

World of Topicals:

The French Red Cross Stamps

By John H. Tanner

(From Mekeel's Weekly, 1915, with images added)

From the August 7, 1915 issue:

In the beginning the postage stamp was introduced as a means of collecting small sums of money due for postage on vast numbers of letters. The stamp system owes its almost universal adoption to the fact that it enables the postal authorities to collect millions of small payments and to keep a check on these payments with a minimum of account keeping. With the example of the adhesive postage stamp as a guide the system has been applied to many other purposes, and notably in the present war we find that stamps are proving a convenient means of collecting small contributions to the charity funds of the nations at war, and even in some cases to nations which though not at war themselves are suffering from the consequences of the war which is spreading throughout Europe.

The only "stamps" of the war with which philatelists are concerned are of course, those which have a bona fide postal validity, and purely charity stamps having no other object than to serve the convenience of collecting charitable donations, are outside the sphere of philatelic recognition. But the most effective of the war charity stamps in augmenting the funds of the humane organizations concerned in alleviating pain and distress are those which combine with the charitable object a postal utility which brings the charity stamp into the category of postage stamps. Such stamps may fairly be expected to attain a greater circulation by reason of their legitimate use on all classes of correspondence, and by the utilisation of the numerous agencies of the postal administration throughout the length and breadth of the country of issue to ensure their widespread sale.

In the present war France was the first country to issue a war charity postage stamp, which it did on August 18th, a



little over a fortnight after les Boches had intruded upon French soil and set ablaze the conflagration which the armies and navies of the allied nations have not yet succeeded in extinguishing. The stamp of August 18, 1914 (Sc. B1, left), was of a provisional character only, being the current

10 centimes stamp (Sc. 162, right) surcharged with a Red Cross and "5c", making the total expressed value 10c + 5c=15 centimes. Of this sum the original face value 10c represented the postal franking value, the extra 5 centimes being the contribution to the war fund.



A postal card sent from Paris to London with the first Red Cross semi-postal as well as Red Cross non-postal charity labels. The card also bears the cachet of the British Red Cross Society Hospital Auxiliary in Paris.

The war fund benefited by the French charity stamps is the Red Cross, which in France is a triple concern, the three branches of which are the:

- (1) Societe Francaise de Secours aux Blesses Militaires.
- (2) Association des Dames de France.
- (3) Union des Femmes de France.

The first of these bodies is the oldest and did great service in the war of 1870. But as a commentary upon the vast extent of the present war operations in France, it may be remarked that this Society alone has already spent more than during the whole of the Franco-Prussian War. Since 1907 three societies have worked in harmony under one central committee as the French Red Cross.

It will be interesting to learn in due course to what extent the French Red Cross benefits by the charity postage stamps issued in its interests. *L'Echo de la Timbrologie* last November gave a few illuminating statistics of the sales:

During the last 15 days of August: Francs 30,000.

During the whole of September: Francs 90,000.

The average daily sale in September was 3,000 francs, sufficient for the tending of 750 wounded soldiers per day, at an average daily cost per head of 4 francs.

The provisional stamp of August was replaced by a stamp of definitive type on September 12 (Sc. B2); in this the die of the Sower stamp has been adapted to show the charity supplement on the stamp impression, so that from the new plates the new stamp is printed at a single impression. Plates have also been prepared for the issue of the Red Cross stamps in book form, in which form they were issued on February 13. The booklet of 210 stamps sells at 3 francs.



Large posters have been printed in various sizes for the extensive advertising of the stamps. Most of these were included in the very interesting and documental collection of the French Red Cross stamps shown by Mr. Franz Reichenheim at the recent War Stamp Exhibition in London.

The Principality of Monaco followed with a surcharged stamp for the French Red Cross (Sc. B1), and since September last a number of similar issues have been made for the French colonies, protectorates and postal agencies. A full list of these to date follows. (All are Scott catalogue #B1 for that particular country unless otherwise indicated.)



FRANCE AND MONACO.

France. Provisional Issue. August 18 (600,000). Definitive issue, without surcharge. September 12.

Monaco. October.



COLONIES, PROTECTORATES, ETC.

Alexandria. May, left

Dahomey. April, above right, including a triple overprint error



Guadeloupe. May, left
Guinea. April, right



Indo-China. Local surcharge (15,000), left
Indo-China. Paris surcharge. February, right, Sc. B2-4, right Sc. B3



Ivory Coast. April, left.
Madagascar. Feb., right.
Martinique. May, far right





Mauritania. April, left.



