

Participation in Wars

Why does a story on the “Apostle of Peace and Non-Violence”, the most celebrated “pacifist” of the twentieth century, have a section on participation in war?

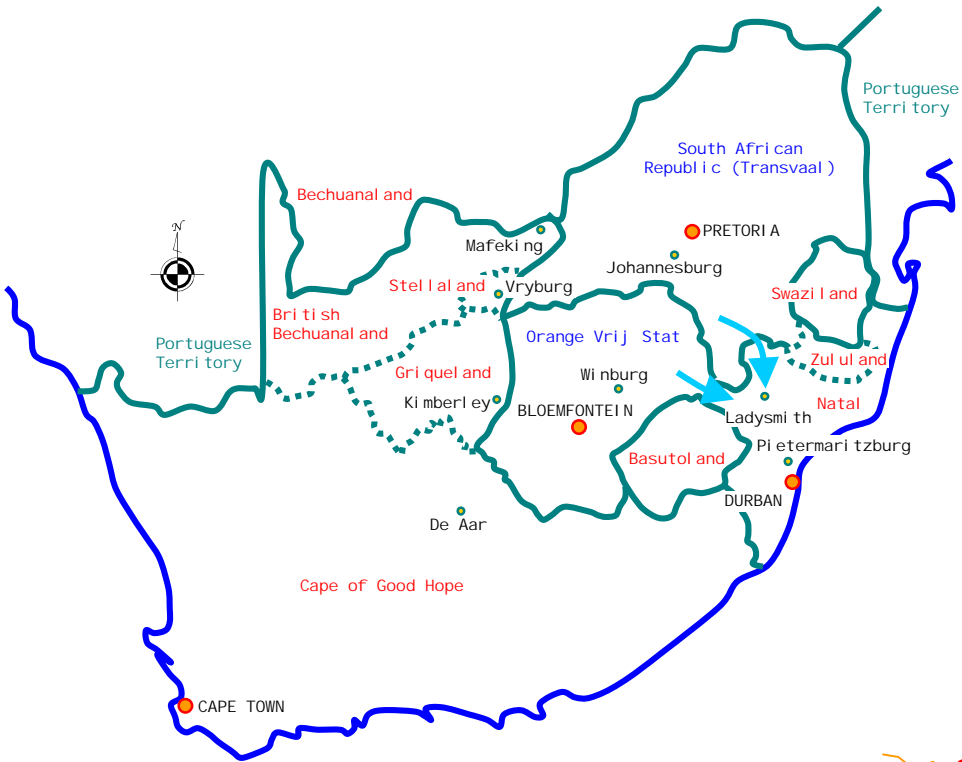
Dwight D. Eisenhower said: *“I hate war only as a soldier who has lived it can, ... who has seen its brutality, its futility and its stupidity”.*

It all began in the last year of the nineteenth century, in Southern Africa. Gandhi, as a proud sincere “Citizen of the Empire”, served what he perceived was his “moral duty” in the Boer War. He later did the same for Natal in the Zulu Rebellion of 1906.

During World War I he assisted in organizing volunteers in England and calling for recruits in India. His objection to participating in World War II was over the fact that he no longer supported the system of government that had declared and was executing the war.

Gandhi wrote in the early 1940s: *“Even after introspection during all these years, I feel that, in the circumstances in which I found myself, I was bound to adopt the course I did during the Boer War and the Great European War and, for that matter, the so-called Zulu ‘rebellion’ of Natal...”*

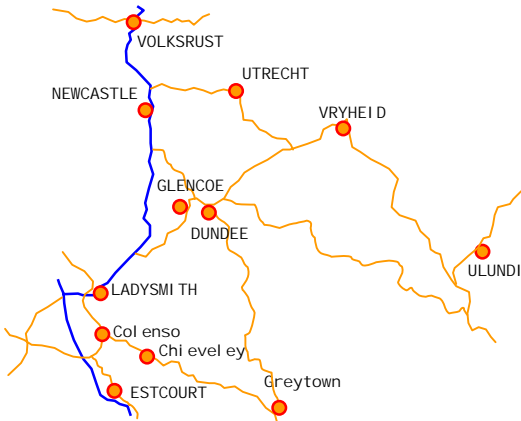
And so, presented in this section is material from these events relevant to Gandhi.



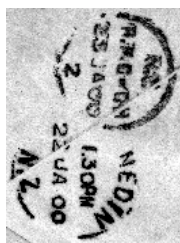
South Africa at the end of the 19th Century.

The map above shows the various crown colonies and provinces within, immediately preceding the South African War of 1899-1902. All the action that Gandhi participated in was early in the war, prompted by the Boer attack on western Natal [see arrows].

The detailed location of battlefields, towns and roads in this region of Natal is shown to the right.

