Free Inbound Letter

Mail sent to troops of the Tonkin Expeditionary Force also went post-free via the French postal system. Perhaps because of the tropical climate in Indochina or because of the rigors of military life, far fewer inbound covers survive than outbound covers.

Posted from Paris, this letter was accepted for free transmission based on the manuscript "Troupes de l'Indo-Chine" written at the top on the envelope. Addressed to a corporal in the Tenth Marine Regiment, the letter was redirected from Hanoi to Haiphong. Considering the number of transit markings, the letter took a relatively short time to find the addressee.

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POSTAL MARKINGS
PARIS 25 104 BÔ SI GERMAIN 4 MAI 92
REVERSE
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 11 JUIN 92
HUE ANNAM 15 JUIN 92
LAM TONKIN 7 JUIL 92
PHU-LANG-THUONG TONKIN 8 JUIL 92
HAIPHONG TONKIN 10 JUIL 92
Round-Trip Letter

Originating in France, this letter was sent to a soldier at "Yunnan-Sen, Tonkin". Mailed just a week before the franchise expired, the "Corps Expeditionnaire" handstamp was applied in France to verify that the letter was post-free.

However, upon reaching Yunnanfou, the letter was redirected back to Bordeaux in France. Since, free mail privileges had been revoked by this time, it was determined that the letter could not be returned post-free. At first, it was charged 25 centimes postage due – the rate from China to France. Yet, when the letter reached Hanoi, the postage due amount was reduced to 15 centimes – the rate from Indochina to France in 1904.

Corps Expeditionnaire

Validation Endorsement

Postage Due Marking

POSTAL MARKINGS
BESANCON-BATTANT DOUBS 22-10 04
T in triangle crossed out with blue crayon
REVERSE
HANOI-RECTE TONKIN 30 NOV 04
MONTZE CHINE 17 DEC 04
YUNNAN-SEN CHINE 20 DEC 04
BORDEAUX GIRONDE 18-2 05
Taxed Inbound Postcard

Sent from France, this post card was endorsed at the top “Troupes de l'Indo Chine.” It was addressed to the Pho-Moi blockhouse near Lao-Kay. Despite apparently satisfying the requirements for free transmission, the post card was cited for postage due at Laokay. The blue 5 centime stamp was from the 1894-1906 postage due series and the black 15 centime value was from the 1884-85 postage due series of French Colonies General Issues.

POSTAL MARKINGS
BEAUMONT-HAGUE MANCHE 10 JUIL 02
HANOI TONKIN 11 AOUT 02
LAOKAY TONKIN 18 AOUT 02
Franked Inbound Letter

The free mail privilege only applied to letters originating from France or her colonies. This cover was posted from Hong Kong to a musician with the Tenth Colonial Regiment in Haiphong. Even though the envelope was addressed in the same style as free letters, the point of origin required postage. Sent on 22 May 1901, the receipt marking on the reverse indicates that the letter was in transit for only one week.

POSTAL MARKINGS
HONG KONG MY 22 01
REVERSE
HAIPHONG TONKIN 28 MAI 01
Inbound Dead Letter

Initially sent to an addressee serving in a Colonial Company in Paris, this mailing was forwarded to Indochina. Several units affixed slips of paper with a cachet and/or a notation that the addressee was unknown. Ultimately, the Dead Letter Office opened the envelope to determine where to send it. The envelope was resealed with an official label.

POSTAL MARKINGS
COULOMMIERS SEINE ET MNE 12-12 02
REVERSE
PARIS 30 R. DU BAC 13-12 02
HANOI TONKIN 23 MARS 03
HAIPHONG TONKIN 27 MARS 03
HANOI TONKIN 30 MARS 03
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 8 AVRIL 03
Recognition of the Franchise

The free franchise was only recognized within France and the French community of colonies. Addressed outside of the French community, this Expeditionary Force envelope was stamped with a "T" in a triangle at Hanoi indicating that a fee was due. Upon arrival in Argentina, the letter was charged 16 centavos postage due.

POSTAL MARKINGS
TONKIN CORPS EXPEDITE 21 NOV 85
HA-NOI TONKIN 21 NOV 85
T in triangle
A COBRAR 16 CENTAVOS
Recognition of the Franchise

In this case, a soldier had put 5 centimes postage on the reverse of his picture postcard along with a short message. Even though he had identified himself as a soldier in his return address at the upper left, the card, which bears no official military validation markings, was charged 10 centimes postage due upon arrival at the destination.

