

## Free Inbound Letter

Mail sent to troops of the Tonkin Expeditionary Force also went post-free via the French postal system. Perhaps because of the tropical climate in Indochina or because of the rigors of military life, far fewer inbound covers survive than outbound covers.

Posted from Paris, this letter was accepted for free transmission based on the manuscript "Troupes de l'Indo-Chine" written at the top on the envelope. Addressed to a corporal in the Tenth Marine Regiment, the letter was redirected from Hanoi to Haiphong. Considering the number of transit markings, the letter took a relatively short time to find the addressee.



### POSTAL MARKINGS

PARIS\_25 104 B<sup>D</sup> S<sup>I</sup> GERMAIN 4 MAI 92

### REVERSE

SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 11 JUIN 92

HUE ANNAM 15 JUIN 92

LAM TONKIN 7 JUIL 92

PHU-LANG-THUONG TONKIN 8 JUIL 92

HAIPHONG TONKIN 10 JUIL 92

## Round-Trip Letter

Originating in France, this letter was sent to a soldier at "Yunnan-Sen, Tonkin". Mailed just a week before the franchise expired, the "Corps Expeditionnaire" handstamp was applied in France to verify that the letter was post-free.

However, upon reaching Yunnanfou, the letter was redirected back to Bordeaux in France. Since, free mail privileges had been revoked by this time, it was determined that the letter could not be returned post-free. At first, it was charged 25 centimes postage due – the rate from China to France. Yet, when the letter reached Hanoi, the postage due amount was reduced to 15 centimes – the rate from Indochina to France in 1904.

Corps Expéditionnaire



Validation Endorsement

Postage Due Marking



### POSTAL MARKINGS

BESANCON-BATTANT DOUBS 22-10 04  
T in triangle crossed out with blue crayon

### REVERSE

HANOI-RECTE TONKIN 30 NOV 04  
MONGTZE CHINE 17 DEC 04  
YUNNAN-SEN CHINE 20 DEC 04  
BORDEAUX GIRONDE 18-2 05

## Taxed Inbound Postcard

Sent from France, this post card was endorsed at the top "Troupes de l'Indo Chine." It was addressed to the Pho-Moi blockhouse near Lao-Kay. Despite apparently satisfying the requirements for free transmission, the post card was cited for postage due at Laokay. The blue 5 centime stamp was from the 1894-1906 postage due series and the black 15 centime value was from the 1884-85 postage due series of French Colonies General Issues.



### POSTAL MARKINGS

BEAUMONT-HAGUE MANCHE 10 JUIL 02  
HANOI TONKIN 11 AOUT 02  
LAOKAY TONKIN 18 AOUT 02

## Franked Inbound Letter

The free mail privilege only applied to letters originating from France or her colonies. This cover was posted from Hong Kong to a musician with the Tenth Colonial Regiment in Haiphong. Even though the envelope was addressed in the same style as free letters, the point of origin required postage. Sent on 22 May 1901, the receipt marking on the reverse indicates that the letter was in transit for only one week.



POSTAL MARKINGS  
HONG KONG MY 22 01  
REVERSE  
HAIPHONG TONKIN 28 MAI 01



## Inbound Dead Letter

Initially sent to an addressee serving in a Colonial Company in Paris, this mailing was forwarded to Indochina. Several units affixed slips of paper with a cachet and/or a notation that the addressee was unknown. Ultimately, the Dead Letter Office opened the envelope to determine where to send it. The envelope was resealed with an official label.

