

# UNITED STATES MILITARY STATIONS: THE POSTAL MARKINGS OF VIGAN

by *Nestor C. Nuñez and Alfred F. Kugel*

Action in the Pacific theater of the Spanish-American War was fought in the Philippines with the Americans winning the dramatic Battle of Manila Bay on May 1, 1898, culminating with the fall of Manila on August 13. The quick capitulation of the Spanish forces was due to a large extent to the activities of the Philippine revolutionary forces which by August 12, had bottled up most of the Spanish in Manila, and controlled most of the island of Luzon. The Philippine revolution was also active in other islands. The initial cooperation between the Americans and the Filipino revolutionary forces in the face of a common enemy, quickly deteriorated into a tense situation after the Spanish factor was removed from the equation. Friction between the erstwhile allies rose significantly when the Filipinos were not allowed to enter Manila on August 13; history later revealed that this was part of a deal between the Americans and Fermin Jaudenes, the Spanish military commander. After the Treaty of Paris confirmed that the United States intended to keep the islands as a possession instead of allowing the formation of an independent country, armed conflict between the earlier allies became inevitable. The conflict became the Philippine American War (or the Philippine Insurrection, as earlier writers called it) and escalated to a point where three-fourths of the entire United States armed forces were engaged in the war. Similarities to the Vietnam conflict sixty five years later have led some observers to call this campaign the "first Vietnam."

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Vol. XVIII No. 3

Third Quarter, 1996

United States Military Stations:  
The Postal Markings of Vigan

*By Nestor C. Nuñez and Alfred F. Kugel*..... Page 1

Mail from Corregidor, 1942

*By Donald D. McPherson*..... Page 11

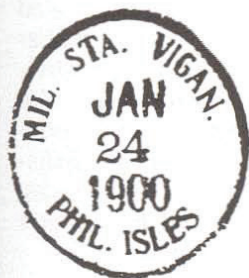
The period from the time Commodore George Dewey controlled Manila Bay and the arrival of reinforcement troops in Cavite in June 1898 through the occupation of towns in the main island of Luzon and in the southern islands, provides a challenging area for the postal history student. The study of postal markings used in military post offices as they were set up to service the troops involved in the Philippine campaign. This article is the first of a series, and focuses on the postmarks of Vigan, in Northern Luzon.

As the Philippine revolutionary army suffered reverses in Central Luzon against the better equipped Americans, it retreated north. After realizing that meeting the Americans head-on in battle was futile, the president and commander-in-chief of the revolutionary forces, General Emilio Aguinaldo, divided his troops into several independent units and waged a guerilla campaign against the Americans. Having been forced out of Malolos, the first capitol of the revolutionary government (occupied by U.S. Forces on March 31, 1899 and the location for a brief period of a U.S. Military post office), Aguinaldo transferred his headquarters to other towns in Central Luzon. Eventually, in the face of American advances, he and his party moved north along the western side of Luzon island. Part of the strategy of the Americans was to use their naval forces to contain Aguinaldo. "On the afternoon of 24 November [1899], the *Oregon* in the company of gunboats *Callao* and *Samar* anchored off Vigan [capital town of Ilocos Sur province], and the following day Captain Wilde bombarded the Filipino defenses and sent ashore a landing party of sailors and marines that overran the city without opposition." (1). The fall of Vigan is probably one of the reasons Aguinaldo and his party who were proceeding north, then turned east at Candon, through Tirad Pass (site of battle where General Gregorio del Pilar was killed). Temporarily eluding the American pursuers, Aguinaldo operated from several places in the mountainous redoubts in the Cordillera and Sierra Madre mountains until his capture by General Frederick Funston at Palanan, Isabela (northeastern side of Luzon) in March 1901.

According to Goodale (2), Vigan was the 1st District Headquarters, Department of Northern Luzon, U.S. Army in March 1900, and the civil government was established there on August 16, 1901. Much of the postmark information in this article came from the correspondence of a captain of the 33rd Infantry who was based in Bangued, Abra (inland, east of Vigan) and who regularly wrote to his wife in Winfield, Kansas, almost on a twice-a-week basis. Additional and confirming information was obtained from other materials in the collections of the authors, and other collectors (3).

