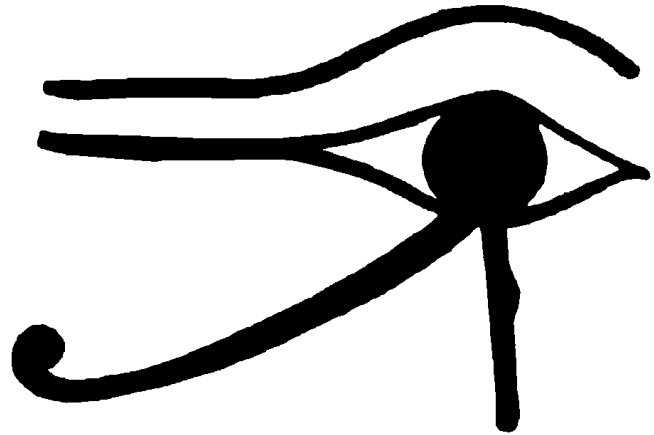


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Report of the Meeting, September 22, 2007

PRESENT: John Sears (President), Peter Andrews (Chairman), Mike Murphy (Secretary), Brian Sedgley (Treasurer), Edmund Hall (Editor/webmaster), John Davis (Librarian), Mike Bramwell, John Clarke, Cyril Defriez, Ted Fraser-Smith, Peter Grech, Paul Green, Alan Jeyes, Mordecai Kremener (Israel), Peter Newroth (Canada), Mohamed Nofal, Lewis Said, David Sedgwick, Vahe Varjabedian (Egypt).

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence were received from: Stanley Horesh (Deputy Chairman), Peter Feltus, Peter Heim, Bill Johns, André Navari, Tony Schmidt, Lucien Toutounji.

The Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming those present, including three visitors from overseas in Peter Newroth, Moti Kremener and Vahe Varjabedian, and offered commiserations to Peter Grech, who bravely attended despite suffering complications from a recent operation for a detached retina; and to Lucien Toutounji, who recently suffered severe damage to his arm and shoulder while playing tennis.

On a happier note, he congratulated Peter Smith (ESC 74) and Dick Wilson (ESC 230) on recent Gold medals in the United States; and Mohamed Nofal (ESC 489) on winning the Postcard Traders Association Desmond Chamberlain Cup for postcard research for 2007 for his new book on Alexandria postcards.

He then announced that Edmund Hall (ESC 239), Editor/webmaster, had again won the Macarthur Award, for the best QC article in 2006, with his survey *Operations Kadesh and Musketeer: the Tripartite Aggression*, in the December QC. The Chairman appealed to members to make more effort to support article writers by voting.

Edmund was then called on to explain the thinking behind his new project for the website, as outlined in the September QC. He described an exciting vision of the site as an area for members to use both as a reference library and as an updatable resource: the idea is to post there all basic information on a series of topics so that members can visit and at once gather in all that has previously been published, instead of having to follow up QC, L'OP or other published references which may or may not easily be available.

The second, interactive, part of the idea is for members to be able to submit their own researches or observations on the posted topics, with a view to including a wide range of opinions, based on the knowledge of members who may perhaps never have met! In this way, earliest/latest dates can be updated virtually instantly, and all the membership has the potential to learn of such changes without having to wait for publication of the next QC.

Aware of members' sensitivities with regard to safeguarding their own research, he envisages access to such topics being protected by an individual password in a members-only area; and that new information will be posted only with the approval of senior members with knowledge of the topic. Dissenting views will be welcomed; and new dates accepted only with suitable visual evidence. Members will have no direct access to amend entries.

For those unable or unwilling to access the website, Edmund will organise a system whereby new topics or newly updated topics are given a brief mention in the QC so that members can request a printout of the fresh material: this printout will then be included in the posting-out of the member's next QC.

Members present listened with increasing interest as the idea was developed, and after a series of questions and answers from the floor the whole meeting – even those without internet access – was won over to the concept's basic simplicity and interactivity. Mordecai Kremener (ESC 291) said that a certain amount of material should be made freely available with the intention of attracting future potential members; and the suggestion was greeted with approval.

Accordingly, Edmund was given the go-ahead to follow up on the concept, and members visiting the website now will find that a fascinating start has been made on the following topics: The Napoleonic Post, Poste Restante, Overland mail to Iraq, Express etc. All are welcome to submit supplementary items, whether in the form of original material, illustrations, updates, original research ... whatever it might be: credit will readily be given to the supplier of the updated material. Those who would like to post entirely new topics should

check first with Edmund that nothing similar is already in train (in which case their material would be either incorporated or set alongside). To those present, this seems like a brave new world of interactive research with all previous studies immediately to hand; it will require an enormous amount of work from Edmund Hall, so let us all support him in this new venture.

The Secretary then spoke of the list of members finally published with the September *QC* after more than two years of effort, and mentioned again that any member who wishes to have details included in either list – of addresses or interests – should contact him: an updated list will appear in the *QC*.

He mentioned that a member had recently had cash stolen from an envelope sent to Egypt and announced that Dr Sherif Samra, President of the Philatelic Society of Egypt, had offered to accept sterling cheques made out to him on behalf of the PSE. They may be sent to him direct or via the Secretary, who offered Sherif grateful thanks and mentioned that he thought that liaison between the two societies of London and Cairo had probably never been closer.

As evidence of this came news of a new catalogue of Egyptian stamps, painstakingly produced over 15 years by Magdi Abdel-Hadi (ESC 445) in Cairo and now nearing completion. After much discussion, members felt that though the market for another catalogue might be bulging, the Secretary should suggest that the new work might be published in sections covering specific areas – classic issues, say, or Fuads, commemoratives, Farouk issues, postage-dues – to make it more attractive to the potential purchaser.

Members then moved on to meeting dates for 2008 and after much discussion the list was tentatively approved:

Jan 12	20th Cent Postal Rates	John Davis/Edmund Hall	(Victory Services Club)
March 1	Ten Sheets	All Members	(Stampex)
May 10	AGM and Bourse	All Members	(Victory Services Club)
July 12	Airgraphs	Dennis Clarke	(Victory Services Club)
Sept 20	Acquisitions/Queries	All Members	(Stampex)
Nov 22	Postal Stationery	Peter Andrews/John Davis	(Victory Club)

The Secretary then mentioned gifts to the Circle received from two members – Peter Feltus (ESC 114), who had donated photographs of the 1867 2pt blue imperforate sheet from the Qubba Palace sale, together with early *Journal Officiel* sheets for the Library, together with Hotel material which will be sold in the Auction; and André Navari (ESC 534), who had given a wide range of surplus philatelic material which again will go through the Auction in aid of Circle funds.

Officers reported briefly, including an appeal from Edmund Hall for articles for forthcoming *QCs*, and thanks from John Davis (Librarian) for donations from Leon Balian (his part II Catalogue), Mohamed Nofal (Alexandria Postcards); and the Philatelic Society of Egypt (Postcode coding book for Cairo in Arabic – immediately handed on to Ted Fraser-Smith).

As usual, the Acquisitions and Queries meeting raised a wide range of topics, starting with the Secretary illustrating copies of some pages from the recently acquired Postal Bulletins, which he explained he had started to photograph, with a view to making all pages available in easily portable CD-Rom form: so far the years 1890 and 1894-1897 inclusive have been completed.

A similar prospect is being made available by André Navari from the *Guide to Mudirias and Place Names*, which he is also hoping to be able to make available in a searchable database form, so that place names may be found even when all that may be read on a CDS is just a few contiguous letters. André's copy of the Guide has page 99 missing: if any member can produce page 99 he will be doing all of us a massive favour!

Other material on display included Peter Grech (use of the French PO 5080 canceller in Alexandria in July 1862, six months before it was introduced in France); Peter Andrews (query on a skeleton datestamp); Alan Jeyes (query on tax rates from India – resolved at the meeting); Ted Fraser-Smith (type styles in censor labels, use of the negative to show postal markings, variations in the Tutankhamun gold beard settings of May 1993); David Sedgwick (Egyptian military and an unrecorded Rural marking); John Davis (query from

Bill Johns on a ship cover Opened Under Martial Law; and his own study of the large 10m green military stamp); Brian Sedgley (classic postmarks including Chantier VI and a new Teh el Barud Station mark); and Mike Bramwell (recent acquisitions in postcards).

Report of the Meeting, November 17, 2007

PRESENT: Peter Andrews (Chairman), Stanley Horesh (Deputy Chairman), Mike Murphy (Secretary), Brian Sedgley (Treasurer), Edmund Hall (Editor/webmaster), John Davis (Librarian), Dennis Clarke (Committee), John Clarke, Graham Coles, Cyril Defriez, Mostafa el-Dars, Ted Fraser-Smith, Peter Grech, Bill Johns, Mohamed Nofal, Sami Sadek, Lewis Said, David Sedgwick. Ann Sedgwick (visitor).

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence were received from: John Sears (President), Mike Bramwell, Alan Jeyes, Tony Schmidt.

The Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming those present, regretted the absence through illness of John Sears, and wished all members, whether present or not, a Happy Christmas and contented and peaceful New Year.

The Secretary then mentioned the recent list of members published with the *QC*, and said that two more had requested their details to be made known (see page 271). Notification was received from the ABPS that affiliation fees had risen from 60p to £1 per British member; there was discussion about the necessity to remain affiliated.

