

Brazil in UNEF I – Suez Battalion

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The Suez Battalion represented Brazil in the first United Nations peacekeeping force (UNEF I) from 1957 to 1967. During this period, over 6,000 military personnel operated in the Gaza Strip. A Postal Service (SV) was established for the Suez Battalion, which earned the nickname “Mala da Saudade” (Bag of Longing). The transport of mail bags between Brazil and the Middle East – and vice versa – was carried out by the National Airmail (C.A.N.) and by conventional air routes, through Panair do Brasil S.A. and Canadian aircraft from UNEF I, on the final leg between Beirut and El Arish. In Brazil, the reception and processing of letters were handled by the Postal Section of the I Army in the Ministry of War in Rio de Janeiro, as well as the handling and distribution of incoming correspondence. Letters sent from the Middle East could follow two routes:

- a) through the regular postal services of the countries in the region, prepaid with local stamps;
- b) through the special UNEF mail, with free postage. This second option was limited to correspondence weighing up to 50 grams and intended for the sender’s country of origin. Items that did not fit these rules used the regular route – which was much rarer – via the UNEF Post Office, which initially operated in Naples (until January 29, 1958) and later in Beirut.

Historical Context: UNEF I was created to ensure the ceasefire following the nationalization of the Suez Canal. It brought together forces from 10 countries, including Brazil, and was stationed in the Gaza Strip.

Objective of the Collection: To study the functioning of the postal service of the Suez Battalion and the correspondence exchanged between military personnel, families, and comrades.

Development: The collection features postal items and marks used during the period, organized into two routes:

- I) correspondence sent from Brazil;
- II) correspondence originating from the conflict zone.

Conservation Conditions: As is typical with military correspondence, many envelopes show wear and tear due to handling and adverse conservation conditions.

Highlights: Very rare items (less than five reported up to this moment) are framed in blue. Other pieces of special relevance are identified with a ★ in the lower left corner.

Rarity: Despite the encouragement of correspondence – including in the Expeditionary Handbook, which recommended writing regularly to family – the volume of known items from the Suez Battalion is low in relation to the mission’s duration. This was influenced by UNEF’s postal service guidance not to fulfill requests from philatelists and merchants for air mail items, as well as the competition from the Brazilian Army’s Radio Service, which provided communication between military personnel and families until the operation’s conclusion.

Plan

Introduction (page 1)

- 1) Correspondence sent from Brazil to the Middle East (page 2 to 5)
- 2) Correspondence sent by the Suez Battalion (page 6 to 12)

Bibliography

AHRENS, Werner. “Correspondência aérea do ‘Batalhão Suez’, contingente da UNEF no Egito”. In: Brasil Filatélico, nº 133, p. 27 a 39, 1962.

ESTRADA, Bruna Melo S. Duque. “A participação da FAB na Missão de Paz da ONU no Canal de Suez”. Instituto Histórico-Cultural da Aeronáutica. Rio de Janeiro, 2022.

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The only one postage paid to Brazil via UNEF up this moment.

Correspondence circulated from **Rafah (May 16, 1964, in Arabic)** to **Pelotas (May 25, 1964)**, with **postage paid of 140 milliemmes** (equivalent to 14 piastras). Sent by a military member, likely on leave, which is why it was processed at the post office, where it received marks related to the date of receipt (**May 15, 1964**), battalion (**United Nations – Emergency Force – UNEF Brazilian Battalion 3rd/2nd R.I. “BTL. SUEZ”**), and country of origin (BRAZIL), all in dark pink. Unidentified transit cancellation on the front and back.

