

U.S. Army Post Offices in Egypt during World War II

Richard S. Wilson, ESC 230

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2014 I decided to look into U.S. Army post offices (APOs) in Egypt during World War II. I hadn't bothered with this interesting area before but covers were mostly modestly priced and were available from several Internet dealers and on eBay. In addition, a number of dealers at the stamp shows carried these covers while few had Egyptian material. The Carter publication *Numbered Army & Air Force Post Office Locations, 7th Edition* is essential for the locations of the APOs but it had very little about the postmarks. *Engel's A.P.O. Cover Catalogue*, issued in 1947, made a connection between some of the datestamps and the APOs but it was not a satisfactory, up-to-date source. However, it gave me a start as it illustrated a few of the cancels along with the APOs that used them.

I would appreciate receiving any corrections, additional data, and scans of covers confirming the use of the postmarks at particular locations and, in turn, I will provide you updated tables and any other new information I come across. Please send it to **dadu1@verizon.net**.

WW2 NOTES

As early as November 1940 the United States had a military presence in Egypt. Prior to Pearl Harbor the U.S. Army Air Forces (USAAF) had advisers, representatives and observers attached to the U. S. legation in Cairo. In late 1941 a military mission headquarters was established in Cairo to coordinate lend-lease and other aid with Great Britain and the Soviet Union. On 13 June 1942 the U.S. North African Mission in Cairo and the Iranian Mission in Baghdad were absorbed by the newly created U.S. Army Forces in the Middle East (USAFIME), a stronger command and control organization. Late June saw the creation of USAMEAF (U.S. Army Middle East Air Force). On 12 November USAMEAF was redesignated the 9th Air Force in recognition of the fact that U.S. ground combat troops would not be taking part in operations in Egypt and Libya. By that time Operation Torch, the Anglo-American invasion of French North Africa, had commenced on 8 November. The 9th Air Force was transferred to England on 25 November 1943 to prepare for the coming invasion of France.

The first USAAF unit to arrive in Egypt and the Middle East was the Halverson Provisional Detachment (HALPRO) Bombardment Squadron. Consisting of twenty-four B-24 heavy bombers HALPRO arrived on 2 June 1942 at Fayid, Egypt. Its first bombing raid on Axis targets took off on June 12, 1942 against the oil refinery at Ploesti, Romania. On June 15 another mission was carried out against the Italian fleet 220 miles east of Malta. Following these raids and as additional air and its ground support arrived the USAAF cooperated closely with the Royal Air Force (RAF) and the British 8th Army in bombing and strafing missions against the Italo-German forces, supply lines, and ships in the Mediterranean Sea and the Western Desert in Egypt and Libya. However, the total contribution of the Americans accounted for only about ten percent of the assets and sorties flown by the combined Allied air forces. By year's end the 9th Air Force was attacking targets in Tunisia, Italy and Crete from bases in Egypt and Libya and by 12 February 1943 the Axis powers were cleared out of Libya thus ending Mussolini's dream of an Italian African empire. The Axis forces surrendered in Tunisia on 13 May 1943.

ARMY POST OFFICE (APO) LOCATIONS

Table 1, APO Locations of US Forces in Egypt WW II, lists details of the various post offices including the type of cancellation, location, and opening and closing dates of operations in Egypt. More details about these APOs may be found in Carter.

Seventeen U.S. Army Post Offices have been identified as having operated in Egypt as well as one Base Post Office (no cancels reported). They are APO 485, 486, 498, 616, 626, 678, 681, 683, 684, 685, 686, 696, 785, 786, 787, 788, and American Base Forces APO 814. I don't have information about the datestamps used at three of these APOs. They are listed as being in operation from two weeks to less than six months. Cancels are not known from the 8th Base Post Office but there is at least one informational handstamp (see figure 1). Eight APOs were reassigned to Cairo from Iran and Bahrain in the December 1945 to April 1946 period but are believed to have been inactive and held in reserve pending discontinuance.



