

AUSTRALIAN FORCES IN PALESTINE 1940-1943

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The first World War saw on the territory of Palestine Turkish, German and Austrian forces, faced by British, Australian, New Zealand, Indian, Italian, etc. units. The second World War brought an even greater variety of troops from all over the world to the small area which is now Israel.

Postal facilities existed, of course, for all these troops and the study of the various postal markings and Fieldpost organisations is of great interest to the student of this country's postal history.

lot our issue of February, 1955, pp. 120/121, we have already published some notes on Italian military mail, during World War I.

We publish here a study of Australian Fieldpost markings of World War II contributed by the foremost expert in this field.

Further studies of this interesting subject will follow in subsequent issues.

Ed.

In February 1940 the first Australian Troops arrived in Palestine, accompanied by an Overseas Base Postal Unit and a Divisional P.U.

The date-stamps, brought from Australia, were of the types shown on these pages and the inscriptions were as follows:

At top	1	2	3
1st Bge H.Q. P.O.	-M.1-	-R1-	-W.1-
2nd Bde H.Q. P.O.	-M.2-	-P.2-	-W.2-
3rd Bde H.Q. P.O.	-M.3-	-P.3-	-W.3-
Div. H.Q. P.O.	-DM.1-	-	-DW.1-
Div. Supply H.Q. P.O	-SM.1-	-SP.1-	-SW.1
Army P.O.	-AM.1-	-AP.1-	-AW.1-
Railhead P.O.	-RM.1-	-	--RW.1-
Base P.O.	-BW.1-	-BW.1-	-BW.1-

It will be seen that there were three date-stamps in each set. Possibly DP1 and RP1 existed, but I have yet to hear of their use. All the three Base P.O. postmarks had identical inscriptions, but they are distinguishable by differences in engraving.



Types of date-stamps brought from Australia



*Australian troops felt quite at home in Palestine. .
They knew how to conquer the hearts of the children*

In the case of the date-stamps with two letters, the significance of the first is obvious but the selection of the recurrent letters M, P and W causes speculation. A likely solution is that M stood for Mails, P for Parcels and W was the date-stamp Code Letter for "Australian" in World War I - so it was used again for sentiment's sake.

It will be noted that the abbreviation 1st Bge differs from Bde, used in the case of the other two Brigades. Evidently this set of postmarks was designed to meet the postal needs of an expeditionary force of one Division and most offices were intended to have three date-stamps. However, in practice, there was always a shortage and only one could be spared for other than the busy Base P.O.s.

Palestine is only one of the Middle East countries where Australian Army Posts operated and only some of these postmarkers were used there - and, of these, some may have been used elsewhere at other periods. The Base P.O. opened an Australian Base P.O. at Jerusalem, using BW1 and the earliest date seen in Feb. 22nd, 1940. Field P.O.s were opened at Qastina (M.1 - Feb. 23rd, 1940), Julis (S.M.1 - Feb. 25th, 1940), and Gaza Ridge (R.M.1 - Feb. 28th, 1940). The postman and earliest known date are shown in brackets.

In April the "set-up" was altered - the only F.P.Q. was at Barbara (using S.M.1 and occasionally S.P.1) and a Travelling Post Office, installed on a motor truck made the round of the camps, using R.M.I. In August, Aust. Base P.O. was moved from Jerusalem to Gaza.

Australian troops were given the concession of free post-age on surface mail. By arrangement, Australian stamps were used to defray registration fee and parcel post. I have seen the current 1d, 2d, 3d (K.G.VI), 3d (A.I.F.), 6d, 9d (Platypus) and 1/- used at this period - but they are hard to come by.

There was no concession rate for airmail, which was 60 mils per 1/2oz., paid in Palestine stamps. At first these are generally found cancelled with the civil post-mark of Jerusalem, and occasionally Sarafand, - however, from June onwards civil postmarks disappear.



MIXED FRANKING Palestine postcard with Palestine and British stamps, post-marked A (Australian) I. F. Field P.O. No. 10 (located at "Hill 69").

From November 30th, 1940, airmail postage was reduced to 9d for the maximum allowed weight of 1/2oz - to be paid in Australian stamps. In anticipation, supplies had been requisitioned from Australia, but they did not arrive until about December 9th, and the small stock on hand was quickly exhausted. It is interesting that the stamps in stock of the small stock on hand

In stock of the 9d value were of the kangaroo design, which was obsolete. A Report dated Dec. 7th states "Palestine authorities have come to the rescue with supplies of their stamps, for which we will be charged cost of printing only". The 9d rate was equivalent to 30 mils and for a few days covers are found franked with two 1.5 mil Palestine stamps. Covers of this period, whether with the 9d Kangaroo or the 30 mil Palestine stamps, are highly desirable.