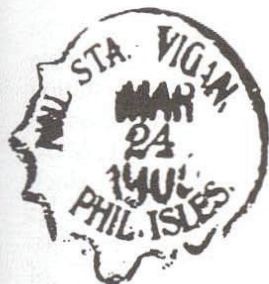


The postal markings are assigned alpha-numeric identifications. The alpha component is meant to signify the type of marking, e.g. DS (datestamp), etc. Dimensions in millimeters, unless specified, refer to diameters for circular cancels, and length (including stop or period) for straight line markings. Illustrations are based on actual strikes (enhanced for clarity) and are shown approximately 150% of original sizes. This article also lists auxiliary postal markings (postage due marks and dumb obliterated, in this instance), which were ignored by Goodale and Baker (4).



DS1. Single-ring rubber datestamp duplex (30 mm) with 3-ring killer (18 mm). Station name 3 mm high. Examples seen show the datestamp to be slightly ovalled. The "S" of "STA." does not impress fully, resulting in only the bottom right quarter being visible. Seriffed letters. Struck in black.

Earliest date: January 16, 1900  
 Latest date: February 16, 1900



DS2. Single-ring rubber datestamp duplex (30 mm) with 3-ring killer (18 mm). Station name 4 mm high. Seriffed letters. All examples seen show half of the ring (from the 4:30 to 11:30 o'clock position) to have a scalloped or serrated appearance. It is not known whether this was the effect of deterioration of the rubber in a hot climate, or whether it was part of the design (compare this to the first Aparri cancellation). In most cases, the arc from 11 to 12 o'clock is not impressed. Struck in black.

Earliest date: February 23, 1900  
 Latest date: April 3, 1900



DS3. Single-ring rubber datestamp (30 mm) with 3-ring killer (18 mm) without the scalloped or serrated appearance of DS2. The letters are in seriffed capitals (4 mm high) like DSI A and DS2. Struck in black.

Earliest date: April 9, 1900

Latest date: April 15, 1900



DS4. As in DS3, but without the 3-ring killer. Struck in black. Two examples seen, with the datestamps struck on the envelope and the stamp obliterated separately by a cork or rubber "rosette" killer (AX3). It is obvious that the killer and the datestamp do not comprise a duplex because of the varying distances between the two marks, and also because of the killer's inconsistent placement.

Earliest date: April 27, 1900

Latest date: (datestamp unclear, but envelope is marked May 1, 1900).



DS5. Single-ring rubber (32 mm) datestamp DS4. Seen used without the killer. Struck in black. In addition to being wider, it is distinguishable from DS4 due to the unusual positioning of the date slugs in relation to the station name. Using the date slugs as the horizontal reference, "MIL. STA. VIGAN" is at the 6 to 11 o'clock position while "PHIL. ISLES." is at 1 to 5 o'clock. The other notable feature is that the "I" of "VIGAN" either does not impress on the envelope or shows up almost as a rough apostrophe.

Earliest date: April 27, 1900

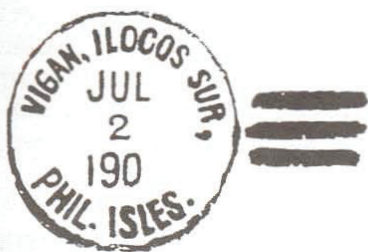
Latest date: May 14, 1900



DS6. Single-ring rubber datestamp (28 mm) with 3-bar killer. 16 mm, sans-serif letters of "PHIL. ISLES." 3.5 mm high. Struck in black. For the first time, the postmark omits "MIL. STA." and identifies the province "ILOCOS SUR". Year date 5 mm high, quite smudged but shows both "00" (compare to DS7).

Earliest date: June 9, 1900

Latest date: June 13, 1900



DS7. Single-ring rubber datestamp as DS6 but 29 mm. Sans-serif letters 4 mm high. Year slug clear but shows only "190" Distinguishable variation in diameter of postmark and letter size between a June 13, 1900 DS6 strike (latest date seen) and a June 20, 1900 DS7 strike (earliest date seen) proves this to be a different canceller, although cursory observation makes it appear identical to DS6. Struck in black.

Earliest date: June 20, 1900

Latest date: August 3, 1900



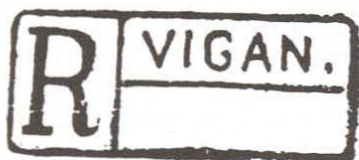
DS8. Single-ring steel datestamp, 30 mm. Nine-bar barrel killer. Another wording change, this time to "VIGAN / ILOCOS SUR, P.I." Struck in black.

Introduction of permanent steel datestamps of this type appears to be one of the steps in the transition to civil government.

Earliest date: August 15, 1900

Latest: used well into the civil government period.





Postage due..... cents

**DUE.**

**POSTAGE DUE, 2 CTS**

RG1. Boxed registration handstamp, 42 x 17mm, with line date stamp either below or above the box. Illustrated by Goodale and recorded used March 26, 1901 (earliest date); reported by Goodale as struck in red. Seen struck in violet (January 13, 1903).

