

POSTAL HISTORY OF THE 2nd A.I.F.

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One of the most popular features ever to appear in the "A.S.M." was the late Mr. Harry S. Porter's "Postal History of the 2nd A.I.F." which was serialised in 1946-47.

The supply of back numbers containing the various parts ran out years ago but the demand continued and Mr. Porter several times expressed regret that the material had not been put into book form. The "A.S.M." readily accepted his suggestion that a completely-revised version could again appear in this journal, and plans were made for it to appear in 1958. Mr. Porter immediately began work on the revision. Illness several times delayed him but eventually the work was completed and new illustrations prepared. The day after the final manuscript was posted to the Editor, Harry Porter died.

The "A.S.M." is pleased and proud to present in these pages, as a tribute and memorial to a noted philatelist and postal historian, the first instalment of the completely-revised "Postal History of the 2nd A.I.F."

The first Australian troops to arrive in the Middle East comprised the H.Q. Aust. 6th. Div. and the 16th Brigade Group. Two Postal Units were included, an Overseas Base P.U. and that of the 6th Aust. Division. Of a total convoy of eleven transports, five carried Australian troops; these being "Empress of Japan", "Orcades", "Strathnaver", Otranto" and "Oxford"-numbered 1 to 5 in the order given. Mail posted on board received a mark bearing the inscription H.M. TRANSPORT No. -, formed in letters 3 mm. high, in two lines, in the case of No. 1 and 7mm. tall in one line on Nos. 2 to 5. This is the only occasion when these marks were used.

The date-stamps, brought from line across the centre. There was Australia, were all of the single no means of indicating the time of circle type, with the day, month and day. (See Figs. A and B). The in-two final figures of the year in one scriptions were as follows:



FIG. A



FIG. B

Series:			
1st Bge. H.Q. P.O.	M.1.	P.1.	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 was a set of three date-stamps corresponding to each inscription at top. Probably DP.1 and RP.1 existed, but I have yet to hear of an example of their use. On all the three Base P.O. date-stamps the inscription at the bottom is BW.1. and they can only be distinguished by slight difference in the size and distribution of the lettering, inseparable from hand engraving.

In the case of the date-stamps with two letters, the significance of the first is evident, but the selection of the recurrent letters M., P. and W. causes speculation. A possible explanation is that M. stood for mails, P. for parcels and W. was the date-stamp Code Letter for "Australian" in World War 1914/18, 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.

It would seem that the above date-stamps were designed to meet the postal requirements of an expeditionary force of one Division and that each office was intended to have a set of three postmarks. However, later on, there was always a shortage of these and only one, or at most two, could be spared for other than the busy Base Offices.

On arrival at destination, the Overseas P.U. went to Jerusalem, where Base H.Q., Overseas Base, A.I.F., was located, and opened an Australian Base Post Office. The date-stamp used was BW.1. and the earliest date I have seen is February 28. Incidentally, examples of this mark at this period are scarce and I have only found them on postage free surface mail covers. All airmail covers which originated at Aust. Base P.O. bear the Jerusalem civil date-stamp, of which there are a number of varieties, both of the single and duplex types; probably they were applied by the Palestine civil officials. The use of the Jerusalem civil marks persists until about the end of May, when they cease and BWA. appears on both surface and airmail covers.

The only case I have met with of the use of a Palestinian date-stamp is that of Sarafand, an important military centre on the railway between Lydda and Jaffa. These have dates between February 27 and April 1.

The Aust. Base P.O. was moved from Jerusalem to Gaza on about August 6, 1940, and continued to function there until 20/1940, when the main Base P.O. was transferred to Cairo and Gaza continued as a Sub-Base.

I am told that the first Post Office opened by the 6th Div. P.U. was at Qastina, where the date-stamp used was M.1. and the earliest date re-corded is February 23. A second office was opened at Julis (using SM.1. - earliest known Feb. 27) and a third P.D. was opened at the 2/1st Aust. General Hospital, at Gaza Ridge, earliest example Feb. 28. When the troops moved from Qastina to Berbera, as from 22/4/40, a Travelling Post Office was installed on a motor truck, which went round the camps and collected the mail. The only Field Post Office which continued to function was Berbara, using SM.1. and occasionally SP.1.

The T.P.O. used RM.1. and dealt with registration business. A variety of registration labels were used-in April a script endorsement only, in May a piece of stamp edging with script lettering T.P.O./2nd A.I.F./R - (number of article), and from the end of May onwards the standard gummed labels in use by the United Kingdom forces. In July it used a rubber stamp inscribed "T.P.O.2nd A.I.F." and in October one reading "Travelling P.O./6th Aus. Div."

The interesting subject of Censor Marks is outside the scope of this study, except insofar as the type assists the student in his researches into periods of use. It may, however, be mentioned that, for a short period after the first troops arrived in Palestine, Censor Marks (in the usual meaning of the term) were not used. That letters were subject to censorship within the Unit was indicated upon the cover by the signature of an officer and the rubber stamp of the Unit I have seen the rubber stamps of 16 Inf. Bde., 2/1st Field Co., 2/1st, 2/2nd, 2/3rd and 2/4th Inf. Bats., 6 Aus. Div. Supply Col., and 2/1 A.G.H. The last date of use seen is March 6.

I have no evidence that the Australian A.I.F. type of Censor Mark, consisting of a rectangle, about 52 x 22mm., surrounding AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL/FORCE/PASSED BY CENSOR/number, in four lines, was used on shore in the Middle East before November, 1940, although it appears on covers posted on Transports on the voyage from Australia.

The Censor Mark first in use consisted of a rectangle, about 40x17 mm., with PASSED BY CENSOR at top. Below "PASSED" is a crown and, on the right of the latter, "No." followed by a number. The earliest date of use by the Australians, that I know of, is March 2, and the rubber Unit stamp also appears-the only example I

have seen of this combination. This type of Censor Mark continued in general use until December, 1940, when it was gradually superseded by the equilateral tri-angle type, comprising a Crown in the centre, PASSED BY CENSOR above and "No.", followed by figures at the base.

As time went on further convoys of troops arrived, first the 17th Bde. Group and additional Units of 6 Div. H.Q. The next formation to embark was 18th Bde. Group but this was diverted to England, owing to the entry of Italy into the war and other European developments. Finally the 19th Bde. Group arrived to complete the 6th Division.

Postal Rates in Palestine From the moment of arrival the Australian troops were given the concession of free postage on surface mail. This did not signify any reduction in the airmail rate, as this was the same as for civilians, viz., 60mils (about 1/6d Australian) per unit weight. The Sydney "Sun" of 19/3/40 quotes a dispatch from Jerusalem "because of delays in surface mail, troops are using air, at 1/6d each, on 1,000 letters per day".

As there were no Palestine stamps of the value of 60 mils, at least two stamps had to be used to make up this rate. I have seen twelve 5 mils, six 10 mils, three 20 mils, one 50 mils and one 10 miles, four 15 mils, and other combinations on overweight letters. I have yet to see what may be termed a "philatelic cover" dating from Palestine at this period.

Although airmail was paid in Palestine stamps, an arrangement was come to, as early as the first week in March, 1940, whereby Australian Army Posts handled registration on surface mail and on parcels and postage on these was satisfied in Australian stamps. I have heard that the Overseas Base P.U. brought with them £200 worth of Australian stamps. As registered letters were seldom sent by surface mail and stamps on parcels are seldom pre-served, Australian stamps used at this period in Palestine are scarce.

The stamps on parcels were sometimes obliterated with a circular cancellation, about 26 mm. diameter, with the words ARMY/POST OFFICE in two lines across the centre between parallel lines which interrupt nine parallel and equidistant lines at right angles:-From its form and appearance it is almost certainly of English origin. (See Fig. C.). Australian stamps used in Palestine, at this period, are the then current 1d., 2d., 22d. (K.G.V.), 3d. (A.I.F.), 6d., 9d. (Platypus) and 1/-. These are the ones seen, others may well exist.



