

“The John Luff Honduras Air Mail Collection”

by Peter A. Robertson

[Editor's Note: First-time visitors to The Philatelic Foundation's headquarters are often most impressed by the Foundation's Reference Collection, which is the most extensive general reference collection in the world. This more than 240 volume resource has been made possible by the generous gifts of prominent philatelists over the last five decades who wanted their collections to remain intact and to remain permanently at the service of philatelists. These tax-deductible gifts allow the staff and Expert Committee of the Foundation to consult not only their extensive knowledge, and our complete photographic record of the almost quarter of a million PF certificates issued, but also to compare the "patient" to numerous other examples of the stamp, often in all its known varieties, as well as any known fakes of the item. Since many contributors from around the country do not have the time to visit our headquarters or tour the reference facilities, the following is the first part in what will be a regular series where Curator Peter A. Robertson will lead readers behind the doors of the Foundation vault and "Inside the Reference Collection." It is our hope that this series will allow you to share in the wonders, joy and irreplaceable knowledge that The Philatelic Foundation maintains in its Reference Collection—priceless treasures preserved to aid the philatelists of the future.]

Knowledge is the essential resource in the expertizing process, but often comparison with the real thing is needed. Some of the collections left to the Foundation were the specialized working collections of the donors. These collections are kept intact in the original albums, as they were prepared by the original owners, including any handwritten notes, drawings, or reference material they may have included on the pages.

John Nicholas Luff (1860-1938) remains one of the legendary names in American philately. In the 1890's he joined the staff of the Scott Stamp and Coin Co., in New York, and for many years edited the *Scott Standard Postage Stamp Catalogue*. Luff served as President of both the American Philatelic Society and the Collectors Club of New York. Each year the A.P.S. presents the prestigious Luff Award for Service to Philately by a Living Philatelist. He and Hugh Clark (a founder of the Philatelic Foundation and later Editor of the *Scott Catalogue*) had the dream of building a reference collection that would contain an example of every Scott-listed item. It was this collection that eventually became The Philatelic Foundation's Reference Collection.

Luff is best remembered for his extensive work on Honduras Airmails, Orange Free State, and of course his major US study, with special emphasis on the US Newspaper stamps. His over 200 volume collection was the basis for and remains the centerpiece of The Philatelic Foundation's Reference Collection. By paging through his albums, one gets a glimpse into the mind and spirit of this giant of philately.

Luff's Honduras Airmail Reference Collection is one of the most extensive in existence. This Reference is actually housed in two separate volumes: the first contains the stamps, the second centers on the backup and collateral material. This includes photographs and much of Luff's original correspondence with key people in Honduras *at the time* the stamps were being issued! He had the foresight to understand that it is far easier to assemble current information than to try to go back and piece it together a few years later. Much valuable philatelic information has been lost employing the latter method.

The value in terms of knowledge that such a collection contains can be evidenced by the fact that almost every Expert Committee in the world usually confers with The Philatelic Foundation before rendering an opinion in this area. For example, the famed "Black Honduras," Scott No. C12, was verified and declared genuine using the Luff Reference Collection to "plate" the stamp. It is a 10 centavos dark blue stamp overprinted 25 c. in black. Often referred to as the "British Guiana of all Airmails," this stamp has a very interesting history.

Four copies were originally reported to exist, but three remained missing for a number of years. This included a pair examined by Luff which has disappeared in Honduras. Its whereabouts is still unknown. A third copy was well known since it has passed through many famous Airmail collections and has been

handled by all the major Airmail specialist dealers of the past. It was this copy which received the first P.F. Certificate as a genuine "Black Honduras." It has since been re-examined by the Expert Committee, and the "Scott C12" number was added to the Certificate. When first examined in 1957, the Scott Catalogue did not list the stamp, and it received the "Sanabria #4" designation. The Luff collection includes a photograph of the pair, as well as the two other single copies known to exist. The fourth copy was unearthed in an "old-time" collection in the last five years and has also received a Certificate of Genuineness by the Expert Committee.

The first volume of Luff's Honduras Airmail Collection, housed in a blue Elbe album, covers the years 1925 to shortly before his death in 1938 (Scott # C1-C88, plus Officials). Many Central and South American countries have issued numerous air mail stamps. Honduras was no exception, and its early air mail stamps contain both rare and common items. In an era when aerophilately was one of the dominant forces in the hobby, Luff pioneered the study of Honduran Airmails, and this collection remained one of his personal favorites.

