

# **A SHORT HISTORY OF THE BASE POST OFFICE, DURBAN (1940-1946)\***

## **1. FUNCTION**

Although the term "A.P.O. Durban" was well known the organisation behind the name was not.

To appreciate the part played in this war by the Base Post Office at Durban, one must know something of its relationship to the other Units of the South African Army Postal Corps.

During the period 1st August, 1940 to 31st December, 1945 approximately 63 million letters, 5½ million newspapers, 3 million parcels and ½ million registered items, posted in the Union and Rhodesia, were delivered to troops in the various theatres of operations, but every item was first handled at Base Post Office, where detailed sorting took place before the mail was made up for despatch. It can be readily appreciated that any serious breakdown at the Base would have crippled the whole service.

To reduce delay to a minimum, it was necessary to know just where Units were located from time to time and for this purpose an elaborate system of colour codes, symbols and numbers were used to maintain the utmost secrecy.

Besides being a Post Office, the Base had to fulfil its obligations as a self-accounting military unit, with its own Training Depot, Orderly Room, and Quartermaster's Stores.

The statistics which accompany this brief history are convincing evidence of the part played by this Unit in keeping up the morale of the troops and maintaining direct contact between the fighting forces and those parents, wives and sweethearts who played their part in writing letters and posting parcels as often as they could.

Postal work of any description is very seldom smooth sailing and the Base Post Office had more than its share of snags.

## **2. ORGANISATION**

The Base Post Office commenced activities in June, 1940.

To outline its organisation clearly, brief reference must be made to the establishment of the South African Army Postal Corps (S.A.A.P.C.) generally.

On the 1st May, 1939 Major G. A. Leech, M.M. (later Lt.-Col.) was appointed Director of Army Postal Services and assumed duty at Defence Headquarters, Pretoria, on 14th May, 1940. Lt.-Col. Leech was later awarded the O.B.E. for his services.

On 26th May, 1940 the S.A.A.P.C. Depot was established at Potchefstroom Camp for the purpose of attesting, equipping and training recruits. It was not long before men, who bore the marks of years of sedentary work, were displaying the physical fitness which had to stand them in good stead in the field.

Meanwhile the Base Post Office was established temporary at Defence Headquarters (Pretoria) and the despatch of mails to East Africa was commenced.

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\* This report was found among the documents of the former Union War Histories Section and prepared for publication. The name of the originator is unfortunately not known.

As it was the intention for the Base to operate eventually at Durban, arrangements were made for all mail for troops serving outside the Union to be addressed c.o. the Army Post Office, Durban. While the Base was accommodated at Defence Headquarters, the General Post Office diverted all such mail to that point.

At this time many thousands of troops were training at Potchefstroom, Sonderwater and other centres and due to some misunderstanding on the part of the public a large amount of post for these troops was addressed to the A.P.O. Durban, instead of being addressed direct to the camp concerned. As a result of this embarrassing situation, it was necessary to check all nominal rolls of personnel serving outside the Union before disposing of the mail.

On 24th October, 1940 Capt. (later Major) H. E. Watts, O.C. Base Post Office, proceeded to Durban with an advance party to arrange for the transfer of the Base. The transfer was completed on 2nd November, 1940, accommodation being provided in the General Post Office (G.P.O.) building for the Base and in the Natal Command Transit Camp and later King's Park for personnel. On 17th June, 1941 the S.A.A.P.C. Depot was transferred from Potchefstroom to King's Park Camp, Durban and came under the control of the O.C. Base Post Office, with an officer in charge of the Depot.

It became necessary to vacate the G.P.O. building, and as a temporary measure, the Base was moved to the G.P.O. Annexe in Pine Street on 15th August, 1941. A search for suitable accommodation then commenced. It was decided that if a suitable building could not be obtained, alterations to the Pine Street premises would be necessary before the Christmas pressure period commenced. The Commanding Officer, after rejecting the offers of a shed at the docks and a building in West Street, found the ideal premises in Dick King Street. The Public Works Department was requested to hire the first floor of the building. This was arranged at a rental of R200 per month and the move was effected on 20th September, 1941. The building had previously been used as a motor workshops, showroom, etc. The Fleet Mail Office occupied the ground floor, the first floor being served by a ramp which was to prove very useful for the loading and unloading of mails. In addition to four Administrative offices, separate retiring rooms for women and men, and a large room for the sorting of letters, approximately 9 000 sq. feet of floor space was available for dealing with newspapers and parcels and for the stacking of bags.

In spite of all this, the number of bags handled during the Christmas period was so great that the old Pine Street building had to be used for the stowage of bags awaiting shipment.

The 1941 Christmas was a plentiful one as far as the Union was concerned and during the three weeks approximately 30 000 bags of mail were made up for despatch to the two South African Divisions in the field.

On 21st June, 1942 the fall of Tobruk was advised and this necessitated the special treatment of 2 510 bags of mail for the personnel concerned.

In the meantime the Madagascar campaign had commenced and mail services to that theatre were inaugurated.

The 1942 Christmas period included special arrangements in connection with the return of the South African 7th Brigade from Madagascar and later the 1st Division from the Middle East.

During 1943 the 6th Armoured Division embarked for Middle East so that there was no considerable decrease in the amount of mail handled.

