

4. Light Horse Brigade Datestamps and Military Censor Cachets

Datestamps overview

With the end of the Gallipoli conflict, the Australian troops were sent back to Egypt to recuperate before engaging in their next campaigns. Infantry soldiers were sent to the Western Front from March to July 1916, whilst the Light Horse troops were retained for the mounted offensive with the Turks.

Arrangement of the infantry brigade datestamps and military censor cachets

An arrangement of the infantry brigade datestamps and military censor cachets in chronological order would provide a disjointed representation of the material which would be difficult to interpret. A more realistic approach is defined by featuring four main categories comprising:

4.1 Formation of the Australian Army Corps postal facilities
4.2 Censorship of the mail

4.3 Military censor cachets
4.4 Instructional cachets

Datestamp manufactured by the Postal Services Section of the British Royal Engineers

With the exception of the 1st Light Horse cds, all the datestamps for this campaign were manufactured by the British Royal Engineers employed by the military postal service. There were two standard types of datestamps with three varieties used only sparingly. These will be discussed in greater detail throughout the exhibit.

The range of datestamps used for the campaign

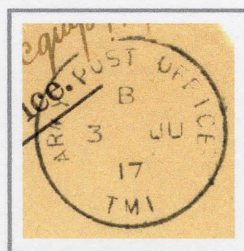
There was a vast range of different datestamps used for the campaign. Illustrated below are a few examples:



1st Light Horse cds made in Australia.



Typical British Army and Field PO cds.



Skeleton type cds.



Unusual early British cds type.

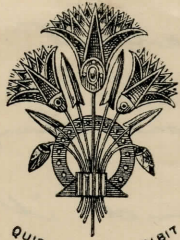


The 3rd Light Horse datestamp was manufactured by the British Royal Engineers in April 1915 and used throughout the Gallipoli Campaign before being allocated for the Light Horse conflict. This datestamp was the only one of its type used during the Light Horse Campaign.

4.1 Formation of the Australian Army Corps postal facilities

Mail from Shepheard's Hotel

Shepheard's Hotel was the most elegant hotel in Egypt before being requisitioned for the postal facilities of the Australian Army Corps Headquarters on the 10.1.1915, with a datestamp manufactured by the British Royal Engineers. The hotel was used by the Australian Branch of the British Red Cross Society, and was used as an informal meeting place for officers. The postal facilities at the hotel operated from the Gallipoli conflict through to the end of the Light Horse Campaign.



16. 2. 18

SHEPHEARD'S HOTEL
CAIRO.

My dear Father,

Just up in town for

a short trip. Off to Luxor tomorrow &

hope - its

seeing I

I got a

Some one

Australian

I did not

was up

was up

gained an



SHEPHEARD'S HOTEL
CAIRO.

On active service BR French



16 Feb 1918

J. Russell French Esq.

Bank of New South Wales

Head Office

Sydney (N.S.W.)

Australia

An envelope and letterhead from Shepheard's Hotel addressed to New South Wales and cancelled by the hotel cds dated the 16.2.1918 and processed through the British military postal service.

Ex Emery

4.2 Censorship of the mail

Censorship of Australian mail prior to the Light Horse Campaign

During the Gallipoli Campaign and on their return to Egypt, censorship of Australian mail was performed by Australian military postal officials. This censorship extended to most of the units censoring the mail before being processed in Cairo or Alexandria and sent home.

The Australian Light Horse was under the direction of the British Mediterranean Forces, who had a much more structured system for processing the mail written by Australian soldiers, especially for censorship. With the Australian mounted troops directly under their command, the British military administration resolved to lock down the censorship function. As such, most of the mail was heavily censored, with virtually no Australian privately produced rubber censor cachets compared to the plethora of handstamps used by the Australian units in Egypt for the Gallipoli conflict.

British censor cachets allocated to Australian units

The British military postal administration authorised the use of their censor cachets to the Australian Light Horse Brigades where they allocated blocks of four or five numbers when required. These numbers were used throughout the campaign, with occasional replacements for lost numbers. More work needs to be done to identify which censor numbers were allocated to each unit.

