

## History of the Danish nationality mark for aircraft

In 1908, at least ten German balloons were alleged to have crossed the Franco-German border and landed on French soil carrying more than 26 aviators, the majority of whom were German officers. Wishing to avoid international confrontation, the French government proposed that an international conference be convened with the purpose of devising regulatory procedures relating to flights into and over foreign territory. This resulted in the “Conférence Internationale de Navigation Aérienne”, that took place in Paris between May 18<sup>th</sup> and June 29<sup>th</sup>, 1910.

In preparation for this, the French government sent out a questionnaire containing 15 very detailed questions to European governments. Of those, representatives of 19 countries (Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Luxembourg, Monaco, Netherlands, Portugal, Rumania, Russia, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey) took part in the conference. Nations from other continents were not invited as, given the distances involved, the prospect of their aircraft operating in Europe was considered unrealistic.

The conference was divided into three “Commissions”, each of which was assigned a number of the 15 questions from the questionnaire, and asked to formulate proposals to resolve them.

The questions related to technical and legal aspects considered relevant to the future of aviation, among which was that of aircraft registration. While the conference was unsuccessful in that it did not result in a signed agreement, the draft it produced subsequently formed the basis for the 1919 Paris convention.

The “Première Commission” that dealt, among other things, with the registration of aircraft came up with a list of nationality marks for the participating states which included:

Germany	D	Austria	A	Belgium	B	Switzerland	SS
Bulgaria	BG	<b>Denmark</b>	<b>DM</b>	Spain	E	Sweden	S
France	F	Great Britain	GB	Hungary	H	Serbia	SB
Italy	I	Monaco	MC	Netherlands	NL	Turkey	T
Portugal	P	Romania	RM	Russia	R		

At the end of the Great War, the victorious powers decided that the peace conference should include the legal framework governing the future of international air travel. These rules were agreed upon, and the result was the 1919 Paris Convention (Convention portant Réglementation de la Navigation Aérienne), which was approved on April 7<sup>th</sup> 1919. No neutral countries were represented at these talks. Soon after, the Norwegian Department of Trade (Handelsdepartement) proposed a meeting in which common rules governing anticipated developments in aerial activity in the Nordic region should be worked out. Convened in June 1919 in Kristiania (Oslo), the meeting included in its agenda discussions of the Paris Convention, details of which had been secretly obtained by the Norwegian Foreign Ministry. The convention was treated with “great confidentiality” at this conference.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Nordic Aviation Conference took place in Stockholm from November 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup>, 1919. Just prior to this, on October, 31<sup>st</sup>, 1919, the Swedish Foreign Ministry received a communication from the United Kingdom inviting Sweden to join the Paris Convention – which had been signed on 13<sup>th</sup> October – instead of entering into bilateral agreements with other states. Work on Nordic regulations made progress at this meeting, but a 3<sup>rd</sup> Official Aviation Conference (3. officielle Luftfarts Konference) was called in Copenhagen January, 26<sup>th</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup>, 1920. Because neutral countries were very unhappy with the content of Article 5 of the Paris convention, which in effect would have made it illegal for neutral countries to allow German-

registered aircraft to enter their airspace, this was only ratified (by Denmark on October 14<sup>th</sup>, 1927) after certain changes had been made in London on October 27<sup>th</sup>, 1922 and June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1923. However, these changes had no bearing on the allocation of nationality marks for aircraft.

The list of allocated nationality marks that came with the Paris Convention only included the countries which were party to the conference. The intention being that other states should adopt the convention and inform the “International Commission for Air Navigation” (ICAN), which was formed on July 11<sup>th</sup>, 1922, of the nationality mark chosen. The Commission would act as the co-ordinating body, ensuring that they did not duplicate those already allocated.

