Soviet Air Fleet/Osoaviakhim Stamps/Labels

G. Adolph Ackerman
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Registered cover from Tashkent - 29 October 1925 to Charlottenburg, Germany - 9 November 1925. Thirty-six kopeck franking. The large 5 kopeck Air Fleet stamp (left) issued by the Southeastern District O.D.V.F. in Rostov-on-Don (1924) shows Chairman M. Kalinin sowing seeds that grow into a crop of aeroplanes. A second small charity stamp (right) was issued to benefit wounded soldiers.

Printed in limited edition by author.

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Forward

My interest in the historic Soviet Air Fleet stamps began nearly twenty year ago when I discovered an interesting Russian air-related stamp on a postcard in a Swiss auction. A bit of research and the remembrance of a fellow philatelist led me to the works of Speers in the Aero Philatelist Annals. Speer’s listed and described a large number of Soviet charity stamps issued by the various cities/district chapters of the Society of Friends of the Air Fleet (and later the Aviakhim and Osaviakhim). I began a long and sustained hunt for these scarce and basically unknown stamps. Slowly my collection grew with the help of one or two specialized Russian stamp dealers and a philatelic acquaintance also interested in these unusual stamps. Early on, a large collection of Air Fleet stamps came to auction, but priced beyond my means. A photocopy of this lot revealed it was composed of two or three collections including the reference collection(s) used by Speers. The Speers listing and this collection provided the basis for my early study and search for the obscure Soviet Air Fleet stamps.

A windfall for my collection came several years later through the offers of a well-known Russian stamp dealer. My collection grew exponentially. Soon, I obtained a copy of the Chesnokov manuscript listing the Air Fleet emissions. It dwarfed the reports of Speers and modified many of the dates of issue and cities/districts of origin of the air stamps as had reported by Speers. This reference added a new horizon to my collecting, search and study. My collection slowly expanded beyond that of the large auction lot offered in the years before. Peripheral material was added to expand the story of the early Soviet air organizations. I have successfully exhibited my expanding collection over the years introducing both the casual viewer and judges alike into this unique and obscure area of Russian philately.

It is unfortunate that so few articles have been devoted to these stamps. Their nature has been argued as to whether they should be classified simply as charity stamps or be placed in a semi-official category. The stamps come in a wide variety of sizes, most are imperforate and without gum. These stamps were sanctioned by the Soviet government, sold by club members for public donations and were given as receipts for society dues. Also, they were sold at local post offices with a portion of the monies retained for administrative costs. Archival postal directives indicate that the Air Fleet stamps when placed on postal documents should be done at specified rates. These factors suggest that the term semi-official is a more fitting description for these emission than simply charity stamps.

G. Adolph Ackerman. M.D., Ph.D.
Worthington, Ohio - October, 2002

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank to Peter Michalove, Gary Combs and Vladimir Svetlov for their time and help in Russian translations. In addition, I would like to thank Dr. Simon Sheynberg for his contributions and diversification of my Air Fleet collection.
Introduction

The development of Russia’s defensive posture and its industrial infrastructure became major priorities of the Soviet government following the events of WWI and its aftermath. The need to train and inform the uneducated and peasant people, and Russia’s youth, in modern technology and national defense was critical. To this end, a number of government-sponsored mass volunteer organizations or societies were formed throughout Russia in the early 1920s with special emphasis and training in the areas of aviation, chemical defense, agriculture, communication, transportation and finance. Although joining one of the emerging societies was voluntary, it was strongly encouraged by the government and party. Thus, the Society of Friends of the Air Fleet (O.D.V.F.) was established in the early 1920s to stimulate public interest in aviation, encourage its youth in the various aspects of aviation and air defense, and to further public support for air-related activities. The training of new pilots and mechanics and the seeking of public funding for the building of both civil and military aircraft and air facilities were major functions of the O.D.V.F. With this cooperative public effort with the Soviet government, the societies membership rapidly increased with the call to develop a “mighty Red Air Fleet”. The Air Fleet society was later amalgamated with the smaller chemical society in the mid-1920s, and then, with the military group to form the Osoaviakhim as the country assumed a more defensive posture.