For months there was agitation for cheaper airmail rates, both among the troops and in Australia, but one of the chief difficulties was lack of aircraft. Eventually the Prime Minister announced that airmail rates from Australia to troops in the Middle East would be reduced to 9d. for the maximum allowable weight of ½ oz. and 5d. for postcards; also that the Palestine Government had agreed that the same rate should apply for airmail dispatched by servicemen to Australia. The arrangement arrived at was that airmail from Palestine should be franked with Australian stamps and a condition was that the Australian Government should be responsible for all costs of air transport and also for the conveyance of the mail between the aerodrome and the troops. No alteration was made in the rates in force from Egypt or Great Britain nor was the cheap airmail available on letters posted to Great Britain from Australia.

The new rates came into force with the mail leaving Sydney on November 26, 1940, and from Palestine on November 30. Similar concessions, at identical rates, were arranged between New Zealand and the Palestine Post Office and came into force simultaneously. About the same period, the British and Palestine Governments had come to an arrangement for reduction in airmail rates for troops-in this case it was fixed at 10d. per ½oz. It would seem that troops from the United Kingdom were using the stamps of the United Kingdom on airmail prior to the lowering of the postage, as I have seen an example in July, 1940, when the rate was 1/3d. The 10d. rate was instituted prior to the reduction of the airmail postage to Australia. It is curious that I have yet to see a statement as to the dates when alterations became effective-they should be ascertainable by postal historians on the spot.

In anticipation of the new arrangement and consequent increase in the use of Australian stamps, a consignment of £100 1/, £2,250 9d., £20 5d. and £100 3d. were sent from Sydney, but did not reach the Australian Army Postal Authorities until December 8. It follows, therefore, that at the date of the inauguration of the new cheap rates, the only Australian stamps available were the small stock designed for use on parcels and for registration. Curiously enough the 9d. stamps were of the old purple Kangaroo type,

which had been obsolete in Australia for some time, owing to the issue of the 9d. Platypus on September 1, 1938. Examples I have seen of soldiers' letters posted in Palestine from November 28 and early in December have the 9d. Kangaroo. Evidently there was a great scrounge round for any Australian stamps to meet the emergency and I have seen a cover with the 6d. Kookaburra and a 3d. A.I.F. with another four 2d. and one 1d.

The position on December 7 may be quoted from a contemporary report "Stamps cabled for not arrived. Palestine authorities have again come to the rescue with supplies of their stamps, for which we will be charged cost of printing only". The return to the use of Palestine stamps is most interesting. Whereas up to the dispatch of the last mail prior to November 30 the rate was 60m., from that date it was 9d. (equivalent to 30mil). No Palestine stamp of the denomination of 30mil. existed and the stamps sold at cost of production to the Australian Army Postal Service must have been 15mil., as two stamps of this value are the only combination seen at this time. The earliest date of the use of the 9d. Platypus at this period is December 9 and covers exist with dates between December 5 and 15 franked by 30mil. in Palestine stamps. The 9d. Kangaroo has been seen with postmarks from November 28 to December 5 and one example as late as January 23, 1941. It would seem likely that these 9d. Kangaroos and the pair of 15mil. Palestine stamps will be sought after items by Commonwealth specialists in the years to come. It is interesting to note that examples exist of the 9d. Kangaroo used by Australian Forces in the Middle East in both World Wars. Remarkable longevity!

Commencing in September, 1940, the 6th Australian Division began to move into Egypt and their vacated camps were taken over by units of the 7th Australian Division on arrival. Other men, other manners, and evidently the T.P.O. idea did not appeal to the newcomers.

Whereas, up to the first week in October, there was only one F.P.O. in Palestine, a few days later there were three others operating at Berit Jirja, Kilo 89 and Nablus. Postmark "P.3" (24/10/40) I know concealing a registered cover with a rubber stamp "Kil 89 F.P.O." so can be located there, and as "AW.1" (29/10/40) and "DW.1" (13/10/40) first appear at this period, they were presumably in use at the other two. The dates in brackets are the earliest seen. "A.P.1" (25/10/40) also comes on the scene but only for about a fortnight. This date stamp had a romantic career, appearing in strange places where, at this time, has yet to be discovered.

By the end of November the Australian Corps Postal Unit had arrived and commenced to function. From a report at that date, 7th Aust. Div. P.U. operated five F.P.O.'s at Barbara, Deir Seneid, Kil 89, Julis and Qastina, while the Corps P.U. manned Gaza Ridge, Air Port, Berit Jirja and the Convalescent Depot at Kefar Vitkin. This would indicate that ten Army datestamps were in use in Palestine at this time, but I only know of eight BW.1 (subbase at Gaza), P.1 (30/11/40), W.1 (4/12/40), W.2 (20/12/40), M.3 (30/12/40) and P.3, AW.1 and DW.1 as already mentioned. AP.1 is not taken in the reckoning, as it may well have preceded one of the others. Again the dates in brackets are the earliest recorded. SM.1 disappears early in November and may have been taken, with SP.1, to Egypt by the 6 Aust. Div. Supply Colin any case there is no record of it ever being used again.

Functioning in Palestine, at this period were certain English Army Post Offices, using datestamps Nos. 121, 122 and 123 (for type see Fig. "D"). Cases have been seen of letters addressed to Australia with Palestine or English stamps cancelled with one of these postmarks. This would happen when individual Australian soldiers were attached to United Kingdom units or schools.

It is interesting to note how often a newly established F.P.O. was supplied with a datestamp but supply of black ink was forgotten. Of the abovementioned postmarks, M.3, P.1, AP.1 and AW.1 are found struck in violet pad, ink in their earliest days. Speaking generally, to the student of war covers, it is an almost infallible indication that we are close to the first date of usage, if a postmark is struck in colour.

Although the use of Palestine stamps for the home correspondence of Servicemen ceased on November 30, 1940, yet they were still employed on articles posted to Egypt, etc., and locally to Civilians in Palestine itself. However, such covers are hard to come by in Australia. (To be continued.)

CHAPTER II. A.S.M. February 5, 1958

United Kingdom 1929-1945

In Chapter I mention is made that the 18th Australian Brigade Group was diverted to England; actually it disembarked on the Clyde and proceeded to Salisbury Plains. Soon after arrival, British Army datestamps Nos. 443 and 445 were issued for the use of this Brigade, earliest known date being August 8 and July 21 respectively.

A typical example of this type of postmark is illustrated under Fig. D. It consists of two concentric circles with FIELD POST OFFICE interposed at top, number (flanked by arcs of solid colour) at bottom and three lines of figures etc. in the inner circle. At the top there is an asterisk or letter, in the middle the day and month and below the two final figures of the year. The asterisk or letter was alterable and such a change sometimes had significance. In the case of those used by the A.I.F. in England in 1940, they almost invariably bore an asterisk, the only exception known to me being a cover with 443 in October, where this space is void.

In the same convoy with the 18th Aust. Bde. were certain units destined for the United Kingdom at the time of their leaving Australia; these being the 2/1st Aust. Railway Construction Co. and the 1st and 2nd Aust. Forestry Cos. On arrival they were stationed at Alton (Hants) and the datestamp of the civil post office was used for a few days until postmarker No. 444 (with asterisk) appeared, earliest date seen being July 29. At that time No. 444 seems to have been only in use for about one month, but it appears later in the Middle East and probably went there on the transport which took the 2/1st Rly. Con. Co. to Egypt. As far as my knowledge goes, these three datestamps, Nos. 443, 444 and 445, were only used by the Australian Forces until 1944.