We have been invited by the Israel Philatelist magazine to provide three pages of information about the Circle for a special issue marking Israel 2008 in Tel Aviv next May; and to contribute an article on the basis of "What I collect" by The Stamp Magazine. It was agreed that we should make every attempt to provide such material – and yet another appeal was made for a Publicity Officer: the position has remained open for far too long, and its filling could bring enormous benefits to the Circle.

Edmund Hall spoke of reaction to his plan to use the website as a source of all information about Egyptian stamps and philately in general, and appealed for members to contribute material. This trail-blazing plan could work only with the co-operation of all, he said, while appreciating an understandable reluctance to reveal half-worked-up research. The meeting encouraged him to continue with his efforts, and asked all members to contribute to building a solid database of information.

Brian Sedgley said that the Auction account had provided further funds to the General account, but it was noted that there had been a decline in the number of members bidding in the recently-completed Auction 44. Officers appealed to members to place attractive material on offer, and then to bid for it!

The remainder of this report was contributed by John Davis (ESC 213):

The subject of this afternoon's talk and display was new to me in that I knew virtually nothing about the Rural Postal Service but Mike Murphy's display was helped by a handout entitled: Rural routes mentioned in the 20 Postal Bulletins held by the ESC 1889-1925.

Mike first thanked Tony Schmidt for generously providing access to Postal Guides 8 and 9, which include crucial itineraries of rural postmen's routes in detail, while the Postal Bulletins recently acquired by the Circle from Peter Feltus record several hundred rural routes or lines. Thanks also to the late Mohammed Shams el-Din who had, many years ago, sold some 100 covers to Mike at £1 each, a nominal price; this provided the basis for his collection; and last but not least, thanks to Ibrahim Shoukry, Peter Smith and Dennis Clarke for photocopies of their collections.

Rural lines were based within governorates and only rarely seem to cross governorate borders. The system was started on May 1, 1889, though the notice published in 1887 proposed a start date in 1888. It didn't

happen. The full notice of the actual starting date was on April 25, 1889, with the initial list of routes published as an annexe which, unfortunately, we do not have.

When the government took over the postal administration from the Posta Europea in 1865 there had been only 19 post offices but by the start of the Rural Service the number had risen to 173 and the introduction of the new service doubled that number with the addition of 172 stations.

The basis of the service was simple: to provide a postal service without the expense of an office and staff. Within a village a Rural Post box for reception of letters was set into the wall of a building or nailed to a tree, and within the box was a handstamp in the form of a long oval, or cartouche, which bore the village name. Only the postman had the key to the box; only he had access to the cartouche stamp.

The first Service Rural marking was a circle with a date bar and the postman had to fill in the details by hand; only three are recorded on cover. A larger oval marking followed, again with a space for manuscript addition of date or village name. Mike showed copies of all 14 of these ovals that he has on record, dating between August 1889 and August 1894. The earliest in his collection is August 2, 1889, from Tunub.

Postmen were relieved of the burden of handwriting the dates when the two hand-stamps that have become familiar were developed: one circular, indicating the parent office, and the other the cartouche. Experimental usage of 213 cartouches on Type XI interpostals – known in at least four sets – must have been carried out between June and August 1890. In Egypt Gino Piperno obtained a set from relatives of Penasson the printer, and brought them to London 1960 for discussion. Dr William Byam and the experts decided that they probably were intended as another aid for the postman - to seal an envelope to contain letters from a particular Rural box: the experiment was not followed through. The Postal Museum in Cairo has 132 of these IPs on display, and recently a set of 213 (but including three duplicates) was sold on eBay.

In the earliest years there were three types of circular datestamp:



All of them carried numerals somewhere in the CDS, specific, it is thought, each to a Rural line depending on that parent office. The Rural Service markings can be set aside for the moment since although their appearance was similar they were clearly of a different generation and none is recorded before 1909.

Mike has carried out an enormous amount of research into these numeral markings and has been able to prove, using maps and the records of cartouches used in conjunction with the numeral CDSs to back up the Postal Guide itineraries, that the theory is correct: for Zagazig, which has three numeral marks, Zagazig 1 is the Zagazig-Mit Abou Arabi line; Zagazig 2 is Zagazig-Karadis; and Zagazig 3 is Zagazig-Kafr Abou Nagah.

One area of interest was how villages of cartouche level early on in the scheme developed to become their own parent offices with their own lines, while others remained with cartouches.

Some Rural lines were circular, arriving back at the parent station, but most were linear, involving an overnight stay. Postmen were urged to stay only in designated locations, for security of the mail. As well as attending the boxes the postman would have mail to deliver, either collected from his parent office on his “outward” route, or delivered to him at his overnight point by courier for delivery next day: incoming mail receives no cartouche, since it has no connection with the postbox but is delivered by hand. When a recipient is not present, regulation required delivery to be attempted on three successive delivery rounds before return to the dead letter office.

The Rural postman travelled by donkey (if he could afford one), and just after the end of World War I the Post Office maintenance subsidy was increased from £E1 to £E2 a month. During the War all donkeys had been requisitioned by the military but so important were Rural Service donkeys that they were exempt.

Mike related his experiences excavating at Mit Rahina, ancient Memphis, when he spotted a young man on a bicycle going past day after day, and how he discovered that there was a Rural postbox set in a wall of their dig-house. The young man was a Rural postman based at nearby Bedrachein: the system had barely changed in 100 years – except that donkey had given way to bicycle!



After a break to view the comprehensive array of material, Mike turned to ancillary services: as far as Avis de Reception (AR) mail is concerned it would appear that the postman carried the AR handstamp with him, but the question of AR cards and who carried them is not resolved. Certainly the service was used (*see illustration above*).

Postcards were also carried, and both Registered and Express postcards were shown. The meeting was amused at the thought of an Express letter starting its journey on a donkey! The Express rate was originally 20 millièmes inclusive of postage.

Initially the service was available for correspondence only, not including the carriage of money or parcels, but in 1896 parcels were accepted up to 1kg, for which the postman received 5 millièmes per parcel. The 1902 Bulletin indicated that from March 1 both ordinary and registered parcels would be carried up to 3kg.

As far as postage due items were concerned, members queried whether the rural postman collected the monies due? The service did not allow the carrying of money, but the postman himself did carry postage due stamps and presumably collected the revenue arising. Incoming postage due items are virtually unknown, but Mike showed one odd cover with an apparent deficiency of 18 millièmes (double the amount not paid) whereas the postman's arithmetic was somewhat over-zealous and the item was charged 36 millièmes. A note in French on the cover indicated that a senior postal official was not impressed!

Free franking of "official" mail was prevalent within the Rural Post (25 per cent of the 3,300 covers Mike has surveyed) and several items carried indications of how the postman recognised such mail. Government sealing labels (banded mail) were used as well as "Official ovals" and the mail went free of charge; both black on white labels and the much more attractive white on black labels were shown, as well as various cachets indicating official use. In one case the postman had applied a boxed T mark and had crossed it out when he realised that the mail should go free. All court correspondence went free as Official mail, but not lawyers' letters to clients.

Different inks on different postmarks on a cover raised the question as to where some handstamps were used; the postman himself carried an ink pad, Rural Service CDS and R-mark (and also AR?), so all of these – and the cartouche in the box – should have been struck in the same ink, but other marks were struck at the parent office.

Mike showed mail sent by the archaeologist John Garstang from Araba el Madfuna (ancient Abydos) to the Mena House Hotel. This item is very definitely in the wrong collection! A cover was shown with no fewer

than 17 CDS markings, two of them Rurals, and a newspaper was sent registered at a cost of 1 millième for the postage and a further 10m for registration.

A square Rural Post cancel (illustrated above) was shown from the 1940s, when Boy King issues were in use, and the question arose as to when the system came to an end. It appears that it may still be alive and kicking and that the postal agencies introduced in the 1960s do not appear to be its death knell. In 1975 there were no fewer than 17,000 rural stations, and covers are so much sought after that a number of (happily obvious) forgeries were shown.



All in all, a wonderful display and we all came away much better informed. The Chairman thanked the speaker, announced himself “gobsmacked”, and members showed their appreciation in time-honoured fashion.

- Mike has developed an unpublished but comprehensive database of more than 750 Rural lines and their markings, and would welcome queries from members about any marking difficult to make out; as well as photocopy or scanned examples of any Rural covers: maalish@hotmail.com

Membership changes

New Members:

- ESC 618 Ronny Van Pellecom**, Groenstraat 50, B-2610 Wilrijk, Belgium
(Foreign Offices in Egypt; Egypt Used Abroad)
- ESC 619 Scott Van Horn**, 130 Silver Fern Court, Simi Valley, California 93065, US
(Postal history, Air Mail, Postal Markings and Cancellations)

Change of address:

- ESC 165 Dennis Clarke**, 4 Hollyfields, Broxbourne, Herts EN10 6LR
- ESC 508 David Brigden**, 8 Pocket Nook Road, Lostock, Bolton, BL6 4HN

Additions to full Members list published with QC 222:

- ESC 257 Dr Michael Michaels:** email drmichaels@charter.net
- ESC 384 Peter Heim**, Hochkalterstrasse 28, 90471 Nürnberg, Germany
pow.michel@t-online.de (TPOs, Rurals, all postmarks post-classic)
- ESC 394 Peter Newroth**, Suite 603, 5332 Sayward Hill Cres, Victoria, BC, Canada V8Y 3HB
prnew@shaw.ca (First Fuad stamps and usages; all cancellations up to 1930)