Postage Due Marking

Civilian Postmark

POSTAL MARKINGS
NUI-DEO TONKIN 17 AOUT 04
T in triangle
RIBERAC DORDOGNE 22 SEPT 04
Recognition of the Franchise

A soldier arranged to have his postcard properly endorsed at the lower left. Since the small village of Ha Lang had no Army post office, the postcard was postmarked nearby at the major town of Cao Bang. However, because the postcard had not received a military postmark, French postal authorities mistakenly charged it upon arrival as postage due in the amount of 20 centimes.

Postage Due Marking
Civilian Postmark

POSTAL MARKINGS
CAO-BANG TONKIN 11 JANV 02
T in triangle
CANTONVILLE MEURTHE ET MOSELLE 25 FEVR 02
Franked Expeditionary Force Letter

Mailed at the very beginning of the franchise, the sender was probably unfamiliar with the new rules. He had franked the envelope with a 25-centime yellow Commerce stamp even though the letter could have been transported to France for free.

Military Postmark

POSTAL MARKINGS
CORPS EXPEDITION TONKIN 13 NOV 83
MODANE A PARIS 1 JANV 84
REVERSE
SAIGON COCHINCHINE 29 NOV 83
POUILLY S/ LOIRE NIEVRE 2 JANV 84
Civilian Use of Army Post Office

Under unusual circumstances, army post offices would accept letters from members of the public. Of course, the franchise did not apply to civilian mail.

The 25-centime yellow Commerce stamp that the sender had affixed to this envelope was canceled by Hanoi’s military postmark. No endorsement of the military rate is present.

Military Postmark

POSTAL MARKINGS
CORR. D. ARMEES HA-NOI 17 JUIN 84
REVERSE
NICE ALPES MARITIMES 31 JUIL 84
Letter to Foreign Address

The franchise only applied to the French Community. Letters sent outside of the French Community required regular postage.

An 1896 letter posted from Bac-Ninh to Germany was franked with a 25 centimes black Navigation and Commerce stamp to satisfy the foreign letter rate.

Military Postmark

Civilian Postmark

POSTAL MARKINGS
BAC-NINH TONKIN 30 NOV 96
CORPS EXPEDITRE TONKIN
REVERSE
HAIPHONG TONKIN 2 DEC. 96
LIGNE N PAQ. FR. № 7 13 DEC 96
MULHAUSSEN (ELSASS)1 5.1.97
The franchise rules were confusing. They applied only to a specific geographic area. Here a soldier apparently qualified for free mail but used a 15-centime blue Navigation and Commerce stamp that corresponded to the reduced rate available to troops outside the combat zone.
Franked Postcard

Here a soldier chose to use the civilian mail system for sending a postcard to France. The postcard is franked with a 5-centime green Navigation and Commerce stamp which paid a special rate for postcards with no more than a five-word message.

Civilian Postmark

POSTAL MARKINGS
DAPCAU TONKIN 8 MARS 03
Franked Postcard

With a message that exceeded five words on the reverse, the soldier was required to use 10 centimes postage for a postcard sent through the civilian mails to France in 1901.
Registered Letter

The franchise was only valid for ordinary letters. The sender had to pay all postage costs for registered letters.

Here stamps worth 40 centimes (15 centimes postage and 25 centimes registration fee) were affixed to a government envelope. Even though the letter was official, the sender had to apply postage stamps and the manuscript "Corps expeditionnaire du Tonkin" only earned the sender the reduced letter rate that was available to troops in Cochin in the south.

![Civilian Postmark and Registration Marking]

**POSTAL MARKINGS**

HANOI RECÉ TONKIN 10 NOV 94
framed R with manuscript registration number
Registered Letter

The military post at Vanlinh, Tonkin was too small for a military post office. Even though the envelope bears the unit’s cachet, the registered letter needed to be franked with 40 centimes postage for mail unqualified for the franchise.

