2. The Convoys and Troopships of the Australian Expeditionary Force

Convoys for the Gallipoli campaign

There were thirteen convoys from November 1914 to December 1915 supplying not only troops for the Gallipoli conflict, but equipment, medical and administrative staff, and horses which were later used in the Light Horse Campaign.

Postal rates

From the outbreak of the war on the 4th August 1914, prepayment of postage had to be paid on mail originating from Australian troops. Since postage stamps were not available on the troopships, most of the soldier's mail was endorsed "On Active Service" or "No Stamps Available", and postage was to be collected by the recipient on delivery. In many cases, given the patriotic fervor for the embarking troops, the postage deficiency was not collected.
After the 15th of February 1915, soldiers on active service were able to send letters and postcards without the pre-payment of postage, so long as the postal item was endorsed "On Active Service".

Overview of the First Convoy   October - December 1914

The first convoy consisted of twenty-eight ships and were allocated the numbers A1 to A28 which they retained throughout the war. Approximately 21,500 men and 7,900 horses, plus supplies and equipment, embarked from various ports within the Australian States in October 1914. The troopships assembled at Albany, Western Australia by the 28th of October, where they were joined by the troopships from New Zealand. The combined convoy and their escorts sailed for Egypt on the 1st of November.

The departure from Hobart   20th October 1914

Before assembling at Albany on the 28th of October, troopships docked at each of the capital cities for soldiers to embark. Two troopships called at Hobart for the embarkation of soldiers on the First Convoy; the A2 "Geelong" and the A13 "Katuna". They departed from Hobart on the 19th and 20th of October, arriving at Albany a week later.

A real photo postcard of "Our troops embarking for the front", depicting troops from the First Convoy at Ocean Pier, Hobart.

The postcard was addressed to China in March 1915, with the author's sentiment consistent with public opinion *"This shows that we are doing our share of helping to put the baby killer and his gang out of commission."*

The First Convoy

Assembling at Albany

The troopships assembled at Albany, Western Australia by the 28th of October 1914, where they were joined by the Main Body of ten troopships from New Zealand, including the Japanese Battle Cruiser "Ibuki" and the British Cruiser HMS "Minotoar". The combined convoy and their escorts sailed for Egypt on the 1st of November.

Treatment of First Convoy mail at Albany

The mail from the First Convoy was generally treated in two different classes:
1. **Closed mail:** The officer in charge of the mail on each troopship was to arrange for the collection of all letters and place them in separate bags for each state. The bags were to be sealed and addressed to the Deputy Postmaster General for each state. As such, the "bagging" of mail for each state was considered to be "closed".
2. **Loose mail:** Postal articles that were received from the troopships and processed through the Albany post office were considered "loose" mail.

Processing of mail from Albany

The processing of the "closed" and "loose" mails was modified by the convoy's Divisional Headquarters on the troopship A3 "Orvieto", which imposed a censorship, and then afterwards, a specific embargo.
Interpretation of surviving envelopes and postcards requires a good knowledge of the tax markings that were currently in use in each of the Australian States. The result is that the mail falls in to five distinct categories.

Closed mail - Albany

24th - 25th October 1914

Mail that was written prior to the 26th of October originating from the troopships and then landed at Albany is considered "Closed" mail. There are no Albany postal markings.
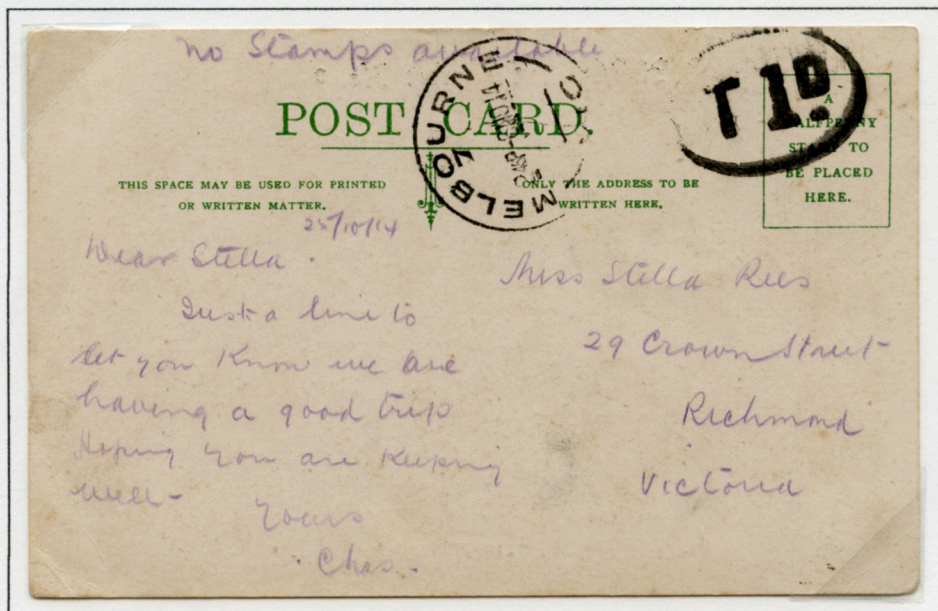

A picture postcard of the A9 "Shropshire" and dated the 25th of October 1914. This card was placed in the closed mail, hence there are no Albany postal markings.

The steamship "Katoomba" landed at Albany on the 1st of November and delivered the mail to Victoria on the 7th. The card has a Melbourne datestamp of the following day and the Victorian oval "T 1d" for postage due to be paid by the recipient.

An unlisted troopship cachet

An unstamped envelope addressed to South Australia, with an unframed straight lined "BENALLA" and "A.I.F./ Passed by Censor…….." cachets (both are not recorded by Firebrace), and initialed for censorship "WFS".
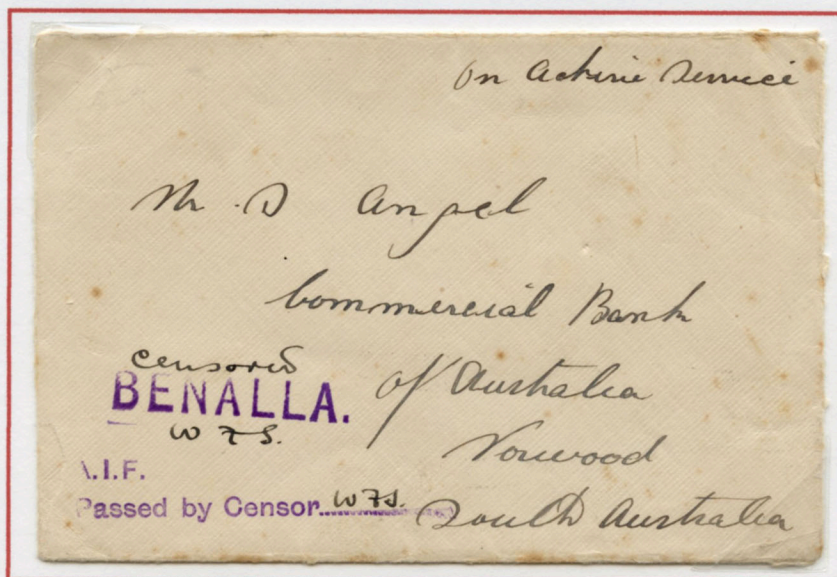
There are no postal markings on this envelope. The A24 "Benalla" docked at Albany on the 24th of October 1914, where this letter was placed in the closed mail bags and not postmarked at Albany. It would have arrived in Adelaide on the 3rd of November aboard the SS "Katoomba".

The envelope was written by Lieutenant Frederick Angel of the 1st Divisional Training Corps. He was awarded the Military Cross on the 23rd of August 1918 for "conspicuous bravery and gallant leadership" at St. Martins Wood near Foucaucourt. This is the only envelope from the First Convoy recorded with handstamps identifying a troopship and military censorship.

Ex Stern

S.-s. "Benalla" at Outer Harbor, Adelaide.

A picture postcard of the troopship A24 "Benalla".

Letters mailed at Albany with instructional markings indicating postage to be collected on delivery is regarded as "loose" mail. Each article has an Albany circular "T" or unframed "T" handstamp with local and eastern states arrival datestamps of the 26th or 27th of October.

A lettersheet sent by my grandfather

A privately printed YMCA lettersheet cancelled at Albany, Western Australia on the 25th of October 1914, where the small "T" tax handstamp was struck, and addressed to Victoria. On arrival in Melbourne, the oval "T 1d" handstamp was applied denoting 1d postage due from the recipient, which was paid on the 2nd of November 1914, the day after the First Convoy departed.

This lettersheet was written by my grandfather, Sergeant Norman Tutton to my great grandmother in Northcote, Victoria. He writes:

"My Dear Mum,

The trip so far has been glorious, the sea is just like a mill pond. We passed through the heads around 12.30 and lost sight of land the same night. I have only seen one ship since. We are expected to arrive in Albany some time tomorrow Saturday. A few of the men have been ill, but taking things in general, everything is OK. I was a little giddy at first day out but since have been splendid. We do an hours physical exercise every morning, the rest of the day is spent in reading and acting the fool in general. The Horarata is a fine ship only been in the water 5 months this being her maiden voyage, she is only going 8 knots an hour the reason is I suppose to waste time. Well mum no more news just now hoping everything is well. Close with heaps of love to all.

