

# **SOUTH AFRICAN ARMY POSTAL SERVICES\***

## **(1940-1946)\***

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### **1**

## **DESIGNATION OF CORPS**

In May, 1940 the Adjutant-General was requested to take steps to gazette the *South African Army Postal Corps*, but for some reason this action was never taken and confusion resulted ever after, the Corps being referred to as *S.A. Army Postal Corps*, *S.A. Army Postal Services* or *G.S.C. (S.A.A.P.C.)* with sundry variations.

### **2**

## **GENERAL ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION**

The head of the S.A. Army Postal Services was Lt.-Col. G. A. Leech, M.M., who was appointed Director of Army Postal Services (D.A.P.S.) on 1st May, 1939 and held the position until 31st December, 1946. His staff consisted of 1 staff officer and 7 other ranks. This Directorate functioned under the Quartermaster-General at Defence Headquarters, Pretoria.

Capt. A. J. Pyper, who proceeded by air to East Africa on 20th May, 1940, with the vanguard of the Mobile Field Force, was appointed Assistant Director Army Postal Services (A.D.A.P.S.).

In October 1940, it was decided to co-ordinate the East African and South African Postal Services under A.D.A.P.S., East African Forces (E.A.F.), Lt.-Col. Pyper. Maj. A. B. McDonald was appointed Deputy Assistant Director (D.A.D.A.P.S.-South African Section), and Maj. G. R. O'Connor, D.A.D.A.P.S., E.A. Section, (the latter being succeeded on his death in November, 1942 by Maj. R. W. Fordyce).

When the Union Defence Force (U.D.F.) troops left East Africa for Mid. East in April/May, 1941, Maj. McDonald was nominated to proceed to the new theatre to assume command there as A.D.A.P.S. Actually, for operational reasons, he did not leave East Africa till the end of June (and it was not until twelve months later that he was promoted to Lt.-Col.). He held this position until June, 1945. The Union Liaison Officer in Cairo clamoured in April, 1941 for D.A.P.S. (Lt.-Col. Leech) to be sent up to organise the Mid. East postal services, but for some obscure reason Defence Headquarters (D.H.Q.), Pretoria did not appreciate the urgency, and Lt.-Col. Leech did not arrive in Cairo till 10th June. Consequently there was initially great disorganization in Mid. East, leading to considerable adverse criticism.

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\* The information which follows has been extracted from War Diaries, and from Narratives (authorship unknown) dealing with the activities of the S.A. Postal Directorate, Base Post Office Durban, Postal Section in the United Kingdom, Postal Section in Madagascar and Postal Services in Middle East and Italy.

With the departure of U.D.F. troops from Mid. East to Italy, A.D.A.P.S. (Lt.-Col. McDonald) proceeded to Rome, with command over both Central Mediterranean Forces (C.M.F.) and Middle East Forces (M.E.F.) theatres, and a new subordinate D.A.D.A.P.S. post was created in Mid. East, to which Maj. J. J. V. O'Neil was appointed on 5th October, 1944. In March, 1945, when Maj. O'Neil had to return to the Union on medical grounds, Maj. J. G. Phimister succeeded him as D.A.D.A.P.S., M.E.F.; and in June, 1945, with promotion to Lt.-Col., he succeeded Lt.-Col. McDonald at A.D.A.P.S. in Rome; Maj. R. A. L. Mandy took over from Maj. J. G. Phimister as D.A.D.A.P.S. in Cairo.

On 20th September, 1940 Capt. (later Maj.) H. E. Watts assumed command of the Base Post Office in the Union, a post he held throughout the war.

In April, 1941, 40 members of the S.A. Postal Services were nominated for retention in East Africa. Subsequently the number was reduced to 5 officers and 33 other ranks who thereafter under the "850 Retention Scheme," became a "Lost Legion."

In June, 1942, Capt. G. F. Green and 15 other ranks joined 7 S.A. Infantry Brigade Group and proceeded to Madagascar, where they operated the U.D.F. Postal Service with "Force 121" until their return to the Union in December, 1942.

On 28th July, 1944 Capt. B. P. Mandy was sent from Mid. East to the United Kingdom to take charge of the postal section (24 other ranks) of the U.D.F. Repatriation Unit, serving U.D.F. prisoners of war repatriated via United Kingdom. He remained in charge until his return to the Union on 21st November, 1945.

Before any recruiting for postal services had taken place or the Directorate had been brought into being (though a schetchy organization had been evolved in 1939), a Divisional Postal Unit was called up for fulltime service on 13th May, 1940. The Directorate opened on 14th May and, for a very small staff unacquainted with procedure, there followed a hectic period.

Serious attention was now given to recruiting. The Postmaster-General was unable to release all the officials who had been earmarked for officers' posts, and those releases that were possible were more gradual than bargained for. However, the first batch of released Post Office personnel arrived at the Postal Depot, Potchefstroom, for enlistment and training at the end of May, 1940 and, as establishments for various postal units were authorized, training and equipping proceeded steadily if slowly. But, on 19th July, 1940, the Postmaster-General advised that no further Post Office personnel could at that stage be released. It transpired that many Post Office officials had been released for service with *other* units, and the only course now open was to obtain their transfer to postal units. Commanding Officers were reluctant to release them, but persistent efforts over the years produced a fair response. There was at no time, however, an abundance of postal personnel, and the units remained under strength throughout the war period.

To augment strength, 8 women of the Women's Auxiliary Army Service (W.A.A.S.) were employed at the Base Post Office, Durban, towards the end of 1940. Their number was subsequently increased, and they rendered invaluable service.

In addition to staffing Base Post Office, Durban, Army Post Office (A.P.O.) personnel in the Union were employed at the various U.D.F. camps as and when required, and also co-operated with the British Authorities in serving overseas troops stationed or hospitalized in the Union or in transit.

Base Post Office, Durban, dealt with the disposal of all private mails, while A.P.O. 20 at Defence Headquarters (D.H.Q.), Pretoria handled all official mails for Nairobi, Cairo and Rome.

## 3

**BASE POST OFFICE, DURBAN**

During the period 1st August, 1943 - 31st December, 1945, approximately 62½ million letters, 5½ million books and newspapers, 3 million parcels and ½ million registered articles posted in the Union and Rhodesia were delivered to troops in the various theatres of operations and every item (on being received from civil Post Offices) was first handled at the Base Post Office, where detailed sorting took place before dispatch. Any serious breakdown at Base would have crippled the whole service. As it was, in spite of frequent "rough sailing" and the inevitable snags encountered, the Base staff put up a grand show. It has often been said that post is Morale Builder No. 1, for even if a soldier does march on his stomach, it is of little use feeding him well if he is not kept in touch with his mother, wife or sweetheart left behind at home.

The Base Post Office (A.P.O. 1), established temporarily at Defence Headquarters, Pretoria, commenced activities on 26th May, 1940 under the direction of Lt.-Col. Leech, and dispatch of mails to East Africa began. On 20th September Capt. H. E. Watts assumed command (a post he held throughout the war), and on 24th October proceeded to Durban with an advance party to arrange the transfer of Base to that point. The transfer was completed on 2nd November, accommodation being provided in the General Post Office building.

On 17th June, 1941, the Officer Commanding Base took over control of the S.A.A.P.C. Depot which had been transferred to Durban from Potchefstroom.

It became necessary to vacate the G.P.O. building, and on 15th August, 1941 Base moved temporarily to the G.P.O. Annexe in Pine Street. On 20th September more suitable and spacious premises were found in Dick King Street — fortunately before the Christmas rush started. Here, in addition to four administrative offices and a large sorting room for letters, approximately 9 000 square feet of floor space was available for dealing with newspapers and parcels and for the stacking of bags. Every inch of this was necessary in coping with the record 1941 Christmas rush when, in three weeks, approximately 30 000 bags of parcels were made up for dispatch to the two S.A. Divisions in Mid. East.

Dispatches to Madagascar by sea began on 12th June, 1942. As from 26th September airmail for the Island was forwarded by British Overseas Airways Corporation Flying Boat to Mombasa for onward transmission.

On 21st June, 1942 the Fall of Tobruk was advised, which necessitated special treatment of 2 510 bags of mail addressed to 2 S.A. Division personnel. 2 030 bags of parcels and 480 bags of newspapers, made up during the period 26th May - 19th July, were held back; examination of them began on 20th July when the first casualty lists were received, and was completed on 7th August. Parcels for those who had escaped from Tobruk were forwarded to Mid. East, and the remainder were returned to senders. 2 000 parcels without senders' addresses were forwarded to the addressees' next-of-kin after reference to War Records Pretoria. Newspapers were disposed of through salvage, the more valuable publications being distributed to local hospitals and H.M. ships. As from 20th July, postings from Durban went forward unrestricted.

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 (P.O.W.) and internees. Parcels addressed to German prisoners of war were forwarded to Canada, and those for Italians and internees to the relative camps in the Union.

The 1942 Christmas period included special arrangements in connection with the return of 7 S.A. Brigade from Madagascar and shortly afterwards the return of 1 S.A. Division from Mid. East. As 6 S.A. Armoured Division embarked from the Union for Mid. East in April, 1943, there was no appreciable decrease in the amount of mail to be handled.

On 1st January, 1944 Base Post Office took over the control of mail for Imperial personnel hospitalized in the Union, and on 1st June, 1945 a new section was established to deal with the mail for all Royal Air Force (R.A.F.) personnel in the Union. (Both these functions had previously been carried out by Imperial personnel).

Eventually Base moved to the Pine Street building, where all the A.P.O. records from the various commands were collected and used for tracing purposes until no longer required.

The War Establishment (by November, 1941) provided for the following personnel:—

	S.A.A.P.C.		W.A.A.S.	
	Officers.	O.Rs.	Officers.	O.Rs.
Base Post Office: .....	3	52	1	27
2 L. of C. Postal Unit: .....	2	40	—	—
S.A.A.P.C. Depot: .....	2	7	—	—
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	7	99	1	27

The Lines of Communication (L. of C.) was not entirely used as such, and it was necessary to pool all establishment tables in order to meet the constant demand for personnel at Base P.O. and at Union Camps, and for Mid. East reinforcements. The Establishment Table for Base also provided for 6 attested Non-European other ranks for mail portorage work, but these were never taken on: it was found preferable to employ 14 unattested G.P.O. trained Native labourers.

The Base Post Office maintained its own Quartermaster's Stores, which in addition to equipping personnel, were responsible for obtaining from the G.P.O. stocks of stationery, string, lead seals, labels and mail bags sufficient to supply not only Base but the A.P.O.s in East Africa, Madagascar, Mid. East and Italy. 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.

Direct mails were dispatched by Base to Rhodesia, East Africa, Somaliland, Aden, Abyssinia, West Africa, Madagascar, Mid. East, North Africa, Iraq, Italy, India, Ceylon and the United Kingdom.

Full advantage was taken throughout of the various means of transport available — air mails by military aircraft and B.O.A.C. Flying Boat, and surface mails by sea.

To facilitate unloading and delivery in Mid. East variously coloured labels were used on letter, parcel and newspaper bags destined for different areas; and also a system of numbers on the labels — recognizable by members of the A.P.O. but meaningless to others — which enabled a bag sealed at Base to be delivered direct to a unit in the field.

A carefully maintained Card Section, contained a card for every member of the U.D.F. who left the Union, compiled from embarkation rolls and duly amended with particulars of return to Union, dead or captured.



During the emergency period in Durban, the building was blacked-out to enable night work of mails to continue uninterrupted.

During normal times 1 detail, and during Christmas pressure periods at least 4 details, were employed solely on repacking parcels which had been broken in transit to Base. No blame can be attached to the G.P.O. for this, as parcels whose contents were declared for example as "cigarettes" were found to contain prohibited items such as brandy, or inadequately packed medicines. It was almost a daily occurrence for the Non-Commissioned Officer (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 merely endorsed "Comforts." It was sometimes possible to reconstruct a 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 300 bags ready for dispatch wasted much precious time before the guilty parcel was located 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.

It is interesting to note that out of a total of approximately 71 774 600 items of mail matter handled from 1940 to 1945, enquiries into delay or non-receipt (mainly due to causes beyond the control of the A.P.O.) totalled only 26 404 — i.e. 0,03 per cent.

Statistics of bags despatched during the Christmas pressure periods are of interest:

7-27 Nov., 1940 :	9 440 bags.	(Staff working 14 hrs. a day).
1-14 Nov., 1941 :	24 411 bags.	(3 100 parcels had to be repacked and 940 retied).
22 Oct.-12 Nov., 1942 :	14 656 bags.	(1 283 parcels repacked and 540 re-tied).
1943 :	16 662 bags.	
6 Oct.-14 Dec., 1944 :	29 653 bags.	(750 parcels repacked).
1945 :	2 699 bags.	(Only necessary to repack 4 parcels).

(It will be noticed that the public was learning to pack parcels).

Anyone who knows Durban in summer will appreciate the conditions under which the staff laboured during these pressure periods.

*Summary of mails handled 1st August, 1940 - 31st December, 1945:*

	<i>Bags Dispatched</i>				
	<i>Letters</i>	<i>Papers</i>	<i>Parcels</i>	<i>Registers Handled</i>	<i>Letters Handled</i>
1940	1 245	3 648	25 428	55 059	4 068 201
1941	3 502	16 328	115 020	144 200	11 538 981
1942	2 645	20 401	90 868	112 276	10 306 975
1943	2 606	10 159	45 165	100 937	9 526 597
1944	3 764	14 517	72 946	158 166	15 623 324
1945	3 334	7 407	26 848	101 689	11 476 313
Total	17 096	72 460	376 275	672 327	62 540 691

1 bag parcels = 8 items (approx).

1 bag papers =

Book = 77 items (approx.)

*Summary of items handled 1st August, 1940 - 31st December, 1945:*

Letters and Letter Cards .....	62 540 373
Registered Articles .....	672 327
Papers, Books, Etc. ....	5 551 700
Parcels .....	3 010 200
	<hr/>
	71 774 600
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Base Post Office close 1946/1947\* but statistics of mail handled after 31st December, 1945 are not available.

**4**

**S.A.A.P.C. TRAINING DEPOT**

The Training Depot, later known as the Training Centre (2 officers, 7 other ranks), was established at Potchefstroom Camp on 26th May, 1940 under Capt. G. R. O'Connor for the purpose of attesting, equipping and training postal recruits. Some basic military training was also given in addition to tuition in postal duties.

On 17th June, 1941 the Depot was transferred to King's Park Camp, Durban, and came under command of the O.C. Base Post Office.

The Depot was responsible also for all orderly room and pay duties, all transfers, and arrangements in connection with all reinforcement drafts.

This unit was disbanded in the Union 22nd March, 1946.

**5**

**2 L. OF C. POSTAL UNIT**

No information available, other than the establishment of 2 officers and 40 other ranks, and that the unit functioned in the Union, where it was disbanded on 1st August, 1945.

**6**

**7 S.A. INFANTRY BRIGADE POSTAL DETACHMENT : MADAGASCAR**

The operations in Madagascar were on a comparatively small scale, and Union forces of limited strength. Means of postal communication were poor.

Capt. G. F. Green and 15 other ranks sailed from Durban on 15th June, 1942 and disembarked at Diego Saureê, Madagascar, on the 25th. They moved with 7 S.A. Brigade into camp at Sakaramy village, where they opened A.P.O. 51 on the 26th.

\* *Footnote:* Letter from Officer Commanding Natal Command, dated 29 August, 1953 — ref. A 5/1/3/5/1:—

(a) Mail Despatches ceased on 31st December, 1946.

(b) Mail re-direction service ceased on 15th February, 1947.

(c) Imperial Army and R.A.F. card section completed by 15th February, 1947.

Only one room was provided for the A.P.O., which was quite inadequate but by borrowing tentage the position was eased until more spacious accommodation was found in September. Sakaramy was 15 miles from the docks at Antsirane, over exceptionally rough roads.

The first airmail to the Union left by military plane on 30th June, 1942, and this service (approximately once a fortnight) continued during July and August. On 6th October a service was inaugurated by military plane to Mombasa and thence to the Union by B.O.A.C. Flying Boat.

There was no direct service from the Union. Official mails were conveyed by Shuttle Service from Pretoria to Nairobi, and private mails by B.O.A.C. Flying Boat from Durban to Mombasa, onward transmission being by plane, Catalina Flying Boat or by sea.

Surface mails to and from the island were most irregular due to infrequent shipping, particularly when direct sailing from Durban to Diego Suarez were discontinued. Dispatches were then transhipped to Mombasa and, as an example of delay, the mail dated 16th September, 1942 from Durban was not received until 26th October.

Very poor facilities existed at Antsirane docks for dealing with mail, which had to be manhandled. Often bags had first to be loaded on to tugs and barges for conveyance to a ship in the bay, and were then hoisted on board by ropes or carried up a ladder, very few ships possessing slings. Incoming mails were cleared on the ship, sorted at Sakaramy, and distribution completed the same day, calling for long and strenuous hours by the postal staff.

Mails for troops on operations in the south of the island were sent forward by every available means — plane, ship or road convoy.

During the long slack periods between mail arrivals morale was maintained by sightseeing, sea-bathing and an occasional cinema show at Antsirane. There was keen disappointment at not being able to see any of the operations in the south. Only one A.P.O. detail had the opportunity of once proceeding with a supply convoy as far as Vohemar and Sahambava. The Detachment, with the rest of 7 S.A. Brigade, left Diego Suarez on 3rd December, 1942 and arrived back in Durban on the 7th. The Detachment was disbanded on 10th February, 1943.

