Window Number

Customers desiring out-of-the-ordinary postal services handed their letters over the counter to a clerk at one of the post office's windows. Determining which clerk was to blame in the event of errors was no problem in small post offices where the staff size was small. In large post offices, like the Saigon's main post office, properly attributing responsibility was more problematic. To solve this accounting problem, clerks were assigned numbers that corresponded to their window number. The letter "G" stood for “guichet,” meaning window or counter position. In this case, the clerk at window number 6 applied his handstamp to the registration label.

G6

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 5-11 31
airmail label
registry label
Window Number

The window numbering system remained in effect through World War II. The format for the numbers changed as demonstrated by this example in a rectangular frame, which was handstamped on the registration label.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 11-3 43
registry label
“9” in circle
REVERSE
VISÉ PAR LA DOUANE
BANGKOK G.P.O. 16 • 3 • 43
Window Number

For this 1951 version of the indicator for window G1, the outer boundary is a circle.

POSTAL MARKINGS
HA-NOI VIET-NAM 3-41951
registry label
“G1” in circle
REVERSE
PITHIVIERS LOIRET -4 1951
Mobile Mailbox
Sept Pagodes Tonkin

Not all mailboxes were at fixed locations. Some were located on mail wagons, on trains and aboard boats. When post office employees emptied these boxes, they handstamped the contents with a "BM" marking to indicate "BOITE MOBILE".

The earliest mobile mailbox marking consisted of the letters BM in a 24 by 16 millimeter oval.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SEPT PAGODES TONKIN  2 MARS 98
large oval mobile mailbox handstamp
REVERSE
HAIPHONG TONKIN  13 MARS 98
VESOUL HAUTE-SAONE 2 AVRIL 98
Even though the large oval BM handstamp generally disappeared after the turn of the century, it did see occasional use for many years. This usage from 1926 is a late example of the large oval marking.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SONTAY TONKIN 18-12 26
large oval mobile mailbox handstamp
REVERSE
HANOI TONKIN 18-12 26
The large oval Boite Mobile marking was succeeded by a smaller marking that retained many of the same characteristics. The dimensions of the small oval are 19 millimeters wide by 11 millimeters high.
Mobile Mailbox
Viettri, Tonkin

In use well into the 1920s, the small oval BM marking was the most commonly used mobile mailbox marking in Indochina.

POSTAL MARKINGS
VIETTRI TONKIN 20-8-20
small oval mobile mailbox handstamp
A variation from the oval markings was one that employed a rectangular shaped frame. Like the large oval type, its letters were sans serif.
When a sender posted his letter too late to be processed before departure of the French mail packet, it was handstamped "APRES LE DEPART" meaning literally "after departure." This marking served to explain to the recipient why a letter had experienced delay in delivery by conveying the message that the sender had posted it "Too Late."

The earliest marking of this type consisted of three lines of text surrounded by a rectangular frame.
Too Late
Cap Saint Jacques, Cochinchina

Posted from Cap Saint Jacques, this postcard was addressed to a soldier in Saigon. The card arrived on the 20th of October. The S.S. Oceanien had departed Saigon on 19 October 1908.

Why the three-line “Too Late” marking was handstamped on the postcard is uncertain. Perhaps it was in error or possibly it was known that the addressee had shipped out although there is no evidence of forwarding instructions. In this case, the letter “R” in “APRÉS” was underinked.

POSTAL MARKINGS
CAP ST. JACQUES COCHINCHINE 18 OCT 06
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 20 OCT 06
framed too late handstamp
REVERSE
CAP ST. JACQUES COCHINCHINE 18 OCT 06
Too Late
Tuyen-Quang, Tonkin

A later variety of the "Too Late" marking consisted of two lines in the same size 19-millimeter wide by 11-millimeter high frame.

POSTAL MARKINGS
TUYEN-QUANG TONKIN 20 OCT 15
framed too late handstamp
BIOGLIO 30 11 18
Too Late
Phu-Lang-Thuong, Tonkin

The “too late” marking was handstamped on a 1918 mailing from Phu-Lang-Thuong to Haiphong. Presumably, the letter missed the last mail wagon of the day as the backstamp indicates that it arrived at Haiphong one the day after posting.

POSTAL MARKINGS
PHU-LANG-THUONG TONKIN 24 JUIN 18
framed too late handstamp
REVERSE
HAIPHONG TONKIN 25-6 18
Too Late
Hue, Annam

Originally prepared to alert customers that a letter had "missed the boat," the "APRÈS le DEPART" handstamp remained in service to handle the same situations for airmail. Because this airmail letter missed the plane's departure, it took three weeks to reach France.
Too Late
Hue, Annam

With the advent of airmail service, problems with missed connections did not go away. The same postal marking that was initially used for missed ship departures was employed for missed flights. Here an airmail letter took 20 days to reach Marseille.