Most of these early air mail were surcharged or overprinted, and Luff's study led to the discovery of numerous varieties, especially overprint and surcharge varieties, including double, triple, inverted, misplaced and partial impressions. This field contains rich ore for the specialist to mine—even the Scott "Standard" catalogue lists 98 major Scott-listed varieties for the first 75 stamps. The collection includes mint and used copies, in singles, blocks and other multiples. The numerous surcharge and overprint variations also make plating an interesting prospect. The collection shows his progress in plating certain stamps, both in originals and reprints. Many complete sheets are present, both of the issued Airmail stamps, and the basic stamps without Airmail overprints. The former is used to "plate" a rare variety and to prove the likelihood of its authenticity, while the latter affords study of the basic stamps before they were overprinted. Both are important steps in verifying the genuineness of an overprinted stamp. Luff also studied the minute variations in settings for the overprint or surcharge of each individual printing of a stamp.

Honduran Airmails also contain numerous fakes and counterfeits as the Scott notation "Counterfeits are plentiful" informs us. Luff's study not only comprises the stamps, but also the numerous forgeries and counterfeits. It is virtually impossible to expertize some of these items without immediate access to a resource such as this collection. The same is true of the stamps on cover, and Luff included many covers, including those with genuine stamps and genuine postmarks, as well as numerous varieties of fake stamps on covers with forged postmarks, genuine stamps with forged postmarks, etc.

If you have a collection that you would like to donate as a tax-deductible contribution to the PF's Reference Collection, or wish to make provisions in your will that the PF take custody of your collection or portions of it in order to benefit the future of philately, please contact: Chairman, The Philatelic Foundation.

John H. Steinway, former trustee of The Philatelic Foundation, passed away on August 29, 1989 at the age of 72 in Plymouth, Mass. Steinway was the son of Theodore E. Steinway, an original founder of The Philatelic Foundation. He was active in numerous musical, artistic, and theatrical organizations. He served as Chairman of the Board of Steinway & Sons until his retirement in 1983, and for several decades also served as Advisor to the White House for Musical Affairs.



Setting A. Rough impression. Known on the 5c, 10c (a few in black, mostly in red) 20c, 50c, 1 peso.



Setting B. Same as A with ■ 25 ■ added. On the 1c only.



Setting C. Clear surcharge in blue on the 5c and 20c



Setting D. Same as C with ■ 25 ■ added. On the 5c and 20c

Setting E. The very clear surcharge about which I am seeking information. Have seen it in black on 5c, 10c, 20c, 50c and 1 peso.

Setting F. Same as E with ■ 25 ■ added. Have seen it in black on the 1c and in blue on the 5c. I cannot show you a copy but send you a photograph of four stamps.

An ongoing research project in Luff's own handwriting. The different settings of the First Airmail Issue (1925). Due to his efforts, it has been established that only the first three settings are genuine as issued.

3

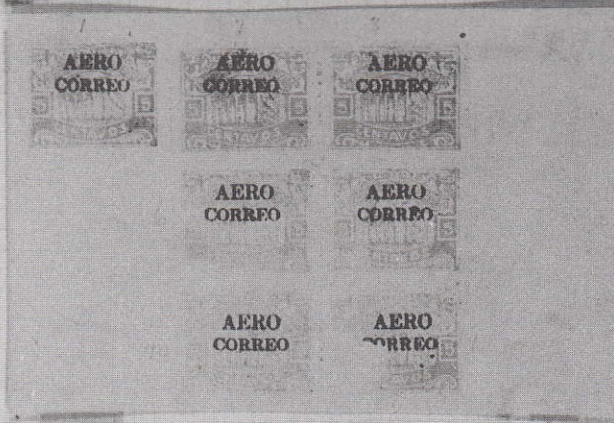
A



see p. C8
for analyses
of
Section A

for C22 ✓
see C7 page 5

C 3



← RED

9-75 Oscar Lichtenstein

410

41

Probability (HMG)
#12



Found by H.M.L.
1/17/40 in notes
by H.M.L.

SEC (Tower) -

* C. D. Smith sold by J. K. Newman 1746

23. *Stoffen - Frey'singhianen*

#6 *Microtus* like *Microtus* (only 1946?)

7 Fuller Healthcare sold by H&M Bank 4/4/51 to Sociobank, who offered it on 6/24/51

4/10/20

of little - here

Complete setting of 12 of the First Airmail Issue of Setting A, photograph of partial setting and 2 defective stamps.

C4

A

4



100-1000
100-1000
100-1000



Bank
\$24.76

Whether for revenue

100-1000

5

100-1000
100-1000

#6




See
100-1000

In the general
the
Not genuine, see Cent #10, 187 for or

Study of the A Setting.