In September the Rly. Can. Co. was moved to Woolmer and there issued with datestamps No. 450, earliest date seen being Sept. 11. I understand that 450 was handed over to the 2/3rd Aust. General Hospital at Godalming, when the Rly. Co. left for Egypt; eventually it was taken to the Middle East on the transport which took the 2/3rd A.G.H. and Aust. General Details Depot from Chelmsford.

There was a standing order which prohibited the insertion of a date when postmarkers were used afloat. An example I possess of No. 450 on cover posted on the transport "Stratheden" off the Cape of Good Hope in April, 1941, shows the centre blank, except for the asterisk. I have yet to discover what happened to 450 after the vessel arrived at the Suez Canal.

While the 18th Aust. Bde. was in England, reinforcements arrived and these were used to form the 25th Aust. Inf. Bde. In November, 1940. both these Brigades were sent by sea, via the Cape, to the Middle East, arriving about Christmas and they must have brought datestamp Nos. 443 and 445 with them. On arrival 18 Bde. was stationed in Egypt and 25 Bde. was sent to Palestine.

It follows that the only Australian Army units remaining in England were the Forestry Companies, which went to work in the Northumberland/Durham area. While there, for some time their correspondence was sent through civil channels and received the Newcastle-on-Tyne postmark.

At the time of the outbreak of the war No. 10 Squadron R.A.A.F. was in the United Kingdom, having been posted there to take over Sunderland Flying Boats. They were ordered to remain and were based on Plymouth, where their outward mail received the datestamp of the civil post office.

In addition to this Australian Unit, there were individual Australians attached to R.A.F. squadrons, and their number rose as the effect of the Empire Training Scheme was felt.

To deal with the situation a small A.I.F. detachment was attached to the Home Depot of the Royal Engineers Postal Service (at Bournemouth until moved to Nottingham in May, 1941). From March to November, 1941. they used a datestamp reading "HOME DEPOT R.E.P.S." with the figure "7" below (Fig. E). The primary function of this detachment was to keep records of postings and movements of Australian personnel, rather than the actual handling of mails, so this postmark is seldom seen.

Late in 1941 it was decided to open an R.A.A.F. Base P.O. in London and one officer and a cadre of 12 other ranks were sent over and Base P.O. No. 4 opened at Kodak House, Kingsway, London, on February 2, 1942. The first datestamp was brought from Australia (Fig. F) and from May onwards it was supplemented by a rubber stamp (Fig. G.) and by a second steel datestamp (Fig. H.) which was obviously of British origin. The growing volume of mails made it desirable to use a machine for cancelling (loaned by the British Post Office) and this first appears in July 1943. The machine was of the continuous type and had a "die hub" with two date cases and two slogan spaces, as can be proved by comparison of two adjoining impressions notably the S of BASE is deformed in one case.



Fig.D



Fig.E.



Fig.F



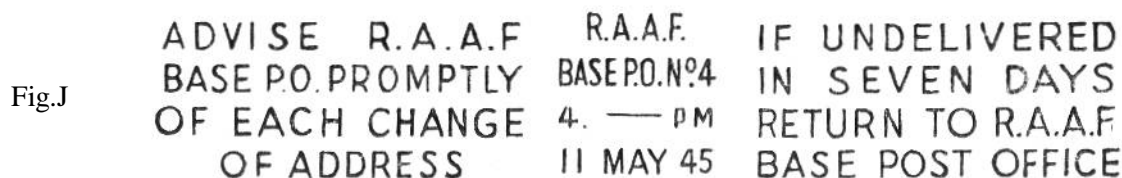
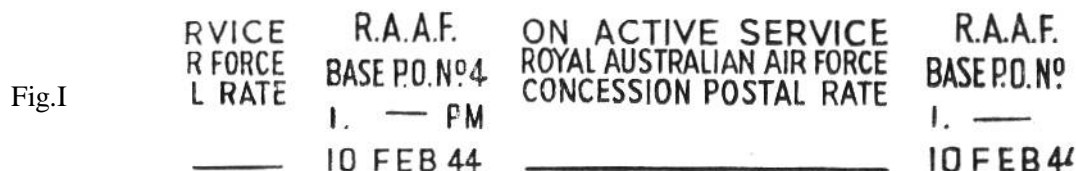
Fig.G



Fig.H

From early 1943, covers from R.A.A.F. personnel in U.K. to Australia have a cachet impressed on the cover reading "ON ACTIVE SERVICE; ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE/CONCESSION POSTAL RATE" in three lines in a box. This was necessary as the home troops in the United Kingdom did not have the privilege of free surface postage. Although those serving in Australian Units stationed in Great Britain enjoyed free postage on surface mail to Australia, it was not until January, 1943, that a special arrangement was come to whereby Australians serving in the R.A.F. were granted this concession.

At first the machine cancellation had five wavy lines in the slogan space, but it apparently occurred to someone that considerable conservation of energy would result if the machine performed the dual function of datestamping and impressing the cachet mentioned in the last paragraph. A pair of the existing flat stamps with the cachet were cut down and curved to fit the machine. The result looked a mess but they filled the bill for about a week until suitable slogan slugs, with the same inscription, could be procured (Fig. I). Later on another pair of slugs were used with the inscription as shown in Fig. J, this being often impressed on the back of incoming mail for R.A.A.F. personnel.



To revert to the Forestry troops, who had swollen to a Group on the arrival of No. 3 Co. in July, 1943, they were moved to the neighbourhood of Dumfries (Scotland) when the woods in the first area were cut out. As soon as the R.A.A.F. Base P.O. came into existence their mail was routed through that office and postmarked there. This continued until the Forestry troops left for Australia, via U.S.A., in Sept./Oct. 1943.

In the early months of 1941, Plymouth was badly blitzed out and, to prevent interruption of the submarine patrol, No. 10 Squadron R.A.F., was moved elsewhere; and as their location was "top secret" their mail was flown to London. At that period Government dispatches to Australia were sent by an air service to Melbourne, which was known as the "Kangaroo Mail". A certain proportion of No. 10 Squadron's personal mail was sometimes included therewith, such letters bearing only a cachet "WRITTEN BY MEMBER OF /RAAF ON ACTIVE SERVICE, in two lines in a box, without either dispatch or arrival datestamps.

It will be noticed that the question of airmail rates, which loomed large in the Middle East, has not been mentioned. A.I.F. Units did not arrive in the United Kingdom until the fall of France made the airmail service too irregular for its use to be encouraged. When special service airmail rates were 'introduced in the Middle East, it was expressly stipulated that the concession did not extend to Australian troops in the United Kingdom. Until the Imperial Airways and Qantas through service ceased completely in February 1942 (owing to Japanese occupation of Malaya and the East Indies) service personnel had to pay the civil airmail rate from U.K. to Australia, which had reverted to 1/3 sterling per ½ oz., when the "all up" airmail rates were discontinued at the beginning of the war.

The R.A.A.F. Base P.O. in London continued to render valuable service until the "folding up" period was over and the office closed at 1703 hours on July 12, 1946.

CHAPTER III . A.S.M. March 5, 1958

Egypt and First Libyan Campaign

BEFORE dealing with the postal history of the 6th Australian Divisiori in Egypt, it is necessary to explain the position prior to their arrival.

From the earliest times British troops stationed overseas were granted special postage rates. During the period between the World Wars, British troops were stationed in Egypt, where the postage rates were fixed by the Egyptian Government; these rates being so high as to prove onerous to the rank and file, and an arrangement was made in 1932 whereby members of the British Forces and their families were allowed to send letters to the British Isles at reduced rates.

For some time special "Army Seals" were used to denote that postage had been paid, but from 1936 these were replaced by special stamps, although the name "seal" still persisted in Service phraseology. In order to benefit by the special rates, persons eligible had to use the special stamps and post their letters at the Service Post Offices, where they were cancelled by the Service postmarks. The original datestamps bore numbers from 1 to 23, but these were withdrawn prior to the period with which we are dealing, and those in use in 1940 were numbered between E.601 and E.611. (See Fig. K).

