

EGYPT

POSTAL HISTORY OF THE CONCESSION SEALS



USED BY THE BRITISH FORCES IN EGYPT-1932-36

By "PYRAMID"

A lot has been written recently about the Concession Seals (now obsolete) used by the British Forces stationed in Egypt, but there has been no mention of their postal history. The popularity of these seals- especially on covers appears to be increasing ; therefore, I give hereunder, for the benefit of collectors, a few facts concerning their history :-

1. As is already well known, the scheme was introduced on the 1st November, 1932.
2. The "Postage Prepaid" franking stamps (25 in all) and the "Rhomboid " (or "Retta") cancelling stamps were supplied by the Egyptian Postal Authorities.
3. Posting arrangements, after posting by individuals, were as follows :-

ARMY.

(i) CAIRO and ABBASSIA--Letters were dealt with entirely by the Military Post Office, Cairo, and the - Military Post Office, Abbassia, i.e., seals cancelled with the Rhomboid, envelopes franked with the Postage Prepaid franks, and postmarked with the M.P.O. postmarks. The letters were then made up in sealed bags and handed over to the Egyptian Postal Authorities for dispatch to the United kingdom.

(Note.--The M.P.O. at Abbassia was disbanded on the 1st February, 1935, after when all letters from Abbassia were dealt with by the M.P.O., Cairo.)

(ii) MOASCAR-Letters were dealt with by the M.P.O. at Moascar in the same way as at Cairo.

(iii) RAS-EL-TIN (Military Hospital)-Until 1st November, 1935, seals were cancelled and envelopes franked at the Hospital. Letters were then handed over to the RAS-EL-TIN local post office, where they were postmarked and forwarded to the G.P.O. Alexandria for dispatch. Covers, therefore, should invariably bear the Ras-el-Tin and Alexandria post-marks.

(iv) ALEXANDRIA (Mustapha Barracks)-Until 1st November, 1935, seals were cancelled and envelopes franked at the Barracks. Letters were then handed over to the G.P.O. Alexandria for postmarking and dispatch. I understand that in some cases letters from Mustapha passed through the Sidr Gaber post office.

(v) PORT SAID--Seals were cancelled and envelopes franked at "Navy House," then handed over to the G.P.O. Port Said for postmarking and dispatch.

ROYAL AIR FORCE.

(vi) Seals were cancelled and envelopes franked under Unit arrangements, .Letters handed over to the local post office, where they were postmarked and forwarded either to Alexandria or Port Said for dispatch. Covers should therefore bear either Abu Sueir and Alexandria or Abu Sueir and Port Said postmarks.

(vii) ABOUKIR-Seals were cancelled and envelopes franked at the Camp, then handed over to the MAMURA URA post office, where they were postmarked and forwarded to the G.P.O. Alexandria for dispatch.

Arrangements were subsequently made to use the Aboukir Post Office in addition to the Mamura Office (this with effect from 1st December, 1932) so that letters from the Royal Air Force Camp at Aboukir posted during November, 1932, should bear the Mamura and Alexandria postmarks, while those posted from December onwards would bear either Mamura and Alexandria or Aboukir and Alexandria postmarks-but see also paragraph 4.

(viii) ISMALIA for the Array at Moascar.

(ix) HELOUAN	}	Entirely by the M.P.O.
(x) HELIOPOLIS		
(xi) H.Q. R.A.F. Cairo.		

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4. On 1st November, 1935, a Military Office was established at Alexandria. From this date letters from all stations in the Alexandria area were handed over direct to the M.P.O. for cancelling of seals, franking with postage prepaid franks and postmarking with the M.P.O. postmark letters were then handed over in sealed bags to the G.P.O. for dispatch to U.K. Postage Prepaid franks were transferred from Mustapha and Ras-el-Tin to the M.P.O. Alexandria.

But to lighten the work at the Alexandria M.P.O., Aboukir continued to cancel seals and frank letters after which the letters were invariably handed over to the M.P.O. Alexandria for postmarking and dispatch.