Your loving Son,

Norman"

The A8 "Argyllshire", A9 "Shropshire", and the A18 "Wiltshire" were all sister ships on the First Convoy and postcards were produced showing one identical view for all three vessels.

Postcards with troopship overprints contravening censorship laws

Theses overprints printed on board the troopships would have contravened censorship laws, however, this was not strictly enforced, with overprints on postcards from other troopships having been recorded up to late 1915.
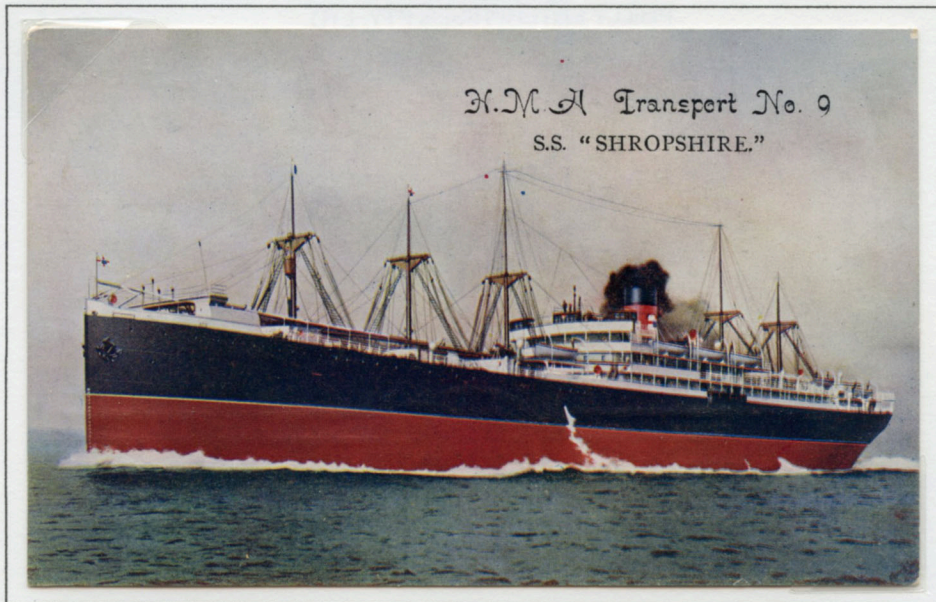

A rare and early postcard overprint for the A9 "Shropshire" produced in Melbourne before the troops embarked. The card was written by a soldier on the 24th of October 1914, the day before the vessel docked at Albany. It was sent under cover in the loose ship mail period.

Type 1 Overprint: "4th Victorian Light Horse   No.2 Field Ambulance A.A.M.C."

A rare postcard overprint for the A18 "Wiltshire" by the 4th Victorian Light Horse produced in Melbourne before the troops embarked.

Although scarce, this is the commonest overprint found.

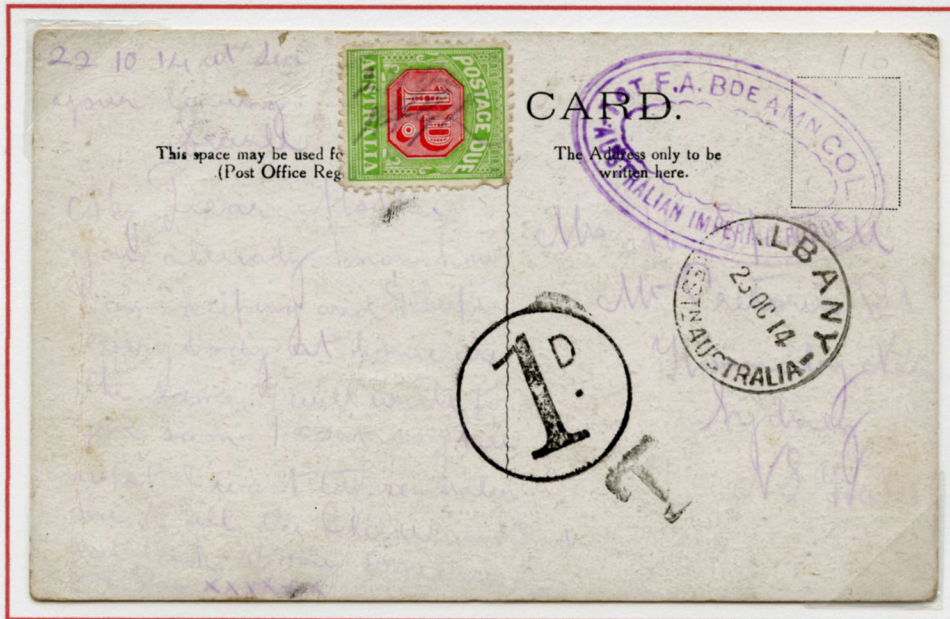The card is headed "Albany 27/10/14" and was sent under cover in the loose ship mail period.
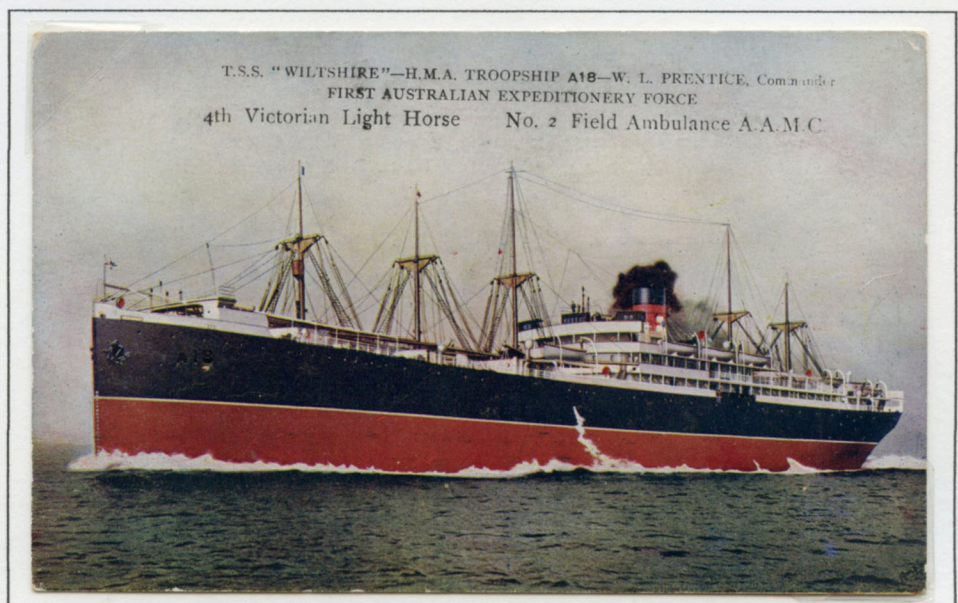
The A8 "Argyllshire" arrived at Albany on Saturday the 24th of October where this postcard was mailed the following day.

It received the Albany "T" tax handstamp before being forwarded to Sydney, where the circular "1d" cachet was applied. The extra 1d postage due was paid by the recipient.

A picture postcard of the Troopship A8 "Argyllshire" which sailed from Sydney on the 17th of October and addressed to New South Wales. It is dated "22 10 14 at Sea", and handstamped with the rare oval "1st F.A. Bde AMn COL./ AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE" cachet in violet (Firebrace Type CA74) of the 1st Field Artillery Brigade.

Pre-payment of £1 postage for a bundle of letters and postcards

Payment of postage was available to the soldiers at Albany if the total payment of postage was £1 or more. In these circumstances, each item of mail would be struck with the Albany "PAID" marking. However, it is unlikely that an individual soldier would have such a quantity of mail, but it could have been organised by a group of soldiers on a transport ship.

A postcard of the A2 "Geelong" addressed to Tasmania with the " P A I D / 1 d / ALBANY" cds dated the 26th of October 1914.

