THE WW II VICHY FRENCH EMPIRE

June 1940 to March 1945

POSTAL HISTORY OF AN EMPIRE IN DECLINE

1940

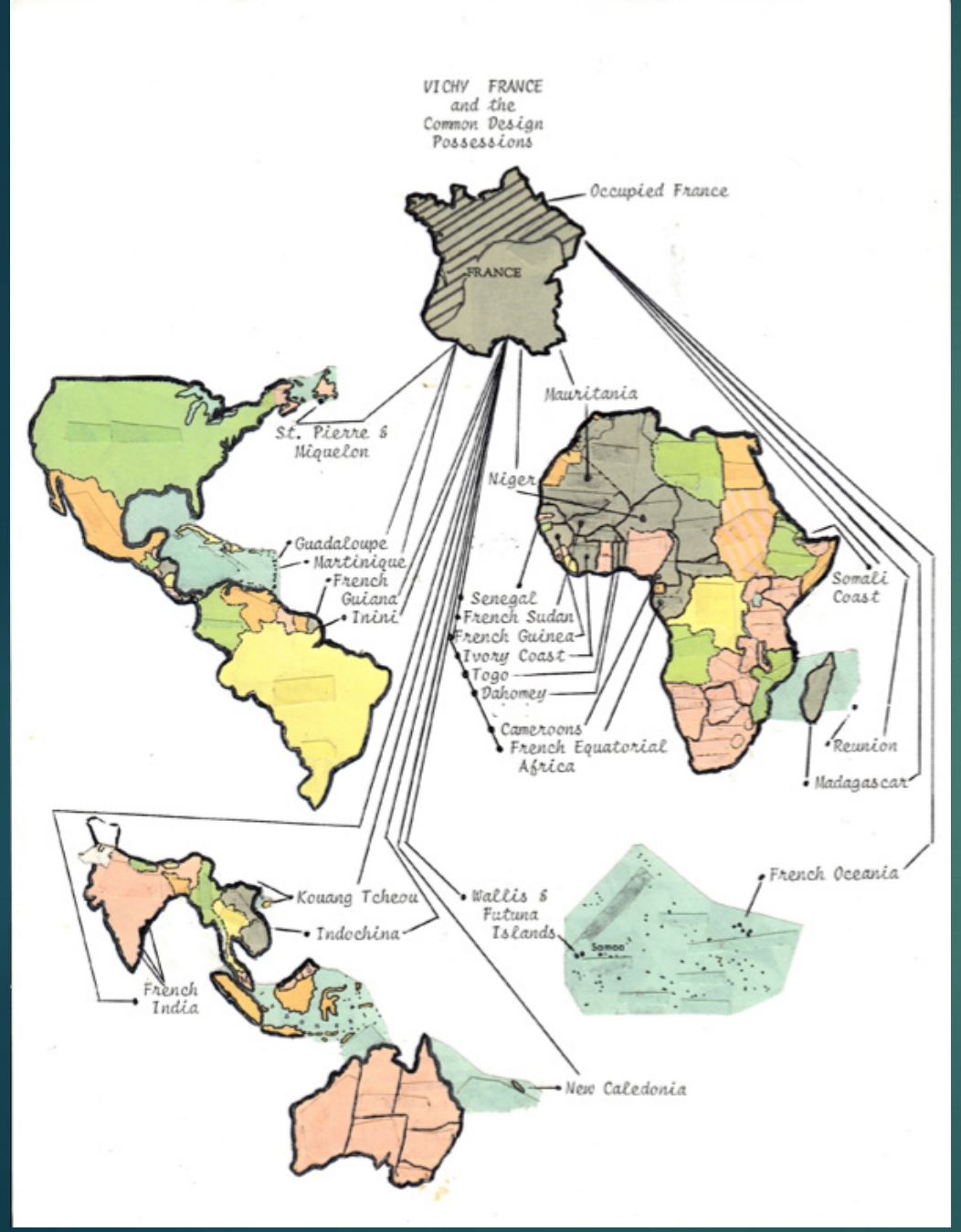
End of Third Republic

Appointment of Marshal Petain as head of government – June 16, 1940
1st priority - seek armistice with Germany, retaining French control of 60% of France
2nd priority - create government: Vichy established July 2. "L'Etat Francaise"
3rd priority - preserve fleet and overseas French Empire

THE WRENCH IN THE WORKS:

COL. CHARLES DEGAULLE, LAST MINISTER APPOINTED BY THE 3RD REPUBLIC FLEES TO LONDON.

