

## POLISH FORCES IN EXILE DURING AND FOLLOWING WORLD WAR II

The Second World War began with the German invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939. When Germany did not withdraw as demanded, Britain and France declared war on the 3rd. The Soviet Union then invaded Poland from the east on the 17th, with resistance ending three weeks later. Those Polish troops that could escape through neutral Hungary, Romania and the Balkans, many of whom made their way to France where they could continue the fight. When France was overrun by the Germans in mid-1940, some of the Poles went into internment in Switzerland, but others fled to Britain. There, they were trained, re-equipped and made ready for the eventual invasion of the Continent in 1944, where they served in France (again) and in the occupation of Germany.

Following the German invasion of the U.S.S.R. a second group of fighting Poles was formed in September 1941 from the POWs that had been held in the Soviet Union since 1939. However, Stalin did not trust a large number of armed Poles running loose in the country, so he arranged that they be sent to Iran where they could serve under the British as a part of the Central Mediterranean Force. As a result, Polish forces ended up in Egypt, Iran, Iraq and the Levant at various times from 1942 to 1944. Many of the men in this group eventually were sent to Italy, where they fought alongside the Americans and British in 1944 and 1945. Some decided not to return to then Communist-ruled Poland and remained in camps in Italy during 1946 and into 1947.

Polish fieldpost services were created for the troops in various locations, although much of the mail (i.e. surface first class letters and cards) were free of postage. However, special services such as airmail and registration required payment of postage and were generally franked with American or British stamps. In addition, special stamps were issued in France, Britain, the Soviet Union and the camps in Italy. Those for France and the U.S.S.R. were used only for very short periods and are highly elusive. Stamps for the Polish Navy in Exile in Britain are easily available, although commercially used covers are much less common than philatelically-influenced ones.



Special adhesive issued for the Polish exile forces in the Soviet Union. Inscribed "Polish Posts in U.S.S.R." this stamp was only used for four days before the troops departed for Iran. This example on piece was used on the first day of issue, 18 August 1942, and sent via Kuibishev, where the Russian government had moved during the German attack on Moscow. The stamp is cancelled at Yangi Jul, Uzbekistan, which was the Polish headquarters during the exile period in the Soviet Union. Only 3,017 copies of the stamp were printed, of which 263 were sold, with less than 50 examples actually used and even fewer having survived.

The exhibit is shown in chronological order of the opening of the Polish fieldpost service in the various areas, starting with France and Britain, then the Soviet Union and Iran, and ending with the Central Mediterranean Force and Italy.

# FRANCE

On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland from the west and, on the 17th the Soviet Union invaded from the east. The Polish forces were quickly overwhelmed and Warsaw fell on the 27th, with the final resistance ending on October 6. A government in exile was quickly established in Angiers, France and began to recruit soldiers from among the Polish citizens living in France. Some 103,000 of these Poles were deemed capable of bearing arms, and 82,000 were conscripted or volunteered for the exile army by June 1940. Few of these men had any military experience, so a large training program was initiated at camps set up throughout France, and most of the mail seen from this period originated from the camps during the spring of 1940.



Coetquidan  
20 November 1939  
15 March 1940



Patriotic postcards sent by Polish troops from Coetquidan, which was an administrative center. The upper card, imprinted with a Polish eagle, is a very early example of this mail; it was distinctly overpaid at 1f80 for posting to a Polish organization in London. Lower example depicts the British, French and Polish flags and has the unit cachet of the "Polish Army/Commandant of the Coetquidan Camp." It was free of postage.

FRANCE  
Administrative Mail

The Poles did not have their own military postal service in France, so mail was marked "F.M. (Franchise Militaire)" to denote that it was to be handled postage free and then deposited in the nearest civil post office.

Paris  
13 March 1940  
17 April 1940



Upper cover has the cachet of the Commandant of the Polish Army in Paris; docketed for receipt on 4 April on the reverse. Lower cover has the imprinted return address of the Polish Ministry of Military Affairs in Paris and was sent to the Training Center of the Polish Army in Serignan, where it was received on April 18.

