The Communist People's Army of Vietnam (P.A.V.N.), also later known as the Viet Cong (V.C.), those guerilla forces indigenous to South Vietnam, and the North Vietnamese Army (N.V.A.) operated a functioning postal system that enabled soldiers to send and receive mail at the unit level during combat operations.

This exhibit illustrates the story of the military mail of the V.C. and the N.V.A. units operating in the South and/or corresponding internally in the North from 1959 when the Viet Cong in Quang Ngai province South of Da Nang first initiated armed uprisings against the Saigon government until the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975.

Little of this 20th Century material survived the war period, making them extremely difficult to obtain. These examples came from mail captured during combat operations or found in storage tunnels after the war, archives, and correspondence with civilian recipients. The exhibit starts with an overview of the development of military postal operations. It concludes with a secret postal instruction document that details the routes and handling of mail late in the war and a last day usage at the Saigon post office. The exhibit presents Vietnam’s Communist Military Mail usages in twelve sections to illustrate the evolution of their operations: (Red borders denote particular significance.)

I. Early Mail 1959-1960s
II. Military Issue Adhesives
III. Propaganda
IV. Patriotics
V. Adversity Usages
VI. Captured Mail & Security Usages
VII. Redirected, Forwarded, & Censored
VIII. POW and Command Usages
IX. Urgent/Expedite Markings
X. Communist Allies’ Involvement
XI. Secret Markings; Command Center
XII. American Withdrawal; Capture of Saigon
Overview of Military Postal Operations

Field post offices were organized by sections and staffed by dedicated full-time personnel with district officers reporting to province officer. Staffing included political offices as censors, liaison agents between districts, 10-15 section route couriers, Giao Liens, per district, and security guards.

District sections, receiving mail from route section couriers, sorted, forwarded and delivered mail to military units at regional levels, among them Cau Sau, a folk hero like Uncle Remis.

Stringent security requirements directed military units to destroy all mail received, after it was read.

Stamps were often removed from captured mail by N.V.A. or V.C. censors and regularly by U.S. G-2 intelligence officials to find hidden messages underneath stamps.

Urgent, Top Secret, Expedite, or Rush markings received priority handling at Section Command Centers.

N.V.A. and V.C. routed mails from the South to North through Quang Ngai and then to the central Command Center in Cambodia, COSVN, which was the Committee for South Vietnam, and finally north via the Ho Chi Minh Trail. South bound mail followed this path also.

Postal addresses to Hop Tho numbers refer to individuals.

Postal addresses to Hom Thu numbers refer to units and were changed frequently for security purposes.

Senders’ and recipients’ names appear on most covers with a letterbox designation.

Military Frank issued adhesives were printed from 1958 to 1975. They were without denomination, to be distributed two stamps per soldier per month for personal mail back home. Almost all military mail to or from home took 2 to 3 months for delivery.

Constant movement of N.V.A. and V.C. units made receiving and sending mails difficult because their Southern positions were not fixed until 1973 after the U.S. forces withdrew.
The Communist tribal leaders and loyalists in South Vietnam, initiated armed uprisings against their government in Saigon in 1959. This folded form used as an envelope, addressed to Hom Thu #5.810A unit, operating near the Quang Ngai Province south of DaNang where fighting broke out, bears the handstamp of a Ward Leader. The trade school form offers their reference for the soldier, Nguyen Phan Nhan. One of seven recorded 1959 usages.
1960 Usage of
Military Frank Adhesive
N.V.A. In Country

Military Frank 1959 Issue: Soldier and Train
N.V.A. soldiers were issued two stamps each month for postage.

Military to military usage in the North with four digit Hop Tho No. 2370 which designates an individual and Hom Thu No. 5716 which designates a military unit. Letter discusses family matters, separation, and updates on status/whereabouts.
Usage: North to South, containing a map of Northern I Corps. Circa 1967-1968, with routing north through Cambodia, having originated there. Military to military usage without content of letter to tell the purpose of the map enclosure. Addressed to Hom Thu #92176 L-T through Cau Sau transfer station.
Enemy forces mail captured prior to 1965 is extremely rare due to the fact that South Vietnamese military forces saw little need to retain captured mail for its possible intelligence value. Surviving examples of mail taken prior to the widening of the war usually are marked with initials "G.M." presumed to be a unit designation. All three examples were used within the South and probably contained political content rather than military or personal. Circa 1964.
From a VC Postal Unit at Binh Duong, Tay Ninh Province, and Doi Giao Lien, a liaison unit. Each page of the booklet records the date, mail box code, and signature of recipient or sender: 245 letters recorded in this book, between June 1 and September 15, 1966. Only known copy.
Early N.V.A. Mail

1964 Issue:
Irrigation for Agriculture Usage:
From Hanoi to Hom Thu unit

1961 Issue:
Resistance Fighters in 15th Anniversary of National Resistance issue
Hanoi machine cancel
August 23, 1963 to a deployed N.V.A. unit
Ha Dong receiving cancel on reverse

Stamp peeled off when captured, looking for messages under the adhesive.
Few surviving V.C. or N.V.A. letters or mail to North Vietnam from those units fighting in the South exist. These reasons account for this scarcity:

1) Writing home officially discouraged to prevent demoralizing news from reaching those who lived in the North.

2) Illiteracy reduced the population of writers.

3) N.V.A. / V.C. instruction that all mail be destroyed after reading, for security.

4) Captured mail also destroyed after inspection.

5) Extremely high mortality rate among couriers and liaison personnel.

6) Noticeably fewer live letter writers as the war progressed, as an estimated 1,200,000 casualties were suffered by the Viet Cong and N.V.A.

7) Hostile climate of high moisture.
Known examples of North to South captured N.V.A. mail from the 1960-1963 period are few in number. The N.V.A. battlefield mail system was still unsophisticated and with the American build-up of forces, later many more couriers were targeted and mail intercepted. This example has inscription on back flap “South to North” although Nam Dong is located near Dalat in the South. Stamp removed after capture; cancellation applied in the North.

Photographs taken from letters carried by P.A.V.N. or N.V.A. mailmen and couriers who were killed in action while making mail transfers. All are taken from covers displayed in this exhibit.
Mail Damaged in Transit

Letter damaged by water immersion prior to being taken from body of communications courier. Photograph below shows courier this letter was taken from. Additional mail and other documents are seen floating on water. Location: Bo Woods, Northwest of Saigon.

The common way mails were damaged in transit down the Ho Chi Minh Trail or within Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam was from combat initiated by allied forces. Such mail was often missed and suffered further environmental and immersion damages until it was recovered. The provenance of this cover can be traced to the military intelligence officer who took the photograph. Circa 1966.
As the locations of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army Units were fluid and mobile, many letter writers had no idea of the unit number, or geographic locations of the intended recipient. In this case, the Hom Thu No. was left blank to be filled in by transfer clerks in Cambodia, Laos, and South Vietnam. Note different color of inks. Bundles of such letters were assembled in the North and transported down the “Trail” in plastic wrapped “Ambulance” packets.

North to South Usage
On Decorated Envelope


The Lotus plant, especially the flower, has long been a sacred symbol in all of Southeast Asia. In 1966, battalions began to use a successful envelopment tactic known as the “enfolding Lotus.” Much refined and tested, the tactic eventually became known as the “exploding Lotus.” Thus, the appearance of the Lotus as a cachet on large numbers of patriotic covers sent by wounded soldiers held a special significance. An uncle in the North is writing a nephew in the South, and conveying greetings.
N.V.A. North to South Usage
On Decorated Stationary

March 11, 1968 to
HT 5270 Ap Nam 2.

Writer discusses
achieving village
quotas on rice
production.

Feb. 2, 1968
to Cau Sau
Transfer Station
Hanoi
Machine cancel
Stamp removed

Both covers entered the mail system from units deployed in the D.M.Z. either the 308th or 324th Division. The bottom item: stamp removed by the 3rd Marine Division Intelligence in I Corps at Dong Ha. Cau Sau address disguised soldier recipient’s location.
Captured Soldier’s Letter

Sent on February 30, 1968 (sic) through mail system to Cau Sau transfer station in the South.

Soldiers’ letters captured during the war showed them to be very similar to their American or South Vietnamese counterparts in one very important way – all wanted mail from home. The soldier’s wife laments that he has not received a letter in over two years. She discusses hardships at home, home village demolished by B-52 raid, “Black Crows.” It reads, “They killed a lot of people.”
Viet Cong guerrilla cover and letter contaminated with blood of dead owner, captured prior to mailing at Lai Khe for delivery by courier to Ben Cat, five miles north. Letter written Feb. 30, 1968 {sic} notes the writer's recent feeling that he "will not be alive much longer." He is recuperating in a clinic with an eye injury.

