

Philippine “Official” Overprints

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The use of Official stamps, either as dedicated issue printing or as an overprint, is a practice not limited to the United States. For example, the use of Official stamps was regularly in use in the Philippines for a period of more than fifty years. Collectors will most likely recognize such issues by the various “O.B.” (Official Business) overprints. This article is not intended to be the definitive treatise on the topic, but rather a potential catalyst for input from CFSC members.

The Philippines tradition traces its origin to U.S. Brigadier General Harry Bandholtz who served as Chief of the Philippines Constabulary until 1913. Bandholtz requested the Philippines Bureau of Posts undertake the experimental usage of the “O. B.” overprint in 1907. The first appearance involved three issues (Scott 214, 240, and E1). Here the overprint was applied to the stamps as part of the stamp printing process (i.e., prior to general release). While the “O.B.” overprints can be found on numerous commemorative issues, I believe the most common usage involved definitive stamps such as the Philippines issues of 1952 through 1960 (Scott 589 - 601).

Figure D1



According to Scott, the basis for the “Official Business” overprints was a December 1905 directive from C.M. Cotterman, Director of Posts. Effective January 1, 1906, all branches of the Insular Government (that is, the territorial government established in 1901 and dissolved in 1935, and succeeded by the Commonwealth of the Philippines) were authorized to mark then-valid postage

Figure D2



stamps with the letters “O.B.” indicating use of the mailing for “Official Business”. The placement of the overprints was such that doing so would not deface the overall appearance of the affected stamp.

For my “generalist” purposes I have identified four categories of the various “Official Business” overprints:

- *Press printed.* Applied as two capital letters with a period after each letter. Applied subsequent to the printing of the host/affected stamp starting in 1926 by

the Bureau of Posts. These are the overprints illustrated in Scott, which makes sense given the other applications were done on an *ad hoc* basis. Examples are shown in **Figure D1**.

- *Typewritten.* Similar to press printed varieties, the type-written examples are uniform in nature. Here again the markings consist of two capital letters, each followed by a single period. Every example which I have seen was produced in black ink. Examples are shown in **Figure D2**.
- *Hand stamp.* Based on personal observations this was a quite common application. Usually noted as “O.B.” While the ink colors reportedly included black, blue, red, green, or yellow, based on personal observation the most common was a light purple hue. Given the *ad hoc* nature of these issues, some collectors consider these to be “local issues”. Examples are shown in **Figure D3**.
- *Handwritten.* Based on personal observation, most commonly “O.B.” in either black or dark blue pen ink. Given the individual nature of the application, the appearance of the markings varies from stamp to stamp. Here again, some collectors consider these to be “local issues”.

Two other Philippine “official business” overprints warrant mention:

- During the Japanese occupation period (1942-1945), the “K.P.” overprint representing the Tagalog words for “Official Business” accompanied by two Japanese characters often within parentheses. Example is shown in **Figure D4**.
- The “G.O.” overprint, which Scott says represents the Tagalog words “Gawaing Opisyal” (literally “official work”). Examples include the 1962-1969 issues (Scott 854 - 864). Based on the illustrations in Scott as well as personal observation, believe these markings were applied by printing press subsequent to the (actual) printing of the “host” stamp. Example is shown in **Figure D5**. Do hand stamp equivalents exist?

Collecting the various “Official Business” overprints presents an interesting, relatively inexpensive collecting opportunity. More detailed information can be found on a number of the more active philatelic online discussion groups as well as via the International Philippine Philatelic Society.



Figure D3



Figure D4



Figure D5

United States Overprints

The Editor

The United States has had a significant number of overprints over the years. The overprints include the Kansas/Nebraska set, the Shanghai China set, the Canal Zone and the stamps of the 1920s such as the Molly Pitcher and Hawaii issues. Overprints can also be found for Cuba, Puerto Rico and others.