*Mails to and from the Union June-November, 1942:  
(approx. figures)*

	<i>Bags Received.</i>		<i>Bags Dispatched.</i>	
	<i>Air.</i>	<i>Sea.</i>	<i>Air.</i>	<i>Sea.</i>
June-July: .....	11	97	15	46
August: .....	30	1 242	7	28
September: .....	28	272	7	69
October: .....	10	662	5	86
November: .....	5	1 102	7	87
	84	3 375	41	316

*Note:* In the absence of other statistics, these figures have been extracted from War Diaries, which are not always explicit.

## 7

# POSTAL SECTION, UNITED KINGDOM, 16 AUGUST, 1944 — 28 NOVEMBER, 1945

The Advance Party of the Postal Section (Capt. B. P. Mandy and 11 other ranks) sailed for the U.K. from Mid. East on 28th July, 1944, landed at Liverpool, on 15th August, and proceeded to Great Missenden, Bucks, where the section came under command of the U.D.F. Repatriation Unit. On 16th August it assumed control of postal arrangements for the Repatriation Unit. ....

The Repatriation Unit closed down at Great Missenden on 16th September, 1944 and moved to Brighton, where the A.P.O. was again opened the following day. Between 20th September, 1944 and May, 1945 seven other subordinate A.P.O.s. were opened at Rest Camps and at S.A. General Hospital.

At the express request of the Union High Commissioner, postal facilities were also provided in London for redirecting mail addressed to South African personnel seconded to the British Army, Navy and Air Force. This office first functioned in Grand Arcade, Trafalgar Square (27th November, 1944) and later at 27 Princes Gate, Kensington (14th July, 1945).

The first direct surface mails from the Union were received on 14th November, 1944, and the first direct mail from the unit to Pretoria, was dispatched on 10th May, 1945 by aircraft carrying ex-P.O.W. to the Union of South Africa.

Additional staff arrived as follows:

Dec., 1944 :	1 other rank.
5 May, 1945 :	4 other ranks.
10 May, 1945 :	8 other ranks.

On 4th April, 1945 the first batch of ex-P.O.W. arrived by plane from the continent, and from then until the end of August the section was kept exceptionally busy dealing with free cables, free letter-cards, and dispatch and delivery of mails. A special effort was made to deliver letters recovered from Italy and Germany to ex-P.O.W. while they were still in England. These were of high morale value to men who had not heard from home for several months.

In addition to ordinary mail, 1 126 hospitality parcels (7 lbs. each) were accepted from the P.O.W. Relatives' Association and distributed to addresses throughout the U.K.

The Repatriation Section of the A.P.O. at Brighton finally closed down on 5th November, 1945 while that at Princes Gate, London, closed on 28th November, 1948. Throughout its period of service the Section received every assistance and fullest co-operation from the U.K. Army Postal Services, the British G.P.O., the S.A. Red Cross and the P.O.W. Relatives' Association.

No statistics are available of mails handled by this Section.

## 8

# S.A. ARMY POSTAL SERVICES IN EAST AFRICA, MAY, 1940 — AUGUST, 1943

Three S.A. Army Postal Units operated in the East Africa Campaign:  
1 Divisional Postal Unit (Establishment 1-37)  
G.H.Q. Postal Unit (Establishment 2-18)  
1 L. of C. Postal Unit (Establishment 2-43)

Included in the vanguard of the S.A. Mobile Field Force which arrived at Nairobi by air from the Union on 23rd May, 1940 was one postal officer — Capt. P. J. Pyper, the Assistant Director S.A. Army Postal Services, who commenced operations on 24th May at Force Headquarters, Nairobi. He alone personally sorted the first mail for the Union — 3½ lbs. dispatched by a military aircraft on 1st June — *on a window ledge in the overcrowded office of an Intelligence Officer on the staff of the General Officer Commanding.*

The first four members of the Div. Postal Unit (including Sgt. H. Nye, later to be O.C. 6 S.A. Armed Division Postal Unit) arrived by sea on 1st June, and with this staff of five the Forward Base P.O. (A.P.O.2) opened the same day at the Salisbury Hotel, Nairobi. Accommodation (one 12 ft. square bedroom) and equipment were most inadequate, and mails were handled with the greatest difficulty until larger premises were acquired on 24th July.

Commencing on 29th May, 1940, airmails were dispatched from Zwartkop Air Station (near Pretoria) to Nairobi by military aircraft as opportunity offered. But as from 25th June, 1940 a regular weekly S.A.A.F. Shuttle Service was introduced between Broken Hill and Nairobi — mails being conveyed by rail from Pretoria to Broken Hill and vice versa to reduce flying distance. (On 21st November, 1940 this service was increased to twice weekly). Parcel mails were conveyed by sea, Durban-Mombasa.

The first mail from the Union (3 bags) arrived by air on 2nd June,

*and the A.P.O. Staff of five quickly swelled to 45 (non-postal volunteers) when it was learned that a mail had arrived. Ten minutes later all that remained of the mail were three empty bags, three used lead seals and odd bits of labels and string. Six months later the Base Post Office staff . . . faced the colossal task of handling 15 000 bags of mail in one week.*

On 17th June, 1940, A.P.O. 3 was opened at Gilgil to serve troops concentrating there. (With the arrival of 1 S.A. Brigade in East Africa on 24th July, this became the 1 Bde. A.P.O.). And on 24th June Sub Base P.O. (A.P.O. 4) opened at Mombasa.

On 4th July Lt. J. J. V. O'Neil and 5 other ranks of 1 Division Postal Unit arrived by air — welcome reinforcements to help cope with the ever-increasing volume of mail. The Base P.O. staff were working 18 hours a day; and the mails, which had long since outgrown the limitations of the hotel bedroom, were now being handled on a veranda.

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\* Passages quoted in the account which follows are taken from *The Army Postal Services in War* by Lt.-Col. P. J. Pyper, Assistant Director of Army Postal Services, East Africa Command. (Presumably published in East Africa in 1943).

The balance of 1 Divisional Postal Unit (28 other ranks) arrived by sea with 1 S.A. Brigade on 24th July, 1940 bringing Div. Unit up to strength. Also on 24th July, Capt. Pyper established the General Headquarters (G.H.Q.) Postal Unit in Nairobi.

As more U.D.F. army and air force units concentrated in Kenya, further A.P.O.s. became a necessity, and these were opened as follows:

A.P.O. 8 at Broken Hill, N. Rhodesia, 1st July, 1940.

A.P.O. 6 at Nanyuki, Kenya, 6th August, 1940.

A.P.O. 7 at Kitale, Kenya, 24th August, 1940 (to become 2 S.A. Bde. P.O.).

A.P.O. 10 at South African Air Force Headquarters (S.A.A.F. H.Q.), Nairobi, 29th August, 1940.

A S.A.A.F. air service was inaugurated between Nairobi and Nanyuki.

On 20th August, 1940 the G.H.Q. Postal Unit at Nairobi received its first staff — 4 other ranks transferred from Div. Unit.

The volume of mail increased steadily during August, and in one week alone over 28 000 lbs. of incoming mail were dealt with at Base.

When 1 S.A. Brigade moved out from Gilgil on active operations on 17th September, 1940, A.P.O. 3 accompanied it, and was replaced by A.P.O. 11 at Gilgil the same day.

On 23rd September, 1940 Lt. R. W. Fordyce arrived by air from the G.H.Q. Postal Unit (bringing its strength to 2-4) and 4 other ranks for the Div. Unit (bringing it once more up to strength of 1-37). The arrival of 14 other ranks on 21st October brought the G.H.Q. Unit up to establishment of 2-18.

October was again a busy month, and the Base P.O. staff often worked all night (with additional personnel borrowed from other units) to clear incoming parcel mails. On 28th October the Postal Service was provided with eight panel vans for the sole conveyance of mails along the lengthy lines of communication from Base to forward areas — a hundred per cent improvement on using supply vehicles — and a direct convoy system from Base was launched on three routes: Nairobi-Gerissa, Nairobi-Nanyuki, and Nanyuki-Habaswein. During November ten motor transport drivers were permanently attached to Postals for this service. (Unfortunately, after five months of this excellent arrangement, the Postal Service had to revert to the use of supply convoys).

The mail service to and from the Union had been working very satisfactorily, but the East African Postal Service did not compare favourably with the South African. Thus the G.O.C. East African Forces instructed that the two postal services should be co-ordinated under a single direction. This had come into force on 12th October, 1940, under the direction of Lt.-Col. (formerly Capt.) Pyper as A.D.A.P.S., East Africa Force. Capt. G. R. O'Conner (ex O.C. Postal Training Depot in the Union), who arrived in East Africa by air on 29th December, 1940, acted as O.C. Base P.O. Nairobi for a month, and on 1st February, 1941 assumed duty as D.A.D.A.P.S., E.A.F., with the rank of Major. Maj. A. B. McDonald arrived in East Africa by air on 4th January, 1941 and assumed duty as D.A.D.A.P.S., South African Section. Lt. D. Leigh, who had arrived by air on 6 November, 1940 as O.C. L. of C. Postal Unit, assumed command of the co-ordinated Base P.O. at Nairobi on 1st February, 1941.



Continued expansion necessitated further A.P.O.s., which were opened as follows:

A.P.O. 12 at Soroti, Uganda, 25th November, 1940.

A.P.O. 13 with 1 S.A. Div. H.Q. at Isolo, Kenya, 4th December, 1940.

A.P.O. 14 at Dodoma, Tanganyika, 11th December, 1940.

A.P.O. 15 at Londiani, Kenya, 11th December, 1940.

A.P.O. 17 with 5 S.A. Bde. at Marsabit, Kenya, 1st January, 1941.

A.P.O. 16 at 4 S.A. General Hospital, Nyeri, Kenya, 1st February, 1941.

*The effect of mail on the morale of the troops was never more completely manifested than on the 16th December, 1940, when the South African troops engaged the enemy for the first time at El Wak (Mail was delivered on the battlefield) . . . The first thoughts of men who survive the fury of battle are of home, and it was not surprising, therefore, that a great shout rose across the desert when the arrival of letters from home was heralded. The battle and all its attendant tragedies were quickly forgotten by those who eagerly seized their mail. Tears of gratitude, relief — call it what you will — fell from the cheeks of men on that memorable occasion . . . The men of the Army Postal Service . . . determined there and then that nothing short of earthquakes and floods would prevent them in the future from getting mail through to their comrades. It was that experience which later inspired them into taking the flimsiest chances of survival in getting mail through to the troops and which subsequently gave war correspondents the background for blazing headlines in their newspapers, which told the world that The Army Postal Service delivered Mail to troops in the face of enemy guns.*

In point of fact, there were only two reasons why post was at times delayed in reaching front line troops in East Africa — over neither of which the Army postal Services had any control: The first was that

*The organization of the Army Postal Service (in the Manual of Army Postal Services, 1938) provided for the transportation of mails to troops in the Field by means of 'Formation Supply Columns' . . . [but] the formulators of ideas and the writers of Military Manuals did not foresee a time when torrential rains would cause the world to stand still between supply points and where the troops were actively engaged . . . During the East African campaign troops were often isolated for weeks at a time owing to bad road conditions caused by torrential rains, when neither supply nor mails could be sent to them.*

The second reason was that although Division A.P.O. was responsible for delivering mail to Brigade (Bde.) A.P.O.s., and Bde. A.P.O.s delivered to Battalions, at that latter point even the most efficient organization was liable to break down, as distribution to Companies was in the hands of a non-postal N.C.O. (appointed by the O.C. Battalion) who was often quite uninterested in his job and over whom the Army Postal Service had no jurisdiction. On one occasion it was found that 7 bags of mail for a company which had been absent from its parent battalion for some time had been allowed to accumulate in the Battalion Orderly Room over a period of five months! But it must be emphasized that a case of this nature is not a reflection upon the efficiency of the postal personnel who, if permitted, would see its job through all its stages and deliver to individuals .

The co-ordination of the South African and East African Postal Services was not working as smoothly as had been hoped, and it was realised that the best results could only be achieved by the amalgamation of the two Services. They were accordingly amalgamated on 3rd February, 1941. This amalgamation necessitated considerable reorganization, but when once the new system got under way it worked easily and efficiently.

When 1 S.A. Division advanced into enemy territory in January and February, 1941, Div. and Bde. A.P.O.s., became mobile and accompanied their formations, remaining with them throughout the campaign and later moving with them to Mid. East. Three weeks after the capture of Afmadu on 11th February the first L. of C. Army Post Office to be established in enemy territory was opened — A.P.O. 19 at Kismayu on 5th March. 2 330 bags of mail had meanwhile been loaded at Mombasa into a British oil tanker which, on 7th March, despite enemy mines in the harbour approaches, *steamed defiantly into Kismayu*.

Mail which was undeliverable at Kismayu was dispatched post-haste the following day in 22 requisitioned troop carriers in pursuit of our advancing forces, and on the evening of the same day 8th March a further L. of C. office (A.P.O. 21) was established at Mogadishu, capital of Italian Somaliland.

Four weeks later 1 S.A. Brigade entered Addis Ababa, capital of Abyssinia, and the Bde. A.P.O. (A.P.O. 3) opened there on 5th April, 1941.

Combined Establishment for the three units of the S.A.A.P.C. was 5 officers and 98 other ranks, and by 23rd February, 1941 actual strength stood at 6-81. Peak strength was reached early in April, 1941 (actual figures not available), but thereafter strength began to dwindle rapidly due to departures for Mid. East.

An advance party of 11 other ranks left Mombasa for Mid. East on 13th April, 1941, followed by Lt. O'Neil and 9 other ranks on 3rd June, Maj. McDonald (nominated A.D.A.P.S., U.D.F., M.E.F.) and 5 other ranks on 24th June (from Berbera), and a final draft of 27 other ranks from Mombasa on 28th June. This left 5 officers and 33 other ranks to see the East African Campaign through to its close (Lt. W. L. Welland having been commissioned from the ranks on 1st March). With only 38 S.A.A.P.C. personnel remaining in East Africa, the amalgamated postal service came to an end, and these remaining members were attached to the E.A. Postal Service. Again, a great deal of reorganization was necessary.

An air letter card service to the United Kingdom was introduced on 22nd July, 1941 — one letter card per man per week. On 3rd August, 1941 an air-graph service to the United Kingdom was inaugurated, airgraphs being forwarded by air to Cairo for filming and onward transmission, (Seven months later an air-graph processing plant was installed in East Africa, and filming in Cairo was discontinued). On 21st September, 1941, a scheme was introduced whereby troops in the field could hand in telegrams for dispatch by Field of L. of C. A.P.Os.

By now there were approximately 65 000 Italian prisoners of war housed in 16 camps scattered over East Africa, and the military authorities were approached by representatives of the International Red Cross with a view to establishing a satisfactory mail service to and from Italy. As a result, on 30th September, 1941, the A.D.A.P.S. (Lt.-Col. Pyper) was placed in control of the Prisoners of War Postal Service. A central receiving and distributing office was established, staffed by 40 carefully selected P.O.W. in the charge of Lt. Welland; a Sub Post Office also staffed by P.O.W., was established in each camp and one P.O.W. was appointed postal agent for each cage in each camp. The system worked most efficiently.

It had been intended that the 38 specialised postal personnel left in East Africa (plus other U.D.F. technicians who had been attached to the East African Forces since the campaign began), should be retained only for the time being, until Command Headquarters could find replacements. By January, 1942, however, with continued expansion, and replacements not forthcoming it was realised that there was no alternative but for U.D.F. personnel to continue to serve in East Africa for some time to come. Accordingly, as a result of negotiations between the British and South African Governments, the *850 Retention Scheme* was formulated, whereby 850 South African technicians would be retained in East Africa for an indefinite period. This scheme became operative on 1st April, 1942. The S.A. Postal personnel concerned proceeded in batches on Union leave during the first half of 1942, those left behind having to work 10 hours a day to make up for their absence. On their return to East Africa, it was to be another year before this forgotten band was returned to the Union: as replacements were gradually found and trained in East Africa. The South Africans were gradually released, in small groups, from February, 1943, the final eight N.C.O.s. returning in August, 1943.

Maj. O'Connor, D.A.D.A.P.S., E.A.F., who had proceeded on Union leave in January, 1942, was unable for health reasons to return to East Africa, and was succeeded as D.A.D.A.P.S. by Maj. R. W. Fordyce in May, 1942. (Maj. O'Connor died in South Africa in November, 1942).

The only postal disaster recorded during the East African Campaign occurred on 2nd August, 1940, when 7 bags of mail dispatched to the Union and Rhodesia by a Valencia aircraft were totally destroyed by fire when the plane crashed at Dodoma.

The S.A. Army Postal Services war diary records on 1st April, 1941 that the S.A. Services had 26 Army and Field Post Offices operating as follows:

Abyssinia 7, British Somaliland 1, Italian Somaliland 4, Kenya 11,  
Uganda 1, Tanganyika 1, Rhodesia 1.

On the other hand, Lt.-Col. Pyper in his booklet *The Army Postal Service in War*, states that, in all, 20 South African Army Post Offices were established during the campaign (including A.P.O.s. at Harar and Diredawa, details of which are not available), and 35 East African Army Post Offices.