SOUS-SECRÉTARIAT D'ÉTAT  
DES POSTES ET DES TÉLÉGRAPHES.  
—  
LETTRE EN REBUT  
OUVERTE CONFORMÉMENT À LA LOI



### POSTAL MARKINGS

COULOMMIERS SEINE ET MNE 12-12 02

### REVERSE

PARIS 30 R. DU BAC 13-12 02

HANOI TONKIN 23 MARS 03

HAIPHONG TONKIN 27 MARS 03

HANOI TONKIN 30 MARS 03

SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 8 AVRIL 03

## Recognition of the Franchise

The free franchise was only recognized within France and the French community of colonies. Addressed outside of the French community, this Expeditionary Force envelope was stamped with a "T" in a triangle at Hanoi indicating that a fee was due. Upon arrival in Argentina, the letter was charged 16 centavos postage due.



Civilian  
Postmark



Military  
Postmark



Postage Due  
Marking



### POSTAL MARKINGS

TONKIN CORPS EXPEDITRE 21 NOV 85

HA-NOI TONKIN 21 NOV 85

T in triangle

A COBRAR 16 CENTAVOS

## Recognition of the Franchise

In this case, a soldier had put 5 centimes postage on the reverse of his picture postcard along with a short message. Even though he had identified himself as a soldier in his return address at the upper left, the card, which bears no official military validation markings, was charged 10 centimes postage due upon arrival at the destination.



Postage Due Marking



Civilian Postmark



### POSTAL MARKINGS

NUI-DEO TONKIN 17 AOUT 04

T in triangle

RIBERAC DORDOGNE 22 SEPT 04

## Recognition of the Franchise

A soldier arranged to have his postcard properly endorsed at the lower left. Since the small village of Ha Lang had no Army post office, the postcard was postmarked nearby at the major town of Cao Bang. However, because the postcard had not received a military postmark, French postal authorities mistakenly charged it upon arrival as postage due in the amount of 20 centimes.