Censor cachet Type CM 3

Recorded Usage: March 1916 - June 1919

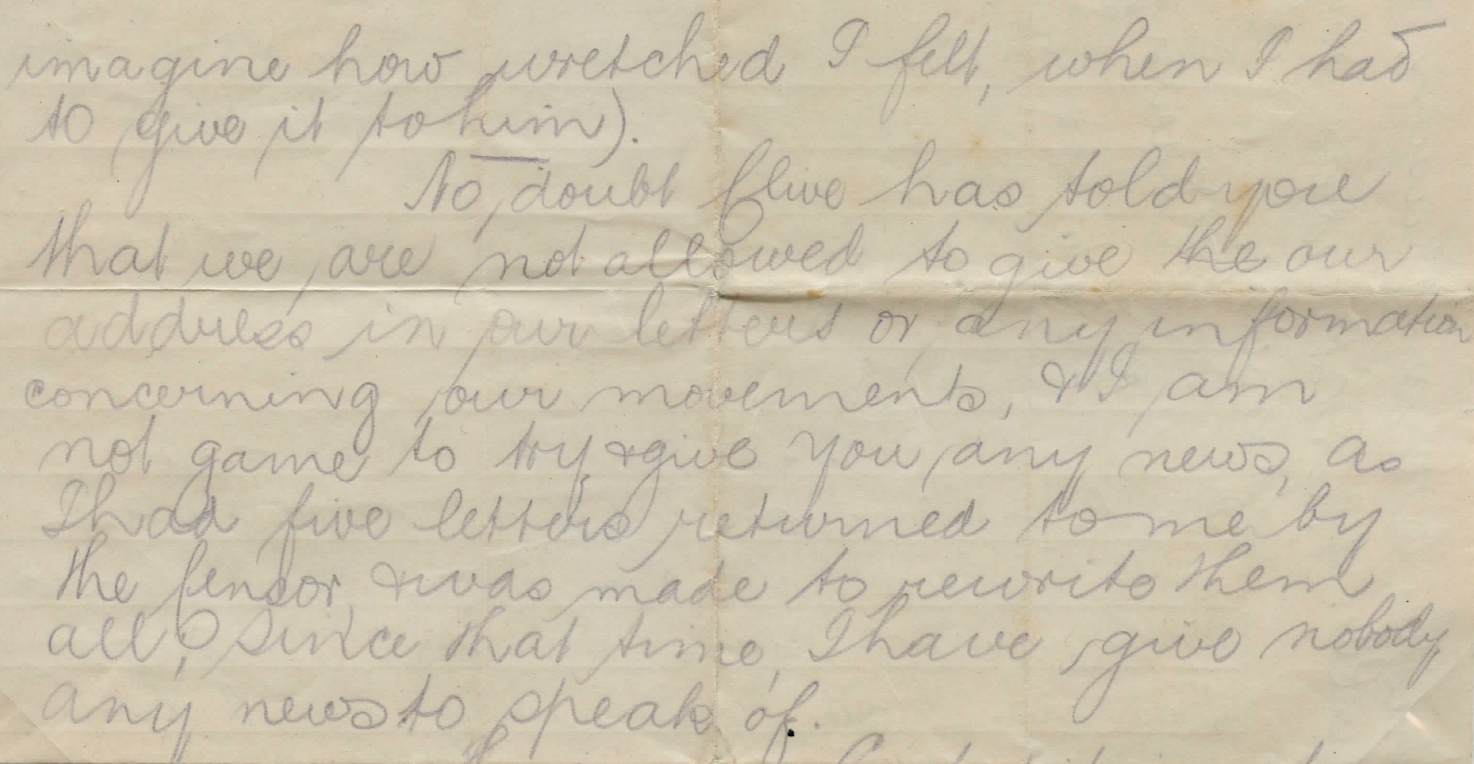


An envelope cancelled by the 1st Light Horse Details datestamp of the 3.10.1917 with the boxed diamond "PASSED BY CENSOR/ No. 2905" cachet in purple (Firebrace Type CM 3). This censor handstamp was the type used on Australian mail throughout the campaign and is known struck in purple, black, and rose inks.

4.2 Censorship of the mail

Censorship lockdown by the British military postal officials

It is unusual to find documented evidence of the strict lockdown by the British military postal officials compared to their Australian counterparts in the Gallipoli campaign. This letter was written by Private Henry Whyte of the 12th Light Horse Regiment and cancelled by the Australian Army Base post office when it was stationed at Moascar in September 1916. It describes in detail his experience of censorship with letters recently written to home.



imagine how wretched I felt, when I had to give it to him).
No doubt Clive has told you that we are not allowed to give the our address in our letters or any information concerning our movements, & I am not game to try & give you any news, as I had five letters returned to me by the censor & was made to rewrite them all. Since that time, I have give nobody any news to speak of.