On 1st January, 1944, the Base took over control of mail for hospitalised Imperial Personnel in the Union and on 1st June, 1945 a new section was established to deal with mail for all Royal Air Force (R.A.F.) personnel in the Union. These sections were accommodated in a building opposite the Base Post Office until 30th August, 1945 when they were transferred to the main building.

Eventually the premises in Dick King Street were vacated and the Base moved back to the Pine Street building, where all A.P.O. records from the various commands were eventually collected and used for tracing purposes until they were no longer required.

From time to time the Base was called upon to perform various other tasks such as the participation in Cavalcades, the delivery of telegrams and mail to returning ex Prisoners of War at Cape Town, troops arriving by sea at Durban, supplying staff to assist at Post Offices such as Potchefstroom Camp, Premier Mine Camp, Barberton, Piet Retief, Voortrekkerhoogte, etc.

All these matters have been dealt with in detail in the sections which follow.

### 3. PERSONNEL

#### a. War Establishment Tables

The establishment provided for the following personnel :

	<i>S.A.A.P.C.</i>		<i>W.A.A.S.</i>	
	<i>Officers</i>	<i>O.R's</i>	<i>Officers</i>	<i>O.R's</i>
Base Post Office .....	3	52	1	27
L. of C. Postal Unit .....	2	40	—	—
Training Centre .....	2	7	—	—
<b>Total .....</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>27</b>
Non-European Army Service (not used) .....	—	6	—	—

The L. of C. Postal Unit was not entirely used as such but it was necessary to pool all establishment tables in order to meet the constant demand for personnel at Base, outstations\* and for Middle East reinforcements.

The following is a summary of staff movements from January, 1942 to December, 1945 :

i.	<i>ON STRENGTH FROM</i>		<i>OFF STRENGTH TO</i>	
	<i>Officers</i>	<i>O.R's</i>	<i>Officers</i>	<i>O.R's</i>
Theatre of Operations .....	22	241	15	224
Recruits .....	—	115	—	—
Transfers from other Units	—	49	—	—
Discharges and transfers to other Units .....	—	—	18	266
<b>Total .....</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>405</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>490</b>

Loss = 11 Officers; 85 Other Ranks.

\* The term "Outstations" is used to denote the Civil Post Offices at the various camps in the Union.

ii.	Officers	O.R's
Sent to Outstations .....	12	216
Returned from Outstations	10	100
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Loss .....	2	116
	<hr/>	<hr/>

#### b. *Male Personnel*

When recruitment for the Army Post Office commenced, the Unit was fortunate in obtaining personnel from the Department of Post and Telegraphs and it is interesting to note that although the nature of A.P.O. work was peculiar to that performed by Post and Telegraph Assistants in civil offices, many details were recruited from the ranks of the Uniformed Staff of the G.P.O. After preliminary training these men were called upon to perform important duties and in most cases they did them equally as well as their colleagues in the Post and Telegraph Assistant Grade.

With the expansion of the Army Postal Services in the field the Base was frequently required to draft reinforcements to the various theatres but the Postmaster-General was forced to put a stop to the release of more men from his department. To meet the position, arrangements were made for men of B and C Medical Categories to be transferred from the C.A. Training Depots. These men were from all walks of life and with few exceptions they were turned into good postal workers. In fact without their services the Base would have been placed in an embarrassing position and for a considerable time, with the exception of Officers, the Base was staffed by personnel other than Post and Telegraph Assistants.

#### c. *Women's Auxiliary Army Service (W.A.A.S.) Personnel*

To augment the staff in 1940, members of the S.A.W.A.S. (South African Women's Auxiliary Service), were employed, most of whom joined the W.A.A.S. and remained with the A.P.O. when the W.A.A.S. establishment was authorised.

Over a period of five years they provided the personnel for the letter, news and cards sections and although their duties were often irksome and at times fatiguing they performed them in a manner which calls for high praise.

#### d. *Honours*

Decoration :	Major, H. E. Watts, M.B.E.
Commendations :	Lt. (later Capt.) W. Hill, W.O.I (later Lt.) R. B. H. Price. W.O.II. R. M. Hardie.
Good Service	W.O.I. H. M. J. Snowball.
Certificates :	Cpl. (Mrs.) V. E. L. Shuttleworth.

#### e. *Non-Europeans*

The steady increase of work necessitated the employment of unattested Non-European labourers for mail portage work. The employment of these workers was arranged through the Postmaster Durban and a debit for the cost involved was raised against the Department of Defence by the G.P.O.

Prior to this arrangement the loading and off-loading of mail bags was performed by S.A.A.P.C. personnel and although it amounted to fatigue duty it was done cheerfully in the proper spirit but it was necessary for these technically qualified men to be available for employment to better advantage.

The porters were employed, paid and housed under the conditions applicable to porters in the G.P.O.

In 1942 the question of replacement of these boys by attested members of the N.E.A.S. (Non-European Army Services) was raised by the Fortress Commander, Durban. But this was not favoured on account of the specialized nature of the work and the necessity of trained Non-Europeans. Additionally the War Establishment Table provided for six N.E.A.S. members whereas fourteen G.P.O. members were employed.

