

**HISTORY
OF THE
RAF POSTAL SERVICE
OVERSEAS
1942 — 1957**

Volume 1

by

W GARRARD

HANDBOOKS

"HISTORY OF THE RAF POSTAL SERVICES OVERSEAS 1942-1957 Vol II RAFPOSTS of SE Asia" by W Garrard - lists the 362 RAFPOST OFFICES used in India, Burma, Ceylon, China, Cocos Is., Hong-Kong, Indo-China, Japan, N.E.I., Malaya & Siam, with, where known, details of the type of d.s. used, known dates, their location & the Unit they served. A 24 page illustrated handbook. Price £6.50

"A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY POSTAL SERVICE DURING WORLD WAR I" - Outlining the main activities of the Royal Engineers - Postal Section (with brief notes on other relevant postal services) during W.W.I. Giving an insight in to all the main theatres of operation, standard postmarks, censor cachets and postal stationery used. A 32 page, fully illustrated handbook. Price £2.00

"CEYLON its Postal History 1914-1919" - Whilst Ceylon was not an active theatre during the First World War, the combination of the following blend to produce a fascinating, if limited, study:- i) its importance due to its location on the convoy route, ii) the religious troubles of the time, resulting in the introduction of martial law and iii) the use of civil censorship. A 12 page fully illustrated handbook, with valuation guide. Price £2.00

"CIVIL CENSORSHIP IN AUSTRALIA & DEPENDENCIES 1939-1945" by J C Smith covers the censorship of all 8 Military Districts together with Cocos (Keeling) Islands, Nauru, New Guinea & Norfolk Is. Tables illus virtually all cachets & labels (with scarcity guide) complimented by diagrams, illus, photo plates and map. 48p + cover. Price £8.50

"THE UNDERCOVER ADDRESSES OF WORLD WAR II" - This is an invaluable reference for both collectors and dealers alike - detailing, as it does, 80 such addresses from 16 countries/colonies. It lists not only those addresses established for communication between Allied countries and occupied Europe but also 'Internal' addresses for the Armed Forces of Governments in Exile, 'Secret' establishments & spy rings. A 24 page handbook. Price £6.00

"AN INTRODUCTION TO GERMAN CENSORSHIP 1939-45" - details the various censor stations established both in Germany and occupied Europe, the mail which they handled, describes the various censor devices and gives some indication of value and date of use. Illustrate, 12 pages plus cover. Price £3.00

"THE GUBA STORY. A tribute to an elder lady" - Recounts the fascinating story of a little known aircraft. The trials and tribulations of introducing it into the West African Service and the eventual success when it carried mail in late 1942. A 16 page illustrated handbook, with background information on the West African Service, of interest to both West African and Airmail collectors alike. Price £2.00

Postage & packing:- Free for delivery within the U.K.: Overseas clients are requested to add £1.50 (Europe 50p) to cover the cost of airmail despatch.

HISTORY OF THE RAF POSTAL SERVICE OVERSEAS 1942 — 1957

Volume I

by

W GARRARD

Published by:

Chavril Press

Bloomfield, Perth Road, Abernethy, Perth, T912 9LW

Tel: (073 885) 351

Chavril Press

Partners: *Avril M. Entwistle*
Charles R. Entwistle

Bloomfield
Perth Road
Abernethy
Perth
PH2 9LW

Tel: (073 885) 351

MORE THAN 30 YEARS AGO JOHN SMITH'S BOOK "THE HISTORY OF THE RAF POSTAL SERVICE OVERSEAS, 1942 - 1957" APPEARED IN PRINT. FOR MANY YEARS SINCE, BILL GARRARD HAS RESEARCHED AND RECORDED THE SUBJECT UNTIL NOW HE IS IN A POSITION TO BRING THE INFORMATION CONTAINED IN JOHN'S PUBLICATION UP TO DATE. BILL HAS NOT ONLY REVISED, UPDATED AND ADDED TO MOST OF THE ORIGINAL INFORMATION BUT HAS ALSO CHANGED THE EMPHASIS OF THE BOOK FROM ONE WHICH FOCUSED ON THE ACTUAL POSTMARK TO ONE CONCENTRATING ON THE OFFICE OF ISSUE.

THE MANUSCRIPT ITSELF FORMS TWO DISTINCT PARTS AND HAS BEEN PUBLISHED IN TWO VOLUMES:

VOLUME I THE HISTORY OF THE RAF POSTAL SERVICE OVERSEAS COVERING ITS ORGANISATION, TYPE OF DATE AND HANDSTAMPS USED AND THE POSTAL HISTORY OF THE INDIVIDUAL COUNTRIES FROM ADEN TO WEST AFRICA.

VOLUME II A CHECKLIST OF THE RAF POST OFFICES NUMBERS USED IN INDIA AND SOUTH EAST ASIA (INCLUDING BURMA, CEYLON, CHINA, HONG KONG, INDO-CHINA, JAPAN, MALAYA & SIAM).

THE AUTHOR WOULD BE HAPPY TO RECEIVE LETTERS FROM FORMER R.A.F. MEMBERS HE HAS SERVED WITH, PARTICULARLY FORMER MEMBERS OF THE WIRELESS INSTALLATION AND FITTING PARTY WHICH OPERATED AT BARRACKPORE, IN BENGAL DURING 1942/43, AND ALSO FORMER MEMBERS OF HQ 180 WING AT ALIPORE, IN CALCUTTA FROM 1943 TO 1945.

ALL SUCH LETTERS SHOULD BE SENT TO: BILL GARRARD
7 HILLBECK WAY
GREENFORD
MIDDLESEX UB6 8LT

OUR THANKS GO TO CORA SMITH FOR HER KIND PERMISSION TO ALLOW JOHN'S BOOK TO BE USED AS THE BASIS FOR BILL'S WORK. IT IS HOPED THAT THE COMBINATION OF THE TWO WILL BRING BOTH PLEASURE AND PROFIT TO THE READER.

ISBN 1 872744 05 2

FOREWORD

An Introduction to the 2nd Edition

In attempting to produce a 2nd Edition of "The History of the RAF Postal Service Overseas, 1942-1957" I hope I have managed to stay close to the aims and intentions of the late John Smith, its pioneering author.

A new edition was essential in order to bring John's book up to date, to give it the benefit of recent research into such archives as the Public Records Office. This has proved to be somewhat of a mixed blessing, but progress has still been made.

It is also hoped this new edition will be seen to be a tribute to John's pioneering work in this field. Large parts of his original book still remain, but here and there you will find changes!

One area where it had been hoped the Public Records Office might have spread more light was into the RAFPOs of South East Asia, but in the event only a slight glow has resulted.

John gave us a detailed listing of the postmarks resulting from those RAFPOs and wherever possible this has been extended; but with one important reservation; where John was inclined to give priority to the description of the postmark, it has been my objective to list and deal with the post office which produced that postmark, even in cases where none are known to have been reported! It is hoped that when future postal historians stumble on a postmark which we would have given our wives to possess, they now will be able to allocate it accurately.

I must express my warmest thanks to my colleague, Nick Colley, for his willingness to allow me to publish selected extracts about the RAF Base Censors from our forthcoming book "RAF Censorship 1916-1956". I feel sure you will agree that these add extra spice to the book.

The Allocation of RAFPOs to Related Base Postal Units:

An attempt has been made to allocate such RAFPOs to the specific Base Postal Unit which operated it. This has been achieved solely by instinct and the application of some common sense, for there were no records to guide me. In the main the results have been happy ones and only the arrangements concerning Nos. 5, 6 and 8 BPUs gave cause for concern. In those particular cases, since No.5 BPU appeared first on the scene, it thus follows that certain RAF-POs would have been first attributed to 5 BPU and later transferred to either No.5 or No.8. For example, it would seem that Chittagong itself was first a RAFPO of No.5 BPU Calcutta.

This state of affairs should surprise no-one, since No.5 BPU was born after and out of the debacle of the retreat from Burma and confusion was

everywhere and when, in turn, No.5 gave birth to Nos. 6 and 8 BPUs the dividing lines of this common kinship is hard to distinguish. I will, however, offer this theory. Going east from Calcutta, the first natural obstacle one encounters is the river Ganges; a fearsome obstacle which be-devilled communications throughout the campaign. One would suggest, with some degree of certainty, that the river was the boundary. Every unit east of it, if also north of Tripura state, was allocated to 8 BPU and those units in Tripura state and south of it would belong to 6 BPU.

After V—J Day there is more confusion, not least because in the rush for demobilisation, fewer records were kept, and the ground is already poorly covered in any event. During this stage it is more likely that the units of No.8 BPU went into Indo-China and into Hong Kong, while it was most probably the units of No.6 BPU which took responsibility for Malaya, the Netherlands East Indies and the Cocos Islands.

INTRODUCTION

I well realise that I am beginning a subject, about which I do not know the complete story. However, I am hoping that this history, the outcome of ten years' intermittent and ten months' intensive study, to which many others have contributed, will form a basis for further research.

It was obvious when I first became interested in these postmarks that they were much rarer than the Army Field Post Office numbers and the Naval Mail cancellations of the Second World War. Two facts confirmed this. Firstly, unlike the two excellent books written about those Services, except for a one-page article by Mr. L.G. Clarke on the RAFPOST in the Far East, published in 1946, I can still find no other general articles devoted to this latter subject. The few short references elsewhere I have come across, will be included in the bibliography section to be printed at the end of this history. Secondly, the Air Ministry has told me that no official history has been written, nor is one being contemplated.

This brings me to the Air Ministry, who might be expected to hold, and therefore release, the official facts and figures. Since the war I have approached them on two separate occasions to help me write a history. The first produced a few useful details. Four years later I managed to arrange an interview with the Squadron Leader who is in charge of the present Postal Service organisation. After he had expressed surprise at what he had learnt about the wartime RAFPOSTs and so on from a fairly thin file, I was allowed to mark extracts from it for possible use in my article. Just four months after I originally wrote to the Squadron Leader I received these — "typed at Bristol"! I should make it clear that this file was merely one of background and historical details, also general correspondence. No lists of RAFPOSTs with dates and locations were included. It would appear that these no longer exist. I was told officially "there are very few details available on the organisation and administration of the Postal Service in the Far East. This situation largely came about as the result of files being burnt and destroyed in transit from India to the United Kingdom". Indirectly, I understood that the Air Historical Branch was unable to help me.

Whilst it is obviously possible that the majority of the South East Asia details were lost in this unfortunate fire, I have proof that as recently as 1953 the Air Ministry was able to supply certain accurate facts and figures on the RAF-POSTs in such places as Calcutta, Ceylon, Hong Kong and Japan. So I have asked more than once, "If you can still trace these details from sources not in the file I have seen, can they not be produced to help in this history?" Up to the time of writing I have had no reply to this question.

To sum up, whilst I am very grateful for the small amount of help the Air Ministry has given me, I can only record reluctantly that there must still be other useful files tucked away by the Postal Service or Air Historical Branch.

Having explained how little official information has been available to me, I want to explain how I propose tackling this large subject. Beginning with the reasons why the R.A.F. Postal Service was set up and an outline of its organisation, I intend covering the story under such headings as : types of date and hand-stamps; history of the service in various overseas countries; lists of numerical and other date and hand-stamps with known dates and locations; acknowledgements and bibliography.

Reasons for the creation of the R.A.F. Postal Service

On the outbreak of war, the R.A.F. peace-time arrangements were found to be increasingly unsatisfactory and inadequate; towards the end of 1941 considerable chaos existed due partly to the rapid expansion of the R.A.F., the handling of mail by untrained personnel and the greater dispersal of units. As a result an increasing flow of complaints began to be received regarding losses, delays, mis-routing and inadequacy of postal arrangements and facilities generally. Matters were finally brought to a climax by the representations of the Canadian Postmaster-General to the Secretary of State for Air. Overseas in Egypt and India, for instance, delays of seven to ten months in mail were not unknown.

It was decided to improve the postal organisation at R.A.F. Stations and accordingly the R.A.F. Postal Service was formed under the authority of the Air Council to direct, co-ordinate, supervise and standardise all R.A.F. mail arrangements and postal sales amenities.

Establishment

As a result of these complaints it was decided to set up in March 1942 an Assistant Directorate of Organisation (Mails) within the Department of the A.M.S.O., to be responsible for postal policy and executive questions in the U.K. The head of the Branch, the Assistant Director of Organisation (Mails), reported direct to the Director of Organisation. A cachet "AIR MINISTRY/ (date) /A.D.O. MAILS" in a rectangle 44 x 23mm. was sometimes used (*Fig. 1*).

The first activities of this Branch were concerned mainly with liaison work between the G.P.O. and the Directorate of the Army Postal Service. It became evident quite early that this was not sufficient to meet the postal needs of the R.A.F., and that a postal organisation on a wider scale would be required.

By the autumn of 1942 a scheme was ready, and sanction was obtained from the Treasury for the introduction of the R.A.F. Postal Service as an emergency measure; the continuance of which was to be reviewed at the end of the emergency.

Here it must be explained that up till then the R.A.F. overseas and in the U.K. where necessary, had relied on the Army Post Office; from about 1947 up to the time of writing the R.A.F. overseas has reverted to the British A.P.O. or local G.P.O. with concessional rates. Consequently I understand from official

sources on both sides that the A.P.O. opposed the setting up of the R.A.F. P.S.

The previous casual employment of personnel on mails work was discontinued and replaced by the introduction of the sub-trade of Clerk (G.D.) (Postal).

During the war the establishment of postal personnel was:- Officers, 60-80; Airmen/Airwomen, 3,000-4,000.

Many of the above were naturally employed in the U.K. at Class "A", Class "B" and Class "C" R.A.F. Post Offices, and part-time Post Rooms. This, with their many date and hand-stamps, is another story and has been written elsewhere. See 'Postal Markings of the RAF 1918-1968' published by the Forces Postal History Society.

Although the Air Ministry has been unwilling to supply the names of any of the officers responsible for the running of the service, I feel it wrong to omit from this history the, probably quite inadequate, list of them I have built up during my own research. They were:-

A.D.O. (Mails): March 5th 1942-December 1st, 1943, W/Cdr. A.C. Bayley

A/A.D.O. (Mails): March 31st 1943-November 30th, 1943, F/Lieut. later S/Ldr. W.J. Shewry

A.D.O. (Mails): December 1st 1943-February 14th, 1945, W/Cdr. W.J. Shewry

A.D.O. (Mails): March 1st 1945-April 6th, 1945, W/Cdr. M.S. Hards, D.F.C., D.F.M.

Should readers know any of them, perhaps they would kindly draw their attention to this article, as I would like to get in-touch with them.

The other officers on the staff of A.D.O. (Mails) or Postal Officers with the various Home and Overseas Commands included: S/Ldrs. Bird, German (A.E.A.F.), McCosh (M.E.F.), Whitehead (C.M.F.), and Williamson; F/Lts. Ager, Arnold, Benwell, Chapman, Clifford (India tour in 1944), Dawes, Feather, James, Jones, Rutherford, Scrope-Davies, Sinfield and Thomson; F/O. Mahon. In India — the roots of the RAFPOSTs — W/Cdr. R.W. Baird, O.B.E., organised the many P.O.s with the help and ex-G.P.O. knowledge of S/Ldr. S.G.W. Spaul. Mr. H. Finch was also out there.

I understand it was W/Cdr. Shewry's suggestion that the only real solution to the postal chaos was for the R.A.F. to have its own Postal Unit on each large station with a filing system of all movements to be used in conjunction with the stick-on redirection label. When permission was granted, he created an efficient service, which was second only to the long-established one of the Army. I think it was he who coined the alliterative adage "Mail + Messing = Morale". I succeeded in tracing him just as I was finishing this article. He lent me many interesting historical documents — again, unfortunately, there were no lists of date-stamps — and I am very grateful. He tells me he did in fact want to write a history himself, but was refused permission on security grounds!

The R.A.F. Postal School was opened at the School of Administration, Stannington, Morpeth. A Postal Supervisors' Course was held at Kirkham. Postal Clerks were also trained at the London Postal Region Training School.

An armlet was issued in blue cotton with the words "RAF POSTAL/SERVICE" 22mm. high stencilled in red. They were to be worn by all postal clerks on duty.

Formation of R.A.F. P.S. Overseas

After the position of the R.A.F.P.S. in the U.K. had become established, it was necessary to extend the new standardised postal system overseas. Accordingly, towards the end of 1942 this was introduced into overseas Commands. (As will be stated under Ceylon, a system had, in fact, started there in June.) In June 1943 the first R.A.F. Regional Postal H.Q. was established in Gibraltar. Three months later, No. 13 R.P.H.Q. was opened at Algiers. Thereafter, the postal procedure was introduced throughout the Middle East Command and eventually into all overseas Commands where R.A.F. personnel were engaged.

The introduction of the new standardised service was an immediate success. Great improvements were made, not only in administration, but particularly within mobile units.

In 1944 a report was made to the War Cabinet Overseas Mails Sub-Committee on the state of the R.A.F. P.S. generally, and especially with regard to the speedy delivery of letters from the U.K., of which the following were typical examples:-

B.L.A.....	2 days
North Africa.....	3 to 4 days
Italy (forward units).....	4 to 5 days
India (Western Area).....	6 to 7 days
India (Burma Front).....	9 to 10 days

Division of Responsibility for Postal Services Overseas

The basis of the division was laid down under three headings.

Firstly, where the Army or civil postal service operated in the country of delivery, the function of the R.A.F. was confined to seven main duties, most of which are included under the third and most important heading.

Secondly, where the Army postal service operated as the sole postal authority in the country of delivery, R.A.F. Postal H.Q. and Regional P.H.Q. could be established according to Command needs under arrangements made by the Command Postal Officer.

Thirdly, where no Army or civil postal service operated in the country of delivery, or where the Army or civil postal service did not handle forces mail (the former sounds to me a contradiction), nor provide postal sales facilities in

the country of delivery, the R.A.F. P.S. became entirely responsible for ten main duties. Briefly these were: Handling of all air and surface mail to, within and from the Command; delivery to and collection from, such points or air-fields as might be used for the distribution of mail; internal collection, distribution and re-direction of private and non-security official mail and telegrams; provision of limited post office sales facilities (including despatch and receipt of telegrams and cables), and accounting work in connection with this; collation of R.A.F. postal statistics; distribution of postal information; inquiries and claims relating to R.A.F. postal matters; R.A.F. Base Postal Units, Base Postal Unit Detachments and R.A.F. post offices established at selected locations as arranged by Command Postal Officer; Air Ministry D.D. Movements, in conjunction with O.7 (Mails), responsible for the postal arrangements of scheduled air and surface services for the conveyance of mail; and special instructions concerning postal sales, facilities, telegrams, accounting, scales of stock, equipment and stationery issued by Air Ministry to the Command Postal Officer.

