This presentation explores censorship during World War II as it affected correspondence between Indochina and the rest of the world as well as within Indochina itself. What mails were censored depended on routes, which were frequently changing over time as the ravages of war ebbed and flowed in various regions.

The presentation is organized as follows:

Part 1. Censorship Markings of Indochina

Bank Exemption to Censorship

Services Interrupted due to Hostilities

Family News Postal Cards

Censorship of Internal Mails

Under Indochinese Authority

Under Japanese Authority

Part 2. Censorship of External Mails between Indochina and France

Continents arranged alphabetically (countries alphabetically under continent)

Africa

Asia

Australia and Oceana

Europe

North America

South America
Postal Commission C

Type 1

Each political unit of Indochina had its own censor commission. The commission for Cochinchina was given the designation "C". By far, Saigon handled the greatest amount of mail in Indochina. Consequently, code “C” markings are the most common of the commission handstamps.

Several varieties of the marking exist. The variety with 4.5 millimeter lettering for "INDOCHINE" in the center is also distinct in that only the first letter of the word "Commission" is capitalized.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 8-9 39
CONTROLE POSTAL Commission C INDOCHINE
REVERSE
DINARD ILLE ET VILAINE 19 SEPT 39

Type 1 Commission C
Postal Commission C
Type 2

For the second type of CONTROL POSTAL marking, the word "COMMISSION" was in all capital letters and the lettering for the word "INDOCHINE" was 5.5 millimeters tall.
Commission C employed a third type of CONTROLE POSTAL marking with 6 millimeter lettering for the word "INDOCHINE". Like the 5.5 millimeter variety, the word "COMMISSION" was entirely in capital letters.
Control Commission A, based in Hanoi, used the handstamp for only a very short period in 1939. Hanoi quickly dropped it in favor of the “secret” “BIS” postmarks for marking censored letters.
Postal Commission B
Annam

Commission B had responsibility for Annam. Here, the Commission B making was applied to the resealing tape of a letter that had been opened for inspection. Application of commission handstamps on resealed letters was an exceptional occurrence.
Postal Commission D
Cambodia

Phnom Penh, Cambodia was assigned the code letter "D." Its Commission marking for censored letters was similar to the 4.5 millimeter Type 1 lettering version for Cochinchina except that the Commission's identifying letter was changed to "D."
Postal Commission E

The code letter “E” was assigned to Laos. Vientiane’s censor cachet employed same large circle format used by Indochina’s other political subdivisions.

POSTAL MARKINGS

VIEN'TIANE LAOS  6-2 40
CONTROLE POSTAL Commission E INDOCHINE

REVERSE
HANOI R.P. bis TONKIN  9-2 40
SAINT-ETIENNE LOIRE  16.II.40
Telegraph Commission K
Saigon

Commission K was responsible for telegrams at Saigon. However, when demand warranted it, Commission K personnel reviewed letters and applied the commission’s handstamp. The framed marking at the top, left of this piece reads “COMMISSION REGIONALE DE CONTROLE TELEGRAPHIQUE.”
Postal Commission C
Postcard Censorship

Censors faced the same problem with postcards that they had with letters – namely, identifying which items had been examined and judged safe for passage onward. Here, the type 2 CONTROLE POSTAL COMMISSION C handstamp had been applied to a postcard sent from Saigon to Sweden in 1939.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 27-8 39
CONTROLE POSTAL COMMISSION C INDOCHINE
Postal Commission C
Use as an Canceller

The CONTROLE POSTAL COMMISSION C handstamp served to alert authorities on which pieces of mail had been examined. In rare instances as with this example, it served as a means of canceling the postage stamps on examined envelopes.

Type 2 Commission C

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 26-10 39
CONTROLE POSTAL COMMISSION C INDOCHINE
OUVERT PAR L'AUTORITE MILITAIRE

Opened letters were resealed with paper tape and given the "OUVERT PAR L'AUTORITE MILITAIRE" marking signifying that the item was officially opened for inspection. For security, the football-shaped marking was normally struck in black across both the tape and the envelope. This marking was used throughout Indochina.

POSTAL MARKINGS
HANOI R.P. TONKIN 28-8 40
Military Authority football
censor’s resealing tape
REVERSE
HANOI R.P. BIS TONKIN 29-8 40
Military Authority football

Mailed from Hanoi, this letter also bears the HANOI R.P. BIS circular date stamp on the reverse indicating that it had been seen by the censors in the main Hanoi post office.
OUVERT PAR L'AUTORITE MILITAIRE
Purple Ink Variation

Except for Saigon, the "OUVERT PAR L'AUTORITE MILITAIRE" marking was usually applied in black ink. In Saigon, the marking was normally struck in purple ink. Here a mailing from Saigon received the Military Authority "football" as well as a censor signature handstamp in purple.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 26-2 40  
censor's resealing tape  
Military Authority football  
C3 in circle - censor's signature handstamp

REVERSE
SAIGON CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 26 FEV 40  
C3 in circle - censor's signature handstamp
Code A Signature Handstamp
Tonkin

Each administrative area was assigned a code letter for its associated censor markings. Ultimately, the censors were given individual numbers. Thus, the censor's "signature" was encoded as a letter over a number within a circle.