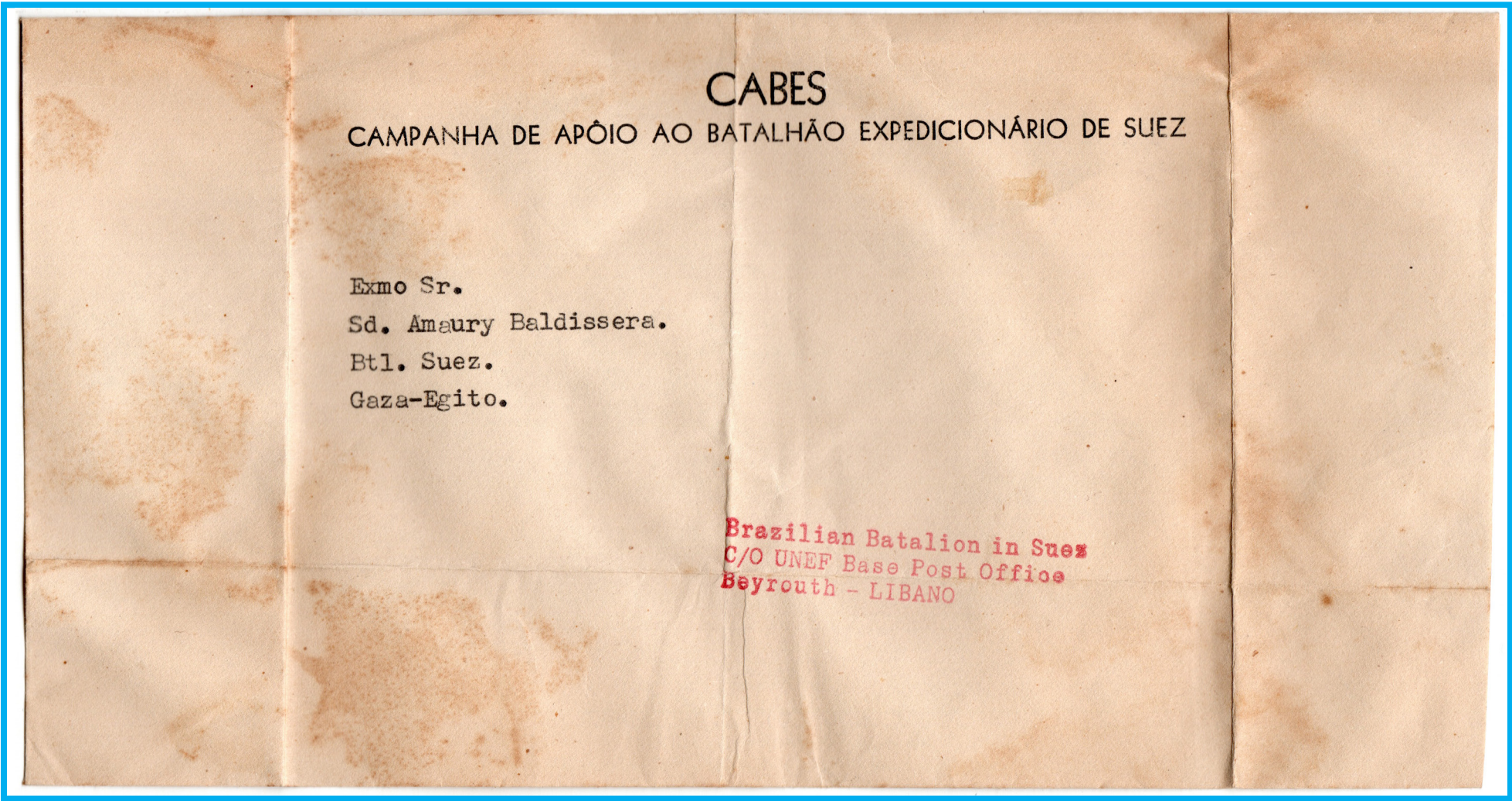
Back of the envelope
Reduced copy



1) Correspondence sent from Brazil to the Middle East

Small packages intended for military personnel — such as books and records — were exempt from postage if delivered directly to the Ministry of War. When mailed, the sender paid only the postal fee up to the barracks in Rio de Janeiro. According to Daily Bulletin No. 143 from the Postal Traffic Superintendency, the maximum allowed weight for each package was three kilograms. Packages could also be delivered in person or forwarded to CABES, which was responsible for sending them to the Ministry of War.

CABES (Support Campaign for the Suez Expeditionary Battalion) was created to provide moral and material support to the members of the Brazilian contingent in the Gaza Strip. It operated with the support of various organizations, especially the LBA, where it was headquartered in Rio de Janeiro (RJ). Among its activities were the collection of donations and visits to the families of military personnel. CABES also promoted campaigns to encourage correspondence, setting up mailboxes in various locations in Rio de Janeiro to collect letters addressed to the Battalion.

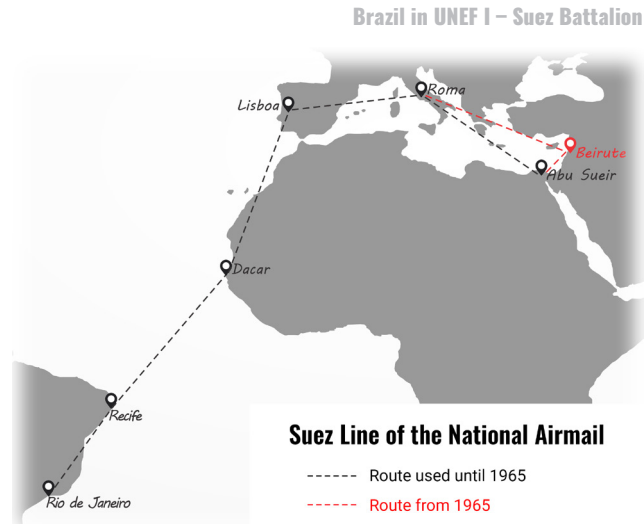


The only one custom-ordered piece shipped via CABES up this moment.