A Command Tracing Section for the re-direction of mail of officers, airmen and airwomen was established at a selected location in each Command.

Areas included

Many readers will already know that in most Commands the R.A.F.P.S. continued to rely on the A.P.O. for the supply of date-stamps and facilities where required. This story will, therefore, only touch on B.L.A., B.N.A.F., C.M.F. and M.E.F. Commands, who used F.P.O.s or their equivalent. This being an overseas postal history I am chiefly concerned with the postal service in five areas; Aden, the Azores, Iceland, India and South East Asia Commands. It was here, because of obvious isolation and circumstances, that R.A.F. P.O.s, RAFPOSTs and so on were used. Since about 97% of all known date-stamps were in the Far East, this will be mainly the story of the RAFPOSTs known, or thought to have been located, in Borneo, Burma, Ceylon, China, Cocos Islands, French Indo-China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Malaya, Siam, Sumatra and Java.

Organisation

This followed two main forms, each of which was determined by local conditions within each Command, as for example the state of mobility of the forces employed in the area.

In the Middle East and elsewhere, except South East Asia, a regional scheme was devised. This was based on transport centres and concentrations of forces in particular areas.

An example of the organisation in the Middle East and the Mediterranean Allied Air Force (MAAF) is given below as are their recorded life. But no trace of Nos. 10 and 15 has ever been found, although John Smith places the latter at Gibraltar. While both numbers would fit both logically and neatly into the slots which John has allocated to them they do not appear in SD161 "Con-

fidential List of RAF Units" whereas all the others do, so they have not been included.

Command Postal Officer, R.A.F. Postal Headquarters M.E.				
No.6	No.7	No.9	No.11	No.13
				No.14
				No.16
Command Postal Officer				
R.A.F. Regional Postal Headquarters MAAF/MEAF				
No.6	Cairo	August 1944	to	July 1947
No.6	Ismailia	August 1947	to	November 1947
No.7	Habbaniyah	August 1944	to	August 1946
No.9	Nairobi	August 1944	to	August 1946
No.11	Steamer Point, Aden	August 1944	to	February 1949
No.13	Algiers	August 1944	to	April 1946
No.14	Malta	August 1944	to	August 1946
No.16	Naples	August 1944	to	August 1946

Datestamps are only known for Nos.6 and 11 Regional Postal Headquarters (Fig.9) but it is quite reasonable to assume that similar examples may eventually emerge for Nos.7 and 9. Two handstamps only, have so far been recorded from No.13 and nothing from the others.

It is interesting to observe that from January 1942 to December 1943, No.4 Air Formation Postal Unit is shown as an RAF unit in Cairo and No.9 Air Formation Postal Unit is similarly shown in Naples from October 1944 until February 1946.

The following note by John Smith is retained just in case some future postal historian is lucky enough to find records which have escaped me.

★ I do not know if the intermediate numbers existed, except No.15, which was Gibraltar, having originally been allocated No.10.

In South East Asia, different circumstances determined the organisation, which operated almost independently of the Indian Army P.S. Although designed also on a regional basis, it was administered somewhat differently, as this example will show:-"

Command Postal Officer. R.A.F. Base Postal Units										
No.1	No.2	No.3	No.4	No.5	No.6	No.7	No.8	No.9	No.10	No.11

How best can I sum all this up in a sentence? I think probably by quoting from an official report:- *"The significance of an efficient mails service particularly in*

relation to morale, was appreciated most towards the end of the 1939-1945 war, when forces' mail came to be regarded as a munition of war, was given top priority in all air transport services and was granted substantial postal concessions."

Since I have seen only one or two date-stamps in many cases and there are obvious gaps in the text and lists, I am hoping readers will be kind enough to correct and add to this history wherever they can.

Abbreviations

To save space, both in the text and in the numerical lists, a certain number of abbreviations have been made. Some of the more frequent are given below:-

A.C.S.E.A.	Air Command(er) South East Asia
A.D.O. (Mails)	Assistant Director(ate) of Organisation (Mails)
A.F.P.U.	Air Formation Postal Unit
A.H.Q.	Air Headquarters
A.M.E.S.	Air Ministry Experimental Station
A.M.S.O.	Air Member for Supply and Organisation
A.O.C.-in-C.	Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief
A.S.R.U.	Air Sea Rescue Unit
B.C.O.F. (J)	British Commonwealth Occupation Forces (Japan)
B.P.U.	Base Postal Unit
I.A.F.	Indian Air Force
I.C.	India Command
M.A.A.F.	Mediterranean Allied Air Force
M.E.A.F.	Middle East Air Force
M.U.	Maintenance Unit
P.O.C.	Posted out of Course
R.A.F.P.S.	Royal Air Force Postal Service
R. and S.U.	Repair and Salvage Unit
S.E.A.A.F.	South East Asia Air Force
S.E.A.C.	South East Asia Command

TYPES OF DATE AND HAND-STAMPS

(This section introduces the various types and gives basic illustrations. They will be used again in the appropriate sections dealing with each country separately.)

There were, basically, two types of these, single-ring and double-ring. Several rectangular hand-stamps and cachets are known for use on parcels, registered, re-directed or damaged mail. There were also at least three single-line hand-stamps. No machine cancellations have been recorded.

Single-ring Date-stamps

These were used in Aden, Ceylon, Iceland and India (*Figs. 2 and 3*). The various wordings and sizes will be found under the histories of the countries concerned. Perhaps the single-ring type can best be summarised as being between the 23mm. of Aden and Iceland to the usual 26mm. of India.

Double-ring Date-stamps

Every country which had R.A.F. date-stamps also had one or more of these

(Figs. 4 and 5). Again, various wordings — there were many — and sizes will be found under each country. A great number of the basic RAFPOST types have been recorded under "India". Whilst the majority of them, with diameter around 32mm., are typically Indian in appearance and, presumably, manufacture, only those used in the Azores and Iceland (Fig. 4) could be called typically British, with their thick cancelling bars either side.

Hand-stamps

Whilst nearly all the single and double-ring cancellers had a space for the correct date across the centre, several in Ceylon and India were undated. These I have called hand-stamps to differentiate them, though I realise that all the date-stamps were also "hand-stamps".

Four of the undated circular hand-stamps were used by the B.P.U.s. In the numerical series one is reported from Ceylon and three were from India; all these are thought to have been of local and temporary manufacture, probably replaced later by more uniform types. Of the one-line hand-stamps the only three recorded were used in India. The framed and open B.P.U. types were probably for permanent use on packets, but the "RAFPO 10" (Fig. 6) strike seems by its very design to have been only temporary.

Cachets

Under this heading I have classified all hand-stamps, whose main function was not to cancel stamps nor be placed correctly in the top right-hand corner of the cover, but to inform the addressee or postal authorities. I have seen several from the B.P.U.s in India. These and the four RAFPOSTs in Japan used rectangular registration strikes; one P.O. in Iceland added a one-line identification to the printed label. All these will be fully recorded later. (Figs. 7 and 8.)

Materials and Inks Used

In general, it can be said that the earlier and more temporary hand-stamps were made of rubber, the later and more permanent types of steel. To save space I have not usually listed them specifically.

Two basic colours were used — black and purple, with now and then a mixture of the two. The majority were in black; the rubber hand-stamps were more often in purple.

Varieties

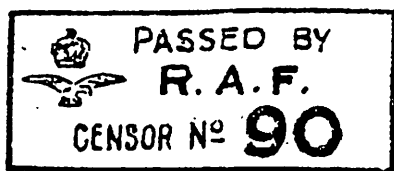
Considering the limited training of the staff and the conditions under which they worked, I have seen remarkably few varieties. The most common was of the complete moveable date-slugs being inverted. There were also occasional day and month reversed, day or year omitted, no full-stop after month, or the inclusion of a stop after "MAY".

No errors of spelling or frame-lines have been recorded, although sometimes the horizontal bars were very weak, probably from wear.

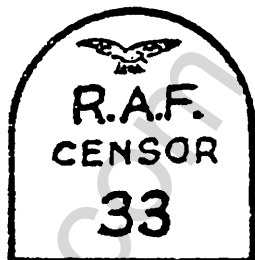
MOST FREQUENTLY SEEN RAF CENSORS



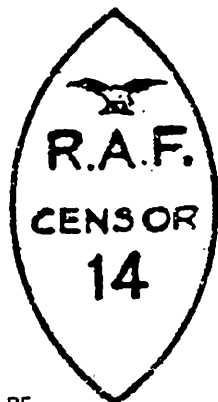
R1



R2



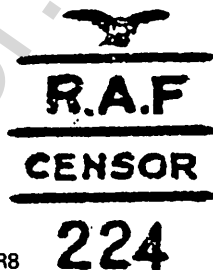
R4



R5



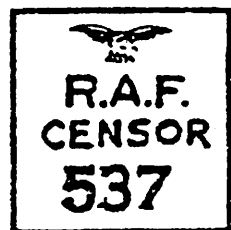
R6



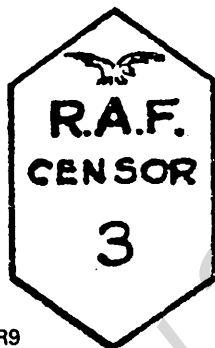
R8



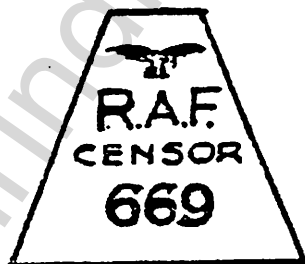
R7



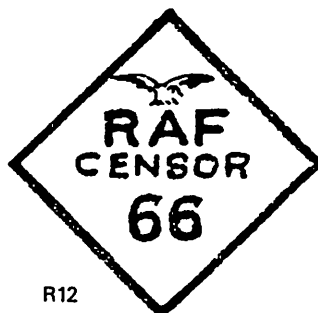
R11



R9



R10



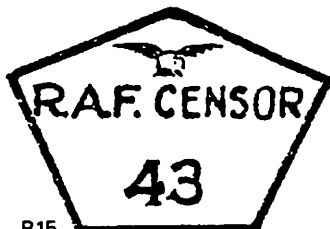
R12



R13



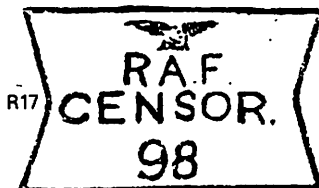
R14



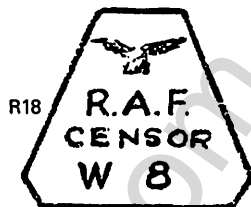
R15



R16



R17



R18



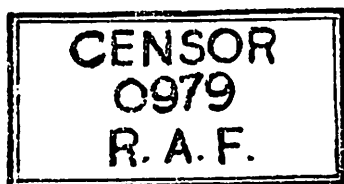
R19



R20

R.A.F.
CENSOR

R21

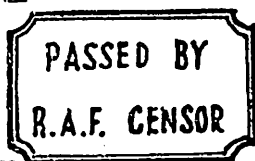


R22

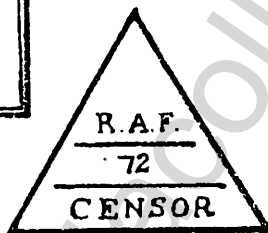
CENSORED

R25

265M.R.U.R.A.F



R26



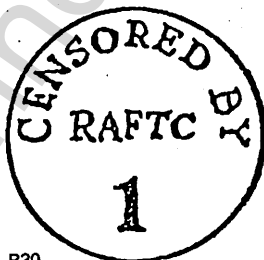
R24



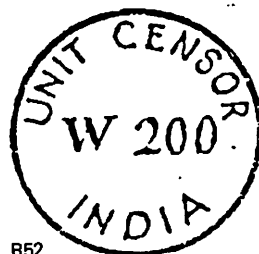
R28



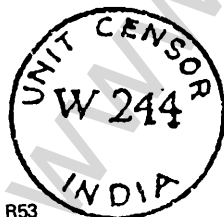
R29



R30



R52



R53

R.A.F.
CENSOR

18

RS1

POSTAL HISTORY OF INDIVIDUAL COUNTRIES

ADEN

This outpost has been guarded chiefly by the RAF - with local levies - for many years. No.11 RAF Regional Postal Headquarters was set up here under Middle East Command, in August 1944. However, it was not until after the war, in October 1945, that the datestamp 'No.11 R.A.F./POSTAL

H.Q.' (Fig.9) was first recorded.

It is not generally realised the extent to which Aden was almost totally invested in 1940 and 1941. When Italy entered the war in June 1940, British Somaliland fell shortly afterwards; and without access to staging airfields at Hargeisha (British Somaliland) and Asmara (Eritrea) the colony's air links to the west, north and south were cut until the success of the East African Campaign restored them again 18 months later. The Red Sea route was also of uncertain reliability at that time. Only the desert air route to the Persian Gulf and the sea routes to Mombasa and the Cape remained open.

Whether a security F.P.O. or open postmark was used regularly during the war I do not know, though FPO 729 is known to have been used there from December 1944 and John Smith records a copy from RAF Aden dated 24 Feb 1945. Two airmail letter cards recorded have the 3d G.B. stamp cancelled by a single-ring datestamp 25mm in diameter, reading "ADEN" at the top and "26 MAY/43" or "9 MAR/44" in the centre. The sender's addresses are respectively: S.H.Q. Khormaksar, Aden and ..?.. British Forces, 'X', Aden. The colours of the datestamp and the RAF censor mark No.59 (type R11) are so similar that they may well have been put on at the same time.

About September 1st, 1947, the first datestamp seems to have been replaced at Khormaksar by a neat single-ring reading 'R.A.F./ADEN' (Fig.2) at the top and bottom with '*/(month)/(year)' in the centre, which I have not seen after January 1949. This post office is not listed in SD161 and therefore could not have been an RAF unit. It was thus a civilian post office.

At least six different RAF censor marks have been recorded as having been used in Aden during the last war.

All the RAF Base Censors in the Middle East, unlike the RAF Base Censor Units of MAAF, were detachments of the RAF Base Censor in Cairo; no trace of RAF Base Censor activity has ever been reported from Aden. However, from nominal rolls kept by HQ MEAF Cairo, we learn that it is an historical fact that in July 1945, and perhaps earlier, the RAF Base Censor Aden was a F/O E.Collet. Unfortunately, the document which provides that snippet and similar snippets of information, fails to mention any information concerning the datestamps used for this purpose but at least it gives us something to look forward to.

It is interesting to recall that it was from Aden too that several provisional examples of RAF Honour Envelopes (Form 1645) were reported to the Forces Postal History Society. There can be no suggestion that the two situations are in anyway linked, but it must fuel the determination to identify the RAF Base Censor assigned to Aden in 1945.

For registration the RAF in the 1950s used a distinctive label reading 'ADEN (RAF)'.

ALLIED EXPEDITIONARY AIR FORCE EUROPE

On the formation of the RAF PS in 85 (Base) Group, Allied Expeditionary Force, British Liberation Army, it was agreed that the policy should contain adequate arrangements for the following: to adopt a 'closed' address by the RAF units operating within the A.E.A.F.; to liaise with, and to provide 21 Army Group with the fullest information concerning locations; to set up a tracing section so as to overcome delays concerning tracing and re-direction of mail from A.E.A.F. units; to issue comprehensive postal instructions to all units; to liaise with Dominion Base Post Offices and to provide postal arrangements in the concentration areas. The only specifically RAF datestamp I have heard of is the double-ring thick bars type reading 'A.E.A.F.-C.P.H.Q.-' (Fig.10) with the date in two lines in the centre. This has been recorded as being used by the Command Postal Officer, A.E.A.F. Base Group, SHAEF, between June and October 1944. Incidentally, another author, in a book published abroad, lists this as 'Canadian Postal H.Q.'.

I believe the C.P.O. was S/Ldr W.I.German, stationed at rear H.Q., 2nd T.A.F.

The tracing section at C.P.H.Q. dealt with re-direction of all undeliverable or untraceable mail. A complete up-to-date card-index of all RAF personnel within this theatre was kept. About 800 items per day were handled at this Station.

ALGERIA

For a few brief years from November 1942 onwards, the spotlight of world events shone brightly on Algeria and made it of great interest to RAF postal historians, - inevitably the spotlight shifted to Naples.

One could make a case for claiming the landings in Algeria during Operation Torch, in November 1942, were very significant stepping stones in the advance of RAF postal history. A free Algeria was able to provide the means of air transport to North America via the Azores, to the U.K. via Gibraltar and into Italy and the Central Mediterranean. The long air reinforcement route to the Far East via West Africa was now a thing of the past. The RAF Staging Post network had begun to develop. Central to all of this was the major airfield at Maison Blanche, outside Algiers and the Transport Command support squadron stationed there.

The "Torch" convoys brought with them their own RAF censor handstamps (Type R13). These were only used for approximately 4 months and were soon superseded by type R14, a locally made product.

There were two types of RAF Base Censor handstamps. The first (Type R19) was an undated type, seldom seen in use after July 1943. The dated type of RAF Base Censor (Type R20) carried the index number '2' and is known from May 1943 until February 1945. For some inexplicable reason this Base Censor operated in Belfast from April to July 1944, thus releasing RAF Base Censor No.1 for other duties over the same period.

In Algiers too, No.13 RAF Postal Headquarters made its appearance in August 1944 and lasted until February 1946. Three types of handstamps are known. The first is an undated 50mm double-ring type "No 13 RAF POSTAL/HQ BNAF", the second is a double rectangle type 48mm by 29mm and 30mm by 8mm, the date being inscribed inside the central box. It is worded "ADDRESSEE RETURNED/UNITED KINGDOM/date/No.13 RAF POSTAL HQ/

B.N.A.F." and the third one was "NO TRACE/ADDRESSEE/date/No.13 RAF POSTAL HQ/B.N.A.F.".

