

French Far East Expeditionary Force

At the end of World War II, Ho Chi Minh had achieved virtual control of Indochina. Anxious to retain sovereignty over its most important colony, France responded by sending a large military force. The force was designated the French Far East Expeditionary Force (Corps Expeditionnaire Française d'Extreme Orient). General LeClerc arrived with the first troops at Saigon on 5 October 1945. Thus began the protracted and bloody conflict, which ended with the defeat of the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu. The French forces were officially dissolved on 11 August 1954.

The first Army post office opened at Saigon on 18 October 1945. Soldiers and sailors were granted free mail privileges. To mail a free letter, the sender simply wrote "FM" (= "Franchise Militaire") in the upper right hand corner of the envelope where stamps would normally be affixed. The franchise applied to ordinary letters, including airmail up to 20 grams, sent anywhere within the French Community of nations. Fees for registration, parcel post, etc. had to be paid by the sender. Special provisions were put into effect for Foreign Legionnaires. Their letters addressed to foreign countries were first sent to France where the necessary postage was added prior to onward transmission.

This collection shows the types of postmarks, postal markings and administrative markings employed during the campaign. Additionally, various types of usages (e.g., civilian use of the military postal system) are represented. The collection is arranged as follows:

- Pre-Deployment Mail

- Mail Services (Military Postal System, Civilian Postal System)

- Moving the Mail (Modes of Transport, Identification of Military Post Offices, Delivery Difficulties, Instructions for Addressing)

- Censorship

- Official Mail

- Unit Cachets and Imprints

- Organizations

 - French Union

 - Indochina association

 - Red Cross

- Postmarks

 - Mute

 - Numbered

 - Naval

Indochinese Infantry Battalion
Madagascar

As the war wound down in Europe, France assembled its forces for reestablishing political and military control of Indochina. Madagascar was a major point of embarkation for troops heading to the Far East. As this free letter posted by a member of the Indochinese Infantry Battalion demonstrates, soldiers' mail was subject to censoring even during the late stages of World War II.



POSTAL MARKINGS

ANTSIRABE MADAGASCAR 9 AVRIL 45
censor's resealing tape

REVERSE

OUVERT PAR L'AUTORITE MILITAIRE football
TANARIVE R.P. MADAGASCAR 10-4 45

POST AUX ARMEES Five-Point Star at Base

Posted on the day before the atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, this cover demonstrates that, even before World War II in Asia had ended, the "Forces Expeditionnaires Françaises en Extrême-Orient" were organizing for reoccupation of French Indochina. The military postmark, with its five-pointed star at the base, was a generic one that traveled with the troops returning to Indochina.



POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTES AUX ARMEES 8-8 45

Pre-Deployment Mail

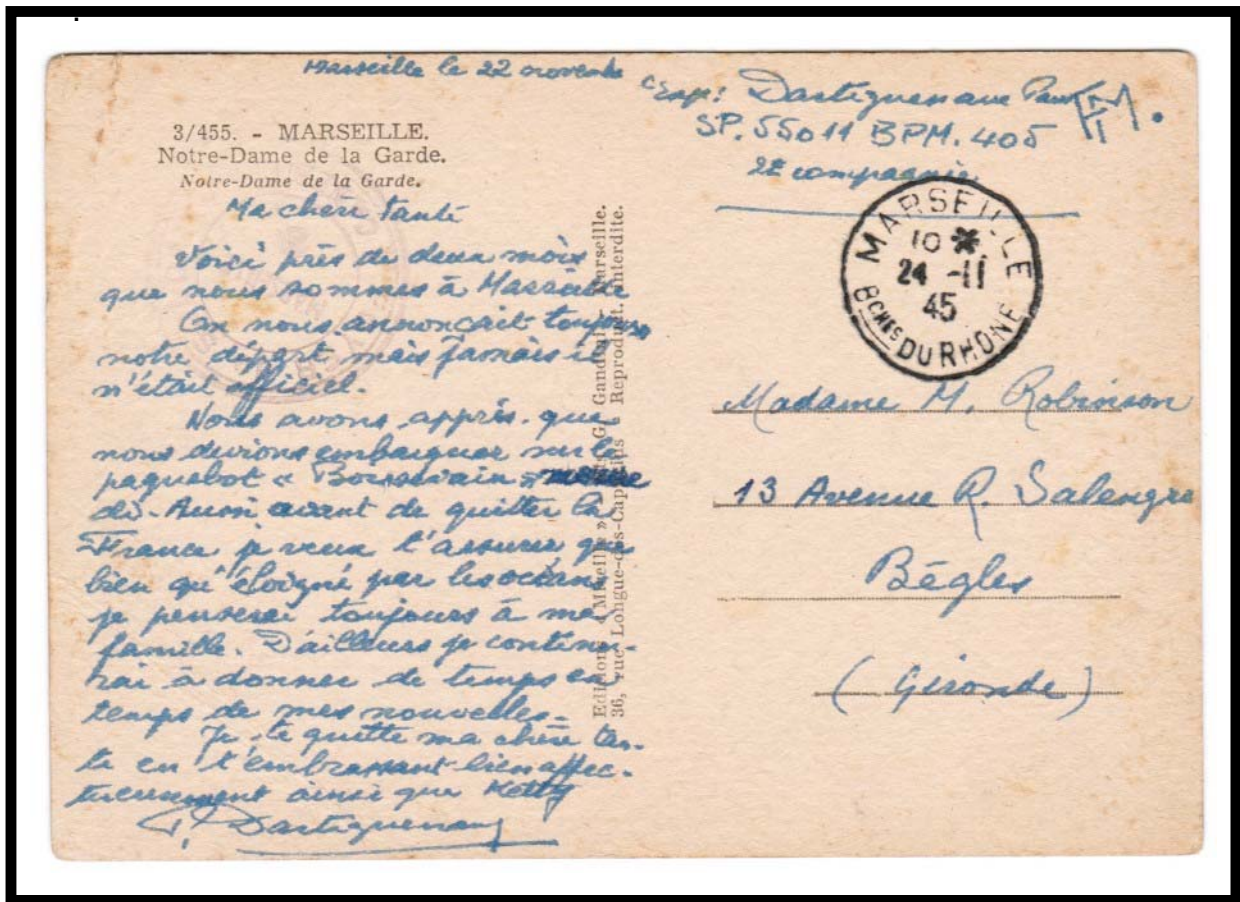
A 1945 postcard identifies the sender's military post office as BPM 405 before leaving France and it reads:

Marseille the 22nd of November

from: DARTIQUENAU Paul
SP.55011 BPM.405
Second Company

My dear aunt,

We have been in Marseille for nearly two months. Our departure was often announced but was never official. We learned that we will embark on the liner "Boissevain" on Wednesday. So, before leaving France, I want to assure you that I always shall think to my family even if we are far from each other, separated by oceans. Anyway, I will continue to send some news about me from time to time. I leave you, my dear aunt. I kiss you and Kitty with love.
(signed) P. Dartiquenau



POSTAL MARKINGS

MARSEILLE BUCHES DU RHONE 24-11 45

Airmail Franchise

The Expeditionary Corps franchise was valid for airmail up to 20 grams. The sender had to indicate somewhere on the envelope that he desired airmail service.

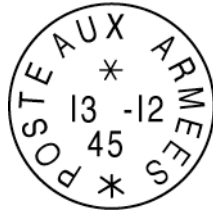
From the mention of B.P.M. 403 in the return address on the reverse of this envelope, the sender was located in Hanoi.



POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 21-10 1950

Free Franchise Postcard New Years Greeting 1946

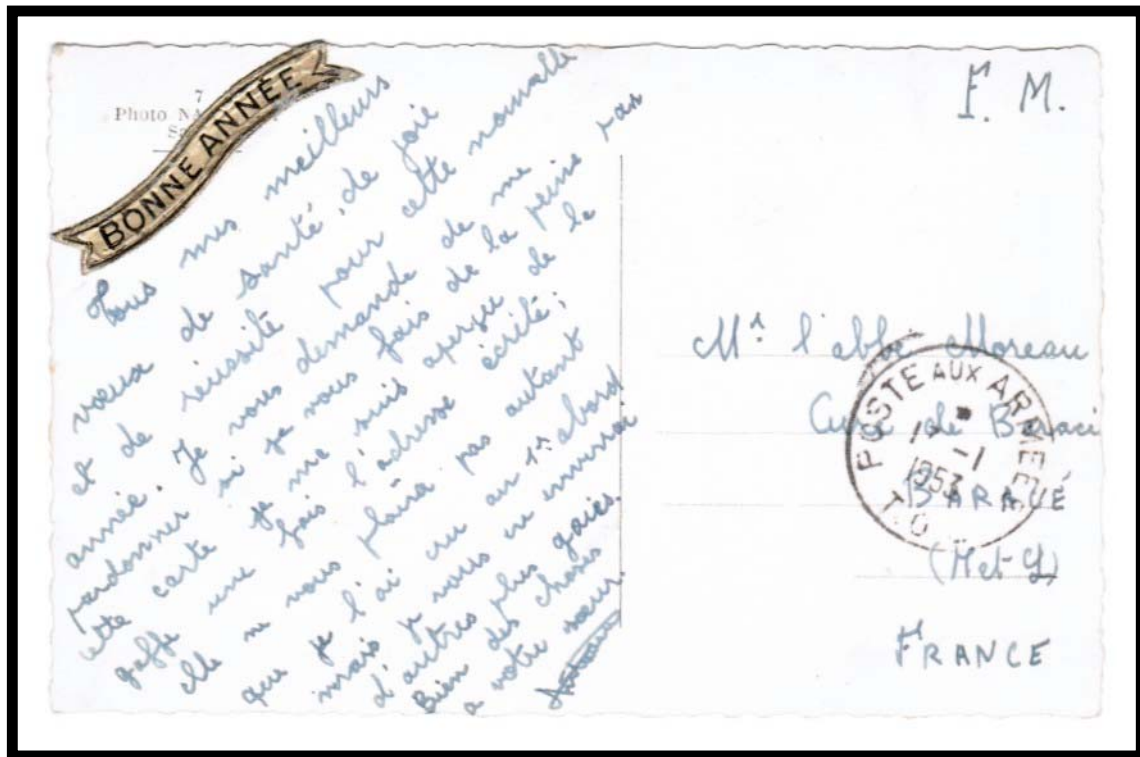
A soldier, who was an early postwar arrival in Indochina, sent a picture postcard home with New Year's greetings at the end of 1945. Like letters, postcards from members of the military traveled free of postage. Here the sender identified himself as part of the "C.E.F.E.O." (Corps Expeditionnaire Française d'Extrême Orient) or French Far East Expeditionary Corps.



POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTE AUX ARMEES 13-12 45

Free Franchise Postcard New Years Greeting 1953

A soldier took advantage of the free mail privilege to send a New Year's greeting to France on picture postcard. The soldier had decorated his card by pasting a "BONNE ANNEE" label at the upper right. He posted the card on New Year's Day 1953.



POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 1-1 1953

Franked Mail to France

The stamps that had been affixed to this 1946 franchise cover were struck through with a pen because they were unnecessary for soldiers who had free mail privileges. The affixed postage was correct for October 1946, when the regular letter rate to France was 20 cents and the airmail surcharge was 65 cents.



POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 28-10 46

Franked Mail to France

If an item happened to have stamps on it, the Army post office in Indochina would cancel them. Here a soldier returned to Paris a pre-franked postcard to Reader's Digest magazine. The local Army post office dutifully canceled the stamp.



POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 25-3 1955

Franked Foreign Mail

Mail to foreign destinations did not qualify for the franchise. Here the sender used French stamps to pay the postage on his letter to Rome, Italy in 1946. The stamps were canceled at an Army post office in Indochina. The usage is unusual because, later in the campaign, the central military post office in Paris affixed stamps to foreign envelopes free of charge to the sender.



POSTAL MARKINGS

POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 24-7 46

REVERSE

ROMA DISTRIBUZIONE 13-VIII 1946

ROMA OSTINSE 14-VIII 1946

Use of Civilian Postal System by the Military

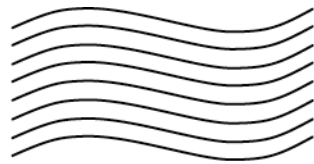
Here a soldier used the civilian postal system to mail a letter from Savannakhet, Laos to Tunisia in 1949. By habit, the soldier wrote his return address as BPM 411A at the lower left. BPM 411A was located at Savannakhet from 1946 through 1954.



POSTAL MARKINGS
VIENTIANE LAOS 26-1 1949

Use of Civilian Postal System by the Military

A soldier from BPM 405 (Saigon) used the civilian mail system to send a letter to Germany in 1949. Postage was paid using an early, metered postmark from machine number 3001. Machine number 3001 was the first to operate in Indochina.



= 30 AVR 49 = SAIGON R.P.=



POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON R.P. 30 AVR. 49 (meter)

Use of Civilian Postal System by the Military

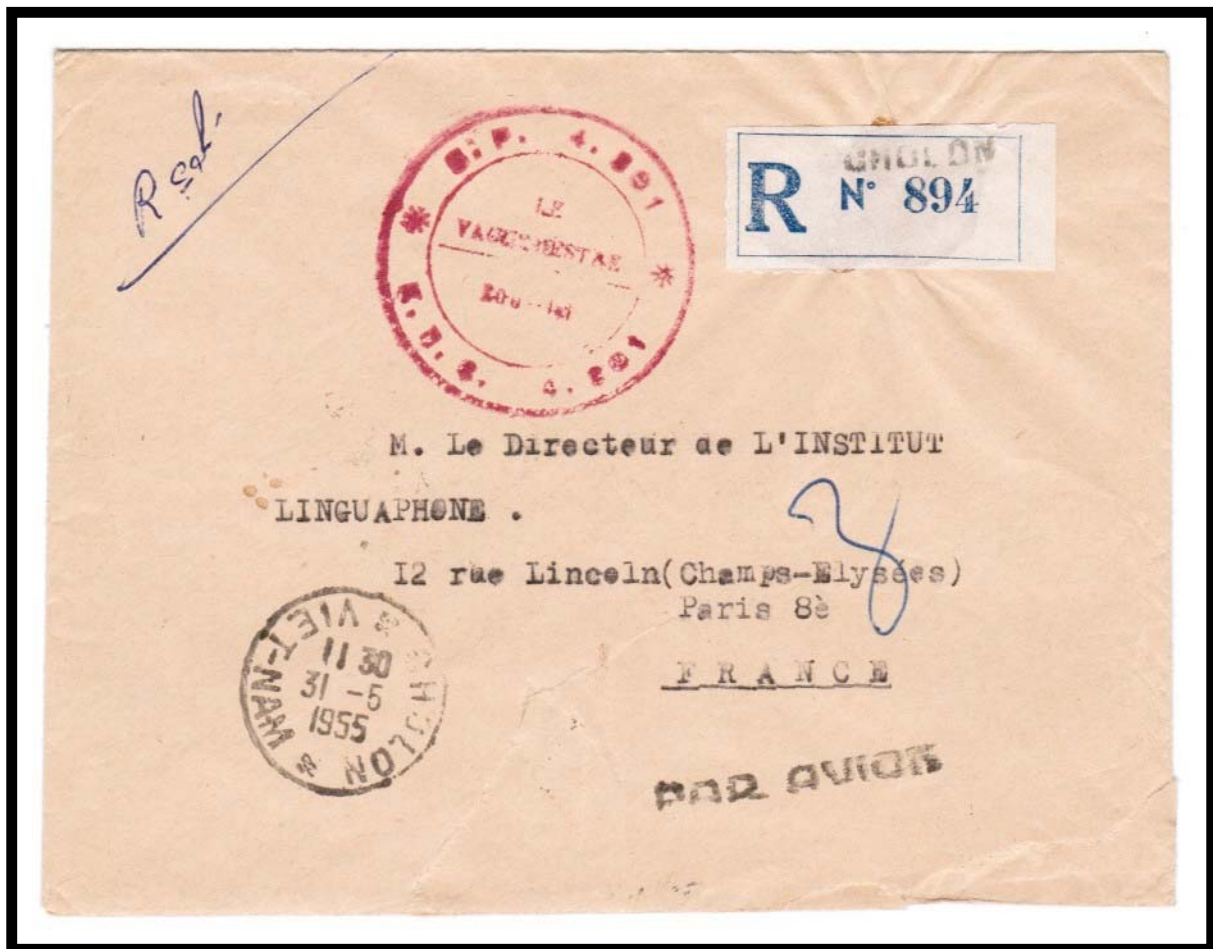
A 1953 letter from a soldier to France, lacking postage but endorsed "F.M.", was processed by the civilian postal system. Even though the envelope lacked any military postmark validating the free franchise, there was no apparent effort to collect postage due.



