

BRITISH AND EMPIRE FORCES ON THE WESTERN FRONT

The first troops of the British Expeditionary Force landed in France in August 1914. During the course of the war troops from the dominions and colonies arrived in support. The Portuguese contingent and also some of the American troops also served with the BEF.

From January 1915 to late June 1916 the datestamps of the Field Post Offices serving brigades, divisions and corps carried coded identification of those formations. Then, for security, the datestamps were periodically exchanged so that they no longer indicated the correct identity of the user.

FIELD MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH was commander in chief of the BEF from 30 July 1914 to 18 December 1915. This cover (with letter) from him in his last days before retirement was sent by bag to the War Office in London, where it was posted (Official Paid) to Field Marshal Sir Evelyn Wood.



ROYAL AIR FORCE

15 Squadron Royal Naval Air Service was formed at Coudekerque, near Dunkirk, on 10th March 1918. When the Royal Air Force was formed on 1st April 1918, this became 215 Squadron R.A.F. Its role was to provide diversionary bombing during the Royal Navy's operations at Zeebrugge to block German access to Bruges, in April 1918. The squadron was then withdrawn to England. Postcard written on 10th April 1918, the sender still showing his RNAS address as 15 Sqdn 5 Wing. As a RNAS squadron the unit would probably have been issued with a standard censor mark comprising the wording CEN SOR, with a circle in the centre containing 15/SQ.

There is now a home made version of this, with the designation 215/SQ, the letters N and Q being reversed.

Card postmarked in London on 12th April with the standard postmark RECEIVED FROM H M SHIP/NO CHARGE TO BE RAISED.



CANADIAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

2nd Canadian Division Railhead office – Army Post Office RX2 dated MY 30 16, located at the time at Steenwerck Station. The Canadian offices were issued with British Army and Field Post Office datestamps incorporating the identification code X. This was changed in January 1917 to code P. However the British practice of periodically exchanging datestamps was followed.



AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE

PARCEL POST LABELS

The Australian FPOs were issued with British datestamps coded W (subject to subsequent security changes). However they used their own styles of parcel post labels.

OC 27 16 APO RW2 – 2nd Australian Division Railhead, in the Somme area.

12 JU 17 FPO120 – used at this time by 8th Australian Infantry Brigade [FPO 8W], in 5th Australian Division in the Somme area.

