

## Back Issue of Military Postal History Society 'Bulletin': (War Cover Philatelist Dec 1940)

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# THE WAR COVER PHILATELIST

An Occasional Publication

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FIG. 1.



FIG. 2.

Vol. 3

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## British Army Field Post Offices, 1939-40

By Col. GUY R. CROUCH, M.C., T.D.

(Reprinted by permission from The Philatelist, October, 1940)

Now that the war is entering on a new phase, one can look back over the past year and trace the vicissitudes of the British Army Post Office in France and Flanders, in Norway, and now in Palestine and at home, from an examination of covers bearing the Field Post Office date stamps.

These have invariably taken the form of the usual double-ringed date stamp with two "obliterating bars" between (although they had no stamp to obliterate as a rule), and the number of the Field Post Office at the foot. Some Field Post Offices (probably those which were in fact stationary offices, in fixed positions at bases and elsewhere) appear to have had more than one date stamp in use simultaneously, as there are in many cases two distinct types of mark bearing the same office number. In one type the lettering FIELD POST OFFICE appears with considerable spaces between the words, while in the other type the spaces are so small that the words almost run into each other, thus FIELDPOSTOFFICE. These types may conveniently be distinguished as the "spaced" type (Fig. 1) and the "close" type (Fig. 2) respectively.

Another point of interest is the peculiar figure 4 appearing in many of the date stamps with office numbers from 41 to 49 inclusive and 54. In those of the "spaced" type the figure 4 is serifed, whereas in the "close" type the figures are invariably sans-serif, as elsewhere throughout the series.

At the time of writing the Field Post Office numbers below 150 so far recorded (those above 150 will be mentioned separately) are: 1 (used at Tientsin, N. China, from 1927 until the evacuation of August, 1940), \*4-12, 14-33, 35-75, 77, 78, 80-82, 85-92, 104, 110-115, 121-124, 127, 130 and 132. Although I have seen it stated that all the numbers up to 100 have been collected by one specialist, I personally have my doubts, whether all these numbers have in fact been used during the present war (they were certainly used during 1914-18, but the Great War impressions are of course easily distinguishable.)

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\*Although No. 4 has been recorded, I have not seen it and have some doubt whether it was in fact used in France. FPO's 1-4 have, since 1927, been in N. China, and No. 1 was in constant use in Tientsin until its evacuation by British troops in August, 1940. I suspect, therefore, that the series issued to the F.P.O.'s in France commenced with No. 5.

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 THE WAR COVER CLUB

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## New members:

- 45 Pierrepont E. Sperry, P.O. Box 291, Sunbury, Pa. (World War 2nd)  
 46 C.D. Brenner, 5 Montrose Rd., Berkeley, Calif. (World War 2nd)  
 47 Geo. C. Hahn, 835 Williamson Bldg. Rocky River, O. (World War 2nd)  
 48 Milton E. Cornman, 9901 Pratt Ave., Cleveland, Ohio  
 49 Ralph A. Kimble, 8118 Dante Ave. Chicago, Ill. (Literature)  
 50 Frank L. Stultz, 1123 Eoff St. Wheeling, W. Va. (General)

Correction: In the June issue the name of J. M. Perkins was inadvertently omitted as a member of the board of directors. Our apology. Mr. Perkins is now located at 118-16 14th Ave. College Point, L.I., N.Y.

Annual Convention: President Sanford announces that the 1941 club convention will be held at the Hotel Hollenden, Cleveland Ohio, in connection with the annual meeting of the Garfield-Perry Stamp Club, March 29th and 30th. This is one of the largest annual Ohio meetings. Plan now to attend. A good War Cover exhibit will be held.

World War 2nd: With interest in covers of the present war, it is a pleasure to present the article by Colonel Guy R. Crouch in this issue. (We hope there will soon be British Field P.O.s in Albania and Lybia.) It is impossible to give more space in the War Cover Philatelist to World War 2nd, and it is a pleasure to announce the War Cover Bulletin, to be edited by Mr. George C. Hahn, 835 Williamson Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio, and published in cooperation with the War Cover Philatelist and the War Cover Club. As more or less complete check-lists are compiled they will be published, through Mr. Hahn, in the War Cover Philatelist. Send 50c to Mr. Hahn, and submit all current war items direct to Mr. Hahn for the record.