A major source of public funding for the activities of the Air Fleet society (and later the Aviakhim and Osoaviakhim) was through the sale of special stamps/labels with aviation and air defense themes issued by the central society and by local air chapters. These stamps were government-sanctioned, thereby differing from ordinary charity stamps. The public was encouraged not only to buy these stamps but to use them on postal documents. Official postal directive regarding the use of these stamps points to the semi-official nature of these emissions.

*Soviet Air Fleet/Osoaviakhim Stamps/Labels* is designed to provide a historical prospective of the formation, development and activities of the civil and military defense societies and to describe and illustrate the special stamps/labels issued by these organizations to collect public funds for the building of airplanes, strengthening defense and various air projects.

This book is divided into two parts, the first dealing with the formation and development of the air societies, and the second illustrating and describing the stamps/receipt/labels issued by the civil air-defense societies during the 1920s and early 1930s. The presentation of the stamp emissions is organized by regional sector and year, and the descriptions are presented in text format rather than as a standard catalog listing.

Several hundred different stamps/labels were issued by the various society air chapters during the 1920s and early 1930s, most in relatively small numbers. These stamps are little known by aerophilatelists and are quite scarce, especially on postal documents. The most complete description and listing of these stamps comes from the unpublished manuscript of Chesnokov.\(^1\)
and the extensive collection available to him for study, and later placed in the Central Museum of the Air Forces. Published cataloging/listing of these stamps has been limited to the series by Pritula\(^5\) and by Krasin and Turchinskiy\(^2,3\) in the Russian philatelic journals. The published articles of Pritula and Krasin and Turchinskiy are based primarily on the work of Chesnokov although some differences are apparent. Speers\(^7\) and Reynolds\(^7\) also have attempted to classify and catalog these emissions using their smaller collections. It is apparent that no complete collection of these scarce stamps exists in the hands of collectors. The illustrations in this book are from several sources including my extensive collection, photocopies from various auctions and from the unpublished manuscript of Chesnokov. The stamps are organized by republics, cities/districts and by date of issue based on the works of the Russian authors.


Chapter 1

Prelude to the Formation of the Soviet Air Fleet Organization

The lure of flying attracted increasing numbers of individuals in Russia and throughout the world soon after the 20th Century began. Early Russian aviation pioneers supported their activities and purchase of aircraft with their own funds from France, Germany and England. Thus, young men and women attracted to flying tended to be well educated and financially independent. Few aircraft and support facilities were available during the early years. Soon small flying groups or aero-clubs began to form in western Russia and Ukraine. Pilots were basically self-taught and flattened fields and pastures served as runways. Gradually, Russian aircraft designers began producing new aircraft after the introduction of new light-weight engines prior to WWI.

![Figure 1.1: Imperial Aero-Club of Russia official cover and enclosed letter dated 23 December 1910 to Paris with arrival postmark 9 January 1911; franking on reverse. Letter signed by General Secretary of the Imperial Aero-Club of Russia. Insert shows members of the 1911 Aero-Club standing before a Farman biplane.](image)

In early 1908, the Imperial Aero-Club of Russia was formed in St. Petersburg. An early cover and letter enclosure from the Imperial Aero-Club of Russia are shown (figure 1.1). Club members from 1911, along with a Farman biplane, are also illustrated; both men and women participated. Publicity, new models of planes, air shows and records in air speed, altitude and endurance attracted public attention particularly of the more affluent and educated (figure 1.2). The tsar permitted the club to seek public funding for their activities because of the costs involved (figure 1.3).

Public awareness of aviation and curiosity about flying increased during the years prior to WWI. The number of aero clubs steadily increased and military pilot and mechanic training schools were initiated. Publicly-owned aircraft factories and workshops began to appear in Moscow and St.
Petersburg primarily producing aircraft of similar design to those being used in western Europe. Russian aircraft designers began to emerge and built a number of aircraft of original design (figure 1.3). Several of their aircraft were used on observation and bombing missions during WWI.

Air squadrons were attached to armies along the front lines (figure 1.4). Initially military leaders had little regard for airplanes in their observational tactical maneuvers until after several successful bombing and observational missions deep behind enemy lines. Aerial combat began in 1916 but German pilots had the advantage of superior pilots and aircraft. The deposition of the Tsar in early 1917 and the weak Provisional government that followed greatly affect the Russian economy, military production and war effort resulting in a loss of public and
military morale. The Bolshevik take over of the government also had devastating effects on military aviation as war effort and food supplies dwindled and military leaders were removed. New pilots were poorly trained and repair parts for damaged aircraft were lacking.