Postage Due Marking



Civilian Postmark



### POSTAL MARKINGS

CAO-BANG TONKIN 11 JANV 02

T in triangle

CANTONVILLE MEURTHE ET MOSELLE 25 FEVR 02

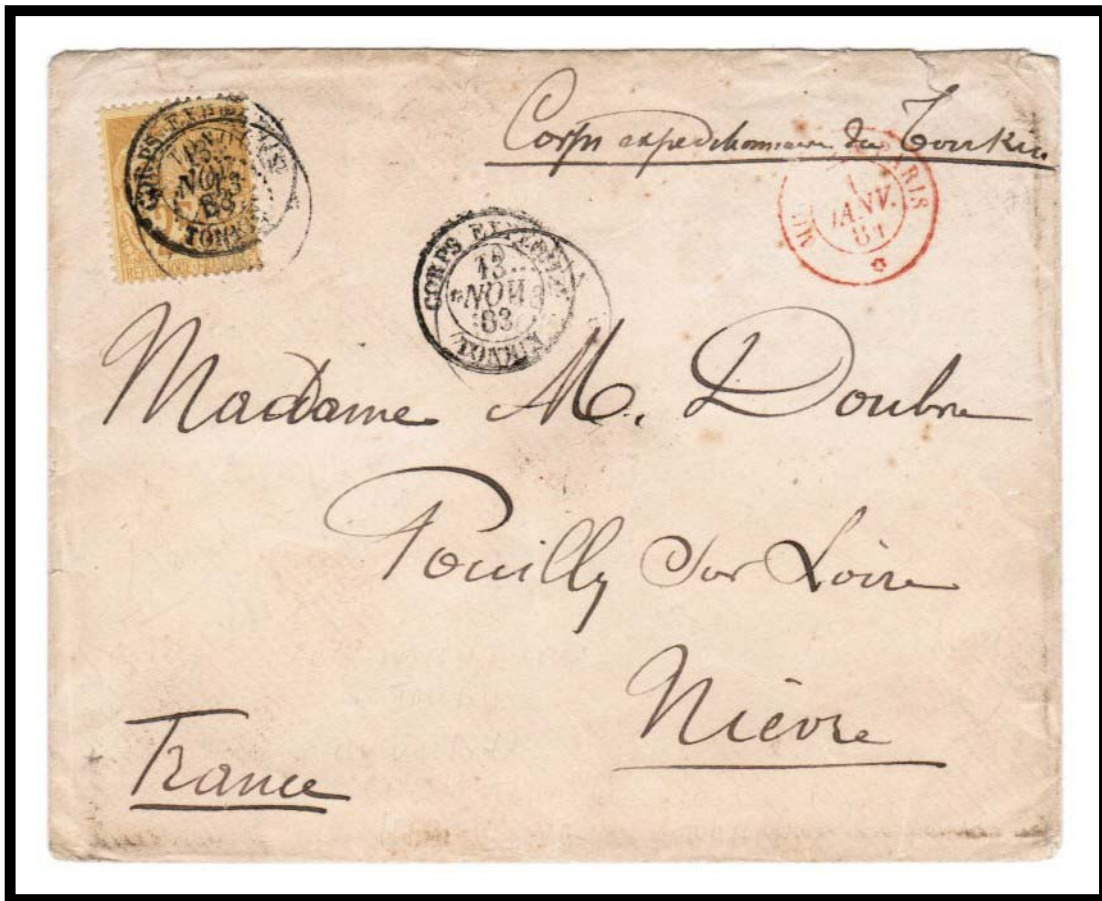


## Franked Expeditionary Force Letter

Mailed at the very beginning of the franchise, the sender was probably unfamiliar with the new rules. He had franked the envelope with a 25-centime yellow Commerce stamp even though the letter could have been transported to France for free.



Military Postmark



### POSTAL MARKINGS

CORPS EXPEDITRE TONKIN 13 NOV 83  
MODANE A PARIS 1 JANV 84

### REVERSE

SAIGON COCHINCHINE 29 NOV 83  
POUILLY S/ LOIRE NIEVRE 2 JANV 84

## Civilian Use of Army Post Office

Under unusual circumstances, army post offices would accept letters from members of the public. Of course, the franchise did not apply to civilian mail.

The 25-centime yellow Commerce stamp that the sender had affixed to this envelope was canceled by Hanoi's military postmark. No endorsement of the military rate is present.



Military Postmark



### POSTAL MARKINGS

CORR. D. ARMEES HA-NOI 17 JUN 84

REVERSE

NICE ALPES MARITIMES 31 JUIL 84

## Letter to Foreign Address

The franchise only applied to the French Community. Letters sent outside of the French Community required regular postage.

An 1896 letter posted from Bac-Ninh to Germany was franked with a 25 centimes black Navigation and Commerce stamp to satisfy the foreign letter rate.



Military Postmark



Civilian Postmark



### POSTAL MARKINGS

BAC-NINH TONKIN 30 NOV 96

CORPS EXPEDITRE TONKIN

### REVERSE

HAIPHONG TONKIN 2 DEC. 96

LIGNE N PAQ. FR. N° 7 13 DEC 96

MULHAUSSEN (ELSASS) 1 5.1.97

## Franked Letter to France

The franchise rules were confusing. They applied only to a specific geographic area. Here a soldier apparently qualified for free mail but used a 15-centime blue Navigation and Commerce stamp that corresponded to the reduced rate available to troops outside the combat zone.



### POSTAL MARKINGS

HANOI TONKIN 6 MARS 97  
LIGNE N PAQ. FR. N° 3 17 MARS 97

### REVERSE

HAIPHONG TONKIN 7 MARS 97  
LYON RHONE 15 AVRIL 97  
LYON RHONE 16 AVRIL 97



## Franked Postcard

Here a soldier chose to use the civilian mail system for sending a postcard to France. The postcard is franked with a 5-centime green Navigation and Commerce stamp which paid a special rate for postcards with no more than a five-word message.



Civilian Postmark



POSTAL MARKINGS  
DAPCAU TONKIN 8 MARS 03

## Franked Postcard

With a message that exceeded five words on the reverse, the soldier was required to use 10 centimes postage for a postcard sent through the civilian mails to France in 1901.