I believe S/Ldr H.C.Whitehead was Command Postal Officer at HQ MAAF.

The function of No.13 RAF Postal HQ was to deal with complaints, enquiries and investigations concerning private correspondence and the tracing and re-direction of undeliverable letters and parcels received from RAF units. Close liaison was maintained with the Army Postal Service, the extent to which the RAF postal arrangements would affect the Army Postal Service was discussed and agreement on the division of responsibility was reached.

AUSTRALIA

An official report stated the RAF was stationed here, but no RAF datestamps have been reported. This is because the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) had its own system of RAAF post offices across the country and these would have been utilised. The RAAF authorities rightly took the view that postal records were fit historical subjects to save for posterity, these details have been available in printed form for at least 30 years. This is quite unlike the ostrich-like attitude of our own Air Ministry in respect of censorship and postal records, to whom only things which fly are worthy subjects for historical conservation.

AUSTRIA

This country has the rare distinction of controlling the last RAF Base Censor to have operated following the cessation of the Second World War. No.31 RAF Base Censor was formed at Portici, Italy, in November 1945, for the sole purpose of service in Vienna. RAF records are quite definite that this RAF Base Censor operated in the Austrian capital from January until April 1946. Postal proof of this activity has yet to be seen. In that it is not alone.

This number has been previously known in March and April 1945 when, as a spare datestamp, it saw service in Marseille with a detachment of No.7 RAF Base Postal unit until this had, in turn, to become one from 2nd T.A.F.

AZORES

The landing by the British forces on Terceira Island on October 8th, 1943, meant the establishment of the first overseas postal service to be operated exclusively by the R.A.F. Up to this time the handling of mail for troops overseas had always been carried out by the Army Postal Service and the setting-up of an organisation capable of taking over the conveyance and complete distribution of all mail not only proved successful but exceeded official expectations. The first landing of mail was by Dakota with 22 bags on October 25th.

I do not intend to include many detailed facts and figures in this book, but the following may give some idea of the large amount of mail handled by the RAF PS overseas. In the nine months from October 1943 to June 1944 these were the despatches dealt with under RAF postal supervision in the Azores:

Outward Mail from Azores:	Letters & Letter Packets..	875,000
	Parcels (by air)..	34,546lbs
	Parcels (by sea)..	4,298lbs
Inward Mail to Azores:	Letters..	625,000
	Parcels (by air)..	5,710lbs
	Parcels (by sea)..	78,572lbs

In the six months following the landing, 13,000 registered packets were sent from the Azores to the U.K. and an average monthly turnover of £600 in cash was handled with a loss of only 3s.6d. All money was in Portuguese currency.

After initial arrangements for despatch and receipt of mail between the U.K. and Azores, further services were begun between the Azores and India, British Dominions and various theatres of war where British and Dominion troops were stationed.

Only one datestamp "R.A.F. P.O.-004-" (Fig.4), in double-ring thick bars, has been recorded between January 1944 and December 1945. As I understand we handed back the base at Lagens about June 1946, it is probable that the last known use can be extended.

Registration labels were of the "FPO DS No ____" type. In manuscript the figure "4" was added.

During July 1944 the Senior Postal Clerk was Sgt. L.G. Warminster, who censored his own letters. He appears to have succeeded a Sgt. Robinson (2214877). By February 1944 the Base Censor shared a 72ft Nissen hut with the N.C.O. and his six airmen.

The censor handstamp normally employed here was Type R6; seven numbers of this type are known and these take in the numbers 30, 88 and 209. These have been recorded up to April 1945, in conjunction with the RAF PO double-ring datestamp.

The Azores also used RAF Base Censor No.3 from February 1944 until May 1945.

BAHAMAS

For many years I was very puzzled by the inclusion of this island in John Smith's book; after all, it had no RAF postal markings and was, in any event, in quite the wrong part of the world.

Then light shone in the darkness! I realised that Nassau was a key player in the supply of American aircraft, across the South Atlantic to such diverse destinations as the Middle East, North Africa and South East Asia. Once American military engineers had blasted an airfield out of the tiny island of Ascension, in 1942; the way was then open to fly American aircraft, via the Bahamas, to all destinations.

American factory pilots would fly aircraft destined for the RAF to the Aircraft Receipt and Delivery Unit (ADRU) at Nassau, a lodger unit of No. 110 OTU. Once there, it was brought on charge by the RAF and sent on its way to its new unit, via the Caribbean to Natal, in Brazil. There it faced the 1,800 mile hop over the South Atlantic to the tiny island of Ascension before going on to Accra in Nigeria. After that came the long

haul across Africa to Khartoum, before forking either North or East, depending upon the ultimate destination.

BORNEO

Borneo is a very large island and when the Second World War ended most of it formed part of Netherlands East Indies. Only in the north west corner did the U.K. have a vested interest; in the three Crown Colonies of Brunei, North Borneo and Sarawak. Officially this area was the prerogative of Australia rather than SEAC and would thus have been administered by No.6 BPU in Singapore, but it has proved impossible to pin point any resultant RAF Post Offices. Nevertheless, the arrival of V-J Day did bring about one new facet of RAF history. The island contained very large numbers of Allied prisoners of war in Japanese P.O.W. camps; civilians, British military, naval and RAF personnel, Indian and Netherlands military P.O.Ws. This welter of P.O.Ws. needed urgent medical attention and evacuation, firstly to Singapore, and ultimately to the U.K.

To meet this need, the following Staging Posts (SP) were opened, either in Borneo or the rest of the Netherlands East Indies:

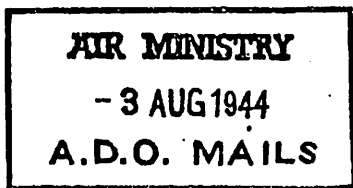
SP	Date	SP	Date
32 Batavia	1/11/45 - 30/11/45	157 Labuan Island	2/46 - 7/3/46
35 Medan	3/46 - 6/46	(157 renumbered 159)	7/3/46
37 Padang	3/46 - 6/46	195 Labuan Island	2/46 - 6/46
49 Palembang	3/46 - 6/46	196 Macassar	6/2/46 - 6/46
69 Kemajordan	3/46 - 4/46	197 Biak-Sorido	21/7/45 - 11/45
69 Batavia	5/46	214 Balikpapan	25/1/46 - 5/46
69 Kemajordan	6/46	215 Amboina,	25/1/46 - 4/46
155 Sourabaya	3/46 - 6/46	Moluccas	

BURMA

Censor Type R8 is first recorded from Singapore in December 1940 and gained a reputation for being involved in most of the trouble spots of the world. Thus it probably marched to captivity with the RAF in Hong Kong, Java and Singapore. But in Burma it managed to evade imprisonment, but only just!

There were two Type R8 censors at large during the retreat from Burma and both survived to fight another day! One (No.32) was carried to India, all the way to Imphal and then disappears from view, whilst the other (No.63) arrived at Rangoon just as the retreat was getting under way. It made its way to Chengtu, in China, with No.517 AMES.

A cover with No.32 bears on its flap the evidence of those momentous days. This is endorsed "BURWING", indicating it was written after the fall of Rangoon, when the RAF in Burma had split into two components, AKWING and BURWING. There are two subsequent sightings of this censor, both franked with Burmese stamps as the RAF retreated steadily northwards, until a final example is seen postmarked Calcutta in May 1942. The long walk was over!



1



2



3



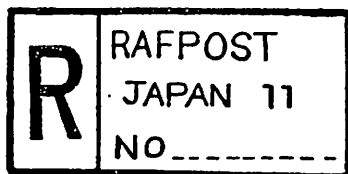
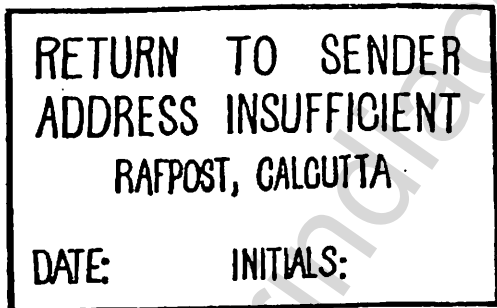
4



5



6



8



9



10



11

Rangoon was recaptured on May 3rd, 1945. Earlier, on January 3rd, the Allies had landed on Akyab Island; a further landing on Ramree Island, nearly a 100 miles south, was made on January 21st. The main airfield at Meiktila had been occupied during March 1944. Air HQ Burma was formed on September 20th, 1945, and continued until May 31st, 1946.

Mingaladon airfield was 'occupied' by the commanding officer of 110 Sqn the day before the British force disembarked. On a low reconnaissance of Rangoon, finding the city deserted by the Japanese and with Allied flags flying over P.O.W. camps, he landed, hitch-hiked the eight or so miles into 'town' and released some of our P.O.Ws. Finally the Wing Commander borrowed a native boat, rowed down the river to tell the British Commander that Rangoon was unoccupied by the enemy and offered his services as a guide to the "Expedition"!

No.8 Base Postal Unit was established at Rangoon, having moved down from Meiktila. Its double-ring datestamp read "RAFFPOST +RANGOON+" (Fig.11). I have seen copies of it only between March and September 1946; quite possibly it was working some months before this, but it seems one of the rarer base postmarks.

CANADA

Canada is justifiably proud of its contribution to the Allied War effort during both World Wars. It is hoped that it will not be thought to be belittling of that Dominion's proud record if I concentrate upon only two aspects of its aid to the RAF.

It would seem that there are two particular areas of assistance that Canada extended to the RAF.

Firstly, its involvement in the Empire Air Training Scheme freed many airfields in the U.K. for operational requirements by taking over responsibility for flying training; an occupation which could now be followed free of:- overlapping airfield circuits, our fogs and the black-out! This activity contributes nothing to our story since airmen and naval aviators used the postal and censorship arrangements of the RCAF.

Canada is famous for another innovation, - it is the gateway through which passed a never ending stream of American Lease-Lend aircraft. To N.W. Europe on the one hand and the Middle and Far East on the other. Without Canada, none of this would have been possible. Before the U.S.A. came into the war, aircraft used to be towed across the border in order to preserve American neutrality; after that date, aircraft were flown direct to Dorval, near Montreal.

This level of activity was instrumental in the birth of Ferry Command, later absorbed into Transport Command, and a chain of RAF Staging Posts to help new aircraft on their way. Some went to Prestwick in Scotland from Gander, by the North Atlantic route (No.112 Wing). This route was served by six Staging Posts from Labrador, via Greenland and Iceland to Scotland. In its heyday, even a single engine fighter could safely travel this route.

All this activity has left behind nothing tangible of a censorship or postal nature and we must content ourselves with recording three RAF censors from Canada itself. These are Types R30, R55 and R56.

CEYLON

The RAF Postal Service was opened here by S/Ldr R.W.Baird, O.B.E., as part of a welfare service, in June 1942, about 16 months before it was inaugurated in India. This may surprise readers as it did me when I first considered it. I can only suggest the following possible reasons: the Indian Army Postal Service was already working slowly but on a bigger scale in India, together with the Indian civil P.O. I realise that there were I.A.P.S. staff in Ceylon by 1942 but perhaps the number of RAF units stationed at inaccessible places in Ceylon were too remote from Army units or even small village P.Os. Most likely it was just a question of morale.

By the end of September 1943 30 RAFPOSTs were already in operation here, though it is doubtful whether they were issued with their own numbered datestamps until 1944. I can only suggest that before then all mail was sent to Colombo for cancelling; if so, did that apply to registered mail and money orders also?

No.7 Base Postal Unit was opened at Colombo, presumably in 1942, though it may not have been given this number until the B.P.U.s. in India were set up. It was postally responsible for the RAFPOST in Cocos Islands. During 1946 the BPU was in Turret Road; earlier it had been opposite the Grand Hotel at Miller's Building.

I have recorded eight different Base handstamps, five of which were single- and three double-ring types. The first single-ring, of 25mm, is an obscure rubber handstamp, which is always presumed to be a RAF one applied during 1942 to 1943 in Colombo, but it might be a Services' "security" one. Across the centre there are three parallel killer bars, "C", a space, "O" and three more killer bars, between three graduated killer bars at the top and bottom and is, therefore known as "IIIC OIII" (Fig.12). A similar-sized strike is recorded with the central letters much smaller. Perhaps the middle two letters are a semi-security abbreviation for Colombo (it was officially shortened to "CBO"). It is certainly one of the most interesting of the RAF (?) cancellations, and is illustrated in the hope that readers can tell me more about it.

During 1942 to 1944 there were three rubber types "R.A.F. BASE P.O./CEYLON" measuring 24mm (Fig.13), two with seven horizontal bars in the centre, the other having them running diagonally.

A similar barred type, though possibly of steel, is "RAFPOST/COLOMBO" in black.

Finally, during 1944 to 1946 there was a neat steel datestamp of 25mm reading "RAFPOST/COLOMBO" with the date across the centre.

In the double-ring types there were two nearly identical datestamps used simultaneously - anyhow during 1945-46 - on mail handed in at the BPU. They were both worded "RAF POST COLOMBO" (Fig.14) but the one which had the wider space between "RAF" and "POST" also had the ornament "+" on each side. I have seen a copy of the latter as early as December 1943. The third one, I admit, may not be a base type; the 75 per cent which is legible reads R.A.F. P(or B) ... + CEYLON +". On the left-hand side there is no number, but I am inclined to feel it should be there.

John Smith records a double-ring handstamp of 26mm and 17mm worded "R.A.F.WELFARE SOCIETY" with nothing in the centre. It is cancelling Ceylon stamps which apparently came from a duty-free Gift Tea box in

1945. It demonstrates the other half of the official title "RAF Postal Services and Welfare".

In the Ceylon numbered series the majority were worded "(number) RAF POST OFFICE (number)+CEYLON+" (Fig.15) inside a diameter of 32mm.

The only exception reads "R.A.F. POST OFFICE +CEYLON+" inside a double outer-ring and has a large "12" in the centre instead of the date.

Another wording was "RAFPOST" at the top and "134" at the bottom, with ornaments in between; used at Negombo.

The only other type I have identified with Ceylon is an unnumbered (or illegible on the copies seen) "RAFPOST SOUTH EAST ASIA" with dates between April and August 1945. As the RAF and Indian Field Censor numbers were identical with those of certain RAFPOST and I.F.P.O. covers identified with Kandy, I have listed this under "139". The widest dates of the numbered datestamps I have recorded are October 5th, 1944, and November 1st, 1946.

As regards locations, I believe there were RAF units at or near the following (I have put the RAFPOST number in brackets where known or supposed):

China Bay, near Trincomalee (684 Sqn. Mosquitos and Air Sea Rescue [15])	Kayts, near Jaffna (Air Sea Rescue) Koggala [8] Minneriya, S.W. of Trincomalee (Special Duty Operations)
Colombo (Air Sea Rescue [24])	Negombo [134]
Diyatalawa (Leave Centre)	Nuwara Eliya (Leave centre)
Galle (Air Sea Rescue)	Peradeniya (S.A.C.S.E.A. H.Q.)
Kandy [39]	Ratmalana [7]
Kankasantural, N. of Jaffna (203 Liberator Sqn.)	Sigiriya, S.W. of Trincomalee
Katukurunda	Vavuniya, W. of Trincomalee

A wide range of RAF censor marks are known from the island, ranging from Types R1/88 in July 1940, R4/20 sometime in 1942, R8/41 and 79 in 1941, to R10/955 in 1942, when No.955 must have been brought from the Middle East by an operational squadron, only to be mutilated on arrival to provide five further censor handstamps by having the letters 'A' to 'E' added.

During 1944-45 the standard RAF censor type, as in India, was R17; and just like India, Ceylon also went in for experimenting with temporary censor types; R18, R34, R35 and R42 are the types in question, and not illustrated Types R45, R46 and R47.

Ceylon was also only one of two countries to use RAF censor labels. Four types of these have been recorded; these are types RL1 to RL4.

CHINA

Prior to the surrender of the Japanese in 1945, there had only been four RAF units in China and their introduction dated back to the chaotic days of 1942 and the retreat from Burma. They consisted of two radar stations

(Nos.517 and 677 AMES), an RAF Headquarters at Kunming and an RAF Liaison Mission to the Chinese Aeronautical College, at Chengtu.

The story of 517 AMES is a colourful one and was instrumental in bringing in China RAF censor Type R8/63.

This unit left Singapore before the Japanese invasion began and were caught in Rangoon docks as the Japanese Army approached. There they were invited to grab as many Lease/Lend trucks destined for China, which still littered the docks, as they could and head north with them. They paused from time to time to operate their radar on behalf of the dwindling remnants of the RAF. When they ran out of customers it became necessary to make a run for the Chinese/Burmese frontier, where the unit stayed long enough to discuss their final destination. Finally, they crossed into China and prepared to travel along the newly built Burma Road. Here a rude shock awaited them. They were told to hand their vehicles over to waiting Chinese drivers. One airman refused, - and was promptly executed by the Chinese!

Their ultimate destination was the Chinese College of Aeronautics at Chengtu where they were destined to train Chinese students to operate their radar equipment. All staff left for India by the middle of 1943 where they were absorbed into Nos.180 and 181 Wings.

The RAF Liaison Mission entered China by way of India but no RAF censor has ever been seen, although it would have been reasonable to have picked up a Type R24 censor during their stopover in Calcutta.

No.677 AMES was a much smaller unit and was not particularly successful. It could have been taken into China "over the Hump"! The remaining personnel certainly left by this route, as did those of 517 AMES.

We must now return to John Smith. "When in Ceylon, I received a letter postmarked "R.A.F.POST OFFICE/+SOUTH EAST ASIA+" around the double-ring with "212/24 July 46/212" in the centre: it was struck in purple ink. The sender's address was 772076 LAC Daniel, RAF China. For a long time I was unable to obtain any information on RAFPOST services in China, until I had my attention drawn to the Chengtu News Bulletin of May 26th, 1942, from it I learnt that a large unit of the RAF arrived in China by 22nd May 1942. The huge convoy of motor transports entered by way of the Burma Road. I later learned that this unit was under the command of W/Cmdr Andrews. At first letters were sent via the Air Attache at Chungking".

"Finally, I received a reply to my original question as to whether there were any RAF in China during 1946. This unit was originally formed in 1945, as part of Tiger Force, for the invasion of Japan.

