

Indian Freedom Struggle straddling on Japanese Expansionism during World War 2

... Inspired by events during 19th century and World War 1, fought by defecting Indians in the Far East with political and military support from Japan

Purpose: To narrate with the inspirational events, the revolutionary struggle for Indian Independence in Malaya during WW2, with political and military support from Japan.

Background: Indian Independence from British rule on August 15, 1947 serves as the hallmark of decolonization in the post WW2 world. While Mahatma Gandhi became a global icon for his non-violence struggle, Clement Attlee, the then British prime minister, admitted that Gandhi's influence upon the decision to quit India was 'minimal'. He reportedly admitted the erosion of loyalty to the British crown among the Indian army as a result of the activities of the Indian National Army under **Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose**, as the principal cause.

INA's key military activities were founded on three intertwined principles: 1. The mutiny of 1857 by Indian sepoys fighting against socio-cultural hegemony to achieve equal benefits as non-natives, 2. A revolutionary movement arising from a sense of inequality and ill-treatment, and 3. Formation of an army comprising captured prisoners of war defecting against their hitherto British masters and fighting for a greater cause.

Revolutionary movement in India gained ground after **Chapekar brothers' execution**, who had assassinated the plague commissioner of Bombay dissenting against the latter's treatment of Indian subjects during the Bubonic plague of 1896. Thereafter revolutionaries working in India and abroad immortalized the mutiny of 1857 as an inspirational event, garnering a spirit of mass rebellion by attributing it as the First War of Indian Independence. During WW1, propaganda against British imperialism were mobilized and mutinies by defecting Indian soldiers were thatched only to be crushed by the British eventually. Several revolutionaries fled to Japan and Malaya, where the cause of Indian independence was supported both politically and by an already existing Indian diaspora.

As Anglo-Japanese alliance was waning, Indian sovereignty became a strategic necessity for the **Greater East-Asia co-prosperity sphere** advocated by Japan. **Militant revolutionary groups were formed**, collectively regarded as **Indian Independence Leagues (IIL)** or **Indian Volunteer Forces** with Japanese patronage. However, their involvement in the impending Burma and Indian campaigns was not explicitly strategized. The goal was to **penetrate from Burma, marching towards Delhi and occupy India**.

Simultaneously, **Netaji** traveled to Germany and attempted the formation of a provisional Government of British Indian PoWs in Italy and Germany, with help from Axis powers. **However, India's independence was nowhere in the then political agenda of Europe**. It was **Netaji's secret arrival in Japan**, that provided the **much needed leadership** and in **May 1943**, the IIL and Indian PoWs detained after the fall of Singapore in 1941, were organized into a well-knit unit, the **Azad Hind Fauj (AHF)** or the **Indian National Army (INA)** – the official army of the **Azad Hind Government** (Provisional Government of Free India) formed officially in October 1943.

Netaji negotiated **INA's engagement in warfare alongside Japan** in impending battles of **Imphal and Kohima, invading India** as part of the Burma campaign. He envisioned that Indians engaged militarily against the British would have a tremendous psychological impact and spark off a pan-Indian revolution, similar in spirit to the uprising of 1857.

Although **strategic Allied victories at Kohima and Imphal** would **crush the military efforts of the INA**, British rule in India became widely unpopular as demonstrated by public support, **during the INA trials of 1945 and a subsequent mutiny of the servicemen of the Royal Indian Navy in 1946**. These events urged the post-war, British government grant India her independence on August 15, 1947.

Scope: The narrative of this exhibit is dissimilar to others highlighting non-violent movements led by Gandhi. Postal history materials of **Indian and Japanese-Occupation postal history** are exhibited to **establish historical background and the influence of Japan on Indian Independence movement** in Straits settlements respectively.

Rarity: Materials related to Indian Independence movement in the Straits settlements are extremely scarce and elusive and **not more than 20 items** are known to exist in private hands **including 6 items displayed here**. The scarcity stems from a **conscious attempt to destroy evidence of connections with Axis powers** after surrender of Japan, in addition to **British censorship in India precluding captured PoWs (eventually INA soldiers) from writing letters home to India**. **All the 6 items have been discovered by the exhibitor**.

Since **postal regulations of the occupation period required explicit details of the sender** (name and location) to be listed on the mail, **sender's details bear de-facto postal history that has been used to derive historical context of Indian association**.

Rarity statements have been made based on **survey of highly acclaimed collections and exhibits or known references**[4, 7]. Rarities are matted red ■, and items with significant research associated either with postal or contemporaneous history are identified with a 🔍.

During Japanese occupation period, explicit listing of name and location of the sender was mandatory, whereby sender's details are de-facto elements of postal history.



1944 Postcard (4 sen rate) sent from Syonan (Singapore) to Java with Japanese censor mark and instructional handstamp. **“CONTRARY TO REGULATIONS - Sender's Name and Address not shown on cover”**. Although the name and designation of sender was noted, the camp address is not detailed.



1943 Japanese occupation cover bearing combination of “Dai Nippon” and Kanji overprints bearing Japanese mark, obliterated by cancellation bearing **Showa year 2603 (1943)**, with **boxed instructional handstamp “CONTRARY TO REGULATIONS - Sender's Name and Address not shown on cover”**.

Plan of the Exhibit

Earlier Inspirational events

- Indian Rebellion (1857) and Proclamation Durbar (1877)
- Bombay plague of 1896
- WW1, propaganda and defection of Indian troops

Efforts in Germany to form a Provisional Government of Free India

Indian Independence Leagues and formation of the Azad Hind Fauj

Japanese Invasion of Burma, the Andamans and legitimacy of the INA

Defeat of the Japanese by Allied forces

The battles of Imphal and Kohima

Defeat of Japan by innovative and strategic Allied forces

Commemoration by Allied powers and the fate of the INA

References

[1] W.H. Adgey-Edgar (1946). *Catalogue of Imperial Japanese overprints and issues*. Gloucester Printers

[2] T.R. Sareen (2004). Subhas Chandra Bose, Japan and British Imperialism. *European Journal of East Asian Studies*. Vol. 3(1), p. 69-97.

[3] D.S. Virk (1973). *Indian Army Post Offices - Locations and movements 1939-1947*. A.P.S. Historical Society, Kamptee.

[4] Japanese occupation stamps in Southeast Asia: Masayoshi Tsuchiya collection (2004). Japan Philatelic Society (http://www.stampedia.net/stamp/exhibition/67_2/fr).

[5] Vikram Sampath (2019). Savarkar. Penguin India.