Wanted: articles for the QC

See page 278

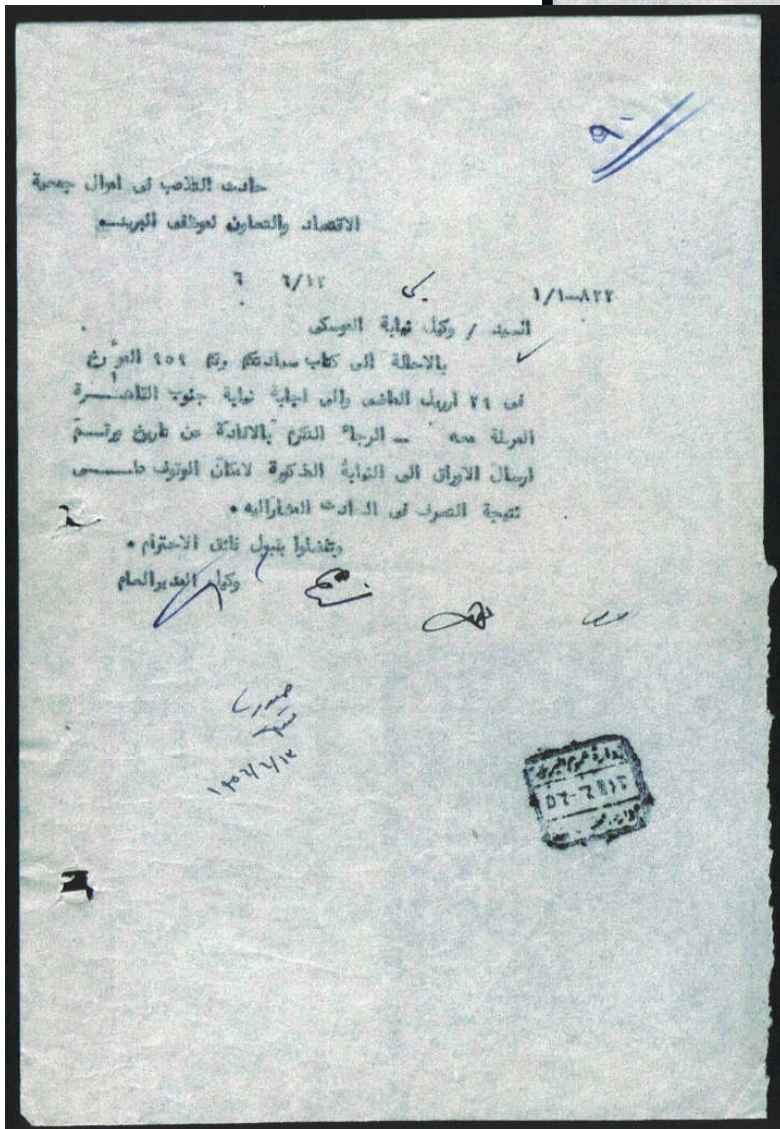
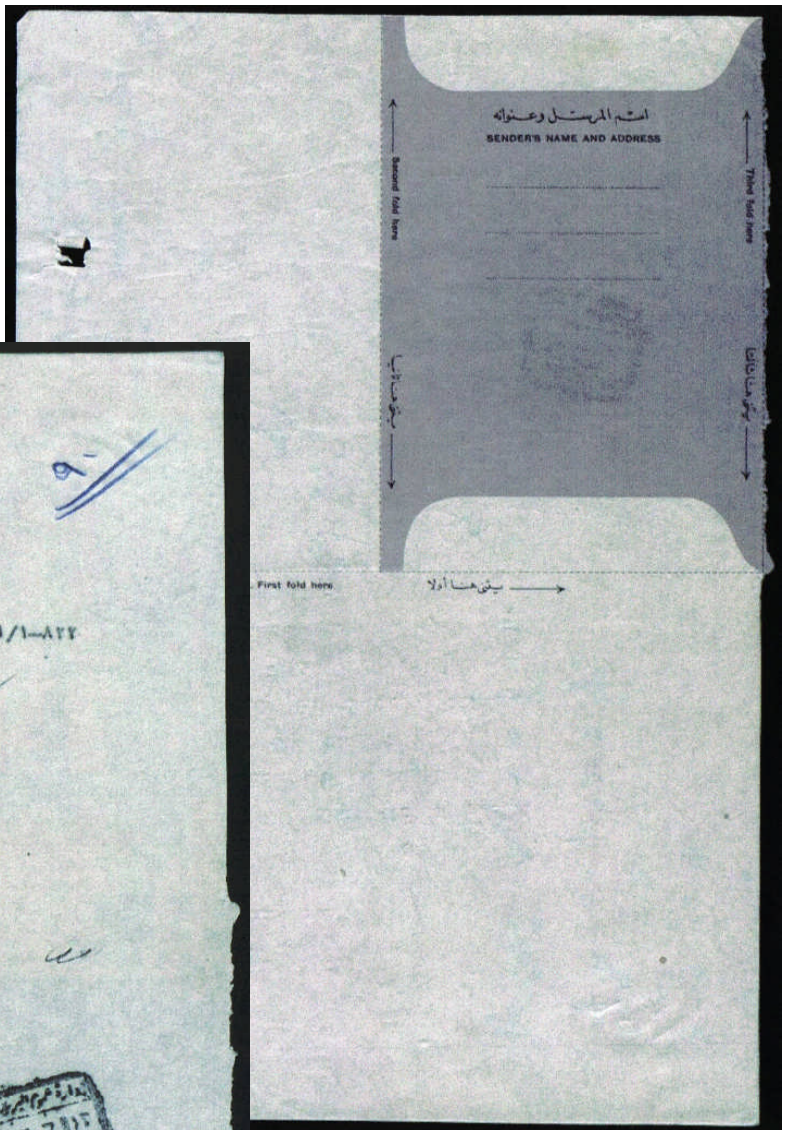
Farouk Air Letter Used in 1956 as a Post Office Form

Vahe Varjabedian (ESC 390)

While checking a lot of old used Post Office papers and receipts recently, I noticed an unusual half-page creamy purple paper, typewritten and cancelled with a small rectangular Post Office boxed official handstamp.

After careful checking I discovered that the paper was half of a Farouk 25 mills Air Letter (watermarked *al barid el masry*) issued in 1949 (H&G 4, NP4). The message side of the half-Air Letter contained a note from the Director of the Post Office to Egypt's Attorney-General at the time seeking information about a fraud that had occurred within the Post Office. The message is signed and authenticated with a boxed General Post Office handstamp dated 13-6-1956.

It seems to me that after the republic was proclaimed, the remaining stock of Farouk Air Letters must have been cut in half and used as Post Office forms, as also happened later with the 1971 military concession 10 mills stationery envelope: many of its uncut sheets remaining in stock have been found reused as Post Office registration records.



Have any of our collector friends seen a similar item?

Pyramids Postal Cancellations 1892-1956

Vahe Varjabedian (ESC 390)

One of the most attractive spots in the world, and indeed the only surviving one of the ancient Seven Wonders, the Pyramids have been visited by many millions of people since postal service began. And many, many thousands of them have sent correspondence from the site itself or from the Mena House Hotel nearby virtually to every corner of the world.

Many articles have been written about the hotel and its post office, and there has been much controversy about such questions as “Was there a post office in the hotel?”, “Where was the Pyramids post office situated?” and so on.

After much research and discussion with Lucien Toutounji (ESC 264) and former Post Office employees (most of them now sadly passed away), I can state definitely that the early Pyramids post office was outside the Mena House Hotel in the shape of a small wooden kiosk in front of the Sphinx in the village of Nazlet es-Samman. All Mena House front desk letters and postcards were carried by an hotel employee on a donkey to this postal kiosk to be cancelled with a PYRAMIDS handstamp (see CDS P1) and sent on to the main Cairo post office downtown in Ataba Square for onward transmission.

Later the Mena House Hotel post office was opened (ESC records for the postmark, HM1, run from 5 III 92 to 25 II 95 with T for duty, and 7 III 92 to 26 III 94 without T). After that there is an odd three-year gap between 1895 and 1898 in recordings of any Pyramids CDS. Why was it that correspondence of this period was cancelled only with the CDS of Cairo, even though private Mena House Hotel cachets or hotel stationery prove that mail was still emanating from the hotel itself?

From 1898 to 1909 we find the PYRAMIDS / CAIRO datestamp (see P3), which is quite Common, followed by the short-lived Arabic version AHRAM (recorded only in 1910). In 1912 the city’s electric tram service was extended to the Pyramids and a new post office was built in front of the hotel’s main entrance, directly across the road, which still exists, though it has been rebuilt and redecorated several times over the years.


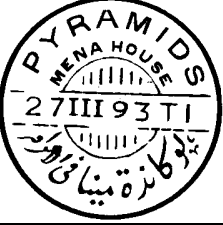



At the start of the First World War the hotel was taken over by the military and used as a hospital for Australian and New Zealand forces. During that period most of the correspondence was from soldiers and officers (see P5 and P6A). After the war, most mails are found cancelled with P6B and P7.

