities of Mazatenango and Cuyotenango, which were in route. When the trimotor arrived and had landed at Retalhuleu, the Travel Air, piloted by Capt. Harding and accompanied by Mr. Carlos Schauffler of the National Aviation Company had already landed. Eight minutes later the Fleet NC-9435, piloted by Capt. Daniel Ellis, landed, carrying Mr. Burnham, a guest of the National Aviation Company as passenger."

#### Itinerary of outgoing flight: Left Guatemala 8:00 a.m.

Passed over Cocales 08:30hr

Passed over Mazatenango 08:40hr

Passed over Cuyotenango 08:45hr

Arrived at Retalhuleu 08:53hr

#### Itinerary for return flight:

Left Retalhuleu 10:51hr

Arrived La Aurora Airfield, Guatemala 11:55hr

Mail was carried on this flight and a simple ceremony of delivery of the mail took place and both the pilots and the passengers went to the city where they were entertained in the Casino Retaleco. On the return flight, there was an added passenger, Col. Servulo Moto, ex-political chief of Retalhuleu who was invited by the Company.

Figures 9, 10 and 11 show souvenir covers carried on these flights. The cover has a 53mm x 20mm boxed cachet of the same design with the wording "INAUGURACION DEL CORREO AEREO/DE \_\_\_\_\_" in either blue or violet (outward) or black (return) and the destination in rubber handstamp.



Fig. 9

Letter sent by Mr. G. K. Donald of the American Consul General in Guatemala City to Retalhuleu. Guatemala G.P.O. machine 5 PM, 5 June 1930. The cover went on next morning flight to Retalhuleu.



Fig. 10

Registered letter mailed on the day of the flight at the G.P.O. Retalhuleu receiver 6 June on reverse.



Fig. 11

Letter sent on the return flight to Guatemala City. Guatemala machine receiver 6 PM, 6 June 1930 on reverse.

### First Flight: Guatemala City – Flores, Petén

*El Tiempo* on Saturday 7 June 1930 reported that:

“This morning at 08:30hr the first National Aviation Company airmail plane left for the airport of Flores, Petén. The Hodkinson trimotor NC-82-M was piloted by Captains Harold White and Daniel Ellis, and as passengers, Alfonso Alejos and Carlos Schauffler, employees of the company, and, in addition, Mr. Rod Burnham, a good friend of the company and famed geologist. Mr. Nicolas Oseta was their first passenger on this route. The flight took 45kgs. cargo and some mail.”

Figure 12 shows one of the souvenir covers carried on these flights; it has the same cachet as above except blue ink was used and the destination in rubber handstamp.

On the return flight, only 21 official letters and 8 private covers were carried and these do not have the cachet on them.



Fig. 12

Letter dropped into a mailbox in Guatemala City day before the flight. Received and canceled at G.P.O.

Guatemala G.P.O. machine 5 PM, 6 June 1930, on reverse Buzon 1 c.d.s. 6 June, 2 PM and Flores receiver 7 June.



Fig. 13

Letter dropped into a mailbox on the day of the flight in Guatemala City. Received and canceled at G.P.O., Guatemala G.P.O. machine 3 PM, 9 June 1930, on reverse Buzon 1 c.d.s. 9 June, 2 PM. Returned from Puerto Barrios on 10 June to Guatemala City. Guatemala G.P.O. machine 7 AM, 11 June 1930, on reverse applied day after arrival of the flight.

*El Tiempo* did not specify a time of the flight but judging by the time of the datestamp, it must be after 3 PM.

### First Flight: Guatemala City – Zacapa – Puerto Barrios

*El Tiempo* on Tuesday 10 June 1930 reported that:

“Airmail service between Guatemala and the departments in the East, namely, Zacapa (Zacapa) and Puerto Barrios (Izabal) was inaugurated. The Hodkinson trimotor NC-82-M was piloted by Capt. Harold White and as passengers the photographic reporter of *El Tiempo*, Mr. Rafael Morales and Mr. Alfonso Alejos, representative of the company.”