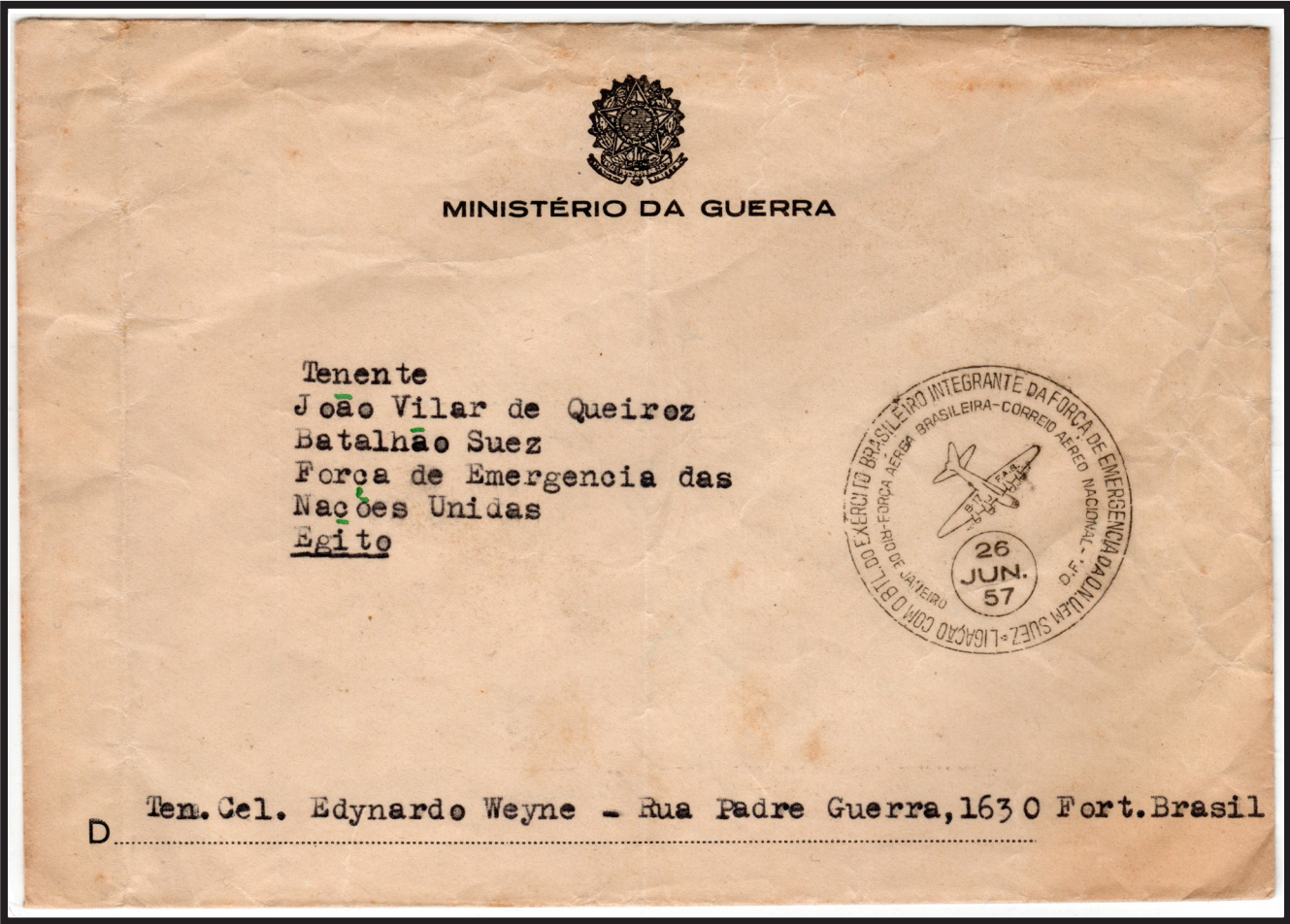
Letterhead envelope from CABES, **exempt from postage** and without postal marking. It likely accompanied a **small package** (the back has a handwritten note with the words “Disco – Três Caravelas”), circulated by the **National Airmail flight on November 11, 1959**. The addressing is done with a red stamp, following the identification of the recipient, indicating a large number of shipments made by the organization.

1) Correspondence sent from Brazil to the Middle East

To serve the Suez Battalion, the National Airmail established a regular route to the Middle East. Notice No. 21, dated February 11, 1957, outlined the operational guidelines for the Suez Line, including the use of B-17 airplanes (referred to as Flying Fortresses). Initially, the frequency was set to be monthly (on the last Thursday), except during the winter months in the Northern Hemisphere (December to February), when flights were suspended due to weather conditions. Starting in 1965, the regulation changed to flights every two months. It is noted that this schedule was not followed in the first two years; in 1957, there were 11 flights, and in 1958, five. The first “Mala da Saudade” transported by the C.A.N. left Rio de Janeiro on March 28, 1957, with the return occurring on April 15, 1957. Each trip lasted, on average, 15 days.



Notice No. 9-57 from the Department of Posts and Telegraphs mandated that all correspondence transported by the National Airmail destined for the Suez Battalion, starting in April, must receive a special commemorative circular stamp, made of metal, with a diameter of 40mm and using black ink. The first pieces of correspondence to receive the stamp are from the mail pouch of the flight on April 25, 1957. According to the notice, the stamp would be available to the public at the Postal Section of the I Army at the Ministry of War on the days of C.A.N. flights to the Middle East, and could “be applied to stamps, sheets, blocks, cards, envelopes, and loose papers (...)”. This application makes a careful analysis of these items important, given the various envelopes produced with favor cancellations.



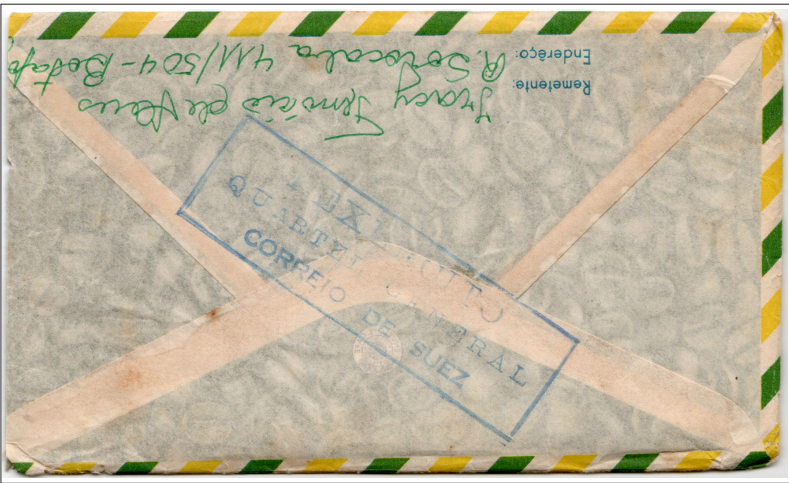
Official correspondence circulated from the Ministry of War to the Suez Battalion, via **the National Airmail flight on June 26, 1957, exempt from postage** and bearing the **special cancellation** used on C.A.N. trips addressed to the Brazilian battalion.



★ Correspondence circulated from **Novo Hamburgo (July 8, 1964)** to the Suez Battalion, with postage paid up to Rio de Janeiro, in the amount of **Cr\$ 13.00 (equivalent to the second tier of airmail: Cr\$ 10.00 + Cr\$ 3.00 - letter up to 5g + additional for excess 5g)**. It received **transit cancellations** QUARTEL GENERAL (July 13, 1964) and I ARMY - HEADQUARTERS - SUEZ MAIL. Letters sent from any post office agency were required to pay postage up to Rio de Janeiro. However, known letters with this postage payment are scarce.