[6] <https://www.mkheritage.org.uk/archive/jt/tw/docs/88.html>

[7] Jal M. Cooper (1948). *Early India Cancellations*. Thacker and Co., Bombay

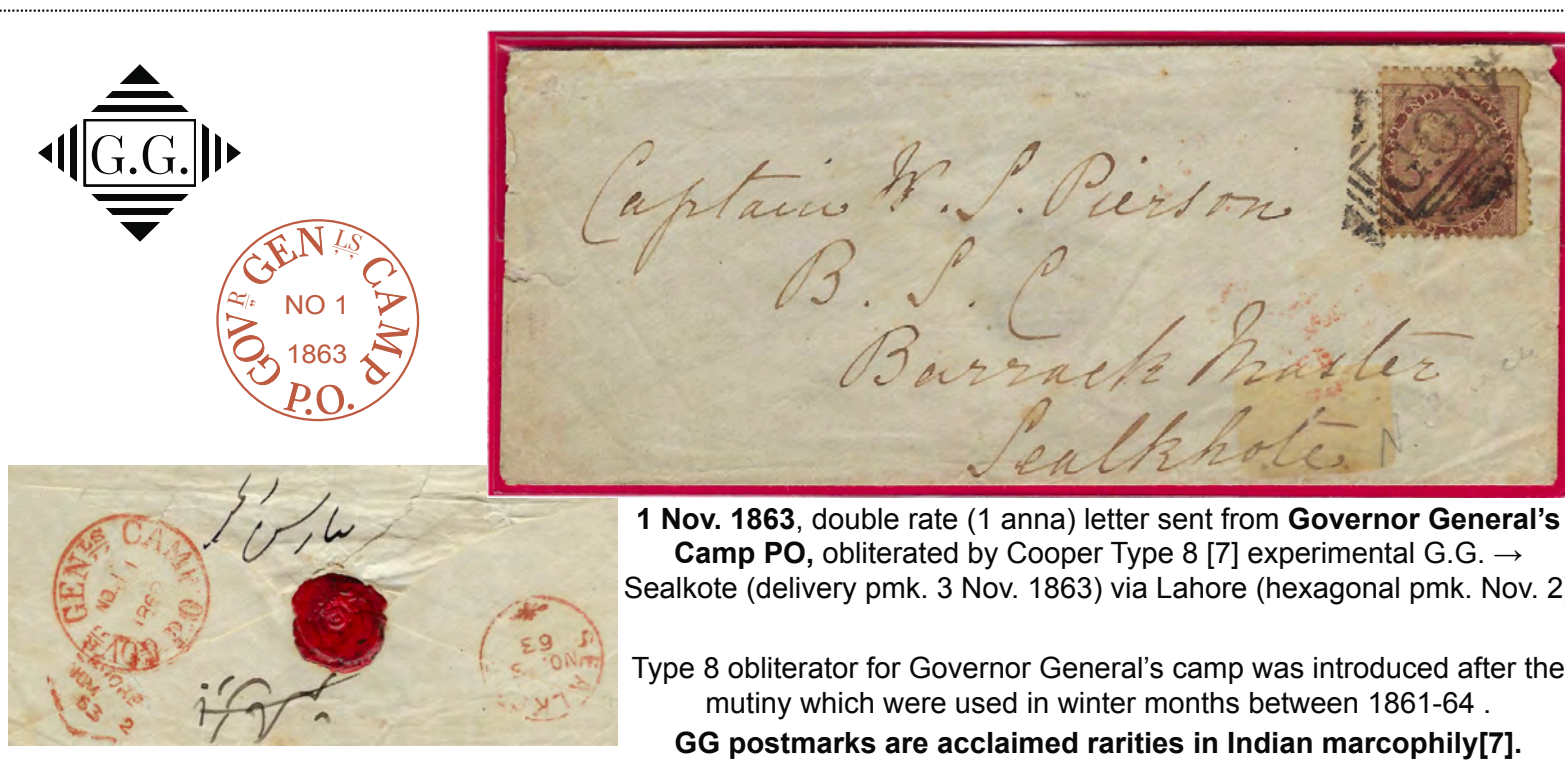


Earlier inspirational events: Indian Rebellion (1857) and Proclamation Durbar (1877)

Earlier inspirational events: Bombay plague of 1896

The uprising of 1857 was immortalized as **First War of Indian Independence – the ideological origin of the well-knit INA almost a century later**. East India Company was abolished and British Crown rule was established under a Governor-General.

In 1896-97, a bubonic plague hit India. British government had set up a Special Plague Committee to manage the pandemic. Despite directives of the government, attitudes of the plague commissioner was dismissive of local norms and customs. This **enraged the Chapekar brothers into assassinating the commissioner** in the June of 1897.



1 Nov. 1863, double rate (1 anna) letter sent from **Governor General's Camp PO**, obliterated by Cooper Type 8 [7] experimental G.G. → Sealkote (delivery pmk. 3 Nov. 1863) via Lahore (hexagonal pmk. Nov. 2)

Type 8 obliterator for Governor General's camp was introduced after the mutiny which were used in winter months between 1861-64 . **GG postmarks are acclaimed rarities in Indian marcophily[7].**



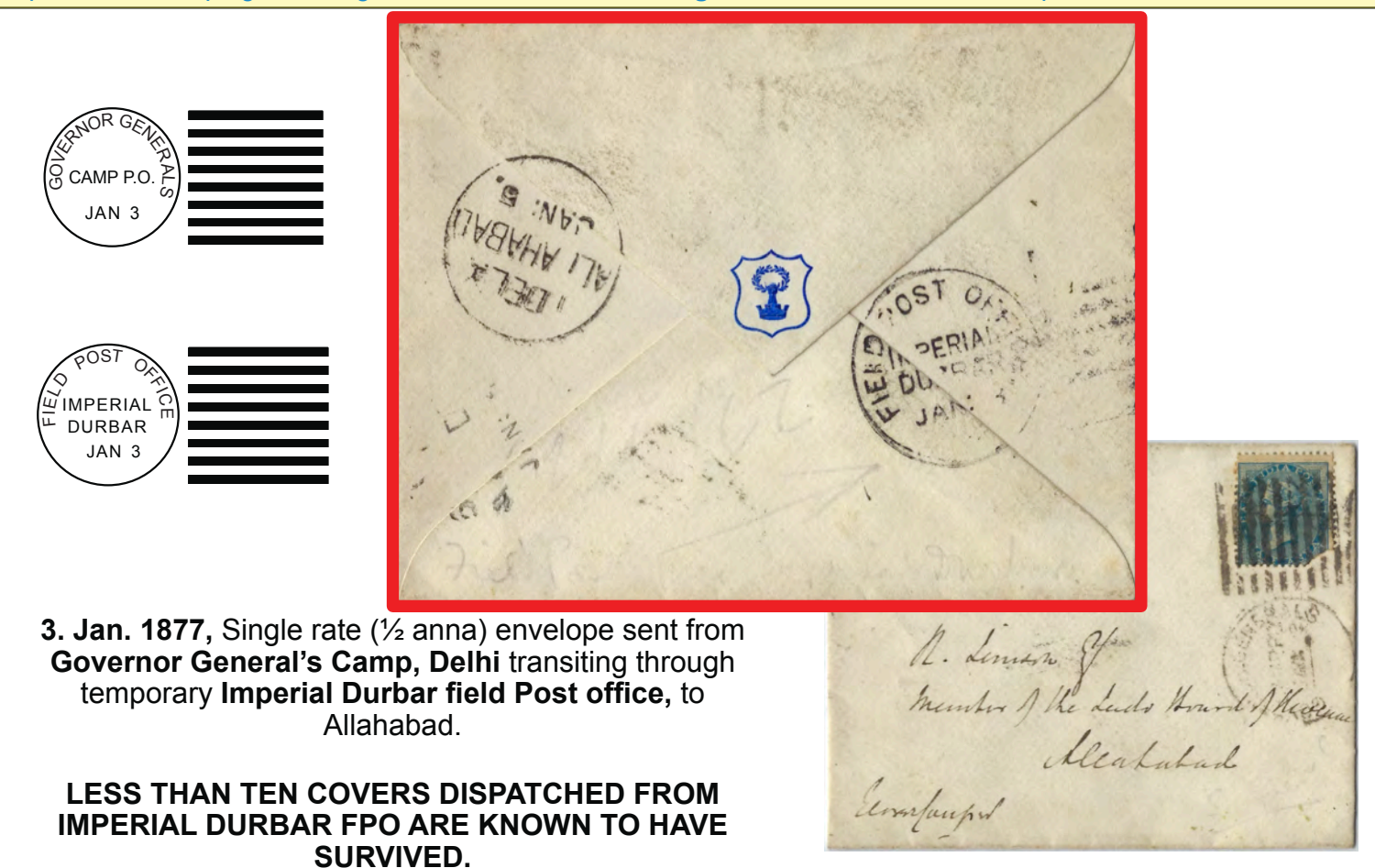
Clothes and possessions of a suspected patient being burned on the street

The Chapekar brothers were **arrested and sentenced to death**. Their sacrifice evoked **Revolutionary Nationalism in India**.



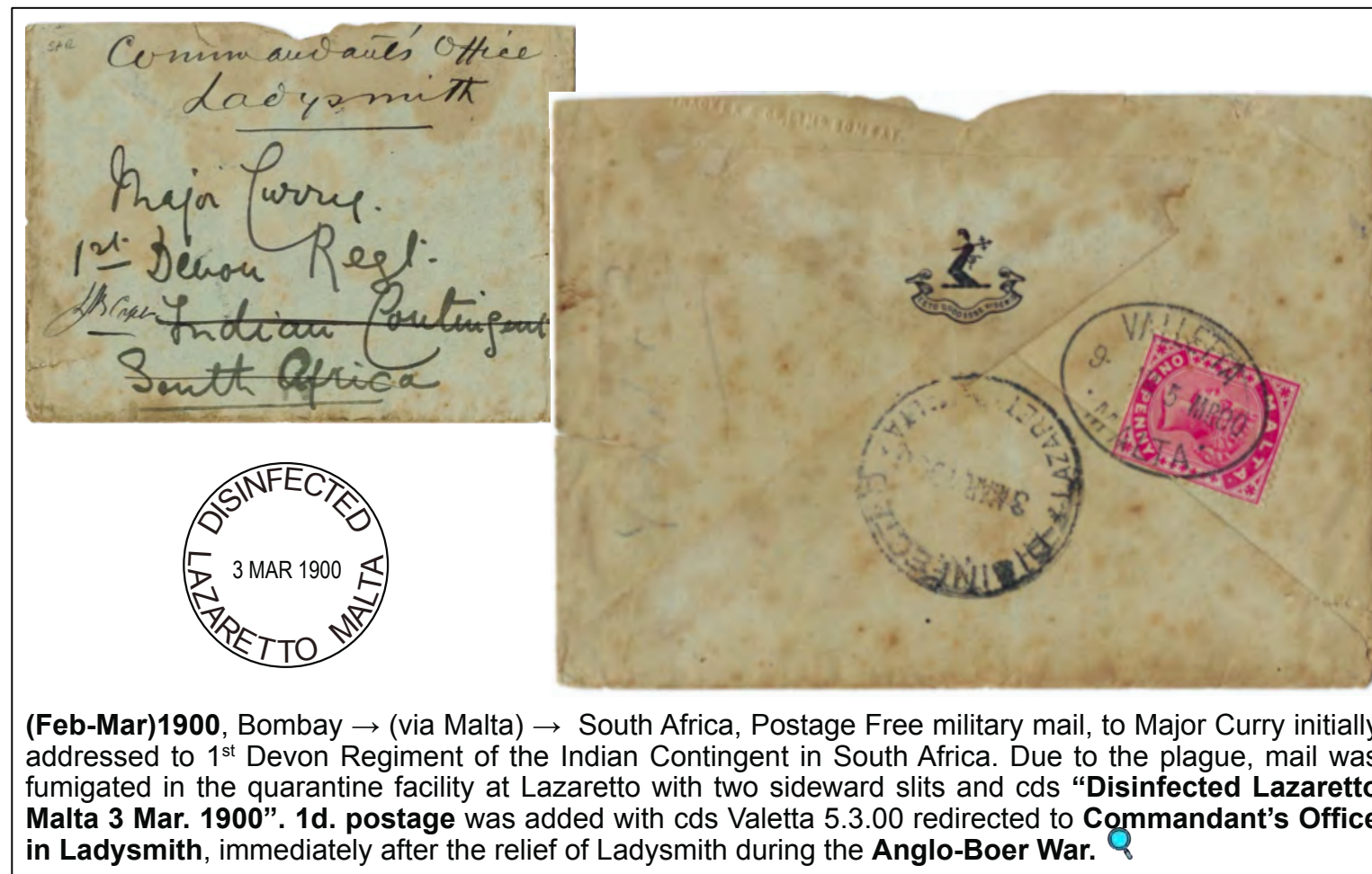
Chapekar brothers

At the **Proclamation Durbar of 1877**, a citation was read out requesting the declared **Empress of India, Queen Victoria** to grant the **same political and social status to Indians** as her British subjects. This was the first hint of an Indian independence campaign evoking a **consciousness of foreign domination – another inspirational narrative of the INA.**