Figure 1

They are APOs 523, 535, 680, 795, 797, 799, 816, and 824.

The first APO to arrive in Egypt was American Base Forces APO 814 on 25 June 1942 but it closed less than two months later on 12 August and was replaced by APO 616 that opened 27 July. Additional APOs were established over the ensuing year as more American aircraft and support troops arrived from the United States, Eritrea and Libya. In addition, a number of APOs ceased operations in Egypt as they were relocated to Libya, Palestine, and England making some of their stays in Egypt only a matter of months.

Four temporary or transit Army post offices have been identified with the forces in Egypt.. These numbers were assigned to individuals or units in transit from the United States to their permanent stations. Once the troops arrived they would use the APO number assigned. The TPOs used datestamps without an Army post office number or, in the case of a machine cancel, just the killer wave lines. Thus the only way to identify a cover from a TPO is through the return address.

DATESTAMPS

I have recorded and numbered twenty-five different variations of the handstamps used by the APOs in Egypt as shown in Table 2. APO numbers in boldface have been confirmed as being used in that specific APO. The unconfirmed APOs are believed to have used that particular datestamp but have yet to be verified. All are single circles except HS-1, which is a double circle or ring and no killer bars. This is found on the back of registered mail. The others measure between 30mm and 34mm in diameter with a four bar killer or obliterator. There are six groupings of these duplex cancels:

- 1) Double-ring, no killer bars (HS-1),
- 2) Single-ring with station and APO number (HS-5),
- 3) No APO number (HS-10 to 19),
- 4) APO number within the date and time slugs (HS-20-25),
- 5) APO number at ring bottom and within the date and time slugs (HS-27) and,
- 6) APO number at ring bottom with 3 or 4 line date and time (HS-30-39).

Some of the differences between the various postmarks are minor as illustrated in Group 2 where the spacing on the sides of the APO is different (HS-14 - HS-15). In other cases there may be different arrangements of the three- or four-line date slugs, perhaps caused by the failure of the postal clerk to insert the time of day slugs in the appropriate place (or leaving it out completely making a gap or blank space). While some of these may be the same physical CDS, in any case I consider each one to be a different cancel. Black ink was used for all of the cancels although HS-37 is also known in blue (HS-37A).

Group 2 datestamps do not include any APO number. The numbers were ordered removed by a directive from the War Department beginning July 1, 1942, supposedly as a security measure. However, this doesn't make a whole lot of sense, as the APO number is included in the sender's return address. On 15 March 1943 (I have also seen 9 and 10 March) the order was reversed with Postal Circular 16, Headquarters, Services of Supply, European Theater of Operations, U.S. Army. Carter states that the first number to reappear was that of APO 887 on 17 March.

There were two hand-operated cancelling machines used by the APOs in Egypt that were issued to postal units serving at least 7,500 personnel. The first (PMC-1), Pitney-Bowes Universal Machine Model K, had a postmark die measuring 20mm. in diameter with seven wavy lines for the killer. This postmark is found from APOs 616, 678, and 788. The other machine is the International Postal Supply Company Model Hey Dolphin 2 (PMC-2) used at APO 616. The postmark die measures 22mm.

RATES

Military Personnel

Surface Mail: Postal cards and first class letter mail was *FREE* effective 1 April 1942. Prior to that date postage was at the domestic rate of 1¢ and 3¢ (per ounce), respectively.

Air Mail: 6¢ per half-ounce effective 25 December 1941 to and from members of the Armed Forces serving outside the continental United States.

Other services: Domestic rates applied.

Registered mail: minimum fee 15¢ to 25 March 1944, then 20¢, not eligible for free franking.

Insured mail: minimum fee 5¢ to 25 March 1944, then 10¢ to 31 October 1944, then 3¢, not eligible for free franking.