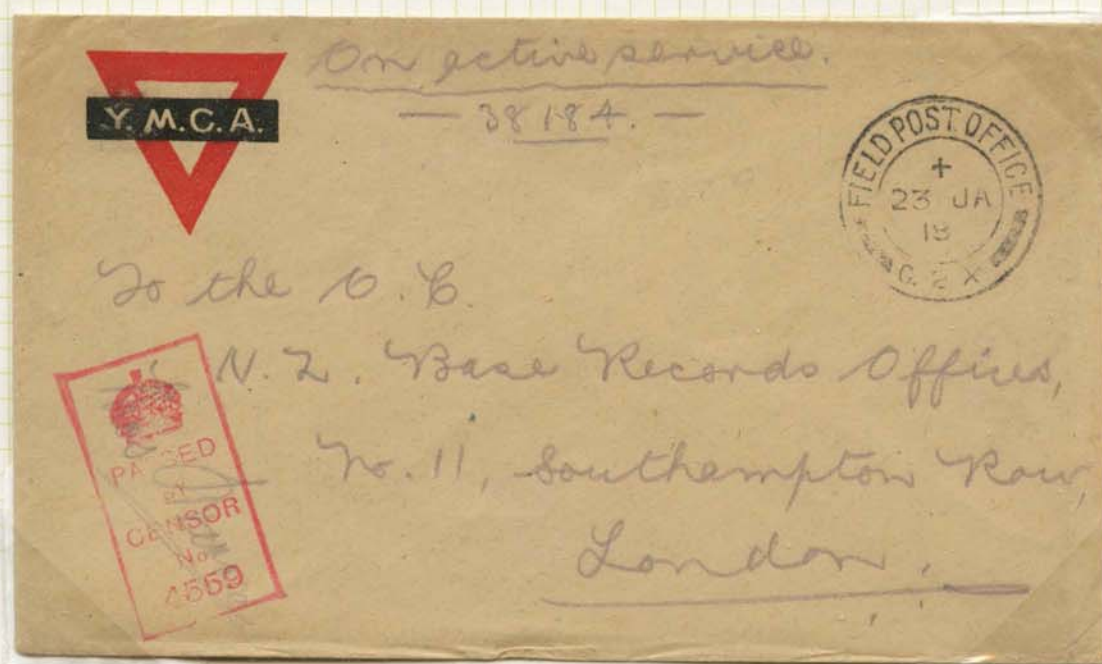


NEW ZEALAND DIVISION

A fourth Brigade was formed in the New Zealand Division in May 1917, and disbanded on 7th February 1918. At this time the three NZ brigades were using datestamps coded C1, C2 and C3 (instead of 1Z, 2Z, and 3Z); C4 was used by a British brigade. To provide a datestamp for this new brigade, there happened to be a datestamp FPO C2X which had been produced in 1915, but not needed then. This conveniently fitted in with the other datestamps. It was used for the life of the office in two forms – the regular double ring datestamp (possibly lost in enemy action) and a provisional one with the code inserted in loose type.

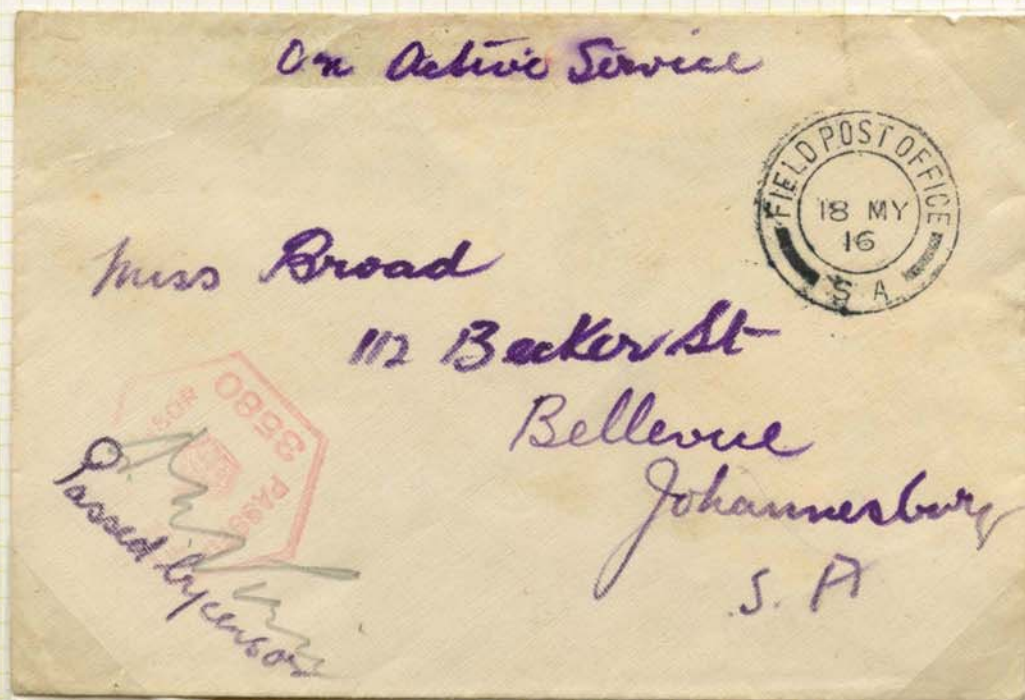
30 JY 17 regular datestamp, in the Ploegsteert area in Belgium.

26 JA 18 typeset datestamp, in the Hooze area in Belgium.



SOUTH AFRICAN BRIGADE

Because of heavy involvement against the German colonies in Africa, South Africa could only spare one brigade for service on the Western Front. This had earlier served in Egypt, and arrived in France on 20th April 1916. It joined 9th Scottish Division, relieving 28th Brigade. The first postmark issued was a provisional double ring FPO datestamp with typeset designation SA, soon replaced by a regular double ring datestamp code SA1. From late June 1916 the datestamp was exchanged with other British brigade FPO datestamps for security. The brigade was soon to be involved in the Somme battles.



7. 8079. [Crown Copyright Reserved.]

ON ACTIVE SERVICE.

