

Military Franchise Postage Stamps

In 1901, France began the practice of overprinting current postage stamps with the letters "F.M." (Franchise Militaire). Distributed to enlisted men at the rate of two per month, the franchise overprints were valid for ordinary letters to France and its colonies.

The stamps were used by the French military worldwide including locations from all over Indochina.

FIRST FM STAMP - 15-CENTIME ORANGE MOUCHON



BARIA
COCHINCHINE



BIENHOA
COCHINCHINE



CHOLON
COCHINCHINE



SAIGON-CENTRAL
COCHINCHINE



TAYNINH
COCHINCHINE



THUDAUMOT
COCHINCHINE



CAP SI JACQUES
COCHINCHINE

Military Franchise Postage Stamps

SECOND FM STAMP - 15-CENTIME RED MOUCHON



HAIPHONG
TONKIN



NAM-DINH
TONKIN



NGAN-SON
TONKIN



SAIGON-CENTRAL
COCHINCHINE



TA-LUNG
TONKIN



THAINGUYEN
TONKIN

THIRD FM STAMP - 15-CENTIME SOWER



BANCRA
TONKIN



DAPCAU
TONKIN



PNOMPENH
CAMBODGE



TOURANE
ANNAM

Military Franchise Postage Stamps

THIRD FM STAMP - 15-CENTIME SOWER



HUE
ANNAM



PAK-HA
TONKIN



CAP SI JACQUES
TONKIN

FOURTH FM STAMP - 10-CENTIME LINED SOWER



HANOI
TONKIN



POULO-CONDORE
COCHINCHINE



SAIGON-CENTRAL
COCHINCHINE



SONTAY
ANNAM



NACHAM
TONKIN



THAN-POUN
TONKIN

Military Franchise Postage Stamps

FIFTH FM STAMP - 10-CENTIME CAMEO SOWER



CAP ST JACQUES
COCHINCHINE



CHI-MA
TONKIN



HANOI
TONKIN



BACQUANG
TONKIN



DAINGAI
COCHINCHINE



DONG-TRIEU
TONKIN



DO-LUONG
TONKIN



DONG-VAN
TONKIN



PHONG-THO
TONKIN

Military Franchise Postage Stamps

FIFTH FM STAMP - 10-CENTIME CAMEO SOWER



DONG-DANG
TONKIN



HANOI-CHATEAU-D'EAU
TONKIN



HAGIANG
TONKIN



HA-DONG
TONKIN



LOCBINH
TONKIN



NACHAM
TONKIN



PHONG-THO
TONKIN



NA THUOC
TONKIN



POINTE-PAGODE
TONKIN

Military Franchise Postage Stamps

FIFTH FM STAMP - 10-CENTIME CAMEO SOWER



SAIGON-CENTRAL
TONKIN



THAT-KHE
COCHINCHINE



TRALINH
TONKIN

SIXTH FM STAMP - 50-CENTIME SOWER



BAC-QUANG
TONKIN



CAO-BANG
TONKIN



DONG-KHE
TONKIN



HANOI R.P.
TONKIN



PHUOCLONG
COCHINCHINE

Military Franchise Postage Stamps

SEVENTH FM STAMP - 50-CENTIME PEACE



CAP SAINT-JACQUES
COCHINCHINE



HONGAY
TONKIN



PHO-BANG
TONKIN



PHONG-THO
TONKIN

EIGHTH FM STAMP - 65-CENTIME PEACE



PHONG-THO
TONKIN

15-centime Orange Mouchon

The first stamp to be overprinted for military use was the 15-centime orange Mouchon in 1901 (FM 1). Here a soldier stationed at Cap Saint Jacques, where soldiers did not have free mail privileges like troops serving in the Expeditionary Force stationed in northern Indochina, used an FM 1 stamp to mail a letter to France. The envelope bears the cachet of the Squadron Chief of the Colonial Artillery.



POSTAL MARKINGS

CAP-S^TJACQUES COCHINCHINE 25 AOUT 03

REVERSE

SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 6 AOUT 03

RENEVE COTE D'OR 23 SEPT 03

15-centime Orange Mouchon
Internal Usage

Although mostly used for letters to France, FM overprinted stamps were equally valid for internal mail. In this case, the sender used an FM 1 stamp for a letter from Chaudoc to Saigon in 1903.



POSTAL MARKINGS

CHAUDOC COCHINCHINE 13 JUN 03

REVERSE

SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 14 JUN 03

15-centime Orange Mouchon
Usage during the Free Franchise Era from Tonkin

The free franchise for military stationed in Annam and Tonkin was not abolished until 1 November 1904. The sender placed an FM 1 stamp on this envelope addressed to France despite the fact that the letter could have gone free.



POSTAL MARKINGS

HON-GAY TONKIN 25 JANV 04

REVERSE

HAIPHONG TONKIN 26 JANV 04

COMPEIGNE OISE 3-3 04

15-centime Orange Mouchon
Post-Franchise Usage from Annam

After the franchise expired in 1903, the use of FM stamps from Annam and Tonkin became more common. Here an FM 1 stamp was used for sending a letter from Banghoi, Annam to Plouescat, France.



