

# **AFRICAN RAILWAYS**

## **How to take full advantage of postal history in the development of a thematic exhibit**

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**STOCKHOLM, May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019**



# AGENDA



1. Content of the “African Railways” exhibit
2. How to use items with postal history relevance
3. Most relevant postal history areas
  - TPOs
  - Train Crash Mail
  - Post offices and agencies of railway stations & cities built because of the railways
  - Free franking privileges & official railway mail
  - Military mail (railway-related)



# CONTENT OF THE EXHIBIT



## THE UNFINISHED NETWORK – HISTORY OF AFRICAN RAILWAYS

1. Before the rails
2. The pioneering phase
3. Exporting raw materials: the link between the ports and the inland
4. The building difficulties
5. The development of the networks
6. The big dreams never completely achieved
7. The wartime importance of African railways
8. Railways structuring the African space
9. 1945-1980: the Golden Age of African railways
10. Towards the XXI century: between opportunities and risks of decline

Historic  
development



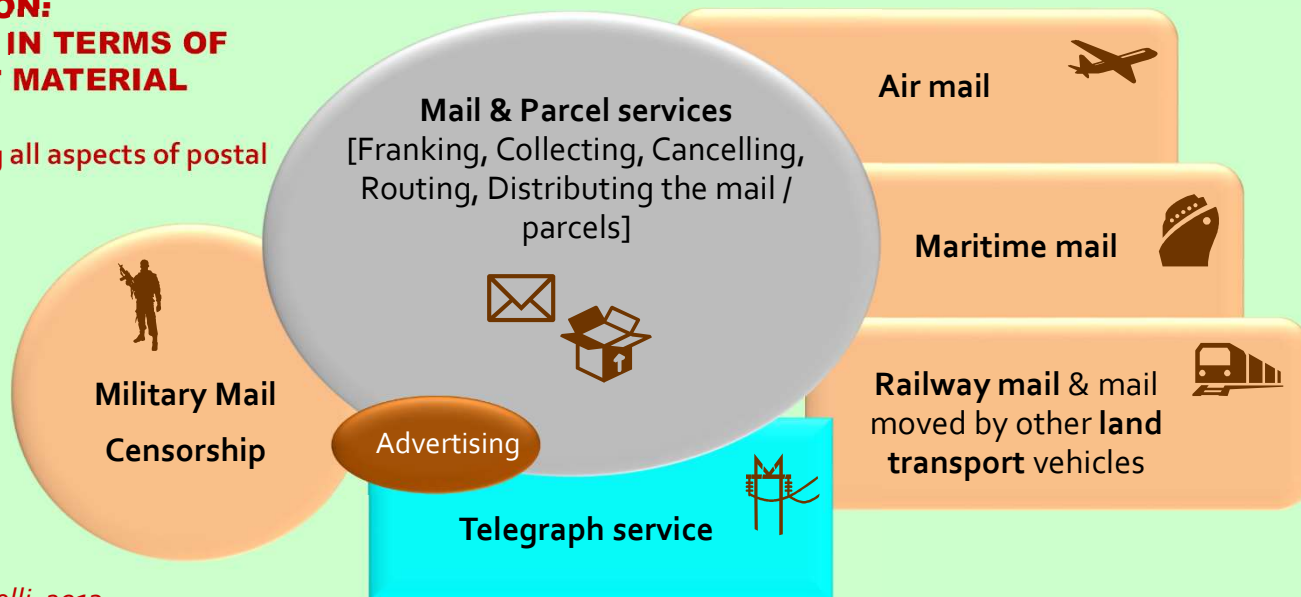


# HOW TO USE ITEMS WITH POSTAL HISTORY RELEVANCE



## SELECTION: VARIETY IN TERMS OF TYPE OF MATERIAL

Considering all aspects of postal services



*Based on G. Morolli, 2013*

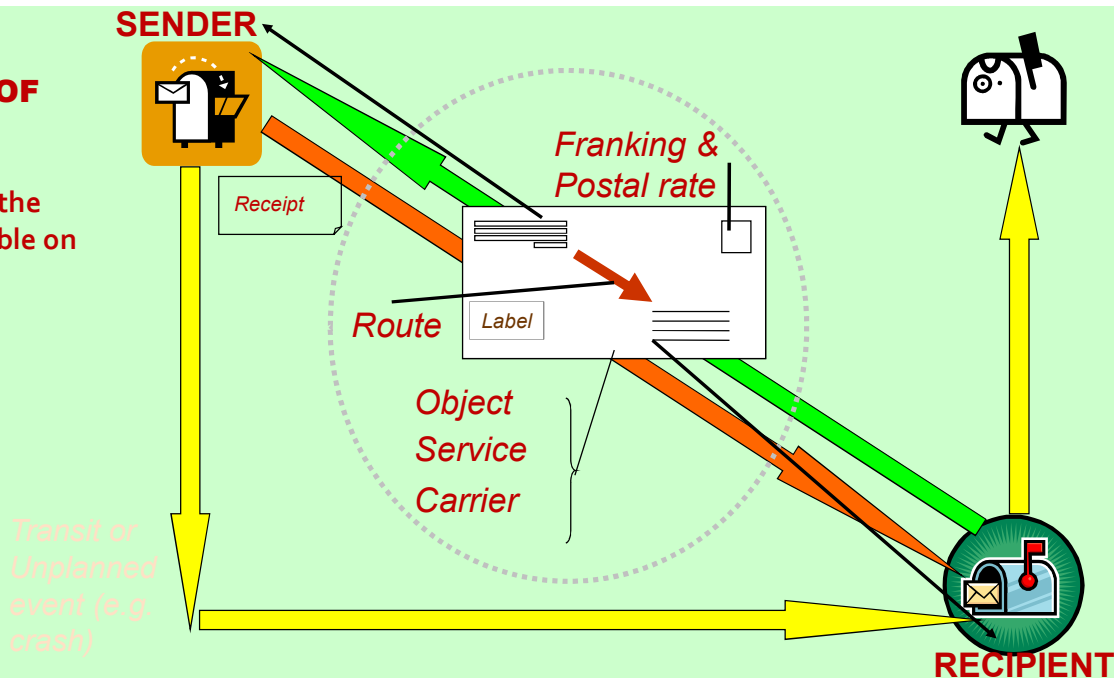


# HOW TO USE ITEMS WITH POSTAL HISTORY RELEVANCE



## SELECTION: VARIETY IN TERMS OF TYPE OF MATERIAL

Considering all aspects of the postal process as identifiable on postal items



Based on G. Morolli, 2013



# HOW TO USE ITEMS WITH POSTAL HISTORY RELEVANCE

- Properly understand the postal history significance of each item
- **Connect the item with the appropriate thematic section** of the exhibit (e.g. construction, opening or extension of the lines, development of cities triggered by railways, evolution in the entities or companies managing the railways, wars and conflicts, safety of transport etc.)
- Maximize the philatelic value by **identifying & looking after uncommon and rare items**, but without losing the thematic connection



# EXPLOITING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POSTAL SERVICE AND THE TOPIC

A SPECIALISED LIBRARY AND MEMBERSHIP TO SPECIALISED ASSOCIATION are essential to identify, find and correctly classify & describe relevant material



ASSOCIATION PHILATELIQUE  
D'ETUDES POSTALES ET MARCOPHILIE  