Figure 13 depicts one of the souvenir covers carried on these flights which received the same cachet in violet ink with addition of PUERTO BARRIOS handstamp. Covers addressed to Zacapa received the ZACAPA handstamp as shown in Figure 13a

The cover received a Zacapa c.d.s. on 11 June arrival and returned to Guatemala on 12 June. Covers to intermediate destination are scarcer.





### First Flight: Puerto Barrios – Zacapa – Guatemala City

*El Tiempo* on Tuesday, 10 June 1930 further reported that:

“The Cuban citizen, Manrique de Laguna, returned with them from Puerto Barrios. Because of bad weather on the return, after flying over the capital for over an hour, it being impossible to land at La Aurora Airport, an emergency landing was made north of the city in a cornfield known as “Los Cipreses”, property of Mr. Jorge Soto.”

Only 109 covers, according to Goodman<sup>2</sup> were carried on this flight.

Bad news came on Wednesday, 11 June 1930, *El Tiempo* reported that the National Aviation Company lost money operating the routes. The total of 9 hours of flight cost Q. 1,125.00. The company carried 8,220 grams of private mail, only receiving Q. 32.88 and 6,579 grams Official mail, with no reimbursement.

### First Flight: Guatemala City - Jalapa

*El Tiempo* on Thursday, 12 June 1930 reported that:

“Passenger and mail service to Jalapa, eastern part of the country bordering El Salvador was inaugurated today by the National Aviation Company's trimotor.

At 07:30hr, the Hodkinson trimotor NC-82-M piloted by Capt. Harold White, left for Puerto Barrios via Zacapa, carrying passengers Mr. Alfonso Alejos for Zacapa; Messrs. Manrique de Laguna and Leon de Candarias for Puerto Barrios. Mr. Alejos remained in Zacapa delivering mail, and at the same time, leaving the air station established at that place. When the flight returned from Puerto Barrios it carried Mr. Leon de Gandarias as passenger. It picked up Mr. Alejos in Zacapa, from where it left for Jalapa to inaugurate the route.

It was reported that the airfield was full of people. Col. Servulo Moto was there awaiting the plane's landing and very cordially congratulated the crew. The City's band greeted the trimotor with "dianas" when it landed. Jalapa has been one of the places where the inauguration of air service has been celebrated with great enthusiasm. The trimotor picked passengers Bjarne Ness and Juan del Carmen up at Jalapa.”

The earliest flight covers to Jalapa are dated 25 June (Figure 14) and the return covers are dated 26 June (Figure 15). The cachet on the outward flight is blue in colour while the returning flight is in black; the destination was filled by hand in black ink.

Several explanations have been put forward to answer the date anomaly:-

- It is possible that mail was not carried on the true “first flight” into Jalapa as reported and the known covers represented the first mail carrying flight.
- It is possible that although mail was carried on the 12 June Flight, letters carried were unmarked. To satisfy the airmail collectors at the time, letters sent on a subsequent flight were handstamped by the company.
- It is also possible but less likely that letters intended for the 12 June Flight were held back and sent two weeks later.

The real answer is depending on whether letters, mailed on 11 or 12 June that went on the flight to Jalapa exist.



Fig. 14



Fig. 15

### First Flight: Guatemala City - Cobán

*El Tiempo* reported on Monday, 16 June 1930 that:

“The Fleet NC-9435 airplane, manned by Capt. Harold White, accompanied by Mr. Alfonso Alejos, left this morning for Cobán in Alta Verapaz.” This is probably a survey flight since the National Aviation Company's offices informed that regular trimotor service with Cobán “...will probably be inaugurated *next Saturday*, provided small changes that the landing field needs are made, so that trimotor can land loaded.”

Thus it is possible that the mail carrying flight to and from Cobán was inaugurated on 28 June since souvenir covers are dated on this day. Such covers received the boxed cachet in violet and blue (outward) and blue (return) and the destination filled in by hand in black ink. Figure 16 shows an example.





Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18a, b

#### First Flight: Guatemala City - Quezaltenango

*El Tiempo* reported on Sunday, 29 June 1930 that:

“The Hodkinson trimotor, piloted by aviator White, left for Xelahu. (Indian name for Quezaltenango) The small Fleet NC-9435 plane, piloted by Capt. Daniel Ellis, took off from La Aurora Airport a little after 07:00hr and carried as passengers Messrs. Pedro F. Barrera, Postmaster General; Alfonso Alejos, partner in the airline; Jorge Hernandez Cobos, reporter for the *Diario de Guatemala*; Luis Arce Avilés, reporter for the *El Imparcial*; newsman Gonzales Campo of *El Tiempo* and attorney Francisco Castillo Monterroso. The flight took 45 minutes.”

The outward covers received the boxed cachet struck in violet and blue on the return; and the destination filled in by hand in black ink. [Figure 17](#) shows an example.

In addition to mail carried, [Figures 18a and 18b](#) show the front and back of the Postal Memorandum carried on this trip.

#### First Flight: Guatemala City - Jutiapa

*El Tiempo* of Tuesday 1 July 1930 reported that:

“This morning, aboard the Fleet NC-9435 plane, piloted by Capt. Daniel Ellis, Mr. Alfonso Alejos de la Cerda left for Jutiapa, a department to the east sharing a common border with El Salvador to inaugurate the air service.”

The known souvenir covers to Jutiapa are dated 7 July and returning on 8 July and boxed cachet struck in blue for the outward and return journey. [Figure 19](#) is an example. Here again, the date anomaly could be one of the three reasons mentioned earlier.

#### First Flight: Guatemala City - Mazatenango

Mazatenango is the capital of the southern province of Suchitepequez bordering the Pacific Ocean. The service to Mazatenango is not mentioned in *El Tiempo*. Covers are known dated 23 or 24 July with the cachet in violet.

#### First Flight: Guatemala City – La Tinta, Alta Verapaz

This flight took place on 17 June 1935. Letters carried are known with a 74mm x 17mm rectangular handstamp in violet with the wording “PRIMER VUELO POSTAL / GUATEMALA – LA TINTA A.V.” ([Figure 20](#)) and another handstamp in purple reading “PRIMER VUELO POSTAL / LA TINTA A.V – GUATEMALA” ([Figure 21](#)) for the return flight on the June 18.

The postage paid on the covers being 4 centavos per 15 grams plus the 1 centavo postal tax.



Fig. 19



Fig. 20



Fig. 21

### Domestic Airmail postage rates

There were frequent changes of postage rates in the first few years of the Domestic Airmail service and this is largely due to bartering between the government and the service provider. Firstly, the low airmail rates of the 1930 tariff for the newspapers, which were much heavier in proportion than average letters must have caused heavy losses to the public treasury. Secondly, CNA was losing money because the airmail service was under utilized since the local population was either not convinced of the advantage of airmail or unwilling to pay a higher price for sending letters by airmail. To counteract this, CNA suggested to the government that if the Government reduced the airmail fees CNA would also reduce the fares charged to the Postal Service. In addition, CNA suggested that making airmail conveyance to any part of the country with airfield compulsory would make more money.

In September 1930, the government made airmail conveyance to Petén compulsory and on December 3, 1930, the Postal Administration consented to reduce the Domestic Airmail fees in effect since 15 August to 4 centavos per 10 grams. Furthermore, the new tariff no longer required payment of internal postage except the 1 centavo tax.

In 1931, despite the government cutting monthly subsidy of the CNA twice in the same year, the postal deficit was still substantial and it was inevitable that postage rates had to be increased again. Thus on 4 December 1931, the letter rate was increased to 6 centavos per 15 grams to other places and 12 centavos per 15 grams to the Petén.

In January 1933, because CNA settled for a 50% reduction of fare from 4 Quetzales to 2 Quetzales per kilo of mail carried, the letter rate was again reduced to 4 centavos per 15 grams to other places while the rate to Flores, Petén remained the same.

Changes in postal rates also accompanied re-scheduling of the services provided by CNA. For details of these changes, please refer to the excellent articles written in 2003 by Gabriel Ramirez in El Quetzal<sup>4</sup>.