Morocco Protectorate. September, center.

Varieties: No "c" to "+5."

Double surcharge, Sc. B2, top right



Morocco Protectorate.

Locally overprinted at Oudjda. This resembles the preceding stamp, but the word PROTECTORATE is absent from the black overprint; and the figure "5" is slightly larger. Left, Sc. B7.

Morocco Protectorate.

Definitive type, with "+5c" added in design of the stamp. Special issue for Tangier. The French definitive stamp overprinted MAROC and in Arabic. Right, Sc. B6.



New Caledonia. Local overprint on Cagou type, left.

Port Said. May, right.

Reunion. Local surcharge in black (2,000). 50,000 were surcharged in black, but only



2,000 had been sold when the stamp (left) was withdrawn and superseded by



the next stamp in this list.

Reunion. Local surcharge in red, right, Sc. B2.



Senegal. April, left.

Somali Coast. May, center.

Tangier. See under Morocco.

Tunis. The 15 centimes stamp over-
printed with cross only, in red.
February or March, above right.

Upper Senegal and Niger. April,
right.



**This more detailed background information is from
the February 20, 1915 Mekeel's:**

The Red Cross Stamps of France by Franz Reichenheim

Shortly after the outbreak of hostilities some of the countries involved issued certain special war charity stamps or postal stationery to be sold for the benefit of their red cross societies. In France a special "Red Cross" stamp was created by a decree of the President of the Republic, dated August 11th, 1914. This is published in Bulletin Mensuel des Postes et des Telegraphes of September, 1914, and reads as follows:

Decree of August 11th, 1914, creating a special postage stamp, called 'Stamp of the French Red Cross.'

The President of the French Republic, In pursuance of the report of the Minister of Commerce, Industry, Post, and Telegraph:

DECREES-

Art. 1. -A special postage stamp; called 'Stamp of the French Red Cross,' has been created. The public will be able to use this stamp, but only for inland correspondence, for franking purposes up to the value of 10c.

Art. 2. -This special stamp will be sold at 15c. The difference between the sale price and the franking value, less the legal deduction of 1 per cent., will be paid to the committee created at the War Office, by Decree of August 8th, 1914, under the authority of the Military Health Department, and in conjunction with the various French Red Cross societies.

Art. 3. - Provisionally, until new stamps are ready, the public will have at their disposal ordinary postage stamps of 10c, overprinted with the sign of the red cross and surcharged 5c.

Art. 4. -The Minister of Commerce, Industry, Post, and Telegraph, and the Minister of Finances, each as far as he is concerned, are charged with the execution of this Decree.

Given at Paris, August 11th, 1914. The Minister of Finances, NOULENS. R. POINCARE,

For the President of the Republic; The Minister of Commerce, Industry, Post, and Telegraph, GASTON THOMSON.

* * * * *

The provisional "Red Cross" stamps authorized by the above decree were issued to the post offices on August 17th, and placed on sale on the following day, the following order being sent by the postal administrations of the various districts to their respective post offices:

Postal Administration of the District of the Seine.

General Service No. 224.

SERVICE ORDER.

SIR,

I beg to inform you that you will receive postage stamps in value of 10c, bearing a surcharge of 5c. The sale of these stamps to the public at 15c each will begin at once. Their value shall not be charged against and their proceeds

not be credited to the general account. On the contrary, the proceeds from the sale are to be kept separately. The same applies to the value of the stamps remaining unsold. Supplementary instructions as to the accounts to be kept for this special purpose will be issued without delay.

Paris, August 17th, 1914. The Director of the Postal Administration of the District of the Seine, FERRIERE.

* * * * *

With this order were issued posters printed at the National Printing Office for exhibition at post offices on and after August 18th.

These posters read:

SALE OF SPECIAL POSTAGE STAMP called STAMP OF THE FRENCH RED CROSS

Only to be used for inland correspondence.

SALE PRICE: 0 FR. 15.

FRANKING VALUE: 0 FR. 10.

NATIONAL PRINTING OFFICE.

2688-676-1914.

* * * * *

Although it is expressly stated in the above-mentioned documents that these "Red Cross" stamps are available for inland correspondence only, it is worthy of note that letters to foreign countries bearing them in part-payment of postage have, so far, not been taxed as insufficiently stamped owing to non-compliance with the regulations.