The code letter for Hanoi was "A". Censor A5 applied his marking with blue ink to this envelope mailed from Haiphong to France in 1941.

A

5

censor’s signature (Hanoi)

POSTAL MARKINGS
HAIPHONG TONKIN 27-6 41
A over 5 in circle – censor's signature handstamp (Tonkin) (blue)
censor’s resealing tape (Indochina)
Military Authority football
censor’s signature handstamp and censor’s resealing tape (Singapore)

REVERSE
HAIPHONG TONKIN 27-6 41
HANOI R.P. BIS TONKIN 28-6 41
Military Authority football
SÈ CERQUES H Î È SAVOIE 16-9 41
Hanoi, location of the seat of Indochina’s government, soon abandoned the circular censor signatures in favor of “secret” censor markings that mimicked the design of postmarks but bore the identifier “HANOI BIS” or “HANOI R.P. BIS.” Since virtually all of Tonkin’s mail funneled through Hanoi, the “A signatures” are not common.

The cover shown here has several unusual aspects. In 1944, it was mailed at a rural post office (Bang Ngang) in Hung-Yen Province with the rural postmark canceling the 10 cent Pavie stamp, an uncommon occurrence. The censor signature, “A 19” in a circle, is plainly struck above the address. On the reverse, dated postmarks establish the late usage of the “A” censor signature.

**POSTAL MARKINGS**

BANG NGANG POSTE RURALE PROVINCE DE HUNG-YEN
A19 in circle
REVERSE
HANOI RP BIS TONKIN 5-2 44
QUANG-YEN TONKIN 6-2 44
The code letter for Annam was "B". Censor B1 examined this mailing from Hue to the United States. Besides the distinctive censor signatures, different political subdivisions used paper sealing tape with different printing.
Saigon was assigned the letter code "C". Here the censor's signature was applied in purple ink as was the military authority "football" marking.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 12-7 40
censor's resealing tape (Saigon)
censor's signature handstamp (purple)
Military Authority football (purple)
The censor code letter for Phnom Penh, Cambodia was "D". Here, censor D1 applied his signature mark with black ink on a missionary’s envelope after his examination of the contents.
The letter "F" was given to the leased territory of Kouang Cho Wan. The censor markings were applied in purple ink to this letter sent from Tchekam, Kouang Cho Wan to Saigon. Like other areas, Kouang Cho Wan had its own distinctive censor’s tape.

POSTAL MARKINGS
TCHEKAM KOUANGTCHEOUWAN 21-9 42
SAIGON CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 1 OCT 42
REVERSE
TCHEKAM KOUANGTCHEOUWAN 21-9 42
Military Authority football
Telegraphy censors would sometimes assist postal censors. The code letter for the telegraph censors at Haiphong was "G". Originating at Tourane in Annam, this letter was censored at Haiphong before leaving Indochina.

**POSTAL MARKINGS**

TEURANO ANNAM 25-3 41
Censor's resealing tape
Censor's signature handstamp (Haiphong)
Military Authority football
Censor's handstamp (Hong Kong) Sorter’s handstamp (Hong Kong)

**REVERSE**

HUE ANNAM 26-3 41
HAIPHONG TONKIN 28-3 41
Military Authority football
HONG KONG 9 AP 41
15 in rectangle
Code H Signature Handstamp

A 1944 local letter was handstamped with a censor signature using the letter “H.” Censor signatures with the letter “H” have not been previously reported.

H3

censor’s signature
(Haiphong)

POSTAL MARKINGS
HAIPHONG TONKIN 21-12 44
slogan handstamp
H3 censor signature and censor’s resealing tape
REVERSE
QUANG-YEN TONKIN 22-12 44
Censor Code K  
Saigon

The letter "K" was the code for Saigon's telegraph censors. Here censor K4 applied his mark to a letter posted in 1946, well after World War II was officially ended.

censor's signature handstamp  
(Saigon)

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-PRINCIPAL COCHINCHINE  24-2 46
  censor's resealing tape (Saigon)
  Military Authority football
K4 in circle - censor's signature handstamp
REVERSE
K4 in circle - censor's signature handstamp
  Military Authority football
HANOI R.P. bis
TONKIN

Specially coded date postmarks were used at the Main Hanoi post office (Recette Principal = R.P.). The marking, which was almost always applied to the back of covers, signified that the post office had turned the letter over to the censors.

The circular date stamps exhibit variations in the spelling of the word "bis". This letter was sent from Hue, Annam to Paris in January 1940. The date stamp on the back of the cover includes "bis" in lower case letters.