DECLARES ON JUNE 19TH UNCOMPROMISING FIGHT AGAINST NAZI GERMANY



The French Overseas Empire

2 COMPETING VISIONS:

1. Collaborate with Germany by the legitimate successor to the Third Republic (Petain's "L'Etat Francaise"

2. Continue the uncompromising

fight against the Germans by rebel French in alliance with Great Britain. (DeGaulle's " Free French"

- Explanation of Diversity of Vichy postal history:

- I. Vichy postage created or available for the possession;
- II. Mails in the possession using:
- A. Third Republic issues *
- B. Vichy issues
- C. Possessions which switched loyalty to Admiral Darlan or General Giraud using Vichy for Third Republic issues for 1 year before joining the Free French; and
- D. Vichy issues used after joining the Free French
-
- * ***Note:*** ***Depending on date of switch of loyalty to Free French, for some possessions only Third Republic franked postal history is possible.***

- At outset (July 1940) all overseas territories adhered to Vichy as the legitimate heir to the disgraced Third Republic.

- In short order, the Free French became emboldened.

- Gradually the Free French movement gained adherents.

Achieved by convincing or forcing Governors and military forces to abandon the Vichy vision for the future of France.

- The ABSOLUTELY essential key to TRACING postal history is date of the switch from Vichy

- TABLE I: Date switched Loyalty FROM Vichy

- August 26, 1940: Chad* and French Equatorial Africa (included Chad, Cameroun, French Congo, Ubangi-Chari, but not including Gabon.
- Sept., 1940 French India, New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Condominium of New Hebrides,
- November 1940: Gabon
- July 1941: Syria, Lebanon
- December 1941 St. Pierre and Miquelon
- May 1942: Wallis and Futurna Islands
- November 1942: Algeria*, Dahomey*, Togo*, Madagascar, Ivory Coast*, French Guinea*, Morocco*, French Sudan*, Senegal*, Tunisia*, Reunion
  - (* but DO NOT join Free French for another year).
- December 1942: Somali Coast/Djibouti
- March 1943: French Guyana/Inini
- July 1943: Martinique, Guadaloupe
- March 1945: French Indochina, Guangchouwan (Kouang-Tcheou Wan)

Vichy French Overseas Empire in WW II: Its Dissolution and Changes in Postal Administration

	Possession	Date of Switch in Fealty To Free French	Form of change in Government	A1 Short Use of 3rd Republic . Stamps	A2 Long Use of 3rd Rep. Stamps	B1 **Vichy Issues** Printed	B.2. **Vichy Issues** Used	C Giraud Use of Vichy Issues	D Free French Use of 3rd Rep. or Vichy Issues
1	Cameroun	Aug. 27, 1940	Military – Free.French.	X					
2	Chad	Aug. 26, 1940	Governor	X					
3	Fr. Equat. Af.	Aug.29, 1940	Military - F.F.	X					
4	Fr, India	Sept. 9, 1940	Governor	X					
5	French Oceania	Sept. 9, 1940	Governor	X					
6	Gabon	Nov. 12, 1940	Military – F.F.	X					
7	Lebanon	July 13, 1941	Military Allies		x				
8	Djibouti/Som.	Dec. 26, 1942	Military F.F.		X	x			
9	Fr. Guiana	Nov. 8, 1943	Giraud Resigns		X	x			
10	Kouang Tcheou	March 10, 1945	Japan Takeover		x	x			
11	Guadaloupe	March 9, 1943	Legislative Action		X	x			
12	Fr. Guiana	Nov. 6, 1942 & Nov. 8, 1943	Giraud Resigns		X	x			
13	Inini	Nov. 6, 1942 & Nov. 8, 1943	Giraud Resigns		x	x			
14	Martinique	July 14, 1943	Legislative Action		x	x			?*
15	Fr. Indochina	March 9, 1945	JAPAN		x	x	x		Yes
16	Algeria	Nov. 6, 1942 & Nov. 8, 1943	Giraud Resigns		X	x	X	Yes	Yes
17	Dahomey	Nov. 6, 1942 & Nov. 8, 1943	Giraud Resigns		X	x	X	YES	?
18	Fr. Guinea	Nov. 6, 1942 & Nov. 8, 1943	Giraud Resigns		X	x	X	Yes	?
19	Fr. Sudan	Nov. 6, 1942 & Nov. 8, 1943	Giraud Resigns		X	x	X	Yes	?
20	Ivory Coast	Nov. 6, 1942 & Nov. 8, 1943	Giraud Resigns		X	x	X	Yes	?
21	Lebanon	July 31, 1941	Military - F.F.		X	x			
22	Madagascar	Nov. 5, 1943	Military -Allies		x	x	x	Yes	?
23	Mauritania	Nov. 6, 1942 & Nov. 8, 1943	Giraud Resigns		x	x	x	Yes	?
24	Morocco	Nov. 6, 1942 & Nov. 8, 1943	Giraud Resigns		x	x	x	Yes	?
25	New Caledonia	Sept. 20, 1940	Governor	x					
26	New Hebrides	Unknown, likely adhered to	British partners						
27	Niger	Nov. 6, 1942 & Nov. 8, 1943	Giraud Resigns		x	x	x	Yes	?
28	Reunion	November 28, 1942	Military - F.F.	x	x				
29	St. Pierre & Miquelon	December 24, 1941	Military - F.F.		x				
30	Senegal	Nov. 6, 1942 & Nov. 8, 1943	Giraud Resigns		x	x	x	Yes	?
31	Syria	June 2, 1941	Military - Allies						
32	Togo	Nov. 6, 1942 & Nov. 8, 1943	Giraud Resigns		x	x	x	Yes	?
33	Tunisia	May 7, 1943	Military-Allies		x	x	x	Yes	
34	Wallis & Futurna Is.	April 27, 1942	Military F.F.		x				

