

RED CROSS "OUR DAY" FLIGHTS. MAKE YOUR SIXPENCE FLY. 7 October – 30 December 1918

The Red Cross Organisation in South Africa arranged special flights in a campaign to raise funds. The flights were authorised to carry mail in the form of special cards. The Post Office provided a special date stamp for postmarking the postcards. The special postcards issued by the Red Cross are known as the "Make Your Sixpence Fly" postcards. They were sold at 6d each. The cards used in Cape Town are called the "Large Wing" type and those used in the Transvaal the "Small Wing" type.

The first flight took place on 7th October, 1918. The cards were flown from Wynberg to Green Point Common in a B.E.2E. biplane by Lieutenant Arthur Hugh Gearing ¹. Two further flights were carried out on the 26th October and 2nd November 1918 respectively. However, the Spanish influenza epidemic was raging at the time and further arranged flights had to be postponed.

Early in November Lieut. Gearing and the R.A.F. mechanics were recalled to Johannesburg on official duty in connection with a threatened revolt by Africans. The aeroplane was railed up north. The Red Cross used this opportunity to arrange similar flights in the Transvaal. Here, the second type of postcard was issued and the same date stamp used for postmarking the mail carried on these special demonstration flights.

On the 19th November 1918, as a promotion of the Red Cross military display opening at the Wanderers Ground next day 20th November, Lieutenant Gearing made a special flight over Johannesburg and, using a then novel method of distributing propaganda, dropped printed leaflets headed "AN AERIAL MESSAGE: dropped by Military Aeroplane in the Transvaal, November, 1918" and addressed to "The Public of the Transvaal". The leaflet encourages the public to buy and post the Red Cross Aerial Post Cards. Today, *these are accepted as major aerophilatelic rarities.*

Further flights took place on the 20th November and the 22nd November 22; and a flight was made to Germiston on 24th November 1918. On the 27th November, he flew to Pretoria landing on the then Race Course (later to become the Show Grounds. A fifth flight was made on 30th November to Benoni, but he was unable to land there the landing site being invaded by spectators. He repeated the flight the next day.

Thereafter, Lieut. Gearing returned to Cape Town to resume his flights. The fourth Cape flight, known as the Dingaan's Day Flight on 16th December 1918, was carried out during the Naval and Military Tournament held at the Rosebank Show Grounds. A fifth flight, called the Christmas Flight, took place on 23rd December 1918, from Young's Field, Wynberg to Green Point Common. The sixth and final flight, known as the New Year's Flight, took place on 30th December, 1918 was made to Green Point Common where the mail was dropped.

The postmark is of the double-circle type, measuring 33 and 21 mm in diameter. "AERIAL POST" appears at the top. A Maltese Cross flanked by two semi-circular bars appears at the bottom. The date in the centre is shown between SOUTH above and AFRICA below. A control letter appears before the year. About 20,000 postcards were sold, of which about 12,000 were of the "Large Wing" type. The postcards had to be franked with the normal postage rates and posted in the normal manner.

¹ Arthur Hugh Gearing married 6 February 1911 Catharine Steyn in DSRC, Cape Town. Together they produced Eileen (b. 26 November 1912 bapt. 20 January 1913) but parted company in the 1920s, he subsequently marrying Grace Dorothy NN. He died in 1960 (MHG 586/60). 23 March 1917, Lieutenant A H Gearing was recruited from the South African Mounted Rifles to the Royal Flying Corp PT2Lt, later confirmed as a Flying Officer 2 July 1917 and returned to the South African Defence Force in March 1918.

AN AERIAL MESSAGE: Dropped by Military Aeroplane in the
Transvaal, November, 1918.

From

The Red Cross.



To

The Public of the
Transvaal.

Although Peace has come, the work of the Red Cross will go on for very many months; until all the sick and wounded soldiers have gone to their homes. To assist to provide funds to continue the work until the end, a Great Military Exhibition is being held at the Wanderers Grounds, Johannesburg, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, November 20th, 21st, 22nd and 23rd. Nothing like it has ever been seen in South Africa. There will be on view daily from 2.30 to 10 p.m. the wonderful reproduction of Ypres Trenches and Dug Outs, and the Aeroplane which drops this Message. On Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, the S.A.M.R. Artillery, the boys of the Naval Brigade and the Boy Scouts will give displays. Bairnsfather's Old Bill will be there. On Wednesday and Saturday Evenings there will be a Great Military Spectacle portraying Old and New Warfare in which 200 troops from Potchefstroom will demonstrate how the Springboks went "Over the Top" concluding with a Grand Military Torchlight Tattoo and massed bands. The only opportunity of seeing the War at your disposal. Buy and Post at the Red Cross by coming in your thousands, and Buy and Post at the Red Cross.

AERIAL POST CARD.

Aerial Co., Ltd.—12283.

VOLUNTARY AID DETACHMENT AND THE “WANDERERS MILITARY HOSPITAL”

The Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) was a unit providing field nursing services, mainly in hospitals, in the United Kingdom and various other countries in the British Empire. Founded in 1909 with the help of the Red Cross and Order of St. John, two-thirds of its members were women.

At the outbreak of the First World War, VAD members eagerly offered their service to the war effort. The British Red Cross and army authorities, at first reluctant to allow civilian women a role in frontline hospitals, over time were persuaded to accept assistance, though they remained an uneasy addition to military hospitals' rank and order as they were considered to lack the advanced skill and discipline of professional trained nurses. Suffice to say that in reality they provided an invaluable source of bedside aid and in fact many were decorated for distinguished service.

In 1917, the Wanderers Club, Johannesburg, had virtually lost its identity, a casualty of the depression, industrial unrest and war compounding the already endemic financial problems. Characterizing this deterioration in many peoples' minds was the presence of the “Wanderers Military Hospital” on its turf.

At the point where expenditure exceeded revenue, the Red Cross Voluntary Aid Detachment offered to lease the Gymnasium Hall as a hospital for military patients. This was agreed at a rental of £20 a month and soon after, the Bar premises were included as they were producing no revenue.

Huge fund-raising enterprises for war causes were held on the derelict grounds, raising considerable sums. Capt. George Allsop, long-time part-time secretary of the Club and secretary of the Wanderers V.A.D. Hospital, himself obtained leave to organise the Red Cross military display which ran between 20th-23rd November 1917.

When the “Wanderers Military Hospital” was disbanded is not known to this author.

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<http://www.thewanderersclub.co.za/the-club/history/>
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5. "South Africa, Dutch Reformed Church Registers, 1660-1970," index and images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/VRLW-7SC> : accessed 18 Nov 2014), Arthur Hugh Gearing and Catharine Steyn, 06 Feb 1911, Marriage; citing p. , Cape Town, Cape of Good Hope, South Africa, State Archives, Cape Province; FHL microfilm 2214375.
6. Voluntary Aid Detachments (V.A.D.)
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