The Army stamps were of two denominations, the 10 mils, red, which covered the ordinary postage on a single weight letter, and the 3m. green, which paid a special cheap rate on Christmas Cards. The first stamps were of large format and had the head of King Fuad, but were succeeded by the issue, in December 1939, of smaller stamps with a similar frame design but with the portrait of King Farouk. It is evident that the use of Fund stamps persisted into 1940, as I have seen covers addressed to Australia from R.A.N. ships in Mediterranean waters bearing same, even' as late as October 1940.

Although the rate had been fixed at 10m. per 20 grams for surface mail, no arrangement existed for any special airmail rate for the troops until, in September 1940, an arrangement was reached between the British and Egyptian Governments whereby the following tariff came into force:

Weight grams	Surface charge	Airmail charge	Total charge
10	10m	30m	40m
20	10m	60m	70m
30	20m	90m	110m
40	20m	120m	140m
	etc.	etc.	etc.

The above applied to all Allied Troops in Egypt, and covered postage by air, not only to the United Kingdom but to any Empire country served by Imperial Airways.

In the early part of 1940 the only Australians quartered in Egypt were individuals attached to other units and to schools, and the few covers seen passed through the British Military Post Offices in Egypt. Postmarks seen are B.P.O.602 and M.P.O. s E601, 603, 607 and 608 with dates between April and August 1940. I understand that, about August, a new Postal Unit arrived from the United Kingdom, furnished with the

standard type of datestamps (see Fig. D), and that this Anglo Egyptian type was withdrawn and returned to Ordnance.

On June 10, 1940, Italy declared war on the Allies with the result that Egypt's western frontier (the Italian colony of Libya) was openly hostile.

In September 1940 an Australian Branch Base Post Office was opened at Cairo. The datestamp used was A.M.1 (type Fig. B) and the earliest date seen is 3/10/40. For some weeks it was the practice to use blue ink.

In early October it is stated that there were three Australian F.P.O. in Egypt, 6th Div. HQ, (using DM.1), 16th Aust Bde. (M.1). and 17th Aust Bde. (M.2). The earliest date seen of the revived M.1 is 11/9/40 and of M.2 and D.M.1. 7/10/40 and 27/10/40 respectively. There was also a small off-loading party at Suez but I do not know whether they had a datestamp at that period.

In November the 18th Aus. Bde. arrived in Egypt to complete the 6th Aust. Div. The datestamp was W.3, and the earliest date seen is 29/11/40; again blue ink was used for a few days.

The standard organisation of a Division in the field includes a Postal Unit with the necessary personnel to operate five Field Post Offices, one at Div. H.Q., one at the H.Q. of each of the three Infantry Brigades and one at Divisional Supply H.Q. In the case of the 6th Aust. Div., the last to appear was The datestamp S P 1 for Supply, earliest date recorded 312/40. This was a reappearance as it had previously been used in Palestine.

Mention has already been made of a special 3m. Army stamp issued to pay postage on Christmas Cards. A certain number of these were used on dates between October 27 and 30 by Australian servicemen to Australia presumably they were told that this was the last surface mail sure to reach Australia in time for Christmas. I have also seen a solitary example of the use of a 4m. ordinary Egyptian stamp of the 1937 issue with datestamp M.1 on Oct. 30. Strangest of all, I have a cover addressed to England endorsed "Christmas Card only" and bearing a 3m. Army King Fuad green, so the 3m. Army King Farouk must have run out of stock on this occasion? I have seen the 3m. Army Fuad cancelled by postmarks D.M.1, M.1, and M.2. They are most desirable items.

It is not proposed to deal at length with the interesting study of Censor Marks, but it may be mentioned that, while stationed in Palestine, the A.I.F. used either the horizontal rectangle or the A.I.F. type as indicated in Chapter 1. Almost immediately after each formation arrived in Egypt, these types were substituted by another consisting of two concentric squares, with a number in the centre: between the squares are the four words "Passed by unit censor" one on each side. I have been told that the omission of a Crown was to prevent hurting Egyptian susceptibilities.

Having come from Palestine, where surface mail was free, the troops took a poor view of having to pay the higher rate of 10m. (3d.) for surface mail and 40c. (1/-) for single airmail. Efforts were made to get the Egyptian Government to allow the rates in force in Palestine after the reduction in November 1940, but they adopted a "won't play" attitude. However, by tacit agreement with the British Government, all forces in the Western Desert were given free postage on surface mail and "Western Desert" was considered to mean "West of Alexandria".

On December 7, 1940, the offensive opened, and the Italians were heavily defeated and Sidi Barrani taken. The 6th Aust. Div. did not participate in this initial attack, but bore a prominent part in the taking of Bardia (January 6), Tobruk (January 22), Derna (January 30) and Benghazi (February 7).

The lengthening lines of communication which from the postal angle extended from Aust. Base P.O. at Cairo to the Australian troops in Libya, naturally required much organisation and work to prevent delays. In the early stages of the advance, mails, in company with supplies, must have been picked up from the Divisional Railhead at Mersa Matruh. Later on the road transport could not cope with the distances and mails were, for a time, sent by sea from Alexandria to Sollum and later to Tobruk. Aust. L. of C. Postal Units were brought in to operate an Aust. Army P.O. at Alexandria which used the British F.P.O. datestamp number 443, of which the previous history appears in Chapter II. The earliest date seen of this usage is 7/1/41.



Fig.B



Fig.D



Fig.K

Another L. of C. P.U. detachment, using "P.2" first appears on 9/1/41 and this was probably first in use at Sollum and then moved to Tobruk.

At this period the Australian Army Postal Service must have been extremely short of datestamps. To help things out, someone remembered the Anglo Egyptian type datestamps in store at Ordnance, and some of these were loaned by the British Army. Nos. E.607 and E.608 (both with M.P.O. at top) were issued to reinforce the overworked "A.M.1" at Cairo Base P.O. these are seldom seen on letters until later in 1941, as they were first normally used for registration and parcels however, in March, 1941, E.608 was used on letters for a few days.

E.606 is stated to have been used by the Off Loading Party at Suez, but I have yet to see an example of its employment.

E.605 (F.P.O. at top) was issued to the Brigade F.P.O. of the 18th Aust. Bde. lately arrived from England. This Brigade saw action early in 1941 in the capture of Girabub Oasis from the Italians, after which they returned east and were stationed at Ikingi Maryut, a staging camp on the railway, some 10 miles west of Alexandria. The earliest date of this mark encountered is 6/2/41.

Reverting to the question of postage stamps, for all practical purposes one can use the singular and not the plural, as the only one encountered is the 10m. red Farouk Army Seal. Until stationed west of Alexandria, one stamp was necessary for surface mail and four or seven for airmail, according to whether it was single or double weight. From the Table shown earlier in this Chapter, it will be seen that the charge was made up of 10m. postage and 30m. airmail surcharge. I have not been able to find any authority for the change but from about January 29 onwards the majority of airmail letters emanating from the 6th Aust. Div. have three stamps only (30m.). Probably it occurred to some bright soul that surface postage was free and that the airmail rate was 30m. and not 40m. In any case the position was that these Egyptian Army stamps were being used abroad, i.e., in Libya, beyond the Egyptian frontier.

As from February 8, 1941, the A.I.F. in Libya were ordered to use Australian postage stamps, and the same rates were introduced as from Palestine. It follows that the 30m. rate is only found for about a fortnight, and these covers are comparatively scarce in no case do they bear indication that the 30m. rate was other than perfectly valid. Once Australian stamps were introduced in Libya, the mail bags originating from there were handled throughout by the Australian Army Postal Service, even while in transit through Egyptian territory; whereas letters originating from Australian units stationed in Egypt still used the Egyptian Seals and the transport of the bags behind Aust. Base P.O. was still performed by the Egyptian Civil Postal Authorities.