COIN OR ARTICLES OF VALUE SHOULD NOT BE SENT IN THIS ENVELOPE.
THIS ENVELOPE WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED FOR REGISTRATION.

NOTE.—
Correspondence in this envelope need not be censored Regimentally. The Contents are liable to examination at the Base.
The following Certificate must be signed by the writer:
I certify on my honour that the contents of this envelope refer to nothing but private and family matters.

Address—

Miss Nellie Morgan

9 Irvine Street

Port Elizabeth

South Africa

FIELD POST OFFICE
B
9 JUL
16
S. A.

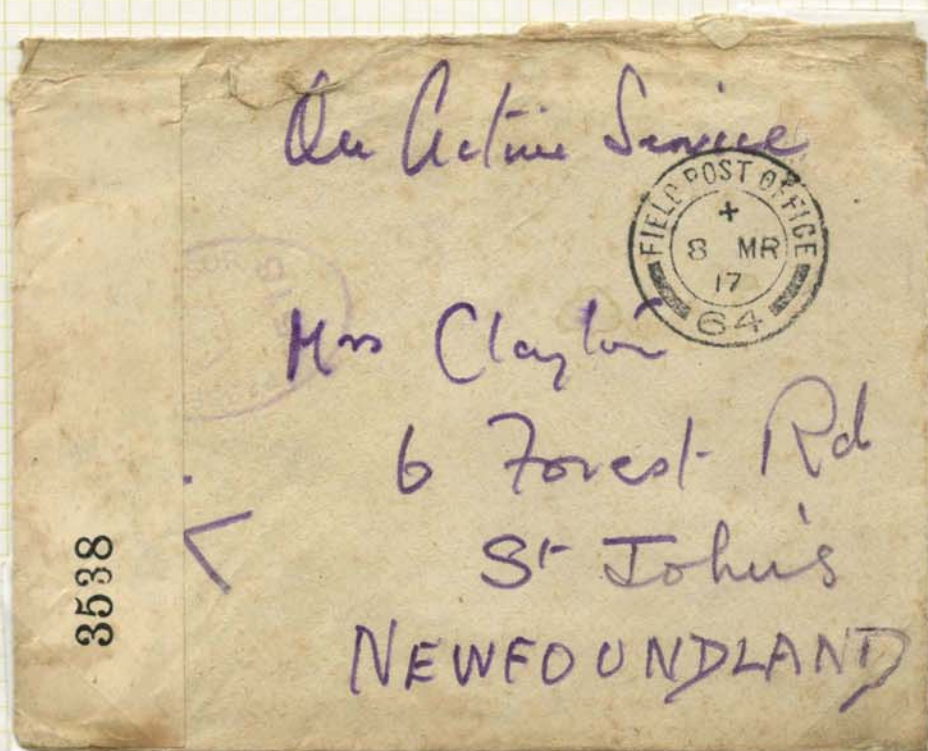
Signature }
(Name only) }

Waight 4065.

NEWFOUNDLAND CONTINGENT

1st Bn Newfoundland Regiment served in 88th Brigade, 29th Division. After service at Gallipoli, it arrived in France in March 1916. The 88th Brigade used datestamp FPO 64 (instead of FPO 88) in the period February to June 1917.

Cover to Newfoundland, postmarked FPO 64 8 MR 17. The Brigade was soon to be involved in the Somme battles.



INDIAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE A

The Indians (two infantry divisions and two cavalry divisions, which included some British units and personnel) began arriving at Marseilles in September 1914. They moved to Orleans for a few weeks before moving to the British area south of Hazebrouck. The infantry moved to Mesopotamia in December 1915, but the cavalry remained in France until the spring of 1918.

Although the IEF was accompanied by a good provision of Indian FPOs, this Indian Field Service Post Card was posted in the French civil post office at St Venant, Pas de Calais, on 4th December 1914. It was accepted free of postage.



BERMUDA CONTINGENT

The Bermuda Volunteer Rifle Corps provided a contingent of volunteers for service with the BEF. They were attached to 1st Bn Lincoln Regt, 62nd Brigade, 21st Division from November 1915 (earlier 9th Bde)

Cover to Bermuda, with letter, from Cpl P. S. Ingham, 667, BVRC; censoring officer Capt R. J. Tucker, BVRC, with faint hexagonal censor stamp no. 2044 (of 1st Lincolns). Postmark FPO 62 (of 62nd Bde) dated 16 MY 16. On arrival in Bermuda, the P.C./ BERMUDA civil censor stamp was applied.