FRANCE  
Administrative Mail

Angers  
1 April 1940

RZECZPOSPOLITA POLSKA  
MINISTERSTWO OPIEKI SPOŁECZNEJ

RÉPUBLIQUE DE POLOGNE  
MINISTÈRE DE L'ASSISTANCE SOCIALE  
31, RUE MIRABEAU  
ANGERS (MAINE-&-LOIRE)



Ministère des Affaires Militaires

Hotel Régina  
2, Place des Pyramides

PARIS 1er

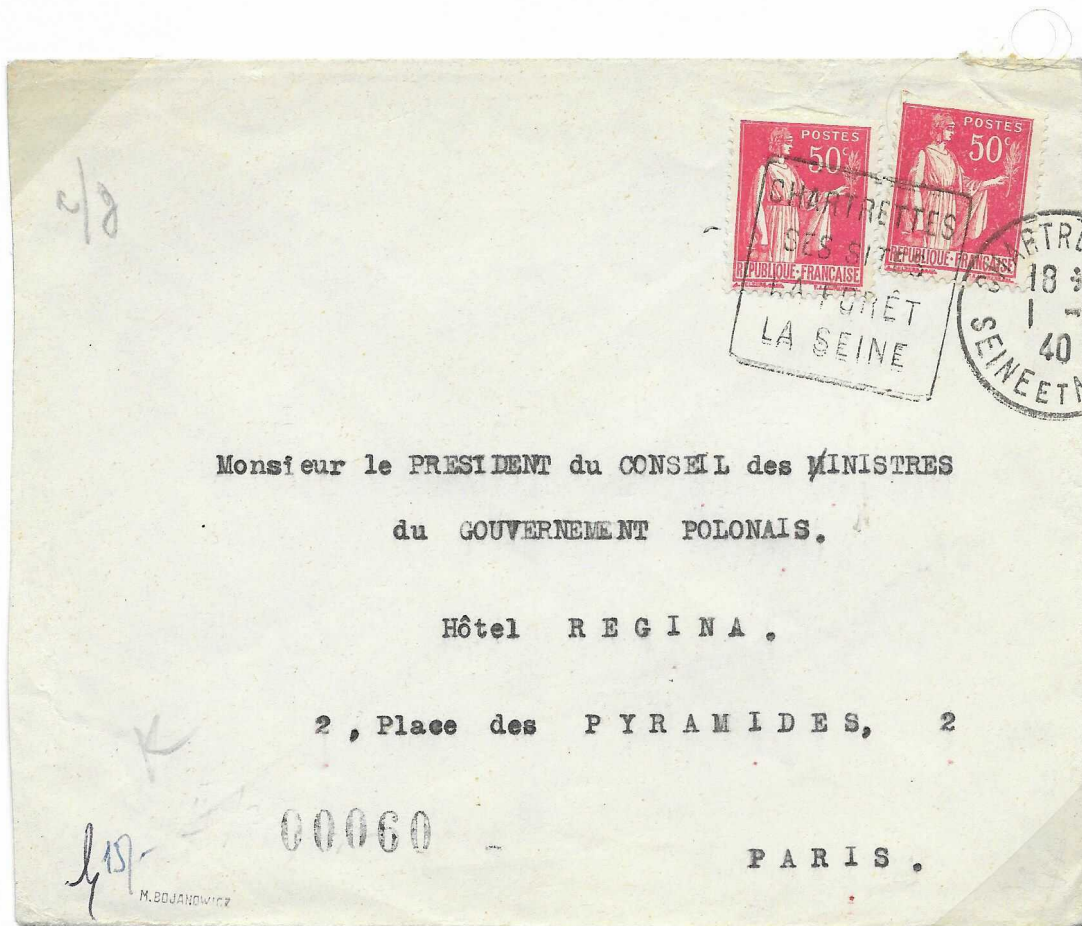
M. BOJAROWICZ

L.dz 1388/40

This cover was sent between departments of the Polish Government in Exile. It went from the Ministry of Social Assistance in Angers to the Ministry of Military Affairs in Paris. Such mail was not exempt from postage, so adhesives were affixed to pay the 1 franc letter rate.

FRANCE  
Polish Government -- Inbound Mail

Chartrettes  
1940



Inbound cover sent by an architectural firm to the President of the Council of Ministers of the Polish Government in Paris. A very unusual usage to a high official of the Government in Exile.

