

When a serving soldier from the frozen North found himself keeping the peace in the sands of the desert he turned his attention to forming a stamp collection based on his new-found love of the Middle East

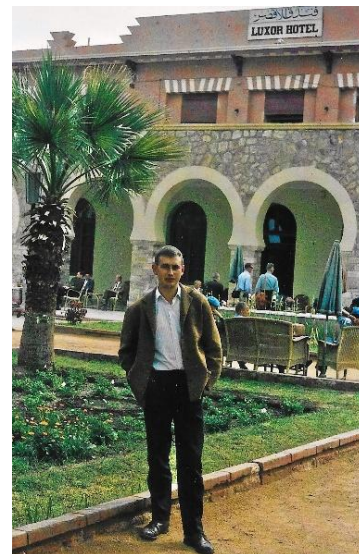


Why I collect Egypt – Ole-Fredrik Olsen (ESC 530), Sandefjord, southern Norway

A Norwegian interested in collecting stamps from the Middle East is not very common [*Ole is our only member in Norway* - Ed] and especially not the way I am doing it, by concentrating on material of the British Forces in Egypt.

It all started in 1965-66, when I was sent to Gaza as part of Norway's contribution to UNEF (United Nations Emergency Force), the UN military and peacekeeping operation following the 1956 Suez Crisis. As a UN soldier, I fell in love with the people and the history of Palestine. At that time, Egypt was responsible for the postal administration of the Gaza Strip, and I spent much of my time buying stamps, sending letters home, and asking my mother to open the covers neatly and keep them in a safe place.

In March 1965 I was given a period of leave from UNEF and went to explore Egypt. I stayed for a week at the Ambassador Hotel in Cairo, then three days in Alexandria, and a week in Luxor where I stayed in the Luxor Hotel (*See right*). I travelled by train in first class, feeling just like King Farouk. I roamed all over the Vally of Kings, took a felucca on the Nile, visited Abu Simbel and the Temple of Karnak.



For a collector like me, with a love for people and history, Egypt was the ultimate cave of treasure. I bought my first Zeheri catalogue and started to build my collection as no other Norwegian had before. In the 1970s I came across a cover from Mersah Matruh with a crown cancel and some seal on the reverse. I wondered what it could be, and started searching. When I found that it belonged to the British Forces, I said Go, go. go...



Forces mail from Mersa Matruh Meal time for UN troops in Sinai Winter Palace cds with Q for X

For the next 20 years I was able to seek out all the information I needed by joining the Circle in December 1999 and in the goldmine of books and presentations written by John E. O. Hobbs (ESC 159, died 2009).

In 1999, after a chance meeting at PhilexFrance I was fortunate enough to buy almost his entire collection and exhibited nationally and internationally as it grew in depth and extent: the first part on British Forces in Egypt 1932-1936, the second Egyptian Army Post stamps 1936-1941. Working for years on this collection mean that my love for Egypt and its history will never end. I hope whoever bought it years later really enjoyed it.

From 1981 to 2002 I lived in the United Arab Emirates, working for Jotun, a Norwegian paint company with factories in many Middle East countries. I collect British Administrations in Oman, and all of the Arabian Gulf countries. Today I still collect Egypt, including French Port Said and Alexandria, together with Palestine from 1918 until today.

To all our members, I love to read your articles and comments, and I send special thanks to Mr Greg Todd (ESC 585) for all the help he gave me at the beginning of this great adventure.