

Thus, the Makhnovists maintained friendly relations with the Bolsheviks only during two short periods, from February to the end of 1919, and in October/November 1920. In regard to the hammer-and-sickle emblem next to Makhno's portrait, the 1 rouble postage stamp in question must have been printed during one of these periods.

I was unable to discover details about the origin and the originators of the stamp, and do not know whether the stamp was postally used as a local stamp or was just a propaganda stamp. In any case this rather unattractive stamp seems to be among the rarest items of the Russian civil war. Perhaps one of our readers can shed more light on this affair.

## ROSE ISLAND: A SHORT-LIVED NATION ON THE HIGH SEAS

by Bernhard Lürssen

In the 1960's the internationally accepted limit of a country's territorial waters was three nautical miles. Especially, states with shallow waters on their shores had or could have sandbanks or even artificial structures many miles offshore and thus outside their jurisdiction.

During the Second World War, the United Kingdom built many anti-aircraft platforms in the Thames and Mersey estuaries to protect her industrial centres. After the war, these structures were left to rust and rot. In the early sixties, many pirate radio stations took possession of them and transmitted from outside the UK.

Maybe all these events inspired an Italian engineer by the name of Giorgio Rosa. In 1964 he received permission to test a new technique by building a large platform in the Adriatic Sea. Construction probably started in the same year. The selected position was 44° 10' 48" North, 12° 36' 00" East, putting it 11 km from Rimini and 500 m outside the Italian territorial waters. The first platform, however, was wrecked by a storm on 13 February 1965. Undeterred, Mr. Rosa soon built another one in the same place.

The new platform with an area of 400 square meters was supported by nine strong pylons resting on the sea bed in an area where the sea is apparently only 2 metres deep. It consisted of just the one deck. Fig 1 gives an impression of the structure.

It seems that financial problems and engineering issues soon combined to put the project into trouble. Some sources claim that there were a restaurant, a bar, a night club, a souvenir shop, a post office and even a radio station on this platform. In reality, however, there was only a restaurant and a post office. The intention to add a casino later on seems to have angered the Italian authorities. They seem to have suspected that that would only be the beginning of a whole range of shady dealings if left to their own devices. What looks like a mast for radio aerials on the photograph was in reality a drilling device to search for drinkable water below the seafloor.

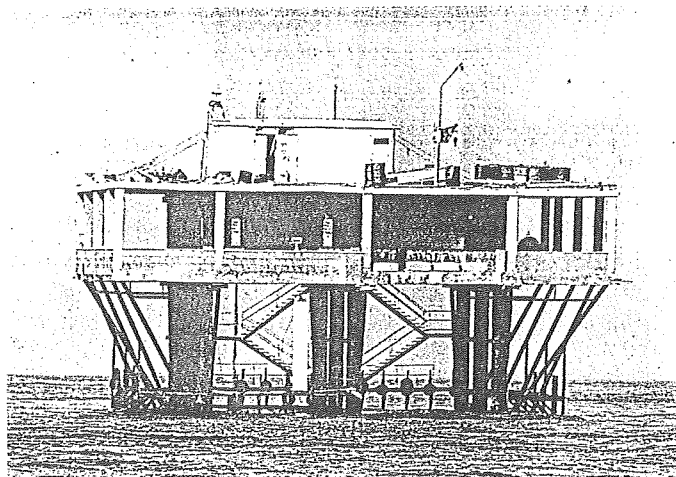


Fig 1

According to some reports, some time later a small group of unknown managers took ownership of the platform from Giorgio Rosa. They seemed to have invested up to 100 million Lira (approximately 1.5 million Euros by today's standards) without a penny in return.

Whoever owned the structure, on 24 June 1968, a press conference was held to announce that two days earlier, on 22 June, independence had been declared. The new country was named in its official language, Esperanto: "Insulo de la Rozoj" (Rose Island). According to Mr. Rosa the name of the

country does not refer to his surname but to his vision of creating "a garden of flowers in the middle of the sea". The Government apparently comprised a total of five ministers: Foreign Minister, Interior Minister, Finance Minister, Trade & Industry Minister and Communications Minister.

As is common for new countries and those which aspire to that status, coins were minted and stamps were printed. The multicolored stamp depicts the structure and its position in the Adriatic Sea. Its denomination is "30 Mills". See Fig 2. Of course a new national flag was also created and flown. It consisted of an orange field with a white shield in the middle. Three red roses with green leaves and stems adorned the shield.

