

XLIII

Diplomatic Franking and Pouch Mail

Diplomatic Franking
Pouch Mail

815
818

References

822

Diplomatic Franking

It has been the custom internationally that diplomatic missions, including consulates, are allowed to send mail to addresses within the country in which they are located free of postage, provided that an official imprint or handstamp is used to identify the status. The custom presumably began with the formation of the UPU, for a cover in the Biolato collection was sent from the French Vice-Consulate in Massawa (Egyptian territory at that date) to Cairo in 1877 thus franked.

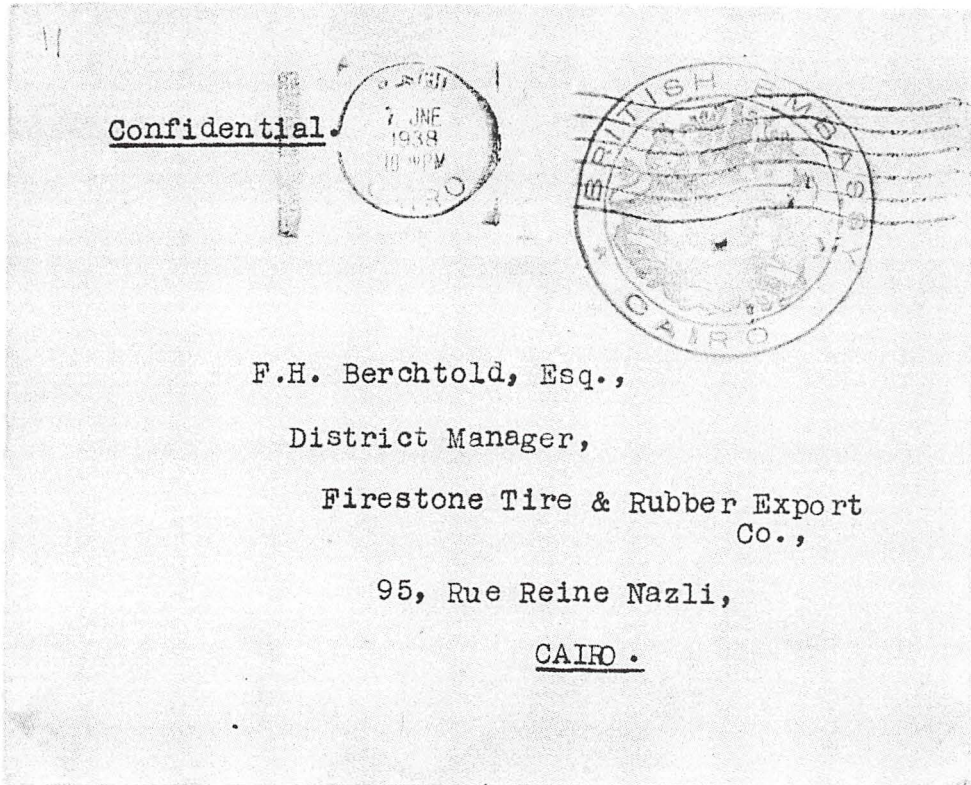


Fig. 1 An envelope sent from the British Embassy, Cairo.

Examples of this type of mail are very scarce, and only those from a few countries with especially great interests in Egypt have been recorded. Dacos¹ has illustrated examples from Greek Consulates in Alexandria, Mansura, Minieh, Port Said, and Shibin el Kom, over the period 1887 to 1933. Covers have been seen from the British High Commissioner for Egypt (1936) (Fig. 1), the Austro-Hungarian Consulate in Alexandria (1910) (Fig. 2), the American Consulate in Cairo (1928) (Fig. 3), the French Consulate in

