

The Holy Land Philatelist August to November 1958

The Suez Crisis by Fredric

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The Suez crisis began with the occupation of all installations and administrative branches of the Suez Canal Company on July 26th, 1956 by Egyptian police and armed forces. The Director General was forced to turn over the whole organization to the Egyptian Government. All British and other European personnel was replaced by Egyptians, except the pilots, who were asked to work with the new owner of the company, but over 90% of them refused to do so.

Notes of protest were presented to the Egyptian Government, but without avail. Even the UN sessions of September-October 1956 ended without any practical success, as Great Britain and France insisted on their standpoint that Egypt had to return the Suez Canal Company to their former owners.

In order to be fully prepared for an emergency, Britain and France increased their naval forces in the Eastern Mediterranean. In August 1956 a good number of British reservists were called up, and sent to Malta and Cyprus by air and sea. Additional Jet Fighter Squadrons were transferred to Lybia, Malta and Cyprus.

On August 30th, the first French paratroopers arrived on Cyprus for the protection of French interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. The French Government also took over more than one hundred merchant ships for the transportation of troops and material to Cyprus. At the same time, the main body of the French naval forces sailed to the Eastern Mediterranean.

Into the political debates and military preparations burst the attack of Israel forces on October 30th, which with four motorized columns entered the Sinai Peninsula.

One day later, during the night of October 31st to November 1st "Operation Musketeer" began with the raids of British Canberra Jet Bombers on targets in Egypt. At the same time ships of the combined British and French fleet began shelling costal defences in the Port Said area.

On November 5th British and French Para- troopers were dropped in the Port Said area. British and French troops occupied the Port Said- Port Fuad area as well as a strip along the Suez Canal until El Cap.

The first units of the new United Nations Emergency Force were flown from Naples to Egypt on November 15th. On December 6th the evacuation of the British and French Forces began and ended on December 21st, 1956.

The important events of the Suez intervention are well reflected in the philatelic field.

In order to facilitate the tracing of special markings we are listing herewith those British and French vessels which, directly or indirectly, were connected with the Suez campaign.

GREAT BRITAIN NAVY

The following units were engaged during the Suez conflict:

Aircraft Carriers: HMS Theseus, Bulwark, Ocean, Albion, Eagle.

Cruisers: HMS Birmingham, Mauritius, Cumberland, Kenya, Newfoundland, Jamaica, HMNZS Royalist (New Zealand).

Destroyers: HMS Chieftain, Decoy, Diamond, Duchess, Chaplet, Chevron, Childers, Defender, Dainty, Whitby, Hardy, Surprise.

Frigates: HMS Undine, Urania, Ulysses, Ursa. Fast Minelayers: HMS Manxman.

Miscellaneous: HMS Duquesne (Depot ship), HMS Dalrymple (Survey ship), HMS Reggio (Landing ship), HMS Stricker (Landing ship), HMS Forth (Submarine Depot ship).

TRANSPORTS:

Besides the ships which are normally employed for troop transports, others of private companies had been chartered for this task, especially of the Cunard Line (the list is far from being complete) HMTS Dunera (Cunard Line), Dilwara (Ascania), Rampura (Asturia), Neveda (Coronia), Cheshire, Empire Fowey, Empire Orwell, Empire Ken, Empire Clyde, New Australia.

Most of the mail of all the British ships was routed via the British Fleet Mail Office 10 at Malta; later, as a part of the units operated from ports of Cyprus, the mail was handed over also to the different British Army Post offices there. But if the mail was delivered in closed bags it continued its way unopened to the Central Fleet Mail Office in London.

POSTAL MARKINGS FMO MALTA

The postmark of this office (Fig. 1) is mostly found besides the stamps on the covers, the cancellation itself was done by the FPO 76 (Fig. 2). The postmark Fig. 1 I have seen in red, without date slug. Sometimes navy mail can be found with the postmark of APO 1040.

CYPRUS

On naval mail I have seen the postmarks of FPO 148 and 168 (Fig. 2A), but probably other FPO markings can be found too.

LONDON

At the London Central Fleet Mail Office the mail was cancelled with the machine marking "POST OFFICE MARITIME MAIL" or circular handstamps with the same inscription (in different types), Fig. 3.

