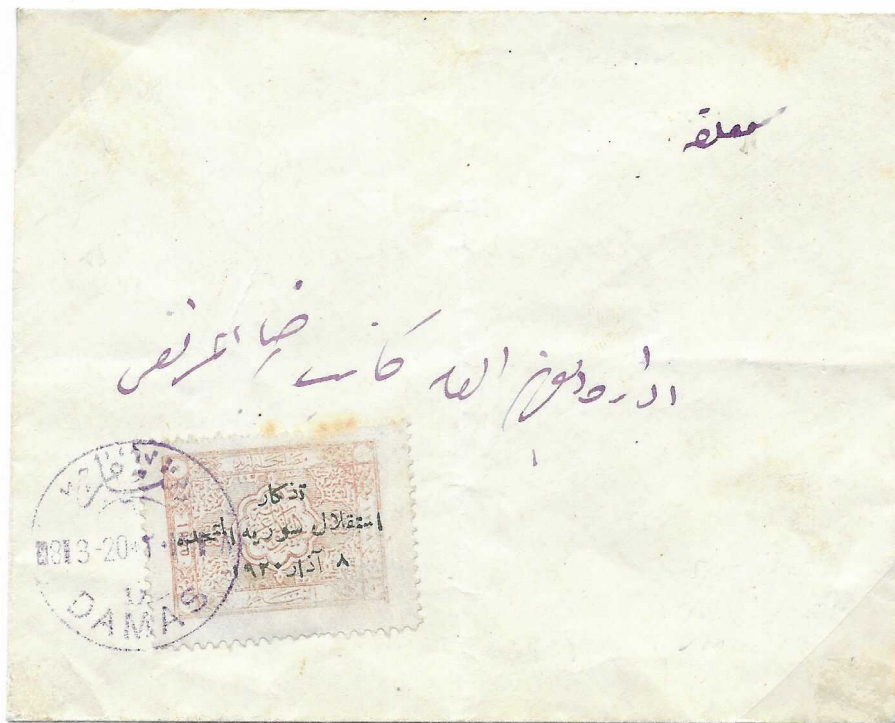


## THE FRENCH IN THE LEVANT 1915 - 1944

This exhibit examines the postal history of French activity in territories in the Eastern Mediterranean during the World Wars and the interwar period. In essence, it tells the story of the invasion, occupation and administration of areas that were part of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of World War I. It begins with the abortive attack on the Dardanelles in 1915 in an effort to take Constantinople. After the seizure of a couple of minor islands, the next important act was to send a military mission to Hedjaz to help foment an Arab uprising against the Turks. Later, in association with the British, Palestine and Syria were invaded, which eventually caused the Ottoman forces to collapse and drop out of the war.

The peace settlement required Turkey to give up all Ottoman territories populated by Arabs (and considered doing so with Armenians and Kurds). In the end, Hedjaz was annexed by Emir ibn Saud of Nejd (thus creating Saudi Arabia); Britain established mandates over Palestine, Transjordan and Iraq; and France got mandates over Lebanon and Syria. In this division of the spoils, the independent Arab government that had been established in the interior areas of Syria in 1919 was displaced by the French by force in the following year.

Naturally, all of this activity had considerable philatelic consequences. In addition to military mail during the fighting and garrison periods, civil postal services had to be developed for all of the various political entities that were created. This process was considerably complicated by the French policy of "divide and conquer" in which it gave varying amounts of autonomy to one tribe or sect after another to keep the groups from uniting in opposition to French rule.



An Arab Government for eastern Syria was established in Damascus in 1919, and Emir Feisal (formerly of Hedjaz) was crowned King on 8 March 1920. France believed that their mandate applied to all of Syria and sent troops against the Arab forces. Damascus fell on 25 July 1920, and Feisal fled the country. The above cover is franked with a stamp of the Arab government overprinted for the proclamation of the kingdom. Thus, it can be considered a forerunner of the French administration of Syria.