A 1918 Registered cover from Boulogne Sur Mer, France with, left to right, semi-postals Sc. B1, B11 and B2 accepted as postage to Belgium.

* * * * *

The sale of these stamps seems to have been very small in Paris. This is shown by the following order issued by the postal administration of the District of the Seine, and

dated September 9th, 1914:

Postal Administration of the District of the Seine.

General Service No. 253.

SERVICE ORDER.

SIR,

The attention of the postal administration has been drawn to the small number of "Red Cross" stamps sold by the post offices in Paris. In accordance with information received this is principally due to the failure of officials not drawing the attention of the public to the sale. Will you please strongly advise the officials under your charge to exercise a greater zeal in offering these stamps to the public. It is essential that the posters advertising the sale, and containing the conditions of franking power of these stamps, are exhibited in conspicuous places in the public rooms of the post offices. It is expected that full attention will be paid to this matter.

Paris, September 9th, 1914. The Director of the Postal Administration of the District of the Seine, FERRIERE.

* * * * *

This order, which undoubtedly was also issued by the postal administration of other districts, seems to have had a good effect, as *L'Echo de la Timbrologie* gives the following figures as the result of the sale of the "Red Cross" stamps during the first six weeks: During the last fifteen days of August, 30,000fr; during the month of September, 90,000fr. Our contemporary adds that the sale during September, averaging about 3,000fr a day, provides the means of caring for about 750 wounded soldiers a day, the daily costs of which amount to about 4fr each.

As regards the stamps themselves, the "ordinary postage stamps of 10c" as they are called in the decree, are in



the redrawn sower type of November, 1906, overprinted with a thick red cross and surcharged 5c, both in a much darker red shade than the stamps.



The measurements are: height of the cross, 4 mm.; width of the cross, 4 mm.; thickness of the bars, 2 mm.; height of the figure, 4 mm.; height of the letter c, 1 1/2 mm.

If the overprint and surcharges are in their proper position-

1. A horizontal line drawn through their centre should meet the centre of the figure 0 of the original value of the stamp.

2. The surcharges and overprints should stand exactly in the centre between the value and the word "POSTES" of the original stamp, leaving an equally small space on either side.

In the horizontal rows of the stamps of some of the sheets, however, the surcharges and overprints are slanting, so that the red cross and the figure 5 touch nearly the feet of the sower either on the extreme left or on the extreme right stamp respectively, instead of the top line of the red cross just touching the knee of the figure. Therefore, there are found some stamps on which the red cross covers entirely the letter c of the original value, whereas this; letter ought to be quite visible. On others is found the red cross touching the figure 10 and the letter c of the surcharge or the word "POSTES."

It is interesting to note that the printing office started printing the stamps a few days before the decree authorising their issue was signed. The decree is dated August 11th, whereas the figures 808 at the bottom of a block before me show [but not reproduced in the article] that this particular sheet was printed on August 8th (about the meaning of the various figures on the margins of the sheets of the French Stamps, vide "Monthly Report of the Herts Philatelic Society," Vol. VII, No. 3, p. 73).

These provisional stamps were replaced by stamps in a new design in the provinces on September 12th, and in Paris about a week later.

* * * * *

The service order issued by the postal administration of the district of the Seine (Paris) on September 20th, con-

tains the following paragraph referring thereto:

3rd. New type of the French “Red Cross” stamps. The Postage Stamp Department has just issued “Red Cross” stamps in a new design. This new stamp differs from the ordinary 10 centimes stamp by showing the value 10c underneath the word “REPUBLIQUE” in the left upper corner, and the sign of the red cross, and the value 5c underneath it, both in red, in a white rectangle in the left lower corner. The post offices will be supplied with stamps in the new design according to requirements.



The measurements are: height of the white rectangle, 9 mm., width of the white rectangle, 5 mm., height of the cross, 3 mm.; width of the cross, 3 1/2 mm.; thickness of the bars, 1 mm.; height of the figure 5, 4 mm.; height of the letter c, 1 1/2 mm.

In addition to the description given in the above Service Order the new design differs in other points from the provisional one:

1. The vertical inscription on the right side of the stamp reads “CROIX ROUGE POSTES” instead of “POSTES” only.

2. The sower, newly and much more carefully engraved, stands out more clearly and does not show any retouches as in former issues.

So far, I have not come across any variety.