

Operations Kadesh and Musketeer: the Tripartite Aggression

Edmund Hall (ESC 239)

The war in Egypt in 1956 is more commonly known as the Suez crisis, and the reason for it given as Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal. This is however an over-simplification and the reasons for war predate the nationalisation: all the three invading forces, Israel, France and Great Britain, had each considered and drawn up possible plans for an invasion before the nationalisation.

This is not the place for a detailed discussion of one of the most important and puzzling events of the second half of the twentieth century or of the military actions that took place a half century ago. What I have tried to do is to gather and collate what I can on the philatelic aspects of mid-1956 to the evacuation by the British and French Forces.

There were in fact more than the four main participants, with America and the Soviet Union playing decisive roles leading up to the military undertakings.

One of the main players in this tragic event was John Foster Dulles, the American foreign secretary in the Eisenhower administration. Nasser vested his authority in the building of the Aswan High Dam, to which Eugene Black, then President of the World Bank, had "pronounced the project feasible and sound, and both Britain and the United States offered grants to help finance the construction". The Western offer was announced in Washington on December 16, 1955, with the United States offering to contribute \$56 million. Nasser also requested from US Ambassador Henry Byroade a list of arms he required and hoped to buy from the US. When Eisenhower saw the list he called it "peanuts". Nasser, far from wishing to dissociate himself from the West, was unwilling to align himself with the Soviet Union which was the only real alternative.

After negotiations Nasser was under the opinion that the finance for the dam and the arms, albeit with a much reduced list, would be forthcoming. Dulles however recoiled from Nasser's declared "neutrality", calling it an immoral and short-sighted conception. Despite information from the American intelligence services that a refusal of arms to Egypt would give the Soviet Union an open door Dulles went back both on the loan and the arms deal. Late in the morning of July 19 he received Egyptian Ambassador Ahmed Hussein and in what turned out to be a poorly handled talk, on hearing that the Russians were prepared to loan the money for the dam, Dulles retorted: "Well, then, as you already have the money, you have no need of our support. The offer is withdrawn."

Nasser received the news by radio while flying back to Cairo from Brioni where he had been meeting with Tito and Nehru. "This is not a withdrawal," he told his foreign minister. "It is an attack on the Egyptian Government and an invitation to the people of Egypt to bring it down." Exactly one week after Dulles reneged on the Aswan Dam project, Nasser acted, probably by impulse or to maintain his credibility by "nationalising" the Suez Canal. He promised to pay off all the shareholders of the Suez Canal Company, and as the company was registered in Egypt he was acting well within international law. He urged all of the present employees to stay in place - perhaps a little too forcefully in some cases, with the employees being told that the alternative was 15 years in an Egyptian jail. By international treaty the canal, in any case, was due to revert to Egypt in twelve more years. Nasser was simply moving up the timetable.

Since 1945 one of the goals of the Soviet Union had been to become one of the key players in the Middle East and weaken the "imperialist" powers France and Britain. After the Western powers refused to supply Egypt with arms the door began to open for them and when Nasser nationalised the canal Khrushchev saw a further opportunity to advance his cause. Intelligence to the Soviet leadership suggested that war was unlikely, as closure of the canal would lead to a stoppage of oil, paralysing both the French and British economies and any armed conflict could lose them the entire Middle East. They supported Egypt's historic claim to the canal and made clear that Nasser's actions did not breach international law. The Soviet Union was a staunch advocate of freedom of passage though the canal, as this was a benefit to them, and took part in the London conference to reach a new international agreement for control and use of the canal.

Excluded from the various alliances created by the West in the Middle East, Israel felt itself uniquely vulnerable. The situation had taken a turn for the worse in October 1954 with the withdrawal of British troops from the Canal Zone and the loss of the British buffer. In March 1955 a terrorist attack at a wedding outraged Ben-Gurion, then defence minister, who proposed to drive the Egyptians out of the Gaza Strip.

Moshe Dayan, in conversation with the CIA chief Allan Dulles during a visit to the United States in July-August 1954, had said that Israel had very good reasons to seek war - notably its inconvenient boundaries and the Arab countries' rapid military build-up. By 1955 he had become convinced that another all-Arab war against Israel was imminent and that Israel could survive only by initiating war, at a time of its choosing and on its terms.