POSTMARK TYPE: G
PERIOD OF USE: 1939-41

POSTAL MARKINGS
HANOI R.P. bis TONKIN  26-1 40
REVERSE
HUE ANNAM  25-1 40
A second variety has "BIS " in capital letters but they are only 2.5 millimeters tall. The receipt stamp was applied to this letter to Hong Kong that originated in Haiphong. In this case, the censor definitely examined the contents as evidenced by the paper resealing tape.

POSTMARK TYPE: G
PERIOD OF USE: 1939-41

POSTAL MARKINGS
HANOI R.P. BIS TONKIN 23-1 40
MILITARY AUTHORITY football censor's resealing tape (Indochina)
VICTORIA HONG KONG 25 JA 40
REVERSE
HAIPHONG TONKIN 22-1 40
airmail label
Par avion jusqu'a destination handstamp
MILITARY AUTHORITY football
The third variation of this marking has the last two letters of “BIS” in 2.5 millimeter type and doubly underlined.

In this instance the letter originated in Shanghai and was addressed to Saigon. The letter was turned over to the censors in Hanoi before going south to Saigon. By the difference in dates, the censors had the letter for one day (30 April until 1 May).

POSTMARK TYPE: G
PERIOD OF USE: 1941-43

POSTAL MARKINGS
CANTON 28.4.41
HANOI R.P. BIS TONKIN 30-4 41
HANOI R.P. TONKIN 1-5 41
REVERSE
SHANGHAI 14.4.41
Two varieties of censor markings that simply use “HANOI” instead of “HANOI R. P.” are recorded. One format has a single line under the letters “IS” in the word “BIS.”

**POSTMARK TYPE: G**
**PERIOD OF USE: 1942-44**

**POSTAL MARKINGS**
HANOI B\(^{IS}\) TONKIN  4-10 42
HANOI R.P. TONKIN  4-10 42

**REVERSE**
HON-GAY TONKIN  2-10 42
HANOI BIS TONKIN

The double underline of “IS” characterizes the second variety of the dated “HANOI BIS” censor marking. Also, the lettering is larger than the single underline variety.

POSTMARK TYPE: G
PERIOD OF USE: 1943-44

POSTAL MARKINGS
HANOI BIS TONKIN  21 6 43
HANOI R.P. TONKIN  22-6 43
REVERSE
SAIGON-PRINCIPAL COCHINCHINE  18 -6 43
HANOI BİŚ TONKIN

During most of World War II, the “HANOI R.P.” designation was the dominant spelling employed for postmarks. Although some Hanoi censorship marks incorporated “HANOI BİŚ” as opposed to HANOI R.P. BİŚ,” these were only seen in the latter part of the conflict.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAM-SON ANNAM 18-9-43
HANOI BİŚ TONKIN 20-9-43
HANOI R.P. TONKIN 20-9-43
DONG-DANG TONKIN 22-8-43
CHUNGKING
PINGSIANG
REVERSE
SAM-SON ANNAM 18-9-43
registration label
HANOI R.P. BIS Censor Postmark
Used as Conventional Postmark

Hanoi’s “secret” censor postmarks were almost always applied to the reverse of envelopes. Perhaps because this 1940 mailing was official government correspondence to France, the censor postmark was used to cancel the stamps on the front side of the envelope.

POSTAL MARKINGS
HANOI R.P. BIS TONKIN 12-9 40
airmail label
Indian censor’s signature handstamp and resealing tape
REVERSE
“24” in double lined rectangle

POSTMARK TYPE: G
PERIOD OF USE: 1939-41
Coordination between Censors and Post Office

Handling within the Hanoi post office can be traced by the times recorded in the postmarks. On the front, the stamp was canceled with a Hanoi R.P. postmark at 13:10 on 15 July 1940. The Hanoi R.P. BIS postmark shows that the letter was turned over to the censors at 15:30 and was returned to postal personnel at 17:00.

POSTAL MARKINGS
HANOI R.P. BIS TONKIN 15 7 40
HANOI R.P. TONKIN 15-7 40
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 18-7 40
CHOLON COCHINCHINE 19-7 40
REVERSE
HANOI R.P. TONKIN 15-7 40
Sealed by Customs

During the war, sending money or other valuables through the mail was prohibited. This registered letter from Saigon to New York City was examined by the Customs service before leaving Indochina. The "VISE PAR LA DOUANE" marking means "Sealed by Customs". It was always applied on the backs of envelopes with manuscript date and initials of the inspector.

VISE PAR LA DOUANE
("Sealed by Customs ")

POSTAL MARKINGS
HONOLULU, HAWAII REGISTERED NOV 27 1940
NEW YORK, N.Y. REG’Y. DIV. 11-30 1940
NEW YORK, N.Y. (STA. F) REGISTERED. DEC 2 1940
censor’s resealing tape (Saigon)
“Sealed by Customs” with manuscript date and initials
“Sealed by Customs”

REVERSE
SAIGON CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 7-11 40
registration label
C8 in circle – censor’s signature (Saigon)
MILITARY AUTHORITY football
REGISTERED handstamp
Seen by Customs

The second marking that the Customs Service used to certify that an envelope contained no prohibited valuables means "seen by Customs". Like the other marking, it was applied on the back of the envelope and it was supplemented by the inspector's handwritten date and initials.