However, continue to send U.S. World war 1st covers direct to your Editor for recording. Our thanks are due Dr. George Wedell and Mr. V.A. Norman for sending their entire collections for this purpose. Mr. Norman suggests that we make a practice of using current patriotic envelopes in writing each other.

An interesting article on Canadian War Markings, 1900-1940, by Mr. M. Hertzberg appears in the Nov. 23rd issue of Stamps.

"World War Soldiers' Letters" in the U.S. Specialized Catalog: At the invitation of Mr. Hugh Clark, editor of Scott's Catalogs, your Editor contributed a two-page general article, appearing on pages 19 and 20 of the 1940 U.S. Specialized. More about this later.

Priced Catalog of A.E.F. covers: With this issue you will find a priced catalog of A.E.F. postmarks and covers. Bind these with your Type Charts A (and supplement), B, C, and D, and you will have a 24-page handy catalog and type chart. An additional copy will be sent to each member by the Secretary in a few days, and each new club member will receive a copy.

If not a member, join the club and use the enclosed application blank. If you are a member, then make use of the blank to secure a new member. The War Cover Philatelist is still not paying its way. If the membership and subscription list were doubled we could issue a much larger publication.

## A.E.F. Type A-41 Postmarks

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(Continued from p. 24)

## APO 781 (Vichy)

Early 16 NOV 1929 (Error for 1918) Only specimens seen.  
Late 21 DEC 1918 (1918 inverted)

## APO 783 (8th Army Corps)

Early 16? SEP 1918 (Purple) Only specimens seen.  
Late -6 OCT 1918

## APO 784 (Toul)

Early 5 OCT 1918 (H.K.Robinson) Several intermediate dates.  
Late 23 OCT 1918 Do not confuse with 734.

## APO 785 (Allerey)

Early 12 SEP 1918 One intermediate date.  
Late 26 NOV 1918

## APO 786 (Clamecy)

Early 20 SEP 1918 (G.Wedell) Two intermediate dates.  
Late 25 OCT 1918 (R.R.Safarid)

## APO 788 (40th Division)

Early 24 SEP 1918 Only specimen seen.

## APO 789 (85th Division)

Early 14 OCT 1918 (G.Wedell) One intermediate date.  
Late 19 Oct 1918\*(H.A.Coleman)

## APO 790 (2nd Army Corps)

Early 25 SEP 1918 (V.A.Norman) Two intermediate dates.  
Late 6 JAN 1919

## APO 791 (81st Division)

Early 27 SEP 1918 Many intermediate dates.  
Late 19 JAN 1919

## APO 793 (7th Division)

Early 7 SEP 1918 Many intermediate dates.  
Late 13 MAR 1919 7 SEP in green; occasionally in purple to 30 SEP, 1918

## APO 794 (Perigueux)

Early 11 DEC 1918 Only specimens seen.  
Late 20 DEC 1918 (E.Carey) (May be 784?)

## APO 795 (88th Division)

Early 18 SEP 1918 Many intermediate dates.  
Late -1 NOV 1918 (H.K.Robinson)  
 Do not confuse with 796 or 799

## APO 796 (36 Division)

Early 11 OCT 1918 Only specimen seen.  
 Do not confuse with 795

## APO 798 (Mesves-sur-Loire)

Early 27 SEP 1918 Several intermediate dates.  
Late 31 OCT 1918

## APO 806 ( ? )

Early 11 NOV 1918 Several intermediate dates.  
Late 27 NOV 1918 Nov 12 in blue.