Charity stamps were a popular means of obtaining public funds for various causes during imperial times. As the war began the St. Petersburg Committee issued in 1914 a war charity stamp with a 10 kopeck value for “Soldiers and their Families”. This charity stamp features an airplane with cannon in the foreground and a war ship at sea in the background. The purchase of these stamps was voluntary and they could be affixed to mail envelopes as decorations and to further promote the war charity (figures 1.5, 1.6). In early 1915, the Imperial Ministry of Finance aggressively sought the purchase of war bonds by the public. Using a variety of means including posters of various scenes from the front lines and activities involving the war effort. The public was encouraged to buy the 5.1/2 % interest bonds; charity stamps were part of this effort and a great variety of these stamps were issued but only one related to aviation. These air-related war bond multicolor stamps were printed on different colors/shades of paper. This stamp design featured a two-seat monoplane with a gunner and an inscription “Invest in 5 1/2 War bonds” (figure 1.5).

Figure 1.4: Postcard (left) with round blue fieldpost cachet of the Fifth Corp Aviation Detachment. Card sent to Petrograd with oval railroad (Vokzel) postmark dated 12 September 1915. Picture postcard (right) shows a military air squadron. Text indicates an aviation detachment from the theater of war. Printed in Moscow, no date.

Figure 1.5: a. Ten kopeck war charity stamp issued by St. Petersburg Committee (1914). Inscribed: “Soldiers and their Families” + initials for St. Petersburg Committee (top).

b. Estonian War Loan of Fellin charity stamp (1917) features a Bleriot airplane. Inscribed “Fellin 1917”; 2 kopeck value.

c. War loan label from Ministry of Finance (1915) shows monoplane with pilot and gunner flying over land. Inscribed “Invest in 5 1/2% War Loan”.

3
During the later stages of the war, the Estonia Committee of Grand Duchess Elizabeth Fedor-ovna issued a stamp-label featuring a Bleriot airplane flying over the city for its “War Loan of Fellin” (figure 1.5).

Figure 1.6: World War I postcard from St. Petersburg - 23 August 1914 to Pontiac, MI - no arrival postmark.
Note - St. Petersburg 10 kopeck charity stamp for “Soldiers and Families”. Charity stamp (left) tied at right margin by St. Petersburg cancel.

Figure 1.7: a. War charity label for Samara (1916) shows soldier with rifle and airplane in background. Imperforate, no denomination or gum.
     b - d. War charity labels issued as receipts for donation to the fund for wounded Russian aviators during World War I. Inscribed “For Injured Aviators”. Imperforate, no denominations or gum.

Other war charity stamps featuring airplanes appeared during the war. Samara issued a war charity stamp featuring a soldier with an airplane overhead and additional charity stamps were issued to obtain public funds for the support of wounded airmen (figure 1.7).

The disastrous effects of WWI, instability of the Russian government and the changes in the political climate pervaded the land and its people. As the twenties began civil strife, famine and mounting inflation faced the newly-established government as it attempted to reach economic and political stability. The civil war had resulted in large numbers of disabled soldiers and orphaned children. The use of special stamps/labels for the public support of charities, particularly those
Figure 1.8: Air mail letter (folded) from Petrograd - 22 October 1923 to London - no arrival pmk. via Moscow - 29 October 1923 (bks). Thirty kopecks correctly paid the air letter rate for this date. A canceled 5 ruble RSFSR disabled soldiers charity label (arrow) is tied to the cover. Cover inscribed (top) - “vozduhna poqta via Berlin / Luftpost”. One of three known covers with the handwritten “Envoyé par la / poste aérienne.” inscription on a magenta label.

for orphaned children and disabled war veterans, continued to be an important mechanism for public support of charities as the new government evolved. An example of one of these charity stamps of the R.S.F.S.R. issued for disabled soldiers is illustrated on a 1923 air mail cover from Petrograd (figure 1.8).
Chapter 2

The Society of Friends of the Air Fleet – Historical Background

Important pioneering efforts in aircraft design and air-related activities took place in Russia prior to World War I.3, 5,16, 22 However, the development of an aircraft industry, airdromes and both commercial and military aviation was essentially stalled by political upheaval, civil war, famine and rampant inflation in Russia following World War I and the October Revolution. In contrast, rapid changes in aviation were taking place in the United States, Germany, Great Britain and France as aircraft design and technology improved. Soon commercial air networks began to emerge throughout Europe and in the United States in the post-war years.