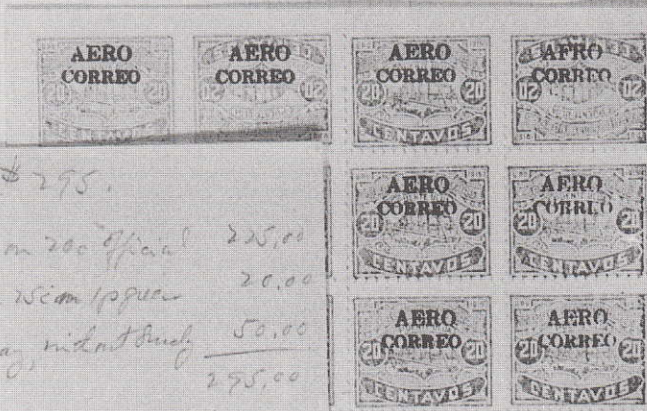
C6
 A
 10.04



← AFRO

Stamp inverted.

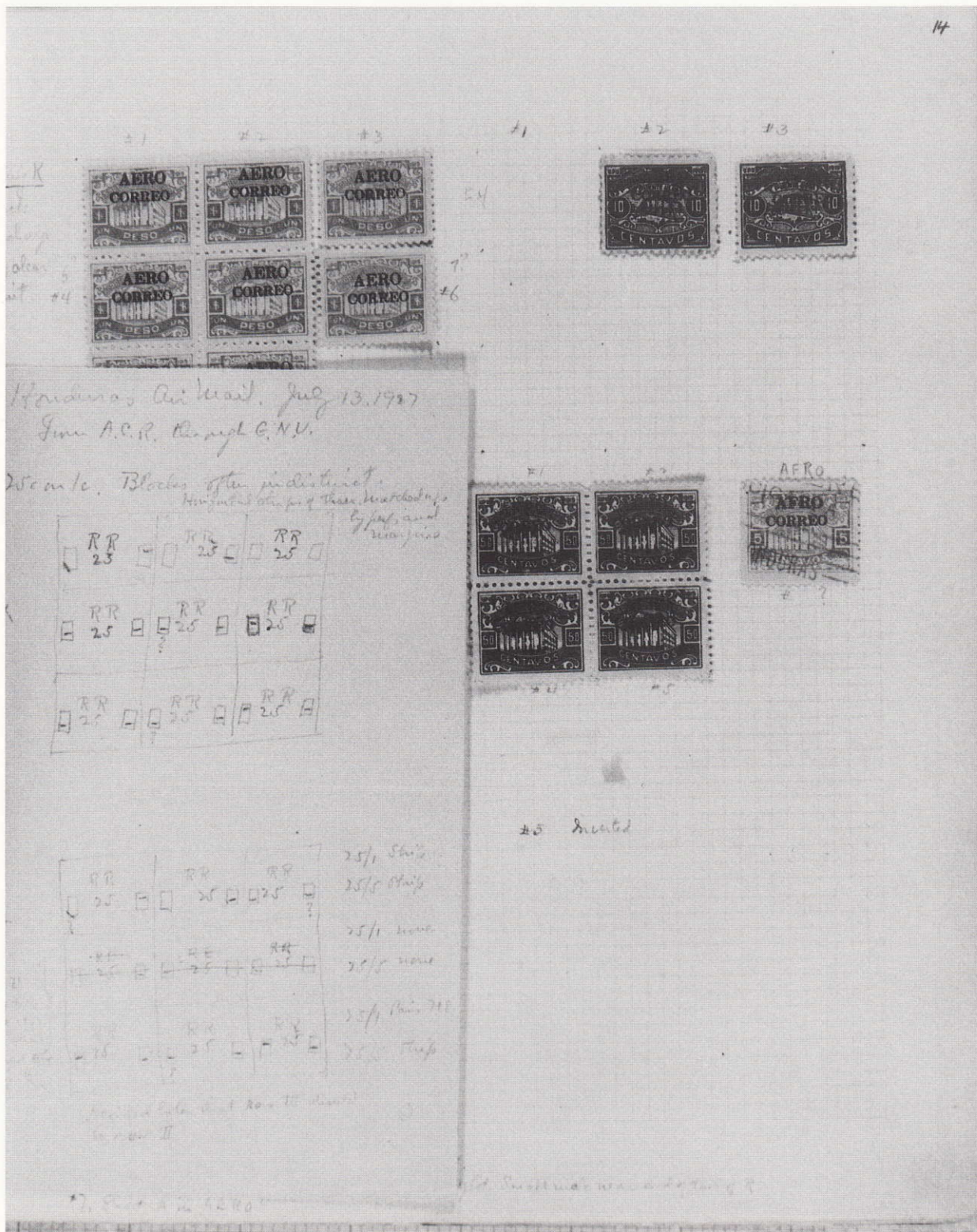
↓



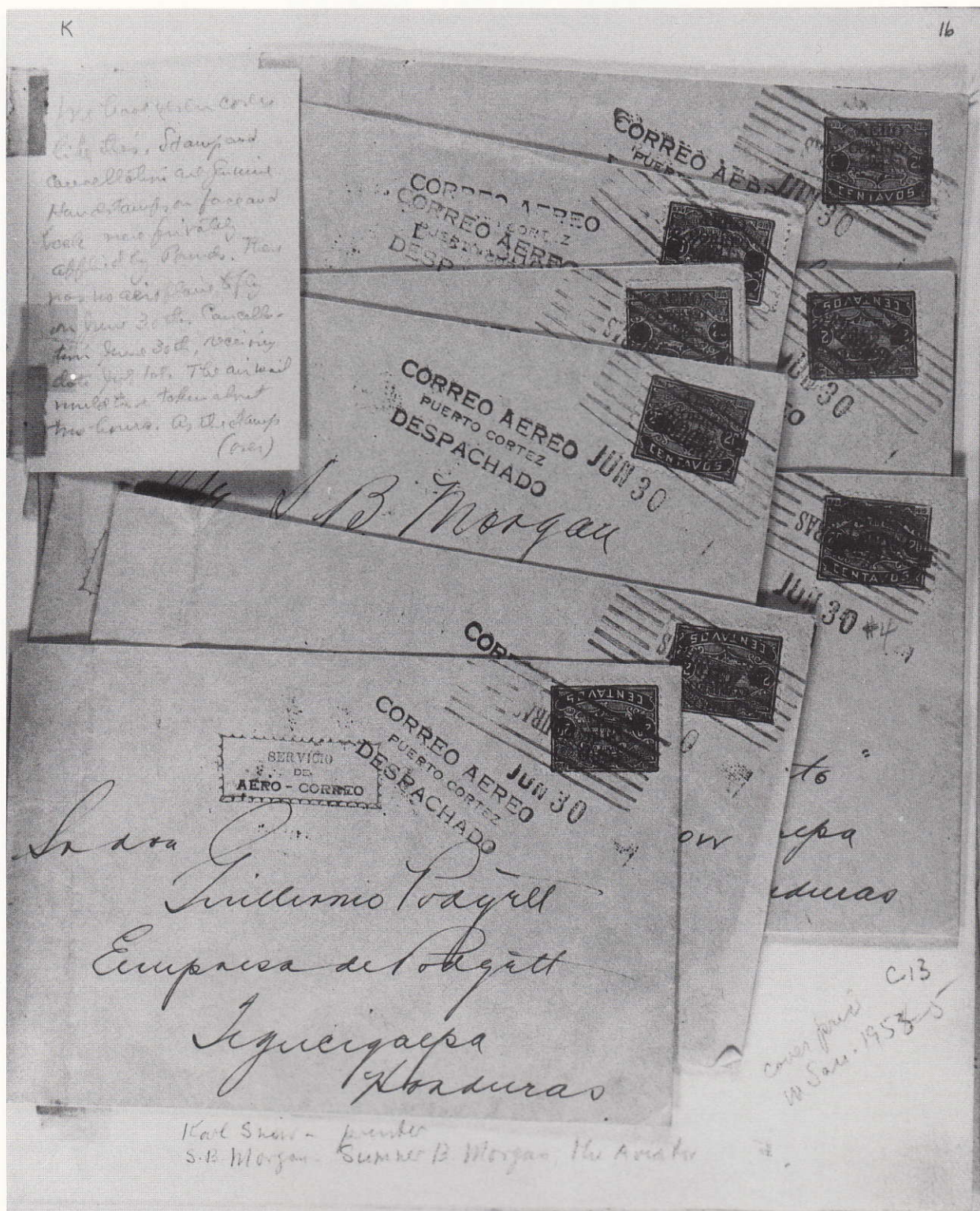
P.D. m. Check for \$295.
 1 Block 3 in, 5c on 20c official 225.00
 1 Block 3 in 50c on 15c on 10 paper 20.00
 10 sheets 5c blue gray, without back 50.00
 295.00