POSTAL MARKINGS
HAI-PHONG VIET-NAM 2-3 1953

Use of Civilian Postal System by the Military

Some troops stayed in Indochina well after the defeat at Dien Bien Phu and the subsequent armistice. With stamps affixed on the reverse, a soldier sent this letter from the civilian post office at Cholon, South Vietnam at the end of May 1955.



POSTAL MARKINGS

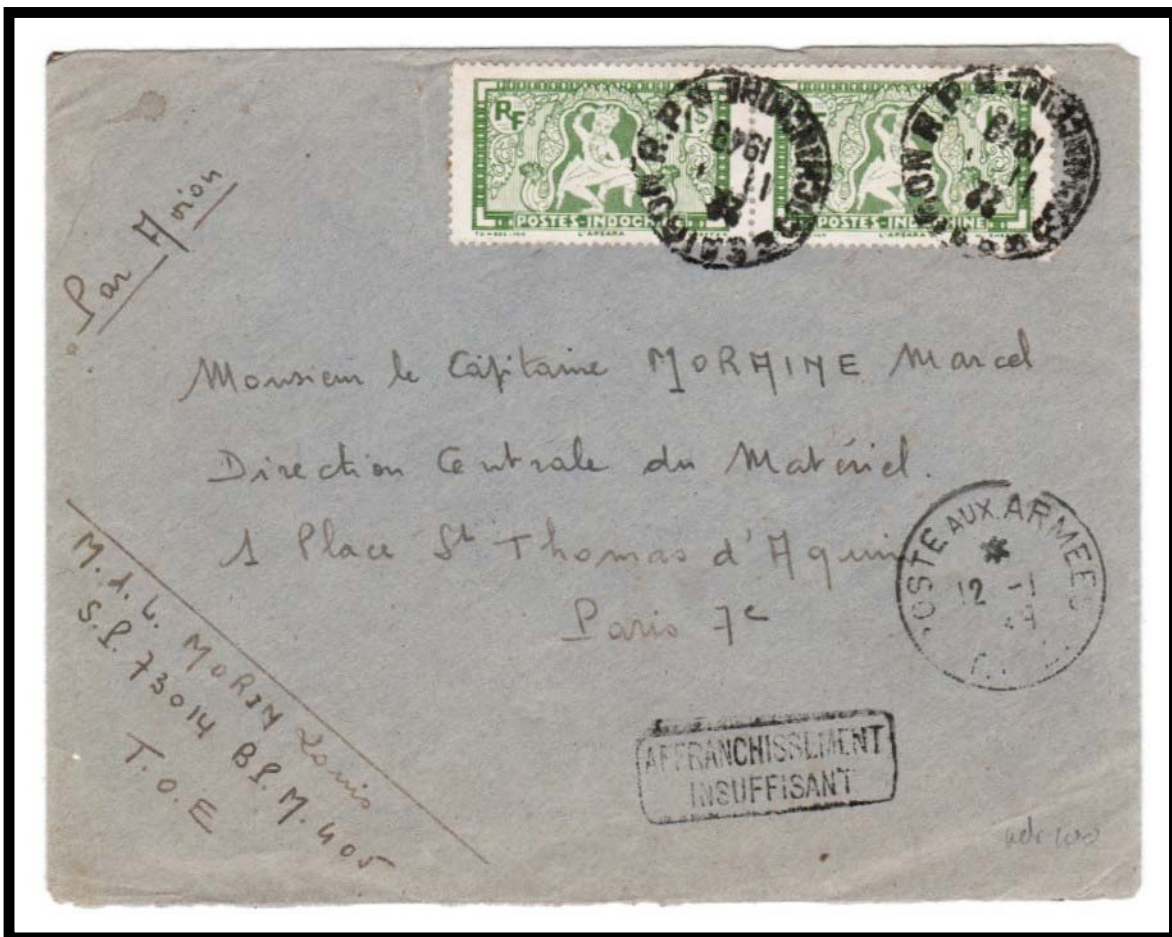
CHOLON VIET-NAM 31-5 1955
registration label

REVERSE

CHOLON VIET-NAM 31-5 1955
SAIGON R-P VIET-NAM 30-5 1955

Use of Civilian Postal System by the Military Underpaid Soldier's Mail

A soldier stationed in Saigon (as indicated by the B.P.M. 405 in the return address) sent a franked letter via the civilian mails to Paris in 1949. Because the 2\$40 airmail rate had been underpaid with two 1-piaster Indochinese Culture stamps, the letter was handstamped "insufficient postage."



POSTAL MARKINGS

SAIGON R.P. COCHINCHINE 11-1 1949
framed "AFFRANCHISSEMENT INSUFFISANT"
POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 12-1 49

Use of Military Postal System by Civilians Internal Mail

The sender used the civilian access to the military postal system at Hanoi (B.P.M. 403 X.Y) to send a letter to the War Crimes Office in Saigon. Then letter was franked with a French stamp.



POSTAL MARKINGS
B.P.M. 403 X.Y 15-10 46

Tandem Military and Civilian Postmarks

In the post World War II period, military mail normally did not receive civilian postmarks. The presence of the two together would indicate the geographical location of the sender.

This example of free mail exhibits both civilian and military date stamps confirming that the sender was in Cantho (also indicated in the return address). Perhaps because the letter was between members of the military legal administration, the rules were not scrupulously enforced.



POSTAL MARKINGS

POSTE AUX ARMEES 4-7 1950
CANTHO SUD VIET-NAM 4-7 1950

Via British Ship

Available means for transporting the mails were limited in the postwar period following World War II. Here a sender in Saigon indicated airmail service ("BY AIR MAIL") for this free letter. The red handstamp showed that the letter, in fact, went by British ship.



MARITIME
MAIL



POSTAL MARKINGS
POST OFFICE in circle MARITIME MAIL

Via Helicopter

During the war, isolated garrisons did not have regular mail service. In these situations, mail was taken in and out by helicopter. Letters carried this way were sometimes given special markings to indicate the mode of transport.

Curiously, this marking uses the abbreviation "T.E.O." instead of "T.O.E."

PAR
HÉLICOPTÈRE MILITAIRE
T.E.O.



POSTAL MARKINGS

POSTE AUX ARMÉES T.O.E. 26-1 1955
"By Military Helicopter" handstamp

Registered Mail

The free franchise did not extend to registered letters. When sent as a registered mailing, the sender had to pay all fees. From the return address at the lower left, a soldier from postal sector 50738 had sent this letter. The registry label is hand stamped with the number of postal sector 50.650.



POSTAL MARKINGS

POSTE AUX ARMEES * 12-12 1953

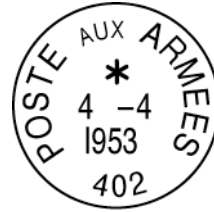
registration label

REVERSE

PARIS 216 40 RUE SINGER 15-12 1953

Money Order Services

Army post offices could offer many of the services provided by their civilian counterparts. These examples of receipts were for money orders purchased at Army post office 136 (Phnompenh) and Post Office 402 (Cholon).

A vertical receipt form for a money order. At the top, there is a circular postmark from "POSTE AUX ARMEES" dated "7 -4 1952" with "136" at the bottom. The text on the form includes: "COUPON destiné au titulaire du C/C N° 5390-18 (Correspondance au verso)", "MONTANT DU MANDAT (1) 100 f. 00", "Nom et adresse de l'expéditeur (à répéter au verso du mandat) M. Sergent Colombiat", "N° 50348", "T-O-E", and "Dru". At the bottom, it says "(1) Monnaie du lieu de destination".A vertical receipt form for a money order. At the top, there is a circular postmark from "POSTE AUX ARMEES" dated "4 -4 1953" with "402" at the bottom. The text on the form includes: "COUPON destiné au titulaire du C/C N° 53901F (Correspondance au verso)", "MONTANT DU MANDAT (1) 3.300", "Nom et adresse de l'expéditeur (à répéter au verso du mandat) M. SPT/ricard", "SP 58916", "TOE", and "(1) Monnaie du lieu de destination". On the right side, the text "POSTES ET TELECOMMUNICATIONS" is printed vertically.

Indication of Fees Paid at Army Post Office 411

When civilians in Hanoi who used Army post office 411 were unable to obtain stamps because of shortages, a special handstamp was put into use to indicate that postage fees had, in fact, been paid. The handstamp was only used from 14 to 22 March 1946.



B.P.M.411 P.P. 3frs



POSTAL MARKINGS

POSTE AUX ARMEES 18-3 46 B.P.M.411 P.P. 3frs

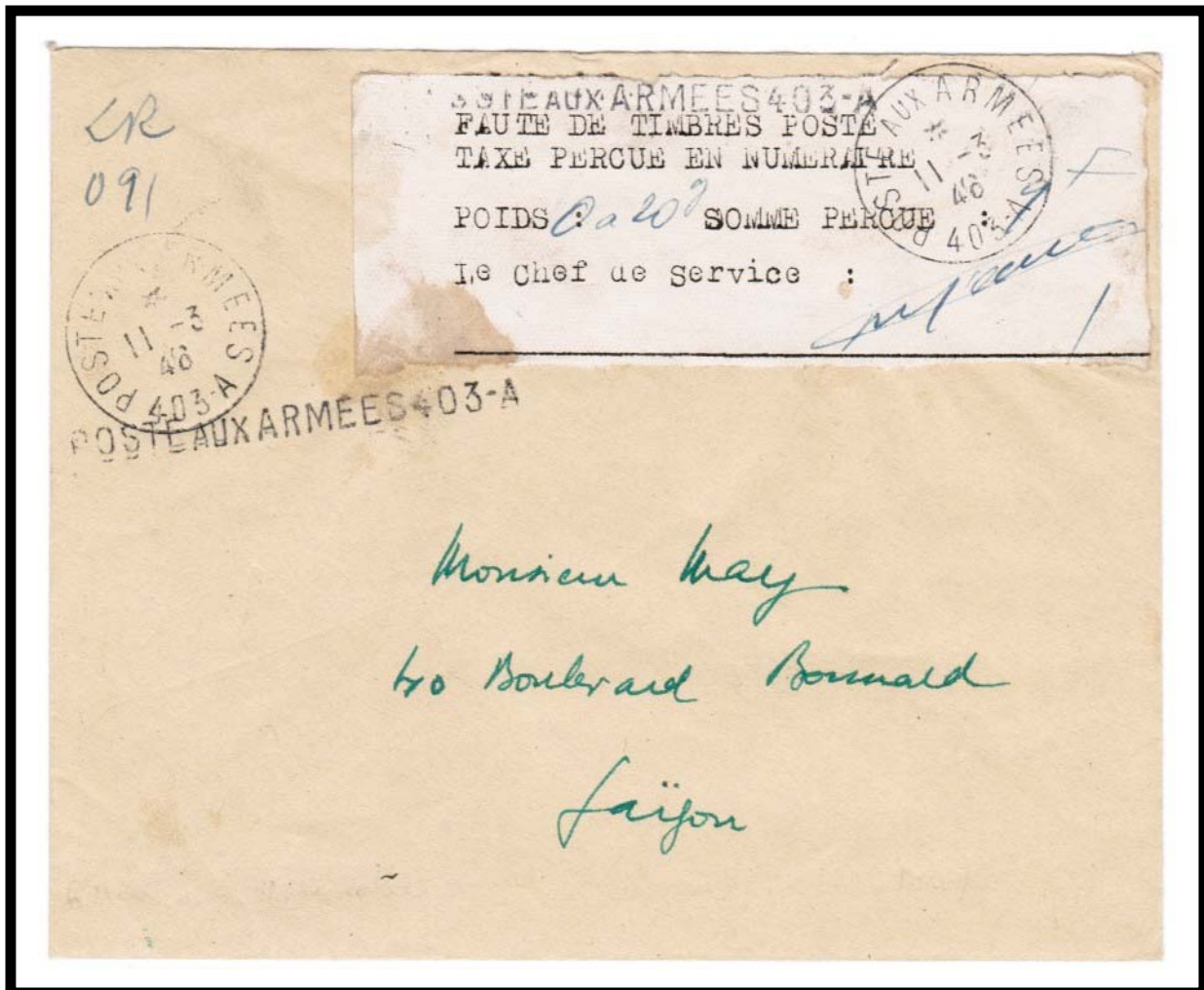
Indication of Fees Paid at Army Post Office 403A

Because of a shortage of postage stamps, mimeographed labels were put into service at Army post offices in March 1946. Army Post Office 403A employed a label that had no place for indicating the "B.P.M." A total of 2,588 labels were prepared.

POSTE AUX ARMEES 403-A
FAUTE DE TIMBRES POSTE
TAXE PERCUE EN NUMERAIRE

POIDS : SOMME PERCUE :

Le chef de service :



POSTAL MARKINGS

POSTE AUX ARMEES 403-A 11-3 46
POSTE AUX ARMEES 403-A handstamp

REVERSE

SAIGON-PRINCIPAL COCHINCHINE 12-3 46

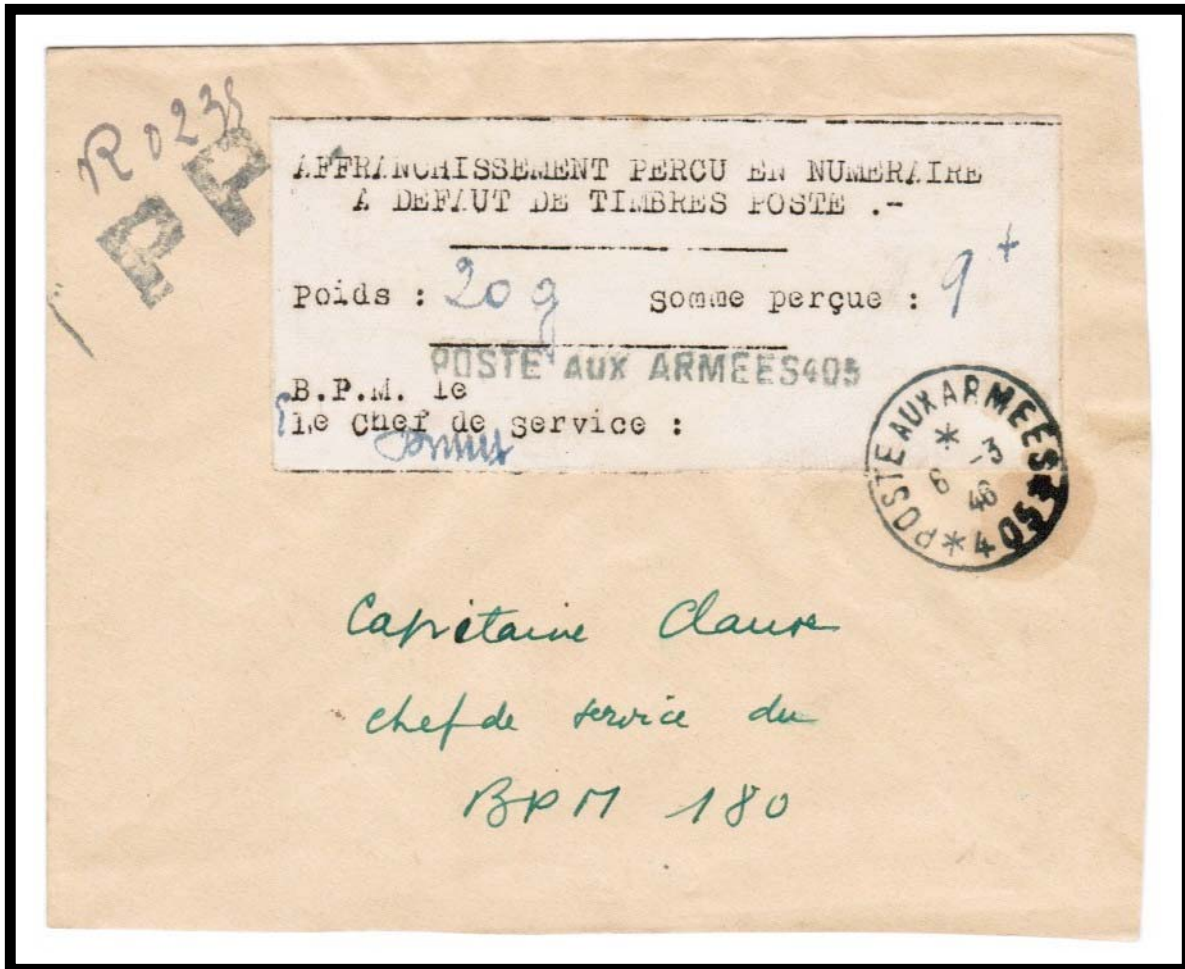
Indication of Fees Paid at Army Post Office 405

Among the several labels that Army Post Office 405 put into service was this one that relied on a handstamp to indicate of its origin. Once stamp stocks were replenished, the labels immediately disappeared.