Earliest date: March 26, 1901  
Latest date Used well into the civil government period.

PD 1. Rubber "Postage due cents" marking, 45 mm.. Seriffed lower case letters except the capital "P". Struck in black with amount in manuscript (blue). Four examples seem

Earliest date: February 16, 1900  
Latest date: June 9, 1900.

PD2. Rubber "DUE" marking in crude, tall black letters. 18 mm, letters 9 mm tall. Struck in black. Value in manuscript (red in two recorded copies).

Earliest date: September 10, 1900  
Latest date: September 29, 1900

PD3. Rubber "POSTAGE DUE, 2 CTS". 57 mm long, in block capitalized letters 5 mm high. Struck in purple. This postage due mark style is the most common among military post offices, but a close examination of them reveals individual differences. (The Manila post office had at least four with this letter style).

Recorded date: July 19, 1900

It should be noted that the Vigan post office was inconsistent in marking unfranked and underfranked letters. In addition to the three postage due markings listed above, instances have been seen when the postal personnel just wrote "Due 2 cts" on the envelopes. The probable explanation for the manuscript marking is that it was faster to just write on the envelope than to search for a temporarily mislaid postage due handstamp which, because it was not used frequently like the datestamp, was not always kept within reach. Some collectors are of the opinion that all postage due markings were all applied in Manila. An article in *La Posta* has also speculated that postage due markings were applied in San Francisco (5). The authors disagree with either opinion as there are many instances of postage due markings which could be shown without doubt to be specific to certain post offices only. It is also difficult to envision how the Manila post office could be assigned to do this task, which would have meant significant volume of work reprocessing mail already handled earlier. So far, the only hard evidence of Manila's active involvement with mail from other locations pertain to incoming registered letters, or registered letters going abroad, and for mail being returned from the field for being undeliverable.

We now come to dumb cancellers or obliterations. Purists may want to exclude these markings, but they qualify under the authors' definitions of postal markings. Indeed, these types of obliterations are also listed by other compilers of postmarks.



AX 1. Slanting, uneven rectangle of solid bars killer. Struck in violet. The length of the obliterator could possibly be 82 mm, but other examples seen are shorter. Seen used in conjunction with RG1. Earliest date: March 26, 1901



AX2. Crude block capital "R" enclosed in circle, 20 mm diameter. Struck in black. Seen used in conjunction with RG1. Earliest date: December 11, 1901



AX3. Six-petal "rosette" obliterator, 19mm wide and 16mm tall. While seen used in conjunction with DS4, it does not form with the datestamp into a duplex. Clearly applied separately on the stamp or indicium. Struck in black.

Earliest date: May 1, 1900 (date on envelope)



AX4. Rough sans-serif "V" 22 mm tall and 22 mm wide. Made either of wood or rubber. Struck in black. Earliest date: April or May 1900.

The listing for AX4 is from a single example in the collection of Alfred F. Kugel. It was found in the correspondence of a soldier from the 33rd Infantry to a lady in San Antonio, Texas. The cover with the "V" cancellation has no return address and is backstamped San Antonio, Texas July 4(?) 1900. A companion cover shows a return address of Candon P.I. (Candon is a town in Ilocos Sur, south of Vigan), and it is postmarked by Vigan DS7, dated July 30, 1900 and backstamped in San Antonio September 26, 1900. The evidence strongly suggests that the first cover was cancelled in Vigan, using AX4 as a temporary canceller until a datestamp arrived.

The foregoing list is likely incomplete. Readers of this study and collectors of this area are encouraged to look into their collections with a view of adding types not included in this article, and/or extending the earliest or latest dates. Information should be sent to the authors, P. O. Box 12, San Mateo, CA 94401. Postage and photocopy costs to be reimbursed, and credits to be attributed.