Correspondence circulated from **Novo Hamburgo (May 12, 1964)** to the Suez Battalion, **exempt from postage**. It received transit cancellations M. GUERRA - DR-GB (May 15, 1964) and “I ARMY - HEADQUARTERS - SUEZ MAIL.” Like most known letters sent to the Ministry of War by mail, no postage was paid, as was initially required. This suggests that at some point, **the charge was waived by the postal authority**.



Back of the envelope
Reduced copy

Circulated correspondence from **Rio de Janeiro** to the **Suez Battalion**. Letters and parcels delivered directly to the Mail Section of the Ministry of War were **exempt from postage fees**. Up to this point, no type of marking—postal or otherwise—that formalized this special condition is known.



Reverse of circulated correspondence from **Rio de Janeiro** to the **Suez Battalion**, delivered to the Mail Section of the Ministry of War, without postage payment and with a transit stamp from the department.

I EXERCITO
QUARTEL GENERAL
CORREIO DE SUEZ

The rectangular postmark, in three lines, with the inscription I ARMY – GENERAL HEADQUARTERS – SUEZ MAIL, was applied at the Mail Section of the I Army, both on correspondence intended for the Middle East and on those sent to Brazil. It is known in blue, black and purple. The first recorded use is from 1961.



Reverse of circulated correspondence from **Rio de Janeiro** to the **Suez Battalion**, delivered to the Mail Section of the Ministry of War, without postage payment and with a transit stamp from the department.

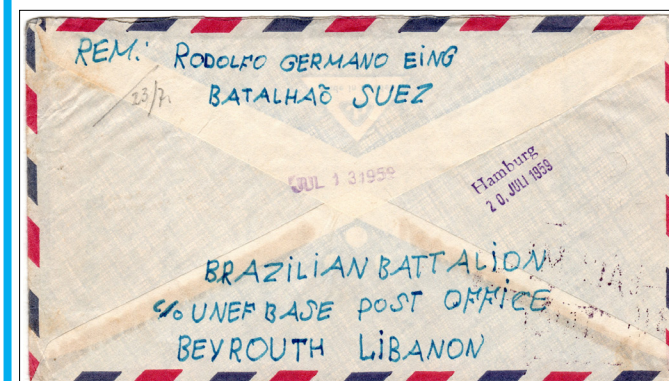
2) Correspondence sent by the Suez Battalion



★ Air correspondence circulated from Beirut (June 1, 1959) to Vienna. Since it was not destined for Brazil, it paid a fee of 45 piastres, with postage covered by UNEF at the Base Post Office in Beirut. On the back, there is a non-postal receipt marking from Beirut (May 29, 1959).