Vu par la douane

("Seen by Customs")
Seen by Customs

The "seen by Customs" marking was normally applied to the reverse of envelopes. In exceptional instances, it was applied to the front as shown here. In this case, the Customs agent had opened the envelope and then resealed it with brown paper.

Vu par la douane

"Seen by Customs"

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 28-9 40
registration and airmail labels
"Seen by Customs" handstamp on resealing tape
REVERSE
SAIGON CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 30-9 40
Forwarding Authorized
President of Censor Commission

In addition to the normal censor markings, the back of this 1941 cover bears a rectangular handstamp applied at Saigon. It translates: “Forwarding Authorized. Postal Control Office, Saigon. The President of the Censor Commission.”

ACHEMINEMENT AUTORISÉ
CONTROLE POSTAL SAIGON
Le President de Commission

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 16 SEPT 41
C10 censor signature and resealing tape
forwarding authorization handstamp
“PASSED BY CENSOR 223 A” (Singapore) and resealing tape
INDE FRANCAISE PONDICHERRY 21 • 10 • 1941

REVERSE
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 16 SEPT 41
military authority football
Seized by the Military Authority

Censors took possession of letters that they considered to posing a risk to security. To prevent these letters from reentering the mail stream, they were handstamped with a distinction indication. In this case, the large hexagonal marking reads "SEIZED BY THE MILITARY AUTHORITY."

POSTAL MARKINGS
PHANRANG ANNAM 9-11 43
"SEIZED BY THE MILITARY AUTHORITY"
Bank Censor Exemption
Tourane

By agreement with the government, several official and semi-official organizations were granted exemptions from censoring. Naturally, it was important to its business that the Bank of Indochina avoid delays in processing financial transactions. Accordingly, the bank instructed its branch offices to prepare special markings to indicate the exemption for their mailings.

The Tourane branch office employed at least two markings. One was a small exemption marking with a frame 5 centimeters wide by 2 centimeters high. A range of sizes was necessary for different size covers. Here Tourane’s censor exemption marking was applied with violet ink.

![COURRIER DE LA BANQUE PRiviligée
A EXPÉDIER SANS DELAI
EXEMPT DE Censure](image)

POSTAL MARKINGS
TOURANE ANNAM 5-2 40
airmail label
REVERSE
HANOI R.P. TONKIN 7-2 40
HANOI R.P. bis TONKIN 7-4 40
Bank Censor Exemption
Tourane

Tourane’s branch office of the Bank of Indochina also had a bold marking with 6 millimeter lettering in a large rectangular frame. Here the exemption marking was struck in red ink.

POSTAL MARKINGS
TOURANE ANNAM 6-1 40
REVERSE
HAIPHONG TONKIN 7-1 40
Bank Censor Exemption
Cantho

At Cantho, the bank used the same wording as the Qui-Nhon branch office. However, in a departure from usual practice, the marking was applied with blue ink.
Bank Censor Exemption
Dalat

The Dalat branch’s marking was similar to that used by the Saigon branch except that it included a second line, which read “EXEMPT DE CENSURE.”

POSTAL MARKINGS
DALAT ANNAM 1-6 40
slogan handstamp
The bank’s exemption marking for Haiphong consisted of large, unframed lettering. The handstamp was applied with red ink.

**POSTAL MARKINGS**
HAIPHONG TONKIN  7-10 39
REVERSE
HANOI R. P. TONKIN  8-10 39
Bank Censor Exemption
Haiphong

Posted in 1943 from Haiphong to Tokyo without an exemption handstamp, the sender likely recognized that it was futile to claim immunity from censoring by the Japanese authorities.

POSTAL MARKINGS
HAIPHONG TONKIN 27-1 43
airmail label
REVERSE
HANOI R.P. TONKIN 28-1 43
HANOI BIS TONKIN 28-1 43
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 30-1 43
Bank Censor Exemption
Hanoi

The format for Hanoi’s censor exemption marking closely resembled that employed by the Nam-Dinh branch office.

POSTAL MARKINGS
HANOI–A TONKIN 11-1 40
registration label
REVERSE
HANOI R.P. TONKIN 11-1 40
HAI-PHONG TONKIN 12-1 40
Bank Censor Exemption
Hue

The Hue branch office of the Bank of Indochina used the same exemption making that the Tourane branch office used. As was typical, the exemption marking was struck in red ink.
Bank Censor Exemption
Nam-Dinh

Nam-Dinh’s version of an exemption marking used 3-millimeter capital letters meaning “Privileged bank mail to be sent on without delay. Exempt from censoring.”

POSTAL MARKINGS
NAM-DINH TONKIN 1-2 40
REVERSE
HAIPHONG TONKIN 1-2 40
The Qui-Nhon branch office employed different wording for its marking meaning "Business of the Privileged Bank of Indochina." As was typical, the marking was applied with red ink.