### POSTAL MARKINGS

TUYEN-QUANG TONKIN 11 MARS 01  
HANOI TONKIN 14 MARS 01  
RENNES ILLE-ET-VILAINE 19 AVRIL 01

## Registered Letter

The franchise was only valid for ordinary letters. The sender had to pay all postage costs for registered letters.

Here stamps worth 40 centimes (15 centimes postage and 25 centimes registration fee) were affixed to a government envelope. Even though the letter was official, the sender had to apply postage stamps and the manuscript "Corps expéditionnaire du Tonkin" only earned the sender the reduced letter rate that was available to troops in Cochinchina to the south.



Civilian Postmark



Registration Marking



### POSTAL MARKINGS

HANOI RECIFE TONKIN 10 NOV 94  
framed R with manuscript registration number

## Registered Letter

The military post at Vanlinh, Tonkin was too small for a military post office. Even though the envelope bears the unit's cachet, the registered letter needed to be franked with 40 centimes postage for mail unqualified for the franchise.



## POSTAL MARKINGS

VANLINH TONKIN 12 NOV. 02  
framed R with manuscript registration number  
LIGNE N PAQ. FR. №7 20 NOV 02

## REVERSE

HANOI TONKIN 13 NOV 02  
HAIPHONG TONKIN 14 NOV. 02



## Double Weight Letter

The rules of the franchise were strict. The franchise only applied to light letters (less than 15 grams). Overweight letters had to include postage. A double weight letter, between 15 and 30 grams, required 30 centimes postage—twice the reduced rate for letters sent by occupation troops in Cochinchina.



### POSTAL MARKINGS

HAIPHONG TONKIN 6 FEVR 98

REVERSE

MONTPELLIER HERAULT 12 MARS 98

## Service by English Ship

To qualify for the franchise, letters had to be transported by French ships. Probably because he was aware of an impending departure, the sender of this letter indicated service by an English ship ("voie anglaise"). Because the sender had specified this carrier, he had to affix 15 centimes postage.



POSTAL MARKINGS  
HAIPHONG TONKIN 12 MAI 92

## Interior Mail Lacking Postmarks

This 1900 cover is unusual in that the front bears neither a military postmark nor a civilian postmark. Nevertheless, since it was an internal letter from Bac-Ken to Hanoi, the postal system recognized it as a free letter.