In general, the exhibit is presented chronologically in the order of the various territories that were invaded by the French. There is a clear imbalance of material from Syria and Lebanon, which reflects the long period of French administration until independence was granted in 1941. However, Free French forces remained active in the Levant until late in World War II in order to displace the Vichy officials.

# THE FRENCH IN THE LEVANT 1915-1944

## PLAN OF EXHIBIT

Material in this exhibit will be shown chronologically by the beginning of each phase of operations:

Dardanelles Campaign -- 1915-1916  
Occupation of Rouad -- 1915-1922  
Occupation of Castellorizo -- 1915-1921  
Military Mission in Hedjaz -- 1916-1918  
Detachment in Palestine -- 1917-1920  
Occupation of Syria -- 1918-1923  
Occupation of Constantinople -- 1918-1921  
Occupation of Cilicia -- 1919-1922  
Occupation of Southern Anatolia -- 1921  
Syria - Greater Lebanon -- 1923-1924  
Lebanon Mandate -- 1924-1941  
Syria Mandate -- 1924-1941  
Alawite Territory -- 1925-1930  
Djebel Druze -- 1925-1940  
Latakia -- 1930-1936  
Alexandretta -- 1938-1939  
Free French Forces -- 1941-1944



Picture postcard of Cairo which was sent as a forerunner of the fieldpost mail from a member of the French Military Mission to Hedjaz during the period when the group was forming in Egypt. Entitled to be sent free of postage due to the use of a special cachet of the "French Military Base at Suez."

## DARDANELLES

The first aggressive Allied thrust in Europe of World War I was an assault on the Turkish fortifications guarding the waterway from the Sea of Marmara to the Aegean. The ultimate goal was to capture Constantinople, divide Anatolia from European Turkey and open up a new warm water route for shipping war materiel to Russia. The initial landings on Gallipoli began on 25 April 1915. However, the operation was not a success and the forces were thus withdrawn on 9 January 1916.



Tresor et Postes 194  
27 May 1915



The French participation in the Dardanelles Expeditionary Corps was modest relative to the British and Imperial (especially Anzac) forces. However, several different fieldpost offices were in operation to service the troops. This example was mailed from FPO 194 at Sedd-ul-Bahr. Registered mail from this campaign is very scarce.

DARDANELLES  
Fieldpost

Tresor et Postes 409  
16 July 1915

Tresor et Postes 506  
13 November 1915

Sedd-ul-Bahr  
14 juillet-1915

XIII

ΕΛΛΑΣ-GRÈCE  
ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΙΚΟΝ ΔΕΛΤΑΡΙΟΝ  
CARTE POSTALE

AMBULANCE  
Ancien Aide-Major  
1<sup>re</sup> classe

TRÉSOR ET POSTES  
16  
15  
409

Mon cher fiancé  
Les circonstances sont telles  
amis. nous avons cherché  
subsistance. nous sommes maintenant  
à l'abri des balles. Je voudrais  
bien un peu goûter au pain  
de ruz des jours.

Senti toujours excellente.  
Moral satisfaisant.  
Nous avons fêté à midi le  
jour de la victoire par un  
copieux repas. Le soir après dîner  
un poton, nous à joué les  
marchés; aucun de nous  
certainement n'a jamais senti  
notre hymne, aussi religieusement  
jamais les communiés. Colonne en  
une production de moi une telle  
impression.

Si vous pouvez à vos jours  
Seth.

Monsieur EYSSERIC  
Médicin aide-Major de 1<sup>re</sup> classe  
Hôpital-Depôt de comestibles n° 40  
ANTIBES

No. 12.

