

## BRITISH ARMY POST OFFICE IN NATAL DURING THE ABW.

The British Army on arrival in Natal moved up to Chieveley and congregated there. Initially the Advanced Depot was at Frere with the army HQ (Jan 1900). The various APOs were attached to Infantry Divisions (2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>) and Brigades (see below). A British Army PO Base Office was established at Pietermaritzburg which operated throughout the ABW. The 5<sup>th</sup> Division arrived in early Jan 1900, and the 4<sup>th</sup> Division was formed from the Ladysmith garrison as well as 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Brigade and 4<sup>th</sup> Mounted Infantry Brigade all after the relief of the town in March 1900. On 12 March the Advanced Depot was opened at Ladysmith, moved to Elandslaagte and finally Newcastle and border.

### 1. HEADQUARTERS NATAL FIELD FORCE (NFF).

- Serviced by FPO 9 using **DC FPO 9** cancel for a very short time (Gen Buller arrived at end November 1899). Not seen after the Battle of Colenso 15 DE 1899. ER = 21 11 99 and LR = 14 12 99. Used at Mooi River, Estcourt and Frere. Date stamp looks unusual for a Natal BA FPO (DC FPO 9 – has dots not square ornaments). Serviced by FPO 18 using temporary Field Force 1 and Field Force 2 SC cancels + intaglio NFF/2 mark (Feb – March 1900). **DC FPO 18** cancel also used from Feb 1900. But APO closed on 1 Nov 1900. Then APO 18 re-opened and serviced 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Brigade until Jan 1901. Then DC FPO 18 used at Newcastle in June 1901.

### 2. STATUS OF BRITISH ARMY CORPS AT CHIEVELEY (as on 13 February 1900):

2<sup>nd</sup> INFANTRY DIVISION serviced by FPO 5 used **DC FPO 5** cancel. And comprised-

- 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade serviced by FPO 8 used **DC FPO 8** cancel. Closed by 1 Jan 1901.
- 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade + Divisional troops, serviced by FPO 13 using **DC FPO 13** cancel.

5<sup>th</sup> INFANTRY DIVISION comprised –

- 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade serviced by FPO 15 using **DC FPO 15** cancel. In May 1900 the **DC FPO 23** cancel was used.
- 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade serviced by FPO 3 used **DC FPO 3** cancel until 30 April 1900.
- 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade (temporarily attached). Serviced by FPO 12 using **DC FPO 12** cancel.
- 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade was unattached, serviced by FPO 7 used **DC FPO 7** cancel which was used for only a few days in the Chieveley area and is not seen from after Battle of Colenso 15 DE 1899. From February 1900 the **FPO 11 DC** cancel was used on the mail.

The initial concentration of troops in the Chieveley – Colenso area along the railway line led to the Battle of Colenso on 15 December 1899 which was won by the Boer forces (holding the Tugela heights stopping the BA from crossing over the Tugela River) and the capture of 10 serviceable guns. In January Gen Buller then moved his forces to Spearman's Farm 30 km west of Colenso – the Battles of Spionkop (24 Jan) and Vaal Krantz (5-7 Feb) then took place. Buller then relocated his forces east of Colenso and the Battle of Tugela Heights (14-27 Feb) resulted in the break through and relief of Ladysmith (28 Feb 1900).

It is not possible to know where each of the ten APO FPOs were located in the field during the above operations (certainly a lot were at Spearman's Farm camp). Included are therefore the postmarks of each APO FPO under a heading CHIEVELEY – COLENZO BRITISH ARMY FIELD POST OFFICES (see Table below).

<b>APO</b>	<b>Chieveley/Colenso</b>	<b>Ladysmith</b>	<b>To Newcastle</b>	<b>To Border</b>
FPO 3	Jan – Feb 1900	March- April 1900	May 1900	
FPO 5	Dec 1899	Feb – March 1900	May 1900	June 1900
FPO 7	Dec 1899			
FPO 8	Nov-Dec 1899	March 1900	May 1900	June 1900
FPO 11	Dec1899	March 1900		
FPO 12	Dec 1899	Feb-March 1900		
FPO 13	Dec1899	March 1900	May 1900	May-June 1900
FPO 15	Jan 1900	March 1900	May 1900	June 1900
FPO 18	Feb-May 1900	Nov-Jan 1901	Jan-June 1901	
FPO 20		March 1900	May 1900	June 1900
FPO 26		May 1900		June 1900
FPO 38		May 1900	May 1900	
Advanced depot		March- April 1900 <sup>1</sup>		
Advanced depot FPO 49			May-June 1900 <sup>1</sup>	
BA NFF HQ (Field Force 1 SC postmark)	Frere (telegrams) Feb 1900			
BA NFF HQ (Field Force 2 SC postmark)	Chieveley Feb-March 1900			
8B (FPO 40)		May 1900	June-July 1900	
3MB (FPO 24)		March - April 1900		