CHAPTER IV April 5, 1958

TOBRUK.

By early in 1941 the strength of the Australian Forces in the Middle East had reached that of an Army Corps, comprising Corps Troops and three Divisions.

As early as February the system was adopted of numbering the Australian Army Post Offices in the area. The following are those listed in May 1941, with the datestamp then in use at each:

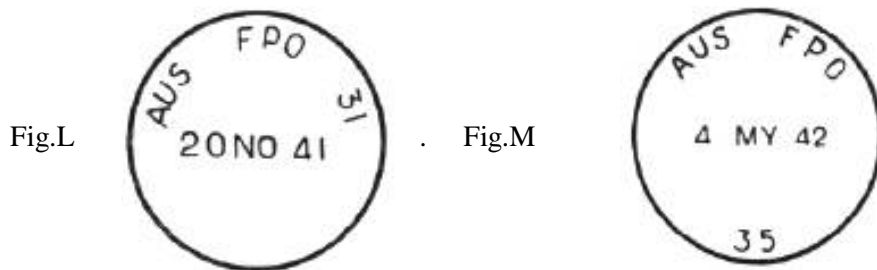
Number		Location or Formation	Date-Stamp
1	a	Kilo 89	Pl
2	a	Deir Seneid	RW1
3	a	Dimra	E605

4	a	Beit Jirja	AW 1
5	a	Barbara	DW1
6	a	Julis	E611
7	a	Mughazi	W1
8	a	Nozeiret	F.P.O.26
9	a	Khosso	W2
10	a	Hill 69	E609
11	a	Jerusalem	AP1
12	b	Aust Corps P U	-
13	b	Aust Corps P U	-
14	b	Aust Corps P U	
15	b	Aust Corps PU	
16		Spare	
17		Spare	-
18	c	Alexandria (Atlantic Hotel)	F.P.O. 443 star
19	c	Ikingi Meryut	F.P.O. 444 star
20	c	Tobruk	P2
21	d	6th Div Supply	-
22	d	6th Div HQ	
23	d	16th Bde	
24	d	17th Bde	
25	d	19th Bde	
26		Spare	
27		Spare	
28	e	7th Div Supply	F.P.O. 28
29	e	25th Bde	P3
30	e	21st Bde	M3
31	e	18th Bde	Aus F.P.O 31
32	e	7 th DivHQ	Aus F.P.O 32
33	f	20th Bde	Aus F.P.O 33
34	f	9th Div Supply	Aus F.P.O 34
35	f	24th Bde	Aus F.P.O 35
36	f	26th Bde	Aus F.P.O 36
37	f	9th Div HQ	Aus F.P.O 37
38		Spare	
		a. Palestine Lines of Communication P.U. b. Australian Corps P.U. c. Egypt Lines of Communication P.U. d. 6th Aust. Div. P.U. e. 7th Aust. Div. P.U. f. 9th Aust. Div. P.U.	

If no datestamp is shown, this indicates that the office in question was not functioning at the time that the list was compiled.

In February 1941 it was decided to send an Expeditionary Force to Greece, the Australian components of which were to consist of Aust. Corps H.Q. and the seasoned 6th Division to be followed later by the 7th Division. As a preliminary, the 9th Division was sent from Palestine to Libya to relieve the 6th Division.

Apparently while in transit, the 20th Bde. (which relieved the 17th Bde. in the most forward position around El Aguila) was allotted datestamp F.P.O. 444, already mentioned in Chapter II. The cover I have with this postmark is dated 15.3.41. The remaining troops of the 9th Division relieved the other two Brigades of the 6th Division near Tobruk and the whole of the latter Division was withdrawn to the Alexandria area. The latest dates I can record of the 6th Div. datestamps at that period are M.1 4.3.41; M.2 24.3.41; W.3 19.3.41; D.M.1 24.3.41 and S.P.1 18.3.41. From these dates it would seem that some may have been used for a short time in Egypt and the remainder in two lines. Not infrequently the office number is difficult to read, so the position of the number and the distribution of the date is of material assistance in identification.



Those of us who were trying to classify these datestamps had a lot of fun in the early days after their appearance. It was noticed that No. 31 had two types, differing in the distance between the letter "O" and the figure "3". As time went on, varieties multiplied and eventually I tumbled to the idea that we were dealing with "skeleton" datestamps with movable type assembled in slots. This made it unlikely that the type could be reassembled in the same position after being cleaned. Long after I had confirmation of this diagnosis. The thought has also occurred to me that some or all of these "skeleton reliefs" are veterans of World War I, having been "won" by the Palestine Government in 1919, when the troops departed.

The allocation of these reinforcement datestamps has been given already in the List. 31 was first allotted to the A.P.O. at Ikingi Maryut Camp on March 16 and Nos. 33/38 sent to O.C. 9th Div. P.U. on March 20.

It has already been mentioned that L. of C. A.P.O. No. 20, using datestamp P2, was moved to Tobruk soon after its capture; the presence of this office in their neighbourhood probably accounts for some time elapsing, after their issue, before examples of 33 to 37 are found. Datestamp 444 was with

The Anglo Egyptian datestamps (type K.) plus the windfall of British F.P.O. 443 and 444 from the United Kingdom and two others F.P.O. 26 and 28, loaned by G.H.Q., M.E., did not long suffice to stay the dearth. The next move to overcome the shortage was an appeal to Palestine Post Office, which came to the rescue with eight postmarks with the inscription AUS F.P.O. and numbers from 31 to 38. Nos. 31, 34 and 36 had the number located at the top, in continuation of the inscription, whereas the others had it at the foot. Furthermore Nos. 31, 32, 35 and 36 had the date in one line drawn from the 20th Bde. and presumably No. 33 then issued in any case the former was returned to Egypt.

At the end of March Rommel attacked and the 20th Bde. retired to join the other two Brigades of the 9th Div. at Tobruk. It having been decided to hold the town, the 18th Bde. was sent there by sea, taking with them datestamp AUS F.P.O. 31; previously this Bde. had used E.605, as mentioned in Chapter III. It follows that covers datestamped with Nos. 31, 33 to 37 and also P.2 emanate from beleaguered Tobruk after 12.4.41.

I have also seen examples of covers, known to have originated from Tobruk, which have not been postmarked prior to reaching Alexandria or even the Aust. Base P.O. at Cairo. With regard to the adhesive stamps used by the A.I.F. in Tobruk these are nearly always Australian, the only exception being the occasional use of English the few examples of the latter seen being in July, 1941. I have no definite evidence that there was ever a shortage of Australian stamps prior to November 1941, but it is curious how many covers carry one each of the 6d. and 3d., to make up the 9d. rate in fact it is odds on that the cover comes from Tobruk if it bears this combination.

The Australian L. of C. Post Office continued to function in Tobruk during the siege. Quoting from Chester Wilmot in his book "Tobruk" - "Throughout the bombing an Australian Postal Unit operated in the bank building, and by August was handling up to fifty tons of mail a week. The Australian people flooded Tobruk Post Office with 5,000 parcels and more than 50,000 letters a week. The average weekly mail was then 700 bags inwards and 350 outwards . . . The Post Office, during one month sold £3,200 worth of Australian stamps."

From August onwards the gradual relief of the Australian garrison took place. The 18th Bde. left in that month, 24th in September and 20th and 26th at the end of October. The latest dates I have seen of FPO 31 is 18.8.41; FPO 3320.10.41; FPO 3417.8.41; FPO 352.9.41 and FPO 362.4.41. No example has been seen of the use of FPO 37 at this period. The last date seen of FPO 29 (P.2) is 8.10.41 and I have never heard of a case of the use of this datestamp subsequently.

