

# The "Military Postal Seals" of Egypt

By NEVILE L. STOCKEN.



HERE has been a good deal of controversy as to the status of these interesting labels. Here is some light on their use which may help readers to decide whether they care to class them as legitimate postage stamps or not.

In the latter half of 1932 an official notice referring to correspondence bearing these "Seals" was distributed amongst the rank and file of the British Army of Occupation in Egypt, of which the following is an abridged version:

"The letters *must* be posted in Regimental or Unit post boxes and not in Egyptian post boxes.

"Letters for air mail, registered letters, letters containing valuables must continue to be despatched through Egyptian post offices.

"The money paid for the Special Seals will be collected from the N.A.A.F.I. by the Command Paymaster for the purpose of raising the considerable sum of money which has to be paid to the Egyptian Government for the concession.

"The Lt.-Gen. Commanding and the Air Vice-Marshal have incurred a serious financial responsibility in the matter and it is hoped, therefore, that all members of the Royal Air Force and the Army in Egypt and their families will use this new system of postage and so help to establish it on a sound footing and eliminate the risk of financial loss. Should they not do so the scheme will have to be abandoned."

From this notice it is decisively shown that these labels were to all intents and purposes actual postage stamps issued by the British military authorities with the full ordination of the Egyptian Government. The facts that they were issued at reduced postal rates, and that the Government of Egypt received a lump sum in consideration of the carriage of letters bearing them, do not in any way exclude them from their status of genuine official issues (the payment for the concession was £10,000 in the first year and £6,000 in the second).

It has been argued that because all correspondence franked by these labels would not be recognised by the Egyptian postal authorities if posted in the ordinary way in a public letter box, they are therefore not postage stamps, but I think that this assertion is quite untenable. True, they had to be posted in military boxes only, and had to be handstamped by the military post office officials in order to meet the requirements laid down by the Egyptian executive, but I cannot see that these special regulations cause them to be otherwise than official postage stamps used for a postal purpose.

The circular handstamps used for the purpose of officially "passing" letters bearing these stamps was lent by the Egyptian Government. It comprised a double concentric circle containing a number in the centre varying according to the station at which it was used; between the outer and inner circles are the words "Egypt—Postage Prepaid," the whole surmounted by an Egyptian crown. The labels themselves are cancelled in various coloured inks by a diamond-shaped obliterator of 81 dots in a frame.

The issues of the stamps are as follow. All were ordered to be withdrawn from use on March 1st, 1936, when they were superseded by the "Army Post" emissions, but it is probable they were allowed to be used for a fortnight after.

1932 (Nov. 1). Type 1 inscribed "Postal Seal". Perf. 11.

1. 1 piastre red and blue. 500,000 issued. Known imperf.

1932 (end of Nov.). Type 2 inscribed "Xmas Seal". Perf. 11½.

2. 3 millièmes black on blue.

1933 (Aug.). Type 1 inscribed "Letter Seal". Perf. 11.

3. 1 piastre red and blue. 516,000 issued. Known imperf.

1933 (Nov.). Type 2 inscribed "Xmas Seal". Perf. 11½.

4. 3 millièmes chocolate. 54,000 issued.

1934 (June 1). Type 3 inscribed "Letter Stamp". Perf. 13½-14½.

5. 1 piastre rose-carmine. 250,000 issued.

1934 (Nov. 17). Type 2 inscribed "Xmas Seal". Perf. 11½.

6. 3 millièmes deep blue. 63,000 issued.

1934 (Dec. 5). Type 3 inscribed "Letter Stamp". Perf. 13½-14½.

7. 1 piastre green. 250,000 issued.

1935 (April 24). Type 3 as last. Perf. 14.

8. 1 piastre red. 405,000 issued.

1935 (May 6). Type 3 as last overprinted in red "Jubilee Commemoration 1935".

9. 1 piastre blue. 27,000 issued. Variety with broken "U" in "Jubilee".

1935 (Nov.). Type 2 inscribed "Xmas Seal". Perf. 14.

10. 3 millièmes red-orange. 101,000 issued.

11. 3 millièmes pale orange. 2nd printing (in Dec.) of 12,075.

1935 (Dec. 22). Type 3 overprinted "Xmas 1935, 3 Millièmes".

12. 3 millièmes on 1 piastre red (No. 8). 10,000 issued.



The smaller perf. of the earlier issues (usually classed as "perf. 14") is from a comb-machine, the pins of which vary from  $13\frac{1}{2}$  to nearly  $14\frac{1}{2}$ , and the other perfs. by single-lined "guillotines," the one perf.  $11\frac{1}{2}$  having very small pins. Both values were issued in booklets of 100 (five pages of 20 each), the lower value in panes  $5 \times 4$  and the higher  $4 \times 5$ . The 3 millièmes was intended for the postage of Christmas and New Year cards.

The so-called "franking" stamps which were used were numbered for the various stations as follows:—

Moascar	...	...	...	...	...	1, 7 and 8
Port Said	...	...	...	...	...	9 and 10
Abu Sneir	...	...	...	...	...	11 and 12
Aboukir	...	...	...	...	...	13 and 14
Ras-el-Tin (Alexandria)	...	...	...	...	...	15 and 16
Mustapha (Alexandria)	...	...	...	...	...	17 and 18
Cairo	...	...	...	...	...	21, 22 and 23

Type 1.  
Printed by Hanbury, Tompsett & Co.,  
London.

Type 2.  
Printed by The Amalgamated Press,  
Cairo.

Type 3 (Sphinx).  
Printed by Harrison & Sons, London.

These "seal" stamps were used in exactly the same way, for the same purpose, and under the same regulations as the government-printed issues which superseded them, yet most catalogue publishers illogically catalogue the later ones but do not recognise the former, the very feeble "reason" for the differentiation being that one was stuck on the back and the other on the front of the missives they were used on!