Particulars of S.A.A.P.O.s. in East Africa as far as known are as follows\*:

<i>A.P.O. No.</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Opened at</i>	<i>Closed at</i>
(1)	(Base P.O. Durban).	D.H.Q. Pretoria 26th May, 40 Durban 2nd Nov., 40	Durban (see footnote p. 6)
2 (E.A. 2)	Forward Base A.P.O. Nairobi, Kenya.	Nairobi 1st June, 40	Nairobi
3	1 S.A. Bde., 1 S.A. Div.	Gilgil, Kenya 17th June, 40 Addis Ababa, Abyssinia 5th April, 41	Advanced with 1 Bde. from Gilgil. 17th Sep., 40

\* On 11th August, 1941 all Army and Field P.O.s. in East Africa bearing S.A. A.P.O. numbers were renumbered in the East African series.

<i>A.P.O. No.</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Opened at</i>	<i>Closed at</i>
4 (E.A. 66)	Sub Base P.O. Mombasa, Kenya.	Mombasa 24th June, 40	Mombasa
5	Force H.Q. Nairobi.	Nairobi 1st March, 41	
6 (E.A. 67)	Nanyuki, Kenya.	Nanyuki 6th Aug., 40	
7	2 S.A. Bde., 1 S.A. Div.	Kitale, Kenya 24th Aug, 40 Presumably re- opened at Gilgil on arrival of 2 Bde.	Kitale 15th Oct., 40 Advanced with 2 Bde. from Gilgil. 27th Nov. 40
8	Broken Hill, N. Rhodesia.	Broken Hill 1st July, 40	Broken Hill
9			
10 (E.A. 68)	S.A.A.F. H.Q., Civil Aerodrome, Nairobi.	Nairobi 29th Aug., 40	27th Sep., 41
11 (E.A. 69)	Gilgil Camp (replaced A.P.O. 3).	Gilgil 17th Sept., 40	
12 (E.A. 70)	Soroti, Uganda.	Soroti 25th Nov., 40	Soroti 13 Aug., 41
13	1 S.A. Div. H.Q.	Isiolo, Kenya 4th Dec., 40	Advanced with 1 Div. H.Q.
14	Dodoma, Tanganyika.	Dodoma 11th Dec., 40	Dodoma 27th May, 41
15	Londiani, Kenya Berbera, British Somaliland.	Londiani 11th Dec., 40 Berbera 9th April, 41	Londiani 20th Feb., 41
16 (E.A. 72)	4 S.A. General Hospital, Nyeri, Kenya.	Nyeri 1st Feb., 41	Nyeri 19th Sep., 41
17	5 S.A. Bde., 1 S.A. Div.	Marsabit, Kenya 1st Jan., 41	Advanced with 5 Bde. from Marsabit 29th Jan., 41
18	Marsabit.	Marsabit 11th Feb., 41	Marsabit 7th March, 41
19 (E.A. 73)	L. of C .Office, Kismaya, Italian Somaliland.	Kismayu 5th March, 41	Kismayu 19th Oct., 41
(20)	(Defence H.Q. Pretoria)	Pretoria May, 40	
21	L. of C. Office, Mogadishu, Italian Somaliland.	Mogadishu 8th March, 41	

In addition to the above, postal facilities were provided during September and October, 1941 at 16 P.O.W. Camps throughout East Africa.

Although Base Post Office Nairobi handled incoming and outgoing mails from the beginning of June, 1940 and Base war diary records on 12th June *Volume of mail matter increasing daily*, the only two entries regarding actual quantities handled during June and July are :

*29 June: 2 850 lbs. of mail received from Union (air or sea not specified). 5 July: 2½ tons of mail handled (presumably incoming).*

From August, 1940 figures are quoted in the War Diary and are summarized hereunder. It is felt, however, that these are possibly incomplete.

*Bags received from Union of South Africa*

<i>1940</i>	<i>Shuttle</i>	<i>Flying Boat</i>	<i>Sea</i>
Aug.	141	45	742
Sep.	65	77	2 132
Oct.	116	11	3 025
Nov.	288	—	11 756
Dec.	421	—	6 892
<i>1941</i>			
Jan.	249	—	7 647
Feb.	217	—	4 609
Mar.	248	—	7 984
Apr.	142	—	4 450
May.	124	41	1 357
	2 011	174	50 594

*Bags dispatched to Union of South Africa*

<i>1940</i>	<i>Shuttle</i>	<i>Sea</i>
Aug.	110	—
Sep.	108	—
Oct.	367	—
Nov.	427	39
Dec.	692	200
<i>1941</i>		
Jan.	575	288
Feb.	462	21
Mar.	489	85
Apr.	269	564
May.	220	503
	3 719	1 700

Base diary ends on 31st May, 1941 and further figures are therefore regrettably not available. Lt.-Col. Pyper, however, in his booklet already referred to, states that in June, 1941 the E.A. Base P.O. was handling 40 000 postal articles daily, 70 000 in April, 1942, and 110 000 by February, 1943. This increase was partly due to the fact that, as from 21st February, 1942, handling of mail for civilian evacuees and internees in East Africa had been placed under the control of the Army Postal Service. (On 3rd April, 1942, 81 000 letters posted to P.O.W., civilian evacuees and internees were sorted into 102 Italian Provinces and dispatched to Italy by the first group of repatriation ships. On 10th November, 1942, 92 507 letters and greeting cards, sorted into 96 Provinces, were dispatched by the second group of ships; and on 27th May, 1943, 49 175 letters, sorted into 59 Provinces, were dispatched by the third group).

## 9

## S.A. ARMY POSTAL SERVICES IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND ITALY, MAY, 1941 — MARCH, 1946

Valuable lessons had been learned in East Africa, which were used to advantage in Mid. East when operations began there. But in the early stages work was seriously hampered by lack of suitable accommodation and inadequate staff — the latter due to personnel having to remain in East Africa to maintain the postal services there.

Two S.A. Divisions were to operate in Mid. East. The establishment (authorized in April, 1941) of a Div. Postal Unit was 1 officer and 31 other ranks. This allowed for 1 officer and 6 other ranks to operate with Div. H.Q., and 4 other ranks with each of the three brigades, leaving a balance of 13 other ranks to be placed at Railhead and Mine Dumps at Forward Supply Depots, to receive and dispatch mails and act as couriers between Railhead and Bde. A.P.Os. The Base P.O. and L. of C. A.P.Os. were to be staffed by personnel of a G.H.Q. Postal Unit (Estab. 2-40) as was done in East Africa. Upon arrival in Mid. East of Base A.P.O. Nairobi personnel released from that Command, the G.H.Q. and L. of C. Units, were to be disbanded in East Africa and transferred to Mid. East.

The first A.P.O. personnel to reach Mid. East were the advance guard of 1 Div. Postal Unit (11 other ranks headed by a Warrant Officer — W.O. II R. A. L. Mandy), who arrived with 1 S.A. Division Advance H.Q. and 5 S.A. Brigade on 2nd May, 1941, direct from East Africa. These troops concentrated at Amiriya, where on 3rd May A.P.O. No. 13 was opened to serve 1 Division H.Q., A.P.O. 17 to serve no. 5 Brigade, and A.P.O. 35 as L. of C. office.

Closely following the advance guard of 1 Division came the advance party of 2 Division which arrived by sea from the Union early in May and proceeded to Mareopolis. With this party were the O.C. (Lt. F. E. Lawrence) and the first 7 other ranks of 2 Div. Postal Unit. On 13th May A.P.O. 34 was opened to serve 4 S.A. Brigade, on 21st May A.P.Os. 33 and 36 to serve 3 and 6 S.A. Brigades respectively, and on 26th May A.P.O. 30 to serve 2 Division H.Q.

Air mails to and from the Union were conveyed by the twice weekly B.O.A.C. Flying Boat Service. The British A.P.O. at Cairo dispatched them to A.P.O. 35 at Amiriya, from where it was the business of the Div. H.Q. A.P.Os. to collect and arrange distribution to their Bde. A.P.Os. Mails from Bde. A.P.Os. to units and vice versa were conveyed by postal N.C.Os. appointed by Officers Commanding Units.

On 13th May A.P.O. 28 was opened at Port Tewfik for handling mails arriving from the Union and East Africa by sea.

Lt. Lawrence, the only postal officer in the area, assumed the designation of Acting Deputy Assistant Director of Army Postal Services and proceeded to Cairo to establish Base P.O. 29. This opened on 28th May in the only building available, which was quite inadequate for a Base P.O. serving two divisions, and prior to the necessary furniture and equipment being obtained the first mails were sorted on the floor. (Larger premises were obtained in July).

This then was the position when Lt.-Col. Leech, D.A.P.S. arrived (belatedly) from the Union on 10th June to organize the U.D.F. postal services in Egypt.



During the first two weeks in June A.P.O. 3 (attached to 1 S.A. Brigade) and A.P.O. 7 (attached to 2 S.A. Brigade) arrived in Mid. East from East Africa, and moved to join 1 S.A. Division which had moved up to Mersa Matruh on 24th May. The main body of 2 S.A. Division (including the balance of 2 Div. Postal Unit) landed at Port Tewfik from the Union on 20th June and joined the advance party at Mareopolis.

Air mails arriving by aircraft at Cairo were now dispatched by Base P.O. 29 by regular passenger train to Matruh Railhead, mails of 2 Division being put off at Amiriya. These mails were escorted by British A.P.O. personnel. Surface mails landed at Port Tewfik were trucked direct to the Divisions from A.P.O. 28.

Until the arrival in Mid. East of the G.H.Q. and L. of C. Postal Unit personnel from East Africa, Base P.O. Cairo was staffed by details drawn from 1 and 2 Div. Postal Units. This weakened the Div. Postal Units, and in order not to delay mail the men had to work at pressure which could not be maintained for any length of time. The position was relieved however, when Lt. J. J. V. O'Neil and 9 other ranks disembarked at Port Tewfik from East Africa on 9th June, 27 other ranks on 11th July, and Maj. A. B. McDonald (A.D.A.P.S., M.E.F.) and 5 other ranks on 18th July. Also, Lt. N. C. Unwin had arrived in Cairo by air from the Union on 11th July. The six officers now in Mid. East were posted as follows:

<i>A.D.A.P.S. :</i>	Maj. A. B. McDonald.
<i>G.H.Q. Postal Unit :</i>	Lt. J. J. V. O'Neil.
<i>L. of C. Postal Unit :</i>	Lt. F. E. M. Lawrence. 2/Lt. R. A. L. Mandy (promoted to commissioned rank w.e.f. 22.6.41).
<i>1 Div. Postal Unit :</i>	2/Lt. T. E. Sinclair (had arrived from E.A. 9.6.41. Commissioned 1.7.41).
<i>2 Div. Postal Unit :</i>	Lt. N. C. Unwin.

Two A.P.Os. were opened during July — A.P.O. 32 on 1st July at U.D.F. Base Depot Helwan to serve personnel in transit and to dispose of undeliverable mail, and A.P.O. 31 on 17th July at S.A.A.F. Headquarters, Cairo to handle all mail for Air Force personnel. All hospitals advised A.P.O. 32 daily of admissions and discharges, particulars being entered on a card system, and delivery of mail to hospital patients thus functioned smoothly.

At the end of July, 1941, therefore, the position was:

S.A. Base P.O. Cairo :	A.P.O. 29
S.A. Sub Base P.O. Port Tewfik, Suez :	A.P.O. 28
A.P.O. at S.A.A.F. Liaison Office, Cairo (H.Q. R.A.F. G.H.Q. M.E.) :	A.P.O. 31
A.P.O. at S.A. Base Depot, Helwan :	A.P.O. 32
A.P.O. at Amiriya L. of C. Office :	A.P.O. 35
<i>1 Div. Postal Unit — Mersa Matruh :</i>	
Div. H.Q. A.P.O. :	A.P.O. 13
1 Bde. A.P.O. :	A.P.O. 3
5 Bde. A.P.O. :	A.P.O. 7
5 Bde. A.P.O. :	A.P.O. 17
<i>2 Div. Postal Unit — Mareopolis :</i>	
Div. H.Q. A.P.O. :	A.P.O. 30
3 Bde. A.P.O. :	A.P.O. 33
4 Bde. A.P.O. :	A.P.O. 34
6 Bde. A.P.O. :	A.P.O. 36

A problem of magnitude had arisen in the shape of violations, principally at Port Tewfik, of mails dispatched from Durban by sea. The dishonesty and cunning of the Egyptian labourer is well known, and the various methods employed by him in thieving portions or of extracting whole parcels from mail bags was, to say the least, amazing. Only by continued extreme vigilance and the use of armed guards at all times was it possible to restrict the number of violations to reasonable limits. Unfortunately, however, violations were not confined to Port Tewfik, only, but in a number of cases had occurred either during loading at Durban or en route to Mid. East. Although parcels were sealed in unit bags before being handed over to the civil authorities for loading, sometimes additional cargo was loaded into the hold before sailing; sometimes the hold had to be opened at an intermediate point before reaching Port Tewfik. Armed guards had to be placed on all railway trucks conveying mails from Port Tewfik to Cairo and the two Divisions.

On 24th September, 1941, A.P.O. 40 was opened at 5 S.A. General Hospital at Helieh, Cairo — the biggest U.D.F. hospital in the Mid. East. The S.A.A.P.C. Establishment made no provision for A.P.O. personnel at hospital, but they were nevertheless an essential link in the chain, and it was decided to take similar action in respect of the other S.A. hospitals when staff became available.

With the increase in numbers of S.A. troops in Mid. East, ordinary letters (i.e. those prepaid at inland rates) could no longer be conveyed from the Union by B.O.A.C. Flying Boat. As air mail charges were high, and in order to meet the public demand for an expeditious service, the threepenny Active Service Air Letter Card was introduced (for conveyance by Flying Boat) and, until these were available in the Union, as a special gesture ordinary letters were conveyed by S.A.A.F. Shuttle Service until 30th September, 1941.

An unfortunate accident occurred on 10th October, 1941. Capt. H. C. Wain (who had just arrived from the Union to assume duty as O.C. Base P.O. 29 Cairo) sustained a compound fracture of the left forearm, and Capt. O'Neil a gashed right forearm when, on a visit to the two Divisions their vehicle ran over and exploded a land mine at Matruh. Capt. Wain's arm was subsequently amputated and he returned to the Union, being replaced by Lt. J. G. Phimister from D.A.P.S. office Pretoria.

Divisional A.P.Os. had been static for several months while the fighting troops were preparing to attack: the 1 Div. A.P.Os. (3, 7, 13, 17) were concentrated in Matruh until the Division moved out at the beginning of November, 1941; and the 2 Div. A.P.Os. (30, 33, 34, 36) were at El Alamein, where 2 Division had moved from Mareopolis in August, and where they remained until late November.

The months of November and December, 1941 were probably the most difficult and trying experienced in the history of the S.A.A.P.C.:

On 12th November a S.A.A.F. shuttle plane carrying mail for the Union crashed at Malakal in the Sudan, and 18 bags of mail containing registered articles, private and official correspondence, were partly destroyed by fire. Salvaged mail was dealt with at Base P.O., Nairobi, where identifiable mail was forwarded to addressees and unidentifiable to the Returned Letter Office Cape Town. Under the terms of the Universal Postal Convention held at Buenos Aires in May, 1939, the Postmaster-General ruled that the losses of registered articles were due to *force majeure* and that liability for compensation could therefore not be accepted. This decision not unnaturally led to a certain amount of dissatisfaction among the troops.

The move of 1 S.A. Division from Matruh early in November and the *Crusader* push coincided with the period of Christmas pressure. Mails arrived in unprecedented volume, and quick movements by units plus lack of authentic information regarding their whereabouts, together with a shortage of motor transport for conveying mail from Matruh to Div. H.Q. and Bde. A.P.Os., resulted in a large accumulation of bags at Railhead (where A.P.O. 7 had remained behind as an L. of C. office).

On 23rd November, A.P.O. 17, attached to 5 S.A. Brigade, was lost as a result of enemy action at Sidi Rezegh; all records and equipment were lost, and the staff of 4 other ranks taken P.O.W. This further aggravated the already difficult position. A subsequent check, however, established that all mails dispatched from Base P.O. 29 to A.P.O. 17 during the period before capture could reasonably be assumed to have been safely delivered there, and that most of them had probably been distributed to units. A.P.O. 8 was opened at Matruh on 5th December to replace A.P.O. 17.

The lines of communication work at this stage were most difficult and Maj. McDonald himself proceeded to the forward areas to render all possible assistance. A.P.O. 7, which had been doing the L. of C. work at Matruh, accompanied 2 S.A. Brigade to Sidi Barrani late in November, and was replaced by A.P.O. 33, detached from 2 Division. When 1 Division H.Q. and the remnants of 5 Brigade returned to Matruh, thousands of bags had to be brought back. It rained heavily for days on end, and it took some time to disperse the accumulation.

With the return to Matruh of A.P.O. 13 (attached 1 Div. H.Q.), A.P.O. 33 was released to rejoin 3 Brigade in the Bardia area. 1 Div. A.P.Os. 3 and 7 were now in the Sidi Barrani-Halfaya Pass area; 2 Div. A.P.Os. 30, 33, 34 and 36 were spread out between Sollum and Bardia.

Some 2 000 men of 2 Division had been left at Mischiefa (50 miles S.W. of Matruh) as left out of Battle details, and to serve this group A.P.O. 37 had been established as an L. of C. office at Mischiefa Railhead on 30th November. A pack train service was introduced from Cairo to Mischiefa, in addition to the normal passenger train Cairo-Matruh.