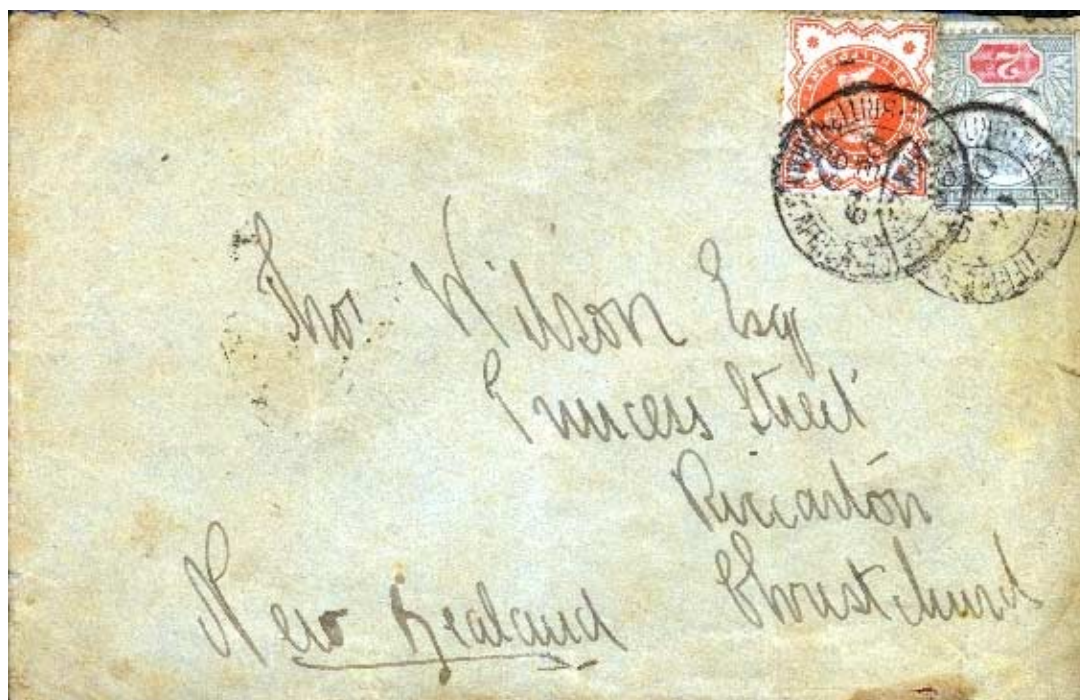


Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902)



Gandhi offered the services of the Indians on Oct. 27 and left for the front with the Ambulance Corps on Dec 14.

He served in Estcourt on Dec. 19, when the corps was temporarily disbanded after the "Colenso Reverse".



19 Dec. 1899 British Army field cancel [FP0 14] on UK stamps. Early covers with NZ destinations are rare. This was mailed four days into the Battle of Colenso in Natal. Interesting backstamps from NZ shown.

When the war began, Gandhi's personal sympathies were with the Boer, but he felt he had no right to consider his "individual convictions" before duty to the nation!

The choice of volunteering for the medical services was simple- these Indians in Natal were neither trained nor would be allowed to enter combat.

Even this service had to be "fought for", by a very supportive Dr. Booth who ran the British medical effort.

Transit [Martinsburg] and destination [Escher] backstamps shown.



20 Apr 1900 British FP0 15 cancel on cover to England with on 1/2p Natal stamp. After the crushing blow at the battle of Spioenkop [Jan 19-24], General Buller changed his strategy. Gandhi was commended for bravery for serving under fire. Corps was disbanded Jan 28 after the British Red Cross arrived.

Between Apr 20-24, Gandhi addressed several personal letters and forwarded presents to the men who served in the ambulance corps.



The second British offensive from the Cape, with the help of Lord Kitchner's tactics, was at its tail end when this cover was mailed.

The interesting letter card to England says that the war had "assumed the ridiculous stage".

Bloemfontein was taken by the British on 13th Mar. and the rest of the Orange Free State fell soon.



Interesting use of a UK 1p domestic letter card mailed from British FP0 12 on 7 Aug 1900. Isolated from the action in neighboring Orange Free State, Gandhi was busy in July and August 1900 collecting funds for famine relief in India.



Striking Registered envelope mailed 4 Sep 1900 from Winburg in Orange Free State to England.

Interesting transit markings in Bloemfontein, Capetown and London and delivery markings in Leamington shown.

Winburg in Sep 1900 was the location of the infamous POW camp for Boer families. Their brutal treatment was later commented upon by Gandhi, whose impressions on the goodness of "The Empire" was beginning to wear off.

The fortunes had reversed with the second British offensive from the Cape [Jan- Aug 1900].

The Boers began a guerrilla offensive that lasted from Aug. 1900 through May 1902.

The handling of the Boers in Bloemfontein and other O.F. State towns is the subject of many stories.



27 Jan 1901 AP0 43 cancel on "official" cover to England with 1d Orange Free State stamp. The location of the APO was Bloemfontein. Destination backstamp and the royal insignia shown.

While these covers were in transit, Gandhi and Natal were mourning the death of Queen Victoria. On Feb 2nd, he laid a wreath on the pedestal of the Queen in Durban and paid tribute to her at a memorial meeting.



Another cover mailed in the same period to England- this from British Army South Africa FPO 5. Mailed 24 Jan 1901 and franked with a 1p UK stamp.

Destination backstamp shown below.



On Jan 23rd, Gandhi expressed condolences over the Queen's death in writing, to the Colonial Secretary, on behalf of Natal Indians.

Zulu Rebellion [1906]



1 Jul 1969

Approved Bromide showing Gandhi as Stretcher Bearer in the Zulu Rebellion.



Gandhi was living in Johannesburg when news of the Zulu rebellion reached him. He still believed in the good of the British Empire and his sense of loyalty to the Crown was unshaken. Natal had a Volunteer Defense Force to quell the rebellion and Gandhi offered to form an Ambulance Corps. The offer was accepted and Gandhi enlisted 24 men from Durban.

Much has been said about Gandhi's involvement in the Zulu Rebellion. The high historical profile of this service on the side of the "whites" was a thorn in the side of relations between Indians and Africans in South Africa for some time to come.

Gandhi's own recollection was that he *"bore no grudge against the Zulus, who had harmed no Indians"*.

He even recorded doubts about the existence of the "rebellion", but indicated that the *"rightness or otherwise of the rebellion was not likely to affect"* his decision.

Gandhi said that his *"heart was with the Zulus"* and he was elated to learn that they would basically *"nurse wounded Zulus"*.

Which is why his offer for the ambulance corps was accepted so quickly. The whites did not want to nurse the Zulus!

Gandhi learnt that most of the severely wounded Zulus were not in battle, but were prisoners of the British vigilante forces!