TRÉSOR ET POSTES  
DIRECTION  
CORPS EXPÉDITIONNAIRE DES DARDANELLES

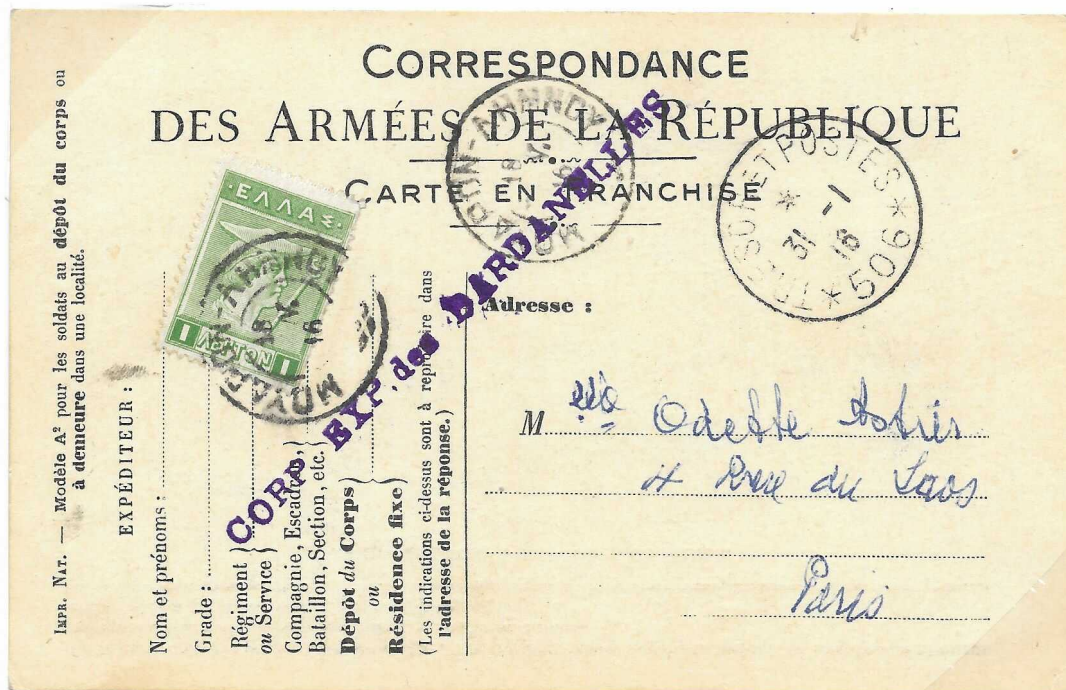
TRÉSOR ET POSTES  
13 \*  
15 -11  
\*506\*

Monsieur Lucien Laticule  
122<sup>ème</sup> d'Infanterie : S.H.R  
Rodez (Aveyron)

Postcard datelined Sedd-ul-Bahr, site of one of the outer forts protecting the Dardanelles. Cover shows example of the large cachet of the "Dardanelles Expeditionary Force" posted to France.