3. Jan. 1877, Single rate (½ anna) envelope sent from **Governor General's Camp, Delhi** transiting through temporary **Imperial Durbar field Post office**, to Allahabad.

LESS THAN TEN COVERS DISPATCHED FROM IMPERIAL DURBAR FPO ARE KNOWN TO HAVE SURVIVED.



(Feb-Mar)1900, Bombay → (via Malta) → South Africa, Postage Free military mail, to Major Curry initially addressed to 1st Devon Regiment of the Indian Contingent in South Africa. Due to the plague, mail was fumigated in the quarantine facility at Lazaretto with two sideward slits and cds **"Disinfected Lazaretto Malta 3 Mar. 1900"**. 1d. postage was added with cds Valetta 5.3.00 redirected to **Commandant's Office in Ladysmith**, immediately after the relief of Ladysmith during the **Anglo-Boer War**.

Earlier inspirational events: WW1 and defection of Indian troops

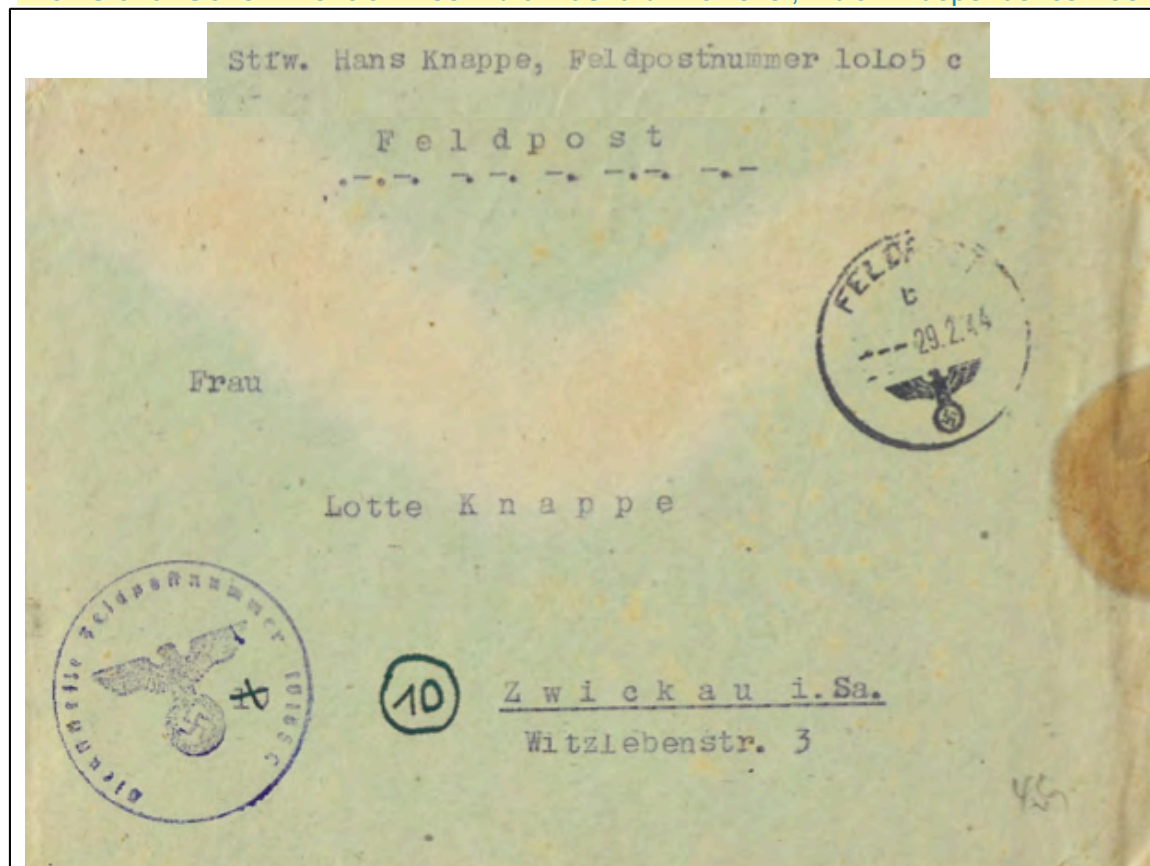
Indian Revolutionaries abroad developed the narrative of British exploitation of India during WW1.



12 Aug. 1917, German Propaganda postcard sent (postage free) to Heidelberg via Feldpost, with a sarcastic message in both French and German “John Bull [personification of the UK], the protector of the Oppressed” showing an Indian (INDES) under the boot, with violet handstamp identifying sender’s regiment (Fussartillerie Regiments Stab or Artillery of Foot).

Efforts in Germany to form a Provisional Government of Free India

By WW2, British imperialism in India was well recognized in world politics. Subhas Chandra Bose, arrived in Germany, seeking alliance with Axis forces. Indian PoWs in Germany and Italy were consolidated into an Indian Legion, and foundation of the Provisional Government of Free India was laid. However, Indian independence was not in the political agenda of Europe.

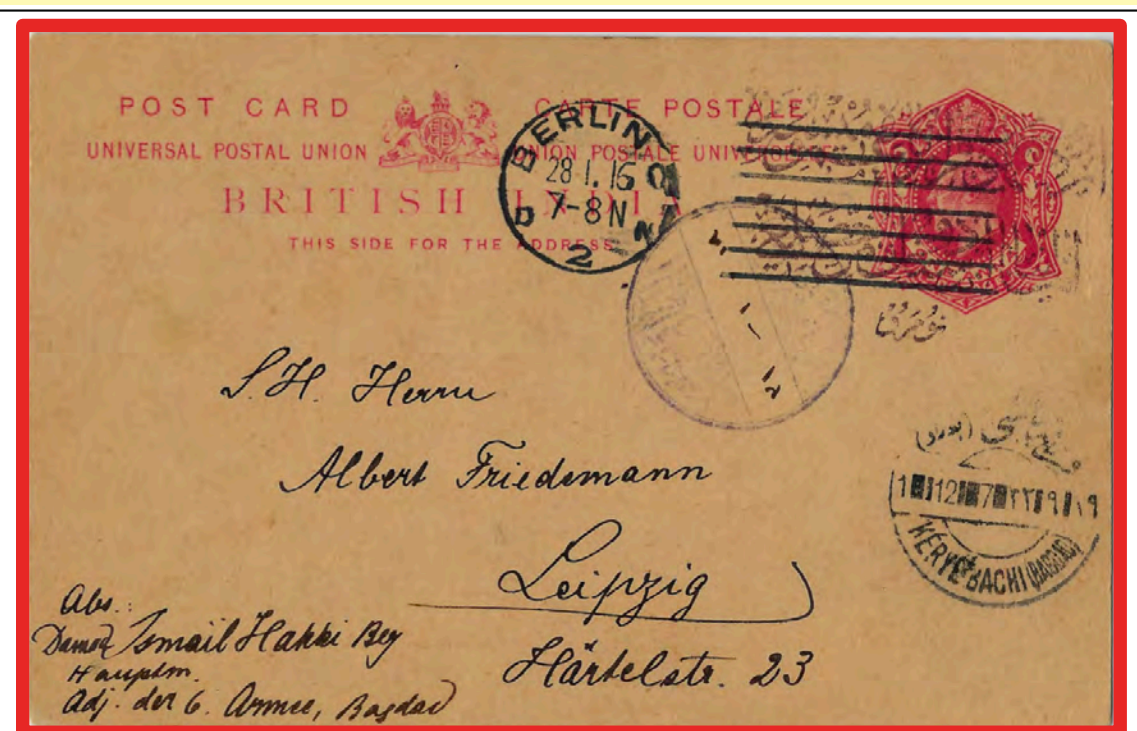


29 Feb. 1944, Envelope sent from Indian Legion 950 (10105C) formed by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose earlier in 1942 via German Feldpost.