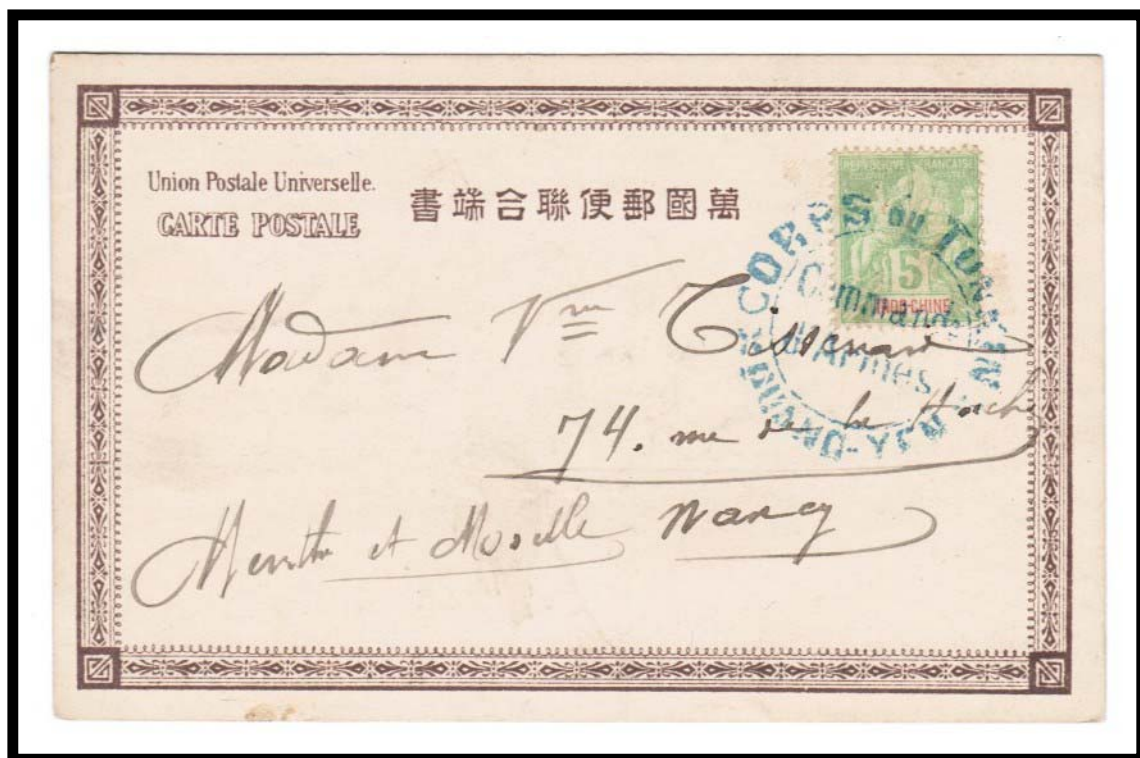


POSTAL MARKINGS ON REVERSE

TUYEN-QUANG TONKIN 4 MAI 1900

HANOI TONKIN 7 MAI 1900

The unit cachets had no significance as far as the civilian post office was concerned. However, in the case of this postcard, the post office apparently accepted a mailing with the stamp canceled by the cachet of Commander at Quang-Yen.





## Mobile Mailbox

Mail wagons that passed through small towns without post offices sometimes had mailboxes where customers could deposit letters. After arriving at a regular post office, the box was emptied out and handstamped "BM" denoting "Boite Mobile." In this way, problems with a letter would not be ascribed to the post office that happened to open the box.

Originating from the village of Ti-Cau, which had neither a civilian nor a military post office, this cover was marked with the oval framed "BM" at Sept Pagodes, Tonkin. Although it lacked the usual indication of military mail at the top of the envelope, it was accepted postage-free.



POSTAL MARKINGS  
CORPS EXPEDITIONNAIRE  
SEPT-PAGODES TONKIN 22 MAI 96  
REVERSE  
8 PARIS 8 DISTRIBUTION 24 JUIN 96

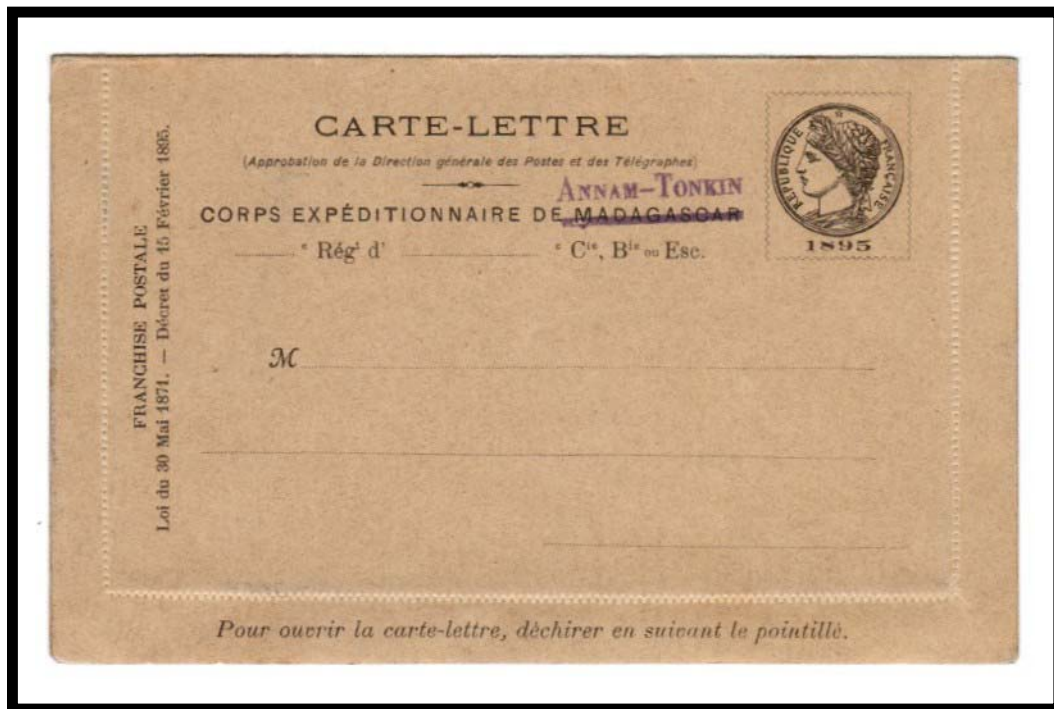
## Annam-Tonkin Overprint on Madagascar Stationery

