

**CENSORSHIP
of
CIVILIAN MAIL
in
SOUTH AFRICA
DURING WORLD WAR II**

by

TOM MULLINS

February 2001

The Purpose of Censorship

Censorship of civilian mail is an irritating but necessary procedure in maintaining national security during any period of hostilities. Primarily the object is to prevent information of military, economic or even social importance or significance, falling into enemy hands. Secondly censorship can often disclose similar information regarding enemy countries. There are other less obvious benefits.

Censorship can take many forms, but that most obvious to the general public involves the opening of letters and other postal material passing through the normal postal channels. Postal material entrusted to the postal authorities of any country is, during times of peace, regarded as inviolate, and stringent penalties are usually imposed for interference with the mail. Emergency powers entrusted to governments during wartime usually abrogate this rule, subject to strict measures of control.

Completely different and independent systems of censorship usually exist for the censorship of civilian mail, and that of military mail, the latter being letters and other postal material emanating from members of the armed forces, whether within or outside the country's borders. Censorship of the latter is entrusted to "Military Intelligence", even though the civilian postal authorities effect the delivery of such mail to the addressees. The censorship of military mail in South Africa is not dealt with in this article, save where there was an overlap between, or duplication of, civil and military censorship, which occasionally occurred.

The need for postal censorship of civilian mail in South Africa was appreciated almost immediately after South Africa declared war on Germany on 6 September 1939. The establishment of a censorship organisation received immediate and urgent attention from none other than General J C Smuts, Prime Minister of South Africa, who appointed the then Postmaster-General, Mr H J Lenton, as Chief Censor, in addition to his postal duties. Mr Lenton was given the military rank of Brigadier. In its issue of December 1939, the South African Philatelist announced that "Censorship is to be instituted in the Union".

The Censorship Organisation.

Brigadier Lenton wrote his memoirs, which he did not appear to have completed, and which have never been published. His appointment as Chief Censor, and some of the problems with which he was faced, are dealt with in the extract from his memoirs Annexure "A" hereto.

Censorship offices for the censoring of civilian mail appear to have been established in twelve of the main centres in South Africa and South West Africa, with headquarters in Cape Town. These are, in alphabetical order, Bloemfontein, Cape Town, De Aar, Durban, East London, George, Johannesburg, Kimberley, Pietermaritzburg, Port Elizabeth, Pretoria, Windhoek.

Due to the secrecy attaching to censorship, it is not known precisely how and by whom specific letters were selected for censorship. As pointed out in Lenton's memoirs, censoring of civilian mail was largely haphazard, and only a very small proportion of domestic and business letters would be opened. Presumably a random quantity of the vast quantity of domestic mail passing through each of the main centres would be passed on by the postal authorities to the censorship office.

The place of censoring was not necessarily at the censoring office nearest to the place of posting, but might occur in transit, or when mail reached its destination. For example, numbers of letter from South West Africa were censored at De Aar, being on the postal route to the Union.

There was also no doubt procedure for determining particular mail which might be suspect. Mail to and from foreign countries appears to have received more than usual attention. Similarly mail from South West Africa, where there was a large German population, was more carefully scrutinised. Mail from inmates of internment and prisoner of war camps was invariably subject to censorship.

In order to ensure that the censorship system was not evaded, the conveyance of letters out of the Union by private individuals was prohibited in terms of Regulation 12 of the National Security Regulations contained in Proclamation No 20 of 1941.

The System of Censoring

In May 1940 the South African Philatelist announced that a cover from Lourenco Marques to Johannesburg had been seen with the rubberstamp "P.B.C. JH" (Passed By Censor, Johannesburg). The use of such cachet was temporary and short-lived.

A number of different bilingual "Passed by Censor" rubber stamps were used in specific situations throughout the war, more particular at the various Internment Camps within the Union. J Harvey Pirie refers to some of these in the South African Philatelist of September 1946.

However, the procedure that was soon adopted for the censoring of civilian mail in South Africa was, as in most other countries, for the envelope to be slit down the left hand vertical side, this being the side which would least interfere with the address, adhesives, and other postal markings. After the contents had been read and replaced in the envelope, a printed and gummed adhesive label, of appropriate length, would be folded in half horizontally, and would be used to re-seal the side of the envelope that had been opened, thus ensuring the safety of the contents.

In certain circumstances, for example in the case of letters emanating from interment camps, letters reached the censor with the back flap remaining unsealed. In such cases there was no need to slit open a side of the envelope, and the censor label would be affixed flat over the back flap, thereby sealing the envelope.

It was also deemed desirable that there be some means of identifying the particular censoring officer who censored a letter, and this was done by such officer placing his initials or an identifying number in pencil on the label. In some cases this pencil mark "ties" the label to the envelope, but in the vast majority of cases the mark is entirely on the label. This suggests that a particular officer might mark a batch of labels with his initials or number before affixing them to the letters censored by him. The use of blue, red and indelible pencils has also been seen.

The "Coat of Arms" Cachets.

Later a more satisfactory means was found for "tying" the label to the envelope and, at the same time, identifying the particular censoring office. The possibility existed that a label could be soaked off a censored letter, and thereafter falsely applied to an uncensored letter. Censoring officers were therefore issued with rubber stamps of the Coat of Arms of the Union of South Africa with, below the Coat of Arms, a different letter of the alphabet for each censoring office. After affixing the re-sealing label, this rubber stamp would be applied, usually on the reverse, partly over the label and partly on the envelope. Examples are also known where the Coat of Arms stamp was applied to the front of the envelope, or even to both back and front. Censoring officers continued to apply their pencilled initials or number as before.

In order to circumvent any fraudulent use of censorship labels, postal authorities were, in terms of Post Office Circular 1243 dated 20 April 1942, instructed to intercept any letter that bore a censorship label not properly "tied" with a Coat of Arms cachet, and to return it to the censoring authorities.