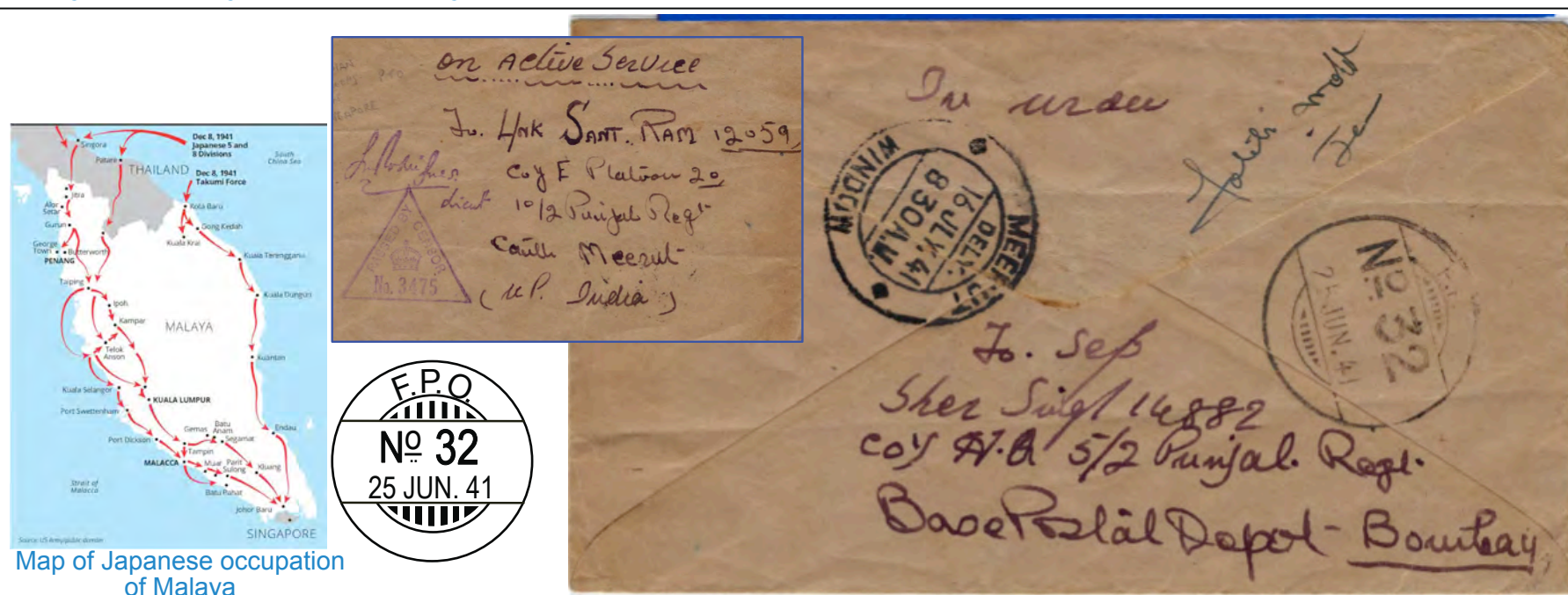
Proposed issues of the Azad Hind Government in Germany

Several native Indian infantries fought in WW1 and the idea of a collective mutiny by Indian soldiers against British rule in India, was thatched by revolutionaries. Although several planned mutinies were crushed, the revolutionaries became convinced later, when captured Muslim PoWs defected and fought for the Caliphate – a symbol of religious solidarity, after Allied defeat at Kut-al-Amara.



1916 overprinted “Turkish correspondence letter” used with Ottoman Field-postmark mailed from “KERYE BACHI (BAGDAD), to Berlin. Few India 1 anna UPU postcards were surcharged by the Ottoman army after defeating the British at the Battle of Kut. ONE OF THREE SURVIVING EXTANTS

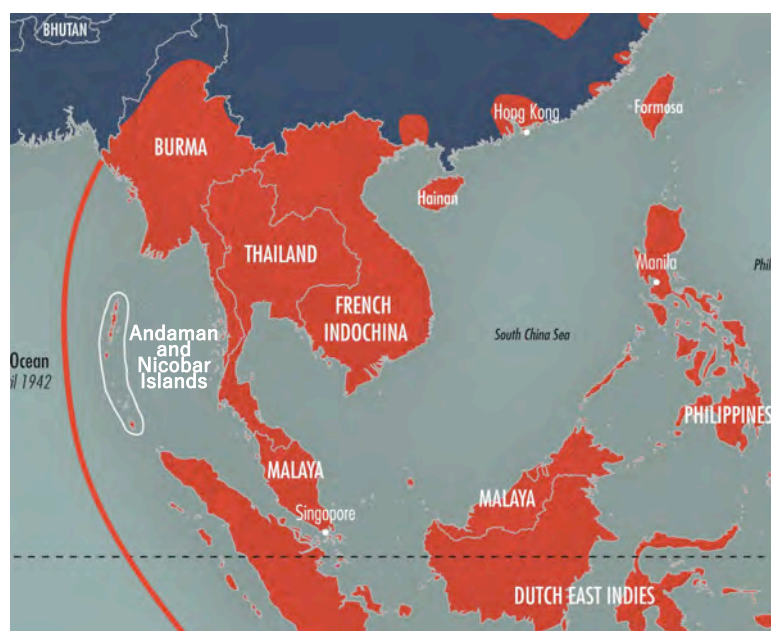
In the Pacific theatre, several Indian troops were sent to Singapore in 1941 to defend British interests in the Straits-Settlements from Japanese invasion. After Fall of Singapore in Feb 1942, these soldiers were perceived as potential sources of intelligence on British military defenses by Japanese military.



25 Jun, 1941 censored mail correspondence between Indian soldiers, of the 5/2 Punjab Regt. stationed in Singapore (FPO 32) to a soldier of 10/2 Punjab Regt. Stationed in Meerut via Base Postal Depot in Bombay. FPO 32 was a part of the contingent sent to Malaya before Fall of Singapore. Mails to/from Indian soldiers are rare [3].

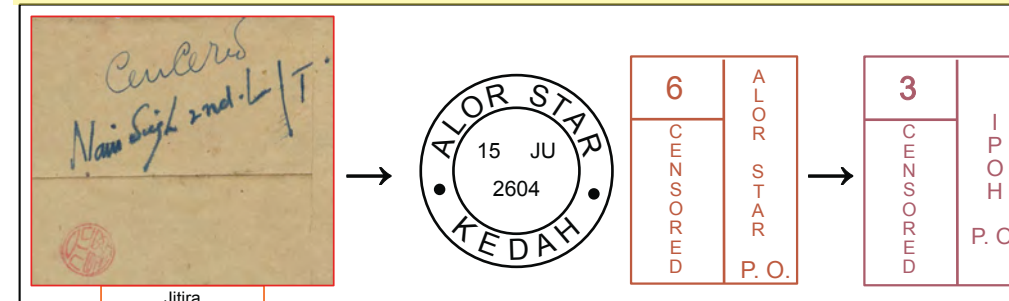
Indian Independence Leagues and formation of the Indian National Army (Azad Hind Fauj)

By 1942 Japan had occupied significant territories in South-east Asia and had been formally advocating the idea of a **Greater East-Asia co-prosperity sphere** where **Indian independence** was **strategically important**. With a large expatriate population in the Straits-Settlements, **Indian Independence Leagues** or **Indian Volunteer forces** under **Rashbehari Bose** were formed, **being trained in warfare**.



Map of Japanese occupied territories by 1942

Arrival of **Subhas Chandra Bose** in Japan in May 1943 from Germany, provided **essential leadership**, whereby **PoWs**, along with **military forces of the IIL** were organized into a well-knit **Indian National Army (INA)** collectively regarded as the **Azad Hind Fauj (AHF)**. In October 1943, the **Azad Hind Govt. (Provisional Govt. of Free India)** was formally established.

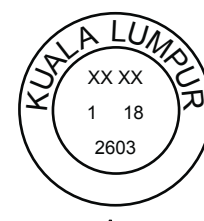
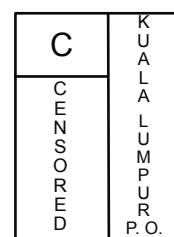
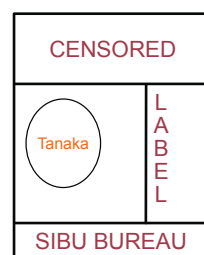


Rate: 8 Sen

Route: Sibuloh (boxed censor) → Sari Kei

18 Mar. 1943, Letter from Sibuloh to Sari Kei in Malaya with cachet depicting map of unpartitioned India signifying special privilege of not divulging explicit details of sender.

ONLY DISCOVERED COVER BEARING SIBU-SHU CACHET



Rate: 8 Sen

Route: Kuala Lumpur (boxed censor) → Alor Star → Kulim (2 days)

18 Jan. 1943, Cover sent from a **military camp of Indian Independence League** in Kuala Lumpur with by Indian Independence Volunteer Force handstamp, censored in black at Kuala Lumpur, to Kulim via Alor Star.