The first portion of the Christmas parcel mail arrived during November and early December, while the balance (10 877 bags on 5 ships) docked at Port Tewfik 18-20 December. There was not sufficient time to get these latter parcels to the forward areas in time for Christmas, but the majority were delivered before the new year.

During the period 1st November - 31st December, 1941, 41 000 bags of parcels were landed in Mid. East. Reckoning the weight of each bag as approximately 50 lbs, this represented a weight of 2 505 000 lbs; and with an average of 10 parcels to a bag it meant a total of approximately 410 000 parcels.

*Sea Mails to and from the Union and East Africa*

*1 June-31 December, 1941.*

Received from		Dispatched to	
<i>Union</i>	<i>East Africa</i>	<i>Union</i>	<i>East Africa</i>
74 889	5 943	6 397	1 022
(bags)		(Jun.-Aug. only)	

Letters for soldiers "Missing," "Deceased" and "P.O.W." were being forwarded by units to 2 Echelon M.E.F., who in turn passed them to War Records Pretoria for disposal. This involved an enormous amount of work in Pretoria, and the procedure was accordingly altered, all such undeliverable letters being forwarded direct to the Returned Letter Office, Cape Town.

The number of parcels delivered during the latter part of 1941 had been out of all proportion, and in order to reduce involved correspondence and work the parcels for "Missing," "Deceased," and "P.O.W." were sent to the detail's unit for distribution amongst the men of his section or platoon, any articles of intrinsic or sentimental value being returned to the sender.

Although not an A.P.O. function, the A.P.O. also undertook to convey deceased soldiers' effects from Units to 2 Echelon and from 2 Echelon to War Records Pretoria.

The strength of the U.D.F. in Mid. East was now in excess of that which the postal establishments had been designed to serve, and there were barely sufficient A.P.O. personnel to meet requirements, let alone any margin for emergencies. Both Div. Postal Units were under strength, and G.H.Q. and L. of C. Postal Units were being depleted to meet the position; treatment of post for soldiers missing, deceased and hospital cases occupied the full time of 25 details not provided for by establishment; 8 details were fully employed at hospitals; it was desirable that an office be opened without delay at Alexandria, both to serve a number of units stationed there and also because mails were at times offloaded there instead of at Port Tewfik, and on each occasion losses were suffered from pilfering; the Base P.O. was woefully understaffed, leading to a difficult position whenever a large parcel mail arrived; it was necessary for the Helwan office staff to be increased; and more personnel were needed for the courier system. The authorized strength of the S.A.A.P.C. in Mid. East was 132 all ranks (including A.D.A.P.S. staff 2-4), existing strength was 121, and strength actually required to meet present and future commitments was 174! It was therefore essential that the existing units be brought up to strength immediately, and also that an additional L. of C. Unit be made available.

Request for this additional unit was made late in 1941, but as the existing L. of C. unit was being used in conjunction with the G.H.Q. Unit for work out of its normal sphere of action, it was decided at Defence Headquarters that it was preferable to revise the establishment of the G.H.Q. unit to 5-60. This new establishment was authorized on 23rd February, 1942.

In January, 1942, with the fall of Bardia and Halfaya Pass, the divisional troops were given a short rest from the fighting line: 1 Division was in Matruh and 2 Division in the Sidi Barrani area. Mail still went forward by passenger train from Cairo to Matruh, and in the case of Division by road from Matruh to Sidi Berrani. A.P.O. 9 opened at Matruh on 7th January as an L. of C. office. The train to Matruh was most irregular and very often late, which meant that A.P.O. personnel meeting the train were often subjected to the rigours of the desert winter until the early morning hours.

A further loss of mail occurred on the night of 19/20 January, 1942. when a motor truck containing 63 bags of mail was removed from the front of A.P.O. 13 attached to 1 Division H.Q. at Matruh and was subsequently found completely burnt out on the road nearby. Much work was entailed here in arranging payment of compensation (debited to the War Expenses Account) to senders of registered articles destroyed. Mention should also be made of a bell, captured from the shell-shattered Roman Catholic church at Bardia by 1 Battalion

(Bn.) Royal Durban Light Infantry (R.D.L.I.): it was included in the mail on the burnt out truck, and was recovered, blackened but otherwise unharmed, among the charred debris. Weighing 22 lbs, it should never have been accepted for transmission through the post, but the N.C.O. in charge of the A.P.O. "took a chance" and did the O.C. 1 R.D.L.I. a favour, hoping the package would not attract any special notice during transit! The bell was hung in the small belfry of the R.D.L.I. chapel in Epsom Road, Durban, but is believed to have been since restored, by general consent, to the Church at Bardia.

The two Divisions were not given a very long rest, and were soon again on the move: A.P.Os. 3 and 7 accompanied 1 Division (1 and 2 Brigades) to the Gazala Line at the end of January, A.P.O. 13 remaining at Matruh with Div. Rear Party. 2 Division with its A.P.Os. moved from Sidi Barrani to the Halfaya-Sollum-Capuzzo area for a short time before (less 3 Brigade) taking over Tobruk Fortress on 27th March. 3 Brigade (A.P.O. 33) was detached from 2 Division in March and on 20th April moved to the Gazala Line under 1 Division.

Letters went forward from Matruh by Despatch Rider Line Service (D.R.L.S.), and parcels were sent up as best they could by road.

Railhead formerly at Mischiefa was advanced to Capuzzo on 10th March, and A.P.O. 37 was moved accordingly.

On 17th March, A.P.O. 6 was opened at Tobruk; on 4th May, A.P.O. 16 opened to serve 106 S.A. General Hospital at Qassassin; on 15th May A.P.O. 35 was moved from Amiriya to Alexandria; and on 20th May A.P.O. 14 opened to serve 4 S.A. General Hospital at Huselli.

On 14th June, 1942, 1 Division evacuated the Gazala Line, passed through Tobruk on the 15th, and withdrew to El Alamein. 2 Division (4 and 6 Brigades) with supporting troops was left to hold Tobruk. Owing to the grave position, the passenger train service Cairo-Matruh and the pack train service Cairo-Mischiefa were cancelled on 15th June. The special road service Capuzzo-Tobruk run by O.C. Div. Postal Unit ceased on the same day. The airmail service Cairo-Gambut, recently inaugurated, was also cancelled. The only outlet for mail from Cairo to the forward areas was by rail to Alexandria, thence by special road service to Matruh, and onwards by 8 Army road service to Tobruk. A.P.O. 37 was evacuated from Capuzzo to Helwan on 18th June, the same day that a dramatic message was received from the O.C. 2 Div. Postal Unit that the Matruh-Tobruk road was being shelled by the enemy, and that there was every possibility of 2 Division being cut off.

2 Div. Postal Unit had rendered yeoman service during the period of Rommel's offensive, taking the mails up to the Gazala Line right up to the time the line was evacuated, even under heavy enemy shelling. The appreciation shown by all ranks in the forward area was reckoned ample reward for the trouble and risk involved.

Within the Tobruk Fortress perimeter were A.P.Os. 30, 34, 36 and 6, and because of the violent and continuous air attacks all postal activities were centered on A.P.O. 6. The final mails received in Tobruk were during the hours of darkness on the morning of 17th June. The final mails dispatched from Tobruk were per hospital ship *Amra* on the evening of 18th June. A further dispatch was prepared by A.P.O. 6 to leave by Motor Torpedo Boat (M.T.B.) for Alexandria at 1300 hours on the 20th but at 1230 hours owing to the fact that enemy tanks had penetrated the perimeter and were commanding the harbour entrance, the departure of the M.T.B. was postponed indefinitely, and mails were taken back to

A.P.O. 6. (The M.T.B. was destroyed an hour later by artillery fire from enemy tanks). Meanwhile A.P.O. 30 had been pinned down by machine-gun and fire and overrun. In the early afternoon on the 20th A.P.O. 6 came under shellfire and was forced to evacuate its position, taking letter mail, cash and stamps with it, but leaving parcel mails behind. Chaos reigned within the perimeter during that night, with communications disrupted, units fleeing in disorder, roads choked, and constant bombardment. A couple of hours after dawn on the 21st it was all over. The staff car used as an H.Q. by O.C. 2 Div. Postal Unit and containing the main stock of stamps was captured by the enemy, but the stocks of the four A.P.O.'s. were effectively destroyed prior to capture. Lt. N. C. Unwin and 15 other ranks were all taken P.O.W., and one, Pte. F. W. Williams, was mortally wounded in a dive bomber attack on the A.P.O. 36 vehicle.

When the Tobruk road was closed, letter mails for 2 Division were held at Matruh. Approximately 2 000 bags of parcels for the Division were also on hand. All these mails were returned to U.D.F. Base Helwan for such disposal as might be possible, while mails for 1 Division were sent to Alexandria until the position was clarified, and subsequently to Alamein. A.P.O. 9, the L. of C. office in Matruh, after clearing all mails, closed on 26th June and did not reopen; A.P.O. 8 was evacuated to Helwan on 24th June with the remnants of 5 Brigade, to serve remnants 2 Division units which filtered back.

At A.P.O. 30 Helwan survival mail for delivery was separated from that for missing, deceased and P.O.W. There were approximately 1 250 undeliverable parcels of the latter category on hand. The procedure followed hitherto of forwarding such to the O.C. of an addressee's unit for distribution among members was no longer practicable as there were no O.Cs. to hand them to. Numbers of patients in hospitals had decreased in proportion to the numbers taken prisoner, so hospitals could therefore not absorb such a quantity of parcels at one time. A certain number were accordingly forwarded to the International Red Cross, Geneva, for distribution to South African P.O.W. in Italy. As certain items were prohibited, and each parcel was permitted to contain only one class of articles, all parcels had to be opened and repacked. Between 24th November and 15th December, 1942, 2 045 such parcels (754 bags) were dispatched, divided into categories, such as 296 parcels of canned fruits, 131 of cigarettes, 202 of tinned vegetables, 157 of tinned meats, 285 of sweets, 76 of clothing, 50 of reading matter — and so on. Articles of intrinsic or sentimental value were returned to senders.

Meanwhile 2 030 bags of parcels and 480 of newspapers for 2 Division had been held back at Durban. (See Base Post Office Durban, p. 64).

After the fall of Tobruk, when Rommel was driving towards the Nile, W.A.A.S., Probationers, Nurses and Women's Auxiliary Air Force (W.A.A.F.) were evacuated from Cairo, Helwan and Alexandria to Aswan (2nd July), and A.P.O. 37 was opened to serve them there. The "Flap" did not last long however; when the evacuees were brought back on 9th July A.P.O. 37 was closed, being subsequently reopened at Amiriya on 15th July as an L. of C. office for 1 Division.

Another unfortunate accident occurred on 6th August, 1942 when Capt. F. E. M. Lawrence fell from the balcony of his pension in Cairo and was killed. He had been the first S.A.A.P.C. officer to arrive in Mid. East and had done much to get the Service on its feet.

On 11th August A.P.O. 14 serving 4 S.A. General Hospital at Huselli ceased to function when the hospital closed down.



One of the lessons learned during the previous operations was that parcel mails proved only an embarrassment to troops on the move. Accordingly, when the Alamein offensive was launched in October, 1942, all parcel and newspaper mails were held at Base P.O. Cairo until such time as it was convenient for troops to take delivery.

When the enemy line at Alamein was broken, 1 Division was withdrawn from 8 Army and proceeded to a base camp at Qassassin on 12th November for return to the Union. The last surface mail for the Division was dispatched from Durban on 11th November, the remainder being held over for delivery to units on arrival.

During October and November, 1942 there were three cases of mail being either lost or destroyed: one was a surface mail of letters and parcels to the Union that was damaged by sea water in October when the S.S. *Elizabethville* sprang a leak on the voyage to Durban. The sodden mails were dried out in the Union and forwarded where possible. The Christmas mail to the Union was entirely lost when the S.S. *Nova Scotia* was torpedoed and sunk by enemy action north of Durban on 28th November, 1942. One of the passengers lost, who was on his way to the Union on well-deserved leave, was Lt. N. Last, who had served in the ranks with the S.A.A.P.C. in East Africa and who had been in Mid. East since 11th July, 1941, gaining his commission in October, 1941. One bag of mail was lost on 14th November from a motor truck proceeding from Base P.O. 29 Cairo to A.P.O. 32 Helwan. This was one of the very rare instances of loss being established or attributable to negligence on the part of the S.A.A.P.C. escort.

With effect from 21st October, 1942 a change was brought about in the internal organization of the S.A.A.P.C., by which the G.H.Q. and L. of C. Postal Units would control directly the A.P.Os. falling within their sphere, as follows:

*G. H. Q. Postal Unit :*

- A.P.O. 29 (Base P.O. Cairo).
- A.P.O. 31 (S.A.A.F. H.Q. Cairo).
- A.P.O. 32 (U.D.F. Base Helwan).

*L. of C. Postal Unit :*

- A.P.O. 16 (106 S.A. Gen. Hosp. Qassassin).
- A.P.O. 28 (Sub Base P.O. Port Tewfik).
- A.P.O. 35 (Alexandria).
- A.P.O. 40 (5 S.A. Gen. Hosp. Helmiek).

Although 1 Division had been withdrawn from 8 Army, non-divisional Engineering units and S.A.A.F. were still operating in the Western Desert over widely scattered areas, and on 6th December, 1942 A.P.O. 10 was established at Tmimi as L. of C. office (attached 3 S.A.A.F. Wing Rear H.Q.) to serve these troops.

A.P.Os. 3, 7 and 33 ceased to function in Mid. East on 2nd January, 1943, when they sailed for the Union with 1 Division. A.P.O. 13 closed on 1st February and returned to the Union with 1 Division Rear H.Q.

*Air mail Correspondence to and from the Union  
1st January - 31st December, 1942.*

<i>Union to Mid. East</i>		<i>Mid. East to Union</i>		
<i>B.O.A.C.</i>	<i>Shuttle</i>	<i>B.O.A.C.</i>	<i>Prepaid</i>	<i>Shuttle</i>
<i>Prepaid</i>	<i>Official</i>	<i>Prepaid</i>	<i>Prepaid</i>	<i>Official</i>
59 069	18 753	37 909	9 351	18 602
	(lbs).			

*1st January - 31st December, 1942.*

*Sea mails to and from the Union*

*Union to Mid. East*

100 080 bags.  
(38 ships).

*Mid. East to Union*

12 627 bags.  
(27 ships).

At the beginning of 1943, with the departure of 1 Division to the Union, the following S.A.A.P.Os. remained to serve U.D.F. non-div. troops and S.A.A.F. in Mid. East :

- A.P.O. 10 — Tmimi (3 Wing S.A.A.F.),
- A.P.O. 16 — Qassassin (106 S.A. General Hospital).
- A.P.O. 28 — Port Tewfik.
- A.P.O. 29 — Base P.O. Cairo.
- A.P.O. 31 — S.A.A.F. H.Q. Cairo.
- A.P.O. 32 — U.D.F. Base Helwan.
- A.P.O. 35 — Alexandria.
- A.P.O. 40 — Helmieh, Cairo (5 S.A. General Hospital).

In various areas where it was not possible to establish S.A.A.P.Os., U.D.F. units were served through the medium of the British Army Postal Service. Surface mail was conveyed to Railhead (Tobruk) by train three times a week and thence by road, and there was a daily airmail service.

Capt. R. A. L. Mandy, O.C. L. of C. Postal Unit, established his H.Q. Tripoli on 5th February. The introduction of a sea service between Alexandria and Tripoli necessitated an A.P.O. at the latter point, and accordingly A.P.O. 14 was established there as a Forwarding Base Transit Office on 1st April, 1943.

Owing to unavailability of suitable premises for Base P.O. Cairo, it was decided to build a new Base P.O. A site was finally chosen about 29th March, 1943 and clearing began on 30th May for occupation in July.

On 13th April, 1943 A.P.O. 5 was established at Khatatba (midway between Cairo and Alexandria) to serve odd detachments already assembled there, pending the arrival of 6 S.A. Armoured Division from the Union, when it would become the 6 Div. H.Q. A.P.O.

6 S.A. Armoured Division was formed in the Union on 1st February, 1943. O.C. 6 Div. Postal Unit was Lt. (later Capt.) N. H. Nye (who, as a Sergeant had been among the first postal personnel to reach East Africa) and the establishment provided for 1 officer and 24 other ranks. This allowed for the O.C. and 6 other ranks to be with Div. Troops, 100 other ranks to serve at Rail, or Sea Head and with Supply Column, and 4 other ranks to serve each of the two brigades.

The Division sailed from Durban in mid April, 1943, the final delivery of mail was effected on board the same day after sailing: one soldier wrote home to his wife that he had been away for two days only and had received a letter from her! This was capped later by another who wrote, „Vrou, wat makeer? Ek is al tien dae weg en nog geen briewe nie.” (“Woman, what’s the matter? I’ve been away ten days already, and still no letters!”).

Division concentrated at Khatatba early in May for a year’s intensive training. A.P.O. 5 at Div. H.Q. served the whole Division. There was a twice weekly airmail service to and from the Union, while surface mails from the Union arrived irregularly though not infrequently. A daily train service operated between Base P.O. Cairo and Khatatba.

On 2nd June, 1943 Capt. G. F. Green (who had been O.C. Postal Detachment in the Madagascar campaign) took over the L. of C. Postal Unit from Capt. R. A. L. Mandy at Tripoli. A.P.O. 16 moved with 106 S.A. General Hospital from Qassassin to Tripoli, and opened there in 16th June. The airmail service to Tripolitania and Tunisia was working most satisfactorily, but surface mails were slow due to the convoy system between Alexandria and Tripoli.