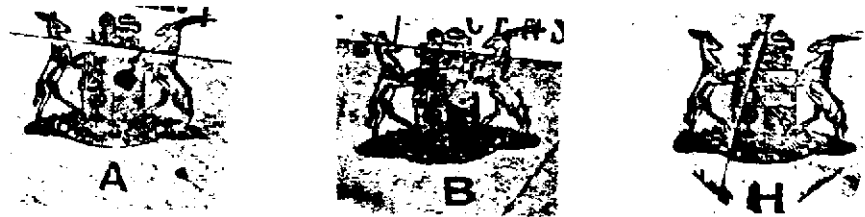
These Coat of Arms cachets were introduced early in 1942, the earliest example known to the writer being 20 March 1942. The only means of determining the approximate date of censoring is by reference to the date of posting from the postmark. It is assumed that domestic mail was censored within a few days of posting. Mail from foreign countries might of course be subject to considerable delays before reaching the South African censors. Censoring appears to have continued until mid-1945, after V.E. Day, although censorship continued at Windhoek until the end of that year.

The letters of the alphabet which appear below the Coat of Arms to identify the various censoring offices are as follows:

A	E M P R	CAPE TOWN	H	DE AAR
B		JOHANNESBURG	J	PORT ELIZABETH
C		DURBAN	K	EAST LONDON
D		WINDHOEK	L	GEORGE
F		PRETORIA	N	PIETERMARITZBURG
G		BLOEMFONTEIN	O	KIMBERLEY

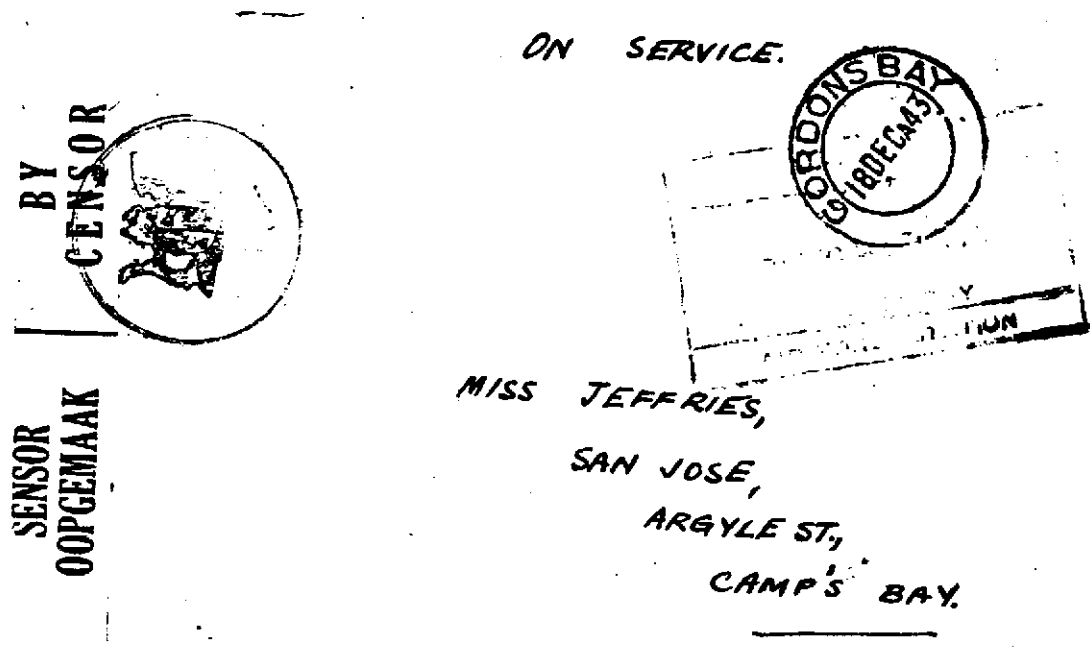
The letters I and Q were not used, and letters S and T were prepared but not issued. Examples of these Coat of Arms cachets are illustrated in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1:



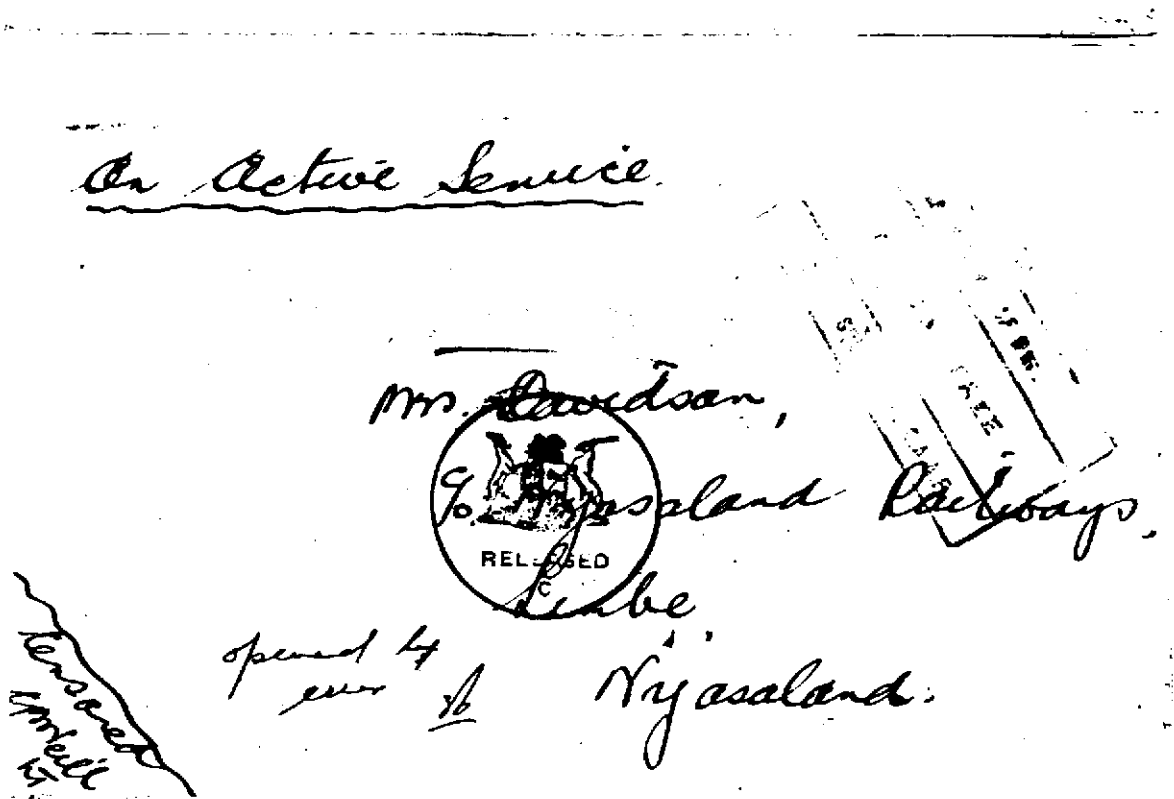
In the case of J (Port Elizabeth) and R (Cape Town), the cachet is also known with the whole enclosed in a circle. In his book on *World War II Philately of Southern and Eastern Africa*, at page 6, Pirie stated that these cachets were used in addition to the cachet of the original design. A cover posted at Gordon's Bay, near Cape Town, on 18 December 1943, and apparently censored in Cape Town, is illustrated (**Figure 2**).

