

THE AIRMAILS OF EGYPT



By JOHN SEARS

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OF
EGYPT**

**BY
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1990

**2ND EDITION 1991
3RD EDITION 2000**

REPRINTED 2008, (WITH SUPPLEMENT)

Copyright: John Sears
496 Uxbridge Road
Pinner
Middlesex HA5 4SL

Published by: the Author

Printed by: Jameson Digital Ltd
21 Fairways, New River Ind. Est.,
Cheshunt, Herts EN8 0NL

Misr Airwork S.A.E.
Also known as Misr Airlines and later Misrair

The company was formed in 1932, but first, it is necessary to consider the influence of the Misr Bank on its formation. Misr Bank was founded in 1920, the man responsible being Mohammed Talat Harb (1867-1941). The son of an employee of Egyptian Railways, he received a legal education, and became particularly hostile to the foreign economic domination of Egypt. The Bank was formed with an initial capital of £E80,000, 95 per cent of the subscribers being wealthy landowners. It was launched initially to finance the cotton industry in competition with the National Bank of Egypt and the Ionian Bank, both of which had British connections.

By the end of 1929, the Bank had 39,000 accounts and deposits of £E7,250,000. The 1930s saw a dynamic expansion of the Bank. It invested in a number of companies in various fields, eg, Misr Insurance, Misr Shipping, Misr Spinning & Weaving, Misr Ginning, Misr Airwork and others. Those concerned with textiles were profitable, the others were not, depending on Government subsidies for their continuance. It also led to the group becoming politicised, with members of political parties becoming directors.

During the late 1920s the British Government was again becoming concerned about the rise of Egyptian nationalism, and was encouraging Anglo-Egyptian commercial ventures. They were also concerned about the increasing influence of foreign airlines in the Eastern Mediterranean. In 1929 Imperial Airways approached Bank Misr with a view to forming a domestic Egyptian airline as a joint venture; they were rebuffed. However, an approach by Heston Airworks Ltd (a private company) was accepted. The new company would provide training for Egyptian pilots, construct airports and provide other flying services. In 1932 Misr Airwork SAE was formed with the Bank Misr having a majority shareholding, and Heston Airworks 40 per cent of the shares. It was registered in May as an Egyptian joint stock company. In return for an annual Government subsidy, and the promise of a monopoly of certain internal air services, Misr Airwork had to give a discount of 15 per cent to Government officials travelling on holiday!

The headquarters of the company was Almaza (Cairo), and it became a member of the International Air Traffic Association (I.A.T.A.). Apart from Almaza, flying schools were set up at Alexandria and Port Said, students coming from all over the Middle East. In prewar days the airmail and passenger services were operated by De Havilland DH 89s (Rapides) - twin-engine six-seater biplanes - and DH 86s (Expresses), four-engined, 14-seater biplanes. The precise numbers of each type owned by the company in the mid-1930s are not known.

Neither the Egyptian nor British governments really envisaged that it would become a major Middle Eastern airline, but Bank Misr and Airwork were keen to expand their domestic operations as follows:

July 1933 - a weekly service Cairo-Alexandria-Mersa Matruh

August 1933 - a twice daily service between Cairo & Alexandria (by 1935 increased to three times daily, and by 1944, four times a day)

December 1933 - A winter tourist service Cairo-Assiut-Luxor-Aswan, twice weekly.

1936 - A service from Alexandria-Port Said-Cairo-Minia-Assiut.

During 1934 the company commenced operating outside Egypt. In July a service was opened to Palestine on a twice-weekly basis, Cairo to Lydda and Haifa. This became thrice weekly, but it is not clear if mail was carried. Indeed, there is no official record regarding carriage of mail within Egypt at this time

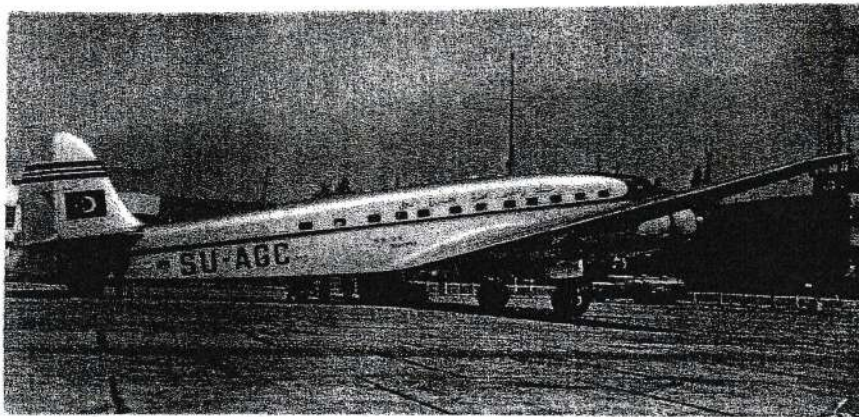
According to the autobiography of a former RAF pilot (G D Fleming) who joined Misr Airwork in 1936: "It was a well run company with a dozen British pilots, several trainee Egyptian pilots, and Egyptian and British engineers." He stated that during his five years with the company, their aircraft flew roughly 7,000,000 miles with no serious accident, and not one passenger injured, attributing this to the excellent maintenance schedules.

SERVICE AERIENS INTERNATIONAUX EGYPTE - "S.A.I.D.E."

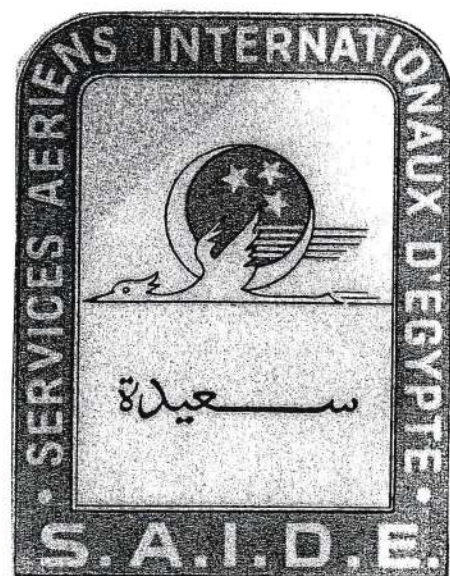
The history of this short lived Air Line is not as well documented as that of M.I.S.R. Airlines. S.A.I.D.E was formed in February, 1948 with 45 % of the shares held by Italian interests, said to be Contieri Aero Navali, Sidi - Marchetti who may have been connected to FIAT, and 55 % by the National Bank of Egypt on behalf of the Egyptian Royal Family. Another source reports that the 55 % was held by Misr Bank, in either case the Royal Family was involved.

All the aircraft used were Italian, principally the Savoia Marchetti S M 95, and the Fiat G 212. Initially the personnel were all Italian, but they were gradually replaced by Egyptians. The general manager being Umberto Klinger, past President of Ala Littoria.

Although S.A.I.D.E. was originally based at Almaza it soon transferred to the old U.S. base at Payne's Field, Heliopolis, perhaps due to the influence of the Royal Family.



A Savoia - Marchetti S.M. 95 used by the Company



Luggage labels in green & white

(M. of C. P. No. 25 B.)

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Par Avion

(M. of C. P. No. 25 B.)

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AIR MAIL

(M. of C. P. No. 25 B.)

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