

Cachet of the Commanding General

A wide variety of administrative markings were employed during the campaign. Here, the cachet of the commander-in-chief was applied to the stationery of the General Staff's Map Service.



POSTAL MARKINGS

TONKIN CORPS EXPEDITRE 4 OCT 1900
HANOI TONKIN 4 OCT 1900

Cachet for the Commander of Troops in Annam

Soldiers would occasionally write "Corps Expeditionnaire du Tonkin" on their covers even though they were serving in Annam, a different political area. Here a letter posted from Hue, Annam bears the purple cachet of the commander of the troops there.



POSTAL MARKINGS

HUE COCHINCHÉ CORPS EXPE
HUE ANNAM OCT 1900

REVERSE

SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 10 OCT 00

Cachet of Commander at Dong-Dang

This postcard sent from Dong-Dang to France bears several cachets. The large rectangular cachet of the Commander at Dong-Dang is notable because of the stylized Chinese writing in its center.



POSTAL MARKINGS
DONG-DANG TONKIN 1 JANV 03

Cachet of Commander at Ha-Giang

The cachet of the commander at Ha-Giang, while generally similar in format to others, is distinctive because of the Chinese characters in the interior.



POSTAL MARKINGS

CORPS EXPÉDITIONNAIRE TONKIN
HA-GIANG TONKIN 10 JUIL 1900

Cachet of Commander at Ha-Giang

A later version of the Ha-Giang commander's cachet is larger but preserves the Chinese characters in the center.



POSTAL MARKINGS

CORPS EXPEDITRE TONKIN
HA-GIANG TONKIN 5 AVRIL 03

REVERSE

HANOI TONKIN 11 AVRIL 03
ST FIRMIN-EN-VALGODEMARD HIES ALPES 23 MAI 03
CORPS ISERE 24 MAI 03
MEAUDRE ISERE 25 MAI 03

Cachet of Commander at Trung-Khanh-Phu

The commander of the military post at Trung-Khanh-Phu utilized an oval shape for his cachet, a departure from the typical circular format.



POSTAL MARKINGS

TONKIN CORPS EXPEDITRE
CAO-BANG TONKIN 15 AVRIL 93

REVERSE

HAI-PHONG TONKIN 23 AVRIL 93
PARIS 71 PI. VICTOR HUGO 2 JUIN 93

Foreign Legion Cachet

Among the most famous of all military units is the French Foreign Legion. Here a letter from a Legionnaire received a cachet of a unit serving on the border with China.



POSTAL MARKINGS

TONKIN CORPS EXPEDITRE
HA NOI TONKIN 13 FEVR 03

REVERSE

8 PARIS 8 DISTRIBUTION 22-3 03

Cachet of the Review Commission

Here the cachet of the Review Commission was applied with both red and blue inks.



Review Commission Cachet



POSTAL MARKINGS

TONKIN CORPS EXPEDITRE 10 JUIL 02
HA NOI TONKIN 10 JUIL 02

REVERSE

4 PARIS 4 DISTRIBUTION 12-8 02

Cachet of the Tenth Marines

The cachet for the 9th Company, 10th Marines was fashioned in a manner that simulated a typical postmark of the period, albeit on a larger scale.



POSTAL MARKINGS

CORPS EXPRE TONKIN
QUANG-YEN TONKIN 10 AOUT 98

REVERSE

LA CLAYETTE SAONE ET LOIRE 10 SEPT. 98

Personal Cachet

Cachets could sometimes be quite ornate as in the case of this personal cachet. Since the postcard was mailed after revocation of the franchise, postage was required and was affixed on the reverse side.



POSTAL MARKINGS

MON-CAY TONKIN 4 AVRIL 05
HAIPHONG TONKIN 5 AVRIL 05
VICTORIA HONG KONG 13 AP 05

REVERSE

MON-CAY TONKIN 4 AVRIL 05

Service Optique

The Service Optique was part of the military's communication system in Indochina. Contrary to first impression, it was not based on signaling flags (semaphore). Rather, the Service Optique was based on mirrors. Using mirrors to reflect sunlight allowed messengers to transmit coded messages great distances at the speed of light. A series of stations was established for reliable communications (at least, on sunny days).



POSTAL MARKINGS

TONKIN CORPS EXPEDITRE 26 OCT 94
HA NOI TONKIN 25 OCT. 94
CORPS EXP. TONKIN LIGNE N. 4 4 NOV. 94

Location without Post Office Donc-Chau Tonkin

A civilian post office was never established at Donc-Chau, Tonkin. Soldiers' mail was sent to Phu-Doan for onward transmission.



Commander's Cachet



Military Postmark



Civilian Postmark



POSTAL MARKINGS

CORPS EXPEDRE TONKIN
PHU-DOAN TONKIN 18 NOV 93

REVERSE

HA-NOI TONKIN 22 NOV 93
HAI-PHONG TONKIN 23 NOV 93

Location Without Post Office Bac-Muc Tonkin

The civilian post office at Bac-Muc did not open until 15 October 1899. Before then, military mail was transferred to Tuyen-Quang for processing.



Military Postmark



Commander's Cachet



Civilian Postmark



POSTAL MARKINGS

CORPS EXPEDRE TONKIN
TUYEN-QUANG TONKIN 25 OCT 93

REVERSE

HA-NOI TONKIN 26 OCT 93
PARIS B. DISTRIBUTION 30 NOV 93

Missing Military Postmark Ha-Noi Tonkin

The free mail franchise was established effective 16 June 1883. Special military postmarking devices were not widely available at the outset. The front of this free letter bears no postmark other than Hanoi's civilian postmark.



Civilian Postmark



POSTAL MARKINGS

HA-NOI TONKIN 27 SEPT. 84

REVERSE

2 LYON 2 RHONE 15 NOV. 84

Missing Military Postmark Bac-Ninh Tonkin

By 1904, the army post office at Bac-Ninh had closed. Military mail was handled directly by the civilian post office. Consequently, soldiers' mail was only postmarked by the civilian post office.



Civilian Postmark



POSTAL MARKINGS

BAC-NINH TONKIN 8 JUIN 04

REVERSE

HAIPHONG TONKIN 9 JUIN 04

CAEN CALVADOS 14-7 04

Reserve Brigade
China Occupation Force

The cachet on this cover shows that the Reserve Brigade for France's China Occupation Force was located in Haiphong in 1904.



POSTAL MARKINGS
CORPS EXPEDITIONNAIRE
HAIPHONG TONKIN 26 JUIN 04
REVERSE
2 PARIS 2 DISTRIBUTION 6-8 04

Living Conditions

Troops serving in the Tonkin Expeditionary Force could expect very different field conditions depending on where they were stationed. Period postcards show that, near major cities, barracks could be quite comfortable as compared to more primitive conditions at border outposts.