World War I

Indian Forces Overseas

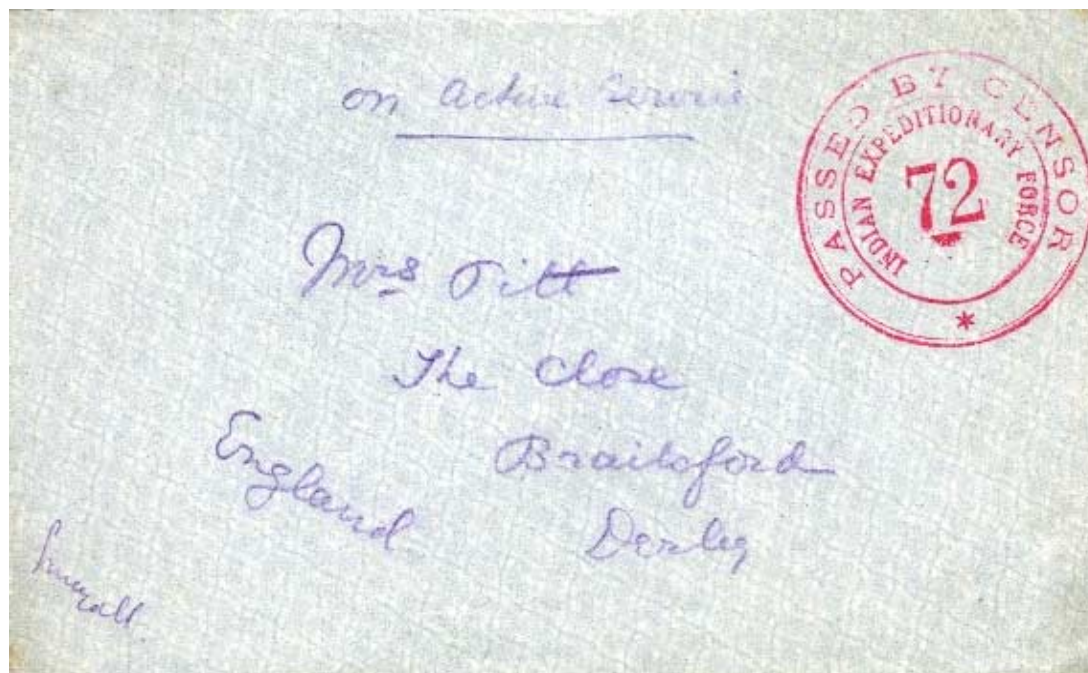
Gandhi was in England when WWI broke out. He gathered Indians in England and Ireland, many his colleagues from South Africa.

He insisted on Indians in England "*doing their bit*" for the war, an idea objected to by many others.

He assembled a class of 80 volunteers who trained for first aid.



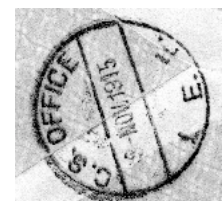
Early usage of cover mailed from FPO No. 8 [Indian Forces in Merville France, as part of the Western Front] on 29 Aug 1915. Of the 70,000 who served in France, over 5,500 were killed.



Cover mailed to England from Indian Forces serving in North Africa during WWI. The Indian Expeditionary Force was serving in Egypt. Overprinted stamps were used for regular mail. This was the uncommon "official" mail on active service. Note CS Office backstamp.

Besides the Western Front, the Indian Army of 10 divisions served in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Palestine, East Africa and Gallipoli.

A quarter of the forces were infantry and cavalry and almost all artillery personnel were British [the official policy from 1857 to 1935!].



Recruiting Combatants



Scottish "Local" depicting Gandhi's efforts at recruiting soldiers for WWI. Progressive Color Proofs.

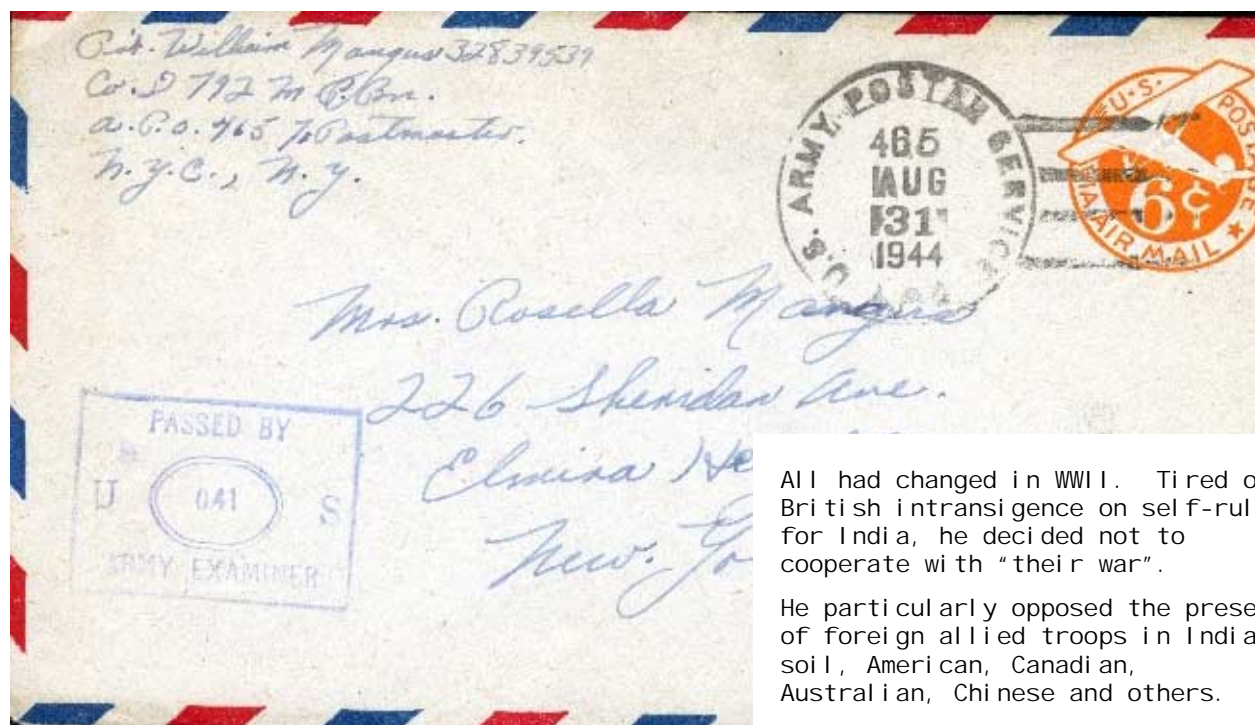
Probably the most controversial subject on Gandhi and Wars was his participation in the Imperial War Conference in Delhi [invited by the Viceroy] in 1918. He left Delhi and initiated a call for volunteers.