The paid datestamp indicates pre-payment of postage for over £1 for a number of items.
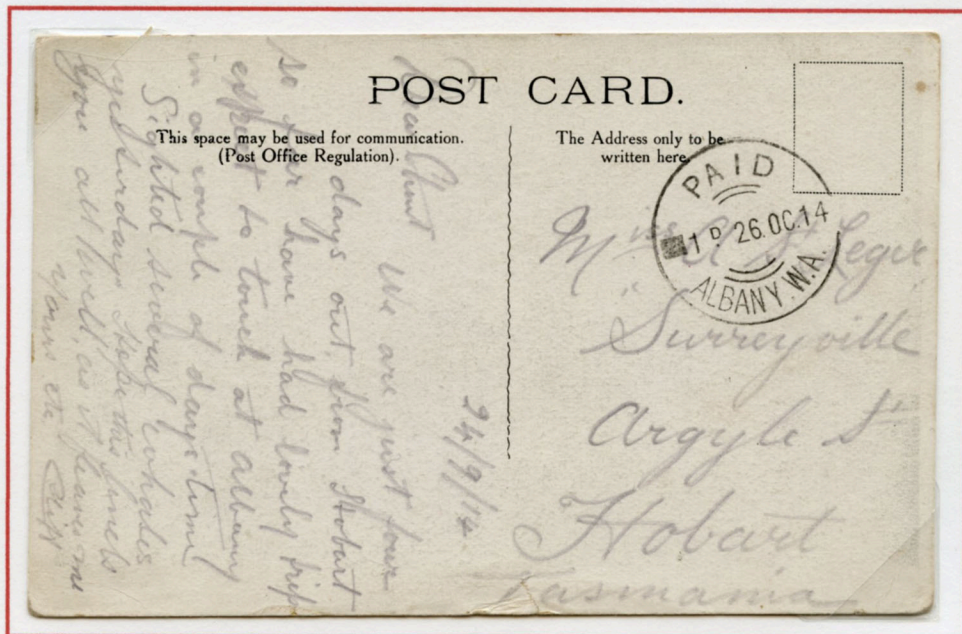
Three examples of this Paid datestamp are recorded for First Convoy mail, also from the A2 "Geelong"

## The impact of censorship on mail from the First Convoy

On Wednesday the 28th of October, the Divisional Headquarters on the A3 "Orvieto" decreed that all mail was to be censored, and the following day the order to embargo all First Convoy mail for security measures until the 15th of November was implemented.

Closed and embargoed mail - Albany   28th October - 16th November 1914

Letters which landed at Albany were transferred to Perth, which is indicated by the Perth oval "T 1d" handstamp. Each item was postmarked with a Perth Krag machine cancellation dated the 16th of November 1914.

An unlisted battalion handstamp used on troopship mail
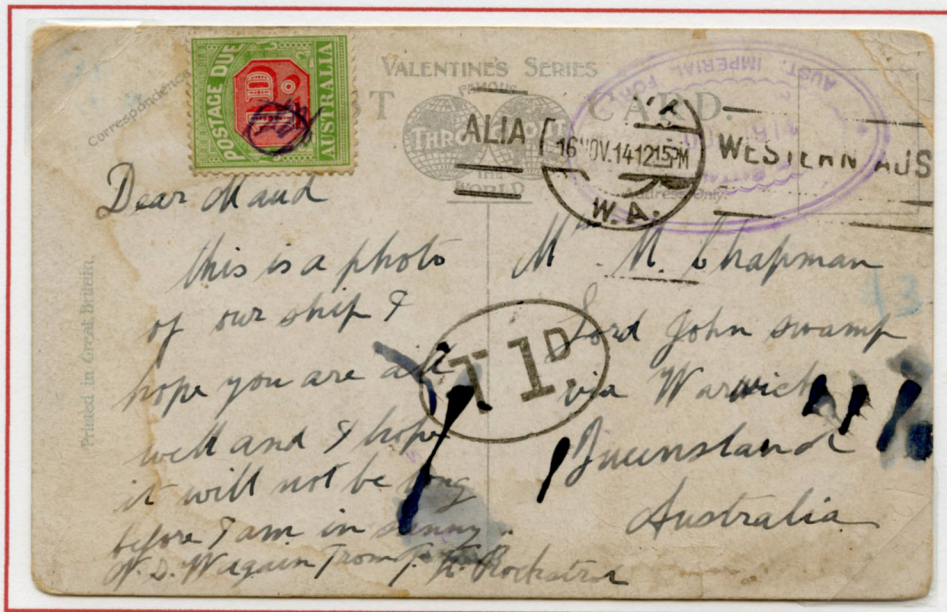
An unstamped picture postcard addressed to Queensland of the Troopship A19 "Afric", with the violet oval "1st BATTALLION/ OCT 1914 (inverted)/ AUST. IMPERIAL FORCE" cachet (not recorded by Firebrace).

The postcard was transferred in the closed mail from Albany and sent from Perth on the 16th of February, after the release of the embargo on First Convoy mail. The oval "T 1d" was applied at Perth, and the card placed on board the SS "Malwa" for shipment to the eastern states on the 18th of February.

Most of the soldiers from Western Australia were not sent to Albany, but embarked at Fremantle on the A11 "Ascanius" and the A7 "Medic". Items written from the 1st of November were "bagged" and taken on the voyage to the first port of call at Colombo, Ceylon. It was sent on the return journey home on board the RMS "Ophir", and the mail processed at Fremantle on the 1st of December.

The second earliest censorship of troopship mail recorded

An unstamped picture postcard of the troopship A7 "Medic" endorsed "On Active Service" and dated "Fremantle 1/11/14", (the day the First Convoy sailed for Egypt), and addressed to Adelaide.

The card was heavily censored before being placed in the civilian mail at Fremantle on the 1st of December, with much of the message erased. The date is clearly visible, as is mention of the escorting Japanese cruiser "Ibuki", contrary to regulations. This is the second earliest item of censored mail recorded. Unusually, there are no postage due handstamps.
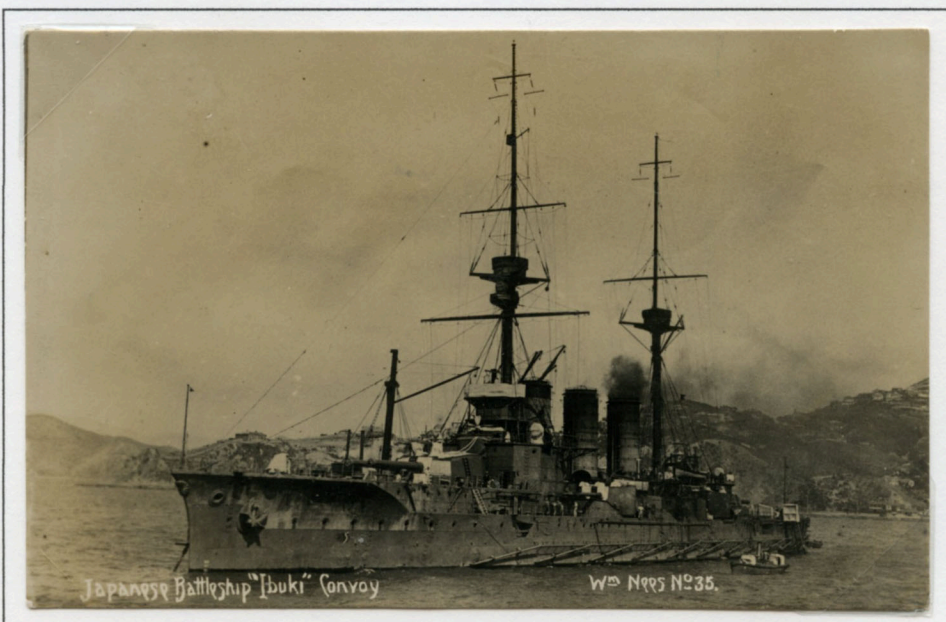
A real life postcard of the Japanese cruiser "Ibuki", which escorted the Australian and New Zealand troopships on the First Convoy.

On the morning of the 9th of November, the German light cruiser SMS "Emden" was reported in the area of the First Convoy, and HMAS "Sydney" was ordered away to engage the raider off Cocos Island. In the resulting battle, the superior firepower of the Australian cruiser's broadsides quickly reduced the "Emden" to a fiery wreck and the German cruiser was beached on North Keeling Island.

The only recorded mail from a sailor on board HMAS "Sydney" after destroying the SMS "Emden"
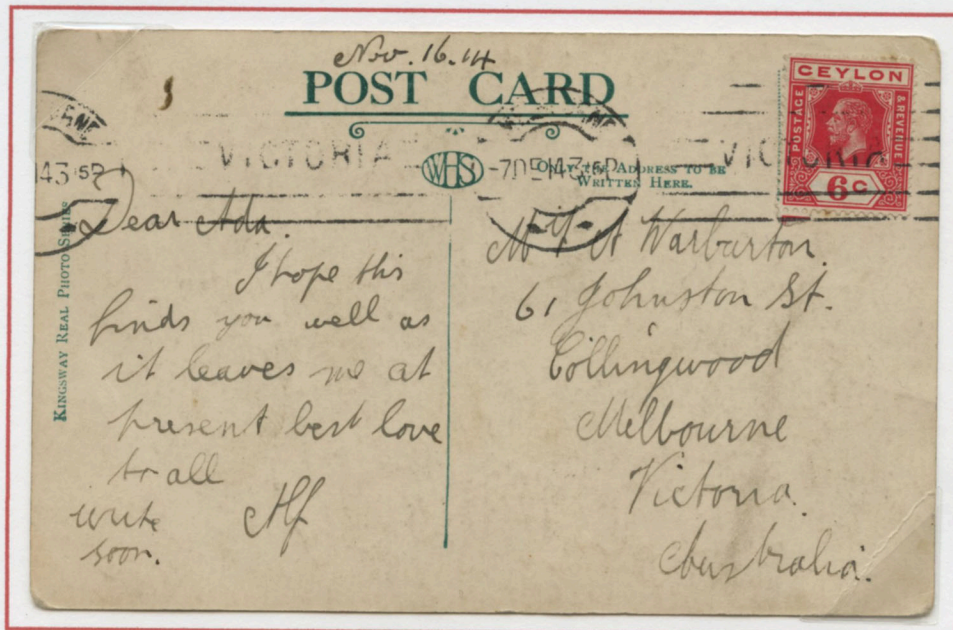
A postcard of the HMAS "Sydney" dated the 16th of November 1914 from Ceylon and addressed to Victoria. It was written by Able Seaman Alfred Willett who was a sailor on board the Australian cruiser when she attacked the German raider SMS "Emden". The card was mailed a week after the battle to his wife who lived in Collingwood. Able Seaman Willett enlisted on the 6th of September 1912 for a seven year term, and was discharged in 1919.