D'ALGERIE  
PHIL - EA

West Africa Study Circle





# MOST RELEVANT POSTAL HISTORY AREAS



## Railway carrying the mail

- TPOs (including «special» ones organized in particular circumstances)
- Railway letter service (South Africa)
- Transport of parcels & newspapers (Algeria, Congo, Rhodesia, South Africa)



## Train crash, fires & interrupted mail



## Post offices and agencies of railway stations & cities built because of the railways



## Free frank and official mail of railway companies



## Military mail related to the railways



# RAILWAY CARRYING THE MAIL

- **Carriage of mail** was a key function of African railways. The mail agents usually travelled in special **mail vans** or special compartment in normal coaches.
- In Southern Africa, **special TPOs** were organized to accompany particular trains transporting authorities and special interest groups.
- Railways were also used to transport **newspapers and parcels**, in some cases requiring the payment of a fee collected by franking with special railway stamps (Algeria, Belgian Congo, Rhodesia, South Africa).





# EXPLOITING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POSTAL SERVICE AND THE TOPIC

TPOs

## BLIDA ALGERS TPO, 1872

In **Algeria** initially the railway service on trains – the first of such kind in Africa – were organized similarly to the situation on the smaller lines in France, with mail guards on train equipped with “**Convoyeur Station**” postmarks, i.e. undated, ondulated cancels with initials of the line termini in the center, and name of the station were the mail was collected.

This system was quickly replaced by more conventional dated postmarks with full names of line termini.

*From Birtouta, less than 200 French inhabitants at that time, (10.11.1872 - handwritten date inside) to Hypres, posted in the station post-box and picked there by the railway mail guard Blida – Algeri (BL.ALG.)*





# EXPLOITING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POSTAL SERVICE AND THE TOPIC

TPOs

## FAYOUM LIGHT RAILWAYS TPO, 1943

The rural areas of Lower Egypt were reached by narrow-gauge lines, gathered in 3 networks in the areas of Mansura and Damanhur/Tanta, as well as in the zone of the Fayum oasis, built from 1898 by the Fayoum Light Railways Company .

Railway TPOs in Africa being often the only available postal facility, they were used by public not just to post urgent mail, but also to send **registered mail**.