Some of the military forces serving in Madagascar were transferred to Indochina in 1895. With them, they brought postal cards and letter cards valid for the separate franchise in Madagascar. A small number of the stationery items were overprinted "ANNAM-TONKIN."

The overprint was applied with a rubber handstamp in purple ink. A solid bar was included to obliterate the reference to Madagascar.

ANNAM-TONKIN

### Handstamp Overprint



## Annam-Tonkin Overprint on Madagascar Stationery Use of the Letter Card

Here an overprinted letter card was mailed to Lyon from a soldier in the Expeditionary Force. A postal clerk aboard ship applied the CORPS EXP. TONKIN LIGNE N.7 postmark as a transit marking.



Military Postmark

ANNAM-TONKIN

Handstamp Overprint



Maritime Postmark



### POSTAL MARKINGS

CORPS EXPRE TONKIN  
CORPS EXP. TONKIN LIGNE N.7 8 AOUT 96

### REVERSE

SAIGON COCHINCHÉ CORPS EXPÉ 7 AOUT 96  
LYON RHONE SEPT 96

## Annam-Tonkin Overprint on Madagascar Stationery Use of the Postal Card

Mailed from Touranne Annam, this overprinted postal card was properly accepted by the post office postage free. The attached reply card is similarly overprinted "ANNAM-TONKIN."