Note: superscript 1= SC cancellations. Opened at Ladysmith on 12 March 1900.

### 3. NEW BRITISH ARMY DIVISIONS.

Army at Ladysmith on 13 February 1900 (i.e. during the siege):

- Cavalry Brigade
- Volunteer Mounted Brigade
- 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade
- 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade

Serviced by the civilian Ladysmith PO + Ladysmith Siege PO.

The BA concentrated their forces at Ladysmith during March and April 1900. This allowed the Boers to establish a line of defense along the Biggersberg between Ladysmith and Newcastle and therefore delay the BA advance into northern Natal.

Included are the postmarks of each APO FPO that serviced the Divisions and Brigades in the Ladysmith area during the approximately two months before the BA advanced northwards (see Table above).

4<sup>th</sup> DIVISION (formed in March 1900 after the relief of Ladysmith) comprised -  
Ladysmith garrison, 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry, 4<sup>th</sup> Mounted Infantry Brigades

- Serviced by FPO 20 using **DC FPO 20** cancel. At Ladysmith March – May 1900, Re-designated as **APO 38 in May** = Ladysmith and Newcastle May 1900.
- 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade at Ladysmith March-April and serviced by FPO 25 using **DC FPO 25** cancel until 30 April 1900.
- 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade at Ladysmith March-April 1900.

2<sup>nd</sup> CAVALRY BRIGADE. Serviced by FPO 26 using DC FPO 26 date stamp during April to June 1900.

#### 4. BRITISH ARMY ADVANCE TO NEWCASTLE.

Lord Roberts ordered Buller to engage with the Boer Forces on the Biggersberg. This was done 71 days later when the BA moved from Ladysmith (from 10 to 13 May 1900) via Helpmakaar to Dundee (15 May) and then Newcastle (18 May). Included are the postmarks of each APO FPO that serviced the Divisions and Brigades at Newcastle between 18 May and 8 June 1900 (see Table above).

#### 5. BRITISH ARMY ADVANCE FROM NEWCASTLE TO VOLKSRUST (TVL).

The British Army concentrated at Newcastle. Boer Forces had concentrated at Laing's Nek and Majuba and heavily defended this position. But the BA in a flanking movement went via Botha's Pass east of Ingogo (railway) into the OFS on 8 June and engaged with the Boer Forces at Alleman's Nek on 11 June and Volksrust was captured on 12 June. Included are the postmarks of each APO FPO that serviced the Divisions and Brigades operating between Newcastle and the OFS-TVL border together with those that were stationed at Newcastle (see Table above), i.e. included are the postmarks of each APO FPO under a heading NEWCASTLE – OFS & TVL BORDER.


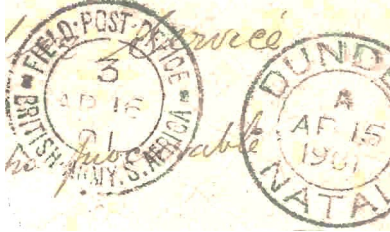

#### 6. BRITISH ARMY GARRISON POs


FPO 23 used **DC FPO 23** cancel at Utrecht May 1901 to July 1902.


FPO 47 used **DC FPO 47** cancel at Vryheid Aug 1901 to June 1902.


Included are the postmarks of these two APO FPO used at these two ex-Transvaal towns that subsequently became part of the Natal Colony. The Utrecht and Vryheid districts were ceded by Britain to Natal in reparation for their contribution during the ABW in terms of the Peace Agreement of 31 May 1902. The Natal PO dept then operated the civilian POs at these towns and at others (e.g. Paulpietersberg, Lunaberg, Zwartfolozi).