Human blood shed by mail and communications couriers was one of the most common battlefield contaminants. Occasionally mail salvaged from a dead courier by another courier was then taken from the second courier's body. The guerrilla penchant for carrying away their casualties was more battlefield expediency and security protection than humanitarianism.
Typical V.C. Usages

Usage: South to North Viet Cong military to either a civilian or political officer. Made from a ledger form. Six characteristics:

- Less than 3 inches on any side
- No postal markings
- Few if any origin markings
- Made from ruled notebook paper
- Recipient’s location omitted
- No censor marks

Usage: Viet Cong folded letter August 19, 1968
Comrade to comrade
"Thanks to the enemy (Americans) we know each other."
Hanoi, March 15, 1968 with original enclosure to Hom Thu No. 5201 deployed in South.
Letter discusses U.S. bombing the North, strengthening the people's cause to kill U.S. imperialists.

April 15, 1968 to Hom Thu No. 503 with original enclosure sister to deployed brother discussing wounded uncle, love for country, and reunification. Kinh Goi” is Please forward. On a reused envelope.
March 15, 1968
Intercepted in DMZ
by 3rd Marine Division

Northbound In-Country Mails

Most northbound mail was handed off to couriers until reaching Quang Tri province. There, all mails were directed west bound and entered Laos south of the D.M.Z. near Lang Vei for their journey on the Ho Chi Minh trail north bound. N.V.A. soldier Nguyen Viet Gnh, Hom Thu No. 5301, is discussing family matters, status and daily responsibilities.
South Bound N.V.A. Mail

II. Military Issued Adhesives

1968 Issue: Cuban and Armed Revolutionary Brotherhood
With detailed squad, platoon, and company’s return address.

1968 Issue: 150th birthday of Karl Marx. Tinh Hoa, postmark.
N.V.A. Usage in the North of Military Frank Adhesive

Military Frank
1961 Issue:
Mounted Frontier Guard

Hai-Phong to Hanoi
October 31, 1961
From Hom Thu
Military Unit
No. 4566 MP

Military Frank
1961 Issue:
Mounted Frontier Guard

Hanoi
Machine Cancel
December 1962
to Hom Thu
Military Unit
No. 5676
Early N.V.A. Military Stamp with Registered Adhesive

1958 Issue: Vo Thi Sau, 17 Year old Heroine, in 13th Anniversary of Southern Resistance Movement issue
Miliary Frank 1960 Issue: Invalids Riding Water Wheel, Rice fields
Hanoi Handstamp with manuscript March 3, 1962

Four Military Frank stamps were issued and in use before 1960. Few early Military Frank stamps used on cover are recorded. Registry services with free Military Frank stamps required additional postage, removed by sensor. This 1958 stamp replaces the removed stamp.
Undeliverable due to recipient being killed, therefore, cover returned to battalion headquarters for forwarding, as indicated on the reverse and then captured. Pre-used stamp, allowed for postage by the Government,
Very seldom seen red P.A.V.N. handstamp Quan Buu from Tram K 35 command center, unknown location, to C-111 military zone in Ha Bac, North Vietnam.
Seldom seen manuscript identification of a N.V.A. Division, the 330th at Luc Nam in return address.
Decorated Stationary

1972 Issue: Workers in 3rd Vietnamese Trade Union series
Usage: to the “Political Educational Committees” at Bac Kan
Tram Guven handstamp
May 29, 1973

1972 Issue: Workers
Hanoi machine cancel
May 11, 1974
Hom Tho No.
to a Hom Thu No.

1972 Issue: Workers
Hanoi machine cancel
May 11, 1974
Hom Tho No.
to a Hom Thu No.

Military Frank
1971 Issue:
Nguyen Viet Xuan
January 10, 1974
from military training installation in Hanoi
to Hanoi with enclosure
N.V.A. Usage On Decorated Stationary

Military Frank
1968 Issue: Soldiers in Attack
Usage: North to South
Tu Liem handstamp
March 18, 1970
to HT No. 63305 KP
likely the 330th Division,
operating in II Corps.

1964 Issue: Modern Everyday Costume in Women’s National Costumes series
Usage: Intra-Country
Military Frank Issue Decorated Cover
Usage in North Vietnam

Military Frank 1968 Issue: Soldiers in Attack

From Hom Thu No. 53561 TQ to civilian at Thanh Hoa, North Vietnam, on Industrial machinery cache.

Postmarked Lam Song near Laotian border to a deployed unit in South Vietnam.
General Issues on Decorated Stationary

1964 Issue: Pistol Shooting of Military Game Series
From Hom Thu
No. 2135 HA

1961 Issue: Ancient Towers
Hanoi handstamp
Originating there but most likely hand carried into city by carrier

Luc Ngan cancellation January 1, 1965 to a Hanoi government office
N.V.A. Military Frank Adhesives

Sent on April 27, 1965 by HT No. 2881 TG to a civilian from a military unit that had not yet been deployed.

Two Military Frank adhesives were given to each N.V.A. soldier each month to be used on mails to send home. Printed in Hanoi without values, most known used examples were within the North from units not yet deployed.
As the war progressed, increased numbers of N.V.A. units deployed in the South stretched the military postal service. Increased security and delivery problems led to a five digit letterbox codes and then to an alpha/numeric system of codes. This cover travelled between two nearly consecutive numbered letterboxes assigned to units within a single command, probably within a battalion sized unit.
III. Propaganda

Booklet, printed in Hanoi in 1973 by the Xunhasaba Printing Company, contained a complete set of the nineteen adhesives, given as a gift to visitors and diplomats to strengthen North Vietnam's bargaining position and objective of reunification during the peace process. These celebrations of numbers of planes downed began with 500 in 1965 and ended with the last plane, number 4181, in 1973.

Inside:
All nine issues of U.S. Planes Downed Over North Vietnam
Propaganda Post Card

1964 Issue: 10th Anniversary of Victory at Dien Bien Phu

Hand painted card usage from Hanoi May 7, 1964
Both 1964 Issue: 10th Anniversary of Victory at Dien Bien Phu series

Both examples postmarked Hanoi May 7, 1964
National Liberation Front Issues

Issue: 1965 N.L.F., 1st Death Anniversary of Nguyen Van Troi: Exploding Aircraft.
Usage: North to South as a patriotic propaganda label only, as these N.L.F. issues were ruled invalid for postal use by the International Postal Union.

Travelled on the Ho Chi Minh trail in Cambodia through the "Cau Sau" transfer station on the trail, this adhesive image celebrates the successful guerilla attack on the Bien Hoa airbase. Backside of the cover bears blood stains from the mail courier killed in ambush.
National Liberation Front Issues

1967 N.L.F. Issue
Struck twice by magenta double bar canceller,
On folded form, (below)
Hom Tho No. 5221
Added by transfer agent


Issues by the National Liberation Front had no postal validity since the Universal Postal Union and its member countries correctly reasoned that the Viet Cong/N.L.F. did not have a viable and functioning postal system. Approximately ten covers are recorded with N.L.F. adhesives.
1967 Issue: Light from Aurora Battleship in 50th Anniversary of the Russian October Revolution series, multiple rate franking to France, handstamped Hanoi August 17, 1973

Facsimile of the complete covered sketch showing the historic 1968 engagement at Khe Sanh
Patriotic Usage in North Vietnam

1972 Issue: 3,500th Plane Shot Down, with Hanoi handstamped postmark.

Military Frank 1969 Issue: Soldier and Guerilla Woman; Hanoi machine cancel to Hom Thu No. 91364 CS

The left mint example captured personally by the exhibitor (3rd Marine Division,) in 1967, while stationed at Con Thien in the D.M.Z.
February 2, 1972

Usage between two military units on Khe Sanh patriotic cover in I Corps. Writer Hom Tho No. 270 792 JB02 discusses family matters and status of things back home with recipient Hom Tho No. 262 652 JA01, Both N.V.A. units operational near the D.M.Z.
Patriotic Usage

1968 Issue: Ho Chi Minh Appeal; Hanoi handstamp, November 3, 1970

1971 Issue: Flight of Luna 17; Lang Bo handstamp. March 26, 1972
Military Frank 1965 Issue: Obstacle Crossing Soldier (Red)

From military address HT No. 9512 HK, possibly the military training center at Yen Bai; dated 3/09/66, addressed to “Commander Training School III” Bien Hoa, Nam Ha, North Viet Nam.
Patriotic Usage

1965 Issue:
Electricity and Irrigation
Usage: Military to Civilian
Dong Hy red cancel

Dated March 18, 1965
Note purple "53" marking for destination; Hanoi machine cancellation on reverse.
Hue War Memorial Patriotic Usage

Usage: North to South post-Tet via Cau Sau receiving center.
Letter sent to a military unit address Hom Thu No. 92 159 LT.
Captured military patriotic cover from I Corps sent between two military individuals, 1972. Stamp partially removed for security inspection. Cachet notes death of the Communist North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh. Below are examples of the damaged adhesive used on this cover.