*Travelling post office El-Fayum – Qalam(s)ha (18.08.1943), line of the narrow gauge network of the zone of El Fayum oasis, on registered letter to Side Gaber (arrival postmark on the back) – registered letters from Egyptian TPOs are very rare*





# EXPLOITING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POSTAL SERVICE AND THE TOPIC

SPECIAL TPOs

## ROYAL TOUR, 1925

Prince of Wales (later Edward VIII) visited South Africa from 30 Apr. to 29 Jul. 1925.

The government provided a **special Royal Train** preceded by a Pilot Train. A TPO equipped with special datestamp was available on the pilot train.

The TPO sent on average 100 letters per day (about 9000 in total).



*From the royal train, 1.07.1925, to Durban, with the special postmark of the post office travelling on a 2<sup>nd</sup> train accompanying the royal one*



# EXPLOITING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POSTAL SERVICE AND THE TOPIC

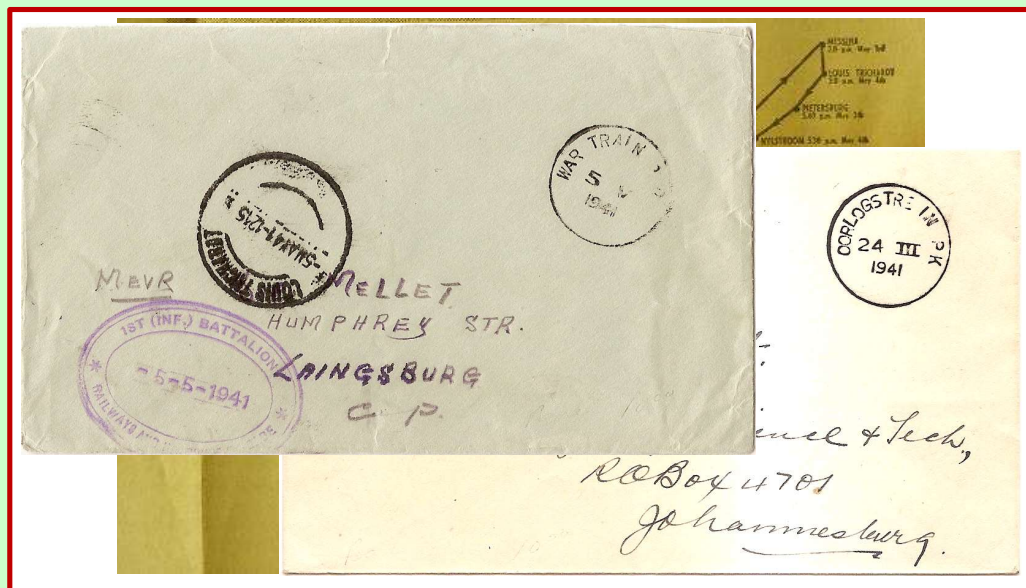
SPECIAL TPOs

## WAR TRAIN, 1941

TPO attached to the **War Train** that in 1941 circulated in all South Africa lines promoting the recruitment in the army and the collection of subscriptions in support of the war effort.

*Free frank letter to Laingsburg from the "War Train", 5.04.1941, with the postmark – with English text – of the travelling post office operating on the train, and the free frank marking of the army's Railway and Harbours Brigade*

*Free frank letter to Johannesburg from the "War Train", 24.03.1941, with the postmark – with Afrikaans text – of the travelling post office operating on the train*





# EXPLOITING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POSTAL SERVICE AND THE TOPIC

## RAILWAY LETTER SERVICE

### RAILWAY LETTER POST IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1931

In South Africa, railway companies were allowed to directly collect mail from customers willing a faster posting.

Such letter were franked with basic postage + **specific railway fee**, and handed on the rail stations' staff who cancelled them by means of the station datestamp.

*"Railway letter" accepted by the Bloemfontein SAR office (15.05.1931) to Durban (arrival postmark 16.05), T110 label for the indication of train and date; franked 4 pence (1st weight postal rate 2 p. + rail-letter fee 2 p.) – the label specify the train number and date*





# EXPLOITING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POSTAL SERVICE AND THE TOPIC

## RAILWAY PARCEL IN GERMAN SOUTH WEST AFRICA

The development of the transport of mail by train also boosted the traffic of parcels between Europe and the colonies, since the weight limits imposed by portage and other less performing means of transport were not a constraint any more.

In some cases, such as German South West Africa, this generated the establishment of a two tariff systems, with lower rates for parcels transported to/from places along the railway lines.