ONE OF TWO KNOWN COVERS BEARING CACHET OF INDIAN INDEPENDENCE VOLUNTEER FORCE

Although Japan supported the IIL, it **lacked strategy to integrate both PoWs and IIL in their army and engage them in their impending campaigns against Allied powers westward.**



Rate: 8 Sen

Route: Camp Jitira (censored chop 2nd Lt. Nani Singh) → Alor Star (unit 6) → Ipoh, Perak (unit 3)

15 Jun, 1944, Triple censored cover bearing Siamese colonial issue sent from Camp Jitira to Ipoh endorsed by **JAI HIND** (Glory to India), by a soldier of **Azad Hind Fauj** awaiting for action during battle of Imphal. Cover was censored at Jitira by 2nd Lieutenant Nani Singh, Alor Star and Ipoh.

The address of the sender reads:

1/7th **Guerrilla Regiment**
Azad Hind Fauj (**A.H.F.**)
JITIRA

Japan ceded four Malay states Kedah, Kelantan, Trengganu and Perlis to Thailand on the condition of cooperation. Definitive stamps printed in Bangkok were issued in the four states on 15 January, 1944, to be purchased only with Japanese currency making their usage particularly rare.

UNIQUE SOLDIER'S LETTER OF INA WITH THAI COLONIAL ISSUE

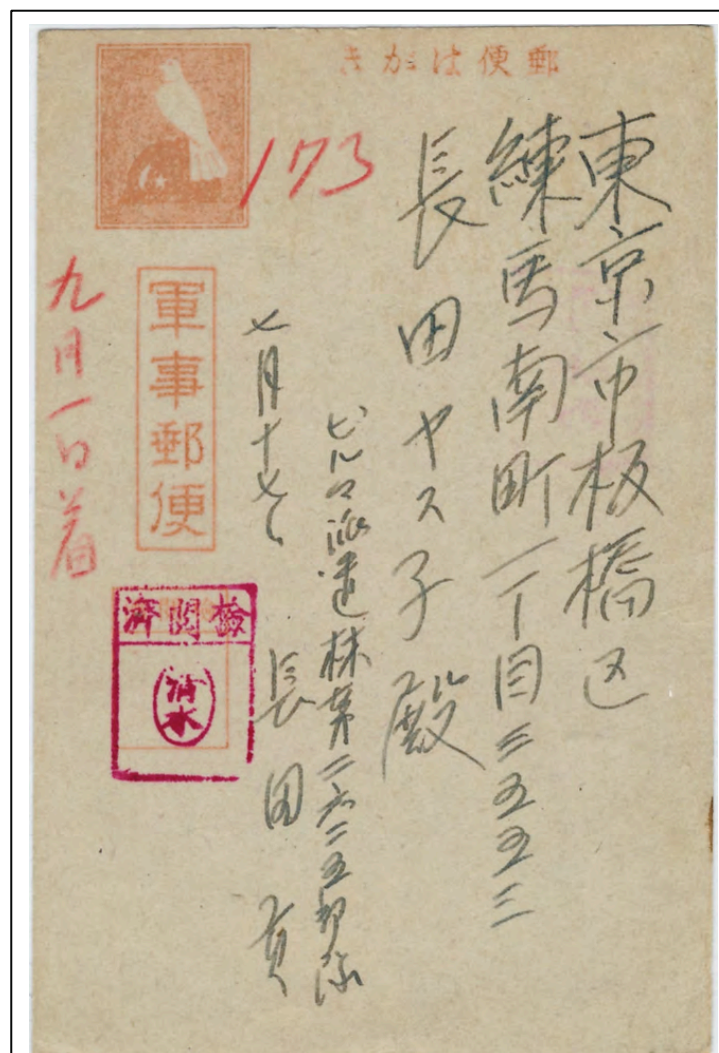
Japanese Invasion of Burma and transfer of Andaman Islands to the Azad Hind Govt.

Japanese invasion of Burma (1942-1945) was a strategic objective to **disrupt critical supply links between the Allied powers and China**, while also attacking British government in India.

In addition to military forces, Japan leveraged anti-British sentiment of the native people, since Burma's colonization after the **Third Anglo-Burmese War** in 1886.



31 Jul, 1886, Military mail from Third Anglo-Burmese war. **Double rated (9 annas)** envelope from **Temporary Post Office (Burmese Field Sub PO/No. 1)** sent from Mandalay to UK. Route: Mandalay (overland) → Bombay (Aug. 3: P&O Gwalior ship) → Suez (Aug. 15: Overland) → Alexandria (P&O Tanjore ship) → Brindisi (overland) → Surrey



17 Jul. 1942, Military censored postcard from **Hayashi's Army (Burma)** → Higashi city with receipt date of Sept. 1, 1942. Hayashi's Army of **15th Infantry division of the Japanese Army**, involved in Burmese invasion. **Sender's details are listed on bottom left**

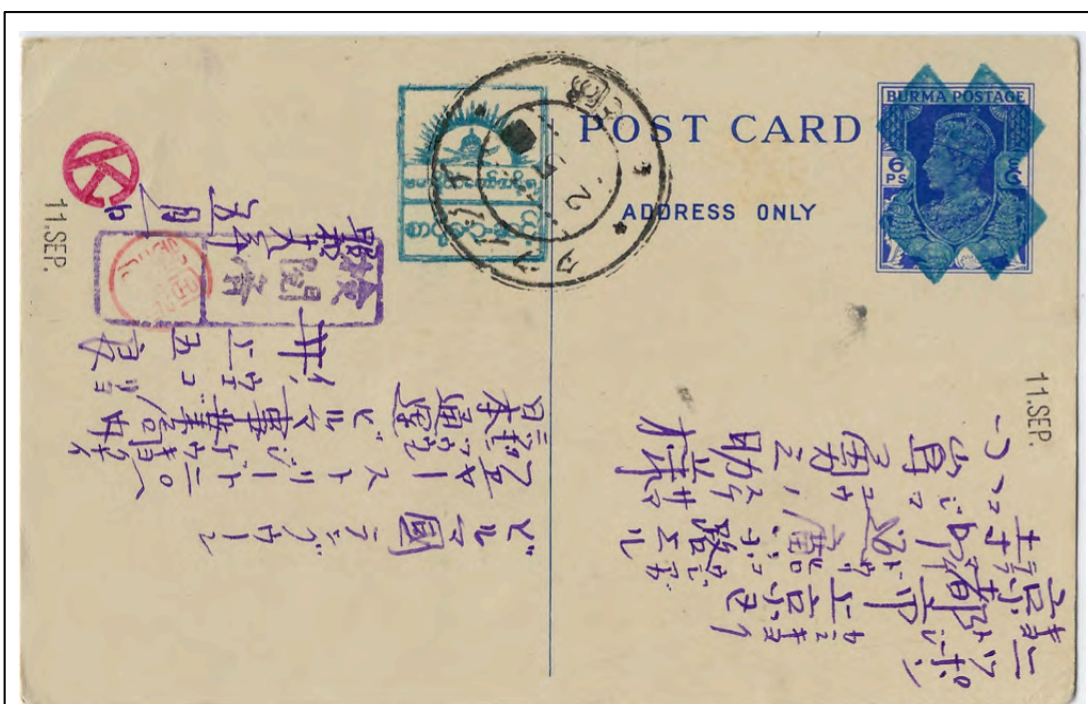
Japan **occupied Andaman and Nicobar islands** as part of the Burma campaign on Mar 23, 1942, used hitherto as a British penal colony.

In December 1943, the **political administration of the islands** was transferred to the **Azad Hind Government**, granting it legitimacy in international law.

Low values of King George VI stamps at Port Blair were ceased by the Japanese and overprinted with a '●' preceding the value. The overprints are crude and the dot is believed to be inherited from date slugs used for obliterating stamps.



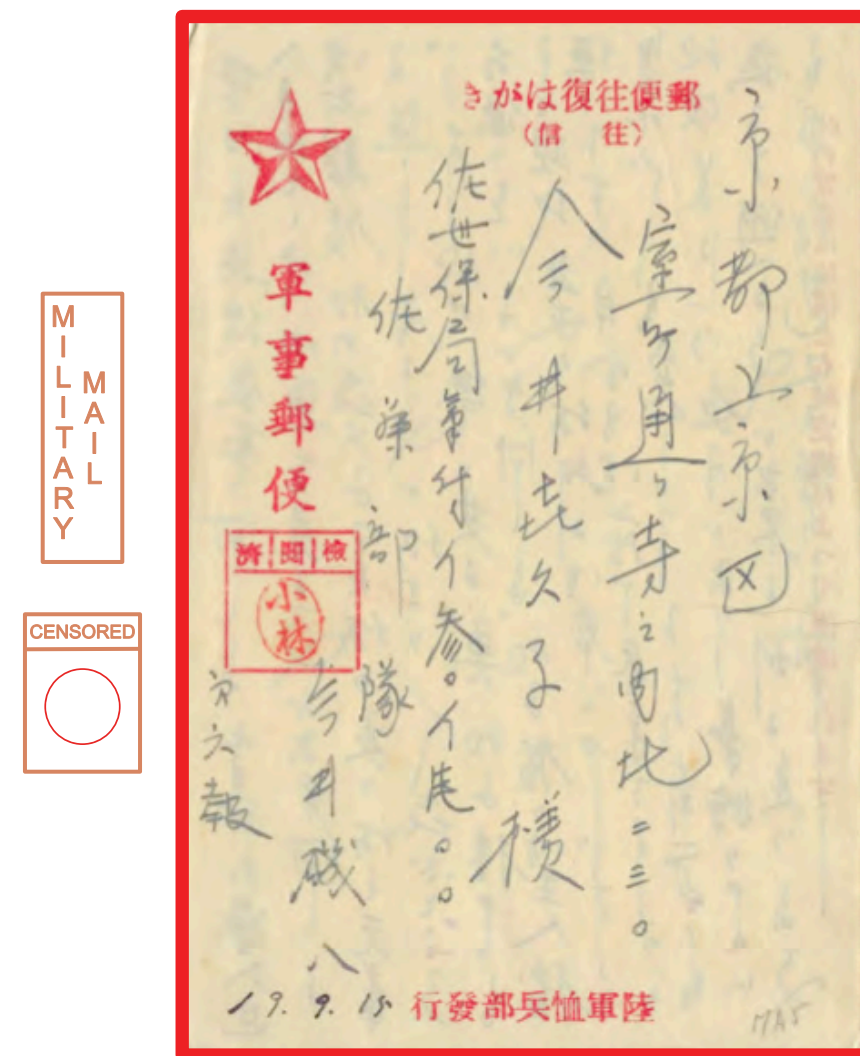
3ps SERVICE stamp overprinted with 20 sen in red. **Ex. Tamano. Less than 10 copies in existence.**



