

## **Egyptian Military Post Offices of the E600 series.**

**by Alistair Kennedy**

At the time of his death, Alan Brown was working on a study of the use of these destamps and this article is based on Alan's notes and records, supplemented by my own researches.

### **Background**

At the start of the Second World War there was a British garrison in Egypt for defence of British interests in Egypt, most specifically the Suez Canal. It was not until the fall of France in June 1940 and entry of Italy into the war on the side of Germany reinforcements for Egypt were required, Italy having the colony of Libya on Egypt's western frontier and Eritrea, Somalia and occupied Ethiopia to the east of Sudan.

Since 1932 the troops enjoyed a postal concession rate of 10 mills for a surface letter and 3 mills for greetings cards, these being lower than the Egyptian civil rates postage was paid by use of the NAAFI seals from 1932 to 1936, then by the Army Post stamps (large size depicting King Fuad, followed by the small size King Farouk issued on 12 December 1939) until 30th April 1941. In conjunction with the postal concession named Military Post Office datestamps came into use in 1932 at the principal garrison towns. Soon after the outbreak of war a series of numbered datestamps replaced the named datestamps or use of civil post offices. The numbers were in the range E601 to (eventually) E615, although not all were used.

### **The use of E601 to E615, 1939-1940**

The numbers were presumably allotted by the War Office for security purposes following on from the SP500 series used in Singapore and Malaya, but the datestamps were produced locally in Egypt. E602 was inscribed BPO (Base PO) (two stamps) or MPO (Military PO) (one stamp). E601 had five easily distinguished stamps inscribed MPO, and MPO was also used for E603, E604, E607 and E608. The other numbers used were designated FPO (Field Post Office - potentially mobile). The earliest recorded use is on 1st October 1939. These post offices were not staffed by Royal Engineers (Postal Section) personnel, but by soldiers drawn from units stationed in Egypt, presumably some at least with postal experience in civilian life. The service was run (in September 1940) by Lieut Cox. A senior British postal officer, Assistant Director of Army Postal Services Lt Col R E Evans arrived in Cairo from England on 20th July 1940, followed on 23rd August by postal units including 5 Line of Communications P U and "B" Divisional P U. Personnel of these units were soon attached to the existing military post offices (5 L of C P U - the static offices and "B" Div P U - the field offices in the Western Desert) to gradually transform them into full field post offices, and some additional offices were opened. On 24 September 1940 the REPS formally took over the postal service, redesignating the offices with standard nomenclature of the period: "S" for stationary APO, and "H", "D" or simple number (each in conjunction with letter "E" for Egypt) for respectively Corps, Division or Brigade (or equivalent) FPO. Each office was issued with a standard double ring FIELD POST OFFICE datestamp. MPO ABU SUEIR (serving RAF units) was not replaced by a numbered MPO datestamp or FPO, and continued in use at least until at least 7th October 1940. Occasional usage of MPO CAIRO continued into 1940. The following table shows the Military POs operating prior to the REPS takeover, and the new FPO designation and datestamp number, the earlier named MPO datestamps used are also noted. Some named datestamps (having ABU QIR) apparently ceased to be used some years prior to the introduction of numbered MPOs. Some E offices were opened as detachments of Indian offices in the Western Desert. A few REPS offices opened shortly before the official takeover date, but it is not known what datestamps were used at these prior to 24th September.

### **Usage after September 1940**

The numbered 'E' series of datestamps became obsolete on 24th September 1940 (with the possible exception of E610 which apparently continued in use for some months) and were then held in store. However they came in useful to make up for a shortage of Australian and Indian datestamps, and to a lesser extent British ones.