The sudden end of the war changed these plans. After a short stay in Hong Kong the unit arrived in Shanghai on HMS Apollo, during January/February 1946, where it formed a link to Hong Kong. On the approach of the Communists the unit was disbanded and left about November 1946."

COCOS ISLANDS

Even before W.W.II this group of islands occupied a strategic position in the Indian Ocean, about 800 miles south of Sumatra, which operated a cable relay station half way between Ceylon and Australia. Following the fall of Singapore, it became the only flying boat base capable of linking

Australia with Ceylon and was a vital link in the Allied chain of communications. It became the most remote base controlled by No.222 Group in Ceylon.

The RAF, (postally under No.7 BPU, Colombo), was issued with date-stamp "RAFFPOST 301 +". It is an interesting double-ring type as, unlike other similarly-worded ones, it has the number at the top and a single ornament of dots bottom centre. Its dates of use have been recorded from April 3rd, 1945 to March 31st, 1946. I understand that the RAF was, in fact, withdrawn about the end of that month.

Ceylon's defence rested upon a chain of island bases deep in the Indian Ocean. Addu Atoll, Diego Garcia and the Cocos Islands were well placed to give Ceylon plenty of advance warning of the approach of hostile forces. We can observe this in action when, in early 1942, the Imperial Japanese Navy made a feint at Ceylon but gave scant attention to the Cocos Islands when steaming past them. They paused only long enough to fire a naval shell through the radio station. Believing, mistakenly, that the station was destroyed the Islands were left free to warn Colombo of the approaching threat and thus giving them plenty of time to disperse naval shipping out of harms way.

From then on, the Cocos Islands were left in comparative peace, except for a fortnightly overflight by Japanese flying boats from Singapore. Only once did the Japanese attempt any sort of hostile action. This occurred when they caught a Qantas flying boat at anchor in the lagoon, being refuelled, and unsuccessfully tried to bomb and machine-gun it. The most surprising thing is that although the Japanese must have been aware of the growing airfield, they made no attempt to interfere.

An airfield opened on the island in September 1944 and that event, in a sense, marks the start of the modern story of the Cocos Islands. No.222 Group in Colombo possessed an RAF Auxiliary Vessel, the S.S.Shengking, which was to supply the several ocean bases around Ceylon.

The record of the movements of this ship are available in the Public Records Office and it is no doubt significant that only one round trip from Colombo to the Cocos Islands is listed. This is in stark contrast to the many made to Addu Atoll and Diego Garcia. This solitary trip (in August 1943) must have been the one which would have delivered the heavy earth moving equipment and the like, needed for constructing this airfield. For all other purposes the Islands' lifeline was its airfield.

When the Cocos Islands first made an appearance in contemporary RAF records, in July 1945, (almost a year after the airfield is thought to have opened) it did so under its Security name of Airfield "Brown". The following month it is listed in SD161 under its true name.

According to SD161 the first RAF units on the islands were No.2962 Squadron RAF Regiment, No.7217 Servicing Echelon, No.129 Staging Post, a detachment of No.78 Embarkation Unit and No.737 Met. Forecast Unit. It was not until October 1945 that any operational squadrons are listed, i.e. Nos.99 and 356 squadrons, and those only for one month. This is in marked contrast to W/Comdr Jefford's "R.A.F. Squadrons", which shows No.99 squadron moving here on 1.8.45 and No.356 arriving here even earlier, on 1st July 1945. Soon after the turn of 1946 the RAF presence on the islands had been completely run down.

CYPRUS

During the war Cyprus was very much a training back water and no RAF datestamps have been reported.

"In February 1957, Mr W. Garrard received two Forces Air Letters bearing as backstamps a double-ring datestamp in red reading "No.6 R.A.F./POSTAL H.Q." at top and bottom, both with "-7 FEB 1956" in the centre. It is similar to that of Aden (Fig.9). One was addressed to Port Said in November 1956 - the other to Aden, was re-directed by H.Q. M.E.A.F., Cyprus which is the likely location of this datestamp. For an apparently early use of this number, see under Egypt."

EGYPT

October 1941 saw all postal arrangements so chaotic that re-organisation became a matter of urgency. Letters and parcels were often three to six months late and ownerless parcels had, in some cases, been in the Middle East since Christmas 1940. As a first step in this re-organisation, the Army Postal Directorate took over control of HQ RAF ME Unit Post Office. No.4 Air Formation Postal Unit was established in Cairo in January 1941 and manned by trained staff. A number of the Army Field Post Offices were also set up at strategic points.

In May 1944, the RAF Postal Service was introduced and a Command Postal Headquarters was set up in Cairo with the intention of bringing the RAF Postal Service to every unit in the command, each run by a qualified RAF postal clerk. In August 1944 a Regional RAF Postal Headquarters was formed in Cairo.

Mr E. Jagger reported a double-ring datestamp reading "No.6 R.A.F./POSTAL H.Q." at top and bottom, with "25 Nov 1946" across the centre. As mentioned under Cyprus, it is similar to Aden (Fig.9). It was on a re-directed Air Letter. In January 1946 Mr Jagger visited this P.O. in Sharī Imbrahim Pasha, Cairo.

A cachet in August 1943 was worded "NO TRACE/RAF RECORDS,M.E./DATE... INTLS...". Another at about the same time reading "R.A.F.H.Q./M.E." in a thick rectangular box 50mm by 38mm.

A rectangular registration handstamp reading "R.A.F./H.Q.M.E. No..." has been recorded.

During World War II many types of RAF censor have been recorded, if only briefly. These range from Types R1 and R2, R4 to R6, R8 to R12 and R20. In most cases there are numerous recordings of these types.

Additionally, Cairo was the hub of a chain of RAF Base Censor detachments which embraced all of the RAF Air Headquarters in the Middle East, i.e. No.15 (HQ RAF ME - Cairo), No.16 (AHQ E.Mediterranean - Alexandria), No.17 (AHQ PAIFORCE - Habbaniyah), No.18 (AHQ Levant - Jerusalem), No.25 (AHQ East Africa - Nairobi). In addition to these Air Headquarters there were two others, for which the identity of the RAF Base Censor is known but not the number of the datestamp used; these are AHQ British Forces Aden and Advance AHQ M.E.F. at Castel Benito in Libya. Both Headquarters enjoyed the services of the same RAF Base Censor but at markedly different times.

Post-war RAF units in the Suez Canal Zone (i.e. M.E.A.F. 9-17 and 25) used British FPOs. Two of the known cachets I have seen were "R.A.F. POST OFFICE/DEVERSOIR/date" in 1948 and "POST OFFICE * ISMAILIA *" inside

a double-ring with "M.E.A.F.10" in the centre segment, during 1945. A small RAF party remained in Port Said but was withdrawn, as agreed, before June 18th, 1956.

The RAF at Gamal airfield, Port Said, during the occupation in November and December 1956 used Field Post Office 443 but their mail can be identified by the use of RAF Censor type RS1 in the first few days. It must be emphasised that the use of this type of RAF censor was not restricted to Egypt, but was also used in the concentration areas of Malta, Cyprus and Habbaniyah in Iraq.

ERITREA

The capture of Eritrea from the Italians in 1941 restored the air link between Aden and the Suez Canal Zone. Asmara in Eritrea was an important staging post along that route.

No RAF datestamps have been recorded in use here.

FRENCH INDO-CHINA

After the capitulation of Japan in 1945, the main RAF flew into Saigon from Burma on September 12th, 1945. HQ RAF French Indo-China was formed on October 1st and continued until February 15th 1946.

RAF Indo-China was postally the responsibility of No.8 BPU in Rangoon and RAFPOST 177 entered Indo-China from Hmawbi, in Burma, during September 1945.

The Saigon-Than Son Nhut area had been the maintenance and repair area for the Japanese forces.

RAF units which were sent to occupy it and restore order and essential services were No.273 Squadron, Nos.2963 and 2967 Squadrons RAF Regiment, No.2 Staging Post and part of No.684 Squadron.

It seems more than likely that this unit must have employed more than two datestamps. The following have been recorded; both are the standard double-ring type. It may have been that the original unit to enter Saigon took with it a datestamp which read "RAFPOST INDIA/+177+", but since its life included some time when it was undoubtedly used in Assam and some in Indo-China, is it not likely that heavy wear and tear on that datestamp caused a new one to be ordered which saw service in Indo-China. This second one read "R.A.F.POST OFFICE/+ SOUTH EAST ASIA +/177" and saw service until 12th November 1947.

GIBRALTAR

John Smith claims that the first RAF Regional Postal Headquarters was established here in June 1943. At first, (he claims) it was to have been numbered 10, but this was later changed to 15. Having gone through most RAF records which cover this area it has been impossible to find any basis for this claim.

Three post rooms were opened, fully equipped for the handling of all types of mail and staffed by fully trained postal clerks. The facilities provided were curtailed by the close proximity of an Army Post Office (FPO 475) and the chief functions of the post rooms therefore were the

sorting, delivery, tracing and re-direction of RAF mail, delivery of telegrams and general advice on postal matters affecting the RAF.

No RAF datestamps have been reported from this colony, but it would be very remiss to close without a parting reference to incidence of RAF censorship. Gibraltar was at the crossroads both in naval terms and that of the RAF. Seven types of RAF censor have been identified from here; these are types R1, R4 to R6, R11, R15 and R20.

RAF Base Censor type R20/5 was used here from April 1944 to June 1945.

GREECE AND CRETE

When, in January 1941, Britain went to the assistance of Greece and suffered a resounding defeat as a consequence of that action, the involvement of the RAF did at least leave behind some mementoes in the form of RAF censor marks. The first were type R2 and in this batch five numbers have been recorded, all used in conjunction with FPO 193 in Athens. The next batch is found with type R9. These are nos. 65, 108 and eight other numbers.

When, three years later, the liberation of Greece occurred, in the autumn of 1944, the principal type recorded was R15, since Greece proper was part of C.M.F. command. The censor numbers recorded are 108, 112, 208, 287, 323, 386, 420 and 470. The Dodecanse Islands, however, were part of Middle East Command and therefore used RAF censor type R12 and from there only one number has been recorded, - no.149 used in association with FPO 532.

The RAF Base Censor picture is just as confusing! No.9 RAF Base Censor moved to Greece in January 1945, from Catania and continued to be based here until RAF censorship ceased in November 1945. Yet, the only RAF Base Censor handstamp to be recorded during the whole of this period is that of No.29!

The only explanation which springs to mind is this. The Greek partisans overran Air Headquarters on 19th December 1944 and held the staff captive until the 15th January 1945. Is it not very likely that in those circumstances the handstamp might have been lost or purloined; so that when a degree of normality returned, there remained no option but to bring into use a reserve handstamp - No.29.

HONG KONG

Prior to the Japanese invasion, the only aspect of RAF postal history came from the occasional use of RAF censors. Three types of RAF censor have been recorded used in the Colony. They are type R1/87 in September 1939 and April 1940; type R2/559 in October and December 1940; and finally type R8/36 sometime in 1941.

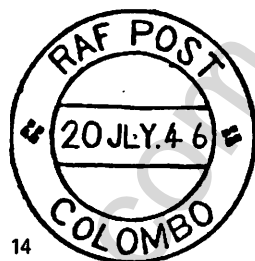
John Smith states that after the liberation of the Colony: "The original responsibility for the postal arrangements at Hong Kong were allocated to RAFPOST Rangoon (No.8 BPU) in the expectation that air services would operate from Rangoon to Hong Kong. However the air service actually operated from Calcutta (No.5 BPU) and on October 17th, 1945, RAFPOST Calcutta was made responsible for the postal arrangements pending the opening of a service from Singapore. The first mails from Hong Kong actually arrived at Calcutta on September 25/26th, 1945.



13



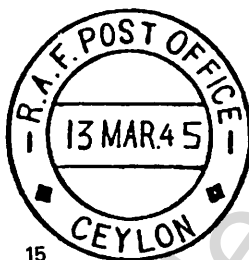
12



14



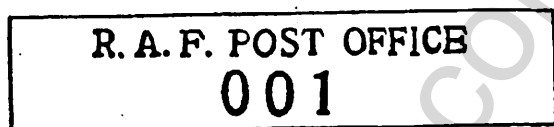
16



15



17



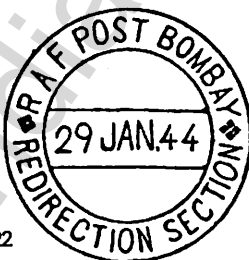
18



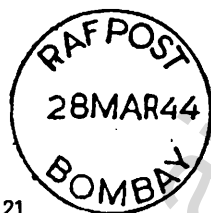
20

RAFPO2

19



22



21

RAFPOST DELHI

24



23



25



26

On October 17th, 1945, RAFPOST 130 was allotted to the P.O. at Kai Tak and to all units in the area. The main party of No.6 BPU, the postal unit responsible for the Far East postal area, arrived at Singapore on September 17th and soon after a detachment was sent to Hong Kong to organise postal arrangements. This detachment was renamed RAFPOST Hong Kong with effect from August 1st, 1946.

Early letters might have been postmarked "5 RAFPOST 5/S.E.ASIA" (in Calcutta) and the later ones "6 RAFPOST 6/S.E.ASIA", "RAFFPOST/+130+" or "RAFFPOST/+HONG KONG+" (Fig.16)." A variation of RAFFPOST 6 has been reported from Hong Kong by the Forces Postal History Society, with a much smaller figure '6', dated 5th March 1945.

Although one has often made use of SD161 for research purposes, there has always been an unspoken fear that this method of recording events was one which, in wartime, carries with it the penalty of considerable delay. By good fortune, events in Hong Kong give an excellent opportunity to test that theory. The delay occurs because the basic information has to be sent by signal between several Headquarters before it finally reaches the Air Ministry. On each leg of its journey this information has first to be encoded and then decoded. Each are very time consuming. This would be followed by circulation within Air Ministry before being typeset for publication. Even here there is a chance of one month's further delay occurring if the previous month's issue has just been sent to print.

Until now it has been impossible to measure the length of the inbuilt delay of this system, but now, thanks to Mr Cyril Norman of the Forces Postal History Society, we are at least able to measure the size of the delay. It was he who confirmed entering Hong Kong with No.132 Squadron on 11th September 1945, and allows us to put the system to the test! The arrival of No.132 Squadron is reported in SD161 in the December 1945 issue, thus a delay of some three months has resulted in the system.

After applying such a correction, it is noted that No.1 Detachment of No.8 BPU (Rangoon) arrived in the colony in December 1945 and remained till January 1946. For the next five months its place is taken by No.1 detachment of No.6 BPU (Singapore), until RAFFPOST HONG KONG was formed on 1st August 1946, when it had a life span of some three months.

John Smith tentatively located RAFFPOST 212 in Hong Kong on 6.12.45 and at Shanghai on 24.7.46, and there the situation still rests.

The post-war years produced several RAF cachets. The earliest cachet is a rectangular one of 44mm by 22mm reading "POST ROOM (or? OFFICE/date /R.A.F. KAI TAK". It would seem that this back-stamp was used during the period 1947 to September 1949, when Forces mail at concessional rates was postmarked by the civil authorities. In August 1955 a large single-ring handstamp reading "R.A.F. POST OFFICE/LITTLE SAI WAN" round top and bottom was used. September 1960 produced yet another large double-ring handstamp reading around the top and bottom "R.A.F. POST OFFICE/KAI TAK".

No.200 Staging Post was in Hong Kong for five months in 1945/46 until going on to Shanghai, after which No.201 Staging Post maintained a presence in Hong Kong for at least a further year.

ICELAND

This island was occupied by British troops on May 10th, 1940. I believe 98 Squadron, RAF, with their Battles, arrived during August 1940. Early in 1943, 120 Squadron with their Liberators - presumably one of the very

long range squadrons - 269 Squadron with their Hudsons and 330 Squadron with their Northrops were reported to be here.

From the time of the occupation in 1940 until January 1943, the postal services were conducted by the Army post office stationed at Reykjavik with a sub post office at RAF, Kaldadarnes. When the majority of the British Army left the island, Army personnel were retained until January 1943 when the Royal Navy took over postal services for all the remaining troops; the RAF provided seven servicemen for the portage of bagged mail and to help with general sorting duties. Difficulties arose, however, owing to differences in postal and censorship procedure within the two Services. On March 7th, 1944, arrangements were made to withdraw the RAF personnel from the Fleet Mail Offices and to open a central post office at RAF Station, Reykjavik, controlled by the RAF Postal Service. The service was extended and a receipt and despatching office for all mail for the island was established at Reykjavik, in addition to the RAF post office already mentioned. Besides the one at Kaldadarnes two more post offices were opened at Camp Geck and Camp Cook.

Four datestamps are reported to have been in use, though I have no details of one. There were at least two types of datestamps and handstamps used in Iceland. The one at Reykjavik was a small single-ring type, diameter 23mm, reading "R.A.F. POST OFFICE/001" with the date in the centre (Fig.17).

Camp Cook and, possibly, Kaldadarnes, had normal double-ring thick bars with "R.A.F.P.O." and "00-" at the top and bottom, similar to the Azores.

On registered covers from the Senior Postal Clerk at P.Os. 001, 002 and 005, the first and last used registration labels reading "FPO DS N1..". Two covers from the former had nothing added, but on the back at "Name & Address of Sender" was their large rectangular rubber handstamp measuring 70mm by 15mm and reading "R.A.F. POST OFFICE/001" (Fig.18); the latter added "RAF 005" in manuscript. P.O. 002 had a blank in the top right of their label, which they filled in with a single line handstamp of 23mm worded "RAFFPO 2" (Fig.19).

Four types of RAF censor have been recorded from Iceland. First amongst these is type R2/302, which has been recorded with the FPOs in 1940. Next, eight numbers of type R4 are known from here in 1942, all tied to FPO postmarks. Next, type R5 has produced 10 numbers (6, 141, 142, 168, 174, 457, 467, 594, 633 and 638), all of which are seen tied to FPO 306 in 1942. Lastly, type R6 produced several examples mostly tied to FPOs 2, 306 and 526 from September 1942 until April 1943. After that period all recordings are tied to RAFFPO 001, including the final one in May 1945.

It should not be forgotten that Iceland was an important link in the chain of supply of new aircraft to the Allies in Northern Europe. No.86 Staging Post, at Reykjavik, was active in this role from 1943 until 1945, at least. In this role it was the next stop on the North Atlantic route from No.81 SP at Blue West 1, in Greenland.