Special delivery: 10¢ to 1 November 1944, then 13¢, eligible for free franking for surface mail.

Civilians served by military post offices

Surface Mail: Domestic rates applied, 3¢ per ounce for first class mail and 1¢ for postal cards.

Air Mail: 6¢ per half-ounce effective 23 October 1942.

Other services: Domestic rates applied (see above).

Table 1





APO CDS	CDS TYPE (HS-) OR MACHINE CANCELLATION (bold face = confirmed)	APO LOCATION	BEGAN OPERATIONS IN EGYPT	CLOSED, SUSPENDED, INACTIVATED, DISCONTINUED	COMMENT
485	19, 30, 35	9th Air Service Group, Kabrit	12-Jan-43	1-Jun-43	TO: Castel Benito, Libya
486	5, 19, 35, 37, 37A (blue)	Deversoir Air Base	12-Jan-43	28-Feb-45	TO: Heliopolis
		Heliopolis	1-Mar-45	31-Oct-45	
498	17	Camp Huckstep, Heliopolis	14-Oct-43	30-Apr-44	FROM: Benghazi, Libya TO: Tripoli, Libya
616 See also: 814, (T) 1221, 1222, 1223, 1224	13, 14, 16, 18, 20, 21, 22, 30, 31 PMC-1, PMC-2	Cairo	27-Jul-42	30-Sep-43	TO: Camp Huckstep
	18,21	Camp Huckstep, Heliopolis	1-Oct-43	1-Nov-46	TO: Dhahran, Saudi Arabia
626	None Reported	Heliopolis	19-Jan-43	1-May-43	FROM: Nairobi, Kenya TO: Benghazi, Libya
678	1, 11, 14, 15, 17, 20, 21, 23, 33 PMC-1	HQ, Middle East Service Command, Camp Huckstep, Heliopolis	7-Nov-42	31-Oct-45	
681	14, 17, 23	376th Bomber Group, Abu Sueir	20-Nov-42	1-Apr-43	FROM: Lydda, Palestine TO: Soluck Main, Libya
683	14, 20, 27	USAAF Bomber	20-Nov-42	31-Jan-43	Moved to Gambut,




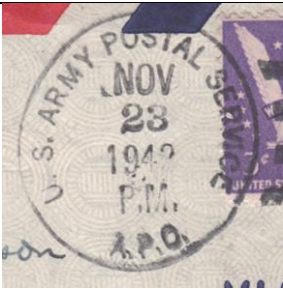
		Command, Fayid, Egypt			Cyrenaica, Libya
684	21	Mobile Unit, USAFIME, Egypt (Alexandria?)	17-May-43	2-Oct-43	FROM: Eritrea
		Camp Ataka (Near Ismailia)	3-Oct-43	15-Jan-44	
		Camp Huckstep, Heliopolis (mobile)	16-Jan-44	1-Apr-44	
		Alexandria	1-Apr-44	1-Jul-46	
685	None Reported	1081st Engineer Utility Detachment; Cairo	13-Mar-43	26-Mar-43	FROM: Eritrea TO: Palestine and back to Cairo.
		Cairo	16-Jan-44	31-Jul-44	TO: Benghazi, Libya
686	14	Headquarters, Suez Canal Ports, Suez	3-Oct-43	26-Oct-43	FROM: Eritrea
		Port Tewfik	27-Oct-43	15-Jan-44	
		Camp Ataka	16-Jan-44	1-Nov-44	
		Cairo, Mobile	1-Nov-44	6-Dec-44	
		Cairo	1-Mar-45	15-May-46	
696	12, 14, 20, 21, 23, 27	HQ, 9th Air Force HQ, 9th AF Defense Command, Cairo	23-Dec-42	24-Nov-43	TO: England
785	16	12th Bomber Group: Alexandria	30-Nov-42	3-Jan-43	TO: Gambut, Libya
786	None Reported	Alexandria	5-Dec-42	23-Jan-43	TO: Gambut, Libya
787	12, 20, 21, 23, 25	HQ, USArmy Forces in the Middle East, HQ, Africa-Middle East Theater, Cairo	21-Jan-43	1-Jul-46	
788	12A, 20, 21, 23, 25 PMC-1 (only known cover 4-11-46.)	HQ, North Africa Division Air Transport Command, Egypt Division, Heliopolis (John Payne Field)	1-Oct-43	1-Jul-46	
ABF 814	10, 39	Cairo	6/25/1942 HS-39	12-Aug-42	Established as an Army Base Forces (ABF) Post Office. Replaced by APO 616. Listed as never operational.
8th BPO	No cancels reported	Activated at Heliopolis, Egypt	1-May-43	19-Dec-43	Informational marking known