1965 Issue:
75th Anniversary of the Birth of Ho Chi Minh
April 11, 1967

Viet Cong comrade writing wife of a soldier about husband’s bravery, killing 14 enemies, receiving medal of gallantry, and becoming a party member.
Patriotic Usage on European Mails

1970 Issue: 40th Anniversary of Workers Party with Hanoi handstamp, June 17, 1970 to Poland

1965 Issue: Spraying the Rice Fields (Agriculture) in the series “Completing the First Five Year Plan” Military usage HT X NN to the Soviet Union July 30, 1967 with receiving handstamp.
Patriotic Usage

1965 Issue: Iron Worker to Hom Thu No. BC-40/H manuscript

1965 Issue 20th Anniversary of the August Revolution

Hanoi, August 13, 1969
Usage: Southbound
Other issues in the 1969 Patriotic Paintings series

1969 Issue: Patriotic Paintings "Land and People"
N.V.A. Naval Usage to Europe

Hanoi machine cancel September 16, 1968; Usage: to Budapest, Hungary. HQ or Hai-Quan in sender’s address designates Naval Command Operations in Hanoi.
1968 correspondence from cadre F 9229 in Cambodia to Comrade Ba Cay at H.T.N. 3423 B10. The enclosed letter, above, from a V.C. commander, assesses the plight of the Vietnamese who were beginning to swarm across the border because of persecution in Cambodia.
Viet Cong Adversity Covers

Constructed from Cambodian cigarette package. Captured while en route through Tay Ninh to Long An Province, the package still bears a Cambodian tax stamp.

With extremely limited resources, V.C. combat mail required ingenious solutions for handling and delivery of combat mail. The adhesive used to make envelopes and as gum for labels was produced by chewing rice with liberal amounts of saliva. Any and all types of paper were used and reused to produce envelopes.

Made from 0.1 Kg. opium shipping tag
N.V.A. Main Force Mail

First usage as civilian mail in North Vietnam to Hanoi with stamp removed. Turned and reused to a soldier deployed in South Vietnam at Nam Dong near Dalat. Circa 1964.

Usage: North to South
States on the reverse: “Be more careful, if it can be lost” and “Thank you”
Signed by political censor
In-Country Usage Before Deployment in South

Made from a China Sea map, stamp removed for security inspection.
From Ba Vi, a military post

1965 Issue:
35th Anniversary of Soviet Peasant Uprising

Cancelled Bach Mai Tu Liem, December 1, 1965; to a soldier identified in the 165th Regiment that was reforming in the North after having sustained losses
Usage in North Vietnam
Early Turned Cover

First usage:
1965 Issue:
5th Anniversary of N.L.F.
Hom Thu No. obliterated

May 19, 1965 Issue: 10th Anniversary of African Asia Conference
Red Cancel: Phu Dinh, August 21, 1965

Original usage from Hanoi to Hom Thu No. 2777 TM and not forwarded further. Why the postage was paid and applied and then redirected and returned is one of the many mysteries surrounding these unusual military mail usages. Second usage redirected and forwarded with slightly changed Hom Thu No. 2777 XM.
Address label on a wrapper made from a military political directive tract (facsimile shown). Sent from an unknown N.V.A. unit in Hanoi to the Director of the Bao Tang Museum, which at the time had been taken over by the North Vietnamese Army for an operations and coordinating center, off limits to American aircraft attack.
From Ha Bac, Democratic Republic of Vietnam envelope made from an unused central government birth certificate form. The certificate carries many political and independence slogans. Stamp was partially removed by South Vietnamese military intelligence censors post-capture.

Adjacent is a copy of the damaged stamp used on the cover.

1968 Issue:
3000th Plane
Shot Down over
North Vietnam
Green: Dog-fight
Involving Russian MIG
Magenta: Anti-aircraft Missile
Viet Cong Adversity Covers

Made from a computerized parts list from the U.S.S. Genesee AOG-8, a gasoline tanker of the Patapsco class. Commissioned in 1944, the Genesee may have inadvertently provided the enemy with writing material when it dumped or off-loaded trash during one of its many trips up or down the Saigon River to the Nha Be petroleum tank farm.

Illustrated operational/liberated zone markings. Crayons were often used due to their high moisture resistance. This seldom seen marking applied at a rest recovery station represented by numerical markings, “Z” in Cambodia.
Early Turned Cover Patriotic Usage

1965 Issue:
Birth Bi-Centenary of Nguyen Du Post
Cancelled Dong Hy
December 22, 1966
From HT No. 91484 CS

Second Usage: Military to civilian in the North

1965 Issue:
20th Anniversary of August Revolution
Revolution; to Hom Thu
No. 91484 CS,
not yet deployed

First Usage: Military to military
Cancelled November 25, 1966
Popular materials used for making wartime envelopes were any of the thousands of political flyers, handouts, pamphlets, and tracts. In the rigid Communist society of North Vietnam, the only paper more abundant than government forms was political paper. This particular cover was made from a political broadside that detailed the 1964 Students' Uprising against the Diem government in the South.
Typical Viet Cong Military Mail

Viet Cong field letter sent from B505 battalion to B703 battalion with "Kinh Goi" Please Forward and bottom inscription "Important pass it on, thank you." On reverse manuscript August 11, 1968
Note staple from field content evaluation form

Reused envelope captured off fishing junk in the South China Sea at Tam Quan, to Hom Thu No. 54225 XP. Made from war memorial patriotic, water damaged
Viet Cong Adversity Usage

Intra-country usage
April 2, 1964
On printed form
Manuscript “Hoa Toc” is Urgent delivery

To command center between two V.C. administrative staffs. Contents describe money and provisions Zone 5 donated to the Liberation Army: “15 chickens, 6 cans of milk, 20 packs of cigarettes, 22 letters to soldiers,” etc. “Three dead soldiers, six injuries from last fight. We withdrew after 2 days of fighting.”
First usage to Vinh Linh; reused to HT No. 3418BC marked “Chet” (dead), to recipient in the 324th Division circa 1968 and then captured at Khe Sanh,
V.C. Routing Instructions and Forwarding on Turned Cover

Captured, turned cover bearing forwarding instructions. Manuscript August 2, 1968 censor location given in lower left hand corner.

First usage from Thanh Mi with “Kinh Goi” Kindly forward and “Chuyen Giao” Pass it along.

Viet Cong mail destined for guerrillas who frequently moved from one sector or another or between provinces was often marked “Chuyen Giao” or Pass it along/Pass it on. Such mail tended to circulate for long periods to catch up with the intended recipient. As was with N.V.A. mail, common postal instructions were to destroy the letter within a specified time if the recipient was not located quickly.

From Hong Hao
“Kinh Goi” Kindly Forward to the leader of the unit at Duc Pho Circle 1969

Operating without handstamps or other postal devices required Viet Cong and N.V.A. couriers to rely on written instructions. As a security measure, Viet Cong would often have one of the other two members of their three man “cell” write and address letters in his name to prevent local militia from identifying his handwriting style if the mails were captured.
The Red circle PBV. T.N. handstamp means Phong Benh Vien Tay Ninh or hospital office. It was used in the massive underground tunnel complex at Chu Chi, Tay Ninh province. This letter requisitions food and is written to the Viet Cong military operations command P.B.B.V. at Tinh Bien Hoa. Letter was written December 8, 1972. Made from an American newspaper.
V.C. Hospital Office Adversity Usage

The Red circle PBV T.N. handstamp means Phong Benh Vien Tay Ninh or hospital office. It was used in the massive underground tunnel complex at Chu Chi, Tay Ninh province. Letter was written January 12, 1972. Made from an American newspaper.
Captured N.V.A. and V.C. mail, even when sent from civilians, often provided intelligence data that when collected and correlated with other information, collaborated findings and conclusions about war efforts. The above adversity cover sent from one V.C. woman to her sister fighting in the South was made from a listing or inventory of medical supplies used by V.C. medical cadre at Hai Le village to treat villagers as well as V.C. and N.V.A. wounded. Such information could be extrapolated into figures that helped to correlate casualty rates as well as the amounts of supplies needed to treat those casualties. This item was taken from the body of a military mail courier headed for the Laotian border during the Tet attacks of January and February of 1968. The following four adhesives portray the role of women as combatants.
First Use
Military Frank
1959 Issue: Soldier
And Train

First usage from Bac Giang to Gia Lau, the main air force base and training facility outside Hanoi.