POSTAL MARKINGS
HUE ANNAM 9-2 32
airmail label
framed too late handstamp
route indication

REVERSE
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 12-2 32
MARSEILLE-GARE BÔCHES DU RHONE 29 II 1932
Too Late
Hue, Annam

The sender had posted his letter on 25 February 1938 and it reached Hanoi on the 27th. Despite carrying 37 cents postage for airmail service, the letter missed the plane. It was handstamped with the framed "APRÈS le DÉPART," with slightly larger lettering than earlier versions. The mailing reached Paris on 7 March – a total transit time of 15 days.

POSTAL MARKINGS
HUE ANNAM 25-2 38
framed "TOO LATE" handstamp
REVERSE
HANOI R.P. TONKIN 27-2 38
PARIS VII RUE DE CLER 7 • III 1938
Too Late
Haiphong

The separated “AP RES” wording along with the distinctive format of Haiphong's “Too Late” handstamp marks it as a locally fabricated product.

POSTAL MARKINGS
HAIPHONG TONKIN 10 NOV 04
framed “AP RES LE DEPART” handstamp
REVERSE
HANOI TONKIN 11 NOV. 04
Too Late
Quangtri, Annam

Quangtri’s locally fabricated handstamp consisted of “APRES DEPART” in large, irregular letters. The mailing took two days to reach the major city of Tourane, Annam.

POSTAL MARKINGS
QUANGTRI ANNAM 11-11 15
“APRES DEPART” handstamp
REVERSE
TOURANE ANNAM 13-11 15
Too Late
Quinhon, Annam

With the passage of time, the former framed markings were replaced with plain, straight-line markings. Here a Bank of Indochina letter was posted too late for the weekly flight to France.

APRÉS LE DÉPART

POSTAL MARKINGS
QUINHON ANNAM 7-1 38
airmail label
straight-line too late handstamp
REVERSE
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 8-1 38
Too Late
Saigon

The handwritten routing instructions on this cover specified that the letter was to go to Bangkok and there connect with KLM air service to France. Since it missed the initial flight from Saigon, it took 15 days to reach its destination, twice the normal time.

APRÈS LE DÉPART

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 19-3 38
straight-line too late handstamp
REVERSE
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 19-3 38
DINARD ILLE ET VILANE 2 AVRIL 38
Too Late
Qui-Nhon, Annam

The "Too Late" marking was normally applied with black ink. In this case, the postal clerk used blue ink for both the handstamped marking and the postmarks.

APRÉS LE DÉPART

POSTAL MARKINGS
QUI-NHON ANNAM 10-3 33
straight-line too late handstamp (blue)
REVERSE
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 13-3 33
Found in the Box

When a postal clerk found a problematic letter that had been collected from a mailbox, he would sometimes handstamp it "Trouvé à la Boîte." This marking, which literally meant “found in the box,” alerted the recipient that there was a problem with the mailing that was not the fault of the post office. Because the letter had been deposited in a mailbox rather than handed over the counter, the post office had had no opportunity to notify the sender about the problem. Typically, the marking was applied to underpaid letters.

Presumably, the “box” is the collection box or what would today be called the mailbox. An early twentieth century picture postcard shows the post office at Viettri. It really looks like just a wide spot in the road. Immediately at the side of the road is a structure. More massive than today’s counterparts, could this be an early version of the roadside mailbox?

Several types of “Found in the box” markings are known from Indochina. The earliest employed cursive lettering while later varieties used standard block lettering.
The earliest type of marking employed cursive lettering. In this case, the handstamp was applied to this internal cover in 1893.

Cursive lettering was very rarely used for postal markings because it was more difficult to read than block lettering. In any event, the marking remained in use for almost a half century. In fact, for a number of years, it remained in service in parallel with the block printing variety of the Found in the box marking.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SOCTRANG COCHINCHINE 18 FEVR 93
T in triangle
Found in the Box handstamp
Found in the Box
Cursive Variety on Registered Mail

With another 25 centimes worth of postage affixed on the reverse and the “Recommandé” instruction written at the top, the post office apparently followed the sender’s wishes even though the letter had simply been dropped in the collection box.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 3-7 14
framed R with manuscript registration number
Cursive Found in the Box handstamp
REVERSE
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 3-7 14
CLICHY-LA-GARENNE SEINE 1-8 14
Found in the Box
Cursive Variety

With 40 cents worth of stamps on the reverse, sufficient postage had apparently been paid for airmail delivery of this 1933 letter to India. The “Found in the Box” marking was not accompanied by any indication of postage due. It is possible that a postal clerk applied the “Found in the Box” Handstamp before noticing the stamps affixed to the back of the envelope.

POSTAL MARKINGS
VINHLONG COCHINCHINE 22-4 33
cursive Found in the Box handstamp

REVERSE
VINHLONG COCHINCHINE 22-4 33
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 23-4 33
KARAIKUDI 27 AP 33
Posted from Hanoi in 1935, this mailing received a number of directional markings. The letter reached its originally intended destination in 8 days, but was forwarded from there.
Found in the Box
Cursive Variety

Because the airmail postage had been underpaid when this 1936 envelope to Bordeaux was dropped in the mailbox, the post office at Cap Saint Jacques applied the marking with blue ink.