#2795

#796

S'n ☆ 33

S'n ☆ 33

- 
- AP0 807 ( ? )  
Early 8 Nov 1918\* (Mrs. J.W. Williams) Only specimens seen.  
Late -1 DEC 1918
- AP0 808 ( ? )  
Early 11 NOV 1918 One intermediate date.  
Late 28 NOV 1918
- AP0 809 ( ? )  
Early 11 NOV 1918 (G. Wedell) One intermediate date.  
Late 23 NOV 1918 (E. Carey and G. Wedell)
- AP0 810 (Possibly Italy)  
Early 18 OCT 1918 Several intermediate dates.  
Late 24 Nov 1918\* (Mrs. J.W. Williams)
- AP0 813 (Possibly Le Mans)  
Early 15 Nov 1918\* (Mrs. Williams) Many intermediate dates.  
Late -9 JUL 1919 (H.M. Sanford)
- AP0 814 ( ? )  
Early -2 NOV 1918 Several intermediate dates.  
Late 23 NOV 1918 (Mrs. J.W. Williams)
- AP0 815 ( ? )  
Early -6 NOV 1918 Only specimens seen.  
Late 8 NOV 1918 (Mrs. J.W. Williams)
- AP0 818 (Possibly Italy)  
Early 26 FEB 1919 Only specimens seen.
- AP0 819 (Probably Italy)  
Early 14 OCT 1918 Two intermediate dates.  
Late 30 NOV 1918 (Purple)
- AP0 822 (Italy)  
Early -9 OCT 1918 Many intermediate dates.  
Late 25 MAR 1919 Usually in purple.
- AP0 823 (Probably Italy)  
Early 9 NOV 1918 (Mrs. J.W. Williams) Only specimen seen.
- AP0 824 (Italy)  
Early 8 DEC 1918 (Mrs. Williams) Several intermediate dates.  
Late 23 JAN 1919 All in green.
- AP0 827 (31st Division)  
Early 25 OCT 1918 (Mrs. Williams) Two others seen.
- AP0 829 ( ? )  
Early 29 NOV 1918 (Mrs. J.W. Williams) Only specimens seen.  
Late 30 NOV 1918 Both in purple.
- AP0 830 ( ? )  
Early 25 NOV 1918 (Blue) Several intermediate dates.  
Late 28 JAN 1919 (Red) Blue, purple and red.
- AP0 831 (8th Division)  
Early 29 SEP 1918 (H. Artist) Many intermediate dates.  
Late 23 NOV 1918

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- AP0 832 ( ? )  
Early 22 SEP 1918 (G.Wedell) Many intermediate dates.  
Late 28 FEB 1919 20 Feb 1919 in purple.
- AP0 834 ( ? )  
Early -- OCT 1918 (Mrs.J.W.Williams) Only specimens seen.  
Late 17 NOV 1918 (Mrs.J.W.Williams)
- AP0 835 ( ? )  
Early 9 SEP 1918 (H.K.Robinson) Only specimen seen.
- AP0 838 ( ? )  
Early 8 SEP 1918 (Mrs.Williams and V.A.Norman) Many inter-  
Late 23 NOV 1918 (V.A.Norman) mediate dates. Purple  
from 4 Oct 1918 to 22 Oct 1918.
- AP0 839 (Probably Joinville, Haute Marne)  
Early 10 SEP 1918 Many intermediate dates.  
Late 23 DEC 1918 (H.M.Sanford)
- AP0 841 ( ? )  
Early 29 AOUT 1918 (H.M.Sanford) Two intermediate dates.  
Late 18 OCT 1918
- AP0 842 ( ? )  
Early 23 SEP 1918 Many intermediate dates.  
Late NOV 20 1918
- AP0 843 ( ? )  
Early 8 SEP 1918 (red) May be 848? Only specimen seen.
- AP0 844 ( ? )  
Early 2 NOV 1918 (Mrs.J.W.Williams) Only specimen seen.
- AP0 845 ( ? )  
Early 22 AUG 1918 (Mrs.Williams) Several intermediate dates.  
Late 18 NOV 1918 (Mrs.Williams)
- AP0 846 ( ? )  
Early 26 OCT 1918 (M.Hunt and E.Carey) One intermediatedate .  
Late 2 NOV 1918 (M.Hunt)
- AP0 848 ( ? ) Two intermediate dates.  
Early 8 SEP 1918 (pink) (Mrs.J.W.Williams)  
Late 21 JAN 1919 (E.Carey) Some question about 21 Jan 1919.
- AP0 849 ( ? )  
Early 16 AOUT 1918 Several intermediate dates.  
Late 20 NOV 1918 (Mrs.Williams) 16 Aout 1918 in purple.
- AP0 850 ( ? )  
Early 31 AUG 1918 (purple) M.Hunt Only specimen seen.
- AP0 901 (Milan, Italy)  
Early 7 FEB 1919 Only specimens seen.  
Late 15 FEB 1919
- AP0 CPO (902 - Bourges, Central P.O.)  
Early 19 AVR 1919 One intermediate date.  
Late 22 MAI 1919 (W.Montgomery) With dash at bottom of cir-  
cles instead of star.