POSTAL MARKINGS
BANGHOI ANNAM 7 JANV 06
REVERSE
PLOUESCAT FINISTERE 7 FEVR 06

15-centime Red Mouchon

The second stamp overprinted was the 15-centime red Mouchon (FM 2) beginning in 1902. On this cover, unit's postal clerk applied a naval cachet that tied the stamp. The stamp was also tied to the cover with the postmark of the civilian post office that first handled the cover.



POSTAL MARKINGS

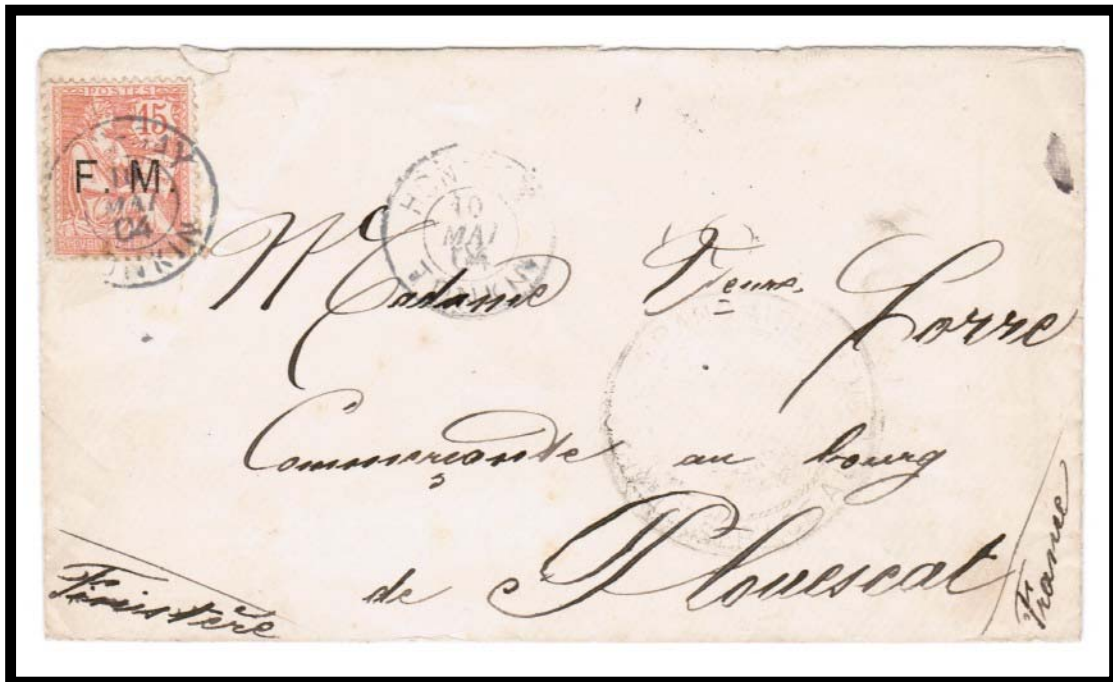
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 30 JUN 05

REVERSE

CLEDER FINISTERE 28 JUL 05

15-centime Red Mouchon
Usage from Tonkin

The FM stamps were valid in all the political subdivisions of Indochina. Here the FM 2 stamp was used from Hongay, Tonkin for a 1904 mailing to France. Free mail was available to soldiers in Tonkin until 1 November 1904.



POSTAL MARKINGS

HON-GAY TONKIN 10 MAI 04

REVERSE

HAIPHONG TONKIN 10 MAI 04
PLOUESCAT FINISTERE 10 JUIN 04

15-centime Red Mouchon
Usage from Cambodia

Usage of FM stamps from Indochina was predominately from the more populous political subdivisions. Occasionally, the franchise stamps were sent from more remote areas such as this 1905 example from Pnompenh, Cambodia.



POSTAL MARKINGS
PNOMPENH CAMBODGE 4 AVRIL 05
REVERSE
PARIS 10 (DISTRIBUTION) 2-5 05

15-centime Red Mouchon
Internal Usage

Because most mail was directed homeward to France, relatively few stamps were employed for local mailings. Here an FM 2 stamp paid for delivery of an internal letter from Ha-Giang, Tonkin to Hanoi.



POSTAL MARKINGS

HA-GIANG TONKIN 10 MARS 06

REVERSE

TUYEN-QUANG TONKIN 15 MARS 06

HANOI TONKIN 17 MARS 06

15-centime Lined Sower

The third stamp overprinted "F.M." was the 15-centime lined Sower (FM 3), which was put into service starting in 1904. Here the FM 3 stamp was utilized on a letter from Saigon to France in 1906. The anchor cachet shows that the sender was a member of a naval unit.