By the end of February 1955 Ben-Gurion had come to agree with Dayan, but he thought that to be successful Israel needed an alliance with a foreign power. At this time the Israeli air force was far from being the dominant one it is today, with only a few piston-engine planes and a few British Meteors. Ben-Gurion was concerned with Egypt's new IL28 wreaking havoc in bombing Israeli centres of population.

France, which had just lost Indo-China and was determined to retain power in North Africa, was motivated by the belief that Nasser was behind the nationalist-inspired war that was then agitating Algeria.

One thing the three conspirator nations had in common was the conviction that Nasser, who was upsetting the Middle East balance of power by accepting Soviet military and economic assistance, had to go. So by the beginning of 1956 Britain, France and Israel were seeking a reason to attack and remove Nasser, although at this point not in concert.

From 1954 France had become the main source of arms for Israel and the countries became close politically, with Shimon Peres playing a major role. By early 1956 Gurion, Dayan and Peres saw war with Egypt necessary before Egypt had a chance to absorb the new weaponry from the Soviet Union but Ben-Gurion would not agree to an Israeli-initiated war without political and military support by a Western power - preferably the United States, though Britain or France would do.

Only France showed any willingness to listen, and on June 26 signed an agreement in Vermeers which provided for arms supplies to Israel in unprecedented quantity and quality. France also undertook to support Israel politically in its conflict with the Arab states. In return, Israel agreed to help France in its struggle against Nasser, by providing intelligence and carrying out mainly covert operations. Even more important was the issue of operational collaboration and the creation of a liaison apparatus for joint military planning: a joint French-Israeli planning staff was already operating in Paris in July 1956.

France and Britain had already discussed joint action against Egypt but Sir Anthony Eden would not countenance any collaboration with Israel. France realised that it needed the use of British bases in Cyprus and air power and that it needed only some incident to bring the British on board. Nasser duly obliged by nationalising the Canal.

The French were the matchmakers in the Anglo-French-Israeli military pact whose undeclared aim was the overthrow of Nasser. Ever since his nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company on 26 July, 1956, the French and the British had been making plans for military action against Egypt if negotiations failed to achieve their aims. By early October it looked as if these plans might have to be abandoned because no suitable excuse could be found to justify the attack. The French came up with the idea of using an attack by Israel as a pretext for Anglo-French intervention. On 14 October, General Maurice Challe and Albert Gazier visited Eden at Chequers and at the meeting the French general presented a plan, which quickly became known as the Challe scenario, that Israel would be invited to attack the Egyptian army in Sinai and pose a threat to the Suez Canal, thus providing Britain and France with the pretext to activate their military plans and occupy the Suez Canal Zone, ostensibly to separate the combatants and protect the canal.

Eden liked the idea, the only aspect of the Challe scenario that he opposed was the idea of Britain inviting Israel to move against Egypt. He preferred Israel to move of its own accord; he did not want Britain to be implicated in anything that might be construed as collusion in an alliance with Israel against an Arab country. The war was on, with an agreement being made at the Sèvres conference during October 22-24.

Although Nasser only decided on nationalisation after the loans were not forthcoming he still gave some consideration to its ramifications. He thought Dulles would not resort to military means, that the French were too committed to their Algerian problem to have the recourse and never considered Israel would involve itself. His only concern was Eden but reasoned the British troops in Aden, Kenya and Cyprus insufficient and before they could mobilise further forces it would be possible to reach a peaceful solution.

The war was played out from October 29 until November 7.

See page 183 for the philatelic aspects.

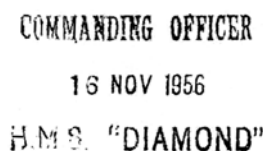
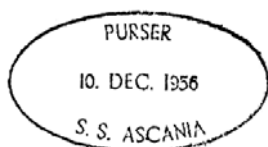
Material for this period is hard to come by and is well sought after by military postal historians. There was a great deal of “philatelic” material produced and I for one am somewhat grateful for this for without it some of the postal markings may never have been recorded.

British Naval Markings

The two operational bases were Malta and Cyprus, with most mail from the British ships initially being routed via British Fleet Mail Office 10 on Malta. Later, as a part of the naval units operated from Cypriot ports, the mail was handed over to the different British Army Post offices there. However, closed mail bags were sent unopened to the Fleet Mail Office in London.