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 British Army Field Post Offices (1939-40)

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(Continued from p. 33)

The numbers up to 69 or 70 were in use in France before the end of 1939, and the higher numbers up to 92 came into use during the first four months of 1940. With few exceptions, none of these office numbers have been used since the Dunkirk evacuation, and many of the date stamps themselves, with other postal equipment, probably fell into the hands of the enemy, or were destroyed by bombs or shell-fire during the fateful days of May, 1940.

With the exception of the Field Post Office numbers used in Norway and Palestine, as mentioned later, it would seem that the numbers between about 100 and 150 were used in offices serving the "Second B.E.F." before and during the "Battle of France" in June, 1940. Some of the earlier numbers, however, used in Stationary Offices south of the Somme, like Field Post Office 66 which was at Cherbourg, no doubt continued in use until the evacuation of Brittany took place on the collapse of France. Any of these, with dates in June, are worth watching for, as they will be of historic interest later on.

Of the numbers above 100, Field Post Office 115 was certainly in Norway during April and May, and possibly Nos. 110 to 114 also, but of the latter I cannot yet be sure. The Army postal communications with the North Western Expeditionary Force were slow and uncertain, and it seems difficult at present to say how many Field Post Offices were in fact established in Scandinavia during those weeks. It is to be hoped that, when the history of that expedition comes to be written, the postal aspect of it will not be overlooked.

There can be no military secret in the fact that Field Post Offices 121-123 are in Palestine, as these date stamps are found on Palestine stamps, and possibly Field Post Office 124 is there also. (Here it may be remarked that letters from the British Army in Egypt still have to bear the Egyptian "Army Post" stamps, and these are generally cancelled with "M.P.O." or "B.P.O." Egyptian date marks similar to those used before the war.)

For two months or so after the return of the B.E.F. to Britain, the only Field Post Offices which still continued to function were apparently those in Palestine and that in North China (F.P.O. 1), but in August, 1940, letters from members of the Home Forces commenced to arrive bearing Field Post Office date stamps cancelling the 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>d postage stamp, which the British Tommy then had to place on his letters home, after enjoying free postage for so many months (at least those who had served on the Continent.) It seems that the Royal Engineers (Postal Section) then once again commenced to serve the Army by setting up Field Post Offices in areas where large numbers of troops were stationed, probably in order both to help the civil post offices in coping with the resultant increase in traffic, and also to keep the Army Post Office organisation in training with a view to future requirements. The number of the Field Post Offices attached to the Home Forces (including those stationed in Iceland and the Faroe Islands) appear at the time of writing to range between 224 and 422, as evidenced by the postage stamps cancelled at these offices.

Field Post Offices 169 and 181 are also recorded, but these are in a different category which cannot be particularised at present.

In addition to the Field Post Office date stamps already described, three other distinct types of postmarks were used by the B.E.F. in France and Flanders. These were the Base Army Post Office marks, the machine cancellations, and the parcel post stamps.

Of the Base Army Post Office hand stamps there are three types. All are of the double-ring category, like the Field Post Office marks already described but reading BASE ARMY POST OFFICE, and differing from each other as follows:

(a) The earliest, and rarest, seems to have been used only in September, 1939, (NB. A specimen dated 9 DE 1939 has now turned up) and has "No. 1" at the foot between the two obliterating bars. This may be found either in black or violet ink (Fig. 3.)



Fig. 3.

(b) In October, 1939, a new stamp was brought into use bearing a sans-serif "1" at the foot.

(c) Later the number "1" appeared with serifs. These were used on letters emanating from or examined at the Base.