Representations were made for the retention of the G.P.O. Non-Europeans in the interests of efficiency. Eventually authority was obtained to continue as before.

In acknowledging the work done in the Base Post Office due tribute must be paid to these Non-Europeans for their share.

#### 4. *TRAINING CENTRE*

The Training Depot, later known as the Training Centre, was established at Potchefstroom Camp in May, 1940 but was transferred to King's Park Camp, Durban, on 17th June, 1941.

Several N.C.O's had taken courses at the Military College, and it was possible for recruits to be given some basic military training in addition to postal tuition.

Regular attendance at the Rifle Range, training in anti-gas warfare, route marches, etc., although embarrassing at times when staff was urgently needed for postal purposes, were carried out in the right spirit and the Unit when on parade compared favourably with Units more accustomed to parade ground work. The W.A.A.S. members participated in many of the drill parades.

All Orderly Room and pay duties were carried out at the Training Centre and the Unit was fortunate in having good clerical men to perform these duties.

The Training Centre was responsible for the attestation of recruits, the training, transfer and accommodation of personnel, and all arrangements in connection with drafts.

On 27th August, 1945 the Orderly Room and Pay Section were moved to the Base, but the personnel living in barracks continued to be housed at King's Park.

#### 5. *QUARTERMASTER'S STORES*

As a self-accounting Unit, the Base Post Office maintained its own Q.M. Stores, which were accommodated at Lord's Grounds when the Training Centre moved to Durban. Early in 1944 the stores were moved to the Base.

In addition to completely equipping personnel, the Q.M. Stores had the task of obtaining from the G.P.O. and maintaining adequate stocks of postal stationery, string, lead seals, labels and mail bags to supply not only the Base but the U.D.F. A.P.Os in East Africa, Madagascar, Middle East and Central Mediterranean. To mention only some of these items, approximately 500 000 lead seals, 10 000 balls of string, 500 000 letter bundle labels and 500 000 bag neck-labels were forwarded to the various theatres.

The manner in which the work in this section was carried out always evoked high praise from the Stores Inspectorate.

## 6. BAGS

G.P.O. canvas bags were used for the despatch of mails but the increase in traffic was so phenomenal that the G.P.O. was unable to meet the demand and grain bags had to be introduced for news and parcel despatches.

By experiment it was found advisable to pack these bags to two-thirds of their capacity, to that they would withstand the frequent loading and unloading.

It was the intention that all bags would be used again by the forward A.P.Os. for the despatch of mails to the Union, but owing to the failure of many Units to return bags to the A.P.O., it was often necessary for the Base to forward adequate supplies of empty bags.

## 7. TRANSPORT

It has always been the policy of Base to ensure that sufficient members held U.D.F. driving licences. This was useful when the Base had its own "fleet" of troop-carriers and other vehicles.

Troop-carriers were used daily to convey personnel from the barracks to the Base and back, but transport for this purpose was later withdrawn and details were issued with tram coupons.

## 8. EQUIPMENT

In order to deal efficiently with the large mails, it was necessary for the Base to be adequately equipped with furniture.

All technical items such as sorting presses, troughs, bag-opening tables, bag-holders were obtained on loan from the G.P.O. Other furniture, such as tables, chairs, filing cabinets, fire-extinguishers, fans, were P.W.D. items obtained through Command Stores.

During the emergency period, black-out screens and incendiary bomb equipment was also supplied by Command Stores.

## 9. SECURITY

A Unit Security Officer was appointed to attend to all matters affecting security.

Lectures were given regularly, the building was suitably blacked-out so as not to interfere with the despatch of mails at night. All male personnel were fully armed and supplied with live ammunition and during "Alerts" armed guards were posted at the Base, Training Centre and Quartermaster's Stores.

Until the 29th October, 1945, night picquets were provided for the buildings.

## 10. VISITS

The regular visits by the Director proved very useful and enabled full discussion on matters that could not have been easily dealt with by post.

The Base was visited from time to time by the Durban Fortress Commanders and Officers Commanding, Natal Command, the Commander of the British Military Mission and many other senior officers.

In 1942 Senator Clarkson, then Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, paid an official visit and expressed his appreciation of the work being done by the Base Post Office.

In December, 1945, the Postmaster-General, Mr. L. C. Burke, paid a short visit.

## 11. *ARRIVAL OF EX-PRISONERS-OF-WAR*

Special arrangements were made at Cape Town for the arrival by boat of repatriated South African ex-Prisoners-of-War and on each occasion a party of S.A.-A.P.S. personnel under one officer was despatched to Cape Town to undertake the delivery of telegrams and post.

During the repatriation of U.D.F. personnel from the Middle East, telegrams and letters were delivered at the Durban Docks to drafts arriving by sea. One officer and about eight other ranks were usually detached for this duty.

## 12. *CAVALCADES*

Cavalcades were held in the principal towns from time to time and the A.P.O. was represented in the form of exhibits in connection with the U.D.F. Demonstrations and Exercises. The public was thus able to see more or less how the A.P.O. performed its task.