At the London Fleet Mail Office the mail was cancelled with the machine marking “POST OFFICE MARITIME MAIL” or circular handstamps with the same inscription. Covers are also found with the triangular I.S. mark of the London Inland Section to indicate that postage was free and that a postage due fee should not be raised.

Covers can be found with ship’s cachets either of a “philatelic” or an official nature.



British Army Markings

All units which were connected with the invasion of Port Said were assigned the mailing addresses BFPO 200 and BFPO 300, for both staging areas, Malta and Cyprus. Later only BFPO 300 was still in being when all the troops were either in Port Said or on Cyprus. Covers with the return address BFPO 60, for use by 16 Para, are also found, some of them from Post Said.

The Field Post Offices used were already in operation in Malta or Cyprus, with some old ones, as previously used in Egypt, being reissued, together with a couple of new ones. The older ones are of the same pattern as found on mail in WWII whereas the new ones used the newer designs brought in during the early Fifties.

203 Army Postal Unit was an original party of seven Royal Engineers under a second lieutenant which set up the APO for all UK forces stationed in Port Said, including H M Ships. The unit arrived early in November 1956, after the ceasefire, and stayed until about December 18. The remainder of the unit arrived early in December bringing the total personnel to 33.

Censorship

Military censorship was reintroduced for the campaign for the first time by British forces since it was lifted at the end of the Second World War other than for some censorship on POW mail used during the Korean War. The new censor mark comprised a large diamond of 355mm sides with a crown, the words “MILITARY CENSOR” and a censor number. I have not given an exhaustive list of nearly 70 numbers recorded, as most are on mail from Libya, Malta and Cyprus. Only numbers 915, 1001, 1512 and 1513 are found on mail from Port Said. Censorship was imposed only just before the landings and dropped soon afterwards. Covers with such markings are found with postmarks from November 1 to 10.

For naval covers the Second World War “tombstone” markings were put back into use and found on covers covering November 1-6. The Royal Air Force also imposed some censorship in Cyprus, Iraq and Malta with new censor markings.

Few of the covers found with censorship markings appear to have been opened and the one that I have seen has been resealed with an economy resealing label; it is thought that no resealing labels were issued. I can't help wondering for whose benefit censorship was imposed and suspect that the concern was more with what the boys might tell the folks back home that could fuel the anti-war demonstrations than anything that could be of use to the Egyptians.

Malta				
			APO 1040 ? 461 ?	
6.11.56 16.11.56				19.10.56 8.11.56
Cyprus				
15.10.56 22.11.56	2.11.56 21.11.56			22.8.56 18.12.56
Port Said				
6.11.56 18.11.56	12.11.56 10.12.56	22.11.56 18.12.56	4.12.56 19.12.56	

F.P.O. 443 is recorded with the time slugs A, B and C. F.P.O. 938 has only been recorded on registered mail. F.P.O. 1020 was also used on the troopship *SS New Australia* before returning troops to the UK, leaving Port Said on December 21. It has been recorded with both A and B time slugs.

Cover with F.P.O.443 dated 22.NO.56.
Manuscript on back from a corporal in A Sqdn.
6th. R.T.R (ROYAL TANK REGIMENT) with
return address as B.F.P.O 300. The 6.R.T.R
were in Port Said.



F.P.O.353 8.NO.56. with censor mark 1,001 the signature to the left is probably that of the censor.

Manuscript on back from corporal in the 3rd.BN.Parachute REGT with return address B.F.P.O 60

French Navel Markings

The French Naval Forces consisted of 40 warships and some hundred chartered merchant ships, auxiliary and "servitude" ships of the French Marine. Eight/six (??) of the larger ships, aircraft carriers, battleships and cruisers had their own onboard post offices - "Agences Postales Navales" (APN). They used hexagonal handstamps with dotted periphery, the name of the ship appearing in the crown and the date (day - month - year) in two lines in its centre. The date is framed with a star above and an anchor below. In addition, the *Georges Leygues* also used a similar handstamp with only the text "POSTE NAVALE". The list of ships included in the invasion fleet does not match the reported postmarks. This is probably because the aircraft carrier *Bearn* and the battleship *Richelieu* were kept in Toulon as support vessels and perhaps their postmarks may not be considered to be part of the invasion fleet.