## FRANCE

### Stamps for the Polish General Headquarters

The Polish authorities were desirous of printing their own stamps for use within France. However, this was impractical under the existing circumstances. However, permission was obtained from the Ministry of Posts in Paris to perforate French stamps with "W P (Wojsko Polskie/Polish Army)." A supply of stamps was then purchased from a nearby post office and a perforating machine obtained. The record indicates that a total of 8,580 stamps were perforated (*Philatelic Magazine* August 29, 1941) consisting of 25 different types, which were then used on mail from the General Headquarters from 3 May to 10 June 1940, when the office closed due to the approach of the Germans. The unsold stamps and perforating machine were evacuated from the office but later jettisoned in the Bay of Biscay due to overloading of ships carrying personnel to England.



Shown above are the 17 definitive stamps that were perforated "W P" for this purpose. The quantities produced range from 2,800 of the 50 cent. Peace design down to 100 each of five of the denominations. The used copies shown were all cancelled to order on the first day, 3 May 1940.

**FRANCE**  
**Stamps for the Polish General Headquarters**



In addition to the definitives, eight commemorative and semi-postal stamps were perforated "W P" and used for postage. These were produced in very limited quantities, with 100 pieces each of the Maid of Languedoc and Bridge at Lyon, 75 pieces each of the Soldiers and Field Marshals, and only 40 each of the Red Cross and Military Engineers. It has been estimated that the number saved in unused condition was between 23 and 30 copies of each, but only four of the Red Cross stamp. The used copies shown were all cancelled to order on the first day, 3 May 1940.

## FRANCE

### Stamps for the Polish General Headquarters

Although the "W P" perfin stamps were theoretically available for use on mail of the Polish authorities for 38 days, obtaining examples of such use is a very difficult effort. Essentially all of the (few) covers with these stamps that have been seen by exhibitor bear the 3 May 1940 postmark, but appear to be "handbacks" that were presented at the postal counter then cancelled and given back to the person presenting them, rather than something actually sent through the mail.