CENSOR MARKINGS

Censorship was imposed on letters from the area occupied or from ships near the Egyptian coast, during the period 1st to 10th November, 1956. But not all mail was censored. It is curious to note that the old wartime "tombstone" censor markings were put into use again. Naval covers could also be found with a new diamond-shaped censor marking (see later). All items with the "tombstone censor marking" are extremely scarce. The identification of naval mail is difficult and only the sender's address, with the name of the ship, can help. Besides the senders' addresses, different administrative rubber stamps of the ships' offices can be found on mail of an official nature, but also on private mail.

These rubber stamps are of various sizes and shapes, and bear different inscriptions, as for instance, Commanding Officer, Captain's Office, Ship's Office, Mail Office, Supply Officer, etc., etc. (Fig. 4), and of course HMS and the ship's name and date.

Sometimes mail was handed over to homeward bound ships and this mail was posted on arrival at the next civilian post office of the home port. Mail from the different troop ships and also from chartered civilian ships was mostly handled in the same way as naval mail.

Some of these troop carriers used their "Purser's Office" markings or only straight-line rubber stamps with the ship's name, etc. on the mail posted on board. Most of the mail despatched can, of course, not be identified. On mail from such ships I also found the marking "London FS Paquebot". From S/S Empire Fowey I have seen the Purser's Office rubber stamp used as cancellation of the stamps affixed.

FRANCE NA VY

The main body of the French naval forces in the Mediterranean is based at the large Naval Base of Toulon.

Almost all ships available at the base were prepared for immediate action after the nationalization of the Suez Canal. The C-in-C of the French Fleet was Admiral Bajot whose flag ship was the brand new anti-aircraft cruiser "De Grasse".

Like the British Government, also the French Government chartered a large number of private passenger and freight ships for troop transports to Cyprus. The number of chartered ships reached more than one hundred.

These are some of the units which took part in the campaign

Aircraft Carriers: Arromanches, Lafayette, Bois Belleau, Bearn.

Escorteur (Destroyers and Frigates) : Surcouf, Corse, Brestois, Berbere, Arabe, Malgache, Soudanais, Sakalave, Bambara, Dupetit-Thouars, Kabyle.

Aircraft Tender: Marcel Le Bihan.

Battleships: Richelieu, Jean Bart.

Cruisers: De Grasse, Georges Leygues.

Submarine : Sultane.

Hospital Ship: Marseillaise.

Transports: Aulne, Vivre, Brest, Athos II, Marseillaise, Sidi Farouch, Henry Poincare, Robert Espagne, Pierre Loti, Oradour, Pierre Corneille, Rabelais, Ferdinand de Lesseps, Malgache.

Postal Service

SHIPS WITH BOARD POST OFFICES

The situation differed here from that of the British Fleet. The eight major ships of the French armada (Aircraft carriers, Battleships, and Cruisers) possess their own post offices, which operate as normal second class agencies. The postmarks are of hexagonal shape with interrupted frame line. The inscription bears the classification and the name of the ship and a small anchor at the base. Date in two lines and a star over them (Fig. 5). The classifications should be translated as follows

Batiment de Ligne = Battleship

Porte Avions = Aircraft Carrier

Croiseur = Cruiser

The board PO's are using the usual (but neutral) French registration labels. They are stamped with the ship's name. In addition to the octagonal postmarks one- or two-line obliterations are in use (Fig. 6).

The two-line obliterations are used in the registration labels, sometimes also on labels for mail bags, etc.

The single-line obliterations are mostly used for money orders, etc., but can also be found on covers, primarily of official nature.

SHIPS WITHOUT BOARD POST OFFICES

Mail from the smaller units without their own board PO's can be found with one or the other of the postmarks mentioned above, mostly Air- craft Carrier "Bearn", which was the depot and supply ship, or with different postmarks POSTE NAVALE (Fig. 7) of the Naval P.O. Toulon.

The only markings affixed on board ships without their own postal facilities are of purely administrative nature.

- 1.) Straight line markings, mostly with classification and name of the ship, with or with- out frame.
- 2) Double circular rubber stamps of different size with the inscription MARINE NATIO- NALE SERVICE A LA MER and anchor in the centre (Fig. 8).
- 3) Similar with inscription MARINE NATIONALE - (ship's name) Le Vaguemestre in the centre. (Hand stamp of the postal orderly). This is generally found on free-mail covers, stamped with the well-known Army postmark FM in red.

All three types can also be found on covers of ships with their own board P.O.'s. If such markings are totally absent, the covers can only be identified by the senders' addresses. On official mail a lot of other markings may be found, like "Bureau Administrative", "Commissaire du Porte Avion Arromanches" , "Officiel", "Officiel urgent", "Priorite", etc., etc.