### a. *Port Elizabeth Cavalcade*

The Port Elizabeth Cavalcade was held during the period 29.7.43-2.8.43 and the A.P.O. was represented by two Officers, eleven S.A.A.P.C. Other Ranks and eight W.A.A.S. Other Ranks. The exhibit included a replica of a Western Desert Field Post Office and a Section of the Base Post Office, at which the public could see mail posted in and around Port Elizabeth, diagrams and photographs were on view and proved to be of good propaganda value.

### b. *Liberty Cavalcade (Cape Town)*

A similar number of A.P.O. personnel were on duty at the Liberty Cavalcade held at Cape Town during the period 25.3.44-1.4.44. In addition to the Field Post Office (F.P.O.) and Base Post Office exhibits, the Unit undertook the delivery of mail addressed to military personnel on duty at the Cavalcade. This was done at the urgent request of the Camp Commandant.

### c. *Thanksgiving Cavalcade (Durban)*

From 29.7.44-7.8.44 the Durban Thanksgiving Cavalcade was held but owing to limitations of space the exhibit had to be confined to an F.P.O. and the usual diagrams and statistics.

### d. *Speed the Victory Fair (Johannesburg)*

In Johannesburg from 25.11.44-2.12.44 the "Speed the Victory Fair" was held. On this occasion the staff comprised two Officers and thirteen Other Ranks of the S.A.A.P.C. and one Officer and fourteen Other Ranks of the W.A.A.S.

The exhibit consisted of a counter, sorting section for letters, newspapers and parcels (including the remains of a dozen fresh eggs), and a Field Post Office. All troop mail from the Transvaal and Cape Town was diverted to this temporary Post Office. Air mails were despatched direct and Surface mails after being sorted were forwarded to the Base Post Office at Durban.

At all these cavalcades, great interest was shown by the public and many tributes were paid to the Unit. An Officer or N.C.O. was always available to explain the working of the A.P.O. and judging by the many questions asked, participation in the cavalcades was justified.

## 13. *MAILS*

The purpose of the Base Post Office, Durban was to receive from the civil post offices, mails for the troops outside the Union, to sort these mails and despatch them to the various theatres of operations.

The amount of postal matter handled was so great that most of the larger post offices despatched direct mails to the Base. Arrangements were made for the G.P.O. Durban to collect these direct mails and convey them to the Base.

So far as mail work only was concerned, the Base operated along similar lines to a large Post Office, divided into the various sections, namely — Administrative, Letters, Newspapers, Parcels, Registered Letters, “Blinds,” Cards, and Regulating Section, with Officers, Warrant Officers or N.C.O.’s as supervisors according to the size and importance of each section.

a. *Administrative Section*

The administrative section was responsible for :

- i. The organisation of mail services, checking of records, adjustment of irregularities, etc.
- ii. The preparation and maintenance of up-to-date circulation records.
- iii. The arrangement of loads for conveyance by aircraft, ship or train.
- iv. The investigation and disposal of enquiries regarding non-receipt of or delay to mail matter. In the case of registered items, each article had to be traced.

It is satisfactory to note that in most cases these enquiry cases, delay or non-receipt was due to matters beyond the control of the Army Post Office, such as frequent movements for point to point of the addressee or his Unit, hospitalisation, loss of mails due to enemy action, incorrect form of address on the part of the senders. More often than not the applicants had not allowed sufficient time to elapse before instituting enquiries.

The under-mentioned public enquiries were dealt with :

<i>Year</i>	<i>Letters, Parcels, etc.</i>	<i>Registered Items</i>
1941	6 182	1 511
1942	4 722	1 563
1943	3 331	1 016
1944	3 228	1 630
1945	1 768	1 453
	19 231	7 173

*Total : 26 404*

Compared with the total number of articles of mail matter handled i.e. 71 774 600 this represents .0367% per item.

b. *Letter Section*

In the Letter Section, all letters were first sub-sorted into the various arms of service and separated into “Air” and “Surface” according to the postage paid.

The next step was the detailed sorting into units, companies, etc. When the sorting was completed, the letters were securely tied in bundles labelled to the appropriate company, etc., and then “bagged off” for despatch.

Most of the sorting in the Letter Section was done by members of the W.A.A.S. and the speed and accuracy of their work compared very favourably with the standard maintained in large civil offices.

There were numerous cases of insufficient or incorrect addresses and in order not to retard the progress of the section, items of this nature were put aside for special attention in the "Blinds" Section.

For a considerable period all letters for the S.A.A.F. in the Middle East Force (M.E.F.) and the Central Mediterranean Force (C.M.F.) were alphabetised in addition to being sorted into units. This was done at the request of the South African Air Force Headquarters in M.E.

For some time all air mail correspondence for despatch to British A.P.O.'s in the M.E. and the C.M.F. was divided into priorities, i.e. letter cards were separated from letters. Although all items were included in the same despatch from the Base, Letter Cards were accorded higher priority in the M.E.

c. *Newspaper Section*

The Newspaper Section was also "manned" by members of the W.A.A.S. and this procedure was similar to that in respect of letters except that the papers were sorted into bags instead of sorting-presses and the papers were not bundled, a separate bag being used for each Unit.

Not all items reached the Base intact and it was necessary to associate many books, etc. with loose or torn covers.

d. *Parcels Section*

The set-up in the Parcels Section was similar to that for newspapers, except that parcels after being sorted were checked and carefully packed into bags to prevent damage during transit, loading, etc.