AFFRANCHISSEMENT PERCU EN NUMERAIRE
A DEFAUT DE TIMBRES POSTE .-

Poids : somme perçue :

POSTE AUX ARMEES 405
B. P. M. le
Le chef de service :



POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTE AUX ARMEES * 405 6-3 46

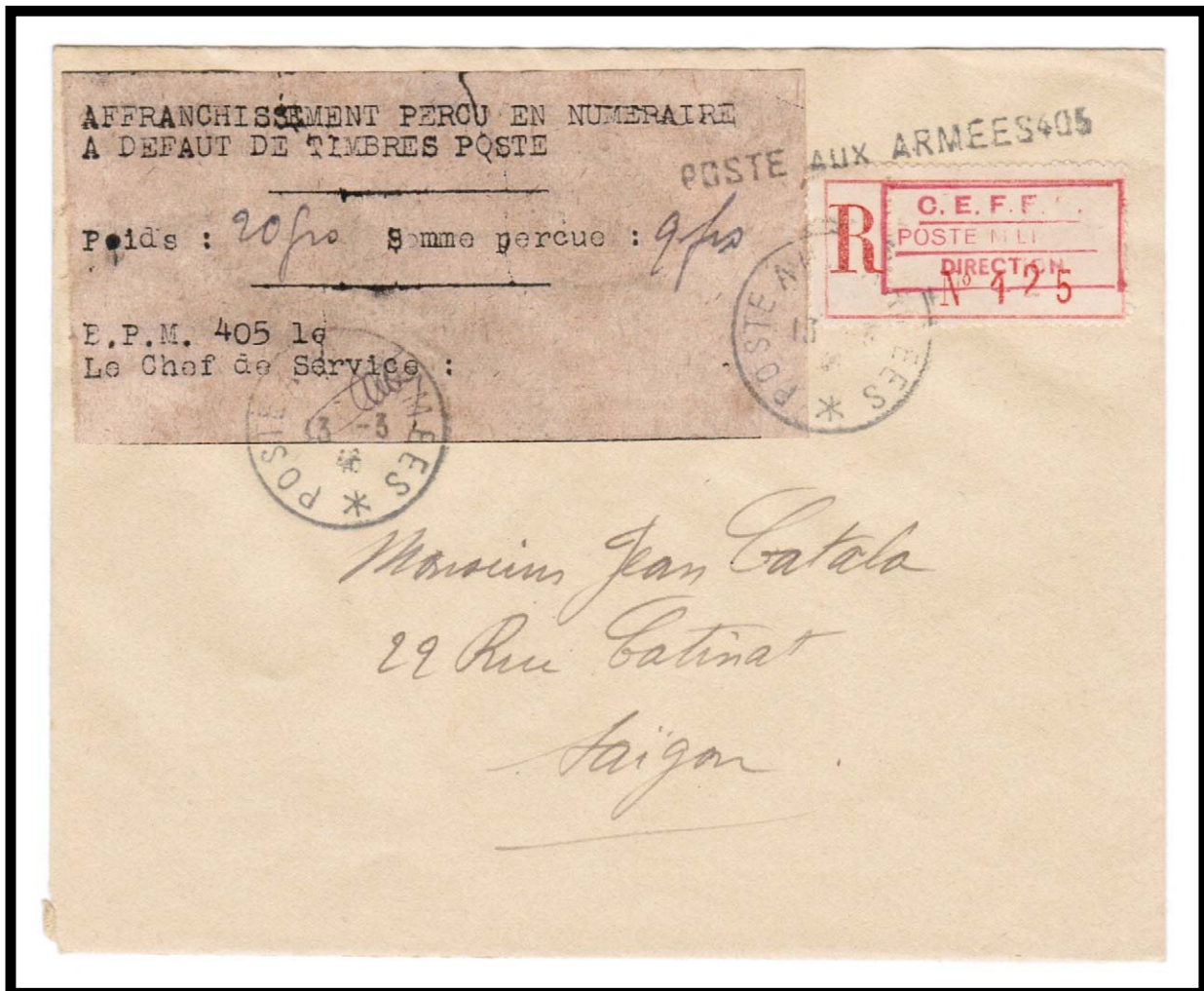
Indication of Fees Paid at Army Post Office 405

In addition to identifying the main military post office at Saigon in the text of the label, this registered letter was also given a straightline "POSTE AUX ARMEES 405" handstamp.

AFFRANCHISSEMENT PERCU EN NUMERAIRE
A DEFAUT DE TIMBRES POSTE

Poids : _____ Somme percue : _____

B. P. M. 405 le
Le Chef de Service :



POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTE AUX ARMEES 13-3 46
registration label

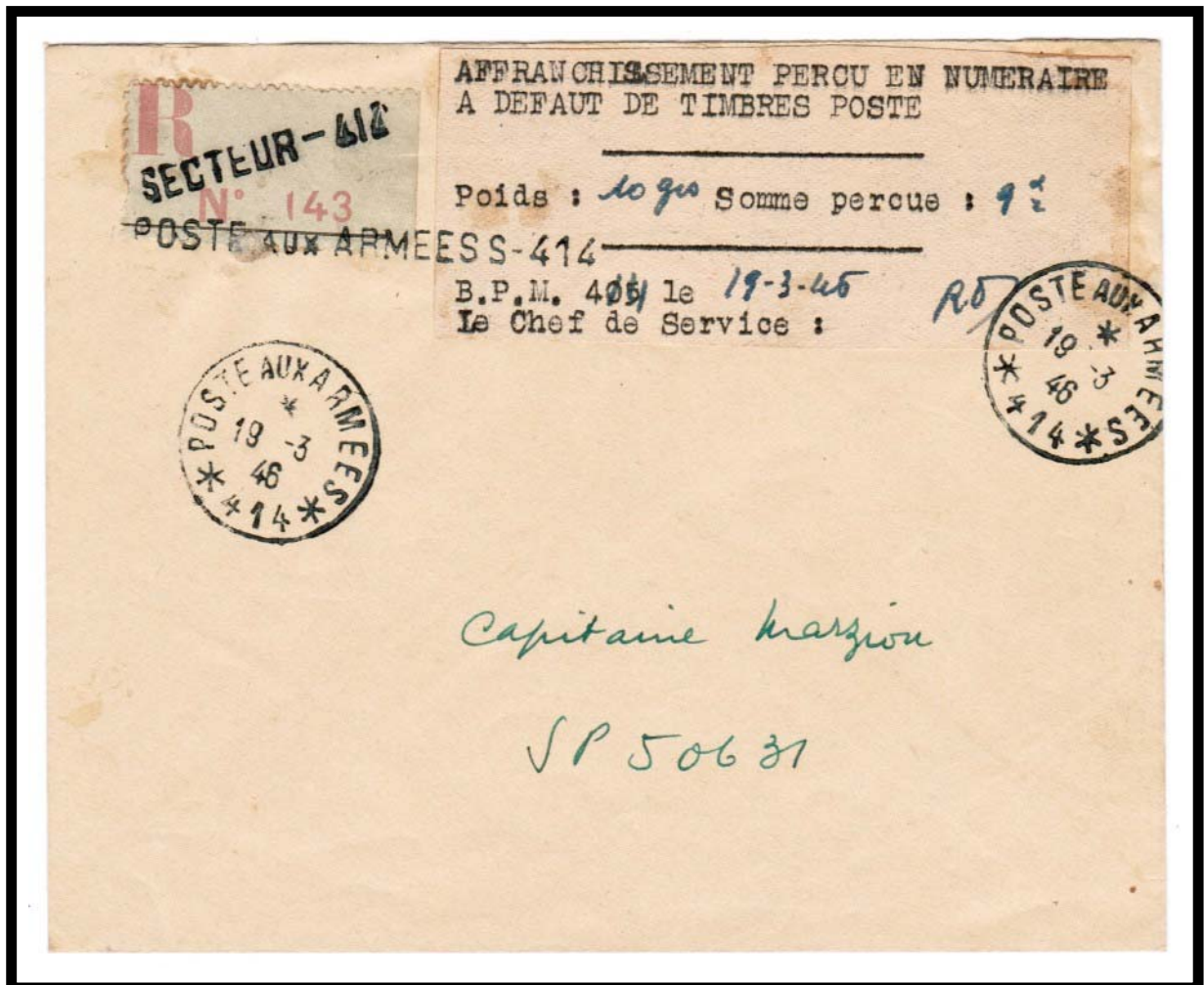
Indication of Fees Paid at Army Post Office 414

The stamp shortage also affected Army Post Office 414 at Cholon. Labels prepared for Post Office 405 nearby at Saigon were pressed into service by simply overwriting "14" over the "05" in the B.P.M. designation.

AFFRANCHISSEMENT PERCU EN NUMERAIRE
A DEFAUT DE TIMBRES POSTE

Poids : _____ Somme percue : _____

B. P. M. 405 le _____
Le Chef de Service : _____



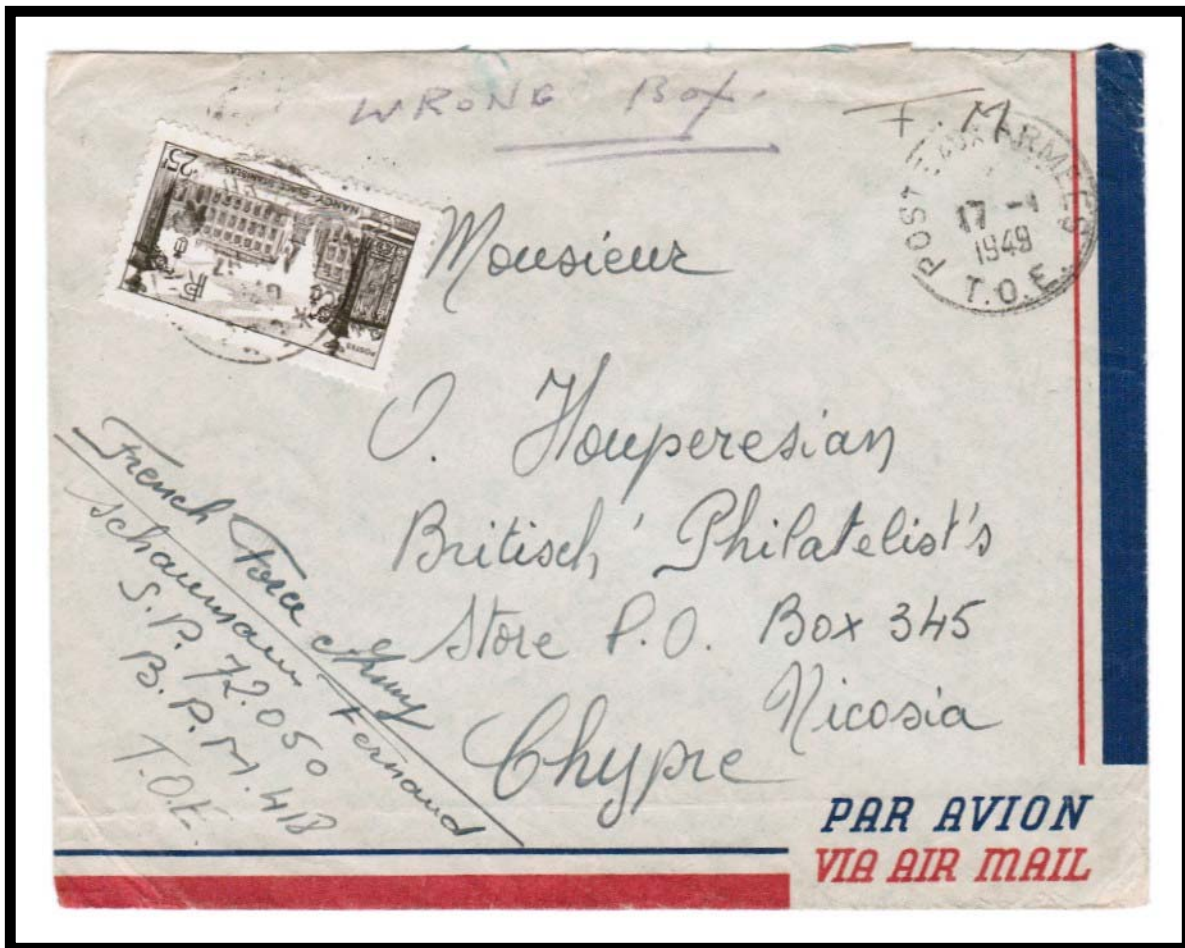
POSTAL MARKINGS

POSTE AUX ARMEES * 414 * 19-3 46
registration label
provisional postage paid label

Numbered Army Post Offices

Regional Army post offices (Bureau Poste Militaire = BPM) were assigned three digit numbers, which were sometimes supplemented with a letter. Individual military units were assigned postal sector numbers, usually four or five digits. If both appeared together, one could deduce the geographical location of the unit. After 1950, the use of BPM numbers in return addresses was suppressed for security reasons.

The return address on this 1949 letter to Cyprus indicates that S.P. 72.050 was in the region of B.P.M. 418. Army Post Office 418 was located at Hue, Annam from 1946 through 1955.



POSTAL MARKINGS

POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 17-1 1949

POSTE AUX ARMEES *222* 28-1 1949

REVERSE

LIMASSOL CYPRUS 22 FE 49

Postal Sector Numbers

Each unit was assigned a postal sector (SP = secteur postale) number for security purposes. The number stayed with the unit no matter where it operated. By tracking the locations of various postal sectors, the military postal system was able to deliver mail to the right place.

The return address at the lower left of this envelope indicates that the sender was with unit that had the code "S.P. 54.127".



POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 13-11 1953

Incoming Mail

Mail was addressed to Indochina in terms of the Postal Sector number.

Here a newspaper wrapper, originating from Paris, was sent to the Army chaplain (aumônier militaire) for the French Foreign Legion troops in Indochina. His location was Postal Sector 82.002.

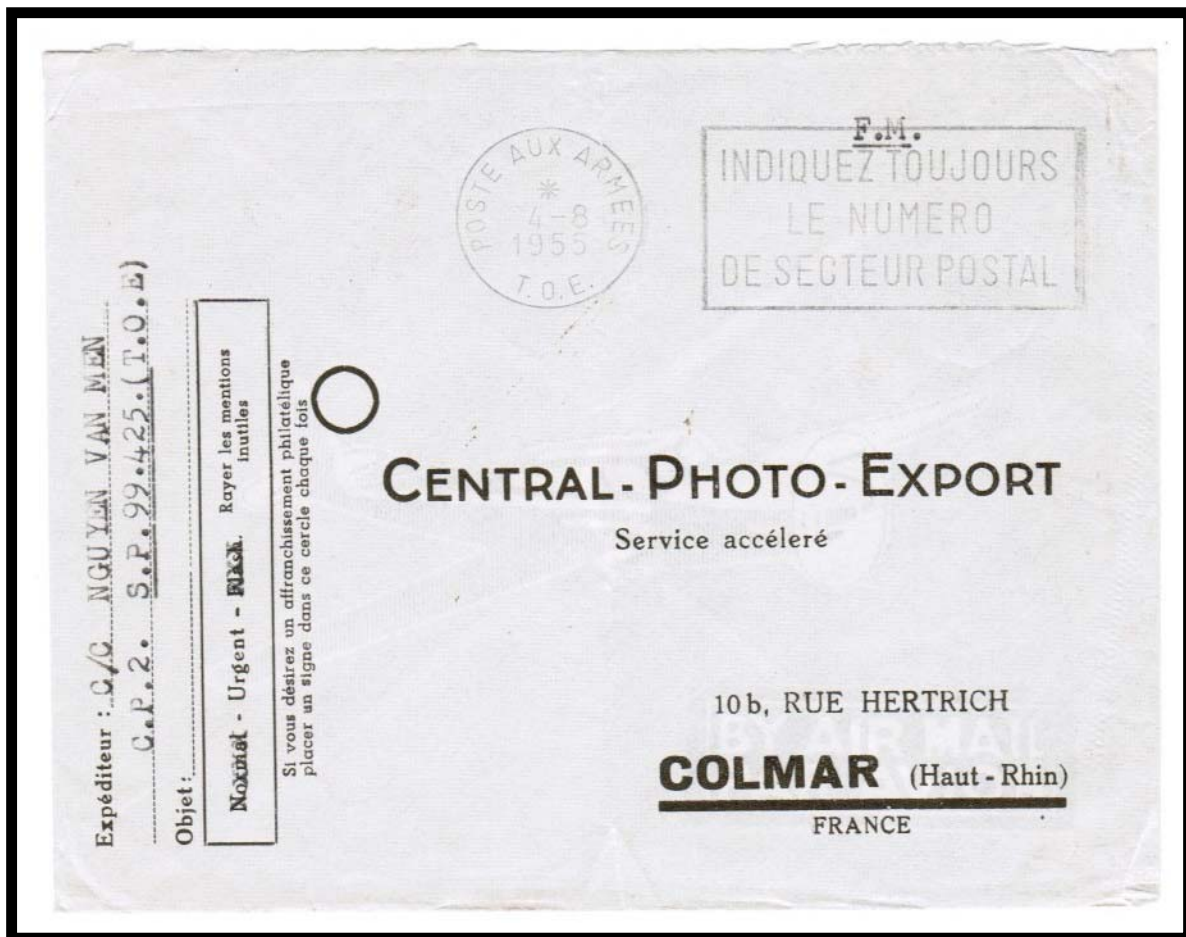


Machine Postmark
"Always Indicate the Postal Sector Number"

Originally, all postmarks were applied by hand. Machine postmarks first appeared in 1952. They carried one of two messages. The first machine postmark admonished correspondents to always indicate the number of the postal sector.

