

Yesterday in STAMPS: **French WW II Forgeries**

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The following two articles were taken from a STAMPS edition that was dedicated to French philately. JFD.)

The Petain Counterfeits Made by the French Resistance

By Carroll Chase

I am frank to admit that 20th Century stamps ordinarily appeal to me very little. Practically all my philatelic work has been with the more or less classic 19th Century stamps and the early postal markings. But, this counterfeit made during the last—no the latest—war is an exception.

The various groups in France called “La Resistance” had a workshop in Paris called “L’atelier des Faux”—the place where all kinds of counterfeits were made to cheat and delude the Germans as well as the Petain government. Making passports, travel permits, food tickets and the identity cards (which all people living in France had to carry), etc., etc., was the principle function of this workshop. The men and women here engaged worked under the greatest difficulty. For example, they were obliged to move their workshop frequently and quickly to keep one step ahead of the hated Boches; and the difficulties in obtaining the necessary paper and ink and making the required plates were enormous. A number of these devoted patriots were caught by the Germans but in spite of this the organization carried on.

The resources of this group were scanty and the necessity of buying the large number of stamps used on its mail was onerous, to say nothing of the fact that the money paid for them went to the hated Petain government. For these reasons it was decided to counterfeit the stamp com-

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monly employed, the 1.50 Franc brown, with the head of Petain, which was used on ordinary domestic letters. The fact that the original stamp was typographed and not particularly well printed aided in this attempt; but obtaining the necessary paper and ink, and especially making the counterfeit plates, was exceedingly difficult. All the necessary material was really scarce and the counterfeit stamps had to be well enough imitated to provoke no suspicion by the authorities.

The plate was of zinc and was made by transferring a block of four of the original stamp by a photographic process, six times to make a pane of stamps—four vertically by six horizontally. Four such panes of twenty-four made the printing plate of ninety-six stamps with intervals between the panes. This was an entirely different arrangement from the sheets of one hundred put out by the government. Perhaps the greatest difficulty to be overcome was the perforation. A sewing machine was first tried and discarded. Then a very rough machine which had been used on counterfeit food stamps was also tried but found useless. Finally a crude perforating machine was built. This had a gauge of 11-1/2 instead of the government gauge of 14 but this passed unnoticed. It was a single line machine and all the perforating was done by hand and thus was far from regular.

These counterfeits were first put in use on the 25th of January, 1944 and were used regularly until the end of May of that same year. Neither the Germans nor the Petain government ever suspected that bad stamps were being used. Fortunately the original stamps were appearing in several marked shades of brown so the considerable variation in the ink used for the counterfeits passed without notice.

The team who made these stamps was composed of a student, the proprietor of a foundry and a lady who was a social worker! The sheets were not gummed so each stamp had to be gummed with a tiny brush and stuck on the letter as used. It is not known how many of these stamps were used but the quantity was very considerable—many

thousands. This stamp on cover used at the proper epoch is excessively rare; the reason being that it was absolutely necessary to burn all such mail as soon as received as it was obviously very dangerous to leave any such letters around in case the Germans made an unexpected call.

When the Germans were finally driven from Paris a considerable stock was on hand. Recognizing the interest in these war souvenirs, ten thousand sheets, each of ninety-six were saved and the balance was carefully burned. This was done under competent supervision and at the same time the original plate of ninety-six was made unfit for further use by scratching heavy lines across it. It is now in the Postal Museum in Paris. These sheets saved were of course ungummed. Of the ten thousand sheets, ten were found imperforate, six imperforate horizontally and six imperforate vertically. Two of the last-mentioned six sheets show the bottom row entirely imperforate. Two sheets are known, otherwise normal, in which the bottom row of stamps are imperforate at the bottom—one row of perforations having been missed. Each sheet or sometimes each block of four stamps shows on the back one of two circular hand stamps in red or violet reading “D. F. ATELIER des FAUX” or “DEFENSE DE LA FRANCE, DIRECTION, Atelier des Faux”—each with a Lorraine cross in the center. See Figure 1.