During normal times one detail — and during Christmas pressure periods at least four details — were employed solely on the repacking of parcels which had been broken during despatch to the Base. No blame can be attached to the G.P.O. for this state of affairs as parcels, the contents of which were declared to be cigarettes, etc., were found to contain prohibited items such as brandy, inadequately packed medicines, etc. It was almost a daily occurrence for the N.C.O. employed on this particular duty to be faced with the task of associating a mixture of fruit cake, tooth paste, jam and clothing with two or more paper covers, endorsed "comforts." It was sometimes possible to reconstruct the parcel by comparing the folds of the paper cover with the shape and size of individual items.

On one occasion an overpowering smell emanating from a stack of about three hundred bags ready for despatch wasted much precious time before the guilty parcel was detected and found to contain an uncooked fowl. Another optimistic sender must have been disappointed to learn that two dozen fresh eggs got no further than Durban.

Whenever the repacking of parcels necessitated the destruction of damaged articles, an advice to this effect was forwarded to the Postmaster of the office of posting so that the sender could be informed. A copy of this advice was also enclosed in the parcel.

e. *Labelling of News and Parcel Bags*

A very interesting feature of the News and Parcel Sections was the system of labelling the bags in such a way as to allow a bag sealed at the Base to be delivered to a Unit in the Field without in any way involving a breach of security. Briefly this consisted of a carefully prepared system of numbers, known as mail serials, that would be easily recognised by members of the A.P.O. but would be meaningless to others. For instance, a bag would simply bear a label addressed to the S.A. Army Post Office Cairo but the mail serial on the reverse

side of the label, say 529, would be an indication that the bag was for delivery to a unit located in the C.M.F.

Labels of different colours were also used to facilitate unloading in the Middle East and Italy.

f. *Registered Letter Section*

The Registered Letter Section, although only employing a few details, was a very important section by reason of the value of the articles handled.

The civil regulations regarding registration were rigidly adhered to in this respect and it was fortunate that the building in Dick King Street included a strong-room. At one stage, however, this strong-room was inadequate for the large number of registered articles awaiting despatch and it was necessary to arrange for several bags to be stowed at the G.P.O.

Prior to the introduction of the Insured Parcel system by the G.P.O. the public could register parcels. Owing to the lack of strong-room accommodation, it was decided to forward these items by air, but it was not long before the public realised that the additional registration fee of four pennies would enable a parcel to be accorded air transmission. The flood of registered parcels led to the withdrawal of this system altogether. After that only items prepaid at lesser rates of postage could be accepted for registration.

Even this step did not entirely relieve the position. Urgent requests by men in the field for certain items resulted in a large influx of registered letter packets and at times it was necessary to seek the assistance of the Postmaster Durban for the stowage of sealed bags awaiting shipment.

During the times when shipping from Durban was in short supply, many registered packets were prepaid at airmail rates and one can appreciate the excessive postage on items such as socks, jerseys, writing pads, cigarettes, sweets and even soap at a third of a penny per half ounce.

g. *Blinds Section*

The "Blinds" Section dealt with all undeliverable or insufficiently addressed mail matter by reference to circulation lists and the Cards Section.

h. *Cards Section*

The Card Section contained a card for every member of the U.D.F. who departed from the Union, the information being obtained from nominal rolls, emplacement advices etc. The cards were duly amended when the personnel concerned returned to the Union. Advices in respect of death, capture by the enemy and subsequent release were also recorded.

i. *Regulating Section*

The Regulating Section was originally known as No. 1 Army Postal Regulating Depot, an Imperial Unit, under Capt. Coleman and was set up for the purpose of regulating mail for the Imperial units passing through Durban en route for the Middle East or Far East. The disposal of mail for hospitalised Imperial personnel was then undertaken and, when the regulating of convoy mail ceased, became the major function of the unit. For this purpose a card index of all hospitalised Imperial personnel was prepared and maintained by means of hospital admission and discharge advices, etc.

Capt. Coleman and his Unit were required to return to the United Kingdom and the work was taken over by the Base Post Office on 1st January, 1944, the designation Regulating Section being adopted.

A large amount of mail for R.A.F. personnel in training in South Africa and Rhodesia and addressed to code addresses was suffering delay owing to incomplete postal records at the Air Force Central Mail Office, Pretoria and the R.A.F. Embarkation Unit, Cape Town. As it was essential that such work should be carried out by postally trained personnel, arrangements were made for the Regulating Section to prepare a complete card index of all R.A.F. personnel in the Union. The scheme was introduced on 1st June, 1944 and the card index was compiled from nominal rolls from every R.A.F. Unit in South Africa. The cards were then amended daily, the information being obtained from Personnel Occurrences Reports, advices of movements, draft nominal rolls, etc. The success of the scheme fully justified the action taken.