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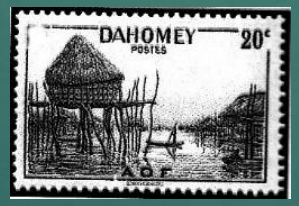
8	Djibouti/Som.	Dec. 26, 1942	Military F.F.		X	x			
9	Fr. Guiana	Nov. 8, 1943	Giraud Resigns		X	x			
10	Kouang Tcheou	March 10, 1945	Japan Takeover		x	x			
11	Guadaloupe	March 9, 1943	Legislative Action		X	x			
12	Fr. Guiana	Nov. 6, 1942 & Nov. 8, 1943	Giraud Resigns		X	x			
13	Inini	Nov. 6, 1942 & Nov. 8, 1943	Giraud Resigns		x	x			
14	Martinique	July 14, 1943	Legislative Action		x	x			?*
15	Fr. Indochina	March 9, 1945	JAPAN		x	x	x		Yes
16	Algeria	Nov. 6, 1942 & Nov. 8, 1943	Giraud Resigns		X	x	X	Yes	Yes
17	Dahomey	Nov. 6, 1942 & Nov. 8, 1943	Giraud Resigns		X	x	X	YES	?
18	Fr. Guinea	Nov. 6, 1942 & Nov. 8, 1943	Giraud Resigns		X	x	X	Yes	?
19	Fr. Sudan	Nov. 6, 1942 & Nov. 8, 1943	Giraud Resigns		X	x	X	Yes	?
20	Ivory Coast	Nov. 6, 1942 & Nov. 8, 1943	Giraud Resigns		X	x	X	Yes	?
21	Lebanon	July 31, 1941	Military - F.F.		X	x			
22	Madagascar	Nov. 5, 1943	Military -Allies		x	x	x	Yes	?
	Explanation: Cameroun switches Fr. India switches Lebanon switches Guadalupe switches Algeria Fr. Indochina	On August 27, 1940 On Sept. 9, 1940 On July 13, 1941 On March 9, 1943 On Two Dates On March 9, 1945	result of Free French assault result of Governor decision Result of allied military assault Result of Legislature Result of Giraud resign Result of Japan takeover	Only used Third “ Used Third Rep. Used Third Rep. Used Third Rep Used Third Rep.	Stamps for “ Stamps for Stamps for & Vichy Stamps & Vichy Stamps	Short period “ Long Period Long Period For Long Period For Long Period	Vichy Issues	Printed but not	Sent

POSTAL HISTORY BEGINS WITH STAMP ISSUING:

1. In many cases, possessions had to use issues of the Third Republic.

2. Common design set of 9 stamps could not get through except to French West Africa.

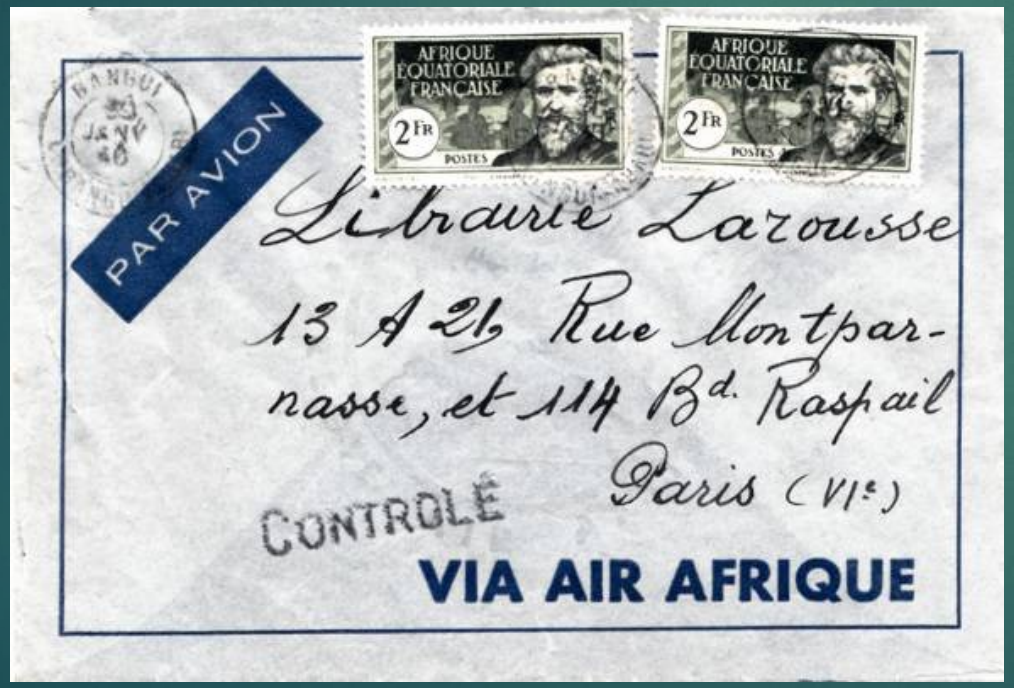
3. Some Third Republic stamps were overprinted or RF removed & printed in the colonies.



