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The First Direct Air Service to Gibraltar

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From 1907 to 1936 the Turin-based Lloyd Sabaudo Steamship Company ran a transatlantic service between Genoa and New York comprising three luxury liners.

On 31st August 1930 the Italian airline company Società Anonima di Navigazione Aerea (SANA) successfully flew a trial flight using a Dornier Wal-Cabina seaplane I-AZED, piloted by Luigi Bonotto, between Genova and Gibraltar via Marseille, Barcelona and Los Alcázares (north of Cartagena).

From 6th September 1930 a full service was put in place with two additional seaplanes, I-AZDL & I-AZEC being added to the service in due course. Incoming air passengers from Barcelona or Genoa could join the ships at Gibraltar for the sea crossing to the United States, whilst those arriving on the ships from the USA could travel by seaplane from Gibraltar to Genoa, thereby saving two days in either direction.



Figure 1. The SANA Dornier Wal-Cabina I-AZED in Malta earlier in 1931.



Figure 2. Picture postcard showing a SANA Dornier seaplane alongside a Lloyd Sabaudo ship in the Bay of Gibraltar, c.1930

This was the first air service run from Gibraltar, although not scheduled as such as the timings were made to coincide with the arrival of the ships. The postcard shows the sea plane alongside a Lloyd Sabaudo ship in Gibraltar Bay.

The only airmail carried by the seaplanes was mail intended for the USA from Genoa

and from the USA for Italy which were transhipped at Gibraltar. No mail addressed to or originating from Gibraltar is known from this service. It nevertheless almost certainly inspired M.H. Bland to institute the first airmail service for Gibraltar correspondence to Tangier in 1931.

In 1932 the Lloyd Sabaudo Steamship Company was merged with two other lines to become the Italia Line. The air service ended when the Spanish Civil War broke out in July 1936.^{1,2}

¹ Garcia, R. M. (1985). The Italian Connection, from "Looking Back - Anecdotes and stories about the Gibraltar Post Office, 1886-1985." Gibraltar Philatelic Society.

² [History of the Società Anonima di Navigazione Aerea – SANA \(1925-1934\)](#)