As the new Communist regime consolidated its power, the Soviet leaders recognized the need to develop both their military and civil air capabilities allowing for the rapid communication and transport of goods to its distant and inaccessible towns and cities and for the protection of its extensive territorial borders. Plans for forming a formidable air capability and establishing an extensive air network within the Soviet Union were greatly influenced by Russia’s recent past, e.g., the Russo–Japanese conflict, World War I, the invasion of Allied Forces in the North, Ukrainian and Siberian sectors, plus the territorial disputes along its southern border and the build-up of air power in Western Europe. In 1921, Lenin called for the building of a “mighty Red Army” and this call was taken on by aviation activists to include the formation and development of a “mighty Red Air Fleet”. Thus, national defense provided a major impetus for the development and expansion of an aviation complex within the U.S.S.R. during the 1920s and 30s.6, 15, 16, 23

Figure 2.1: Wrapper (damaged and portion of address removed) from Smolensk - 24 July 1922 to Petrograd - 27 July 1922. Note - violet circular Air Fleet handstamps - “Headquarters Southwestern Air Fleet” (outer ring) and “Mail Box Dispatch” (arrows and insert).

Bringing Russia and its largely rural and poorly educated people into a modern technological world would prove to be a formidable task requiring public awareness, education, special training
and the active participation of its citizens. As a prelude to the establishment of the volunteer Society of Friends of the Air Fleet, satellite Air Fleet headquarters were opened to organize and oversee developing District Air Fleet Programs. A mail dispatch handstamp of the Headquarters of the Southwestern Air Fleet is shown on a 1922 wrapper sent from Smolensk to Petrograd (Figure 2.1).

Formation of the Society for Friends of the Air Fleet (March 1923): Civil airlines began to evolve and expand in the U.S.S.R. with the initial formation of the Deruluft airline (1922), a German–Soviet venture, that provided mail service between Moscow and Berlin via Königsberg. By the spring of 1923, the Ukrainian airline also was carrying mail and passengers in the region and from the southern part of the U.S.S.R. to Moscow. The Dobrolet airline was formed in early 1923 with service connecting Moscow and Nizhni Novgorod. Dobrolet extended its service to remote sections of the country by the late 1920s and early 1930s becoming the primer airline in the U.S.S.R. An embryonic aircraft construction industry was in operation, although during the 1920s both civil and military aircraft generally were purchased from Germany and France.

To stimulate public interest in aviation, encourage its youth in the various aspects of aviation and air defense, and to further public support for air-related activities and maintenance, the Soviet government, on the initiative of Trotsky, sponsored the formation of an air fleet society (March 1923). The first organizational sessions of the new society included representatives of the supreme military staff, existing air groups, the trade unions, state administration and the Industrial Bank. Established initially in Moscow, aero clubs were rapidly formed in the major cities and districts throughout the Soviet Union. These aviation clubs were loosely federated under the Central Committee in Moscow as the “Society of Friends of the Air Fleet” - abbreviated O.D.V.F. (ОБЩЕСТВО ДРУЗЕЙ ВОЗДУШНОГО ФЛОТА).

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**Figure 2.2:** Portion of a membership diploma from the Moscow O.D.V.F. (left) showing the society handstamp featuring a biplane and sun rays. Outer ring text - “Moscow Society of Friends of the Air Fleet”. Text within design - “Working People Build the Air Fleet”.

Zlatoust O.D.V.F. handstamp on 1923 1-ruble Ural District stamp on piece (right). Detail of Zlatoust handstamp (center) which is identical to Moscow O.D.V.F. handstamp but “Zlatoust” substituted for “Moscow” in outer ring.
A seal was designed for O.D.V.F. showing a biplane flying above the sun and radiating rays encircled with text with the name of the society (figure 2.2). The basic seal modified with the district or city name was used on membership certificates and other official documents of the local aero clubs. The Zlatoust O.D.V.F. applied their seal as a handstamp on the stamps of the 7th and 8th issues of the Central Committee (Moscow) and to the 1924 Ural District stamps. These marked stamps were used on postal items and also served as membership receipts (figure 2.2).