The new Base P.O. building in Cairo was occupied on 15th July, 1943, and a surface mail from the Union was dealt with for the first time at the new office on the 23rd. Had such premises as this been available when operations began in Mid. East much extra work and worry would have been saved. One section of interest in the new building was termed the *Glory Hole*: in it were stored the contents of undeliverable parcels, the senders of which were unknown. A strict check was kept of all items which went to the *Glory Hole*, in case of any enquiry at a later date, whereupon a parcel could be reconstructed and forwarded to the addressee. If a parcel had been violated in transit to Mid. East whenever possible the lost items were replaced by loose articles held in the *Glory Hole*. Periodically the contents of the *Glory Hole* were distributed to the various hospitals in the Mid. East and after the cessation of hostilities in 1945 when the *Glory Hole* was congested with canned goods, they were disposed of to the British Red Cross in Cairo.

Meanwhile, to expedite the tracing of undeliverable mail, a complete card index of all European personnel in the Mid. East was begun at A.P.O. 32 Helwan on 16th May, 1943, based on nominal rolls supplied by units, hospital admissions and discharges, and casualty returns; day-to-day particulars being added to cards as received. When the new Base P.O. opened, the index system was transferred there.

With effect from 4th August, 1943 the establishment of the G.H.Q. Postal Unit was increased from 65 all ranks to 113 (7-106) in order that it should be sufficiently strong to cope with all the G.H.Q. work proper in any future circumstances, thereby leaving the L. of C. Postal Unit free for L. of C. work. This brought the strength of the S.A.A.P.C. in Mid. East to 186 all ranks — and it might be mentioned that the New Zealanders with one division in the field had a postal establishment of approximately 200, and the Australians with three divisions had approximately 400.

A.P.O. 10 accompanied 3 Wing S.A.A.F. from Tmimi to Benina, Benghazi, Colush and Suliman (Cape Bon Peninsula), and during August, 1943 moved to Sicily. A daily airmail service was arranged between A.P.O. 10 and A.P.O. 14 Tripoli.

On 9th October, Maj. O'Neil, O.C. G.H.Q. Postal Unit, and three other ranks who comprised the personnel for A.P.O. 18, arrived at Tapanto, Italy, from Mid. East. A.P.O. 18, originally intended to deal only with postal matters from escaped P.O.W., opened with No. 2 P.W. Transit Camp at Tarnato on 10th October to deal with all U.D.F. postal matters as and when required.

A.P.O. 10 serving 3 Wing S.A.A.F. left Sicily for Italy on 10th October and opened at Manduria (approximately 30 miles east of Taranto on the 18th). A.P.O. 19 was established at Foggia (80 miles north-west of Bari) on 22nd October to serve 7 Wing S.A.A.F.

On 20th October A.P.O. 18 was forced to move with No. 2 P.W. Transit Camp to Pesina (7 miles south of Naples); but Maj. O'Neil decided this was not a suitable location for the Forward Base P.O. and consequently moved it back to Bari,

where it opened on 4th November. All mails for U.D.F. units in Italy (other than 3 and 7 Wings S.A.A.F. with their own A.P.Os.) were located thereon.

Airmails to Italy from Mid. East were far from satisfactory at first, due to the absence of a regular air service. They gradually improved however, and by the end of November, 1943 could be regarded as reasonably satisfactory. Airmail service to Mid. East from Italy was more or less satisfactory from the beginning. Surface mails were governed by erratic shipping facilities.

Mail from the Union for P.O.W. in Italy and Germany, which had formerly passed through the Mid. East S.A. postal services, now fell away, as it was routed via Entebbe and Lisbon.

106 S.A. General Hospital was withdrawn from Tripoli back to Qassassin in December, 1943, where A.P.O. 16 reopened on the 7th.

As Tripoli was no longer an important U.D.F. postal centre, Capt. Green, O.C. L. of C. Postal Unit, was recalled and, with 8 other ranks proceeded to Italy on 14th November. He took control from Maj. O'Neil, who returned to Cairo on the 29th.

Surface dispatches were made up daily by A.P.O. 29 for A.P.O. 18, and by A.P.O. 31 for A.P.Os. 9 and 10. These dispatches were forwarded to A.P.O. 35 Alexandria for loading on the first available ship. The airmail service to Italy was most satisfactory now, and in some instances letters and letter cards were reaching troops in the forward areas within ten days after posting in the Union.

Washaways in the Tobruk area affected the postal service in Mid. East in December, 1943, but it was nevertheless reasonably good, and Christmas mail including parcels reached the troops on or before Christmas Day.

*Airmail Correspondence Mid. East to Union*

*1st January - 31st December, 1943.*

<i>B.O.A.C.</i>		<i>S.A.A.F. Shuttle</i>		
<i>Prepaid Letters</i>	<i>Letter Cards</i>	<i>Prepaid Letters</i>	<i>Letter Cards</i>	<i>Official Mail</i>
10 624	11 797	2 797	3 252	21 134 (lbs.)

*Prepaid Letters : 1 lb = 50 letters (approx.)*

*Per B.O.A.C.: 10 624*

*Per Shuttle: 2 797*

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*13 421 lbs = 671 050 letters (approx.)*

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*Letter Cards : 1 lb = 120 cards (approx.)*

*Per B.O.A.C.: 11 732*

*Per Shuttle: 3 252*

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*14 984 lbs = 1,798 080 cards (approx.)*

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*Airmail Correspondence Union and Rhodesia to Mid. East*  
*1st January - 31st December, 1943.*

<i>B.O.A.C.</i>	<i>Shuttle</i>
from <i>Union</i>	from <i>Union</i> <i>(Official Mail)</i>
45 112	653 20 664 (lbs.)

*Sea Mails to and from the Union*  
*1 January-31 December, 1943.*

<i>Mid. East to Union</i>	<i>Union to Mid. East</i>
10 909 bags. (16 ships)	49 435 bags. (22 ships)

During September and October, 1942 several disturbing cases has occurred of violation of registered articles in mails per Sunday's passenger train from Cairo to Port Tewfik, and despite exhaustive enquiries and all possible precautionary measures the source could not be located. The trouble recurred in April, 1943 and continued at intervals throughout the year. The final case, a particularly serious one — occurred on 9th January, 1944, when on arrival at Port Tewfik banknotes to the value of R22 and two wristlet watches were found to be missing from eight registered articles. The following Sunday on arrival of the mail at Port Tewfik, it was noticed that both the outer and inner bags had been cut down the seams and cleverly resewn while in the train. The escort, an Egyptian civil Post Office courier, was arrested — and the trouble was at an end.

By the beginning of 1944 mails were reaching Italy well, and there were no complaints. Correspondence dispatched twice a week from Durban by Flying Boat and forwarded to Cairo to Bari by air was reaching the men in the forward areas within six days of posting. There was delay on surface mail between Mid. East and Italy but this was due to erratic shipping, over which the postal services had no control. The average transit time was three to four weeks, but portion of the Christmas parcel mail which docked at Port Tewfik on 16th December, 1943 could only be shipped until 14th January, 1944, and then only reached Bari on 1st February.

A.P.O. 21 was established at Vasto (east coast of Italy) on 21st February, 1944 and served thirteen U.D.F. units, mostly S.A.E.C. Until December, 1943 the whole of 6 Division at Khatatba had been served by A.P.O. 5; but on 2nd January, 1944, to accustom personnel to conditions in the field, A.P.O. 11 was opened to serve 11 Armd. Bde and A.P.O. 12 to serve 12 Motorised Brigade.

When Division moved to Helwan in January, 1944 A.P.O. 13 was established to serve the Rear Party at Khatatba. Div. A.P.Os. were closed in Mid. East on 11th April when the Division moved to Italy. A.P.O. 13 moved to Helwan at the beginning of February, closed there on 24th April, and on 6th May was reopened in Italy (at Torillo, near Altamura) to serve the newly formed 6 Division Reserve Group. With the formation of Reserve Group, Div. Postal Unit strength was increased to 1-28 as from 1st May, 1944.

The recent rapid expansion and wide dispersal of S.A.A.F. units made co-ordination of mail arrangements difficult, and in order to maintain the high standard of the postal service it was essential that a S.A.A.F. Postal Unit should

be formed to provide central control over S.A.A.F. postal matters. Accordingly, on 10th April, 1944, No. 3 L. of C. Postal Unit was established in Mid. East (O.C. Lt. A. W. Stanley) with an establishment of 2 officers and 40 other ranks. The establishment appeared somewhat generous compared with that of the Div. Postal Unit, but was devised to cover present needs and future expansion, including provision for five Wing A.P.Os. The new unit had under its control A.P.Os. 9, 10, 31 and 38 (opened at S.A.A.F. Base Depot Almaza on 12th March, 1944), and to avoid confusion the existing L. of C. Unit operating in Italy was redesignated No. 1 L. of C. Postal Unit. (No. 2 L. of C. Postal Unit was operating in the Union.

Cards for all personnel who had left Mid. East for Italy were now transferred from the card index system at Cairo to A.P.O. 18 Bari. There was thus a separate record section for all U.D.F. personnel in the two theatres of operations, which facilitated redirection of mail.

The most difficult mail to deliver was that for hospital patients, and the A.P.O. regarded this correspondence as Priority No. 1. Often a week or more would elapse before a sick or wounded man reached a stationary hospital, where prompt notification to Records Section of admission there, meant prompt forwarding of mail thereafter.

In mid April, 1944, 6 Division moved to Italy with its A.P.Os. (5, 11 and 12) concentrated in the Altamura-Matera-Gravina area. An unexpected and welcome surprise was the delivery of mail to all ranks on docking at Taranto.

In the advance to the south of Cassino some difficulty was temporarily experienced in maintaining regular contact with the Bde. A.P.Os., as the area was congested with innumerable convoys and governed by a system of one-way routes. On one occasion an N.C.O. and driver, endeavouring to locate Bde. A.P.O., after three hours driving saw the welcome A.P.O. signboard: it turned out to be the office from where they had started!

Movements from then on were very rapid and stops longer than 48 hours were exceptional. Command changed from 1 Canadian Corps to 13 Corps after Ferentino at the beginning of June, 1944, and a parting gift from the Canadian Corps on 7 June was the unexpected arrival of six 3-tonners of surface mail (750 bags of parcels) at 0300 hours when everything was packed and the convoy ready to move off at 0500! The bags were offloaded and left under guard of four S.A.A.P.C. personnel, with a fervent prayer that it would not rain. The stack was collected the following day without incident.

With Rome in Allied hands on 4th June the enemy was retreating towards the Apennines fighting bitter rearguard actions. The Bde. B. Echelon areas were frequently subjected to shelling, fortunately with no casualties to A.P.O. personnel. The chief danger was from mines in the fields and vineyards, and A.P.O. 12 personnel had a lucky break at one camp: the driver did not like the area allotted to him, so obtained permission to park elsewhere. The next vehicle that moved to the original site was blown to bits.

By 30th June the Division was through Chiusi, and on 5th June A.P.23 opened in Rome. On 19th June A.P.O. 21 was closed at Vasto, moved up the east coast, and on 21st July opened at Ancona. The building occupied was found to contain in the cellar a 500-lb unexploded bomb — duly dealt with by the Engineers.

Also on 21st July A.P.O. 13 moved up with Reserve Group from Attamura to Alife, near Caserta. A.P.O. 16 arrived in Italy with 106 S.A. General Hospital in May, 1944 and opened with it at Benevento in June.



The airmail position was now most satisfactory; mail for the Division and the S.A.A.F. Wings was being flown direct from Cairo to the nearest landing grounds and was reaching the troops in five days from Durban. Surface mail was still slow, due entirely to shipping facilities, and transit time from the Union to Italy ranged between 8 and 14 weeks. The surface mail Base P.O. at Bari was rather far back from the forward areas, but there were daily train outlets to both sides of Italy.

In Mid. East, A.P.O. 28 at Port Tewfik was closed on 12th June, 1944, as there were no longer sufficient U.D.F. units stationed there to warrant its existence. Two other ranks were attached to the U.D.F. Port Detachment to handle outgoing surface mail, and whenever a large mail arrived from the Union a detachment was sent from Cairo to assist.

H.Q. Air Construction Group, 30 and 32 S.A. Road Construction Companies (Coys.) and 157 and 158 S.A. Works Coys., were engaged on construction of a large airfield at Rabat-Sale (Morocco), and on 16th June, 1944, A.P.O. 25 was established there to serve these units. A S.A.A.P.C. Sergeant who was attached to the British A.P.O. at Algiers to assist in the handling of surface mail had a varied and interesting stay in the area: mails arrived at all times in troopships, destroyers, tramp steamers, and even occasionally in submarines. During the pre-invasion period of Southern France (August, 1944) Jerry was uncomfortably inquisitive and often made a nuisance of himself while mails were being handled. When large mails arrived (often running into thousands of bags) the Sergeant was given about 30 Italian P.O.W. to unload the ships and load the trucks —and usually by the end of the day, one or more of the prisoners had disappeared! The Sergeant's official duties took him to Casablanca, Oran and Tunis, and he even "wangled" a trip to Gibraltar by submarine. On completion of the construction of the aerodrome, units moved, and A.P.O. 25 closed down on 14th January, 1945.

The U.D.F. Units in Syria and Palestine were also very satisfied with the service being rendered by the S.A.A.P.C. — air letters from the Union were being delivered to units on an average 8 days after posting. A.P.O. 8 accompanied 2 Wing S.A.A.F. to Aleppo at the beginning of June, 1944 and, after the Wing's return to Egypt at the end of June, opened at Almaza on 2nd July, closed on the 7th, and proceeded to Italy with the Wing on the 11th, where it opened at Foggia on 30th July.

In conjunction with U.D.F. Admin. H.Q. Lt.-Col. McDonald (A.D.A.P.S.) and his staff moved from Cairo to Rome in September, 1944 and established their office there on the 22nd. With the departure of A.D.A.P.S. to Italy, a new subordinate post of D.A.D.A.P.S. was created in Mid. East to which Maj. O'Neil was appointed on 5th October.

It was now necessary that each separate theatre of operations should be served by an L. of C. Postal Unit; also that a Forward Base Post Office Unit be established instead of the existing G.H.Q. Postal Unit which had developed into an organization quite different from that originally intended. It no longer met requirements, and to have enlarged it would have made it even more unwieldy. Accordingly, on 1st September, 1944, No. 4 L. of C. Postal Unit and Forward Base P.O. Unit, M.E.F., were established and G.H.Q. Postal Unit disbanded. The new units came into operation on 15th October. Capt. J. G. Phimister was now O.C. Forward Base P.O. (P.O. 29) and Capt. R. A. L. Mandy was appointed O.C. 4 L. of C. Unit.

The latter unit was to control the A.P.Os. at 5 S.A. General Hospital, Helwan and Alexandria, personnel at Port Tewfik, A.P.O. 25 and other personnel serving with B.N.A.F.

Under the revised Establishment, therefore, the position in mid October, 1944 was as follows:

		<i>Officers</i>	<i>Other Ranks</i>
A.D.A.P.S.	(C.M.F.)	2	4
D.A.D.A.P.S.	(M.E.F.)	1	2
Forward Base P.O. Unit	(M.E.F.)	4	80
1 L. of C. Postal Unit	(C.M.F.)	2	40
3 L. of C. Postal Unit	(S.A.A.F.)	2	40
4 L. of C. Postal Unit	(M.E.F. and B.N.A.F.)	2	40
6 S.A. Div. Postal Unit	(C.M.F.)	1	28
		14	234

(As from April, 1945 the Div. Postal Unit Establishment was raised by 5 Other Ranks, bringing the overall total to 253).

On 12th October, 1944 the first batch of U.D.F. ex-P.O.W. released from Switzerland (approximately 500) arrived in Mid. East, and a S.A.A.P.O. officer was sent to the port of disembarkation to deliver mail from the Union to them.

Florence fell on 4th August, 1944, and on 6th August 6 S.A. Division began to move to the Siena area for a period of rest which lasted until 22nd August. On 1st September the Division crossed the Arno and reached the outposts of the Gothic Line. Enemy resistance stiffened, and there was bitter fighting in cold rain and icy wind for the heights of M. Stanco and M. Salvaro. At the end of October, with winter at hand, no further advance was possible. Div. A.P.O. 5 had been on Prato, in the foothills of the Apennines, since 4th October, and was now joined in that area by the Bde. A.P.Os. 11 and 12. This was to be the home of the B Echelons for some months.

A.P.O. 7 had opened with 8 Wing S.A.A.F. at Fogjano on 23rd August, 1944; A.P.O. 41 opened at 108 S.A. General Hospital at Florence on 22nd September; and on 3rd October A.P.O. 16 moved with 106 S.A. General Hospital to Rome. A.P.O. 13 moved up with Reserve Group from Alife to Monteverchi (south of Florence) on 13th December, the same day that A.P.O. 42 opened at 107 S.A. General Hospital (S.A.G.H.) at Florence (when 108 S.A.G.H. moved back to Orvieto).

The desirability of establishing a S.A.A.P.O. at Naples had been apparent for some time: it was the logical centre for a Base P.O., being a strategically placed port, the most important railway junction in use at the time, and the radiating centre for practically all lines of communication. It also possessed one of the very few almost all-weather landing grounds. Lack of suitable accommodation, however, and various other factors prevailing, influenced the decision to "wait and see" for the time being, particularly as the existing mail arrangements between Cairo and Italy were working satisfactorily. Until such time as the A.P.O. at Naples should open (huts were being built), all C.M.F. mail for the Union was concentrated on A.P.O. 23 Rome, where the card index was transferred from Bari on 19th October, 1944.