Sept. 1944, 6pies censored postcard sent from Taunggyi, Burma to Kyoto, Japan Post invasion of Burma in 1942, Burmese postcards were seized, the King's head imprinted with **heavy cross and crest of "Burma State Government"**.



Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose inspects Cellular Jail (British Penitentiary) after Japanese transfer of administration.



MILITARY

CENSORED

July 1944, Military post card censored from **Sato Unit I-30, I-100, c/o Sasebo PO** stationed in the Nancowry Island of Nicobar Islands, sent to Kyoto, Japan. This unit was under Independent Mixed 37th brigade of Japanese Army

Special Military Air Postcards from Nicobar Islands are rare

The battles of Imphal and Kohima

Battles of Imphal and Kohima (March, 8 - July, 3, 1944) were turning points of the revolutionary movement. Despite Japan's initial skepticism, **Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose** ensured that the **INA** would fight along with Japan. He envisioned that **INA's** military successes on Indian soil would spark a nationwide rebellion against British imperialism.

Postage Stamps were sponsored by the INA. The battle cry "**CHALO DELHI**" (Onward to Delhi) and one corner of the **Red Fort** were printed on wove paper.

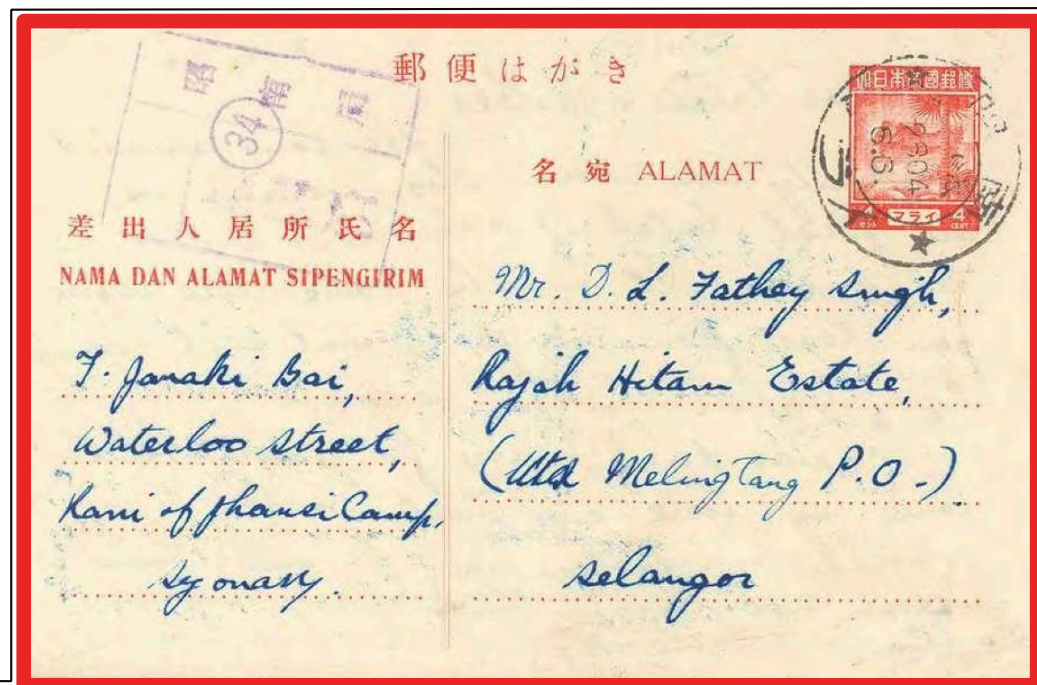
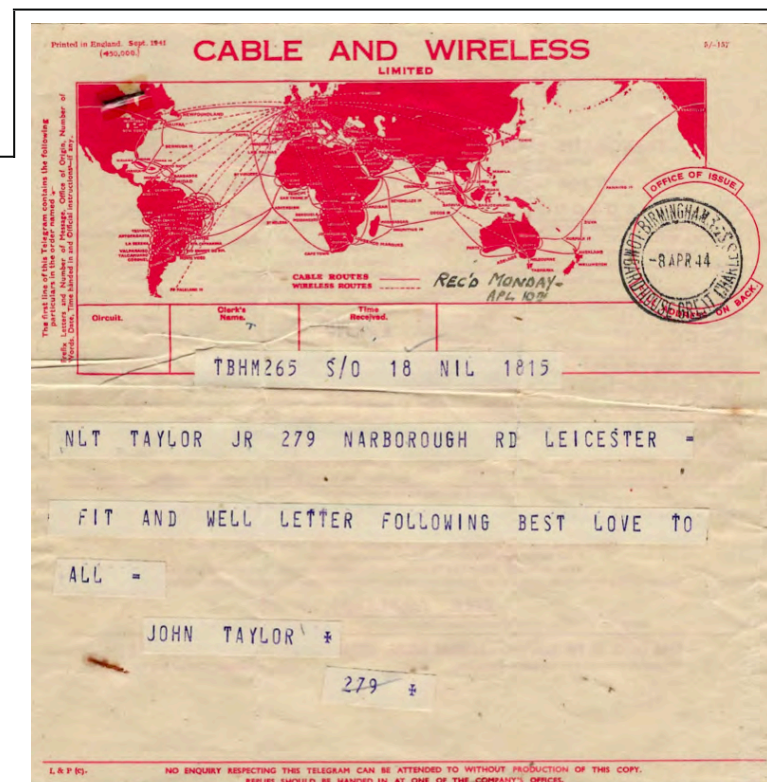


1 Pice (maroon) and 1 Anna (Green), large quantities were destroyed after British relief.

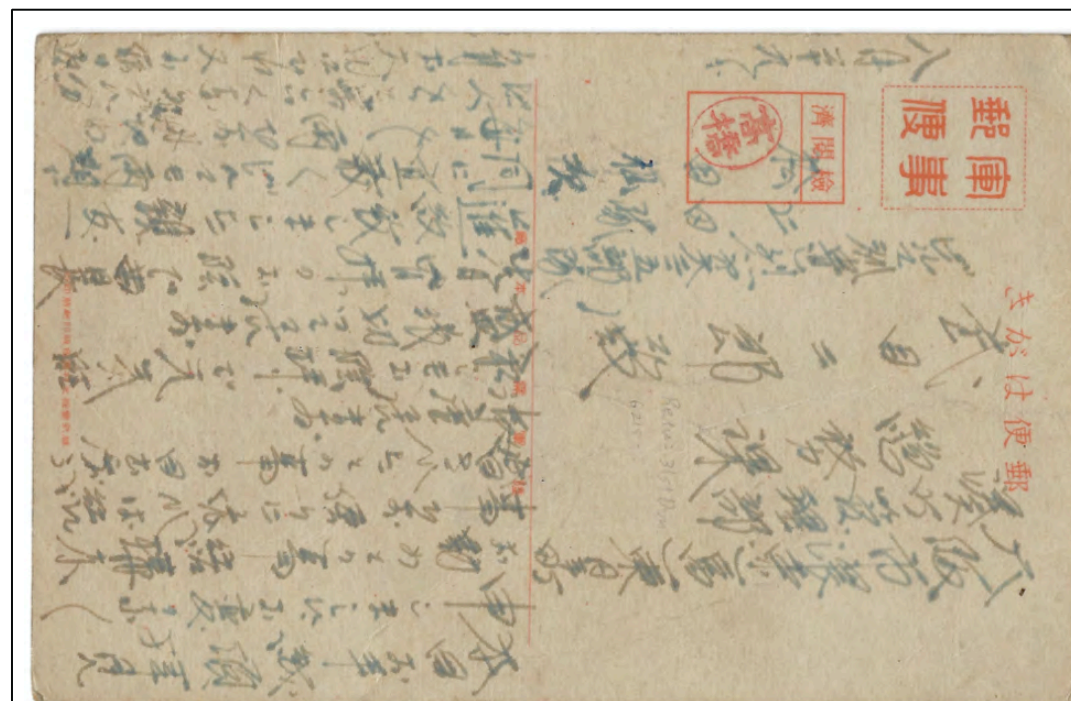
GREAT BRITAIN	JAPAN
17 th Indian Division	15 th Army (31 st Division)
20 th Indian Division	33 rd Infantry Division
23 rd Indian Division	Gandhi Brigade (INA)
50 th Indian Parachute Brigade	Azad Brigade (INA)
253 rd Indian Tank Brigade	Subhas Brigade (INA)
5 th Indian Division	Rani of Jhansi Regiment (INA)
7 th Indian Division	