ROYAL GUERNSEY MILITIA

Many members of the RGM volunteered to serve with the BEF. Organised into a company, they arrived in France in March 1915 and were incorporated into 6th Bn Royal Irish Regt, in 47th brigade, 16th Irish Division.

Two covers to Guernsey, from the same man:

AP 6 16 FPO 47 (of 47th Bde). Hexagonal censor stamp no 2272 (of 6 R I Regt) censor signature Lt J. G. McIlworth, of RGM.

10 SP 17 FPO14 (now used by 47 Bde). Censor stamp now oval no 1556 (of 6 R I Regt) censor signature J M Hunt (location in Ypres area).



ROYAL MALTA ARTILLERY

A number of Maltese officers had postings in various British units.

Lieut A. V. Falzon Sant Manduca (commissioned in 1899) was with 50th Division as an artillery compensating officer.

Cover to Malta postmarked FPO D50 (50th Division HQ) 8 SP 15. Triangular censor stamp no 754.

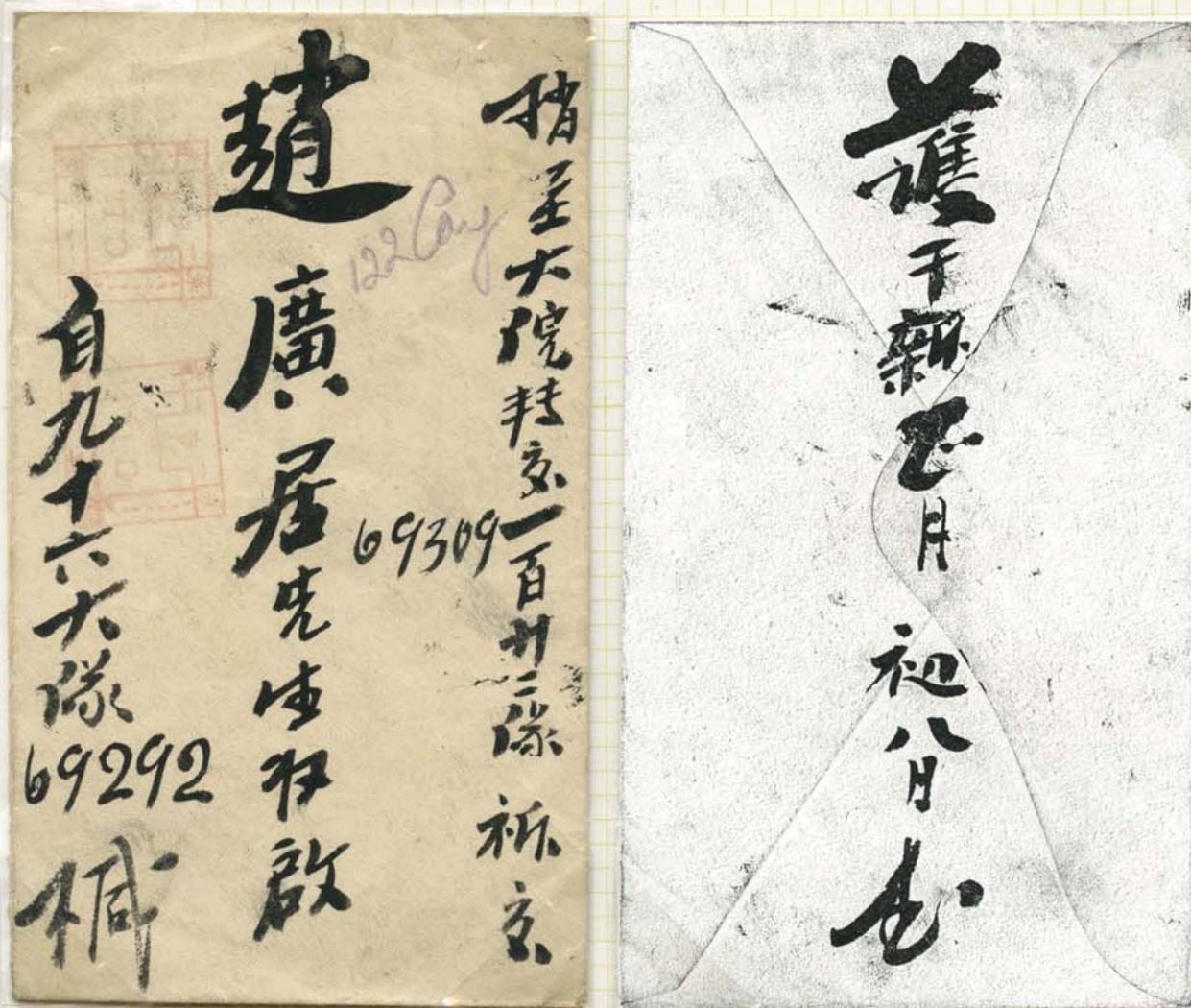


CHINESE LABOUR CORPS

In 1916/17 Britain recruited 120,000 Chinese personnel in Wei Hai Wei to serve on labour duties in the British area of the Western Front. They were organised in companies of 500, with British officers.

Cover from member 69292 of 96th Coy sent to Mr CHAO Kwang-chu, member 69309, of 122nd Coy. Both sender and recipient in France with the C.L.C.

There is a boxed handstamp CL/4 (censorship or postal mark?).



Wording - front - "From 96 Company Number 69292"

" Send to 122 Company and hand to Mr CHAO Kwang-cha, number 69309
back - "First Moon, eighth day".

BRITISH HONDURAS INDIVIDUAL VOLUNTEER

Arthur Norman Wolffsohn, of Belize, served in the Tank Corps as 2nd Lieut. He became Colonial Secretary in 1943/49.

Cover to his father in Belize, with indistinct APO postmark dated 29 MR 18.



PORTUGUESE EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

Two Portuguese Divisions served on the Western Front from the spring of 1917 being under command of the BEF. They suffered very heavy casualties in the German offensive at Neuve Chapelle on 9th April 1918.

Postal services were organised on British lines, and datestamps were provided by Britain.