Round this (late the T.P.O, disappeared and a number of F.P.O.s opened at various camps. The postmarks and earliest known dates are - DW1 (Oct. 13th, 1940), P3 (Oct. 24th, 1940), AW1 (Oct. 29th, 1940), P1 (Nov. 30th, 1940), W1 (Dec. 4th, 1940), W2 (Dec. 20th, 1940) and M3 (Dec. 30th, 1940). BW1 continued in use at Gaza, but the office there was reduced to the status of a sub-Base P.O. SW1, SP1 and RW1 ceased to lie used in Palestine, but some were used elsewhere at a later date.



OBLITERATORS ON LOAN

To overcome a shortage of obliterated the Palestine Post Office loaned a number of “skeleton” date-stamps bearing numbers 31 to 38. The British Military Organisation in Egypt loaned additional ob(see F.P.O. E. 609, below left) and like wise the British Army (see Field Post Office 28, left).

Shortage of postmarks was overcome by loans. The Palestine Post Office provided a number of “skeleton” date-stamps which bore numbers 31 to 38, the British Military Postal Organization in Egypt - half a dozen, and the British Army their Nos. 26, 28, 443, 444 and 445 - the last three having previously been in use by Australian troops in the United Kingdom. Only certain of the above were used in Palestine.

In early 1941 a system of numbering Aust. F.P.O.s was instituted. The following Table gives the allocation of date-stamps to F.P.O.s in Palestine in May and July 1941 - the latter after a new series of postmarks (Fig. G) numbered 5 to 16 and 21 to 24 had been received from Australia and issued:

F.P.O. No.	Location	Date-stamp,	
		May /41	July /41
1.	Kilo 89	P1	P1
3.	Deir Seneid	RW1	RW1
3.	Dimra	E605	W1
4.	Beit Jirja	AW1	AW1
5.	Barbara	DW1	5
6.	Julis	E611	6
7.	Mughazi	W1	7
8.	Nazareth	26	8
9.	Khassa	W 2	9
10.	Hill 69	E609	10
11.	Jerusalem	AP1	11
40.	Hill 95	—	DW1 (Aug.)
41.	Qastima	—	W2 (Sept.)
44.	Hospital, Gaza Ridge	—	444
45.	Hospital, Rehovot	—	445
48.	Tel Aviv	—	E607

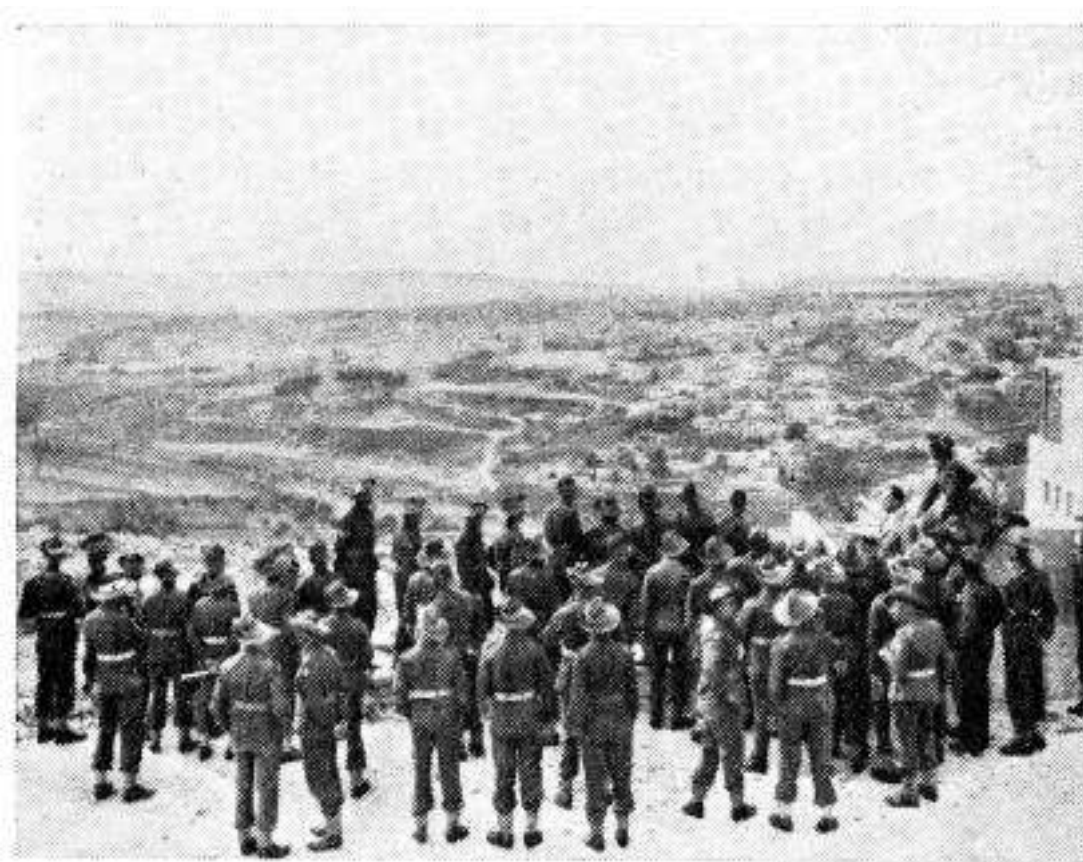
NEW OF SET OF FIELDPOST OBLITERATORS A new system of numbering Australian Field Post Offices was instituted in 1941 and a series of postmarks, numbered 5 to 16 and 21 to 24, was received from Australia