*Parcel of 3 kg from Aus (German Sud-West Africa, 10.12.1913) to Ludwigsburg (Germany, 30.01 arrival postmark on the back) – parcel form franked by 2,50 marks (1-5 kg parcel rate to/from sites along the railway lines, in force between 1910 and 1914; rate for other sites would have been 0,50 marks higher, i.e. 3 marks)*

**134 \*** Aus (Deutsch-Südwestafrika)

Unbei *kein Risiko* Ci-joint

Wertangabe  
Valeur assurée

Nachnahme  
Remboursement

2 In *Ludwigsburg i/n*

(Bestimmungsart) in  
(Lieu de destination)

Wohnung  
(Strasse und Hausnummer)

Postgewicht *3* kg Poids

Zollgebühren.\*)  
Droits de douane.\*)

Postleitvermerk:  
Acheminement:

Von der Grenzeingangspostamt des Bestimmungslandes auszufüllen.  
Cadre à remplir par le bureau d'échange d'entrée du pays de destination.

A. 20.



# EXPLOITING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POSTAL SERVICE AND THE TOPIC

## TRANSPORT OF NEWSPAPERS

### NEWSPAPER TRANSPORTED BY RAIL IN RHODESIA

Rhodesia Railway Ltd. operated the line between Beira and Rhodesia since 1927.

In Southern Rhodesia, the Post Office has facilities for Parcel Post and regular mail. The Rhodesia Railways also handled parcels but such shipments are way-billed and not franked with any stamp. **The Rhodesia Railways, however, issue their own stamps for newspaper parcels.** Regulation stated that "Single newspapers enclosed in wrappers, open at both ends, are carried at one penny per copy, irrespective of distance"

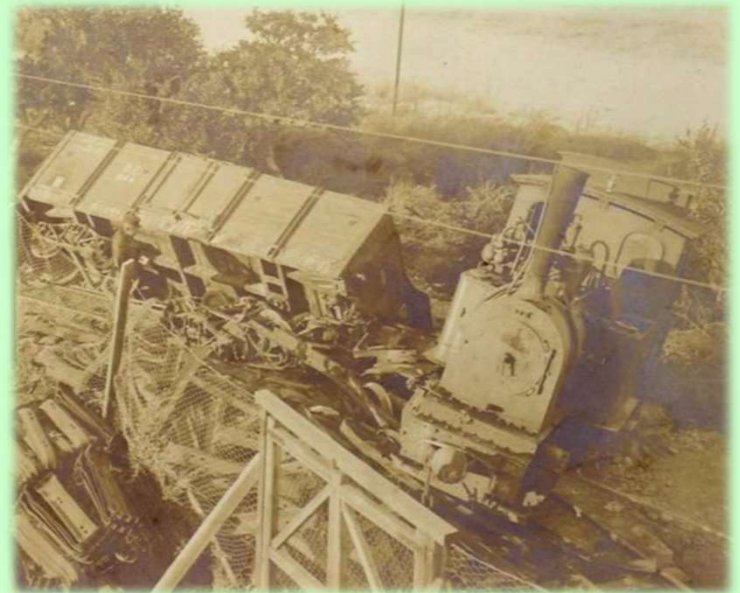
*Wrapper of the newspaper "Noticias da Beira - The Beira News" sent from Beira to Umtali, 21/12/1945 with Mozambican franking completed by 1 p. stamp for the transport of newspapers of the Rhodesia Railways company*





# TRAIN ACCIDENTS AND INTERRUPTED MAIL

- Railways in Africa were often built with **very light equipment**; besides, the staff was not always extensively trained as in Europe, and there were **local constraints** reducing the safety over the lines (such as incursion of wild animals, insects threatening wooden structures , river floods etc.)
- All this created a **relatively high level of railway accidents** if compared with traffic level, a situation that – unfortunately – is still existing today.
- Needless to say, **the carriage of mail also suffered from such situation**, generating several cases of damaged mail due to train fire or other accidents.
- Items related to such events are often very uncommon, and represent an effective evidence of the **precarious operating conditions of the African railways**





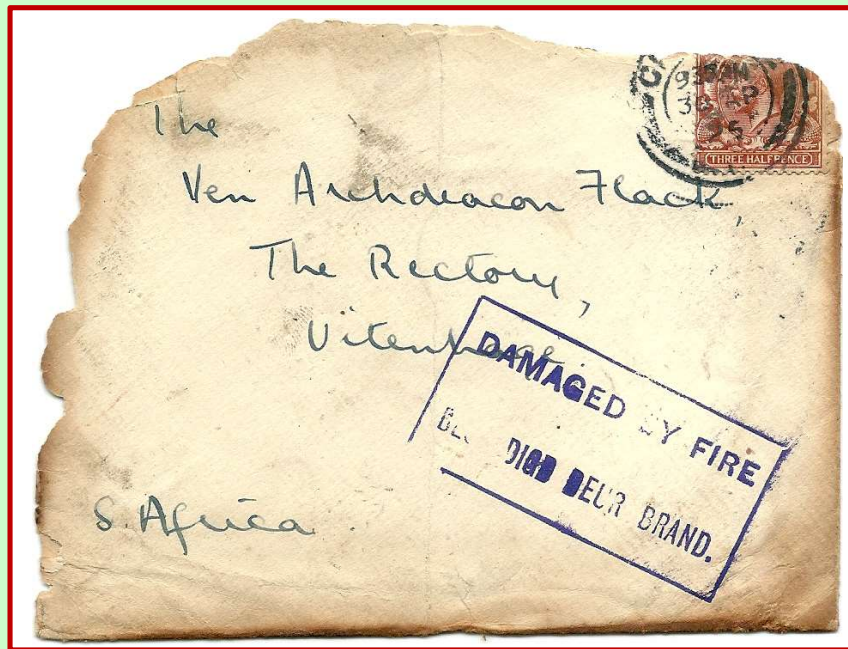
# EXPLOITING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POSTAL SERVICE AND THE TOPIC