Military Postmark

ANNAM-TONKIN

Handstamp Overprint



Civilian Postmark



### POSTAL MARKINGS

CORPS EXPRE TONKIN  
TOURANNE ANNAM 7 JUIL 96  
LYON RHONE 9 AOUT 96

### REVERSE

SAIGON COCHINCHÉ CORPS EXPÉ 10 JUIL 96  
LIGNE N PAQ.FR. №3 12 JUIL 96

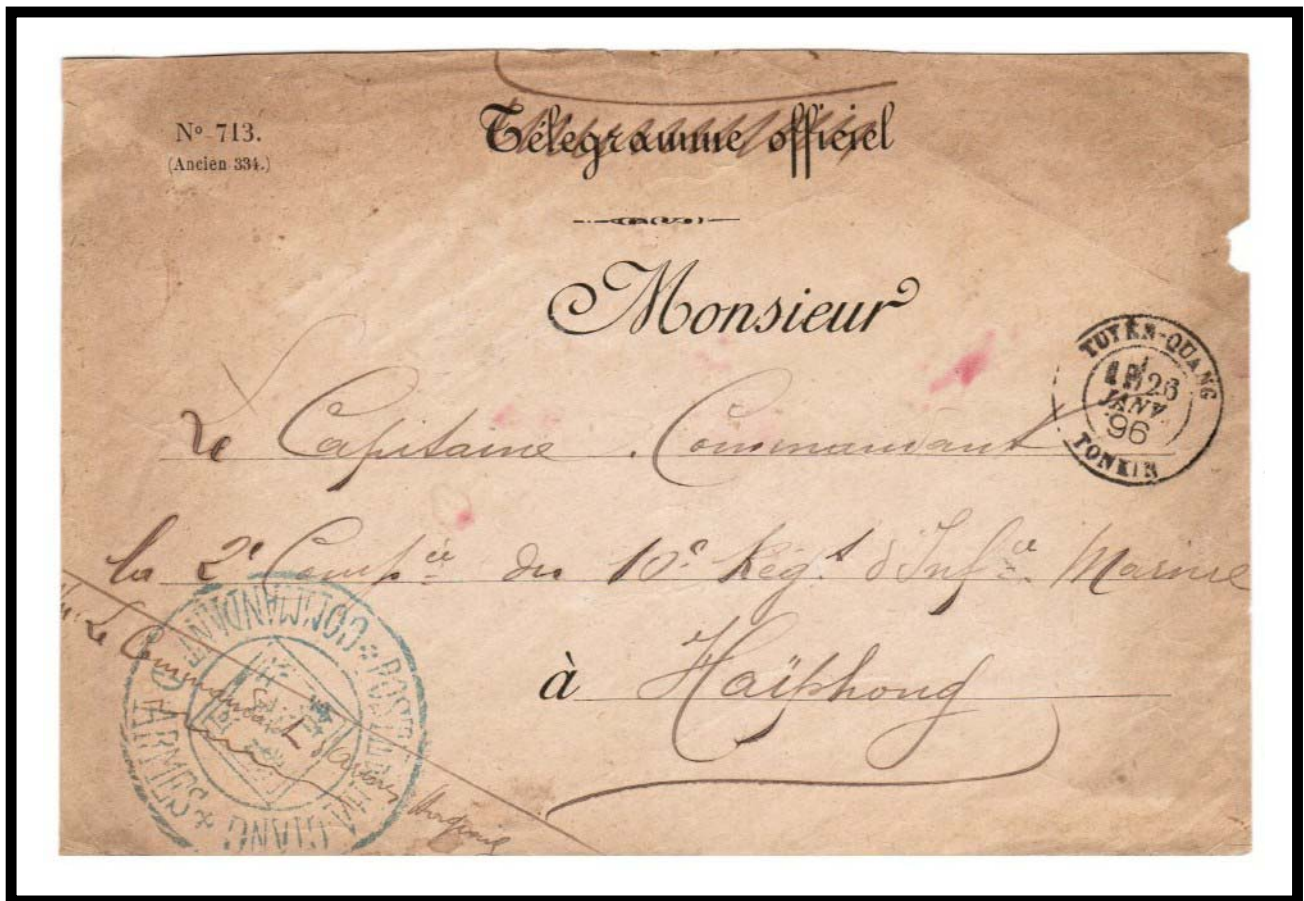


## Use of Telegram Envelope

Here an official telegram envelope was put to use for mailing a letter. Because the destination was internal within Tonkin, the postal system handled it without a military postmark.



Civilian Postmark



### POSTAL MARKINGS

TUYEN-QUANG TONKIN 26 JANV 96

## Letter on Wooden Paper

Like soldiers everywhere, soldiers serving in Indochina snapped up souvenirs for the family and friends back home. This applied equally well to correspondence. Here an example of an envelope made from thinly shaved wood was sent to France from Nam-Dinh, Tonkin.



### POSTAL MARKINGS

CORPS EXPEDIRE TONKIN  
NAM-DINH TONKIN 5 MAI 03

### REVERSE

HAIPHONG TONKIN 5 MAI 03  
ST. QUENTIN AISE 1-6I 03

## Letter on Wooden Paper

The enclosed letter says that the wooden paper ("papier bois") came from Japan.

