



# THE CHALLENGES OF EXHIBITING VIETCONG\* MATERIAL

Presented by  
Earl Toops

- “In actuality, the NLF did not have any sort of postal system that required postage stamps....”
  - Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong*, 1966 [page 296]

\* From *Viet Nam Cong San* [Vietnamese Communists]



# UNDER-REPORTED AND SCANTY RESEARCH DOES NOT TRANSLATE TO UNIMPORTANT

- Stamps symbols of state sovereignty; imply political legitimacy; proof of governance and territorial control.
- NLF/PRG issues as stamps of a successful revolution; restored postal service in the defeated South.
- PRG issues postally valid emissions for a notionally "independent" nation-state in "association" with North Vietnam.
- NLF/PRG being forgotten in Vietnam's national narrative.
- New historical research using Vietnamese sources.
  - • Philately a part of this.



# BUT FIRST, SOME REALLY INTERESTING HISTORY



## The LIFE Magazine Cover (26 FEBRUARY 1965)

- Wrong stamp ID and wrong narrative.
- Conflated NLF stamps 4 and 5.
- No mention of the stamp in the magazine article.

## The CIA Controversy

- "Mystery shrouds Viet Cong Forgery" [Linn's, 19 April 1982]
- "Was CIA Viet Cong forgery a hoax?" [Linns's, 7 February 1983]
- "CIA refuses to release documents to settle Viet Cong stamp mystery" [Linn's, 4 April 1983]
- "CIA abandons previous silence, denies forging Viet Cong stamp" [Linn's, 25 April 1983]





# “YOU CAN’T TELL THE PLAYERS WITHOUT A SCORE CARD”

- “Viet Cong” = NLF + PRG + PLAF
  - NLF = *Mat Tran Dan Toc Gia’i Phong Mien Nam Viet Nam* [MTDTGP] (1963-1969)
  - PRG = *Cong Hoa Mien Nam Viet Nam* (1970-1976)
- NLF/PRG Philatelic Scholarship
  - Early Efforts (1970’s-2000)–mostly descriptive.
  - New Research (2000 to date)–groundbreaking analysis.
    - 2002: “An Introduction to the Viet Cong & Mien Nam Stamps of Vietnam” by Joseph Cartafalsa and John P. Carroll, Jr.
    - 2012: *Some Features of Postal History in the Period of Revolutionary South Viet Nam* by Ta Phi Long





# CATALOGUES AND EXHIBITS

- Catalogue Treatment:
  - Gibbons (UK) and Michel (GER)–list all issues.
  - Yvert & Tellier (FR)–PRG issues 1975-76.
  - Ernest Racz (USA)–first US catalogue [1995] to list NLF/PRG issues.
  - Scott (USA)-- included all NLF/PRG issues in Vol. 6 of 2022 catalogue.
- Existing Exhibits:
  - *Vietnam's Communist Insurgent Military Mail 1959-1975* by Daniel M. Telep (2014)
  - *Postage Stamps of the National Front for Liberation of South Vietnam and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam* by Tran Trong Khai (2007)
  - *Provisional Issues of South Vietnam and Their Use: 1963-1980* by Emory Earl Toops (2019)
  - *The Development and Use of The Provisional Issues of South Vietnam* Emory Earl Toops (2022)



# “HOW DO WE KNOW IF THESE WERE EVER POSTALLY USED?”\*

- Initial NLF issues no unit of currency/lacked words *Buu Chanh* (“Postage”) [not “real” stamps].
- Belief UPU supposedly declared NLF issues “illegitimate” [no viable, functioning postal system].
- Pre-30 April 1975 covers:
  - Philatelically inspired [use of NLF issues on military mail from North Vietnam].
  - Back-dated favor cancels [lack of routing/arrival cancels].
- Post-30 April 1975 covers:
  - Complete sets on cover meeting no known postal rate.
  - No indication of weight/required postage.
  - Outside period of “normal” use [peak usage 1975-77].
  - “Suspicious” characteristics [no return address; unsealed envelope; too “clean”].

\* APS Judge’s Critique, INDYPEX 1987



# A THIRTY-YEAR TIME LAG

- Best time to buy: Late 1970's-1990's
  - Soon after period of use.
  - Cultural/economic reasons.
- Best time to exhibit: 2002 onward.
  - New research and information.
  - Complements new historical research [postal history an under-utilized source for historians].
- As role of NLF/PRG disappears from Vietnam national narrative, learning more about its philately.
- Further research needed:
  - Amount of stamps printed.
  - Volume of mail delivered between 1975-1977.