MAIL FROM THE DIFFERENT TROOP SHIPS

Mail from the different transports are in most cases impossible to identify and only a sender's address can help. Some of the ships used their company's rubber stamps. The mail was handed over after their arrival at Cyprus to the French handed over after their arrival at Cyprus to the French APO, and cancelled with the common "Poste aux Armees" AFN or it was forwarded uncanceled to Toulon and received there the "Poste Navale" postmark.

ARMY

The first 150 men arrived at Cyprus on August 29th, 1956. The "Camp Verdun" with 1,700 tents for 5,000 men was erected near Nicosia. The units chosen for duty in Cyprus were the 10th Paratroop Division, mostly Foreign Legionaries, and the 7th Light Tank Brigade, and some units of Marine Commandos. The embarkation of these troops took place in Algeria and France.

The main body of this Expeditionary Force arrived about September 5th, 1956.

GREAT BRITAIN

ARMY

In August 1956 more than 35,000 reservists were called up and a number of regiments prepared for embarkation. As far as I know, the following units took part in the campaign:

16th Independent Parachute Brigade Group, 3rd Infantry Strategic Division, Life Guards, Suffolk Regiment, Sommerset Light Regiment, West York- shire Regiment, Royal Scots, Argyll Southerland Highlanders, Royal Fusiliers, 21st Medium Regt. RA, 34th Light Anti-Aircraft Regt., 42nd Field Sqdn RE, 45th Commando Royal Marines. Jet fighters and bomber squadrons left Great Britain for Malta, Cyprus, and Lybia. In addition to ships for sea-transport, all available Britannia Airliners were chartered by the Government for the airlift to the Near East. The troops were stationed on the islands of Malta and Cyprus.

It is understandable that a number of Field Post Offices were necessary for such a large concentration of armed forces. All units which were to take part in the Port Said operation got their new mailing address - BFPO 200 and 300, for both staging areas, Malta and Cyprus.

Later during "Operation Musketeer" only BFPO 300 was used.

The different FPO's in Malta, Cyprus and Port Said used the following three types of postmarks

- A - the well-known British standard type, double ring (Fig. 9)
- B - single ring type (Fig. 10)
- C - new double ring type (Fig. 11).

The following FPO's numbers are known to have been used during the "build-up" of the operation.

MALTA: FPO 76 (A), FPO 782 (A), FPO 1040 (C), 558 (A).

CYPRUS: FPO 148 (A), FPO 168 (A), FPO 514 (C), FPO 937 (B).

During the "Operation Musketeer" some more FPO's were designated to serve the Expeditionary Forces in Egypt: FPO 953 (B), FPO 443 (A), FPO 938 (B) only seen on registered mail, FPO 1020 (C).

The date slug in all three types is in two lines; sometimes with star or index letters A, B or C. There was a registration service at all offices. The labels used are of the well-known British standard type, blue on white paper. The FPO number is inserted by hand or with a small hand stamp.

CENSORSHIP

Censorship was imposed upon all Army and Navy mail from both the staging bases of Malta and Cyprus from November 1st until the evening of November 10th, 1956. For this short-lived period of censorship special new censor-markings were brought into use (Fig. 12) : diamond shaped 2X2 inches. In the centre we find a crown and the inscription "Military Censor", and a three- or four-digit number. The censor markings are found in blue or violet. Censor markings with three-digit figures are from Malta, those with four-digit figures from Cyprus and Port Said.

Only official correspondence, OHMS envelopes, were not submitted to the censorship.

FRANCE

Also the French units received a new mailing address shortly before the beginning of the campaign: Secteur Postal (Postal Sector) with serial number 91,000. All mail with such senders' addresses are from troops which took part in the campaign.

Four Army Post Offices, No. 152, 152A, 168 and 412, were designated for the whole force. These offices handled all postal matters, including parcels and money orders. All offices used postmarks which are identical with those of Algeria, with the three letters A.F.N. (Afrique Francaise du Nord) at the base of the postmarks (Fig. 13). These postmarks were used on ordinary as well as on registered mail.

The above mentioned serial numbers of the postal sectors, 91,000, on the senders address is absolutely necessary for the identification of such covers. All Army Post Offices were in possession of obliterators with the office numbers at the base, but according to the instruction given, they were only to be used for internal services.

Sometimes, however, they may be found also on ordinary or registered mail, obviously due to an oversight.