The number of cards filed in the Regulating Section were as follows :

ARMY — Imperial	.....	.....	60 532
Allies	.....	.....	6 544
ROYAL AIR FORCE	.....		54 806
			<hr/>
			121 882
			<hr/>

j. *Diaries*

Diaries were maintained by the officer performing administrative duties and in all sections, a recognised postal practice which proved very useful.

k. *Mail Despatches*

Direct mails were despatched by the Base Post Office to civil or army post offices in Rhodesia, East Africa, Somaliland, Aden, Abyssinia, West Africa, Madagascar, Middle East, North Africa, Iraq, Italy, India, Ceylon and the United Kingdom.

l. *Transport of Mails*

Full advantage was taken of the various means of transport available. Letter mails for East Africa were conveyed by train to Broken Hill and thence by military aircraft until 15th April, 1941, when an air service from Pretoria was inaugurated. Later the British Overseas Airways Corporation flying-boats became the general means of transport for air mails to M.E., C.M.F., East Africa, West Africa, India and the South East Asia Command (S.E.A.C.). This was a bi-weekly service departing from Durban on Wednesdays and Saturdays. From the 4th September, 1944 it was possible to provide a daily air mail service to the M.E. and the C.M.F., by making use of the military aircraft operating the Shuttle Service from Pretoria in addition to the flying-boats. This necessitated daily attendance, including Sundays, for the Staff. From 24th April, 1945, air mail despatches to the M.E. and the C.M.F. by flying-boats were suspended and all air mails for these theatres were forwarded daily by the Shuttle Service. The despatch of direct air mails to India Command and South East Asia was discontinued on 13th August, 1945, arrangements having been made for such mail matter to be forwarded to the British Base Post Office in Cairo for onward transmission.

Surface mails were conveyed by sea but, as a special gesture by the Department of Defence, the 1945 Christmas parcel mails for the M.E.F. and the C.M.F. were despatched by the Sunderland Flying Boats based at Congella.

m. *Mail for Imperial Troops*

When original plans were drawn up, it was not anticipated that the Base Post Office would be required to despatch mails other than those for the U.D.F. It was soon found that the Imperial troops in the various theatres had many pen-friends in the Union and as the civil post office had no outlets, arrangements were made for the Base Post Office to deal with the mail, so that Imperial troops were accorded the same facilities as the U.D.F.

n. *Stowage*

During pressure periods the question of stowage space for mails awaiting shipment presented a difficulty and on more than one occasion the complete rearrangement of the sections was necessary. The Postmaster, Durban, was very helpful in providing stowage accommodation when this was necessary.

o. *Christmas Pressure Periods*

These pressure periods called for extreme effort on the part of all ranks. During the period 7th-27th November, 1940, 9 440 bags were handled, the work commencing at 0715 hours and ceasing at 2100 hours with breaks for lunch and supper.

From 1st to 14th November, 1942, 24 411 bags were despatched. During this period, male personnel worked fourteen hours a day and W.A.A.S. members approximately twelve hours. 3 100 parcels had to be packed and 940 retied, this task employing four details continuously. The volume of traffic during this period exceeded all expectations and the highest praise is due to the men and women who worked under the most trying conditions. The strain proved too great for one detail who collapsed and had to be removed to hospital. From 8th to 13th November it was necessary to suspend all clerical duties including those in the Training Centre orderly room.

From 22nd October to 13th November, 1942, 14 656 bags were despatched, the decrease being due to the capture of the 2nd Division and also reaction to the the Director's broadcast advice to the public to send postal orders rather than parcels. 1 283 parcels were repacked and 540 retied and it was observed that most of these were from firms.

During the 1943 Christmas period 16 662 bags were despatched.

In 1944 the pressure period extended from 6th October until 14th December during which time 29 653 bags were despatched. 50 673 registered articles were forwarded and 750 parcels repacked.

With the repatriation of troops in progress, the 1945 Christmas despatches amounted to only 2 699 bags, of which 1 567 bags of parcels weighing 72 418 lbs were conveyed by Sunderland Flying Boats. The Shuttle Service from Pretoria was also used to convey parcels which could not be accommodated on the flying boats. It was only necessary to repack four parcels.

p. *Security Mails*

The handling of security mails was taken over from the civil post office on 16th November, 1940 and dealt with until the final mail of this series was despatched on 5th July, 1941.

q. *Active Service Letter Cards*

The recording of weights of active service letter cards was commenced on 31st July, 1941 and continued until Base ceased despatching mails.

r. *Censorship*

The Deputy Chief Censor operated in Durban and was responsible for the censorship of all correspondence passing through the Base. Mail matter was forwarded to both these offices on request and returned to the Base with a minimum of delay.

s. *Co-operation with G.P.O. Durban*

Close co-operation with the G.P.O., Durban, was always maintained with beneficial results to both offices.

t. *Delivery of Mail to Units Embarking*

From time to time it was possible to deliver mail on board ship to units embarking.

u. *Fall of Tobruk*

The fall of Tobruk on 26th June, 1942, necessitated special arrangements for mail addressed to captured U.D.F. personnel.

Circumstances permitted the retention of 2 030 bags of parcels and 480 bags of news, which had been made up during the period 26th May to 19th July. Detailed examination of these bags commenced on 20th July when the first casualty lists arrived and was completed on 7th August.

Parcels for those who escaped from Tobruk were forwarded to the M.E., the remainder being returned to the senders. There were 2 000 parcels without senders' addresses and these were forwarded to the next-of-kin after reference to War Records.