4. INDOCHINA: Authorities designed and printed their own stamps for nearly three years.

- A.1.: Possessions that quickly disavowed Vichy had used ONLY Third Republic Issues, Examples are very difficult to find and identify :

  - August 26-30, 1940: Chad, French Equatorial Africa(Cameroun, French Congo, Ubangi-Chari, but not including Gabon) French India, New Caledonia, French Polynesia/Oceania, Condominium of New Hebrides



Governor Felix Eboue - first colonial governor to side with Free French 7 weeks after the creation of Vichy. Chad one of four colonies in A.E.F.

Mailed after Petain nominated on June 16, 1940 but before establishment of Vichy government on July 2, 1940.

Pays proper airmail rate of 4 francs, and carried by *Air Afrique*. Issued between 1937 and 1940, the stamps were produced for French Equatorial Africa (initials A.E.F. in French).

Censor “Controle” mark hints that Petain postal authorities had quickly taken up censorship

A. 1: Third Republic Issues:

Mailed June 30, 1940 two days before Vichy govt. established and 14 days after Petain appointed.

Sent internally between Kribi and Lolodord – a distance of 110 kilometers.

Sender clearly overpaid using the entire Mandara Woman issue.

Cameroun forsook Vichy following an August 27, 1940 military assault by the Free French

The cover was flown on an inaugural FAM 18 flight between New Caledonia and Canton Island on July 21, 1940.

In July 1940, the island council voted to join the Free French.

On September 20, 1940 the Vichy Governor was forced into exile in French Indochina.

A. 1. Third Republic Issues:

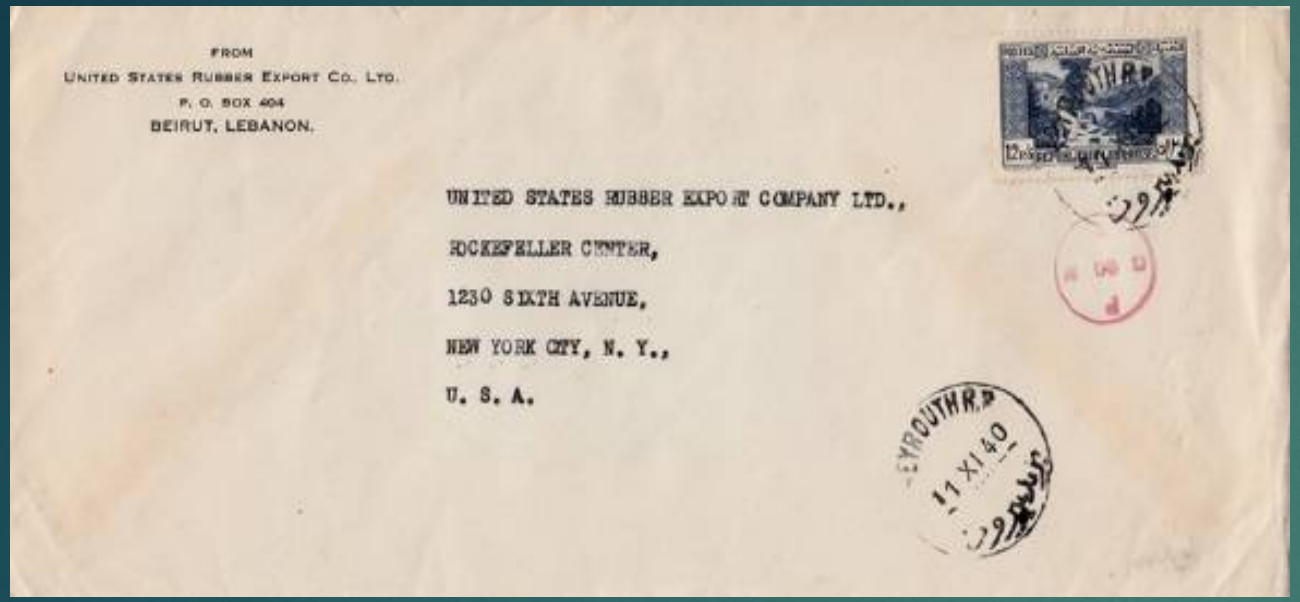
French Oceania/Polynesia switches to Free French on September 2, 1940.

Cover cancelled on 8/14/40 three weeks before the switch.

These Third Republic issues cancelled with a tourist slogan: “Visit Tahiti and Live.”

Censor marking of the Vichy regime reads “Establishments French of Oceania.”

A.2. Long Use of Third Republic Issues:



Posted in Beirut on November 1, 1940 to U.S. by branch office.