Back of the envelope
Reduced copy

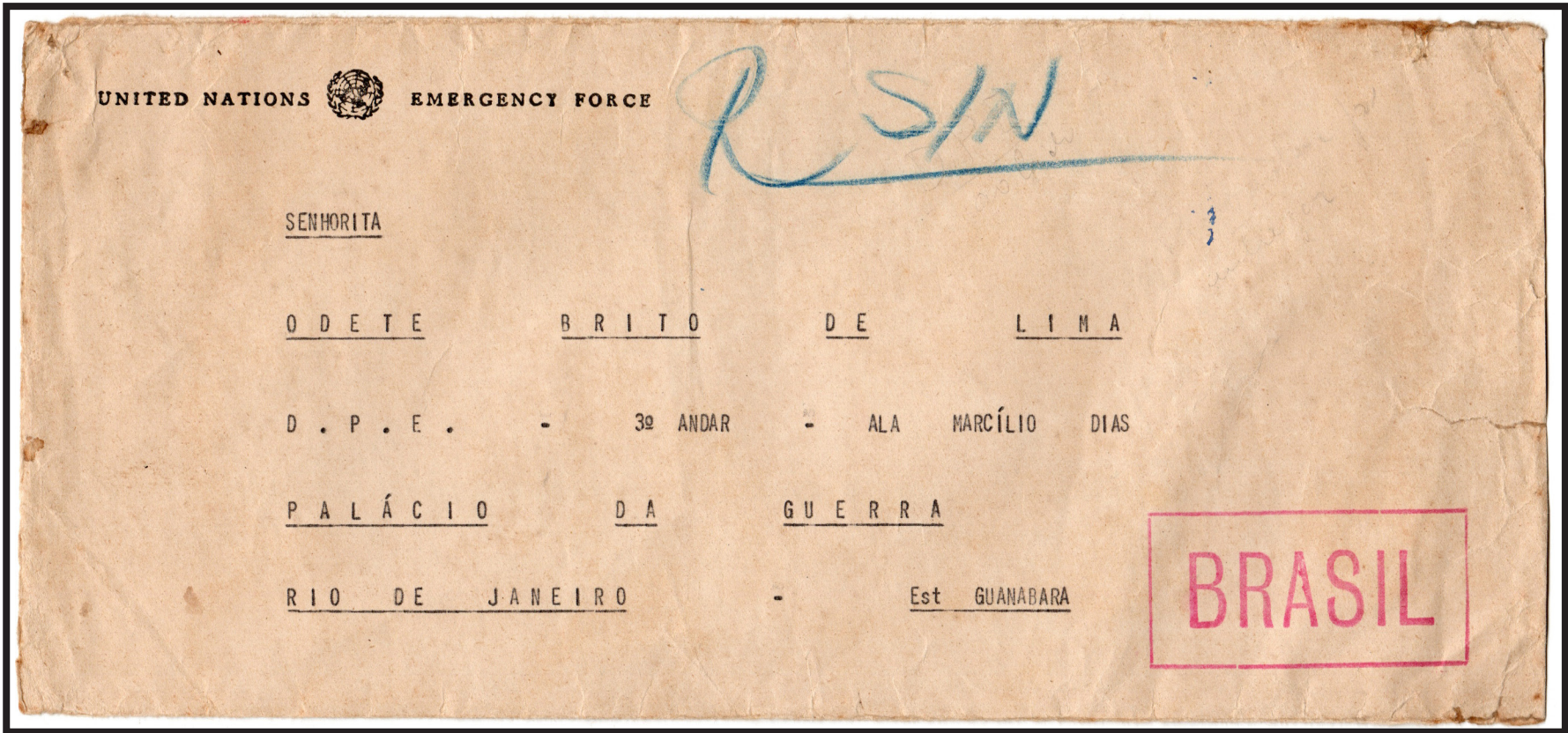


Air correspondence circulated from Beirut (July 15, 1959) to Hamburg (July 20, 1959), and redirected to Kassel (July 23, 1959). Since it was not destined for Brazil, it paid a fee of 45 piastres, with postage covered by UNEF at the Base Post Office in Beirut. On the back, there are non-postal receipt markings from Beirut (July 13, 1959) and redirection in Hamburg (July 20, 1959).

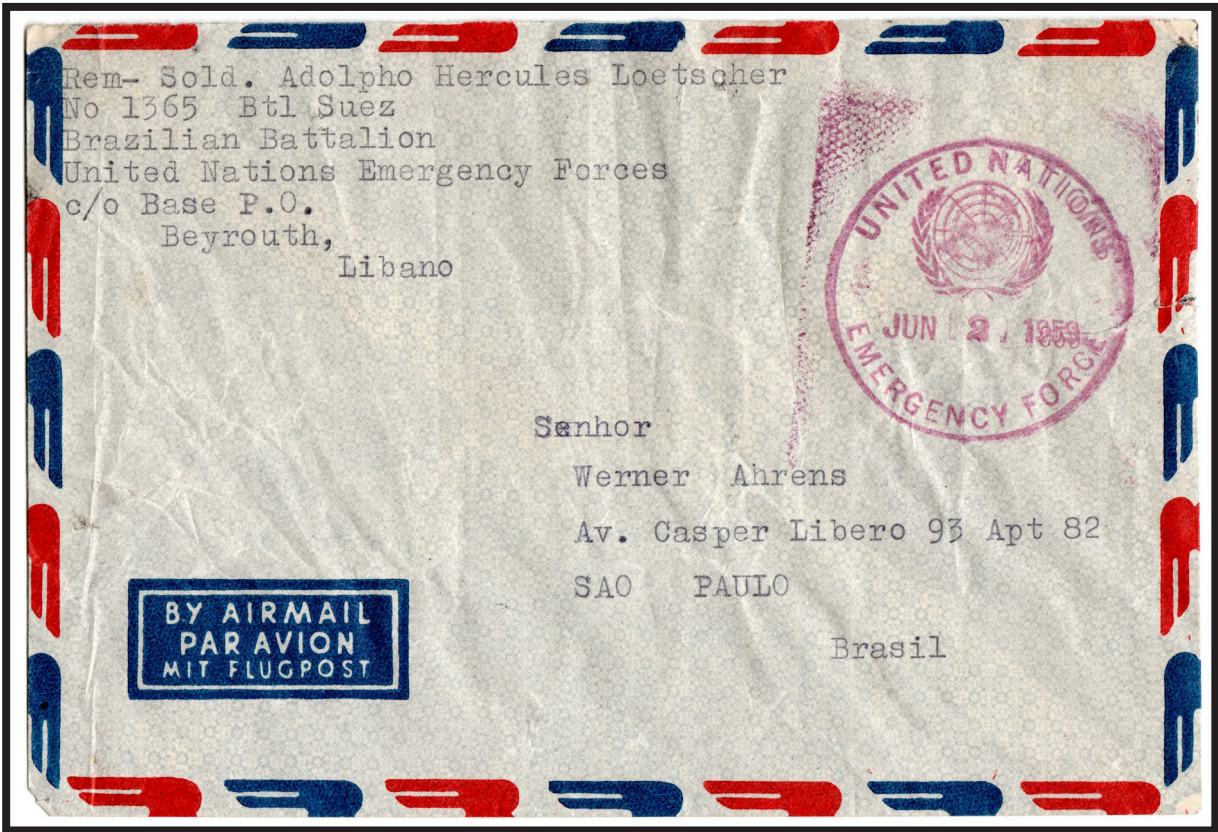


Detail of the date cancellation on the back of the envelope. Reduced copy

★ **Official correspondence** circulated from the **Suez Battalion (September 2, 1958)** to **Rio de Janeiro (September 11, 1958)**, with a typewritten and signed exemption **dispatch authorization** from the Battalion Commander due to excess weight (maximum = 50g). It received a mechanical departure stamp in Rafah and a date stamp upon arrival (**REDE RADIO EXERCITO = ESTACAO PTP - 8 =**). This date stamp is known only on correspondence that received certification from the Battalion Commander.



★ **Registered correspondence** circulated from the Suez Battalion to Rio de Janeiro, with the corresponding inscription in pencil, **R S/N**. There is a non-postal stamp indicating the origin (**BRAZIL**). On the back, there are non-postal **receipt markings (July 22, 1961)** and **SV POSTAL BTL SUEZ - III/2º RI**, in red. Registered correspondence was not common between the Suez Battalion and Brazil.



