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EGYPTIAN MILITARY _____ _____ POSTAL SEALS



By G. SEYMOUR THOMPSON.

These seals, with which most philatelists by now must be well acquainted, had their origin on November 1st, 1932, when the following proclamation, here abridged, was issued :-

“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 Pay-master 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.”

The amount paid for the concession in the first year has been stated to be £10,000 and in the second year £6,000.

I have been informed by a senior officer of the Army that the sale of these labels has fallen short of the guaranteed minimum. Failing some further concession the abandonment of the scheme would be deplorable both from the point of view of the wretched Tommy who will have to pay anything from 20 per cent. to 50 per cent. more postage and that of the philatelist who, despite any deviation from normal usage, has adopted them as stamps.

I have seen as many as sixty of the first type used on a parcel. Sixty piastres would convey 1,200 grammes as opposed to 78.2 piastres at normal rates, a saving of 3s. 9½d. in 16s., or about 22½ per cent. The value of this concession can, therefore, well be gauged and the Lt.-Gen.'s comments were perfectly justified.

Even at 2½d., however, the letter home seems dear when the person at home can write to Egypt for 1½d. If I were to suggest that possibly a Highland regiment had been quartered there at some time or other--well, perhaps I had better not.

What had apparently not been foreseen was that at Christmas, 1932, there would be cards to send out. This necessity was, however, met by the issue of Christmas seals at 3 milliemes, with the design of a camel and two pyramids. Even then three farthings is 50 per cent. higher than a halfpenny and again, possibly, Tommy would jib at the extra cost,

The canteen numbers range up to twenty-four : the proclamation only deals with five Cairo centres. The first type, issued in November, 1932, had the arms of the N.A.A.F.I. in red at the left end of the oblong seal and the inscription “British Forces in Egypt, Postal Seal, 1 piastre,” on the right; on wove paper, no watermark, and perf. 11. The cancellation or frank on the front of the cover is the figure surrounded by a double circle inscribed “Egypt Postage Prepaid “ and surmounted by an Egyptian Crown.

The first Christmas Seal, black on green, has as its main design a camel statant, very proper, backed by the summits of two pyramids. On a label at the top “British Forces in Egypt “ in sans-serif capitals, on a band across the centre “Xmas Seal,” and at the foot “3 milliemes 3 “ also in sans-serif capitals, perf. 1½ (rough).

By the way, the franks are found in red and in black. The label is cancelled with the rhomboid of eighty-one dots in frame.

In 1933 the wording of the seal was changed to "Letter Seal" in place of "Postal Seal," design and perf. as before.

The Christmas seal of that year was changed to a reddish-chocolate in colour, design and perf. as before. In 1934 a new type of label made its appearance with a design of the Sphinx and inscribed "British Forces in Egypt, Letter Stamp, 1 piastre, "in. crimson lake. The paper used is much higher in finish and the perf. was changed to 16.

In the same year, for some reason unknown, the colour was changed to green and is still in use. The Christmas Seal in 1934 was changed to dark blue on bluish.

The Jubilee Seals of 1935 were of the same design in rich blue on white, overprinted in red block letters "Jubilee Commemoration, 1935". The Sphinx types have been printed and produced by Harrison's ; the others are believed to be of local manufacture.

Since writing the above some very interesting material has come into my hands from a military source. It appears that there are the following sub-varieties :-

Types I and II Medallion. No. 5 (a) small dot, (b) No. 9, no dot after "FORCES"; letter "I" of "INSITUTE" broken (No. 13) ; diagonal stroke (right to left) through "E" of "SEAL."

Type III Sphinx. "P" of "PIASTRE" in bottom left-hand corner does not touch horizontal line above it; second "T" of "LETTER" has right side of right arm broken; the "s" of "FORCES" has white dot in upper crook. These varieties apply only to one each on the sheet.

There is a variety of the jubilee overprint with a defective "u" in "JUBILEE":

All issues were in booklets of 100 in five sheets of twenty, the postal and letter seals in five rows of four, the Christmas seals in four rows of five. Apparently they were not issued in sheets of 100.

The "Postage Prepaid" cancellations were affixed in the orderly rooms, the "M.P.O" and town cancellations at the post offices, where no doubt the rhomboid was also added.

The following is furnished by- Mr. Jean Boulad, of Cairo, writing for *L'Orient Philatelique*, the official organ of the Egyptian Stamp Club, as a complete list of the barracks issuing these labels:-

- Nos. 1, 7, and 8 at Moascar
- Nos. 9 and 10 at Port Said.
- Nos. 11 and 12 at Abu Sueir.
- Nos. 13 and 14 at Aboukir.
- Nos. 15 and 16 at Ras-el-Tin (Alexandria).
- Nos. 17 and 18 at Mustapha (Alexandria).
- Nos. ,21, 22, and 23 at Cairo.
- Nos. 2 to 6, 19, 20, 24, and 25 are not at present in use.

The dates of the various issues are given as : - Type (I), Postal Seal, Medallion, November 1st, 1932; Letter Seal, Medallion, 1933; Sphinx type, lake, June, 1934; Sphinx type, green, December, 1934; Sphinx type, blue (Jubilee; flay, 1935The blue (Jubilee) seal has not been reported without overprint.

The next issue will be, it is believed, in red.

It is the writer's hope that some statistics will be forthcoming from Cairo as to the number of each printed. Should the scheme be abandoned it will then be found that dealers are short of supplies and should demand warrant it the value of these labels will rise rapidly, because they have no parallel in philately.