Figure 2:



Coat of Arms cachets are also known enclosed in the circle with the word "Released" and the censoring office's identifying letter underneath. Such marks have been seen with the letters A and C and all censoring offices probably had similar cachets. According to Post Office Circular 1269 dated 19 October 1942, these cachets were in use from 19 October 1942, and were applied to covers passed by the censor without having been opened. The cachet was applied to the front of the envelope, without the envelope having been opened and re-sealed. **(Figure 3)**

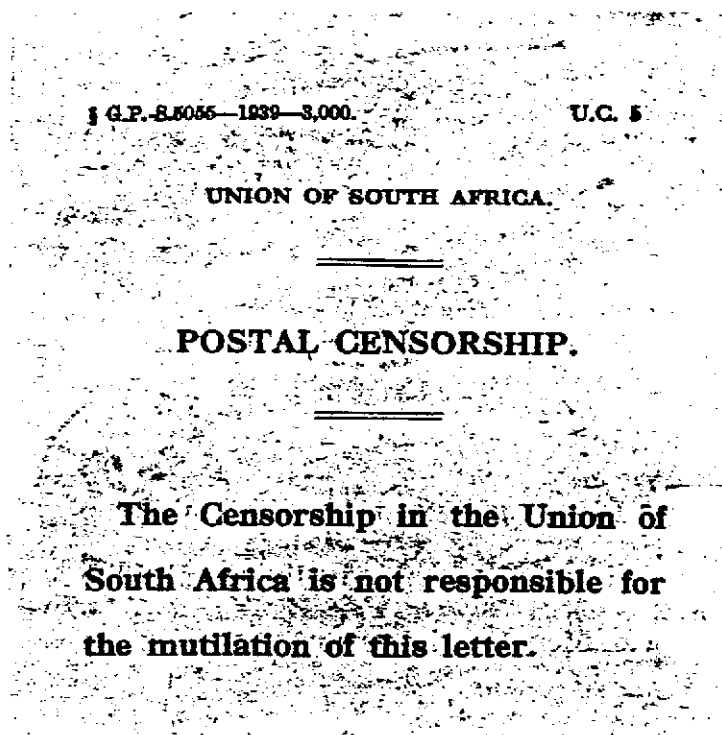
Figure 3:



Censorship Stationery.

All censorship stationery was designated by the letters U.C. (Union Censorship) followed by a number. From time to time letters were received by the censoring authorities in South Africa in a damaged condition. In such cases a form, U.C. 5, was inserted to absolve the censoring authorities from responsibility for the mutilation. This form, which is 96 mm square and printed in black on grey paper, is illustrated as **Figure 4**. Similar wording in Afrikaans appears on the reverse of the form.