**Figure 2.3:** Membership Diploma of the Moscow Friends of the Air Fleet ~1924/25.

“This certificate is for membership in and contribution to the Moscow O.D.V.F.”

“Award”

“Working People Build the Air Fleet” (top margin).

“Workers of All Countries Working Together (ribbon over airplane).

“Moscow Society of Friends of the Air Fleet”

Text: “By this award ----- has the right to wear the badge of the M.O.D.V.F. No ___

This award given to a person for demonstrating and fulfilling the requirements and has given to the charity “Friends of the Air Fleet”.

“Every donation will increase the Society of the Moscow Friends of the Air Fleet”

Signed by M.O.D.V.F. Officers Kamenev, Volin and Nikulin.

Note - violet Moscow O.D.V.F. circular seal (lower left) and wing badge of the O.D.V.F. (below).

Frame size - 9” x 15”.

Membership in the O.D.V.F. was voluntary and an active campaign was made to recruit new members into the aviation fold. Upon completing the requirements the person became a member of the O.D.V.F. and was given a membership diploma/certificate. An Air Fleet diploma from the
Figure 2.4: Certificate of Membership Awarded by Guberniya Society of the Friends of the Air Fleet.

Inscriptions

“S.S.S.R. Working People, Build the Air Fleet (top).

“Proletariat of All Countries Unite” (circle around worker/soldier/peasant).

“We Want Peace, Peace and Peace” (text above men)

“Worker: Here are the brutal executioners of the workers and peasants sleep and dream how they could erase us from the working world. Let’s strengthen our aviation. It will give us the ability to continue our world of labor” (left text block).

“Red Army Soldier: In future wars these airplanes will decide the fate of the people. We have to build as many of them as will guarantee full invincibility of the S.S.S.R.” (center text block).

“Peasant: After a series of destructive wars, forced on working people by capitalists and landowners, we slowly began to reconstruct the economy of the country. The oppressors again dream of choking us with an air fleet. Our task is to protect our peaceful labor, having created our own powerful air fleet. Let’s all be members of the O.D.V.F.” (right text block).

Scroll: “Membership Certificate of the O.D.V.F.”

Scroll Text: “Dear Comrade (manuscript V.F. Zelentsin), the Presidium of the Guberniya Society of the Friends of the Air Fleet presents this membership certificate to you. You, having become a member of the above-mentioned society, not by words, but by deeds, have proved that you are an active son of the working people and their true defender. The Presidium of the Guberniya O.D.V.F. believes that only through the common understanding of the historic days, which we are now experiencing, can we peacefully continue our labor. May this certificate testify to the revolutionary power of the workers’ and peasants’ class, and your name, dear comrade (V.P. Zelenstein) will be entered in the book of active members of the Society of the Friends of the Air Fleet.

Signed by Chairman, Member and Secretary of the O.D.V.F.  Diploma size: 8.5” x 13”
Moscow O.D.V.F. from ~1924/5 is illustrated (figure 2.3), as well as, one prepared later by the Guberniya Society of the Friends of the Air Fleet with anti-capitalist figures and text (figure 2.4). All O.D.V.F., and later the Osoaviakhim, members kept a membership booklet that listed the rules of the society and provided a place to affix small stamps given as receipt for payment of dues (figures 2.5, 2.6). Membership in the O.D.V.F. reached over 3 million by 1925.

Figure 2.5: Cloth (red) cover membership booklet of the Northwest District O.D.V.F. presented to Pavlova Tatjana Nikolayevska - 25 June 1925 (became a member - 6 June 1925). Booklet give rules/regulations for the O.D.V.F. Note the official Northwest District O.D.V.F. handstamp.

Booklet contains 5k (x2) and 25k (x2) Northwest District stamps used for receipts for payment of dues. Examples of these stamps are shown (left).

Figure 2.6: An R.S.F.S.R. Osoaviakhim membership booklet (dated 8 September 1927). Booklet has the small stamps given as receipts for payment of society dues for the years 1927–1930. Information regarding the rules and regulations of the society is included in the booklet (right).
Badges/lapel pins of the society and chapters were proudly worn by active O.D.V.F. members (figure 2.7a–d). Several pins are shown including an O.D.V.F. member pin, a pin of the Central Committee (Moscow), a Northwest District pin and a Moscow Local O.D.V.F. pin. The winged O.D.V.F. emblem also has been reproduced on several Air Fleet stamps/labels (figure 2.7e).

