

T is for Telegraph? The use of Transvaal Cantonment "T" date-stamps.

Shortly after the Boer War, Transvaal started issuing date-stamps with the letter T at the bottom. These are now widely thought to have been issued for use at telegraph offices and counters, though there seems to be no contemporary statement that this was the case; Mathews (1986) rather surprisingly makes no mention of them in his chapter on postmark typology, and neither does Putzel (Putzel and Visser 1992-2003) in his introduction to *The Postmarks of South Africa*, though he mentions date-stamps with TO at the bottom (v. 1, p.57), though he commented on BRAKPAN Put 2, a triple ring canceller with T at the bottom: "(Probably intended for telegraphs, it was also used for registered letters)".

A small kiloware lot of Edward VII Transvaal stamps, recently acquired, casts some light on the use of the "T" datestamps at Middelburg and Potchefstroom, and supports Putzel's comment on use for registered letters.

The lot consisted of three packets, one containing around 300 4ds on piece, almost all singles; the second about 60 2ds, almost all in pairs making a 4d rate, and the third about the same number of ½ds, mostly in blocks of eight, again making a 4d rate, with Middelburg, Potchefstroom and Standerton Cantonment cancellations all dated between October 1904 and December 1905. The stamps are stuck on heavy paper of reasonably good quality. Unfortunately they have almost all been trimmed rather closely; however a few have blue crayon lines suggesting use on registered mail, as is also suggested by the 4d rate – the standard basic rate for registration at this date. Figure 1 shows a range of pieces, selected for clear and reasonably complete cancellations. (Each packet also included a few other stamps from other places and with other dates; it seems likely that they are later additions to the accumulation, and they are not further described or discussed.)

CANTONMENT MIDDELBURG

There are 28 4d "units" with Put Military 45 (a double circle date-stamp with CANTONMENT B.O. MIDDELBURG / TVL) that are dateable to month of use, and 23 "units" with Put Military 46 (a similar double circle date stamp with CANTONMENT B.O. MIDDELBURG. TVL / T, a T datestamp which Putzel allocates to the Telegraph Office). The dates of both cover most of the period of the accumulation with no obvious differences, gaps or concentrations (Table 1). Nearly all are on heavy pale brown paper, varying slightly in colour and in surface glazing; one is on darker brown paper and one on pale blue paper of similar weight.

CANTONMENT POTCHEFSTROOM

There are 80 4d "units" with Put Military 47 (a double circle date-stamp with CANTONMENT POTCHEFSTROOM / x) that are dateable to month of use, and 12 with Put Military 48 (a similar double circle date stamp with CANTONMENT POTCHEFSTROOM / T, a T datestamp again allocated by Putzel to the Telegraph Office). (They can be easily distinguished even if the lower part of the cancellation is missing by the year in the date, which has four digits (e.g. "1905") in Mil 47 and only two (e.g. "05") in M48. Although Mil 47 is considerably commoner than Mil 48, again both cover the period of the accumulation (Table 1). For both date-stamps about three-quarters of the units are on pale brown paper like that used at Middelburg, most of the rest are on the darker brown paper, and there is one on pale blue paper.

CANTONMENT STANDERTON

Again two date-stamps are present; neither is a "T" canceller – no T canceller has been recorded. There are 55 "units" with Put Military 52 (a double circle date-stamp with CANTONMENT B.O. / STANDERTON TVL) that are dateable to month of use again covering the same period (Table 1). Like Potchefstroom, about three-quarters of the units are on pale brown paper, and most of the rest are on darker brown; there are two on pale blue paper. There are just three "units" with Put (Military) 53

(a rather different larger double circle canceller with broken inner circle and two “half moons”), all on the commoner pale brown paper and within the same date range.

What does seem rather clear is that these pieces aren't from telegram forms, At least at this time (October 1904 - December 1905) at the Cantonment Middelburg and Potchefstroom offices, the T cancellers were being used postally very regularly, very probably for registered packets, based in part on the 4d rates, in part on the weight of the paper and in part on the occasional blue crayon lines. It's not at this point possible to be hard to be more specific about their likely use, though one fragment (with a Potchefstroom date-stamp) has a small part of a cache with the letters “...AL FIE..” which might be military (Figure 2), which hopefully someone might recognise. Also two of the pieces with Standerton date-stamps have “...M B 2059” above a line printed on the paper (and mostly obscured by the stamps). Any ideas?.

Dates in the first part of the month are commoner than later dates (Table 2), especially at Middelburg. This could relate some kind of monthly use.

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Table 1: Months of use in the different date-stamps

Month of use	Cantonment	Cantonment	Cantonment	Cantonment	Cantonment	Cantonment
	Middelburg Put Mil 45	Middelburg Put Mil 46 (/T)	Potchefstroom Put Mil 47	Potchefstroom Put Mil 48 (/T)	Standerton Put Mil 52	Standerton Put Mil 53
Oct 04			1	1	1	
Nov 04			3		3	
Dec 04	2	1	7	1	4	1
Jan 05	3	1	1		1	
Feb 05	2	1	3	2	3	1
Mar 05	4	1	4	1	9	
Apr 05	1	3	8	1	10	1
May 05	3	6	6	1	1	
Jun 05	5		6	2	3	
Jul 05	1	3	9	2	4	
Aug 05	1		14		5	
Sep 05		1	3	1		
Oct 05	3		8		4	
Nov 05	2	2	5	1	6	
Dec 05	1		3		1	
Total	28	19	80	12	55	3

Table 2: Dates of use in the first part of the month are commoner than later dates, especially at Middelburg

Day of month	Cantonment Middelburg	Cantonment Potchefstroom	Cantonment Standerton
1-5	26	36	11
6-10	3	11	14
11-15	4	16	3

16-20	2	15	6
21-25	5	12	10
26-31	1	4	3



Fig 1: Selected "units" from the accumulation.

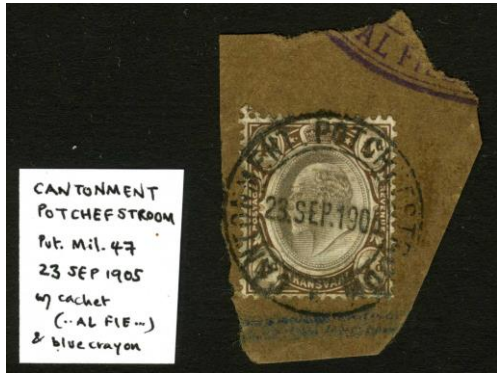


Fig 2: Piece with partial cachet and blue crayon line.

References:

Mathews IB 1986 *Transvaal philately*. Cape Town.

Putzel RF and Visser AT 1992-2003 *The postmarks of South Africa and former states and colonies*. 10 vols, Tokai, and then Meyerspark, South Africa.