THE EMDEN, AFTER THE SYDNEY HAD FINISHED WITH HER.
(All Rights Reserved.)

A picture postcard of the SMS "Emden"

"After the Sydney had finished with her".

These letters were not landed at Albany. They were detained on board the troopship and landed at Colombo for forwarding to Australia.

A rare privately printed picture postcard for the "First Australian European Expeditionary Force, 1914-15" written enroute and mailed from Colombo.

This card was sent on the RMS "Ophir", which left Colombo on the 24th of November and docked at Melbourne on the 6th of December. It was censored with the Melbourne unframed "PASSED" censor cachet and taxed with the oval "T 1d" handstamp denoting 1d postage due from the recipient.
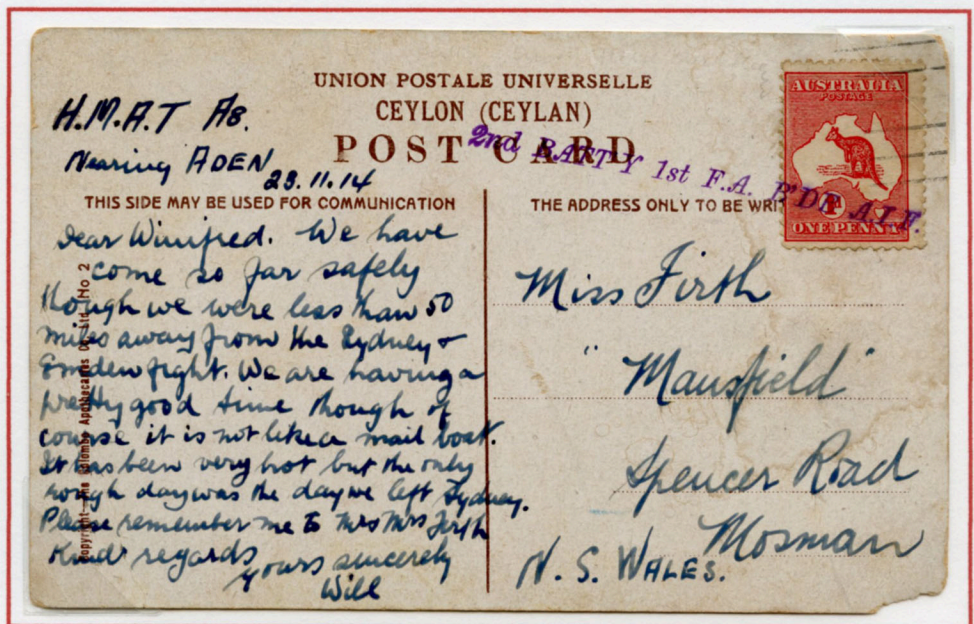
The second port of call - Aden

25th November 1914

The mail from Aden was picked up by the "Maloja", arriving at Fremantle on the 15th of December, and Adelaide on the 19th. The mail was forwarded to the eastern states by rail under normal contract conditions.

The message reads:
"We have come so far safely though we were less than 50 miles away from the Sydney & Emden fight"

A postcard dated the 23rd of November 1914 from a soldier on board the A8 "Argyllshire" and headed "Nearing Aden", and addressed to New South Wales. Unusually the card is prepaid with 1d postage, and cancelled by the straight lined "2nd BATT'Y 1st F.A. B'DE A.I.F." cachet in violet (Firebrace Type CA 311) representing the 2nd Battery of the 1st Field Artillery Brigade of the A.I.F. Use of this cachet is only recorded on a couple of First Convoy postcards.
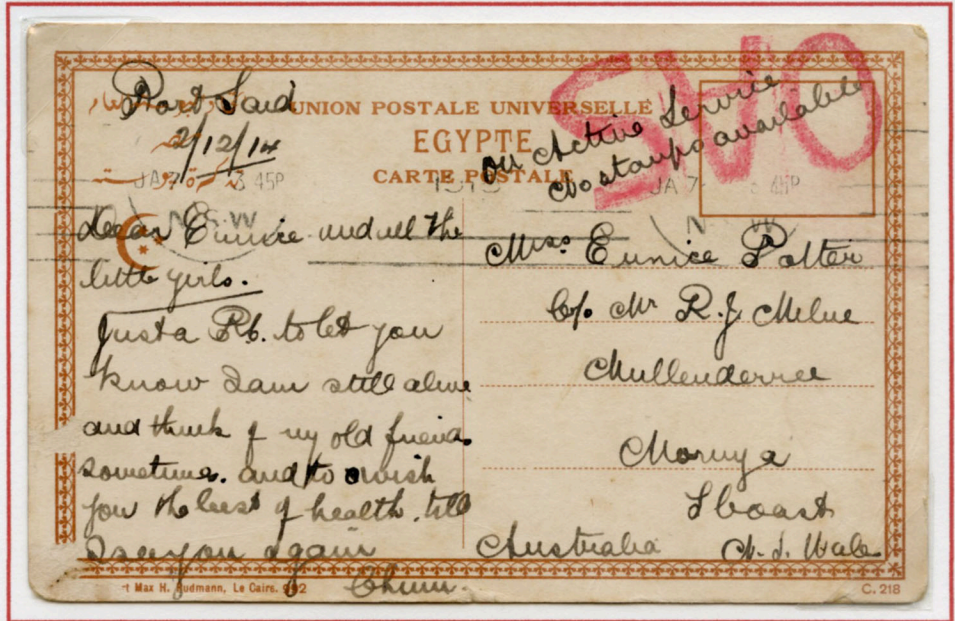
The First Convoy docked at Alexandria, Egypt over several days from the 3rd of December, with the mail taking days to be processed whilst the troops were relocated around Cairo.

An unlisted cachet

A postcard headed "Port Said 2/12/14", the day before docking in Alexandria. At the top right is a crude early example of an "OAS" cachet in red (not recorded by Firebrace) intended to advise the Australian postal authorities not to tax unstamped mail from the A.I.F. since they were On Active Service. *Ex Finlayson*

Mail embargoed in Egypt
A censor cachet only recorded used on mail from the First Convoy
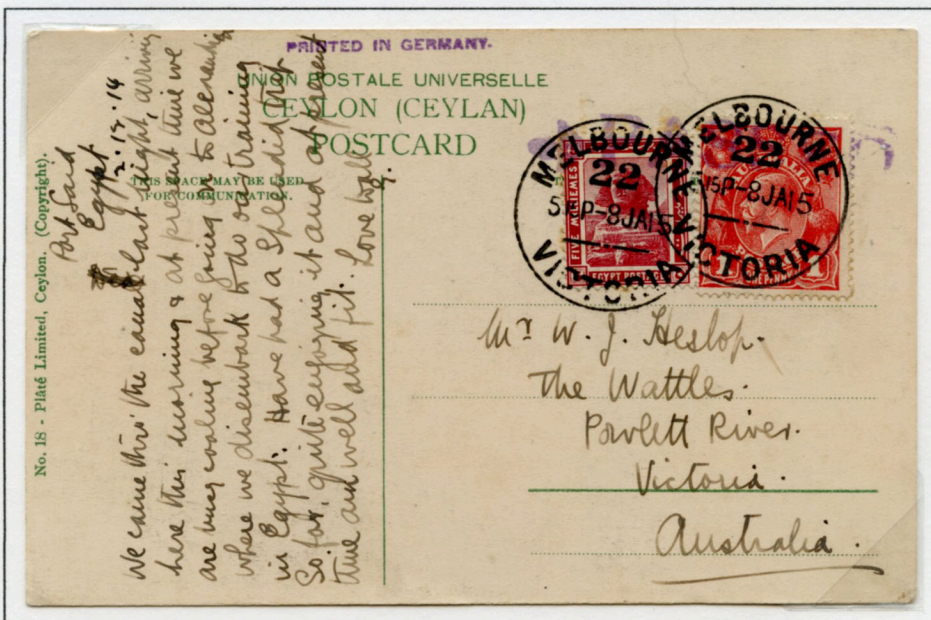
A picture postcard dated the 2nd of December 1914 and headed "Port Said". Captain Heslop of the 1st Field Artillery Brigade writes:

"We came through the canal last night, arriving here (Port Said) this morning and at present time we are coaling before going to Alexandria for training in Egypt".