Other markings are found on the naval covers: double circular rubber stamps of different size with the inscription MARINE NATIONALE / SERVICE A LA MER and anchor in the centre. Inscription MARINE NATIONALE - (ship's name) - Le Vaguemestre in the centre (handstamp of the postal orderly). This is generally found on free-mail covers. On official mail a lot of other markings may be found, like "Bureau Administrative", "Commissaire du Porte Avion Arromanches", "Officiel", "Officiel urgent", "Priorite", etc

French Inscription	Batiment de Ligne	Porte Avions	Croiseur
Translation	Battleship	Aircraft Carrier	Cruiser

Also in operation was the "Poste Navale" the French postal organisation which, in wartime, is entrusted with the private and official mail to and from ships and administrative buildings of the "Marine Nationale". The Bureau Navale No. 16 was operating in Cyprus. Opened on September 12 in the English barracks in Famagousta, transferred on November 5 to Limassol, and closed on February 17, 1957.

It was in charge of the postal service of the whole French Naval Forces and used the following markings: A circular datestamp "Poste Navale/ Bureau No. 16; and two linear handstamps - "Bureau Naval No. 16" (length 27 mm, height of letters, 3 mm) in two lines, and "Bureau Naval No. 16" (length 53 mm, height of letters, 4 mm.) in a single line.

In Egypt itself the only naval office was "Bureau Naval No. 24" which opened on November 22, operating in a building of the Suez Canal Company in Port Fouad, and closed on December 22. It was intended for the mail of the ships which had called at a port in Egypt. This mail was transferred by helicopter or "servitude" ships on the large warships. It was then sent on to Cyprus, Algeria, or directly to France. Markings used included two linear handstamps "BUREAU NAVAL No. 24", of the some sizes as the handstamps described for the Bureau No. 16.

French Army Markings

For the Army campaign the Secteur Postal (Postal Sector) serial numbers 91,000 were used and only covers with these numbers should be considered as part of the invasion force. The French were also fighting a war in Algeria, so some of the covers dated for the same period may come from here. All Army Post Offices were in possession of obliterations with the office numbers at the base, but according to the instruction given they were to be used only for internal services. Sometimes, however, contrary to instructions, they may be found also on ordinary or registered mail.

Army Post Offices seen and/or reported are No. 152, 152A, 168, 169, 412, 618. Some of these have Poste aux Armees in the upper portion, others (mute) carry the three letters A.F.N. (Afrique Française du Nord) at the base of the postmarks. These offices handled all postal matters, including parcels and money orders. The postmarks were used on ordinary as well as on registered mail. The military franchise was in effect August-December 1956. Mail to and from units in Egypt or at sea transited via Cyprus. Mail to France was free, while to all other countries the normal French postal rates were applied.

The date slugs in all obliterations comprise two lines with a star above. Mail can also be found with a machine cancellation, single ring and inscription "Poste aux Armees" and five wavy lines at right. Such an obliterator was used at 412 in Port Fouad, but in some cases the mail was flown uncanceled to the BCM Paris 186 or BCM "B" Marseille (BCM= Bureau Central Militaire), where the same cancellations were in use, thus only the sender's address with Secteur Postal 91,000 can identify such covers.

The French APOs also had a registration service. The labels used are the same as those of the civil Pos, only with imprinted large R and registration number. The "Secteur Postal" on both the offices was added by rubber stamp, metal stamp or inscribed by hand.

Each postal orderly in the French Army possesses his own rubber stamp to be used on letters bearing the red army marking FM(Franchise militaire), but also on other mail as well as for internal purposes. These handstamps are usually made of rubber and occur in different shapes and sizes. Inscriptions found include "Secteur Postal" (or S.P.) and "Le Vaguemestre" (Postal Orderly). Inks used are black, violet, blue and red. Official mail is stamped with different markings of administrative nature, as Officiel, Courrier Officiel, Urgent etc.

French Censorship.

















It appears that there was no censorship imposed upon the mail of the French Forces (Army and Navy) during the whole operation.











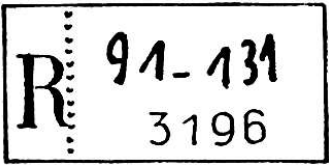

French cover sent outside France, hence the stamp from S.P. 91014, then at Cyprus.

Another cover sent outside France from S.P. 91013 at Port Fouad.