The letter describes how the British censors were much more diligent than the Australians during the Gallipoli campaign. He writes:

“No doubt Clive has told you that we are not allowed to give our address in our letters or any information concerning our movements, and I am not game to try and give you any news, as I had five letters returned to me by the censor and was made to rewrite them all. Since that time, I have given nobody any news to speak of”.

This letter was written just after the Battle of Romani when sensitive information would have been strictly censored.

4.3 Military censor cachets

Australian unit handstamps used as censors - Confirmation of a new theory

Since the early 1980's, there has been a growing body of collectors who believe that the Australian rubber unit cachets manufactured in Egypt served as censor handstamps. During the Gallipoli campaign, the manufacture and use of these cachets was prolific. After Gallipoli, the use of the rubber handstamps in the Light Horse conflict is virtually non-existent. This was due to the British Military Postal Administration who took control of censoring the mail.

In all the cards and envelopes in this section, none of them bear a censor cachet from Egypt. The British censor administration was very strict, and they would not allow mail to be posted uncensored during the campaign. I believe these cachets were manufactured for the following reasons:

1. To identify the origin of the military unit from where the correspondence came from.
2. To act as a censor cachet. In many cases, there is the signature or initials of the censoring officer, adding further evidence that these handstamps were integral to the censorship function.

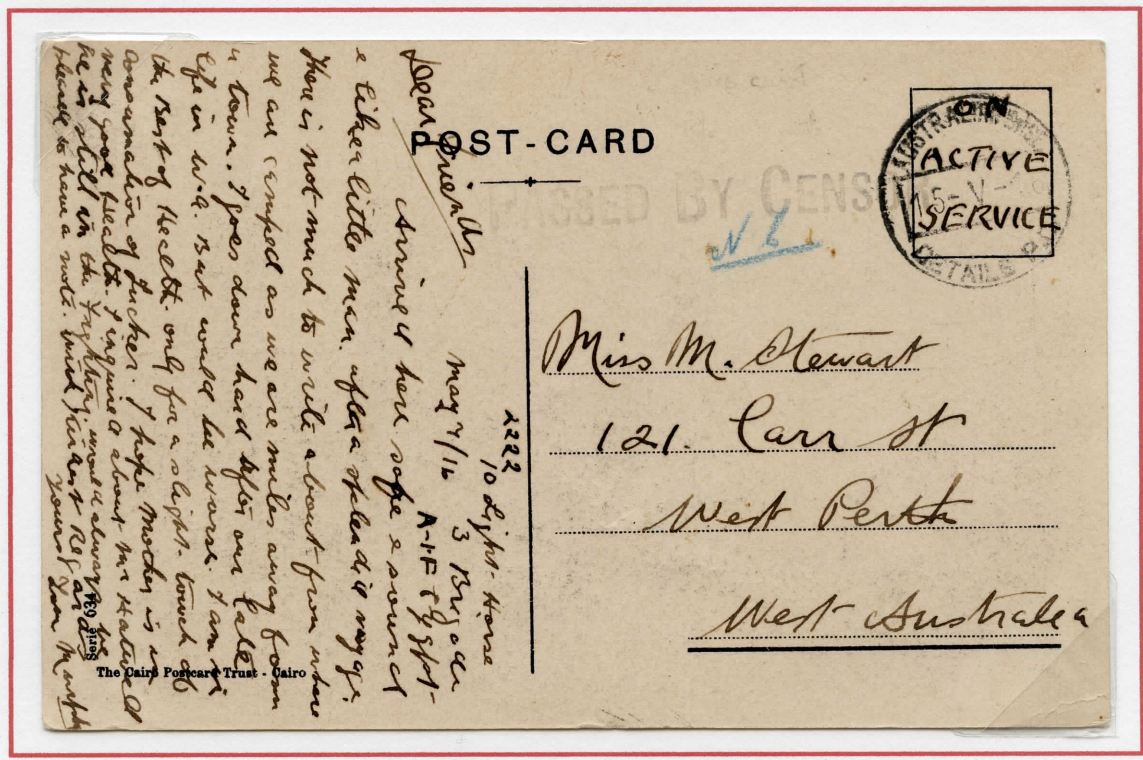
Usage and rarity

All the cachets in this section are rare, with some not recorded in the published texts on the subject. Dates of use are recorded for each cachet, with many only known to have been in use for a couple of weeks. Those items which are boxed in bold represent envelopes or postcards of particular rarity.