Finally, two additional BA APO are included (these postmarks are very rare). They are the large circle rubber date stamps with code 'AD' used at the Advance Depot Frere 10 2 00 – 20 3 00, and code 'A' used at Howick by FPO 77 13 9 00 – 4 1 01 (see Prime pg 75-6).




<b>CHIEVELEY – COLENZO BRITISH ARMY POST OFFICES.</b> The BA Field Post Offices were attached and moved with the Army’s Divisions and Brigades, for example, to Spearman’s Farm camp west of Colenso (Battle of Spionkop and Vaal Krantz) and later to the east of Colenso (Battle of Tugela Heights).			
<b>FIELD POST OFFICE 3</b>		Operated from January to February 1900 and serviced the 11 <sup>th</sup> Brigade of the Natal Field Force. Initially used at Estcourt in late December 1899.	
 <p>Code 3</p>			
No. 1 EBP PP	24 mm DC.FPO ER 29 12 99 EBP LR 20 2 00 EBP Rarity C/RR		
		Prime records use of FPO 3 at Dundee by APO 17 from 25 May 1901 to 1 July 1901. A British Army garrison was stationed at Dundee after the relief of Ladysmith (28 February 1900) to defend the boundary between Natal and Tvl from possible Boer incursions. Early in September 1901 the British became aware of a possible Boer invasion of Natal from the east and reinforced the three drifts on the Buffalo River (east of Dundee). General Louis Botha's attempted invasion of Natal was prevented by the B Army and he with his force largely comprising Bittereinders then attacked the British army garrisons at Fort Itala and Fort Prospect on 26 September 1901 they were responsible for preventing Boer forces from entering Zululand. Botha lost both these battles and then moved back into the Transvaal. The illustration may have been in use at Dundee, as indicated by Proud.	
No. 1a EBP PP	24 mm DC.FPO ER 16 4 01 AV LR Rarity C/RR		
<b>FIELD POST OFFICE 5</b>		Operated from December 1899 to February 1900 and serviced the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division of the NFF. Initially used at Pietermaritzburg (late November) and then Frere (early December).	
 <p>Code 5</p>			
No. 1 EBP PP	24 mm DC.FPO ER13 12 99 EBP LR 11 2 00 EBP Rarity C/RR		
<b>FIELD POST OFFICE 7</b>		Operated in December 1899 and serviced the 5 <sup>th</sup> Brigade (unattached) of the NFF. Not seen from after the Battle of Colenso (15 December 1899).	







 <p>Code 7</p>					
No. 1 EBP PP	24 mm DC.FPO ER 2 12 99 RNP LR 15 12 99 EBP Rarity RRR				

<b>FIELD POST OFFICE 8</b>		Operated from November 1899 to February 1900 and serviced the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Brigade part of the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division of the NFF.			
 <p>Code 8</p>					
No. 1 EBP PP	24 mm DC. FPO ER 28 11 99 EBP/RNP LR 1 3 00 EBP Rarity C/RR				


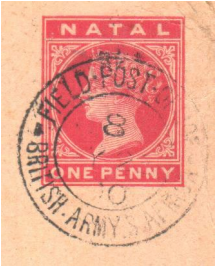

<b>FIELD POST OFFICE 9</b>		Operated in late November and part of December 1899 and serviced the Headquarters of the Natal Field Force. Was not seen after the Battle of Colenso 15 December 1899.			
 <p>Code 9 (scan ex PP)</p>					
No. 1 EBP PP	24 mm DC. FPO ER 23 11 99 EBP LR 8 12 99 EBP Rarity RRR				

<b>FIELD POST OFFICE 11</b>		The 5 <sup>th</sup> Brigade, serving with the NFF used the FPO 11 date stamp which possibly replaced the FPO 7 date stamp that had been lost (Battle of Colenso).			
 <p>Code 11</p>					
No. 1 EBP	24 mm DC.FPO ER 11 2 00 EBP				