DARDANELLES  
Fieldpost

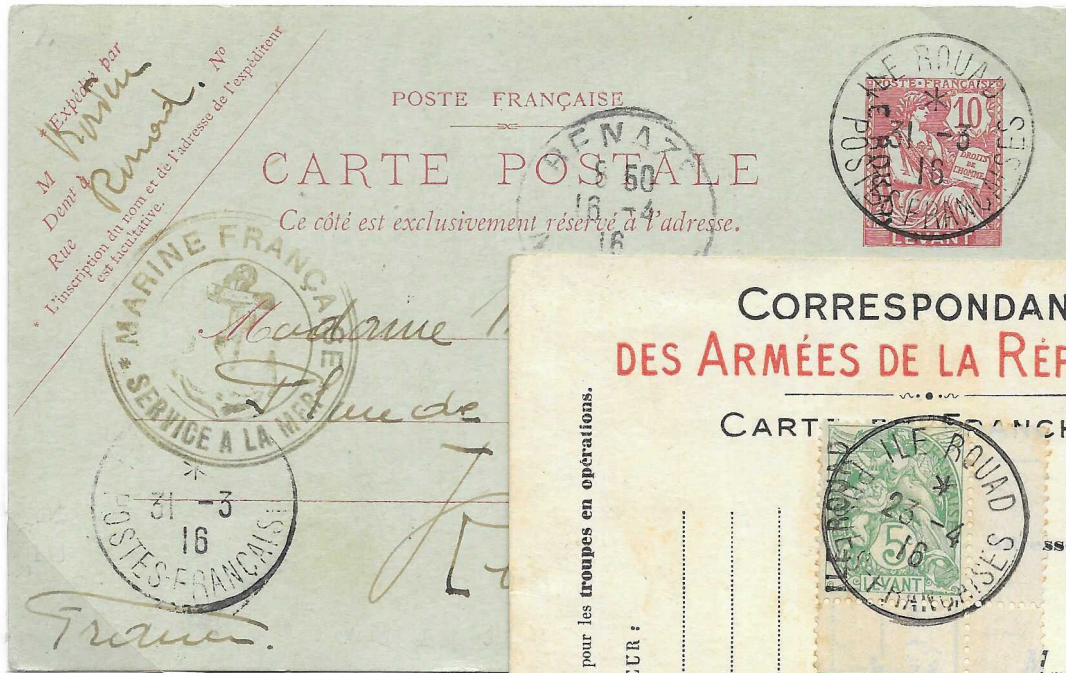
Tresor et Postes 506  
31 December 1915  
31 January 1916



These items mailed shortly before and after the ending of the Dardanelles campaign. Postage was free, but cover bears a 35 centime adhesive to pay the registration fee. Postcard has single-line cachet of the "Dardanelles Expeditionary Corps" but was actually mailed from the base at Mudros on Lemnos Island, to which many of the troops had been evacuated. The Greek stamp was not required but was affixed as a souvenir.

# ROUAD

In 1915, the French navy occupied the small island of Rouad (today called Arwad) off the coast of Syria, south of the city of Tartous. In order to publicize this minor victory over the Ottomans, three French Levant stamps and a postal card were handstamped with "Ile Rouad" and placed on sale in 1916. The island was occupied until 1921 when it was attached to the French-controlled Alawite Territory, which was later incorporated into Syria.



Ile Rouad  
23 April 1916  
31 March 1916



Only one postmark was used on Rouad, with the name of the island at the top and "French Posts" at the bottom. The hand overprinted stamps were only in use briefly and are elusive on cover. In addition to the first three denominations, 40 and 50 cent. stamps were prepared but never issued; however, a small available supply was postmarked and sold to collectors.



When supplies of the hand overprinted stamps were exhausted, standard French Levant issues were utilized, as shown here on covers to France and The Netherlands.

**ROUAD**  
Overprinted Levant Stamps

Ile Rouad  
27 December 1916  
16 January 1917



Late in 1916, a new supply of French Levant stamps was overprinted "Ile Rouad" and placed on sale. Four of the higher denominations were also surcharged with a new value in piastres. These stamps continued in use until 1921 when they were replaced by those of Syria.



ROUAD  
Overprinted Levant Stamps

Ile Rouad  
6 September 1918  
14 December 1920



Covers with higher and lower denomination "Ile Rouad" overprints, the latter to the U.S. utilizing a new type of rectangular registration "box."

## CASTELLORIZO

Castellorizo was a small island of four square miles in the Mediterranean Sea off the southern coast of Anatolia. The Allies thought that its port had some strategic value, so the island was occupied by a French naval expedition on 24 December 1915. The French remained until 28 February 1921, when the island was transferred to Italy as a part of its Aegean Islands colony.

Castellorizo/Occupation Francaise  
February 1916  
January 1921



During the early part of the occupation, no new stamps were issued for Castellorizo but those of Greece and the French Levant could be used. Two different cachets were used to cancel postage, one with designation of the "3rd Squadron, First Naval Division" and the other without. These examples were backstamped in transit at Port Said on 16 February 1916 and at Rhodes on 8 January 1921, respectively.