As from 8th September, 1944 private airmails from the Union arrived in Mid. East by S.A.A.F. Shuttle Service in addition to B.O.A.C. Flying Boat, making seven airmails weekly. The S.A.A.F. Shuttle Service from Mid. East to Italy and within Italy was not so frequent or satisfactory — 1 plane per week to Bari and

3 per week to Rome, and the daily available lift did not always meet requirements. In November, 1944, however, the Shuttle was increased to seven planes each way weekly — 5 to Rome and 2 to Fano.

During October and November, 1944 most of the forward Landing Grounds in Italy were often unserviceable due to heavy rains, and the road services which were the most reliable had to be utilized. There was an excellent daily service in operation from Naples to Ancona and Pesaro via Rome; and from Naples to Arezzo via Rome. But there were washaways between Prato and Arezzo, and a bridge near Monteverchi was washed away. At times roads were impassable and vehicles had to be pulled through by bulldozer. Nevertheless, with the minimum of delay, the mails got through. On 28th October an air service was introduced between Naples and Pisa. From Pisa to Florence mail was conveyed by British transport, and the Div. Postal Unit collected it from there. Surface mail was collected from Apezza Railhead.

December brought the usual seasonal pressure; just over 6 000 bags of surface mail from the Union were handled at Naples on 18th December and cleared (from 9 railway trucks) at Arezzo on the 21st. This was the first occasion that surface mail had been handled at Naples, and a postal detachment had to be sent from Bari for the job. These parcels were delivered to the troops before Christmas. A further two consignments totalling 4 600 bags docked at Taranto too late to deliver for Christmas; they were cleared (8 truckloads) at Arezzo on 30th December and delivered before New Year's Day.

There were four cases of violation of parcel mails between Arezzo and Naples during the six weeks ending 25th November, 1944 — in each case where consignments had been handed over to the British Army Postal Service for onward transmission.

*Airmail Correspondence Mid. East to Union  
1 January-31 December, 1944.*

<i>B.O.A.C.</i>		<i>S.A.A.F. Shuttle</i>		
<i>Prepaid</i>	<i>Letter</i>	<i>Prepaid</i>	<i>Letter</i>	
<i>Letters</i>	<i>Cards</i>	<i>Letters</i>	<i>Cards</i>	<i>Official</i>
984	767	41 415	37 049	60 110 (lbs.)
(January-March only)				

*Note:* Since 7th March, 1944, the weight allotment for mail per Shuttle Service to the Union had been so generous that it was possible to clear all private mail without resorting to Flying Boats. Not only did this accelerate mail, but it also meant a considerable financial saving to the Union Government.

*Airmail Correspondence Union to Mid. East  
1st January, - 31st December, 1944.*

<i>B.O.A.C.</i>	<i>S.A.A.F. Shuttle</i>	
<i>Prepaid</i>	<i>Prepaid</i>	<i>Official</i>
66 157	22 108	49 496 (lbs.)
(September-December only)		

*Sea Mails to and from the Union  
1st January, - 31st December, 1944.*

<i>Union to Mid. East</i>	<i>Mid. East to Union</i>
79 296 bags (25 ships)	13 073 bags (15 ships)

At the beginning of 1945 there were 7 officers and 121 other ranks of the S.A.A.P.C. in Italy.

In January the air service Naples-Pisa was changed to Naples-Florence. There were initial delays due to bad flying conditions, but by March arrivals at Florence and distribution from the airfield were regular and frequent. Surface mail was still being dealt with at Arezzo (including 11 truckloads — approx. 5 000 bags — on 29 January), but Florence was soon to be opened as Rail-and Roadhead.

In February, 6 Division again came out of the line for a rest period and moved to Lucca. A.P.Os. 11 and 12 were temporarily amalgamated to serve troops in that area. On 13th February A.P.O. 37 was established to serve the recently-formed 13 Motorised Bde. at San Tomaso (Prato-Pistoia area). A.P.O. 5 remained at Prato.

On 5th March, 1945 Forward Base P.O. (A.P.O. 3) opened at Naples, and thereafter all air and surface mails were concentrated there instead of at Rome and Bari. A.P.O. 18 at Bari closed on 18th March. On 13th March A.P.O. 26 was established to serve Advance U.D.F. Depot at Colle Ferro.

Airmails arrived from the Union daily, via Mid. East, were opened and re-bagged at Naples, and dispatched by air, or in some cases by fast road service, daily. Motor Transport (M.T.) vehicle conveying mail carried a plaque inscribed "Army Mails — No Lifts," and were usually accorded priority over all other traffic.

Airmail transit time from the Union to Italy varied between 6 and 12 days, depending on place of posting and final destination. Southbound mails took only from 5 to 6 days as they were routed direct to the large centres in the Union and not via A.P.O. Durban. Mention should be made of one particular delivery in May, 1945 (and there must have been many similar cases not reported) for which the postal services received a pat on the back from the recipient — a letter card which, from time of being postmarked by A.P.O. Durban to time of receipt by addressee at Helwan, took just 3 days, 21 hours. Since this involved handling in Durban, air passage to Rand Airport, surface conveyance to Pretoria, surface again to Swartkop Air Station, Shuttle Service to Almaza, further handling and sorting at Cairo and again at Helwan, it was quite an achievement.

During the first three months of 1945 seven cases of violation of registered articles occurred in Italy, in each case whilst in the custody of the British Postal Service for delivery to U.D.F. formations. D.D.A.P.S. (Deputy Director A.P.S.) (British), however, declined to accept liability, maintaining that all reasonable precautions were taken with mails. As the value of the services rendered (gratis) by the British Army Postal Service in transportation of U.D.F. mails in the Mediterranean area during the past four years had been beyond computation, and as the cost of providing a parallel U.D.F. service would have been prohibitive, under the circumstances the Union Government agreed to accept liability for payment of compensation in such cases. Considering the abnormal conditions prevailing in Italy at the time, and the unruly elements amongst the civil population it is astonishing that losses were not greater.

At the beginning of April, 1945 6 South African Armoured Division moved back into the line, preparatory to the final break through the mountains into the plains of the Po. The Bde. A.P.Os. moved up gradually with the B Echelons, while A.P.O. 5 remained at Prato until a single move was made on 23rd April to San Giovanni north of Bologna.

Thereafter, movements were so extremely rapid and communications became disrupted due to the rapid advance on all fronts. Unavoidable delays were caused partly by the great distances between the forward formations and the Divisional Maintenance Area, and partly by insufficient transport during moves. Contact between Bde. A.P.O. and A.P.O. 5 was difficult during this abnormal period, but even so there was no undue delay of mail.

After crossing the Po on 24th April, 6 Division moved fast between Padua and Vicenza, crossed the Brenta on the 29th and reached the outskirts of Treviso on the 30th. On 1st May it was suddenly diverted to Milan.

After A.P.O. 5 left Prato, all mails were still collected for two days from Florence. Thereafter, as airfields and railheads were advanced, the transit office became first Bologna (through 8 Army at Forli), then Verona, then Piagenza, and finally Milan, where all mails were collected and dispatched.

After cessation of hostilities, A.P.O. 5 rejoined Div. H.Q. at Monza, north of Milan. A.P.Os. 11 and 12 were closed on 21st May, as was A.P.O. 13 on 28th May with the absorption of Reserve Group into the Division. A.P.O. 37 continued to operate with 13 Bde. at Turin. After Div. H.Q. (with A.P.O. 5) had moved to Vervelli on 1st June, 12 Bde. moved to Aosta, and A.P.O. 12 had to be reopened there on 4th June. With the amalgamation on 13th July of 12 and 13 Bdes. at Turin (served by A.P.O. 37), A.P.O. 12 closed at Aosta on the 19th and reopened at Genoa on the 23rd to serve the Div. Equipment Park and other U.D.F. units in the vicinity. Div. H.Q. had moved to Baveno on Lake Maggiore on 21st June, and on 20th July, A.P.O. 5 joined them in that area (at Meina).

When the Division moved to the coast, A.P.O. 5 opened at Genoa on 30th September, and A.P.O. 12 there was closed on the same day. 12/13 Bde. moved from Turin to Alessio on the coast on 1st October, and A.P.O. 37 closed down. This left only A.P.O. 5 to serve all troops left in the Genoa area.

Forward Base A.P.O. 3 moved back from Naples to Bari on 18th July, 1945.

Unlike so many units, the "Cease Fire" did not mean any relaxation for A.P.O. personnel — the troops had more time to write and, as a result of the withdrawal of censorship (June, 1945), had more to say. The postal personnel, therefore, were amongst the last to be repatriated. But they appreciated what post meant to the "boys" and the service was not allowed to suffer. Actually, repatriations and cross-postings of personnel and amalgamations and dissolutions of units necessitated in many cases double handling of mail, so that the volume of work showed no appreciable decrease. An efficient organization was set up, however, by means of which the unit and the postal authorities were promptly advised of a man's change of address as he progressed from his unit in Italy to Transit Camp in Mid. East and from there to the Union, so that redirection of mail was facilitated.

Meanwhile in March, 1945 Maj. O'Neil had proceeded to the Union on leave prior to taking over from Lt.-Col. McDonald in Italy, but in April it was advised that for health reasons he would not be returned to Mid. East. Capt. Phimister, who had been acting D.A.D.A.P.S., M.E.F., was therefore appointed to the position with effect from 27th March, with the rank of Maj. On 12th May, however, he proceeded to Italy to take over from Lt.-Col. McDonald, and when the latter left for the Union at the beginning of June, on recall to civilian duties, Maj. Phimister, succeeded him as A.D.A.P.S. C.M.F./M.E.F., with promotion to Lt.-Col. On the same day (8th June) Capt. R. A. L. Mandy, promoted to Maj., succeeded him as D.A.D.A.P.S., M.E.F.

On cessation of hostilities, G.H.Q. Pretoria instructed that in future the daily southbound Shuttle was to carry only official mail and U.D.F. personnel repatriated to the Union. Consequently for private mail the postal service had to revert to the B.O.A.C. Flying Boat, which operated from Cairo to the Union only twice a week and took four days instead of two. In addition, as from 10th June, the S.A.A.F. Shuttle service between Mid. East and Italy was discontinued and airmails had to be conveyed by a slower R.A.F. service. These two factors caused an increase in transit time between Italy and the Union of anything up to 6 days. On 20th September a R.A.F. Dakota weekly service to the Union was inaugurated, in addition to the twice weekly Flying Boat. On 4th October the R.A.F. service was increased to two aircraft per week, and the Flying Boat service needed to be utilized only once a week for private mail. (On 7th February, 1946 the R.A.F. Dakota service was cancelled, and private mail was again forwarded by Flying Boat twice a week).

Parcels arriving now for personnel deceased, missing, P.O.W. or returned to Union were opened by O.S.C. Units: articles of intrinsic or sentimental value were returned to senders, and the balance distributed among the addressee's unit. The volume of mail, especially parcels, to the Union was still great.

The task of breaking down the Postal Service proved almost as formidable as its building up had been, but by November, 1945 great strides had been made in releasing S.A.A.P.C. personnel.

In May, 1945 the following postal units and formations were operating in Mid. East and Italy :

A.D.A.P.S.	C.M.F.	
D.A.D.A.P.S.	M.E.F.	
Forward Base P.O. Unit	M.E.F.	
1 L. of C. Postal Unit	C.M.F.	
3 L. of C. Postal Unit	M.E.F.	
4 L. of C. Postal Unit	C.M.F.	(H.Q. transferred from M.E. to Naples 1 May, 1945).
6 Div. Postal Unit	C.M.F.	

4 L. of C. Postal Unit returned from Italy on 15th August, 1945 and continued operating at Helwan, where it was dissolved on 9th November. A.D.A.P.S. (Lt.-Col. Phimister) and staff returned to Egypt on 15th October, and responsibility for control of S.A.A.P.Os. still functioning in Italy was delegated to O.C. 1 L. of C. Postal Unit and O.C. 6 Div. Postal Unit. 1 L. of C. Postal Unit was dissolved at Bari on 3rd November, leaving Capt. Nye, O.C. Div Postal Unit in control of all postal arrangements in Italy. In Mid. East, 3 L. of C. Postal Unit was dissolved at Cairo on 20th December. On 10th December Lt.-Col. Phimister left for the Union, and Maj. Mandy (D.A.D.A.P.S.) assumed control of all postal matters of policy in M.E.F./C.M.F. Forward Base Postal Unit controlled all Mid. East active operations.

Consequent upon the evacuation of most U.D.F. troops from Italy it had been possible, too, between May and November, 1945 to close 17 of the 18 A.P.Os. there, leaving only A.P.O. 5 at Genoa to serve the residue of 6 Division. There was also a small detachment at the British A.P.O. at Bari — where A.P.O. 3 closed on 3rd November — serving U.D.F. non-div. units in the area. A.P.O. 23 in Rome closed on 10th November, and U.D.F. Units in that area were likewise served by a British A.P.O. with one S.A.A.P.C. other rank to assist.



During the latter half of December, mail for the cadre of 6 Division, due to leave Genoa area by the 28th, was held in Mid. East. With the evacuation of all 6 Division personnel from Italy by the end of 1945, the Div. Postal Unit was dissolved on 23rd December. A.P.O. 5 continued to operate at Genoa, serving the Equipment Park and acting as a C.M.F. Base for cross-post mails ex British A.P.Os.

In May, 1945 the strength of the S.A.A.P.C. in the Mediterranean area had been 249; by the end of the year it had been reduced to 135.

*Airmail Correspondence Mid. East to Union  
1st January - 31st December, 1945.*

<i>B.O.A.C.</i>		<i>S.A.A.F. Shuttle</i>		
<i>Prepaid</i>	<i>Letter</i>	<i>Prepaid</i>	<i>Letter</i>	
<i>Letters</i>	<i>Cards</i>	<i>Letters</i>	<i>Cards</i>	<i>Official</i>
17 010	12 799	17 655	17 278	70 657 (lbs.)
(May-December only)		(January-June only)		

*Airmail Correspondence Union to Mid. East  
1st January - 31st December, 1945.*

<i>B.O.A.C.</i>		<i>S.A.A.F. Shuttle</i>	
<i>Prepaid</i>		<i>Prepaid</i>	<i>Official</i>
11 684		72 862	33 028 (lbs.)

(January-April only, due to accelerated  
S.A.A.F. Shuttle Service)

Christmas 1945 parcel mail from the Union was dispatched to Mid. East by S.A.A.F. Sunderland Flying Boats, which left Durban twice weekly and landed at Kasfareit Flying Boat Base on the Great Bitter Lake. The first consignment of 80 bags, weighing 3 731 lbs, was received on 21st November — six days after dispatch from Durban. The even flow of parcels resulting from the Sunderland Service, in contrast with the congestion experienced in previous years, was much appreciated by the Base P.O. staff. The number of parcels, however, was beyond the estimate, and exceeded the capacity of the Sunderlands, so that a certain number had to be dispatched from the Union by Dakota Shuttle Service.

Parcels received by air during November and December, 1945:

Sunderland	(Nov.):	241 bags (10 720 lbs)
„	(Dec.):	1 163 bags (53 572 lbs)
Dakota	(Dec.):	320 bags (16 034 lbs)
		1 724 bags (80 326 lbs)

*Sea Mails to and from the Union  
1st January - 31st December, 1945.*

<i>Union to Mid. East</i>	<i>Mid. East to Union</i>
42 160 bags (20 ships)	20 641 bags (16 ships)

*Note:* M.V. *Selandia* which left Durban on 14th December, 1944, and docked at Port Tewfik on 1st January, 1945 carried 10 808 bags of mail — the largest consignment to be carried by any one ship during the campaign. (The C.M.F. mail was on its way to Italy within a week).

A.P.O. 35 at Alexandria closed down on 5th January, 1946, as there were no longer any U.D.F. units stationed there. On 26th January A.P.O. 40 moved from 5 S.A. General Hospital at Helmeih to Cairo, to serve S.A.A.F. H.Q., 5 General Hospital, S.A.A.F. Base Depot and all U.D.F. personnel in Cairo. (A.P.O. 38 at S.A.A.F. Base Depot Almaza closed the same day, and A.P.O. 31 at S.A.A.F. H.Q. had closed on 19th December). Postal N.C.Os. collected mail from A.P.O. 40 for Helmeih and Almaza. This A.P.O. closed down on 12th February.

Also on 12th February the Forward Base Postal Unit was dissolved, and the Record Section which had operated at A.P.O. 32 Helwan was transferred to Base P.O. Durban, where all future tracing and redirecting would be undertaken. A.P.O. 5 closed at Genoa on 13th February, 1946.

The final dispatch of surface mail to the Union (121 bags) was loaded at Port Tewfik on 20th February, and the final dispatch of airmail by Flying Boat left on the 25th.

On 26th February the last remaining A.P.O. Forward Base P.O. 29 at Cairo, was closed. There were still a few S.A.A.P.C. personnel in Mid. East and Italy attached to the British Army Postal Service, by whom all future mails for remaining U.D.F. personnel would be handled.

D.A.D.A.P.S. office in Cairo closed on 2nd March, 1946, and, apart from six S.A.A.P.C. personnel who had voluntarily offered to remain on with the U.D.F. M.E. Equipment Unit, the last two S.A.A.P.C. officers and two other ranks sailed for the Union on 7th March.