Figure 2.7: a) Member Badge of the O.D.V.F. in brass and enamels shows wings, red star, two crossed propellers blades and the letters “SSSR” and ‘ODVF’.

b) Central Committee O.D.V.F. lapel pin in brass with purple enamel with flag design and showing an airplane and sun/sun rays. also, O.D.V.F./S.S.S.R. initials.

c) Northwest District O.D.V.F. pin in sterling and enamel shows biplane over hammer/sickle emblem, red star with date 1923 and Society of Friends of the Air Fleet (below).

d) Moscow Local O.D.V.F. pin in brass and purple enamel flag design with airplane and sun/sun rays. Similar to the Central Committee pin but initials “MODVF” and “RSFSR” (on sun) replace “ODVF” and “SSSR”.

e) Osoaviakhim pin with crossed propeller blade/rifle and a gas mask on a red enameled star enclosed by a wreath with a hammer, sickle, wheat shaft and machinery gear. A red flag (above) has letters “SSSR” with “Osoaviakhim” (below).

f) O.D.V.F. wing emblem on Krasnoyarsk 1924 Air Fleet issue. Text: “For Building an Airplane Squadron for Illich”.

The newspapers, Pravda and Izvestia, provided daily coverage of the progress of the O.D.V.F. activities and information regarding the amount of money raised through voluntary public funding (figure 2.8). Coverage was continued for several years. While conflicts arose concerning the military versus the civil direction of the embryonic Air Fleet society, both activities were successfully blended during the first years of the organization.4, 24
One of the main methods used by the O.D.V.F. (and its later transition into the Aviakhim and the Osoaviakhim, see chapter 3) to raise public funds to build airplanes and for various air-related projects and facilities was through the sale of government-sanctioned air fleet charity stamps.

These unique and colorful stamps were issued by various regional chapters of the O.D.V.F. and sold in post offices throughout the country, as well as, being distributed and sold by members of the local air chapters. These stamps/labels brought in significant revenue and played a pivotal role in the early development of Soviet aviation, both civil and military. A potpourri of the stamps from various O.D.V.F. chapters illustrates the diversity of designs used on these unique stamps (figure 2.9).
Figure 2.9: Examples O.D.V.F. stamps issued by various chapters during the 1923/24 period. 
Top row: Central Committee (Moscow), Moscow Local, Northwest District and Northwest District Societies. 
Second row: Yaroslav, Kremenchug, Valuiki and Ukraine Central Committee Societies. 
Third row: Kharkov, Tomsk and Omsk Societies.
Chapter 3

The Formation of the Aviakhim (1925) and Osoaviakhim (1927)

As the new Soviet government was being consolidated and efforts were being directed to bring the new Russia into the modern world of industry and technology, the military leaders were faced with the training of new recruits and fledgling officers. The Military Academy of the Red Army in Moscow envisioned forming a special group or society that would focus its attention on training a new breed of military officers, improving the standards of the military and evaluating recent military events in the light of modern warfare and technology. This new organization was called the Military Scientific Society or VNO and was founded in November 1920 under the leadership of Frunze. By 1925, VNO groups were active in most Red Army units and VNO members participated energetically in government and party congresses.

The need to train and inform the uneducated and peasant people, and Russia’s youth, in modern technology and national defense was critical. Thus, developing Russia’s industrial infrastructure including a rapid communication system became major priorities of the Soviet government and Communist Party. The War had highlighted the importance of both aviation and chemistry for Soviet development and defense. The concept of forming various government-sponsored mass volunteer organizations or groups for civilian and youth education with special training in these disciplines (e.g., aviation, chemical defense, agriculture, communication and transportation and finance) soon came to fruition with the establishment of individual societies throughout the country. Although joining one of the emerging societies was voluntary, it was strongly encouraged by the government and party.