INDIQUEZ TOUJOURS
LE NUMERO
DE SECTEUR POSTAL

"Always Indicate the Postal Sector Number"



POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTE AUX ARMEES T. O. E. 4-8 1955

Machine Postmark
"Indication of Location or Army Post Office is Prohibited"

The association of a postal sector with the regional post office code number was forbidden because it would reveal the geographical location of a particular unit.

A second machine postmark reminded senders and recipients that any indication of BPM number or geographical location was prohibited in the military address.



L'indication
du N° du B. P. M.
ou d'un lieu géographique
est interdite
dans les adresses militaires



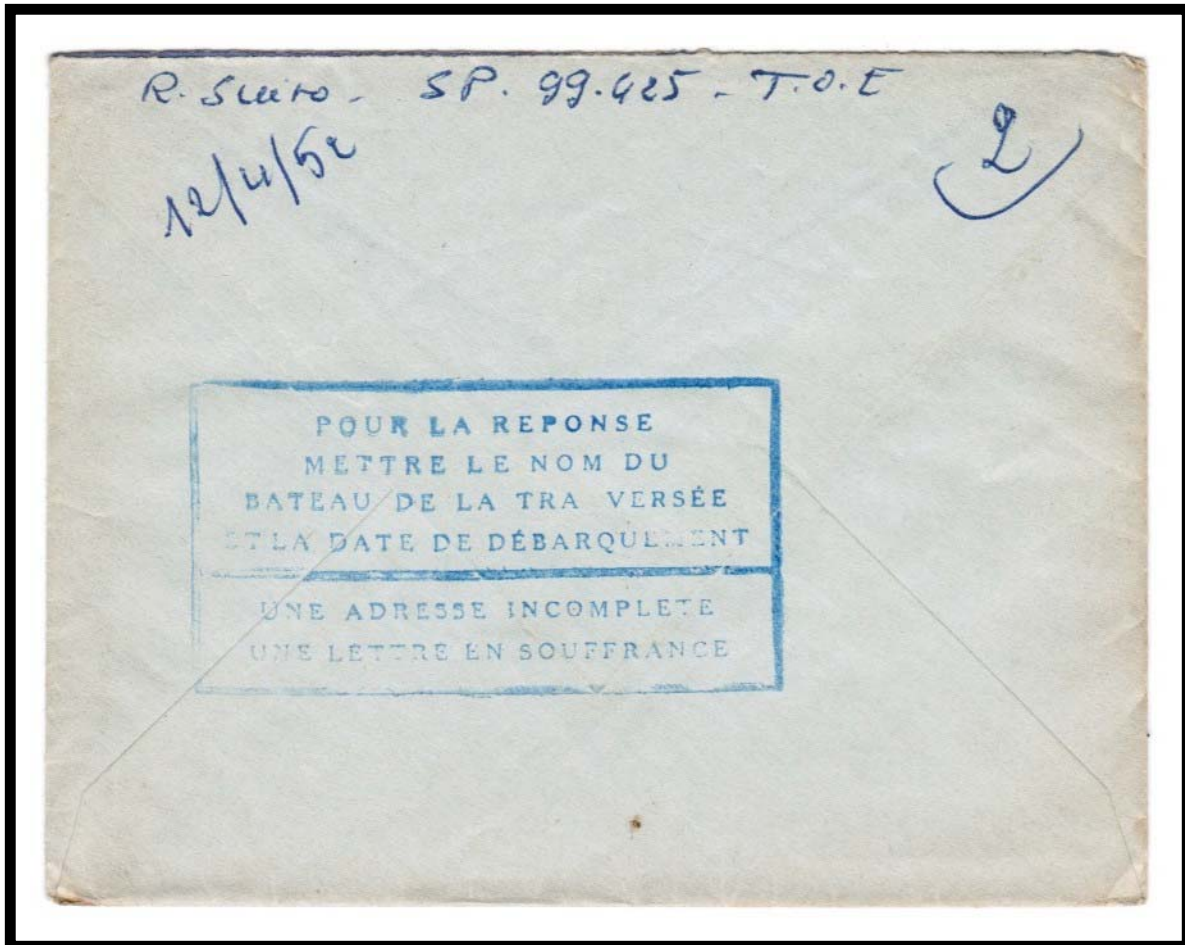
POSTAL MARKINGS
POST AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 4-1 1954
REVERSE
MAISON-CARREE ALGER 9-1 1954

“Put the Name of the Ship”

A soldier's letter sent from Indochina in 1952 carries an instructional handstamp on the reverse side telling respondents how to properly address return mail.

POUR LA RESPONSE
METTRE LE NOM DU
BATEAU DE LA TRA VERSÉE
ET LA DATE DE DÉBARQUEMENT

UNE ADRESSE INCOMPLETE
UNE LETTRE EN SOUFFRANCE



POSTAL MARKINGS
instructional handstamp

Outgoing Mail Specifying Geographic Location

Military security required that geographic locations never be identified on the outside of correspondence. The rules notwithstanding, here the stamps on a letter to Switzerland were canceled with a circular Army Post Office postmark and a straight-line handstamp reading "BANMETHUOT."

BANMETHUOT



POSTAL MARKINGS

POSTE AUX ARMEES TOE 11-8
straightline BANMETHUOT
plain "T" due handstamp

Incoming Mail Specifying Geographic Location

Postal sector codes (and, to a lesser extent, Army Post Office numbers) were supposed to conceal the location of specific military units. In this case, an incoming letter from 1950 locates Postal Sector 53.381 and Army Post Office 402 at Bien-Hoa. Identifying geographic locations, a practice which violated prevailing military regulations.



POSTAL MARKINGS

PONDICHERY INDE FSE 13-9 1950

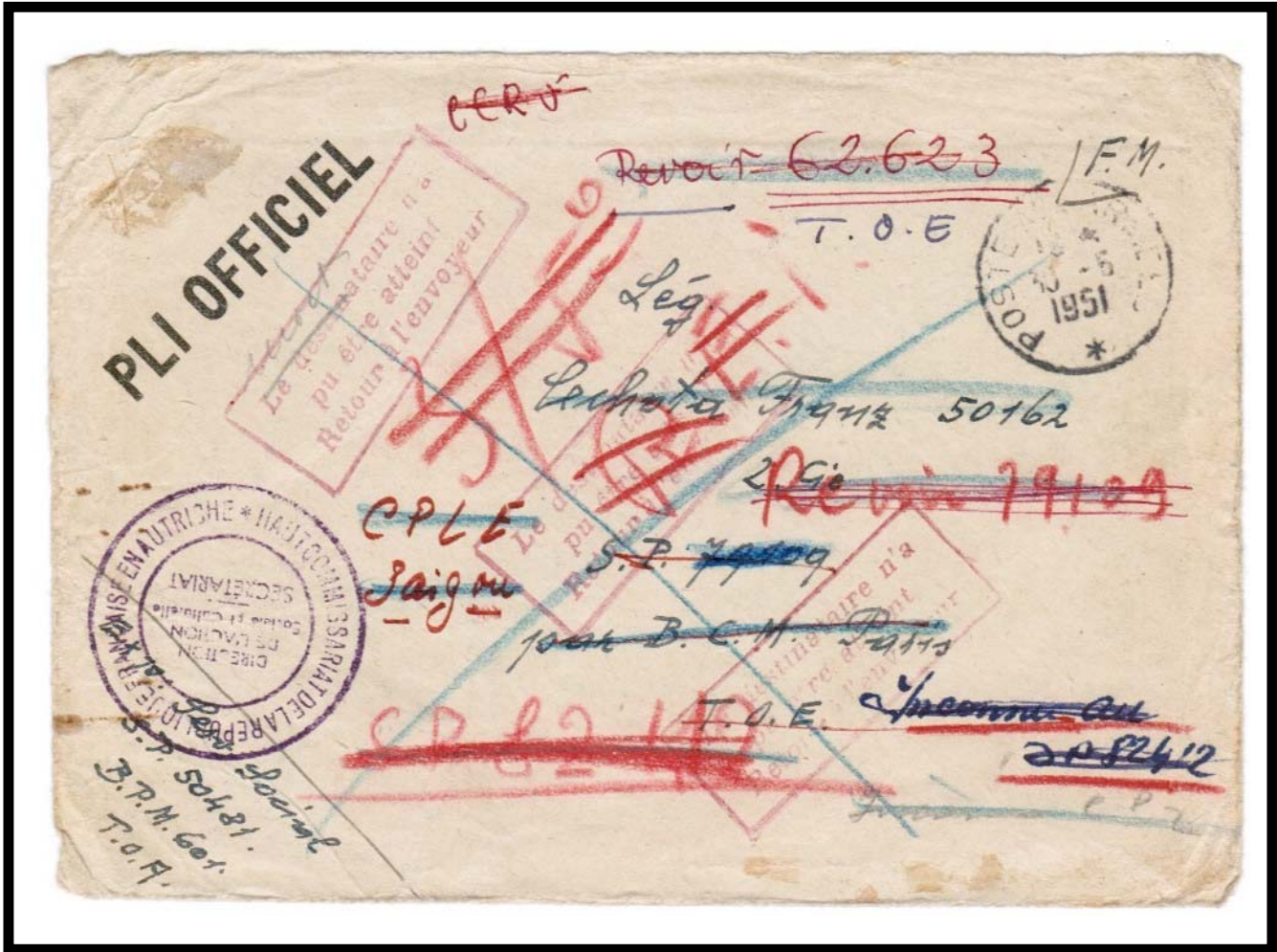
REVERSE

SAIGON R.P. SUD VIETNAM 19-9 1950

Delivery Difficulties
Undeliverable Mail

Sent from Vienna, Austria (B.P.M. 601 in return address) by a government cultural office, this official mailing was forwarded and reforwarded in attempts to catch up with a soldier. Eventually, the cover was handstamped that the addressee could not be located and that the letter was to be returned.

*Le destinataire n'a
pu être atteint
Retour à l'expéditeur*



POSTAL MARKINGS

POSTE AUX ARMEES * 10-5 1951
framed "Return to Sender" marking

REVERSE

POSTE AUX ARMEES *421* 7-6 1951

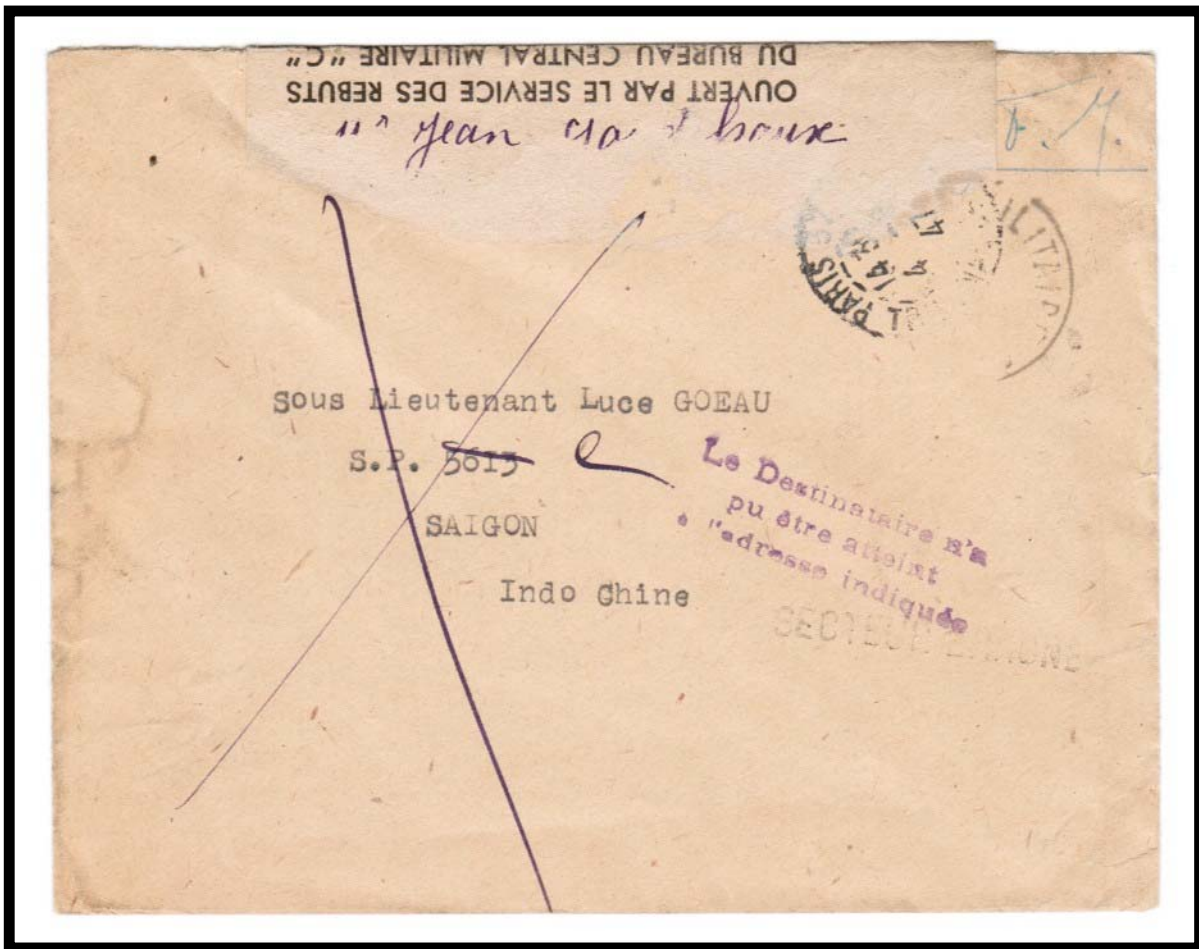
Delivery Difficulties Army Dead Letter Office

Postal sector numbers were composed of five digits. In this case, the sender only typed four digits in the address causing the letter to be directed to the Dead Letter Office ("Service des Rebuts"). There the cover received a handstamp noting that the addressee could not be found at the indicated address. Afterwards, the envelope was resealed with a with a Dead Letter Office label.