INDIA

On 1st October 1943, authority was given for the setting-up here of the RAF Postal Service and the RAF became responsible for the receipt, sorting, re-direction and despatch of all air and surface mail, both incoming and outgoing.

Preparations began in early 1943 when S/Ldr (later W/Cmdr) R.G. Baird, O.B.E., a New Zealander, was called to Delhi from Ceylon and set about recruiting staff such as former G.P.O. personnel, - amongst whom was F/Lt (later S/Ldr) S.G.W. Spaul.

As I have stated earlier, Ceylon was the first country served by RAFPOST, but there is no doubt in my mind that 1st October 1943 is the most important date in the history of the R.A.F.P.S. overseas. It was from that organisation created in India that, after the Japanese surrender, it was possible to spread the RAFPOST across South East Asia as far as Japan itself. For clarity, and to avoid repetition, much that I write here will also refer to other areas of S.E.A.A.F. Again, as I mentioned under Burma, RAFPOSTs, which may have been either side of the India-Burma frontier, will be referred to here.

In the Beginning:

Before we discuss the Base Postal Unit (BPU), it may be helpful to discuss the postal arrangements which preceeded them. Initially, all postal arrangements were in the hands of the Post and Telegraphic Department of India and members of H.M. Forces paid postage on their letters home.

It should be realised the whole RAF presence was grouped in the North-West of the country to deal with an imagined threat from Russia, which for many generations had been expected to descend upon India via Afghanistan. When Japanese forces appeared on India's eastern borders the RAF was caught completely wrong footed, at least 1,500 miles from the real threat. One doubts whether, by the end of 1941, the RAF had any significant presence in the states of Assam and Bengal; which much later would blossom out into vast bases of men and equipment.

By July 1942, (SD161 adjusted forward by three months), two Postal Clearing Centres (PCC) had been formed by the RAF as a contribution to dealing with the mounting postal chaos. No.2 PCC was formed at Calcutta and No.3 in Karachi. There is also a suggestion that No.1 may have been formed in Colombo, Ceylon, but we must leave it to future generations of collectors to sort that one out.

Base Air Post Depot:

This unit, which was an Army one and not RAF, was no doubt raised about the same time as the PCC's, and for the same reasons. This post office had no direct connection with No.1 BPU and details are only repeated here in order to be consistent with John Smith. "Three datestamps of this post office are known (Fig.20). The first is worded "BASE AIR POST DEPOT *" round a double-ring. The earlier version measured 31.5mm, and the later 32.5mm; had smaller letters and a larger inner circle.

The other double-ring datestamp, which I have only recorded on a mail sorting slip, read "BASE AIR POST DEPOT +KARACHI+" and was dated "10 AUG 44" across the centre.

A parcel handstamp has been recorded as worded "BASE AIR POST DEPOT" in one line inside a rectangle 52mm by 10mm."

Base Postal Units:

From a RAF postal Service point of view, the Indian sub-continent was divided into six areas, each area under the control of a Base Postal Unit

(BPU). There was also a BPU which controlled postal operations in Ceylon, which is not part of this story.

The BPUs have to be explained in detail as it is essential to understand the BPUs themselves before going on to study the RAFPOSTs. The BPUs must have operated with clearly definable, geographic boundaries and would have been issued with a limited range of datestamps. In both areas certain hypothesis have been offered for your consideration!

To understand our terminology, it first must be pointed out that the BPUs were each known by the name of the base in which they happened to operate, i.e. No.1 RAFPOST Karachi, No.2 RAFPOST Bombay, through to No.11 RAFPOST Iwakuni. The first six to begin with, used an undated handstamp with a single star in the centre and the BPU number to either side (Fig.28) or similar to Fig.28 but enclosed in a 35mm circle. The single-ring datestamps (Figs.3 & 29) are sometimes seen.

The account of the BPUs is in two parts. Firstly there is an operational record, followed by a record of the changes and movements endured by some of the BPUs.

No.1 BPU: This was centred on the city of Karachi. Its operations were within the province of Baluchistan, North West Frontier Province and Sind. Within Karachi there were RAFPOSTs at: No.10 RAF General Hospital, 29 PRC, 9 Transit Camp and Base HQ Karachi; there were also RAFPOSTs at Drigh Road, Jiwani, Jodpur, Korangi Creek, Mauripur and Quetta. The range of datestamp numbers used by the BPU may be in the range between numbers 11 to 30. Seven datestamps have been identified, but from these, only five have been located.

No.2 BPU: This was centred on the city of Bombay; its responsibility took in the whole of Bombay Presidency and also made incursions into the State of Hyderabad, to control RAFPOSTs at Secunderabad. Only 51 EU has been identified within the city of Bombay but in a wider context RAFPOSTs have been reported at Bairagargh, Baroda, Belgaum, Bhopal, Kalyan, Poona, Sambre, Santa Cruz and Secunderabad.

One might easily have expected Deolali to have been mentioned. It is intriguing to note a RAFPOST at Sambre, near Belgaum. This RAFPOST is recorded in both Nos.2 and 3 BPU, - why this should be so is not clear.

Towards the end of August 1945, No.3 BPU closed. No.2 BPU continued to operate through a detachment at Bangalore but the dates do not explain the dual control at Sambre. Eight datestamps have been recorded from No.2 BPU but of those only four have been located. The datestamps used were probably in the range of numbers 31 to 60.

No.3 BPU: Based in the city of Bangalore. It was formed on 21st September 1943 and its area of operation can be assumed to have included the whole of Madras Presidency, Central Provinces and the States of Mysore and Travancore. Its boundaries included four ports and therefore all the FAA stations in the country, but those play no part in this story. Twenty two RAFPOSTs have been recorded from this BPU - thirteen of which have been identified and located. In a single case it is identified but unlocated and in eight cases the RAFPO has not been identified although its location has been established. This area provides the first firm evidence of a RAFPOST being transferred from the area of one BPU to another, when RAFPOST No.83 leaves Cochin to re-appear in Rangoon. The range of datestamp numbers used was probably between 61 to 90.



27



28



29



30



31



32



33



34



35



36



37



39

RAFPOST, SOUTH EAST
ASIA REGD No. 2/

38

R R.A.F.P.O. 320
IWAKUNI
No. _____

40

No.4 BPU: This unit was formed at New Delhi on 3rd September 1943. It operated principally in Punjab and the United Provinces. The record, although not very precise, leaves the impression that this BPU had in excess of 20 RAFPOSTs under its control. Of these, eleven datestamps are known and fully located, eight are known unlocated, whilst in two cases the locations are known but details of the datestamps are unknown. The range of datestamp numbers used by this BPU probably ranged between 91 and 120.

No.5 BPU: This was formed at Calcutta on 5th September 1943 at 168, Lower Circular Road. It was very much in the forefront of RAF operations against the Japanese in Burma; it formed only 18 months after that city had greeted a stream of bedraggled stragglers returning from the debacle of the retreat from Burma.

But from here-on, it is necessary to part company with John Smith's account of the development of the BPUs in India and follow an independent path, dictated by historical accuracy.

By the time No.5 BPU was formed, the Assam/Bengal base was growing at a comforting rate but it suffered from poor road/rail communications, its terrain being cut by large river systems; the largest only bridged in one place. Elsewhere, freight and passengers had to travel downstream by ferry for several hours before landfall was made on the east bank. These facts persuaded the authorities to consider other alternatives. At that time all the action, and thus the largest concentration of RAF, was in the Arakan. To meet their needs it was decided to enlarge the RAFPOST at Chittagong into No.6 BPU, with complete responsibility for that part of Bengal east of the river Ganges. At the same time, talks were in train to help units in Assam. As a result No.8 BPU was ultimately formed at Imphal, in the State of Manipur, to be responsible for all RAF postal operations in Assam, Burma and Manipur State.

We now return our attention to No.5 BPU, which as re-constituted, was still responsible for the whole of west Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Tripura states. There are eight RAFPOSTs, at least, which can be attributed to Calcutta and its immediate environments and a further sixteen in the BPU at large.

The range of datestamp numbers is from 121 to 169, 175, 195 and 199. Details of the following datestamps are known but unlocated: 124, 126-128, 138, 140, 143, 145, 146, 159, 160, 162, 163, 166 & 168.

This BPU is complicated because of its earlier, mixed parentage, thus many of No.6 and No.8 BPU RAFPOSTs started life in No.5 BPU. RAFPOSTs 170, 177, 180, 191, 207 & 220 may all fall into this category. After August 1945, most of the No.6 BPU RAFPOSTs still operating probably reverted to No.5 BPU's control.

Postal events after V-J Day were complicated. No.5 BPU had to go to the assistance of Hong Kong in September 1945; also, the datestamp issued to Negombo, in Ceylon, out of the allocation of No.5 BPU must have been a result of Nos.3 and 7 BPUs having closed, leaving only No.5 BPU with the necessary experience to help.

There are four periods in the life of No.5 BPU which need illuminating, e.g. RAF mails to China must have arrived via this unit and have been despatched by the same route. A subject for future study?

The situation in Tripura is vague. As an hypothesis this area could have been in either No.5 or No.6 BPU, there is no indication either way. My

original hypothesis rested on the difficulties of rail transport from Calcutta to Comilla on the one hand and from Chittagong on the other. From Chittagong there was a direct link, whereas the journey from Calcutta entailed a night journey to the west bank of the river Ganges, arriving in the small hours, then a ferry trip down river for up to 13 hours to Chandpur on the east bank, before catching another train to Comilla! But the movement of mail no longer depended on the train. Instead the aeroplane had taken over, so my hypothesis is null and void and No.5 BPU may have ruled that particular roost after all!

It may help to make up your mind if you consider the following facts from the F540 of No.5 BPU:

"On 18.2.44, the C.O. of No.5 BPU toured POs (RAFPOs?) at Imphal, Silchar, Khumbirgram, Khulna, Feni, Agartala, Comilla and Chittagong." The first three places I can accept, since they were ultimately to be included in No.8 BPU; and No.4 was a RAFPOST of No.5 BPU, but what were the other POs doing on that list some five months after No.6 BPU had been formed? On 30.8.44 we learn that "S/Ldr Baird proceeded to Comilla to discuss the setting up of a sub-Base PO there" There is no news of the results of his discussions. On 20.12.44 we further read "F/Lt Elson contacted F/Lt Welch of 231 Group Comm. Flight re. the air transit of mails to Digri, Salbani, Jessore, Feni and Dhubalia". The reference to Feni tends to indicate that No.5 BPU still had an interest in that area. There is one further fact which tends to move me into No.5 BPU camp. Chandpur, on the east bank of the river Ganges, is known to have been in No.5 BPU so why not Comilla also?

During July and August 1945 many RAF units in the Arakan were withdrawn to India, to form a nucleus for the forces who were to invade Malaya and liberate Singapore (Operation Zipper). Amongst these forces were No.6 BPU and 182 Wing. The evidence has always been that these units reformed at Madras, but there is evidence to suggest that No.6 BPU first withdrew to Calcutta, allowing No.5 BPU to take over some of its responsibilities. In that context, four entries in 5 BPU history make sense:

- "28.5.45 A visit paid to RAFPOST 220 at Chittagong.
- 6.6.45 F/O Roberts left on an inspection of postal facilities at Akyab and Ramree.
- 27.8.45 RAFPOST 207 took over the mail duties of RAFPOST 220 (No.5 Detachment Chittagong).
- 1.9.45 Due to a change of plans, No.6 BPU Special Party was sent by train to Madras to embark for Singapore instead of going from Calcutta."

It will come as no surprise to learn that both Akyab and Chittagong became detachments of No.5 BPU during August 1945, - this fact is recorded in SD161. Throughout it all, one finds No.5 BPU acting very much as a big brother to Nos. 6, 8 and 100 BPUs.

No.6 BPU: Was formed at Chittagong on 3.9.43 and superseded 224 Group post office, of which we have no further information. No.6 BPU was formed to serve the RAFPOSTs on the Arakan front, the only front at that time that was in contact with Japanese forces.

Apart from Hathazari, we know nothing of its spread northwards from Chittagong. Since Feni was in Bengal, rather than in Tripura, it is possible that its authority spread as far as that town, but we have no proof. In December 1943 we are told that eight RAFPOSTs were established

at Chittagong with others at Chiringa, Cox's Bazaar, Dohazari, Hayo, Bawli North, Akyab, Ramree, Ram, Shalimar and Ukhia. On 27.8.45 we learn:

"27.8.45 RAFPOST 207 took over the duties of RAFPOST 220 (BPU detachment), Chittagong."

It therefore seems very likely that both RAFPOSTs 221 & 303 at Akyab and RAFPOSTs 205 & 302 at Ramree were under the control of No.5 BPU after 27.8.45.

The probable range of datestamp numbers allocated to this BPU were 200 to 221 and 302 & 303.

After V-J Day the situation changed. This BPU was face to face with the situation it had been re-trained to deal with; the fall of Singapore! The BPU landed at Morib on the coast of Malaya, on 14.9.45 and three days later was operational from Winchester House, Singapore. One assumes its previous responsibilities had been left to No.5 BPU since the task which now faced it was far more onerous. There were Malaya and Singapore with their airfields and bases, Hong Kong in a similar predicament and thousands of newly freed Allied POWs at all three places and in the Netherlands East Indies. All were eager to get letters off home and also very hopeful of receiving some. There is some way to go in doing justice to all these facets but I hope you will find some improvement there.

No.7 BPU: Although not strictly part of our story; it is nevertheless worth keeping our story complete by recording the bare details of No.7 BPU. There are only three items recorded in the history of this BPU. The first dated 18.12.44 and the last dated 3.1.45. It is the most sparse Form 540 that I have ever encountered. We learn that there was a RAFPOST at Koggala, but which one it was is not divulged. Only with John Smith's help are we able to learn that it was first opposite the Grand Oriental Hotel at Miller's Buildings and in 1946 was in Turret Road. From the same source we also learn that this BPU may have opened as early as June 1942, some 16 months before the same unit opened in India. He also tells us that by the end of September 1943 some thirty RAFPOSTs were already in operation. There is also evidence to suggest that the datestamp used by RAFPOST 12 ("R.A.F. POST OFFICE + CEYLON +") inside a double outer-ring with large "12" in the centre instead of the date) first appeared without the figure '12' within the double-ring on re-directed mail circa March 1943.

No.8 BPU: Was formed out of part of No.5 BPU to look after the RAF postal affairs in Assam and Manipur State, at Imphal. This unit opened on 3rd December 1944. The requirements to site this BPU at Imphal was discussed seven months earlier but rejected. We are not permitted to know what caused the change of heart, but it did the RAF no harm. By waiting until all threats from the siege of Imphal had passed they would then go on to earn the distinction of the most travelled BPU in India and Burma; but more of that anon. It would spend Christmas the following year (1945) in Rangoon itself, hard on the heels of the victorious 14th Army.

Since No.8 BPU was formed out of the northern part of No.5 BPU, it must follow that it took over a number of RAFPOSTs which were already going concerns. These might have included (176) Tuilial, (177) Kumbhirgram, (186) Manipur Road, (181 & 191) Imphal as well as such places as the leave centre at Shillong; and Dinjan, Rajyeswarpur, Silchar, Sylhet, and Tezpur, whose RAFPOSTs are yet to be identified. It is likely that No.

181 was amongst the first to leave Imphal, when it moved to Kalembo on 21.12.44, newly wrested from the Japanese army. During the following nine months the scene is one of constant movement; with No.8 BPU split into more and more advanced and rear components, until it arrives at the situation in which its advanced H.Q. is virtually knocking at the gates of Rangoon, whilst its rear H.Q. is still stacking the furniture back in Imphal! At Monywa and Meiktila, on the line of advance there were still intermediate H.Qs. in operation.

On V-J Day arrived it was time to re-open air routes with Saigon in French Indo-China and Bangkok in Siam. These twin objectives were attained when RAFPOST 177 was sent to Saigon in September 1945 and RAFPOST 181 to Bangkok about the same time. A consolidation of units and RAFPOSTs in and around Burma then followed as our strength there slowly drained away.

The range of datestamp numbers which were probably used were 157, 170-173, 176-194 & 304-306.

No.9 BPU: Was formed at Madras on 1.5.44 as a sub-unit of No.3 BPU. Only RAFPOST 66 is mentioned but not located. There is no further mention of datestamps or locations. This unit cannot be said to have fulfilled any postal purpose, the following entry probably explains it all:

"11.7.45 The advance party of No.6 BPU was accommodated on this unit and arrangements were made to provide them with office facilities".

No.10 BPU: Was formed at Calcutta during the summer of 1945. It is not known to have controlled the operations of any RAFPOSTs, its life history is summed up by the following entry taken from the F540 of No.5 BPU:

"2.5.45 F/O Roberts arrived pending the formation of No.10 BPU."

This BPU also receives a mention in SD161 for only two months, each time at Calcutta. One cannot help wondering whether the orders given to F/O Roberts were made out in error and should have read No.11 BPU instead of No.10?

No.11 BPU: The first mention of this unit comes from Calcutta on 18.11.45, F/O Stocker, the potential C.O. reports to No.5 BPU to commence the formation of the unit. Later we read, still from No.5 BPU:

"9.12.45 F/O Stocker, the C.O. of No.11 BPU, left with his staff for Madras."

For the rest of the story we must depend upon the F540 of the unit in question:

"1.3.46 Advance party arrives at Iwakuni, Japan.

12.5.46 Lt Lebbs, O.C. Brindiv BPU opened (Indian) FPO 56 and left Havildar Santhairarag in charge.

15.4.47 C.O. flew to BCAIR station Miho to inspect PO 321 (RAFPOST 321?)."

On 24.6.47 we meet an old friend, Major (later Brig.) D.S. Virk D.A.D.A.P.S. Indian Army Postal Service:

"24.6.47 Lt Col C.J. Fletcher O.B.E. AD Posts and Major Virk D.A.D.A.P.S. Indian Army Postal Service visited the unit.

- 18.8.47 RAFPOST counter service opened at BCAIR station Iwakuni for the provision of full postal services consequent upon the closing of Indian FPO 56.
- 13.8.47 Cpl Maclean detached to Kure to open and operate RAFPOST 322.
- 3.3.48 RAFPOST 322 closed.
- 16.3.48 Last surface mail despatch from RAFPOST 11 - Japan.
- 17.3.48 Last airmail despatch from RAFPOST 11 - Japan.
- 1.4.48 No.11 BPU disbanded."