Cyprus				
				
16.11.56 (.9.56 - .8.57)	14.12.56	6.11.56 (11.56 - .4.57)	26.11.56	(11.56 - .1.57)
B.P.M = Bureau Postal Militaire				
Cyprus. 412 Marseille then Post Fouad 24.11.56 - 18.12.56				
				
	6.11.56		9.11.56 18.12.56	14.11.56 3.12.56
A.F.N. = Afrique Francaise du Nord				
Cyprus.				
				
15.11.56				
Bureau No.16 Cyprus (12.9.56 - .17.2.57)				
				
10.9.56 17.12.56	9.11.56	25.9.56	19.9.56 4.12.56	
No. 24 port Fouad 22.11.56 - 22.12.56				
				
14.12.56				

Note. Those in grey have been reported but I have not seen strikes so are artists impressions.

				
6-11-1956	17-9-1956		6-12-1956	2-12-1956
				
6-11-1956	9-11-1956			
PORTE-AVIONS BEARN ⚓			BATIMENT DE LIGNE RICHELIEU ⚓	
BUREAU NAVAL N°16	BUREAU NAVAL N°16		BUREAU NAVAL N° 24	
				

French Naval markings



Cover from the Escorteur (Frigate) Arabe during the build up to invasion.

Egyptian Army

Again I am indebted to Major Berest and his article in the BAPIP magazine for most of this information. The Egyptian Army had introduced six- and eight-sided military handstamps in the early Fifties and several were in use in the Sinai. I have no information of any being used in the Canal Zone. These are all in Arabic and have the date in the centre with the number in the lower section and the top section *el-barid el-harbi*.

No.	Location	Units served
1	Presumed in Egypt	
2		
3	Abu Agheila	Gunnery School
4	Cairo Camp	
5	Rafah	87 Bde., 5 Bde., 3rd Btn.
6	Gaza	26 Bde., Security Services, Medical Services
7	El Arish	3rd Div., 4 Bde.; 2nd Tank Btn.
8		
9	Abu Agheila	18 Inf. Btn.
10	Rafa	8th Div., 86 Bde., 3rd Btn.
11	El Arish	No. 2 Light Tank Coy.
12	El Arish	No. 1 Volunteer Unit (Fedayin)
13	Ismailia	Eastern Command HQ (Sinai Area)
14	Port Said	National Guard Command HQ.
15	Ismailia	Southern Command (Sinai)
16	Sharm El Sheikh	21 Inf. Btn.
17	Gaza	24 National Guard Bde.
18	Kuseima	23 Bde., 16 Frontier Force Btn.
19	Rafa	No. 2 Volunteer Unit (Fedayin)
20	Gaza	National Guard HQ (Palestine), 313 Volunteer Btn.
21	Cairo	GHQ Accounts Section



FPO *el-barid el-harbi* البريد الحربي The war post.

The example shown is ٢٠ (20) dated ٥٦-١٠-٣٠ (56-10-30)

٠	١	٢	٣	٤	٥	٦	٧	٨	٩
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Note: Dealers and auction houses make great play that many of the covers offered with these markings are “last day”, being the date the Israeli army overran the position in which they operated. These are no more scarce than those showing earlier dates, and in fact are probably easier to find because they are all “liberated” covers taken by the philatelically-minded Israeli troops.

In fact good clean covers, possibly with additional postmarks of that period, are difficult to find.

Egyptian Censorship

Egyptian covers show the normal violet censor marks, either triangular or a number in a circle. Red resealing labels are also found.