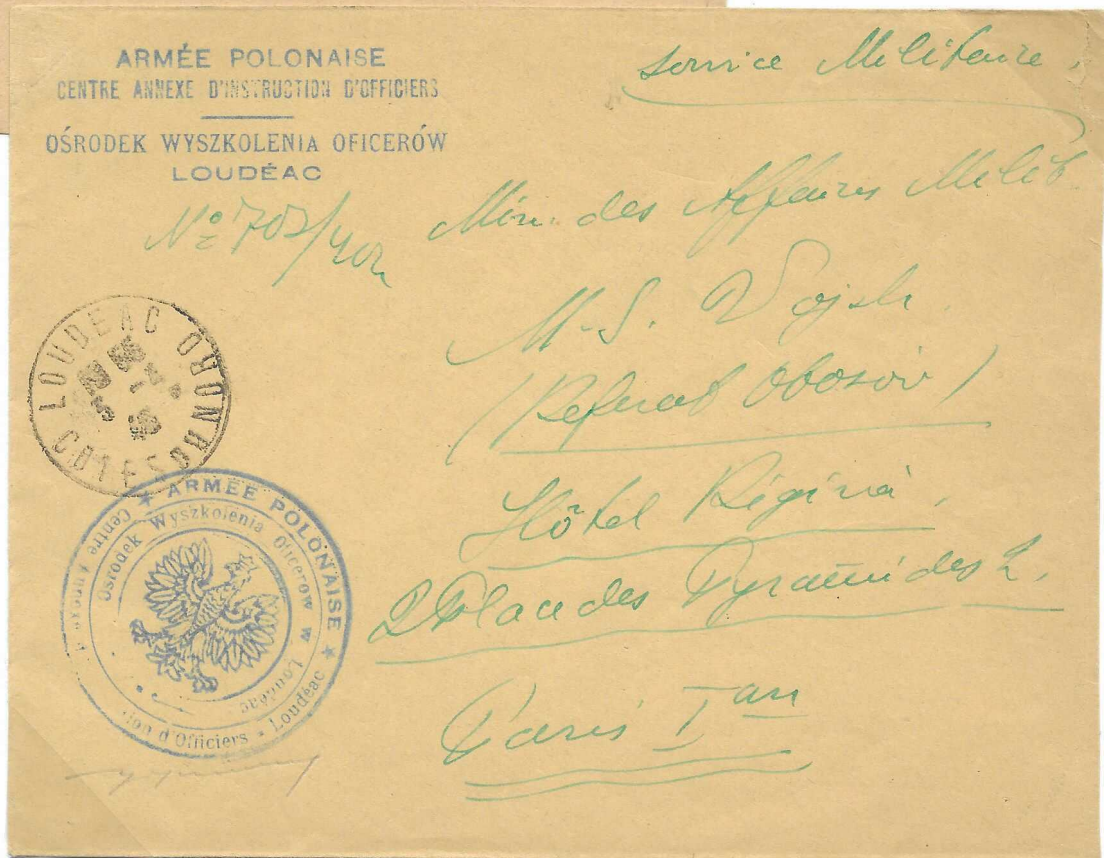
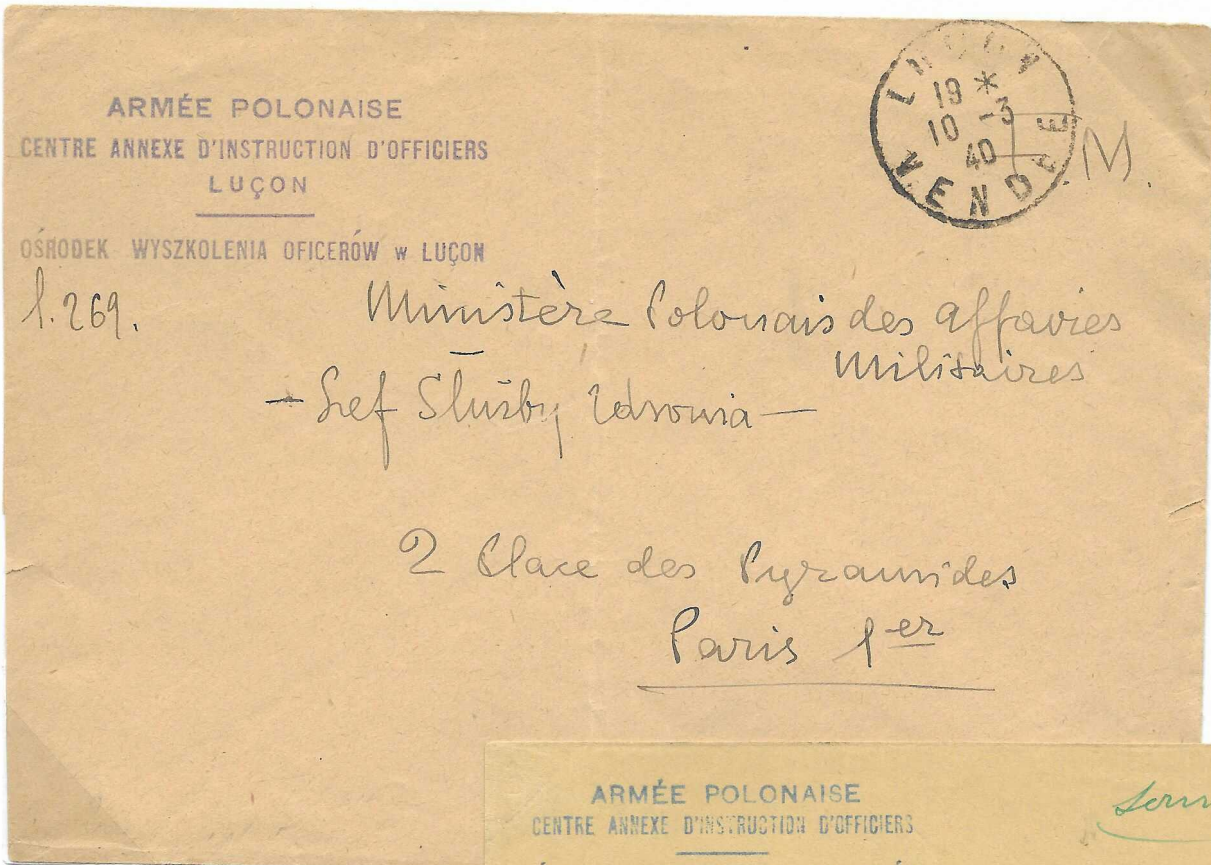
In fact, the only example of legitimate mail that appears to have actually processed and forwarded to the addressee in the normal course seen by the exhibitor is the wrapper shown above. It is franked with three of the "W P" perfins and sent between Polish Exile offices in Paris. The postmark appears to be dated 18 May 1940.



FRANCE  
Army Unit Mail

Loudeac  
3 April 1940

Lucon  
10 March 1940



Additional covers from Officers Training Centers, these being sent from Loudeac and Lucon. Lower cover has additional bilingual circular cachet depicting a Polish eagle in the center.