This was different from all else, he was recruiting COMBATANTS, not an ambulance Corps. The moral dilemma was probably taxing, as his pacifist ideals had begun to congeal. He got very sick towards the end of his drive, as he did while he was recruiting in London in 1914.

Indian forces numbered about 155,000 in 1914. By November 1918, the Army had swelled to 573,000. Over 1.3 million Indians served in WWI and about 72,000 were killed in combat.

World War II

Foreign Forces in India



All had changed in WWII. Tired of British intransigence on self-rule for India, he decided not to cooperate with "their war".

He particularly opposed the presence of foreign allied troops in Indian soil, American, Canadian, Australian, Chinese and others.

US Army Postal Service letter mailed from APO 465 [Calcutta, India] on 31 Aug 1944 to USA.

Indian National Army



21 Oct 1968

Bose shown proclaiming an Azad Hind Government in Singapore in July 1943.

Subhas Chandra Bose, formerly President of the Indian National Congress [1938-39], broke ranks with the mainstream during WWII to form a rebel army that could take advantage of British vulnerability in the face of a Japanese attack.



23 Jan 1964

Bose portrait with INA insignia and "rallying the troops". He escaped house arrest in 1941 in Calcutta and fled to Nazi Germany.



A set of "Free India" stamps with patriotic themes were prepared for use by the Germans in Vienna. Most were destroyed after Allied Capture.

These were meant for use when the Japanese invaded and conquered British India.

Bose left Berlin for Japanese occupied Singapore on 2 July 1943, to join them in their drive towards India and their operations in Burma.



Bose, who had been arrested several times in the early 1930s was released once in 1932, on the condition that he went to Europe.

His exile in Vienna in 1932 is believed to have sowed the seeds for his contacts with the Nazis.

He released a militant book called "The Indian Struggle" in 1934.

On Jan 26th 1943, Bose celebrated "Independence Day" in Berlin.

He took charge of the INA in August 1943 and formed a second division in December.

In 1944, the INA lost the famous "Imphal Campaign" in NE India and he's believed to have died in an air crash in early 1945.

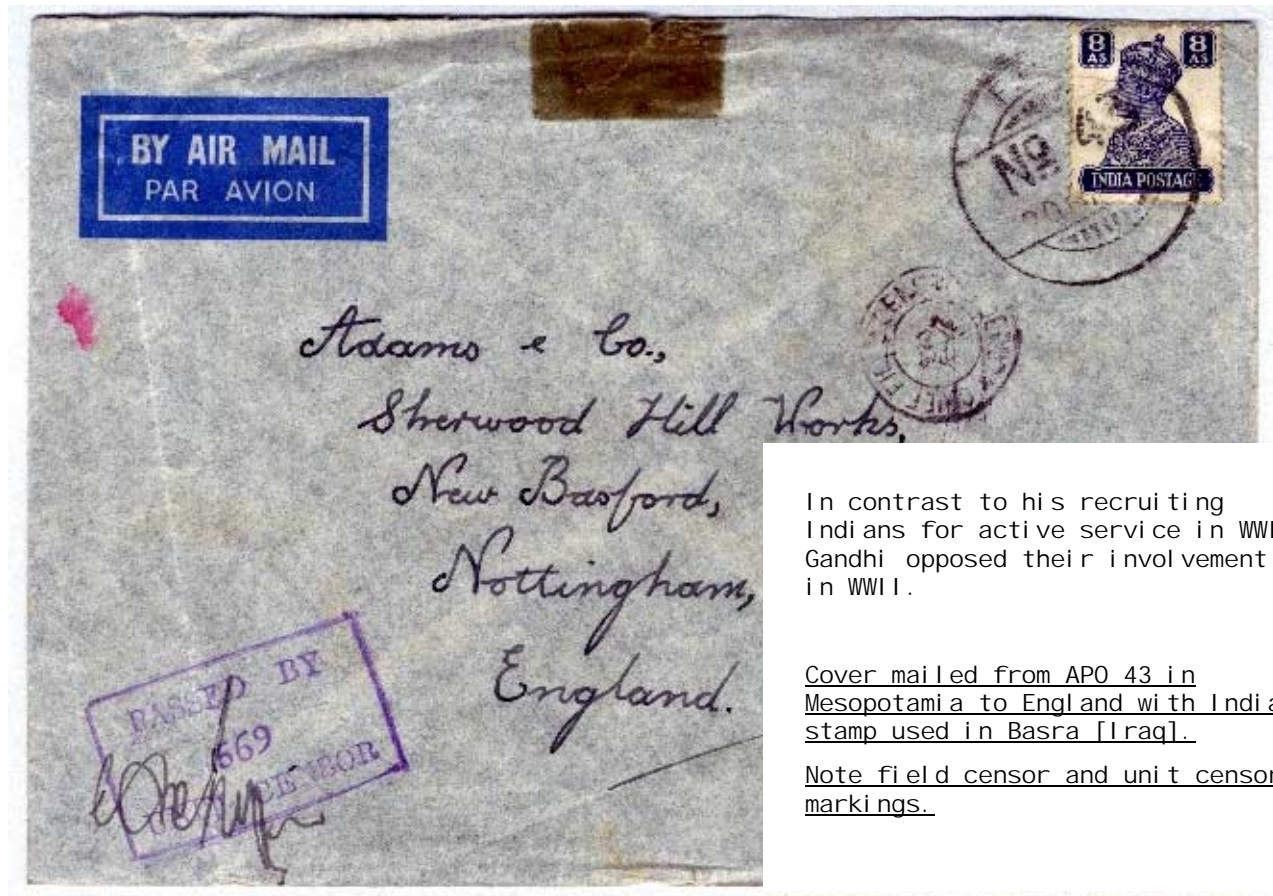
While Gandhi vehemently criticized Bose and the INA, he was popular. Even Tagore asked Gandhi to stop alienating Bose!