OUVERT PAR LE SERVICE DES REBUTS
DU BUREAU CENTRAL MILITAIRE " C "

ADRESSE DU DESTINATAIRE

Le Destinataire n'a
pu être atteint
à l'adresse indiquée

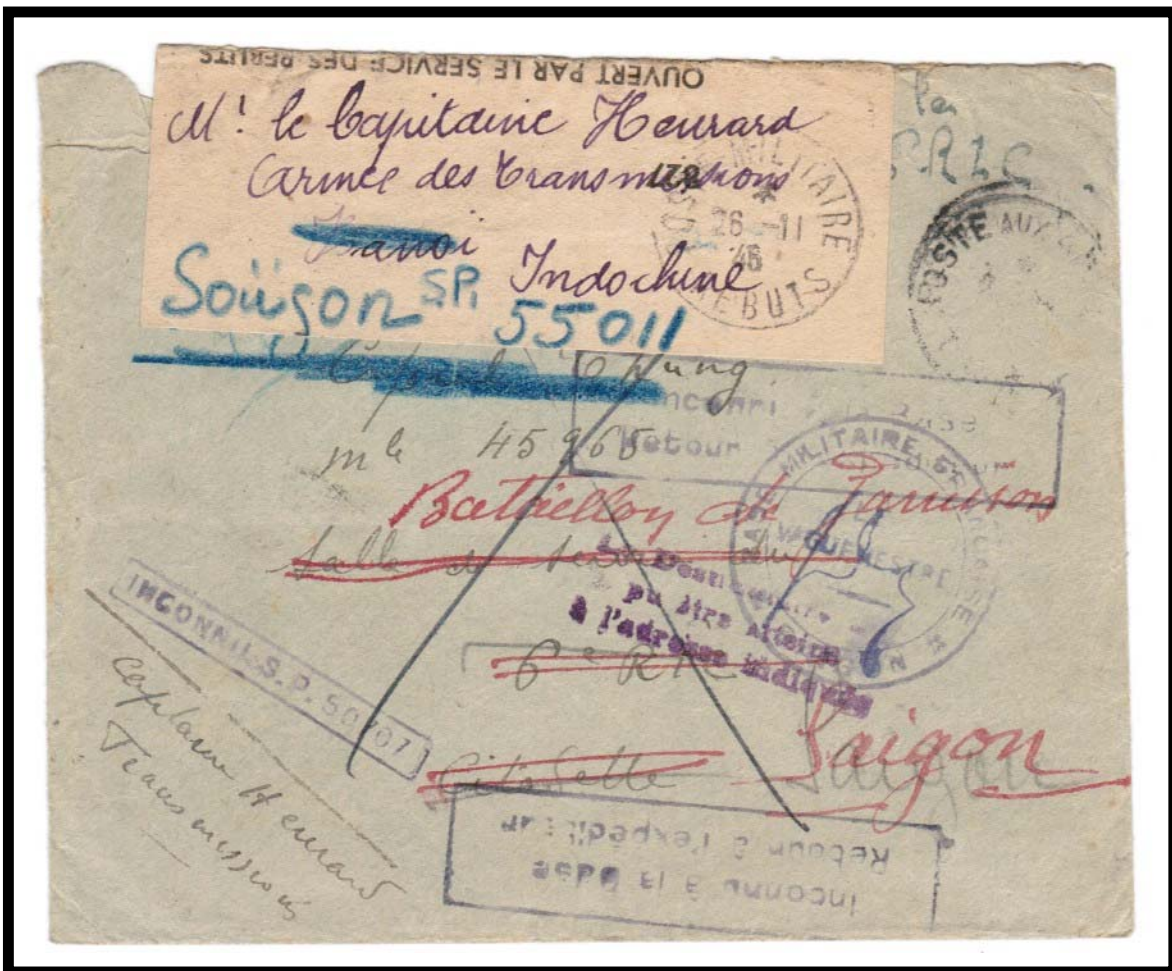


Delivery Difficulties Dead Letter Mail

Directed and redirected, the military postal system was unable to find the addressee for this letter. Eventually, the Military Dead Letter Office opened the envelope to determine where to send it. The envelope was resealed with a label and handstamped with the Dead Letter Office postmark. Apparently the Dead Letter Office was able to determine the addressee's location as the letter was redirected yet one more time from Hanoi to Saigon.

OUVERT PAR LE SERVICE DES REBUTS
DU BUREAU CENTRAL MILITAIRE " C "

ADRESSE DU DESTINATAIRE



POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTE MILITAIRE REBUTS 26-11 46

Censorship of Forces Mail Provisional Marking

When French troops first arrived in Indochina, military security demanded that some degree of censoring be implemented. Based on the return address on the reverse, this early cover was posted from Hanoi in February 1946. This provisional censor marking copied the style of the "censor football" markings employed during World War II.



POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTE AUX ARMEES 19-2 46
OUVERT PAR L'AUTORITÉ MILITAIRE football
censor's resealing tape

Censorship of Forces Mail Type I Censor Marking

Three types of censor markings were created specifically for the Tonkin Expeditionary Force. The first type mimicked the "football" shape used in Indochina during World War II. The authority mark was usually applied over a resealing label.



POSTAL MARKINGS

POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 25-4 1946
censor's handstamp and resealing label

REVERSE

censor's handstamp
censor's signature in form of "20" in circle

Censorship of Forces Mail Type I Censor Marking

Although the authority mark was usually applied over a resealing label, in this case of this 1948 letter, there is no evidence of a label.



POSTAL MARKINGS

POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 9-5 1948
censor's handstamp

REVERSE

censor's handstamp and censor's signature

Censorship of Forces Mail Type II Censor Marking

The shape of the second censor marking was a true oval. The wording remained the same although very small lettering was used for the marking.



POSTAL MARKINGS

censor's handstamp
censor's signature in form of "4" in circle

REVERSE

POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 10-10 1952
censor's handstamp

Censorship of Forces Mail Type III Censor Marking

The third type of censor certification marking was a variation of the second type except that the central and border lettering was larger.

The same resealing label, with color variations was used throughout the forces' tenure.



POSTAL MARKINGS

POSTE AUX ARMÉES T.O.E. 29-1 1953
censor's handstamp

REVERSE

censor's handstamp
censor's signature in form of "2" in circle

Censorship of Forces Mail Type III Censor Marking

The third type of censor certification marking was typically applied to the reverse side of envelopes.

3



POSTAL MARKINGS

censor handstamp and censor's signature in form of "3" in circle
censor's resealing label

REVERSE

POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 4-7 1954

Censored Military Mail

Posted from Indochina at the end of 1945, this letter was censored upon arrival in France. Some areas of France employed censoring until all of the occupying German soldiers had been removed.



POSTAL MARKINGS

POSTE AUX ARMEES 29-12 45

censor's resealing tape with censor's handstamp

REVERSE

censor's signature in form of "10" in circle

Green Censor Resealing Label

This early censor's resealing label from 1948 exhibits a thicker border and thinner lettering than was employed with later labels. The paper is pale green as opposed to white.

From the return address, the sender was stationed near BPM 405, the main Army post office in Saigon.



POSTAL MARKINGS

OUVERT PAR LES AUTORITES DE CONTROLE S.A.X.
censor's signature in form of "19" in circle

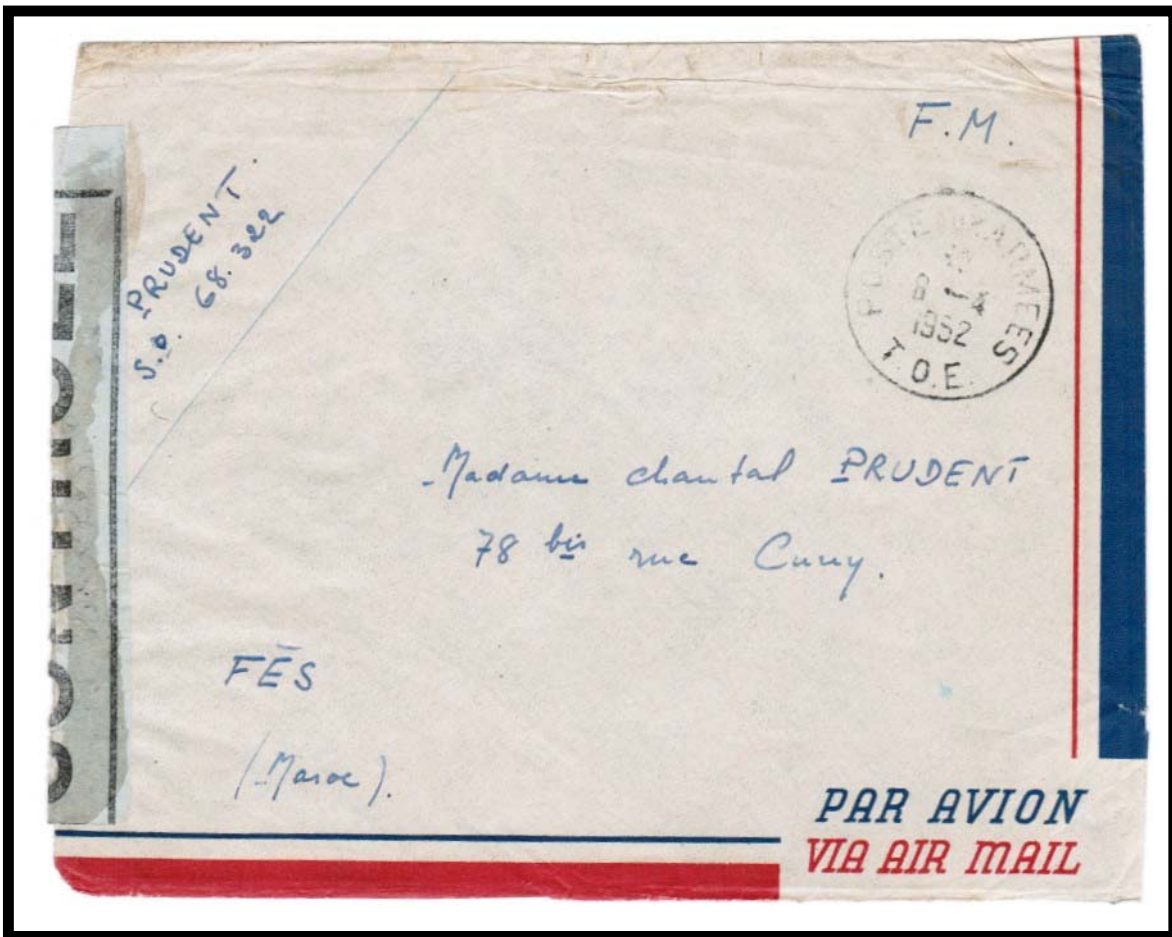
REVERSE

POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 10-3 1948

Blue Censor Resealing Label

Usually, censors' resealing labels were printed on white paper. In this case, the paper used for the label was blue.

CONTROLÉ



POSTAL MARKINGS

POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 8-4 1952
censor's resealing label

REVERSE

oval OUVERT PAR LES AUORITES DE CONTROLE S.A.X.

European Recruiting Office
Saigon

The cachet on this envelope from the European Recruitment Office testifies that there was as sufficiently large population of expatriates in Saigon to warrant their own recruiting office.



POSTAL MARKINGS

POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 26-4 1950

REVERSE

SAIGON R.P. SUD VIETNAM 26-4 1950

Vietnamese Naval School

This 1956 cachet identifies the sender as having been associated with the Vietnamese Naval School. At this academy, French instructors taught Vietnamese officers the rudiments of naval warfare.

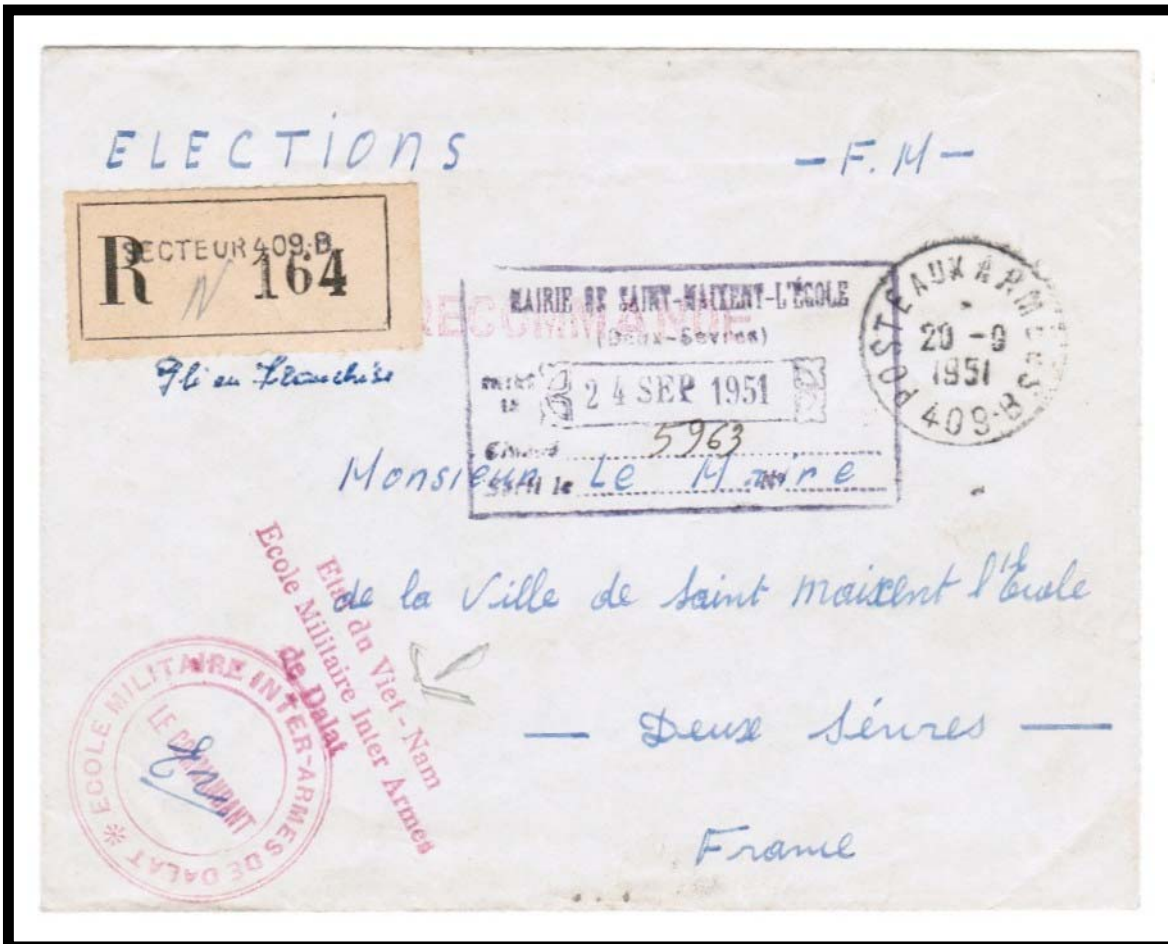


POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTE NAVALE 13-3 1956

Inter Army Military School
Dalat

The cachet and corner handstamp show that this 1951 letter originated from the Inter Army Military School at Dalat. As the conflict wore on, combined training of French and Vietnamese forces had become one element of France's strategy for victory in Indochina.

Etat du Viet - Nam
Ecole Militaire Inter Armes
de Dalat



POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTE AUX ARMEES 409-B 20-9 1951
registration label

National Police
Hue

This small envelope, bearing the cachet of the National Police, was accepted post-free as military mail. The sender's return address, indicated on the reverse, is B.P.M. 418.



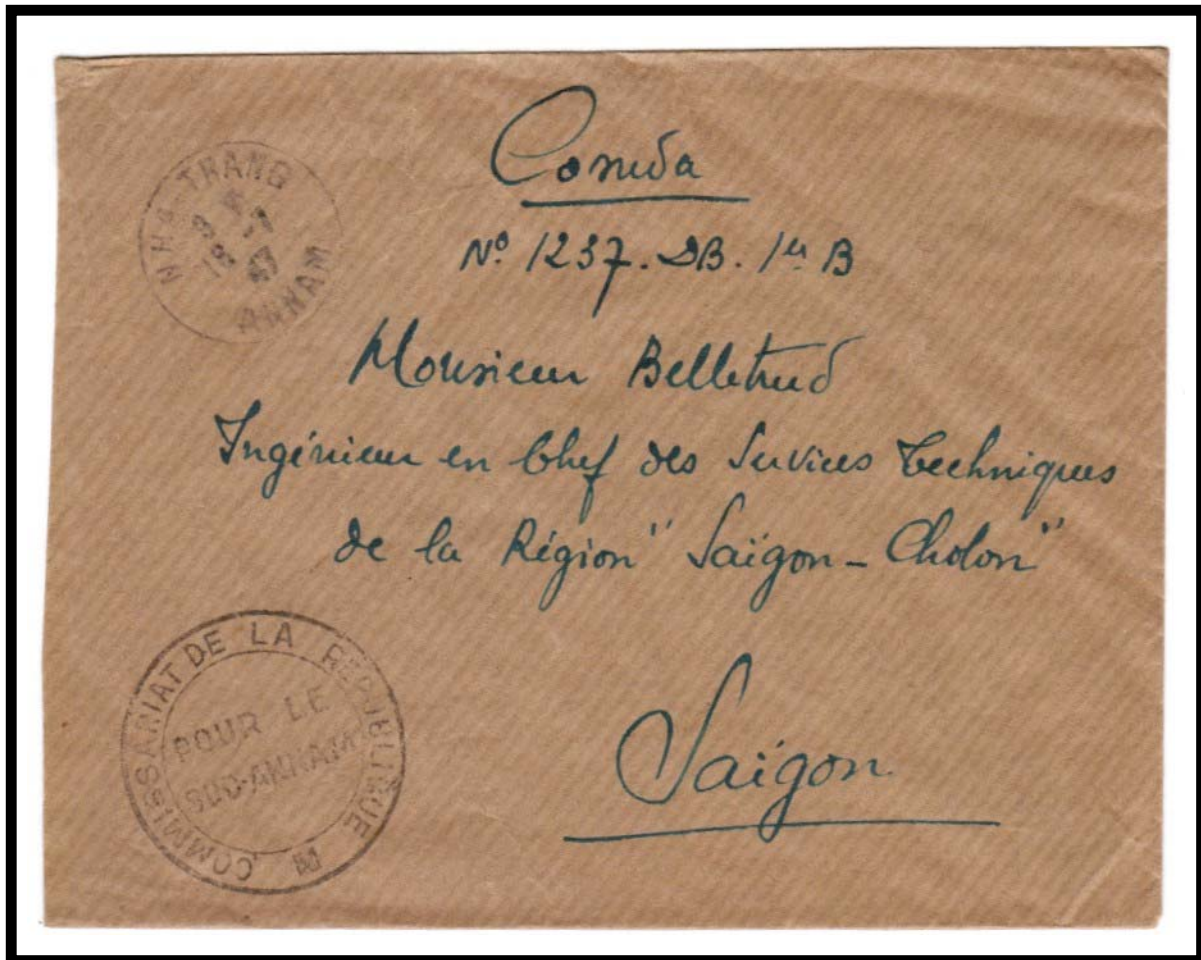
It was common practice to exchange business cards at the start of the New Year. In this case, the card was printed on a thin piece of bamboo.