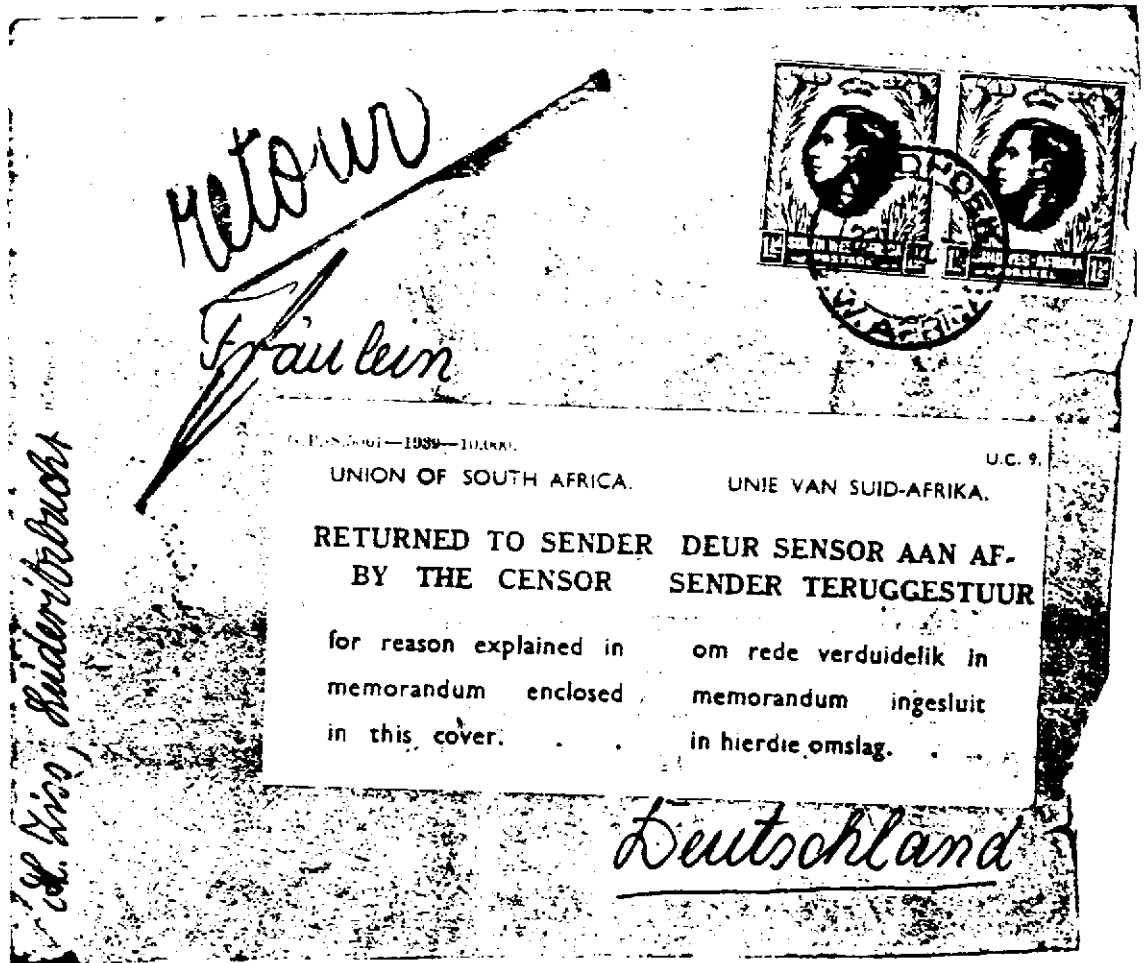
Figure 4:



A copy has been seen which was inserted in a letter that had been censored in Germany, where the adhesive stamps had been torn off, presumably on suspicion that they may have concealed a secret message.

Letters to addresses overseas were frequently returned as undeliverable and were censored on arrival back in South Africa. After censoring, and having been re-sealed with the usual UC 8 label, a "Returned to Sender" label UC 9 was affixed over the original address on the front of the envelope. This label was printed in green on white paper, 10 000 having been printed in 1939. (**Figure 5**). The roneod memorandum contained in the cover illustrated explained that the reason for the return of the letter was that the letter consisted of two pages, whereas Red Cross requirements stipulated a single page only.

Figure 5:



Another printed form inserted by the censor where appropriate reads as follows (with Afrikaans on the reverse):

U.C. 12
Union of South Africa
POSTAL CENSORSHIP.
Returned to sender owing to the suspension of communication with enemy countries.

Adhesive Re-sealing Labels

The adhesive labels for re-sealing envelopes were printed in red by the Government printer on white or cream paper, all bearing the stationery number U.C. 8. A number of different sizes and formats were used, designated "U.C.8.", "U.C.8.(Small)", "U.C.8.(Medium)" or "U.C.8.(Large)". The actual sizes of the labels did not however always correspond to the description of the size printed on the label, and it is sought in this article to analyse the various known labels, and where and when they were used. Unfortunately none of the labels bore the Government Printer's imprint of the year of printing and the number of copies printed as, for example, in the case of forms U.C. 5 and U.C.9 referred to above.

Sizes of U.C. 8 Labels.

Those who have been interested in the various U.C. 8 labels in the past, whether as collectors or researchers, appear to have regarded the overall size of the label as the criterion for distinguishing the various types of labels that are found on covers, examples of most of which are still fairly common. For reasons set out hereunder, the overall size of the label is of minor importance, and the various printings can and should be distinguished solely by reference to the differences in format, size of font, and wording.

Each of the different types of printing described hereunder (none of which have printed borders) is found on labels of varying overall sizes. Care must be taken in measuring the size of a label on cover to ascertain, as far as possible whether the label appears to have been trimmed in any way by the censoring officer. For example where the label, after having been affixed to the envelope, projected significantly beyond the top or bottom of the envelope, it would often be trimmed flush with the envelope. Even though such trimming would only affect the width of the label, and there would be no need to trim the height, variations in the height of the various types of labels are also found

Nevertheless most labels on cover have all four sides remarkably cleanly cut, and with sides at right angles. Especially where a number of copies are checked as having approximately the same size, one can, with practice, be satisfied whether a specimen has been trimmed by the censoring officer or not.

Another problem is that even on labels of the same type and of the same overall size, the position of the printing on the label may vary, either laterally or vertically. If these were to be treated as different types, there would be an infinite number of varieties, and is another reason for ignoring the overall size in seeking to analyse the various types of labels.

Careful measurements of a large number of labels reveal variations in overall size, often of only a millimetre or two, which are difficult to explain. Although the overall size of a label is of interest, it is in fact of minor importance from the point of view of identifying the various printings and types of labels described hereunder. The reason for the variations in overall size may also be the subject of speculation. Were the labels printed in sheets or in rolls? Were they cut by hand or machine, and by the Government Printer or by censoring officers?

It must also be borne in mind that metrication had not during World War II been introduced into South Africa. Domestic non-metric envelopes in use at that time were $3\frac{1}{4}$ to $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches (82.55 to 95.25 mm) in height, the average being $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches (88.9 mm). This accounts for what might otherwise appear to be the strange sizes of labels, when measured in millimeters. There were of course larger envelopes and parcels that also had to be catered for. The censorship department no doubt advised the Government Printer of the most common sizes of envelopes that had to be sealed.