FRANCE  
Army Unit Mail

Chateaubriant  
8 May 1940

Fontenay le Comte  
24 May 1940

ARMÉE POLONAISE  
CENTRE ANNEXE D'INSTRUCTION D'OFFICIERS  
FONTENAY-LE-COMTE  
OSRODEK WYSZKOLENIA OFICERÓW W FONTENAY-LE-COMTE



Ministère des Affaires  
Militaires de Pologne  
Paris (Per)  
2 Place des Pyramides

ARMÉE POLONAISE  
CENTRE ANNEXE D'INSTRUCTION D'OFFICIERS  
CHATEAUBRIANT  
FRANCHISE MILITAIRE  
PRIORITÉ  
RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE  
CHATEAUBRIANT  
BUREAU DE BERE  
40  
CARTE POSTALE AUX ARMÉES

Cette Carte est vendue 5 Centimes dans tous les Bureaux de Poste

| EXPÉDITEUR            | DESTINATAIRE                            |
|-----------------------|---|
| M. Francisch          | Nom . . . . . Stefan Gziewicz           |
| Sniderski             | Grade . . . . . Colonel                 |
| capitaine             | Compagnie, Batterie Paris I             |
| à Chateaubriant       | 2 Pl. des Pyramides                     |
|                       | Régiment (arme ou service) Hotel Regina |
| Département Loire Inf | Secteur Postal N° chambre 140           |

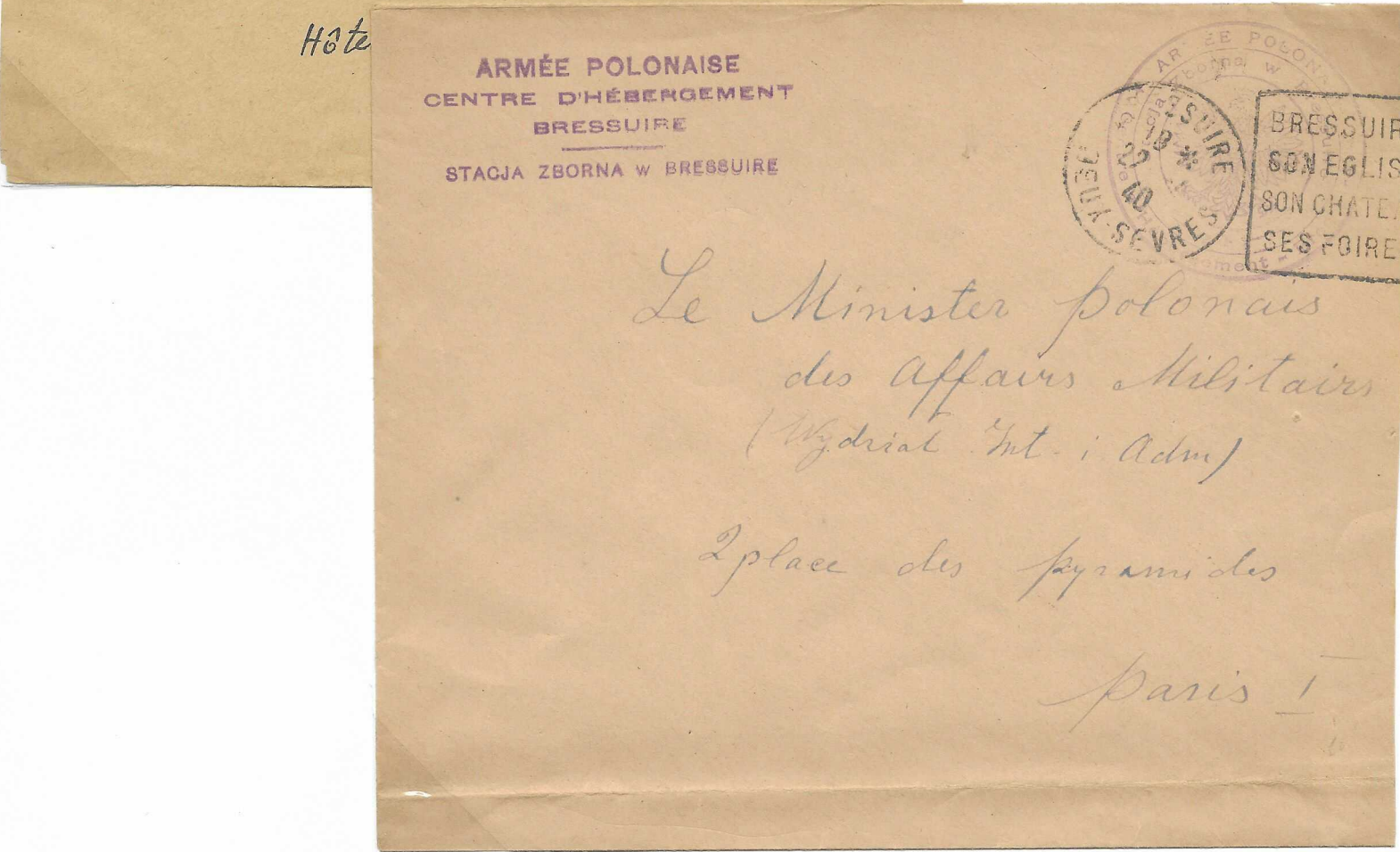
(Il est recommandé d'écrire très lisiblement)