POSTAL MARKINGS
HUE CENTRE VIET-NAM 2-1 1950

Republic Police
Southern Annam

A letter sent from the Republic Police for Southern Annam was directed to the Chief of Technical Services for the Saigon-Cholon region.



POSTAL MARKINGS

NHA-TRANG ANNAM 16-7 47

REVERSE

SAIGON R.P. COCHINCHINE 18-7 47

Second Aerial Observation Group
Artillery

Aviation gave artillery the advantage of accurately pinpointing fire by shifting impact points to enemy positions.

Contrary to military regulations, the sender indicated both "S.P. 52.079" and "B.P.M. 405" in his return address.



POSTAL MARKINGS

POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 5-8 1948

REVERSE

ST SAVIN GIRONDE 12-8 1948

Regional Air Base Saigon

A "Parc Régional Air" was an air force base for a particular area/region that dealt with non-routine aircraft maintenance, large spare parts storage, rehabilitation after severe damage, major engine maintenance, etc. There were two of these regional bases in Indochina.

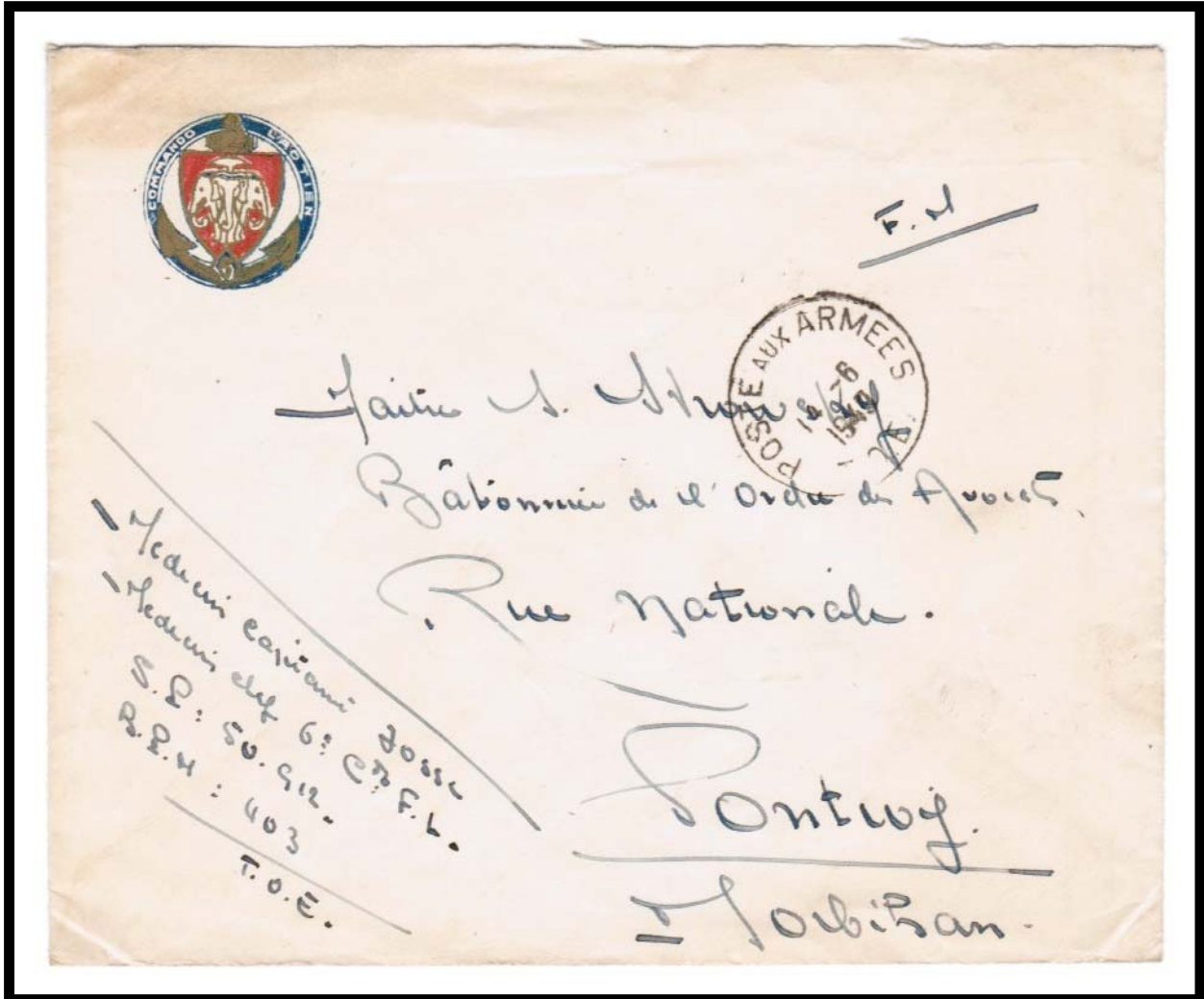
This cover bears the logo of Parc Regional 482 in Bien Hoa located northeast of Saigon. Before World War II, it was known as "Parc Colonial" and had the same logo with the letters "PC" instead of "PR."



POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON R.P. COCHINCHINE 14-12 48

Lao Commandos

The return address of the sender at the lower left identifies his army post office as B.P.M. 403, which was located in Hanoi. However, the emblem on his stationery shows his association with the Lao Commandos.



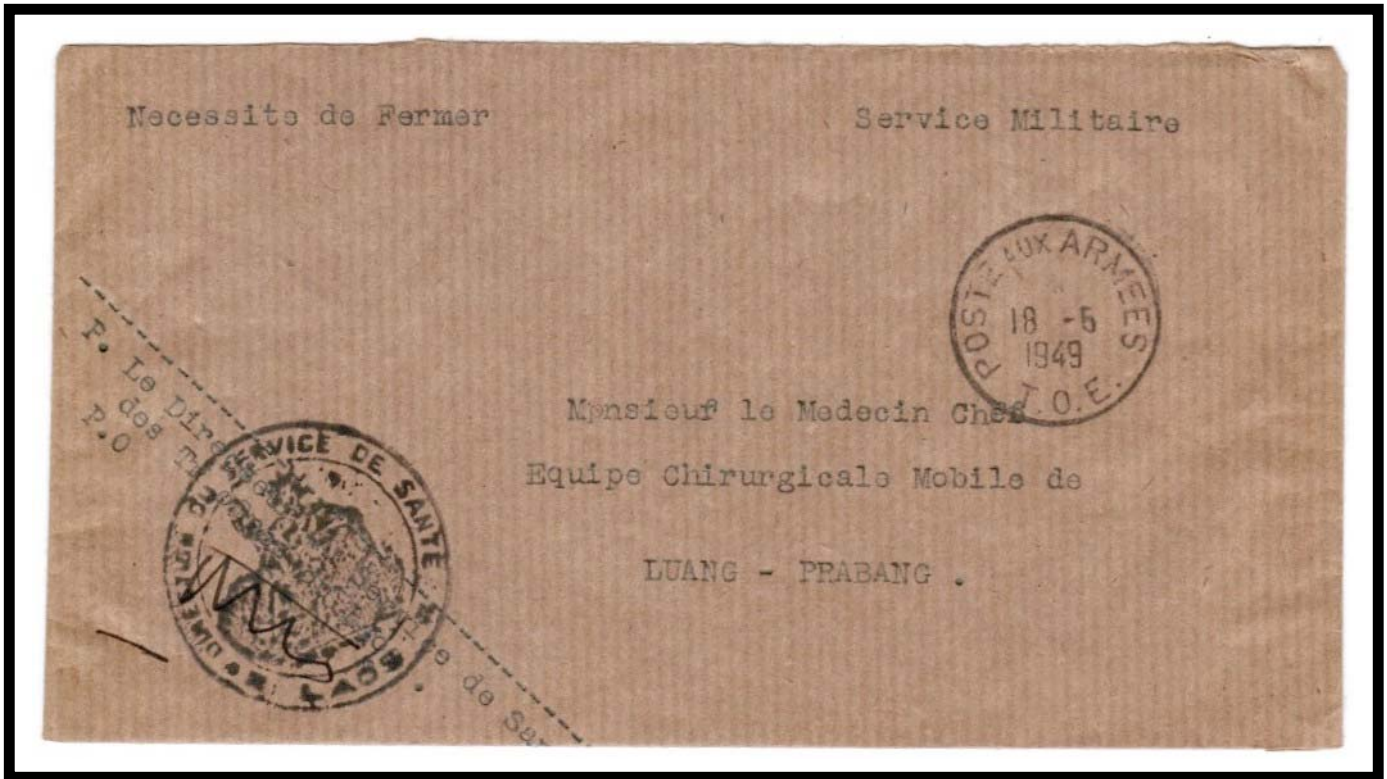
POSTAL MARKINGS

POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 14-6 1949

Health Service Headquarters Laos

Many types of military units exist to support the frontline fighters. In particular, modern armies, have medical corps to serve the health needs of the troops.

At the lower left of this 1949 cover is the cachet of the "DIRECTION DU SERVICE SANTÉ * LAOS *" (Health Service Headquarters, Laos). Typewritten instructions note that this mailing was "official military mail" (Service Militaire) and had to remain sealed ("Necessite de Fermer"). As with most facets of Indochinese postal history, military mail from Laos is scarce.



POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 18-5 1949

Commander of Troops
Cambodia

Mailed at Phnompenh on the last day of 1945, this letter came from a soldier in one of the first units that returned to Cambodia after World War II.



POSTAL MARKINGS
PHNOMPENH CAMBODGE 31-12 45

Officer's Cachet

Occasionally, soldiers created personalized cachets for use on their letters. Here an officer's cachet shows that his unit's S.P. number was 4.651.

Instead of "FM", this letter bears a manuscript "SM" which means that it was "official business" mail as opposed to personal mail. The addressee's location was indicated only by S.P. number and the address is similarly designated only by SP number.



POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 18-10 1953

Vaguemestre's Cachet Postal Sector 4750

Sometimes the unit's postal clerk (vaguemestre) struck his cachet on outgoing mail. This was purely optional and did not serve to validate the free franchise.

The vaguemestre of postal sector 4750 applied his cachet in red to a letter addressed to Germany.



POSTAL MARKINGS

POSTE AUX ARMEES * 19-3 1952

Vaguemestre's Cachet
Postal Sector 51-121

Beyond the fact that his postal sector number was 51-121, this cachet contains no amplifying information about the vaguemestre's unit.



POSTAL MARKINGS

POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 2-9 1951

REVERSE

EL KSEUR CONSTANTINE 10-9 1951

Vaguemestre's Cachet
Postal Sector 73586

The sender's return address associated him with postal sector 54679. On the other hand, the postal sector specified in the post orderly's cachet was 73586.



POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 28-6 1954

Vaguemestre's Cachet, Vietnamese Army
Postal Sector 4.410

The earliest units of Vietnamese troops employed cachets identical to the style used by French units.

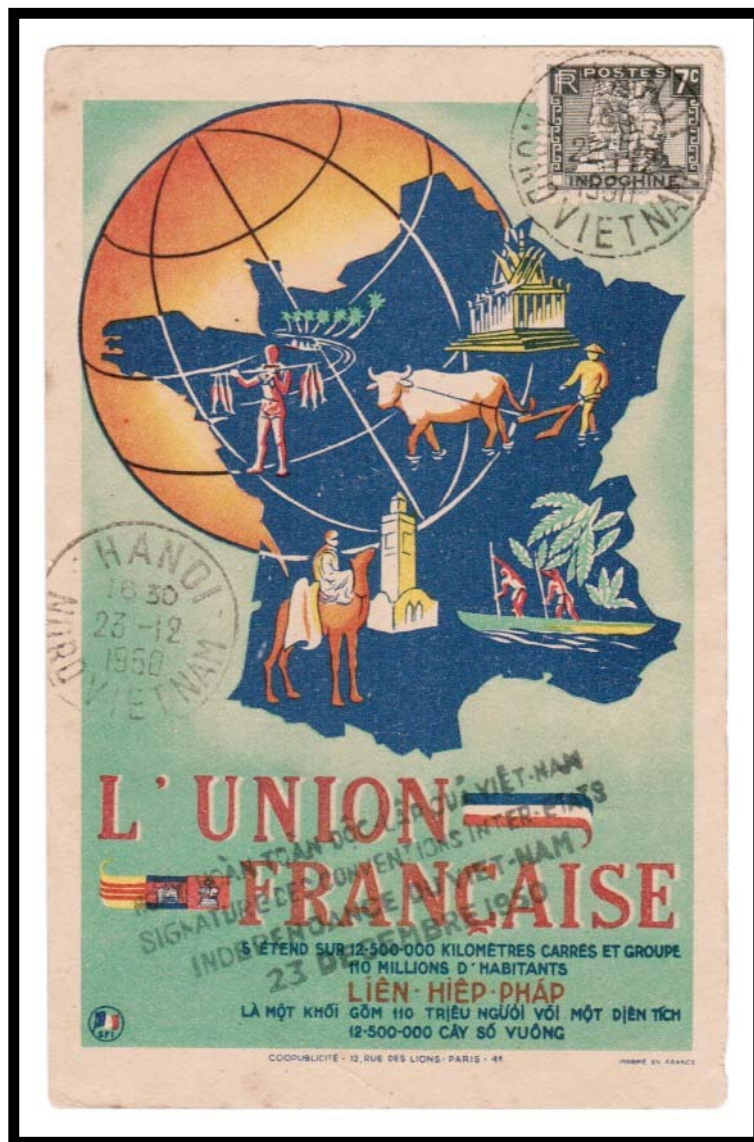


POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 28-12 1954

French Union

The French constitution of 1946 established the French Union (loosely modeled on the British Commonwealth of Nations) to replace the colonial system. It comprised metropolitan France, French overseas departments, territories, settlements, and United Nations trusteeships; French colonies, which became overseas departments of France; and associate states (protectorates).

Immediately after the creation of the new organization, France became engaged in a massive propaganda campaign to convince the citizens of former colonies that membership in the French Union was their best choice for the future. In Indochina, the struggle for the hearts and minds of the people ultimately led to armed conflict.



The postcard shown here was an instrument of the propaganda crusade. It depicts a map of France overlaid on a globe. Sprinkled across the map, are pictorial symbols of various parts of the former French Empire. The postcard is franked with a 7 cent Indochinese Culture stamp and is postmarked “HANOI NORD VIETNAM 23-12 1950.” Overlaid on the card’s “L’UNION FRANCAISE” is a diagonal slogan handstamp commemorating the signing of the convention giving Vietnam independence on 23 December 1950.

By any measure, the French campaign to garner the support of the population failed. By 1950, the time that this postcard was mailed, France was involved in an ever-escalating war in Vietnam. In 1954, Vietnam along with Cambodia and Laos withdrew from the French Union. With a new constitution in France, the French Community replaced the French Union in 1958.