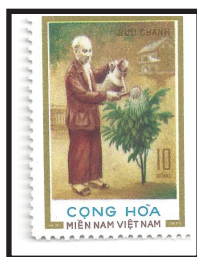


# RE-STARTING A POSTAL SERVICE

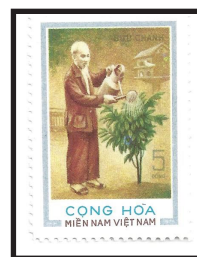
- Mail primary means of long-distance communication.
- Initial consideration: Overprint SVN issues; discarded.



- Solution: Use PRG issues [starting with Ho Chi Minh watering a Kainito Plant [7 & 8 May 1975 issue].

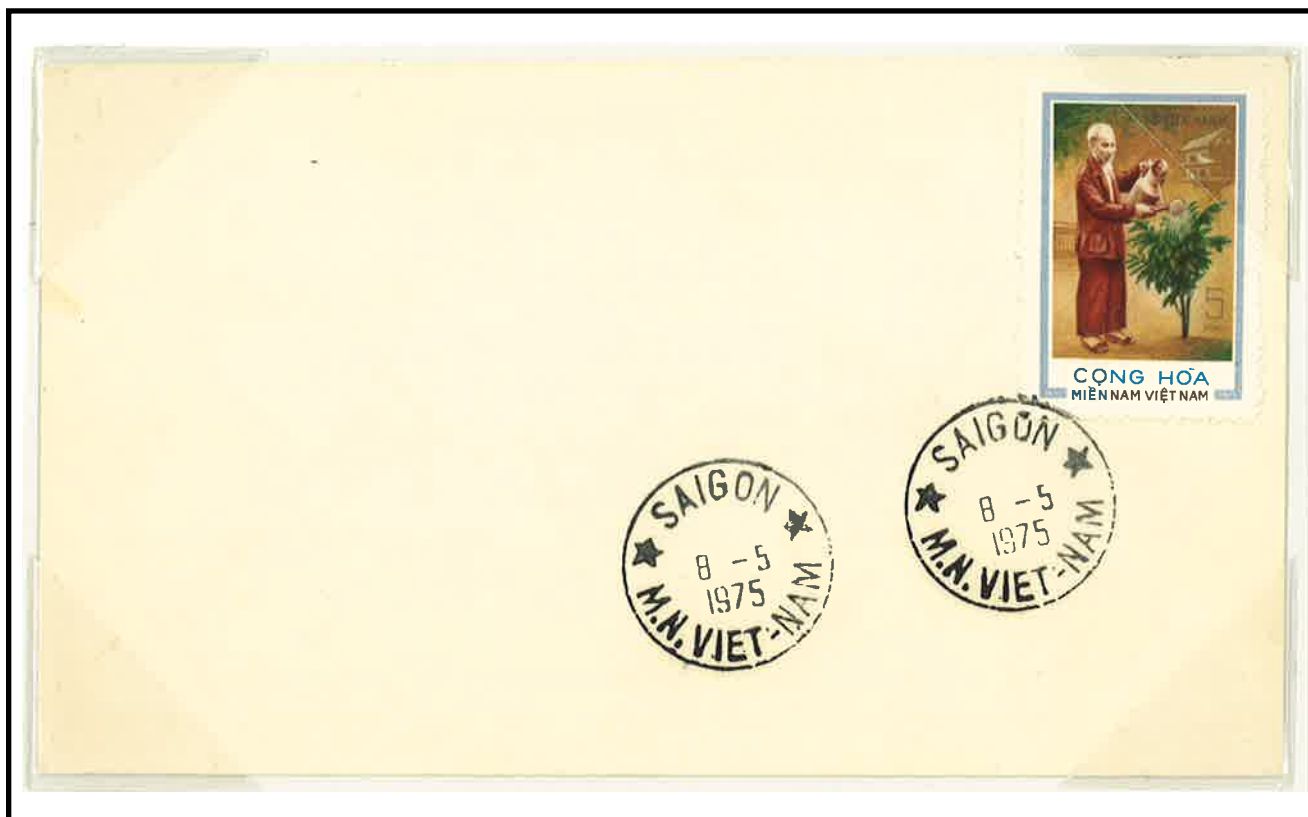


7 May 1975



8 May 1975

- Significant events:
- 7 May 1975: Saigon Post Office reopened.
- August 1975: Mail to/from foreign countries re-established.
- 19 August 1975: Saigon re-named Ho Chi Minh City.
- After 22 September 1975: 500 SVN dong = 1 "new" dong
- 15 April 1976: First PRG stamp in new currency (xu) [5 PRG dong = 1 xu]