Red alternative marking beneath stamp appears to be date stamp, not censor marking

Lebanon and Syria were mandates of France from the League of Nations in 1920.

Not a colony nor a protectorate. France could exercise mandate until it awarded independence.

German Luftwaffe units used Lebanese and Syrian airbases in March 1941 to assist Iraqi revolt against Great Britain.

British + Free French forces fought several months long campaign. Vichy colonial administrators capitulate to British in July, 1941.

Control of the mandates turned over to the French later in July 1941.

A.2. LONG USE OF THIRD REPUBLIC ISSUES:

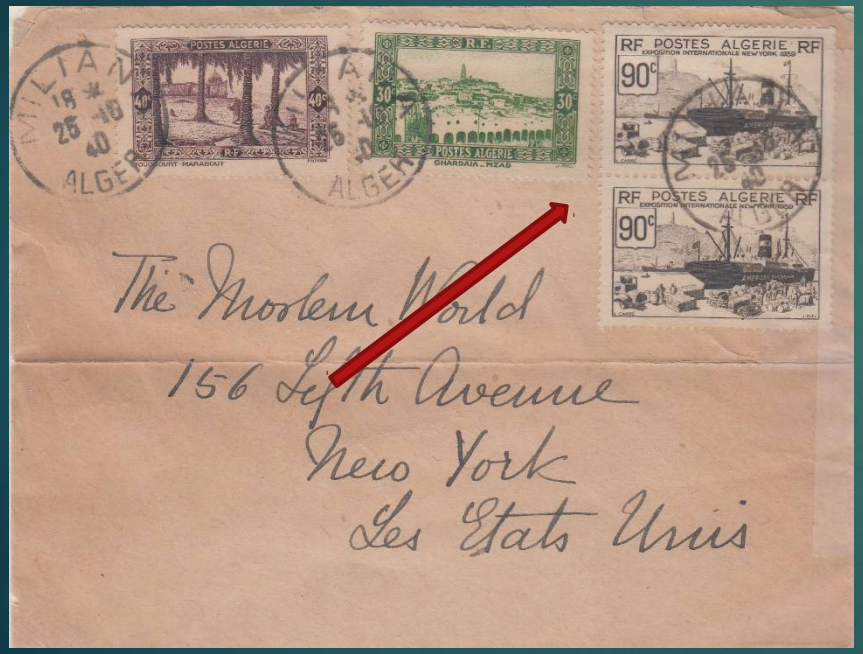
Use OF Third Republic Issues easier to find and identify for those colonies. Adherence to Vichy France:

through: November 1940: Gabon; July 1941: Syria, Lebanon December 1941 St. Pierre & Miquelon

May 1942: Wallis and Futurna Islands

November 1942: Algeria*, Dahomey*, Togo*, Madagascar, Ivory Coast*, French Guinea*, Morocco*, French Sudan*, Senegal*, Tunisia*, Gabon, Reunion

(* but not fully Free French for another year).



Left: Algeria, posted 10/25/40 from Miliana, Algeria to U.S., paying 2 fr. 50 centimes rate for surface transport. The 90 c ship stamps date to 1939 just before the defeat of the French Army.

Right: French Guiana switches to Free French on March 16, 1943. Mailed on 4/6/42, the cover arrived in NY on 4/18/46, taking extraordinarily circuitous route shown in the upper left corner.

A. 2. LONG USE OF THIRD REPUBLIC ISSUES:

Left: Printed matter was sent on 5/3/41 to the U.S. where it was censored. French Guinea remains loyal to Vichy until November 11, 1942, then switches to Admiral Darlan as part of A.O.F.

Right: Josef Pravaz cover from Pointe-A-Pitre sent on 9/12/40 by 3rd Rep. air mail to New York Guadaloupe switches to Free French July 1943 following Vichy attempts to control riots on 5/21/43 and a failed coup d'etat on 6/4/43..

Right: Mailed at Tamatave on August 29, 1941 to Tananarive in Central Madagascar – received 8/31/41.

Cover of pre-war origin. Instructions in French and Malagasy on reverse that it should not be used for mailing bank bills or payments.

Madgascar remains loyal until November 5, 1942 following British invasion of the island on September 10, 1942. Vichy forces agree to armistice on November 5, and agree to a Free French Governor on November 6, 1942.

A.2.: LONG USE OF THIRD REPUBLIC ISSUES: INDOCHINA is exception among possesions in using postage spanning all four periods of the various Vichy usages

With no access to Europe, stocks of Third Republic issues were used.

Mailed on February 13, 1941 from Saigon to Brooklyn, New York.

The Saigon Central cancellation uses the Cochin China designation from the early days of French colonial rule.

Vichy France acceded in September 1940 to Japanese demands to take over all military bases.

The Japanese decided to let Vichy administrators run French Indochina, with heavy oversight by the Japanese. This extended to the postal administration.

Lasted into March 1945 when Japanese seized all French facilities.