Changes and Movements of Base Postal Units:

No.1 BPU:

- 9.9.43 Unit formed at Ladies Club, Ingles Road, Karachi.
- 10.9.43 First All Airmail service left Mauripur carrying 1,038lbs of Air Mail Letter Cards, airmail letters and airgraphs.
- 14.10.43 Supplies of Christmas Air Mail Letter Cards and airgraphs received from AHQ and distributed to all units.
- 10.9.45 Unit censorship ceased.
- 18.11.46 The communal violence of 1946 caused the unit to operate from RAF Mauripur in a search for greater security.
- 28.5.47 Unit closed.

No.2 BPU:

- 3.9.43 Unit opened.
- 15.11.45 The C.O. visited No.2 Det. at Madras.
- 17.11.45 The C.O. visited No.1 Det. at Bangalore.
- 31.12.46 Unit closed.

No.3 BPU:

- 21.9.43 Unit opened at Bangalore.
- 1.5.44 RAFPOST Madras became operational at Amir Baragh at the Madras end of the Adyar Bridge. It is to operate under the control of No.3 BPU.
- 31.8.45 No.3 BPU is disbanded and is to continue as Det.1 of No.2 BPU.

No.4 BPU:

- 3.9.43 Unit formed. 16.5.47 Unit closed.

No.5 BPU:

- 5.9.43 Unit formed.
- 15.11.43 Unit moved from 168, Lower Circular Road to Crescent Court 39B, Lower Circular Road.
- 22.5.44 The C.O. paid a visit to Imphal to ascertain whether it might be possible to site No.8 BPU there.
- 28.5.44 The C.O. gave a negative reply to the report re Imphal.

1.8.44 S.E.A.C. Base P.O. (Army) opened.
 30.8.44 S/Ldr Baird proceeded to Comilla to discuss the formation of a sub-base PO there.
 21.9.44 F/Lt Collins visited the manager of Chromotype Ltd re the printing of Christmas airgraphs & Air Mail Letter Cards.
 23.9.44 F/Lt Collins called on S/Ldr de Boursac, Chief RAF Censor at Base Censor Office, Calcutta to discuss the censoring of RAF mail.
 27.11.44 W/Comdr Gridley-Baird (Office of the Air Attache, British Embassy, Chungking), visited the unit and gave a complete picture of the distribution of units in China and discussed increased quotas on China bound mail and crossed & uncrossed bags for China Relations Office.
 30.11.44 55,762lbs of RAF mail, 78,858lbs of Army mail, 1,226lbs of Naval mail and 644lbs of miscellaneous mails, making a grand total of 136,690lbs of mail despatched by air by No.5 BPU during the month of November 1944.
 5.4.45 F/Lt Hindes arrived from Delhi to assist in the moving of RAFPOSTs Chittagong and Imphal.
 2.5.45 F/O Roberts arrived pending the formation of No.10 BPU.
 14.5.45 F/Lt Payne arrived from No.8 BPU to receive instructions from the O.C. of No.5 BPU re the location of the BPU in Rangoon.
 27.8.45 RAFPO 207 took over the mail duties of RAFPO 220 (5 BPU det.) Chittagong.
 30.9.45 A direct air service with Hong Kong will commence on 1.10.45. A direct air despatch to Singapore will also commence on 1.10.45.
 12.11.45 No.5 BPU detachment at Akyab closed.
 18.11.45 F/O arrived to commence the formation of No.11 BPU. As in Karachi, the communal violence took its toll, No.5 BPU moved to RAF Dum Dum for added security.
 21.4.46 A small detachment of this RAFPOST commenced operations at 38 SP RAF Dum Dum. The detachment consists of 6 BORs.
 19.9.46 Thus unit moved to No.38 SP RAF Dum Dum.
 30.3.47 Last entry.

No.6 BPU:

3.9.43 Established at Chittagong in east Bengal.
 11.1.45 Sgt Wiles visited No.18 L of C Postal Unit to discuss the conveyance south of army mails.
 9.2.45 Major Hamilton (Base Censor Office Chittagong) visited to discuss arrangements for expediting special mail despatches from Censor Office Chittagong to Censor Office Calcutta.
 2.4.45 No.6 BPU moved to Akyab and occupied a site close to 903 Wing.
 8.4.45 Tents and equipment destroyed by fire. The work of the unit was temporarily carried out by RAFPO 221, which was attached to HQ 903 Wing at that time.
 16.4.45 No.6 BPU again operational.
 10.5.45 RAFPOST Akyab closed.
 15.6.45 RAFPOST 303 opened at Akyab.
 4.9.45 No.6 BPU reformed and refitted at Madras and embarked on P19.
 14.9.45 Disembarked at Morib.

17.9.45 Arrived at Singapore and operated from Winchester House.
 10.2.46 F/O Brown departs for No.6 BPU Det.1 (RAFFPOST Hong Kong).

No.7 BPU:

Opened at Colombo.

8.12.44 First entry. An issue of free air letters was made on the ratio of three per person per month, this ration does not apply to the Blue Triangle Air Mail letter sheets.
 15.12.44 It has been necessary to suspend the operation of the Tea Parcel Scheme owing to the fluctuation in the cost of such parcels.

No.8 BPU:

3.12.44 Opened at Imphal after the siege had been lifted.
 13.2.45 Collected censor stamp 601 at 221 Group Cypher Office.
 20.2.45 PO W9 at Sadaung, Burma.
 14.3.45 A fire destroyed all the records.
 31.3.45 No.8 BPU moved to Tuliha.
 16.4.45 No.8 BPU moved to Monywa.
 17.4.45 No.8 BPU moved from Monywa to Meiktila.
 24.5.45 The advance party of No.8 BPU moves to Rangoon.
 28.5.45 The rest of No.8 BPU moves to Rangoon.
 12.6.45 The unit moved to 69, Strand Road, Rangoon.
 14.6.45 The airgram office became operational.
 5.7.45 The Fleet Mail Office visited the unit. In future all naval mail is to go with the RAF mail.
 9.9.45 First despatch of eleven bags of mail to Penang carried by Catalina aircraft.
 12.9.45 First despatch of mail mail to Singapore and Bangkok.
 21.9.45 The C.O. visited Hmawbi to arrange for the handling of mail by 345 Wing on the move of RAFPO 177 to Saigon.
 24.9.45 The C.O. visited Zawatkun to make arrangements for the handling of mail on the move of RAFPO 191 (to Bangkok).
 11.3.46 No.8 BPU becomes a section of AHQ Burma.
 20.3.46 The C.O. and Sgt Davies left for Saigon on tour.
 26.3.45 The C.O. and Sgt Davies return from tour of RAFPOs 177 & 181.
 21.4.46 Despatches 5 and 6 for RAFFPOST Japan despatched his morning via Singapore.
 13.9.46 Arrangements made with No.7 ABPO and No.595 L of C post office for the purchase of bulk stocks of stamps and postal orders for RAFFPO 177 (Saigon).
 28.1.47 F/Lt Beckett left on tour of RAFFPO 181 (Bangkok).
 29.1.47 F/Lt Beckett returned. RAFFPO 181 is to close on 1.2.47.
 15.2.47 F/Lt Beckett visited DADAPS (12th Army HQ) re the closure of Army and RAF postal services in Burma - w.e.f.1.4.47
 15 to 30 RAFFPOST detachment formed in section No.7 ABPO building
 4.47

Nos.9, 10 and 11 BPUs:

There is nothing additional to record in respect of these three units.

BPU datestamps and handstamps of India:

These have already been mentioned briefly and readers can find further details in 'Volume II RAFPOSTs of South East Asia'. However, certain marks warrant inclusion here, which are as follows:

For **No.1 BPU** a dated cachet reads "OFFICIAL MAILS CLEARING SECTION + RAFPOST KARACHI +" in between an oval double outer-ring and single inner-ring, its widest measurements being approximately 50mm by 32mm. The only copy recorded was dated "-7 DEC 1943" and was a back-stamp on, I believe, an official envelope.

Turning to **No.2 BPU**, a double-ring datestamp, which is self-explanatory, was worded "RAF POST BOMBAY + REDIRECTION SECTION +" (Fig.22). I have seen this only during early 1944 and as a backstamp.

A cachet has been recorded as reading "NO TRACE R.A.F. INDIA COMMAND/INITIALS.....DATE...../R.A.F. BASE POST OFFICE. BOMBAY." inside a rectangle 72mm by 18mm; it is self-explanatory. Also probably from Bombay is "NO TRACE R.A.F./INDIA COMMAND".

No.4 BPU had a single-ring handstamp of 25mm, it is unique in that it has an eagle spread right across the centre of the ring, the only RAFPOST one recorded (Fig.23). It is known cancelling Indian Service stamps in January 1946 and I am told was usually on dockets attached to large bundles of official mail. I have also seen it cancelling the first dotted lines of the following cachet "RECEIVED AT..... IN DAMAGED/(OR OPEN) CONDITION. FORWARDED AS/RECEIVED. SIGNATURE... DATE.....".

Another handstamp unique as regards format is the one line "RAFPOSTDELHI", 36mm in length (Fig.24). Of "local" manufacture, I have seen it on piece cancelling India Service stamps; it was probably designed mainly for office use, as a similar cachet for "KARACHI" is known so used.

A large packet handstamp associated with Delhi read "RAF POST/INDIA"; it is similar in size to the rectangular Calcutta one illustrated (Fig.25), but has no frame.

From **No.5 BPU**, at Calcutta, there was a handstamp worded "RAF POST CALCUTTA + REDIRECTION SECTION +" inside a double-ring with date in centre, similar to the Bombay one already illustrated (Fig.22); I have it in July 1944 as a backstamp.

Two large handstamps are thought to have come from this BPU, but I have seen them only on piece. Reading "RAF POST/INDIA" in both cases, one is surrounded by a thick rectangular frame of 60mm by 27mm with small blocks in each corner (Fig.25); the other a thin interrupted frame 61mm by 28mm.

Two cachets recorded are even larger. The first, in a rectangle 84mm by 61mm, read "No. RANK. NAME/UNIT./(large space)/.../RECEIVED AT RAF-POST CALCUTTA/IN A DAMAGED CONDITION CONTENTS/FORWARDED AS RECEIVED/ Sig:..... Date.....". The first three lines below the dividing line are sans-serif, the remainder seriffed. The second, in a rectangle 63mm by 39mm, was worded "RETURN TO SENDER/ADDRESS INSUFFICIENT/RAFPOST CALCUTTA/ DATE: INITIALS: " (Fig.7).

The Numbered RAFPOSTS

Single-ring handstamps

Numbers 1 to 6 were issued between November and December 1943 and appear to have been replaced with dated types by February 1944.

Each was worded "RAFPOST" at the top and "INDIA" at the bottom, one number having full stops; all had five-pointed stars in the centre except No.1 which had a double diamond (Fig.26).

Nos.1 and 2 had a close thick and thin double outer-ring, the two handstamps measuring 24mm and 26mm respectively. No.3 was really a double-ring handstamp, but is listed here for simplicity; besides the thick and thin double outer-rings, it had an inner-ring between the wording and star. In the larger version, with a diameter of 35mm, this wording read "3 R.A.F. POST. 3 INDIA"; I have seen this used about November 11th, 1943 (Fig.27). The smaller version of 25mm is worded "3 RAFPOST. 3 INDIA"; I have this used during December 1943.

No.4 had two types, both of 25mm, one with small neat letters and pointed star, the other thicker all round (Fig.28).

At least four sizes of star are known with No.5, which had handstamp diameters up to 30mm.

No.6 had two handstamps of 25mm and 26mm.

These were replaced by single-ring datestamps.

Single-ring datestamps

These were numbered 1 to 6 and read "RAFPOST (numbered at each side) INDIA" round a ring of 26mm with the date in two lines in the centre (Fig.3).

Only two exceptions have been recorded. No.2 had two distinct datestamps; with large figure "2"s there were full-stops after "R.A.F."; with small "2"s, no stops.

No.5 also had a large datestamp of 33mm with the date in one line; I have seen only two copies of it (Fig.29).

These were replaced by double-ring datestamps.

Double-ring datestamps

These range from No.1 to No.225 and No.300 to No.322, at least, the latter is the highest number known.

Of these 248 RAFPOSTS, some information has been recorded about 139 of them. Of the remainder, 94 are known to have existed but there is no information recorded. The relevant files were burnt in transit to the U.K. from India; consequently all numbers, wordings, dates and location known, (and listed in Vol.11), have been built up from covers and details I have.

The diameter of the many datestamps measured was always within 1mm of 32mm. The space between the double-rings varied more. Therein at the tops, sides and bottoms were the appropriate words and ornament(s), with the date across the centre. Exceptions were Nos.34 and 68 which have a broken inner ring forming upper and lower segments. All the other differences were in the exact position and spacing of the letters and ornament(s), which varied a little from number to number and even datestamp to duplicate datestamp.

The following are the sixteen or so different wordings recorded. It includes all security types, nearly all of which were used in India or Burma, and omits those specifically worded "CEYLON" or "JAPAN".

RAFPOST 300	No. at bottom. Not known in India.
RAFPOST +114+	No. at bottom (Fig.30).
RAFPOST 301+	Ornament at bottom. Unknown in India.
RAFPOST INDIA 84	No. at bottom.
RAFPOST INDIA +11+	No. at bottom.
-RAFPOST INDIA- -34-	Two pairs of dashes; broken inner ring. Also Nos.38 and 68. (Fig.31)
3 RAFPOST 3 INDIA	No. at each side (Fig.32).
133 RAFPOST 133 +INDIA+	No. at each side (Fig.33).
6 RAF POST 6 REGISTERED	Large letters, smaller inner ring. Not known in India.
RAFPOST 8 -S.E.ASIA-	No. at top right; arcs at sides. Not known in India (Fig.34).
2 RAFPOST 2 S.E.ASIA	No. at each side.
1 RAFPOST 1 SOUTH EAST ASIA	No. at each side (Fig.5).
? RAFPOST ? SOUTH EAST ASIA	Three clear covers seen with no number. RAFPOST 39? and Ceylon.
2 RAFPOST SOUTH EAST ASIA 2	
REDIRECTION	No. at each side.
1 RAFPOST SOUTH EAST ASIA 1	
REGISTERED	No. at each side (Fig.35).
R.A.F. POST OFFICE +SOUTH EAST ASIA+16	Date between numbers; note stops (Fig.36).

Numbered handstamps

Only three numbers have been recorded. No.10 had a one-line handstamp, of local appearance, 30mm by 5mm, reading "RAFPO 10" and is considered rare (Fig.6).

No.139 had a double outer-ring handstamp of 31mm; between that and an inner ring were the words RAF POST OFFICE INDIA", with number in the centre (Fig.37).

A similar one was used by No.195; it also had a smaller version, of 25mm, with full-stops after "R.A.F.". This number later used an ordinary double-ring datestamp, which presumably replaced the handstamp.

Numbered cachets for registered mail

Presumably at each BPU, if not each P.O., one of the duties would have been the handling of registered mail. However, few examples have been recorded and it is possible that the facility was only available for official mail.

Of the seven numbers known, 2, 5, 6, 11, 320, 321 and 322, the last four were used in Japan and are described under that heading.

I have seen three rectangular types for No.2. Measuring 40mm by 18mm, 55mm by 21mm and 51mm by 18mm, the first two were worded "RAFPOST, INDIA/REGD. No.2", the third "RAFPOST, SOUTH EAST/ASIA REGD No.2", all in two lines (Fig.38).

No.5 also had three rectangular types. The first, 36mm by 12.5mm, read "R.A.F. POST INDIA/REG. NO.5/...."; the second, 51mm by 20mm, "RAFFPOST SOUTH EAST/ASIA REGD. No.5" had about 11mm missing from the bottom and lower right-hand frames; the third, a luxury affair with thick and thin outer frame lines of 55mm by 25mm and 52.5mm by 22mm, was worded "R.A.F. POST SOUTH EAST/ASIA REG. NO:5" in three lines.

Two rectangular types have been recorded for No.6. Measuring 37mm by 12mm and 59mm by 12mm they were worded "RAFFPOST INDIA/REG'D. No.6/....." and "RAFFPOST SOUTH EAST/ASIA. REGD NO6/.. ..", both in two lines, the latter in seriffed letters.

Locations in India - and generally

The locations of the various offices can be found in "HISTORY OF THE RAF POSTAL SERVICE OVERSEAS 1942-1957 Volume II RAFFPOSTS of SOUTH EAST ASIA"

RAF Air Letters in India

It is not generally known that the RAF Postal Service in India issued their own Christmas Air Letters, for the year 1944 at least. Possibly they were issued after that date but regretfully, there is only sparse evidence in support of that fact. Three of the Air Letters in my possession were issued for Christmas 1944 and are in two distinct cover layouts. One bears a rectangular, printed pre-cancel reading "R.A.F. POSTAL SERVICE/AIR COMMAND/SOUTH EAST ASIA/POSTAGE FREE/XMAS 1944". These have two different coloured interiors, while the third carries the legend "POSTAGE/4 as" which has been franked by a double circle handstamp reading "POSTAGE FREE/* XMAS 1944". A fourth type in my collection may have been prepared for Christmas 1945. It has an oxen pulling santa on sleigh design on the front, surrounding the address area. The inside is quite different from the preceding year's offerings but it still carries the Imprint "R.A.F. Postal Services and Welfare".

You will have noticed that No.1 BPU insisted that the 1943 Air Mail Letter Cards were issued by Air Headquarters but as we saw from No.5 BPU, in 1944, they were actively planning to have their stocks printed locally.

RAF Censorship

The Government of India was determined to keep control of censorship in its own hands and resisted all attempts to introduce U.K. types of RAF censor handstamps into India. It is true that three U.K. types of RAF censor have been noted from India, two from Bombay on draft mail (Types R4/27 and R6/103) and one from Calcutta (Type R8/32) brought there from Burma in 1942. It is worth noting that none of these censor types were allowed to establish themselves permanently.

Surprisingly, the Government of India allowed a myriad of types of censor handstamps to flourish, most, obviously manufactured in the local bazaar! Some of these were a real attempt to arrive at a standard type of censor for the whole theatre, (type R16), or until a standard type (Type R17/R35) was arrived at.