POSTAL MARKINGS

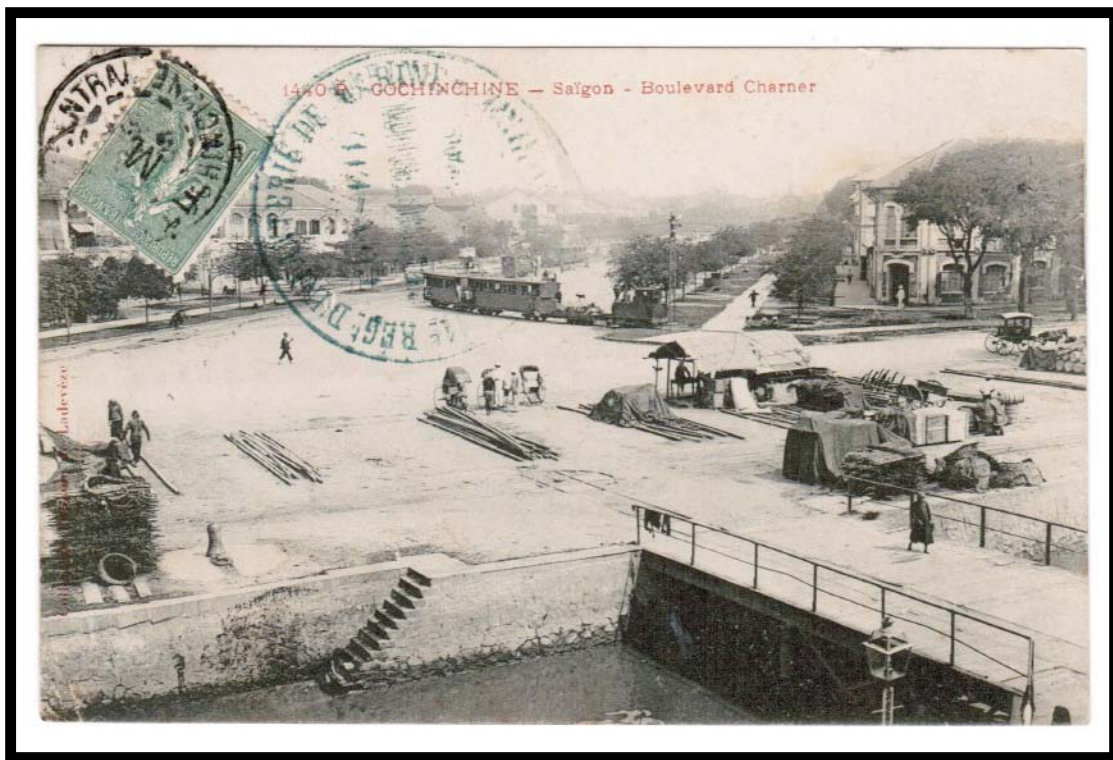
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 30 NOV 06

REVERSE

PLOUESCAT FINISTERE 26 DEC 06

15-centime Lined Sower Postcard Usage

FM stamps could be used for postage on postcards as well as letters. The FM 3 stamp on this postcard is tied to the view side by the cachet of the sender's unit as well as by the postmark of the main post office in Saigon. It was common practice early in the century to affix stamps to the view side of picture postcards.



POSTAL MARKINGS

SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 4 AVRIL 08

REVERSE

SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 4 AVRIL 08

LIGNE N PAQ. FR. N°6 4 AVRIL 08

15-centime Lined Sower
Usage from Annam

The FM 3 stamp paid the postage for a picture postcard sent from Tourane, Annam to France in 1908.



POSTAL MARKINGS

TOURANE ANNAM 29 MARS 08
MANIGOD HIE SAVOIE 23-4 -03

REVERSE

TOURANE ANNAM 29 MARS 08

15-centime Lined Sower Usage from Cambodia

The use of military franchise stamps was directly related to the number of troops stationed at any given area. Relatively few soldiers served at out-of-the-way locations like Pnompenh, Cambodia.



POSTAL MARKINGS
PNOMPENH CAMBODGE 7 FEVER 10

15-centime Lined Sower
Usage from Kouang Cho Wan

The 15-centime Lined Sower FM overprint was employed for a mailing from the leased territory of Kouang Cho Wan. The letter was postmarked at Fort Bayard in 1911.



POSTAL MARKINGS
FORT BAYARD INDOCHINE 19 OCT 11
PARIS 1 DISTRIBON 22 NOV 11

15-centime Lined Sower Usage from Tonkin

For a picture postcard mailed to France, the FM 3 stamp was postmarked in blue ink at Hagiang, Tonkin in 1912.



POSTAL MARKINGS

HAGIANG TONKIN 1 JUIL 12

REVERSE

HAGIANG TONKIN 1 JUIL 12

15-centime Lined Sower
Internal Usage

Here the FM 3 stamp was employed for an internal letter from Lang-Son, Tonkin to Tuyen-Quang, Tonkin. The envelope was addressed to the director of a mining company at Tuyen-Quang.



POSTAL MARKINGS
LANG-SON TONKIN 9-7 14
REVERSE
HANOI TONKIN 9-7 14
TUYEN-QUANG TONKIN 11-7 14

10-centime Lined Sower

The fourth FM stamp, the 10-centime lined Sower (FM 4), was overprinted beginning in 1906. This was the first stamp with a face value of 10 centimes as opposed to the previous stamps which all had a face value of 15-centimes. On this cover, the stamp paid the postage from Saigon to France in 1907.



