

France & Colonies Philatelist



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The "RF" Overprints on U.S. 6c Air Mail, 1943-45

Reprinted from Aerophilatelists' News, July 15, 1948, by permission of the editor who is also the author of the article (Mr. Henry Goodkind).

In Nos. 22, 24 and 46 (1945 and 1946) of the F. & C. Philatelist, we reported these markings very fully, and gave them the status of cancellations. The evidence we then had, so required.

The new evidence unearthed by the group of students in Aerophilatelists, changes the matter. We hasten to present their report in full, even though other results than those we reached, are their conclusions.

In July, 1946, we published a lengthy preliminary article (Vol. I, No. 3), on the "RF" initials which were applied to the U. S. 6c carmine airmail stamp (Scott C25), and the 6c orange stamped envelope (Scott UC4), during the recent war. Besides illustrating and explaining their usage, which we felt had never been properly explained in other studies, we attempted to show their official status by quoting from two pieces of written evidence: (1) from the U. S. Post Office Department, and (2) from the U. S. Navy Department.

As a preface, let us summarize these.

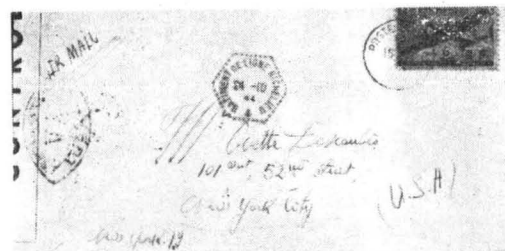
(1) This was a letter from the then 3rd Assistant Postmaster General to Scott Publications replying to the latter's inquiry that the "RF" overprints were applied by the Free French forces in North Africa at the direction of the U. S. Navy.

(2) This was the U. S. Naval directive, which read: "Where no French postage is available, and cancellation is made by a French Post Office, U. S. postage stamps may be used with the letters 'R.F.' overprinted thereon in accordance with International Postal Convention Agreement. French postage affixed must be cancelled by French postmark and U. S. postage by U. S. or U. S. Navy postmark, unless such U. S. Postage has been overprinted as described above."

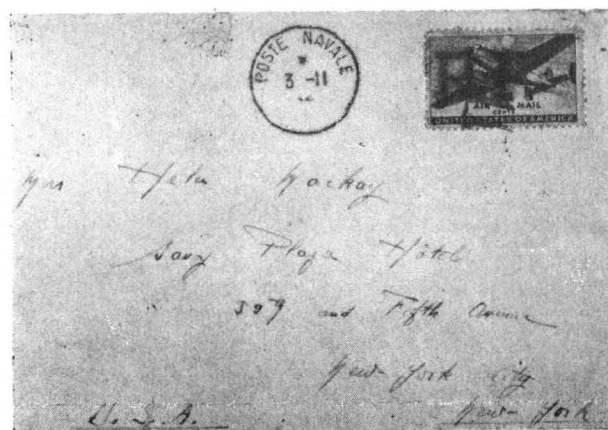
Since then, confusion and controversy has again involved these overprints. Many new types were shown

R. F.

R. F.



TYPE I



TYPE II

RF



TYPE III

and described, some of which students here and abroad doubted. Nothing was produced by writers as coming from official sources. Nothing conclusive was offered as to when the "RF" overprints started, how they were to be applied, and what control methods had to be used. Nothing was ever proven as to whether they were sold to the French personnel already overprinted or whether the "RF" was applied after mailing. Some plausible evidence supported both theories.

In our own minds, we felt that the heretofore quoted letters showed that the U. S. Navy at some time after we were located in North Africa, stipulated that the French Forces operating in junction with or under the U. S. Command could continue to use our Military airmail service, providing that the French sailor's mail was classified in some distinctive manner. A record and directive must exist which could assist philatelists to properly classify these "RF" overprints. Were they cancellations, control marks, or overprints? And most important was whether there existed conclusive evidence to accord the "RF" overprints a catalog listing.

A group of about five AERO PHILATELISTS attempted this task in the following manner: First we tried to corral as much material available with the "RF" overprints, and then determine which appeared official, which unauthorized, and which plain bogus. One of us even advertised in French language newspapers in this country and Canada with excellent results. The second method was to contact as many students as possible and learn what they knew and what material they had collected. The third was to follow the foreign philatelic press and see what it wrote on the "RF's." We have a large file of such articles which we had translated from French into English. And the final task (and no doubt the most difficult) was to keep after official sources to unearth what archives they might have. This resulted in a voluminous mail, which would be impractical to quote. A quick summation would show that for more than two years, we were referred by the U. S. Post Office Department in Washington, D. C., to the U. S. Navy Department, who, in turn, referred us back to the Post Office Department. Correspondence to French authorities in North Africa was unanswered. But we kept plugging and on May 11, 1948, the following was received. We think that this offers the evidence that many have been seeking.