**CASTELLORIZO**  
**Unofficial Overprints on French Levant**  
**O.N.F. (French Naval Occupation) Overprints**

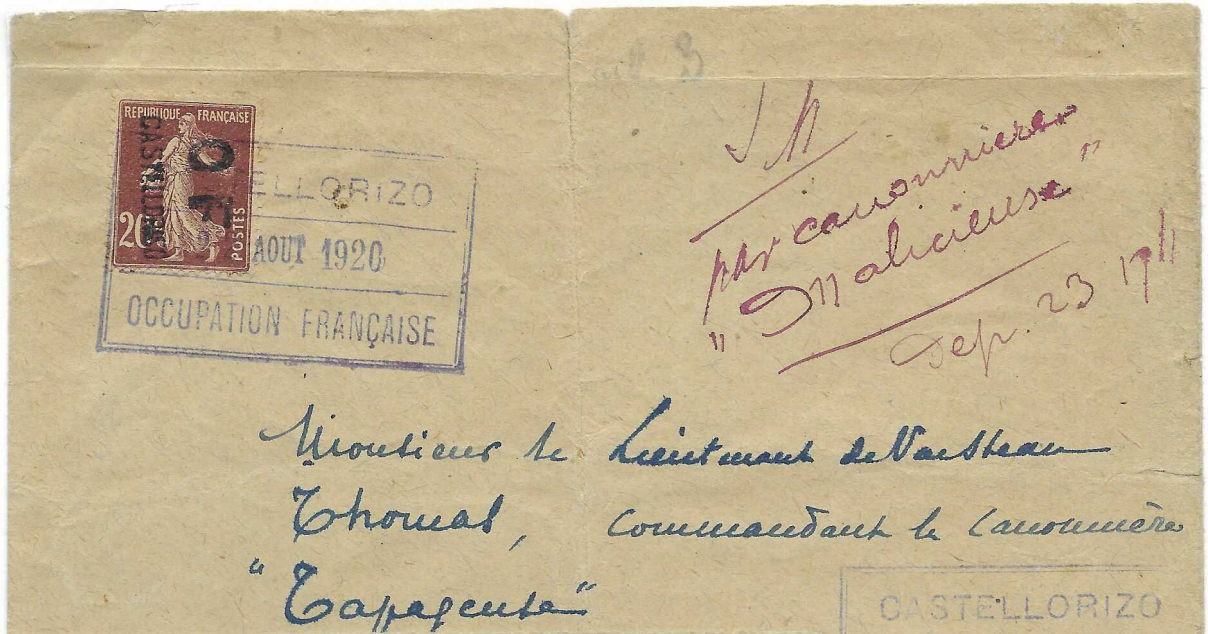
Castellorizo/Corps d'Occupation  
 September 1920



Upper philatelic envelope with French Levant stamps unofficially overprinted for the occupation. In July 1920, officially overprinted stamps were issued for Castellorizo, with the wording of O.N.F. (Occupation Navale Française) and the name of the island. In addition to the issued denominations, an 8 piastres on 2 francs value was overprinted but never issued.

CASTELLORIZO  
O.F. (French Occupation) Overprints

Castellorizo/Ocupation Francaise  
22 August 1920



Monsieur le Lieutenant de Vaisseau  
Thouas, Commandant la Canonnière  
"Capitaine"



Monsieur le Lieutenant de Vaisseau  
Thouas, Commandant la Canonnière  
"Capitaine"