POSTAL MARKINGS

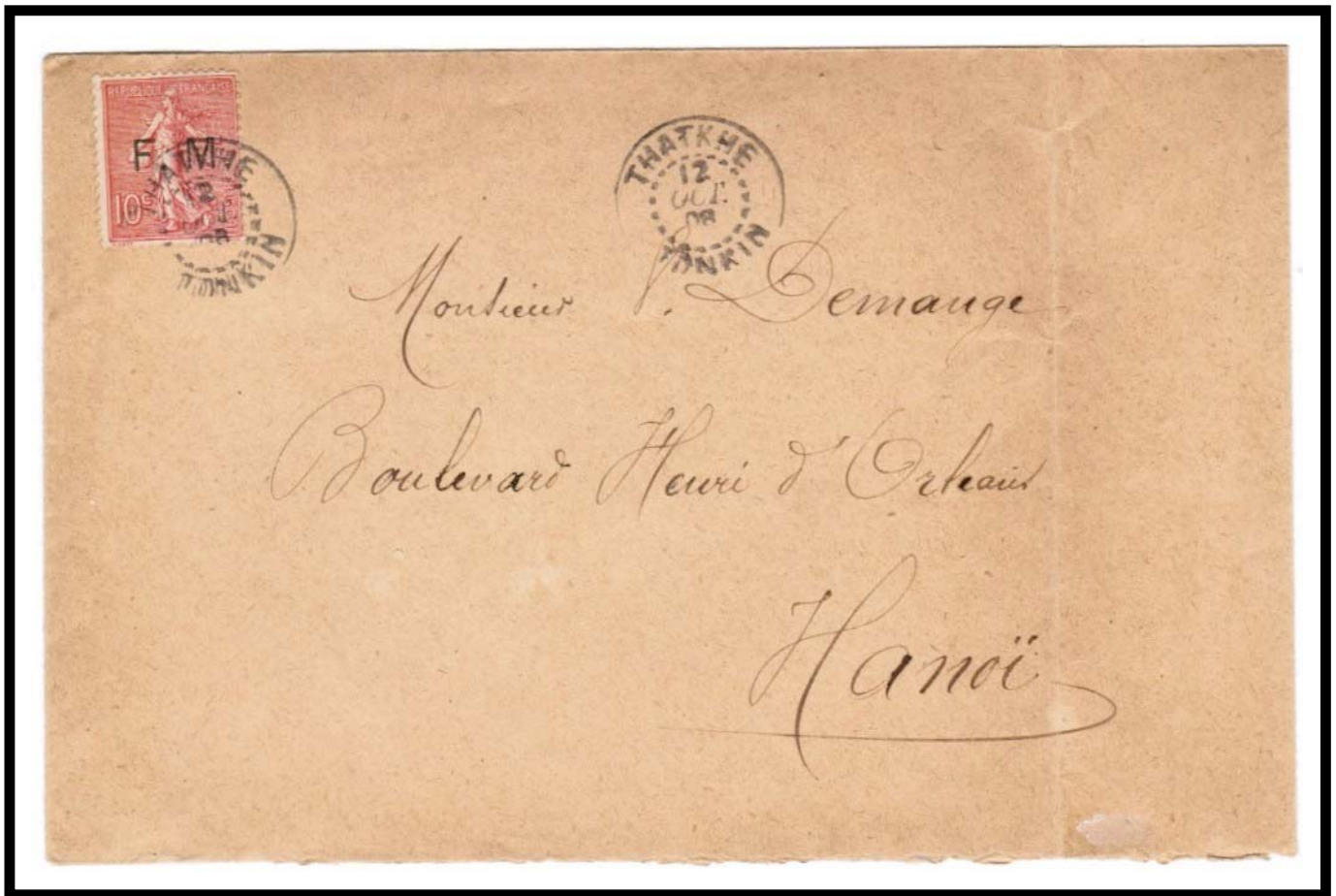
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 13 DEC 07

REVERSE

CLEDES FINISTERE 9-1 07

10-centime Lined Sower
Internal Usage

The fourth FM stamp used on this 1908 cover paid for delivery within Tonkin from Thatkhe to Hanoi.



POSTAL MARKINGS
THATKHE TONKIN 12 OCT 08
REVERSE
HANOI TONKIN 12 OCT 08

10-centime Lined Sower
Late Usage

This printed envelope sent from Cholon, CochinChina to Paris in 1912 demonstrates a late usage of the 10-centime Sower. The sender used military stationery provided by "La Solidarité Militaire".



POSTAL MARKINGS

CHOLON COCHINCHINE 22 MARS 12

REVERSE

SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 12 MARS 12
PARIS 8 DISTRIBUTION 24-4 12

10-centime Cameo Sower Mixed Usage

Because of the free franchise given to soldiers during World War I, the use of FM overprinted stamps was interrupted. Although the 10-centime Cameo Sower, the fifth FM stamp (FM 5), was first issued in 1907, it was most commonly used later after the war.

Here an FM 5 stamp was applied to a postcard and canceled 7 March 1909 even though the card had already been franked with a 5-centime Grasset stamp and postmarked Tay Ninh 21 November 1908.