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT
THIRD ASSISTANT POSTMASTER GENERAL
HSC:EMB
May 11, 1948

Mr. Richard E. Samek
New York, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Samek:

Reference is made to your inquiry of April 29th, with regard to the overprint "RF" used by French Naval Forces during the recent World War.

It is noted that Naval authorities have been unable to offer much assistance in this regard and this office finds it in a similar position.

We have in our files a copy of a directive headed "FRENCH REPUBLIC—POSTS—TELEGRAPHS—TELEPHONES. National Navy, General Headquarters, No. 523 PN/Ep and dated Algiers, June 22, 1944. A

copy of this directive is being enclosed for your information.

Under date of December 1, The Navy Department, in response to an inquiry from this office, refers to a directive issued March 13, 1943, reading as follows:

"Where no French postage is available, and cancellation is made by a French post office, U. S. Postage stamps may be used with the letters "R.F." overprinted thereon in accordance with the International Postal Convention Agreement. French postage affixed must be cancelled by French postmark and U. S. Postage by U. S. or U. S. Navy postmark, unless such U. S. Postage has been over-printed as described above."

The efforts of this office to determine where the authority originated have been unsuccessful thus far.

Very truly yours,

JOSEPH J. LAWLER,

Third Assistant Postmaster General

Enc.

FRENCH REPUBLIC
POSTS TELEGRAPHS TELEPHONES
Algiers, June 22, 1944
No. 523 PN/Ep
General Headquarters
Memorandum for the Chief of the Naval Bureau of Oran

Subject: Mail for the U.S.A. and Canada prepaid at 6 cents.

Reference: My circular No. 737 PN/Ep of Nov. 9, 1943.

I inform you that, at the request of the American naval post in Casablanca, correspondence FOR THE U.S.A. AND CANADA should meet the following conditions:

a) be wholly censored. If the censorship service for outgoing mail can't put the censorship slip or seal on all the letters, non-examined letters should be put together in bundles bearing the notation:

U.S.A. and Canada

Uncensored letters.

b) on letters prepaid at 6 cents, the stamp or the equivalent embossed imprint should be covered with a stamp bearing the impression "R.F."

c) the 6 cent stamp affixed on the envelopes should be cancelled by the office of mailing by means of the anonymous date stamp "POSTE NAVALE" (Navy Post).

The Naval offices are therefore urged:

1) to have a stamp "RF" made up by the local navy
2) to censor all letters prepaid at 6 cents or not which are delivered to them or to place together these which could not be censored prior to the departure of the mail.

3) to affix their date stamp "POSTE NAVALE" (Naval Post) on all letters of this kind.

The foregoing instructions replace the instructions given by my memorandum No. 737 PN/EP mentioned in the reference in so far as it relates to the procedure to apply to letters prepaid at 6c, according to which the naval bureau of Casablanca was alone charged with affixing the impression of the date stamp intended for authenticating the origin of the articles.

The Director of the Naval Post

It becomes obvious that order No. 737 PN/Ep of November 9, 1943, was the directive for Casablanca that probably created the "RF" overprint and a letter posted at that date would be the first day of use. As can be read in the letter from the 3rd Assistant Postmaster General, all efforts to locate this November 9, 1943 directive have been unsuccessful. On June 22, 1944, the order for the use of the "RF" overprints was extended to other places, such as Oran and Algiers.

Based upon these directives, we conclude that a catalog listing of some of the established types of "RF" overprints is in order. As they were called for by a U. S. directive, we hold that the "RF" overprints are a **UNITED STATES ISSUE**. That the French Navy issued a following order for their use in the U. S. mailbags does not make them a French stamp. Furthermore, paragraph (b) of Order No. 523 PN/ep calls for an overprint, and paragraph (c) prescribes how they are to be cancelled. This should settle the controversy as to the philatelic description of the "RF's."

We have selected, as a start, three types of overprints for catalog consideration. We have chosen those which we believe are fully substantiated from the hundreds of covers we all possess. They are found upon letters from many different French Naval personnel marked and used in the directed manner. Their name, rank and Fleet Post Office was always noted on the envelope, front or back. This does not mean that other types are or should be ruled out. It signifies that we could not fully ascertain from the material we possess that they were properly or regularly used. Sometimes, their address showed philatelic manufacturing. This we proved by attempting to contact both the addressee or addressor. Often, our letter was returned from France marked "Inconnu" (Unknown). The U. S. Post Office had to return our letters as undeliverable as either the name or street address was fictitious. We feel that when another type of overprint can be substantiated by proper use by the French Navy, and not through one isolated instance, this can be safely added, but existence upon a cover is not sufficient evidence.