The arrangements between Aboukir Camp and the two local post offices (Mamura and Aboukir) remained in force, however, for when a mail, not sufficiently large to justify the expense of road transport to Alexandria, was collected in the Camp, it was handed over to either of the local offices to, be forwarded with the local mail by train. Such letters were either further postmarked at the G.P.O. and dispatched to U.K. or handed by the G.P.O. over to the M.P.O. for inclusion in the latter's bags.

Covers posted at Aboukir Camp subsequently to 1st November, 1935, may therefore be found bearing :-

- (a) Aboukir "Postage Prepaid" franks and Alexandria M.P.O. postmark only.
- (b) Aboukir "Postage Prepaid" franks, Mamura and Alexandria postmarks.
- (c) Aboukir "Postage Prepaid" franks, Aboukir and Alexandria postmarks.
- (d) Aboukir "Postage Prepaid" franks, Aboukir postmarks and M.P.O. postmark.

5. About the same time (November, 1935) a sub-M.P.O. was established at Mersa Matruh, but until March 1st, 1936, letters were simply collected by this sub-office and forwarded to the Alexandria M.P.O. for the necessary cancelling of seals, franking and postmarking, etc.

Prior to the formation of this sub-office, letters bearing seals are known to have passed through the local Egyptian post office. Such letters were postmarked "Mersa Matruh" (and in some cases "Alexandria" in addition), but they bore no Rhomboid cancellation or Postage Prepaid frank.

6. The first and second issues of seals ("Postal" and "Letter") were printed by the Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes.

7. Subsequent issues ("Letter stamps") were printed by Messrs. Harrison and Sons, High Wycombe, Bucks. These were delivered to the Command Paymaster in Egypt, who issued them to the N.A.A.F.I. for sale to the Forces.

8. Christmas Seals were printed in Cairo by Walker's (Amalgamated Press).

9. There were two printings of the 1935 Christmas Seals. The first was on sale in November and the second on December 17th.

10. The Provisional Christmas Seals (1 Piastre Carmine "Letter Stamp," overprinted "Xmas 1935-3 Milliemes") were on sale on the 16th December. They were available only at Head-quarters R.A.F., Cairo; Citadel, Cairo; and Mersa Matruh. It is said that 10,000 were overprinted, but that 5,000 were destroyed.



11. The Jubilee Seals were on sale on May 6th, 1935. First day covers should be rare, since May 6th was a Service holiday in Egypt and Service post-boxes were cleared at most stations only once on that day (in the afternoon). Many people were disappointed to find their covers postmarked May 7th, although posted on the 6th.

12. Except as stated in paragraph 5 above, SEALS WERE ALWAYS CANCELLED WITH THE "RHOMBOID" OBLITERATOR. I particularly mention this fact because I have recently seen a number of the provisional seals (off paper-and some with original gum!!) with circular Egyptian postmarks. As the provisional seals were available only at Cairo and Mersa Matruh, and as these places used only the M.P.O. Cairo and the M.P.O. Alexandria respectively, genuinely postally used provisional seals should bear the "Rhomboid" cancellation, and if on cover, should have either the Cairo or Alexandria postage prepaid frank numbers and Military Post Office postmarks.

Of course, in these days of air travel, provisional seals may have been bought in Cairo or Mersa Matruh and flown the same day to another station and posted at the latter. Nevertheless, collectors should, when purchasing used provisional seals (or any other), make certain that the seals bear the genuine cancellation. In some cases, letters posted through Egyptian post offices may be found with Egyptian postmarks on the seals, put on while handstamping in a hurry, but this should be in addition to the Rhomboid Cancellation.

13. The seals were withdrawn from use on March 15th, 1936. The Postage Prepaid franking stamps and Rhomboids were withdrawn from Units and M.P.O's on 16th or soon after.

The seals were superseded by a 1 Piastre "Army Post" stamp, the particulars of which are already well known.

14. Military Post Offices in Egypt now exist at Cairo, Moascar, Alexandria, Abu Sueir, Aboukir, Mersa Matruh and Port Said-the last four with effect from March 1st, 1936. Each office has its own time and date stamp.