POSTAL MARKINGS
CAP SAINT-JACQUES COCHINCHINE 9-5 36 (blue)
framed Saigon-Marseille route marking
plain T due marking
cursive Found in the Box handstamp (blue)
REVERSE
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 9 MAI 36
MARSEILLE-GARE-AVION BUCHESS DU RHONE 17 • V 1936
BORDEAUX GIRONDE 18-5 36
Although the “Found in the Box” marking was used only sparingly, it was in service over a long period of time. A 1938 airmail letter from Cap Saint Jacques to Germany was franked with 45 cents worth of postage when 48 cents would have been required. Because the sender had underpaid the required postage, a clerk applied the "Found in the Box" handstamp. There is no indication of an attempt to collect any postage due.

POSTAL MARKINGS
CAP SAINT-JACQUES 11-2 38
cursive Found in the Box handstamp
REVERSE
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 11 FEVR 38
In 1908, a picture postcard was mailed from France to Indochina and was handstamped with a “Found in the Box” marking. There is no indication that the postage on the card had been underpaid resulting in a postage due citation.
Found in the Box
Block Printing Variety

Supposed to be liable for underpayment charges, this cover was initially handstamped with a framed “Found in the Box” marking as well as a “T in triangle” postage due marking. At some later point, it was determined that the 66 cents postage was indeed correct and the latter marking was obliterated.

POSTAL MARKINGS
LANG-SON TONKIN 9-5 32
airmail label and framed Saigon-Marseille routing instruction
block printing Found in the Box handstamp
T in triangle
REVERSE
HANOI R.P. TONKIN 9-5 32
NANTES R.P. LOIRE INFérie 24 • V 1932
Handstamped with the plain “Found in the Box” marking as well as the plain “T” postage due marking, postage was evidently underpaid for airmail service from Saigon to Marseilles in 1933.

POSTAL MARKINGS
HANOI TONKIN 26-7 33
Saigon-Marseille routing instruction
block printing Found in the Box handstamp

REVERSE
MARSEILLE-GARE-AVION BOCHES DU RHONE 10 • VIII 1933
AJACCIO CORSE 19 VIII 33
Found in the Box
Block Printing Variety

A much-forwarded mailing from Saigon in 1934 was underpaid. The “Found in the Box” handstamp was one of three makings tying the stamp to the cover.

TROUVE À LA BOîTE

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 3-3 34
Saigon-Marseille routing instruction
“T” in triangle and block printing Found in the Box handstamp
ASNIERES SEINE 15-5 34
REVERSE
MARSEILLE-GARE-AVION BOCHE DU RHONE 12 • III 1934
“T” in triangle and block printing Found in the Box handstamp
In 1929, a 5-cent Native Scenes envelope was deposited in the collection box at Ha-Dong without any address whatsoever. A manuscript “Found in the Box” notation was applied with blue ink. In red ink, a clerk noted the absence of an address and directed the mailing to the dead letter office.
Found in the Box
Three-Line Variety

A third variety of the “Found in the Box” marking places “TROUVE” with serif letters at the top of a three line format. Perhaps the unusual franking of 7.4 cents confused the clerk who first handled the letter and caused him to cite it for postage due. This is the discovery cover for the three-line marking.

POSTAL MARKINGS
HAIPHONG-DOCKS TONKIN  4-7 28
T in triangle
three-line Found in the Box handstamp

REVERSE
T in triangle
three-line Found in the Box handstamp

ASNIERES SEINE  5 VIII 28
ASNIERS-CHANZY SEINE  7-8 28
Found in the Box
Serif Lettering

An underpaid letter from a mission at Plei-Ku in 1932 was cited for postage due. Differing in typestyle from others of the period, the “Found in the Box” marking was a local fabrication.

Trouvé à la boîte

POSTAL MARKINGS
PLEI-KU ANNAM 15-3 32
T in triangle and Found in the Box handstamp
SAINT CHAMOND LOIRE 1-4 32
REVERSE
QUI-NHON ANNAM 15-3 32
Sending samples must have been a common practice for Saigon businessman Malcolm Beranger. His stationery was imprinted “Echantillon Nulle Valeur.”
A heavy 1932 letter to France with fabric samples ("Echantillons de tissus sans accune valuer.") was franked with a total of 4$50 in high value postage stamps. Likely the fabric samples were being sent to France for the sender’s relative to make a selection for a hand-made article of clothing.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 28-1 32
registration label
framed Saigon-Marseille routing instruction (red)
Mourning Stationery

Early in the twentieth century, it was common practice to use black-bordered envelopes to signify a state of mourning.

This envelope was franked with 6 cents worth of stamps to prepay the postal charges for service to Indochina. There was no special rate for mourning letters.
Mourning Stationery

The practice of using a wide black border to denote a state of mourning applied to writing stationery.
Mourning Stationery

Mourning stationery extended from letter sheets down to smaller cards.