POSTAL MARKINGS
QUI-NHON ANNAM 13-1 40
REVERSE
HAIPHONG TONKIN 15-1 40
Bank Censor Exemption
Saigon

The exemption marking used by the Saigon branch office ("Succursale de Saigon") was struck in blue ink and did not explicitly mention censorship. It simply noted, “Privileged mail.”

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE  7 FEV 40
REVERSE
HANOI R.PBIS TONKIN  9-2 40
HAIPHONG TONKIN  9-2 40
Like many other locations, the Saigon branch office used red ink to apply its “privileged mail” handstamp.
Bank Censor Exemption
Saigon

The handstamp claiming “Privileged Mail” was evidently not honored by the censor in Singapore, who opened the bank’s letter to the Royal Bank of Canada to examine it.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 4-7 41
“PASSED BY CENSOR 243” and resealing tape (Singapore)
The bank's branch office in Vinh used an unframed, three-line handstamp. The marking was applied using red ink.

**POSTAL MARKINGS**

**VINH ANNAM 11-3 40**

**REVERSE**

**HAIPHONG TONKIN 13-3 40**
Bank Censor Exemption
Fort Bayard

The practice of marking bank mail for exemption from censoring extended to the leased territory of Kouang Cho Wan.
Bank Censor Exemption
Yunnanfou

Like the branches of the Bank of Indochina located in Indochina proper, the satellite branch in Yunnanfou, China used its own censor exemption marking. Consistent with bank practice, the marking was applied with red ink.
Entry Refused
Return to Sender

Upon arrival at Tinh Tuc Tonkin in May 1940, this envelope was marked for forwarding to Paris. However, in the interim, because the Germans had occupied the northern part of France in June 1940, the cover was handstamped "Not to be admitted. Return to Sender."

"INADMIS"
RETOUR
À l'ENVOYEUR

POSTAL MARKINGS
AIX EN PROVENCE B. DU R. 6-5 40
airmail label
OUVERT PAR L'AUTORITÉ MILITAIRES football and censor's resealing tape
"INADMIS" RETOUR À l'ENVOYEUR handstamp

REVERSE
HANOI R.P. TONKIN 15-5 40
TINH TUC TONKIN 17-5 40
Interrupted Service on Mail from China to England

Normally, mail from China to Europe would be carried westward on Air France from Indochina. When Air France ceased operations in June 1940, alternate routes had to be found. In this case, after several months delay, a registered letter posted at Shanghai, was sent via transpacific service through the United States to England. A handstamp offered an explanation to the recipient.

Diverted by air via U.S.A. owing to suspension of Air France Service.

POSTAL MARKINGS

SHANGHAI 19.6.40
registration label and “REGISTERED “ (purple) handstamp
“Diverted by air via U.S.A. owing to suspension of Air France Service.” (purple)
censor’s resealing tape

REVERSE

SHANGHAI 19.6.40
HONOLULU, HAWAII REGISTERED SEP 6 1940
NEW YORK, U.S.A. FOREIGN 9-9 1940
The *Felix Roussel* was the last French ship to depart Indochina at the beginning of World War II in France. Arriving at the Suez Canal, she was seized and interned by the British.

This letter was posted 26 July 1940 aboard the *Duguay-Trouin*, a French cruiser. After the French defeat, this ship, along with others in Alexandria, were likewise seized by the British to prevent them from joining the German Fleet. At some point, British censors in Egypt examined the letter and judged it free to pass.

But, as the Nazis extended their control over France, mail remained stuck in Egypt. Ultimately, the British decided to send the mail from the *Felix Roussel* back to Indochina. A large handstamp explained that the service had been interrupted ostensibly on 17 May 1940. To cope with letters from various places addressed to France that had been stuck in Egypt, the British also sent this mail to Indochina.

**POSTAL MARKINGS**
CROISEUR-DUGUAY-TROUIN 26-7 40  
censor’s resealing tape  
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 22 JANV 41  
REVERSE  
HANOI R.P. TONKIN 18-1 41
British authorities employed two types of handstamps, framed and unframed, to notify senders that the mail connection between Indochina and France had been severed. In this case, a returned letter originally mailed from Laos in April 1940 reached Hanoi in January 1941 before getting to Laos in February 1941.

**POSTAL MARKINGS**

PAKLAY LAOS 29-4 40

censor’s resealing tape and return to sender handstamp

**REVERSE**

HANOI R.P. TONKIN 18-1 41

SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 25 JANV 41

VIENTIANE LAOS 28-2 41

Retour à l’envoyeur
Voyage Indochine-France
du 17 Mai 1940 Interrompu
Return to Sender  
Correspondence Prohibited to the Occupied Zone

After the German military authorities sealed the borders of Occupied France in July 1940, incoming letters were refused. Limoges was one of the cities where mail was collected for return. Mailed in August 1940, this cover was finally returned to its sender from Indochina in November 1941, fifteen months later.