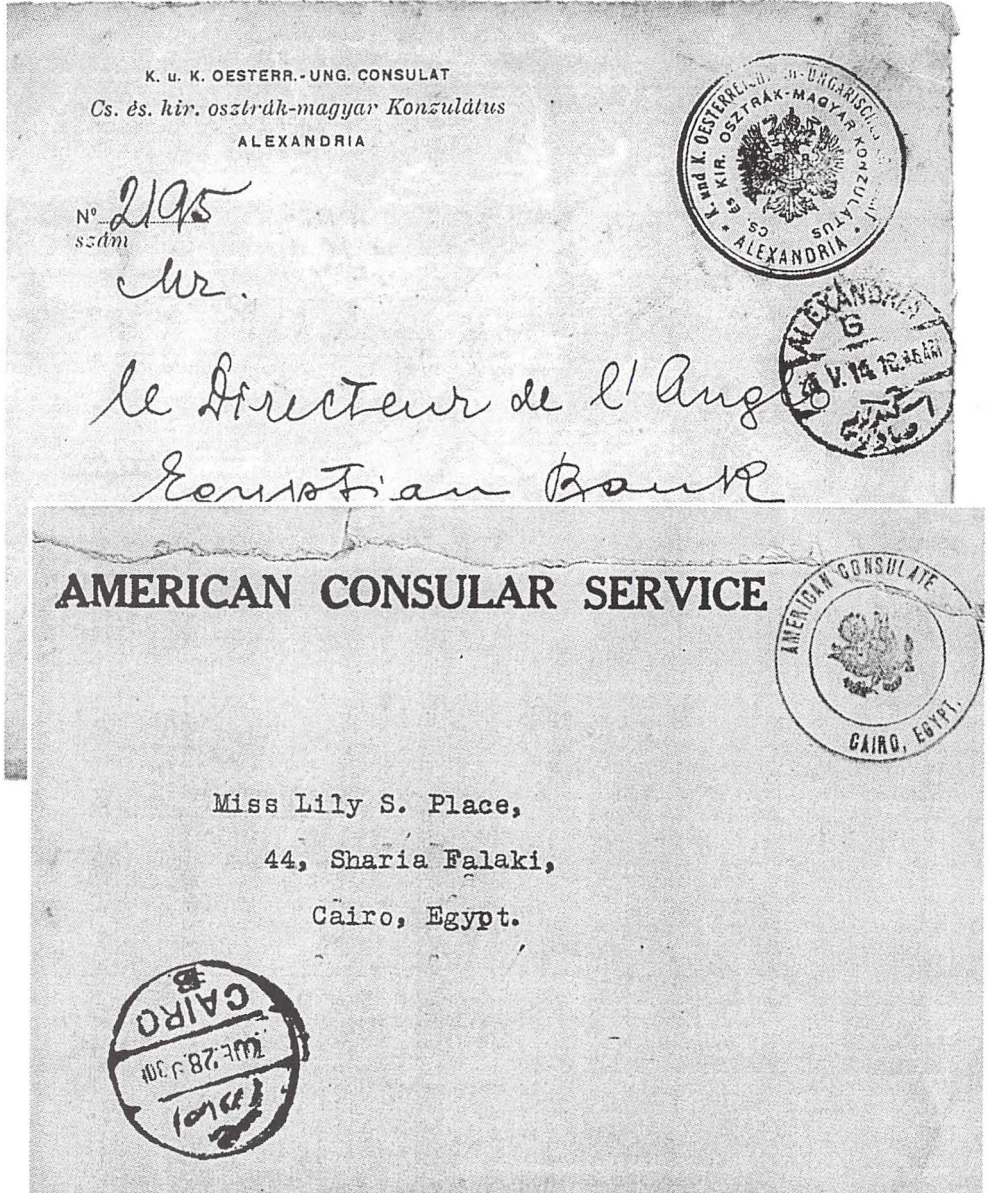


Fig. 2 Austro-Hungarian diplomatic frank (top).

Fig. 3 Frank of the American Consulate, Cairo (bottom).

Alexandria (Fig. 4), the German (1933) and the French Diplomatic Agency, Cairo (1913).

The franking privilege applied only to simple postage; special services, such as registration, still had to be paid for with stamps; this requirement was apparently rescinded later (Fig. 5).



Fig. 4 Frank of the French Consulate, Alexandria (top).

Fig. 5 Registration fee paid with a 5m. stamp; postage free under frank, 1913 (bottom).

Pouch Mail

Correspondence and confidential documents of many kinds from foreign embassies worldwide are generally carried back to the home country by diplomatic “pouch” (which may, in fact, be of the dimensions of a trunk!) accompanied by a courier. This procedure provides security for sensitive information and also saves time compared to the ordinary postal service (the couriers go by air, and leave whenever required). Under some circumstances, personal mail is carried in the pouches.