The original list contained:

USA	N	British Empire	G	France	F	Italy	I
Japan	J	Bolivia	C-B	Cuba	C-C	Portugal	C-P
Romania	C-R	Uruguay	C-U	Czechoslovakia	L-B	Guatemala	L-G
Liberia	L-L	Brazil	P-B	Poland	P-P	Belgium	O-B
Peru	O-P	China	X-C	Honduras	X-H	Serbia-Croatia-Slavonia	X-S
Haiti	H-H	Siam	H-S	Ecuador	E-E	Greece	S-G
Panama	S-P	Hedjaz	A-H				

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Official Aviation Conference in Copenhagen also dealt with the question of nationality marks for the Nordic countries and it was agreed to use T as a common Nordic mark, followed by a D for Denmark, N for Norway, S for Sweden, and F for Finland. Sweden had wanted S for Scandinavia, but Norway objected as it might be mistaken for meaning Sweden.

According to a letter from the Danish Ministry of Public Works to the Foreign Ministry dated October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1921, it was agreed at a later meeting between Nordic Ministers, not to have a common Nordic convention, but to establish bilateral agreements. The T was retained as the common mark in the agreement between Norway and Denmark that was signed on July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1920. A similar agreement was proposed by Denmark in talks with Sweden in Stockholm, but Sweden wanted to use S as their nationality mark. *If it transpired that, given the Swedish resistance, Norway and Finland also preferred something other than the common T, then Denmark would express a preference for D as its nationality mark!*

(Perhaps it was felt that Germany’s pre-war use of the D could be ignored, given its post-war exclusion from convention participation. Anyway they could always have another letter when they re-entered the fold, couldn’t they?)

Passed on October 4<sup>th</sup>, 1919, the first Danish law on aviation gave the Minister of Public Works the power to issue regulations for aviation. In accordance with this, he issued the “Anordning om Luftfart” (Ordinance for Aviation) September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1920. This contained “Reglement A” (Regulation A) prescribing the marking of aircraft. It states that:

*“The nationality mark consists of a T. The registration mark consists of a group of four capital letters; the first letter in the group shall be a D; the group shall contain at least one vowel.”*

It goes on to say: *“On aircraft other than state and commercial, the registration mark shall be underlined with a black line.”* (I have yet to see photo proof that this underlining was ever used in practise on Danish private aircraft, but the rule was copied directly from Annex A to the Paris convention).

At the first public meeting of ICAN, that took place in London October 27<sup>th</sup>, 1922, the French delegation suggested that it would be practical to adopt the same letters for aircraft nationality marks, as those allocated for use as wireless call signs.

In 1913, the ITU (International Telegraph Union) had already made a list of letters to be used as call signs for wireless calls, and Denmark had been allocated the group OUA – OZZ. It was decided at the meeting to seek the help of the League of Nations to persuade the countries to adopt this system.

On November 25<sup>th</sup> 1927, “International Radiotelegraph Convention of Washington, 1927” was signed.

Among the rules set out were the following parts with direct bearing on aircraft registrations:

“Article 14.

#### *Call Signs*

*§1 Fixed, land and mobile stations.....must have a call sign taken from the international series assigned to each country in the following table of distribution. In this table, the first letter or the first letters provided for the call signs show the nationality of the stations. (The table shows that Denmark is allocated OUA to OZZ).*

*§2 Call signs consist of:*

*c) five letters in the case of aircraft stations;*

*§5-1 Each country selects the call signs of its stations from the international series allotted to it and notifies to the International Bureau the call sign allotted to each station.*

*2 The International Bureau takes care that the same call sign is not allotted to more than one station and that call signs which might be mistaken for distress signals or other signals of the same nature are not allotted to any station.”*

The next change to Danish regulations reflected this, as the Ministry decided that OY would be the new nationality mark to signify Danish nationality of the aircraft. This was set out in “Bekendtgørelse (Departmental order) Nr. 305” dated December 27<sup>th</sup>, 1928, which stated:

*“The nationality mark of civilian Danish aircraft is from 1<sup>st</sup> January 1929 changed to OY, in accordance with the decision made at the Washington-conference in 1927. From the same date, the registration mark is changed, so that the first letter will be a D, followed by a vowel, and the last letter, until further notice, the consonant C”.*

Defying all logic, this regulation – using the vowels A, E, I, O, U and Y - allowed for only six possible combinations for registration purposes. The reasoning behind this is anybody’s guess!