### Summary of Domestic Airmail letter rates

Domestic postage rate by air	Effective date	Example
15 centavos per 20 grams (air) + 3c per 20 grams (Interior)	27 November 1928	-----
6 centavos per 10 grams (air) + 3c per 20 grams (Interior)	15 August 1930	Fig. 9 - 19
4 centavos per 10grams	3 December 1930	Fig. 22
6 centavos per 15grams to other places	4 December 1931	Fig. 23
12 centavos per 15grams to Flores, Petén		Fig. 25
4 centavos per 15grams to other places	January 1933	Fig. 20,21,
12 centavos per 15grams to Flores, Petén		24,26 and 27

1 ctv. postal tax per postal item is payable in addition to the above rates.



Figure 22 shows a April 1931 cover from Guatemala City to Mazatenango franked 4 centavos per 10 grams rate only, the 3 centavos inland rate now no longer necessary.

The cover dated 27 October 1932 from Quezaltenango to Guatemala City shown in Figure 23 represents the 6 centavos per 15grams rate to other cities apart from Petén. The express service was introduced to speed up delivery in Guatemala.

Figure 24 shows a February 1934 double-rate letter from San Antonio to Cobán franked 4 centavos per 15grams rate. From St. Antonio to Retalhueu, the nearest airport, the 3 centavos inland rate required.



Fig. 22



Fig. 23



Fig. 24



Figure 25 depicts a 5 February 1935 letter from Guatemala City to Flores, Petén franked at the 12 centavos per 15 grams rate.



Fig. 25

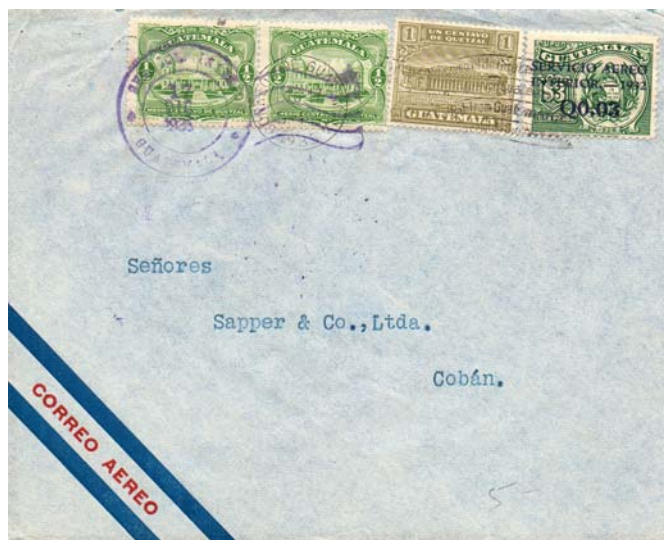


Fig. 26

Figure 26 shows a 17 December 1935 single-rate letter from Guatemala City to Cobán, Alta Verapaz paying the 4 centavos per 15 grams rate. By this time, CNA had stopped carrying mail and this letter was carried by aircraft of TACA (Transportes Aéreos del Continente Americano).



Fig. 27

### Late Fee

In order to facilitate mailing for the business community after the close of normal business hours at the post office, letters could be mailed with addition of a Late Fee at a special counter or mailbox.

From 1936, the fee was double postage for mail deposited between 7 – 11.30 p.m. Datestamps inscribed “Nocturno” were used for such purpose.

Figure 27 shows a cover datestamped 28 February 1936 from Quezaltenango to Guatemala City franked 4ctvs. Airmail rate per 15 grams + 1ctv. Postal Tax + 4ctvs. LATE FEE.

Special SERVICIO NOCTURNO cancel used for such mail. Guatemala City arrival 29 February 12 A.M. on reverse.

### Other airline companies carrying Domestic Airmail

In 1935, the government began to contract other airlines to carry mail in addition to services provided by CNA. One such company, Servicios Aereos de Guatemala (SAGUA) transported passengers, luggage and mail from and to the interior between February and October 1935. Transportes Aéreos del Continente Americano (TACA) founded 1931 in Honduras acquired CNA in 1935<sup>5</sup> and from 17 October in the same year, took over transporting mail to and from the interior under a five-year contract. In 1949, the state-owned Aviateca took over all the domestic services.

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