



### 1. Introduction

These decals are intended for 1/76-72 scale models of WW1 French Army Softskin Vehicles, AFV's and Artillery, but you could use the playing card symbols for US vehicles as well. Here you find the basics.

### 2. Historical Background

French tanks, in the shape of the Schneider CA.1, first saw action during the Aisne offensive in the spring of 1917. At first these tanks appear with only with a serial number or a single (individual) tank number, painted in white on the sides, plus sometimes nicknames. Playing Card symbols were also used to distinguish certain sub-units – a common enough practice during WW1: some British tank units also used markings of this kind – often together with numerals (arabic or roman) denoting Section or even individual Tanks, as in the photo below, showing a knocked out Schneider CA.1.



The Playing Card Markings caught on, at first obviously in a more un-official way, but in 1918 the French Tank Arm (or as it's proper name was at this time: Special Artillery: *Artillerie Speciale*) employed a distinctive system of unit markings.

The three battalions in a regiment (the French Tanks were organized in *Regiment Artillerie Speciale* or RAS) were first each assigned a colour: blue (1st), red (2nd), yellow (3rd). Then each company in the battalion had a geometric shape painted on the rear hull sides: a 35cm circle for 1st Coy., a 30cm square for 2nd Coy. and a 45cm-high triangle for 3rd Coy. Each section then had a card symbol painted on this white company insignia in the battalion colour: a Spade for 1st Section, Heart for 2nd, Diamond for 3rd and Club for 4th Section. So a tank with a red club on a white triangle would be identifiable as a tank of the 4th Section, 3rd Company, 2nd Battalion.

This was the official system, anyway. All up until the end of the war many variations of this system could still be seen, the most common being the original use of a simple Card symbol (denoting the Battalion) maybe combined with a numeral (arabic or roman).

The US Army used the French system for their FT-17 Tank units as well. The variation is, that while in the French Army the symbols were often painted on both sides of the coffin-shaped rear of the FT-17 ( thus being visible from both sides and the rear) in the US Army they preferred to paint these markings on the turret rear sides, and sometimes added a vehicle number in white just outside the upper left of the design.

Most vehicles in the French Army had a serial number. It is not clear weather these numbers were issued by the French Army, or if each of the factories simply sequentially numbered their own vehicles. (For instance, Renault-built vehicles often had a six-digit production matricule painted in white, for the FT-17 these began in the 66000 series to the 73000 block – with many blocks in between reserved for other vehicles made by the same firm.) When vehicles were painted with camouflage, these numbers were often overpainted. In some cases a reduced-visibility version was applied in black outline, but in many cases the number was obscured entirely. Since unit records used this number for accounting, many units chalked the number on the side of the turret or hull, or inside the front driver's door, to help in keeping unit records.

### 3. The Decals

The names for the St Chamond tanks were generally placed on the side at the nose. On the doors at the front side, the Roman numbers 1 upto 4 were placed above a playing card symbol in white, above any of the notations A36S, A37S or A38S.



The Schneider tanks carried 5 digit numbers on the front and sides, and often playing card symbols in white on the sides. The sheet provides also decals for the Schneider called “Maleche”.



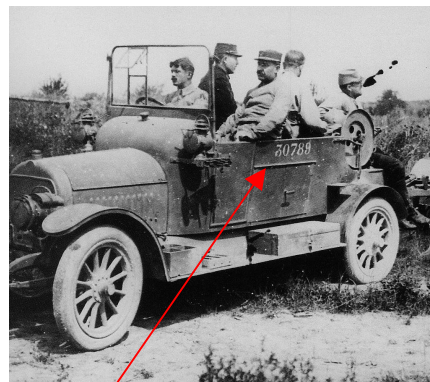
The Renault FT-17 tanks carried their playing card symbols on the rear end of the hull, like the vehicle “Le Tigre”, with the serial number on the beam of the running gear. The vehicle “Loulou” carried it’s nickname on the turret sides.