The Society of Friends of the Air Fleet (O.D.V.F.) began in the spring of 1923 concentrating its efforts on training its members in various aspects of aviation, including pilots and mechanics, and soliciting public funds for acquiring new military and civilian aircraft. Similarly in May 1924, a society was formed that focused on chemical technology and defense - the Dobrokhim (Society of Friends of Chemistry). The relationship between the O.D.V.F. and Dobrokhim was defined as one of mutual support.

During the early to mid-1920s, heated political debates voiced by Trotsky and Frunze revolved about the role of social–economic versus military aspects of technological development and the building of a strong Soviet militia. Trotsky championed a strong militia for the country and the non-military aspects of technology with an emphasis on aviation. Trotsky did not want aviation to be fully incorporated into the military framework. The relationship between the military and civil industrial development had difficulties during the early-mid 1920s. Frunze pushed for greater emphasis on the development of the military complex and industrial military production while Trotsky’s followers promoted civil growth and advancement.

With Trotsky’s death, Soviet governmental power became more restrictive, bureaucratic and
military in nature under Stalin. Since the Dobrokhim had not archived large membership during its first months of existence, it was soon amalgamated with the O.D.V.F. (May 1925) to form the Aviakhim. The O.D.V.F. had achieved a membership of ~3,000,000 by 1925. 8

In contrast to the success of the Air Fleet stamp program and wide production of its distinctive stamps by central and regional O.D.V.F. chapters, the Dobrokhim produced only a limited number of stamps for soliciting public support for their activities. Several stamps issued by the Dobrokhim are shown and depict themes related to chemical warfare (figures 3.1).

The basic Air Fleet stamp program continued but with less vigor. Fewer new issues were prepared during this period that were designated as air fleet issues. Comparatively few Aviakhim designated stamps were produced. Most Aviakhim stamps were so designated and incorporated designs related to both the air and chemical groups (figures 3.2.). Although the O.D.V.F. and Dobrokhim had joined forming a single society or organization, older O.D.V.F. stamps continued to be sold and used on postal and documentary items.

Under Frunze’s direction the VNO changed in 1925-6 from an intramilitary elite scientific group...
to a mass volunteer organization that included both civilians and military personnel. The Society’s name was changed to the Society for Assistance to Defense (abbreviated OSO) in 1926. At this time the OSO which had a membership of only 85,000 was charged with insuring the coordination and cooperation of the O.D.V.F. and Dobrokhim groups under the Aviakhim. In little more than a year and a half (January 1927), the Aviakhim amalgamated with the OSO paramilitary group to form the Osoaviakhim. The joining of these societies ended much of the cooperative and unrestrictive interactions between the local and regional aviation clubs and the Soviet government. As would be expected, these organizations under the Osoaviakhim assumed paramilitary status. Military training was stressed within the new joint society. It was reported at the First All–Union Congress of Osoaviakhim that the required reregistration of members and the changed direction of the new Society resulted in over a 20% drop in its membership.

The broad aims of the Osoaviakhim were designated as follows: 1) to find resources (financial, material and labor) for allocation to the aviation and chemical industries, to agriculture and to defense; 2) to train members in basic military skills and to increase their knowledge in aviation, chemical and military technologies without taking them away from their homes and work place; 3) to gradually change the organizational patterns and attitudes among the membership and, 4) to increase public awareness of new technologies and propaganda in case of future war. The emphasis of the Osoaviakhim differed from those of the original O.D.V.F., Dobrokhim and OSO organizations. The Osoaviakhim paramilitary units activities needed to be censored in order to prevent foreign recognition of the similarities between Osoaviakhim and Red Army military training and goals.

The Osoaviakhim consisted of a number of distinct groups including those centered on military, aviation, chemistry, agriculture, and communication. The administrative organization for most of these groups followed the Soviet territorial districting from the central or all-union level to the republic and autonomous nationality boundaries, to the local oblast, okrug, and raion (city and rural district) levels. The R.S.F.S.R., Ukraine, Byelorussia and Transcaucasian republics each possessed a separate society within the Union Osoaviakhim. The nationalities within the R.S.F.S.R. also were similarly organized. In 1929, the societies of the All–Union Osoaviakhim numbered 26.

Recruitment and paramilitary training of new members to the various interest groups of the Osoaviakhim remained a priority. Funds for chapter activity were dependent upon dues and the sale of charity stamps. New stamps were prepared by a number of local Osoaviakhim chapters. Designs had a more military and defense appearance than those issued earlier by the O.D.V.F. (figures 3.3). Most of these emissions were of large size and commonly imperforate; some were printed on card stock and many had no gum. Although such issues could be categorized as labels or receipts for dues or donations, they are found decorating covers of the period (figures 3.4, 3.5).