Standard Field Service Post Card printed in Portuguese (British form no A.F.A. 2042 (P)) posted at CEP/SPC 5 on 30th March 1917, to Portugal, transit CEP/SPC 8 at Portuguese Base PO.

C.E.P. = Corpo Expedicionário Português

S. P. C. = Seção Postal do Campana



NADA deve ser escrito n'este lado, senão as datas e a assignatura do expedidor. As palavras não necessárias podem ser apagadas. Se qualquer outra matéria for ajuntada, o cartão será destruído.

Eu vou completamente bem.

Eu fui admitido em hospital.

☐ doente e ando bem.
☐ ferido e espero sair brevemente.

Em para a data d'operação:

Tenho recebido ☐ a vossa carta com data de 19.3.17
☐ o vosso telegramma com data de.....
☐ o vosso pacote com data de.....

Escrevi na primeira ocasião.

Não tenho recebido carta de F.S.

ultimamente.

desde muito tempo.

A assignatura unicamente.

Data 19.3.17

AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

Several American Divisions arriving in France in the spring of 1918 went to the British rear area for instruction by British personnel. Most went on to the American area, but 27th and 30th Divisions (in 2nd American Corps) remained to serve under British 4th Army. British APO and FPO datestamps were provided, with Identification code K.

SP 13 18 FPO HK (typeset datestamp) = 2nd American Corps – located at Beauval, S. of Doullens.

AU 26 18 FPO21K = 54th Brigade, 27th American Division – in the Dickebusch Lake sector for the Ypres – Lys offensive. The Division sustained 862 casualties.



VICTORY PARADE IN LONDON JULY 1919

To celebrate the end of over 4 years of war, and the signing of a peace treaty, a Victory parade of British and Allied forces was held in London on 19th July 1919. Some of the participating contingents were camped in Kensington Gardens.

Postcard sent to Antwerp by a Belgian soldier of 16th Line Regiment.

Posted at APO/KENSINGTON GDNS CAMP (temporary skeleton postmark) on 20th July 1919.

Also an unused postcard showing Belgian troops in the parade.

