

“POSTAGE PAID AT APO”

This rubric appears to have been applied by rubber straight line hand stamp to stamps that were affixed to a letter at a different office from the one where it was handed in and paid for. The exact sequence of events seems uncertain but, as noted in Figure 5, the likely reason for its use would have been that the APO of first posting did not have stamps of the required value.

For example, regarding the cover illustrated in Figure 5, Tananarive was only occupied in September 1942 and the final armistice with the Vichy Governor was not signed until November. In January 1943, offices based in Tananarive had possibly not received any high value stamps and the cover was not big enough to be covered with the required number of smaller value stamps. However, the letter had to pass through Mombasa and the French stamps paid for that. *In some way*, it was communicated to Mombasa that full payment had been made (perhaps such letters were in a separate bag?), and the Mombasa office applied stamps and cancelled them with the rubric stamp rather than with a circular cds, although one of those was applied as a transit mark on the reverse (not illustrated).

This explanation is open to question because Rossiter (ref. 2) illustrates (without comment) a registered “Par Avion” civilian cover from Tananarive to London dated 21 January 1943 (Fig. 6) that is almost exactly contemporary with the letter in Figure 5. A French 8 franc stamp was applied, paying 4f to Mombasa and 4f registration fee. A Tananarive registration label and blue cross-lines were applied. It was then censored, labelled and stamped by Censor 252-1 (just as shown in Fig. 5), and went to Nairobi, where it was hand stamped “Nairobi Registered 1 FE 43”. It also passed through EA APO 2. 1/3d (the correct air mail fee) was applied using GB stamps, which were cancelled by the “POSTAGE PAID AT APO” rubric. The rubric is faint but the “PO” of “APO” can be seen on the rightmost GB stamp. However, one of the blue cross-lines passes over the GB stamps, which is difficult to explain if these were only applied (with the stamped rubric) at Nairobi, rather than at Tananarive where it was registered.

Thus, an explanation of the procedure for usage of the stamp would be welcome and any reader able to help, please contact the editor.

[Article continues on page 8.]



Figure 6. Rossiter cover bearing French and GB stamps (see text for further details).



Figure 7. 9 September 1943. The British Military Administration was formally ended in June 1943 and the island was administered by a Joint Control commission. However, the British still controlled censorship and had the military base at Diego Suarez.

This letter is likely from a South African serviceman paying the normal air mail rather than using an AMLC. The EA APO cancel is difficult to read, but best seen on the 20c stamp. It is from No. 64, which was at Sakaramy from July 1943 to June 1944 (Rossiter, ref. 2). This was part of the Diego Suarez area. The military censor's "Arch Mark" is EA No.1/140, presumably in Diego Suarez but the location was officially secret. EA 1s 30c was the correct rate to destinations in the Empire. This would have gone to Mombasa, and then by flying boat from there to Durban and on to Cape Town.

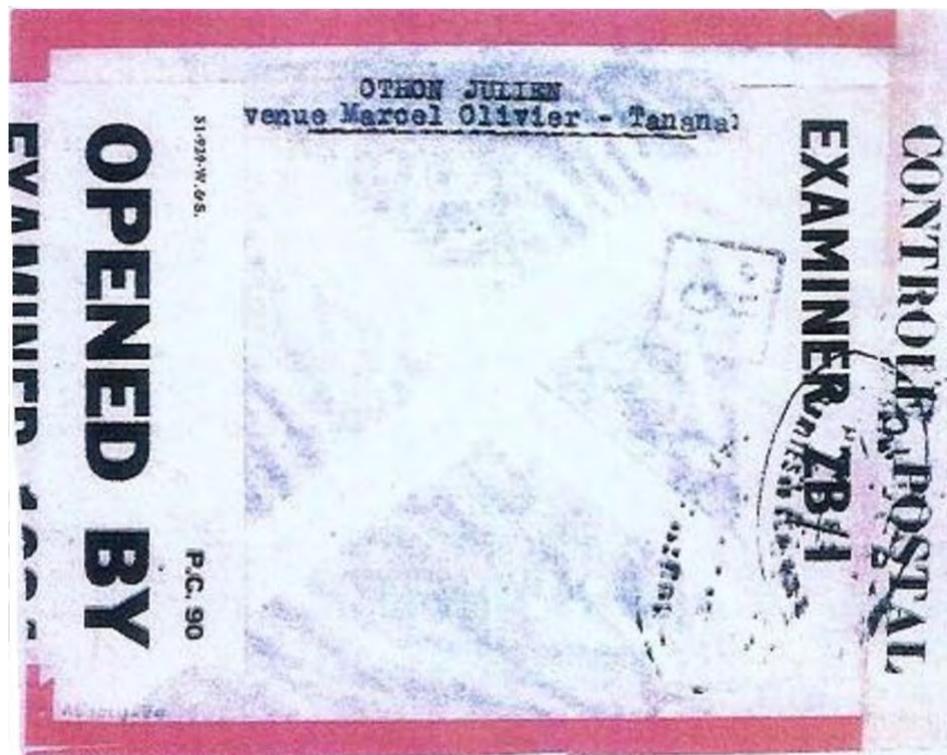


Figure 8. 5 January 1944. French civilian air mail postage for Tananarive to London paid with French stamps, and the letter examined by both the French and British censors.

This is the period of the joint commission administration. There is a pre-printed “PAR AVION”, and it was pre-paid 4f.50c, but that is difficult to see on this image. The sender paid another 10f in “FRANCE LIBRE” overprinted and surcharged stamps and 4f with a France Libre printing of the Traveller’s Palm design – total 18f 50c, which was the correct French rate to the U.K. Posting was at Tananarive.