NGÀY HOÀN-TOÀN ĐỘC-LẬP CỦA VIỆT-NAM
SIGNATURE DESCONVENTIONS INTER-ETATS
INDEPENDANCE DU VIET-NAM
23 DECEMBRE 1950

French Union

This card (circa 1950) depicts Indochina as part of the French Union. Interestingly, Indochina is then shown as comprised of the three politically separate states that exist today.

The French Union was created in the aftermath of World War II. While appearing similar to the British Commonwealth, it actually provided far less autonomy.

Vietnam declared independence on 2 September 1945. Using gunboat diplomacy, France applied increasing pressure to resume control of Indochina. On the brink of all-out conflict, an agreement was reached with Ho Chi Minh. On 6 March 1946, France recognized the Republic of Vietnam as part of the Indochinese Federation and the French Union. In turn, Ho agreed to 25,000 French troops stationed in Indochina for a period of 5 years.



Up through the 1950s, companies distributed printed cards as a means of corporate promotion. Sometimes cards were included with products to induce more purchases by consumers in order to complete their collections of card series.

National Association for French Indochina General de Gaulle's Appeal

In the immediate postwar period, many Frenchmen feared that Indochinese nationalism would cause France to lose her most valuable colony. These deep-seated fears gave rise to organizations supporting return to the prewar status quo. An appeal from General Charles de Gaulle, likely dating from 1945, asks the French people to support the government's effort in Indochina. The message is:

"By your mass membership, you will support the efforts of your Government to protect Indochina from the invaders.

"Join along with your family.

"Dues: 10 francs.

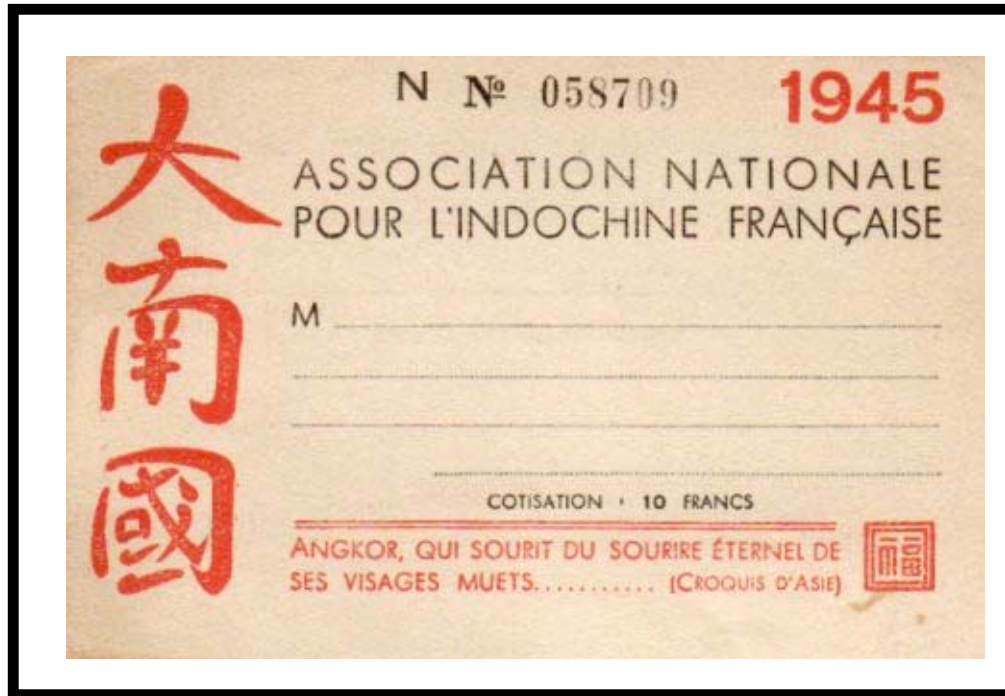
"The suffering and the blood of our soldiers will bond us in a solemn pact between France and the people of the Indochinese Union.

General de GAULLE"

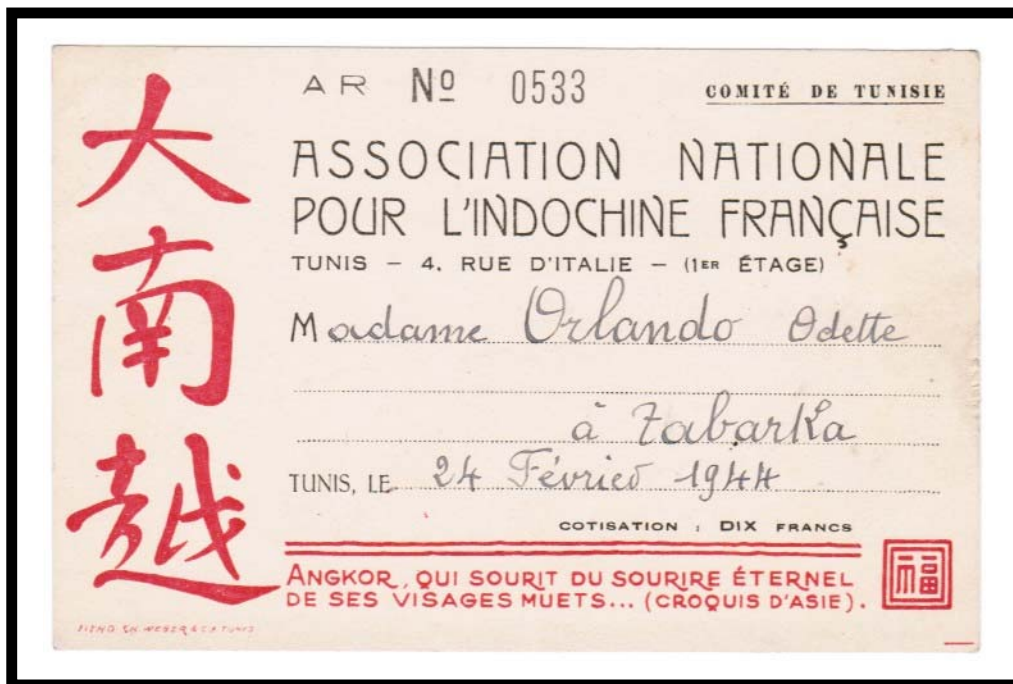


National Association for French Indochina
Membership Cards

A serialized French membership card is dated "1945" at the upper right and indicates annual dues were assessed in the amount of 10 francs.

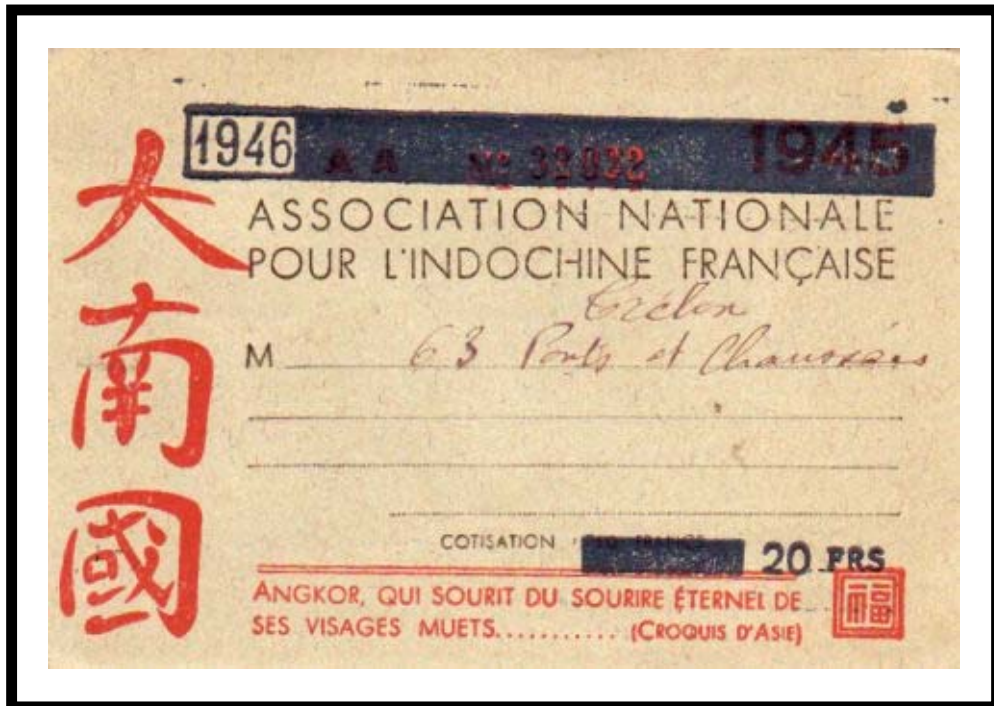


A similar card for the Committee in Tunisia bears a serial number but provides no indication of year. The manuscript date was written as 24 February 1944.



National Association for French Indochina Membership Cards for 1946 and 1947

The size of the membership of the National Association for French Indochina is not known. Following its first year, new membership cards were created by printing an obliterator bar that covered the "1945" and identified the year as "1946." Dues, originally 10 francs in 1945, were increased to 20 francs in the following year.

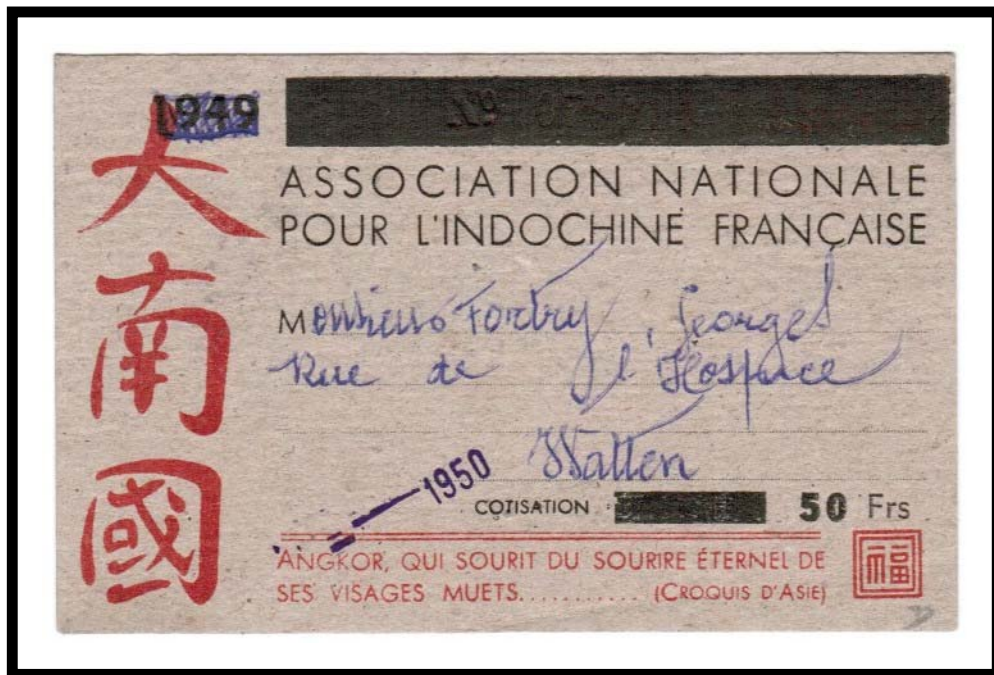


The organization created a new membership for 1947 card by again overprinting the 1945 membership card. Annual dues remained at 20 francs.



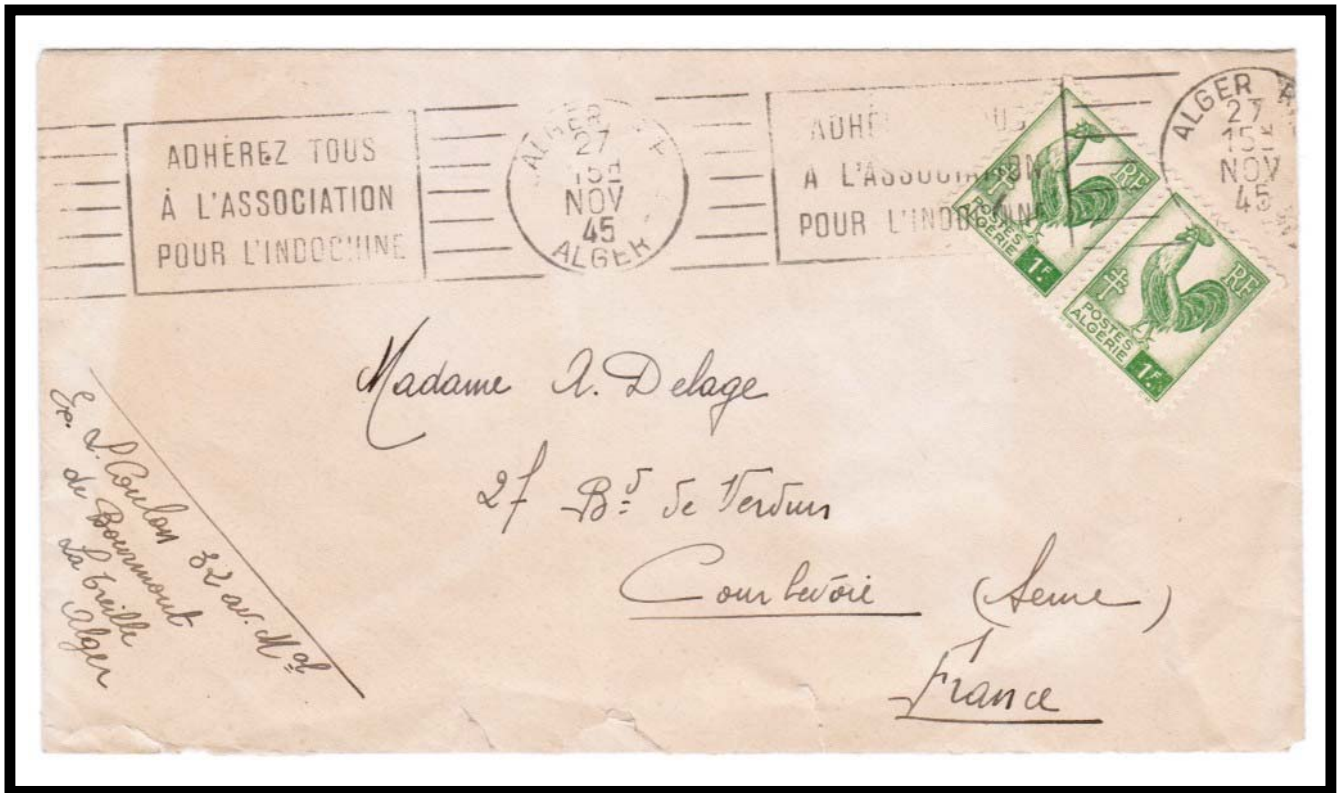
National Association for French Indochina
Membership Card for 1950

By 1950, the annual dues for the *Association Nationale pour l'Indochine Française* had risen to 50 francs.



National Association for French Indochina
Algerian Propaganda Postmark

A roller cancel from Alger in 1945 encourages membership in the National Association for French Indochina with the message "ADHÉREZ TOUS À L'ASSOCIATION POUR L'INDOCHINE."