	(Carter)				
		Camp Huckstep, Cairo	20-Dec-43	15-Mar-46	
Temporary or Transit Post Offices (TPOS did not have numbered postmarks))					
(T) 1221		Egypt	12-Jun-42	24-Jul-42	assigned to 616
(T) 1222		Egypt	10-Nov-42	30-Jan-43	343rd Bomber Squadron; assigned to 616; 12 Jun-24 Jul 42 (?)
(T) 1223		Egypt	1-Feb-43	10-Feb-43	24th Station Hospital; Assigned to 616 9 Nov 45
(T) 1224		Camp Huckstep, Cairo	1-Nov-42	1-Nov-43	Assigned to APO 616 12 Jun - 24 JUL 42; assigned to APO 678 23 Oct 42; cancelled about Mar 45.
The Following APOS are Believed to Have Been Inactive While in Egypt and Held In Reserve Pending Discontinuance.					
523		Cairo	Jan 46	Apr-46	FROM: Iran
535		Cairo	Jan 46	Apr-46	FROM: Iran
680		Cairo	Jan 46	Apr-46	FROM: Iran
795		Cairo	Jan 46	Apr 46	FROM: Iran
797		Cairo	Jan 46	Apr 46	FROM: Iran
799		Cairo	Jan 46	Apr 46	FROM: Iran
816		Cairo	Jan 46	Mar 46	FROM: Bahrain MAO Mailing Address Only
824		Cairo	Dec 45	Mar 46	FROM: Iran

Table 2



A.P.O. Cancellations Used in Egypt during World War II

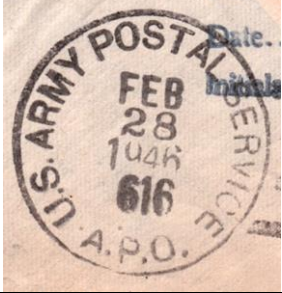

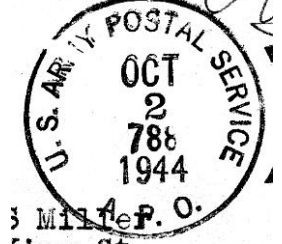
CANCELLATION NUMBER HS-	CANCELLATION (image may not be to scale)	COMMENTS	ASSIGNED TO APO*
Double Ring – No Killer			
<p>HS-1 Diameter: 29mm</p>		<p>Double ring used on registered mail</p>	<p>APO 678, 788</p>
Single Ring with Station and A.P.O. Number			
<p>HS-5</p>		<p>A.P.O. number on right rim and above date. STA. A at bottom m of rim.</p>	<p>APO 486</p>
No A.P.O. Number July 1942 – March 15, 1943			
<p>HS-10</p>		<p>AMERICAN BASE FORCES No A.P.O. number</p>	<p>APO 814, 816</p>
<p>HS-11 Diameter: 32mm</p>		<p>No A.P.O. number at bottom. Gap above month and no A.M./P.M.</p>	<p>APO 678</p>