PP	LR 20 2 00 EBP Rarity C/RR				
<b>FIELD POST OFFICE 12</b>		Operated from December 1899 to February 1900 and serviced the 6 <sup>th</sup> Brigade part of the 5 <sup>th</sup> Division of the NFF.			
 <p>Code 12 1 &amp; 2 may be separated or together, at left, center or on the right. Often thick '1'.</p>					
No 1 EBP PP	24 mm DC.FPO ER 5 12 99 EBP LR 12 2 00 EBP Rarity C/RR				
<b>FIELD POST OFFICE 13</b>		Operated from December 1899 to February 1900 and serviced the 4 <sup>th</sup> Brigade and Divisional troops part of the 2 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division of the NFF.			
 <p>Code 13.</p>					
No 1. EBP PP	24 mm DC.FPO ER 9 12 99 EBP LR 14 2 00 EBP Rarity C/R				
<b>FIELD POST OFFICE 15</b>		Operated from January 1900 to February 1900 and serviced the 10 <sup>th</sup> Brigade part of the 5 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division of the NFF.			
 <p>Code 15</p>					
No 1. EBP PP	24 mm DC.FPO ER 13 1 00 EBP LR 28 2 00 EBP Rarity C/RR				
<b>FIELD POST OFFICE 18</b>		Operated from February to May 1900 and serviced the Headquarters of the NFF. A shortfall on date stamps led to the APOC in Natal using their own temporary date stamps and cancels (Prime 2003).			




 <p>Telegraph use only.</p>					
No. 1. EBP PP	24 mm SC.FPO 1 ER * 11 99 EBP LR 30 4 00 EBP Rarity RRR	No. 2 EBP PP	25 mm SC FPO 2 ER 6 2 00 RNP LR 22 3 00 EBP Rarity RRR	No. 3 EBP	26 mm intaglio ER 19 3 00 EBP LR Rarity RRR
 <p>Code 18 This date stamp was used at Utrecht OC12/00 on Soldier's letter.</p>		 <p>Used on parcel and package post.</p>			
No. 4. EBP PP	24 mm DC.FPO ER 18 2 00 PP LR 23 5 00 EBP Rarity RRR	No. 5 PP	23 mm Cork ER * (5) 00 RNP LR Rarity RRR		
<p><b>BRITISH ARMY POST OFFICES STATIONED AT NEWCASTLE OR NEAR TO THE ZAR BORDER.</b></p> <p>In April 1900 a thorough re-organization of the British Army and Post Office Corps was undertaken. Army Post Offices were re-numbered (EBP refers to this as a Second Series of postmarks). The new system was introduced on 1 May 1900.</p> <p>The BA Post Offices moved with the Divisions and Brigades of the Natal Field Force from Ladysmith via Dundee to the Newcastle – ZAR border area on 8 May 1900. Boer forces retreated to defend the passes through the Drakensberg. The British Army congregated at Newcastle from 18 May 1900, on 6 June they advanced and by the 8th the army entered the OFS. The Battle of Allaman's Nek took place on 11 June and the British Army entered Volksrust on 12 June 1900. The BA established garrisons supported by FPO (e.g. FPOs 23, 47 &amp; 14) at Utrecht and Vryheid. The Districts in which these towns are located were incorporated into Natal in compliance with the Peace Agreement of 31 May 1902 that ended the war.</p>					
<p><b>FIELD POST OFFICE 3</b></p>  <p>Code 3</p>		<p>APO 17 used FPO 3 date stamp during May 1900 and serviced the 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade that was part of the 5<sup>th</sup> Division of the NFF. Recorded near Wessel's Nek on 15 May 1900.</p>			
No. 1	24 mm DC.FPO				






EBP PP	15 MY 1900 PP 27 MY 1900 RNP Rarity C/RR			
<b>FIELD POST OFFICE 5</b>		APO 5 used FPO 5 date stamp and continued to service 2 <sup>nd</sup> Division of the NFF. The Brigade entered Newcastle on 18 <sup>th</sup> May 1900 and participated in the battles on the frontier until the surrender of Volksrust on 13 June 1900.		
 <p>Code 5</p>				
No. 1 EBP PP	24 mm DC.FPO 8 MY 00 PP 13 JU 00 PP Rarity C/RR			
<b>FIELD POST OFFICE 8</b>		APO 8 used FPO 8 date stamp and continued to service the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Brigade part of the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division of the NFF. It was at Newcastle on 19 May 1900 and participated in the battles on the frontier until the surrender of Volksrust on 13 June 1900.		
 <p>Code 8</p>				
No. 1 EBP PP	24 mm DC. FPO 19 MY 1900 PP 13 JU 1900 PP Rarity C/RR			
<b>FIELD POST OFFICE 13</b>		APO 10 used FPO 13 date stamp and continued to service the 4 <sup>th</sup> Brigade part of the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division of the NFF. It was at Mount Prospect – Laing’s Nek on 19 May 1900 and participated in the battles on the frontier, occupying Laing’s Nek on 11 June 1900.		
 <p>Code 13</p>				
No. 1 EBP PP	24 mm DC.FPO ER 19 MY 1900 PP LR AU 14 1900 RNP Rarity C/RR			
<b>FIELD POST OFFICE 15</b>		APO 15 used FPO 15 date stamp and continued to service the 10 <sup>th</sup> Brigade part of the 5 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division of the NFF. Recorded at Newcastle on 27 May 1900, at Charlestown on 14 June 1900 and serviced the Brigade that operated in the Charlestown – Volksrust area in July 1900. The APO returned to Ingogo with the 10 <sup>th</sup>		