The only Australian Unit to remain in Tobruk and to have the honour to come out overland was the 2/13th Bat. of 20th Bde. When the last Australian Unit embarked, the 2/13th was left with a supply of 3d. and 9d. Australian stamps, and, when these were used up, they bought English stamps, and consequently the postage rate was raised to 10d. (the English rate). Letters from the 2/13th passed through the F.P.O. of the formation to which they were attached and were cancelled with the datestamp 155 (type D.). The siege was raised on December 10 and the battalion left for Syria on December 17.

CHAPTER, VI I June 5, 1958

Cyprus, Syria, Etc., 1941

IT WAS the intention that the 7th Aust. Div. should follow the 6th to Greece, and as the latter embarked, units of the 7th were brought from Palestine to Egypt. It will be seen, from the list in Chapter IV, that the F.P.O. numbers allotted to the 7th were 28/32. From April 15, datestamp P.3. (FPO 2925th Bde.) appears cancelling Egyptian seals, and I have one example of Aus. F.P.O.31 (7th Div. H.Q.) cancelling the seals on April 24., this being actually the first day when Australian stamps were permissible.

Evidently a relic of the Libyan campaign was that Italian stamps were obtainable as souvenirs. I have a cover with P.3 obliterating three Italian and one Egyptian as well as the 9d. Australian. As the date is April 29, the Platypus did the work, Pegasus, Fuad, Victor Emanuel & Co. supplying solely glamour. A fashionable souvenir at this period was the use of Italian Airmail envelopes, of which quite a spate reached Australia. The etiquette reads PER VIA AEREA/POR AVION and this and the borders of the envelope are printed in sky blue. Maybe these were obtainable in shops and not the fruits of victory? Owing to Rommel's advance in Libya, the move of the 7th to Greece was cancelled and certain units of the Division were diverted to the Western Desert. These moves, combined with the situation created by the return of troops from Greece and Crete caused the creation of the following FPOs. on various dates.

No.	Location or Formation	Date Stamp
39	Mersa Matruh (Egypt)	443B
40	Hill 95 (Palestine)	445
41	Crete (never opened) Qastina Camp (Palestine)	W2
42	2 A.G.H. (Kantara, Egypt)	E.608
43	B.O. Depot (TelelKebir Egypt)	Egypt No. 7
44	1 A.G.H. (Gaza Ridge, Palestine)	444
45	7 A.G.H. (Rehovat, Palestine)	445
46	5 A.G.H. (Gura, Eretria)	A.P.1
47	Suez, Egypt	E.606
48	TelAviv (Palestine)	E.607

It will be noted that datestamp 443, with star, was previously shown

as being in use at F.P.O.18 (Alexandria), but it was probably withdrawn from there when Egypt No.61 was issued. In its new location it bore the letter "B" instead of the star.

The situation created by the German occupation of Greece resulted in a Mixed Brigade being sent to garrison Cyprus in May, 1941. The Australian component was the 7th Aus. Div. Cavalry Regiment and the postal orderly was provided with a stock of 9d. Platypus stamps. The Brigade F.P.O. was at Nikosia and used datestamp F.P.O. 122 (type D) the previous use of which has been already mentioned in Chapters I and V. I have a registered cover sent from Cyprus with No. 122 on July 10; the peculiarity is that the airmail postage is paid by a 9d. Platypus and the Registration Fee by a 3d. English stamp. The combination is "nonphilatelic" as the 9d. was the only Australian stamp available. The Brigade returned to the mainland in the middle of August.

Later in 1941 an arrangement was come to between the Directors of Army Posts of the various British Forces, whereby any of their stamps were available and interchangeable between the various forces on the insurance "knock and knock" system. The idea was to cut out accountancy between the various forces. Although no order to this effect was published, yet the arrangement became known. A friend of mine is proud of a cover he sent to his wife from Palestine, the 9d. airmail rate being satisfied by 1d. S. Africa, 3d. and 1d. New Zealand, 3d. U.K. and 1d. Australian.

I do not possess anything so elaborate, but have a number of samples of mixed frankings, which must be labelled with that term of opprobrium "philatelic" unless they can be proved to be otherwise. In another class may be graded the occasional cover one meets bearing a few stamps with no franking power, put on the cover "for the kids". Apparently the majority of Australian F.P.Os. were most obliging in putting the datestamp on these adornments; and, as they were sent by one "stampconscious" person to another, their rate of survival has been high.

The Syrian campaign commenced on June 8 and the 7th Aust. Div., less 18th Bde. (still in Tobruk) bore an active part from the start. The datestamps in use were those shown for F.P.Os. 28, 29, 30 and 32 in the list in Chapter IV. Shortly after the issue of datestamps to Aust. Corps P.U. (F.P.Os. 13/15) these start appearing (see next paragraph for dates of issue). In July No. 13 was in use at Advanced Corps H.Q. on Lebanon and 14 at Haifa (Palestine) which was probably then Corps Railhead.

On October 10, 6th Aust. Div. P.U. arrived in Syria, which meant the appearance of datestamps 21/24. The earliest example I know is No. 22 on October 18.

On July 4 a major postal event was the arrival of a batch of new datestamps from Australia. These bore numbers 1 to 24, less Nos. 17 to 20 which were sent to Malaya. All these had a single outer circle and had the date in one line in the centre. The serial number comes at the bottom, preceded by "No." and flanked by arcs. In the case of Nos. 1 to 4 the inscription at the top is AUST BASE P.O. (Fig. P) and 5 to 24 read A.I.F. FIELD P.O. (Fig. Q).



Nos 5 to 10 were issued to the F.P.Os. with those numbers on July 9 and No. 11 to F.P.O. 11 (Jerusalem) on July 15, thus releasing A.P.1. Nos. 12 to 15 were given to Aust. Corps P.U. and Nos. 21 to 24 to 6th Aust. Div. P.U., but it was laid down that datestamps issued to Formations were only for use in the field and not while in camp in Palestine. No. 16 was kept in reserve for the time being.

The issue of the above meant that the datestamps previously in use at F.P.Os. 5 to 11 were freed and W.1 from F.P.O. 7 was reissued to F.P.O. 3, releasing E.605. E.605, E.609 (ex F.P.O. 10) and E.611 (ex F.P.O 6) were returned to G.H.Q., M.E., on July 30. D.W. 1 (ex F.P.O. 5) was issued to F.P.O. 40 on August 1, releasing No. 445 which, in its turn, was reissued to F.P.O. 45 in September-October.

F.P.Os. 18 and 19 were closed in about November, but, prior to this, datestamp 444 from F.P.O. 19 must have been withdrawn, as it was reissued to F.P.O. 44 when it opened on September 8. F.P.O. 41 originally destined for Crete was eventually opened at Qastina Camp in October and W.2 (previously retired from F.P.O. 9) was issued to this office.

Datestamps Nos. 1 to 4 were issued to Aust. Base P.O. at Cairo early in July, and Sub Base at Gaza continued to use B.W.1. At first the Base P.O. used No. 4 and, later on, Nos. 1 and 2 occur, but I have never seen an example of the use of No. 3, although it may have been used on parcels? The issue of these liberated A.M.1, E.607 and E.608. A.M.1 was reissued to F.P.O. 39 on Aug. 1, releasing 443B and E607 and E608 were issued to F.P.Os. 48 and 42 respectively indeed E.608 must have been released by Cairo Base prior to the arrival of the new datestamps as it is recorded in use at F.P.O. 42 as early as May. F.P.O. 39, at Mersa Matruh, ceased to function in about September, 1941.

Details of this game of "General Post" are wearisome, but they must be left on record.

I am told that Aust. Base P.O. was moved from Cairo to TelelKebir (“Tek”) on October 30, 1941. An ordinary F.P.O. continued to function in Cairo and I think that datestamp No. 16 was used there. On July 14 a noteworthy event was the issue of Airmail Letter Cards, which allowed a short missive on a special form to be sent by air to Australia for 3d. During the succeeding period there were a number of distinguishable types, which can be classified by the presence or absence of AUSTRALIA at the foot of the address, the wording and distribution of the instructions printed in the “box” for the adhesive stamp and the design of the “allover” pattern backing the address. Some were printed in Australia and others apparently printed locally.