Newspapers were disposed of through salvage, but the more valuable publications were distributed to local hospitals and H.M. Ships.

v. *Force 121, Madagascar*

Despatches by sea to Force 121 were commenced on 12th June, 1942, and from 26th September, 1942, air-mail correspondence for this theatre was forwarded by B.O.A.C. Flying Boats to Mombasa for onward transmission.

When this force returned to the Union in December, 1942, mail was diverted to Hay Paddock Camp, Pietermaritzburg, where special arrangements had been made for delivery.

w. *Return of 1st Division*

On 22nd December, 1942 one officer and eleven other ranks were attached to Hay Paddock Camp, Pietermaritzburg to deal with mail for the returning 1st Division.

x. *Enemy P.O.W. Parcels*

On 21st September, 1942 a special staff was provided for the handling of a large consignment of parcels which had arrived for enemy Prisoners-of-War, and internees. The parcels addressed to Germans were forwarded to Canada and those for Italians and internees to the relative camps in the Union.

y. *Losses*

In view of the large amount of mail handled and the various means of transport used between the Base and points of delivery, the number of losses due to enemy action or violation during transit was exceedingly small.

14. STATISTICS

During the period 8th-14th May, 1943 a count was taken and the following statistics obtained :

<i>Air</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Assessed as Units of ½ oz</i>	<i>Annual Revenue Derived</i>
Active Service Letter Cards	82 077	82 077	at 3d. per card × 52 = £ 53 350. 1. 0
Letters, including Registers	13 434	14 589	at 1/3d. per ½ oz × 52 = £ 47 414. 5. 0
			£100 764. 6. 0
<i>Surface</i>			
Letters, including Registers	22 531		at 2d. per oz × 52 = £ 9 763. 8. 8
			£110 527. 14. 8

- 1 lb. of Letter Cards ..... = 134 items Approx.
- 1 lb. of Air Mail Letters ..... = 46 items Approx.
- 1 lb. of mixed Air and Surface Letters ..... = 107 items Approx.
- 1 lb. of Surface Letters ..... = 50 items Approx.
- 1 lb. of mixed Letter Cards Air and Surface Letters = 87 items Approx.
- 1 bag of parcels contained approximately 8 items.
- 1 bag of papers contained approximately 77 items.

The figures which follow indicate the mails handled from August, 1940 to December, 1945.

BAGS DESPATCHED

<i>1940</i>	<i>Letters</i>	<i>News</i>	<i>Parcels</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Bags Received</i>	<i>Registers Received</i>	<i>Letters Handled</i>
Aug.	156	256	1 364	1 776	1 789	12 106	651 711
Sept.	236	438	2 183	2 857	2 810	13 701	784 430
Oct.	262	806	3 671	4 739	4 432	9 850	858 017
Nov.	336	1 142	12 408	13 886	12 731	9 101	917 349
Dec.	255	1 006	5 802	7 063	7 119	10 301	856 694
Total	1 245	3 648	25 428	28 881	30 321	55 059	4 068 201

## BAGS DESPATCHED

<i>1941</i>	<i>Letters</i>	<i>News</i>	<i>Parcels</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Bags Received</i>	<i>Registers Received</i>	<i>Letters Handled</i>
Jan.	251	993	5 386	6 630	6 795	10 741	854 465
Feb.	279	1 131	6 395	7 805	7 844	11 196	7 070 731
Mar.	282	1 197	7 044	8 523	8 099	10 149	1 016 401
Apr.	294	1 031	6 377	7 702	8 145	12 400	917 642
May	311	1 266	6 648	8 225	7 885	12 975	875 949
June	317	1 337	6 998	8 652	9 085	11 861	968 450
July	303	1 258	8 598	10 159	9 980	12 171	997 179
Aug.	321	1 349	10 180	11 850	12 066	10 752	895 412
Sept.	307	1 297	10 861	12 465	12 698	11 897	899 865
Oct.	298	1 019	12 486	13 803	13 493	13 009	1 014 132
Nov.	250	2 417	27 444	30 111	26 078	13 116	1 047 114
Dec.	289	2 033	6 612	8 934	8 786	13 933	981 641
<b>Total</b>	<b>3 502</b>	<b>16 328</b>	<b>115 029</b>	<b>134 859</b>	<b>130 954</b>	<b>144 200</b>	<b>17 538 981</b>

## BAGS DESPATCHED

<i>1942</i>	<i>Letters</i>	<i>News</i>	<i>Parcels</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Bags Received</i>	<i>Registers Received</i>	<i>Letters Handled</i>
Jan.	228	2 352	7 422	10 002	9 620	8 341	811 328
Feb.	181	1 990	8 212	10 383	9 282	8 947	714 203
Mar.	239	2 088	9 650	11 977	11 240	9 530	1 047 316
Apr.	214	2 148	8 576	10 938	9 747	8 530	961 004
May	194	2 039	8 608	10 841	10 238	11 017	965 797
June	250	2 001	7 722	9 973	8 881	7 630	934 790
July	201	1 426	5 767	7 394	7 941	8 657	802 004
Aug.	224	1 428	5 435	7 087	7 924	8 327	790 872
Sept.	194	1 315	5 355	6 864	7 514	9 514	781 152
Oct.	257	1 354	9 487	11 098	11 001	9 313	873 014
Nov.	214	1 106	12 008	13 328	12 082	11 118	851 358
Dec.	249	1 154	2 626	4 029	5 801	11 352	774 137
<b>Total</b>	<b>2 645</b>	<b>20 401</b>	<b>90 868</b>	<b>113 914</b>	<b>111 271</b>	<b>112 276</b>	<b>10 306 975</b>