Troopship censor cachet used on land

Only date of use: 15.5.1916

At least four troopship censor cachets are recorded from January 1916 and used on land mainly at Zeitoun. The censor handstamp below was used by the A9 H.M.A.T. "Shropshire" which docked at Port Said on the 31.4.1916 as part of the 19th Convoy.



A postcard addressed to Western Australia and cancelled by the Australian Base Details datestamp of the 15.5.1916 with an unframed "PASSED BY CENSOR" cachet in purple blue which was used by the A9 "Shropshire" on the 19th Convoy.

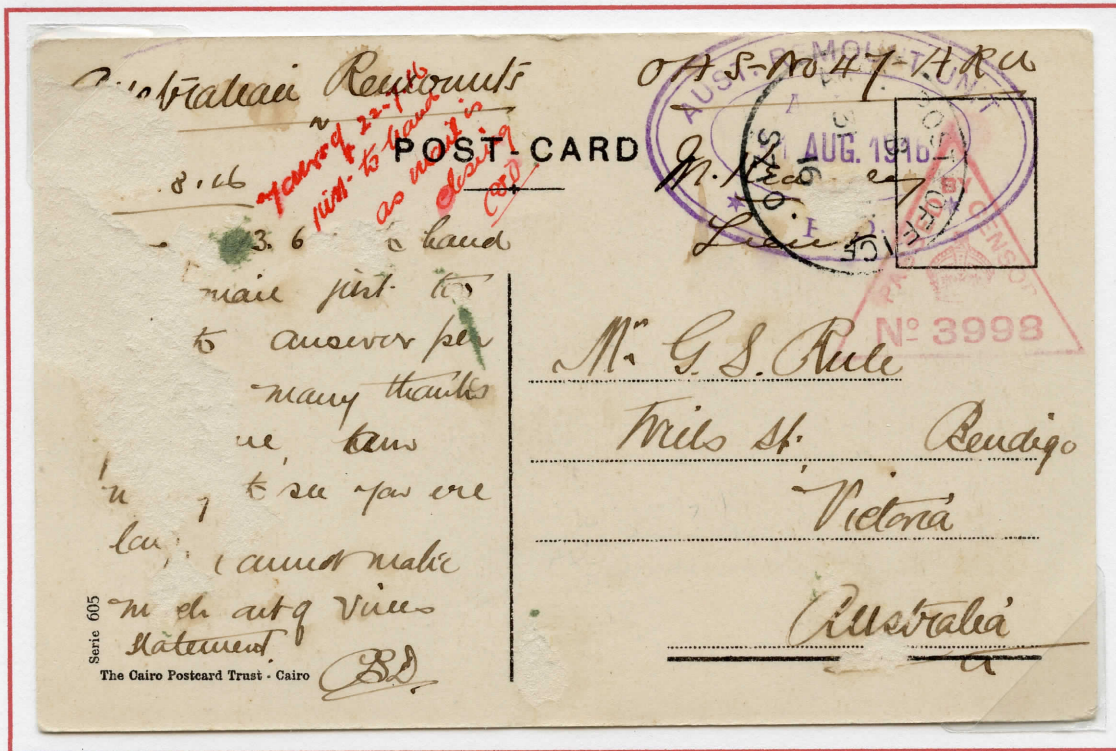
The card is headed "10th Light Horse" and written by Private Thomas Murphy who writes "There is not much to write about from where we are camped as we are miles away from any town. It goes down hard after the late life in W.A. But could be worse." He served throughout the campaign and returned to Australia on the 14.3.1919.