These examples sent from Officers Training Centers in Chateaubriant and Fontenay le Comte, respectively. Bilingual French/Polish unit cachets were applied.

FRANCE  
Army Unit Mail

Angers  
12 March 1940

Bressuire  
22 April 1940



Upper cover bears the cachet of the Instruction Center of the Polish Engineers at Angers. Below, the cover was sent from the Staging Area of the Polish Army at Bressuire.

FRANCE  
Army Unit Mail

Armee Polonaise

Poste aux Armees  
2 April 1940

Wojenny 2-go POLKU PIECHOTY

F. M.

M. J. Wojcik.  
Wydz. Int. i Adm.  
ref. Rachunk-Budzetowy.



Hotel

Paris

Mlle Anna Chodkowska  
Croix Rouge Polonaise

F.M.

2 rue Euler

Paris VIII



Upper cover has no postal markings, hence undated. However, it was sent to Paris by a member of the 2nd Infantry Regiment. Once units were activated for service at the front, the mail was processed by the French fieldpost system with a "Mail from the Army" postmark. However, such items are rarely seen due to the impending German invasion of France. This cover sent from a Polish anti-aircraft training unit located at the time at St. Nazaire.

FRANCE  
Army Unit Mail

Niort  
1 April 1940  
20 April 1940

Compagnie autonome à Niort  
Kompania Samodzielna w Niort

F.M.

L. 213/40.

Ministerstwo Spraw Wojskowych

Komisja Gospodarcza

Paris  
2, Place des Pyramides

3<sup>e</sup> Région Militaire

Service de Santé

SECTEUR HOSPITALIER ET PLACE  
DES GANTS NIORT

NIORT  
CENTRE DE  
CHAMOISERIE



S.M.