Second Use
Military Frank
1962 Issue: Armed
Forces on a Boat
Military Service

Second usage to Hom Thu No. 9626 HK, a deployed Infantry Unit
VI. Captured Mail & Security Usages

Captured Mail – Contents

Cover and personal letter sent from Ha Bac, North Vietnam via the Ho Chi Minh trail to an N.V.A. soldier fighting near My Tho. Cover contents include letter, photo of children, and a village council election ballot, already filled out by sender.

All wars exact a high personal cost from those who fight as well as from those who are counted as its victims. Often, those who are called upon to fight are as much victims as is anyone else. The above item contains a letter imploring an N.V.A. soldier to return home safely to his children, one of whom he had never seen. Sadly, he would never be granted the privilege of seeing either them or his wife for he did not survive the firefight he was caught in during the Tet Offensive of February and March, 1968.
Captured enemy mails received a preliminary field analysis for content and intelligence value. Due to the tremendous amount of letters and documents that were captured, little time or manpower was available for analysis of the postal/communications value a captured cover might have. Time in transit from North to South via the Ho Chi Minh trail was considered important as it pointed to typical time material and men took to travel the trail. Young brother writes older brother, "How evil Americans are. We will survive. Thanks for your efforts."
Field Content Evaluation Form

On N.V.A. Southbound Mail

Patriotic cover with letter, photograph, and post card as enclosures. Sender's address is given as V.N.T.T.X., Hanoi (Vietnamese Textile Corporation.) Letter dated March 2, 1968.

The content of intercepted or captured soldier's letters often told intelligence personnel about the morale of the sender and the conditions which he or she was living. In this case the writers are upbeat for the recipient's peace of mind, although constant reference is made to the very heavy toll, both mental and physical, endured in the face of the B-52 raids on Hanoi. Note: G-1 intelligence preliminary evaluation report slip. Two letters in same envelope were written to high school friend and uncle serving in same unit.
From Hanoi to northern I Corps, March 11, 1968 with field notes and preliminary intelligence evaluation concerning letter from an N.V.A. regular to his brother killed in an attack during a helicopter landing near Phouc Vinh, Republic of Vietnam during Tet 1968.

As soon as was practical, the captured mail, when taken from prisoners of war or removed from the bodies of Viet Cong or N.V.A. was given a rudimentary analysis, then sent on to Military Intelligence specialists, both American and South Vietnamese for further study. Soon thereafter, the covers were destroyed as it was felt that they were of little value. Later on, the letters and other documents contained within the covers were also destroyed. Few of these seldom seen evaluation forms have survived. This letter written in parts by five family members to a father discussing family affairs.
Seldom seen red double circle military handstamp reads “Nhan Dan Quan Su 70” which translates roughly as: “People’s (Army) Platoon 70.” The cover also bears blind obliterator handstamps as well as a June 25, 1974 Tan Yen receiving mark. Secrecy concerns were the top communications priority.

Tied by “blind” wartime security cancel, August 7, 1967, sent from Interior Security Ministry military letterbox at unknown location to Yen Gon Village (Xa) Luc Nam Province, Ha Bac. The interior Security Ministry controlled troops responsible for defense within North Vietnam.
Blind Security Cancel

1972 Issue: 3rd Vietnamese Trade Union, Workers
Usage: Hom Tho to Hom Thu

1972 Issue: 3rd Vietnamese Trade Union, Workers
Handstamped April 1973 on reverse
Usage: South to North
HT No. NGI 915 P12 to Cho Ton near Bau Thoi
Both examples feature military security cancel without reference to city, village, or date. Top example mailed to Hanoi; bottom item addressed to Ha Bac.
Blind Security Cancel

Manuscript receiving mark: February 15, 1974; folded letter from Than Hoa, North Vietnam
To unknown military location in the South. Tied by North Vietnam blind war-time handstamp.

More examples of N.V.A. soldiers’ mail exist after 1972 because more couriers survived after the U.S. departed in late 1972. Examples almost always bear postage stamps, since the 1964 decree allowing soldiers fighting in the South to post mail without postal charges was rescinded in 1972. Blind Security cancels do not show the town.
Southbound N.V.A. Mail

To N.V.A. officer or non-commissioned officer serving with a V.C. unit in the Mekong Delta.

Hom Thu No. 5303 (different ink) filled in by military postal clerk somewhere on the Ho Chi Minh trail.

Originating in North Vietnam to V.C. HT Letterbox "Cau Sau" military transfer office.

The names "Mac Van Chieu" and "Mac Van Trang" are what were called a "V.C. name." They provide disguise or code name to hide the identity of the soldiers, usually officers.
The U.S. Planes Shot Down series of war issues are among the best known stamps issued by North Vietnam. This is one of the few known uses of any North Vietnamese postage stamps as a revenue documentary stamp. The document above is an application/receipt for a postal money order, which until this time, were unknown with documentary stamps affixed as payment for documentary fees, or more likely as a war tax. Note that the backside of the application requires the remitter to provide an explanation as to the use for the money.

N.V.A. security measures were used to minimize intelligence extractable from captured mail. This double ring date stamp bears “B.C. 37 MA” rather than originating post office’s name. Mostly found on military mail. In this case, the sender’s address is clearly shown in the return address, so the security cancel was not needed. Boxed “3131” may be a forwarding mark or transfer instruction. “Kin'g, Gui Anh” means Urgent, Forward...
Messages Hidden Under Stamps

From Hom Tho No. 270.801 jBO2 to military unit at Hom Thu No. 201.304 jC14; postage stamp removed; backstamped Phuc Tho August 26, 1972; recipient's letter "C" indicates a company sized unit; sender's letter "B" in address indicates a battalion.

Captured military covers held in collections are easily recognized because the stamp, or part of the stamp has been peeled away. This was done for two reasons: 1. The government wanted the stamps destroyed due to their high visual propaganda value. 2. Many stamps had messages or code written on the backside of stamp. Covert communications are partly visible on the back of this postage stamp.
Viet Cong Lock Box Mail Drops

1966 UNESCO Issue Viet Cong drop letter sent to box holder at Can Tho, October, 1967, Saigon surveillance cancellation

One guerrilla method used to communicate among Viet Cong at different locations was via “secure” Post Office Lock Boxes. They were thought to be secure because only the boxholder possessed a key, but that was a false assumption which caused many Viet Cong agents and leaders to be arrested. Finding lock box mail on Viet Cong and N.V.A. couriers allowed military intelligence and postal authorities to observe, backtrack the path the letter took, and ultimately, arrest those who utilized the post office box.
Surveillance Marks on Viet Cong Mail

1961 Issue: Tien Mu Tower, Hue, in the Ancient Towers – Temples
Saigon special handstamp cancellation September 1, 1966
Viet Cong cover sent to Lock Box #39 at Can – Tho.

To identify suspected mail and those who sent, received, and handled it, South Vietnamese military and postal authorities used special date stamps or extra marks on the canceling device as seen above at the 10 o’clock position. Note the Hue theme of the stamp, as the theme representing a Communist objective. Such subliminal messages were typical, as was the use of a false northern name.
February 4, 1975 Letter: Tiu Tung writes that he is leaving on a mission. If he returns safely his letter will contain the code phrase “My father has been cured of his disease, no longer a need to worry.” From the enclosure, this was probably an assassination or kidnap mission.

V.C. were constantly on the move. As units were depleted, the V.C. quickly redeployed its forces, thus mail delivery often lagged far behind its intended recipient. The most frequently used forwarding mark was the seldom seen ‘X’ within a diamond, followed by the name of the forwarder. Covers were usually placed within another cover going to the recipient’s new letterbox address.
Forwarded Mail
Manuscript Red BC 135 Military Station

Military letter from North Vietnamese Army Hom Thu to North Vietnamese Hom Thu located at Nam Dong, South Vietnam then forwarded to Viet Cong Hom Thu BC No. 135 in red pencil.