A.2.: LONG USE OF THIRD REPUBLIC ISSUES:

IVORY COAST able to continue using Third Republic issues as part of French West Africa (A.O.F.)
.

January 18, 1942 usage of 1936 to 1940 Third Republic issues.

Ivory Coast was able to use revisionist san RF postage of the Vichy regime, as well as the Petrain issues of the common design set.

None of the welfare issues of the common design set for the Vichy overseas empire were made available in the Ivory Coast.

B.: Use of Vichy Issues, until :

- November 1940: Gabon
- July 1941: Syria, Lebanon
- December 1941 St. Pierre and Miquelon
- May 1942: Wallis and Futurna Islands
- November 1942: Algeria*, Dahomey*, Togo*, Madagascar, Ivory Coast*, French Guinea*, Morocco*, French Sudan*, Senegal*, Tunisia*, Gabon, Reunion (* but not fully Free French for another year).
- December 1942: Somali Coast/Djibouti
- March 1943: French Guyana/Inini
- July 1943: Martinique, Guadaloupe
- March 1945: French Indochina, Guangchouwan (Kouang-Tcheou Wan)

These are plentiful but very difficult to pinpoint as to which phase of Vichy use without precise dating. Reason – many are revisions to the Third Republic issues, with the RF removed.

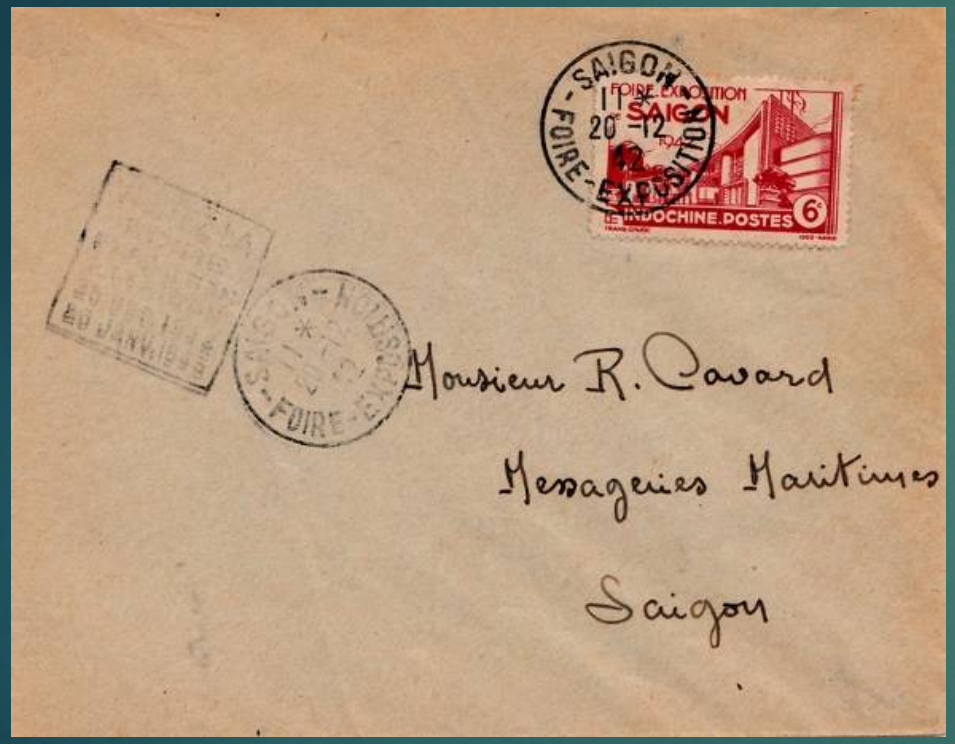
Additionally, in several possessions the Vichy issues (as well as 3rd Republic issues) continued in use after the disavowal of allegiance to Vichy

B. Use of Vichy Issues :

Use of Vichy issues during the period of loyalty to Vichy resulted in covers which are highly prized and difficult to find.

Posted in Algiers on August 26, 1941 the letter was rerouted from Marseilles to St. Cyr, accounting for the 4 franc postage due stamps which have the RF designation, unlike the Petain stamps, which lack the RF.

B.: Use of Vichy Issues



French Indochina had the ability to print its own stamps under the puppet Vichy administration government left in place by the Japanese after September 1940.

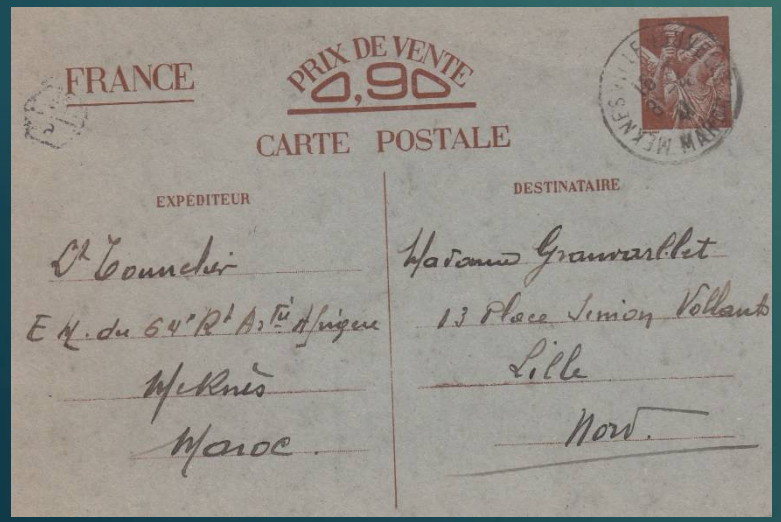
Posted in Saigon on December 20, 1942, the stamp and cover are first day covers commemorating the Saigon Fair of 1942. The cancellation and slogan cancel invited visitors to the fair.