The card was embargoed in Egypt and did not pass through the Egyptian civilian or military postal service. It was cancelled on arrival at Melbourne on the 8th of January 1915.

The Second Convoy

The Second Convoy consisted of sixteen troopships numbered A29 to A44, and comprised principally of the 4th Infantry Brigade and the 2nd Light Horse Brigade. All vessels assembled at Albany and sailed on the 31st of December 1914. The A34 "Persic", A29 "Suevic" and A40 "Ceramic" went directly to Aden, whilst the rest of the convoy sailed to Colombo, with all ships except the "Persic" docking at Aden between 21st -23rd January. They arrived at Suez on the 30th January 1915, before disembarking at Alexandria on the 31st.

Mail embargoed at Albany   28th December 1914

From the 28th of December all mail was collected from the Second Convoy troopships and processed by Divisional Headquarters on board the A38 "Ulysses". The mail was landed at Colombo on the 14th of January and picked up by the SS "Egypt" the following day, landing in Adelaide on the 30th of January for distribution by rail to the eastern states.

Scarce use of the 'Passed Censor….M" censor label
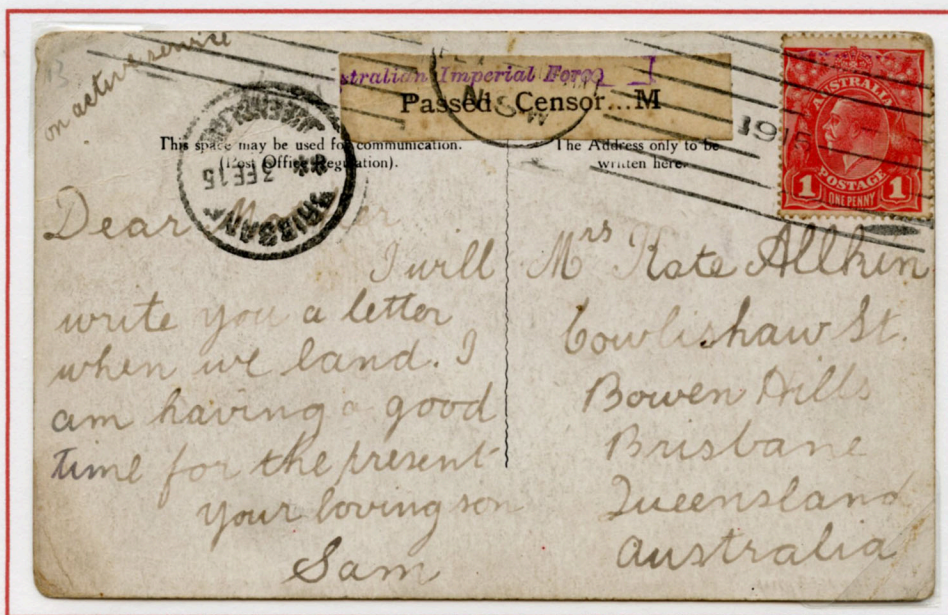
An undated postcard of the A40 "Ceramic" addressed to Queensland with the "Passed Censor...M" label (Firebrace Type CM 24), and tied by an unframed "Australian Imperial Force" cachet in purple.

Origin of the censor label

The processing of this card was at the Headquarters on the A38 "Ulysses", where this censor label originated. Other cards from this voyage show the censor label also originating from this troopship.

Firebrace states that this censor label was privately produced by Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Beeston on the A35 "Berrima". However, given that all the known examples of this censor label have originated from the "Ulysses", this statement is now considered incorrect.

The postcard was written at Albany and transferred to the Divisional Headquarters on the A38 "Ulysses" before leaving port on the 31st of December. The evidence of the embargoed mail is the Brisbane arrival postmark of the 3rd of February 1915. All arrival datestamps in the first week of February 1915 in the eastern states were transported by the SS "Egypt", which picked up the mail in Colombo on the 15th of January. The A40 "Ceramic" from which Private Allkin embarked, did not go to Colombo, instead sailing directly to Aden, where she docked on the 21st of January. The mail from Aden did not reach the eastern states until the 15th of February 1915.

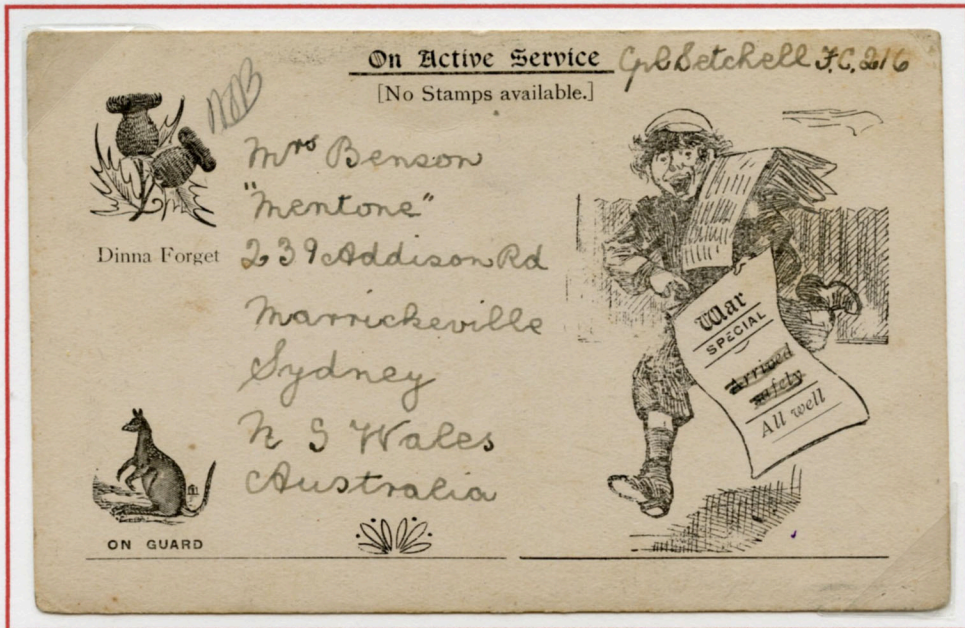**Embargoed mail from the Second Convoy is rare**

A pre-printed postcard for the Second Convoy, written by Corporal Frederick Setchell of the 13th Infantry Battalion on board the A38 "Ulysses" to New South Wales. He writes *"We have left Colombo and called at Aden where we stopped 12 hours and then left and are on the move again"*. Corporal Setchell was wounded in the face at Gallipoli and discharged as medically unfit for duty in May 1916. *Ex Finlayson*

The illustration of the newspaper boy above is identical to those printed for the A71 "Nestor" postcards on the Thirteenth Convoy.

This is the only recorded example of the "newspaper boy" postcard from this convoy
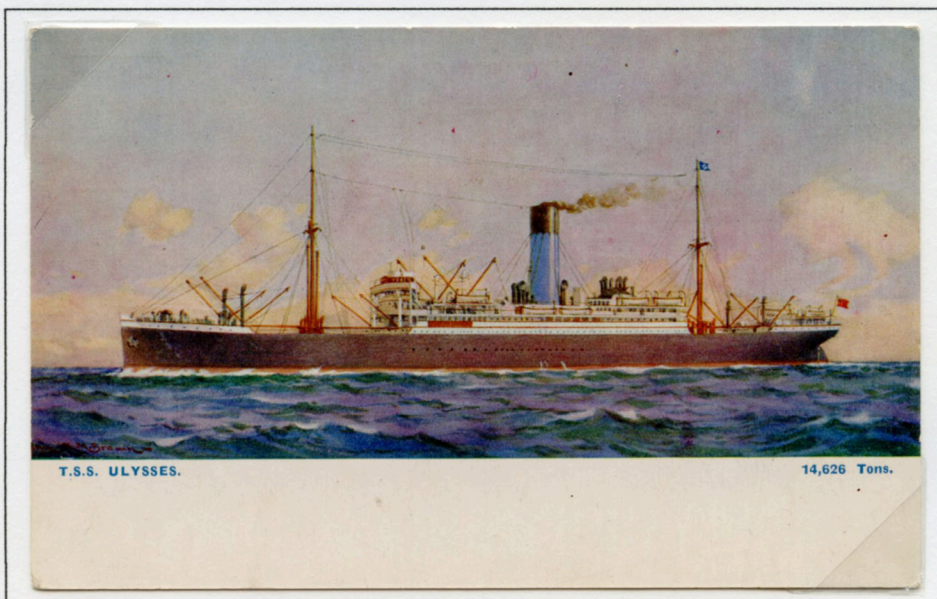
A picture postcard of the A38 "Ulysses".