Limited resources of Viet Cong and the N.V.A. forces dictated that civilian to soldier mails be forwarded on a different basis than was military mail. Civilian mail could be forwarded twice if the ultimate location of the addressee was known. Military mail was forwarded until the destination was reached unless the cover had a time-sensitive code number on the front. Once the time limit for delivery was exceeded, the letter was destroyed.
Undeliverable/Forwarded Mails
CHET “Killed in Action”

Mailed from Hai Phong to N.V.A. soldier in the South without Hom Thu No. Transfer agent supplied 9001 KG, another forwarded to Ap Nam. Undeliverable after forwarding due to “chet” (death) of intended recipient, marked by third person.

Undelivered mail intended for deceased recipients raised political considerations, which required that such mail be destroyed rather than returned to sender. As seen above, the Viet Cong military Hom Thu No.9001 KG had been filled in upon the letter’s arrival in the combat zone. If returned to sender, secret Hom Thu numbers and locations would no longer be secure. This cover was taken from a Viet Cong base in Tay Ninh before it was scheduled to be burned.
Extremely late 'R' usage, March 5, 1975. From an N.V.A. Unit (T72) to Comrade Lau Vang. Letter discusses activity, successes, and failures of the Unit with casualties, objectives and money details.
‘R’ (Roi) Censored, ‘X’ Approval & ‘GAP’ Expedite

‘R’ Manuscript Already Censored on reverse, August 10, 1968
‘Kinh Goi’ Please Forward
Staple from capturing U.S. Intelligence group.

‘X’ Cirled Blue Manuscript
Approval of personal enclosure,
Signed by Censor across bottom
‘Kinh Gui’ Secure Forward

‘GAP’ Expedite Blue Manuscript
‘Kinh Goi’ Please forward
Note blood stains on cover.
Usage Transfer and Forwarding

To Hom Thu No. 20 780NO and readdressed by field transfer agent to Hom Thu No. 20 351 HC at Nam Dong, North Vietnam. Note staple holes in corners from field evaluation form.

Usage: Military to Military

Note “Gui Anh” Forward and “Cau G” for the transfer station Cau Sau; staple holes in corner.
Regional Field Postal Locating/Transferring Stations

"Sao Be" Sorting/Transfer Station
Viet Cong field cover addressed to "Tinh" (leader)
at Long An, a major staging area for attacks on Saigon.
Only known "Sao Be" sorting/transfer station included
in address. Sao Be is a Vietnamese folklore figure who
fooled his enemies.

"Cau Sau" Sorting Station

Since many N.V.A. soldiers fighting in South Vietnam were gone for the duration of the war, and since their
location and Hom Thu numbers were often changed, relatives had no way of knowing their current address or
location. To remedy this, letters were sent without Hom Thu No. or Hom Tho No. Military mail
transfer/forwarding personnel, after censoring the unsealed letter, would add the addressee's Hom Tho address.

"Cau Sau" (Uncle Sau) may refer to a Vietnamese folk hero like Uncle Remis or may be a play on words for
"Uncle Sam." This clandestine N.V.A. military mail transfer and sorting office served to locate the individual or
unit.
North Vietnam Senders
Return Addresses

Complete return addresses with the family’s name and address of the sender are only found on mail sent from Communist North Vietnam to N.V.A. soldiers fighting in the South. Mail originating in the South intended for in-country distribution or sent to the North would never include a return address. This example captured August 19, 1968 with stamp removed by intelligence officer. Family letter between two close army friends. “I hope to tell you more in person. We were marching at 2:00 AM when I got injured. How nasty are the Americans, and the atrocities they commit among our villagers.”
V.C. Written Endorsements and Inscriptions

On reverse, “Nothing is more valuable than freedom,” and “With determination and love of country we will triumph over the American enemy.”

Hom Thu address No. 5303 at Ap Nam 3 postal mailing center. Stamp removed, unknown cancellation. On reverse, “Carry this through river forest, if he is lost do not read this.”
The North Vietnamese Army and the Viet Cong military/political command structures required nearly all mail, military or civilian, to undergo examination and censorship. V.C. censored mails often have the notation “censored” or “examined” on a corner of the cover. Included was the date and initials of the examiner. Officers, communications personnel and political cadre had the responsibility to censor military mails. Note manuscript sensor markings in blue ink and staple holes from evaluation form attachment.
Civilian patriotic envelope sent from Hai Phong to central South Vietnam without the Hom Thu No. Transfer agent supplied 13948 IS, later crossed out in red ink.
Forwarded to 317 location, then re-sent to military letterbox 225 by manuscript backstamp in Hai Phong twice. All three attempts failed.

Only two examples have been recorded of mails that were undeliverable in South Vietnam attempted return to the North. As indicated by manuscript backstamps on this item, these failed attempts were redirected north to military/political offices for examination and destruction. Stamp removed for inspection. Forwarded mails were usually discarded.
Addressed to Phan Nhan, a high ranking Communist Officer not in the Military, from his wife Thi Phi, writing from a hiding place outside the city with their two children. Sent by military courier, the letter claims the family is hiding nightly to avoid bombing raids. 90 days later the U.S. pulled out of Vietnam.
Folded letter missent from Nam Binh, North Vietnam, February 1968, through Cau Sau transfer station

Admonishment in red ink manuscript warning: “You must be more careful the next time” applied by officers at unit receiving the missent covers. Returned to sender.
V.C. guerrillas as well as N.V.A. soldiers captured and imprisoned by Allied forces were accorded the privilege of sending mail home via “free” letter sheets as guaranteed under the 1954 Geneva Conventions of War. Few V.C. did so since sending such a message home would identify family and relations and might lead the South Vietnamese military intelligence to other V.C. personnel. Preprinted form in Vietnamese and French. Nguyen Van Lanh, born August 16, 1946, to family in Long Xuyen in On Giang Province.
Preprinted postal cards dating back to French colonialization. Both cancelled from KBC 3887 A.R.V.N. prison located at Phu Quoc Island military prison, which operated from 1/65 to 11/73 near Saigon. Prison had harsh conditions for hard core enemy prisoners, including ‘tiger cages.’

No postage required. Message on the reverse.

Top: V.C. Prisoner
Le Van Duong, born in 1932, writing to his family at QuanTruc Giang, Kien Hoa Province.

Sent in 1972

Bottom: V.C. Prisoner
Tran Van Lue, Born 2/18/1929, writing to Quan Truc Giang, Kien Hoa Province.

Sent April 12, 1968
Command Center Usage, from Laos to Hanoi

Military Frank 1971 Issue: Nguyen Viet Xuan, Officer, Anti-Aircraft Gun
Hanoi handstamp, November 5, 1973

Originating in Laos, made from map with coordinates 5238 (note red box at coordinate 52 detailing location of the unit,) backstamped Phuc Tho November 9, 1973 and into mail system in Hanoi November 11, 1973. Stamp torn off for security inspection. Adjacent copy of the damaged stamp.
V.C. unit-to-unit on folded printed form with two enclosures: manuscript letter dated January 15, 1975 with "K. Trung" details attack plans for Saigon; typed letter signed by Deputy Commanding Officer, Xuan At Nao.
C.O.S.V.N.'s Central Mailing Facility in Cambodia

Military usage into South Vietnam from Cambodia where the C.O.S.V.N. command center operated.
Addressed to Hom Tho No. 9175 LT at the transfer station "Cau Sau". Circa 1965 – 1966

These crayon markings are used for a unit number and as routing instructions. This example in crayon is from Rest and Recovery Station No. 6. Only recorded example.
This cover represents seldom seen usage due to the nature of the war when it was mailed. Mailed from Phu Loung, North Vietnam on February 10, 1972 (by the recipient’s notation) it did not enter the mails until February 27, 1972 (Phu Loung datestamps.) The recipient notes the date of arrival June 15, 1972 which shows a four month transit time from North to South, a relatively short transit period. Thus, it is believed to have been routed through neutral Cambodia with a Hom Thu No. address of N.V.A. unit in the far South. The initials NGOCKHE are a mystery but from the same pen that noted February 10, 1972.
Addressed to C40, the command center COSVN, dated September 18, 1972. Carried by courier. Folded letter outlines need for medical and other supplies.
Decorated Envelope, to Unit x. 9055, with fewer secret or security markings because the transportation routing was then controlled by the Viet Cong.

Typed report, November, 1973, with boxed type written “Tuyet Mat” meaning Top Secret, lists the order of battle for all subordinate VC commanders engaged near the Cambodian border.