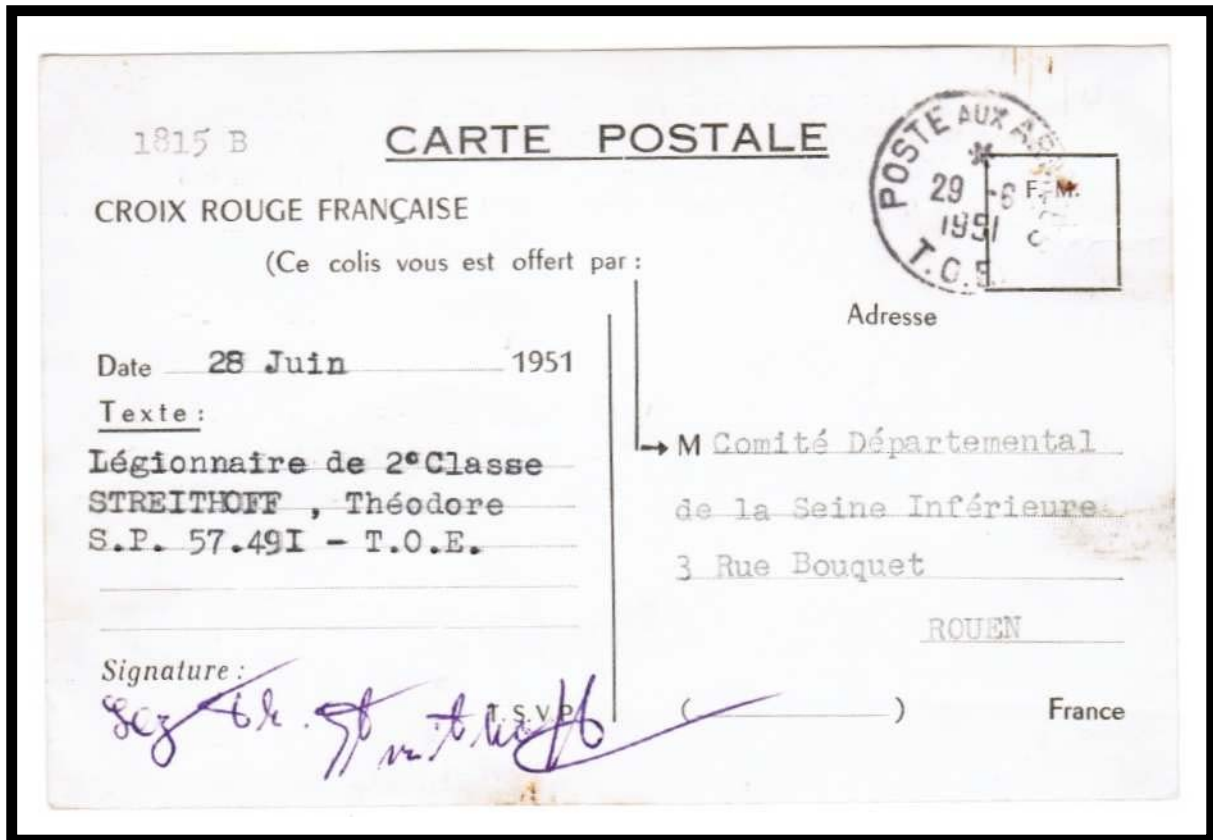


POSTAL MARKINGS
ALGER RP ALGER 27 NOV 45

Red Cross Thank You Card

In support of troops in the field, French citizens assembled packages of diversionary materials (books, games, etc.). Working through the Red Cross, local organizations in the major cities sent the packages to troops serving in Indochina. Included within the packages were special cards for the soldiers to acknowledge receipt of the gifts.

This card was preaddressed with a typewritten address and a package identification number. Preaddressed to Rouen, this card was returned by a Legionnaire through an Army post office in June 1951.



POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 29-6 1951

Red Cross Thank You Card

This card has a similar format to the preceding one, but differs in the details (e.g., "Signature" at the lower left). On the reverse, the style of text as well as the wording is different for the two cards.

In this case, the recipient of the Red Cross package was a sailor, who posted his thank you card via the Naval Post Office at Saigon in March 1951.

CARTE POSTALE

CROIX ROUGE FRANÇAISE
N°3674 A (Ce colis vous est offert par:)

Date 8 Mars 1951

Texte :
Monsieur Le Maire
J'ai l'honneur de
vous informer que je
vous envoie le colis
N° 3674 A. Colis offert.

Signature :

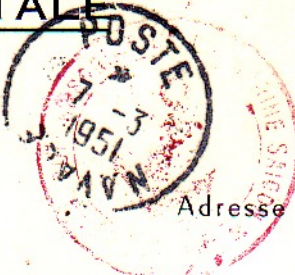
F. M.

Adresse

→ M. Le Maire
de CHERBOURG

(Manche) France

T. S. V. P.



POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTE NAVALE 7-3 1951

Red Cross Thank You Card

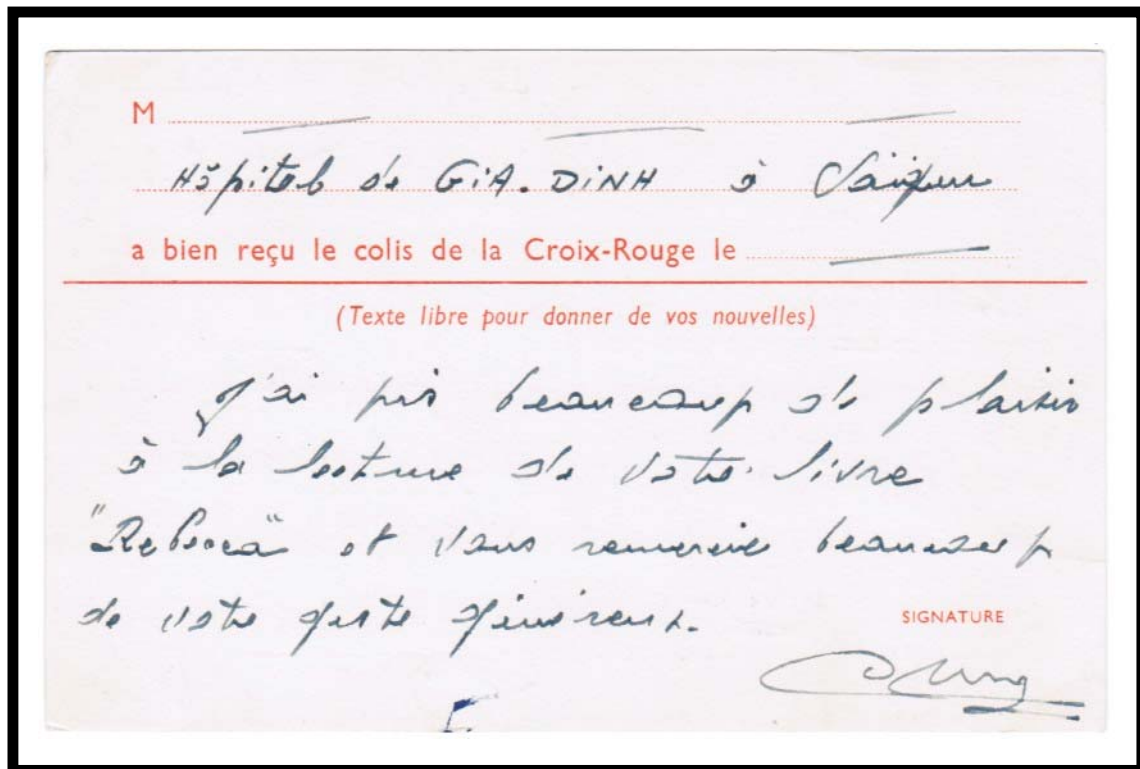
Cards printed in red ink were slightly smaller and the layout did not provide room for the sender to put any information on the address side. The word for “package” (“colis”) had been crossed out and had been replaced with the word for “book” (“livre”).



POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 9-9 1952

Red Cross Thank You Card

The reverse side of the card printed in red provided a space for the recipient to identify himself and an area for a message. In this case, an unidentified recipient at the Giadinh Hospital in Saigon expressed thanks for a copy of "Rebecca."



POSTAL MARKINGS ON REVERSE
POSTE AUX ARMEES 18-9 1952

POSTES AUX ARMEES
Five-Pointed Star at Base

This military postmark, with its five-pointed star at the base, was a generic one that had been used during World War II. The postmark traveled from France with the troops sent to reestablish French control over Indochina.



POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTE AUX ARMEES 29-5 46

POSTES AUX ARMEES
Double Asterisk at Base

Like several early postmarks that were holdovers from World War II, this one used "POSTES" as opposed to "POSTE." However, the most distinguishing characteristics of the postmark are the two asterisks at the 4 o'clock and 8 o'clock positions. .



POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTES AUX ARMEES 6-6 46

POSTE AUX ARMEES
Asterisk at Base

Early postmarks with asterisks at the base were also holdovers from World War II. For security purposes, they purposefully conveyed little information beyond the date. Nonetheless, the return address indicates that the sender as attached to B.P.M. 411, which opened on 1 November 1945 and was soon replaced by B.P.M. on 1 July 1946. Also identified was S.P. (Secteur Postale) 50653, which was never supposed to related to the B.P.M.

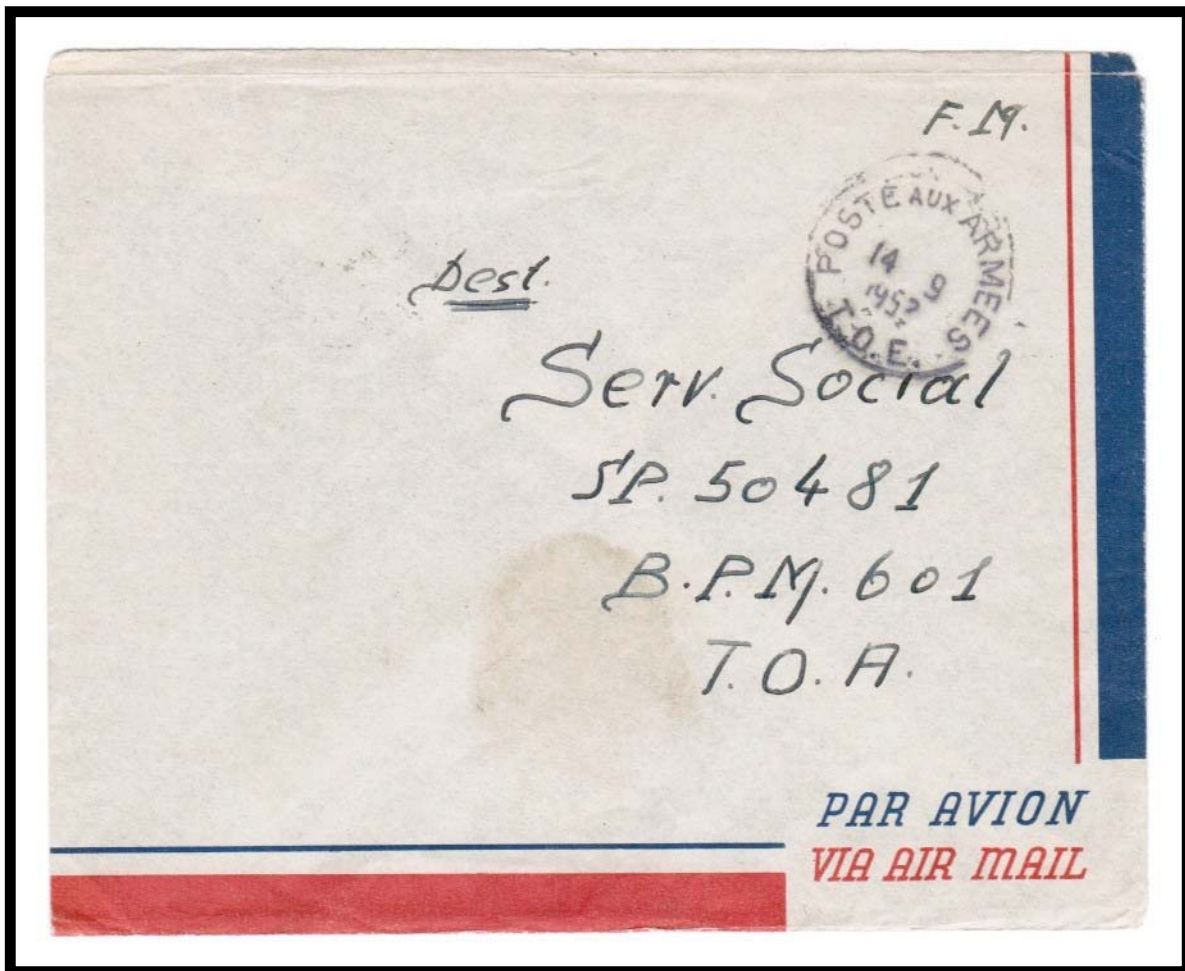


POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTE AUX ARMEES * 24-4 46

POSTE AUX ARMEES
T.O.E.

Beginning in August 1946, postmarks appeared with the notation "T.O.E." at the base. It is thought that "T.O.E." stood for either "Theatres d'Operations Exterieurs" or "Territories d'Occupation Exterieieur."

Perhaps because the plug date for "2" was missing, an enterprising clerk pressed an upside down "5" into service for the numeral designating the month in the postmark. The letter was sent from Indochina to Army Post Office 601 (B.P.M. = Bureau Poste Militaire), which was located in the Mid East.



POSTAL MARKINGS

POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 14 5 1952

REVERSE

POSTE AUX ARMEES * 601 * 19-2 1952

POSTE AUX ARMEES
T.O.E.
Missing Asterisk Variety

Normally, the "POSTE AUX ARMEES" postmarks had an asterisk or the Cross of Lorraine above the date. Here neither is present.

The return address indicates that the sender was in the region of B.P.M. 409, which was at Nhatrang from 1949 through 1955.



POSTAL MARKINGS

POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 10-1 1950
POSTE AUX ARMEES 222 19-1 1950

POSTE AUX ARMEES
TOE

Starting in 1953, a variation of the postmark came into use. Periods no longer followed the letters "T", "O" and "E." The "POSTE AUX ARMEES" portion of the postmark went from the 8:30 position to the 3:30 position.



POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTE AUX ARMEES TOE 2-7 1954
REVERSE
"S.P. 50.678" in rectangular frame

Central French Military Post Office
B.C.M. – C Variety

The French government paid the fees for foreign mail from soldiers of the Foreign Legion and similar units. Local military postal clerks forwarded unfranked letters addressed to foreign destinations to Paris. There, the proper postage was added to the cover and the stamps were canceled by the military post office.

The first postmark used by the central post office in Paris employed the initials “B.C.M.-C” at the bottom, meaning “Bureau Central Militaire”. This postmark remained in use through 1947 when it was replaced by the number 222 variety.



POSTAL MARKINGS

POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 24-6 47
POSTE AUX ARMEES B.C.M.-C 12-7 47

Central French Military Post Office
B.C.M. – C Variety

With this variety of the central military post office's postmark, the lettering for "POSTE AUX ARMEES" was all the same size. Usually, "AUX" was in smaller type.

Upon arrival in Germany, the envelope was marked with a red roller marking that said "US CIVIL CENSORSHIP MUNICH 03.4.47." It is uncertain whether the contents were actually examined by the censor. Perhaps the censorship marking meant only that the item had passed through the censor's office.



POSTAL MARKINGS

- POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 10-3 47
- POSTE AUX ARMEES B.C.M.-C 24-3 47
- US CIVIL CENSORSHIP MUNICH 03.4.47

Central French Military Post Office
222 Variety Postmark

The central military post office in Paris began using the number 222 in 1947. In the case of this 1948 letter, the stamps were canceled by the variety of the postmark with asterisks on both sides of the "222." On its way to Germany, it took about two weeks for the letter to go from Indochina to the central military post office in Paris.



POSTAL MARKINGS

POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 14-10 1948
POSTE AUX ARMEES *222* 29-10 1948

Central French Military Post Office
222 Variety Postmark

A second type of the POSTE AUX ARMEES 222 postmark, without asterisks surrounding the "222," appeared about 1949. Here the postmark had been applied to a letter sent to Austria. About one week was required from the time that the letter was postmarked in Indochina until it was postmarked in Paris.



POSTAL MARKINGS

POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 24-8 1950

POSTE AUX ARMEES 222 1-9 1950

REVERSE

LIEBNITZ 8a 4.IX.50

Central French Military Post Office
222 Variety Postmark

Here a combination of postal markings were overlaid in the upper right hand corner of the envelope. First, the sender wrote "FM" for free service. Next, the cover was postmarked with the POSTE AUX ARMEES circular date stamp in Indochina. At the central military post office in Paris, stamps were added (including 24 francs on the reverse) and postmarked with the POSTE AUX ARMEES 222 circular date stamp.

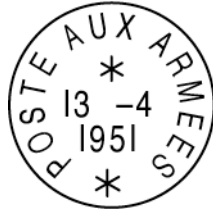


POSTAL MARKINGS

POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. ?? 1949
POSTE AUX ARMEES 222 14-12 1949

Central French Military Post Office
Asterisk Variety

Beginning in 1951, the "222" in the central post office's postmark was replaced with an asterisk. Here a letter to England was franked and postmarked in Paris before being sent onward in 1951.



POSTAL MARKINGS

POSTE AUX ARMEES T.O.E. 9-4 1951
POSTE AUX ARMEES 13-4 1951

Central French Military Post Office
Asterisk Variety

Beginning in 1951, the "222" in the central post office's postmark was replaced with an asterisk. Here a letter from S.P. 79.311 was franked and postmarked in Paris before being sent to Canada.



POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTE AUX ARMEES 9-2 1951
REVERSE
Montreal, Canada No. 677 FEB 27 1951

Central French Military Post Office
Late Use of Asterisk Variety Postmark

The asterisk variety postmark continued in service through the end of the conflict. This cover represents a late usage. The official end for French military operations was 11 August 1954 although troops were not fully evacuated until 10 April 1956. The return address on the reverse of this envelope specifies "S.P. 52.290 T.O.E." verifying that the letter originated in Indochina.



POSTAL MARKINGS
POSTE AUX ARMEES 21-2 1955