#### **(i) Australian FPOs**

Six of them (605, 606, 607, 608, 609 and 611) were borrowed by the Australian Army postal Service in November 1940. These had varied use at Australian FPOs in the Middle East, mainly Palestine. However receipt of new datestamps from Australia in July 1941 enabled three (605, 609, 611) to be returned on 30th July. Two more (606, 607) were returned in late 1942 or early 1943. The remaining one (608) was taken back to Australia and used there for some months during 1943. The use of E608 in Australia as recorded by Collas appears to be inaccurate. He recorded E608 used by 2/1 Australian General Hospital in Queensland from April to December 1942; but he also shows that hospital was served by FPO 057 in Western Australia during the same period! 2/2 Australian General Hospital is shown as served by Unit Postal Station E42 in Queensland from mid 1942 to early 1944. I therefore think that it was 2/2 AGH which used the E608 datestamp, possibly before E42 opened, and subsequently as a supplementary datestamp at that office. This is logical as E608 (coincidentally as FPO 42) had served 2/2 AGH in Egypt until about January 1942. A registered cover postmarked E608 on 11th May 1943 shows the office designation as FPO 42, and passed in transit through Cairns, Queensland.

#### **(ii) Indian FPOs**

Datestamp numbers E601, 602, 603, 604 and 615 were used by the Indian Army Postal Service when improvised FPOs were needed in the Sudan/Eritrea theatre of operations from December 1940 onwards, E604 continuing in use into 1943. E610 also continued in use from September 1940.

#### **(iii) British FPOs**

There were varied uses.

(a) After Australian use, E606 was issued by Palestine Corps PU on 13th August 1941 for use at a new FPO (designated E50 - E no longer being specific to Egypt) to be established at Ma'an, Transjordan. This office was redesignated APO S257 by 14th September 1941, and remained there until 3rd December 1942. E605 has been recorded 11th July to 1st August 1942, but it appears to have been in Syria/Lebanon at this time.

(b) After Indian use, E603 was used by FPO E44 serving 14th Brigade (in 6th, later renamed 70th, Division) which re-opened in Syria/Lebanon on 14th September 1941, moving to Tobruk on 24th October. On 17th November 1941 all British FPO datestamps in Tobruk were interchanged, and thereafter E603 was used by FPO E49 serving 23rd Brigade, closing in Tobruk on 30th December 1941. After a short period of service in Egypt and Syria/Lebanon 70th Division transferred from the Middle East to India where E603 was again used by 23rd Brigade until replaced by British FPO 30 datestamp.

(c) During 1943 E605 was used, apparently at Alexandria (APO S202), as a transit marking on registered mail.

(d) There is isolated recorded use of BPO E602 in 1947 on a telegram to Ismailia, presumably applied at the Moascar APO S205.

Recorded use up to September 1940

Office	Location	recorded use	Named PO LD recorded	British APO	FPO d/s no
MPO E601	Cairo	1/10/39 - 23/9/40	1/10/39 <u>(11/4/40)</u>	S200	171
BPO E602	Alexandria	10/10/39-19/9/40	24/1/37	S202	172
MPO E602	Alexandria	3/1/40-16/5/40	24/1/37	S202	172
MPO E603	<u>Moascar</u>	27/10/39-23/9/40	3/10/39	S205	173
MPQE604	<u>Port Said</u>	13/11/39 - 12/9/40	1/12/36	S204	186
FPO E605	Mersa Matruh	20/10/39 - 5/9/40	25/9/39		
FPO E606	EIDaba	18/11/39 -22/9/40	31/8/39	S206	243
MPO E607	Sidi Gaber ( <u>Mustapha Bks</u> )	9/1/40-21/7/40		S203	187
MPO E608	Abbassia	4/6/40 - 20/9/40		S201	188
FPO E609	14 Bde	disbanded 7/40	10/6/40 - 27/6/40 closed		
FPO E610	Ikingi Maryut Ind FPO 25 det	(open C5/40-7/40)			
FPO E610	Ikingi Maryut? Ind FPO 19 det	(open c8/40)			
FPO E610	Port Tewfik Indian Section	(opened 9/40)	continued in use		Jun 41 Camp PO L69
FPO E611	( <u>Western Desert</u> )	3/7/40 - 21/9/40		FPO E1 7 Armd Div	244
FPOE615	Baqqush Ind FPO 25 det	5/6/40			
FPO E615	Sidi Haneish HQ WDF from 17/6/40	8/7/40 - 23/9/40		FPO HE1 HQ WDF	245
(E2)	16 Bde	(opened 17/9/40)		FPO E2	246
(S207)	Geneifa	(opened 19/9/40)		S207	169
		(opened 19/9/40)		S208	170