TRAIN CRASH &  
INTERRUPTED MAIL

## EUROPEAN NAIL TRAIN FIRE AT KRUIDFONTEIN (S.AFRICA), 1925

A common reason of railway accidents in Africa were the **train fires generated by some inflammable freight** (such as chemicals) and/or the sparks from the locomotives. Most wagons were still made of wood, increasing both the probability and the severity of such kind of disasters.

*From UK, 30.04.1925 to Uitenhage (South Africa) – Mail damaged by the fire on the special European mail train while passing at Kruidfontein (18.05.1925), 197 bags of mail were destroyed; boxed bilingual 2-lines blue linear cachet specifying the reason of the damage*





# EXPLOITING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POSTAL SERVICE AND THE TOPIC

TRAIN CRASH &  
INTERRUPTED MAIL

## KABALO ALBERTVILLE TRAIN FIRE, 1925

*From Kindu, 14.04.1925 to  
Bruxelles – Mail damaged by  
the fire on the train Kabalo –  
Albertville (today Kalemie) on  
the line between river Congo  
and Tanganyika lake operated  
by the “Compagnie des Chemins  
de Fer du Congo Supérieur aux  
Grands Lacs Africains »; linear  
3-lines black cachet explaining  
the damage (only piece known  
– not recorded by Gwynn-  
Hoggarth)*





# EXPLOITING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POSTAL SERVICE AND THE TOPIC

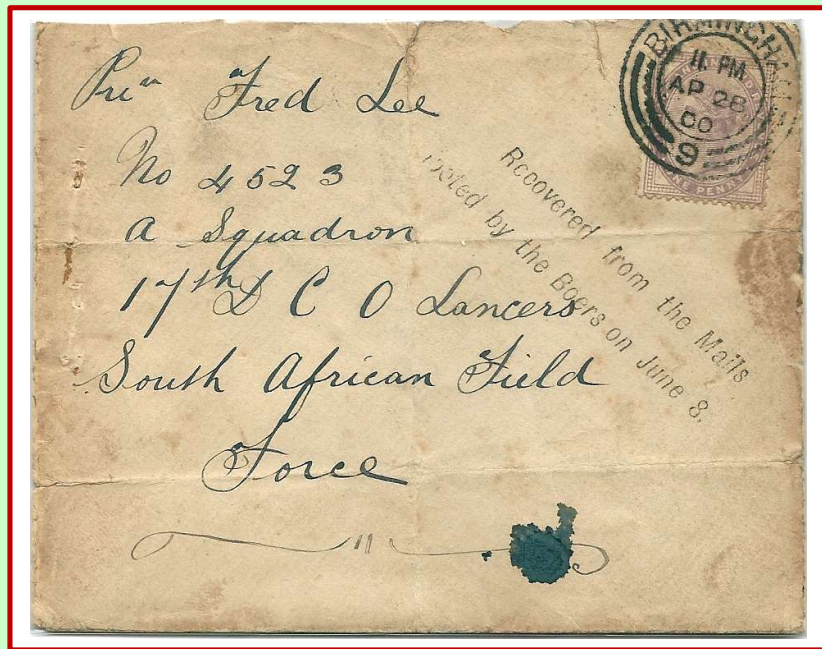
## TRAIN CRASH & INTERRUPTED MAIL

### ROODEWAL INCIDENT, 1900

During their counter attacks, often successful, the Boers did not hesitate to **sabotage railway communications**.

On June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1900 they attacked the **Roodewal station on the line Bloemfontein - Pretoria**, where several wagons with mail for the soldiers at the front were temporarily parked, and subtracted 2000 bags of mail, then partially recovered, and other supplies; they also destroyed the rail installations.