4.3 Military Censor cachets

An unlisted cachet

Australian Unit Cachets

Recorded usage: 31.8.1916

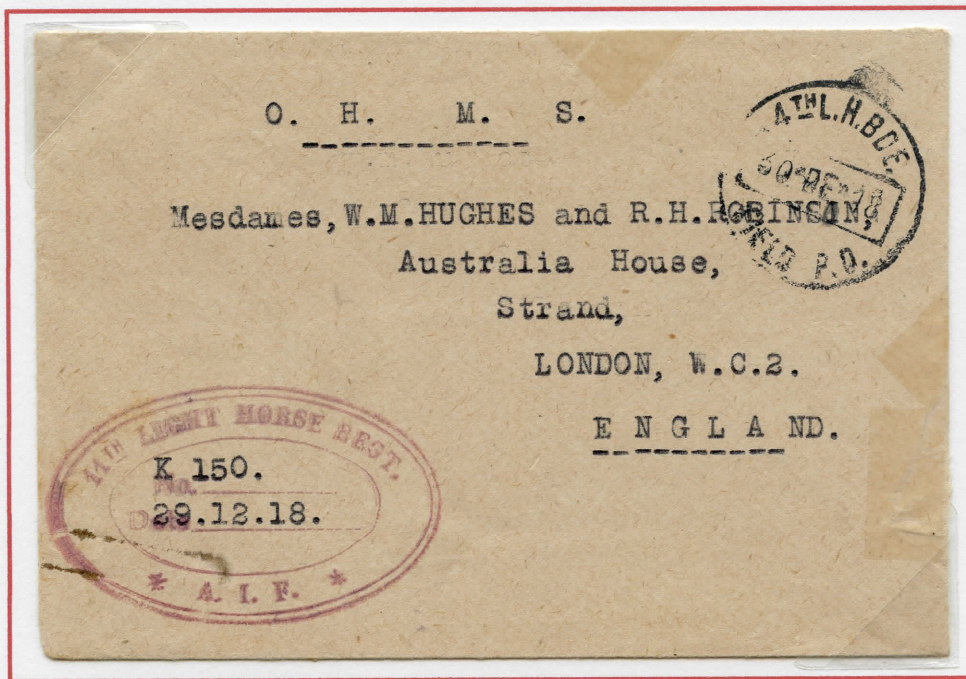


A postcard addressed to Victoria and cancelled by the British Army Post Office SZ 10 datestamp of the 31.8.1916 located at Cairo. There is a double oval "AUST. REMOUNT UNIT/ A.I.F." cachet in violet of the same date which is not recorded by Firebrace.

The only example of this cachet recorded

Censor cachet Type CA 260

Recorded usage: 30.12.1918



An envelope addressed to the wife of the Australian Prime Minister "Billy" Hughes in London with the 4th Light Horse Brigade cds dated the 30.12.1918 when the Brigade was located in Tripoli after the Armistice with Turkey. At the lower left is the rare framed oval "11th LIGHT HORSE REGT./ A.I.F." cachet in purple (Firebrace Type CA 260).

The only example of this cachet recorded

Ex Emery

An unlisted cachet

Recorded date of usage: February 1919

A scarce wood chip envelope with a printed coloured enclosure of George Street, Sydney with a Sydney cds dated the 11.10.1918 and addressed to Sapper George Foster of the 4th Field Company Engineers.



The envelope arrived in Palestine where a manuscript “Not with 4th Field Eng 30/11/18” was applied. The envelope was redirected in the following course of events:

- ◆ The envelope was cancelled by the 4th Light Horse Brigade cds of the 1.12.1918 when the unit was in Lebanon from the 5.11.1918 to the 5.3.1919.
- ◆ The cover was sent to the Australian General Hospital where it received the manuscript “Not at AGH 9/12/18”.
- ◆ The envelope was probably returned to Cairo where it received the “RETURNED TO AUSTRALIA” cachet in black measuring 65 x 5mm (not recorded by Emery).
- ◆ Sent to Australia, the letter arrived in Melbourne where it was handstamped with the boxed “UNABLE TO TRACE/ RETURNED LETTER OFFICE A.I.F./ MELBOURNE/ RETURN TO SENDER” cachet in violet (Emery Type CA 4A).
- ◆ It was then placed in the civilian mail on the 12.5.1919 where the letter had become quite fragile due to the brittle nature of the paper and its extensive travels. It was resealed with official tape and a boxed “RECEIVED OPEN/ RETURNED LETTER OFFICE/ MOORE ST. SOUTH MELBOURNE” and a fickle finger “RETURN TO SENDER” applied.
- ◆ Arriving in Sydney, the envelope received two strikes of the “RETURN/ TO/ SENDER” cachet in black (Emery Type CA 4C) and being finally returned to Neutral Bay in Sydney.

The only example of this instructional cachet recorded