In November a special issue was printed for sending seasonal greetings. There were two varieties of these, which differed in the inscription below the Mosque to the left of the space for the address. One wording reads “Greetings from the/A.I.F. Middle East/XmasNew Year/194142.” in four lines (Fig. R.), while the second type differed in that the second line read “Aust. Forces M.E.”. This Christmas Air Letter is also known with the word “Australia” missing in the address, but I have not heard of these being used by members of the Australian Forces.

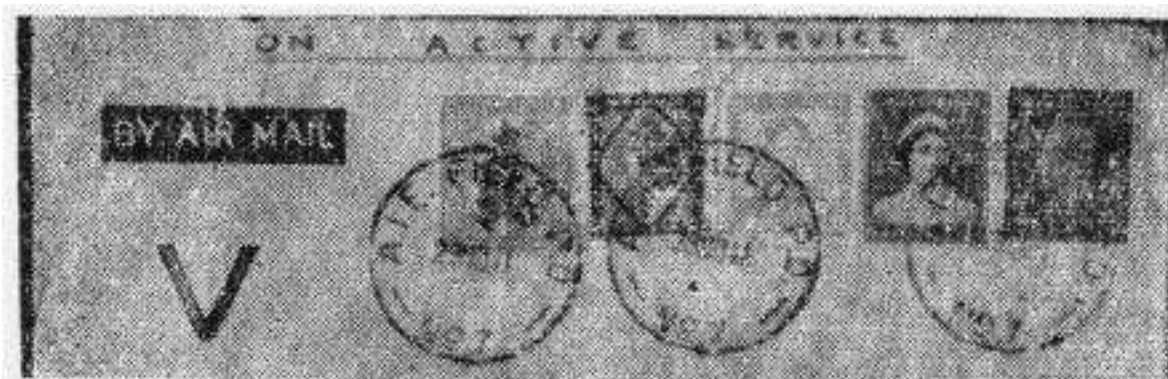


Fig.O

Fig.R



It will have been noted, in the List, that F.P.O. 46 was located at Gura (Eritrea) which is on the rail” way from Massawa to Agordat. This was the site of a large convalescent camp where men who were likely to be fit for active service within three months were sent instead of evacuating them home. The 5th A.G.H. arrived

at Gura in September and left for Barbara (Palestine) in December. The datestamp issued to F.P.O. 46 was A.P.1 and I have seen some examples of it cancelling Australian stamps at this period. However, I have also seen letters from Gura to Australia bearing Indian stamps cancelled by Indian military datestamp No. 90. The postal history of the Eritrean campaign and subsequent occupation has been written up in a masterly manner by B. de Burca in "Stamp Collecting" for 10/12/54.

A few points still need elucidation. E.606 is shown as assigned to the Mail Offloading party at Suez, later F.P.O. 46, but I have never seen an example of its use. F.P.O. 25 (19th Bde. 6th Div.) lost its datestamp W.3 in Crete and presumably was issued later with a replacement, but I have yet to discover what it was. Life would be dull if no scope for discoveries remained! In addition to British "Field Post Office" datestamps (type D) mentioned as loaned to the Australian Army Posts or used by Australian troops under circumstances described, I have examples of Nos. 37, 40, 51, 67, 121, 154, 164, 187 and 201 used to cancel Australian stamps on covers addressed by servicemen to Australia. According to a serial article by Crouch and Hill which appeared in the "Philatelic Adviser" in 1948, all these were in use in the Middle East in 1941. There is no reason to think that any of them were ever at Australian Field Post Offices.

CHAPTER VII July 5, 1958

THE YEAR 1942

AN EVENT which altered the whole future of the A.I.F. in the Middle East was the entry of Japan into the war on December 6, 1941. The crippling of the American Fleet at Pearl Harbour, followed by the successes of the Japanese armed forces in Hong Kong, Malaya and the Philippines, caused anxiety to be felt for the safety of Australia.

In December, 1941, a telegram was sent to the Government of the Netherlands East Indies requesting free postage on surface mail and the right to use Australian stamps on airmail from their territory if Australian troops should be stationed there. The request was verbally agreed to. However, although certain A.I.F. units from the Middle East were landed and fought against the Japanese in Java, I have yet to encounter proof that such facilities were availed of.

During the opening months of 1942, Australian Corps H.Q. and the 6th and 7th Australian Division left the Middle East theatre, only the Australian 9th Division remaining in Syria and certain Base and Depot troops in Palestine.

The Australian 6th Division, with the 16th and 17th Brigades, landed in Ceylon and formed part of the defence forces there from March until July 13, when they departed homeward bound. During this period, datestamps Nos. 21, 22, 23 and 24 (Type "Q") are known used in Ceylon they can usually be identified by the censor mark, which takes the form of two concentric triangles with PASSED/BY UNIT CENSOR interposed on the three sides, and figures, preceded by the letter "C", in the centre. The majority of the covers are stampless, but Australian stamps must have been available, as occasionally one finds a cover with a 3d. stamp, the object being to pay the inland airmail rate from Fremantle to destination. I only know No. 21 used on parcels which are said to have largely contained ebony elephants designed, maybe, to indicate when the sender sent from? After the return of this force to Australia datestamps 21 to 24 continued in use for a lengthy period.

The 19th Brigade, forming the balance of the 6th Division, returned direct to Australia and was sent to the Darwin area. Soon after arrival there, it was issued with datestamp reading A.I.F. FIELD P.O. at top and 25 at bottom. 12 Australian General Hospital was sent from Australia to Ceylon and took with it a datestamp reading ARMY POST OFFICE at top and 067 at bottom (Fig. T). This is the only instance I know of a datestamp of this series (sometimes referred to as "prefix O") doing duty outside Australia and the Pacific area. Incidentally, this series ran from 01 to 0145, although there are certain numbers the use of which has not been reported. This A.G.H. remained in Ceylon until December 24, 1942, when it returned to Australia. During the latter portion of its stay, a round censor mark was in use bearing the inscription UNIT CENSOR/INDIA and a number prefixed by the letter "X". What happened to postmark 067 after that, I do not know. The 7th Aust. Div., less one or two units, returned direct to Australia, and arriving at the end of March, and was speedily sent to Papua to



stem the threat on Port Moresby.

Fig.T

The 21st Brigade of this Division continued to use M.3 in Australia until June 11, 1942, when it was replaced by one reading A.I.F. FIELD P.O. -27-.

I have no record of datestamps AUS F.P.O. 31 and 32 (of the Palestine "skeleton" type), used in the Middle East by 18th Bde. and 7 Aust. Div. H.Q., being used in Australia, but they were brought back and returned by L.H.Q. Melbourne to the Palestine Government on August 7.

It will be remembered that 7th Div. Supply used a loaned British Army datestamp number 28. This was also brought back to Australia, never used (as far as I am aware) and returned to G.H.Q., M.E. on August 7. I am told that it was in use at Lydda, Palestine, later on.P.3, used by 25th Bde., 7th Div., is a bit of a mystery. I have no record of it being used after October 1941, when the Brigade was in Syria, nor of it being replaced yet it did come back to Australia.

In the latter part of 1942 the 7th Division was using datestamps 27, 28, 53 and 54, all with the inscription A.I.F. FIELD P.O., but I do not know how they were allocated within the Division.

Aust. Corps brought back with them their datestamps Nos. 12 to 16 and 12 to 15 were used by 1st Aust. Corps P.U. for a short time in Queensland and then in Papua/ New Guinea. No. 14 is generally found as a transit backstamp on registered letters. No. 16 had a rest until it was put into use on Treasury Island, in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate in 1944/5.