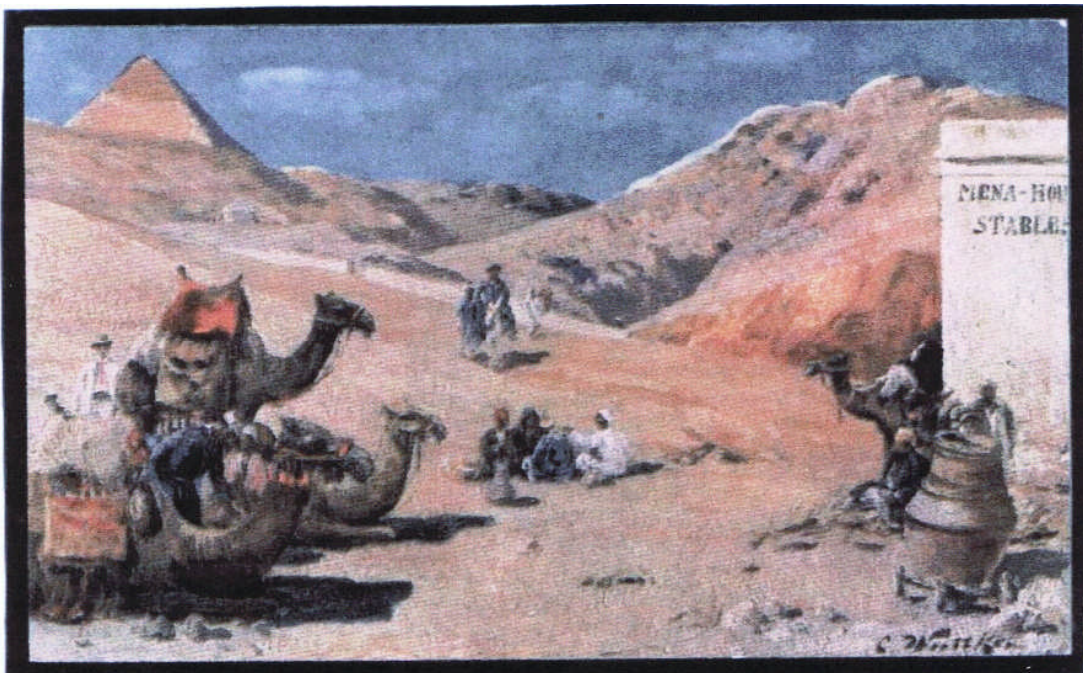
From early in the 1930s until 1956 all correspondence collected from the Pyramids post office was sent daily to the Imbaba office on the west bank of the Nile in Cairo for onward transmission to the main post office in Cairo, except during the period of the Second World War.

In this brief review I have tried to classify the different datestamps of the Pyramids, their dimensions and early and late dates of cancellation after looking at hundreds of covers and postcards of Pyramids and the Mena House Hotel.

If members have any new information or comments on this article, I hope they will contact the Editor or myself direct.



	P1 28mm 12 91 to 1892			P6A 26mm 1911-1919
	HM1 30mm/4.5mm 1892-1895 No T: 1892-94 Reported with T inverted			P6B 29mm 1924-1929
	P3 28mm 1898-1909			P7 28mm 1937-1949
	P4 26mm II 10 to XII 10			P8 26mm 1953-1956
	P5 27mm 1915			P9 28mm 1954-1958



Editor's note: Vahe has done a grand job, but could members supply me with scans to make accurate pictures of the postmarks. HM1 and P4 I have already.

The 1872 5pi Tête-bêche

Peter A. S. Smith (ESC 74)

Only two tête-bêche pairs of this stamp have been recorded: an unused vertical pair and a used horizontal pair. The unused pair is first recorded in the auction of the famous Ferrari collection following World War I, and the used pair was (is?) in the Royal Philatelic Collection, provenance unknown to me. This discussion is concerned with the latter.

The used pair was illustrated (black and white) in the comprehensive book about the Royal Collection published in 1960s. It was later illustrated in an article by Jean Boulad d'Humières in the *Schweizer Briefmarkenzeitung* (the illustration may have been reproduced from that in the aforementioned book). In May 2001 foreign items no longer wanted in the Royal Collection were sold at auction. Ostensibly all of the Egyptian holdings were included in the sale, but curiously, the 5pi tête-bêche was not there.

The unused pair passed from the Ferrari sale to the London dealer T. Allen, where it languished unpublicised for two decades. It was bought by Ibrahim Chaftar and brought back to Egypt, and was sold in 1953 (?) to the Turkish collector Tevfick Kuyas. Kuyas eventually disposed of his collection by sale to Stanley Gibbons Ltd., who sold the pair privately to me.

Some time ago I was having a look at the illustration of the used pair, and suddenly became aware of a startling feature: the lines of horizontal perforations at the top of the two stamps do not match. That is, the lines are not on the same level, leading to a step from one stamp to the other. There seems to be only one explanation for this: the two stamps do not belong to each other in the orientation shown. The 'pair' cannot be a true pair; the stamps must have been joined by a skilled paper restorer.

What are the possible explanations? (1): The pair may have originally been a vertical tête-bêche pair that became separated, and was sent to a restorer to be rejoined. The restorer may have misunderstood the situation, and rejoined the stamps incorrectly as a horizontal pair (he may have been misled by the cancellation, which gives the appearance of overlapping the two stamps). (2) Alternatively, the two stamps may never have been joined originally, but came from different parts of the sheet. Two possible explanations of how they came to be joined come to mind. (2a) The stamps may have been placed on the cover so close to each other that they appeared to be a pair, but fell apart on soaking. Another possibility is (2b), that the two stamps were selected by a faker to make a fraudulent tête-bêche pair.

Let us consider hypothesis (1). An inverted stereo would have the watermark inverted. In a genuine tête-bêche pair, therefore, one stamp must have inverted watermark. The position of the inverted stereo in the sheet of the 5pi has been determined by Major MacArthur as number 97 (and the stamp above it as number 87), from his study of the small irregularities in the positions of the perforating pins. The adjacent stamp of the used pair, which would have to be below (position 107), since the mismatched lines of perforations preclude positions 96 and 98, and the characteristic plate flaws of stereo 87 are not seen in the used pair (these flaws are most prominent along the right edge of the pyramid).

If the stamp with upright watermark had originally been joined to the inverted stereo at top or bottom, the teeth of the perforations would match, not only in register, but in their irregular lengths that resulted when the stamps were separated (that is, a long tooth on one stamp must correspond to a short tooth on the other). In the accompanying illustration, I have placed a second image of the upright stamp so as to show the relation of the horizontal perforations. They do not match with the precision to be expected. Therefore hypothesis (1) can be rejected.

That leaves hypothesis (2), the two forms of which are not easily distinguished. Since the two stereos have now been shown not to have been adjacent, one can suppose that the two stamps were simply detached from different places in the sheet and fortuitously affixed to the cover side by side (hypothesis 2a), or that the two were never on the same cover, but were artfully assembled from available loose stamps (2b). A reasonable scenario is that a faker was familiar with the Ferrari pair, and reasoned correctly that the inverted subject must have an inverted watermark. Then, luckily coming into possession of a separate example of the subject with inverted watermark, he proceeded to join it to another copy of the 5pi. Joining perforations at the teeth

is painstaking work requiring meticulous care, but would be justified in this case by the enormous increase in value.

Why would a faker choose to produce a horizontal rather than a vertical pair? One possibility is that it would require less work. Another possibility is that a stamp with a roughly matching cancellation, if it could be found, would augment the apparent authenticity of the resulting pair. I unfortunately do not have an illustration in colour to study, so the details of the cancellation are not visible against the background of the stamp in a black and white illustration.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the used tête-bêche pair is not genuine. Those who prepared the material from the Royal Collection for the auction must have had serious doubts about the pair, for it was not put in the sale. We are thus left with only the unused pair as genuine - a unique item in Egyptian philately.



Third Issue Flaw

Jürgen Fricke (ESC 557)

Some days ago I had another 'go' through my nearly 1,000 examples of the 1875 1-piastre stamps, hoping to find some flaws. And indeed, I found a very prominent flaw, as illustrated. The large egg-shaped red flaw has a white spot in the middle, also egg-shaped, and inside this is a red vertical line containing two white dots! How could a 'flying saucer' like this appear on the stamp? I wonder if anybody has seen this one before!



Perforation Variety of the 20 Paras of 1874

Peter A. S. Smith (ESC 74)

The stamps of the Third Issue in the printing of 1874-75 are normally perforated $12\frac{1}{2}$ or $13\frac{1}{3} \times 12\frac{1}{2}$. I recently came into possession of an example perf. $12\frac{1}{2} \times 13\frac{1}{3}$; I bought it as a gamble, half suspecting that it could have been re-perforated vertically. That type of fakery can be difficult to detect.

The stamp is shown enlarged here. The irregular length of the perforation teeth is consistent with genuine perforation, but can also be accomplished by manipulation. As it stands, however, the stamp is slightly wider than normal; had it been reperfed, one would expect it to be narrower, although exceptionally wide stamps do exist. The odds seem to be that the perforations are genuine - but can one be sure?

If it is indeed genuine, how might one account for its occurrence? It would seem to be the result of an anomalous occurrence, rather than a normal production, considering the apparent rarity. Since these stamps were perforated a line at a time, it was easy to miss a line, sometimes several lines. At the end of the work shift, when the sheets are examined, the missing perforations would probably be noticed, and the faulty sheet would be sent back to complete the perforation. In the case at hand, it would have been the vertical perforations that had been missed. Since it is known that there were two machines in use, it is easy to understand how the $13\frac{1}{3}$ machine might have been chosen for the repair job. In that case, stamps that were initially intended to be perf. $12\frac{1}{2}$ all around would turn out to have compound perforations (the number so produced would depend on the number of lines of originally missing perforations). There is precedent for such a scenario in the case of the 1872 $2\frac{1}{2}$ pi in perforation $13\frac{1}{3}$ (a very rare stamp!), which Major MacArthur has demonstrated to have arisen by a similarly anomalous procedure.