POSTAL MARKINGS
VANLINH TONKIN 12 NOV. 02
framed R with manuscript registration number
LIGNE N PAQ. FR. №7 20 NOV 02
REVERSE
HANOI TONKIN 13 NOV 02
HAIPHONG TONKIN 14 NOV. 02
Double Weight Letter

The rules of the franchise were strict. The franchise only applied to light letters (less than 15 grams). Overweight letters had to include postage. A double weight letter, between 15 and 30 grams, required 30 centimes postage—twice the reduced rate for letters sent by occupation troops in Cochinchina.

POSTAL MARKINGS
HAIPHONG TONKIN 6 FEVR 98
REVERSE
MONTPELLIER HERAULT 12 MARS 98
Service by English Ship

To qualify for the franchise, letters had to be transported by French ships. Probably because he was aware of an impending departure, the sender of this letter indicated service by an English ship ("voie anglaise"). Because the sender had specified this carrier, he had to affix 15 centimes postage.
Interior Mail Lacking Postmarks

This 1900 cover is unusual in that the front bears neither a military postmark nor a civilian postmark. Nevertheless, since it was an internal letter from Bac-Ken to Hanoi, the postal system recognized it as a free letter.
USE OF CIVILIAN MAILS
CACHET USED AS A CANCELLER

The unit cachets had no significance as far as the civilian post office was concerned. However, in the case of this postcard, the post office apparently accepted a mailing with the stamp canceled by the cachet of Commander at Quang-Yen.
Mobile Mailbox

Mail wagons that passed through small towns without post offices sometimes had mailboxes where customers could deposit letters. After arriving at a regular post office, the box was emptied out and handstamped "BM" denoting "Boîte Mobile." In this way, problems with a letter would not be ascribed to the post office that happened to open the box.

Originating from the village of Ti-Cau, which had neither a civilian nor a military post office, this cover was marked with the oval framed "BM" at Sept Pagodes, Tonkin. Although it lacked the usual indication of military mail at the top of the envelope, it was accepted postage-free.
Annam-Tonkin Overprint on Madagascar Stationery

Some of the military forces serving in Madagascar were transferred to Indochina in 1895. With them, they brought postal cards and letter cards valid for the separate franchise in Madagascar. A small number of the stationery items were overprinted "ANHAM-TONKIN."

The overprint was applied with a rubber handstamp in purple ink. A solid bar was included to obliterate the reference to Madagascar.

ANHAM–TONKIN

Handstamp Overprint
Annam-Tonkin Overprint on Madagascar Stationery
Use of the Letter Card

Here an overprinted letter card was mailed to Lyon from a soldier in the Expeditionary Force. A postal clerk aboard ship applied the CORPS EXP. TONKIN LIGNE N.7 postmark as a transit marking.

Military Postmark  Handstamp Overprint  Maritime Postmark

POSTAL MARKINGS
CORPS EXPRE TONKIN
CORPS EXP. TONKIN LIGNE N.7 8 AOUT 96
REVERSE
SAIGON COCHINCHÊ CORPS EXPÊ 7 AOUT 96
LYON RHONE SEPT 96
Annam-Tonkin Overprint on Madagascar Stationery
Use of the Postal Card

Mailed from Touranne Annam, this overprinted postal card was properly accepted by the post office postage free. The attached reply card is similarly overprinted "ANNAM-TONKIN."

Military Postmark  Handstamp Overprint  Civilian Postmark

POSTAL MARKINGS
CORPS EXPRE TONKIN
TOURANNE ANNAM 7 JUIL 96
LYON RHONE 9 AOUT 96
REVERSE
SAIGON COCHINCHÈ CORPS EXPÈ 10 JUIL 96
LIGNE N PAQ.FR. №3 12 JUIL 96
Use of Telegram Envelope

Here an official telegram envelope was put to use for mailing a letter. Because the destination was internal within Tonkin, the postal system handled it without a military postmark.

Civilian Postmark

POSTAL MARKINGS
TUYEN-QUANG TONKIN 26 JANV 96
Letter on Wooden Paper

Like soldiers everywhere, soldiers serving in Indochina snapped up souvenirs for the family and friends back home. This applied equally well to correspondence. Here an example of an envelope made from thinly shaved wood was sent to France from Nam-Dinh, Tonkin.
Letter on Wooden Paper

The enclosed letter says that the wooden paper ("papier bois") came from Japan.