B. Use of Vichy Issues :

Vichy regime postal cards seem to be easier to acquire.

Two cards at left were used in Morocco, on October 3, 1942 (from Casablanca) and April 3, 1941 (from Mekenese). The Tunisia postal card below was used from Sfar on March 28, 1942.

In the case of both Morocco and Tunisia, both were protectorates, not possessions of Vichy France.



None of the mandates or protectorates had common design stamps issued for them.

C. Use of Vichy Issues after switch of loyalty from Vichy.

In November 1942, Admiral Darlan (Vice Premier of Vichy) abandoned Vichy while visiting Africa. The A.O.F. (French West Africa) switched loyalty to Darlan. In late December, he was assassinated by a Free French militant.

As his successor, the British preferred General DeGaulle, the U.S. favored General Giraud. Giraud was appointed as Darlan's successor as High Commissioner of North Africa (Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia). The A.O.F. (French West Africa) adhered to Giraud.

Vichy postal authorities were retained, but communications with Vichy France were discontinued.

General Giraud refused to align with the Free French. However, he began collaborating with Free French in February, agreeing to merge anti-German planning. In November a banking scandal involving Germany forced Giraud to step down as President of the combined Giraud and Free French movements. General DeGaulle unified the two segments the day following Giraud's resignation.

Vichy issues used by Giraud colonies are common between November 1942 and November 1943 among the following: Algeria, Dahomey, Togo, Ivory Coast, French Guinea, Morocco, French Sudan, Senegal, and Tunisia.

C. Use of Vichy Issues after switch of loyalty from Vichy

Identifying Vichy issues (sans RF) relies on distinguishing them from their Third Republic predecessors (with RF).

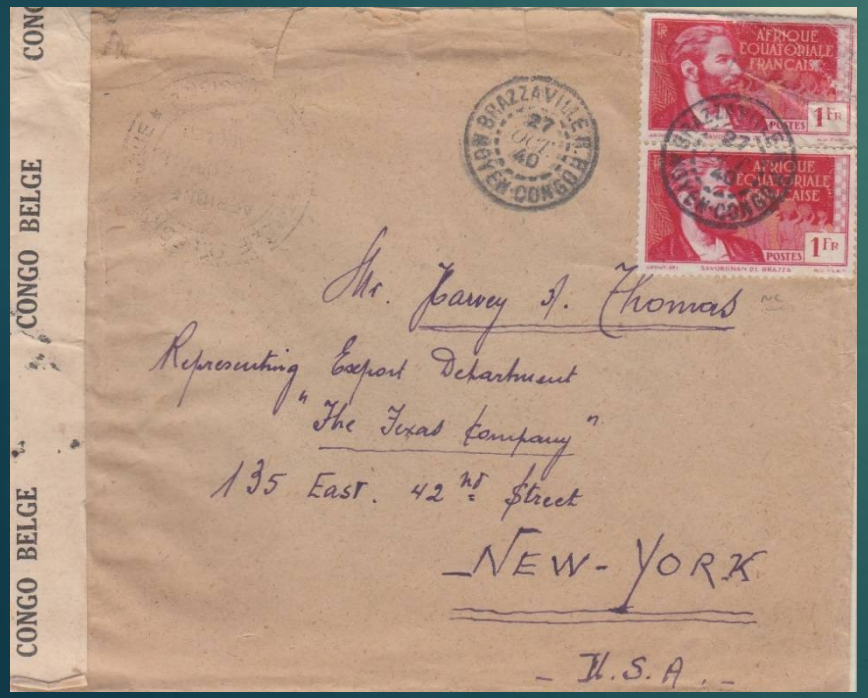
Algeria: The registered letter was sent from L'Arba on September 27, 1943, The unusual triangular label "Remboursement" (Reimbursement) pays the added 2 hundred and 24 centimes plus .80 centimes remboursement fee.

At the left, the mail was addressed to neutral Switzerland, posted in Kouea, Algeria on March 1, 1943, and censored by the Germans before forwarding to the International Red Cross.

C. Use of Vichy Issues after switch of loyalty from Vichy

Algeria (right): Both Third Republic and Vichy issues used to pay the franking from Ghardaia, Algeria on June 28, 1943 to Black Mountain, North Carolina.

Cover examined by censor # 717 of Giraud postal administration.