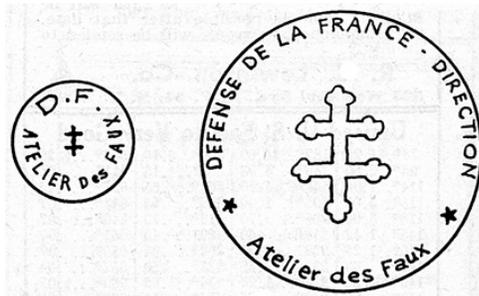


Figure 1

Because of the crude methods of production these counterfeit stamps show many constant flaws—so many that the reconstruction of the plate of ninety-six is possible. Many defects of impression are also found but these have little interest.

It is hardly necessary to state that while all forgeries have an interest to collectors who are specialists, those made to cheat the post office and not collectors are by far the most interesting and sought after. Such counterfeits

often have a very decided value.

I am indebted to a Belgian friend, Monsieur B. E. de Pelenkine of Bruxelles, who in collaboration with Monsieur W. A. Biemans wrote an excellent brochure giving a full history of these counterfeit stamps. Even the constant plate flaws are described and illustrated. Monsieur de Pelenkine has very kindly allowed me to use his brochure and I take pleasure in giving him the credit due. Without this most excellent work I could have told but a very incomplete story.

An exhibition of the work of the Atelier des Faux was opened the 28th of December, 1944, in Paris by General Koenig. A similar exhibition was held in Bruxelles in November, 1945, and, as you may well suppose, our counterfeit stamps had an honorable place.

The popularity and growing scarcity of these “Faux pour Servir,” as the French call counterfeits to cheat postal authorities, soon tempted a forger and we have just seen some recent forgeries of the forgery! So far, they seem extremely scarce and it is probable that the forger was quickly suppressed. Even the red control marking on the back was crudely forged.

See Figure 2 (page 5) for enlargement of the three stamps in question. A—the original Petain; B—the postal forgery; and C—the forgery of the forgery. Fortunately they may easily be told apart. The difference in perforation distinguishes the first two, while the recent forgeries are too short—measuring but 20.5 mm in height as against a full 21 mm for the other two stamps. As the photographs show, there are many minor points of difference in the three stamps.

Figure 2



A



B



C

The “Espionage Forgeries”

By Raoul Lesgor

During the dark days of 1940-42, the German Armies seemed victorious everywhere. A large part of France was occupied by the German troops and the so-called Free Zone under the Vichy Government had little choice but to obey orders given by the German High Command.

The Resistance Movement had not yet become national in scope. Some individuals and small groups to whom German and Italian occupation was intolerable took to the forests and mountains, and started harassing the Vichy Police and the German military.

In Corsica, the desolated and little populated parts of the island are called the Maquis. When a young man has a little brush with the law, and does not particularly desire to meet the gendarmes, he takes to the Maquis. This expression was adopted by the early “resistants” in France and as a group they became known as the Maquis.

These brave men had little chance of doing anything useful for the liberation of their country unless a method could be devised to unite their scattered energies, giving them directives and leadership.

These bits of paper that we all love and collect helped immensely to attain this goal.

Beginning in the Fall of 1940, the RAF started to parachute into France intrepid young French men and women whose mission it was to establish contact with these disseminated Maquis and weld them into the large underground organization which was so effective from 1943 to the end of the war and became known as the F.F.I. (Forces Francaises de L' Interieur).

The “Agents de Liason” thus deposited on French soil by parachutes carried weapons, food, drugs, currency, good and bad, stamps. It is possible that these stamps, identical in appearance to the stamps then used in France, were meant to discredit the Vichy Regime and create confusion, but I believe that their mission was much more important. I said that these stamps were identical in ap-

pearance, but a close inspection tells the story. The colors are well matched with the stamps printed by Vichy, and since we know that shortages of inks and papers were responsible for many shades and paper variations of the postage stamps used in France during that period, color alone is not sufficient to distinguish these “Espionage” varieties.