Manuscript “Kinh Goi,” means “Communist Brother.”
Seldom seen preprinted discharge form from the surgeon in a jungle hospital to the command center of unit K4 near Saigon, discharging Le Hoang Long, age 26 to return back to active duty after 8 months recovering from injury. Addressed to Chu Ban Duc, Commander in the Cholon area.
High Command Official/Political Mails

Military Frank 1968 Issue: soldiers in Attack
Hanoi Machine cancel, February 26, 1970

Official military command usage to an N.V.A. unit deployed in North Vietnam.

Official mail destined for political operatives and agents of the Communist North Vietnamese fighting in the South were transported, handled, and delivered by the military mail system. The above item shows all the earmarks of a letter sent by a politician or government official. The return address bears the approved name given to South Vietnam for geopolitical reasons- Nam Bo. If the letter had been mailed by V.C./N.L.F. official, the designation would have been “Mien-Nam” or “South-Land.”
The high number of captured V.C. covers bearing the notation 'QT 10' suggests that covers and letters bearing that notation originated from, or were being sent to, the long hunted and sought after N.L.F. headquarters. C.O.S.V.N., the Central Office for South Vietnam was thought to be just over the Cambodian border from Tay Ninh, Republic of Vietnam. The Cambodian invasion of 1970 proved that C.O.S.V.N. did not operate from a fixed "hard" headquarters site as envisioned but moved around. 'QT10' at least designates the largest N.L.F. or V.C. postal facility in the war zone.
Official V. C. Mail

'Kin' Urgent

V.C. military letter sent to Thua Thien, the Province of Hue City, from a leader of Team 10 of an impressment/conscription squad to the political head or leader (Tinh) within the province just prior to the fall of Hue City during the Tet offensive of 1968.

Political and official V.C. mail, recognized by the salutation "Tinh" meaning head or leader of a particular political organization, often received expedited service and delivery. Absent from this cover are any of the auxiliary markings featured in this exhibit.
Regional Field Postal Locating/Transferring Stations

“Cau Sau”
Usage: Civilian to N.V.A. Soldier in the South

Folder letter from Ha Tinh, North Vietnam, routed south to the locating server where the Hom Thu No. was added with “Cau Sau” Censor’s manuscript Thang-1-1968 in the corner.
N.V.A. Command Administration
Supply Requisitions with Military Handstamp

Front

Reverse

September 1972

June 1972

Large double circle red handstamp “Lien Quan Govap Hoc Mon”
Manuscript dates June 6 and September 9, 1972

Both examples to Tien Hai address of Commanding Officer on carbon copy form.
From the same special task unit at an undisclosed location.
Military Handstamp, Ward Leader
Command Center Usage

January 21, 1969 usage from local V.C. leader to comrade with handstamped lettersheet. From Official Command Staff asking addressee to return to resolve issues and finish the project they started.
IX. Urgent/Expedite Markings

Bao Dam’ Adhesive, Registered Letter

The ‘Bao Dam’ adhesive

‘Bao Dam’ translates “secured/registered.”
“Kinh Goi” translates ‘please send’.
Cover was captured on day of mailing, August 31, 1968

Two known recorded examples. The labels were locally printed and used by V.C./N.L.F. guerrillas on registered letters. Hand written English note on lettersheet: “I Corps taken from body U.S.M.C. Hayes.”
Female writer discusses being ambushed by Americans: three wounded, they escaped but one died.
### Urgent/Expedite Markings

#### Types of Secret 'K' Markings

1960 – April 1975

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Size (mm)</th>
<th>Usage</th>
<th>NVA / VC</th>
<th>'K' Letter Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>12x14</td>
<td>Handstamped</td>
<td>VC</td>
<td>Boxed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>10x11</td>
<td>Manuscript</td>
<td>VC</td>
<td>Boxed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>17x9</td>
<td>Manuscript</td>
<td>NVA</td>
<td>Partial Boxed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Manuscript</td>
<td>VC</td>
<td>Circed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Manuscript</td>
<td>VC</td>
<td>Circed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Handstamped</td>
<td>VC</td>
<td>Circed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Handstamped</td>
<td>VC</td>
<td>Circed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Handstamped</td>
<td>VC</td>
<td>Circed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Handstamped</td>
<td>VC</td>
<td>Circed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Handstamped</td>
<td>VC</td>
<td>Circed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XI</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Handstamped</td>
<td>VC</td>
<td>Circed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XII</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>19x20</td>
<td>Manuscript</td>
<td>VC</td>
<td>Twice Boxed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIII</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>19x20</td>
<td>Adhesive</td>
<td>VC</td>
<td>Circed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### The 'K' Adhesive Label

Type XIII

Both the sending unit HT 121 VC Officer and the receiving Unit HT C2/3111 were operating in the Southern area. Corner staple on the folded form envelope held U.S. Intelligence summary of the contents, dated July 30, 1968, but now both separated from this cover.

One of four recorded usages.
These two examples of an adhesive ‘K’ usage are Type XIII and the second and third recorded examples of a printed ‘K’ label. Taken in a firefight August of 1968, both covers were captured less than two days and ten miles from where mailed. The top letter writer, a female Viet Cong, describes how she is the only survivor of the twelve in her “travelling group.” Both covers are pierced adjacent to the K label by an M-16 bullet. Bottom letter discusses war-ravaged homeland, devastation, and hardships at home.
Handstamp and Manuscript 'K'
Earliest and Latest Recorded Usages

Type I


1964 to 1979, with increased sophistication of mail operations, official or valuable mail was identified and secured by both V.C. and N.V.A. forces with a 'K' marking (Kin or Kinh, meaning urgent or expedite).

Type XII

From Hong Cuc
To: Mr. Ba Duc
A political officer
July 9, 1974
"Please pass it along to an exact address"
**Urgent/Expedite ‘K’ Manuscript Markings Command Center Usage**

Type V Manuscript circled blue ‘K’ marking and Type VI Manuscript circled red ‘K’ marking
Sent cross-border to Cambodia; manuscript notation “to leader at headquarters”

Only known examples of the Type V and VI manuscript markings. Addressed to the National Liberation Front Headquarters in Cambodia, known as C.O.S.V.N. (Central Office for South Vietnam), this cover may have been sent in response to the Type X cover on the next page. The courier was killed and this cover was captured.
Urgent/Expedite 'K' Manuscript Marking
V.C. Command Center Document and Currency Package

Type IV Manuscript Circled 'K' in Blue Crayon
Document contains instructions for families that were plagued in V.C. controlled areas; it also demands new troops conscripted from local villages under control of L71

Currency packets carried by V.C. mail carriers often contained documents and medicines as well as money. No other wrappers from packages that contained documents or currency have been recorded. The label reads: “This envelope contains 50,000 Southern dong, dated June 10, 1973.”
Urgent/Expedite ‘K’ Manuscript and Handstamp

Type II boxed ‘K’ red handstamp on V.C. cover to Hung Chong, 1966

Type III Boxed ‘K’ manuscript marking in blue ink
On V.C. military letter to a political leader at Ap Nam Hai, near Saigon
Urgent/Expedite ‘K’ Handstamp

Type XI Circed small ‘K’ in blue
Pen markings by censor or forwarding agent
On adversity cover containing U.S. dollars.

Cover made from propaganda handbill alleging U.S. atrocities at Long Tan, South Vietnam. The only K’ handstamp known in blue ink.

V.C. mail courier from whom Type XI cover was taken, Ho Bo Woods, NNW of Saigon, 1966.
Note canvas mail pouch, mail visible in right compartment.
Urgent/Expedite ‘K’ Manuscript Markings

Type III to Ap Nam Hai; North Vietnam official military adhesive removed by South; Vietnamese military intelligence officials.

Usage: North to South. Sent from Son Tay, a blind or mute double circle cancel was applied where the cover entered the mails headed down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, at the Mu Gia Pass post office. In the address, this cover bears the symbol “M”, commonly found along the Ho Chi Minh Trail meaning that a letter box or “postal” station was located nearby.

Backside of Type III cover showing forwarding/return notation “Not at Ap Nam 2;” boxed “C” notation indicated recipient was presumed dead (chet)
Urgent/Expedite ‘K’ Handstamps

**Type VII**
Large ‘K’ in small circle Red

Applied at the point of origin; second handstamp applied at mail relay point

The only known examples of a Type VII marking are on a single cover. The cover was sent from local force V.C. at Anh Dung to main force V.C. unit near Ap Thai. This example was taken from a V.C. sampan intercepted near Lao Nai Island on the Bassac Flueve (River), 1966. Note water damage.