We would omit, for the present, a catalog listing for MINT "RF" overprints, until official proof is offered that the stamps were thus available. We own numerous mint copies, secured from reputable sources in this country, but this is not the evidence needed. Therefore, we illustrate below Types I, II, and III of the "RF" overprints and urge their catalog listing upon both the 6c carmine airmail stamp (U. S. Scott C25, Sanabria 31), and the U. S. 6c stamped envelope with or without border (Scott UC4, Sanabria A11-16). They can be listed and priced both "used" and "on cover."

Paris Stamp Bourse Postmark



—Courtesy W. D. Moreland

This cover testifies that Paris, France used a special postmark October 25-26, 1947 to advertise the "Grande Bourse Philatelique," being held there. The central portion of the cancel shows a stamp collector with his album in front of him.

The F. F. I. Forgeries (Forces Francaises de l'Interieur)

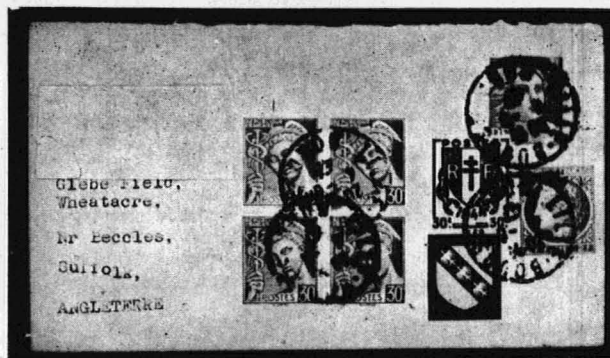
By Ben Reeves

(published also in S.P.A. Journal of Sept. 1948)

The complete story of the so called Espionage Stamps of Austria, Bavaria and Germany of World War I printed in England are still a mystery. Let us add to those mystery stamps the just as mysterious French postage stamps of nine values which were also printed in England sometime during this last War. These nine values of postage stamps consisted of the Mercury, (Scott's Type No. A98), Iris (Scott's Type No. A99) and two different Petain designs (Scott's Type Nos. A115 and A116) including one piece of postal stationery (a postal card with a face value of 1 Fr. 20c. with the imprinted stamp of Petain in Scott's Type 115). We would also like to record the existence of a propaganda label issued during the same time,—a label the same size as the postage stamps with the portrait of Petain to imitate Scott's Type No. 114 in the 30 c. value on which there is an outline of the profile of the hated Pierre Laval, in the background behind the portrait.

The first ten items were to be used by the F. F. I. for propaganda mail and the last item, the label, for propaganda purposes. It was intended to distribute heavy mailing of propaganda literature through the mails without enriching the French Post Office.

To our knowledge the stamps were never put in use for the purpose for which they were intended. Mint sheets of these forgeries were circulated in England with the above story as early as in May, 1946. Inquires in official circles did not shed more light on the subject. No covers turned up franked with the forgeries bearing the "RIGHT DATES," so that we may recognize the issue on cover as "Used at the proper time."



Cover partly franked with a block of the F. F. I. forgery,—killer dated April 8, 1947, from Lille-Bouasse to Glebe Field in Suffolk, England.

However, late in 1947 covers were offered on the market with these F. F. I. "ESPIONAGE FORGERIES" paying part of the postage on them. As mentioned, they paid only part of the postage; they were accompanied by other "GENUINE" postage stamps and naturally the forgeries went thru undetected. Each cover seen by us was franked similarly, that is with some genuine and some counterfeit stamps, but each cover had the proper overseas postage of 10 Fr., the correct fee at that time for mail between France and England. To our mind, these stamps on these covers are used posthumously at best. We can not consider them even on cover as postal forgeries on account of the late dates on the killer as they were not used for the purpose and at the time they were originally issued.

The stamps by right can be called "Prepared but not placed in use." The stamps on the covers are nothing more than curiosities, and are placed practically in the same category as covers franked with Christmas Seals or other labels which slip through the busy mails during the Christmas rush without additional postage.

We illustrate one of these covers on which part of the postage was paid by a block of four of the forgery of Scott's No. 336, 30 c. rose. For obvious reasons the name of the addressee was removed on the illustration.



1948 New Air Mail
of New Caledonia



Middle Congo No. 26 with
double surcharge. This
is the only known copy
of this stamp.

--Thornton R. Runge

The Pre-Centenary
Celebration.

