

Stamp Collecting, December 14th, 1940.

Xmas Seals of the British Forces in Egypt



Ever since the latter part of 1932 soldiers, sailors and airmen serving with the British Forces at Egypt have enjoyed the privilege of reduced rates of postage on their letters home.

Many thousands of Christmas greetings reaching friends and relations of our fighting men in the Middle East will reach England this year with an unfamiliar stamp with the head of the King of Egypt printed in green and the words "ARMY POST" along one side.

Up to five Christmases ago, however, the special "stamps" used for this purpose were provided by the N.A.A.F.I. authorities and were known as "seals" because they had to be affixed to the backs and not the fronts of envelopes like regular postage stamps.

It was in November, 1932, soon after the British Army postal concession had come into force, that a special stamp was called for, to be used on Christmas cards, etc., the reduced rate for which was 3 milliemes. A distinctive design showing an Arab with his camel in front of the Pyramids was prepared by Sergt. W. F. Lait, R.A.S.C., and the "Xmas Seals" were printed off, black on azure paper, in books of 100 (5 panes of 20) from electrotypes plates by Messrs. Walker & Co. at the Amalgamated Press, Cairo, being roughly perforated 111. The total printing for 1932 amounted to 41,857 copies. Tete beche varieties exist but are scarce.

Subsequent printings were made in the same design, but different colours, as follows:-

- 1933 (November) 3m. chocolate (54,000).
- 1934 (November 17th), 3m. blue (63,000).
- 1935 (November) 3m. orange-red (101,100).
- 1935 (December) 3m. pale orange (12,075).

On account of the large numbers of extra troops drafted into Egypt at the time of the Italo-Abyssian campaign the double printing of the 3m. camel seal proved inadequate. To supply the deficiency, 10,000 copies of the regular 1 piastre "letter stamp" normally used upon first-class postage matter were overprinted and surcharged "XMAS, 1935, 3 MILLIEMES" in black and issued, mainly to units serving in the Western Desert, on December 22nd, 1935. Later the balance was distributed among other military stations in Egypt, until on December 31st, 1935, they finally ceased to be employed.

Cancellations of military post offices most commonly met with on these Christmas "seals" are those of Cairo, Abu Suweir, Abyqir, Alexandria, Mossca, Port Said and Mersa Matrua. Covers are scarce and command a considerable premium.

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