It would be interesting to read the opinions of other members about this curious stamp.



Reduced Rate agreement – Response to Peter Smith

Anton Jansen (ESC 383)

I was pleasantly surprised by Peter Smith's "discovery" of a reduced rate agreement with Austria. Confirmation probably could be found in one of the Egyptian Postal Bulletins recently acquired by the ESC Library.

The fact is that I have been wondering for some time about the 5 mills franking on a small cover to Vienna, postmarked Shepherds' Hotel 4.IV.12 (see *Figure 1*). Maybe this can not be considered as proof of an earlier date, because the cover wasn't sealed, and maybe the sender added a 3 mills stamp just for fun. Anyhow, I thought it worth mentioning.

I also add a nice example of a later date of a 5 mills franking to Italy: 24.II.15. The (censored) letter arrived in Milan on March 10, acting as testimony to the slow movement of mail in wartime.



Editorial. An apology – or maybe not

When I wrote my article, Sinai & Gaza Part 1 pre World War 1 (QC 188), one member suggested it was a bit long and more history and not enough philately, so I truncated it a little, but put the full article on the website. My article on the Suez crisis could have been subject to the same thoughts: too long, not enough stamps. However, as both articles won the Macarthur Award I can only assume that someone liked them.

Now in this QC there is another largish military one, p280-288. I find it hard to remove the history - 'too much fighting, not enough stamps' - because it is the history that gives life to the collecting. I have left out much from my own notes, so again I intend to put an extended version on the website. Inshallah.

I wrote the bulk of the current article some four years ago and dusted it off recently, for without it I did not have enough material to fill a QC. So if these articles are not to your taste the solution is simple: inundate me with glorious ones on Egyptian stamps and/or postal history so I don't have time to dust off the others I have in various states of completion.

Comment on Air Jottings in *Q.C.* Sept 2007 (222)

Richard Wheatley (ESC 168)

This is a real puzzle cover. I can help with some of the answers.

Looking at the message on the card, we see that it was written by a passenger on board the Dutch passenger boat m.s. *Indrapoera* belonging to Rotterdam Lloyd. This well-known boat was on its way between the Dutch East Indies and Holland and when it called at Suez this card was posted, receiving the Egypt stamps and the Port Taufiq despatch mark. The card would then travel by train to Cairo to go onwards by air.

The card was then flown as far as Munich, at which place the airmail part of the postage ran out, as verified by the cachet PAR AVION / JUSQU'EN ALLEMAGNE. It arrived at Munich at 12.15 and would then continue its journey by rail to Berlin, arriving there at 19.20 the same day. From Berlin it would go by the normal surface route to Sweden, where it would not normally receive an arrival mark.

With regards to the airmail label, this particular one is of Dutch origin, being issued free to customers. The "37AA" is the Netherlands Post Office item number for airmail labels and the "3730" is indeed the date when that batch was ordered (3 July 1930). These labels were available in booklets of ten strips of four labels, with the booklet covers having postal information. I illustrate one of these booklets, which is complete with the labels all printed "3730"!



Q40: (June 11): reply by **Joe Chalhoub** (ESC 385)

Regarding your Question 40 in the last *Quarterly Circular*. A sheet of 50 misperforated 27m. violet airmail NP A1 was part of the Royal collection; it was part of lot 376 of the 1954 Harmer's sale. It should have been listed in my catalogue - the *Nile Post*. I noted this stamp after I had published the book. This misperforated stamp is rarely seen. I purchased a block a couple of years ago.

The Italian Army in Egypt during World War II

Edmund Hall (ESC 239)

I had intended to begin by saying that the Italians were nearly always portrayed unfairly as having a very poor fighting reputation; but nearly all the works I have consulted indicate that this was not the case. This unfair judgment, written mainly from the Allied side during the war, survived in a lot of postwar literature and is unfair to the individual Italian soldiers who in many cases fought bravely when given the chance to do so. In the imagination of the British Army and the Allied press it was the Italian soldier who was lacking in military skill and fighting spirit. Once this reputation for military ineptitude had gained ground after the crushing defeats in 1940 from Sidi Barrani to Beda Fomm, it was perpetuated by the British as a propaganda tool.

Most of the accounts of Axis forces in the campaigns in North Africa concentrate on the German military, sometimes to the extent that one could imagine that they consisted only of the *Deutsches Afrika Korps* (DAK) commanded by Rommel. This over-simplistic view is wrong on several accounts. Although Rommel was without doubt the most important person for the Axis forces he at times had more Italian troops and tanks under his command than German, while some of his victories were due to the efforts of the Italian tank divisions. Remember also that the DAK, after the initial stages, was only one part of the total German forces in North Africa.

This article however is concerned only with the Italian Army (*Regio Esercito*), those sections of it that were in Egypt, the postmarks used by them. The Italian Navy (*Regia Marina*) and Air Force (*Regia Aeronautica*) in this case have been neglected. In the "desert shuffle" that exemplified the North African campaigns the Italians entered Egypt a total of three times from their first invasion on September 11, 1940, to finally being expelled on November 12, 1942.

The Italian Army in Libya before the war was large - well above 30,000, if the Libyan auxiliary units are included - and so was superficially a powerful force, but this was true in size only. The strategy adopted by the Italian Supreme Command was essentially a defensive one, with a string of well-defended coastal points around the main towns in Cyrenaica and a number of fortified positions in the desert. This arrangement, especially the desert forts, proved adequate for handling the troublesome desert Senussi tribes but did not anticipate the style and scope of fighting that occurred when Italy went to war with her British neighbour across the Egyptian frontier. Still, the main concern of the pre-war Italian Army seems to have been to project the image of a strong militaristic state in line with current Fascist ideology which promoted a strong brand of militaristic nationalism.

When Italy declared war on the Western Allies of France and Britain on June 10, 1940, there was a total of 167,000 men in Libya: the Fifth Army was deployed against French Tunisia, while the Tenth Army looked towards Egypt. With the rapid fall of France, the bulk of Italian Fifth Army was moved to reinforce the Tenth Army and to threaten British position in Egypt. The Italians were also able to deploy 1,400 artillery pieces, 339 light tanks, 8,500 trucks and over 300 aircraft with further transport and 70 medium tanks arriving in July.

Since Italy had been among the first European nations to re-arm during the early 1930s, most Italian equipment was well out of date by 1940 with Italian infantry equipment almost exclusively dating from the First World War, as was most of the artillery pieces. Italian tanks were even more dramatically outclassed. The main Italian tank in the 1940 campaign was the three-ton L3, armed with machine guns; the M11 and M13 were little better, with only 37mm and 47mm guns, both being unreliable, thinly armoured and very slow. It is little wonder that these tanks came to be known by their own crews as "rolling coffins". An even more critical weakness for the Italian army was its lack of suitable transport, with some 40 per cent unserviceable. Overall, the Tenth Army was still essentially a marching army. These difficulties severely restricted the mobility of the Italian Army and formed one of the many reasons why they were tied to an advance along the Via Balbia, which ran close to the coast, as it was the only good road in the entire region. Many soldiers were already war-weary as Italy had been fighting numerous wars since 1935; add to that the poor condition of Italian training, and morale was very low.

When Mussolini declared war, Marshal Italo Balbo was Governor and Commander in Chief of Italian forces in Libya. He was aware of the poor state of the army but his warnings went unheeded, and unfortunately he was shot down by his own anti-aircraft gunners over Tobruk on June 28. He was replaced by Marshal Rudolfo Graziani who, as Viceroy of Italian Abyssinia, had developed a reputation as Italy's best colonial fighting soldier as well as the epithet "Butcher of Ethiopia". He flew to Benghazi on June 30, 1940, to take over command.

Concerned that Germany might win all the glory and plunder for itself Mussolini planned to fight a "parallel war" whereby Germany would occupy itself in northern Europe, leaving Mussolini free to turn the Mediterranean into an Italian lake. Almost immediately, Mussolini began his demands that Graziani should attack so that his "parallel war" would appear to have some substance. Although Graziani did consider a minor attack, he gave warning that any major attack would meet with total disaster and refused to move until the summer heat had passed. While he hesitated, skirmishes and minor actions took place between the Italians and aggressive British patrols, particularly by the 11th Hussars, the "Cherry Pickers", who broke through the wire, capturing Italian forts and taking prisoners. In the first three months of the war the British inflicted 3,500 casualties on the Italians for the loss of just 150.

The fall of France allowed the transfer of the 5th Army divisions to the eastern frontier of the colony so that the Italians had overwhelming forces at their disposal in North Africa. Figures differ from various sources but the number of troops totalled in the region of 230,000, with 128,000 in the 5th Army and 88,000 in the 10th Army. Italian ground troops in Libya comprised not only the regular army divisions - known as "Metropolitan" divisions, but also divisions of the Royal Corps of Libyan Troops (*Regio Corpo di Truppe*), the Saharan Command (*Compagnia Sahariana*), the Fascist Militia (*Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale* or *MVSN*), known as blackshirts (*Camicie Ne - CCNN*), the Frontier Guards (*Guardia all Frontiera*) and the Italian African Police (*Polizia Africana Italiana*). Opposing them, Wavell had no more than 36,000 troops in what Churchill grandiosely called the "Army of the Nile".