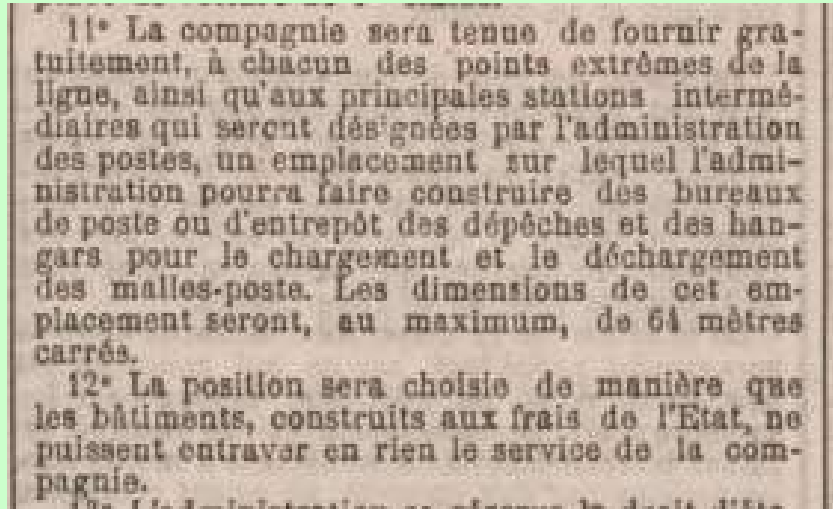
*Letter from Birmingham, 28.4.1900, to a British soldier involved in the Anglo-Boer War, looted by the Boers in Roodewal on 8.06.1900 and then recovered, as indicated by the linear marking*





# POST OFFICES AND AGENCIES OF RAILWAY STATIONS & CITIES BUILT BECAUSE OF THE RAILWAYS

- The development of the railway network triggered significant structural changes in the African spaces, including the **creation of new cities**, such as Nairobi in Kenya, Atbara in Sudan etc.
- More in general, the railway stations were often used as **location of post offices and agencies**, and in many cases this was explicitly prescribed in the **concession agreements** for new railway lines →
- Such post offices / agencies were often the **only available postal facility** in the smaller settlements connected by the railways. The railway network, therefore, amplified the capillarity of the postal service in the territories of the African colonies.



Example: *Convention for the Dakar – Saint-Louis line, 1882*

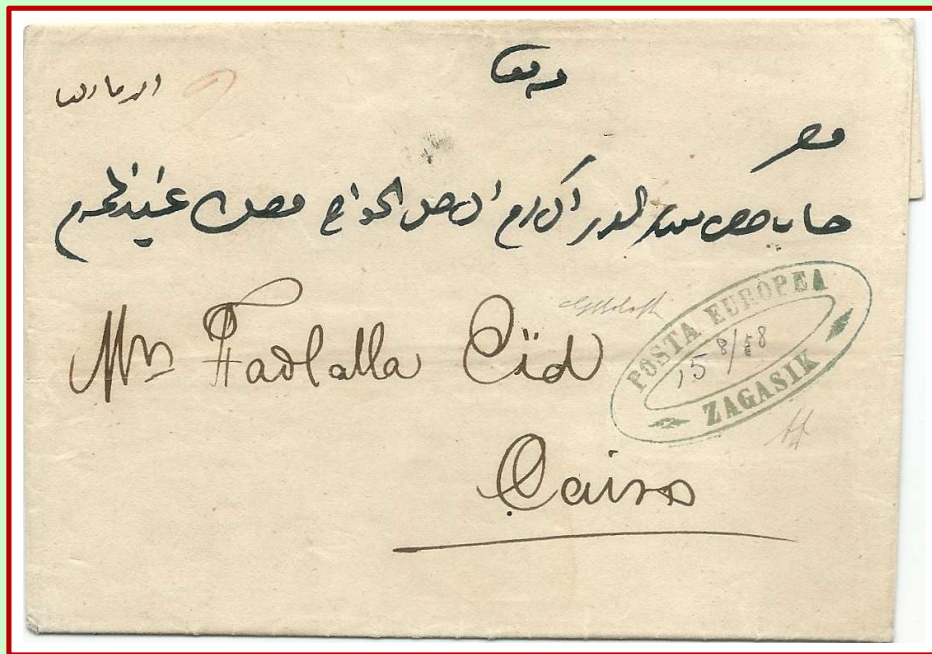


# POST OFFICES AND AGENCIES OF RAILWAY STATIONS & CITIES BUILT BECAUSE OF THE RAILWAYS

## POSTA EUROPEA IN EGYPT

The development of the first railway lines in Egypt generated the opportunity of an agreement for the carriage of the letters by train between the Transit Administration of Egypt (governing the rail system) and the "Posta Europea" mail service developed by some Italian entrepreneurs.

The "Posta Europea" company also took the opportunity of the completion of the railway to open branch offices in some intermediate stations in 1856-57.





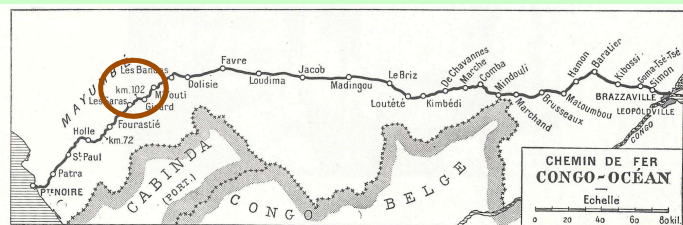
# POST OFFICES AND AGENCIES OF RAILWAY STATIONS & CITIES BUILT BECAUSE OF THE RAILWAYS

## POSTAL AGENCY CREATED ALONG THE CONGO RAILWAY LINE

The relationship with the railway is confirmed by the post office designation, based on the distance from the railway terminus in Pointe Noire.