		Brigade to protect the railway from 16 August 1900 to 30 May 1901. It was closed by June 1901.		
 <p>Code 15</p>				
No 1.	24 mm DC.FPO			
EBP	ER 19 3 00 EBP			
PP	LR 30 4 00 EBP			
	Rarity C/RR			
<b>FIELD POST OFFICE 20</b>		APO 38 used FPO 20 date stamp and serviced the 7 <sup>th</sup> and 8 <sup>th</sup> Brigades of the 4 <sup>th</sup> Division of the NFF. It was at Newcastle on 27 May 1900 and then in the Charlestown – Volksrust area in June 1900. APO 38 returned to Natal and was at Ingogo on 18 June 1900 and Newcastle on the 19 <sup>th</sup> .		
 <p>Code 20</p>				
No 1.	24 mm DC FPO			
EBP	ER 27 MY 1900 EBP			
PP	LR 18 JU 1900 PP			
	Rarity RRR			
<b>FIELD POST OFFICE 26</b>		APO 42 used FPO 20 date stamp and serviced 2 <sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Brigade of the NFF. It was at Charlestown from 13 to 15 June 1900 before moving into the Transvaal.		
 <p>Code 26</p>				
No 1.	24 mm DC FPO			
EBP	ER MY 18 1900 RNP			

PP	LR JU 25 1900 RNP Rarity RRR			
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Mounted Brigade</b>		Used the Type VII (EBP) rubber date stamp. The Brigade consisted of Natal Volunteer Regiments under Maj Gen Dundonald which advanced from Ladysmith and operated in the Newcastle – ZAR border area from May to June 1900. Scouts from these units may have operated in this area as early as April 1900.		
 <p>Index 3 M B</p>				
No 1 EBP PP	36 mm SC. APO ER May 1900 PP LR June 1900 PP			
<b>ARMY POST OFFICE 40</b>		Used the 8 B Type VII (EBP) rubber date stamp and operated in the Newcastle area 20 June to 11 July 1900.		
 <p>Index 8B</p>				
No 1 EBP PP	36mm SC.APO ER 12 MAY 1900 RNP LR 21 JUN 1900 RNP			
<b>FIELD POST OFFICE 23</b>		APO 16 used FPO 23 date stamp and serviced 5 <sup>th</sup> Division of the NFF. It was at Newcastle on 27 May 1900 and then moved to Utrecht servicing the British Army Garrison (1 <sup>st</sup> York and Lancaster Regiments) from June 1900 to 1 July 1902. On 22 October it was at Fort Itala near Dundee.		
				

 <p>Index 23</p>				
No 1	24mm DC. FPO ER May 1900 PP LR July 1902 PP			
<b>FIELD POST OFFICE 47</b>		APO 94 used FPO 47 date stamp which was at Vryheid and serviced the British Army Garrison (Royal Lancaster Regiment) from August 1901 to end June 1902.		
 <p>Index 47</p>				
No 1	24mm DC. FPO ER August 1901 PP LR June 1902 PP			
<b>FIELD POST OFFICE 14</b>		APO 17 used FPO 14 date stamp at Dundee and serviced the 11 <sup>th</sup> Brigade from 30 October 1900 to July 1902.		
 <p>Code 14</p>				
No 1 EBP PP	24mm DC. FPO ER October 1900 LR July 1902			