POSTAL MARKINGS

TAYNINH COCHINCHINE 21 NOV 08
TAYNINH COCHINCHINE 7 MARS 09

10-centime Cameo Sower

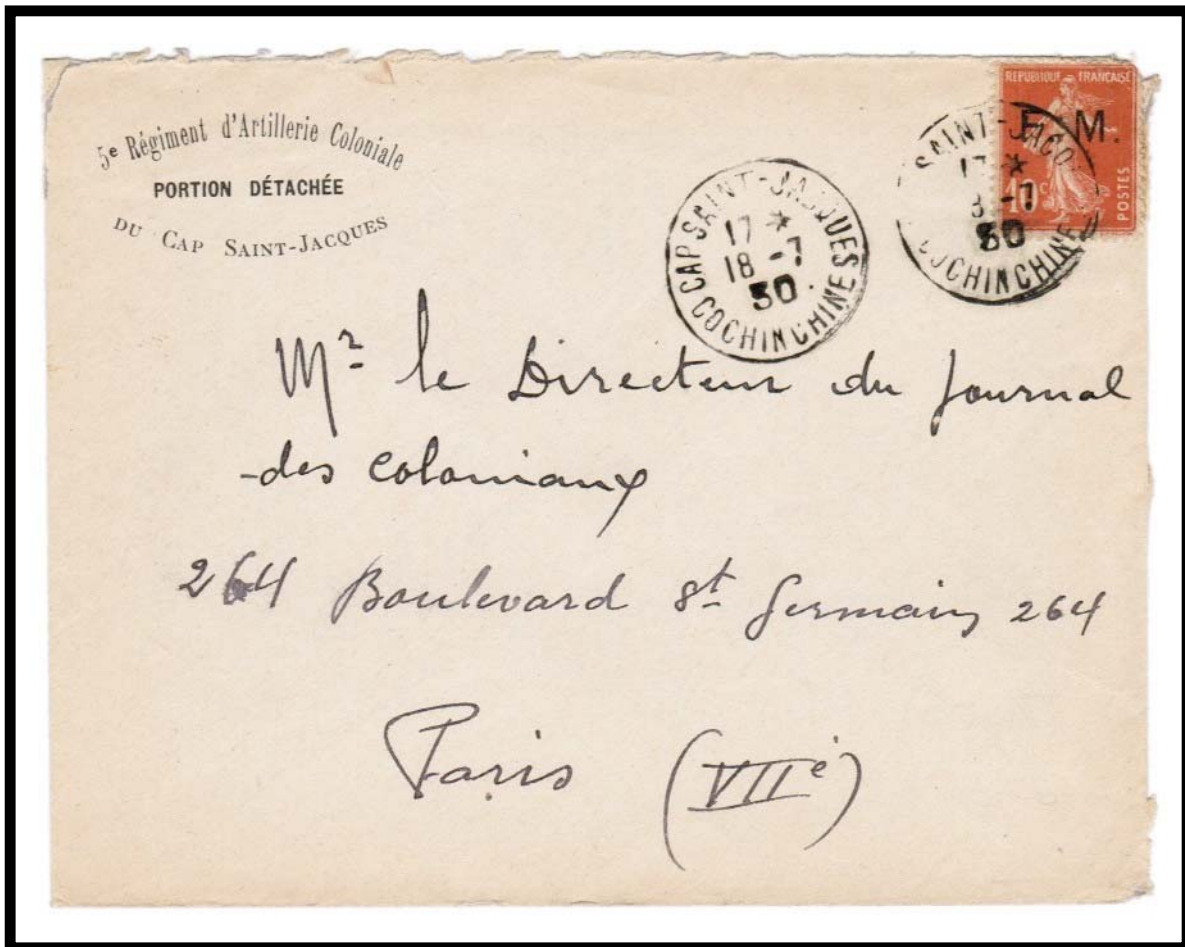
Here the FM 5 stamp was used on an envelope bearing the cachet of the commander of a Marine infantry regiment. To be doubly certain that the letter was recognized as military mail, "F.M." was written at the top of the envelope.