**POSTAL MARKINGS**

HANOI R.P. TONKIN 16-8 40  
LIMOGES R.P. VIENNE 18-5 41  
Military Authority football and censor resealing tape  
Return to Sender handstamps  
REVERSE  
HANOI R.P. TONKIN 5-11 41
Return to Sender
Correspondence Prohibited to the Occupied Zone

After the German military authorities sealed the borders of Occupied France in July 1940, incoming letters were refused. Limoges was one of the cities where mail was collected for return. Mailed in October 1940, this cover was finally returned to its sender from Indochina in November 1941.

POSTAL MARKINGS
UONGBI TONKIN 24-10 40
Suspended Service handstamps
LIMOGES RP HAUTE-VIENNE 10-5 41
REVERSE
HAI-PHONG TONKIN 24-10 40
HANOI R.P. TONKIN 5-11 41
UONGBI TONKIN 7-11 41
Return to Sender
Postal Relations Interrupted

Sent by airmail to France, this letter was returned because it was addressed to occupied France. The “Return to Sender. Postal Relations Interrupted” handstamp was applied with purple ink at Marseilles.

The postmark on the reverse indicates that the letter took over a year to make the round trip from Indochina to France and back.

RETOUR A L'ENVOYEUR
RELATIONS POSTALES
INTERROMPUES

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 24-10 40
Return to Sender. Postal Relations Interrupted handstamp
REVERSE
BUDOP COCHINCHINE 18-11 41
Refused Mail

First censored in Indochina, this letter was sent from Haiphong in November 1940 via combined transpacific/transatlantic airmail service. Arriving in Europe, it was diverted to Berlin where it was inspected for a second time and resealed with a label (reverse). It was marked for return to sender first in red, which was later struck out. Black handstamps in French were also applied. Inspected for a third time by the Allies, the envelope was resealed with transparent tape.

**POSTAL MARKINGS**

HAI-PHONG TONKIN 16-11 40
censor resealing label (Indochina) and tape
“refused” and “return to sender” handstamps

REVERSE

HANOI R.P. bis TONKIN 18-11 40
censor’s handstamp and censor’s resealing label (Germany)
A letter mailed from Indochina to Paris in January 1941 was refused and handstamped with an unframed marking which said “Return to sender. Postal relations interrupted.” The mailing had made it as far as France, but could not be processed for entry into occupied France and hence was returned.
Mail Service Suspended by Military Authority

Addressed to Papeete Tahiti, this cover was directed to go via Sydney by Dutch KNILM service. The handstamped marking indicates that the military had closed the route. Lacking any other markings, it is likely that the envelope remained in Saigon until after the war.

Acheminement Suspendu
PAR L'AUTORITÉ MILITARE

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 17-2 41
Suspended Service handstamp (purple)
Impounded Letter
on Mail from Indochina to France

Sent by dual ocean service from Saigon to Lyon, this letter was censored in Bermuda and impounded. The manuscript “R.CL” with number on the resealing label is believed to stand for "registry of censored letters" and served as a means for retrieving seized letters. Held till the closing of the station in Bermuda on 1 May 1944, the impounded mail was moved to Britain. After the war, when the courts allowed mail to be sent onward, letters were stamped with “RELEASED” with three wavy lines above.

RELEASED

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 15-4 41
registration label

censor's resealing label (Bermuda) and “RELEASED” handstamp

REVERSE
“Seen by Customs” handstamp with signature
Impounded Letter
on Mail from Indochina to France

Sent from Hanoi to an official of the national government in Vichy in June 1941, this mailing was censored and then impounded by the Allied forces. After the war, when the courts had released them, embargoed letters received a handstamp on the censor’s band. This letter was delivered nearly five years after it was originally posted.

POSTAL MARKINGS
HANOI TONKIN 4-8 41
registration label
censor’s resealing label (Bermuda or Britain)
REVERSE
SAIGON-CENTRAL COchinCHINE 10-8 41
PARIS VII SERVICES PUBLICS 28-1 46
Mail Service Suspended by Military Authority

First marked "via Lydda", this airmail cover to Hanoi was redirected to go by air as far as Dakar ("Voie aérienne jusqu'a Dakar"). The last ship for Saigon left Dakar on 1 August 1941. After that, military authorities suspended mail services. The letter remained in Africa until after the end of the war.

Acheminement Suspendu
PAR L'AUTORITÉ MILITARE

POSTAL MARKINGS
VALENCE DROME 20-8 41
OUVERT PAR L'AUTORITÉ MILITAIRES NF208 football (France)
Suspended Service handstamp (red)
censor's resealing tapes (France)

REVERSE
OUVERT PAR L'AUTORITÉ MILITAIRES NF208 football (France)
Suspended Service handstamp
TAMATAVIE MADAGASCAR 3 NOV 41
TANANARIVE MADAGASCAR 30-8 45
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 10-11 45
Return to Sender
Service Suspended

The last ship going to Marseille around the Cape of Good Hope left Saigon on 6 September 1941. After waiting unsuccessfully for another ship, this cover was marked "Return to Sender Service Suspended" at Saigon. The letter arrived back in Hanoi nearly 4 months after being mailed.