*Summary of Airmails to and from the Union  
1942-1945*

<i>B.O.A.C.</i>		<i>Shuttle</i>		<i>B.O.A.C.</i>		<i>Shuttle</i>	
<i>Prepaid</i>	<i>Prepaid</i>	<i>Official</i>		<i>Prepaid</i>	<i>Prepaid</i>	<i>Official</i>	
1942: 59 069	—	18 753		37 909	9 351	18 602	
1943: 45 112	—	20 664		22 356	6 049	25 134	
	653		(from Rhodesia)				
1944: 66 157	22 108	49 496		1 751	78 464	50 110	
1945: 11 684	72 862	33 028		29 809	34 933	70 657	
182 675	94 970	121 941		91 825	128 797	164 503 (lbs.)	

*Summary of Surface Mails to and from the Union  
1941-1945.*

<i>Union to Mid. East</i>			<i>Mid. East to Union</i>		
1941 (sea):	74 889		(sea):	6 397	
(sea):	5 943 (from E. Africa)		(sea):	1 022 (to E. Africa)	
1942 (sea):	100 080 (38 ships)		(sea):	12 627 (27 ships)	
1943 (sea):	49 435 (22 ships)		(sea):	10 909 (16 ships)	
1944 (sea):	79 296 (25 ships)		(sea):	13 073 (15 ships)	
1945 (sea):	42 160 (20 ships)		(sea):	20 641 (16 ships)	
(air):	1 724				
Bags:	353 527		Bags:	64 669	

*Note:* Unfortunately airmail figures for 1941 and air and surface mail figures for 1946 are not available.

Packing of parcels improved immensely as senders learned through bitter experience; but the best packed parcel often had a scar or two after being handled, say, 25 times, including conveyance by ship's sling and M.T. vehicles. The terrific "Black Market" in Italy was responsible for attempts to violate parcel mails in rail trucks, not only by individuals but by large, well-organized gangs which appeared to operate within official organizations, and there were some unfortunate experiences in this regard, as already mentioned. There were few losses due to enemy action, and in this the U.D.F. was most fortunate.

This spirit of co-operation which existed throughout the Empire Postal Services in Mid. East and Italy must be emphasised, for there is no doubt that without this spirit it would not have been possible to serve a constantly moving clientele accurately and expeditiously. The British, New Zealand and South African services borrowed each other's personnel, M.T. and equipment whenever necessary and units of one Force were located at A.P.Os. of another if it was found impracticable to provide them with their own office.

The friendly spirit which prevailed at all times is illustrated in a letter written by Col. W. Scott, O.B.E., D.D.A.P.S. (British) to Lt.-Col Phimister on 19th October, 1945:

*. . . this . . . has probably been one of the best co-operative efforts on the part of the Commonwealth Postal Services. Both my staff and I have enjoyed every minute of the time we have worked with you and your lads; and I in particular, after an association with the Army Postal Service of the Union extending now to nearly five years through our adversities and victories, can very sincerely say that I could not have wished for better co-operation or better friends than I have found among all ranks of your Service. It has been a real pleasure to help when we could . . .*

Lt.-Col. G. A. Leech, D.A.P.S., having been shown a copy of the above, wrote to Col. Scott on 6th November, 1945 as follows:

*. . . It is a far cry from one very hot day when I walked into your office in June, 1941 and received a welcome . . . the warmth of which created the understanding upon which the close co-operation of our Services, from top to bottom, was built. We are proud to have been accepted, brothered and mothered . . . We built up a reputation for service second to none in the U.D.F., but those of us who have been concerned in the administration readily acknowledge what the limitations of our efforts would have been without your firm and steady aid . . .*

A letter written by Maj.-Gen. P. de Waal, Quartermaster-General, to the Postmaster-General, Mr. L. C. Burke, in May, 1946 may also be quoted :

*. . . The Army Postal organization has emerged from the war with a record second to none, an achievement which would not have been possible without the trained personnel provided by your Department . . .*

Within the South African Army Postal Corps itself there was a never-flagging spirit of loyalty and enthusiasm, and its members can pride themselves on a job well done. The S.A.A.P.C.'s motto of *Service* had been upheld to the end.

## S.A.A.P.Os. in M.E., B.N.A.F. and C.M.F.

<i>A.P.O. No.</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Opened At</i>	<i>Closed At</i>
(1)	(Base P.O. Durban)	Pretoria 26th May, 40 Durban 2nd Nov., 40	Durban (see footnote p. 6)
(2)	(Base P.O. Nairobi)	Nairobi 4th June, 40	Nairobi
3	1 S.A. Bde., 1 S.A. Div.  Forward Base P.O., Italy	Matruh June, 41  Naples 5th March, 45 Bari 18th July, 45	Qassassin (on sailing for Union) 2nd Jan., 43  Bari 3rd Nov., 45
4			
5	6 S.A. Armd. Div. H.Q.	Khatuba 13th April, 43 Altamura, Italy 21st April, 44 Prato 4th Oct., 44 San Giovanni 23rd April, 45 Monza May, 45 Vercelli 1st June, 45 Meina 20th July, 45 Genoa 30th Sep., 45	Helwan 11th April, 44          Genoa 13th Feb., 46
6	2 S.A. Div. Cross-posting Office	Tobruk 17th March, 42	Lost at Tobruk 21st June, 42
7	2 S.A. Bde., 1 S.A. Div.  8 Wing S.A.A.F.	Matruh 14th June, 41  Foiano, Italy (s. of Arezzo) 23rd Aug., 44	Qassassin (on sailing for Union) 2nd Jan., 43 Campoformido (Unione area) 4th Aug., 45
8	Replaced by A.P.O. 17 (remnants of 5 S.A. Bde., 1 S.A. Div.)	Matruh 5th Dec., 41	

<i>A.P.O. No.</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Opened At</i>	<i>Closed At</i>
8 (Cont.)	2 Wing S.A.A.F.  (Served 6 S.A. Div. Rear Transit Camp at Foggia after 2 Wing left in Sept., 45)	Helwan 24th June, 42 Aleppo, Syria 2nd June, 44 Almazza 2nd July, 44 Foggia, Italy 30th July, 44	Aleppo 27th June, 44 Almazza 7th July, 44 Foggia 2nd Nov., 45
9	L. of C. Office 7 Wing S.A.A.F.	Matruh 7th Jan., 42 Palata, Italy (Foggia area) 22 Oct., 43	Matruh 26th June, 42 Tissano (Udine area) July, 45
10	3 Wing S.A.A.F.  (Also served 8 Wing S.A.A.F. at Udine as from Aug., 45)	Tmimi 6th Dec., 42 Sicily 8th Aug., 43	27th Sep., 45
11	11 Armd. Bde., 6 S.A. Armd. Div.	Khatatba 2nd Jan., 44 Matera, Italy 20th April, 44	Helwan 11th April, 44 Monza 22nd May, 45
12	12 Motd. Bde., 6 S.A. Armd. Div.  6 S.A. Armd. Div. Equipment Park	Khatatba 2nd Jan., 44 Gravina, Italy 20th April, 44 Aosta 4th June, 45 Genoa 23rd July, 45	Helwan 11th April, 44 Monza 21st May, 45 Aosta 19th July, 45 Genoa 30th Sep., 45
13	1 S.A. Div. H.Q.  Rear Party 6 S.A. Armd. Div.  6 S.A. Armd. Div., Res. Gp.	Amiriya 3rd May, 41 Matruh 24th May, 41  Khatatba Jan., 44 Helwan Feb., 44 Altamura, Italy 6th May, 44 Alife (near Caserta) 21st July, 44 Montevarchi (s. of Florence) 13th Dec., 44	Qassassin (on sailing for Union) 1st Feb., 43  Helwan 24th April, 44  Monza 23rd May, 45

<i>A.P.O. No.</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Opened At</i>	<i>Closed At</i>
14	4 S.A. General Hospital  Forward Base Transit Office	Buselli (32 miles N.E. of Alexandria) 20th May, 42 Tripoli 1st April, 43	Buselli (hospital closed down) 11th Aug., 42 Tripoli Nov., 43
15			
16	106 S.A. General Hospital	Qassassin 4th May, 42 Tripoli 16th June, 43 Qassassin 7th Dec., 43 Andria, Italy 10th May, 44 Benevento 15th June, 44 Rome 3rd Oct., 44	Rome 30th June, 45
17	5 S.A. Bde., 1 S.A. Div.	Amiriya 3rd May, 41 Matruh 24th May, 41	Lost at Sidi Rezegh 23rd Nov., 41
18	Forward Base P.O. Italy	Toranto 10th Oct., 43 Resina 20th Oct., 43 Bari 4th Nov., 43	Bari 18th March, 45
19			
(20)	(Defence Headquarters, Union)	Pretoria May, 40	
21	S.A.E.C. (O.R.E. Roads)  (Note: This was the only S.A.-A.P.O. to be established in Austria)	Wasto, Italy 21st Feb., 44 Ancona 21st July, 44	Vasto 19th June, 44 Portschach, Austria (near Klagenfurt) 4th Aug., 45
22	S.A.E.C. (O.R.E. Corps Troops)	13 Corps Area, Italy 14th June, 44	Pordenone 12th Aug., 45
23	U.D.F. Adm. H.Q., and U.D.F. Units	Rome 5th July, 44	Rome 10th Nov., 45
24			



<i>A.P.O. No.</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Opened At</i>	<i>Closed At</i>
25	U.D.F. Units, H.Q. Air Construction Gp., B.N.A.F.	Rabat-Sale (Morocco) 16th June, 44	Rabat-Sale 14th Jan., 45
26	Adv. U.D.F. Base Depot, Italy (Remained to serve S.A.E.C. Dispersal Centre at Colle Ferro when Adv. Base Depot moved to Rome)	Colle Ferro (Rome area) 14th March, 45	Colle Ferro 15th Oct., 45
27			
28	Sub Base P.O.	Port Tewfik (Suez) 13th May, 41	Port Tewfik 12th June, 44
29	Base P.O.	Mareopolis 26th May, 41 Alamein 29th Aug., 41 Tobruk 27th March, 42	Lost at Tobruk 21st June, 42
30	2 S.A. Div. H.Q.	Cairo 28th May, 41	Cairo 26th Feb., 46
31	S.A.A.F. H.Q.	Cairo 17th July, 41	Cairo 19th Dec., 45
32	U.D.F. Base Depot	Helwan 1st July, 41	Helwan Feb., 46
33	3 S.A. Bde., 2 S.A. Div.  3 S.A. Bde., 1 S.A. Div.	Mareopolis 21st May, 41 Alamein 7th Aug., 41 Gazala Line 20th April, 42	Qassassin (on sailing for Union) 2nd Jan., 43
34	4 S.A. Bde., 2 S.A. Div.	Mareopolis 13th May, 41 Alamein 29th Aug., 41 Tobruk 27th March, 42	Lost at Tobruk 21st June, 42
35	L. of C. Office	Amiriya 2nd May, 41 Alexandria 15th May, 42	Alexandria 5th Jan., 46

<i>A.P.O. No.</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Opened At</i>	<i>Closed At</i>
36	6 S.A. Bde., 2 S.A. Div.	Mareopolis 21st May, 41 Alamein 1st Aug., 41 Tobruk 27th March, 42	Lost at Tobruk 21st June, 42
37	L. of C. Office  13 Motd. Bde., 6 S.A. Armd. Div.  12/13 Motd. Bde., 6 S.A. Armd. Div.	Mischiefia 30th Nov., 41 Capazzo 10th March, 42 Helwan 18th June, 42 Aswan 2nd July, 42 Amiriya 15th July, 42 San Tomato, Italy (Prato-Pistoia area) 13th Feb., 45 Turin 13th July, 45	Aswan 9th July, 42  Alassio 1st Oct., 45
38	S.A.A.F. Base Depot	Almaza 12th March, 44	Almaza 26th July, 45
39	102 (N.E.) S.A. General Hospital	Bari 11th May, 44	Bari 23rd July, 43
40	5 S.A. General Hospital (From 1 Sep., 42 to 27 Apr. 44 also served 102 S.A. General Hospital on adjacent site, Hel- mieh) U.D.F. Units, S.A.A.F. H.Q., S.A.A.F. Base Depot, 5 S.A. Gen. Hosp.	Helmieh 24th Sep., 41  Cairo 26th Jan., 46	Helmieh 26th Jan., 46  Cairo 12th Feb., 46
41	108 S.A. General Hospital	Florence 22nd Sep., 44 Orvieto 16th Dec., 44 Bologna 26th April, 45 Milan 23rd June, 45	Orvieto 3rd April, 45 Bologna 17th June, 45 Milan 31st July, 45
42	107 S.A. General Hospital	Florence (When 103 S.A. Gen. Hosp. moved to Orvieto) 13th Dec., 44	Florence 31st Aug., 45

<i>A.P.O. No.</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Opened At</i>	<i>Closed At</i>
43			
44	Adv. Party 6 S.A. Amrd. Div.	Helwan 7th March, 44 Altamura	Helwan 20th March, 44 Altamura (on arrival of A.P.O. 5) April, 44

## 10 HONOURS AND AWARDS

June 1946 :	Lt.-Col. G. A. Leech	O.B.E.
January 1946 :	Lt.-Col. A. B. McDonald	O.B.E.
January 1946 :	Maj. H. E. Watts	M.B.E.
January 1946 :	Capt. N. H. Nye	M.B.E.
January 1946 :	Sgt. P. J. Bunce	M.B.E.

(Sgt. Bunce had served in East Africa, Mid. East and U.K.)

Lt.-Col. A. B. McDonald Capt. J. J. V. O'Neil Capt. J. G. Phimister Lt. N. C. Unwin Capt G. F. Green and 8 other ranks	}	Mentioned in Despatches: Mediterranean Theatres.
Lt. W. Hill Lt. O. G. Nicholls and 2 other ranks	}	Commendations: Union.

## 11 NOTES

### a. POSTAGE AND POSTAGE STAMPS

- i. South African troops were required to pay postage on air mail correspondence, parcels, etc., sent to the Union from the following countries : Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika, Eritrea (Italian Somaliland), British Somaliland, Ethiopia and East African Postage Stamps were sold by the South African Army Post Office. In Northern Rhodesia stamps of that country were used.

- ii. When the British troops of the Mediterranean Force arrived in Egypt all soldiers were required to pay postage, but after negotiations, arrangements were concluded whereby letters posted "On Active Service" were accepted free. Air Letter Cards were introduced to certain countries of the British Commonwealth and British postage stamps were used in payment.
- iii. Egyptian postage stamps were used for all items which had to be passed to the Egyptian civil post offices for delivery on onward transmissions.
- iv. At all Army Post Offices established in Egypt, in accordance with the arrangements concluded, Egyptian date stamps supplied by the Egyptian Civil Administration were used for cancellation purposes.
- v. With the advent of Dominion troops permission was granted to the Dominion Army Postal Services serving them to organise their own postal services and to use stamps of their own Dominions.
- vi. In order to facilitate postal arrangements generally it was an unwritten law that any postal items bearing postage stamps of British or Dominion Army Postal Services serving in the same area, would be accepted at any Army Post Office under their respective controls.
- vii. Outside of Egypt cancellations were effected by means of the date stamps of the British and Dominion Army Postal Services.
- viii. A credit stock of Union of South Africa postage stamps and registered envelopes was issued by the Postmaster-General and South African Army Post Offices operating in the following countries were supplied with stamps for sale to troops: Madagascar, Egypt, Libya, Cyrenaica, Tripolitania, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Sicily, Italy, Great Britain, and South Africa.
- ix. The credit stock with the demand and the amounts were fixed as follows :
 

5. 7.1941	— R 20 000;
23. 7.1941	— R 50 000;
26.11.1941	— R 70 000;
19. 4.1944	— R100 000;
20.11.1944	— R120 000;
21. 8.1945	— R100 000;
10.12.1945	— R 60 000.
- ix. Postage stamps as indicated hereunder were despatched from the Union of South Africa.
 

Madagascar,	1942 : R278
Middle East,	1941 : R128.500
	1942 : R150 646
	1943 : R143 144
	1944 : R211 442
	1945 : R149 704

**b. POSTAL PERSONNEL**

i. *Lt.-Col. G. A. Leech, O.B.E.*

1. 5.1939 — Appointed Director Army Postal Services (D.A.P.S.), Union Defence Force.
31. 1.1946 — Held post (Pretoria) until 31.1.1946.

ii. *Lt.-Col. P. J. Pyper.*

- 20. 5.1940 — Left the Union by air to East Africa (as a Captain).  
— Appointed Assistant Director Army Postal Services, Union Defence Force.
- 26. 8.1940 — Promoted Major. Appointed Deputy Director A.P.S., U.D.F.
- 12.10.1940 — Appointed Assistant Director A.P.S., East African Force.
- 1.11.1940 — Promoted Acting Lt.-Col.
- 7. 2.1941 — Promoted Lt.-Col.
- 2. 7.1943 — Left East Africa for the Union of South Africa.

iii. *Lt.-Col. A. B. McDonald, O.B.E.*

- 4. 1.1941 — Arrived in East Africa by air from the Union of South Africa as Deputy Assistant Director A.P.S., South African Force (as a Major).
- 24. 6.1941 — Left East Africa by sea from Berbera for the Middle East (M.E.).
- 18. 7.1941 — Arrived in the Middle East as A.D.A.P.S., Middle East Force, Cairo.
- June, 1942 — Promoted to Lt.-Col.
- September, 1944 — Moved from Cairo to Rome as A.D.A.P.S., Central Mediterranean Force/Middle East Force. Established office in Rome with effect from 22.9.1944.
- 2. 6.1945 — Left for the Union of South Africa via the Middle East.
- 4. 6.1945 — Arrived in the Middle East from the Central Mediterranean Force (C.M.F.)
- 8. 6.1945 — Left for the Union of South Africa (recalled to civil duties. Succeeded by Lt.-Col. J. G. Phimister (see iv).

iv. *Lt.-Col. J. P. Phimister.*

Appr.