NIORT  
SES PEAUX  
SES GANTS

Monsieur le Ministre des Affaires Militaires

de Pologne

Hôtel Régina

Rue de Rivoli

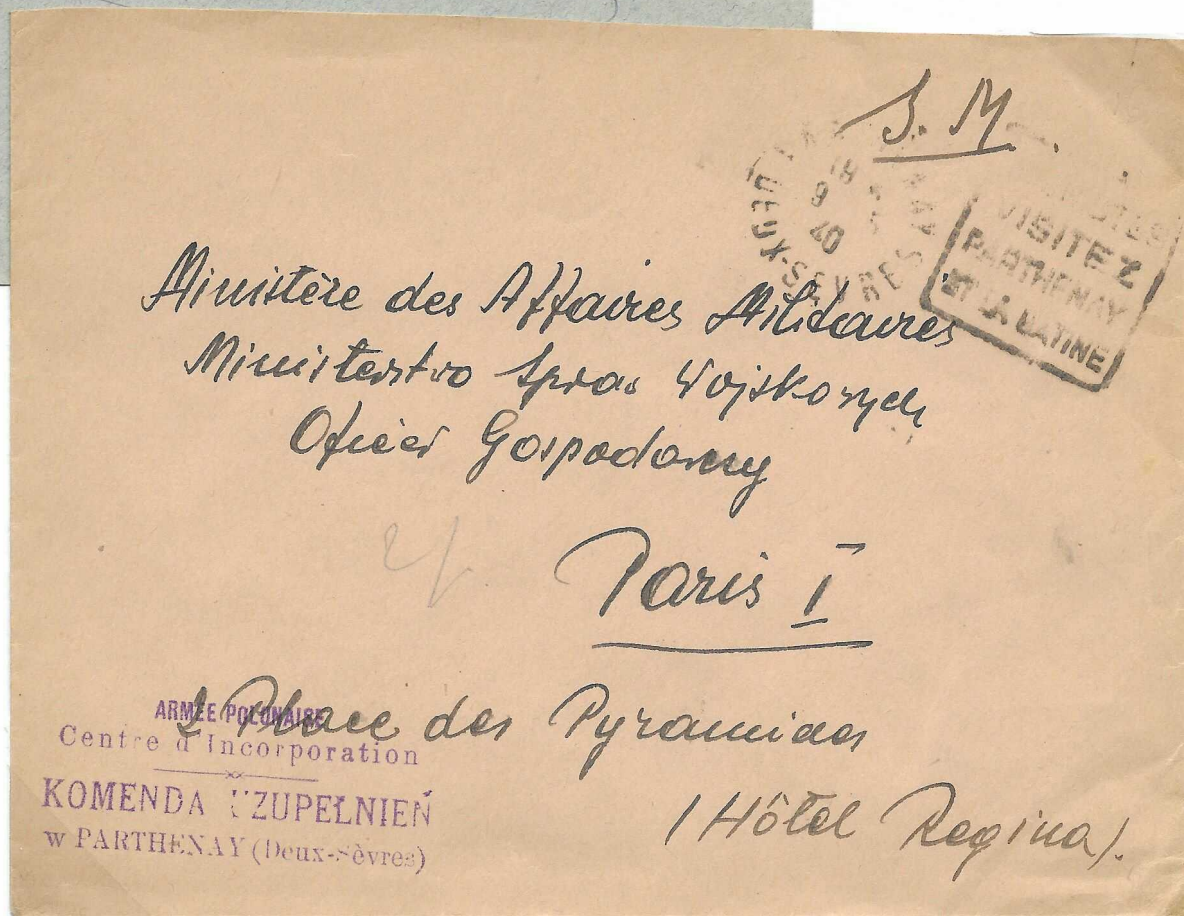
PARIS



The upper cover is one of the more unusual uses, with the cachet of the Autonomous Company at Niort. The men recruited for this unit had been Polish volunteers on the Republican side during the Spanish Civil War. When the Nationalist forces won, the volunteers crossed the border into France, where they were interned and subsequently released in order to serve in the Polish Army in Exile. Lower cover sent from the Chief of Medicine at the Hospital in Niort.

FRANCE  
Army Unit Mail

Parthenay  
17 April 1940  
9 May 1940



Official covers with cachets of the Conscription Center and Reserve Center at Parthenay. Upper example was sent registered, which is highly unusual for mail from the Polish units, although no additional postage was charged for this service.

FRANCE  
Army Unit Mail

Sables d'Or  
8 April 1940

Ste. Cecile les Vigues  
28 February 1940

15.



Ministère des Affaires  
Militaires de la République de Colombie  
Paris

60 11 de Paris

157-

60018

Komenda Główna Wyszkolenia Oficerów w Ubezpieczeniu  
SABLES D'OR  
L. nr. 87/40.



Ministère des Affaires Militaires de Colombie  
Sitab Nareluergo Nodra

Paris 1<sup>o</sup>

2 Place des Pyramides  
Hotel Regina



Seine

Upper cover from Ste. Cecile has an unusual cachet of the 1st Tank Battalion. There was another Officers Training Center at Sables d'Or, which also used a red cachet.

FRANCE  
Army Unit Mail

Thenezay  
8 April 1940

Thouars  
April 1940



RTHENEZAY  
034

Etat Major du 2e Regiment  
Paris



Recow

ARMÉE POLONAISE  
CENTRE ANNEXE D'INSTRUCTION D'OFFICIERS  
THOUARS

OSRODEK WYSZKOLENIA OFICERÓW W THOUARS

Nr. 425/40  
426/40  
427/40



Ministere des Affaires  
Militaires de Pologne  
2-Place des Pyramides

Paris 1er



Upper cover sent registered from the Command Center of the 2nd Regiment of Light Artillery at Thenezay.  
Lower example sent from the Officers Training Center at Thouars.