Unsurprisingly, Bekendtgørelse Nr. 305 was very short-lived, it being superseded by Bekendtgørelse Nr. 94 dated April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1929, which stated:

*“Nationality and registration marks shall consist of a group of 5 letters. The nationality mark consists of the letters OY. A hyphen of the same length as the width of a letter shall be placed immediately after the nationality mark. The registration mark consists of a group of three capital letters; the first letter in the group shall be a D. The group shall contain at least one vowel, e.g. OY-DAC.”*

On August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1938, Bekendtgørelse (Departmental order) Nr. 269 was issued covering, among other things, glider flying. This divided glider flying into two categories: "Begrænset Svæveflyvning" (Limited glider flying), which was categorized as flying with a glider within a previously defined, limited area, and "Udvidet Svæveflyvning" (Extended glider flying), which was categorized as flying with a glider, without the area flown over being defined previously. Gliders for "Begrænset svæveflyvning" had a number as their registration mark (OY-1 to OY-125 were used). This system remained in force until June, 1957, when the concept of "Begrænset svæveflyvning" became outmoded. Gliders and motor-glidens have continued to have registration marks containing at least one "X" ever since.

The next change came with Bekendtgørelse (Departmental order) Nr. 285 dated June 18<sup>th</sup> 1951. This was as a result of Denmark's ratification of the Chicago Convention of December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1944, that laid the foundations for the creation of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). The departmental order came into force on July, 1<sup>st</sup> 1951 and required that:

*"2.1 Nationality and registration marks on aircraft shall consist of a group of capital letters or numbers or combinations thereof.*

*2.2 The nationality mark, which shall be placed before the registration mark, shall consist of the letters OY. If the first character of the registration mark is a letter, a hyphen shall be placed after OY.*

*2.3 The registration mark is issued by Statens Luftfartsvæsen."*

The rules for nationality marks approved by ITU in 1927 have been adopted by ICAO, and the present version of Annex 7 "Aircraft Nationality and Registration Marks" still states, among other rules:

*"2.3 The nationality mark shall be selected from the series of nationality symbols included in the radio call signs allocated to the State of Registry by the International Telecommunication Union. The nationality mark shall be notified to the International Civil Aviation Organization."*

Bekendtgørelse (Departmental order) Nr. 172 dated April 28<sup>th</sup>, 1985 transferred the responsibility for issuing rules governing the registration of aircraft to the Statens Luftfartsvæsen (Danish CAA), that issued BL 1-23 covering nationality and registration marks, etc. for aircraft, with effect from September 1<sup>st</sup> 1987. This BL is still in force. It says:

*4.1 Nationality and registration marks on aircraft shall consist of a group of capital letters.*

*4.1.1 The nationality mark, which is placed in front of the registration mark, shall consist of the letters OY. Between the nationality mark and the registration mark shall be placed a hyphen.*

*4.1.2 The registration mark is issued by Statens Luftfartsvæsen.*

Amateur-built aircraft used to have their own series of registrations (OY-AMx, OY-BMx and OY-CMx). Amateur constructions had to be approved in their country of origin and were given a normal CoA in Denmark. New rules came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1980, when the KZ & Veteranflyklubben (KZ & Vintage Aircraft Club) was delegated responsibility for approving aircraft projects built by amateurs. These are then given an experimental CoA, but registered in the normal series of letters.

Balloons are registered with an "O" as the second-last letter, and helicopters are registered OY-Hxx.

Importers, airlines, and other operators who require many registrations, are normally allotted them in whole blocks, thus enabling them to decide for themselves which aircraft will use which letters within the reserved block. In these cases, the Statens Luftfartsvæsen (Danish CAA) will probably be unaware of the individual allocations until an application for registration is received. Temporary registrations are often

assigned to aircraft for ferry flights, etc, and are normally valid for a fixed period of time. An aircraft can only be registered in Denmark if it has a valid Certificate of Airworthiness.

Sources:

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