But the other types owed more to the pressing needs of the moment. Towns and cities which, up until then, had never had a need to fly a barrage balloon, now sported them. Censor types R22 and R50 were issued to such units, which not only ringed industrial towns but also accompanied ships sailing to Calcutta and Chittagong.

Only types R31 and R49 are attributed to the remnants of the pre-war RAF manning the stations and units on the N.W. Frontier. The remaining RAF censors, Types R22, R24, R40, R43, R44, R50, R52, R53, R57 and R60 are products of the RAF in Bengal during 1942 and 1943 which was born out of the retreat from Burma in 1942.

When type R17 was finally issued, probably in March 1944, all these 'temporary' RAF censors were withdrawn.

IRAQ

It was here that the fledgling service began to spread its wings and flex its newly acquired muscles! With an abundance of post-war aircraft available, it is not surprising that one of its priorities should have been opening air routes to India and beyond.

It follows that such activities would have started from Egypt and spread across the deserts of Palestine and Trans-Jordan to Iraq. There is a legend, which may be apocryphal, that in the earliest days the new service ploughed a huge furrow over the deserts in the desired direction, which served as a giant directional mark to new or lost pilots.

The first recorded post markings arrived with RAF censor marks in September 1939. From that moment, every type known in the Middle East was also seen in Iraq. Fourteen examples of type R1 have been reported as have 11 of type R2. About the same time RAF censor label type RL5 was also used. The next RAF censors to occupy the stage, in Iraq, were types R9 (17 numbers), R10 (2 numbers), R11 (27 numbers) and R12 (11 numbers). August 1944 sees the arrival of a RAF Base Censor, type R20/17, at RAF Habbaniyah, with Capt J.D. Granstoun-Day SAAF as the RAF Base Censor. This unit was a detachment of the RAF Base Censor in Cairo, rather than an independent unit. No.7 RAF regional Postal Headquarters was established at Habbaniyah on 1st August 1944 also and this unit lasted until August 1946, but has left no trace of its existence in the form of the datestamps it used.

Iraq has thrown up two other postal oddities in the form of units which are only listed in RAF records (SD161) as 'RAFPOST Habbaniyah' and also 'RAFPOST Shaibah'. Once again no postal proof of their existence has ever been seen. The first unit is recorded as having operated from October 1947 until March 1952 and the second from November 1947 until March 1952.

This will make something else for our grandchildren to look out for!

IRAN

As this country did not appear in John Smith's original account, one can only hazard a guess that this resulted from Iran being lumped together with Iraq to form Paiforce. Nevertheless, I had hoped to be able to tie a few RAF censors together to construct a story of sorts, and I have not

been disappointed. Both types R10 in 1942 and type R11 in 1942/3, put in an appearance.

In July 1942, type R10 (Nos.108 and 661) have both been recorded used in conjunction with Indian FPO 101, then at Abadan.

Eight type R11 RAF censors are known used in conjunction with Indian FPOs 101 or 103, but No.10 is known used with Indian FPO 105. Number 219 only appears on an airgraph from No.74 Squadron.

ITALY

No.16 RAF Regional Headquarters was set up in Naples on 1st August 1944, and complaints about the postal affairs of the RAF rapidly declined. No datestamps or handstamps are known from this office.

Naples also housed No.9 Air Formation Postal Unit from October 1943 until March 1946. I have no idea of the function of this unit, but since it is listed in SD161, one is entitled to assume it was basically RAF orientated.

Naples was also the home of two RAF Base Censors, Nos.6 and 7. No.6 has been recorded from August 1944 onwards. The situation in respect of No.7 is a little more complicated. This RAF Base Censor is recorded from here from May 1944 onwards, but this is complicated by the sending of a detachment of this BCU to Marseilles in November 1944. This detachment was issued with a reserve datestamp, No.31. The detachment returned to Naples in May 1945. Its datestamp subsequently enjoyed a further lease of life, but not in Italy.

Most of the subsequent RAF postal history of Italy was acutely concerned with questions of RAF censorship and the many different types of censors encountered.

It must be realised that towards the end of 1943, RAF censorship in the area was very much in the melting pot. The authorities had introduced type R15 for use throughout C.M.F., which took in the whole of Italy, Malta, Greece, Algeria, Sicily and Yugoslavia. But, nevertheless, some units crossing over from Algeria took type R14 with them and were allowed to operate them for several months. Similarly, some units from Libya, crossing over from Tunisia or air units flying direct from Libya, often used type R11 for the first few months of the campaign in Italy, until the whole theatre was standardised on type R15.

JAPAN

The original composite British force that went to Japan after the latter's defeat was provided for postally by the Indian Army Postal Service. With the withdrawal of the Indians in 1947, as well as the major part of the British Army, postal facilities for the RAF in British Commonwealth Air were undertaken by the RAF PS (it would seem that the first RAFPOST was opened in the spring of 1946).

No.11 RAF BPU was established at Iwakuni and three RAF P.Os. were opened; at Iwakuni (No.320), Miho (No.321) and Kure (No.322 - the highest so far recorded. Fig.39). The necessary postal stores and equipment such as letter-scales, stamps, postal orders, reserve stocks, forms, etc., were provided by arrangements with the G.P.O. and Army P.S. Telegrams and cable facilities were handled by RAF P.Os.

On the withdrawal of the major part of the RAF from Japan, postal arrangements for the remainder were undertaken by NO.8 RAAF BPU, Kure, with effect from March 1948.

It is interesting to note that the Air Ministry records in at least one place state that RAFPOST 320 was at Kure and 322 at Iwakuni. However, I consider as correct the locations noted at the time from letters and covers received.

Four double-ring datestamps have been recorded between June 1946 and February 1948. RAFPOST 11 had JAPAN at the bottom whilst the other three had it at the top. Each P.O. had rectangular rubber handstamps to apply on registered mail, two of which are illustrated (figs.8 and 40), the middle lines of Nos.321 and 322 reading "MIHO" and "JAPAN" respectively.

JAVA and SUMATRA

Following the fall of Singapore in February 1942, the Allied air forces retreated first to Sumatra and finally to Java, from where we record a RAF censor (R8/93) as a typical censor of this period. This censor is first recorded from Singapore (FPO SP501) in August 1941 and then from Bangdoeng in Java, in February 1942.

In rather similar circumstances, RAF censor type R10/453 has been recorded from here. Since this type of RAF censor is not one which had previously been recorded from here, one is entitled to assume it was brought in by one of the new drafts which were still reaching the island in a vain attempt to stem the flood then sweeping South East Asia. The example recorded was franked by Dutch Feldpost E on 10th February 1942.

KENYA

During the last war the RAF did use postal frank cachets, presumably to authorise free or cheap postage. Little, to my knowledge, has so far been written about them, and at this stage I will only mention five types. The first is a large rectangular one measuring 65mm by 26mm and reads "POSTAL/ROYAL AIR FORCE/FRANK" with lines separating the wording; I have seen this type used in December 1941. There is a much smaller rectangular one 31mm by 10mm and with no lines separating the wording "ROYAL AIR FORCE/POSTAL FRANK/EAST AFRICA". A similarly worded one 38mm by 13mm in red was postmarked at Nairobi on 11th June 1941. Another with the first line abbreviated to "R.A.F." has been reported in blue. A further example has been reported worded "E.A., R.A.F./POSTAL FRANK".

The RAF at Eastleigh, Nairobi, has used several cachets since the war to authorise their mail at the cheap rate. The following are examples and give some idea of these earliest dates I have readily to hand: "STATION POST OFFICE/ROYAL AIR FORCE/EASTLEIGH/9-JUN 1952/EAST AFRICA"; "ROYAL AIR FORCE/EASTLEIGH/10 JUN 1954/EAST AFRICA"; "STATION/ORDERLY ROOM/16 JUN 1954/R.A.F. EASTLEIGH"; "STATION POST OFFICE/ROYAL AIR FORCE/28 DEC 1954/EASTLEIGH/EAST AFRICA"; finally an undated single-ring, in April 1957, reading "RAF POST ROOM/EASTLEIGH EAST AFRICA". It looks as though someone spends his whole time thinking out a new combination!

Five types of RAF censor are reported from Kenya, starting with type R2 in 1941. These can often be found used in conjunction with the postal franks described by John Smith. After 1941, we find types R8, R9, R10, R11 and R12 being used in turn.

LABUAN ISLAND

After the capitulation of the Japanese forces, postal services were provided by No.81 Wing RAAF (Nos. 76, 77 and 82 Squadrons). Air Force P.Os. 234 and 239 have been reported from there.

On 11th February 1946, No.81 Wing moved to Japan and the airfield on Labuan Island was handed over to a small detachment of the RAF. Thereafter, the island was served by a weekly service of RAF Sunderland flying boats between the island and Singapore, carrying mail and passengers in both directions.

This RAF unit was more than likely No.195 Staging Post which is listed on Labuan Island from about February 1946, having moved there from Leyte, in the Philippines. Very recently a RAF double-ring cds "RAF POST 312" dated 1.4.46 has been reported from Labuan Island. This very neatly falls into the range of datestamps known to have been issued to No.6 BPU in Singapore.

MALAYA

RAF postal history for this area can be assumed to have started on 3rd September 1939, with the imposition of RAF censorship. By the very nature of censorship most of the contemporary attention would have been focussed upon the base at Singapore. These would have been types R1, R2 and R8, but it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that some of these types may have been used on the mainland. After them came the long years in a P.O.W. camp.

South East Asia Command's assault on Malaya (Operation Zipper) planned for 9th September 1945, was forestalled by the surrender of the Japanese forces. General Itagaki signed Admiral Mountbatten's terms for unconditional surrender at Singapore on 12th September. However, air formations had already occupied bases at Penang on the 5th and Singapore on 6th. This force would have most certainly included the following RAF units:- 152, 155, 11, 17, 84, 89, 110 and 684 squadrons and their supporting ancillary units. AHQ Malaya was formed on October 1st and continued until May 31st 1946.

The main party of No.6 BPU, the unit responsible for the postal area of Borneo, Hong Kong, Java and Sumatra, reached Singapore on September 17th. There is a rumour that it continued to operate from here until April 1947.

John Smith suggests that the following RAFPOSTs may have been in Malaya in the early days of liberation. It is stressed that I have no first hand knowledge of these and have only included them (less the obvious Singapore locations) to aid your further study: 155 (No.231 ASRU Penang), 187 and 250.

The wording of the double-ring numbered datestamps thought to have been in Malaya varied from "RAFPOST S.E.ASIA", "RAFPOST---S.E.ASIA---", (unique to 8, see Fig.34), "RAFPOST SOUTH EAST ASIA", "R.A.F. POST OFFICE + SOUTH EAST ASIA +", "RAF POST REGISTERED", to "RAFPOST +(number)+", without the ornament in one case.

MALDIVE ISLANDS

As early as 1942 the RAF started planning an airfield and flying boat base on Gan Island, in the Addu Atol group of islands. This was about a mile and three quarters long and three quarters of a mile wide, with a population of about 500. By July 1943 the airfield was sufficiently advanced to allow planes to land and was handed over to the Royal Navy to become a RNAS station, which was commissioned HMS Haitan II. It then joined HMS Haitan, the anti-submarine base ship, which had been there since early 1942. But to resume our RAF story!

This Island was controlled by No.222 Group, back in Colombo and was one of several island bases controlled by that group. The facility, which was basically one of advanced flying bases, gave the group the capability to patrol deep into the Indian Ocean, and to disperse units if danger threatened. Addu Atol was one of three such bases. The others:- Kelai, in the Laccadive Islands, off the west coast of India, allowed flying boats to mount sorties as far as the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Aden. Far to the south, in the Chagos Archipelago, Diego Garcia (with the postal address 'Sec. Q', RAF Ceylon) was able to patrol deep into the southern oceans to search for German blockade runners, as well as being a link in the chain which connected Ceylon with Mauritius and East Africa.

No RAF datestamps have been reported from any of the island fortresses, but since they would have relied so heavily upon the services of flying boats, is it not more than likely that mail arrived and departed by the same means, to be censored and datestamped in Ceylon?

Indian FPO 150 was used by naval personnel at the naval anchorage, known as Port T in Addu Atol from February 1942 to June 1945. It is quite likely that the RAF there may have used the same facility.

In January 1957, the Maldivian Government gave its permission for Gan airfield to be re-established as a RAF staging post. Hittadu Island, a neighbouring island, to be used as a communications centre. A party of three RAF officers and 30 airmen were established on Gan from 31st January 1953.

MALTA

This island has figured in RAF censorship records since the start of World War II. In 1940, type R1 numbers 36-38 and 41 saw the three famous Gloster Gladiators 'Faith, Hope and Charity' do battle with the Italian Air Force, while by the time type R2 numbers 5 and 43 appeared, in late 1940, the air battle was well and truly joined. By the time the RAF had changed to type R4 there were no less than seven different RAF censors on the scene; numbers 10, 21, 40, 47, 48, 69 and 81. The tempo of war is obviously increasing. With the next censor, type R8, the same number of censors (7) was encountered, but the period of use now extends to 1944. Thus, with type R10, we find ourselves back in 1942. Only three examples can be identified as used in Malta; numbers 63, 438 and 764. Type R11 only produces one example, number 31 in July 1943. Type R14 smiled only briefly in the second half of 1944, and produced only two numbers, Nos.401 and 434. 1945 brings us to the closing year of the war, and with it type R15 and numbers 54, 60, 202, 237 and 353. Type R28; numbers 80 and 90 are known from here between February and July 1944.

There was one Base Censor in Malta between June 1944 and May 1945 and that was type R20/8.

The establishment of the RAF Postal Service began here in November 1943. Fully equipped post rooms were opened which resulted in the speedy handling of private mail, the rapid re-direction of correspondence for personnel posted from one unit to another, and a general speed-up in delivery, which greatly improved the morale of the troops.

Up to the autumn of 1944, the postal HQ had successfully dealt with 97 per cent of the 65,000 letters and 5,400 parcels which were received for tracing action.

No.14 Regional Postal Headquarters was on the island from August 1944 until August 1946. No datestamps have been recorded.

From May 1952 a cover is recorded back-stamped with a 30mm square reading "R.A.F. LUQA/rectangular box 19mm by 8mm/POST ROOM".

MAURITIUS

RAF censorship came late to this colony. The first recording is of type R11/944 with East African EA APO 73 in July and September 1944. This is followed with five examples of type R12/194, three of which are franked with EA APO 73. It is, perhaps, relevant to record that the airfield here was taken over by the RNAS soon after it opened as a RAF airfield.

Air Headquarters East Africa was located here in 1943. A Marine Craft Section was also on the island in 1944.

No RAF datestamps have been reported as in use here.

A cachet in 1956 read: "No.6 MOPU/ROYAL AIR FORCE".

MOROCCO

In Morocco we have the most elusive Base Censor of all time. It was established at Rabat Sale in French Morocco in 1944, and was still active in 1945. I learned of this unit over 20 years ago in the course of correspondence with the Air Ministry, yet in spite of this public knowledge, no example has ever come to light. At the time, it was known as No.10 RAF Base Censor. Rabat Sale was basically in an American theatre of operations and apart from No.70 SP, its associated Ferry Control Unit and a couple of Maintenance Units, there was little RAF in the vicinity.

NICOBAR ISLANDS

A 1953 cover from a member of the RAF Staging Post Detachment on Car Nicobar is recorded datestamped "DEMPSEY ROAD (FORCES)".

At the request of the Indian authorities the RAF withdrew on July 1st 1956, handing over to No.1 Indian Air Service Staging Post.

NORTHERN IRELAND

RAF Base Censor No.1 was located here from September 1942 until April 1945, with a short break for six weeks each side of D-Day. The surprising fact is that this unit was not a RAF unit at all, but was run by the Air Ministry. However, as it was the forerunner of the other RAF Base Censors, it has been mentioned here. This censor was always

referred to in day to day correspondence as "the RAF Censor" and was based at Drumglass House, Marlborough Park, Belfast.

And here we touch upon another very interesting fact about Belfast. During the time No.1 was out of action, RAF Base Censor No.2 was brought back from Algiers to plug the gap. It is first recorded from here on the 24th April 1944, and the last recording is 13th July 1944.

When we come to study the other RAF censors which have been noticed in this area, it is quite apparent that types R4, R5 and R6 were there, but the identities of individual censors is vague. It is interesting to note that the D-Day RAF censorship (using type R11) did not extend to Northern Ireland.

Although, of course, territorially part of the U.K., there is no doubt that this was "overseas" to all RAF stationed there. It is interesting as an illustration of the meeting-place of certain Home and Overseas postal procedures.

The RAF PS was introduced here in March 1943 as a result of the withdrawal of Army Postal facilities which had served RAF units prior to this date. The service rapidly expanded and by September 1943 all large stations had RAF POs open and the smaller units had instituted the standard postal procedure. HQ RAF Northern Ireland was responsible direct to Air Ministry (A.D.O. (Mails)) for the conduct of the postal service on all stations there.

In November 1944 the HQ controlled:- nine Class "A" Post Offices (over 1,000 personnel), one Class "B" Post Office (over 700 personnel) and one Class "C" Post Room (over 200 personnel) plus fifty Units with a strength of under 200.

Mail from all stations, if received by the civil P.Os. in the morning, was shipped and arrived on the mainland the same night. Incoming mail arriving at Stranraer was shipped and distributed to stations within 24 hours. The average time of transmission of mail from and to the mainland (including censorship) was two to four days. Refresher courses for the training of postal clerks were held under the direction of the RAF Postal Officer at the G.P.O., Belfast. The RAF PS greatly helped civil postal arrangements here, especially in the numerous isolated districts, where only small civil sub-post offices were available. Several "name" datestamps have been recorded elsewhere by Norman Hill.

An out-of-the-ordinary cachet used on redirected mail in 1957 reads "H.M. AIR FORCE/(boxed blanks in date space)/VESSEL/BRIDPORT" based on Londonderry.

For further details of RAF POs which may have opened in this area, reference should be made to "Postal Markings of R.A.F., R.F.C. and R.N.A.S. Stations in the United Kingdom 1918-1968" by Bill Garrard, published by the Forces Postal History Society.