POSTAL MARKINGS
HA-NOI R.P. TONKIN 3-6 30

10-centime Cameo Sower

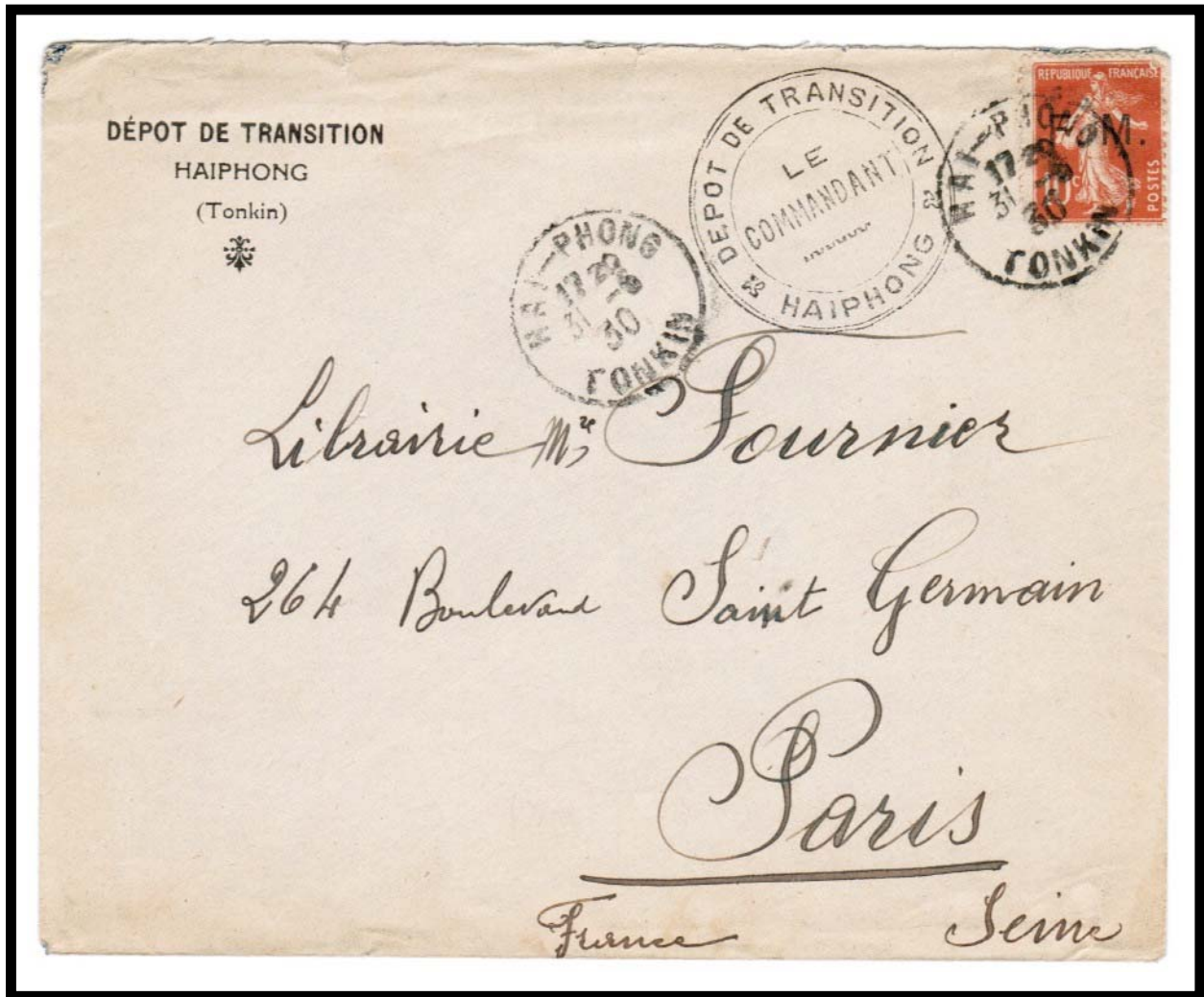
Some military units had personalized stationery. Here the FM 5 stamp was used on an envelope of the 5th Colonial Artillery Regiment.



POSTAL MARKINGS
CAP SAINT-JACQUES COCHINCHINE 18-7 30

10-centime Cameo Sower

This printed envelope of the Transfer Station at Haiphong was franked with an FM 5 stamp for service to Paris.



POSTAL MARKINGS
HAIPHONG TONKIN 31-5 30

10-centime Cameo Sower Postcard Usage

While the vast majority of FM stamps were used for envelopes, some did see service on postcards. An FM 5 stamp was affixed to the front of this postcard from Cao-Bang, Tonkin to France. The circular date stamp from Cao-Bang was applied with blue ink.



POSTAL MARKINGS
CAO-BANG TONKIN 18-1 30 (blue)
ROSNY S/ SEINE SEINE ET OISE 26-3 30

10-centime Cameo Sower Postage Due

FM stamps were not valid to foreign countries. The example shown here, franked with a 10-centime Cameo Sower overprinted "FM," was sent from Hanoi to Holland in late 1914. As evidenced by the Dutch postage due stamp at the upper right, the letter did indeed reach the intended destination – with a postage due charge for the recipient!

In all probability, soldiers' letters addressed outside the French Community were simply returned to the sender. This is the only reported example of a FM cover from Indochina having been charged postage due.



POSTAL MARKINGS

HANOI TONKIN 21-12 14

manuscript due indication in blue crayon

BOERMOND 4. 1. 15

REVERSE

BOERMOND 4. 2. 15

10-centime Cameo Sower Late Usage

This example of the FM 5 stamp saw use in 1939, over 30 years from its original issue.