Of the datestamp with inscription AUS BASE P.O. and Nos. 1 to 4, No. 2 arrived back in Australia in April 1942. It was used to datestamp letters written on a transport which were landed at Adelaide. Nos. 1 and 4 continued in use at Aust. Base P.O. in Egypt.

As previously stated, the 9th Aust. Div. remained in Syria. When Rommel again thrust at Egypt in July 1942, this Division was rapidly transferred there as reinforcements. On October 23, the 8th Army, under General Montgomery, assumed the offensive in the battle of Alamein. After taking part in this battle, the 9th was withdrawn to Palestine.

The 9th Aust. Div. P.U. was issued with datestamps 33 to 38 as detailed in Chapter IV. I have evidence of the use of 33 to 37 during the period that the Division was in Syria. This is the first appearance of 37 and I have no evidence that 38 was ever used. All the datestamps 33 to 37 were again in use in Egypt, and, curiously enough, their use continued in Palestine, contrary to the previous practice that "Field" datestamps were not to be used when troops were in standing camps.

A few of the major vagaries of these "skeleton" datestamps may be mentioned. In 1941, No. 35 had the number at top, in continuation of the inscription AUS F.P.O. but in 1942 it had migrated to the bottom. Both in January 1942 and 1943 No. 36 appears for a time without the year presumably because new slugs had not been requisitioned.

When the 9th Aust. Div. left Syria, the only Australian troops to remain were the Railway Construction Cos., engaged in building the new railway from Acre (Palestine) to Beirut (Syria). So long as the 9th Div. was there, the correspondence of these Coys. went through F.P.O. 27 (Div. H.Q.) but afterwards it passed through Field Post Office 552 at Beirut. The line was opened for traffic on 20/1.2/42, and the Australian Railway Coys. were withdrawn in January 1943. From a list dated October 1942, it appears that the following Australian Lines of Communications Army Post Offices were functioning, in addition to those belonging to the 9th Aust. Div., which was then in Egypt:

No.	Location	Datestamp
1.	Kilo 89	P.1
4.	Beit Jirje	A.W.1
5.	1 Aust. Conv. Depot	5
6.	Mughazi	6
8.	Nazeirit	8

9.	Rafah	9
10.	Hill 69	10
11.	Jerusalem	11
40.	Hill 95	D.W.1
44.	1 A.G.H., Gaza Ridge	444
45.	7 A.G.H., Rehovat	445
48.	Telaviv	E.607

As from January 1, 1943, the N.C.O. i/c F.P.O. 45 was ordered to use R.W.1. The reason for the withdrawal of 445 (by that time I believe that No. 44 was closed) may have been that it was desired to return datestamps 443, 444 and 445 to G.H.Q., M.E., before leaving the area. In any case they were returned and 443 was later used at Malta and 445 at Cairo in 1,945.

CHAPTER VIII August 5, 1958

1943 Onward

IN JANUARY 1943 the 9th Aust. Div. embarked for Australia and brought back datestamps AUS FIELD P.O. 33 to 38. I have never seen any of them used in Australia and they were returned through L.H.Q. to the Palestine Post Office, who acknowledged them in a letter dated July 31, 1943. In lieu, the Divisional P.U. was issued with datestamps of the "prefix O" type, Nos. 033 to 038 (Fig. T.), but with the word FIELD substituted for ARMY in the inscription at top. These datestamps had previously been in use by 2nd Aust. Div., from whom they were withdrawn for reissue to the 9th.

Soon after the departure of the 9th, the L. of C. offices faded out, the last date I have seen being No. 8 on February 24.

In addition to those already mentioned, a few of the Middle East datestamps were later used in Australia and the Western Pacific. A.P.1 can be found with dates between July/December 1942 there is some evidence that it was at the F.P.O. of the same A.G.H. which used it in Eritrea. A.W.1 had a brief innings in April 1943, soon after its repatriation. Perhaps the most curious is datestamp E.608 (Fig. K) which we last met on the Suez Canal at F.P.O. 42 (2 A.G.H., Kantara). This postmark had a second bloom between April/December 1942 when 2 A.G.H. was at Atherton Tablelands in Queensland.

Nos. 7 and 8 (Fig. Q.) were issued to No. 7 Base P.O. at Port Moresby, later A.P.O. Port Moresby in 1944/5. No. 8 is almost invariably used as a transit backstamp on registered letters.

When the last Australian Army units left the Middle East, this did not mean that no Australians were left in the area. The Empire Training Scheme had borne fruit, and Australian aircrew were to be found, with their brothers of other Dominions, forming part of the personnel of the R.A.F. squadrons in the area. From 1942 onwards there was growing dissatisfaction over delays in the correspondence of Australian airmen in the Middle East and the cadre of a R.A.A.F. Postal Unit from Australia was sent to Cairo and R.A.A.F. Base P.O. No. 5 was opened there on April 18, 1943. By June 1943, this Base P.O. had a throughput of 150,000 articles per month.



Fig.S.

The Unit took with them from Australia a datestamp with inscription "R.A.A.F. BASE P.O. No. 5/M.E. (Fig. S), but this is seldom seen as most of the mail had received a Field Post Office obliteration before reaching Base P.O. No stock of Australian stamps was ever held. The office closed on February 16, 1946.

From early 1943 the airmail service from Britain to Australia, via Middle East, first became irregular and then ceased altogether, due to the conquest of Malaya, etc., by the Japanese. In August 1943 the Airgraph Service was extended to operate between Australia and Cairo and materially speeded up correspondence. To show what a boon this was, a total of 417,465 Service Airgraphs were handled between Cairo and Australia and 548,246 in the opposite direction.

Many Australian airmen also served in the South East Asia Command, and a small liaison party was sent from Australia to R.A.F. Base P.O., Ceylon, to deal, as far as possible, with the postal requirements of these men. This party was not provided with a datestamp but examples seen appear to prove that they at least had a supply of 3d. Australian stamps. These must have been sold through Base P.O. to be used on letters to Australia to pay the domestic airmail postage from Fremantle. Those seen are cancelled with a dateless postmark reading "R.A.F. BASE P.O./CEYLON", generally in purple (Fig. U). The same postmark appears on parcels sent from Ceylon to Australia, but, in the case of these, Ceylon stamps were used.



Fig.U

In conclusion, it may be of interest to give a list of the Australian stamps which I have seen on service covers from the Middle East to Australia during the period 1940/43. In the case of some of the scarcer items, it may well be that the stamps were never issued by the Australian Army Postal Service, but that they were sent, on stamped addressed envelopes, to men serving in the theatre.

Value	Design type	SG
1d.	Queen Mother	40a
1d.	A.I.F. and Nurse	42
1½d	d. King George VI	29
2d.	King George VI	40b
3d.	King George VI (blue)	31
3d.	A.I.F. and Nurse	42
3d.	King George VI (brown)	31
4d.	Koala	32
5d.	Merino Ram	33
6d.	Kookaburra	34
6d.	A.I.F. and Nurse	42
9d.	Kangaroo	1
9d.	Platypus	35
1/-	Lyre Bird	36
2/-	Kangaroo	1

Also the 1d. green embossed (K.G. VI) envelope. Naturally it has only been possible to accumulate and correlate this information by the cooperation of many kind folk. When this article was first published in this Journal in 1946/47, a number of people wrote giving further data and this, together with details from other sources, now appears in this revised edition. It would be invidious to mention names of some who have helped and so, by inference, omit others. I prefer to mention only one name that stalwart (if not in stature) of Australian philately, John Hambly. John used to trip into my office, in 1940, with covers from the war theatres and expatiate upon their charms; and, eventually, he infected me with the bug! At 83, John went ahead to a land of peace. And so, I bid you adieu and thanks for reading.

FINIS.