PAKISTAN

Under this country I am naturally not referring to the RAF POs at Mauripur Airfield, Karachi, before independence.

However, until recently the RAF has manned a staging post at the airfield to refuel and maintain RAF aircraft flying to and from the Far East.

I have seen three types of cachet which are applied as back-stamps so as to be eligible for forces' airmail rates. The first, a single-ring of 35mm with serrated edges reads "MAURIPUR. R.A.F. POST OFFICE" round the inside; this was probably used in 1948. Four years later a three-line cachet read R.A.F. POST OFFICE/MAURIPUR/PAKISTAN" in seriffed letters. In 1953 a wider sans-serif cachet is known reading "AUTHORISED FOR TRANSMISSION/BY AIRMAIL AT CONCESSIONAL RATE/RAF POST OFFICE, MAURIPUR/KARACHI. 13. PAKISTAN".

This staging post - the last one left in either Pakistan or India - was closed down at the beginning of January 1957 after 25 years operation.

PALESTINE

Although John Smith is adamant that a Regional Postal Headquarters operated in Jerusalem, I must admit to being very sceptical. All the other Regional Postal Headquarters have been quite openly published in SD161, so why should Jerusalem be an exception?

But Palestine has a good record in respect of its RAF censorship. Types R1, R2, R4, R9 to R12 are all represented here.

No.18 RAF Base Censor was located at Air HQ Levant, in Jerusalem. It was a detachment of the RAF Base Censor in Cairo and had the unusual distinction of being under the sole control of W.A.A.F. censors.

PHILIPPINE ISLANDS

The RAF had a detachment at Clark Field, Luzon I., at least until 1956. It was used as a staging post between Hong Kong and Singapore. Mail could be addressed either c/o R.A.F. Hong Kong or U.S. APO 74. Mail is recorded datestamped with a Krag F.P.0.5 at Hong Kong.

RUSSIA

No.151 Wing of two Squadrons was sent on H.M.S. Argus to Murmansk, near which they were stationed at Vaenga Aerodrome. They were in action from September to November 1941.

SARAWAK

A RAF Dakota of No.31 Squadron landed on Kuching Airfield during the first week of October 1945, taking back to the country several important officials following the Japanese capitulation. Except for the actual machinery of re-occupation between September 1945 and January 1946 no RAF were actually stationed in Sarawak and no datestamps have been recorded.

SEYCHELLES

The principle armament in the RAF armoury in the Indian Ocean was the flying boat and in the Seychelles patrols from Ceylon would occasionally have overlapped. It is thus fitting that one of the RAF censors known to have been reported from here has come from a detachment of a flying boat squadron. The censor is type R10/562 and is recorded in June 1942 from a

detachment of No.209 Squadron. Additionally, type R12/47 has been recorded from here in December 1944. The relevant unit is not known.

A Marine Craft Section was located on these islands in 1944 and it has been reported that mail from RAF personnel stationed here was flown from Victoria, the chief town of Mahne Island, to Mombasa on the mainland.

SIAM

Air formations occupied bases at Bangkok on September 5th, 1945. The Don Muang airfield here provided two important functions. It enabled released Allied P.O.Ws. to be evacuated by our aircraft to Rangoon and Singapore, while it also formed a valuable staging post to Saigon in French Indo-China.

Air Headquarters Siam operated from Bangkok for five months in 1945 and 1946, but RAF units there were to close by the end of 1946. One of the last units to close was No.3 Staging Post. Several RAF squadrons have had associations with Bangkok, e.g. Nos. 20, 221 681 and 684.

No.8 BPU, Rangoon, was postally responsible for the RAF here. RAFPOST 181 was here and is known in two forms. The first has the number in the top and bottom centre, each side of "26 AUG 46" (inverted) and reading round the double-ring "R.A.F. POST OFFICE + SOUTH EAST ASIA +" the following has also been seen up until 27th February 1946, "181 RAFPOST 181/INDIA". It thus is assumed that the first mentioned datestamp turned out to have the longer life. John Smith mentions the possibility of "RAFPOST + 305" also having been in Siam, but I am unable to offer any evidence in support of this theory.

SICILY

This island comes into the frame principally on account of No.9 RAF Base Censor which opened at Catania in May 1944, until it moved to Athens in November 1944. This is significant because the datestamp is not seen during its stay in Athens, although this unit was there until the end of the war. It seems quite likely that this datestamp was destroyed in December 1944, when Air Headquarters was overrun by Greek Insurgents, with the result that No.29 had to be brought into use in its stead as a reserve datestamp.

There is still more to the RAF censor story; this starts in October 1943 with RAF censor R14/336 and progresses to R15 numbers 40, 198, 278, 280, 363, 441 and 480.

SINGAPORE

The earliest use of RAF censors from here are from type R1, numbers 79 to 86 and 89 to 96. Some are record with FPO SP501, and others with civilian post offices. These cover the period from September 1939 to January 1941. Type R2, numbers 67, 69, 72, 80 and 100 are recorded from October and November 1940, when type R8 took over. This was to be the hey-day of type R8 RAF censors, but only No.93 can be identified with any certainty.

There is another prong to the Singapore story. With the liberation in 1945, No.6 BPU went into the colony in strength. The following RAFPOSTs have been recorded from here but at this state of our knowledge there may

be even more. The first is "RAFPOST/ + 170 +" which is known from 5th January 1946 to 1st May 1947, "RAFPOST/ + 221 +", is known until the 21st December 1946, by which time it was superseded by R.A.F. POST OFFICE/ SOUTH EAST ASIA/221" which operated until the 17th January 1947. The next contender was "RAFPOST/300" which lasted until the 28th March 1947. It is more than likely that RAFPOST 305 and 307 to 310 were all used in Singapore.

SOCOTRA

This island, which is larger than the Isle of Wight, was part of the Aden Protectorate. No datestamps have ever been recorded from here but one RAF censor is known. The island possessed an airfield in the latter war years and was far enough from Aden to possess some of the attributes of an aircraft carrier, - except in self sufficiency in food, fuel and ammunition! It suffers one major drawback in not possessing an harbour! All supplies such as fuel, ammunition and petrol had to be manhandled over an open beach and subjected to the full force of the Indian Ocean. Hardly conducive to mounting a sustained campaign! There was a radar station on the island which might have been expected to throw up some RAF censors.

However, the only RAF censor recorded from the island is R11/339, on 27th December 1943. There are grave doubts concerning the antecedents of this censor and one cannot help wondering whether the sender of this airgraph might have been a visitor to the island and the censor stamp applied in Aden itself.

SOUTH AFRICA

Mail was dealt with throughout by the civil postal authorities, as was the carriage of such mail to and from the U.K. Further more, all military matters were under the control of the S.A. Defence Force. Under these circumstances the RAF PS was not introduced but, following numerous complaints from RAF personnel here and their relatives in the U.K., a RAF Postal Liaison Officer was established at Pretoria in August 1944 to advise and assist as far as possible in the handling of mail for the RAF. This led to a general improvement.

No datestamps have been recorded.

SOUTHERN RHODESIA

RAF censor type R1/55 is recorded from Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia in August 1940 when No.4 Flying Training School transferred here from RAF Habbaniyah in Iraq.

A number of RAF training camps were established here as part of the Empire Air Training Scheme.

The first camp post office was set up in February 1942 under the supervision of a retired postal official appointed by the Postmaster-General. The training of selected members of the W.A.A.S. (local A.T.S.?) was undertaken by the Supervisor and, following an eight week course, they were posted to various units. By May 1943 camp post offices had been established on every RAF station with the exception of Norton, where a civil post office was situated nearby.

At the beginning, the organisation was not always by the Manual of the RAF PS but, under the direction of the RAF Postal Liaison Officer at Pretoria, arrangements were made in 1944 for the introduction of the standard RAF PS at all units.

Whilst a number of camp postmarks and official cachets have been recorded, I do not consider the RAF PS was fully responsible for them and they are, therefore, omitted from this history.

SUDAN

John Smith makes the following statement, which I feel sure is fallacious, "No.10 RAF Regional Postal Headquarters was set up in Khartoum under Middle East Command, probably in 1944. Earlier this number had been allocated to Gibraltar." Since this statement has already been made it had better be allowed to stand, so that others can be allowed to pass judgement on this matter. Having been given the chance to register my objections it must be left to another generation to decide whether I am right or wrong. It only remains for me to remind readers that all RAF Regional Postal Headquarters are listed in SD161, - yet in that document there is no mention of either Gibraltar or Khartoum in this context. Neither is No.10 mentioned.

The association of RAF censor marks with the Sudan is of long standing and takes in types R1, R2, R9, R10, R11 and R12, covering the period from 1939 to 1945.

Four type R1 censors are known from here; numbers 13, 17, 32 and 34. Most are known with civilian postmarks and only No.17 is known used in conjunction with FPO 174 in September 1940. The next censor type to be considered is R2. Nine numbers of this type are known, amongst these numbers 26 and 101. In February 1941 RAF censor type R9 appeared upon the scene. Three numbers of this type are recorded from here; 101, 141 and 142 and cover the period until March 1942. From April 1942 until October 1942 seven numbers of type R10 are recorded. These are 13, 147, 537, 592, 604, 637 and 786. Nine numbers of type R11 have been recorded between October 1942 and October 1944; 65, 99, 105, 228, 241, 257, 288, 537 and 562. It was type R12 which saw the end of the war and thus the end of RAF censorship. This type operated from November 1944 until August 1945 and used numbers 147, 320, 323 and 327.

SYRIA

The entry of the Free French into Vichy-held Syria in order to bring that country into the war on the Allied side, was a close-run thing! It was almost too late! At this stage of the war, the Germans already occupied Greece and Crete, and were now trying to persuade the Vichy-French to grant them aircraft staging rights through Syria. The object of their interest was the oil of Iraq and Persia. This threat was very real; an occasional, clandestine Dornier 215 had already been seen landing on the airfield at Mosul. The revolt of the Iraqi Army over looking RAF Habbaniyah, in 1941, was a well orchestrated event and not a spontaneous one. Since Syria was seen to be on the Allied side, the threat passed as quickly as it arose. RAF postal history of this area became richer by the addition of four RAF censor types; R9, R10, R11 and R12. This first of these, type R9, has produced a single example, R9/222, which has been recorded with FPO 61 in January 1942. With type R10, we fare a little

better. There are four numbers of this type known; 584, 786, 908 and 987. These are recorded over the period September 1942 to October 1942. Type R11 brings eleven numbers to consider, these being 62, 149, 237, 347, 487, 512, 513, 520, 839, 961 and 977.

By the time type R12 appeared, the centre of the war had moved westwards to other parts of the Mediterranean and we are left with but a single type R12 number to record, No.951, from RAF Beirut in March 1945.

TRINIDAD and the U.S.A.

The Air Ministry say that No.53 Squadron, R.A.F., was stationed at the Naval Air Station, Quonset Point, Rhode Island, U.S.A., from July 1942. On August 10th it moved to Waller Field, Trinidad, and at the end of the month to Edinburgh Field, where it remained until the end of November 1942.

No RAF datestamps have been recorded.

TUNISIA

Tunisia was the country in which the Desert Air Force met up with the British North Africa Air Force, thus making sure that the African coast was an all-Allied affair. RAF censor type R11 from here has produced sixteen numbers between December 1942 and November 1943. This role was taken over by type R14 and seven censors have been recorded from here; numbers 56, 186, 256, 262, 312, 327 and 375.

WEST AFRICA

The four countries which made up British West Africa; i.e. Gambia, Gold Coast, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, worked together during the Second World War as an integrated command. For that reason it will be similarly treated for this book. West Africa in RAF terms enjoyed far wider boundaries, for the RAF made extensive use of airfields in Liberia and was in the habit of mooring flying boats in both the French and the Belgian Congos. But I shall not stray in that direction.

Gambia

Only one censor type has been recorded from here, type R11. Three numbers have been recorded between 1943 and May 1945, - 84, 256 and 342. The only clear postmark known is FPO 109.

Gold Coast

As befits this much bigger colony, four types of RAF censor have been recorded. These are types R4, R9, R10 and R11.

Two numbers are recorded using type R4 and these are numbers 8 and 43, both recorded on Christmas 1941 airgraphs from RAF Takoradi. Two numbers with type R9 over the period July 1941 to December 1941 are numbers 184 and 254, both tied to FPO 106. Type R10 has introduced a single number (349) which is recorded whilst used in conjunction with FPO 106, from RAF Takoradi in 1942. Five type R11 numbers are recorded from RAF Takoradi between October 1942 and May 1945. These are numbers 9, 84, 91, 102 and 114.

Nigeria

January 1942 opens with R9/189 being recorded with FPO 46. By the time type R11 had arrived upon the scene, there are five numbers known, all but one of which are recorded used in conjunction with FPO 46. These are numbers 95, 100, 209 and 258, with 110 being recorded used in conjunction with an Oshogbo postmark. No.258 is also known used with U.S. APO 606 in February 1945.

Sierra Leone

Four RAF censor types are recorded from here; R8, R10, R11 and R25. In making this statement it will be quite obvious that the usual pattern of RAF censors has been distributed.

Only one type R8 censor, R8/141, has been recorded, used with FPO 41 in March 1943.

Type R10 has produced four numbers mostly used with FPO 41 between January 1942 and August 1942. These are 117, 349, 626 and 719.

Type R11 has produced twelve numbers which are variously seen used with FPOs 41 and 537 over the period November 1942 to May 1945.

Type R25 gives us quite a puzzle! It was used by No.265 MRU, a radar station. The only recording is from a cover from Freetown dated 11th February 1941, but this disagrees with the historical facts as they are known to us in the unit war diary. This unit did not disembark at Freetown until 15th July 1941, after being torpedoed. It only operated until 20th March 1943.

The reader is offered another puzzle. AHQ West Africa is the only Command HQ to offer a clear explanation of the way in which RAF Base Censorship should be conducted; whereas in other Commands the subject is never raised. Censorship is an intelligence responsibility and the intelligence histories for AHQ West Africa are very detailed. One officer was specifically responsible for postal and telephonic censorship. It was he who decided the percentage of Green (Honour) Envelopes which would be selected for censorship each month; this was ongoing routine month after month. What was this if not Base Censorship? And yet no trace of this activity has ever been seen.

FORMS USED IN THE RAF POSTAL SERVICE

Several of these forms were, in fact, postal stationery and some are still being used. The forms, and the Air Publication Manual, were required for the day-to-day running and checking on an efficient postal system. Whilst undoubtedly the majority were based on similar ones employed by the G.P.O. and Army P.O., I know that at least one - the redirection sticky slip Form 1674 - was suggested by W/Cdr Shrewry and helped solve much of the original chaos and delays.

Form No.	Title or Reason for Use
44	Daily Balance Sheet Class 'A' Post Office
45	Daily Balance Sheet Class 'B' Post Office
98	Disposal of all Registered Items
1645	Active Service RAF Privilege Envelope
1674	Redirection sticky label for letters
1677	Personal particulars for station's card Index
1786	Advice of Registered Article/Ordinary Parcels
1787	C.Os. Inspection Report on Postal Organisation: Parts 1 and 2
1832	Unit Correct Postal Address (Poster)
1978	Air Publication: Manual of the RAF Postal Service
1980	Official Paid Post Card about address on posting overseas
2089	Parcels Book
2592	RAF Postal Address: Post Card (For use in the U.K. only)
2596	Official Paid Post Card about address on posting overseas by air
2702	Movements of Personnel
2703	Post Officer's Report
2709	Authorisation for Collection of Section Private Mail
2711	RAF Field Post Card

From South East Asia I have seen four types of headed office paper designed apparently by LAC Witterick from rough sketches by F/Lt Spaul. Three incorporated in their top right-hand corner maps of India and Ceylon with the RAF crest or a 'plane; on the foolscap paper dotted lines showed the routes to and from Peshawar, Bombay, Cochin, Madras, Chittagong, Colombo and so on. The fourth read across the top "(envelope outline) HEADQUARTERS RAF POSTAL SERVICES/AIR COMMAND SOUTH EAST ASIA" in white on a blue background.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Should the reader of this book wish to pursue certain of its aspects in greater detail, the following books may be of assistance:

History of the RAF Postal Service Overseas 1942-1957 Volume II RAFPOSTs of South East Asia

By W Garrard

Published Chavril Press 1990

Postmarks of Australian Forces from All Fronts 1939-1953

By Stephenson Stobbs

Published by Harry Hayes 1976

Postal Markings of R.A.F., R.F.C. and R.N.A.S. Stations in the U.K. 1918-1968

By W Garrard

Published by Forces Postal History Society

RAF Censorship: World War II and Afterwards

By Dr N M Colley and W Garrard

(Yet to be published)

The Bulletin of the Forces Postal History Society

Published Quarterly

Charles R. Entwistle

DEALER IN CAMPAIGN POSTAL HISTORY

BLOOMFIELD
PERTH ROAD
ABERNETHY
PERTH
PH2 9LW

TEL: (073 885) 351

ADVERTISEMENT

The effects of warfare on the handling and carriage of mail has been profound and there are few, if any, countries whose postal history has not been enriched by such events.

The introduction of censorship, the internment camps of neutral countries, the variations of routes and methods of carriage caused by warfare, the effects on the post by occupying armies and the use of the postal system to spread propaganda and patriotic messages have all combined to offer collectors a chance to add the unusual and interesting to their country collection.

Not only has the country collector benefitted but so too has the collector of many of the popular themes and topics.

We specialise in all aspects of War and Philately and produce a monthly list containing items from a diverse range of countries, colonies and territories.

Material ranges from 19th Century Campaigns, through the First and Second World Wars, the intervention forces, expeditions and civil wars of the 20th Century and on up to modern conflicts.

A wide range of subjects/topics are covered, including:- Civil Censorship; Army and Field Post Offices; Wartime Airmail Routes; Delayed, Undelivered and Intercepted Mail; Military Missions; Ambulance, Hospital, Red Cross and related material; Prisoner of War, Internee and Concentration Camp mail; Naval Mails; Postal Stationery; Propaganda and Patriotic items; Used Abroad.

We would be happy to send a sample list, free on request, to readers.

BUYING

We purchase a large proportion of our stocks direct from our clients, both in this country and overseas, and we would be most interested to hear from anyone having such material of which they might wish to dispose.

www.airindiacollector.com

ISBN 1 872744 05 2