

AIR NAMIBIA

Using philatelic material, this collection reflects the activities of *Namibair*, *Suidwes Lugdiens* and *Caprivi Airways* in 1978.

The origins of scheduled air transport in South-West Africa (later Namibia) can be traced back to November 1946, when *South West Air Transport (SWAT)* was established. In 1949, the carrier started passenger, cargo and charter operations linking Windhoek with Grootfontein. In 1950, the company started feeder services in support of South African Airways.

By 1958, a fleet of eight aircraft served a route network that included Grootfontein, Tsumeb, Otjiwarongo, Outjo, Swakopmund, Walvis Bay and Windhoek. On 26 March 1959, SWAT merged with *Oryx Aviation* — a small passenger airline established three years earlier - to form *South West Airways* (Afrikaans: *Suidwes Lugdiens*). The *International Air Transport Association (IATA)* membership was gained later that year.

Expansion continued into the 1960s. *Namibair* was established as a charter airline in 1963 and became a subsidiary company of *Suidwes Lugdiens* in 1966. In 1969, *Safmarine* acquired a 50% stake in *Suidwes Lugdiens* eventually boosting its participation to 85%. By February 1970, the *Suidwes Lugdiens* fleet comprised some 19 aircraft and employed 45 staff. By 1974, the fleet was performing charter flights carrying miners to their jobs in Grootfontein and Tsumeb.

On 1 December 1978, *Suidwes Lugdiens* merged into *Namib Air*. The South-West African government became the major shareholder in 1982. Following the creation of the *South-West Africa National Transport Corporation* in 1986, *Namib Air* took over all air transport operations in the country. The airline was designated as the country's flag carrier in 1987; and in 1988, the company was incorporated into a Namibian state-owned holding company *Transnamib*. On 6 August 1989, the carrier's jet era was inaugurated, flying a route from Windhoek to Johannesburg, return. In October the same year, a third Beech 1900 was incorporated into the fleet.^[10]

Following the independence of the country from South Africa on 21 March 1990, the company was re-christened again, adopting the current name of *Air Namibia* in October 1991.

Caprivi Airways was established in 1968. Caprivi was run by Urban Drew, an ex 361st USAAF Fighter Group, and provided a service from Wonderboom Airforce base, Pretoria to Windhoek and beyond. It was taken over by *African Air Carriers*, a Johannesburg-based company in 1981, reputedly linked to CIA activities and the South African Border War (aka. Angolan War).