General Description of Labels U.C.8.

Labels U.C. 8 are rectangular in shape, the printing being in red. The wording is bilingual, divided by a bold central vertical dividing line, the Afrikaans always being on the left thereof. Certain types include the words "Unie van Suid-Afrika – Union of South Africa", but these were omitted in other (possibly later) types. The words "Deur Sensor Oopgemaak – Opened By Censor" appear, in either two or three lines, on all types in letters 7 mm in height, save for two types which are 5mm and 9½ mm in height respectively.

Because of the different overall sizes of the labels, and of the variations in the position of the printing on the label, measurements have been taken in order to check whether specimens are in fact of the same type. For the purpose of this article, measurements have been made not only by dividers and ruler, but one on one comparisons have also been made by placing labels on top of each other. Inaccurate measurement is thereby avoided.

The measurements checked by the writer are as follows:

- (a) The vertical distance from the top of the top line of printing to the bottom of the last line of printing.
- (b) The length of the words "Unie van Suid-Afrika. – Union of South Africa." where these words appear on the label.
- (c) Where there are no words "Unie van Suid-Afrika. – Union of South Africa", the length of the words "Oopgemaak - Censor".
- (d) The length of the central vertical dividing line and whether it extends above or below the wording. This measurement can not always be made with precision, particularly where the dividing line reaches, and may extend beyond, the top or bottom of the label or both. Where this line reaches the top and bottom of all labels of a particular type, it may therefore have been printed as a continuous line through all the labels in a vertical row on a sheet.

The major variations in the different printings of UC 8 labels, apart from the descriptions of "Small", "Medium" or "Large", consist in the presence or absence of the words "Unie van Suid-Afrika" and "Union of South Africa", the size of the words "Deur Sensor Oopgemaak" and "Opened by Censor" relative to the size of the label, and whether such words are in two or three lines. The presence or absence of brackets and full stops are also of importance.

THE VARIOUS TYPES OF U.C. 8 LABELS.

In his book *World War II Philately of Southern and Eastern Africa* at page 7, J H Harvey Pirie enumerates seven Types of label from his collection. In this article the numbering of these seven Types has, for sake of uniformity, been maintained. However the writer has identified an eighth Type, and in addition Types 1 and 5 have two sub-types and Type 2 has four sub-types. These are described hereunder.

Dates of posting of covers provide the only guide to the sequence of issue of the various types of U.C. 8 labels. The earliest date of use of all types of label known to the writer is 12 December 1939 and the latest date is 4 December 1945.

The illustrations shown are of the actual printing format for each type, without reference to the overall size of the label. Where "average overall size" of the label is referred to, this includes variations in size of a few millimeters on what appear to be complete and untrimmed labels.

Any lack of clarity in the illustrations is due to fact that most labels had to be photostatted in two halves (on the front and back of the cover) and then joined.

Type 1 (U.C. 8):

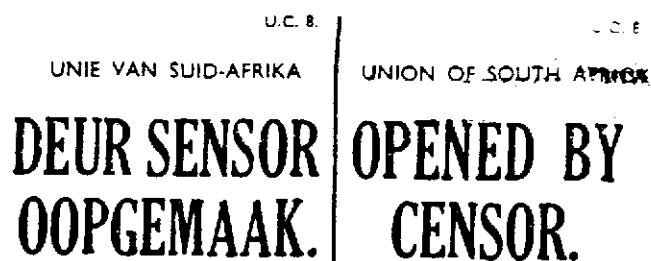
Description on label	U.C. 8.
Words "Unie van Suid-Afrika" – "Union of South Africa" on label	Yes
"Deur Sensor Oopgemaak – Opened by Censor" in two or three lines, and height of letters.	Two lines – 7 mm in height
Length and position of centre dividing line	33 mm, from top of printing to 2 mm below bottom of printing
Average overall size of label	88 x 43 mm
Earliest and latest known dates of use	12 December 1939 to 9 January 1940.

This is the only label UC 8 not to be designated "Small", "Medium" or "Large". A copy seen on a label measuring 88 x 43 mm appears to be complete and untrimmed. It appears on a cover posted on 9 January 1940 from Amsterdam to Durban. This label was in use before the Coat of Arms cachets were introduced.

Two sub-types are known:

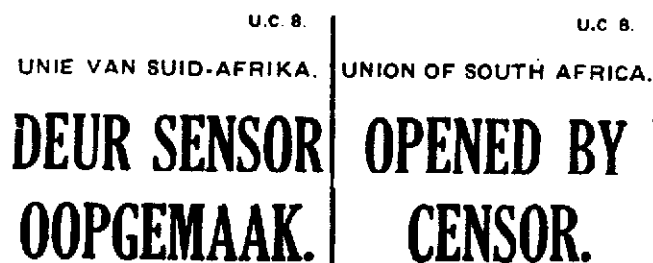
Sub-type 1(a): "Unie van Suid-Afrika" and "Union of South Africa" have no full stops and are 33 mm and 38 mm in length respectively. *(Figure 6.)*

Figure 6:



Sub-type 1(b): "Unie van Suid-Afrika" and "Union of South Africa" have full stops, and are 38 mm and 40 mm in length respectively. *(Figure 7.)*

Figure 7:



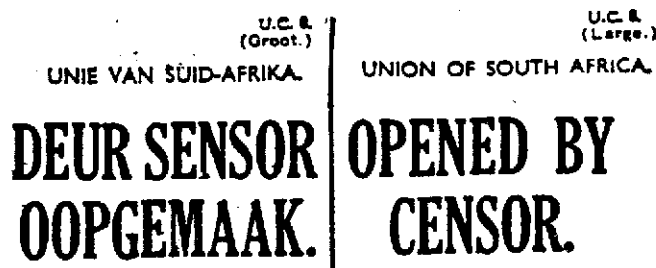
Type 2 (U.C. 8 [Large]):

Description on label	U.C. 8 (Large)
Words "Unie van Suid-Afrika" – "Union of South Africa" on label	Yes
"Deur Sensor Oopgemaak – Opened by Censor" in two or three lines, and height of letters.	Two lines – 7 mm in height
Length and position of centre dividing line	33 mm, from top of printing to 2 mm below bottom of printing
Average overall size of label	113 x 63 mm
Earliest and latest dates known	27 March 1941 to 12 February 1944

This type has been seen on a number of what appear to be complete and untrimmed labels measuring on average 113 x 63 mm. They were used at various centres. Most are "tied" with Coat of Arms cachets. Four sub-types are known

Sub-type 2(a): Full stop after both "Groot" and "Large". (*Figure 8*).