<p>HS-12 Diameter: 32mm</p>		<p>No A.P.O. number at bottom.</p> <p>Gap below year and no A.M./P.M.</p>	<p>APO 787, 12</p>
<p>HS-12A Diameter: 34mm</p>		<p>No A.P.O. number at bottom.</p> <p>Gap below year and no A.M./P.M</p> <p>Narrow spacing left & right of A.P.O.</p>	<p>APO 788</p>
<p>HS-13 Diameter: 31mm</p>		<p>No A.P.O. number at bottom.</p> <p>Year on first line.</p>	<p>APO 616</p>
<p>HS-14 Diameter: 31mm</p>		<p>No A.P.O. number at bottom.</p> <p>A.M./P.M. on third date line.</p> <p>Note spacing both sides of A.P.O.</p>	<p>APO 616, 678, 681, 683, 686, 696, 787</p>
<p>HS-15 Diameter: 31mm</p>		<p>No A.P.O. number at bottom.</p> <p>A.M./P.M. on third date line.</p> <p>Wider spacing between the letters A.P.O.</p>	<p>APO 678</p>
<p>HS-16 Diameter: 31mm</p>		<p>No A.P.O. number at bottom.</p> <p>A.M./P.M. on fourth date line.</p> <p>Note wide spacing both sides of A.P.O.</p>	<p>APO 616, 785, 787</p>


<p>HS-17 Diameter: 31mm</p>		<p>No A.P.O. number at bottom.</p> <p>A.M./P.M. on fourth date line.</p> <p>Close spacing both sides of A.P.O.</p>	<p>APO 498, 678, 681</p>
<p>HS-18 Diameter: 31mm</p>		<p>No A.P.O. number.</p> <p>A.P.O. left of center.</p> <p>A.M./P.M. on fourth date line.</p>	<p>APO 616</p>
<p>HS-19 Diameter: 32mm</p>		<p>No A.P.O. number.</p> <p>NO A.M./P.M.</p> <p>Gap between day and year.</p>	<p>APO 485, 486</p>

A.P.O. Number Within Date and Time Slugs – Not at Ring Bottom

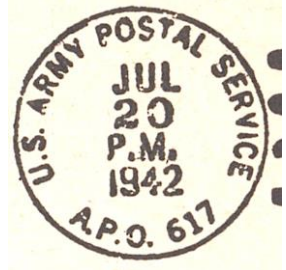
<p>HS-20</p>		<p>A.P.O. left of center A.P.O. number on fourth date line</p>	<p>APO 485, 616, 678, 683, 696, 787, 788</p>
<p>HS-21 Diameter: 31mm</p>		<p>A.P.O. centered at bottom. A.P.O. number on fourth date line.</p>	<p>APO 616, 678, 684, 696, 787, 788</p>

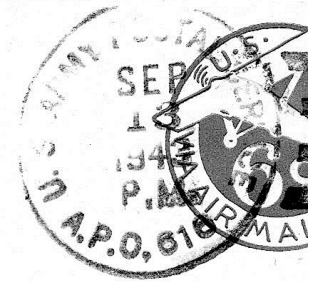


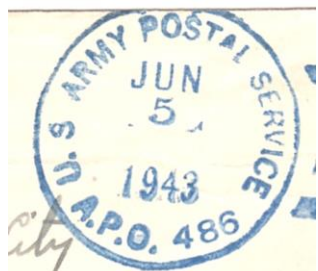


<p>HS-22 Diameter: 33 mm</p>		<p>A.P.O. centered at bottom. A.P.O. number on fourth date line. Larger letters than HS-21</p>	<p>APO 616</p>
<p>HS-23 Diameter: 32mm</p>		<p>A.P.O. number on first date line.</p>	<p>APO 678, 681, 696, 788</p>
<p>HS-25 Diameter: 31mm</p>		<p>A.P.O number between day and year.</p>	<p>APO 788</p>