French Equatorial Africa (left): A.E.F. switched loyalty to Free French early (Aug./Sept. 1940). Brazzaville, the French Congo capital also capital of the A.E.F. was without any new postage.

Cover shows transitions from Third Republic (stamps)- Vichy – to Free French (date cancel) from its Oct. 27, 1940 posting.

Also demonstrates that Belgium Congo (Belgium fell in the summer of 1940) functioning independently of Belgian (or German) control.

D. Use of VICHY, FREE FRENCH, THIRD REPUBLIC Issues after joining Free F

Algeria: reversion to 3rd Republic stock occurred on the day of the takeover by Free French from the Giraud administration. Paying 2 fr. 50 centimes, the cover was mailed from Saint Eugene, Algeria to Morris, Illinois on November 8, 1943. Censor tape is attributable to Free French censor T4.318.

Algeria: An unusual cover, posted with the first Free French stamp and 4 Vichy issues. Addressed to New York City on 1/17/44, the rate paid is unclear. The Free French franking accounts for 1.50 fr., lower than the pre-war and war rates. The 4 Vichy issues amount to 25 francs and 50 centimes, overpaying the rates and suggesting that they were slapped on to meet the additional 1 franc franking of the rates at a discount price. Cover censored on the cruiser *"Gloire"* and (reverse) a U.S. naval censor and flown.

D. Use of VICHY, FREE FRENCH, THIRD REPUBLIC Issues after joining Free French

French Indochina: In March 1945, Japanese oust Vichy authorities in favor of Japanese administration. By war's end, President Roosevelt, Secretary of State Hull, and General Stilwell warn Free French not to try to reassert French authority in light of the enfeebled French forces; the Viet Minh uprising that had begun in the late 1930s, and continuing friction with the Chinese Nationalist government. American advice was ignored.

In the above example, the front is shown. The reverse is at right. Mailed from Haiphong in the North to Saigon in the South on July 3, 1948. The Vichy Governor General stamp of 1944, printed in French Indochina, is shown together with a Third Republic issue of the 1930s.

Practically from the firm re-establishment of French rule in late September 1945, the French were faced with an increasingly widespread Viet Minh rebellion until the crushing defeat of French arms at Diem Bien Phu in 1954.

Cold War considerations, in the meantime, had shifted U.S. policy towards support of the French

D. Use of VICHY, FREE FRENCH, THIRD REPUBLIC Issues after joining Free French

Vietnam, Democratic Republic (DRV - Viet Minh – 1945 to 1954): The Viet Minh, founded by Ho Chi Minh, was in revolt against Free French from October 1945. Revolt included seizure of Vichy stamps, their overprinting, and LIMITED postal usage during the Viet Minh postal administration – 1945 to 46 (see 4 covers below). These stamps are known as the IL number of the DRV

(see Left) Little is known of their postal usage, and legitimate covers are extraordinarily scarce. On December 16 – 18, 1946, the Viet Minh attacked Hanoi. Viet Minh resistance took the French nearly two months to overcome. In the interlude, post offices were looted and the stockpiles of stamps, formed part of the prize of the Viet Minh postal service

D. Use of VICHY, FREE FRENCH, THIRD REPUBLIC Issues after joining Free French

We're virtually back to the beginning.

"Favour" uses of the Vichy common design set for the overseas possessions are shown after the ouster of Vichy

No common design issues received in Martinique (above) per French postal authorities. It is a fabrication, perpetrated by Mr. Dworetzky of Brooklyn, New York. How he acquired stamps is unknown. Martinique taken over by Free French forces in July 1943. More than likely, Fort de France postal authorities were unfamiliar with the issue when presented for mailing three years later on February 23, 1946. Further, a 1949 cover postmarked Somali Coast (Djibouti)(also did not receive the stamps) almost identical to the Martinique cover observed by author in 2017.

Togo: French postal authorities did send some common design stamps to the A.O.F., and admitted in 1946 that some favour covers had been processed. This cover was mailed from Anecho to Lome, Togo on December 3, 1942, during the time of the Darlan anti-German administration of the A.O.F.

To recap:

- four distinct periods of stamp usages during Vichy consisted of: (1) Use of Third Republic stamps, (2) Use of Vichy stamps, (3) Use of Vichy and Third Republic stamps during the Giraud anti-German administration, and (4) use of Vichy and Third Republic stamps after Free French takeover

- Identifying timely uses depends solely on determining dates of loalty to Free French.

- Interaction between dates and finding distinct period covers hampers finding of such covers since most sources unaware of interaction. Added to this is the fact that many clearly Vichy items disappeared from market-place long ago – collected by enthusiasts seeking to preserve a unique chapter of French postal history.

Particularly so with lesser known French possessions - French India and Kouang Tcheou come to mind. Surprisingly, French Indochina also fits in this category – as virtually no 1941 – 1945 covers have ever been observed in the past decade of collecting its postal history. Perhaps, this is a direct consequence of the three decade long war fought by the French and the U.S. in Vietnam.