Examination of the left edge front (right edge back) shows that it was examined twice. First by British civilian Censor ZB/1 in Tananarive (Parmenter, ref. 3). A second closure label or tape partly covers ZB/1 and was used by the French censor (small boxed "G11" on reverse). That tape is inscribed "CONTROLE POSTAL" and tied by an oval handstamp reading "OUVERT PAR LES AUTORITIES DE CENSURE" on the front and back. It would have then gone to Diego Suarez for carriage to Mombasa. In Diego Suarez it was seen by French Censor A2 (circular mark on the front). Finally, it was opened at the right edge by British examiner 1024 somewhere 'en route'.

The cover indicates that a French service was operating using Madagascar stamps even if the British were actually doing the carriage. Had it started out from an APO it would have had KUT stamps.

Interestingly, a search of business registers for this date has not turned up a London company called Crispin Rich. & C^o Ltd. at either Basinghall Street or Gresham Street.

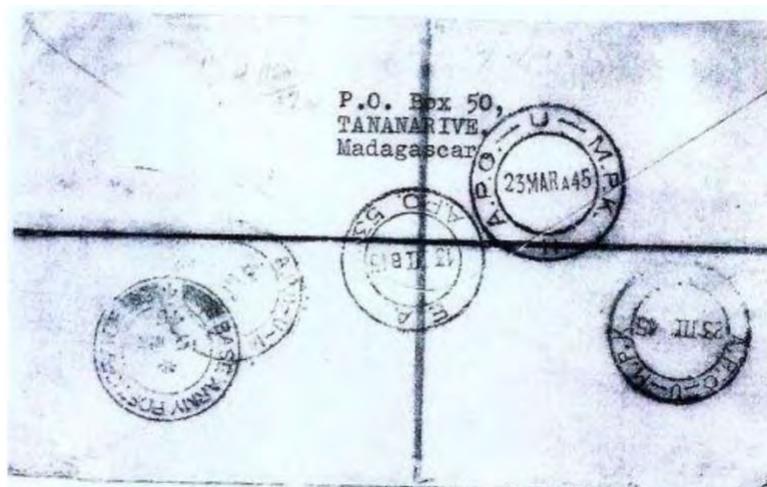


Figure 9, British forces mail in 1944, Diego Suarez Military Base to London, in an ordinary cover bearing the standard rate even though "On Active Service". The date stamp is very poor on this cover and we cannot reproduce it better, but on the specimen "44" can be made out.

By June 44, the French had responsibility for censorship in the whole island except Diego Suarez, where this RAF officer's letter would have been posted.

As noted (Figs. 3 & 4) before, servicemen could use the special AMLC paying 25c but an ordinary envelope attracted the full EA 1s30c charge. The RAF censor mark is noted by Colley (ref. 4) to have been in use Sep '43 – Sep '44 in Diego-Suarez (265 Squadron?).

The writer of a letter to his club in the then ultra-smart St James' area of London (King Street is just off Pall Mall) was able to afford the full rate and this is genuine commercial use.



R A.P.O. 53 (E.A.)
 N° _____

R2 (9.11.43) -
 Val x 2

Figure 10. 13 March 1945. The British censors would leave the island in July and the war, at least in Europe, was nearly won.

This appears to be from a civilian address in Tananarive but posted through the military system to a South African serviceman on active service, i.e., "Wherever found".

The cancel on the stamps is "EA APO 53", which was still at Diego Suarez together with Censor Z.B. 1. The letter was registered there as well. It looks to have had its flap sealed after censorship and tied with the "EA APO 53" mark on the back. The other marks are "Base Army PO 4 15 Mar 45", which was in Egypt at this date, and "APO U MPK ?? 23 Mar 45" (2 strikes), which was a bi-lingual mark for the South African APO. The last mark is another that we cannot fully reproduce but on the specimen it appears to be "APO U MPK 11", which was a rest area in Lucca, Italy. Again, this is genuine use of KUT stamps to pay the EA1s 30c + registration fee of 30c.

Interestingly, Rossiter shows an image of a registration stamp from “EA APO 53” for 1943 (inset). That is not the pattern of the label, but rubber stamps did not last long when attacked by Madagascar’s ink (Parmenter, ref. 3). The one on the letter will be from civilian stock.

References

1. Little D.J. *British Empire Civil Censorship Devices, World War II, Colonies and Occupied Territories in Africa*. Civil Censorship Group, 2000
2. Rossiter, S. (ed. Proud E.B.). *History of the East African Army Postal Service*, Proud Bailey Co. Ltd, no date (but c 1983)
3. Parmenter, J. et al. *Censorship of Civilian Mail in Madagascar during World War Two. Handstamps and Labels*, France and Colonies Philatelic Society of GB and Col fra. (2020)
4. Colley, W. *The Airmails of East Africa to 1952*. East Africa Study Circle, 2009
5. Daynes, J., Colley, W. *Locally Printed Forces Air Mail Letter Cards of East Africa in World War II*, Published by the authors, December 2005
6. Also for the historical background see: Smith J. *SA Forces in the Battle of Madagascar*, South African Philately Club Collective Display on the web at postmaster@southafricanphilatelyclub.com > last updated 12/10/2020

[The authors record their gratitude to Sara Maybury for her research on the Forbes-Sempills and her attempts to trace Crispin Rich.]

© Ronnie Winchester and Brian Livingstone FRPSL 2022