From the Third Convoy onwards they were only referred to "convoys" in name as the vessels did not sail or stay together. This convoy of twenty ships carried the 3rd Light Horse Brigade and the 8th, 9th and 10th Regiments.

The introduction of maritime censor handstamps

The Naval Board introduced ship-based censorship in February 1915 and this was applied to transports in the Third and subsequent convoys. Whilst some cachets included the transport's A number, many did not, with a number of others inserting the A number in manuscript.

The primary type of troopship censor cachets

A number of different types of "A.I.F./ Passed by Censor No....." cachets were manufactured with a variety of combinations of punctuation marks to separate the "A", "I", and "F" in the top row of the handstamp. The registration of the "AIF" with the "Passed by censor No......" in the lower row has two distinct settings. The first has the "I" above the "ce" of censor, whilst the second setting has the "I" above the "n" of censor. Hence, the primary troopship censor cachets are allocated under the following Firebrace classification:

MCM 1/A	stop, stop, comma (I/CE)		MCM 1/B	stop, stop, comma (I/N)
MCM 1/C	stop, comma, comma (I/CE)		MCM 1/C	stop, comma, comma (I/N)
MCM 1/E	comma, comma, comma		MCM 1/F	stop, colon, comma
MCM 1/H	comma, stop, stop		MCM 1/J	stop, stop, stop
MCM 1/K	stop, colon, stop			

Troopship censor cachet type MCM 1/J
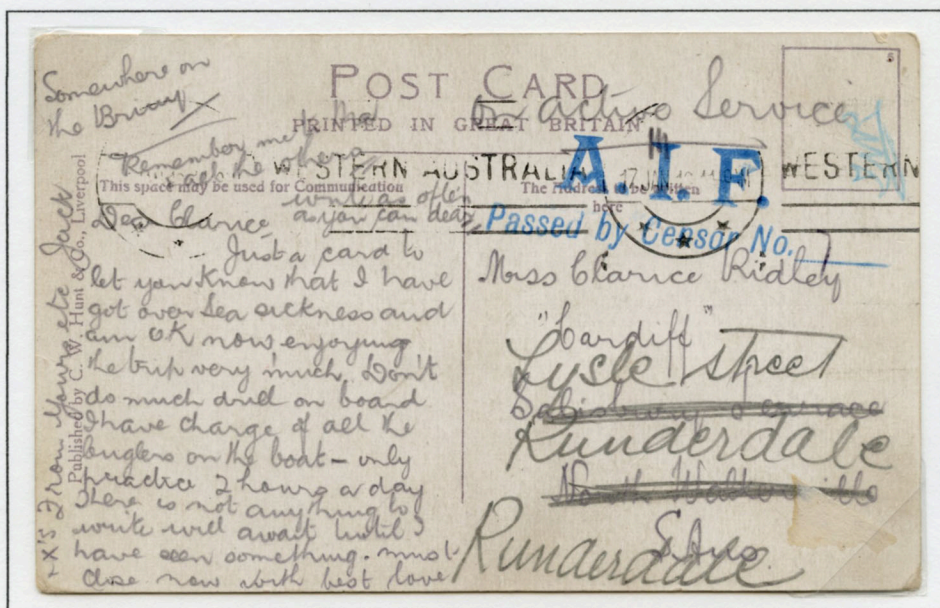
A postcard of the troopship A7 "Medic" addressed to South Australia with the ships censor cachet "A.I.F./ Passed by Censor No." unusually in blue (Firebrace Type MCM I/J). The number "7" was inserted in manuscript, representing the A7 "Medic".

The secondary type of troopship censor cachets

The grouping of the secondary type of troopship censor cachets is very broad. They essentially have the "Passed by Censor" in addition to the specific number of the troopship within the cachet. This format is consistent with almost all the secondary cachets.

Rarity of the secondary type of troopship censor cachets

In nearly all cases, the secondary cachets are scarce to rare, with most having only a couple of examples recorded. Since the publication of the Emery books in the late 1980's, a number of new examples have been discovered.
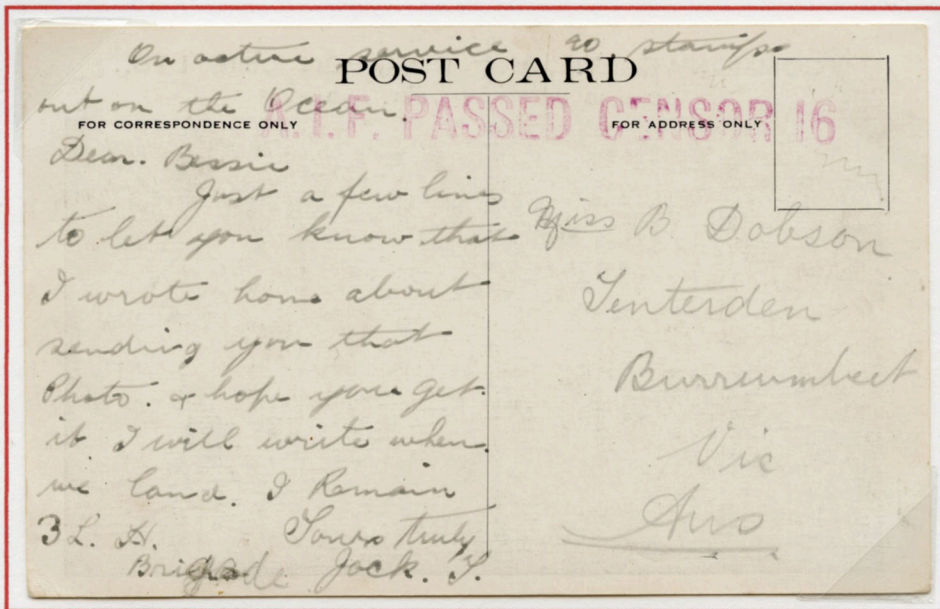
An unstamped postcard endorsed "On active service no stamps" and addressed to Victoria with the rare unframed "A.I.F. PASSED CENSOR 16" cachet in purple (Firebrace Type MCM 8), allocated to the A16 "Star of Victoria". The card is endorsed "3 L.H. Brigade" at the lower left, confirming that this card was posted on the Third Convoy.

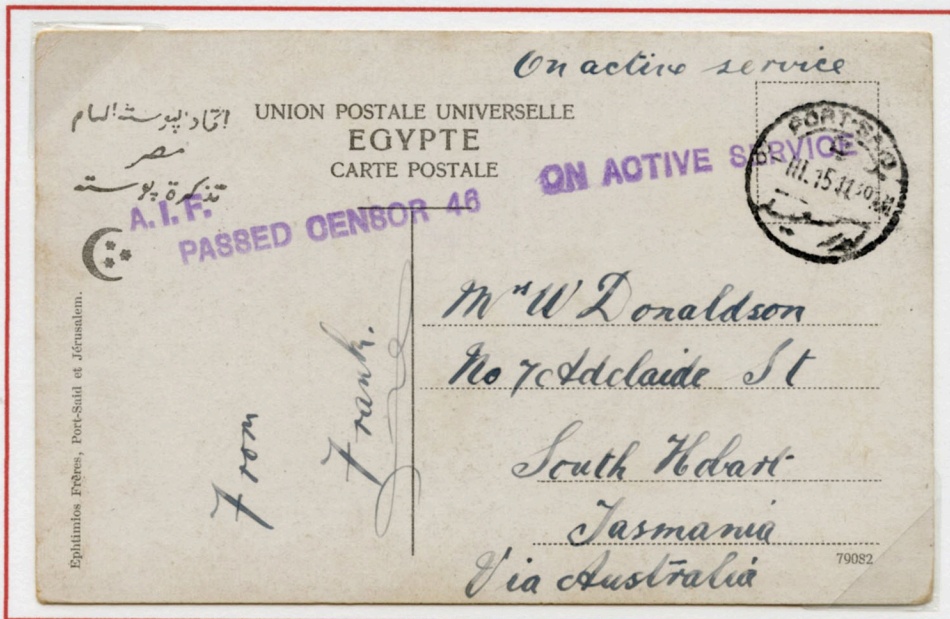A picture postcard of the A16 "Star of Victoria".

T.S.S. "STAR OF VICTORIA"

A postcard postmarked at Port Said dated the 8th of March 1915 and addressed to Tasmania, with an unframed "ON ACTIVE SERVICE" and an "A.I.F./ PASSED CENSOR 46" cachets in violet (Firebrace Type MCM 15). These were allocated to the A46 "Clan MacGillivary". Less than five examples of this ships cachet are recorded.