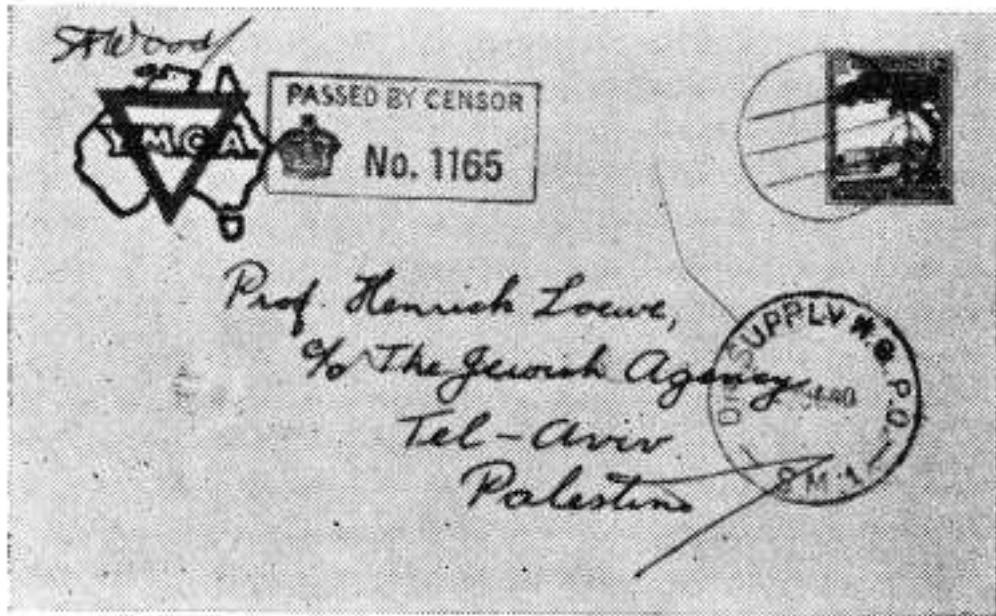
REGISTERED FIELDPOST LETTER

A Registered letter from Australian Fieldpost Office No.9 (Khassa), sent to Ramat Can on 15th September, 1941. The letter shoe,-, mixed franking of Australian and Palestine stamps. The back of the covers British Mandatory civilian postmarkes of Gaza Jaffa, Tel, Aviv, and Ramat Gan.