**I EXÉRCITO
QUARTEL GENERAL
SERVIÇO DO CORREIO**

Rectangular postmark, in three lines, with the inscription (in Portuguese)
I ARMY – HEADQUARTERS – MAIL SERVICE, applied at the Mail
Section of the I Army in Rio de Janeiro, on correspondence received from the
Suez Battalion. It is known in black, purple, and blue.



Back of the envelope
Reduced copy

Correspondence circulated from the **Suez Battalion (June 2, 1959)** to **São Paulo**, with **transit through the Ministry of War (June 16, 1959)**. It received a postal stamp from the **UNEF Mail** in Rafah. On the back: receipt date cancellation from Rafah (**June 2, 1959**), and transit (**M. GUERRA - DR - DF -**) and handling (**I ARMY - HEADQUARTERS - MAIL SERVICE**) in Rio de Janeiro.



**I EXÉRCITO
QUARTEL GENERAL
SERVIÇO DE CORREIOS**

Rectangular postmark, in three lines, with the inscription (in Portuguese)
I ARMY – HEADQUARTERS – POST OFFICE SERVICE, applied in the
Post Office Section of the 1st Army, in Rio de Janeiro, on correspondence
received from the Suez Battalion. It is known in red and blue.



Back of the envelope
Reduced copy

Correspondence sent by a soldier of the **military police (MP)**, stationed at the **Headquarters in Gaza (October 10, 1959)**, to **Porto Alegre (October 21, 1959)**, with **transit through the Mail Section of the I Army in Rio de Janeiro**, where a treatment stamp was applied (**I ARMY - HEADQUARTERS - MAIL SERVICE**). This date stamp, with a double outer circle, was **used only on correspondence from military police personnel**. So far, only two pieces have been known to be canceled by this stamp.



Back of the envelope
Reduced copy



Postmark used at the UNEF Post Office, initially in Naples and later in Rafah. Known in bright red, dark red, reddish-purple, and gray-black colors. It displays the date in the format MMM DD YYYY.

Correspondence circulated from the **Suez Battalion** to **Curitiba**, with a postal cancellation from the **UNEF Mail (March 31, 1959)**, in Rafah. On the back, there are transit cancellation **M. GUERRA - DR - DF** and **I ARMY - HEADQUARTERS - MAIL SERVICE**, in Rio de Janeiro (**April 15, 1959**).

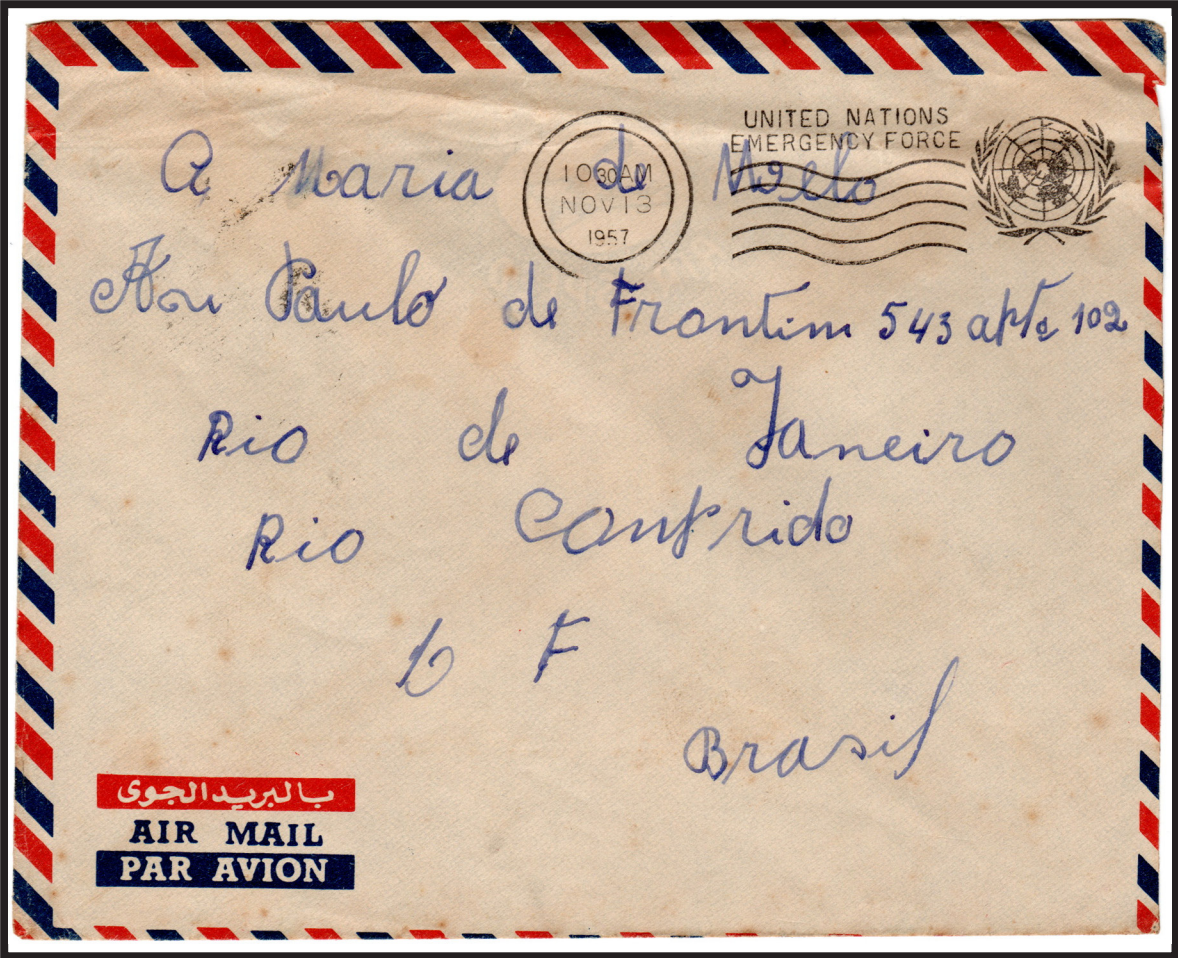


Postmark used at the UNEF Base Post Office in Rafah. Known in dark purple and black colors. It displays the date in the format DD MMM YYYY. Below the date, the digits "1" or "3" appear.