Bose continues to have "cult-like" following in India. Many of his sympathizers protested the release of the film Gandhi in India, as it lacked reference to Bose!



31 Dec 1993

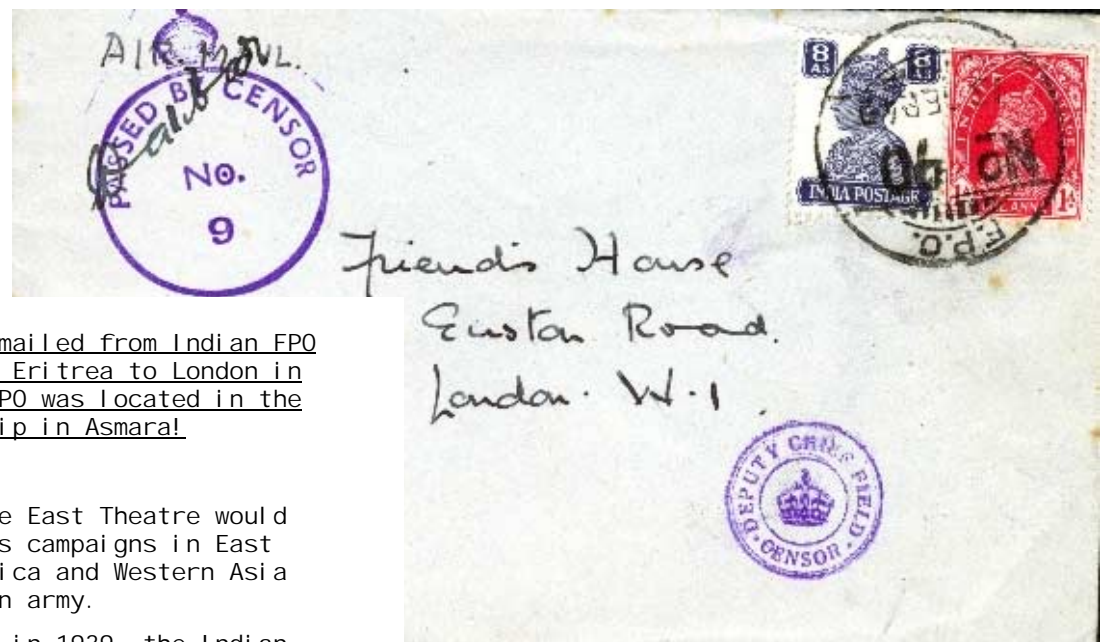
Indian Forces Overseas



In contrast to his recruiting Indians for active service in WWI, Gandhi opposed their involvement in WWII.

Cover mailed from APO 43 in Mesopotamia to England with Indian stamp used in Basra [Iraq].

Note field censor and unit censor markings.

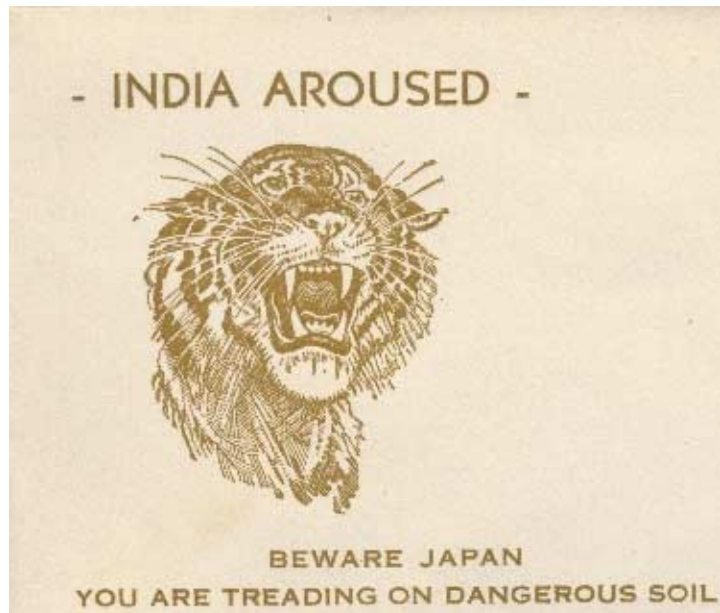


Early use- cover mailed from Indian FPO No. 90 in Asmara, Eritrea to London in Sep 1940. This FPO was located in the old Ford dealership in Asmara!

The British Middle East Theatre would never have won its campaigns in East Africa, North Africa and Western Asia without the Indian army.

Numbering 189,000 in 1939, the Indian Army swelled to over 2.6 million in 1945. Indians are famous for successfully engaged Germans and Italians in the western desert of Eritrea.

Patriotism in the face of Japanese Invasion



Patriotism was the name of the game and the British government did everything to rally the Indian masses against a possible Japanese invasion.

Patriotic cover with anti-Japanese slogan.

The same British government that strongly resisted the use of nationalistic cinderellas and labels, encouraged the use of patriotic war labels during WWII.

Cover with a patriotic "Save for India's Defence" war label that actually went through the mail, in the sensitive area of NE India [near the Burmese border]. Tied to 1½ as local rate with CDS.



Of the 1 million allied forces in Burma and south east Asia, 700,000 were Indians.

After the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan declared surrender on 10 Aug 1945.

The Japanese forces in Burma surrendered to the allied forces officially on August 15, 1945, ending the threat to British India.

