

# The Sinking of the *Russie*, 1901

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The French Packetboat *Russie* (*Russia*), plied the waters of the Mediterranean in the late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, carrying supplies and mail between the ports of Oran (right) in Algeria and Marseille in France.

On the evening of Sunday, January 06, 1901, poor visibility and bad weather caused confusion between two French lighthouses (Faraman and Planier); the *Russie* sank in shallow water on Faraman beach a little west of Marseille. The ship ran aground four hundred meters from shore, but the storm and poor sea condition prevented rescue and salvage for five days. Various attempts were made to rescue the passengers, including firing a cannon to catapult moorings from the beach (below).



There were no fatalities, and about 100 passengers and crew were finally rescued unharmed on Friday, January 11, 1901, along with almost all of the mail. Bundled letters and cards had endured days soaking in ocean waters, and their degrees of preservation were partly due to their location in mail bundles – pieces in the middle of bundles suffered the least.

Dried mail was stamped in red “**NAUFRAGE DE LA RUSSIE**” (SHIPWRECK OF THE RUSSIA) and forwarded to destinations.



Carte de visite (visiting card) envelope that was inside a bundle, and with the stamp in place.

Cancelled Oran, January 4, 1901 and received at Chalons-sur-Saone, January 27.



Front and back of a carte de visite mourning envelope that was at or near the outside of a postal bundle. The five centime stamp, which was attached at upper left has washed away, and the address is blurred by the interaction of sea water and ink. The reverse shows that the carte de visite envelope behind it was addressed in similar ink to an addressee also in Bergerac in the Dordogne, but by a different hand, and the address has bled onto the back of this envelope.