**Type VIII**
Small ‘K’ in small circle Magenta

On adversity cover of political flyer Censored (lower right corner) by political official, July 27, 1968
Note staple holes from evaluation form

From Duc Hoa village, Long An Province, R.V.N. to a letter box number as an address, indicating origin and delivery within a local V.C. command or district.
Writing materials became more difficult to obtain as the war heated up and pressure increased for the V.C. To help alleviate these shortages, V.C. writers resorted to using slips of paper pasted onto already used and re-used covers like this.
Manuscript ‘Bao Dam’, Registered Letter

Manuscript ‘Bao Dam’ on the cover face of the original envelope (right) with circular blue ‘K’ marking Type X Circa 1967

Only recorded example of a ‘Bao Dam’ marking over a Type X ‘K’ handstamp. Writer discusses conferences and political meetings attended.
Seldom seen red ‘BC 135 Hanoi’ handstamp and red ‘Kinh Gui’ handstamp on military mail from undisclosed location in the North to political officer Le Lan Anh at Hanoi training base. Pen markings with forwarding information and red crayon arrow possibly returning to “18 MTE”
Military Telegraph Usage
Carrying Combat Orders

Seldom seen official N.V.A. "Dien Bao" Telegraph Company handstamp.
Red military handstamp indicates it was handled by Unit 81.

To a soldier, probably an officer, at HT No. 63305 KP letter box
Type II Magenta “Kia” handstamp (under the return address)


This example represents civilian usage where postage is required, with a possible second reason for the ‘Kia’ marking. It may be the result of the letter following its intended recipient across the border into enemy sanctuaries located in either Laos or Cambodia. The courier was intercepted and killed two kilometers east of the border by helicopter gunships of the 1st Air Cavalry Division.
'Kia' Cross Border Manuscript Marking

Type I Manuscript (Fancy drawn) blue 'Kia' Marking
Usage: Military to military, April 4, 1968

'Kia' which is a Vietnamese acronym for "over the (Cambodian or Laotian) border" was applied at transfer stations with the intention of routing mail around battles or contested areas via Cambodia or Laos. "Men Goi" in address means please send to brother. It reads "...have not heard from you since October 1967. We are proud of you serving Ho Chi Minh. I have written many letters. Have you received them?" Writer fearful of losing brother in war and angry at "American puppets."
Type III Blue "Kia" above the address

"Kia" indicates across border of Laos or Cambodia. Address pen marked with forwarding information. This example north to south usage has stamp removed by Intelligence Office post capture. A mother writing to a son discusses family affairs and the Tet celebration. Dated February 12, 1968.
N.V.A. Regiment Training Unit in the border state of China, HT No. 2012. The word “Trung” designates the location. “Kinh Goi” Kindly forward. Hand carried by military courier, where prepayment stamp was cancelled in Ha Dong November 2, 1972, to Hanoi.
Letter dated 12/29/74 from female nurse, Wan Ying, trying to contact her father through the Hao Van Committee. Addressed to “Father Lo Wai Cheung of China at Yan Chi Road #14 by Father Duc.” She states that she is constantly moving after her release by South Vietnamese authorities and “Cambodia is controlled by others but we will get it back. Victory is coming.”
Sent from the Laotian border, where there was a regimental staging area for Chinese troops. Addressed to Unit No. 8702, a Chinese advisor to an Army Unit in Vietnam. Chinese characters Yun Nan or Yue Nan both mean "Vietnam," proving a Chinese military presence and military unit in Vietnam. “China’s People’s Army is always an army of victory — Mao’s words” hand written across the top of reverse, then receiver’s hand written note on reverse dated August 1968. Chairman Mao’s instruction to troops on patriotic design, copyrighted 1966, adds inspiration. Translation: “Politics is the key that makes all things work.”
Chinese People's Mail Committee of the National Liberation Front, to a political affairs committee member.

The V. C. command was strong in political strategy, attracting all ethnic groups, especially fluent Chinese.
Chinese Committee Military
V.C. Money Transfer Envelope

V.C. money transfer envelope with hand written 170 Dong (Vietnamese money).

Kinh Goi” Kindly forward. Sent to B. S. 16 operating in the Binh Phouc area. Enclosure documents how funds are to be spent. Return address indicates cover mailed from HV, Hoa Van, a Chinese N.F.L. Committee Member.
Little is known about how Soviet military advisors' mail was handled and processed during the Vietnam War. Since none of the few known covers bear Vietnamese military postal markings, it is believed that Soviet forces mail was pouches and handled outside the Vietnamese system. Such mail can only be identified by Soviet military censor marks and written content of the letters. An informal census revealed that six such covers currently exist. This cover was sent from Hanoi to Moscow and discusses personal issues, eg., receiving envelopes and socks. "The weather is wet, hot during daytime and cool evenings."
February 10, 1969

Soviet Military usage from Hanoi to Moscow via East Germany. It was there that the backstamp was applied. Writer states "...everything is going very well. I am alive and healthy. Do not understand weather here! Rain all day and hot. Evenings very cold. I sent you a photograph in a separate envelope. Please send post cards."
XI. Secret Markings; Command Center

‘DTG’ “Dien Tin Gap”
‘DTK’ “Dien Tin Khan” Manuscript
Late War Usage

‘DTG’ Manuscript
Red Pen Underlined
Printed Flier Envelope
To F9229 Command Center

‘DTK’ Red Pen Boxed Manuscript on Printed Flier (same) Envelope; To F 9229 Command Center

Both ‘DTG’ and ‘DTK’ mean Urgent, Immediate Delivery, usually sent from and to high ranking officials related to the C.O.S.N.V. (Central Office for South Viet Nam), the guerilla/military command and control complex located just inside Cambodia, west of Tay Nihn. This carbon copy letter from N 2034 directs commanding leaders of N.V.A. Unit BS 87 to attend the Party meeting with local committee leadership on March 8, 1975.
December 16, 1974 message of the Provisional Revolutionary Government extending an invitation to attend a celebration for the anniversary (12/20/60 to 12/20/74) of the National Liberation Front, to be held at the location of F 8039 – BS 28. The V.C. military mail system had a dual mission; the first was to carry military mail as quickly and securely as possible, the second to carry and distribute political and governmental mail. This type of mail is more difficult to find than military mail, as 99% was destroyed immediately after reading.
V.C. usage from N 5146 to F 9229, Anh Ba Duc the high level political leader in Saigon in charge of the Cholon area's Chinese Mail Committee operations from 1973 to 1975. The mimeographed 4 page enclosure of January 1, 1975, summarizes the military, civil and political plans and operations.
Combination Auxiliary Handstamps
Late Command Center Usage

'DTG' Type II
Heavy Rectangle
With Dash-D, Red Ink

'Kinh Goi' Urgent/Forward
Black Straight Line, Slanted

'Yeu Cau Den' Return By
Date Blanks, Red Slanted

'N_1077' Unit Identity
Small Black Straight Line

'So 1' Command Identity
Small Black Straight line,
Underlined

Very late V.C. usage from NF 1077 to F 9229, a V.C. Command Center in the South, bearing many auxiliary handstamps, some mail handling instructions and some unit designations. Note the Return By Date handstamp with April 3, 1975. Enclosure discusses a solution to Chinese people's urgent problems. "Resolve now!"
Since secrecy and security were normal mail handling practices, only the highest priority mail would receive the “Tuyet Mat” typed heading on the enclosure. In this case the enclosed document, circa 1974 or 1975, gives instructions for an all-out mobilization of forces due to the increased number of attacks from A.R.V.N. Sent to F 9229, V.C. Command Center in the South.
'DTG' "Dien Tin Gap" Manuscript – Urgent Immediate Delivery

V.C. hand drawn accounting record, dated December 30, 1973, of tax collector, Vinh Kiet, showing details of each date paid, person aid, and village location from the South-West Frontier near and across the Cambodian border. The envelope is made from a Provisional Revolutionary Government form. Sender’s secret code is N3253. The receiver’s code number F9229 is a V.C. Command Center.