Officials of the British Foreign Office were allowed to send letters and postcards, if postage at the British domestic rate was applied, using British stamps². Since the stamps were not cancelled until the mail was posted in the civilian post office in London, there are no special markings on it. The extra cost of air mail was recovered by a pro rata deduction from the official’s salary. Such covers were endorsed “by bag” plus the sender’s signature on the front (Fig. 6). The return address on the back is the only identific of Egyptian origin.

By 1953 the charges for air mail had become onerously unfair, and a new procedure was adopted. For the air mail privilege, a special seal was sold, each valid for a weight of 2oz., and costing 8 piasters for twelve; the seals were borrowed from the Civil Service Sanatorium. They were applied to the backs of letters or to the address side of postcards. This system lasted until 1956.

The United States adopted a different procedure, which seems to have begun about 1906 in some countries³ but was not used in Egypt⁴ until World War II. It became desirable then because of the difficulties and slowness of transatlantic (or transpacific) air mail, as well as security and freedom from local censoring (but not always free from US censoring). Personal mail could be sent by diplomatic pouch provided that postage stamps of the country of origin (i.e., Egypt) were applied according to the prevailing rate



Fig. 6 British pouch mail, endorsed “by bag”.

for surface mail, 22 millimetres (not at the air mail rate, as has been mistakenly asserted). The stamps were nearly always cancelled on arrival in the United States, and usually the handstamped or machine cancellation of Washington was used. I have seen one cover on which the Egyptian stamps (to the value of 37m.) were cancelled with a rectangular date-stamp reading AMERICAN CONSULATE / APR 6 - 1954 / PORT SAID, EGYPT, as well as the usual machine cancellation of Washington. To make sure that there would be no misunderstanding by postal officials who subsequently handled such mail, a handstamp in magenta was often applied, which read "This article originally mailed / in country indicated by postage" (Fig. 7). In addition, various types of endorsement handstamps

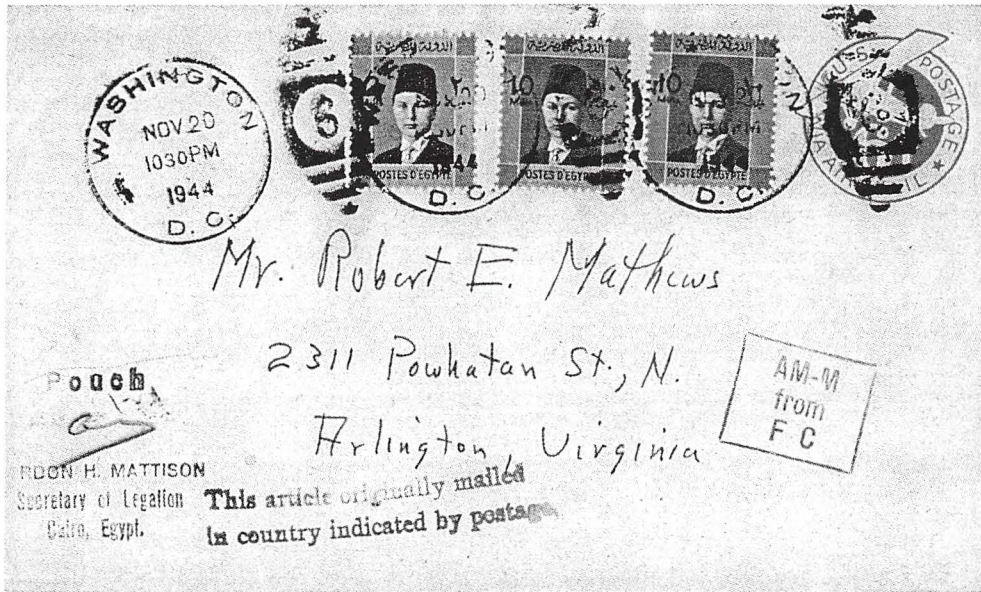


Fig. 7 A pouch mail cover showing handstamps applied in Egypt and in Washington with Egypt 2x10m. + 2m. for surface mail and 6¢ postal stationery for onward internal air transmission.

were applied to the envelopes. Such covers are readily available, although somewhat uncommon. If air mail was desired within the United States, it had to be paid for separately by means of United States stamps or postal stationery. This kind of modern mixed franking is quite scarce and not fully appreciated. The latest date I have seen for mixed-franking pouch mail is August 1945, but use of Egyptian stamps for ordinary postage continued until at least 1964 and was finally eliminated on October 1st 1968 when pouch mail became classified as US domestic mail⁵. Mail to US foreign embassies was cancelled there on arrival (Fig. 8).