Egyptian Navy

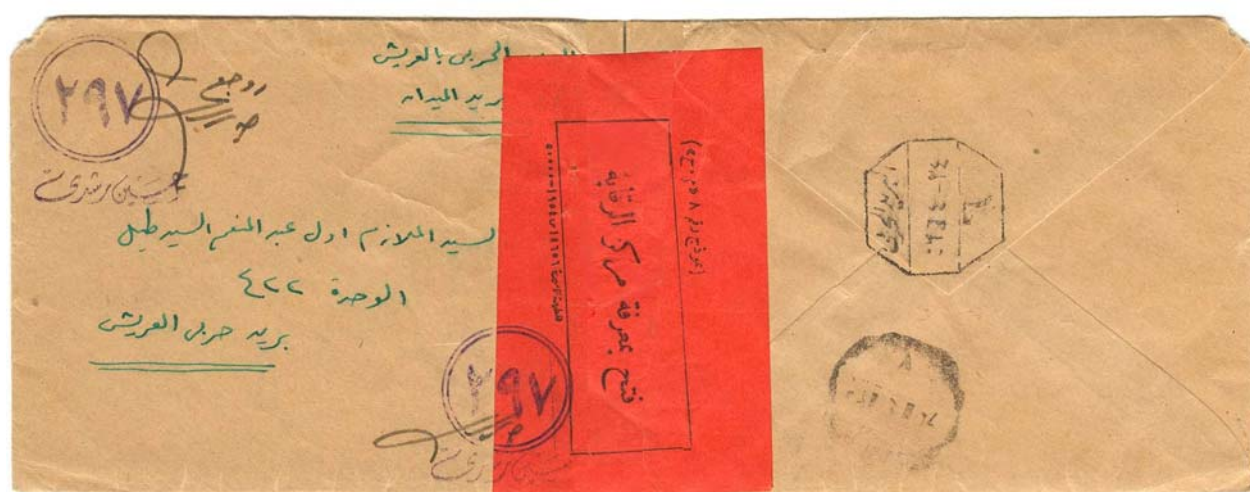


While I know of no Egyptian postal markings, the Navy did play some part in the war. The Egyptian destroyer *Ibrahim al Awal* sailed into Haifa Bay from Port Said, the warship's 4in guns firing 220 rounds at the port and the nearby oil refinery. A French warship anchored in the harbour quickly returned fire, but the *Ibrahim al Awal* was able to slip away under cover of darkness. She sailed northwest towards a group of neutral American ships. At 3.56am, two Israeli naval ships, the *Eilat* and *Yafo*, began searching for the Egyptian intruder, which was well hidden among the American ships.

At 5am, a Dakota pinpointed the enemy ship and the sea battle began in earnest. After taking a few hits, the *Ibrahim al Awal* began running towards Beirut. At 6.38 the IAF entered the fight. Two Dassault Ouragans rocketed and strafed the ship. They knocked out her electrical system, disabled her steering capability and put the munitions elevators out of operation. The warship had no fight left in her. At 7.10, Israeli sailors boarded the destroyer. The *Ibrahim al Awal* was towed back to Haifa, where it was repaired and later entered the Israel Navy as the *I.N.S. Haifa*.



A cover sent to a member of the crew just before the war when she was undergoing a refit in Malta



F.P.O.6 censored with double circle 297.

Israeli Markings

I have no information on naval or air force markings.

Israeli Army

The Israeli Army had introduced triangular markings some time after the 1948 war and as far as I know no additional markings were used during the war beyond those already in use. Each unit had its own number, the mail passing from the military to the civilian post office for delivery. The little information I have comes from BAPIP Magazine No 61 by Major Zvi Breset, and I do not know of any information of which units used which number or where they were used. As some covers used Egyptian “liberated” stationery it is only these that one can, with an appropriate date, be certain they were used by the forces in the Sinai.

Numbers in the table below may have been used in the Sinai and Gaza, including not only Operation Kadesh but also the subsequent Israeli occupation. Those found on captured Egyptian stationery are in **bold**:



1072	Et Tor	2164		2594	
1151		2213		2662	
2105		2215		2688	Abu Rudeis
2135		2295		2919	
2146		2323		2922	
2149		2325	Et Tor	2940	
2155		2572			



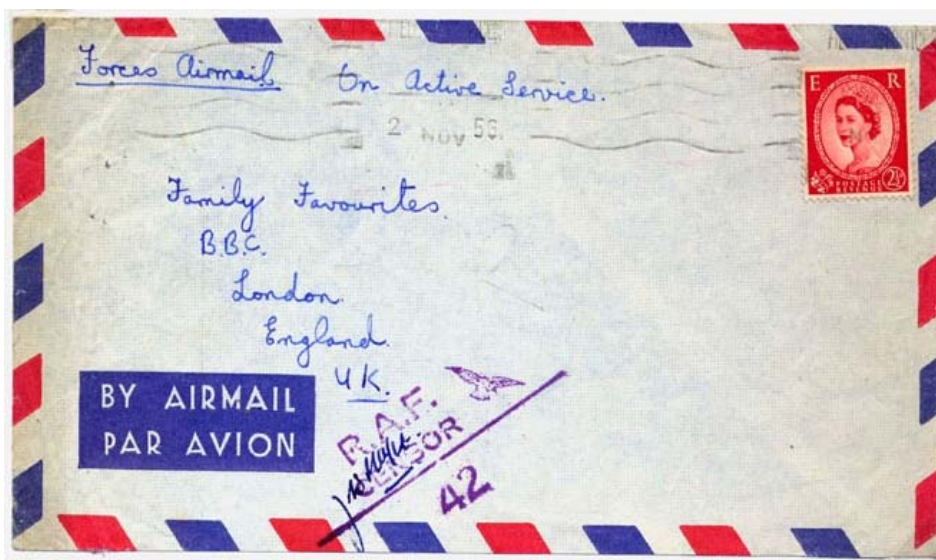
Two covers from Israeli troops using liberated envelopes.