The final destination of the A47 "Mashobra" - Port Said, Egypt   **8th March 1915**
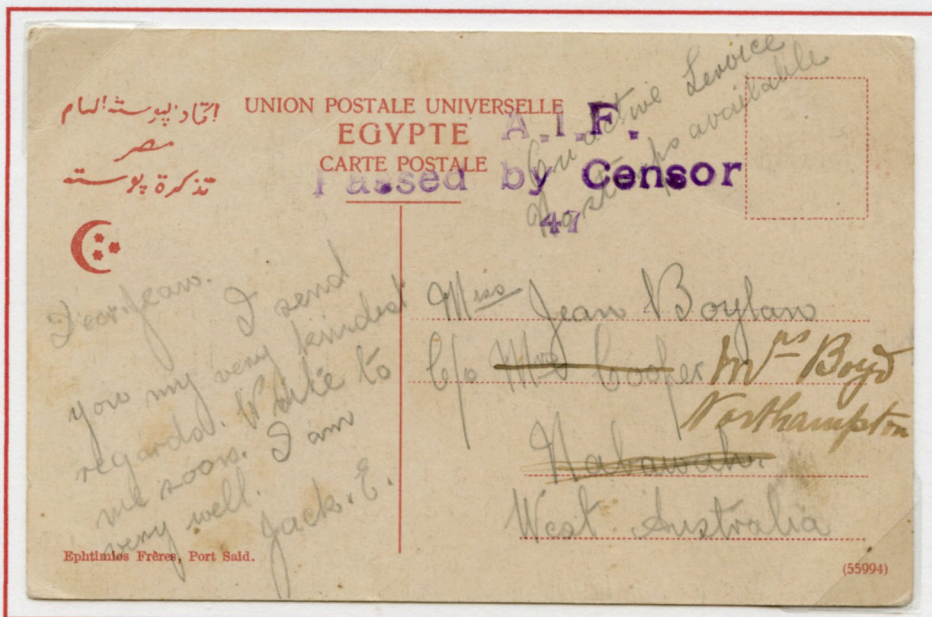
A picture postcard addressed to Western Australia with the unframed "A.I.F./ Passed By Censor/ 47" cachet in violet (not recorded by Firebrace) allocated to the A47 "Mashobra". Although not listed by Firebrace, about half a dozen examples are known, written by soldiers of the 10th Light Horse Regiment from the Third Convoy and addressed to Western Australia.
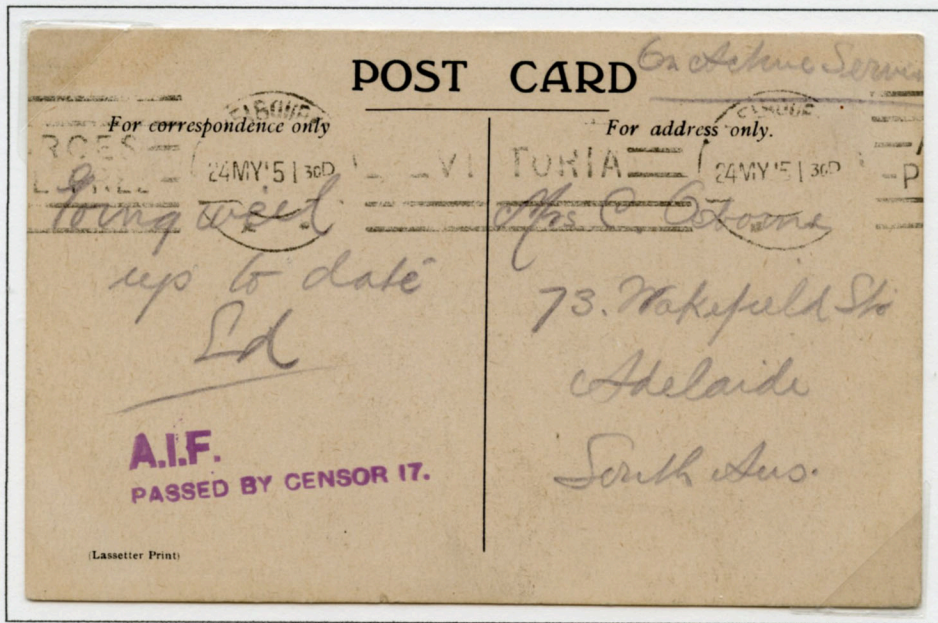
The Fourth Convoy consisted of only five ships which by-passed Colombo, docking at their final destinations of either Port Said, or Alexandria.

The final destination for the A17 "Port Lincoln"- Suez, Egypt

26th April 1915

A picture postcard of the Troopship A17 "Port Lincoln" and censored with the "A.I.F./PASSED BY CENSOR 17" cachet (Firebrace Type MCM 15). The ship departed Adelaide on the 1st of April 1915 and this card was bagged on arrival at Suez on the 26th of April. It was carried by the R.M.S. "Mooltan" from Suez to Australia, where it entered the postal system at Melbourne, Victoria on the 24th of May 1915.
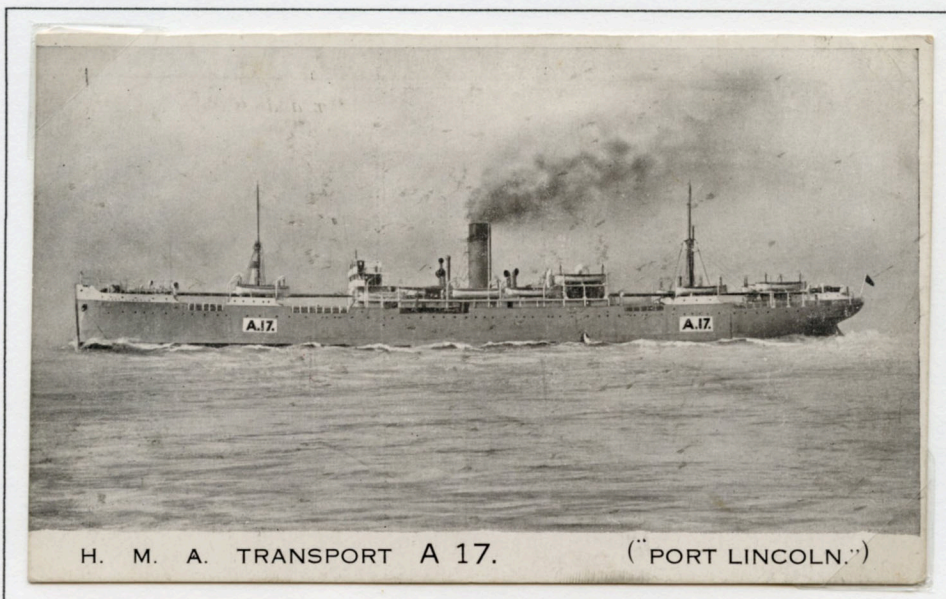
A picture postcard of the A17 "Port Lincoln" written at sea three days after leaving Adelaide for Suez.

Unusually, this card was not censored. The name of the ship and "A17" on the hull should have been inked out by the censor before being posted.
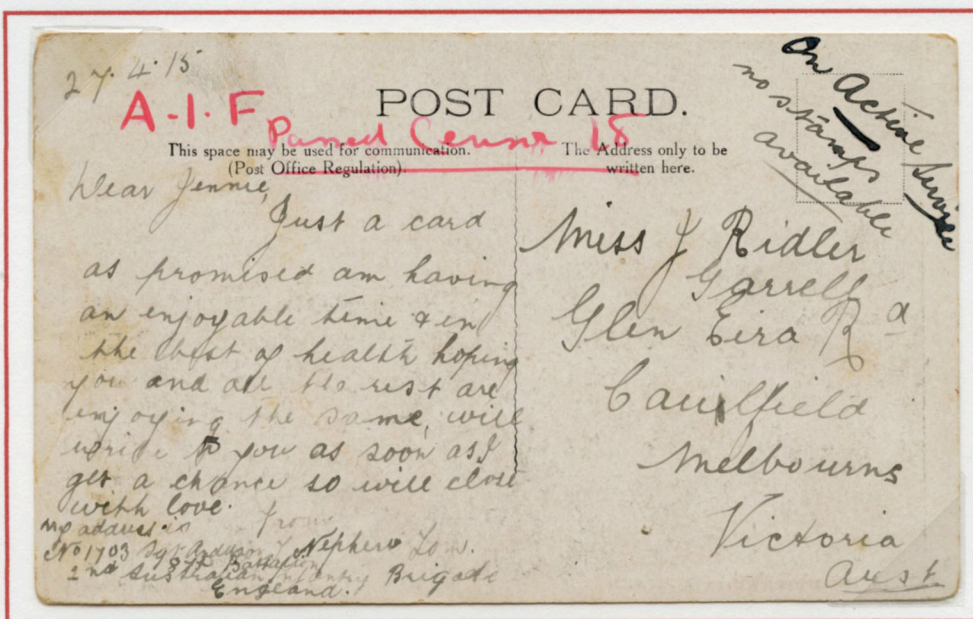
A rare maritime manuscript censor

A postcard of the A18 "Wiltshire" dated the 27th of April 1915 and unusually censored by a manuscript endorsement *"A.I.F./ Passed Censor 18"* in a similar style to the official cachets. It is the only example recorded.