*Registered letter to Brazzaville on 29.09.1936, from the auxiliary post office at P.K. 102 (Point Kilométrique 102) of the Congo – Océan railway.*

*Letter fee 50-100 gr. 1,00 Fr. + registration fee 1,25 Fr.*





# POST OFFICES AND AGENCIES OF RAILWAY STATIONS & CITIES BUILT BECAUSE OF THE RAILWAYS

## POST OFFICE CREATED ALONG THE UGANDA RAILWAY

The post office at “Escarpment” was opened on the top the rift escarpment during railway construction.

The crossing of the Escarpment was one of the most difficult section of the line (initially rope inclines were built and remain in service for almost two years before the permanent tracks were laid

*From Escarpment (21.07.1933) to London, with franking of 65 cent. (combined basic and air mail rate to UK)*





# POST OFFICES AND AGENCIES OF RAILWAY STATIONS & CITIES BUILT BECAUSE OF THE RAILWAYS

## POSTAL AGENCY CREATED ALONG THE USUMBARA RAILWAY

Railway agency located in such locality, at km 113 of the Usumbara railway between Tanga and Moshi in Tanganyika (line built during the German colonial period, and later extended to Arusha during the British mandate)

*Registered letter from Makuyuni to Mnyusi station on the same line, wit the framed linear postmark and handwritten registration label of Makuyuni. Kilimajaro TPO postmark (22.02.1934) on the back*

*Only example recorded by T. Proud of such railway agency postmark*





# POST OFFICES AND AGENCIES OF RAILWAY STATIONS & CITIES BUILT BECAUSE OF THE RAILWAYS

## WATERVAL BOVEN

**Locomotive depots and marshalling yards were built at Waterval Boven** for the line from Pretoria to Lourenço Marques. Initially inhabited only by railway workers, then a center attracting all urban functions and other activities

*Waterval Boven (1898), undated boxed linear railway station postmark*

*Unrecorded as canceller by Drysdall, Transvaal;  
Railway Stamps and Travelling Post Offices,  
1997*





# FREE FRANK AND OFFICIAL MAIL OF RAILWAY COMPANIES

- In some colonies **railway companies** were authorized to send their official mail for free, using stationery with their letterhead and/or free frank markings, or – when they are part of the State administration – using **official stamps**



- This was not the case – however - in all Africa, given also the private nature of some railway undertakings
- In South Africa official mail of railway companies had to be franked by **special stamps perfinned / overprinted or stencil-cut** with the acronym of the companies for their sole use, after the withdrawn of the free franking privilege.



# EXPLOITING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POSTAL SERVICE AND THE TOPIC

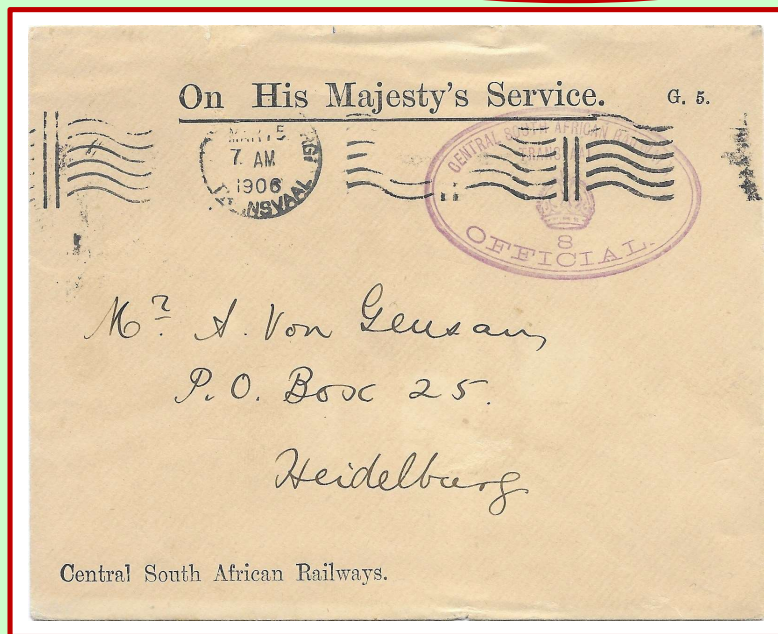
RAILWAY RELATED  
FREE FRANKING

## FREE FRANK MAIL OF THE CENTRAL SOUTH AFRICAN RAILWAYS

Lack of tariff and operational integration between the various territories were among the reasons that led to the unification of South Africa. The railways of Cape (CGR), Natal (NGR) and former Boer republics (CSAR) were merged creating the South African Railways.

