



Synopsis

BURMA CIVIL CENSOR HAND STAMPS 1939-1943



Purpose: This one frame exhibit completely shows all the types of civil censor hand stamps used by Burma in World War II on regular mail, explaining where, when, and why they were used. Unrecorded censor numbers are identified, and listing errors are pointed out. This is not a detailed study of all individual numbers as that would not fit a single frame. The time frame is from the beginning of the War until the Japanese Occupation.

Reference: British Empire Civil Censorship Devices World War II British Asia 6th Edition 2011, Civil Censorship Study Group, pp 87-92, p 89 being the most important. I will refer to it as simply CCSG. It will be discussed more near the end of this synopsis. Whenever I say "listed" I am referring to p 89.

Background: As World War II began the Burma Road, completed in 1938 connecting Lashio in Burma with Kunming in China, became vital to the allied effort to supply China. The allied strategy was to keep China in the war so Japanese troops there could not be used elsewhere. Japanese activities in Indochina caused Burma to become an all-important route for much of the allied mail to and from China and beyond.

Importance: This is the most important exhibit of Burma Civil Censor hand stamps ever shown. Numerous items are included that correct and update the information currently found in the above CCSG publication. The information will appear in CCSG 7th Edition whenever it is printed. I have included as page 3 of this synopsis a draft copy of the new page 89 that was provided to me by the editor in 2018. The exhibit also includes discoveries and information I have made known to CCSG since this draft page was prepared.

Treatment: The exhibit is broken into three chapters as listed on the title page. The chapters differ in length and in fact the middle chapter takes up only one page to tell its story. The exhibit consists of twelve pages in four rows of three pages each. In order to tell the story in a more logical order, I do not show the hand stamps in exactly the catalog order. I do not use catalog numbers in the exhibit, but as a guide page 2 covers 1A1, page 3 covers 1A3 and 1A4, page 4 covers 1C1A and 1CB, page 5 covers 1C2 and 1B, page 6 covers 1A2, page 7 covers 1D, page 8 covers 3, page 9 covers 2X used in Rangoon, page 10 covers 2Z, page 11 covers 2Y, and page 12 deals with 2X used elsewhere after Rangoon was abandoned.

At the top of each page is a text box with the listed CCSG information about the hand stamp including the censor numbers known and colors known. If a second hand stamp is covered on a page there is a second text box in the middle of the page. For the rarest marks I also include my study and research results about the numbers that exist which are much more informative than their rarity numbers.

When appropriate, pages provide information about why hand stamps were introduced or changed and why certain censor stations existed and were changed. The covers are described in some detail including pertinent route information in italics. If the postmark is not same side as the censor mark, a scan of it is shown as the date is part of the story. At times interesting information not directly related to the story is shown in italics. Although I am quite knowledgeable about the rates of the period, I do not discuss them in the exhibit. I wanted to hold down the amount of text and consider the rates not to be an important part of the story.

In some cases, I show on a page three examples of a CCSG rarity level 10 marking which is supposed to indicate four or fewer exist. This is not padding or showing off. The markings are on covers showing use at different times, and on different routes which are a secondary part of the story.

Condition: The war time material shown is drawn from a larger holding of Burma censored covers. The covers are mostly in remarkable condition given some were opened and censored in more than one country. A big consideration was to show the finest covers with very exemplary strikes of the hand stamps. An equally important consideration was to show the rarest markings on the most interesting and significant items to best tell the story. I am willing to show an EKU or LKU or unreported color or censor number even if cover or the strike is not perfect.

Rarity: One marking is unique and many of the markings exist in very small numbers, and this information is shown in dark red. The exhibit would be impossible to duplicate given the large number of EKUs and LKUs shown. Many significant and interesting covers are shown, but only those with unique or one of two known censor hand stamps call attention to themselves by being double framed in dark red.

Exhibitor Study, Research, and Discoveries: I have been collecting and studying Burma for over 25 years. I have been maintaining a data base of the rarest markings. In some cases, I have been able to document five or more examples of a marking assigned CCSG rarity level 10. They are still very rare, but not quite so rare as CCSG implies. This information I share in the exhibit. All my research and discoveries are indicated by a dark red magnifier.

Problems with CCSG: CCSG assigns rarity numbers to the hand stamps from 1 to 10 with 10 being the rarest and defined as less than 5 known. A big shortcoming with the rarity numbers is that a unique item and a mark with 4 in existence are both assigned rarity level 10. The rarity 10 numbers are based on estimates and not on actual census information. Rarity numbers 1-9 are not defined as what they represent.

The EKU date for 1A1 is listed as 30 Oct 39 in edition 6. In edition 7 they will list 1 Sep 39. No censorship began in Burma until Britain declared war on September 3, 1939. CCSG says that covers dated September 1 could have wound up in the censor office on September 3. I will continue to list my September 3 title page cover as the EKU.

The listing for 2X used at Rangoon/Lashio from 15 Mar 41- 17 Apr 42 with rarity level 5 is very confusing. It implies that the mark was used at either location during that time. In truth it was not used at Rangoon after February 20, 1942 when the British ordered the civilian evacuation of the city. Rarity level 5 is justified. The catalog should have a listing for used at Mandalay. CCSG even acknowledges on page 87 that the Rangoon censor staff was transferred there. After Mandalay was abandoned the mark was used at Lashio briefly and would deserve a rarity level 10. I have pointed all this out to the editor, and he agrees with me. Maybe edition 8 will get it right.