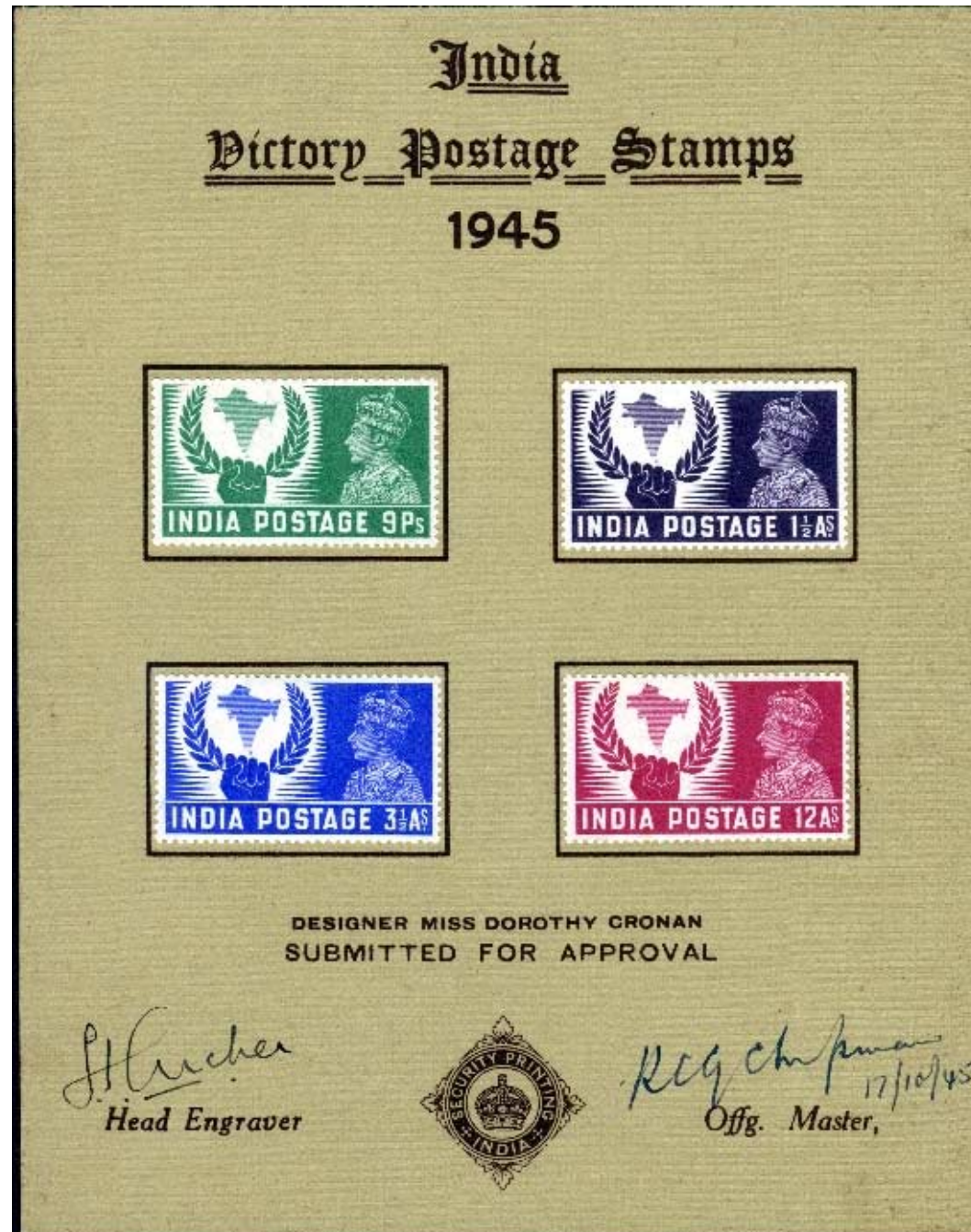
Burma was placed under a military administration and a controversial selection process for native representation in the administration began.

Cover mailed from allied APO No. 36 in Rangoon, with the entire set of "Military Administration" overprint stamps. Sent on the day of surrender, with obviously philatelic use 2 annas, 19 pies for local postage.