Figure 8:



Sub-type 2(b): Space instead of full stop after "Groot". (*Figure 9*).

Figure 9:



In the case of Sub-types 2(a) and 2(b), the words "Unie van Suid Afrika" and "Union of South Africa" are 33mm and 37 mm in length respectively

Sub-type 2(c): Still no full stop after "Groot", but space closed up. (*Figure 10*).

Figure 10:



Sub-type 2(d): As per Sub-type 2(c), but also no full stop after "Africa".
(Figure 11).

Figure 11:



In the case of Sub-types 2(c) and 2(d), the words "Unie van Suid-Afrika" and "Union of South Africa" are 39 mm and 40 mm in length respectively.

Type 3 (U.C. 8 [Small]):

Description on label	U.C. 8 (Small).
Words "Unie van Suid-Afrika" – "Union of South Africa" on label	Yes
"Deur Sensor Oopgemaak – Opened by Censor" in two or three lines, and height of letters.	Two lines – 7 mm in height
Length and position of centre dividing line	33 mm, from top of printing to 2 mm below bottom of printing
Average overall size of label	89 x 44 mm
Earliest and latest dates known	14 February 1940 to 14 December 1943
Comments	

This is a fairly common Type used during 1940 and 1941, with an isolated usage in 1943. None have been seen "tied" with a Coat of Arms Cachet. (Figure 12).

Figure 12:

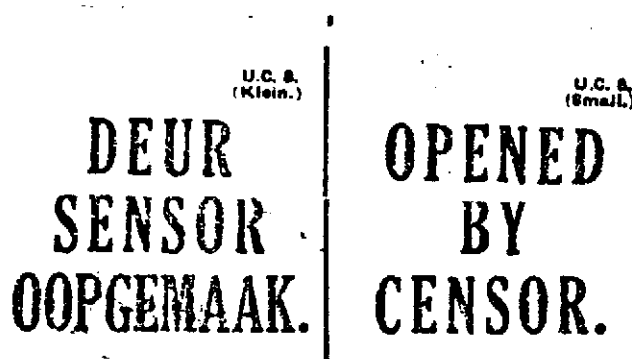


Type 4 (U.C. 8 [Small]):

Description on label	U.C. 8 (Small).
Words "Unie van Suid-Afrika" – "Union of South Africa" on label	No
"Deur Sensor Oopgemaak – Opened by Censor" in two or three lines, and height of letters.	Three lines – 7 mm in height
Length and position of centre dividing line	46 mm, extending from top to bottom of label, but with 2 mm gap at extreme top or bottom of the line.
Average overall size of label	88 x 44 mm
Earliest and latest dates known	15 March 1943 to 10 March 1944

This is the first Type printed without the words "Unie van Suid-Afrika – Union of South Africa" and with the letters of the words "Deur Sensor Oopgemaak – Opened by Censor" in three lines, and 7 mm in height. Types 1, 2 and 3 were in two lines. All copies seen have Coat of Arms cachets. (**Figure 13**).

Figure 13:



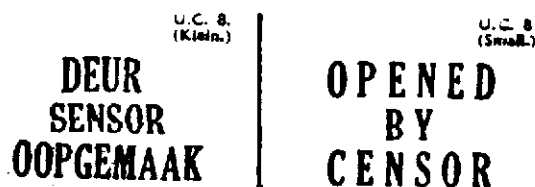
Type 5 (U.C. 8 [Small]):

Description on label	U.C. 8 (Small).
Words "Unie van Suid-Afrika" – "Union of South Africa" on label	No
"Deur Sensor Oopgemaak – Opened by Censor" in two or three lines, and height of letters.	Three lines – 5 mm in height
Length and position of centre dividing line	See notes to sub-types (a) and (b) below.
Average overall size of label	See notes to sub-types (a) and (b) below.
Earliest and latest dates known	

Similar to Type 4, but the words "Deur Sensor Oopgemaak – Opened by Censor" are 5 mm in height. There are no full stops after "Oopgemaak" and "Censor". The earliest date seen is 26 October 1942 and the latest date 16 July 1945. All copies bear Coat of Arms cachets. The average overall size is 88 x 48 mm. There are two sub-types.

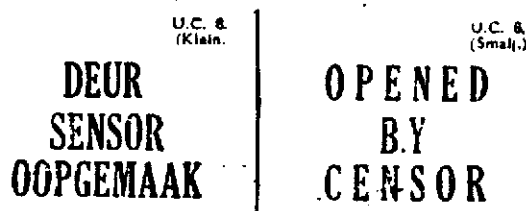
Sub-type 5(a): The centre dividing line is 23 mm in length, extending from the top to the bottom of the printing. The earliest date seen is 26 October 1942 and the latest date 21 May 1945. The average overall size is 8 x 27 mm. (*Figure 14*).

Figure 14:



Sub-type 5(b): The centre dividing line is 27 mm in length, extending from 1 mm above the top line of printing to 2 mm below the bottom of the label. The bracket after the word "Klein" is missing. The second L in the word "Small" is dropped below the level of the other letters. Copies have been seen from 2 March 1945 to 4 December 1945. The average overall size is 88 x 27 mm. (*Figure 15*).