Retour à l'envoyeur
Service suspendu

POSTAL MARKINGS
HANOI R.P. TONKIN 2-10-41
"Retour à l'envoyeur Service suspendu" handstamp
REVERSE
HANOI R.P. TONKIN 3-10-41
HANOI R.P. BIS TONKIN 3-10-41
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 5-10 41
HANOI R.P. TONKIN 27-1-42
Pearl Harbor Interruption

A sender posted his letter on 6 October 1941 from Saigon to Des Moines, Iowa. Rather than paying extra for airmail service across the Pacific Ocean, he elected to send it via surface mail. The mailing was censored first in Singapore ("PASSED BY CENSOR 201 A") and again upon entering the United States (circular "PASSED BY CENSOR").

The 7 December attack on Pearl Harbor, which opened the Pacific Theater of the war, severely restricted the free movement of mails. Usually, one can not determine the transit time for mailings that were not registered. However, in this case, a backstamp shows that this letter arrived on 31 January 1942. By saving the airmail surcharge, the sender’s letter spent almost four months in transit after the original posting. It was probably fortunate to have arrived at all!
Return to Sender on Mail from the United States to Indochina

This cover was posted from New York City by sea mail on 25 November 1941, two weeks before the attack on Pearl Harbor. The letter was marked to be returned, no doubt as a result of America’s entry into World War II. “I.C.B.” stood for “Information Control Branch,” an American agency.

On the reverse, the censor’s resealing label is imprinted “EXAMINED BY 1705.” San Francisco was allocated numbers 1461-1740. The main activity of this censor station was mail to and from the Pacific area. Hence, it seems certain that the I.C.B. handstamp was applied in San Francisco and the cover never left the mainland of the United States.

POSTAL MARKINGS
NEW YORK, N.Y. NOV 25 1941
censor’s resealing label
“RETURN TO SENDER BY DIRECTION I.C.B.” handstamp
Pearl Harbor Day Letter

This cover was posted on 6 December 1941 from Tinhbien to a post office box, but the sender had neglected to indicate the city. A postal clerk had written “Voir Saigon” in pencil.

Ultimately, the cover appears to have reached the sender on 8 December according to the handwritten notation at the top, left. Students of history will recall that the attack on Pearl Harbor had occurred on a Sunday, the 7th of December. As Indochina was on the other side of the International Dateline, it was already the 8th when the attack took place. The transit time was typical of the period, but all things normal would change dramatically with the opening of war in the Pacific.

POSTAL MARKINGS
TINHBIEN COCHINCHINE  6-12 41
REVERSE
TINHBIEN COCHINCHINE  6-12 41
CHAUDOC COCHINCHINE  8 DEC 41
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE  8 DEC 41
Return to Sender
Service Suspended

The attack on Pearl Harbor led to the rapid constriction of postal services in Asia. Posted from Saigon, two days before Christmas, this mailing was addressed (in Chinese) to Hong Kong. The British surrendered Hong Kong to the Japanese on Christmas Day 1941. The envelope was marked for return to sender.

Retour à l'envoyeur
Service suspendu

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 23-12 41
“Retour à l'envoyeur Service suspendu” handstamp
blue crayon cross-outs
Interrupted Service
Indochina to China

A wartime mailing within Japanese controlled territory from Nam-Dinh, Tonkin to Shanghai, China was posted as airmail. Since airmail via civilian aviation was extremely limited in 1943, the letter was transmitted by land. A handstamp in Chinese and English provided an explanation as “Diverted to be sent by surface route.”

POSTAL MARKINGS
NAM-DINH TONKIN 1-2 43
explanatory handstamp (purple)
manuscript notations written in Chinese

REVERSE
HANOI R.P. BIS TONKIN 2-2 43
Restrictions on Mail to Indochina

A letter posted from France in August 1942 was returned to sender with a handstamp that advised mail to Indochina was limited to unregistered postcards.

POSTAL MARKINGS
ETHIZY RHONE 24-642
return to sender handstamp
Following the Franco-German armistice, the German Army established military control over an occupied zone of northern and western France. Starting on 1 August 1940, mail out of the occupied portion was prohibited except for postal cards that contained only “family news” on one side of the card. Messages could not contain comments on conditions in the occupied area.

Not surprisingly, communications were slowed considerably by wartime conditions. This postal card, sent on 13 November 1940 to a civilian connected with the Far East Naval Forces, did not arrive at Saigon until 10 February 1941.
Going westward in August 1941, this postal card was sent from Quang-Yen, Annam to Sarthe in occupied France. To be accepted, both the sender and addressee had to be clearly identified. The reverse of the postal card allowed only seven lines for the message.
This postal card was sent from Hanoi to Paris in occupied France. Curiously, the card was postmarked at Saigon in October 1941. To be accepted, both the sender and addressee had to be clearly identified. The reverse of the postal card allowed only seven lines for the message.