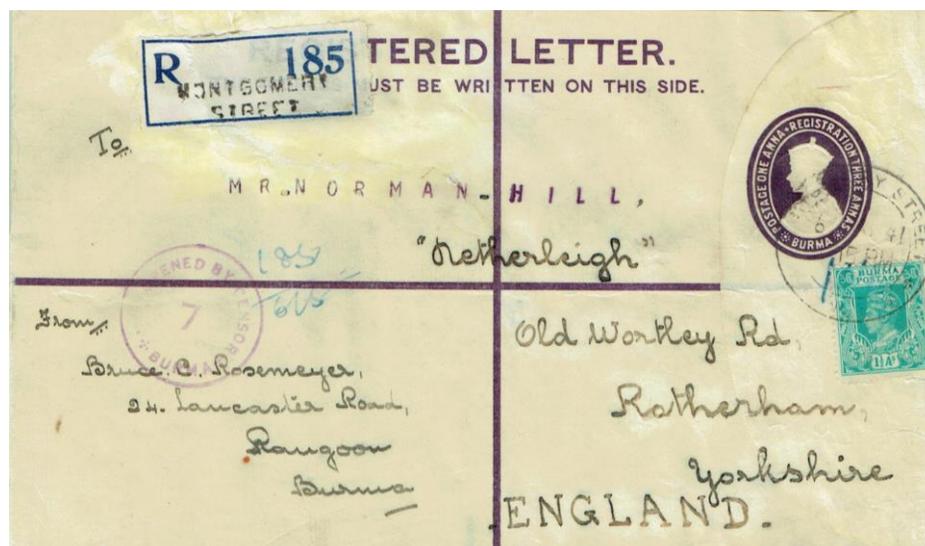
The draft of edition 7 now shows a listing of 2X used at Falam with a rarity level of 10. This is a welcome addition although rarity level 10 is not justified. I have furnished CCSG a list of 20 covers with the marking. They are perceived to be extremely rare because Falam was in the Chin Hills and the covers are eagerly sought out by many collectors and thus pricey. This is a case of something being scarce because of demand.

CCSG Items Not Shown: Two catalog items do not appear in the exhibit. Neither went through regular mail after the hand stamp was applied.

2C is unique. It last sold as lot 311 in the Spink London auction of April 6-7, 2005. The envelope is unstamped and would have gone through diplomatic mail and thus is not in the scope of this exhibit.

Ret.1 is unique. It is a return to sender censor marking on a transit cover that did not go through the mail after arriving in Burma. It was bound for Malaya and could not be forwarded on because of Japanese activities in the area. It was not returned to sender and instead went to the Rangoon dead letter office.

New Items Since Last Showing: Eight items in the exhibit were not in the last showing. The cover below with **NOT OPENED BY CENSOR BURMA 7** is shown on page 8 and is a recent acquisition. This mark with censor number 7 is unlisted, but I have reported it to CCSG.



In April 2020 I purchased a cover I recognized as a new LKU cover from a dealer in Thailand. It was delayed by Covid-19 mailing difficulties. It recently arrived and is shown on page 3.

Listing of the Censor Handstamps and Wax Seals 1939 - 42

Type	Censor No.	Colours	Date range recorded	Censor Station	Points
1A1	1 - 9, 11, 29, 30	violet, green, red	01 Sep 39 - 23 Feb 41	Rangoon	6
1A2	1 - 34	violet, green	03 May 40 - 21 Feb 41	Rangoon	7
1A3	6 - 9	violet, red	10 Oct 39 - 26 Apr 40	Rangoon	8
1A4	none	red	03 Dec 39	Rangoon	9
1B 3		violet	Oct 39 - 19 Nov 39	Mandalay	10
1C1A	1	violet	Sep 39 - 30 Oct 39	Akyab	10
1C1B	7	violet	15 May 40	Akyab	10
1C2	1	violet	Jan 40 - May 40	Akyab	10
1D	none	violet	24 Jun 40 - 6 Jan 41	Lashio	10
2C	1	violet	29 Jan 42	Rangoon	10
2X	2 - 69	violet, green	15 Mar 41 - 17 Apr 42	Rangoon/Lashio	5
2X	27	violet	09 Oct 42 - 19 Jul 43	Falam	10
2Y	1	violet	May 41 - 04 May 42	Akyab	10
2Z	1, 2, 4	violet	04 Mar 41 - 18 Mar 42	Lashio	10
3	3, 6, 10 - 65	violet, green	Apr 41 - Mar 42	Rangoon	8
WS 1	none	red	29 Jan 42 - 27 Dec 45	Rangoon	10
Ret.1	3	violet	27 Jan 42	Rangoon	10

Remarks:

Identification of types 1A: 1A1 - large censor number - 1A2 - small censor number
 1A3 - large censor number and dot after RANGOON.
 1C1B - without dot after AKYAB

Wax Seal 1: Inscription CHIEF CENSOR *BURMA* (Coat of Arms), measurement 25 mm

1) See page 91