Very uncommon use of the free franking cachet in the period after 1904, during which perforated / overprinted official stamps had to be used on official mail

*Letter from Johannesburg (5.03.1906) to Heidelberg, letterhead on his majesty's service, and free franking oval cachet "CENTRAL SOUTH AFRICAN RAILWAYS / TRANSVAAL / 8 / OFFICIAL"*





# EXPLOITING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POSTAL SERVICE AND THE TOPIC

OFFICIAL RAILWAY  
MAIL

## NATAL GOVERNMENT RAILWAY PERFINs, 1908

After 1<sup>st</sup> July 1904, in South Africa official mail of railway companies had to be franked by special stamps perfinned / overprinted or stencil-cut with the acronym of the company, after the withdrawn of the free franking privilege.

*Natal Government Railways, letter from Schroeders to Wartburg, 29.05.1908, letterhead OHMS (On Her Majesty's Service) and franking with railway business stamp perforated "NGR" to be used on official mail*





# RAILWAY-RELATED MILITARY MAIL

- The **involvement of the army** in the development of African railways was significant under many aspects
  - **protection of the railway** against the attack of indigeneous tribes;
  - **construction of the lines** by military engineers;
  - **taking control of railway operations** – including of TPOs – **during conflicts** (Boer Wars, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> World Wars etc.)
- All these elements can be presented by showing mail sent by relevant military units, typically transported under free frank privilege





# EXPLOITING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POSTAL SERVICE AND THE TOPIC

## RAILWAY RELATED MILITARY MAIL

**MILITARY ENGINEERS  
BUILDING RAILWAYS,  
GERMAN SOUTH WEST  
AFRICA, 1905**

the soldiers were also used directly for the building of railway lines. Departments of military engineers were employed, for instance, by the French in Dahomey, as well as in German Southwest Africa for the realization of the first lines.

*Free frank postcard sent by the first railway company of engineers of the German troops in South West Africa from Lüderitz, 5.11.1905 (at the time the troops had started since few weeks the construction of the Southern line Lüderitzbucht - Aus)*





# EXPLOITING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POSTAL SERVICE AND THE TOPIC

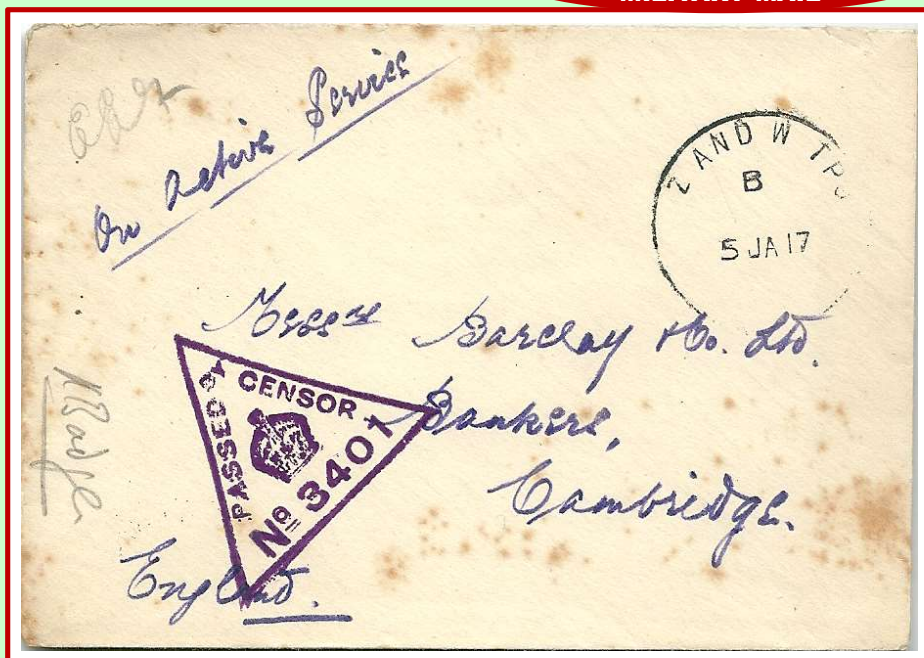
RAILWAY RELATED  
MILITARY MAIL

## BRITISH ARMY TPO, EGYPT, 1917

During the First World War, the British Army used the Egyptian railway lines to support the campaign against the Ottoman troops who wanted to end the British protectorate over the country.

To ensure secrecy on the movements of the troops, the field post offices traveling on trains were marked by letters instead of places of origin and destination.

*From British soldier in Egypt to Cambridge (GB), posted on 5.01.1917 on the TPO on a train of the line Alexandria – Daaba (near the Western border) indicated as « Z and W »; triangular British censor's marking*





# **Q & A**

**Thank you for your kind attention!**