The original plan was to attack Alexandria – the main aim being to remove Nasser – but the attack was switched to Port Said. The ensuing war was a fiasco politically. Other than a few at the highest level, the British and French commanders had no idea of the collusion and thought Israel was also an enemy. The British commander, General Sir Charles Keightley, not knowing he was meant to help the Israelis, postponed the original air raids and Dyan nearly abandoned the Sinai, cursing the British as “*lying bastards who couldn't keep their word*”. Abba Eban, the Israeli Ambassador to the UN, suggested that Israel would agree to the peace plan before the British/French attack, causing Eden to panic. After the first few days the Egyptian air force stayed grounded or flew to safety in Syria and Saudi Arabia, not that the pilots were afraid but Nasser ordered them to stay grounded, reasoning that the aircraft would quickly be replaced but the pilots not so easily so.

While the French had some contact with the Israelis, the British had none and on finding Israeli liaison officers on Cyprus agreed to their remaining “as long as we did not know they were there”. French pilots left Cyprus with sealed orders and after take-off found they had to fly to Israel. On landing they were surprised to find Israeli technicians changing the French roundels to the Star of David. It was French planes flying from Israel that destroyed the feared Ilyushin-28s at Luxor. With a run on the pound partly orchestrated by Eisenhower and Bulganin threatening Britain with atomic retaliation, Eden panicked and stopped the fighting without reference to France. One myth that survives is that if the canal had been taken, Suez would have remained under British and French control. International pressure would still have caused the ignominious withdrawal that followed.

The French were incensed and for many years mistrusted the British: the debacle was partly instrumental in France's withdrawal From Nato. Algeria was lost and both Britain and France accelerated their withdrawal from empire as spent forces. Eisenhower later was to say that Suez was his biggest mistake. Eden resigned and left office a broken man. Khrushchev was soon removed, one reason being given as his almost getting the Soviet Union embroiled in an atomic war over Suez. The Russians had their naval base at Alexandria and influence in Egypt for only a few years. Ben-Gurion's dream of holding the Gaza strip and the eastern Sinai, to ensure passage of shipping into the Red Sea, was thwarted by America and international pressure. Nasser appeared to be realising his pan-Arab dream of a united Arab entity with all the Arab countries behind him, culminating in the 1957 “treaty of Arab solidarity”. But by the end of 1957 King Abd al-'Aziz of Saudi Arabia had become convinced that Nasser's Arab nationalism would become a fatal threat to his family's political survival. By 1958, Jordan and Saudi Arabia had joined Iraq as Egypt's main enemies. There were no winners in this war.



Cover from F.P.O.3 based at RAF Akrotiri with one of the short-lived RAF censor marks.

Tail-piece: at my local stamp club a couple of weeks ago two members were discussing Suez, both having played small parts while serving in Cyprus at the time. One recounted a conversation with an American reporter who was dispatched post-haste to Cairo when the balloon went up. He landed at Cairo just at the British were bombing the airport and suggest to the Egyptians: “Shouldn't the people be evacuated?” “No,” came the response. “They're only bombing the runway”, upon which a Canberra obligingly dropped a few bombs dead centre. The reporter then confronted an Egyptian major in jodhpurs with a small dog on a lead, every inch a Sandhurst product, smoking Players. He pointed out that they were “enemy cigarettes”, to which the major replied, quick as a flash: “Yes, but we are under strict instructions to destroy enemy property by burning.”

I should like to thank several members of the circle and the Forces Postal History Society for some of the illustrations. Any further information or illustrations would be welcome. The main body of this article was done three years ago from notes gathered over 20 years and while I may not recall all of my sources I believe I list the main ones below.

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