THE ARMY POST OFFICES

APO 152 (SP 91.100) Mid-September 1956 until early August 1957 Cyprus (postmark Fig. 14).

APO 152A (SP 91.131) November 1956 until Mid- April 1957, Cyprus (postmarks Fig. 15 & 16).

Dr. Dufloz in his article in "Echo de la Timbre- logic" gives as opening date Feb. 1st, 1957, but as APO 152A and APO 168 operated at the same place, I suppose both offices operated together under the

designation of APO 168 since early November 1956 and the postmarks of APO 152A were used only by mistake before Feb. 1st, as APO 168 closed and APO 152A took over the work under his own APO number.

APO 168 (SP 91.131), early November 1956. until end of January 1957, Cyprus. (postmark Fig. 14).

APO 412 (SP 91.065) operated from end of August until end of October 1956 in Marseille. In Port Fuad this APO was stationed from November 24th, 1956 until December 18th, 1956 and returned to Marseille.

The abbreviation "BPM" in the post- mark of APO 152A stands for "Bureau Postal Militaire". The date slugs in all obliterations are found in two lines with star on the top.

Mail can also be found with a machine cancellation, single ring and inscription "Poste aux armees" and five wavy lines at right. Such obliterator was used at APO 412 in Port Fuad, but in some cases the mail was flown uncanceled to the BCM Paris or BCM "B" Marseille (BCM= Bureau Central Militaire) where the same cancellations were in use, thus only the sender's address can identify such covers.

APO 412 also used a hand-cancellation in the same shape and identical inscription as the others (Fig. 13), but with a star at its base.

REGISTRATION

Like all other French APO's anywhere in the world, both these offices had their registration service. The labels used are the same as those of the civil PO's only with imprinted large R and registration number. The "Secteur Postal" on both the offices was added by rubber stamp, metal stamp or inscribed by hand.

Mail to France was free, while to all other countries the normal French postal rates were applied.

CENSORSHIP

As far as I know, no censorship was imposed upon the mail of the French Forces (Army and Navy) during the whole operation.

POSTAL ORDERLY MARKINGS

Each Postal Orderly in the French army possesses his own rubberstamp to be used on letters bearing the red army marking FM (free mail), but also on other mail as well as for internal purposes. These handstamps are usually made of rubber and occur in different shapes and sizes.

Inscription: "Secteur Postal (or S.P.)..... and "Le Vaguemestre" (Postal Orderly). Used inks are black, violet, blue, red etc.

Official mail is stamped, like those of the navy, with different markings of administrative nature, as Officiel, Courrier Officiel, Urgent etc. Only on such mail the different unit stamps can be found.

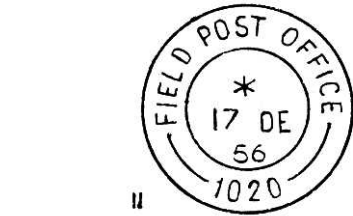
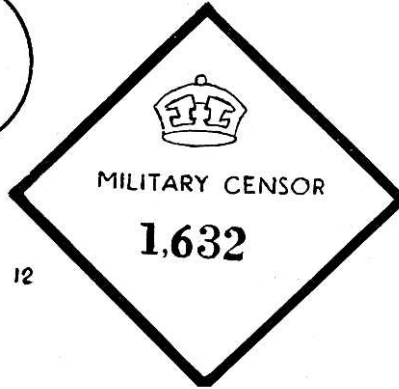
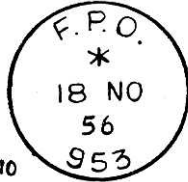
CONCLUSION

This is just a short outline of the philatelic aspects connected with the exciting period of "Operation Musketeer". By its very nature, the material presented cannot be complete and readers are requested to furnish all additional information available to them.





COMMANDING OFFICER
7 NOV 1956
H.M.S. UNDINE



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12



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8



5



BATIMENT DE LIGNE
RICHELIEU &

PORTE-AVIONS BEARN &



13



14



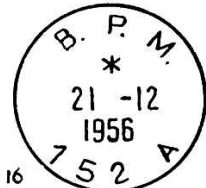
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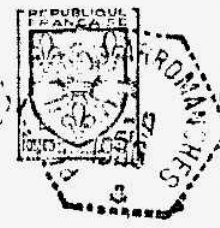
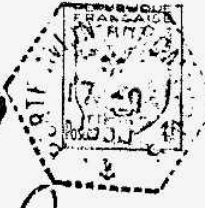
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