Figure 15:



Type 6 (U.C. 8 [Medium]):

Description on label	U.C. 8 (Medium).
Words "Unie van Suid-Afrika" – "Union of South Africa" on label	No
"Deur Sensor Oopgemaak – Opened by Censor" in two or three lines, and height of letters.	Two lines – 7 mm in height
Length and position of centre dividing line	24 mm, extending from top of printing to 3 mm below bottom of printing.
Average overall size of label	113 x 27 mm
Earliest and latest dates known	See notes to sub-types 6(a) and (b) below.

This type, which appears to be uncommon, has the words "U.C.8.(Medium)" in a single line, and in much larger type than the description on the other labels. On the Afrikaans side the words "U.C.8 (Medium.)" are in the left top corner, and not on the right top corner, as in the case of all other Types.

Type 6 is seen mainly on mail from overseas countries. Two sub-types are known:

Sub-type 6(a): Seen on cover dated at Johannesburg on 7 May 1945. Overall measurement of label 113 x 27 mm. (*Figure 16*)

Figure 16:

U.C. 8. (Medium.)
U.C.8. (Medium.)
DEUR SENSOR | OPENED BY
OOPGEMAAK. | CENSOR.

Sub-type 6(b): As per sub-type 6(a), but the bracket at the end of the word "Medium" on the right-hand side of the label is missing. Seen on a cover from Egypt dated 5 April 1945. (*Figure 17*).

Figure 17:

U.C. 8. (Medium.)
U.C.8. (Medium.)
DEUR SENSOR OPENED BY

Type 7 (U.C. 8 [Large]):

Description on label	U.C. 8 (Large).
Words "Unie van Suid-Afrika" – "Union of South Africa" on label	No
"Deur Sensor Oopgemaak – Opened by Censor" in two or three lines, and height of letters.	Three lines – 7 mm in height
Length and position of centre dividing line	26 mm, extending from top to bottom of printing..
Average overall size of label	88 x 48 mm
Earliest and latest dates known	31 August 1943 to 8 June 1944

This type is distinguished from all others in having the letters "G.P.-S." in the top left hand corner, signifying it is stationery printed by the Government Printer. A copy seen with date 5 February 1944. (*Figure 18*)

Figure 18:

<p style="font-size: small; margin: 0;">G.P.-S.</p> <p style="font-size: small; margin: 0;">U.C. 8. (Groot.)</p> <p style="font-size: x-large; margin: 0;">DEUR SENSOR OOPGEMAAK.</p>	<p style="font-size: small; margin: 0;">U.C. 8. (Large.)</p> <p style="font-size: x-large; margin: 0;">OPENED BY CENSOR.</p>
--	---

Type 8 (U.C. 8 [Large]):

Description on label	U.C. 8 (Large).
Words "Unie van Suid-Afrika" – "Union of South Africa" on label	Yes
"Deur Sensor Oopgemaak – Opened by Censor" in two or three lines, and height of letters.	Three lines – 9½ mm in height
Length and position of centre dividing line	43 mm, extending from top of printing to 2 mm below bottom of printing..
Average overall size of label	120 x 50 mm
Earliest and latest dates known	See note below

This type is not mentioned by Pirie, and can be distinguished from Type 2 by the extra line spacing between the letters "U.C.8." and the words "Groot" and "Large". Furthermore the words "Deur Sensor Oopgemaak – Opened by Censor" are 9½ mm, and not 7 mm, in height. The copy seen has been trimmed, but the overall size appears to be about 120 x 50 mm. The date of the cover seen is 8 December 1944. Type 8 should possibly be grouped with Types 1 to 3, as it also bears the words "Unie van Suid-Afrika – Union of South Africa". (*Figure 19*).

Figure 19:

<p style="font-size: small; margin: 0;">U.C. 8 (Groot.)</p> <p style="font-size: small; margin: 0;">UNIE VAN SUID-AFRIKA.</p> <p style="font-size: x-large; margin: 0;">DEUR SENSOR OOPGEMAAK.</p>	<p style="font-size: small; margin: 0;">U.C. 8 (Large.)</p> <p style="font-size: small; margin: 0;">UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA.</p> <p style="font-size: x-large; margin: 0;">OPENED BY CENSOR.</p>
---	---

Summary:

It is possible that further research will reveal other varieties.

As already mentioned, the overall size of the label appears to be irrelevant, except as a matter of curiosity. Nevertheless suggestions would be welcome regarding the method used to cut the labels, and an explanation for the large number of sizes of labels within each Type. The anomaly of some of the "Small" printings appearing on labels larger than the "Large" printings is probably due to the failure by the Government Printer to alter the printed description when labels of a different overall size were ordered from him.

The enthusiasm and assistance of Jim Findlay, of Johannesburg, in providing helpful and critical assistance, and access to items in his collection, is gratefully acknowledged.

ANNEXURE "A"

Brigadier H J Lenton was Postmaster-General of the Union of South Africa from 1926 until March 1943. From the outbreak of war in September 1939 he also occupied the post of Chief Censor for the duration of the war.

During his lifetime he wrote his memoirs, which have never been published. They consist of a lengthy typescript document, and do not appear to have been finally completed. The following are extracts dealing with his appointment as Chief Censor for the Union of South Africa during World War II, and some of the problems with which he was faced. After dealing with the special session of Parliament that resulted in South Africa joining in the war on the side of Great Britain, he continued:

"I had planned to stay in Cape Town, where my home was, a few days after the special session was over, at least over the week-end. But General Smuts, having taken over, and having before him the task of organizing the country for war, was not wasting any time at all.