Interestingly, Panorama magazine provides a significantly different report on the stamp issue. It claims that the Rose Island flag appeared on these stamps, which were printed in sheets of ten on watermarked paper. There is such a sheet but instead of the flag the top is adorned by a coat of arms with a rose. It is doubtful that two versions of this sheet existed. Panorama furthermore writes that the stamps are denominated in "ROS". As the depicted stamps indicate, they were denominated in "MILLS" and "MILOJ". However, 1 ROS might well be 1000 MILLS. They report that one mint set (probably meaning one sheet) went for 300 Lira, while a cancelled stamp was sold at 150 Lira. The cancellation carried the inscription "Verda Havlag". "Verda" is Esperanto for "green", whereas "Havlag" apparently is not an Esperanto expression. Maybe someone has misprinted or misread. It is stated that no coins were issued. According to Panorama, 1 ROS was equivalent to 100 Lira.

At that time, the island had only one inhabitant. Mr. Pietro Bernardini had been shipwrecked in the Adriatic Sea during a storm and reached the safety of the platform after 8 hours at sea. Interestingly, he subsequently rented the entire platform for one year. This story was probably somewhat embellished and fed to the Italian press to promote the island and their claim to (real estate) ownership.

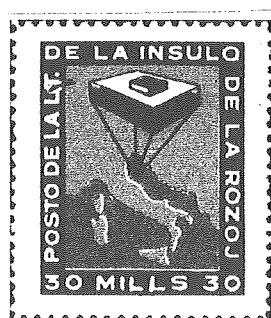


Fig 2



Fig 3



Fig 4

The proclamation of the new country went largely unnoticed by the world community – with one notable exception. Italy took the emergence of a new neighbour on its doorstep not too well. As soon as news of the declaration was received, an Italian motorboat with police was stationed next to the platform, in effect blocking it from the outside world.

A group of four armed police and tax inspectors landed on the platform 55 days later and took control. As far as can be made out, no fighting broke out between the island's authorities and the police. The Council of Government sent out a telegram to the Italian government, protesting against "the violation of its sovereignty and the injury inflicted on local tourism by the military occupation". This message, however, was ignored.

The original stamp issue received a handstamp overprint carrying the Esperanto message "MILITA ITALA OKUPADO" (Italian military occupation). See Fig 3.

In the spring of 1969, divers of the Italian Navy attached explosives to the platform in order to destroy it. This act was depicted by a set of stamps later issued by what is believed to be Rose Island's government in exile. The three values (30 Miloj, 60 Miloj and 120 Miloj) carried an altered inscription of the country name: "RESpubLIKO INSULO ROZOJ" (Republic of Rose Island). The printing is a bit fuzzy. See Fig 4 for the 120 Miloj value.

According to most reports, the story ends with the utter destruction of the platform in 1968. However, a reliable eyewitness reported the structure as still standing in the waters off Rimini as late as the mid-1990's. According to up-to-date Italian nautical information, however, today there is no platform at this position, although other similar structures in the Adriatic Sea are well documented.

Curious as it may seem in the context, but an engineer by the name of Fabio Rosa manufactures pleasure boats under the 'Rose Island' brand in Northern Italy. When asked about Insulo de la Rozoj, he denied any connection. So it must be one of those coincidences.

Rose Island is one of only two attempts to create an artificial territory and then proclaim a new country. The other example is the Republic of Minerva on the Minerva Reefs in the South Pacific. Both failed, and it is not hard to see why the established nations will always do everything to eradicate or, in cases considered harmless, ignore such 'upstarts'.

Sources:

- newspaper 'Il Messaggero di Roma' June, 26th 1968 page 7
- 'Cento Milioni per un'isola inutile' (100 million for a useless island), in 'Panorama' magazine, 11 July 1968, pages 32-34
- 'Il caso dell'Isole delle Rose' (The Case of Rose Island) by Pasquale Paone, in 'Rivista di diritto internazionale' (1968), pages 505-521
- 'How to Start Your Own Country' by Erwin Strauss, second edition, Port Townsend, WA, USA, 1984, ISBN 0-915179-01-6

## THE AUCKLAND ISLANDS STAMPS – LOCALS OR PHANTOMS? edited by Peter Rogers



Don Avery posed the question about the status of the Auckland Islands stamps and answered it quite emphatically with a couple of photographs of a scruffy looking group of individuals aboard a very small boat – one certainly wouldn't expect Percy Catling and his crew to be operating a bona fide local post. Meanwhile, Fabio Vaccarezza had found on the Internet an extract from a booklet entitled *Antarctic Postal Services* by R.M. Startup, published in 1959 by the Mail Coach Press of Masterton, New Zealand. Since this tells us all we might want to know about the islands and the stamps, we reproduce it here with thanks to the author and to the Mail Coach Press which, we understand, no longer exists.

### AUCKLAND ISLANDS

Latitude 50° 50' south, longitude 166° 00' east. A group of volcanic mountainous storm-swept islands about 190 miles south-southwest from Bluff, New Zealand. The group, under 32 miles long by 15 miles broad consists of two large islands of unequal size, Auckland and Adams Islands, and a number of smaller islets of which Disappointment Island to the west and Enderby, Rose and Ewing Islands to the north are the most important. Auckland, the chief island, comprises three-quarters of the total area of 254 square miles of the entire group.