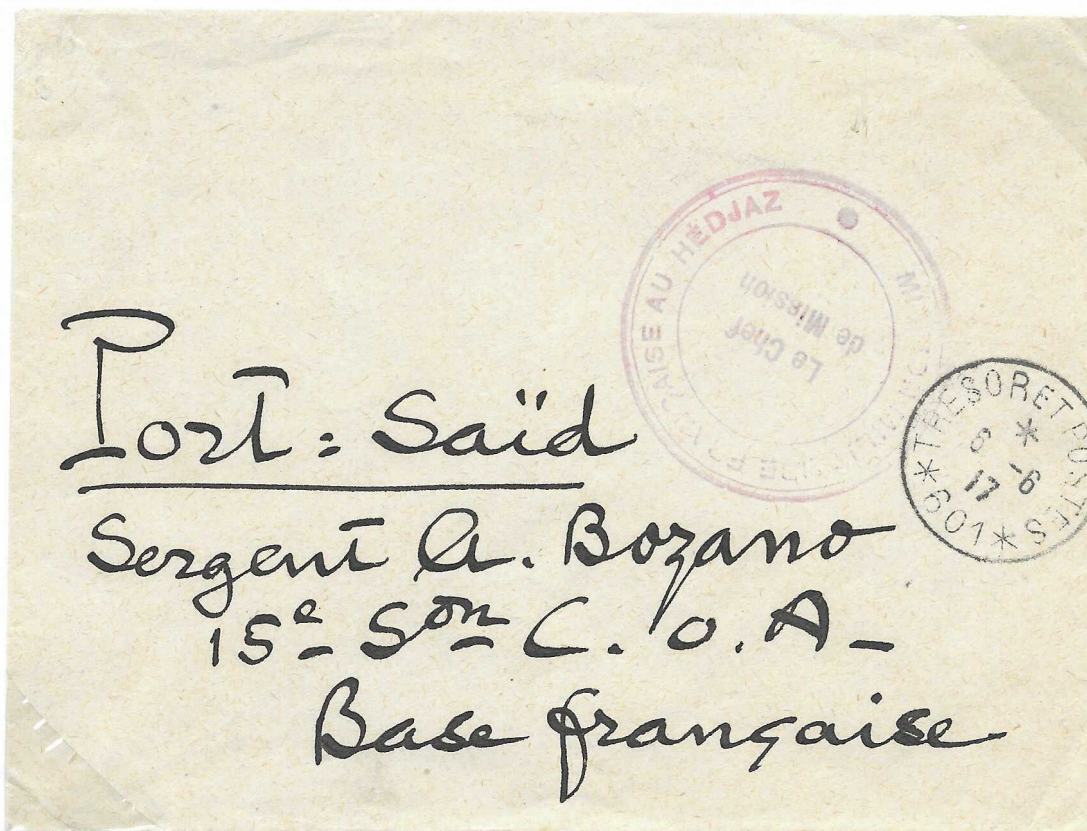
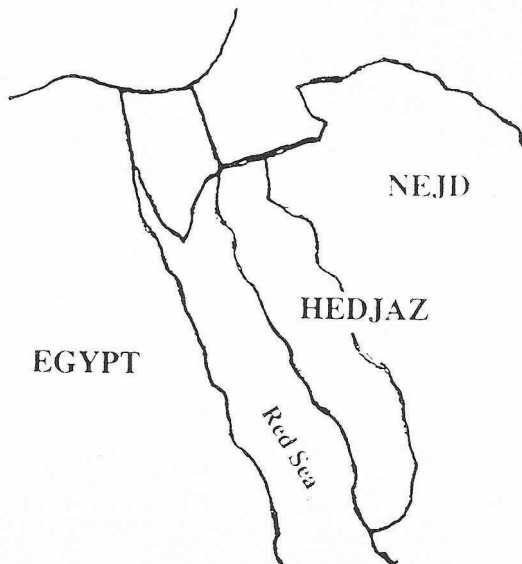
Cetkova

The final stamps for Castellorizo were overprints on French definitives, also in July 1920. The new wording consisted of OF (Occupation Francaise) and the name of the island. Six denominations were issued, including the 1 franc. Manuscript markings on these covers indicate that they were delivered by the gunboat *Malicieuse* to the addressee in Cilicia.

