Use of the French Franchise Militaire Stamps (F.M.) From the Colonies During the Era of the Group Type

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Reference


= Rare item
The Franchise Militaire (F.M.) Stamps

• What are these stamps?
• Why were they created?
• When were they created?
• How were they used from the Colonies during the Group Type Era?
• Was the use abused?
French Military Mail Prior to 1901

• Occupation forces and soldiers on station received a special military concession rate of 15 centimes in lieu the regular 25c rate within the French Community
  – Rate required validation by local commander consisting of unit cachet, manuscript endorsement and commander’s signature

• Forces engaged in combat received full franchise – their mail was sent for free
  – Franchise also required validation by local commander consisting of unit cachet, manuscript endorsement and commander’s signature

• Both types of mail required significant time to process at the point of origin before being carried to nearest post office
Typical Military Concession Rate

• Sent from Papeete, French Oceania in 1894
• Concession rate of 15c in lieu of 25c French Community rate
• Octagonal CORR D’ARMEES PAPEETE military datestamp
• Unit cachet on front
• Manuscript validation and signature on reverse
• Paris arrivals on front and back
Vía San-Francisco - New York

Monsieur l'Abbé Le Maistre au Kowjia

des Frères de St. Vincent de Larvère Dantzig

France

Paris

Capitaine

Commandant
Typical Military Franchise Letter

- Posted Sainte Marie, Saint Marie de Madagascar in 1898
- Military cachet (Marine Unit), manuscript endorsement and commander’s signature at left
- Transit and arrival on reverse
- Possibly the only recorded military franchise letter from Sainte Marie
Monsieur le Dr. H. Bernard
à Versailles (IIe Marne)
P.P. Dijon
Poste Restante
Côte d'Or
Creation of the Military Franchise Stamps

• On January 1, 1899 the military concession rate of 15c in lieu of 25c ceased to exist because the French Community rate was lowered to 15c
• All military mail became military franchise mail
• Complex validation process continued
• How might the process be simplified?
Creation of the Military Franchise Stamps

• In 1901 France authorized creation of the military franchise stamps and a system to go with it
• The existing 15c Type Mouchon (Designer) French Community rate stamps were overprinted F.M. for use in the world-wide French military system
Rules Under Which the Stamps Were Used

- Each member of the military was allowed two free F.M. stamps to send two free letters each month not exceeding 15g (First weight level)
- For letters exceeding 15g additional postage, or registration if requested, was to be prepaid with regular postage
- Two franchise militaire stamps could not be used on a single letter
- If two stamps were not used in a given month, the right to use them was voided and did not carry over to the next month
- Use of the F.M. stamps replaced the standard validation procedures
- The stamps were considered to have no value and could not be used on foreign mail
- The distribution and use of the stamps was to be handled by the local Quartermaster
- Details for ordering the new stamps were developed
Reality of the Use of the F.M Stamps

• The success of the use of these stamps depended on the ability of the French to get them to soldiers around the world on a timely basis.
  – For troops on station and not engaged in combat this was not a problem
  – For troops engaged in combat and changing locations rapidly, the timely delivery of stamps was not at the top of the priority list
Reality of the Use of the F.M. Stamps

• Since it was not possible to readily provide stamps to troops engaged in combat, the F.M. stamps were used as follows:
  – Troops not engaged in combat but doing occupation or police duties received and used the stamps
  – Troops engaged in combat continued use of the old military franchise free mail system with its standard validation procedures

• This had not been clearly realized prior to this study
Use of the Old System in Combat Areas

• Military franchise letter from November 1902
• French Indochinese forces attempting to conquer territory during the campaign in Siam
• Endorsement and military cachet used for validation
• Cachet: POSTE DE PAK NAM SIAM
• Mailed to Noumea, New Caledonia – Only example recorded
• This campaign failed
Travées d’Occupation de Chantaboune

Corps N° 9

Mouille, Ballandee

Nouvelle Caledonie
Stamps Overprinted F.M. During the Group Type Era

• Although the F.M. concept was authorized in early 1901, delivery of the first stamps did not occur until mid 1901:
  – 15c Mouchon – June 1901
  – Retouched 15c Mouchon – April 1903
  – 15c Semuse (light green) – July 1904
  – 10c Semuse (rose) – July 1906
  • Rate change to 10c
  – 10c Semuse (vermillon) – August 1907
Use of the Stamps

• The French American Colonies
• The West African Colonies
• The Indian Ocean Colonies
• Indochina
• The French Pacific Colonies