Eventually Mussolini lost patience with his prevaricating Marshal and ordered Graziani forward on threat of dismissal. When Graziani did move forward, on September 9, he unfortunately showed that he knew little of modern warfare: he was methodical, logical, and old-fashioned. His advance was typical of a colonial army: he marched his mass of soldiers, who found marching for long hours in the heat of North Africa exhausting. As a result the advance crawled along at a snail's pace.

After an advance of 60 miles the Italians captured Sidi Barrani and then halted. Graziani sent despatches to Mussolini claiming that the British had retired in disorder after losing more than half their armour. In fact, the British had planned to conduct a fighting withdrawal all the way to Mersa Matruh, which to their surprise was now unnecessary. However, although Graziani had been able to push his army forward to Sidi Barrani, he could go no further; it was hundreds of miles from the main supply port of Tripoli, and with extreme logistical difficulties getting the Tenth Army on the move again was going to be difficult.

Proceeding in an orderly, colonial fashion, the Italian commander in Egypt, General Mario Berti, deployed the advanced units of his Army (1st and 2nd Libyan, 3 January Blackshirt, Cirene and Catanzaro Divisions, as well as Maletti's motorised brigade group) in a ring of strong-points around Sidi Barrani, and began work on extending the Via Balbia into Egypt. However, this ring of forts was not mutually supporting, with gaps of 10km to 30km covered only by motorised patrols. Although Graziani was aware of this situation and did not approve of such methods, he also discounted any threat from the British and remained confident that they would passively await his next blow, planned for mid-December.

On October 28 Mussolini plunged Italy into a disastrous campaign in Greece. Many of the supplies, reinforcements and men which had been promised to Graziani were now committed to Greece, leaving the Tenth Army starved of the material needed to continue the advance.

This meant that the long-planned British attack, Operation Compass, when it came on December 7-9, 1940, caught Graziani and the Tenth Army completely unawares. Indeed Berti had gone on leave and did not return to his post until five days after the start of Operation Compass. The British forces, comprising the 7th Armoured and 4th Indian Divisions, as well as 45 of the all-important Matilda tanks, exploited the gaps between the Italian forts and in three days were able to destroy Maletti's brigade group, both Libyan divisions, the Blackshirt and Cirene divisions and the bulk of the Catanzaro Division. Fierce resistance was

met in a few places, particularly at Nibeiba. Sidi Barrani fell on the December 11 and Bug Bug soon after, Sollum was not defended and was taken on the 14th and with the fall of Sidi Omar on the 16th the frontier zone was again under British domination. The first period of Italian troops in Egypt had come to an end.

Operation Compass continued on January 3, 1941, under the brilliant command of Lieutenant General O'Connor, who had by February 9 cleared the Italians from Cyrenaica in what became a rout. In just two months of fighting, O'Connor had taken 115,000 prisoners, leaving Graziani with only four demoralised divisions to defend Tripoli. This is not strictly part of our story, but from this reverse British propaganda gave birth to the erroneous idea that the Italians were poor and cowardly soldiers

Mussolini's "Parallel War" had ended in humiliation. Graziani flew out of Tripoli on February 11, 1941, humiliated and disgraced yet still convinced that he had been betrayed by enemies in Rome. He was replaced by General Italo Gariboldi, previously the commander of the 5th Army in Tripolitania. The very next day a certain German general, Erwin Rommel, flew to Tripoli to reorganise the Axis defence. This German force was to be nominally under the Italian commander-in-chief in North Africa, Garibaldi, but it was to be employed operationally as a single formation under Rommel, who had right of appeal to the German Army Command (OKH) in Berlin should the name and reputation of German troops be placed in jeopardy by any "dubious" Italian orders.

Italian formations available were the weakened Savona and Sabratha infantry divisions and Brescia, Bologna and Pavia motorised divisions (the term motorised being largely theoretical). The Ariete armoured division was soon to arrive, with M13/40s, which Gariboldi places under Rommel's command. Trieste, a motorised division, would follow, but not for several months.

Rommel wanted the vital port of Tobruk, and on March 24 he began his wild gamble for it. He attacked the British screening units at El Agheila, and drove them rapidly back, and then, realising their weakness - forces had been reduced as some had been sent to Greece - continued his advance across Libya contrary to orders. By April 2 he had occupied Agedabia, and brought Ariete and Brescia up in support and began a series of assaults on Tobruk on April 10. He detached some of his units to push on to the Egyptian frontier, where they fought a series of savage actions to secure the vital frontier positions of Fort Capuzzo, Sollum and Halfaya Pass, crossing the Egyptian border on April 14. At what time Italian forces returned to Egypt is obscure but Italian troops were soon established at Sollum and Halfaya Pass.

Wavell wanted to gain control of Halfaya Pass and on May 15 he launched Operation Brevity, under the command of Brigadier General William Gott, to secure the pass and Fort Capuzzo. The garrison at Halfaya Pass was almost entirely Italian and they put up firm resistance, chiefly by the Italian gunners, with seven of the ten British Matildas being knocked out. The Italians were all made prisoners and did not realise that their courage had made Operation Brevity a partial Italian success. By May 27 the Germans had recaptured Halfaya Pass. Unable to advance any farther because of supply shortages, they dug in and fortified their positions with 88mm anti-aircraft guns.

Under continuing pressure from Churchill, Wavell launched his major offensive on June 15: Operation Battleaxe began with a frontal attack on the Sollum-Halfaya Pass axis. Skilfully using the 88mm anti-aircraft guns as anti-tank weapons, the German battery blunted the British attack, as did eight Italian guns used with great skill by the Italian artillery Major Pardi. The British troops began referring to the heavily fortified and fiercely defended Halfaya Pass as "Hellfire Pass". On July 2 Gariboldi returned to Italy to be replaced by General Ettore Bastico as Senior North African Command (*Commando Superiore Africa Settentrionale*) on July 19.

The next British attack, Operation Crusader, opened on November 18, with the British XIII Corps advancing on Halfaya Pass and XXX Corps attempting to sweep around Rommel's southern flank to reach the besieged garrison at Tobruk. With tank losses mounting, Cunningham, the operational commander, wanted to halt the operation so Auchinleck immediately relieved him and replaced him with Major General Neil Ritchie. The British continued to press the attack, and on November 29 they broke through to Tobruk. By December 7 an overwhelmed Rommel was withdrawing his dangerously depleted forces. To avoid encirclement in the Benghazi bulge, Rommel retreated back across Cyrenaica, reaching El Agheila on January 6, 1942. He leaves Brescia to buy time in the Sollum-Halfaya area, where it holds out until January 17. Operation

Crusader resulted in a clear victory for the British, but one they were unable to exploit because of a lack of reinforcements. The second period of Italian troops in Egypt had come to an end.

On January 21, without consulting higher authority, Rommel launched a counter-offensive against the British 8th Army, including the Ariete, Trieste and Sabratha divisions of the Italian Mobile Corps. On January 23 General Cavallero, C in C, Italian High Command and Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, German C in C, South, flew to Rommel's advance HQ. The Italians wanted Rommel to stop his offensive and withdraw to his start line, but Rommel rejected their demand. As a result the Italians refused to allow their troops to advance any further east, but, undeterred, Rommel pressed on with just the Afrika Korps.

With intensive fighting particularly around the Gazala in early June, in which the Italians played a significant part, the Axis forces invested Tobruk on June 20 and by June 23 German advanced elements reached the Egyptian border.

On June 25 the Axis forces captured Sidi Barrani, Sollum and the Halfaya Pass as the Eighth Army retreated to Mersa Matruh. Next day Rommel is promoted field marshal and launched his attacks against Mersa Matruh involving the Italian XXX and XXI Corps with the Ariete and Littoria divisions. The British began a withdrawal to the El Alamein defences. Shortly after the fall of Mersa Matruh on June 30, in which the Trento with the 7th Bersaglieri regiment played an important part, Mussolini flew to North Africa in preparation for his triumphal entry into Cairo on his white charger.

During the day confusion reigned in the desert between Fuqa and El Alamein, as intermingled columns of Axis and Allied troops dashed westwards. Meanwhile, signs of panic could be detected in the British rear. The Mediterranean Fleet left Alexandria to be dispersed around Haifa, Port Said and Beirut, and preparations were made to destroy the port facilities at Alexandria and block the harbour. In Cairo itself, in what became known as "Ash Wednesday", there was a wholesale burning of confidential documents, and elements of the Middle East Headquarters were moved back into Palestine.

Despite being reduced to 55 German and 70 Italian tanks, on July 1 Rommel, confident of taking the line at El Alamein, ordered a head-on assault. In what is known as the first battle of El Alamein the fighting continued until July 27. In the process the Littoria and Trieste divisions were depleted by air attacks, and on July 3 a Bersaglieri battalion of the weakened Ariete was overrun, causing them to fall back behind two battalions of the Pavia and Brescia. Auchinleck targeted the Italian formations while avoiding having his tank forces drawn on to the German anti-tank guns. Also to suffer heavy losses were the Sabratha, Trieste and Brescia divisions.

In August Auchinleck was replaced as C-in-C by General Alexander, and General Montgomery took over the 8th Army. On August 30 Rommel attacked the strongly held Alam el Halfa ridge at the southern end of the El Alamein line, the Italian XXI & X Corps made feint attacks in the north, while XX Corps (Ariete, Littorio, Trieste, and the newly arrived Folgore Parachute Division, which gained a good reputation in its combat debut), attacked the 7th Armoured Division. All attacks failed. The Littorio division suffered heavy losses and by September 2 the fighting had ceased.