- November, 1941 — As a Lt. from D.A.P.S. Office, Pretoria, to the Middle East as Officer Commanding Base Post Office 29, Cairo (*vide* Capt. Wain).
- 15.10.1944 — Officer Commanding of newly formed Forward Base Post Office Unit, M.E. (Post Office 29).
- April, 1945 — Appointed D.A.D.A.P.S., M.E. Force, with effect from 27.3.1945, *vide* Maj. O. Neil (see v), at Cairo. Promoted Major.
- 12. 5.1945 — To Rome to take over from Lt.-Col. A. B. McDonald (see iii).
- 8. 6.1945 — Succeeded Lt.-Col. A. B. McDonald as A.D.A.P.S., C.M.F./M.E.F. in Rome. Promoted Lt.-Col. Succeeded by Maj. R. A. L. Mandy (see vi).
- 12.10.1945 — Moved back from Rome to Cairo.
- 10.12.1945 — Left the Middle East for the Union of South Africa.

v. *Maj. J. J. V. O'Neil.*

- 4. 7.1940 — Lt. J. J. V. O'Neil arrived in East Africa ex the Union of South Africa by air. Officer Commanding 1 Div. Postal Unit.
- 3. 6.1941 — Left East Africa for the Middle East by sea.

- 9. 6.1941 — Arrived in the Middle East. Posted to General Headquarters Postal Unit.
- October, 1941 — Captain.
- 9.10.1943 — As Officer Commanding General Headquarters Postal Unit, arrived at Taranto. Established Base Post Office, Bari.
- 29.11.1943 — Returned to Cairo, having handed over at Bari to Capt. G. F. Green.
- 1. 9 1944 — General Headquarters Postal unit established in the Middle East.
- 5.10.1944 — Appointed D.A.D.A.P.S., Middle East Force, Cairo. Promoted Major. Acting Officer Commanding of newly established 4 L. of C. Postal Unit.
- 12. 3.1945 — Left the Middle East for the Union of South Africa on leave.
- April, 1945 — Not to return to the Middle East on medical grounds. Succeeded by Maj. J. G. Phimister (see iv).

vi. *Maj. R. A. L. Mandy.*

- September, 1940 — As a Sergeant to East Africa from the Union of South Africa. Arrived in October.
- 13. 4.1941 — From East Africa to the Middle East (as a Warrant Officer II). Arrived 2.5.1941.
- 22. 6.1941 — Commissioned 2/Lt. Posted to 1 L. of C. Postal Unit.
- 5. 2.1943 — Established his Headquarters at Tripoli. Was then a Captain and Officer Commanding 1 L. of C. Postal Unit.
- 2. 6.1943 — Handed over at Tripoli to Capt. G. F. Green.
- September, 1943 — To the Union of South Africa.
- 15.10.1944 — Appointed Officer Commanding 4 L. of C. Postal Unit.
- November, 1944 — To the Middle East as Officer Commanding 4 L. of C. Postal Unit (M.E.F. and B.N.A.F.) Arrived in the Middle East 20.11.1944.
- December, 1944 — Temporary Officer Commanding Forward Base Post Office Bari.
- 8. 6.1945 — Succeeded Lt.-Col. J. G. Phimister (see iv) as D.A.-D.A.P.S., M.E.F., Cairo. (A./D.A.D.A.P.S. since 12.5.1945). Promoted Major.
- 10.12.1945 — Left in control of all postal matters of policy M.E.F./C.M.F. (as D.A.D.A.P.S. on departure of Lt.-Col. J. G. Phimister (see iv) to the Union of South Africa.
- 7. 5.1946 — Left the Middle East for the Union of South Africa.

vii. *Maj. G. R. O'Connor.*

- 26. 5.1940 — O.C. Training Depot, Potchefstroom.
- 29.12.1940 — Arrived (as a Captain) in East Africa from the Union of South Africa (by air).
- January, 1941 — Acted as Officer Comanding Base Post Office, Nairobi, for a month.
- 1. 2.1941 — Appointed D.A.D.A.P.S., East African Force. Promoted Major.
- January, 1942 — Ex East Africa on Union leave.



- 29.11.1942 — Passed away in the Union of South Africa. Succeeded as D.A.D.A.P.S. by Maj. R. W. Fordyce (see viii) in November, 1942.
- viii. *Maj. R. W. Fordyce.*
23. 9.1945 — Arrived in East Africa by sea from the Union of South Africa.
- January/  
February, 1942 — Left East Africa for the Union (leave).  
20. 4.1942 — Returned to East Africa.  
28. 5.1942 — Promoted Major. Appointed D.A.D.A.P.S., E.A.F. *vide* Maj. G. R. O'Conner (see vii).  
8. 5.1943 — Reverted to Captain. Left East Africa for the Union of South Africa. Returned to the Union 25.5.1943.  
1. 8.1943 — Released from full time service and returned to civil occupation.  
15. 8.1943 — Transferred in the substantive rank of Major to the Reserve of Officers, Union Defence Force, Postal Branch Section 1, with effect from 15.8.1943, by virtue of full time service.
- ix. *Capt. B. P. Mandy.*
- June, 1940 — (As a Private) to East Africa from the Union of South Africa.  
August, 1941 — To East Africa A.P.C.  
March, 1942 — Returned to East Africa.  
1. 4.1942 — Commissioned 2/Lt. in East Africa.  
1.10.1942 — Promoted Lt. in East Africa.  
26. 2.1943 — Left East Africa for the Union of South Africa.  
April, 1943 — Left the Union for the Middle East. Arrived 4.5.1943.  
12. 6.1944 — Ex Middle East for the Union (by air).  
27. 6.1944 — Left the Union for the Middle East. Arrived 30.6.1944.  
28. 7.1944 — Ex Middle East to the United Kingdom as Officer Commanding Postal Section, Repatriation Unit. Arrived in Great Britain 15.8.1944.  
21.11.1945 — Ex United Kingdom to the Union of South Africa.
- x. *Capt. H. H. Nye, M.B.E.*
1. 6.1940 — (As a Sergeant) arrived in East Africa by sea from the Union of South Africa.  
8. 5.1941 — Detached to E.A.A.P.S.  
20.10.1941 — Embarked at Mombasa for the Union of South Africa.
- xi. *Lt. N. Last.*
28. 6.1941 — (As W/O. II) ex East Africa to the Middle East where he arrived 11.7.1941.  
27.10.1941 — Commissioned 2/Lt.  
28.11.1942 — Lost his life when the "Nova Scotia" was sunk north of Durban (on his way to the Union of South Africa, leave).
- xii. *2/Lt. T. E. Sinclair.*
3. 6.1941 — (As W/O. II) ex East Africa to the Middle East where he arrived 9.6.1941.  
1. 7.1941 — Commissioned 2/Lt. Posted to 1 Div. Postal Unit.

c. "HOW YOUR LETTERS GO NORTH"

Broadcast talk by Lt.-Col. George Leech,  
*Director Army Postal Services (30.9.1941).*

Post! Post! What an important factor it is in our daily life but how few people give any serious thought to it until they or one of their dear ones are absent.

To the soldier on active service it is the tie between him and his loved ones. In fact, it means everything to him and nothing is more likely to create discontent or undermine morale more than the lack of news from home.

This became very evident when Colonel Stallard paid a visit to the South African troops in Mid. East a few months ago. Everywhere he went soldiers grumbled about post and the Army Postal Service was, for a time, most unpopular.

All the men in the Army Post Office are recruited from the Civil Postal Service and they are, therefore, experts at their jobs. In civil life their training teaches them that it is a crime to delay any postal article and that is the spirit that governs all our actions. Recently a band of enthusiastic women have joined us and they display the same spirit and are giving excellent results. Each one of us have near relatives up north. All this being so, you will ask, how is it that letters and parcels are sometimes delayed for months at a time. That is a perfectly legitimate question which I will try to answer although I cannot hope to cover every case.

When a complaint is general, the reason is usually not far to seek. No means of getting mails forward. Apart from the airmail — of which more anon — the only means of conveyance between the Union and Egypt is by sea. Now bear in mind that all the shipping in the Commonwealth must be controlled from a central point, that is the Admiralty, and this being so, you will appreciate why the battle of the Atlantic has a very definite bearing upon the delivery of the mails, not only from the United Kingdom to the Union, but upon the mails to our soldiers in the Middle East. Ships must voyage in convoys which are not only irregular, but not always frequent. If your parcel happens to reach Durban just after a convoy leaves, it may have to wait weeks before it is despatched from the Union. The object of convoys is safety and this governs their movements. Their speed is the speed of the slowest vessel and when they leave we do not know whether the mails will be three or six weeks on the way. Some ships have returned to port days after we have said goodbye to them. Some are diverted en route for more urgent services. When they reach their destination the port may be in a bombing area, and if there has been a blitz, days must pass before the mail can be landed. These are but a few of our troubles, but they do illustrate that with all the goodwill in the world there are difficulties which we cannot overcome. Air mails are despatched regularly twice a week, but your 1½d. letters, your newspapers and your parcels are subject to delay and can only be sent forward as vessels become available.

In the case of individuals, a great deal depends upon the particular unit that a man is attached to. The Army Post Office does not deliver post to individual soldiers. There is an N.C.O. in each unit specially appointed for that purpose and it is his job to see that post for any soldier who happens to be away from his unit, is either sent on, or redirected and handed back to the Army Post Office. In the grand show that our lads put up in Abyssinia not only did the main force move at a pace not previously recorded in history, but as they progressed, bits and pieces of all kinds of units were left behind, or scattered over that vast country on special duties. These were the men with whom it was diffi-

cult to maintain contact. And talking of Abyssinia — trying to make postal arrangements was a nightmare. It has been put to me that if supplies could be got forward, why not post. Well — I feel quite sure that we could have equalled the magnificent job of work done by those responsible for the commissariat, if it had been possible to obtain three months post in advance and distribute letters indiscriminately, one to each man once a week. But unfortunately we can't issue letters like tins of bully beef.

Quite a lot of our troubles, too, would have been solved if Brigadier Pienaar and his gallant First Brigade had been able to supply us with an itinerary. But no one knew that they were going to charge through that vast country like a whirlwind and all our preliminary arrangements were valueless.

Try and visualise the coastline — Mombasa, Kismayo, Mogadishu and Berbera with Aden opposite. First stop Kismayo. As soon as opportunity offered thousands of bags were rushed up only to find that the birds had flown and had already captured Mogadishu.

It would have been quite a simple matter to divert the mails had we controlled the shipping. But under great difficulties the mails had been got ashore and then it was a case of patience. The "powers that be" had lost interest in Kismayo and to get the mails to Mogadishu it was necessary to send them all the way back to Mombasa. More patience waiting — waiting for transport. Later the same performance had to be gone through getting the mails from Mogadishu to Berbera.

Subsequently, thanks to the rains and Italian mines, Abyssinia was cut off by road. The monsoons had commenced and shipping — still influenced by the battle of the Atlantic — was scarce. Vehicular transport was, by then, more valuable than gold, and the claims of food, petrol, ammunition and water had to be considered and were given priority.

There were delays, I know, but none that it was humanly possible to overcome.

Then came the move to Egypt, once more, if it had been possible to plan and move to a time-table and obtain shipping space as and when we required it, the job would have been easy. But with common sense and a little understanding you will appreciate that it is quite impossible to announce the movements of troops by convoy, weeks in advance. And once again the battle of the Atlantic interfered and played its tricks. Orders and instruction had to be countermanded and it was quite impracticable to anticipate movement and delays which were inevitable.

For the first week or two in Egypt no air service was available and, as I have already explained, if you just miss a sea mail at Durban an ordinary letter takes weeks in transit.

This position has been met by the introduction of the Active Service letter cards which are despatched twice a week by air and take seven to ten days for delivery.

Many people continue to pay 1/3d. for air mail letters which is extravagant and this practice may cause embarrassment if the postings exceed the limit of the carrying capacity. At present there is no danger but an aeroplane or flying-boat is not like a ship where another hundred bags of mail makes no difference. The weight that can be carried by air is strictly limited and cannot be exceeded on any account, so help us and yourselves by using Active Service Letter Cards. If one is not enough, use two.

Briefly, the means of getting letters to the lad up North are :

- i. Active Service Letter Cards which cost 3d. each and can be purchased at any Post Office.
- ii. Air Mail letters at 1/3d. per half ounce.

Active Service Letter Cards and Air mail letters are despatched by air twice a week.

Ordinary letters prepaid at the Inland rates are sent by sea. Pending a sufficient supply of letter cards, some of these 1½d. letters have been sent by air but the continuance of this service as a regular feature is not practicable. So if you want to communicate with your soldier up north quickly, send him an Active Service letter card.

Newspapers and books are in great demand and the charge is no more than for the carriage of the same article in the Union.

Parcels for soldiers are accepted at a special rate of threepence per pound — probably the cheapest in the world.

I want to repeat 1½d. letters, newspapers and parcels are sent by sea and they only go forward when ships are available.

Now will you please listen to some of my grumbles.

See that your letters are properly addressed.

Don't enquire when a mail goes. Write often and post it is soon as you have written.

If you have a genuine grievance we want to know about it. Other people may be similarly affected and if there is anything wrong the sooner it is put right the better. Writing to the newspapers won't help you — write to the Director of Army Postal Services at Defence Headquarters. But please be patient and when your soldier writes that he received your letter but not the parcel ask yourself whether it has had time to reach him, whether it was properly addressed, and most important whether it was properly packed.

One dear lady was most annoyed because she sent her husband two pairs of socks size 10, when they got there they were far too small. If you could see the jumble of articles and loose wrappers that fall out of mail bags at Durban and the time that is wasted trying to connect loose biscuits, tins of jam, sweets, socks and so on, with wrappers labelled "comforts," you would understand how easy it is to put the wrong pairs into a parcel simply labelled "socks."

It is simply incredible how some people even imagine it possible for parcels to reach their destination loosely packed in tissue fastened with gummed paper just as they were handed over any bazaar counter. The ideal method is to pack a parcel tightly in a strong container, wrap it in cloth and then sew it up.

It is quite impracticable to treat parcels like boxes of eggs. Just watch mail being loaded on any station platform and think.

Don't send perishables. We had to search through 600 bags the other day to find a cooked fowl!

Don't send canned beer. After the tins have been bounced about, the corks leak. If you don't believe that statement hold a tin above your head and drop it once or twice and note the results.

Our concern is the protection of the other parcels that is why liquids are forbidden.

Hard-boiled eggs don't carry either — nor yet sausages.

The battle of the Atlantic affects other soldiers much more than the South Africans and it may be of interest to know that our postal service is the envy of our allies, mainly because our favourable geographic position permits a more rapid and frequent service.

The concern of the South African public for the lads up north is shown by the huge amount of traffic we are called upon to handle and I am quite sure that as letter writers their equal had not been met.

During August we dispatched 165 000 parcels, 261 000 newspapers and books, and 773 000 letters.

A million and a quarter articles in one month!

If one of yours seems to be a long time on its way please be patient and rest assured that the Army Post Office leaves no stone unturned in its efforts to serve our splendid boys up north.

Since I actually drafted this broadcast, I have received advices from several people in the Union about letters returned from the north marked "present address unknown. Sender please furnish new address" and I would like to say that it is most disappointing to us not to have been able to deliver them. It is necessary to make it clear that each and every one of those letters were, in the first place, delivered to the Regiment to which they were addressed. As I have already explained, if a man is absent from his unit it is the duty of the Postal N.C.O. in the regiment to re-direct the letters. This was done whenever possible, but there were occasions when a man, for one of the dozen reasons which occur in war-time, was sent to an address other than originally intended, and then in most cases the letters were handed back to the Army Post Office and we made a final effort to find him. Let us look at a parallel case in ordinary life. If you left your home in Johannesburg to go to Port Elizabeth, and upon arrival at Bloemfontein, you decided to stay there. The people at Port Elizabeth wouldn't know where you were and after keeping your letters for some time, they would be returned through the Post Office to the sender. If, however, you wrote home and told them to send your letters to Bloemfontein; you would receive them without delay. It is really remarkable how few men absent from their units took the trouble to let the various people that mattered, know where they were.

Most of the letters that are being returned are a few months old and they are being returned in the belief that the senders would prefer it. In the majority of cases the senders have new addresses, in others the men have returned to their original units and parents and friends know that all is well. Knowing the keen disappointment created, I ask you to accept my assurance that we would sooner deliver a letter ten times over than return it once.

I would stress the fact that the Post Office, army or civil, can only deliver to the addresses shown on the covers, supplied in the first place by the sender or subsequently by some unit, hospital, or depot to which he has been attached. When all the available records to which you have access have been searched without avail, then and only then do we go back to the sender.

One last whisper — enquiries are frequently made about customs duty. Cigarettes are liable to duty, but the Egyptian Government is very lenient and so long as the privilege is not abused, no soldier is likely to be charged duty.

Finally — Christmas parcels. In order to get parcels to the troops by Christmas they should be posted no later than November 8th.