## BAGS DESPATCHED

<i>1943</i>	<i>Letters</i>	<i>News</i>	<i>Parcels</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Bags Received</i>	<i>Registers Received</i>	<i>Letters Handled</i>
Jan.	164	634	7 719	2 517	4 959	6 612	681 711
Feb.	181	689	1 973	2 843	4 586	5 654	609 903
Mar.	184	691	2 088	2 963	5 200	6 708	820 378
Apr.	189	713	2 112	3 014	5 047	8 304	832 353
May	188	609	2 245	3 042	5 204	6 313	843 907
June	228	830	3 249	4 307	5 413	6 630	687 883
July	202	950	3 497	4 649	6 019	7 349	726 119
Aug.	199	910	3 162	4 271	5 291	7 501	793 515
Sept.	228	1 001	3 149	4 378	4 927	8 234	729 762
Oct.	232	904	5 327	6 463	7 565	8 423	784 930
Nov.	282	1 162	11 628	13 072	11 826	11 400	957 394
Dec.	329	1 066	5 034	6 429	6 616	17 809	1 058 724
<b>Total</b>	<b>2 606</b>	<b>10 159</b>	<b>45 183</b>	<b>57 948</b>	<b>72 653</b>	<b>100 937</b>	<b>9 526 579</b>

### BAGS DESPATCHED

<i>1944</i>	<i>Letters</i>	<i>News</i>	<i>Parcels</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Bags Received</i>	<i>Registers Received</i>	<i>Letters Handled</i>
Jan.	219	1 383	4 118	5 720	5 602	10 971	844 481
Feb.	255	1 032	4 353	5 640	5 776	11 524	858 447
Mar.	237	1 246	4 947	6 430	6 428	12 386	860 146
Apr.	274	1 374	4 442	6 090	6 348	11 308	824 262
May	282	1 098	5 084	6 464	6 622	10 419	865 465
June	274	1 338	6 380	7 992	7 548	10 792	1 270 732
July	291	1 414	6 256	7 961	7 359	11 365	1 233 081
Aug.	279	1 078	5 074	6 431	6 801	11 096	1 252 995
Sept.	345	1 253	5 030	6 628	6 617	12 028	1 286 635
Oct.	387	1 026	11 216	12 629	13 064	14 364	1 506 645
Nov.	412	1 177	11 036	12 625	12 759	17 737	1 865 700
Dec.	509	1 098	5 010	6 617	7 330	24 446	2 954 735
Total	3 764	14 517	72 946	91 227	92 254	158 436	15 623 324

### BAGS DESPATCHED

<i>1945</i>	<i>Letters</i>	<i>News</i>	<i>Parcels</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Bags Received</i>	<i>Registers Received</i>	<i>Handled Letters</i>
Jan.	400	1 278	4 675	6 353	6 497	13 460	1 566 598
Feb.	277	774	4 278	5 329	6 253	14 689	1 333 536
Mar.	389	1 193	4 296	5 878	6 436	14 083	1 483 108
Apr.	373	1 086	3 668	5 127	5 567	10 746	1 260 622
May	384	858	1 786	3 028	3 932	9 786	1 051 396
June	307	392	820	1 519	3 150	8 940	1 026 390
July	313	751	1 019	2 083	3 088	7 255	855 496
Aug.	233	252	1 118	1 603	2 768	5 736	718 047
Sept.	168	109	555	832	2 469	4 815	675 120
Oct.	214	95	847	1 156	1 875	4 236	532 800
Nov.	175	154	1 139	1 468	2 014	3 780	527 880
Dec.	101	105	2 647	2 853	2 492	4 163	445 320
Total	3 334	7 047	26 848	37 229	46 541	101 689	11 476 313

### SUMMARY OF MAILS HANDLED

	<i>Letters</i>	<i>News</i>	<i>Parcels</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Bags Received</i>	<i>Registers Handled</i>	<i>Letters Handled</i>
<i>1940</i>	1 245	3 648	25 428	30 321	28 881	55 059	4 068 201
<i>1941</i>	3 502	16 328	115 028	134 859	130 954	144 200	17 538 981
<i>1942</i>	2 645	20 401	90 868	113 914	111 271	112 276	10 306 975
<i>1943</i>	2 606	10 159	45 183	57 948	72 653	100 937	9 526 579
<i>1944</i>	3 764	14 517	72 946	91 227	92 254	158 436	15 623 324
<i>1945</i>	3 334	7 047	26 848	37 229	46 541	101 689	11 476 313
Total	17 096	72 100	376 302	465 498	482 554	672 597	68 540 373

## SUMMARY OF ITEMS HANDLED AUG., 1940 TO DEC., 1945

(Approximate Figures)

Ordinary Letters .....	62 540 373
Registered Articles .....	672 327
Papers, Books, etc .....	5 551 700
Parcels .....	3 010 200
	<hr/>
	71 774 600
	<hr/>