A.P.O. Number at Ring Bottom and with Date and A.P.O. Number

<p>HS-27</p>		<p>Month, day, year, A.P.O. number. A.P.O. number at bottom of rim</p>	<p>APO 683, 696</p>
---------------------	---	--	----------------------------

A.P.O. Number at Ring Bottom

<p>HS-30</p>		<p>A.P.O. number centered at bottom. A.M./P.M. on third date line.</p>	<p>APO 485, 616, 678,</p>
---------------------	---	--	----------------------------------

<p>HS-31</p> <p>Diameter: 31mm</p>		<p>A.P.O. number centered at bottom.</p> <p>A.M./P.M. on fourth date line</p>	<p>APO 616</p>
<p>HS-33</p> <p>Diameter: 31mm</p>		<p>A.P.O. number centered at bottom.</p> <p>GAP between year and APO number.</p>	<p>APO 678</p>
<p>HS-35</p> <p>Diameter: 32mm</p>		<p>A.P.O. number centered at bottom.</p> <p>GAP between month and day.</p>	<p>APO 485, 486</p>
<p>HS-37 (black) HS-37A (blue)</p> <p>Diameter: 31mm</p>		<p>A.P.O. number centered at bottom.</p> <p>GAP between day and year.</p>	<p>HS-37: APO 485, 486</p> <p>HS-37A (blue): APO 485, 486</p>
<p>HS-39</p> <p>Diameter: 31mm</p>		<p>AMERICAN BASE FORCES</p>	<p>814</p>
<p>Postal Machine Cancellations</p>			
<p>PMC-1 Pitney-Bowes Universal Machine Model K</p> <p>Diameter: 20mm</p>		<p>U.S. ARMY POSTAL SERVICE</p> <p>Only one cover is known from APO 788.</p>	<p>APO 616, 678, 788</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">PMC-2 International Postal Supply Company Model Hey Dolphin 2</p>		<p style="text-align: center;">AMERICAN BASE FORCES A.P.O. No APO number.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">APO 616</p>
---	---	--	---

* APO numbers in boldface have been confirmed as being used in that specific APO. The unconfirmed APOs are believed to have used that particular datestamp. Additional APOs will be added when reported.

References:

- Billings, Bart, *U S Postal Machines of the Army Post Offices – World War II, Volume I and Volume II*, North Las Vegas, NV: 2006.
 - Carter, Russ, *Numbered Army & Air Force Post Office Locations, 7th Edition*, Military Postal History Society, 2001.
 - Coles, Harry C., *Ninth Air Force in the Western Desert Campaign to 23 January 1943*, Washington, DC: Army Air Forces Historical Division, 1945.
 - Davis, John. *Egypt: The Postal Concession to Suez, 1932-1952*, Chapter 25, Other Allied Forces, 2014 unpublished research study.
 - Engel, John H., *Engel's A.P.O. Cover Catalogue*, New York: John H. Engel, 1947.
 - Forte, Jim and Helbock, Richard W., *The Price Guide to U.S. A.P.O. Cancels of the Second World War*, Tarpon Springs, FL: La Posta Publications, 1996.
 - Lawrence, Ken, *U.S. Armed Forces Airmail Stamped Envelopes, 1943-47*, Linn's Stamp News, 21 July 2014, pages 26-46
 - Rein, Christopher M., *The North African Air Campaign, U.S. Army Air Forces from El Alamein to Salerno*, Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2012.
 - Smith, Peter A. S., *Egypt, Stamps and Postal History, A Philatelic Treatise*, Chapter XXXI, Military Mail, Limassol, Cyprus: James Bendon 1999.
 - Smith, Peter A. S., *United States Army Post Offices in Egypt*, The Quarterly Circular of the Egypt Study Circle, Vol. 11., No. 3, Whole number 119, September 1981, pages 66–73.
 - Sherman, Lawrence M.D., *The United States Post Office in World War II*, , Chicago: The Collectors Club of Chicago, 2002.
-