The generic Playing Cards Symbols in this sheet are of the kind used on French and US Army Tanks during WW1. They come in two parts; the colored Playing Card Markings and the White squares, roundels and triangles that were used for background from 1918 on.

The generic numbers in this sheet can be combined into the Serial Number that is desired for a specific vehicle, according below examples:

“61166” was used on a 1917 Schneider CA 1 (early variant with applique armour) placed on the front hull, just below the commanders front observation hatch, and probably on the rear as well. Camo Scheme A1.



“30789” was used on a small passenger truck of unknown make, high up on the side, beside the front passenger door. Camo Scheme C1.

“61213” was used on a 1917 Schneider CA.1 (early variant with applique armour) placed on the rear hull sides, just above drive sprocket Camo Scheme A2.

"2561", "33274" was used on 75mm AA gun trucks, placed low on gun shield front Camo on 2561 C1, on 33274 C2.

"36697" was used on a Renault Ambulance, used during the Chemin des Dames-Battles in 1917, on the side rear, slightly to the left of the back wheel. Camo Scheme A1.

"722", "723" was used on S:t Chamond Tanks (late variant) of *Régiment d'Artillerie Speciale 33* in 1918. The numbers were placed on the front right side, front left lower plate, side, high up and center, and probably on the rear as well. Camo Scheme B2.

"36809" was used on a FT-17 (cannon variant), used in the fighting on the Oise in the summer of 1918. The numeral was placed on the lower track assembly side plate, high up and to the rear. Camo Scheme B3.

"45114" was used on a Berliet CBA Truck in 1917. Placed on the mid rear side of the loading bay. Camo Scheme C1.

"68492" was used on a Renault FT-17 BS in 1919. The numeral was placed on the lower track assembly side plate, high up and to the rear. Camo Scheme B3.

#### 4. Camouflage Schemes

The subject of colours and camouflage used on French WW1 vehicles is complex, and this is just intended as a simple primer. The schemes used can be classified in these seven standard categories (the designations are NOT the historical ones):

Scheme A1: Overall Dark Green. Overall Dark Green was used during the whole war, but it was not a standard scheme, but the normal coating that the AFV's were given at the factory. Sometimes, when the vehicles were badly needed at the front, there was no time to camouflage them, so they were then used in this Factory Scheme.

Scheme A2: Overall Dark Green overpainted with irregular bands of Medium Grey, with the bands having an outline of Medium Brown.

Scheme B1: Disruptive Camouflage of Dark Green, Brown and Black over Sand. This colourful scheme was used mainly during 1917, the patterns being very fanciful – Steve Zaloga calling them "psychedelic" – with black sometimes used as a demarcation but mainly in streaks or "flames" here and there. Note that the Sand was Light Yellowish Cream in tone.

Scheme B2: Disruptive Camouflage of Dark Green, Brown and Black over Sand. During late 1917 and 1918 the same colours were used, but the patterns were often distinctly less wild, instead taking the form of either large, elongated and more angular areas, or somewhat smaller angular areas or simply bands of Dark Green and Brown over the base Sand. The Black was used as a demarcation colour, sometimes between all colour areas – in the case of the scheme with angular areas giving it the appearance of a sort of angular jigsaw puzzle.

Scheme B3: Disruptive Camouflage of Dark Green and/or Brown over Sand. Sometimes the Black was dispensed with altogether, and sometimes only one colour were used on top of the standard Sand. This more simplified type of camouflage seems to have been used mainly during the later stages of the War.

Scheme C1: Medium Grey Overall.

Scheme C2: Medium Grey Overall overpainted with broad bands of Dark Green.

#### 5. References

Yves Buffetaut & Bruno Jurkiewicz: "Mangin sauve Paris". YSEC Éditions 2001.

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Denis Defente: "Le Chemin des Dames 1914-1918". Somogy Éditions d'Art

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Thanks to Peter Kempf of [www.landships.freesevers.com](http://www.landships.freesevers.com)