On October 23 Montgomery unleashed his forces in what is normally called the Battle of El Alamein: 104,000 Axis troops (the majority Italian), with 489 tanks (259 Italian) and 1,219 guns (521 Italian), were attacked and crumbled in a long battle of attrition by Montgomery's 195,000 men with 1,029 tanks and 2,311 guns. Trento and Littorio divisions, between Kidney Ridge and Miteiriya Ridge, faced 30 Corps (9th Australian, 51st Highland, 2nd New Zealand divisions); Bologna, north of Ruweisat Ridge, faced 1st South African and 4th Indian divisions; Brescia, Folgore and Pavia faced 13 Corps at the south of the line; Ariete and Trieste formed part of the Axis mobile reserve. When Rommel was forced to order withdrawal most of the Italian infantry, without transport, were left to their fate. Pavia, Bologna, Brescia, Trento and the majority of Folgore divisions were destroyed; Ariete was wiped out, fighting with great courage while elements of Trieste and Littorio managed to escape.

Montgomery paused to regroup before launching a pursuit on November 4, the last remnants of the Axis forces crossing the Egyptian frontier on November 7, leaving only a small detachment at the Halfaya Pass which was vacated on November 11. So ended the last phase of Italian troops in Egypt during the Second World War.

At the height of Rommel's last offensive, on June 27, 1942, orders were given by the British HQ to evacuate Siwa. On July 23 Siwa saw the arrival of the biggest airlift in its history. Thirty Junkers 52s carrying Italian troops, the first wave escorted by 19 Messerschmitt Bf 110s of III/ZG 26 led by Hauptmann Herzberg, arrived overhead and proceeded to land and link up with Major Jakob Burkhard's 50-man Fallschirmjäger Kampfgruppe which had driven in from Jalo and reported the British gone.

The loss of this major oasis with its more than 3,000 inhabitants came as a severe shock to the Egyptians and there was unrest in Cairo as a result. Had the place been fought over, the inevitable casualties to Egyptian nationals might have caused a political firestorm at a time when all seemed blackest for the British in Egypt.

Siwa was occupied by elements of Generale di Brigata Commandante Ismaele Di Nisio's Divisione Corazzata Giovani Fascisti (136a), GGFF, of 423 soldiers with the airstrips at Siwa taken over by a flight of Caproni-Begamaschi Ca 310s or Ca 309s from 12th Squadriglia Aviazione Presidio Coloniale and the occasional Ju 87.

The oasis had been a staging area for raids by the Allied Long Range Desert Group into Libya, and now the Axis saw an opportunity to return the favour with the Italian planners looked longingly at the tracks leading to the Nile. Rommel visited on September 22 and reviewed the unit, bearing gifts of British tea! Officers showed him their maps and scouting reports of the deep desert, and several Egyptian clan chiefs gave their opinions that no substantial Allied forces stood between Siwa and the Nile. The Young Fascist Division, the officers claimed, could unhinge the Allied positions on the coast from Siwa if only they had the fuel.

To British relief, the oasis now relapsed into torpor. General der Flieger Otto von Waldau, the German air commander, pronounced the airstrips unsuitable for the Luftwaffe. Siwa Town landing ground they considered operable by Fiat CR 42s, but only if the runway was extended. Siwa North landing ground was noted as outside the security zone set up by the single resident Italian battalion and therefore also unusable on a permanent basis.

For Siwa, only two further events marked its passage from an active theatre of war. On the night of September 13/14, 1942, the oasis was subjected to a major British parachute operation which was to prompt Rommel's visit. The British forces consisted of eight self-destroying miniature dummy parachutists made of hessian and straw together with flares and incendiaries dropped in a pattern designed to attract maximum attention. As the result of Rommel's intervention an additional Italian battalion was flown in and used to guard the approaches to the nearby Quara oasis.

On September 13-14, Barforce, composed of the Sudan Defence Force motor battalion with support units, all from Bahariya oasis, made a simulated advance on Siwa and then retired. Apart from the occasional alarm flare, much agitated signalling and some air reconnaissance, all these activities produced little reaction.

On the afternoon of November 14 a platoon of the 1st Royal Sussex formally reoccupied Siwa, the oasis having been evacuated on the 8th, watched by an LRDG patrol and reconnaissance flights. The Italian garrison of Siwa had been a reasonable one, apparently not much interested in looking for trouble and, as a parting gesture had left some of their rations behind to help out the Siwans who were by now on very short supplies. It is reliably reported that not long, after when the Siwans held a fantasia to celebrate their change in circumstance (and the victory of the Eighth Army), the feasting included Rommel's gift of tea which was served up to the returned British Army officers!

When the Axis position at Alamein collapsed in early November 1942, the GGFF mounted its approximately 3,000 men on 290 trucks and headed directly west across the Libyan Desert where they joined the rest of Rommel's army near Mersa el Brega: they were in the best condition of any Axis units. The Young Fascists crossed into Tunisia in January 1943 and were the last Axis unit to surrender in May 1943.

Of interest to Egyptian philatelists is the existence of Egyptian stamps of the 1937 issue, overprinted "Oasi di Siwa, Occupazione Militare Italiana". These are the subject of an article in *L'Orient Philatélique* in July 1953 by Ahmed Mazloum which appears to draw on an article in May of that year in *Il*



Collezionista, a philatelic Magazine published in Turin. The set comprised the 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 13, 15 and 20 millième values overprinted with thick ink and the article concerns itself with the legitimacy of the overprinting. One history I have found states “*While they waited, the Italians set up an Egyptian government-in-exile, complete with postage stamps, and flew the Egyptian flag alongside the Italian tricolour*”; but I have no supporting evidence. Another source states that there was no need of a postal system because the local population were cut off from the rest of Egypt, although I suspect that then, and perhaps even now, the Siwans had more kinship with the Libyan populations than those of Egypt and the little post previously coming from Siwa was not necessarily from the local population.

In general Mazloum draws the conclusion that the overprinted issue “...*qualifies as the work of a dishonest speculator... it is an issue, due to a fiery philatelist who could not resist the temptation of speculating by taking advantage of peculiar dramatic circumstances.*”

In the article a claim was made that they were the work of “...*a pilot on a tank of the «Ariete» Division who occupied the Siwa Oasis*”. However the Ariete did not occupy Siwa nor to my knowledge did any of its units. Mazloum continues “...*he learned at the time from the Commanding Officer of the tank, a Lieutenant from Bologna and a spirited philatelist, that one of his brother in arms, one of the first to enter the Post Office of the Oasis, overprinted some sheets of Egypt stamps and destroyed the seal.*” Again, no units of the Bologna division were in Siwa. In the article he quotes from a letter by General Ismaele di Nisio to *Il Collezionista* “...*that as commander of the Italian forces in Siwa he knew nothing of them.*”

General di Nisio was the commander of the Divisione Corazzata Giovani Fascisti, which did occupy the Siwa Oasis, but he goes on to say that “...*being cut off from its own national territory, and the only Post Office working was the «Posta Militare 58» of the Division and it did not accept Egyptian stamps for use.*” This is another curiosity, because PM 58 was used by the Bologna Division. The Giovani Fascisti were supposedly using PM 136, although at this time this postal unit was in Libya. From August 24, 1942, the mail went twice weekly by aerial courier between Siwa and Mersa Matruh where I suspect the mail was then franked, as PM 58 was at Mersa Matruh at that time.

The Ariete Division was allocated PM 132 which was in Egypt at this time, arriving in Sollum on June 29, Fuka in July and falling back into Libya after the Battle of Alamein. The enterprising philatelist would have had access to Egyptian stamps but I believe their connection with Siwa tenuous at best and they had no official validity, being nothing more than fantasies.

Covers and postcards of the Italian troops in Egypt are fairly easily found, but slightly rarer than from Libya, but most show signs of wear and good clean examples are very difficult to find. Each soldier was issued with four free franking military postcards (*Fig.1*), of which there are several types but nearly all are a blue-green in colour with the words CARTOLINA POSTALE PER LE FORZE ARMATE and are made of a lighter paper than a normal post card. I also have two cards similarly printed in white and of normal postcard weight.

Supposedly other correspondence was meant to be paid for at 50 cents for a letter, 100 cents for airmail and 15 cents for a normal postcard (*Fig.2*). However the troops were often unable to obtain stamps and endorsed their correspondence with “Zona sprovvista di francobolli” (Zone without postage stamps), or some similar message and more often just the initials or simply Z.O. (*Fig.3*). Postage due was to have been charged at the 50-cent rate but covers with postage dues (*Fig.4*), are much less in evidence to those that have been delivered without any charge being raised.

The cards and covers have military handstamps of the FPOs and are of simple design with the words POSTA MILITARE (PM) in the top and the FPO number at the bottom with letter N and the number (*Fig.6*). Of the other types of Italian military postmarks the only one encountered in Egypt is that with UFFICIO POSTALE DI CONCENRAMENTO assigned to Corps headquarters (*Fig.5&7*).