Back of the envelope
Reduced copy



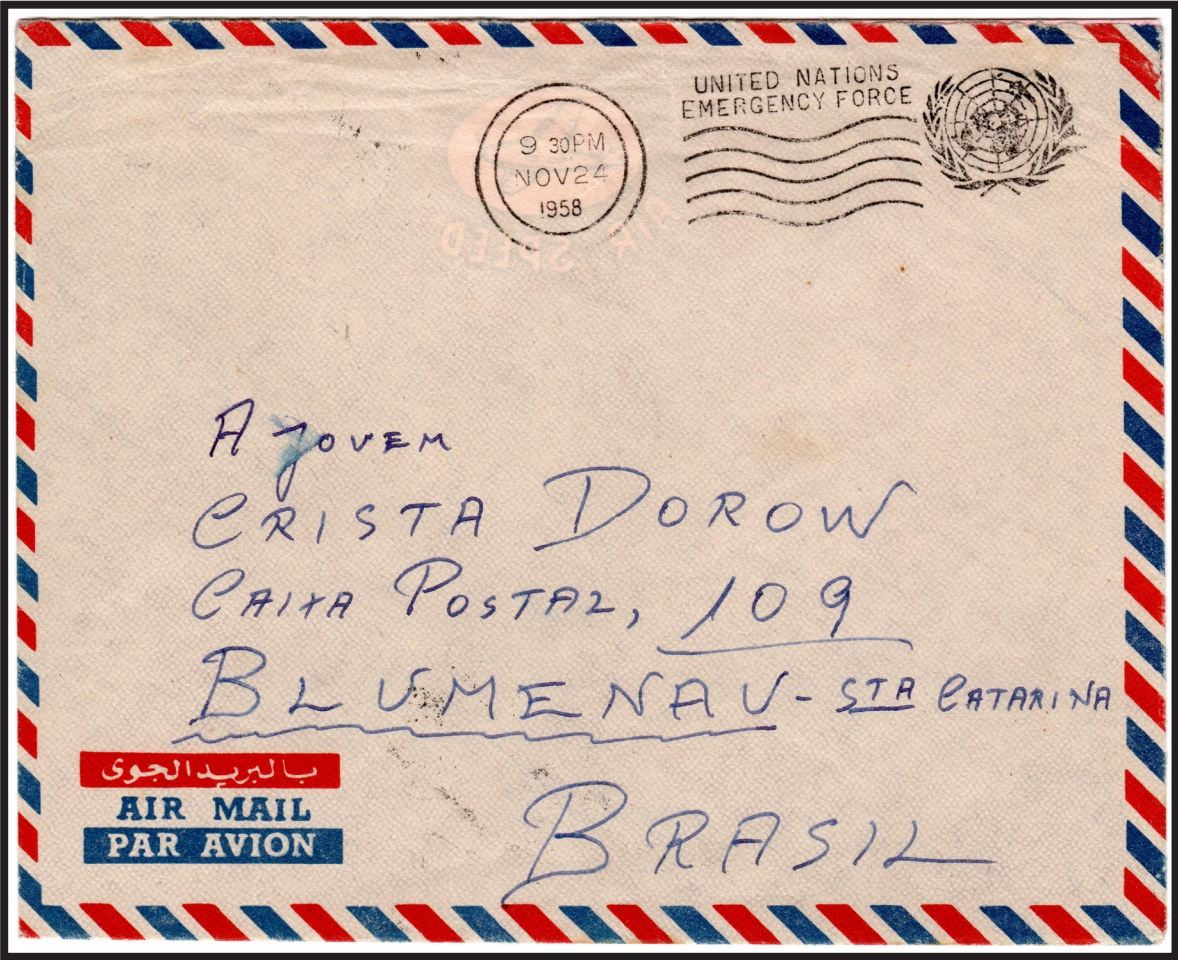
Correspondence circulated from the **Suez Battalion** to **Rio de Janeiro**, with a postal cancellation from the **UNEF Mail (January 13, 1963)**, in Rafah, and transit through the Ministry of War (**HEADQUARTERS - DR - GB - January 21, 1963**). On the back, there are transit cancellation **I ARMY - HEADQUARTERS - MAIL SERVICE** and arrival stamp (**ATLANTIC - DR - GB - January 22, 1963**).



Correspondence circulated from the **Suez Battalion** to **Rio de Janeiro** (**November 27, 1957**), with a mechanical cancellation from the **UNEF Mail** (**November 13, 1957**), in Rafah. On the back, there are purple transit cancellation from the Ministry of War (**I ARMY - HEADQUARTERS - MAIL SERVICE**) and an arrival stamp (**ESTACIO DE SÁ - DR - BRAZIL - DR**).