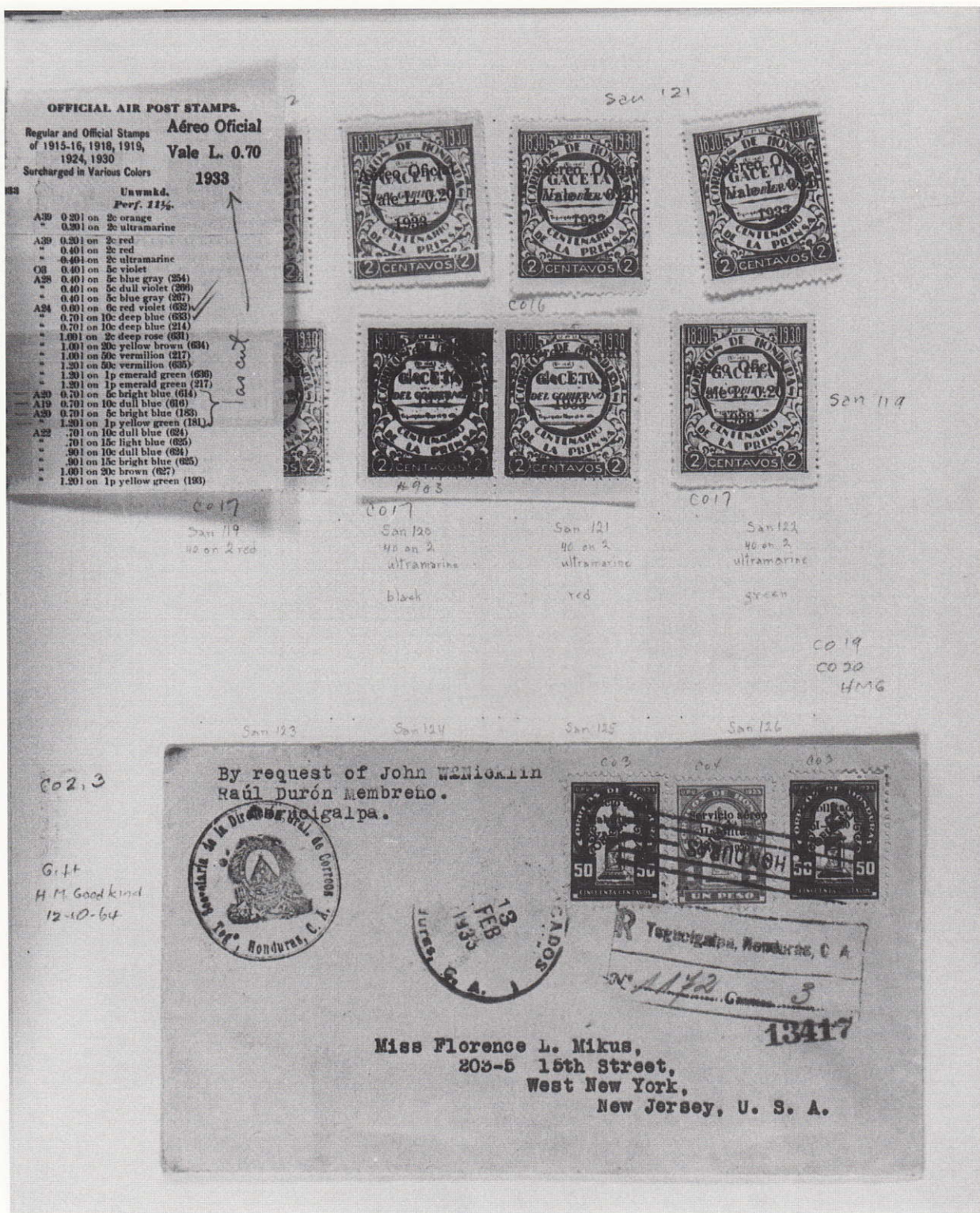
Check for 1336.44
 1 Sheet of metal #405 + 405c (AFRO) 1000.00
 2 Sheets Di. 900 for Jackoff 60.00
 1 Sheet (5) 5c on 20c brown "Mango" 1.25
 Plus 1% .19
 1 Sheet d. 10 with 10 pairs in paper 150.00
 1 " " " 5 pairs in paper 100.00
 30, 20, 10 paper postage, undid 25.00
 1924-25 " " 1336.00

Study of the 20 c. showing "AFRO" error and tete-beche pair.



A study of the later First Issue Setting, with Luff's own notes. Due to the vast inconsistencies encountered, Luff determined that these later Issues were all bogus.





Some Honduran Official Airmails, broken down by both Scott and Sanabria.