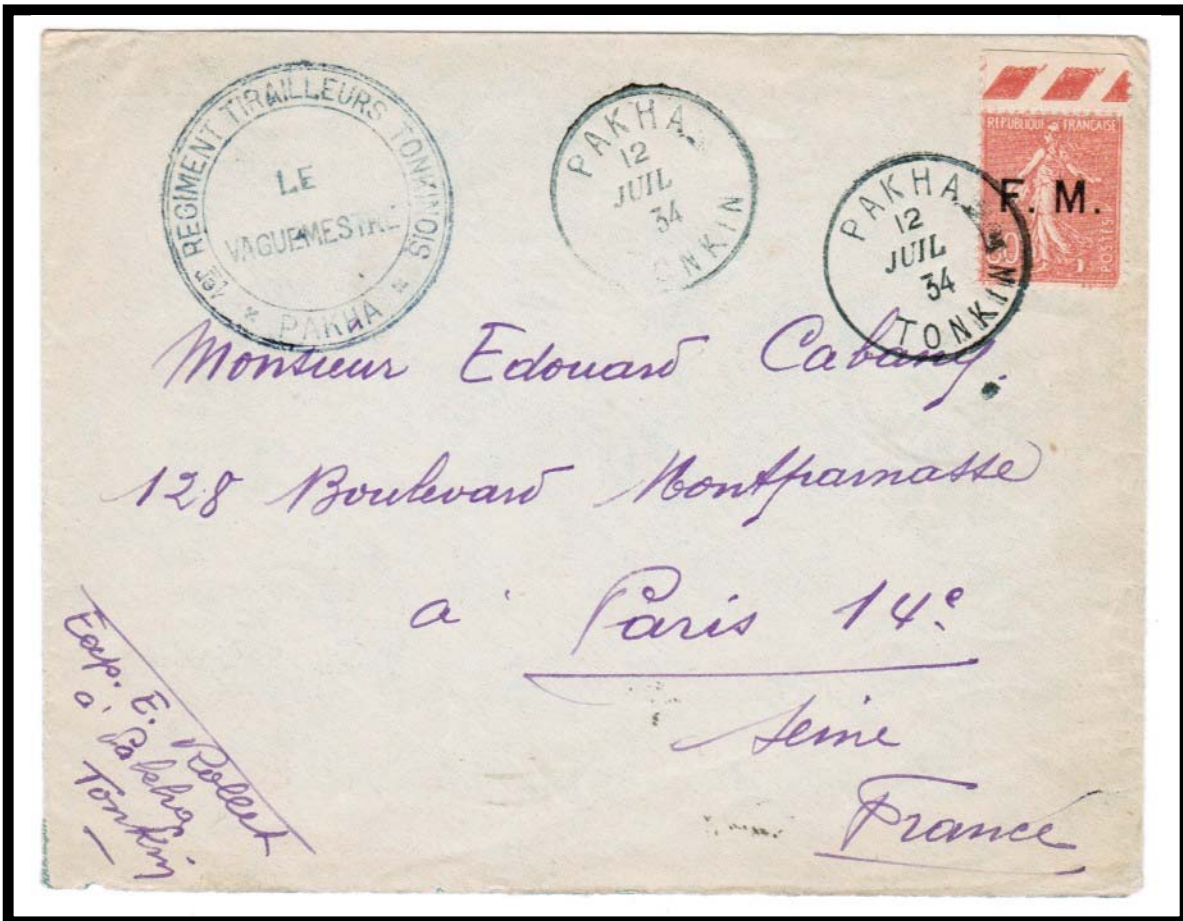
Though FM stamps were canceled by the post office just like other stamps, occasionally variations occurred. Here an FM 5 stamp was struck by the cachet of the unit commander. A clerk at the post office at the small town of Budop applied its postmark at the side after judging that the stamp was sufficiently obliterated to prevent reuse.



POSTAL MARKINGS
BUDOP COCHINCHINE 26-3 39
REVERSE
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 27 MARS 39

50-centime Sower

The sixth FM stamp was the 50-centime lined Sower (FM 6) which was issued well after World War I in 1929. This envelope, franked with the FM 6 stamp, bears the cachet of the postal clerk ("VAGUEMESTRE") for the First Regiment Tonkinese Skirmishers stationed at Pakha, Tonkin.



POSTAL MARKINGS

PAKHA TONKIN 12 JUL 34

REVERSE

PHO-LU TONKIN 13-7 34
HANOI R.P. TONKIN 14-7 34

50-centime Sower
Internal Usage

Here an FM 6 stamp was used on the stationery of the 4th Company, Montagnard Skirmishers Battalion.



POSTAL MARKINGS

KON-TUM ANNAM 30-12 35

REVERSE

LUC-NHON ANNAM 31-12 35

SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 2 JANV 36

50-centime Sower
Use of Multiple Copies

A 1932 mailing to London, using stationery from the soldier's library at Cao-Bang, Tonkin, was franked with three copies of the 50-centime Sower overprint.



POSTAL MARKINGS
CAO-BANG TONKIN 11-7 32
REVERSE
HAI-PHONG TONKIN 13-1 32
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 15-7 32
LONDON 79 AUG 15 1932

50-centime Sower Combination Usage

Here an FM 6 stamp was used in combination with a contemporary Indochinese stamp for a letter from Rachgia, Cochinchina to Paris. The Indochinese stamp was totally unnecessary as the FM stamp fully paid the postage.



POSTAL MARKINGS

RACHGIA COCHINCHINE 15-5 31

REVERSE

SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 16-5 31

PARIS XI RUE MERCŒUR 15 JUIN 31

50-centime Peace

The seventh Franchise Militaire stamp was the overprinted 50-centime Peace (FM 7) first issued in 1933. Here an FM 7 stamp was used on the stationery of a military detachment stationed at Hongay, Tonkin.



