



BRITISH F.P.O.s IN EGYPT The E 601 - E 611 Postmarks

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When war was declared with Germany on September 3rd, 1939, the English troops in Egypt were using post offices which employed date stamps of characteristic type. These were single circles with the letters M.P.O. (Military Post Office) above, and divided by the date (between two horizontal lines) from a town name, e.g. Cairo, Moascar, Abu Qir, etc. Before very long it seemed advisable, for security reasons, to eliminate these town names and to substitute for them one of the symbols "E.601" to "E.611". The town name type was forthwith abandoned, but the handstamps were presumably not destroyed since their use is evident on rare occasions during the next six months or so. The letters M.P.O., which were invariable on the old hand stamps, are now replaced at times by B.P.O. (Base Post Office) or F.P.O. (Field Post Office). It may well be that this also was a security measure, for there is nothing to indicate that these letters had any precise significance. They could only have been calculated to mystify anyone who should deduce from their contemplation that we had 605 field units and 606 base post offices to serve them or, perhaps, if the observer had penetrated the camouflage of the "600", that we had only five field units, still as many as six base post offices.

The usage of these date stamps use falls into two distinct periods between which they spent time in store at Cairo, their general use having been superseded by double circle markings of the familiar Field Post Office type. The first period extended from October, 1939, to September, 1940—so far as available covers can tell me, but there are only just over 80 of them. During the whole of this first period these date stamps were apparently used only in Egypt.

For information about the second period during which these hand stamps were used the philatelic world is indebted to Mr. Harry Porter, whose Australian research work is extremely well known. In the Australian Stamp Monthly of March 1st. 1947 he writes as follows



" At the end of 1940 the Australian Army Postal Service must have been short of date stamps. To help things out, someone remembered the Anglo-Egyptian type date stamps in store at Ordnance, and these were loaned by the British army. Two of these, E.607 and E.608 were issued to reinforce the overworked A.M.I at Cairo Base Post Office They were seldom seen until later in 1941, as they were first normally used for registration and parcels - however, in March-April, 1941, E.608 was used for letters." In the article quoted and others of the series Mr. Harry Porter gives more details of the use of particular stamps and these are mentioned below. The details which it has been possible to gather about the various M.P.O. /E.601. This was allotted to Cairo and four different types are illustrated herewith (two at the head of this article) It was in use throughout the period October, 1939, to August 1940, with the apparent exception of two months, December 1939 and January 1940. None of the thirty covers which I have seen are dated in these two months, but covers of the type used at Alexandria (B.P.O. /E.602)

are very much increased at the same time. This suggests some alteration in postal arrangements which requires further elucidation.

B.P.O. /E.602. This was used at Alexandria throughout the period and my earliest and latest dates are both shown on the particular date stamp, viz. 10.10.39 and 1.9.40.

M.P.O. /E.602. I have seen four covers or single stamps with this mark. One cover is addressed from the Army Audit Office which is known to have been at Cairo.

M.P.O. /E.603. This was used at Suez by, amongst others the Australian and New Zealand troops on their first arrival February 1940.

M.P.O. /E.604. I have a single copy of this on the large Fouad Army 10 mills, so that it was apparently used in Egypt when these handstamps were first issued. It is dated 13.11.39. I have read somewhere that it is suggested that this date stamp was in use at Agordat in Eritrea on 27.3.44. If this is so, it may have been in the hands of an Australian unit there.



F.P.O. /E605 This was issued and used in the first half of 1940 in Egypt itself, but I have no evidence as to whether it at Cairo or elsewhere. On 28.2.41 it had been loaned to the 18th Australian Brigade, which was then somewhere east of Alexandria. Harry Porter says that this Brigade did not use it after March 1941, and it next appears in May 1941 at Dimra on the lines of communication in Palestine. Mr. John Revel has it used as transit mark on a cover addressed from F P O 655 -June 1943.

B.P.O. /E.606. Harry Porter says that he believes this was issued at the end of 1940 to an Australian unit at Suez, but says that he has seen no copy. I have a cover addressed from Indian F.P.O. No. 25 on July 11th, 1940. It is addressed to Cairo and has on the back a Cairo arrival mark which appears to be dated 14.July 1940, and also this E.606 mark which appears to bear the same date but the impressions are such that the dates are not easily read. Further evidence is much needed.

M.P.O./E.607 I have this used in April 1940, and Mr. J. H. E. Gilbert has it on a cover used on February 26th 1940 when it seems to have been in use at Sidi Gaber. There is some reason to suppose that this entire was posted by an Australian and Porter says that this was one of the stamps found on letters to Australia early in 1940 although it was then functioning primarily as a British P.O. It was loaned to the Australian at the end of 1940, and was used at Cairo and later at Tel Aviv -Palestine.

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