Perhaps one strange feature of these military posts in an active war zone is the total lack of censorship or security, with the covers and cards displaying the full unit information on the back, for letters, or on the postcard in the place allotted to it. Cards and covers can also be found with unit and regimental cachets and the return address FPO number, which nearly always echoes the cover's franking. Even the number

allocated, in most cases, refers to the unit, for instance (Fig.1) PM132 was allocated to the 132nd Ariete armoured division, which included the 132 tank regiment, 132 artillery regiment and 132nd engineering battalion among its units. Censor marks and resealing labels are occasionally encountered (Fig.2&4)

The PM numbers were allocated to units and regiments although the postal unit may not necessarily have been with the main body but somewhere to the rear. For instance PM 123 was assigned to XXIII Corpo d'Armata, which was in Egypt in mid-1940 but the postal unit was stationed at Bardia in Libya and did not enter Egypt.

Several excellent books by Giuseppe Marchese give units and locations, but alas for me they are all in Italian, of which I have little knowledge, and I have not found anything in English. I have drawn up a table in which I have tried to give the dates of the postmarks of the units inside Egypt, but as mentioned the handstamps themselves may or may not have been in the country itself. Indeed it may have been applied several days after the letter was given to the unit postal courier, so shifting the dates, for start and finish, a few days might be more accurate in thinking that the cover came from Italian troops inside Egypt.

For any Egypt military enthusiast, I hope this article may be of some help in finding covers. From the military perspective, these have as much right to be in an Egyptian collection as those from Napoleonic and British forces.

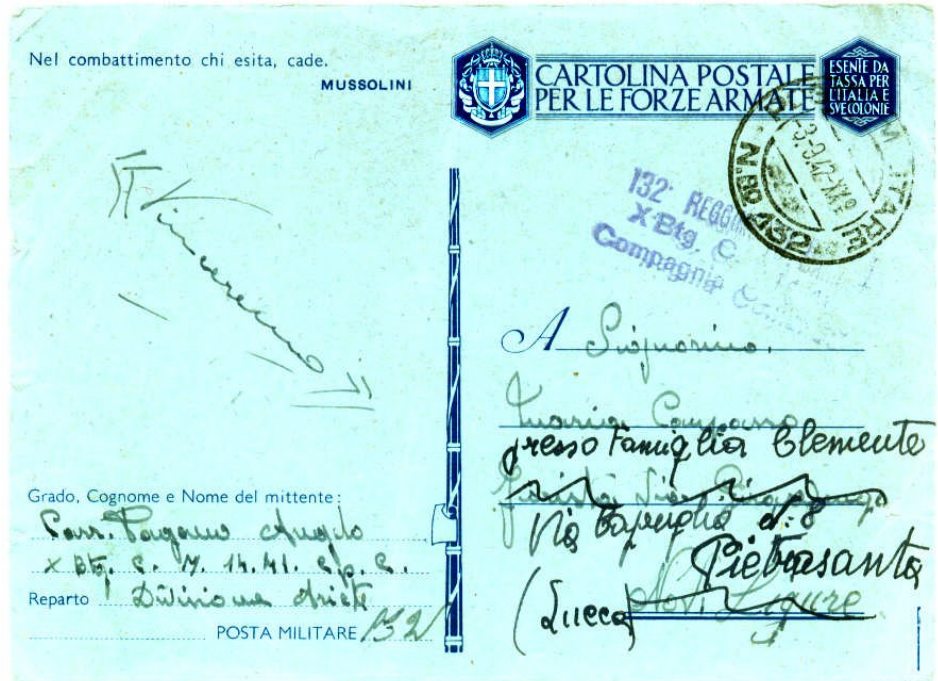


Fig.1 .Free issued postcard with PM 132 of the Ariete division with unit cachet. At the date 3.9.42 it was near Fuka



Fig.3 PM 133 of the Littorio division showing the manuscript "no stamps available".

The Littoria division at the date 18.9.42 was near Mersa Matruh



Fig.4 Letter with hand endorsement that no stamps were available but charged at the letter rate of 50c in Italy. Resealed with censor tape and the 31 censor marking

PM 56 was used by the Trieste division which at the date 1.11.42 was near Bir Achiem in Libya.

Fig.5. Letter franked 100c the air mail rate and cancelled with the XIII UFFICIO POSTALE DI CONCENRAMENTO assigned to Corps headquarters.

At the date shown it would have been at Mersa Matruh



Posta Militare markings of Italian units while they were in Egypt

Period	Numero P.M.	Unit	Entering	Leaving
1	13	Rgp. Lib. Maletti	14- 9-40	9-12-40
1	26	1a Libica	13- 9-40	11-12-40
3	27	2a Libica	13- 9-40	11-12-40
3	31	X Corpo d' Armata	10- 7-42	8-11-42
1	34	Intendenza A. S. (X Armata) (*)	- 9-40	- 12-40
3	34	Intendenza A. S.	6- 7-42	6-11-42
3	54	Pavia	2- 7-42	4-11-42
3	56	Trieste	26- 6-42	4-11-42
3	58	Bologna	31- 7-42	5-11-42
3	76	Pistoia	- 8-42	8-11-42
3	96	Brescia	2- 7-42	30-11-42
2	109	Trento M	18- 6-41	18-11-41
3	109	Trento	23- 6-42	4-11-42
3	123	XXIII Corpo d' Armata	13- 9-40	14-12-40
3	132	Ariete	23- 6-42	4-11-42
3	133	Littorio	6- 7-42	5-11-42
3	136	Giovani Fascisti	20- 8-42	9-11-42
1	221	XXI Corpo d' Armata	13- 9-40	13-12-40
3	221	XXI Corpo d' Armata	29- 6-42	25-11-42
3	260	Folgore - Sabratha	7- 7-42	8-11-42
1	262	Marmarica	13- 9-40	14-12-40
1	263	Cirene	13- 9-40	12-12-40
1	301	23 Marzo	13- 9-40	14-12-40
1	302	28 Ottobre	5- 11-40	14-12-40
1	303	Catanzaro	1- 12-40	14-12-40
1	304	3 Gennaio	12- 9-40	10-12-40
3	600	XX Corpo d' Armata	26- 6-42	7-11-42
3	XIII Conc. P. M	Intendenza A. S.	26- 6-42	5-11-42

(*) Some units

Period 1. Sept 9 1940 to Dec 16 1940. **2.** April 14 1941 to Jan 17 1942 **3.** June 25 1942 to Nov 11 1942

Fig.6



Fig.7



Members' website news.

I was pleasantly surprised at the favourable reaction to setting up a **members-only** section on the website, both at the meetings, where it was discussed, and in the phone conversations and emails I have received about it. The idea is simple, the task enormous – and, as one of our members said to me, it will work only if many members contribute. Of course this is correct, and as I stated at the December meeting, I will add further information myself until the end of 2008 and if there is a lack of contributions from others then I will abandon the idea and simply pull the plug on it. So it's all up to you.

The idea: simply to make available the sum of all information on Egyptian philately.

To get some idea, visit what is already there. I have deliberately put up several themes in different states, and none should ever be considered to be finished. It could become **The Book** so long dreamed about by the Circle – with the great difference that sections need not be completed before information is published.

Some members have had difficulty in finding the links; I admit that they have been somewhat obscure, so I have added a “members only” section to the top bar on the web index page. Click on this and it will take you to the form to sign in to the members' section. **NOTE:** this requires Java and may be disabled on your computer, so if you have problems seeing the input box email me. The password at present is **postmarks**, but this will be altered soon to individual passwords. Once past the password, you should see the members' menu.



Members Only

Stamps:	1971 Military Stamp
Postal History:	The Napoleonic Post Poste Restante Overland mail to Iraq
Postmarks:	Express Postman Station
Other:	Stamp Index

Clicking on, say, The Napoleonic Post will take you to a menu page for that topic. This particular theme already has a reasonable amount of information, including past *QC* articles, pictures of covers and much more. Have a look and see whether you can add anything in the way of pictures; or perhaps there are details that you can amend or correct?



The Napoleonic Post

During the French Campaign in Egypt, from July 1798 to September 1801, a full postal service was planned and put into effect, intended to enable the inhabitants of the country to correspond easily among themselves. (Order No. 2929) of the Commander in Chief, dated at Cairo the 13th Messidor of Year 6 = 2nd August 1798. This postal service gave rise to the first handstamped postal markings of Egypt.

The Post:
[The Postal System](#)
[The Postal Markings](#)
[Example Covers](#)

Articles:
 CC 34 June 1973
 CC 147 November 1988
 CC 188 March 1979
 Die Briefmarken Philatelische Fachbeilage Feb. 1999
 An article by deceased member Kurt Wolfbauer. Any member prepared to give us an English translation.

History:
[Historical Introduction](#)
[Chronology of Events](#)
[The Egyptian Calendar](#)
[Main stamp series](#)



Have a look at the Express postmarks and see if you can find the sample covers through their links – I hope this is fairly easily done.

The Poste Restante is an example of starting a new theme, just a few pictures and a few words.

Please take a look and determine what you can contribute.

Without your contributions, the project is still-born. And in that case, long live the Egypt Stamp Club.

Edmund Hall (ESC 239)

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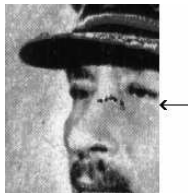
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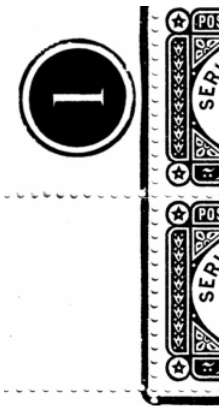
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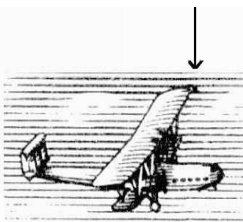


b. French Post Offices in Egypt and their stationery.



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