• It is important to note that these stamps had no monetary value and were essentially labels to indicate a type of mail service. Thus, they were used until supplies were consumed, even when newer values were available or when the value shown on the stamp was no longer the valid French Community postal rate
American Colonies - French Guiana: Earliest Recorded Use August 2, 1901
Guadeloupe: Small Village of Baie Mahault
Gendarmerie Guadeloupe Handstamp
Guadeloupe: GENDARMERIE DE LA GUADELOUPE Handstamp January 11, 1908 With 10c Sower
Guadeloupe: Improper Use of Two Stamps, Not Caught by Originating Office at Saint Claude, Thus Incorrectly Allowed
Martinique: Fort-de-France, November 19, 1903
With Octagonal Military Handstamp (Not Required)
Martinique: Trois Riviers

- Posted from the small village of Trois Rivieres
- February 8, 1905
- **Use of the second Franchise Militaire stamp**
- Incomplete address – delivery not completed until August 24, 1905 in Paris
Monsieur Berret
Maitre Sellier
Caserne des Celstins
16 Boulevard Henri IV
Saint Pierre & Miquelon

• Originated in little village of Miquelon
• From the Gendarmerie
• Registration required prepayment with regular 25c stamp
• Major rarity on all accounts
• Only recorded example
Gendarmerie
Saint-Pierre et Miquelon

N° 38

Monsieur

Ménay, inspecteur des Colonies, au Ministère des Colonies

Paris

France
West African Colonies

- Senegal – Limited use as not lots of troops stationed there
- French Sudan – extensive use as extensive military campaigns and occupation underway during the 1902 – 1915 period
- French Guinea and Dahomey – have not seen use from these colonies
- French Congo and Ivory Coast - Limited use
French Sudan: Sikasso (Small Village) August 6, 1904 to Lyon

- This is a properly franked registered double weight letter (15 – 30 g)
- Franking:
  - F.M. stamp for the first 15g
  - 15c Group Type for the next 15g
  - 25c Group Type for registration
Madame et Monsieur Frantz Caniciat
8, Rue Sergians 8.
Lyon

[Handwritten address and stamps]
French Sudan: Koury (Small Village) January 27, 1906 Local Use to Bamako, the Capitol

Note: At this time the 15c Semuse F.M. stamps were available, but use of the existing stock of older stamps continued until they were consumed.
Ivory Coast – Bouake 1914
French Congo: Impfondo February 13, 1913
Village Deep Within Congo – 10c Sower Stamp
The French Indian Ocean Colonies

- Madagascar
- Reunion
- French India
- There was no significant military activity or presence in Obock/Djibouti/Somali Coast during this period
Madagascar: Diego Suarez - January 21, 1908 to Bel Abbés, Algeria a Small Village

Note use of the second F.M. stamp (revised Mouchon design) nominally valued at 15c when the French Community rate was only 10c. Still valid usage.
Use With Provisional -56- Numeral Cancel From the Newly Opened Office at Sitampitky
Posted on the Reunion – Marseille French Packet While at the Port of Diego Suarez
Posted at Diego Suarez With Request for Registration (25c) in 1908
Reunion: Posting from Saint Denis
Principal Commercial Center
French India
French India: Posting From the Small Village of Karikal in 1906 – Boxed INDE Cancel
Indochina

• Most Complex Colony
  – Cochinchina – Military Occupation
  – Annam – Military Occupation
  – Tonkin – Active Combat
  – Cambodia – Active Combat
  – Laos – Active Combat
  – French Offices in China – Occupation and Combat depending on which office
Incorrectly Applied to Post Card to Switzerland
Not Valid and Corrected With 10c Group Type

Posted at Soctrang, Cochinchine
Banghoi, Annam 1905
Tonkin, Indochina

Village of Hon-Gay 1905

Village of Viettri 1906
Village of Cao-Bang 1905
Second Weight Level with 15c in Postage Stamps
Proper Treatment of Attempted Use of Two F.M. Stamps: Second Stamp Not Accepted, Letter Considered 15c Underpaid and Charged 30c Due at Arriving Post Office
Kwangchow-wan, China
French Territory in China Administered by Indochina
Fort Bayard, Kwangchow-wan 1907
CHINE Datestamp
Fort Bayard, Kwangchow-wan 1910
INDOCHINE Datestamp
New Caledonia: Small Village at Houailou – April 1902
Nouméa, New Caledonia - USA: Illegally Used in Combination with 10c Group Type to Prepay 25c Rate – Not Noted in Nouméa or Napa (Alain Millet Collection)
New Hebrides: Use From Port Vila During Period of New Caledonia Postal Administration
Papeete, Tahiti 1903
Two Examples Recorded
Conclusions From this Study

• The F.M. stamps were used only by troops on station and not engaged in combat
• The regular military franchise system continued for those troops engaged in combat
• Although the stamps were to remove the need for standard endorsements and cachets for military mail, such continued to a small degree
• Not all military postmasters were completely familiar with the rules governing the use of the F.M. stamps, and errors (use of two stamps and use to foreign destinations) occurred
• The stamps were used as available and not according to the most current or those corresponding to the current French Community rate – 15c stamps continued to be used when the French Community rate dropped to 10c
• It has taken 30 years to assemble the ~30 covers in this collection