Back of the envelope
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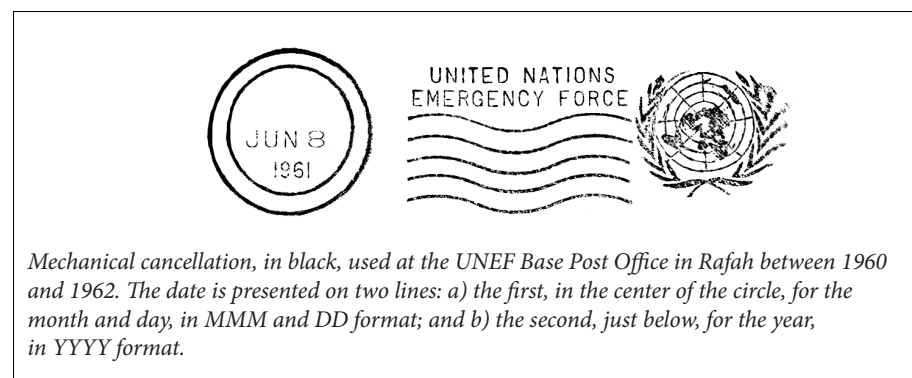


Mechanical postmark, in black, used at the UNEF Base Post Office in Rafah between 1957 and 1959. The date is presented in three lines: a) the first line for the hour (marked in 30-minute intervals), followed by the abbreviations AM or PM (ante meridiem / post meridiem); at full hours, the space for minutes is filled with a horizontal line. b) the second line for the month and day, in the format MMM and DD. c) the year, in the format YYYY.

Back of the envelope
Reduced copy



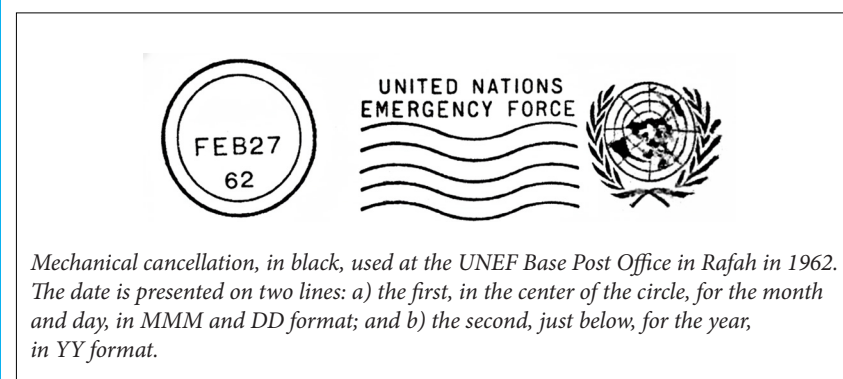
Correspondence circulated from the **Suez Battalion** to **Blumenau** (**December 12, 1957**), with a mechanical cancellation from the **UNEF Mail** (**November 24, 1958**), in Rafah. On the back, there are transit cancellation from the Ministry of War (**I ARMY - HEADQUARTERS - MAIL SERVICE**) and (**HEADQUARTERS - DR - BRAZIL - DR, December 2, 1957**), in Florianópolis (**December 11, 1958**) and an arrival stamp.



Back of the envelope
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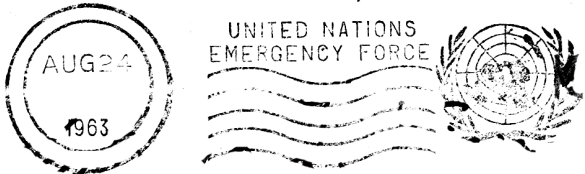
Correspondence circulated from the **Suez Battalion** to **Rio de Janeiro (June 15, 1961)**, with a mechanical cancellation from the **UNEF Mail (June 8, 1961)**, in Rafah, and a transit cancellation from the Ministry of War (**June 14, 1961**). On the back, there are entry cancellation at the base post office (**June 8, 1961**), transit cancellation from the Ministry of War (**I ARMY - HEADQUARTERS - MAIL SERVICE**), and an arrival cancellation (**LARGO DO MACHADO - AFTERNOON - DR - DF**). It also features non-postal markings from the originating battalion: **BRAZIL** on the front; and **SV POSTAL - BTL SUEZ - III / 2nd RI** on the back.



Aerogram distributed by UNEF to military personnel, circulated from the **Suez Battalion** to **Rio de Janeiro (February 6, 1961)**, with a double impression of the mechanical stamp from **UNEF Mail (January 30, 1962)**, in Rafah, and a transit stamp from the Ministry of War (**February 5, 1962**). On the back, there are entry cancellation at the base post office (January 29, 1962) and an arrival stamp. It also features non-postal markings from the originating battalion: **BRAZIL** on the front; and **SV POSTAL - BTL SUEZ - III / 2nd RI** on the back. This mechanical stamp, with the year in two digits, was used only in 1962. Only two pieces are known to exist so far.



Correspondence circulated from the **Suez Battalion** to **São Paulo** (**September 2, 1963**), with a mechanical stamp from **UNEF Mail** (**August 24, 1963**), in **Rafah**, and a transit stamp from the Ministry of War (**August 28, 1963**). On the back, there are entry cancellation at the base post office (**August 24, 1963**), transit cancellation from the Ministry of War (**I ARMY - HEADQUARTERS - SUEZ MAIL**), and an arrival stamp (**SANTANA - DR - BRAZIL - SP**). It also features non-postal markings from the originating battalion: **BRAZIL** on the front; and **SV POSTAL - BTL SUEZ - III / 2nd RI** on the back.



Mechanical cancellation, in black, used at the UNEF Base Post Office in **Rafah** between 1962 and 1964. The date is presented on two lines:
a) the first, at the top, for the month and day, in MMM and DD format; b) the second, at the bottom, for the year, in YYYY format.

Correspondence circulated from the **Suez Battalion** to **Novo Hamburgo** (**August 21, 1964**), with a mechanical stamp from **UNEF Mail** (**August 14, 1964**), in **Rafah**. On the back, there are entry stamps at the base post office (**August 14, 1964**) and a transit stamp from the Ministry of War (**I ARMY - HEADQUARTERS - SUEZ MAIL**). It also features non-postal markings from the originating battalion: **BRAZIL** on the front; and **SV POSTAL - BTL SUEZ - III / 2nd RI** on the back.