POSTAL MARKINGS

HONGAY TONKIN 24-2 36

REVERSE

HAI-PHONG TONKIN 25-4 36

SANDILLON LOIRET 30-5 36

50-centime Peace
Usage from Cochinchina

Although posted by a soldier serving in Budop according to the return address, this envelope was postmarked at Honquan, Cochinchina.



POSTAL MARKINGS
HONQUAN COCHINCHINE 9-8 38
REVERSE
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 10 AOUT 38

50-centime Peace
Usage from Tonkin

Here an FM 7 stamp paid for delivery to Paris from Dong-Van, Tonkin. The commander's cachet was struck in blue ink on the cover.



POSTAL MARKINGS

DONG-VAN TONKIN 30-6 36

REVERSE

HA-GIANG TONKIN 4-7 36

TUYEN-QUANG TONKIN 5-7 36

HAIPHONG TONKIN 7-7 36

PARIS XIV AV. D'ORLEANS 8 VIII 1936

50-centime Peace
Usage from Annam

An FM 7 stamp was used for postage on this 1937 cover from Vinh, Annam to Paris.



POSTAL MARKINGS

VINH ANNAM 14-10 37

REVERSE

SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 17 OCT 37

50-centime Peace
Internal Postcard Usage

The sender used one of his FM 7 stamps for posting a picture postcard from Saigon to Haiphong in 1938.



POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 24-5 38

65-centime Peace
Usage from Annam

The eighth stamp to be overprinted was the 65-centime Peace (FM 8) issued in 1937. Here an FM 8 stamp was used on a letter from Tourane, Annam to France in 1938. The envelope was handstamped with the cachet of the unit's postal clerk ("VAGUEMESTRE").



POSTAL MARKINGS

TOURANE ANNAM 17-10 38

REVERSE

SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 23-10 38

PARIS X DISTRIBUTION 27 X 1938

65-centime Peace Usage from Cambodia

The *Lapérouse*, named after a famous 18th century French explorer, was a hydrographic survey vessel operated by the French Navy. After the Japanese coup d'état on 9 March 1945, French forces destroyed their equipment to prevent the Japanese from seizing it. The *Lapérouse* was scuttled at Cantho on 12 March.

Mission Hydrographique
d'Indochine
" LAPEROUSE "



POSTAL MARKINGS

REAM CAMBODGE 27-1 39

REVERSE

KAMPOT CAMBODGE 27-1 39

PNOMPENH CAMBODGE 28-1 39

SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 29-1 39

65-centime Peace
Usage from Cochinchina

An army sergeant had added the notation "Rayon photo" to the upper left of his mailing postmarked from the Saigon-Tandinh post office in July 1939.



POSTAL MARKINGS

SAIGON-TANDINH COCHINCHINE 10-7 39

REVERSE

SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 10-7 39

65-centime Peace
Usage from Laos

Like all classes of mail, Laos is by far the least common origin of military franchise letters. In this case, an internal mailing from Saravane, Laos took three day to reach a pharmacy in Saigon in June 1939.



POSTAL MARKINGS
SARAVANE LAOS 13-6 39
REVERSE
PAKSE LAOS 14-6 39
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 16-6 39

65-centime Peace
Usage from Tonkin

An FM 8 stamp paid for service from Hanoi to France. After arriving at Toulon, the letter was forwarded to Vesoul.



POSTAL MARKINGS

HANOI TONKIN 6-7 39

REVERSE

TOULON S/ MER VAR 10 8 1939

VESOUL HAUTE SAONE 13-8 36

65-centime Peace
Internal Postcard Usage

In 1939, the FM 8 stamp was used on a picture postcard from Chapa, Tonkin. As indicated by the slogan handstamp, Chapa was a mountain retreat located 1,500 meters above sea level.

CHAPA
LES ALPES
D'INDOCHINE
ΔLT. 1500^m



POSTAL MARKINGS
CHAPA TONKIN 20-5 39

90-centime Peace

The ninth FM stamp employed the same overprint, again in red ink, on the ultramarine 90-centime Peace design. Issued shortly before World War II in 1939, this stamp saw limited use before the free franchise became generally available to French military personnel.

This example was used on a letter posted from Cantho by a member of a Marine unit. The unit cachet canceled the stamp and the circular date stamp shows that the letter entered the mail stream through a Navy post office.



POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTE NAVALE 13-5 47

Green Joint Military Emblem

France's eleventh military franchise stamp was the first specifically designed for the purpose. Issued in 1946, it was unlikely to see service in Indochina because soldiers were not required to use stamps in that theater of operations. Here the FM 11 stamp was used on an internal French mailing posted by a member of the Repatriated Indochinese Regiment.



POSTAL MARKINGS
AGEN R.P. LOT ET GARONNE 27. V. 47

Private FM Overprints

In 1947, a sender in the military used privately prepared overprints for a mailing to France. Each stamp was overprinted by hand with a large format "F.M." These stamps had no official standing and were purely a fantasy created by the sender or an acquaintance of his.

F. M.



POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTE AUX ARMEES 24-4 47