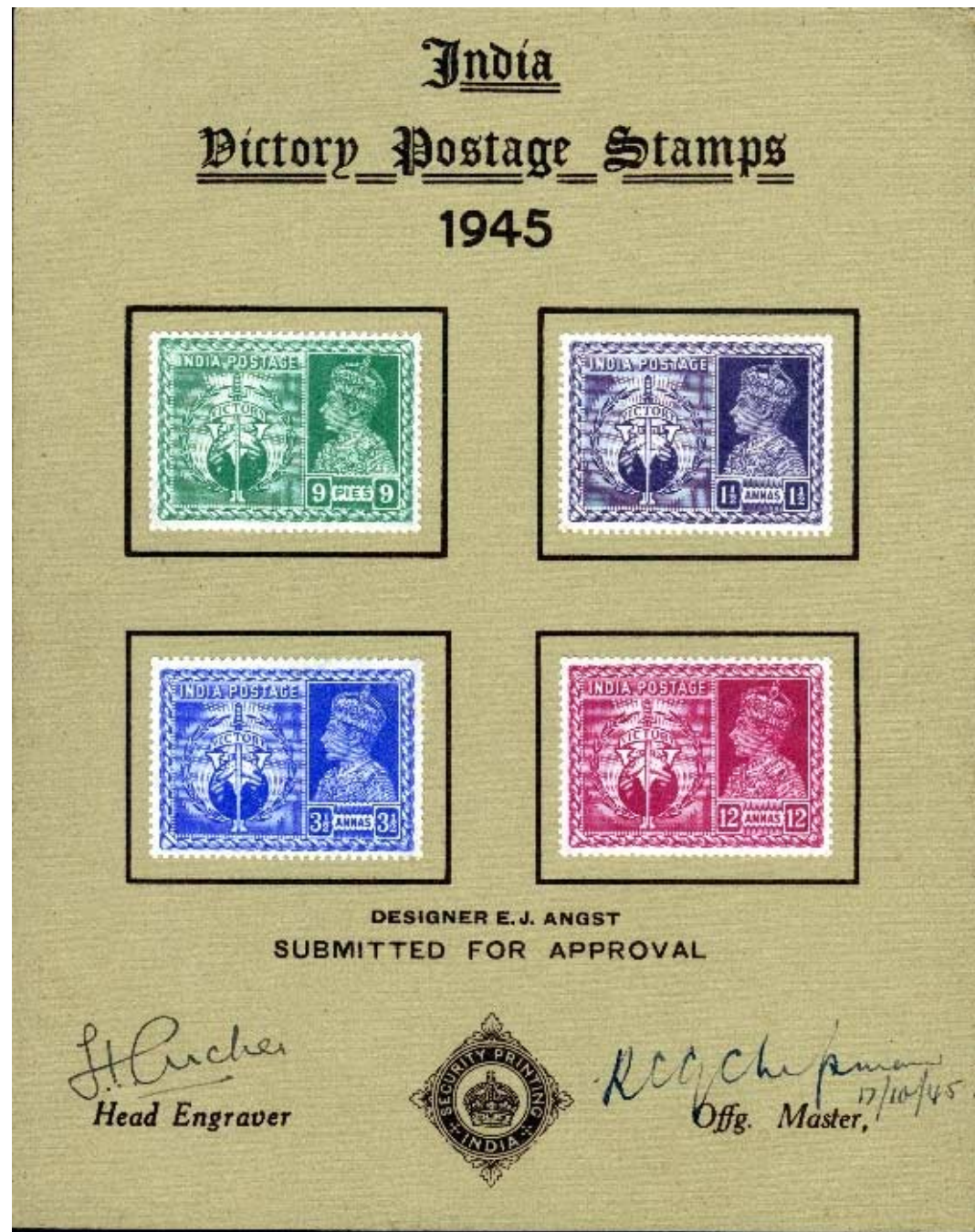
Victory Celebrations

Gandhi and most leaders of the nationalist movement spent the war years in jail, under the Defence of India Act!



Barely six weeks after the end of WWI, the process was underway for India's commemorative "Victory issue" set.

Extremely rare copy of one of the designs submitted for approval. Engraved and printed in full color, this was not the design adopted.



Unlike most British colonies, India did not issue the omnibus design. The stamps printed in India had their own unique design. Copy of the design that was accepted, as submitted for approval. Possibly unique, with the signature of head-engraver and officiating master of the Government of India Security Press.

Political Organizer and Negotiator

Natal Indian Congress [1894-1914]

This organization was triggered in response to the repressive anti-Asian Franchise Law Bill in Natal when Gandhi was in South Africa.

In June 1894, Gandhi sent telegrams to Speaker of Natal Legislative Assembly, Prime Minister Robinson and Attorney-General Escombe, asking for postponement of consideration of Franchise Law Amendment Bill until an Indian petition was presented.

In July, Gandhi led a deputation to the Natal Governor and urged him not to sanction the Franchise Bill. A week later, he petitioned the Governor requesting postponement of dispatch of the Bill to the Imperial Government for Royal assent, pending Indian petition to the latter. On July 17, 1894, he submitted lengthy mass petition signed by 10,000 Indians to Natal Government (addressed to Lord Ripon, Secretary of State for Colonies).

In late August, these preceding activities led Gandhi to establish the Natal Indian Congress- to carry on sustained agitation against discriminatory legislation in the Crown Colony, becoming its first Secretary.



Dr. A. B. Xuma was President of the African National Congress.

Dr. Yusef Mohamed Dadoo was President of the Transvaal Indian Congress.

Dr. G.M. (Monty) Naicker was President of the Natal Indian Congress.

Commemorative Post Card from South African Post Office.

All three organizations had joined forces in the face of the new apartheid government that took over South Africa in 1946. Indian political organization in SA was in good hands by the 1940s. Dadoo and Naicker [native born in Transvaal and Natal of Indian immigrant parents] had kept in touch with Gandhi throughout their struggle on behalf of the Indian community.

The Transvaal Indian Congress crystallized from the efforts against the 1906 Transvaal Asiatic Law and the 1908 Transvaal India Registration act that Gandhi organized against.

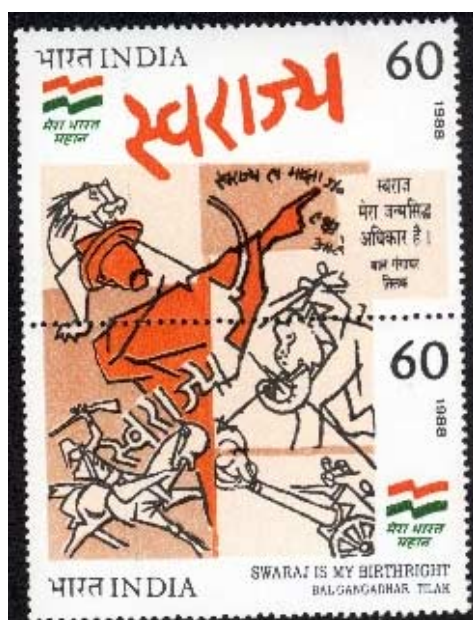
Indian National Congress [1897-1948]

The Indian National Congress was formed to function as a "safety valve" to protect the British interests in the face of Nationalism after the 1857 *Sepoy Mutiny*.

Mutiny for the British was the "First war of independence" for India, celebrated in this stamp.



9 May 1988



16 Aug 1988



23 Jul 1956



28 Jan 1965

The founder of the INC was an Englishman, Alan Octavian Hume [right].

By 1907, Congress had split functionally with the militant Bal Gangadhar Tilak from Bombay [top left] for unconditional self-rule [far left].



31 Jul 1973

Lala Lajpat Rai from Punjab [bottom left], a journalist who edited *Young India* before Gandhi took over, was another militant leader. At times, he served as a mediating intellectual force with the party's moderates.