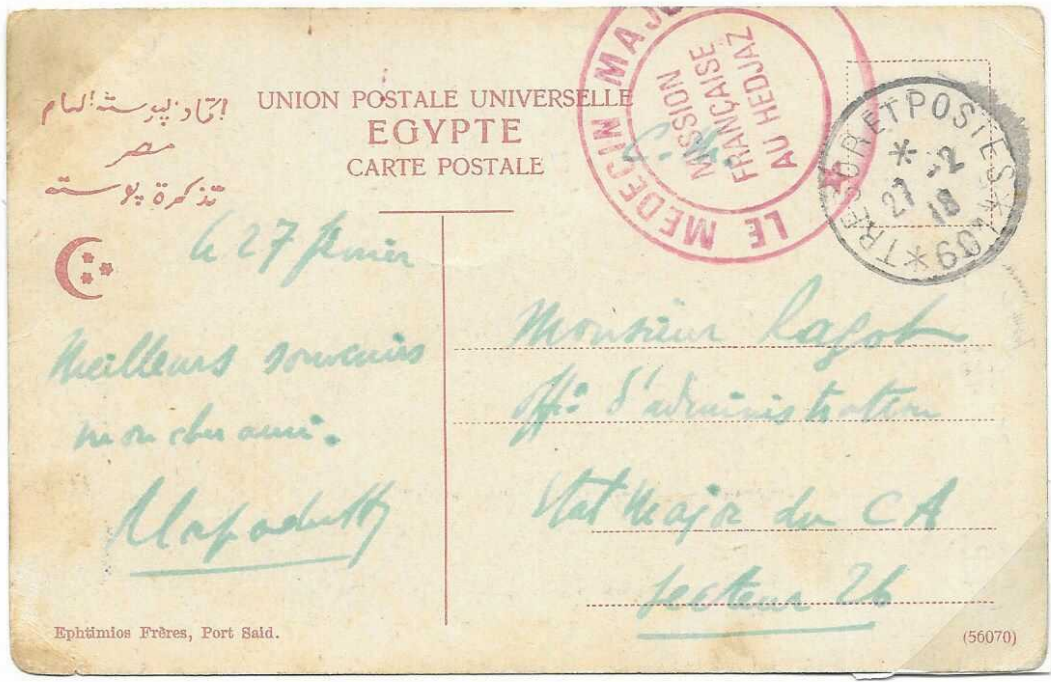
## HEDJAZ

In an effort to support the Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire, France in 1916 sent a military mission consisting of 40 officers and about 1,000 men (mostly Muslim troops from North Africa) to Hedjaz on the western side of the Arabian Peninsula. This effort was successful in that the Turks were defeated at Aqaba and driven northward into Palestine and Syria.

Tresor et Postes 601  
6 June 1917



Above cover sent from Hedjaz to the French base in Port Said, Egypt by a member of the mission. Note that the authorizing cachet has the wording "Chief of the Mission." Only about a dozen cards and covers in total are recorded from this operation.



Several different authorizing cachets were used on mail from members of the mission, including the upper one with "Chief of the Detachment" and the postcard from a medical officer.

HEDJAZ  
Fieldpost

Mecca  
June 1918

Tresor et Postes 601  
25 September 1918



Upper cover shows highly unusual usage through the civil post office in Mecca with straight-line "M.M.F. Hedjaz" cachet of the French Military Mission. July transit markings on reverse of Djedda and Port Said. Lower example shows second type of "Chief of the Mission" cachet with emblematic "France" in the center.

HEDJAZ  
Fieldpost

Tresor et Postes 601  
18 April 1918



A small group from the French mission was sent to Yambo, a minor port on the Red Sea. Upper cover from an artillery instructor shows previously unrecorded cachet. Lower cover shows obvious philatelic influence, being franked with unnecessary Hedjaz stamps and cancelled with old Ottoman postmark. However, it bears a special cachet of "Mission B" in Yambo.