'DTG' and 'GGK' "Urgent" Red Underlined Manuscript markings

Very late usage, April 11, 1975 to Anh Ba Duc at F9229 Command Center.
Unusual request to superiors by two V.C. Soldiers, Quang Huu Nghi born in 1940 who has been a Party Member since 1971 and Quach Than Hoa who has been a Party Member since 1972, are asking permission to marry. To F 9229 Military Branch, Party Chapter Chi Bo, at HT 5226.
N.V.A. correspondence from HT No. 5226 to F. 9229, a V.C. Command Center in the South. Eleven page typed report in sections discusses 1. the enemy, their strengths/losses, detailed strategy, and repression by the Pres. Thiue Regime U.S.A. puppets, 2. Chinese population's support of N.F.L., 3. mobilization of 300 more guerillas for the next large scale battle (date or place not given), 4. P.A.V.N./N.V.A. fighters in the region, 5. Pacification measures in the controlled areas of H.T. No. 5226. 6. Propaganda efforts, 7. How to quickly build up forces in controlled areas 8. List of commanders endorsing this report and plan of action.
'BGY’ Expedite Routing Manuscript
Command Center Usage

VC adversity cover to H.T. 9229, a designated code for ‘Committee Operations’ in that secured VC held area. The carbon copied typed report contains operational instructions to local VC units operating nearby. ‘BGY’, an extremely scarce marking, designates specific routing instructions to the ‘Gio linh’ responsible for an expedited, confidential delivery. Kinh Goi, abbreviated Kg, means Communist Brother, forward.
The enclosed hand drawn map was split in half and mailed in two different envelopes as an additional postal security measure. The map above details the topography, the geography, the major features and encampments of the town of Phuoc Long. The battle, in January 1974, was a decisive defeat for A.R.V.N.
Phuoc Long Combat Map
Second Half
Mailed separately

‘Kinh Goi’ Please Forward
Address Label on
Printed Form Envelope

‘DTK’ omitted

Division level V.C. map
plotting A.R.V.N. positions
and attack routes at Phuoc Long.
To village identified as B5, from soldier Sau Vang assumed to be a very high ranking Viet Cong officer, about addressee’s relative who died weeks earlier. Enclosed pictures of the funeral.
Letter discusses combining “upcoming operations into a single operation.” No location is given for the forthcoming actions due to begin May 5, 1974. Recipient asked to reply to “Mr. #4 Ly” with the consensus of the Committee. Envelope made from a printed form.

No Hop Tho or Hom Thu identification number used. Used very late in the war in 1975 to a unit at F9229, a Command Center, on a printed legal form.
XII. American Withdrawal; Capture of Saigon

1973 Issue:
Armed Youth Marching
in The Premilitary Youth
Movement series
Thanh Hoa cancel
June 24, 1974

Lessened Security

Sent May 29, 1974 to My Duc, per manuscript notation on reverse. Return address includes Hom Thu No. and Thanh Mai, located in a province in the South, showing less concern about revealing the location.

Military Frank 1973 Issue:
Advancing Soldier
with Bayonet,
Son Tay handstamp
August 27, 1974

Entering mails at Son Tay for local delivery.
This top-secret “MAT” document (1975) titled “Announcement VF, LH No. 021.TB.75” specifies how mail couriers “Giao Liens” should function and how letters were to be addressed, handled, and sent. It illustrates the sophistication of mail operations. It states “...the delivery and reception of all letterbox must follow these rules exactly:

1. All mailmen and couriers must come to the general mail station located at Mr. Do HT 433. Anyone who has difficulty finding this location should ask cadre at HT 432 for a guide. Units and HT locations that are near HT 433 can take turns by coming to the station, saving personnel.

2. The best time for arrival is 12:00 p.m. everyday. HT 433 will set suitable alternative mail pick up times according to the high and low tides for that day.

3. HT located a great distance from the general mail station, can contact and work with the postal station nearest to the central station. A list of locations will be made out later. Mr. #3 Do is at location of Hamlet Kinh 2B Long Dinh. Address to Mr. Do, Section A (Station A) HT 433. 4/04/75"
Top Secret document lists new NVA Hom Thu numbers for units to use in the final push to liberate Saigon, sent to commands and commanders of the units involved. "Liaison Office #71 announces the new mail box and letter secret codes to be used only on official mail and letters beginning on April 6, 1975. Attention: these addresses and codes are to be used only on official mail and documents and internal papers of the Liberation Army and the Revolutionary Government and may not be used on personal mail or spoken of during conversations. It is hoped that all will follow this announcement exactly. When new codes are recorded, these documents must be destroyed. April 4, 1975."
‘Tram’ Mail Station Handstamps

Military Frank 1973 Issue: Advancing Soldier with Bayonette
‘Tram’ 700A handstamp; Buu Dien machine cancel, November 8, 1974

Only recorded example of red double circle transit or carrier handstamp ‘Tram’ 700A (Postal Field Station). Only recorded example of originating double circle black machine cancel “Buu Dien” (Registered letter) cancels the stamp and provides a back stamp dated November 16, 1974. Registry treatment during forwarding from the ranking officer’s HT No. location to civilian destination in Hanoi accounts for the two dates.

Military Frank 1971 Issue:
Nguyen Van Be
‘Tram’ K 35 handstamp
Manuscript inspection September 6, 1971

Only recorded example of red double circle ‘Tram’ K 35 handstamp reads “Nhan Dan Quan Doi” People’s Army, “Quan Buu” Military Mail, “Tram” Postal Field Station. From Hom Thu No. to civilian destination in Ha Tay.
Chem VC Mail Usage & Cambodian Occupation Usage

1973 Issue: Armed Youth Marching in Premilitary Youth Movement series
'Chem' (Special handling) Handstamp July 15, 1974
'Buu Dien' (Governmental free frank) Machine cancel on reverse

Northern usage of ‘Chem’ marking and ‘Buu Dien’ backstamp from undisclosed military base in the North to a political officer in Hanoi.

Military Frank 1969 Issue: Solider and Guerilla Woman
Phuong Vien “Blind” Security Handstamp Post code 23752

Backstamp clearly dates the cover to 1974. Sent from Military Region VII which runs from the border of Cambodia to the East China Sea. Addressed to an undisclosed location.
To the next unit over, requiring no H.T. address. ‘Kinh Goi’ my Communist brother, forward.

‘MAT’ Red Handstamp applied by Postal Agent and ‘R’ Red Manuscript added by Censor; July, 29 1974
Adversity cover sent from guerrilla group I 8893 to F 9229, a V.C. Command Center. 4 pages detail a roster of troop levels by individual, and thus top secret. ‘Kinh Goi’ abbreviated as “KG”.

‘MAT’ Red Handstamp, Top Secret, circa 1972-1974
V.C. Command Center Briefing Update

January 7, 1975

Hand carried by guarded courier

Adversity usage of a political musical sheet, addressed to Ngo Lien at Tuc Ba Duc village, a high ranking V.C. officer responsible for the Chinese People's Resistance Committee. Detailed five page letter provides intelligence on enemy troop strength, tactics, strategy, current war and political situation, will of the people, control of unions, money available, government strength among the people by District and plans to end the war.
Command Center Directive with Propaganda Instructions

From HT unit F9021 to cadre in liberated VC controlled area F9229

Kinh Goi: ‘Dear brother’ type of salutation

Typed instructions issued May 3, 1974, an official party document #06/CT.74. The directive exhorts increased efforts in convincing the people that new life under the PRG is better, especially after the Paris Peace Accords, as they rebuild the liberated area of Binh Phouc. The document also notes the amount of negativity among cadre and party members.
Final U.S. troops were withdrawn on March 29, 1973. These stamps are in the last series of U.S. aircraft shot down issues.

Military usage in country to Phu Luong - Bac Chai with manuscript routing instructions both on the front and the reverse.
Very Late 1975 Usages

Written from HT No. 638.372.jh23 to N.V.A. family member at Bac Thai, North Vietnam. One of the latest recorded usages on N.V.A. mails prior to the fall of the Republic on April 30, 1975, confirmed with receiving handstamp on reverse, April 17, 1975.

Written and inspected April 15, 1975 from the North to Quang Nam in the South. It was inspected again on May 5, 1975, when the country had been “reunited.” Note the broken American machine cancel markings, the machine probably captured in Da Nang. First letter from younger sister to her much older brother still in the South, whom she has never met. She introduces herself as having two young children ages 3 and 5, but her husband died in the war.
Originating in Nghe An Province, letter dated April 26, 1975, four days before the fall of Saigon. Hand carried into Hanoi, and there, machine cancelled. Soldier discusses camp life in the North: “It is another sad evening while I sit in Nghi Lam camp writing these lines to you after much activity in the company today. As usual evening is the worst time of the day there is, after having dinner I don’t want to do anything around here. I just keep writing to reduce homesickness and the thoughts of my missing friends here.”
April 30, 1975 Last Day’s usage of South Vietnam issued stamps

Whether any mail was postmarked and delivered on the final chaotic day of the collapsing Republic, no one knows! One witness reported that one could walk into any post office and take whatever was desired. Postal employees loyal to the southern government had fled the day before.