This card was written by Private Thomas Anderson who was promoted to Sergeant in France where he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for an attack on a pillbox in Ypres on the 4th of October 1917. Promoted to Lieutenant, he was further awarded the Military Cross for bravery at Rosiers on the 9th of August 1918. He survived the war and returned to Australia on the 23rd of September 1919.

The final destination for the A15 "Star of England" - Suez, Egypt

15th May 1915

A picture postcard of the A15 "Star of England" and censored with the rare "A.I.F,/ PASSED CENSOR 15." cachet in rose (Firebrace Type MCM 17).

The card was written by Private Thomas Brunton of the 12th Infantry Battalion who served throughout the war and returned to Australia on the 9th of March 1919.
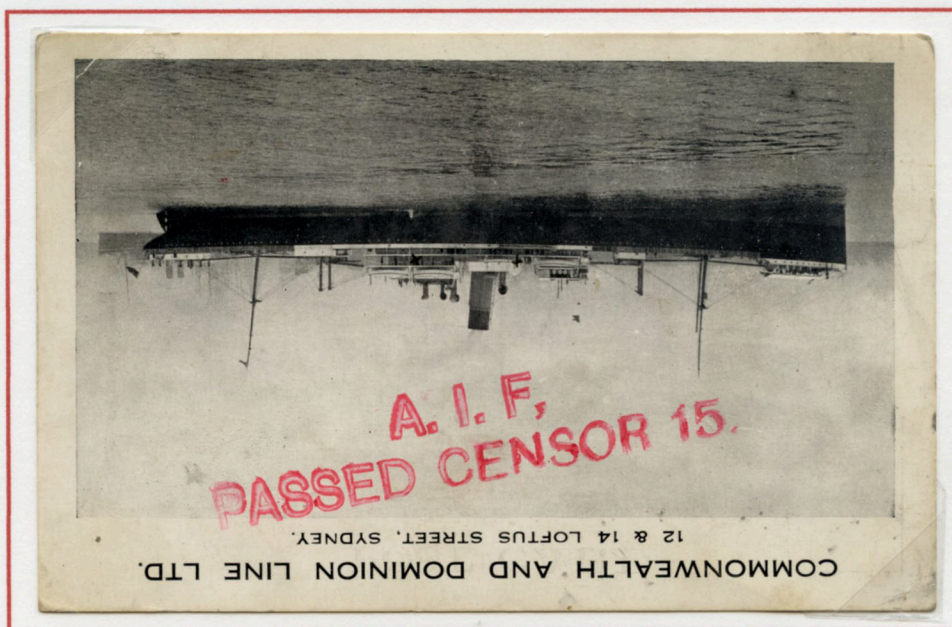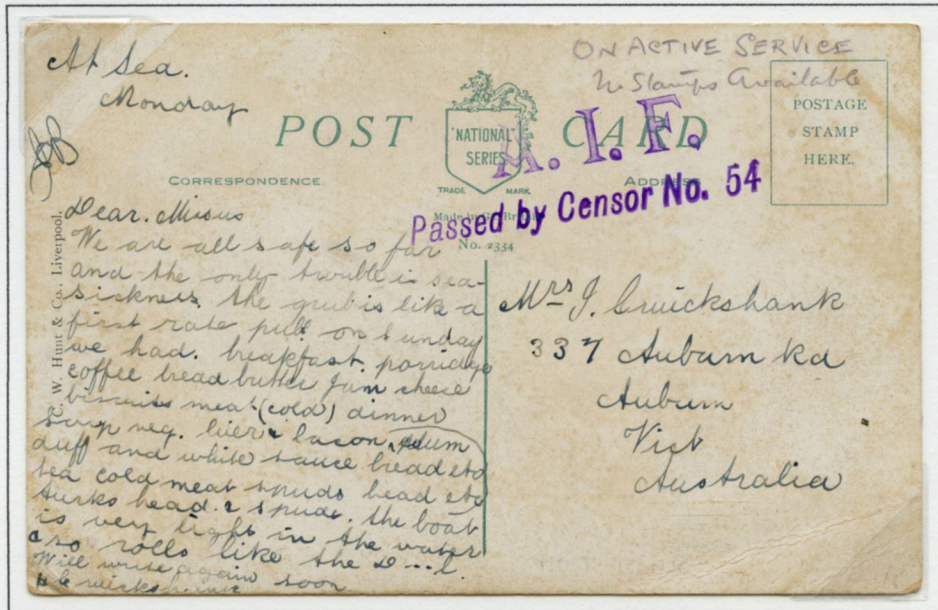
There were five transport ships on the Tenth Convoy, with no stopovers on the sub continent. All of them docked directly at either Suez, Alexandria or Port Said in Egypt.

## The final destination of the A54 "Runic" - Suez, Egypt   9th September 1915

An undated picture postcard endorsed "On Active Service/ No Stamps Available" and addressed to Victoria, with the unframed "A.I.F./ Passed by Censor No. 54" cachet in purple (Firebrace Type MCM 1/G) allocated to the A54 "Runic". The card was written by Lance Corporal Walter Cruikshank of the 2nd Infantry Battalion, who was killed in action at Villers Bretonneux on the 25th of July 1916.

The final destination of the A55 "Kyarra" - Suez, Egypt   28th September 1915
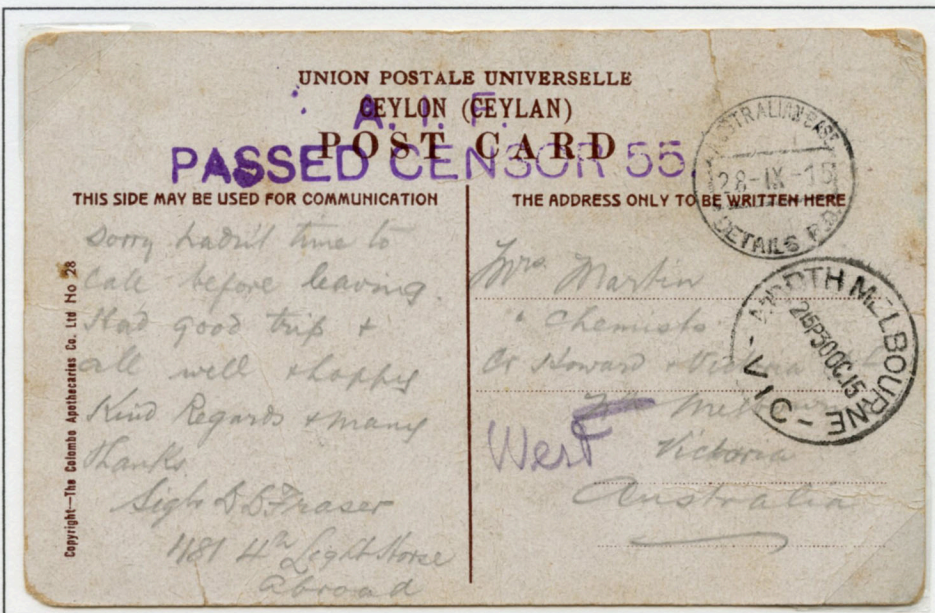
The card was written by Signaler David Fraser of the 4th Light Horse Regiment.

A postcard censored by the "A.I.F./ PASSED CENSOR 55" cachet in purple allocated to the A55 "Kyarra" (Firebrace Type MCM 20) and addressed to Victoria..

The Thirteenth Convoy

2nd October - 21st December 1915

There were only six troopships in the Thirteenth Convoy, all docking at either Suez or Port Said in Egypt.

Prior to the embarkation of A71 "Nestor" - Melbourne, Victoria   11th October 1915

A rare photograph of the A71 "Nestor" looking over the Melbourne pier dated the 11th of October 1915, prior to embarkation of the Thirteenth Convoy.

The image was taken by Captain Arthur Clayton of the First Australian General Hospital. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order as Acting Commander of the 8th Australian Field Ambulance at Ypres in late 1917 for devotion to duty. He served throughout the war and returned to Australia on the 22nd of August 1919.

The photograph is endorsed on the reverse: *"Nestor, Melb Pier, 11/10/15"*

Stopover of the A71 "Nestor" - Albany, Western Australia   15th October 1915

The postcard below was written at Albany on the 15th of October, a stopover not recorded in the official records. It was transported by rail and processed in Fremantle with the scarce circular "A.I.F./POSTAGE/FREE" Type 2 handstamp, before being sent to Victoria. When free postage was provided to the Australian troops in February 1915, these types of handstamps became necessary to avoid the Post Office taxing unmarked mail in Australia.

The card was written by Private William James of the 12th Field Ambulance who was killed in action in France on the 29th of July 1916.

The reverse of a privately printed postcard of the Troopship A71 "Nestor" with a newsboy on the front (Emery Type 303). It is dated the 15th of October 1915, when the ship had docked at Albany, Western Australia.

Four examples of the "Nestor" cards have been recorded for this convoy