These Forgeries were printed in London in sheets of twenty, for most values, and in sheets of six (4 x 4 with gutters in between) for the 30 centimes Mercury. A white border, varying in width from an eighth to a half inch, and without inscriptions, framed these sheets. The printing is always finer than on the originals. The margins between the stamps are, as a rule, nearly one millimeter wider than in the Vichy stamps. The paper is white and of good quality, the gum thin and in most cases colorless. But, and this is where the importance of these stamps becomes evident, all of these stamps bear secret marks, minute additions or detractions from the original design, because of the fact that they were used mostly for corresponding between Resistance groups, and a glance was sufficient to convince the receiver of a letter whether or not it came from a bona fide F.F.I. group and should be read and destroyed, or ignored.

The 25 and 30 centimes of the Mercury design are the most successfully imitated. Two thin white lines over the left eye of Mercury form the secret mark. The inscriptions are much clearer and the shading of the hand much heavier. Perforation is 14 x 13-1/2 as in the originals. *(For a closer look, use your pdf magnifier tool. JFD.)*



Original

London (forgery)

The 1.50 Franc Iris is pale dull orange, a striking variation in this case as the original always leans towards the reddish orange, deep or pale. The white inscriptions are much thicker and the engraver's name, Hourriez, clearer. The torch bears an ornamental band under the flame. This is the secret mark, as



Original

London (forgery)

as this is made of two lines in the originals (see also page 10). The perforation is 15 x 14 as against 14 x 13-1/2 in the originals.

In the 50 and 70 centimes, Petain, the color is very close to some of the Vichy printings. The right eye of Petain, well defined in the forgeries, is incomplete in the originals. The cap on Petain's head is well designed and clear. Secret mark—the lines of the mustache



Original

London (forgery)

are interrupted and broken up. They carry through to the lips in the originals. The perforation is 14 x 13-1/2 as in the genuine issue.

In the 1 Franc Petain (page 9), the color of the stamp is not important, as the originals come in many shades. The inscription is thicker and clearer. The entire design shows many white unshaded portions. There are only two lines in the mustache in the forgeries, as against five lines in the originals. Secret mark—designers and engravers names are well clear of the design of the stamps, and

are half the size of the genuine. The perforation is 15 x 14 instead of 14 x 13-1/2 as in the originals.

In the 1.50f brown Petain (the subject of the Carroll Chase article, see page 5), the worry lines over the left eye in the originals have been erased in the forgeries. The inscriptions around the head are clearer and deeper. There is fine impression throughout. The perforation is 14 x 13-1/2 as in the genuine issue.



Original

London (forgery)

The 2 francs green Petain is identical in size and perforations with the originals. The color is not important. The inscriptions and background of the leaves are clearer and better engraved in the forgeries. Petain's head line is broken in two places right above the ear. Secret Mark—2 and F of different shape and printed in solid color in the forgeries, split by a thin white line in the originals (see also page 10).



Original

London (forgery)

These “Espionage” issues are far from common in used condition, probably because receivers of letters franked with these stamps destroyed them upon receipt for good reasons. Some can still be found.

These stamps are forgeries but were issued regularly for a good cause. They filled a real postal need. They carried letters for people who suffered and died heroically so that

liberty may survive. Should they be accorded civil rights, or to speak more prosaically, should they be listed in our catalogs? I think so.

The Espionage Issues are something new for our catalogs. Of illegitimate birth, they have been legitimized by the fact that they carried mail regularly, and by so doing served to write one of the most glorious pages in human history.

[Scott still does not list these stamps, only footnoting that “No. 440 was forged by the French Underground...”—this being the 1.50 franc Petain issue covered in the article by Carroll Chase and described in the Lesgor article (page 9)—and does not make any reference to the other stamps discussed by Raoul Lesgor. JFD.]

Supplemental Information

An excellent site, <http://www.psywar.org/stamps.php>, is devoted to Propaganda and Espionage Philately, in an article by Herbert A. Friedman. We reproduce here two of the images and refer you to the site for additional images and information.



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