First Day Cover, PRG Issue 17, dated 8 May 1975, with Type 2 M.N. Viet Nam cancel. **One day after re-opening of Saigon post office.**



Saigon - Le Loi to Hanoi, 20 June 1975, with PRG Issue 17. **Postage:** 30 dong for 20 gram letter. **Large (16mm x 33mm) Saigon Liberation hand-stamp.** Type 2 M.N. Viet Nam cancel.



# THE SURCHARGE PERIOD (MAY - AUGUST 1975)



- Done in Central Vietnam (Danang and environs).
- “Area/time period” key to validating postal use.
- Surcharges done locally (variety in surcharge styles).
- Surcharges extensively faked.









Gia Dinh to Saigon, 26 October 1975, with PRG Issue 14.

**Postage:** Under-franked 10 dong for 30 dong rate for 20 gram letter. **Boxed "T" for postage due.** Type 1 M.N. Viet Nam cancel.

**Notation at top reads:** "Please send this letter in a hurry to the addressee. If he is not home, give it to his sister."



Xuan Loc to Ho Chi Minh City, 22 August 1977, with PRG Issues 18 and 19. **Postage:** Short paid 10 dong/2 xu for 20 gram letter. Return address is a re-education camp.



Da Nang to Ho Chi Minh City, 23 March 1976, with PRG Issue 18. Back-Stamped Ho Chi Minh City, 27 March 1976. **Postage:** 30 dong for 20 gram letter. Type 1 M.N. Viet Nam cancel. **Special commemorative hand-stamp (used less than one month) reads:** "Anniversary of the Liberation of South Viet Nam- Da Nang 29/3/1975 - 29/3/1976." Da Nang only city with an anniversary Liberation hand-stamp.





Airmail cover from Ho Chi Minh City to Hong Kong, 15 December 1978. Franked with 20 dong surcharge on PRG Issue 10 and 90 dong [3 x 30 dong] PRG Issue 17 [all with missing perforations]; total 110 PRG dong. Additionally franked with 1 dong, 18 xu SRV stamps. **Total Postage:** 700 "old" dong [1.40 "new dong"]. **Airmail:** 30 "old" dong [6 xu]. **Postage:** 670 "old" dong [1.34 "new" dong]. Postage to Hong Kong within acceptable "tolerance" (410-800 dong) but cannot prove cover actually went through the mails.







Registered airmail cover from Ho Chi Minh City to Hong Kong, 5 November 1977. Postal clerk annotated "80 gr[ams], 4.76 [dong]." Mixed franking using PRG Issue 9 [2 dong] together with stamps from DRV (1 dong, 12 xu) and SRV (1 dong, 74 xu) **Total Postage:** 4 dong, 86 xu (a 10 xu overpayment). **Registration:** 14 xu. **Airmail:** 6 xu. **Postage:** 4.56 dong. **Total Postage in "old" currency:** 2430 dong. **Registration:** 70 dong. **Airmail:** 30 dong. **Postage:** 2330 dong.





Fraudulent Cover, 22 February 1981, with NLF Issues 7 and PRG Issue 14. NLF issues were not valid for postage and the 30 dong is woefully insufficient for airmail to Hong Kong. No postal clerk markings for weight and postage on foreign addressed mail. Cover outside period of normal use of PRG issues; also, no return address. No evidence cover ever went through the mail system.



# CONCLUSION

“...the Viet Cong [NLF/PRG/PLAF] were the war’s ultimate losers. They lost to the Americans, they lost to the South Vietnamese and most conclusively of all, they lost to the North Vietnamese.”

*USA Colonel Harry Summers, Jr  
(2007)*



1st NLF Issue



Last PRG Issue



“Fraternal” Brothers and Sisters in Arms



# QUIZ

Draw a line to match the correct Vietnamese name with its English translation.

1. Viet Nam Dan Chu Cong Hoa

Republic of Vietnam

2. Cong Hoa Mien Nam Viet Nam

National Front for the  
Liberation of South Vietnam

3. Viet Nam Cong Hoa

Democratic Republic  
of Vietnam

4. Mat Tran Dan Toc Gia'i Phong  
Mien Nam Viet Nam

Republic of  
South Vietnam