



# THE CHALLENGES OF EXHIBITING VIET CONG\* MATERIAL

Presented by  
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- "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

- 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?" [Linn'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
  - NLF = *Mat Tran Don 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)–will include 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)



# “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].
- UPU 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





# RE-STARTING A POSTAL SERVICE

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



- Solution: Use PRG issues [starting with 6 June 1974 issue].



- 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]



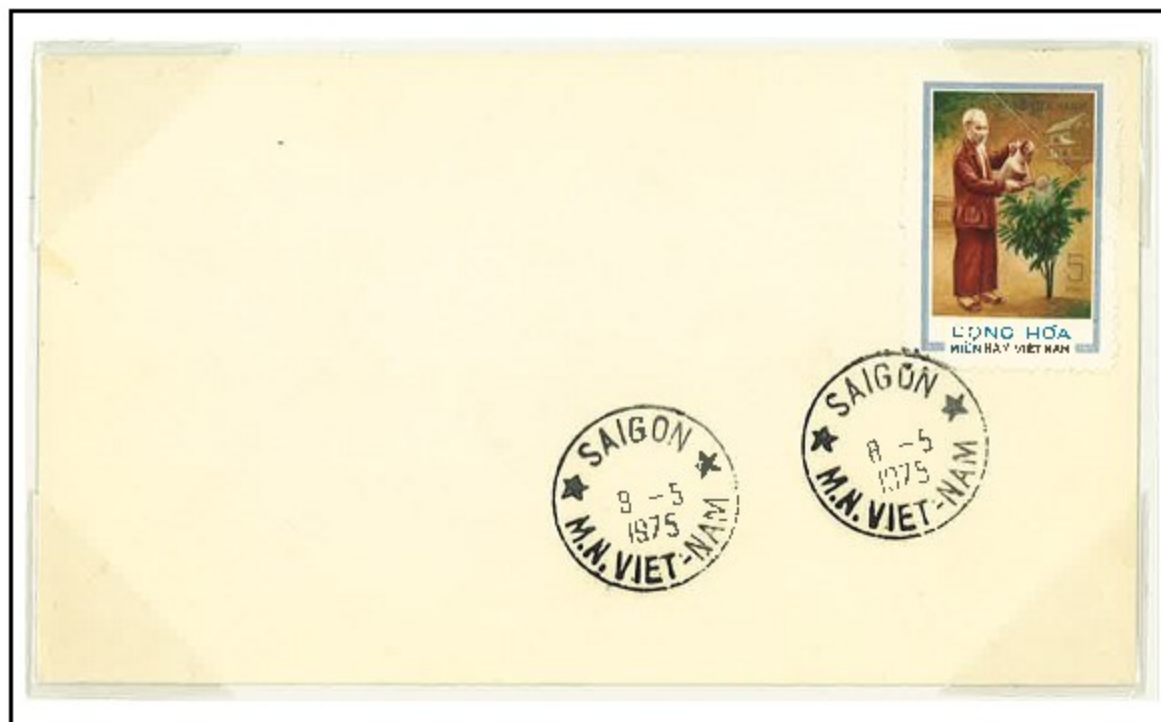
# A THIRTY-YEAR TIME LAG

- 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.
  - Compliments 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:
  - How did PRG stamps get from North to South?
  - Exact date/wording of UPU bulletin declaring NLF/PRG stamps "illegal" and who requested the bulletin be issued?





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.



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.**



Tra-On to Saigon, cancelled with only a Liberation Day hand-stamp on PRG Issue 17. Back-stamped Saigon-Cholon, 8 July 1975. **Postage:** 30 dong for 20 gram letter. **Isolated areas did not receive regular cancellers until much later; Liberation hand-stamps thus served as cancellers. 1-5-1975 was first full day of Liberation. Cancel reads: "Day of Liberation/Tra-On."**

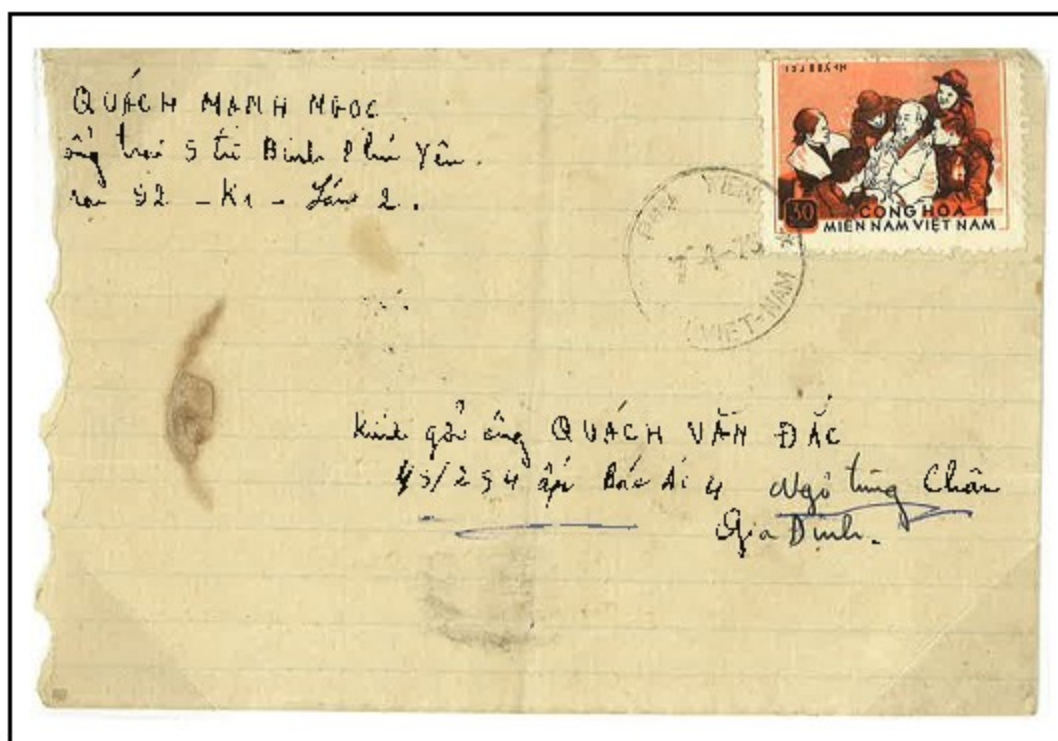




Gia Dinh to Saigon, 26 October 1975, with PRG Issue 14.

**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."



Phu Yen to Gia Dinh, 7 January 1976, with PRG Issue 18.  
Back-stamped Ho Chi Minh City, 9 January 1976. **Postage:**  
30 dong for 20 gram letter. **Return address is POW Prison**  
**5, Ward 52-K1, Hut 2, Phu Yen.** Envelope lined notebook  
paper.





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.





# 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 Don Toc Gia'i Phong  
Mien Nam Viet Nam

Republic of  
South Vietnam