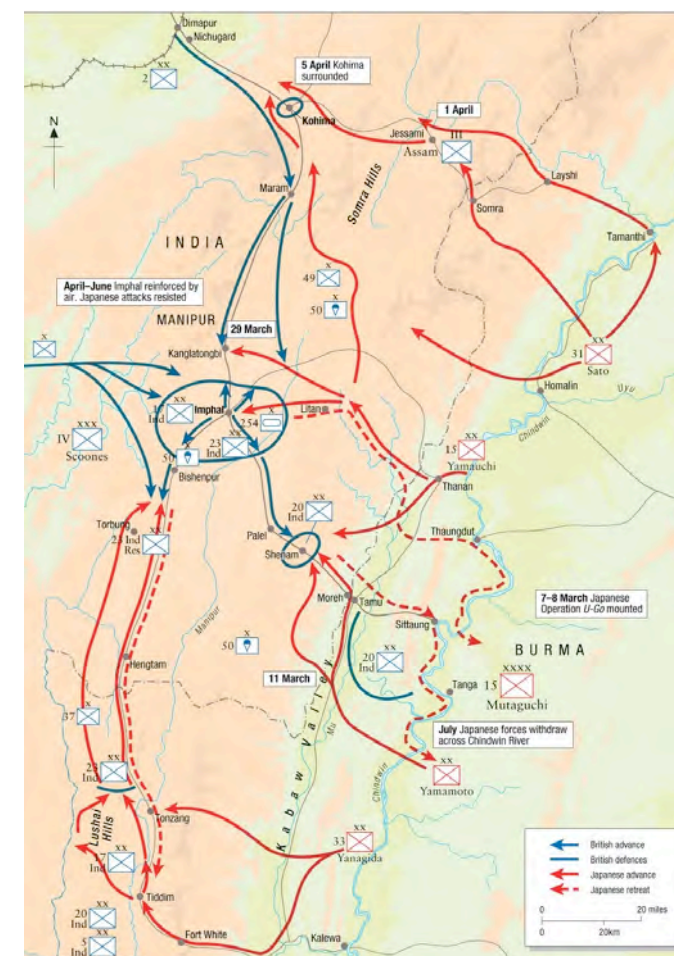
8 Apr. 1944, Telegram sent from **Milestone 83** on the Imphal - Tiddim road → Leicester from **General Taylor** of 17th Indian Division. Around this time, the Japanese had claimed on radio Tokyo that 17th Indian division was destroyed prompting British to make special arrangements to send telegrams home to the next of kin. Telegram shown at 30%. **Ex. John Taylor correspondence [6]**.



Rani of Jhansi (Laxmi bai), "Chalo Delhi", and the Red Fort were symbols of solidarity against the British inherited from the uprising of 1857 – regarded as **India's First War of Independence** by the revolutionaries.



Jul. 1943 Military postcard sent from Ueda Party **Unit 6215 / 31st Division** of the **15th Army** sent prior to the battle of Imphal. 31st Division was also called **Retsu Heidan (Furious Division)**. In the battle of Imphal, it took an active part in operation U-go.



Map of the Imphal and Kohima campaigns

My dear Father & Mother, 3.6.44.
The long-awaited opportunity has come. This evening we, the first batch of volunteers, are leaving for Burma. It may be some time before you hear from me again but rest assured that I shall always be safe and sound wherever I am. May for your child. Give my love and best wishes to my brothers and sisters and friends. Time is short and I can't think of anything else. I will try to write. My love and respect to my parents.
J. Janaki Bai

Reverse at 80%

3 Jun. 1944, Postcard censored at **Syonan P.O. 34**, sent from **Rani of Jhansi Camp** – women's regiment of the **INA**, at Synonan (Singapore) to Selangor, just before the regiment was called for action in the Imphal campaign.

ONLY CORRESPONDENCE DISCOVERED.

Jai Hind (Devanagari)

My dear Father and Mother:
The long awaited opportunity has come. This evening we, the first batch of volunteers, are leaving for Burma. It maybe some time before you hear from me again, but rest assured that I shall always be safe and sound wherever I am. Pray for your child. Give my love and best wishers to my brothers and sisters and friends. Time is short and I can't think of anything else. I will try to write.

Defeat of Japan by the Allied forces

Before Japanese invasion of Burma, **no road or rail links existed on the India-Burma frontier**. Despite initial victories of Japan, the **tide of war turned** and large scale **British reorganization of postal systems** was carried out to maintain the vast Allied forces engaged in warfare. A major innovation was **air-drop of resources to fast moving troops** effected by **newly converted Line of Communication (L-o-C) postal units from existing Base Post offices** [3] contributing to Allied Victories.

Eventually the Japanese forces reneged...



22 Jun. 1944, Censored letter sent from Advance BPO No. 16 which was converted to a L-o-C postal unit, to Cornwall, U.K.



13, Jun, 1944, Censored letter sent from FPO No. 120 serving Manipur Road during the battle of Imphal → Bombay endorsed O.A.S. (On Active Service)

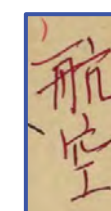
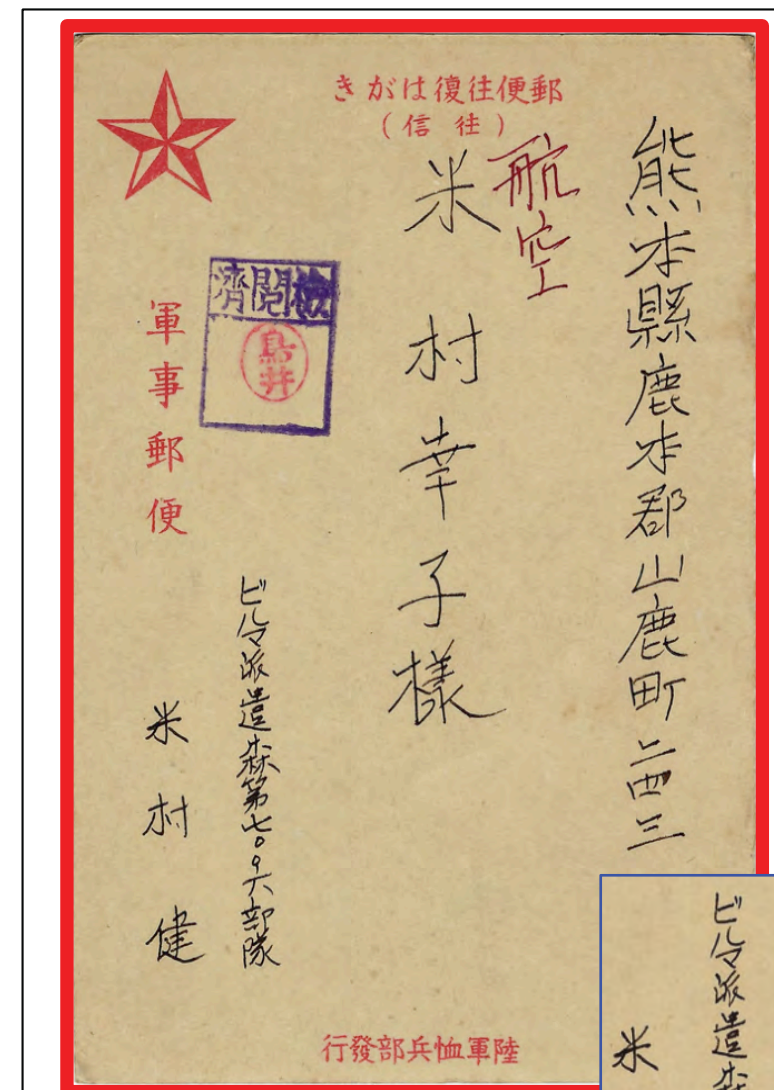
The presence of air support from fair-weather airstrips was paramount to Allied victory



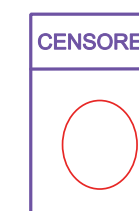
1 Oct. 1944, Censored envelope sent from FPO 122 serving a fair-weather airfield in Wangjing, Manipur endorsed "On Active Service" to Bombay, India.



Thunderbolt aircraft of No. 261 stationed in Wangjing, Manipur, used by RAF for carrying out constant bombing attacks on Japanese lines of communication.