100 Years from the
date of the
order to print
France's
First
Stamp.



Saturday,
Oct. 23, 1948

At The Hotel Lafayette
University Place and Ninth Street,
New York, N.Y.

Program: 2 p.m. on: French and Colonial
Philatelic Forum, with the
best-informed collectors
discussing phases of the
philately of France and
the Colonies.
7 p.m. Dinner. (\$5.00)
Guest of Honor:
Dr. Carroll Chase.
Toastmaster:
Chester A. Smeltzer.

You have had a circular about this event. This
is to remind you of it. If you mislaid or lost
the circular and reply card for a reservation--
the Secretary will pass it on to the proper one
to handle it. (The Secretary will be away, from
Sept. 17 through Oct. 3, however).

George Weiler, President
Alan R. Fernald,
Chairman of Publicity.

"Impressions de Vaugirard"

By F.E. Sellmansberger



As far as is known, France has issued only
one stamp issued by Rotogravure. It is the
second issue commemorative of the 1931 Colonial
Exposition at Paris (Scott No. 262). This stamp
was of large format, and was printed by the
Maison Vaugirard of Paris. Earlier, stamps in
small format, of four different denominations,
had been typographed by the National Printery in
commemoration of the same Exposition.

Concerning this duplication, Mr. R. Pouget,
Director of the Postage Stamp Division of the
National Printery, wrote: "In 1931, we had not
yet perfected our method of production by line
engraving, and had printed only small numbers of
stamps of this kind. Moreover, our typographic
printings . . . were (much) criticized. Since
we were unable to turn out large quantities by
line engraving, the Minister of that time had the
Vaugirard Printery produce a rotogravure stamp."

The House of Vaugirard tells us that, since
1920, they have continuously printed postage
stamps for countries under French protectorate,
under French mandate, and for French colonies, and
that these can be recognized by the "H.V. Paris"
or the "Helio-Vaugirard Paris" at the right side
of the stamp. They also tell us that although
the greatest part of these postage stamps are
printed by rotogravure, the firm is also equip-
ped to print by line engraving.

SECRETARY'S REPORT
June 15 to July 15, 1948.

New Applications:

Beaudoin, Norbert, 7945 Manistee Ave., Chi-
cago 17, Ill.
Obert, Charles H., 201 Alsace St., Bridgeport,
Conn.

Application Pending:

Feneberg, Arnold C., 302 West Loudon St.,
Philadelphia 20, Pa.

Deceased:

238 Waylett, Wilson, Bellingham, Wash.

Changes of Address:

287 Bond, William H., Jr., P.O. Box 1002, Pharr,
Texas
270 Irvine, George J., 1109 South Washington St.,
Alexandria, Va.
187 Wright, Comdr. W.R., Ordnance Stock Office,
Naval Gun Factory, Washington 25, D.C.

Philadelphia Area Members are urged to contact
Mr. H. Thomas Davenport, 2000 East Madison
St., Philadelphia 24, Pa. (Member No. 315) in order
that a Philadelphia Chapter may be formed. We
hope to have something very special, to report
to our Philadelphia members in the very early
fall.

Greater Los Angeles Members who wish to form a
chapter in their area will please get into
touch with Mr. Martin M. Miroff, 3641 Barry Av.,
Los Angeles 34, Calif.

Membership Drive:

An extended effort to interest all collect-
ors of French and French Colonies' stamps
and philately is under way. If YOU know
of anyone who may be interested in the
Group's activities, please write the Sec-
retary for application forms, which you can
send your friends. Or send in names and
addresses, and the Secretary will contact
them. We would like to have your help in
meeting your friends. We are not mind-read-
ers, so you will have to introduce them,
and tell us how to reach them.

THE NEW SERVICE

Want or exchange notices; members only; one or two
insertions only; no charge. Those replying will
please offer only what is asked for here.

Wanted: New Caledonia "France Libre" overprints
on genuine mailed covers. Also other colonies.
Please describe and state price wanted. E.E.
Keys, 14272 Center Ave., Harvey, Ill. (Member
246).

Want to buy Mint Algeria Nos. 98, B12, B13; Algeria
precancels Nos. 4, 6, 9, 10, 12, 17, 21, 37, 38, 39, 41,
48; Algeria Booklet Panes Nos. 7b, 13a, 16a, 49b,
50a, 53a. Martin M. Miroff, 3641 Barry Ave., Los
Angeles 34, Calif. (Member 294)

Back numbers of the F. & C. Philatelist can be
had from the Secretary. Almost all except the
very earliest are on hand.

Can you send us an interesting item of 100 to
200 words, with or without a picture, from your
pet field of French or French Colonies stamps
or covers or postmarks? We can always use such
"shorts." Editor, F. & C. Philatelist.