A boost in support of the Osoaviakhim came in April 1927, several months after its official organization. The Soviet’s arrest of British engineers in the Northern Caucasus for alleged spying
caused England to break off diplomatic relations with the U.S.S.R. and assume an aggressive posture. Sir Austin Chamberlain was serving as the British Foreign Secretary at the time. This political action resulted in a Soviet’s propaganda campaign and fund raising drive for the purchase of 100 military aircraft for the Red Army. The slogan “Our Answer to Chamberlain” was adopted and used on some local Osoaviakhim chapter stamps (figures 3.3c,f). A rare example of
one of these stamps from the Maikop Osoaviakhim is shown on cover (figure 3.5). It features Chamberlain watching a Soviet airplane with workers in background and the slogan “Our Reply to Chamberlain”.

**Figure 3.4:** Crimean Osoaviakhim (Simferopol) 10 kopeck stamp printed on thin card stock with diagonal overprint “Crimea Regional Council O.L.T.R.” Stamp features three monoplanes and inscription - “For an Air Squadron” (top) and “A Gift for the 14th Anniversary of the October Revolution”. Registered air mail cover from Kislovodsk - 17 June 1932 to Zurich, Switzerland - 23 June 1932 via Moscow and Berlin.

**Figure 3.5:** Maikop Osoaviakhim stamp on folded express mail letter (postage section cut off). Novorossiisk - 28 June 1931 to Moscow - 1 July 1931.

Stamp shows Chamberlain with top hat watching a large airplane and Soviet workers. Slogan on airplane reads “Our Answer to Chamberlain”.

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With planes flying overhead, these new airplanes were presented to the Army at special ceremonies in early 1928.\textsuperscript{14} The military planes received names for the offering organization, e.g.,\textit{The Ural Worker, The Moscow Trade Union, The Peasant} etc., or for Soviet leaders, e.g.,\textit{The Lenin, The Stalin}, etc. These airplanes were built in Soviet factories by Soviet workers and were funded through donations and purchase of Osoaviakhim stamps and labels. By 1928, there were 32,000 associated air societies with membership in the millions.\textsuperscript{21} Over 160 aircraft had been purchased and over 6 million rubles had been spent on aircraft and chemical warfare development including the building of 35 airdromes.

\textbf{Figure 3.6}: a) Zhmerinka Osoaviakhim issue for First Anniversary of the All-Union Ukraine Pioneers and Aviation Day (1932). Stamp shows airplane flying over a youth group and factory. b) Special 15 kopeck issue (1932) of the Zaporozhe Osoaviakhim for funds to build a larger airport. Stamp shows monoplane flying above river and hydroelectric plant with a building and tower in background. Inscription (Ukrainian) - “Proletarians of All Countries Unit” (top); “Build a Bigger Airport” (diagonal). c) Samarkand Red Crescent 1928 issue for support of a Uzbekian sanitary airplane. Inscription - “Workers Give to the Uzbekian Sanitary Airplane”.

During the following years, Osoaviakhim stamps were issued sporadically by local chapters and associated groups, some for specific occasions or needs (figure 3.6). Three include an issue of Zhmerinka (1932) for the first anniversary of the All-Union Ukraine Pioneers and Aviation Day; a large stamp from Zaporozhe (1932) for funds to build a larger airport and a stamp from Samarkand (1928) seeking public funds for the support of an Uzbekian sanitary airplane.

By the early 1930s, 6,300 student pilots were in training and their program was expanded to include military tactics, ballooning, parachuting, riflery and motor vehicle experience.\textsuperscript{35} Three thousand O.D.V.F. paratroopers participated in military maneuvers in 1934 and by 1935 the O.D.V.F. owned airplanes had flown over 5,000 hours during military maneuvers in Kiev.\textsuperscript{35}

\textbf{Figure 3.7}: Leningrad Osoaviakhim (~1936) label on thin card stock; no denomination. Group of large military airplanes and parachutes over Leningrad Palace. Inscription - “Our Country Pledges a Thousand Brave Airmen”.

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