The contention that it was the circular handstamp that was the real franking power will not hold water for a moment. The adhesive label was the real stamp that defrayed the postage upon the package that bore it—stamps issued and paid for by the British Military power to the Egyptian Government and issued with the full sanction and authority of the said government. The circular mark was merely to show that the letter had been duly posted in a barrack post box and therefore by a person entitled to use the mails at the agreed reduced fee. No amount of casuistry can get away from this fundamental fact. Had a letter been embellished by this so-called "frank" **without** an adhesive "seal", it would have been charged at double full rate to the recipient (or returned to the sender), thus proving that it was in no way a **frank**.

The use of the word "seal" in the first place was perhaps unfortunate and gave rise to the mistaken idea that these labels were possibly not real "stamps," but it should be noted that this was altered from the former to the latter word in the later type. This alteration is very significant and clearly shows the true purpose these stamps fulfilled.

## Letters to the Editor

### THE MILITARY POSTAL SEALS OF EGYPT.

Sir,—I would like to thank Mr. Stocken for his admirable article on "The Military Postal Seals of Egypt" in the current number of your journal, in which he makes a determined effort to prevent these "seals", "stamps", or "labels" from being consigned to the rubbish heap. Actually they are a most attractive facet of a veritable gem among the treasures of Egyptian postal history. But they are only a facet and if collected alone they will probably find a resting place in the albums of those whose pleasure it is to accumulate "labels", and there they will be neither appreciated at their proper worth, nor understood.

In my possession are three personal letters written to me by a senior member of the Headquarters Staff, British Troops in Egypt, and dated Cairo, 22nd December, 1932; 25th January, 1933; and 6th March, 1933. In the first appears:—

"You have possibly seen the letters, and on the back you will find the postal seal (or stamp) which is issued by us to show that we have been paid the amount of money required to cover the cost of postage. The frank is then used in our various offices to denote that the postage has been prepaid.

"The offices and respective numbers are as follows:

Camp Commandant, H.Q., B.T.E.	- - -	1—3 and 20—25.
H.Q. Canal Bde., Moascar	- - -	7, 8 and 19.
O.C. Troops, Port Said	- - -	9 and 10.
No. 4 Flying Training School, Abu-Sueir	- - -	11 and 12.
R.A.F. Depot, Aboukir	- - -	13 and 14.
Military Hospital, Ras-el-Tin, Alexandria	- - -	15 and 16.
H.Q. Alexandria Area	- - -	17 and 18."

The letter of 25/1/33 includes:

"I am sorry that the information I gave you did not indicate the position of the numerals 4, 5 and 6. This came about owing to the fact that the Cairo Military Post Office, which works directly under the Camp Commandant, was omitted. These numerals are used in our Cairo Military Post Office which is situated inside the Egyptian General Post Office.

"You now have the information regarding the whole lot, except that since writing to you No. 3 has been issued as an additional stamp for Moascar, and No. 19 has been withdrawn to the Camp Commandant.

"The reason why certain places have two stamps is because they are isolated, and if one stamp should break there is one in reserve until the Camp Commandant can put them right again. If they only held one stamp and it was mislaid or broken, the postal despatch of that particular station would automatically cease, as the letters could not be franked.

"The Camp Commandant, Headquarters, B.T.E., Cairo, is in control of the Military and Air Force arrangements for postage in this command."

On 6/3/33 my friend wrote:

"I have heard that as the seal is not catalogued in London it ceases to be of the same value as for ordinary postage stamps. Nevertheless I hardly understand this, because without doubt the seal is a postal seal which carries a letter, or rather which admits of the 'Postage prepaid' franking stamp being placed on the letter.

"... the postal scheme does not function as an ordinary military matter with various clerks deal with it, but is part and parcel of the proper postal administration which works direct between the Army and R.A.F. and the Egyptian Postal Administration. In fact we have in Cairo our own Military Post Offices, and also one at Moascar.

"... you will then have received the numbers of all stamps in use, with the exception of No. 7 which has been mislaid! and also those which are kept in reserve by the Camp Commandant and are not in use."

This correspondence is available for inspection by any student who cares to see it. Personally I think it proves that the "seal" and the "frank" are integral parts of a philatelic whole. Obviously, either may be collected separately, by those who care to do so, but equally certainly both the seals and the franks are deserving of catalogue rank. You, Sir, as one of the acknowledged leaders in the field of Postal History will, I am sure, appreciate the great interest of this most unusual postal concession and will ensure that it receives due recognition in the literature to appear under your direction.

Between those of us interested in the subject it should be possible to extend Mr. Stocken's list of franking stamp numbers. For instance, I have covers from Cairo franked with Nos. 4, 5, 6, 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23; and from Moascar 1, 3, 4, 8 and 23, but not 7, which is the rarest of all the numeral franks. When 4 and 23 were withdrawn from Cairo and re-issued to Moascar I do not know. 4 was in use at Moascar as late as 15 MR.36; 19 used at Moascar is also rare and not included in my collection. Mersa Matruh, an office not mentioned by Mr. Stocken, had received No. 15 and was using it as late as March, 1936.

My correspondent also informed me that 50,000 copies of the 1932 Xmas Seal were issued; a fact not mentioned in Mr. Stocken's list.

Much of what Mr. Stocken has written in his concluding paragraphs is open to doubt. I should be interested to know whether he can exhibit an example of a letter bearing a numeral frank, but no adhesive seal "charged at double full rate to the recipient". May I remind him also that the adhesive "Army Post" stamps issued on 1st March, 1936, replaced not only the adhesive labels but also the numeral franks and that therefore they presumably took on the functions hitherto performed by both these interesting philatelic items.—Yours faithfully,

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W. BYAM.