It has been asserted that registered mail was not offered by the US diplomatic pouch facility, but the assertion is not accurate for Egypt, for registered covers exist (Fig. 9). On the two examples that I have seen, ordinary postage was paid by Egyptian stamps, and the registration fee was collected as postage due. Each is backstamped with the double-ring registry section date-stamp of Washington as well as that of the destination, but neither bears the "This article originally mailed - -" handstamp. Presumably

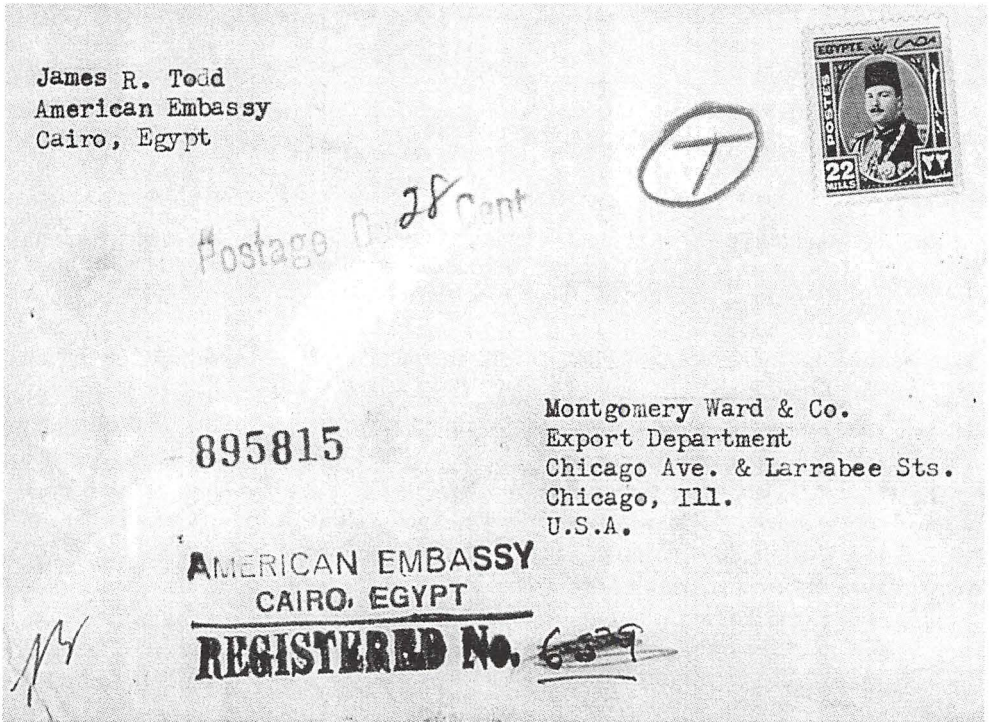
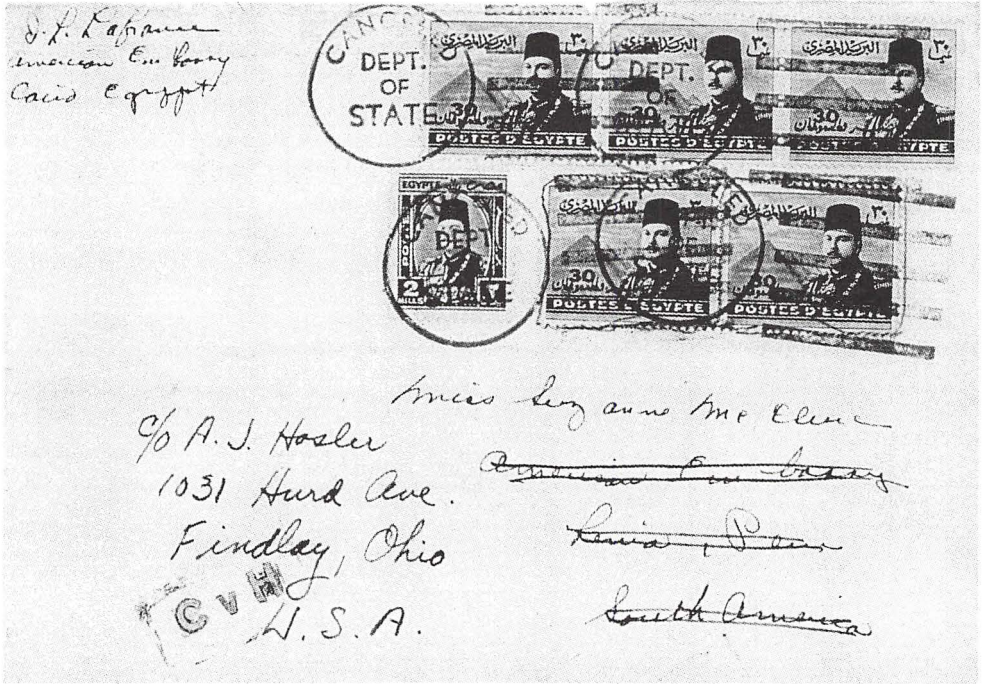