Airmail



航空
熊本縣鹿本郡山鹿町二四三
米村 健

Sender's details

18 Aug. 1944 Censored Reply Military Star post card from a soldier of "Mori" 7006 Unit who fought at the Imphal Campaign, addressed to his wife at Kumamoto with arrival date of January 17, 1945

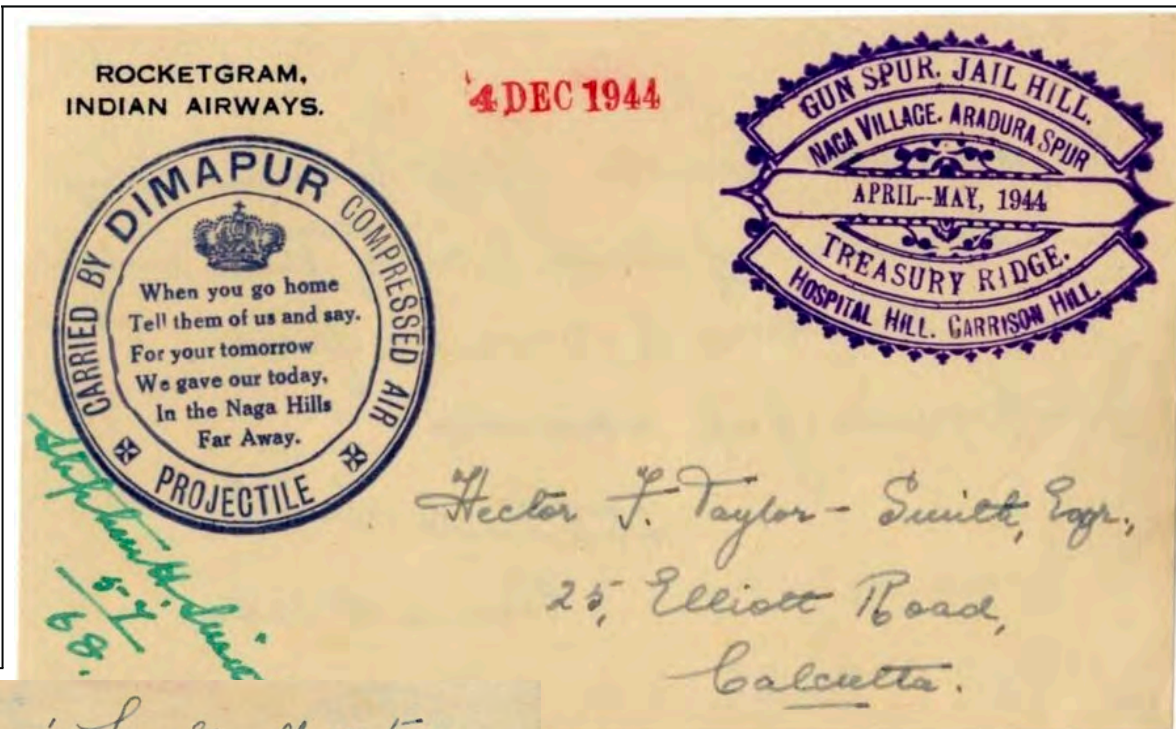
Reply Military post cards were often carried by air mails when space permitted, however, the date of arrival indicates otherwise. The Japanese were retreating during this time and it could also indicate that Japanese Air Force was late.

Victory Commemoration by Allied powers and the fate of the INA

British media denigrated the INA in World Politics. Netaji was exploring support of the Soviet Union [2] for India's sovereignty and negotiating stronger involvement of the INA in prospective future military campaigns of Japan in India.

However, with Netaji's mysterious disappearance in August and Japan's surrender in September 1945, the fate of the movement was sealed. The sacrifice and bravery of INA troops inspired future mutinies and adversely impacted public sentiment against British rule in India, that precipitated Indian independence on 15 August, 1947 [2,5].

The Pioneer of British Indian Rocket Mails, Stephen Smith planned **Compressed Air** and **Gas propelled** Rocket experiments at key defense points during the relief of Imphal, which were **delayed** and later carried out in Calcutta on Dec. 4, 1944, commemorating the most important Allied victory in this theatre of WW2.



A dreamer's humble effort to immortalize those who gave their lives to save us from inhuman Jap atrocities.
 Stephen H. Smith.
 Dec. 4th. 1944.

Compressed Air Experiment. Signed by Stephen H. Smith.
ONLY 68 MISSIVES WERE CARRIED

Message by Smith on reverse of both the missives, commemorating allied victory.



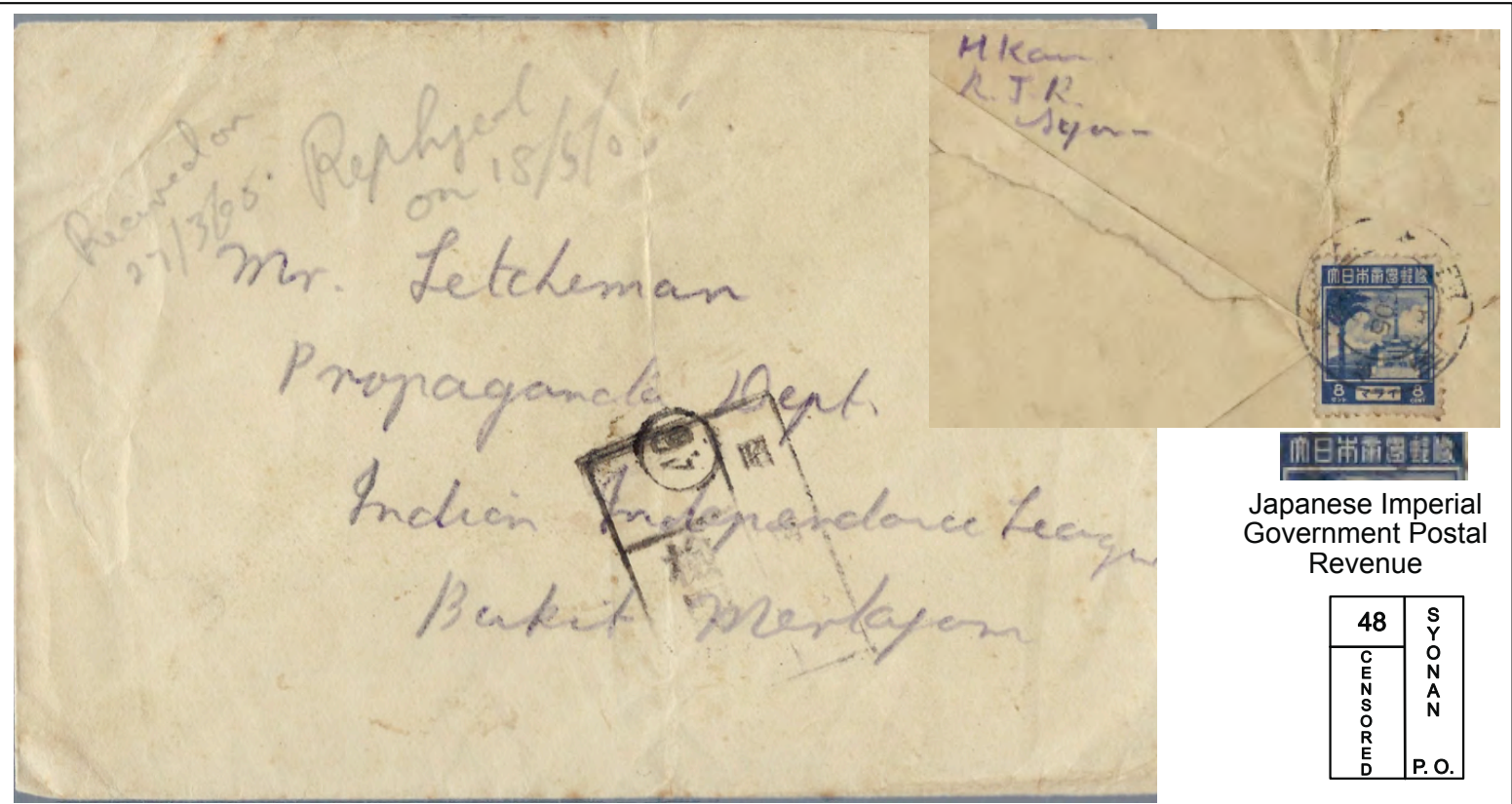
Gas Propelled Experiment. Signed by Stephen H. Smith.
ONLY 78 MISSIVES WERE CARRIED.

8 Jul. 1944: Re-used envelope.
 Kandawlay, Rangoon → Nyaunglebin, Burma with blue 10 sen value of Java Set.
 Addressed to "The Chairman of Indian Independence (I.I.) League"

Owing to the difficulty in printing stamps locally the Java set was printed (0.7 M) on thin wove gummed paper in Java.

ONE OF THREE DISCOVERED CORRESPONDENCES OF IIL in Burma[4].

The Chairman of IIL was S.A. Ayer who retreated out of Burma with Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and about 100 members of the Azad Hind cabinet after Japanese surrender.



Japanese Imperial Government Postal Revenue

48	S
C	Y
E	O
N	N
S	A
O	N
R	P.
E	O.

Mar. 1945 Censored envelope, Syonan (Singapore) → Bukit Mertajam, Malaya, with 8 sen deep blue of Japanese pictorial issues, addressed to Propaganda Division of Indian Independence League.

ONLY COVER DISCOVERED OF IIL IN POST RELIEF PERIOD