Despite meeting these requirements, a handstamp indicates that postal service had been suspended and that the item was to be returned to sender.

Retour à l'envoyeur
Service suspendu

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 2-10 41
Service Suspended handstamp
To provide speedier service via airmail, the post office introduced a supplementary surcharge, which was indicated with a handstamp. Details were filled in by the postal clerk who accepted the postal card.
Later versions of Family News Postal cards were blank on the reverse allowing much longer messages to be composed. Posted on 12 May 1944 to Hue, Annam, this card failed to reach the destination. The address was crossed out with blue crayon and it was handstamped with a small “Retour à l’envoyeur Inadmis” in purple ink at the upper left and a larger “Relations Suspendues” below the indicium.

Retour à l’envoyeur
Inadmis

Relations Suspendues

POSTAL MARKINGS
CHATEAU-THIERRY 12-5 44
A shortage of envelopes used for transporting cards to the airport led the French post office to handstamping interzone cards with the airmail surcharge in November 1942. But with the Allied invasion of North Africa, all airmail service ceased and cards posted after 8 November, such as this example addressed to Dalat, were marked for return to sender.

**POSTAL MARKINGS**
BORDEAUX R.P. GIRONDE  29-12 42
TAXE PERCUED BORDEAUX R.P. 1fr20
framed “Relations Suspendu” and framed “Return to Sender”
Family News Postal Card
Interrupted Service

Sent from an orphanage near Mornant in occupied France to the Plei-Ku Mission in Annam, this card was marked with a “Relations suspended” handstamp in purple. A postal clerk struck out the address with blue crayon and marked the card to be returned to the sender.

POSTAL MARKINGS
“Relations suspended”
framed “Return to Sender”
Indochinese Receipt Censor on Internal Mail

Presumably censors could examine all mail including official letters. Here a registered, insured (CHARGE) letter from the Resident Superior of Laos to the Director of the Bank of Indochina received a censor’s handstamp upon arrival in Saigon.

POSTAL MARKINGS
VIENTIANE LAOS 1-9 39
registration label
CONTROLE POSTAL COMMISSION C INDOCHINE
REVERSE
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 8-9 39
Indochinese Receipt Censor
on Internal Mail

Registration did not prevent examination by censors. This registered letter was posted from Dalat, Annam in 1942. While there is no evidence of censoring at the origin or en route, the letter was examined by censor D3 upon arrival in Pnompenh, Cambodia.

POSTAL MARKINGS
DALAT ANNAM 10-11 42
registration label
censor's resealing tape (Cambodia)
D3 in circle - censor's signature (Cambodia)
Military Authority football

REVERSE
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 13-11 42
PNOSEPENGH CAMBODGE 14-11 42
Military Authority football
D3 in circle - censor's signature (Cambodia)
Japanese Coup d’Etat

On 9 March 1945, Japanese troops seized control of Indochina. Almost 12,000 French were captured and 3,000 were killed in the days immediately following.

This registered cover was posted from Mytho to Saigon on 9 March 1945, the day of the Japanese coup d’etat. The addressee was the Chief Engineer of the Mines and Industry Service, Jacques Desrousseaux. Desrousseaux and his family were interred following the Japanese seizure.

Normally, a letter from Mytho to Saigon would take a day or so. However, under these extraordinary circumstances, even a registered letter could not be delivered. The address was crossed out. A handstamp that appears to read “Retour à l’envoyeur / Service suspendu” (Return to sender/ Service suspended) was applied but then struck through. Above the lined-out handstamp, the word “Facteur” (Mailman) was handwritten. The purpose is unclear. Two postmarks on the reverse are from Saigon-Principal and are dated 12 and 25 April, some six weeks after the initial posting.
Japanese Censor on Internal Mail

This registered cover was posted from Vientiane on 24 February 1945. Shortly thereafter, on 9 March 1945, Japanese forces stationed in Indochina overthrew the government. In the aftermath, Japanese authorities rounded up all French citizens and imprisoned many who were officials.

This letter sent by a military doctor at the Vientiane Hospital to an addressee at Phantiet, got caught in the turmoil. At the time, the Japanese censored all registered mail. In this case, a large block marking with Japanese characters meaning “censorship” was applied with red ink to the front of the cover. Additionally, the censor applied a “CONTROLÉ” handstamp in black ink. Previously, used primarily on telegrams, the Japanese censors adopted this French marking and always applied it to the registration label.

POSTAL MARKINGS

VIENTIANE LAOS 24-2 45
registration label
CONTROLÉ and censor handstamp (Japanese)

REVERSE

VIENTIANE LAOS 24-2 45
HUE ANNAM 8-3 45
PHANTIET ANNAM 19 4 45
SAIGON PRINCIPAL COCHINCHINE 8-5 45
Japanese Censor on Internal Mail

The manuscript notation “Phở báo đảm” means “registered letter” on a local mailing in March 1945. Japanese censors examined all registered letters and marked those that passed muster with a straight-line “CONTROLÉ” on the registration label.