Fig. 8 Letter to Peru, with stamps cancelled there (top).
Fig. 9 Registered letter by US diplomatic pouch, with fee collected from the recipient (bottom).

registered items were bundled separately and immediately taken to the post office for registration, thus bypassing the general process. It is significant that each was given a registered number at the American Embassy, but a new one was supplied in Washington.

In later years (1980s), a special post office was established at the United States Embassy, designated as a Fleet Post Office of the U.S. Navy. United States stamps were used according to the US domestic rate. They were cancelled with a date-stamp inscribed U.S. NAVY / FPO 09527, in duplex with a four-bar obliterator (Fig. 10). Still later (1990s), a date-stamp inscribed AIR FORCE POSTAL SERVICE 09839 was put in use.

A meter machine with the inscription "The Library of Congress" was also in use in the U.A.R. period (Chapter XXXVIII). It was not used on pouch mail, insofar as I am aware.

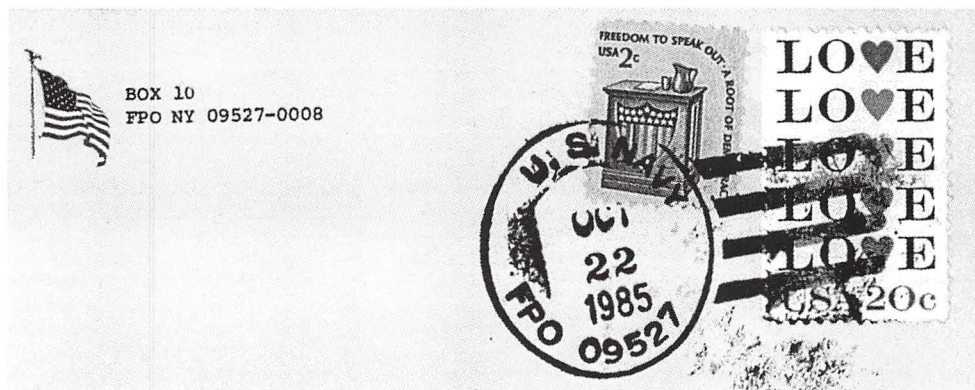


Fig. 10 Postmark of the Fleet Post Office, US Embassy, Cairo.

The embassies of other countries also accepted personal mail for the diplomatic pouch on occasion. I know of no special markings to identify such mail, and the procedure was probably to deposit such mail in the home postal system on arrival, to be charged postage due in the ordinary manner if it was not franked with stamps of the home country (which would be cancelled in the ordinary way in the capital city). Italy, at least, charged only simple postage in such cases (Fig. 11).



Fig. 11 Italian diplomatic mail.

References

1. T. Dacos, *Consular . . . in Egypt*, Collectio, Athens, 1994, pp. 21-37.
2. C. W. Minett, *QC VI* (8/9), 92-5 (whole no. 69/69, Oct. 1967).
3. C.R. Timpany, *AP* 90 (9), 664, 90 (12), 1267 (1976); R.H. Graham, *LWSN* 69 (whole no. 3511), (19 Feb. 1996), 46-7.
4. A J. Moses, *ET* 3 (2), 24-5 (Jan./Feb. 1971).
5. L.H. Smith Jr., *S.P.A. Journal* 30 (6), 369-81 (Feb. 1968); B Healy, in *The Congress Book 1995*, M. Forand ed., American Philatelic Congress, Pleasant Plain, OH, pp. 67-75.