

The Cover Story

The Question of R.F. Overprints

by Francis Ferguson

What does one call a mystery that is wrapped in a conundrum? I wish -- I knew that answer. The overprints that will be presented in this article on C25 & C25a stamps are well known for fakery, which in a small way adds to the intrigue. There are described types A to K according to the Scott's catalog.

Let me start by quoting directly from the Scott's catalog as it forms a good foundation from which to start.

“Authorized as a control mark by the United States Fleet Post Office during 1944-45 for the accommodation of and exclusive use by French naval personnel on airmail correspondence to the United States and Canada. All “R.F.” (Republique Francaise) mail had to be posted on board French ships or at one of the western Mediterranean or northwest African naval bases and had to bear the return address, rank and/or serial number of a French officer or seaman. It also had to be reviewed by a censor.

All “R.F.” overprints were handstamped by the French naval authorities after the stamps were affixed for mailing. The stamps had to be canceled by a special French naval cancellation. The status of unused stamps seems questionable; they are alleged to have been handstamped at a later date.

Several types of “R.F.” overprints other than those illustrated are known, but their validity is doubtful.

All of these key points are mandatory when trying to validate these overprints.

Now for the story. I have two covers and about a dozen stamps in my possession. None of which are real in any sense of the word. Most of them were given to me, while some I paid a very small price to obtain and get out of the marketplace. I view this material as an education pure and simple.

This tale all started in 2017 at a show. I was approached by a dealer with the cover shown in **Figure A1 on the front cover**. He wanted to know if I was interested. I told them that I would have to research the cover that night and would return it the following day. It did not take long to figure out the cover was not what it should be. I returned the cover the next morning, with the information that I had discovered. The dealer submitted the cover for expertizing in the beginning of 2018. It failed spectacularly. At a show in late 2019 the dealer handed me the cover and said: “It is yours.” Normally this cover would carry a catalog value of around \$500 to \$700 – if it was real. The second cover shown in **Figure A2 on the front cover**, suffered an even worse fate. It was submitted as a type CM8 but was determined to be a CM6 with rather ambiguous certification language that states: “It is not Scott CM8, rather it is a genuinely (sic) usage of Scott CM6, “RF” overprint type “f”, stamp creased at bottom and bottom left.” Unfortunately, that description does not match the data in the Scott's catalog. So, the true nature of this cover is in serious doubt. This was a gift from the same frustrated dealer who gave me the first cover. I may submit the cover again for further analysis – and hopefully a better outcome.

In reality, I have never seen a real R.F cover in person – the only ones I have seen are in auction catalogs – supposedly with valid certs. According to one website I looked at there are about 200 expertized covers known – that sounds about right!

Now I can open the door to the truly weird stuff. The postage stamps with R.F. overprints. None of them are real. Let me very clear on that point. This group of stamps were offered to me as a “package deal.” Knowing what I do of these stamps, my first response was they are all suspect. To my knowledge no single, off cover stamp has ever been issued a valid certification. If you go back and read the Scott’s information you will see why. I have treated these as curiosities, and they hold no intrinsic value as far as I am concerned. When I get around to mounting these on pages, the headline of the page will be “Fakes.”

I find the lengths people will go to create what they believe are passable fakes – is truly astounding. Almost every one of the singles I have in my possession has full gum which means they have never seen postal use -- right there -- that is a major flag that there is a problem. Below you will find eight of the different styles of fakes that have been produced to fool those that are the targets for these deceptions. I must emphasize that NONE of these are real. While they look “kind-of-good” the simple fact that they are off cover and have full unblemished gum tells you more than enough. Fake.