I met him in the Civil Service Club on the Friday, and he button-holed me and said: "I assume I can rely upon you to help me see it through?" to which of course there was only one answer. "Then," said he, "see me in my office in Pretoria on Monday morning." So I spent the weekend in the train instead of at home.

On the Monday morning I found that my job was to organize and run the Censorship. There was only the very sketchiest outline at Defence Headquarters of what the procedure should be to establish censorship, and even what there was I did not find suitable, so I had to start from the beginning. But as General Smuts was not prepared to put censorship into operation immediately, although he wanted everything to be ready to do it any moment, I had a few weeks to make preparations.

In due course the General sent for me and said he was ready to sign the necessary proclamation, and as I had been carrying it about in my pocket, so to speak, no time was lost and it was published the next day. In the meantime the last mails for Germany that had been despatched before the outbreak of war had been returned to me unopened from Southampton, and knowing the imminence of censorship in the Union, I had impounded these letters instead of immediately returning the letters to their senders, so we had a considerable mass of stuff to start on, and it proved most informative and important.

It was not convenient to the Government to relieve me of the Postmaster-Generalship, so for two and a half years of the war, until I reached normal superannuation age, I carried both positions and incidentally a lot more, but that will come out later. This duality was anomalous, because while the Post Office must maintain its position that any letters, telegrams or parcels entrusted to it for transmission are inviolate, it is the whole business of censorship to open and examine, delete portions of, delay or even suppress any communication it thinks fit for its own reasons.

Of course I did not use the Post Office staff for censorship work, it was a separate staff altogether, specially recruited and organized for the purpose, although for convenience and expedition I had to find room for them in Post Office premises; but it was my own personal position that was anomalous, and while I took great care not to corrupt the Post Office as Post Office, I had to watch constantly that my left hand did not know what my right hand was doing. The Minister of Posts and Telegraphs got complaints and

inquiries from the public and in Parliament about censorship actions, and I had to explain that in the capacity in which I was responsible to him I knew nothing about the matter, while in the capacity in which I was responsible to the Minister of Defence I must decline to give information to anyone else. I sometimes had difficulty in satisfying him that as Minister of Posts it was for his own good that he should be able in the House honestly to disclaim all knowledge of what I was up to on the censorship side. My "double life" led to one or two funny incidents."

Lenton then deals with certain other topics, and proceeds:

"But to come back to the censorship. I collected half a dozen men from the Post Office whom I could rely on and transferred them to the Censorship organization in positions of control, and then we set about recruiting staff capable of translating other languages into English. It was surprising how we got people of all nationalities and all classes – titled people, clergymen, schoolmasters, journalists, commercial men, - many of whom were refugees from the Far and Middle East who had found their way to South Africa and were most anxious to do a war job for the Allies. Many of them were quite indifferent about the pay they received and others had lost their homes and all their possessions. As time went on it became necessary to provide for more and more languages, and at the height of activities, when I had a staff of nearly 800 people, we were able to cover every European language and several Eastern ones as well. I had two former Postmasters-General of the Imperial Colonial Service, an ex-Director General of Telegraphs in Egypt, who spoke French like a Frenchman, an ex-Director of a world-wide commercial organization who had lived in China for years and spoke Chinese and Russian, a Jewish Rabbi, a missionary who had lived in Portuguese West Africa, and was familiar with Portuguese and Spanish, a Polish barrister, a Russian Colonel of Cavalry, a German Baron, and an ex-editor of a South African newspaper; all these and numerous others of lesser degree worked loyally and with great enthusiasm, and of all the mixed collection of men and women I had, only two proved untrustworthy. One was a young German who professed to be strongly anti-Nazi, but whose actions after we had had him not more than a fortnight led me to put him in an internment camp, and the other was a man who claimed to be able to translate Japanese – a very difficult language – who turned out after a short trial to be a complete fraud.

To handle this cosmopolitan and heterogeneous crew was not an easy matter because strict civil service rules could not possibly be applied to them. But fortunately I was able to keep them outside the control of the ordinary Public Service authorities, and I had a free hand in dealing with them. It would have been impossible otherwise to run the organization.

I very much appreciated the confidence General Smuts showed in leaving me to go my own way. He never once pulled me up for anything the censorship had done and only on one occasion for something I had not done. That was when a fantastic story appeared in an American newspaper based on a report from a correspondent in the Union which it would have been better not to have allowed out if it could have been stopped. But we had a great deal of trouble with some of the representatives of certain American and English newspapers, with whom the Union was flooded at one time, and some of them laid themselves out deliberately to evade the vigilance of the censorship.

Few people, at least in South Africa, realised the vital importance and the true functions of censorship during total war. The popular idea was that we were reading everybody's local letters and prying into their private business. Actually it was only a very small proportion of internal correspondence that came under observation, and that only haphazardly. It would have been quite impossible to examine all inland letters, and totally unnecessary. The inland aspect was of much less importance than the external.

My organization was an integral part of the Allied censorship organization as a whole, and the geographical situation of the Union made it a very important point for the interception of mails passing between various parts of the world. The more important part of our work, which the public knew nothing about, was the examination of these mails and the reporting of information to London where, by means of scraps from us and from many other points, many complete stories were built up giving a picture of enemy activities in the financial and economic fields which it then became possible to foil.

We not only had to prevent information about Allied military and other operations, and the movement of ships, from reaching the enemy direct or through neutral countries, but we had to gather as much information as we could about conditions of every kind in enemy countries, and about any activities favourable to the enemy taking place anywhere. At one stage, for instance there was reason to believe that industrial diamonds, which, as everyone knows, are of very great importance in certain tools, were reaching Germany from outside. The whole world-wide censorship was on its toes to discover any signs of this, and other secret service organization were at work on the same problem. Certain probable channels not very far from the Union were closed as a result."

Regrettably the following few pages are missing from Lenton's original typescript, and the remaining pages do not deal with censorship. Lenton died on 29 March 1953.