Record usage after 24<sup>th</sup> September 1940

Date stamp	Use	Location	Office	Approx period of use	Recorded use	Earliest d/s	Late rd/s
MPOE601	Ind	Sudan - Gebeit when FPO 13 left		2/41-6/41	15/4/41-29/4/41		IFPO 87
BPOE602	Ind	Eritrea - Keren when 4 Div FP017 left		4/41-12/41	21/6/41-29/6/41		
BPOE602	Brit	Egypt - Moascar (on telegram)	S205		1947		
MPOE603	Ind	9 Ind Bde (5 Div): Sudan - Gallabat		25/12/40-11/2/41	7/1/41-8/1/41		
		Sudan - Gedaref		12/2/41-7/3/41	10/3/41		
		Eritrea - Sabderat		8/3/41-	15/3/41		
		Eritrea - Keren area		-16/5/41	6/5/41		IFPO 89
		Eritrea - Asmara		-10/10/41	20/9/41-6/10/41		
MPOE603	Brit	14 Bde (6/70 Div): Syria		22/10/41-17/11/41	25/10/41		
		Libya - Tobruk		17/11/41-21/12/41	8/12/41-16/12/41		
		23 Bde (70 Div): Libya - Tobruk		22/12/41-			
		Egypt					
		Syria					
		Egypt		-27/2/42			
		India		8/3/42-	30/3/42-24/5/42		FPO 30
MPOE604	Ind	Sudan - Gedaref after 5 Div left		24/1/41-22/3/41	12/2/41-25/2/41		
		Eritrea - Agordat used by Area HQ		24/3/41-28/2/43	28/3/41-18/1/43		
FPOE605	Aus	Palestine - Dimra	3	1/41			
		18 Aust Bde: Egypt/Libya/Egypt		1/41-3/41	6/2/41-7/3/41		
		Palestine - Dimra	3	3/41-7/41			W1
	Brit	Transjordan - Ma'an	E50	c13/8/41			
	Brit?	Possibly Syria - Deir ez Zor?	S262 ?	11/6/42-11/8/42?	11/7/42-1/8/42		
	Brit	Egypt - Alexandria on transit regd mail	S202		19/1/43-8/12/43		
FPOE606	Aus	Egypt - Suez Port detachment	no no 47	3/41-12/41			
MPOE607	Aus	Palestine - Gaza Supplementary use	BW1	11/40-12/40			
		Egypt - Alexandria		1/41-6/41			
		Palestine - Tel Aviv	48	7/41-10/42	2/6/42-16/7/42		
MPOE608	Aus	Egypt - Cairo Base PO		12/40-3/41			
		Egypt - Kantara 2/2 Aust Gen Hosp	no no 42	3/41-12/42	17/3/41-4/12/41		
		Australia - Old 2/2 Aust Gen Hosp	UPS E42		15/4/43-11/5/43		
FPOE609	Aus	Palestine - Hill 69	10	3/41-7/41	20/3/41-19/6/41		AFPO 10
FPOE610	Ind	Egypt - Port Tewfik continuing in use		9/40-6/41	19/12/40-14/6/41		Camp PO L69
FPOE611	Aus	Palestine - Julis	6	3/41-7/41	24/3/41-14/7/41		AFPO 6
FPOE615	Ind	Egypt - Abd el Qadir (Mil Hosp nr Amriya)		12/40-1/41			