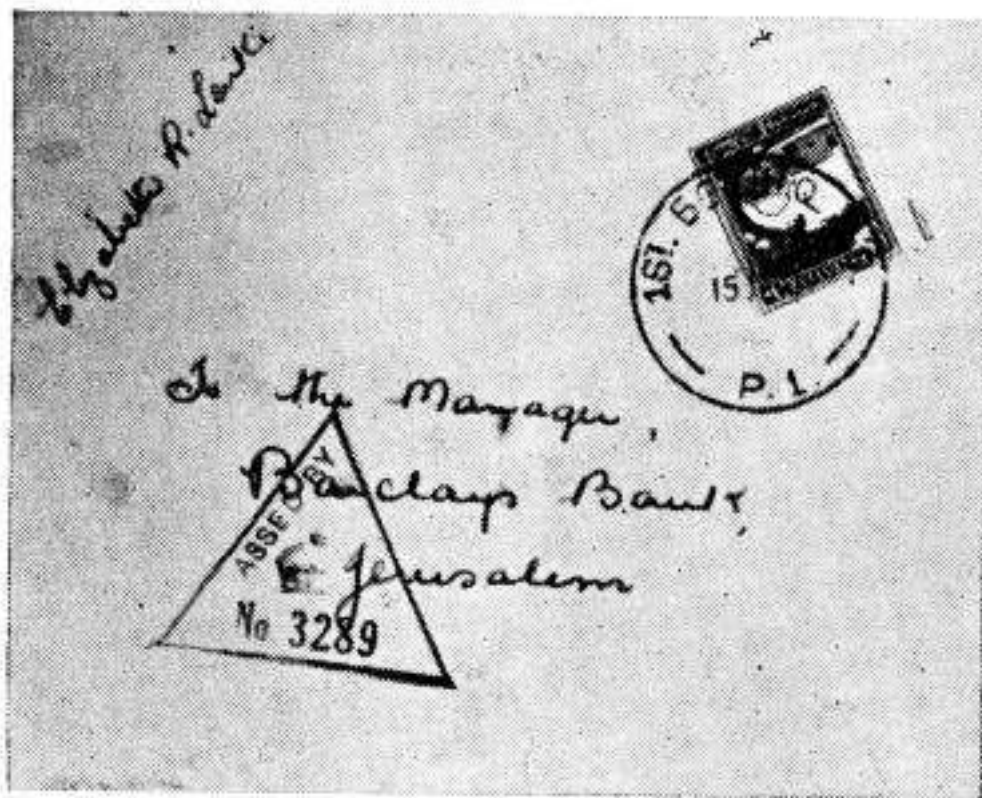


Australian. troops on sightseeing tour in Jerusalem

In July, 1941, Air Mail Letter Cards were introduced, which allowed a short missive, on a special form, to be sent by air to Australia for 3d. There were a number of distinguishable types. In November, 1941, a special issue was printed for sending seasonal greetings three types.



Australian YMCA cover, franked with 10 mils Palestine .stamp, cancelled with mute military obliteration. The cover, in addition, shows the Div. Supply H.Q. Australian P.O. postmark of 7th September, 1940.



Letter franked with Palestine 10 mils stamp, cancelled with 1st Brigade Headquarters P.I. Australian postmark of 15th July, 1941.

In early 1942 the greater part of the Australian forces were transferred to the Pacific area, so a number of the Camp F.P.O.s in Palestine ceased to function. How-ever, it was not until early 1943 that the last Australian troops left Palestine. It would seem that, in the last few months, the rule was broken that date-stamps allocated to formations for use in active operations were not to be used when troops were in standing camps in Palestine. At any rate the date-stamps Nos. 32 to 37 are found with dates in December 1942 and January 1943 - when the formations issued with them were in Palestine awaiting embarkation.

These last-mentioned postmarks were those loaned by the Palestine Post Office and they returned with the troops to Australia. I am glad to say that they were sent back to Palestine and I hope that one or more may become a museum piece someday. They had “done their bit” in Libya, Syria and Egypt - as well as in their native land.

As regards stamps, once the cheap airmail was running smoothly, no shortage again occurred. By far the commonest stamp is the 9d Platypus, followed by the 3d K.G.VI (blue). Any other values are scarce - that some of the rarer exist can be attributed to the practice of friends in Australia enclosing a stamped envelope for reply.

In my experience, what may be termed “philatelic covers” are few and far between. Not only Australians, but also English, New Zealand and South African stamps were in use by their respective forces in the Middle East. An arrangement was come to, on what the Insurance Companies call the “knock and knock” principal, that all these stamps could be used indiscriminately. I have seen an example of a cover from Palestine to Australia which has the correct ninepenny postage made up with stamps of all four countries.

From January 1942, the entry of Japan into the war re-sulted in cessation of the airmail service to Australia - so the use of stamps was again restricted to registration and parcels.

It is a curious trait in human nature that nothing is thought worth collecting until it is hard to come by. It is twelve years since the Australians left Palestine and nearly all the vast number of letters written from there have been destroyed - or, at any rate, the covers have not been kept - so the opportunity of gathering material has largely passed. It is therefore likely that interest may wain.

This information is extracted from a serial article which I wrote in the “Australian Stamp Monthly” in 1946/7 entitled “Postal History of the end A.I.F.”. Additional data - since discovered - has here been added.