Gopal Krishna Gokhale [below left] served as the moderate leader of the INC, seeking dominion status for India under the empire. Gandhi was invited by Gokhale to join the efforts of the INC in India.



9 May 1966



7 Nov 1958

Bipin Chandra Pal from Bengal [above right] was another militant leader who countered Gokhale's influence in the INC.

Throughout his early years at the INC, Gandhi had to face the *Lal-Bal-Pal* Trio [as they were called] in his efforts to organize a pragmatic political party out of the elitist organization.

Stamp showing Presidents of the INC.



28 Dec 1985



29 Oct 1998

One steady assistant Gandhi had for his causes in the INC was Jawaharlal Nehru.

Nehru met Gandhi for the first time in 1916, when he was a 27 year old budding lawyer with political aspirations within the INC. In 1924, he became the INC secretary-general with Gandhi's support.



15 Feb 1990



15 Aug 1973



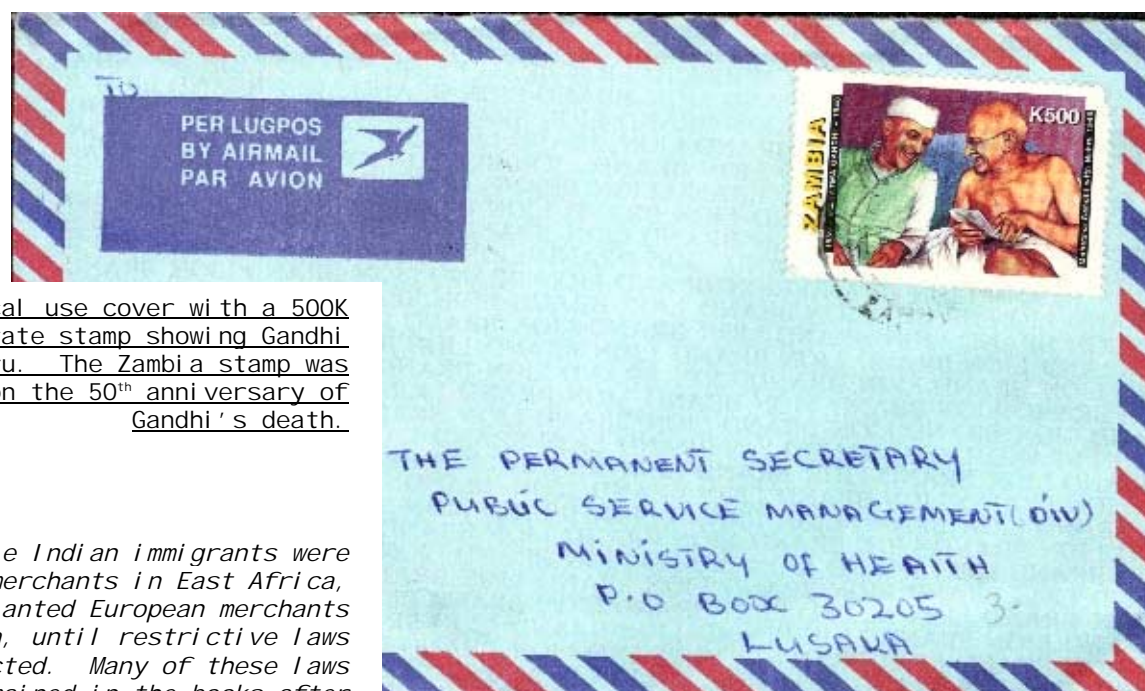
12 Feb 1990

Gandhi's activities in South Africa led to his association with the INC from 1897, long before he returned to India.



15 Oct 1989

The image of Gandhi and Nehru shown in all the stamps above is from the 1946 session of the Indian National Congress convened in Bombay on July 6. The newly elected and energized post-war All India Congress Committee [AICC] session was held under the "Presidentship" of Nehru. Earlier, Nehru was elected as the AICC President in 1929 [Lahore].



30 Jan 1998

Local use cover with a 500K domestic rate stamp showing Gandhi and Nehru. The Zambia stamp was issued on the 50th anniversary of Gandhi's death.

While Indian immigrants were pioneer merchants in East Africa, they supplanted European merchants in Zambia, until restrictive laws were enacted. Many of these laws remained in the books after independence, leading to an efflux of Indians from Zambia to the West.

Post-Gandhi Indian National Congress.

The 55th session of the All India Congress Committee met in Jaipur in December 1948, over 10 months after Gandhi's death.

Nehru, who was elected Interim Prime Minister before independence, was elected as the first Prime Minister of India on August 15th 1947.

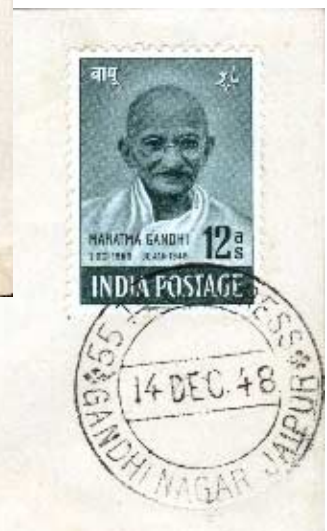
In honor of Gandhi, the location of Jaipur where the Congress convened was named Gandhi nagar.

These covers feature the special cancellation applied to mail sent by the Congress' delegates.

The two covers with lower value stamps are cancelled in Hindi only, another new feature in Independent India's post office.

The CDS reads- "55th Congress, Gandhi nagar, Jaipur". The date, also in Hindi numerals, reads "4 Dec 1948".

The cover with the 12 anna stamp is tied to a traditional English-only CDS. This was applied on the four days before the last session of the Congress.



26 Jan 1998

Nehru and Patel were considered the logical leaders to take over the strategic reins of the INC from Gandhi. The latter served as Nehru's defense minister in the cabinet and made several decisions that could be construed as "un-Gandhian" over the next year.