The machine cancellations were of the continuous type, with five wavy obliterating bars between the date stamps. They first came into use early in March, 1940, and two different marks were used, viz.:

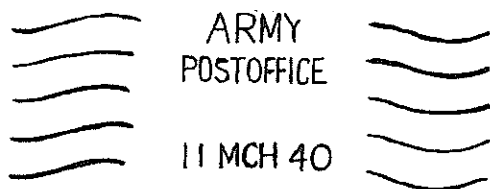


Fig. 4.



Fig. 5.

These have not been noted as having been used since the Dunkirk evacuation took place, and the machines may therefore have fallen into German hands.

The Army Post Office parcel cancellation is undated, with "ARMY" POST OFFICE in two lines across the centre of a circular stamp with the upper and lower portions of the circle filled in by vertical lines, in the same manner as in the parcel cancellations now used in civil post offices. This stamp seems to have been used, not only on parcels despatched by the troops in the field, but also at the Home Depot of the Army Post Office on various official labels, as well as on letters returned to the senders as undeliverable or those readdressed at the Home Depot. In the Field Post Offices black ink was generally used, but at the Home Depot the stamp seems often to have been impressed in violet ink.

The Home Depot of the Royal Engineers (Postal Section) is in effect the clearing house for all mail addressed to the Army in the field. Here a large staff of both military and civilian sorters was employed in dealing with the mails for the B.E.F., which were ever increasing in volume up to May, 1940, as the British Divisions in France, and later in Norway, were reinforced.

When the invasion of the Low Countries commenced on 10th



May, and the British Divisions advanced to meet the enemy, the Field Post Offices presumably moved forward with the formations to which they were attached, but no official accounts have yet been published as to their subsequent movements. Letters from the Army in Flanders from at least 18th May onwards, however, did not as a rule receive the Field Post Office date stamp, but seem to have been sent to the Home Depot bearing only the regimental censor's stamp.



FIG. 6.

Here the covers were impressed, sometimes on the front, sometimes on the back, with the "HOME DEPOT--R.E.P.S." date stamp, of the usual double ring type with obliterating bars between, and the number 19 at the foot between the bars (Fig. 6). Other numbers may, of course, have been in use for this service, but No. 19 seems to have been the one in general use at the Home Depot. No. 18 has also been seen.

On the arrival of the troops from the Dunkirk evacuation at the main points of dispersal and reorganization in this country, they were permitted for some days to write letters home free of postage, provided they were handed in to the Post Office through the Regimental Orderly Room. The few covers of this nature which have been seen by the writer bear the ordinary "Paid" stamp of the post town concerned, impressed in red ink, but without any amount of postage being shown in the stamp, which is therefore of the nature of an "Official paid" stamp.

This free postage privilege was, however, soon withdrawn, and the members of the B.E.F. who had for many months been able to write to their wives, sweethearts and relatives, post free, found that they had to start paying for the privilege again, as in civil life. Worse still, they found the inland rate increased from  $1\frac{1}{2}d$  to  $2\frac{1}{2}d$  per 2 ounces from 1st May, 1940, by the second War Budget! An extra 6d per day was granted to the troops in August, however, partly to meet the additional cost of postage and tobacco.

During the period of reorganization and rearming of the Home Forces, June-August, 1940, the civil post offices of the nearest post towns served the troops without any intervention by the Army Post Office, but in August letters from units stationed in various parts of England, Scotland and Northern Ireland commenced to arrive bearing Field Post Office date stamps like Fig. 2 with office numbers considerably higher than had hitherto been used, ranging between 224 and 399 as already mentioned. These, of course, can easily be identified by the fact that they bear ordinary British stamps and are without any indication of having been passed or examined by the censor. At the time of writing it remains to be seen how far this practice will extend, and whether the Army Post Office will establish a complete system throughout the British Isles or will only supplement the civil post offices where this becomes necessary owing to the concentration of troops in certain areas or the evacuation of the civil population.

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WAR COVER APPROVALS: AEF and US camp covers, military and censored covers from World Wars I and II, Italo-Ethiopian War, Spanish Civil War and others, Prisoner-of-war items, foreign field posts, &c. Approvals against references. STAMP BAR, 2015 S.W. Tenth Ave., Portland, Oregon.