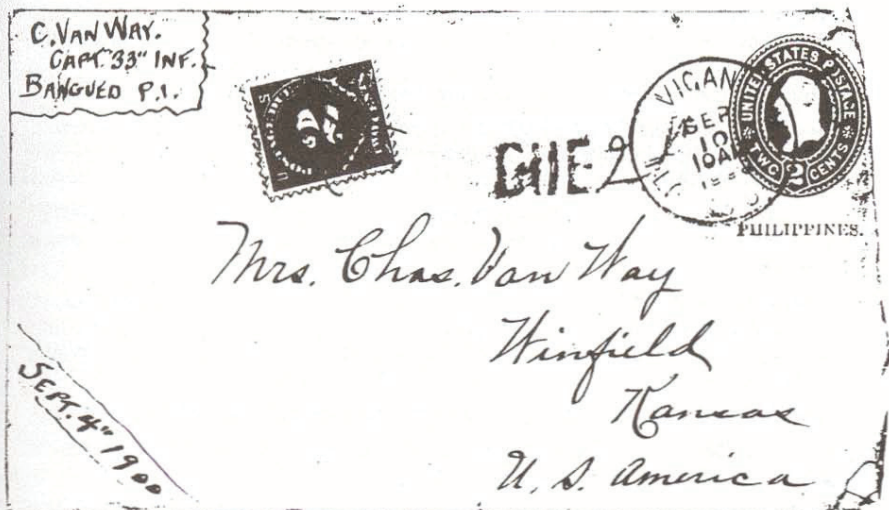
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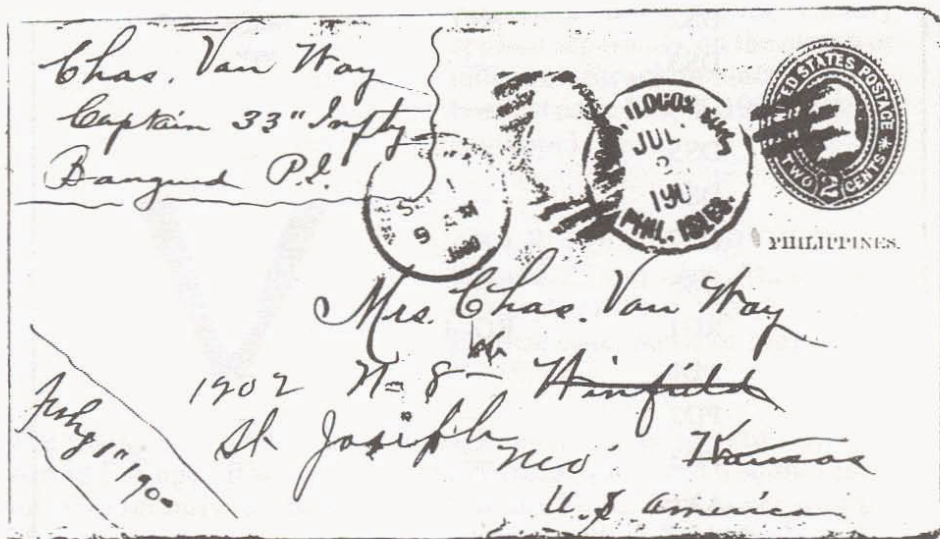


## POSTMARK LIST CONCORDANCE

Nuñez/Kugel	Goodale	Baker
DS1	—	*
DS2	A-1	—
DS3	—	—
DS4	—	—
DS5	—	—
DS6	—	—
DS7	—	—
DS8	A-2	—
RG1	RG-1	—
PD1	—	—
PD2	—	—
PD3	—	—
AXE	—	—
AX2	—	—
AX3	—	—
AX4	—	—

\* Baker illustrates a Vigan C-4 but with "sans-serif" letters.





ENDNOTES:

1. Love, Robert Jr. W., *History of the United States Navy, Vol. 1*, Stackpole Books, Harrisburg, PA. While the American capture of Vigan was quick and did not involve heavy fighting, the Filipino nationalists did not just concede the takeover. *Harper's Encyclopedia of United States History* (Harper & Brothers, New York, 1906) includes the following entries among the "more important events of the insurrection ...":  
 Nov. 26 (1899). The navy captured Vigan on the coast.  
 Dec. 4 (1899). Vigan, held by American troops under Lieutenant-Colonel Parker, attacked by 800 Filipinos; they are driven off, leaving forty killed and thirty-two prisoners; the Americans lose eight men."
2. Goodale, George S., "U.S. Military Postal Stations in the Philippines (1898-1904)," *Cyclopedia of United States Postmarks*, edited by Delf Norona, Quarterman Publications, Lawrence, MA, 1975.
3. The authors would like to acknowledge the help from other Philippine specialists, especially the opportunity to view actual covers or photocopies of the collections of: Capt. Weston Burnett, Wolfgang Haberland, Robert C. Hoge, Fritz-Walter Lange, the late Lynn Warm-Griffith, and Robert F. Yacano
4. Baker, Philip E., *Postal Markings of United States Military Stations 1898-1902*, 1963.
5. Crossley, Rod. "Postal History Associated with the Spanish American War in the Pacific." *La Posta*, May 1994.